

4 Meadow Close
Bridge
CANTERBURY
Kent
CT4 5AT

Tel: 01227 830344
Fax: 01227 830312
email: platformtickets@aol.com

The Editor
The Kentish Gazette
9 St Georges Place
CANTERBURY
CT1 9UU
26 February 2006

Dear Bob

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT STAR HILL, BRIDGE

Spare a thought and (the Archbishop of Canterbury perhaps leading) say a prayer for the souls of your ancestors who have lain peacefully for the last 1,400 years or so beside a structure presumably of religious significance to them on top of Star Hill, Bridge.

You will see that this year an area the size of a tennis court has just been stripped off there in order that the Kent Archaeological Field School may charge its members (and non-members) for the privilege of digging out the bodies of a good number of your ancestors. This will mean removing to some museum (or more likely its storeroom) their grave goods (presumably hoping to part them from some valuable gold or jewellery or other interesting artefact which has lain with them for so long).

Of course, if you or I went down to the local cemetery or churchyard to dig up our nearer relations with the same object, we should be in jail within a matter of hours, but there is no law apparently to stop 'grave-robbing', as one could well call it, at Star Hill. Now if it was necessary in the name of progress or development – roads, housing estates etc. where the site would otherwise be destroyed - to disturb these remains, that is possibly acceptable, but in this instance, as with presumably a lot of other sites outwith consecrated ground, I wonder why it is even permissible.

This is obviously a very important Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and I suggest the excavation thereof should be stopped immediately.

Yours sincerely

Michael Stewart, F.C.A.

mmraraty

From: "Mervyn Gulvin" <info@MJGulvin.com>
To: "'Maurice Raraty'" <mmraraty@btinternet.com>
Sent: 02 March 2006 11:28
Attach: Star Hill.doc
Subject: FW: Star Hill Anglo Saxon Cemetery

From: Platformtickets@aol.com [mailto:Platformtickets@aol.com]
Sent: 28 February 2006 18:09
To: clerk@bridgevillage.org.uk; colin@bridgevillage.org.uk; julie@bridgevillage.org.uk;
mark@bridgevillage.org.uk; mervyn@bridgevillage.org.uk; selwyn@bridgevillage.org.uk;
john@blackvanilla.org.uk
Subject: Star Hill Anglo Saxon Cemetery

Herewith copy letter as sent to Kentish Gazette voicing my extreme concern over the unnecessary excavation of the cemetery at the top of Star Hill.

Copies sent to Kent Arch Socy, English Heritage, British Museum, Archbishop's Secretary.

Should like Parish Council to say unaimously at the next meeting that they agree this should be stopped immediately and the site scheduled as an Ancient Monument.

I have spoken to Charles Macdonald, solicitor, senior partner in Halletts, Solicitors, Ashford, whose wife Vanessa, dau of Richard Neame decd owns the land.

Please acknowledge receipt.

Have only sent to email addresses so not to all members?

Michael Stewart

No virus found in this incoming message.
Checked by AVG Free Edition.
Version: 7.1.375 / Virus Database: 268.1.1/272 - Release Date: 01/03/2006

From the Chairman

The Star Hill Dig

Those members who have been following the progress of the dig this year will know that it has now ended. The excavations that have been concluded (though sadly not completed) had promised to be one of the most exciting events to have taken place in Bridge, revealing evidence of the history of the village since well before the Roman invasions until (most recently) the uncovering of a flint from a flintlock pistol of not so long ago, and the remains of even more recent military occupation. The final survey has offered evidence of more than 80 graves and cremation burials from the Anglo-Saxon period and before, overlying signs of habitation on the brow of the hill from a much earlier and probably pre-Roman age. The dig has however thrown up many more questions about the lives of the early villagers than it has been able to answer.

The inspiration for the dig came some four years ago from an aerial photograph of the field, which revealed a large hexagonal structure, and a number of round barrows. The hexagon was in the following years partially excavated, revealing a ditch surrounding it, and a pit in the middle. In the course of this find, a number of graves were discovered last year in very close proximity to it. The presence of graves in the field has been known for over two centuries, since some were uncovered (or 'turned over') by the Vicar of Nackington, the Rev. Bryan Faussett, in the late 18th century. The probability of further discoveries in this rich archaeological area is very great. The extent of this cemetery however was unknown, and still remains so, since its boundaries have not been found. What purpose the hexagon served, its age, or what its precise relationship to the graves might be, is, it appears, still a matter of dispute among archaeologists. These are questions demanding answers, but they are questions which unfortunately will not now be answered. Nor will we know any more about the people of Bridge who first populated the village: whether they were rich or poor, noble or peasant, soldier or farmer; whether the old story about 'Old England's Hole' has any substance; or why 'Star Hill' has traditionally been so-called. The possibility of such a wonderful discovery as (for instance) the great burials of Sutton Hoo, or more locally that exquisite monument of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship the Kingston Brooch will not be vouchsafed to Bridge, even though it is clear that this immediate district was of cultural and political importance as a meeting place in early Anglo-Saxon times. We must once more fall back on legend and speculation, for the site has been closed, and the dig prematurely suspended, perhaps for a generation to come, not because any of these questions, and many more besides, have been answered, as they might perhaps have been anywhere else in this country, but because of an orchestrated campaign, which I believe to have been quite unwarranted, of discredit and disinformation, by some who for their own reasons did not want these questions to be answered.

This campaign has been inimical to the unprejudiced pursuit of knowledge, to any spirit of open-minded enquiry, and a negation of everything that a History Society should stand for. I for one am profoundly disappointed and saddened by its outcome.

Maurice Raraty

FROM MICHAEL STEWART, F.C.A., 4 MEADOW CLOSE, BRIDGE, CANTERBURY, KENT, CT4 5AT

Tel: 01227830344, Fax 01227830312, email: platformtickets@aol.com

Chartered Accountant, Consultant to (formerly partner in) Chavereys, Chartered Accountants, of Ashford (previously an office of Reeves & Neylan, Chartered Accountants, of Canterbury, in which I was employed 1957-64 and a partner 1964-1998). Peaceful resident of Bridge from 1962 till now.

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT STAR HILL, BRIDGE (in particular) and THE UNNECESSARY EXCAVATION OF CEMETERIES IN GENERAL.

I wrote to the Editor of the Kentish Gazette in Canterbury on 26 February 2006 as follows:

'Spare a thought and (the Archbishop of Canterbury perhaps leading) say a prayer for the souls of your ancestors who have lain peacefully for the last 1,400 years or so beside a structure presumably of religious significance to them on top of Star Hill, Bridge. You will see that this year an area the size of a tennis court has just been stripped off there in order that the Kent Archaeological Field School may charge its members (and non-members) for the privilege of digging out the bodies of a good number of your ancestors. This will mean removing to some museum (or more likely its storeroom) their grave goods (presumably hoping to part them from some valuable gold or jewellery or other interesting artefact which has lain with them for so long). Of course, if you or I went down to the local cemetery or churchyard to dig up our nearer relations with the same object, we should be in jail within a matter of hours, but there is no law apparently to stop 'grave-robbing', as one could well call it, at Star Hill. Now if it was necessary in the name of progress or development – roads, housing estates etc. where the site would otherwise be destroyed - to disturb these remains, that is possibly acceptable, but in this instance, as with presumably a lot of other sites outwith consecrated ground, I wonder why it is even permissible. This is obviously a very important Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and I suggest the excavation thereof should be stopped immediately.'

The site referred to is immediately adjacent to a scheduled site in which a number of graves were found many years ago, and in spite of the excavations and valuable finds in (2004 and) 2005, and the fact that aerial photographs also show more cremation burials close by, the scheduling of the wider area has still not been implemented by English Heritage, though I understand the matter is now under urgent consideration, following representations from a number of concerned parties.

The Council for British Archaeology's South East Newsletter Autumn 2005 (p.4) comprises an article by Dr. Paul Wilkinson (The Kent Archaeological Field School – not a charity as are many archaeological trusts and societies - website www.kafs.co.uk). This explains his findings of the Anglo-Saxon graves, following an investigation (prompted by the Bridge History Society) of a hexagon-shaped feature that had appeared on aerial photographs.

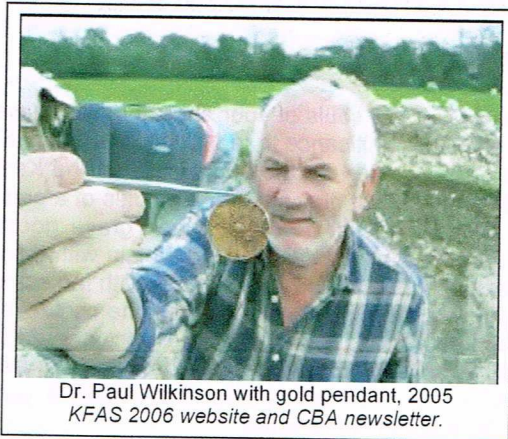
The twelve graves found in 2005 were dated by Dr. Wilkinson to the seventh-century by the finding of about sixty silver coins. 'All the graves contained many artefacts such as gold pendants (pictured), glass and amber beads, buckles, knives, spears, scissors, cowrie shells, beautiful glassware and decorated pottery.....The graves are orientated east-west with the head at the west end. **This is usually thought of as a classic Christian position, because it ensures that when the incumbent [sic] of the grave sits up on the Day of Resurrection, the first thing they will see when their eyes open is the rising sun....**If the graves are for Christian burials why the plethora of grave goods? Maybe the Anglo-Saxons were hedging their bets. Most burials had grave goods. Laid by the feet of the women were a bag of silver coins, cowrie shells, spindle weights, shears, keys, and a small knife.' I understand the extremely valuable grave goods (property of the landowner who states there is no formal agreement with Dr. Wilkinson other than having given him permission to dig) are being examined by the British Museum, but that the bones of the disinterred are currently held at the Archaeological Field School, in accordance with a Home Office Exhumation Licence, which says that they would be scientifically examined by the Museum of London.

The 2006 flier for The Kent Archaeological Field School which came to me from another archaeological society advertises 'Easter April 14th to April 23rd, Excavation of Anglo-Saxon Burials. Excavation of a previously unknown Anglo-Saxon burial site near Bridge.' The KFA website contains the same picture of Dr. Wilkinson (shown overleaf) as is in the CBA Newsletter and additionally states in its section on the intended 2006 course 'Our third season of excavation and field work and excavation at Bridge. The opportunity of a lifetime for KAFS members to join the professional archaeologists in excavating and recording high-status Anglo-Saxon burials. KAFS member's special fee £30 per day, non-members £35 per day.'

The invitation to join these courses could well, I believe, be considered as an invitation to a treasure hunt, and particularly displeasing to me in that it involves the excavation and presumably exhumation and removal of the grave goods (all legally of course) of our ancestors, who have been buried there in the hope, in Dr. Wilkinson's words that 'when the incumbent [sic] of the grave sits up on the Day of Resurrection, the first thing they will see when their eyes open is the rising sun'. Now, that is not going to happen if their bones are now in the Kent Archaeological Field School, and the Day of Resurrection arrives shortly.

Continued overleaf.

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT STAR HILL, BRIDGE (in particular) and THE UNNECESSARY EXCAVATION OF CEMETERIES IN GENERAL – page 2



Dr. Paul Wilkinson with gold pendant, 2005
KFAS 2006 website and CBA newsletter.



3.3.2006, taken from east end, with sheep walking on exposed grave area at back!



4.3.2006 following undertaking not to excavate graves. Too far?
Grave area at west end – grave dug in 2005 at bottom right.

I would therefore ask all right-minded people to think on what I have said, and having consulted their consciences agree with me that the UNNECESSARY exhumation of bodies from cemeteries should cease forthwith. I now hereby ask the Bridge and Bishopsbourne Parish Councils at their next meetings to pass a resolution to the effect that 'The Council condemns the exhumation of any further graves from the Anglo-Saxon Cemetery on Star Hill, Bridge, and calls on English Heritage or any other relevant Government Department to see that particular site fully scheduled immediately, and to see that the unnecessary exhumation of bodies from that cemetery in particular and all cemeteries in general, be they within or without consecrated ground, cease forthwith,' and I would hope that other Parish Councils with similar situations in the parishes might make similar resolutions.

Now as regards Star Hill in particular, on 3rd March 2006, Richard Cross, Canterbury City Council's Archaeological Officer, told me that earlier on that day he had seen Dr. Wilkinson and persuaded him and had got his undertaking that no more graves would be excavated there. An undertaking in such words was also given that day by Dr. Wilkinson to me and my next-door-neighbour, Michael Green, and on 4th March, similar assurances were given to Michael Green and myself by the landowner.

On 4th March at least 15 people were digging on the site, which had been bulldozed to the depth of a foot a week or more previously, and by the end of that day, an Iron Age set of post holes and some pottery had been exposed at the east end, and the area at the west end, adjacent to last years graves, where more graves would have been expected, and which Dr. Wilkinson had presumably intended to excavate at least in April, had been scraped further down to clean chalk, so that the top of several further graves became visible. I hope the undertakings given mean that this is as far down on top of those graves as Dr. Wilkinson means to go, as in my mind it is already too far. The large open site, which adjoins a public footpath, has not been fenced, and no attempt has been made by the Field School to keep the landowner's sheep - which have had access to that field for some days previous and are still there - off the actual diggings, as can be seen by the above photograph on March 3rd.

So, if I have done nothing else other than to help get this unequivocal undertaking not to excavate further graves, that is a great progress as regards the particular site. I do however hope that everyone will agree with my general sentiments about 'unnecessary' exhumations. I state categorically that I have no wish to restrict archaeology on approved and, where necessary, rescue sites.

In conclusion, I would really like to hear from the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to whom I am sending a copy of this, the Church of England's views on the matter. My 13-greats grandfather was Thomas Cromwell, who as Henry VIII's right hand for 10 years, was instrumental in the foundation of the Church of England, though he was executed in 1540 in principle for getting Henry to marry Anne of Cleves in furtherance of a German alliance. My 1st cousin x11, (his grandfather was my 11-greats grandfather) Oliver Cromwell, began as a humble Cambridgeshire farmer and gave his life to righting injustices and to change the face of Britain towards the democracy that it is today – rising to Lord Protector of this realm 1653-58 and then, following proper and deserved interment in Westminster Abbey, had his body exhumed and then hanged. My 8-greats grandfather, Thomas Lamplugh, was Archbishop of York 1688-91 and did a number of good works in his short time there.

Having the blood of these illustrious (though some of course would say the Cromwells were wicked and deserved their ends) ancestors in my veins, I hope hereby to do my own little bit in attempting to write another wrong, and would ask you to support my views.

Michael Stewart 5 March 2006.