2001 has been a year of sorrow for all who dug at Wroxeter, students and excavators, with the loss of the directors of both the excavations, first Phil Barker and then Graham Webster.

For Romanists the loss of Graham is great, extending to those who dug at Barnsley Park, Waddon Hill, Lake Farm, and numerous other excavations, going back into the 1940s. The loss is equally felt by innumerable students in all fields of Roman archaeology who attended lectures given by Graham, and by excavators, both professional and amateur, who benefited from his visits to their sites, with advice and help freely given.

Graham had the ability to talk to students in a way that encouraged their interest and the urge to dig (in all senses of the word) deeper. This is what made the courses, particularly at Wroxeter, memorable for most people. Not only were you involved closely with the physical excavations, but also with all aspects of archaeology, covering everything from field work, architectural fragments, coins and animal bones to Roman pottery. At both Wroxeter and in his extra-mural classes, students were invited to re-interpret excavated evidence, implanting in them a searching analysis of the presented evidence, an essential prerequisite. What he presented could perhaps be termed a classical view, encompassing all fields — despite increasing specialization in archaeology, his view was that you should have a basic understanding of all aspects.

The wide range of his publications illustrates his undoubted contribution to Roman archaeology, some less well documented. His acknowledgement of the importance of finds stemmed from his view that these put the flesh on the bones of the stratigraphic details of a site and its occupants. One of his earliest publications (as an amateur) was a contribution on the pottery from a site in Canterbury (A Roman pottery kiln at Canterbury, Archaeol. Cantiana, 53 (1940), 109-136), and he never lost his deep interest in pottery. As increasing specialization in archaeology became inevitable, he arranged and chaired a meeting in 1971 to found the first specialist pottery group, the Study Group for Roman Pottery, to encourage and promote research and sound working practices. He had already edited what is commonly known as the 'Coarse Students’ Guide' (Romano-British Coarse Pottery: A Student’s Guide, Research Report No. 6, CBA, 1964; 1969; currently being updated by SGRP), quite apart from numerous reports and articles on pottery. Graham’s contribution to Roman pottery studies was unending, lasting into his retirement when, if you had a difficult figured sherd, he was the first point of call for help — always generously given. This is a field where he is greatly missed.

Graham’s enthusiasms were many and various, so a day checking pottery drawings could end with a wide-ranging discussion on jade carving, or tribal rugs or watercolours. It is this, and his warmth and humour, that his many friends and colleagues will miss greatly. It has been both an honour and a pleasure to have known and worked with Graham, and surely the gods smile on him, and have provided him with that set of Roman baths for leisurely relaxation so often dreamt of at the end of a long day excavating.

Graham Webster made a particular study of figured pottery from Roman Britain which incorporates barbotine and moulding techniques.
Brian Dobson is one of our great experts on Hadrian’s Wall; he is well known for leading the famous Pilgrimages to the Wall, and for the seminal book on the Wall co-written with David Breeze and first published in 1976.

Graham Webster will be remembered for his work on the early conquest period in Britain, and his work of synthesis on the Roman Army. *The Roman Imperial Army* remains the one modern attempt to describe the Roman Army in full, more satisfactory than Le Bohec, and different from *Greece and Rome at War*. However, he also deserves to be remembered for different reasons: as perhaps the greatest teacher of archaeology to adults, and the greatest single influence on myself and the Hadrianic Society in setting up courses, both evening and residential.

![Crag Lough, Hadrian’s Wall (Collingwood Bruce 1884).](image1)

I tried to apply Graham’s ideas and methods in Durham. The extension of the Corbridge excavation to two weeks and the birth of the Hadrian’s Wall course, entitled, significantly, *Hadrian’s Wall and the Roman Army*, in 1998, went back to Birmingham experience, though it all owed much to Tom Hornshaw who had done day tours with me, and to John Mann’s trips from the internal Corbridge course. I thought of Graham to help me on the Hadrian’s Wall courses, but he was unavailable and I tried out a young research student, David Breeze. I turned to Graham for the Roman Army courses, when they split off from the Hadrian’s Wall course in 1970, and he stayed for the first courses. As I gained confidence I did not need him in quite the same way, and I think he felt uneasy at not being in charge. But we owe him an incalculable debt, as do the archaeologists of the West Midlands. We may not see his like again, certainly not until we rediscover what adult education truly means.

![Dedication-slab from near Housesteads, Hadrian’s Wall (RIB 1837).](image2)

I learnt so much from Graham in those years. I accompanied him on a tour of students and former students, criticising and encouraging original work. I developed a slightly more abrasive style with students, but then as Assistant I was often involved with personality problems. Graham was ruthless with staff who failed to come up to scratch, however. I learnt and admired, and acquired the experience to apply for the Extra-Mural tutorship at Durham University when Mike Jarrett suggested it to me in 1999. Graham had made the difference.

![Graham resting near Uffington Castle and the White Horse, Oxon., 2000. Photo: © D. B. Webster.](image3)

I knew nothing of adult education when I went to Birmingham University as a Research Fellow in 1957. Graham was one of the many people helped by Eric Birley, so Eric brought us together. He immediately involved me in taking classes, the first at Upton-on-Severn, a saga in itself, gradually increasing the dosage to two classes in 1959. He also involved me as Assistant Director of his Elementary Excavation training course at Wroxeter 1958–60. Donald Dudley, Professor of Latin but a former Director of Extra-Mural Studies, completed the education by involving me in two tours of Roman Wales.
Voices of Imperial Rome
by Guy de la Bédoyère.
£14.99 paperback.

Review by John Hyams

This anthology of passages of Roman writing, almost entirely from the Imperial period and translated into English, is arranged roughly by subject, with titles in triplets such as 'Soldiers, brutality and valour', 'Provincials, foreigners and barbarians' and so on. The passages chosen are all interesting in themselves. Those of us whose acquaintance with Classical authors tended to stop at Tacitus will find the extracts from Herodian, Dio Cassius, Ammianus Marcellinus, Claudian, Sidonius Apollinaris and other later writers of considerable interest. The author sensibly and properly covers himself against reviewers' nit-picking over inclusions and exclusions by describing his book as "a personal selection of some of the legacy of the Roman world". Unfortunately, he gives us no idea of the principles or purpose of his choice, except that "above all" he hopes it will be "a good read", but the formality of his presentation suggests a more serious aim.

One might have hoped that a broad-ranging anthology like this one would form an informal survey of the Roman world over the five centuries or so of the Empire, with some sense of evolution. If this objective is ruled out, why bother? The personal emphasis and the thematic arrangement of the passages chosen inhibit, however, if they do not preclude, any coherent sense of change and development. Approach by theme is current fashion (look at the Tate Galleries!) which it seems we must nowadays tolerate, and this book illustrates some of its limitations vividly. The reader could gain an impression that the Roman Empire was a static and monolithic entity that sprung into being some time before the Battle of Actium and stayed as it was until the disintegration of the West in the 5th century – offering fine opportunities for tabloid journalism, avidly seized by sensationalist historians and Christian apologists.

Moreover, the selection (so as to be a good read, as Mr. de la Bédoyère tells us in his foreword) emphasises the entertaining and titillating. Emperors were degenerate and mad. We have three pages on Elagabalus, two on Nero, two and a half on Caligula and one and a half on Commodus, but not much, except in passing, on Augustus, Marcus Aurelius, Trajan, Hadrian, Septimius Severus, Constantine or Julian the Apostate, and nothing on Theodosius I, to name some of the moderate ones at random. We learn about the horrors of slavery, but little of the possibility of freedom or the achievements of freedmen. The discomforts of living in Rome are properly featured, and in some degree balanced by Pliny’s and Sidonius’ smug descriptions of the rural comforts of the provincial landed gentry. Unfortunately (and this we cannot blame on Mr. de la Bédoyère) there are no accounts, because we have none, of the misery probably endured by the workers on many country estates, including the slaves.

Mr. de la Bédoyère points out in his introduction that the literary records are very incomplete – what would we give for the section of Tacitus’ Annals dealing with the invasion of Britain? Sometimes archaeology and literature come serendipitously together in some marvellous find like the Vindolanda tablets to throw direct light onto social history, but a selection of literary passages alone cannot form a completely balanced picture. Even had all Roman writing survived, it would not answer many of the questions modern historians ask, particularly about the lives of the obscure. The attempt to depict Roman society in the round might nevertheless have been worthwhile, but was that the objective?

If not we are left with “a good read”. The translations are flat, with no trace of any conscious effort to reproduce the flavour of the original. They suffer sometimes from the intrusion of outdated slang inappropriately used (“bloke”, in a writer so rhetorical as Juvenal and so formal as Seneca). The use of unselfconsciously banal prose to render the gracious verse of Horace and Virgil, while exhibiting a becoming modesty on the part of the translator, illustrates the difficulty of a task perhaps too lightly undertaken. Mr. de la Bédoyère suffers, too, from slack editing, which has admitted some loose or ungrammatical writing, occasionally to the point of incomprehensibility.

A good read it may be, while one sips a gin and tonic at the end of a hard day, but it lacks the rigour of good history or the bite of good translation.
My first meeting with Graham, in 1974, arose from a minor emergency at Wroxeter, when a JCB driver illegally gouged huge holes and deep trenches in a cottage garden, hacking through nearly 10 ft of solid stratigraphy.

Graham was running his summer training school at the time and, not knowing where best to turn for help, I took photographs, collected smashed pot from the spoil-heaps, and went, somewhat nervously, to see if I could enlist the great man’s support. I was received with the quiet courtesy I later came to realise was typical, and subjected to a series of closely detailed questions. The kindness and concern surprised me at the time, because I was only a local ‘amateur’, of no standing whatsoever. Even so, I received sound advice and much encouragement, and discovered in time that Graham was always approachable and willing to share his knowledge with those who sought it; he recognised the value of ‘amateur’ (doing it for love) archaeologists, and was ever mindful of his own non-archaeological roots in civil engineering. To this day there are many individuals and local societies who owe Graham Webster a great debt of gratitude for the help, support and encouragement he gave at the beginning of their careers.

Shortly after, I encountered him again. I had moved to Solihull, joined the flourishing archaeological group (one of the many indebted to him), and met my future husband, Leighton, who was doing local landscape research and who turned out to have known Graham for years. Thus I found myself attending Graham’s lectures and courses and, in 1974, participating in the surveying element of his Wroxeter summer school. In 1975, after a splendid study tour of the Peloponnesse with Graham as our Roman expert, he asked Leighton to organise the fieldwork for his other long-running training-school at Barnsley Park in Gloucestershire.

Never one to shirk setting a challenge, Graham had said to us – total strangers to the area – “I want the site put into its Roman context: go out and find me some Roman roads”, adding as an afterthought, “And I don’t mean Ermin Street, Akeman Street and the Fosse!” He gave us East Gloucestershire as a canvas and was always ready with helpful guidance and ideas as the picture developed. When the dig finally ended in 1979, he was adamant that we should continue the fieldwork because of its importance, thereby doing us an enormous favour by helping us finally to snap the shackles of suburban!

We maintained close contact on the fieldwork (which continued until Leighton’s health began to fail in the mid-’80s) because it was Graham’s intention to include our report with the main Barnsley Park report. However, he was beset by obstacles to publishing the full report, some of which looked to me suspiciously like prejudice; it looked like the same prejudice when our final report was rejected (by a pre-historian) as being unsuitable for publication! So much for the value set on original ‘amateur’ research – even under the guidance of someone as renowned as Graham – by some ‘professionals’ (doing it for money)!

At Barnsley we began with a team of 6-8, which over the years, shrank to two. We were more often in the field than on site, or in our tiny caravan ‘drawing-office’ writing-up and producing maps and plans. However, we spent the evenings at Bleddisloe Lodge, eating with the group, attending Graham’s nightly lectures, and gradually improving our acquaintance through these, and through the spectacular end-of-dig parties, at which a great deal of hair was let quite a long way down.

It became apparent that Graham’s areas of interest and expertise ranged far beyond the pre-eminence in Romano-British military archaeology and history and the seminal books on it for which he will be largely remembered. He told me once that he was “really a frustrated art-historian”. To see round his library was to glimpse an even wider range of interests and knowledge, and that too was generously made available to those who sought it.

Graham spent the last 7 years of his long and fruitful life in Wiltshire. This made him and his second wife, Diana, far more accessible, both
socially and archaeologically: Warwickshire's loss was definitely our gain!

Since 1986 I had been helping Eddie Price with his magisterial report on (now) 40 years of work at Frocester Court, and putting the text into the computer. At first draft stage, we too experienced unforeseen applied publishing problems: an apparently pre-arranged, concerted and determined attempt to have the work split into its chronological periods and reject all but the Roman. Once again, Graham stood up in support of the independent archaeologist. He read the text, made various penetrating and helpful suggestions, and formally threw his considerable academic weight behind the campaign to have the Frocester Report published in full, as the story of the long-term landscape and archaeological study it is. The last time I saw Graham was when I gave him a complimentary copy as thanks for all his help.

What can one adequately say about Graham Webster, that extraordinary man who combined so many and varied gifts and talents? He was an engineer and a practical archaeologist; a rigorous scholar and prolific author; an expert on art and art-history; a bon viveur and raconteur; a lover of music (particularly Allegri and Monteverdi); a tireless and peerless teacher; a staunch and stalwart supporter of the archaeological underdog: a man of ideas so far ahead of their time that, even now, some of them are only being reluctantly accepted, despite their foundation on hard evidence, logic, and plain common-sense. He had the courage of his convictions, refusing to toe any particular academic line with which he could not agree, even though it would have enhanced his career. A polymath? A Renaissance man (certainly he had a deep and enduring knowledge of the art and artefacts of that period)? He was approachable and friendly, though less than sympathetic to 'slackers' and those who sought to enhance their own reputation “off other people’s backs” as he put it. He had a naughty, even Rabelaisian sense of humour, and a keen eye for an attractive female form, especially if it included a well-defined and shapely bottom: it was quite entertaining to observe the slyly appreciative gleam in his eye at end-of-dig parties, when the female students appeared as Roman nymphs in rather more revealing apparel than their daily digging gear! In short, Graham enjoyed life, and improved it for those with the good fortune to know him.

The cynical expression, 'another thread in the rich tapestry of life' suggests a different picture, with

Fig. 4. Barnsley Park – late yard surfaces, after recording, 1979.

Photo: © E. A. Bishop.

Fig. 3. A ‘Roman reveler’, last night party, Barnsley Park 1978.

Photo: © E. A. Bishop.

Graham in 1990.

Photo: © D. B. Webster.

Diana Bonakis Webster, Coleshill, Oxon., 1998.

Photo: © Grahame Soffie.
This year’s programme was launched on 22nd April with a visit to Mark Taylor and David Hill’s celebrated Roman glass workshops at Quarley, Hampshire. About 40 members watched as Mark and David demonstrated how they have been able to recreate the techniques used by Roman glass-makers and manufacture an impressive variety of replica vessels, some of which were purchased by members. Afterwards members were guests of Geoffrey Denford, Curator of Archaeology at Winchester City Museum for a visit to the new Roman gallery at Winchester. Here he guided us round the collections from recent excavations in the Roman city (Venta Belgarum), Roman glass, and the newly displayed mosaics from Winchester itself and the Sparsholt Roman villa. Afterwards members visited the important Anglo-Saxon and medieval gallery, and Winchester Cathedral.

Concentrating on the splendid display of material from the Roman town and civitas capital of Caerwent, Venta Silurum. Sites in Caerwent were visited, as in last year’s tour (ARA 10), but access to the town walls was restricted due to foot and mouth disease. This was made up for by the discovery of a Roman stone table top, on site, by Anthony Beeson. At Caerleon the fortress of Legio II Augusta was examined in detail, including the fortress walls and towers, barrack blocks and the amphitheatre. This was followed by visits to the Legionary Baths (Cadw) [the Welsh equivalent of English Heritage], and magnificent collections from Caerleon and other sites such as the fortress at Usk in The Roman Legionary Museum (National Museum of Wales). On the site of the principia, Anthony Beeson spoke about the quadrifrons arch described by Gildas Cambrensis and Geoffrey of Monmouth.

On the following day members visited the remains of the mansio or government stores building, at Cold Knapp, Barry, and, by kind permission of the landowners, Mr. and Mrs. Phil Llewelyn, the villa at

The Annual Dinner was held at the Holiday Inn, Leicester, on 30th June, after which Dr. Eberhard Sauer (Leicester University) gave an illustrated lecture on the most recent results of his excavations at the Roman fortress and annexe beside

Fig. 1. Mark Taylor making a 3rd century-type handled Alchester jug. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Fig. 2. The Jewry Wall Roman Baths in Leicester city centre. Oblique air view from the south-west. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Fig. 3. ARA members assembled on the seating bank (cavea) of the Caerleon amphitheatre. Photo: © Grahame Soffe.
Llantwit Major. This complicated site is visible as low walls and earthworks under pasture, and Bryn Walters explained its intriguing plan, later history and its connections with St. Illtud who founded the monastery of Llanilltud Fawr (Llantwit Major) nearby in c. AD 500. This led us to the remarkable double medieval church of St. Illtud, where Grahame Soffe spoke of its development from the original Celtic church and members saw the early Christian (9th cent. AD) stone monuments – the Crosses of Hywel ap Rhys and Illtud and the Pillar of Samson.

At the Roman (and later) gold mines at Dolaucothi, Dyfed, members were given guided tours by site staff. This remarkable site lies well inland near the probable Roman bath-house and fort at Pumsaint. The final morning was spent on a private visit to the National Museum of Wales at Cardiff hosted by Keeper of Archaeology, Richard Brewer. This was followed by a visit to the late 3rd-early 4th century fort at Cardiff Castle, the remains of its walls and semi-octagonal bastions, and the north gate with flanking gard-towers reconstructed by William Burges.

Our Italian tour to the Bay of Naples and Roman Campania took place from 15th to 22nd September. It was attended by 58 members and based at the Holiday Inn, Naples. The principal guide was Mike Stone, assisted by Bryn Walters and Grahame Soffe. We are also grateful to Patricia Tricker for her help with Italian domestic arrangements and entry to sites. The planned lectures did not take place because of air-flight travel security arrangements following the terrorist events of September 11th.

The tour commenced with examinations of the ancient Greco-Roman cities of Velia (Eleva) and Paestum. Only small areas of the vast walled city and port of Velia have been excavated but these remains, some dating as early as the 6th century BC, are spectacular. Members concentrated on the Acropolis and temple of Athena, the Porta Rosa (the arch viaduct of 4th century BC discovered in 1964) and the Baths of Augustus. Again at Paestum only the central area of a vast walled city has been excavated, along the north-south axis dominated by the unique survival of the three great temples (the so-called Basilica, Temple of Neptune and the Temple of Ceres or Athenaion), and the excavated public buildings around the forum, but the remains are spectacular by any standards.

The eruption of Vesuvius in AD 79 led to the remarkable preservation of the remains of the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, which were the focus of the whole tour. Nevertheless, it was important for members to see the unique architectural and interior decoration of the Villa Arianna, the Villa San Marco, the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis and the Villa of the Mysteries outside the walls of Pompeii.

In the Greco-Roman city of Naples (Neapolis) we toured the remains of early houses beneath the Cathedral, the early Christian basilica and 6th-century baptistry, and also the macellum, aerarium (public treasury) and street of shops beneath the San Lorenzo Maggiore monastery. We also visited the National Archaeological Museum there.

North of Naples the tour continued to the great Flavian amphitheatre at Pozzuoli (Puteoli). This was followed by a tour of the Archaeological Park of Baia containing the remains of two terraced palaces, the Villa Ambulatio and the so-called Sosandra Temple, which incorporate vast spa complexes with a remarkably-preserved circular domed bath, the so-called Temple of Mercury. This is a similar structure to two further domed baths, the so-called Temples of Diana and Venus, which belonged to outlying sets of thermal baths. At Cumae, probably the most important Greco-Roman city in this area, we visited the sanctuary and temple of Apollo on the acropolis, and the rock-carved Crypta Romana and the dromos (trapezoidal tunnel corridor), home of the Cumaean Sibyl.

Driving back to Naples we passed under the great arched viaduct, the Arco Felice (AD 95). Many antiquities from this region, including those from the underwater areas of Baia and Museo, are now housed in the new Archaeological Museum of the Phlegrean Fields in the Castle of Baia. Here members viewed the façade of the Sacellum of the Augustales from Museo, with its collection of marble bases and sculpture, and the magnificent marble statues from the (now underwater) Nymphaeum of Punta Epitaffio at Baia. In addition to the main sites, some members went on excursions to the imperial palace of

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GRAHAM, AND THE EXPLORATION OF WROXETER

by Roger White

Dr. Roger White, from the University of Birmingham Field Archaeology Unit, contributes this appreciation of Graham. He is the archaeologist on the team which recently conducted the four-year Wroxeter Hintertland Project and as a result of that survey reported on the discovery of the Whitley Grange villa in ARA 2 (1996). His book on Wroxeter, written in collaboration with Philip Barker was reviewed in ARA 6 (1998).

The passing this year of both Graham Webster and Philip Barker has been a blow to archaeology, but has particularly affected the site with which they were most closely involved, the Roman city of Wroxeter in Shropshire. Together, their work at the site spanned 50 years and, it is fair to say, revolutionised the way we think about Roman Britain. Graham was involved first through his contacts with Dame Kathleen Kenyon who was asked to set up a training school on the site (Fig. 1).

In the 1920s, directed by Prof. Donald Atkinson of Manchester University, while Kenyon carried out small-scale investigations of the baths in the 1930s.

By that time the Old Work, the largest fragment of a Roman civilian building still standing in Britain, together with other standing walls of the baths, had become ruinous through lack of conservation. Following the Second World War, they were taken into the care of the State, through the Ministry of Public Building and Works, who initiated a programme of consolidation and maintenance on the site. By the 1950s it was realised that this demanded the active involvement of a skilled archaeologist like Graham to record the ruins as they were reconstructed. Graham began to excavate the baths site and found timber buildings which were difficult to interpret within the small box-trenches then favoured as an excavation technique. As more and more boxes were investigated, Graham began to turn his interests to the wider picture both in the city and its surroundings.

In 1964 he published a paper with Brian Stanley, *Viroconium: A study of problems*, which detailed what was then understood of the city and posed a number of research questions. This used the increasing body of aerial photographs being taken by Arnold Baker, James Pickering and the Cambridge University team under Prof. J. K. S. St. Joseph, to explore the site remotely. Their paper was a characteristically structured approach that was rare for its day. Graham also undertook excavations elsewhere in the city, notably on the defences and, crucially, he also sectioned and photographed the city's aqueduct before it was shamefully bulldozed and ploughed-out in the late 1950s.

Beyond the city walls, he investigated a number of sites within the county, such as the enigmatic small fort on Linley Hill, research that led ultimately to his book on *The Cornovii* in 1975. This study, still essential reading for its unparalleled assembly of data, also brought in his work at Chester and its region. It used to full effect information supplied by his team of 'amateur' archaeologists, such as Dr. John Houghton, who had attended his evening classes and training schools and had been trained as an excavator by Graham. This network of diggers kept his work connected with the landscape he described in a way rarely achieved in archaeology. His work in the region also inspired him to write a number of papers on surprising topics, such as the use of coal in Roman Britain or the Roman lead industry. This work further enhanced his interest and research in Roman pottery, and led to his founding the Study Group for Roman Pottery.

Perhaps Graham's greatest contribution to Wroxeter studies came in 1975. The long hot summer of that year produced an excellent series of cropmarks for Arnold Baker and the Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography, one of which proved to be the north side of Wroxeter's fortress. Simultaneously, Graham recognised the characteristic timber strapping of a military rampart beneath the south-west corner of the *macellum* (market place). He believed he had found a fortress but confirmation came in the following equally hot summer when, as a budding archaeologist on the training school, Graham asked me to excavate in the neighbouring *macellum* shop to find the back of the rampart seen in 1975. I still have a vivid recollection of Graham standing on the wall above me, smiling in satisfaction as the ghostly outline of the timber-strapped rampart emerged just where he had predicted it would. With two sides of
the fortress known, sense could be made of the timber buildings excavated in previous years – they were the remains of barrack blocks and rampart buildings. The remaining decade was spent in adding detail to this picture and in unravelling the complex archaeology of the fortress and its successive civilian buildings, some of which incorporated elements of their military predecessors.

In 1980 Graham retired from the university, allowing him more time to devote to post-exavcation and the writing-up processes. This was carried out with the help of a number of able assistants. Sadly, his final report on the military phases is still awaited having hit a number of technical problems over the years, but his report on the macellum excavations, edited by Peter Ellis, was published last year. When the military volume appears, it will complete the publication of all the excavations on the baths complex, a major milestone in our understanding of what was until recently one of our more neglected yet most important Roman cities.

the Villa Jovis on the Island of Capri, and to view the crater of Vesuvius.

Nearly two hundred members attended the AGM in the Stephenson Theatre, Clore Education Centre, at the British Museum, London, on 3rd November. The Chairman reported the death of our Hon. President Dr. Graham Webster. He thanked Board members for their work over the year and the officers gave their reports. Sam Moorhead (Education Officer at the British Museum) and Mike Stone (Curator and Manager of Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre) were elected to the Board; Grahame Soffe and Don Flear were re-elected. After lunch the Symposium was devoted to recent developments in Romano-British villa studies with well-illustrated addresses by Roy Friendship-Taylor (Upper Nene Archaeological Society) on Piddington Roman villa, Northamptonshire, and David Rudling (Field Archaeology Unit, Institute of Archaeology, UCL) on Roman villas in Sussex. The Board is grateful to Sam Moorhead and his colleagues at the museum for helping to make the meeting such a success.
We reprint here one of Graham’s short articles, with Diana Webster’s agreement. It was first published in 1986 and again in 1991 in Graham’s Archaeologist at Large, a collection of some of his shorter papers demonstrating the wide range of his knowledge and interests. This example shows a light-hearted side to his writing and his interest in the female form.

Ancient festival rituals, such as Shrowe Tuesday football, horn dancing, bull-running, pace-egging and pancake racing, have persisted in England despite attempts by Puritans of all periods to suppress them. In many cases, one may trace them back to a very ancient past, though often the present-day festivals – surviving in the face of what is euphemistically called ‘progress’ – retain only a vestige of their former meaning and complexity. A case could be made for such a ritual being enshrined in the legend of Lady Godiva of Coventry, riding through the city on a white horse, though this idea has been dismissed by Hilda Ellis Davison in her otherwise full and admirable account of the legend. This eminent folklorist, however, has not given a full consideration to the Celtic background.

For the Celts, female nudity held a very powerful magical significance, and this is nowhere better illustrated than in the Irish saga of the great semi-divine hero, Cú Chulainn. When only seven years old, he was given arms and went out to do battle. He was greatly aroused by his victories and, when he came to Emnain, thrice 50 women, all naked, went out to meet him. They lifted him from his chariot and placed him successively in three vats of water to quench his ardour. The first vat burst open, the water in the second boiled, and only in the third was his temper restored to normality. It is interesting to note that the Christian Celtic monks who translated the legend from the bardic account introduced their own Biblical morality, noting the sin of the women’s nakedness before a boy of seven. The idea of the sinfulness of nakedness and sexual activity has haunted generations of Christian believers, and still persists.

The vernal equinox was the greatest of all the Celtic seasonal festivals, since it signalled the rebirth of vegetation in the cycle of death and rebirth. (The festivals marking the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were adapted to this ancient scheme.) One of the commonest rituals was for men and women to go into the fields and couple, as imitative magic, enabling the crops to germinate and flourish, followed by leaping dances to encourage them to grow. These are described by Ovid in his great festival poem, Fasti. This would also have been the time for naked women on horseback to lead the community out into the fields, bearing symbols of fertility to ensure a plentiful harvest. The horse, too, had a special significance for the Celts. They were wonderful horsemen and gloried in their skills, much as the Cossacks did in later times. The horse was a symbol of potency and fertility, as was their horse goddess, Epona. (Note the similarity with the Greek hippos, horse.) The colour white is also significant, representing the purity and innocence appropriate to the New Year, as yet unblemished.

Unfortunately, we do not know the time of year when Lady Godiva is supposed to have ridden out. Coventry’s Great Fair was part of the festival of Corpus Christi at midsummer, and included a large procession, but it is unlikely that such a pagan feature as the nude ride would have survived the Church’s hostility. However, in France the infamous Pestum Asinorum – the Ass’ Feast – during which a live ass was present at the Mass and the congregation brayed like the animal, survived almost to the Reformation despite efforts to stamp it out.

The association of Lady Godiva with a spring ritual is more likely, and not difficult to explain. The fusion of ritual and legend was common and, if a suitable historical figure could be used, it would seem more convincing. In this way, the unfortunate Guy Fawkes became linked indissolubly with the autumn solstice and its fire-lighting rituals, which were imitative magical ceremonies designed to keep the power of the sun from waning. The Godiva story was probably concocted in the thirteenth century, because the first account is that of Roger of Wendover in 1236, while Florence of Worcester, writing about Leofric and Godiva in 1118, fails to include any reference to the story. So, the appearance of the story during the period when many legends were being interwoven is 200 years after the time of Godiva and her husband Leofric, c. 1035. The tale is inherently a most unlikely one, uniting a pious lady with a pagan fertility ritual. The inference is that the ritual remained as a memory in the Middle Ages, if not in actuality, and was linked with historical personages to give it a little more authenticity. It is at least one possible explanation of a garbled fable, nicely spiced as an entertaining story to be recounted, no doubt with gusto, at the great feasts.
Conjectural reconstruction of the NW corner of the principle at Chester, based on the 1948-9 excavations.
Drawing by Graham Webster 1950.
Courtesy D. B. Webster.

Luigi Thompson, Diana and Graham Webster and Dee Randolph, Burford, Oxon., 1997.
Photo: © Grahame Soffe.

Graham examining an unusual small find.
Grosvenor Museum, Chester, c. 1950.

Photo: © D. B. Webster.

Graham discusses his picture of Winchester College with Prof. Christopher Hawkes, Chesterton, 1988.
Photo: © D. B. Webster.

Graham examining a small find.
Graham Webster
Windsor Seminar
1986. Final seasons digging