



Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

NEWSLETTER

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Editorial

Another Barcombe season draws to an end, but it is not 'the end'. We are currently drawing up our plans for the future, and it is likely that the project will continue for a few more seasons yet. The UCL participation in the project has finished, and we are looking to progress the post-excavation work on the artefacts and site archive up to this point. However there are still many unanswered questions, so the project will continue as a joint project between MSFAT and the University of Sussex. Next season we will be opening up more of the villa courtyard in front of the main villa building and, if the field is put down to set-aside, we will open up a number of smaller trenches around the villa to answer some of the remaining questions. The excavation will also be the venue for training courses next summer whilst also becoming the centre of a wider villa landscape study.

This means that although the excavation of the main site has all but finished for the season, we will be doing some further work at Barcombe over the autumn and winter. This will include a geophysics survey to locate a possible further building upslope of the main villa site. Excavation trenches will be sited to locate the road up to the villa, and the water supply and source, whilst in the fields around the site we will be fieldwalking, and we will try to locate the main London-Lewes Roman road. Fieldwalking to the south of the villa has already located a probable Mesolithic site.

As well as the work at Barcombe, we will be excavating more test pits around Hamsey with Sue Rowland to locate more of its Medieval origins. The initial test pitting in August was very successful with all of the trenches on the first weekend finding archaeology.

We will also have other projects lined up including some geophysics at Peacehaven on a Bronze Age round barrow near the cliff edge, and two Medieval moated sites in West Sussex. It is also possible that further evaluation excavations will be carried out at Arlington Roman site.

Chris Butler

Barcombe Villa 2005 Season update

This season has been very interesting. The excavation of the aisled barn (Building 3) was completed, and produced no real surprises. The tessellated floor in the north-west room was lifted, and although there was nothing below it, the plough furrows cutting through the floor could clearly be seen.

Last year we found an earlier building lying partly within the western side of Building 3. Having extended the trench this year we have completely excavated this new building, and determined that it is an early phase bathhouse, which was demolished, possibly before it had even been used, and then replaced by Building 3. To the west of the bathhouse were a number of postholes, a large rubbish pit and a square pit that had been filled with clay.

The trench was also extended to pick up the south enclosure wall of the villa complex. This wall survived as a chalk foundation, but at its east end where a gap between the wall and Building 3 marked a probable entranceway into the courtyard, the wall broadened out to form a more substantial footing almost 2m wide. A number of postholes and two pits (one of which was Saxon) were found within the courtyard, together with the remnant of a possible flint metalled surface.

As well as working on the main villa site, we opened two small test pits over the site of the Roman buildings in the adjacent Church Field. One of these was located over the main building and located a compact area of building rubble just below the ploughsoil. The second located a possible geological anomaly identified from the geophysics survey.

A further trench was excavated some 500m to the south of the villa site to try and identify the line of the Roman (London-Lewes) road. The farmer had mentioned that each year when ploughing this field the plough hit a line of flints. On closer inspection these flints could be seen on the field surface, so a trench was excavated in a gap in the crop. This discovered a plough damaged flint metalled surface sitting on a packed clay agger, and below that a bedding layer of flint nodules. Although no stratified artefacts were located, this is almost certainly a Roman road.

The site also featured briefly on the Time Team's Big Roman Dig, and in conjunction with this, we opened the site to the public on two consecutive Saturdays. In excess of 300 people visited the site over the two days, and were treated to guided tours, a pit for children to excavate, and displays of artefacts. This was extremely successful and raised over £300 for the project. Many thanks to all those members who helped.

Chris Butler

Clayton Manor Barn

During building work at the above site (TQ303139) in Clayton, Michael Fairbrother recovered a small assemblage of artefacts. The area had previously been levelled during the construction of a driveway. There were no archaeological features, with only a number of modern services observed. Amongst the pottery recovered were Roman and Medieval sherds:

Roman

A single grey-ware sherd, two amphora fragments, two East Sussex Ware sherds. Two fragments of Roman tile were also found. Given the close location of this site to the Clayton Roman bathhouse it is likely that there would be Roman material found here.

Medieval

A single sherd of flint tempered Saxo-Norman ware, 20 flint-tempered 12th to 13th century sherds, 26 sand-tempered 13th-14th century sherds, Four fine sandy green-glazed 13th-14th century sherds, including a fragment of a face jug.

There were also two hard-fired sandy burnished sherds, which could be later Medieval, a late Medieval green-glazed jug base, one medieval tile fragment and a Post Medieval stoneware sherd.

There have been numerous finds of Medieval and Roman material from Clayton in the past, many of which have been reported in previous MSFAT newsletters. An interim report on the excavations at the Clayton Roman bathhouse is available from MSFAT (see our website for details).

A trench cut on the Ringmer to Laughton Road

On Tuesday 14th I surveyed a trench cut across the field west of Downsview farm on the Laughton Road. The trench runs north to south for a distance of approx. 90 metres from the road. The width is approx. 3.5 metres. The purpose appears to be to construct a road leading south from the Laughton road. The ditch had been filled with hardcore to allow access to the trench. The depth of the trench was 45 cm, with between 20 and 30cm plough soil and 25–35 cm of yellow clay which appears to be the natural.

I surveyed the whole length of the trench as well as the spoil. The natural layer of the trench shows no features at all and appears to be completely sterile without any inclusions of stone. A field drain (Clay pipes) was observed running north to south at the eastern edge of the trench at a depth of approx 45 cm. It was exposed in a number of places along the whole length of the trench. The spoil showed small nodules of flint (2-5 cm) in the plough soil. The flint is more apparent at the southern end of the trench. Other items observed were some sherds of modern glass in the plough soil.

The site was revisited on the 26th June when more hardcore was found dumped at the North end of the trench and the south end covered to a length of 10 meters with white geo textile matting.

Franz P. Plachy

Pevensey Castle

We were commissioned by English Heritage to carry out a geophysics survey at Pevensey Castle as part of a research project designed to enhance knowledge of the castle prior to the installation of a new exhibition in the north tower of the castle. The survey of the interior of the Roman fort was carried out over three weekends in March and April this year.

The interior of the fort has received very little attention in the past. Salzman excavated an area in the north-west sector in 1907-8, and Cottrell investigated the west and east gateways in 1936-8. Little trace of buildings was found, but a well and hearths were located in these excavations. Given the long history of occupation and activity at the Castle, it is likely that the interior will have a complex history of use. However, this includes some remodelling of defences in the 11th century, which resulted in some 1.5m depth of overburden being spread over the eastern part of the fort. Additionally, later modifications such as the Tudor gun emplacement may have disturbed and buried earlier features.

The survey showed that there are many linear negative and positive features within the fort interior. Many of the positive anomalies are likely to be old paths, whilst others could be interpreted as agricultural features, perhaps evidence for cultivation in the interior. The interior has been disturbed by recent activity including the dumping of spoil when the interior of the Medieval castle was cleared, but it is possible that many of the anomalies especially in the lower south part of the fort could be evidence of Roman and later activity.

The survey has allowed an insight into the numerous features preserved below the ground within the interior of the Roman fort, and outside the walls. Although some of these features can be linked to known structures or events, it is not possible to link the vast majority of the features to a particular period or event in the castle's history without further investigation. However, the survey has helped our understanding of the potential archaeology preserved within the interior, and suggests that there is a rich and complex story still to be investigated and understood.

A final report has now been produced and sent to English Heritage. Copies of this report are available from me on CD or hard copy (Cost £2, or free to anyone who took part in the survey).

I would like to thank Bruce Milton and David Staveley who supervised the survey, and the numerous members who helped.

East Grinstead Museum site

Some members of MSFAT recently helped out on an archaeological assessment excavation at the site of the new East Grinstead Town Museum in advance of the construction commencing. The site was located to the rear of 39 High Street, East Grinstead. The building that occupies the High Street frontage of 39 High Street, is of early 17th century date, and is currently used as a Pizza Express.

The site is situated in the historic and archaeologically sensitive old town of East Grinstead. 39 High Street is one of a number of long narrow parallel portlands, which run from the High Street northwards. When the borough of East Grinstead was laid out in the early 13th century each burgage plot, c. 33 feet wide included a strip of land, c. 200 yards long, known as a portland. The site extends across the boundary between 39 High Street and the adjacent Portland to the west, currently occupied by The Crown Hotel.

It was decided to locate a single trench (Trench 1), initially 4m x 1m in size, and orientated east-west across the west portland boundary to investigate whether there were any surviving remains of an early boundary. A second trench (Trench 2), also 4m x 1m, was then located in the centre of the new building footprint, and was orientated north-south.

Although the excavation did not find any evidence for a portland boundary, it did produce a small assemblage of Medieval pottery dating to the 13th and 14th centuries, and possibly as far back as the late 12th century. An early 13th century date would coincide with the laying out of the portlands. Although the boundaries are likely to have been marked with ditches it is possible that a fence or hedge may have been used instead. If that is the case, it is likely that subsequent building activity on the site will have removed any surviving evidence for the boundary itself.

The site has been heavily disturbed by recent building and demolition activity, evidence for which was found in both trenches. A rubbish pit was discovered in Trench 1, which contained broken pottery and glass that can be dated to between 1898 and the first few years of the 20th century. This dating is provided by the maker's marks and impressions on the pottery, together with information provided by the glass bottles.

The location of the rubbish pit places it within the portland associated with the adjacent Crown Hotel. The type of rubbish that was discarded into the pit, such as wine glasses, bottles, pottery, and the measuring jugs are typical of the types of artefact that would be being used in a hotel or inn, and the presence of three pottery sherds with 'Crown Hotel' motifs confirms that this was a rubbish pit associated with the Crown Hotel.

I would like to thank Liza Stewart, Keith Butler, Sue Birks, Michael Fairbrother, David Cudmore and Jane Elliott, who helped with the excavation. The excavation was commissioned by the Trustees of the East Grinstead Museum.

Chris Butler