

# KENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

# NEWSLETTER



No. 16

Summer 1990

## CONSERVATION

Conservation — a word that seemed to blossom in the 1980's and will hopefully come to fruition in the 1990's.

The conservation implied, however, is usually ecological but there is another type of conservation, that of Archaeological Conservation. This is a subject equally complex, with an important role to play in the quality of life in the future.

The conservation of archaeological and historical objects, in which we include buildings as well as artifacts is a comparatively new branch of science. This does not mean to say that some form of conservation was not practiced in the past. Romans, Greeks, Egyptians and other early people took an interest in and displayed artifacts found in their times. In later centuries, particularly Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, people became almost obsessed with the past and collected vast quantities of artifacts from many sites. Much of this was deposited in storerooms, never to see the light of day again.

The scientific methods of conservation used today developed and became increasingly important as public awareness and interest in details of the past grew.

Being a Conservator is like being a doctor of antiquities!

We try to understand the condition of an object in terms of the materials of which it has been made, the techniques employed to make it and the environment in which it has been in the past, stored in the present and will be subjected to in the future.

One of the projects upon which I am currently engaged is that of First Aid conservation to Uppark House, the National Trust property that burnt down last Summer. Here it definitely feels like being Florence Nightingale to a building site, with patients lying burnt, waterlogged and wounded in a network of field hospitals.

The materials of which an object is made may be organic such as bone, skin, wood, textiles, or, inorganic such as metals like iron, gold or lead. They may be ceramic in the form of bowls, tiles or bricks while many things are made of stone of one kind or another. However, the object is likely to be made of more than one type of material.

The condition of an object when presented to a conservator for analysis and work will be determined, not so much by its age but by the environments in which it has been and the chemical and physical influences that may have acted on its micro structure. I have worked on an 8,000 year old basket that didn't look a day over 50 years old, mainly due to the conditions in which it had been stored for the 7,950 years prior to its excavation.

Environments may range from marine or fresh water, dry hot conditions of desert regions, the hot steamy atmosphere of the tropics, cool temperate dampness to the bitter cold of Arctic snow and ice. Many environments have the added hazards of air laden with sea salt or industrial chemicals. While these environments are indicative of geographical locations it isn't necessary to range the world in search of them.

Desert conditions can easily occur in a room where there is central heating and sunlight streaming through a window and there is many a steaming jungle atmosphere within the realms of kitchen or bathroom.

On locating and excavating new archaeological sites one of the main public misconceptions is that it has been 'saved' from the ground. The precious and everyday objects can now be put safely on display, locked away in cellars or storage rooms. They have been 'saved' from the nasty, damp, dark soil in which they have been hidden for perhaps thousands of years. Unfortunately this is far from the truth — from the moment the first trowel

enters the ground many of the objects awaiting discovery are doomed to destruction.

Why should this be so? If it has lasted anything from 100 to 5,000 years or more why shouldn't it last so that it can be seen by people of the Twentieth and Twentyfirst centuries?

The nature of the deterioration will depend on the stability of the materials involved. Ceramics on the whole tend to be of stable material chemically and their breakdown is usually caused by physical stress. An unwittingly placed trowel perhaps, or crushed under the weight of overburden. They may be broken by pressure that has developed within their porous network, caused by the growth of crystals that may develop in environments where there are fluctuating conditions of saline solutions and drying air. Recent investigations have even recorded the sound of such crystals growing and the subsequent pressure they create in the ceramic body. Metals on the other hand, will, given the right environment, try to revert to their most stable form — which in most cases is the ore from which they were extracted in the first place. Some metals, like gold and silver are very stable and change little with time. The silver spoon from the K.A.S. Plaxtol excavation was as bright and shiny when found as the day it was lost nearly 2,000 years previously.

Organic materials are naturally part of the carbon cycle and, given the right conditions will continue to be so, as the Dry Rot fungus will readily indicate to an unsuspecting houseowner.

The moment the resting place of an archaeological object is disturbed, so too are the conditions to which it has stabilised over the centuries. So how can a Conservator help?

An object is taken into the care and custody of a Conservator. An array of chemical and electrical gadgetry is used to help determine the present condition of the object. The environmental conditions of the past are gleaned from archaeological records and geographical information of the area. There is also a need to know the likely environmental conditions of its immediate and long term future.

Work is begun on an object. It is first photographed and then possibly drawn. A detailed examination is made using a microscope or hand lens to look for flaws, cracks, corrosion, paint or gilding, etc., traces of things that could be associated with its original owners or burial customs. For example, layers of textiles, encrusted and mineralised within the details of a Saxon brooch can shed light on fabrics and weaving techniques of that time. An object may require an X radiograph to determine what might be hidden within thick encrustations of corrosion material. Soil, dirt and corrosion encrustations may be removed slowly and carefully with scalpels, bristle brushes and dental tools — though some encrustations may be so hard they need carefully controlled power assisted tools to prise them from the surfaces. When cleaning is completed some metal objects may need chemical stabilising to help delay further corrosion processes taking place.

If an object is to be displayed, it might require gap filling where there are large gaps that would detract from the presentation. Pottery frequently has sherds missing; a gap fill not only allows better presentation but often imparts strength and stability to an otherwise fragile object. However, a gap fill is never intended to fake the original but blend with it, to please the eye when looking at the whole. The observant will always be able to detect the filling.

After completion of conservation work there are more photographs, detailed reports are written giving whole treatments including chemicals used, recommendations for storage condi-



tions, lighting and display environments best suited to the object, bearing in mind the materials of which it is made. All treatments and materials used in the course of conservation are aimed at being reversible so that should better techniques and materials be developed in the future, previous treatment can be removed.

However, we have been considering perfect conditions, where objects will have well equipped laboratories to hand. Such is not always the reality and Conservators may be asked to work in a variety of strange locations, under unfavourable conditions, with the minimum of equipment. Necessity is the Mother of Invention — Conservators are very inventive. A very effective solar panel was once made from a fishing umbrella, a piece of card and a length of baking foil — to assist in the drying of a wet decorated plaster wall that had been excavated in a very remote location. Then there was Orkney! Here we lifted pottery that was so fragile and friable that it resembled biscuit crumbs that had been rolled flat, in a landscape that was so bleak that gale force winds were the norm and the laboratory had to be held down with steel hawsers.

Nearer to home, lifting the neck of a Twelfth century kiln in Canterbury was hardly a comfortable job. It was a particularly wet location, not far from the river and several feet below its bed level, where the delicate task of undercutting and lifting was made while lying in liquid mud.

I am particularly interested in building conservation, using the knowledge of materials and their interactions, as applied to artifacts, to help stabilise the buildings. As you can imagine these pose particular problems concerning access and working conditions on a much larger scale than those involving artifacts. We may be asked to look at medieval painting, plasterwork, deteriorating stones that are in walls and timberwork only accessible by walking across open joists, balancing on planks of wood or high on scaffolding — invariably on cold days!

There is a great deal of satisfaction from being able to find inscriptions hidden under centuries of overlying paint using infra-red photography and then having the knowledge and techniques to be able to reveal them to the eye, for all to see again.

However, there is also the heartache of seeing an old building, lovingly cared for by its owners who are unwittingly using modern materials that will lead to the destruction of the very thing they are trying to save.

If you are lucky enough to have in your care an article of antiquity, whether artifact or building — be aware of its needs, seek the cause of problems — you are *not* the owner, merely a custodian in time.

Maureen Lovering

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## Infant Burials at Plaxtol

Have you noticed how those special features and finds never reveal themselves until you have decided, for at least the fourth time, that the next digging day will definitely be the last?

This phenomenon visited itself on me in the latter part of last year during the final days of the 'Villa Aprilis' (Newsletter No's 11 & 15).

My conscience had been pricking me for some time because I had not persuaded myself or anyone else to complete the clearance of the small room at the North-east corner of the building. It was the arrival of the cooler weather which finally convinced me that digging that area was preferable to plan drawing.

I made a start in the North-west corner of the room and everything was perfectly straightforward for the first 30 cm. or so. Then I disturbed what appeared at first to be a very thin piece of wood but turned out on closer inspection to be a piece of bone. Not just any old bone but skull bone.

I had begun to be a little doubtful about finding the infant burial or burials which seems to be a common feature in Roman villas but there seemed little doubt that the piece of skull was human and too curved to have belonged to an adult. I turned my mind to the best method of excavating so small and fragile a find.

It was well into the afternoon and I knew that I would not be able to remove any of the bones until the police had been notified and given the go-ahead but I needed to be able to expose the upper surface of the bones without disturbing them. Clearly a trowel was going to be much too big so I sent out an S.O.S. for a plasterers' leaf which I had borrowed for a delicate task in the past. No luck. O.K., so what could anyone offer me in the way of delicate tools? A dental probe! You know the thing I mean; a metal handle with something that looks like a gramophone needle set at 90 degrees. Perfectly harmless except in the hands of a dentist! It takes a little time to adjust to digging with something that has as much effect on clay as a teaspoon has on

shifting Mt. Everest but by the end of the day I had exposed the surface of the larger bones. The displaced bones were deposited with the local police with a description of the circumstances of their discovery and two weeks later I was able to resume work with the knowledge that in the opinion of the Forensic Pathologist the skeleton was not recent and was probably of a child of no more than 18 months of age.

With the aid of the dental probe, the plasterers' leaf and two paint brushes I began to record and remove the bones, keeping a rough mental note of those I could recognise. I was not worried about the number of very small bones; fingers and toes come out in lots of bits but the finding of the *third* femur struck me as odd.

To cut an already too long story short I recorded and removed the skeletons of two infants, one buried on top of the other, the lower one being slightly larger. I discovered quite a few people who had always wanted to excavate a skeleton suddenly went off the idea, that wearing three sweaters and a jacket makes little difference to body temperature when you are only moving one wrist and that artists palette knives are almost as useful as dental probes.

My thanks to the suppliers of the various tools, advice, cups of coffee and moral support that kept me going, and to Roger Cockett for giving me the chance to broaden my digging experience.

Sara Bishop

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## Manor House Farm, Swanscombe

In August 1988, Mr. Geoff Baker, a former Dartford Borough Councillor was quoted in the Kentish Times as saying he felt that an investigation should be carried out on this site prior to any re-development. On reading this the Dartford District Archaeological Group contacted Dartford Borough Council to obtain permission to undertake archaeological investigation of this area. Permission was readily granted and the Group commenced on the site in January 1989 with a resistivity survey. This was done with the kind assistance of Roger Cockett and Sara Bishop of the Fawkham and Ash Archaeological group. It was followed in February by our excavation which continued through until November 1989. The site was then backfilled; further work on the adjoining area may be possible in the future.

Manor House Farm started off life as a much larger establishment which historians believed is mentioned in the Domesday Book. Edward Hasted describes it as a 'mansion of the manor' but goes on to say that much of it had been pulled down and the remaining building was used as a farmhouse.

According to W. Ireland the Weldon family owned the property until 1731, having been granted it in 1544 by Elizabeth I. It then changed hands several times before being sold to Thomas Bevan of Stone Park for £40,000 in 1872. The building was eventually demolished in the early 1960's to make way for Council Offices which were officially opened in 1964 by Councillor T. Bodle, J.P., Chairman of the Council.

This new building was built partially over the site of the earlier Manor House Farm, so that the Group's excavation was confined to the rear of these offices. Our work revealed a range of late 18th, early 19th Century buildings including a cellar and a wash-house. Unfortunately, the oldest part of the building still lies buried under the council offices.

Tantalisingly earlier foundations, including a corner of flint foundationed building was found, as well as a stairway leading to a second earlier cellar. Unfortunately, neither of these features could be traced further as they both disappeared under modern building.

Further details, including several old photographs came to light following an article in one of the local newspapers requesting information on this once famous Swanscombe landmark.

C. R. Baker  
Dartford and District Archaeological Group

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## Restoration Plans for Bexley Bath House

This 18th Century building, investigated and surveyed by the late John Caiger in 1966 (See Arch. Cant. Vol. LXXXII, 1967) was unfortunately damaged by the storms of 1987. Conservationists hope to restore this Grade Two listed building which stands on an island in the River Cray in the garden of a house in the North Cray Road, Bexley. More than £13,000 is needed for the restoration and money has been obtained from English Heritage and the Bexley Council Heritage Fund.



## Moatenden Priory, Headcorn

Investigations into the history of this former monastic site have now been in progress for a year. Research has so far concentrated on the historical background and written references, as well as fieldwork, photography and surveying. The use of aerial photographs has proved invaluable in understanding the surrounding field systems, hedges and trackways. An outer circuit of hedge and ditch, seen on an aerial photograph taken in 1966 would seem to represent an early boundary of the priory lands. Some of the hedges have now been removed as a result of farm operations.

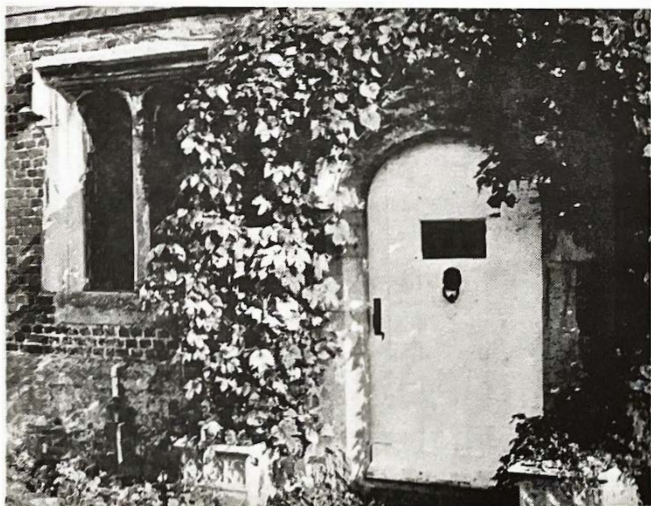
A large rectangular moat still surrounds the site and encloses an area of 5½ acres; in the centre of this is a 16th Century house which incorporates a number of stone windows and two doorways. These are probably 15th Century materials, re-used from the priory remains after it was dissolved in 1538. A number of other pieces of stonework were recovered from the bed of the moat during the dry summer of 1989.

Moatenden, formerly known as 'Mottenden' or 'Moddenden' was a Trinitarian house founded around 1224 by Sir Richard or Robert de Rokesly. It has recently been discovered that his wife was Joan Criol, whose mother was Eleanor de Crevecoeur, a member of the family associated with Leeds Castle for two centuries and who also founded Leeds Priory in the 12th Century.

Around twenty years ago a lead seal was found at Moatenden, it has now been identified as being from a 'papal bull' of Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254).

Work is to continue here during 1990. The surrounding fields also contain the site of a post-mill which presumably was associated with the priory.

N. R. Aldridge



Moatenden Priory. Kitchen door and window.  
(15th Century re-used materials in 16th Century house)



Moatenden Priory. Windows.  
(15th Century re-used in 16th Century farmhouse)

## Letters

### The Geoff. Porteus Appeal

Under the patronage of the past and present Bishops of Rochester, the Right Reverend Michael Turnbull and the Right Reverend David Say, a committee has been formed from Dartford people who knew Geoff. Porteus. Besides a lifetime of service to his Church he was also the Chairman of the Historical and Antiquarian Society as well as the Editor of its publications and was a well-known and much admired lecturer on Historical and Architectural subjects. His books included: The Book of Dartford, Yesterday's Town, and Dartford Country.

The Committee are considering a number of suggestions for a suitable means of commemorating this true Dartfordian; among them a stained glass panel incorporating Geoff's interests to be placed in Trinity Church, Dartford and a commemorative tablet. We invite you to make your contribution. H. Fenton, Memorial Appeal Committee. Donations to: Manager, Lloyds Bank, 55 High Street, Dartford DA1 1DJ.

### Help Requested

Ms. L. B. R. Goodwin is a third year graduate in Historical Archaeology. Her main interest is in the archaeology of 17th Century rural domestic sites and for her dissertation she would like to compare the results of the excavation of such a site in South-east England with that of a similar site in the North-east of the U.S.A. If any K.A.S. members can give advice or suggest any suitable sites for study could they write to

### East London River Crossing

Your readers will probably know about the eighteen month Public Inquiry into the East London River Crossing held during 1985/86. This road would run from Beckton to the Rochester Way Relief Road at Falconwood and would cause widespread damage to historic sites, the environment and local communities. It would pass near to the Mediaeval Parish Church of St. Nicholas at Plumstead; pass through the site of the Two Roman burials at King's Highway (the lead coffin is in the Maidstone Museum) and the probable Roman site below Bleak hill. It would destroy the 1930's Rockliffe Gardens, built over former brickworkings; destroy part of the Green Chain Walk and open farmland of Woodlands Farm; demolish the ancient woodland of Oxleas Wood, as well as causing the loss of 260 homes.

As the Department of Transport has now altered the design of the River Crossing Bridge to allow jets to fly from the Stolport and has introduced six traffic lanes instead of four there will be a Public Inquiry in June 1990 into the aspects of the proposed road. People wishing to become objectors should write to the

Department of Transport,  
Susan Parker

### Recent Publications

SHOREHAM: A VILLAGE IN KENT. by Malcolm White and Joy Saynor. Published by The Shoreham Society this is a 276-page hardback book, copiously illustrated, which embraces all aspects of life from prehistoric times to present day. Price: £15. Inquiries to Mrs. Saynor,

JOURNAL OF ANCIENT CHRONOLOGY FORUM. This is the journal of the Institute for the Study of Interdisciplinary Sciences. It offers to readers an open forum for the presentation of current research in the fields of ancient history and culture, archaeology and chronology.

Incorporated within the pages of the journal are papers on comparative history and chronology, stratigraphy, dating methods, traditional histories, ancient historical documents, calendars and language. The J.A.F.C. also publishes up-to-date archaeological reports.

92 pages, fully illustrated with photographs, line-drawings

Membership of I.S.I.S. includes Journal. Further information from M. Rowland.

EAST LONDON RECORD. Issue No. 12. Published by the East London History Society, price £2.20 inclusive (postage) from E.L.H.S., 20 Puttux House, Cranbrook Estate, London E20 9RF.

CONTINUITY AND COLONIZATION. THE EVOLUTION OF KENTISH SETTLEMENT. One copy of Alan Everitt's masterpiece is available at reduced price to members. £37.50. (Published price £47.50.) Contact Mrs. Lawrence.

C.B.A. PUBLICATIONS. The revised Catalogue of the Publications of the Council for British Archaeology is obtainable, free, on application to the Honorary Treasurer of the C.B.A., Paul Oldham,



## Roman Coffin at Snodland

During the excavation of the Roman Villa at Snodland by the Maidstone Archaeological group the stone coffin, previously located during the building of the Lead Wool factory in the 1930's, was re-discovered.

The rectangular coffin, which is well constructed of Lower Oolitic Limestone four inches thick had unfortunately been badly damaged by the factory foundations. It could, however, probably be re-constructed from the surviving fragments if this was thought worthwhile.

There is a full report on the skeleton of the occupant in Arch. Cant. XLVI (1934) p.202. He was a man of about 50 who had evidently made a full recovery from a most serious injury, which had crushed the whole of his chest, breaking his collar bone and no less than fifteen of his ribs, all of which had healed some years before his death — they surely were tough in those days!

A. C. Harrison

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## Events, Outings, Lectures

K.A.S. FIVE DAY TOUR OF HOLLAND. 21st to 25th May 1990. £205. There are still six places available. Anyone interested should contact Mr. Crane immediately. Tel. 0304 840310.

GOODNESTONE BY WINGHAM. Sunday 8th July 1990 (Transport by own cars). To see Goodnestone Gardens, Chillenden Mill and Goodnestone Church.

Meet at Goodnestone Church 2 p.m. Maps sent to interested persons for rendezvous. Goodnestone Gardens 2.45-3.45 p.m., Chillenden Mill 4.00 p.m., Strawberry Tea at Dane Court Barn, Adisham. £4 inclusive tea, entrance and gratuities. Limited to 30 persons. Contact Mr. Crane by 1st May.

BOAT TRIP ON THE RIVER STOUR. Saturday 22nd September 1990. Half day boat trip from Grove Ferry downstream to Sandwich. Cost £5.50. Teas available on board. Limited to 50 persons. Use own cars. Participants could lunch in Canterbury then meet at Grove Ferry, 2.00 p.m., near Upstreet. Maps sent to prospective visitors.

Anyone wishing to join any of the above trips should contact Mr. Crane without delay..

COURSES ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL TECHNIQUES. The K.A.S. Fieldwork Committee has decided to organise a series of one day courses on archaeological techniques. The first of these, based on the Benenden area, is a one day course on *Tracing Roman Roads*. This will consist of a morning session illustrated by slides, followed by field trips (using members' cars) in the afternoon. The course will be under the guidance of Mrs. M. C. Lebon, M.A. The date is not yet confirmed but will probably be on a Saturday towards the end of September. There will be no charge but only a limited number of places is available. Further details, S.A.E. to Alec Miles, 66 Headcorn Road, Biddenden, Ashford, Kent TN27 8JN.

KENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING. This will be held on 19th May 1990, at Queen's Hall, Corn Exchange, Rochester. 11.00a.m. Coffee will be available before the meeting. Bookstall.

KENT HISTORY FEDERATION. One day Conference: SANDWICH — THE MEDIEVAL GATEWAY TO EUROPE. on Saturday 12th May 1990 at the Guildhall, Sandwich. Lectures include *Sandwich—The Cinque Port, 19th Century Sandwich*. Guided tours of the town in the afternoon. Exhibition and Sales stall. Tickets £5.00. Contact Mr. D. Coast..

SUSSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY will be visiting East Kent on 6th October 1990. K.A.S. members are welcome to join the group which will visit Barfreston, Patricbourne and Fordwich. Tickets and details will be available later from Barbican House, Lewes, Sussex. Further information in next K.A.S. Newsletter.

COUNCIL FOR KENTISH ARCHAEOLOGY. Half-day Conference: THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN. On Saturday 17th November 1990 (2.15 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.), at Christ Church College, North Holmes Road, Canterbury. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain. Talks include: *The Battle of Britain, with special reference to Kent, World War II Aircraft Recovery in Kent, Hell Fire Corner in Kent*. Speakers include Frank K. Mason, author of 'Battle over Britain', Richard Windrow (Kent Battle of Britain Museum), and Terry Sutton, Chief Reporter, Dover Express. A bookstall and light refreshments will be available. Tickets: Price £1 (payable to C.K.A.).

ORPINGTON & DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY. Excavations at the moated manor site at Scadbury Manor, Chislehurst,

will be open to the public on Saturday 22nd and Sunday 23rd September. Members of O.D.A.S. will give guided tours showing work that is currently being done on the site, as well as the foundations of the drawbridge by the side of the moat. The moated area contains foundations of the buildings associated

with the Walshingham family. Guided tours will be given at 15 minute intervals throughout both afternoons, the first at 2.00 p.m. and the last at 4.30 p.m. There will be a slide show, refreshments and bookstall. Admission is free and limited car parking is available

close to the site, by ticket only for which application should be made (enclosing S.A.E. and stating for which day required) to Mr. M. Meekums.

O.D.A.S. also have an interesting programme of lectures including: 2nd May, *A Report on progress with various projects that O.D.A.S. has in hand*. 6th June, *Excavations at Barking Abbey*. 4th July, *The Interpretation of Human remains in Archaeology*.

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## Kent Archives Service

As indicated in the last Newsletter the above service has recently instituted a number of new developments at record offices in Kent. Further information on opening hours, charges etc., may be obtained from West Kent Archives Office, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent ME14 1XQ or tel. 0622 694363 ext 4472. Miss Rowsby.

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## Subscriptions

The yellow subscription reminder form, which was included in the January Newsletter as an experiment has proved most successful. More subscriptions arrived in January than ever before. Those who even added words of approval and encouragement are thanked. If you have not yet sent in your yellow form with cheque, please do so before June 1st, which is the deadline for ordering your Arch. Cant. (Cheques without yellow form acceptable!)

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## Christmas Buffet Lunch

The ninety members who floundered through grey fog-bound Kent on December 2nd, to attend the Christmas Buffet will remember the contrast of the dazzling light, colour and warmth of the splendid St. George's Hall, Chatham Dockyard. There was much appreciation of the food and of the members who had brought publications, seasonal items and publicity materials for sale, but most appreciated was the opportunity to enjoy a special occasion which will certainly be repeated. Reserve the 1st December 1990. (Details in Sept. Newsletter).

Margaret Lawrence. Hon. Subscriptions Secretary

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The Hon. Editor of the Newsletter welcomes all letters, articles and communications and would particularly like to receive more from members and others, especially such as requests for research information, finds, books and related topics. Illustrations, if relevant, are always helpful and can assist readers in identifying objects, understanding points and following arguments.

The Editor, however wishes to draw the readers attention to the fact that neither the Council of the K.A.S. nor the Editor is answerable for the opinions which contributors may express in the course of their signed articles. Each author is alone responsible for the contents and substance of their letters, items or papers. Material for the next Newsletter should be sent by 1st July 1990 to Hon. Editor, Nesta Caiger.

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Members can obtain 'Tote' bags, Tea Cloths, Ties, (Navy blue, Maroon, Green or Grey; please state colour required) by post from Mrs. J. Saynor. Bags £6. Tea cloths £3. Ties £3.50 (includes p&p). Miss Sarah Bishop has kindly designed for the K.A.S. a stitch-chart showing the Society badge and title. This can be used as a guide for either knitting or embroidering the badge design into the front of a favourite jumper. Chart also obtainable from Mrs. Saynor price 75p.

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