

# CHATELPERRON 1998

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In recent years the annual BAMS conference has been held in a number of impressive historic settings. York, Cambridge and Durham all provided beautiful venues, but for the 1998 conference it was decided to travel further afield and visit the Château de Chatelperron in the French Bourbonnais. To many prehistorians the village is already familiar, the term Chatelperronian being applied to a distinctive group of stone tools created in the area some 40,000 years ago. Chatelperron thus provided a wholly appropriate venue for a conference based around the manual and mental skills involved in medal-making.

Many of the New Chatelperronians met at Waterloo Station early on Friday morning, before commencing the journey south aboard the Eurostar. Arriving safely in Paris, we were met by Marian Fountain and bussed across the city to the Gare de Lyon. The second stage of the rail journey was marked by the wonderful food provided by Marian, and by the champagne which flowed freely. Alighting at Moulins, the party next travelled by coach to Chatelperron, where we were met by our gracious hosts for the weekend, Angela and Bernard Mouscadet, and escorted to our accommodation. After settling in, we gathered at the château for dinner. This proved to be a splendid affair, reflecting the finest in local cuisine and washed down with generous measures of wine.

The following morning we gathered once again, this time in order to attend the first of a series of lectures. The opening talk, delivered by Mark Jones, focused on collecting behaviour. This was followed by Lorna Goldsmith's fascinating review of the extensive series of Vauxhall Garden admission tickets. After coffee, Alan Weil discussed popular and revolutionary medals, whilst Sylvie de Turckheim-Pey's talk revealed the extensive range of animal imagery to be found on medals and plaquettes.

The afternoon witnessed the first of two practical workshop sessions. Under the guidance of Marian Fountain, participants were shown how to create their own 'cylinder seals' by cutting directly into cylinders of plaster. Many found the interior of the château hall too dark for such delicate work, and, taking advantage of the excellent weather, opted instead to work in the courtyard outside. At the conclusion of the workshop session, some of the more adventurous members of the party took a dip in the local lake. Only later was it discovered that they were sharing the water with the



*The Château de Chatelperron, where the BAMS conference was held.*

local coypu colony! A further fine dinner was rounded off by a musical evening, featuring the uniquely gallic experience of an operatic soprano being accompanied on the accordion.

Sunday morning commenced with a hearty breakfast, followed by a further two speakers. Charles Avery delivered two short papers, followed by Sara Ewers, who talked about her work as a medallist. Both presentations were unfortunately marred by problems with the projector, and the speakers were much admired for their tenacity in struggling to cope with the rogue machine. After coffee, the second workshop session was held, with participants using the seals which they had created the previous afternoon to produce plaster plaques.



*The workshop indoors and out.*

During the afternoon we were taken on a tour of some of the châteaux and churches of the Besbre valley. An undoubted highlight of this outing was the visit to the fairy-tale château at Thoury, where the owner was kind enough to invite us to view the contents of his living room, including a very fine Attic krater. Dinner was taken at the château of La Palice, where we were also able to examine at first hand the remarkable medieval tapestries.

During the morning of our final day, we all had the opportunity to spend some time in the town of Moulins. The stunning triptych by the Master of Moulins housed in the cathedral was well worth visiting, as was the Musée Anne de Beaujeu. First impressions suggested that the museum was in fact closed to the public, but closer examination revealed that the staff merely kept the lights switched off when there were no visitors on the premises. The museum proved to be



*Participants at the BAMS conference gather for a group photograph.*

both modern and filled with art and archaeological remains of surprising quality. Of particular interest was the medieval and early renaissance sculpture, the numerous moulds for Roman pipeclay figurines, and the prehistoric tools from Chatelperron.

A superb lunch at the superb *belle époque* Grand Cafe de Moulins followed, after which those travelling back via Paris made their way to Moulins station. The return journey would have passed without remark had the French authorities not decided that the evening of a UK bank holiday offered an unmissable opportunity to hold a comprehensive passport check at Paris Gare du Nord. In consequence the departure of the Eurostar was delayed, causing some delegates severe travel problems once back in England. That notwithstanding, the first BAMS conference to be held overseas proved to be a great success. That this was the case is attributable in no small part to the forward planning of Lorna Goldsmith and Peter Bagwell Purefoy; to the hard work of Marian Fountain and her friends; and to the kindness and generosity of spirit of our hosts, the Mouscadets.

One interpretation of the strange prehistoric stone tools found at Chatelperron is that they were the products of Neanderthal people who had come into contact with - and were trying to learn from - modern humans. The collectors, curators and others sitting alongside professional medallists in Marian's workshop had the opportunity to enjoy a similar learning experience. BAMS 1998 will not quickly be forgotten.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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*Lunching at fresco.*