

# 9th Annual Public Lecture - 2000

## **A birds eye view of our coastal heritage: aerial archaeology of the Isle of Wight**

### **Mr David Motkin**

The Trust's 2000 annual public lecture was held on the 23 November in the Medina Theatre on the Isle of Wight, in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant of the County of the Isle of Wight and attracting an audience of over 250 people. Mr David Motkin had kindly agreed to talk on the subject 'A birds eye view of our coastal heritage: aerial archaeology of the Isle of Wight'. His fascinating collection of slides had been accrued over many years with the Island County archaeological service.

Mr Motkin began by defining aerial archaeology (its not the archaeology of aeroplanes!). The practice of interpreting the images is not as straightforward as it may seem. The marks visible on the ground are caused by a number of different elements within the soil. For instance a buried wall would cause a crop to grow poorly, whereas over an old ditch a crop would be more abundant. It is not only buried features which are investigated through aerial photography, structures which are still standing can be given a completely different dimension when viewed from the air.

As the Island reduces in size more archaeology is becoming visible around the coasts. Aerial photos are a good way of assessing how far and quickly the erosion is taking place. Remnants of structures from the World Wars, once inland by some distance, are now seen hanging precariously close to the edge of cliffs.

Changes in sea level are also important to the Island now and in the past. Through another type of aerial survey - Lidar, a type of high definition radar - it is possible to identify areas which were once intertidal or marsh land. This is particularly evident at Brading which evolved as a sea port but is now inland.

Neolithic mortuary enclosures are visible as earthworks as are whole Bronze Age barrow cemeteries, these tend to be found on hill tops but would once have been in the valleys which have since been ploughed out. The Romans settled on the Island exploiting its position and resources; these remains are also well represented in the aerial photograph collection. The stretch of the Solent between the Needles and Hurst is particularly fascinating to see from the air, the 18th century forts and batteries line its edges. The presentation contained many more exciting images of site types and finds, all periods of prehistory being represented right up to the more recent remains from the wars.

Finally, we were reminded of the continuing loss of sites of archaeological and historical importance through the ongoing problem of coastal erosion, the heritage is at risk of being lost without adequate recording.