



The PROFILE

January, 2009

January Program Features British Sites From Roman and Middle Saxon Periods

The January 9th HAS meeting will once again feature our own Fred W. Kelly Jr., who will show two video programs from an interesting BBC series called the “Time Team.” In



this series, an archeological team representing several professional disciplines is sent to a site with only three days to determine whatever they can about the site. They use a variety of

sophisticated geophysical technologies in addition to the archeological surveying and trenching that we are all familiar with. The first video will be about a Roman fort on **Hadrian's Wall** (A World Heritage Site) in **Britain** and the second video be about a Middle Saxon Period (circa 700 AD) **monastic settlement** in Britain with some artifacts dating back to 2,000 BC. Both run about 45 minutes with a coffee break in between.

Fred Kelly is a retired international petroleum geologist; his last posting was as Manager of International

Political Affairs for Marathon Oil Co. For 22 years he lived in various countries all over the world, and as an amateur archeologist he tried to visit archeological sites wherever he went.

Fred is the author of a book published in 2006, *Global Oil Finder, Autobiography of a Petroleum Geologist*. He is a past Director of HAS and an active member of both HAS and AIA-Houston. You also may have seen him and his Titanic dinner menu featured on PBS's “Antiques Roadshow” and “Antiques Roadshow FYI.”

The January meeting will be held at our usual location in Anderson Hall on the Academic Mall of the University of St. Thomas, at 7:30 p.m. For a detailed map, visit our website at www.houstonarcheology.org. Parking: use the Moran Center Parking Garage at the corner of West Alabama and Graustark, or park in Faculty Parking Lot S at Montrose and Branard after 7:00 p.m.

Sam Whitley, who originally planned to speak in January on his research of early Texas household items, was unable to be with us, but he will be rescheduled for March, according to VP Michael Bailey.

Lab Schedule for January: Lab sessions will be held on January 12th and January 26th. Lab is held in Room 103, Sewell Hall at Rice University from 7-9 p.m. We'll continue cataloging the Menard-Morris House artifacts; several interesting artifacts have been noted during our cataloging efforts. Work also continues on articles for Part 3 of the Elizabeth Powell site report. Visit our web site, www.houstonarcheology.org for a map.

February Meeting: February's speaker is Frederic B. Pearl from Texas A&M Galveston, who will be speaking on his research into the archeology and cultures of Oceania.

March Meeting: Sam Whitley of Houston will be speaking on his study of early Texas Colonial Period household items. (Powell Site researchers take note!)

THE AMERICAN DREAM AND ANCIENT ROME: AN EERIE PARALLEL

By William Neidinger, PhD

Texas Foundation for Archaeological and Historical Research

Home ownership is, by common consensus, an integral part of the American dream. When precisely that became so, is open to dispute. Some might argue that it was part and parcel of the founding of the country: to immigrate, go west, and carve out a homestead on the frontier. Others, with a shorter historical horizon, maintain that this dream developed only after World War II: the prosperity of the 1950s, Levittown, the growth of suburbia.

Whatever one's belief about the pedigree of the American ideal of home ownership, there is little argument that the government became thoroughly involved in that dream with the Community Re-Investment Act of 1977, with subsequent refinements to home ownership possibilities in 1989, 1992, 1994, 1995, and 1999. Banks were encouraged to expand credit opportunities to their entire communities, including offering home loans to those who normally would not be considered good credit risks. For the sake of argument, let's attribute the motive behind all this to the best of intentions on Congress' part – to expand the dream. Some have suggested more sinister motives, but we'll leave that discovery to upcoming Congressional investigations. At any rate, now we are suffering the consequences of these best of intentions: liar loans, ninja loans (no income, no job, no assets), rapid unloading of questionable and unfathomable “assets,” bank failures, and bailouts.

Eerily enough, something quite similar happened in ancient Rome. In the first century BC Julius Caesar decided that members of the upper classes should hold part of their assets in Italian land. Admittedly, the ideal of the citizen-soldier-farmer had always been part and parcel of the Roman dream: the ideal was the involved citizen, who spoke in the Forum, fought in the ranks, and then retired to the farm to till his fields. The embodiment of this ideal was the fifth century BC hero, Cincinnatus: politician, warrior, and, duty done, farmer.

But by Caesar's time the days of Cincinnatus were gone. Most of the urban upper class did not fight and did not farm. More importantly, many couldn't afford an estate in the Italian countryside. So, why did Caesar pass a law requiring that 1/3 of a wealthy individual's assets be invested in Italian real estate? We could attribute the motive behind this act to the best of intentions on Caesar's part – to revive the Roman dream and all the ideals that went along with it. But ancient authors suggest more sinister motives; Caesar wanted the “hoarders and speculators” to disgorge their hoarded cash. In ancient Rome it was traditional to impute every financial crisis to the clandestine activities of “hoarders and speculators.” (Like our hedge fund managers today, in antiquity “hoarders and speculators” were, with religious regularity, denounced as the agents behind every financial calamity.) But the ancient Romans did not immediately suffer the consequences of Caesar's best of intentions. Caesar was assassinated and Rome came to have other things on her mind.

But in 33AD the emperor Tiberius revived Caesar's legislation, once again, to shake out the hoarders and speculators. The results were predictable. Families that couldn't afford it found themselves with Italian rural real estate on their hands. There was an immediate real estate boom (a bubble?), followed quickly by a cataclysmic real estate crash. Land wouldn't sell even at rock bottom prices. Panic ensued. Loans were recalled post haste. Fortunes disappeared. But the government would not let the Italian real estate market crash or people be dispossessed of their land. Tiberius floated a 100,000,000 *sesterces* loan to select “land banks.” Other banks and moneylenders were allowed to fail. Sound financial institutions refused to make loans. Some landowners just walked away (fled) from their lands. When the dust settled, the hoarders and speculators finally moved in and purchased Italian land at fire sale prices.

The full consequences of Tiberius' follies are not known. Our two ancient sources both moved on to juicier tales of treason, incest, and court scandal. Many modern historians, however, see the beginning of the decline of ancient Italian agriculture in the government's attempt to force land upon those unable to afford it and unknowledgeable about how to tend it. The obvious difference between what happened in Rome and what is happening to us concerns the matter of compulsion. Ancient aristocrats were forced by the government to invest in Italian farmland; our government hasn't forced anyone to purchase a home via liar and ninja loans. Many bankers, however, have yet to weigh in on this matter of government coercion and loan making.

The lesson for us, however, is not just the obvious historic parallel of the folly of government trying to manipulate real estate markets. The true lesson to be learned is that when governments try to manipulate economic pol-

icy to achieve even plausibly laudable ends, there can be some fairly catastrophic economic consequences, consequences that were not then and are not now even that hard to predict. We do not know if anyone had warned Tiberius of the consequences his actions might have. We do know that later emperors (Julian, for example) were warned not to try to manipulate the market. Again, Julian was trying to help the poor by undermining the hoarders and speculators who were driving up the price of grain. He ignored the advice and sent the grain market of Syria into a tailspin. Likewise, our Congress was warned in 2004 and 2005 about the impending calamity awaiting Freddie and Fannie. But, as Sophocles said, nobody loves the messenger bearing bad news. He might have added that people usually ignore the messenger.

The article above is the first in a series that will be posted at Dr. Neidinger's new website, "Lessons from History," at <http://neidinger.stylusproductions.com/>. You are invited to visit this site and post any comments you may have on this article (click on comments link after the article).

Dr. Neidinger will offer a 6-lecture adult education series, "*The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*," in Houston beginning January 26, 2009. In this series he will examine the events, personalities, and causes of the decline and fall of Rome, and assess the validity of comparisons to the modern West. Information on this series and registration forms can be found at <http://www.tfahr.org/DFRome.html>.

2008 HAS Merit Award Goes to Sara Guillote

The last 2008 award of the Houston Archeological Society was announced at the December meeting. Sara Guillote was selected to receive a Merit Award for her previous work as editor of our newsletter, *The Profile*, as well as her outstanding contributions to the outreach activities of the society. The HAS Merit Award has previously been given to Fr. Edward Bader, Pat Aucoin, Wanda Carter, Etta Palmer, Pam Wheat, Sheldon Kindall, Bob Etheridge, Dick Gregg, Don McReynolds, Bernard Naman, Beth Aucoin, Karen

Acker, Linda Swift, Muriel Walker, Jeanette Siciliano, Jim Wells, Joe Hudgins, Tom Nuckols, Bob Selby, Richard Carter, David Pettus, Mary Barbara Gold, and William Haskell.

Other previous HAS awards include a special award to Alan Duke as HAS Journal Editor, and election of Alan Duke, Don Lewis, Dick Gregg, Evelyn Lewis, and Pam Wheat as Lifetime Member of the HAS.

-- Beth Aucoin

Reminder: Register for TAS Academy Sessions

The central Texas town of Georgetown will host **ARCHEOLGY 101** on January 30 and 31 and the field day to be held on February 1 at the Gault site.

Study Butte, west of the Big Bend National Park, will be the setting for **BIG BEND: A REGIONAL ACADEMY** Feb. 20 -22. A team of archeologists - Tom Alex (BBNP), Tim Roberts (TPWD), and Melissa Williams (CBBS) - will lead participants through a series of lectures and tours.

The **HISTORIC ARCHEOLOGY** Academy March 7-8 in Lake Jackson will be led by archeologist Joan Few, author of *Sugar, Planters, Slaves and Convicts*. She will present an overview of historic archeology using local data to illustrate the broad principles. FEES are \$95. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CREDIT is provided to teachers. REGISTER online at <http://www.txarch.org>.

Archeology. . . Life in the Past Lane

AIA-Houston presents a program by Patrick Peters on "*The Original Green Housing: Yesterday's Indigenous Housing for Today*," at 7:00 pm January 12, at the Hines College of Architecture on the University of Houston main campus. For more information: www.AIA-Houston.com or call 281-497-7382.

The 16th Annual East Texas Archeological Conference will be held on Saturday, January 31, 2009 from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm at the Ornelas Activity Center, 3402 Old Omen Road, across Spur 248 from

the University of Texas at Tyler. Admission is \$10 at the door. For more info contact **Mark Walters**, mwalters@wildblue.net.

TFahr is now accepting applications for its June/July 2009 Excavations and International Field School at Bylazora (Sveti Nikole, Republic of Macedonia), ancient capital of the Paionians. Information and applications can be found at <http://www.tfahr.org/dig09.html>. The application deadline is March 1, 2009.

Time to renew your membership! Fill out this form and mail it in with your dues by the end of January.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL Houston Archeological Society, P. O. Box 130631, Houston, TX 77219-0631

Please complete this form and mail it, with your check for the correct amount, to the above address.

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ (home) _____ (work) e-mail: _____

Type of membership: New Renewal Please circle one: Student (\$10/year) Single (\$20/year)
Family (\$25/year) Contributing (\$30+/year)

ALL MEMBERS MUST SIGN THE FOLLOWING PLEDGE: "I pledge that I will not intentionally violate the terms and conditions of any present or future federal, state or local statute concerning cultural resources, or engage in the practice of buying or selling artifacts for commercial purposes, or engage in the willful destruction or distortion of archeological data, or disregard proper archeological field techniques."

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

Please submit articles for publication to Linda Swift, swiftlinda@sbcglobal.net
Submit articles no later than February 1st for the February issue.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ARCHEOLOGY IN THIS AREA, CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:

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