

# *Field Trip to Southeastern Wiltshire, April 2004*

*Elizabeth Devon*

The trip was led by Isobel Geddes, author of *Hidden Depths, Wiltshire's Geology and Landscapes*. We all met on Pepperbox Hill (SU 212248) on the crest of Dean Hill, an anticline separating the Hampshire Basin syncline in the south from the smaller Alderbury syncline in the north. The rocks in this area were gently folded during the Alpine orogeny causing Chalk to be exposed on the anticlines while the younger Tertiary deposits remain the synclines.

Pepperbox Hill is made of Upper Chalk. The land falls steeply away to the north, down towards the Tertiary rocks. Beyond, to the north, the underlying Chalk reappears in the hills. It is quite easy to pick out the Tertiary deposits to the south as the vegetation changes to woods which eventually lead to the New Forest. The Tertiary sands encourage acid-loving plants while only those which like alkaline soils can grow well on the Chalk.

After admiring the views and mastering the structural geology, we set off to the south to Pound Bottom landfill site (SU 231179) where the Tertiary Bracklesham Beds are exposed. These are the youngest Tertiary rocks exposed in Wiltshire and are the lateral equivalent of the coloured sands of the central part of the cliffs of Alum Bay in the Isle of Wight. The colours are really spectacular, unfortunately not shown by *photograph 1*. Clays here contain glauconite which proves a marine origin. Also fossil sea snake bones have been discovered.



*Photograph 1: Bracklesham Beds, Pound Bottom*

Next we visited Hale Park Church (SU 178186) just outside the county of Wiltshire. This is on the east side of the Avon valley and is on London Clay. We were interested in the building stones of the Church. First, we managed to identify Chilmark Stone which occurs in the Vale of Wardour and was used for Salisbury Cathedral. It is the same age as Portland Stone, (Upper Jurassic) but looks more like the Middle Jurassic Bath Stone. The best way to tell the difference is by using a hand lens.

Glauconite and quartz occur in Chilmark Stone. Much of Hale Park Church, however, is made of orange-coloured sandstone and pebbly sandstone of either Tertiary or Lower Cretaceous age. Some blocks really do look like the Lower Greensand.



*Photograph 2: A ppp (perfect picnic place)*

After lunch by the Salisbury Avon (*see photograph 2*) at a site just below Hale Park Church, we continued to Breamore Church (*photograph 3*) on the west side of the Avon valley. It dates from c.980 AD and is built on terrace gravels on Chalk. It is made almost entirely of flint and is a valuable and practically complete example of a Saxon building. It is exceptionally long (almost 30m) and consists of a chancel and aisle-less nave. The flints of the walls are whole and the cornerstones are made of a green sandstone and ironstone. These, we thought, are probably the Lower Greensand but there are Tertiary sandstones too. There was also evidence of Chilmark Stone. Bath Stone was used for the massive impost of the arch over the south door inside the porch. Also in the porch, and also carved in Bath Stone, is the Saxon Rood and, although badly mutilated, it is still possible to see what a striking sculpture the original must have been. In pre-conquest times, the whole Church, both inside and out, would have been covered in plaster. The only portions left uncovered were the cornerstones which are cut to receive it.

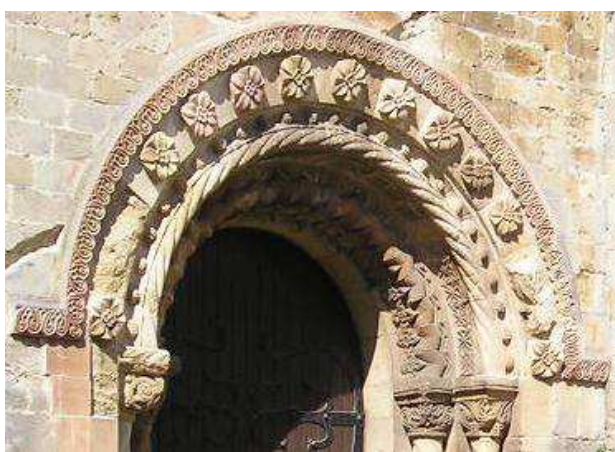
Our next destination was Romsey Abbey, built on gravels and alluvium of the Test Valley on Tertiary London Clay. The Abbey was built between 1120 and 1240 and bought for the townspeople from Henry VIII for £100. Romsey Abbey is built of Chilmark Stone and a variety of sandstones. The famous Saxon Rood (*photograph 4*) is believed to be Bath Stone (*refer to Journal, volume 22, 2003, bottom of page 19*). The decorated arch nearby is also believed to be Bath Stone (*photograph 5*).



Photograph 3: Breamore Church



Photograph 4: Saxon Rood, Romsey Abbey - Bath Stone  
Above the head of the Crucified Christ is the Manus Dei  
(Hand of God) projecting downwards from the clouds



Photograph 5: Decorated Arch of Bath Stone on the south  
side of Romsey Abbey, just west of the Rood

After a leisurely wander around the Abbey we set off again for West Harnham Chalk Pit (SU 128287), just south west of Salisbury. This old quarry in the Upper Chalk displays clear joint structures and Isobel was proved right when she said that it was famous for its fossil echinoids (sea urchins). Several of our members found good examples.

There was also an amazing variety of shapes in the flint nodules here. The view from the top towards Salisbury was spectacular, *photograph 6*.



Photograph 6: View towards Salisbury from  
West Harnham Chalk Pit

This was one of many very successful trips into Wiltshire and beyond run by Isobel for our Society. She always puts together a very interesting, comprehensive and well organised tour and has so far even managed to arrange excellent weather. Thank you Isobel!

Thank you to David Workman for his contributions to this article and for the photograph of the Romsey Abbey Saxon Rood.

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