

Camertonia – The Early Days

Memoirs of when the Society was a Club, back in the austere post-war years

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Two members of BACAS are currently sorting articles from past Camertonias into an accessible database and some delightful items have come to light. The following examples are taken from issues between the Newsletter of the Camerton Excavation Club in 1949 and the Camertonia of 1954.

An early item is a message of January 1949, from Professor Mortimer Wheeler - the Knighthood came later - to Bill Wedlake, the Director of Excavations. *'I am writing this from Karachi, 5000 miles from Camerton, but my thoughts are very much with you and your new Excavation Club. I wish it a career of useful, practical research based on a maximum of fact, and a minimum of theory. Under your care, I know that it will acquit itself well, and that it will add to knowledge in inverse ratio to its size. You invite me to be a Vice-President; I do not disguise my pleasure in accepting your invitation. With all good wishes, Yours very sincerely R E Mortimer Wheeler'*

The following is taken from an article of December 1954. *'Equipment. Due to the new arrangement whereby we are able to excavate areas rather than by the previous system of trenching it has been necessary to make additions to the Clubs digging equipment. This has entailed the purchase of a wheelbarrow and other additional tools'. 'A further requirement ... is a useful camera. It is difficult and precarious when one has to depend on someone in the party having a camera, and often a feature has had to be left unrecorded when a camera has not been available on site at the time it was required'*.

Those of us of a certain age will remember just how short money and goods of all sorts were in those post war years and funds for the Club were often supplemented by a jumble sale or a quiz night. The following item also reminds us how few people had cars at that time. Tom Cleworth, later to become Secretary, writes of his first visit to the site. At Bath he found a bus marked Camerton and considered himself lucky that the conductor knew of the dig. *'Here's your place'* he said, *'through that gate and across the field'*.

Touchingly, in October 1950, Bill Wedlake writes *'...should these notes reach anyone interested in this work, and who is contemplating "having a go" I can state, without hesitation, (and after 20 years experience) that the popular idea that archaeologists are a "dry as dust crowd" and that they live largely in the past is far from the truth'*. Finally, among the members listed in 1950 is one 'R Whitaker'. Surely it cannot be, can it? The Peter Pan of archaeology?

Figure 1 below
Cartoon from the first Camertonia (1950) by 'Brash'. The caption reads
Them? O merely some types from Aquae Sulis who congregate here every weekend.

Figure 2 and 3 right
Camerton Excavation Club Christmas cards for 1949 and 1950.

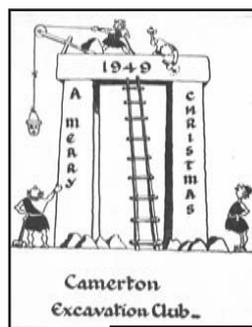


Figure 4 right
The cover of the first Camertonia in 1950. The Club initials form the head of the key (CEC).

