

# Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

## NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 50

July 2003

### Editorial - Barcombe Roman Villa 2003

This year we are excavating an area to the east of the main villa building. By the time you read this the UCL students will have finished their four weeks on site, and we will be into the public training courses and volunteers' weeks. At the weekend members of MSFAT have been working on the northern part of the trench where we have had some exciting discoveries.

At the south end of the site, we have exposed most of the building that contained the tessellated floor found last year. This building comprises at least six rooms, built on chalk foundations and flint walls, with reinforced foundations of ironstone blocks in the north-east corner. There are a number of features within this building that are currently being excavated. To the west of this building is a small Roman oven or kiln.



**Fig. 3: Part of the tessellated floor in Building 3 at Barcombe Villa**  
(photo - Franz Plachy)

Running north from this building and turning a corner to join the main villa building is a wall built on chalk foundations. To the east of this the slope may have been terraced in the Roman period, but this has been filled in by the down-slope movement of soil, including material from the demolition phase of the villa building. Below this is a layer of soil that may be the original Roman land surface, and cutting into this surface are a number of features: postholes and a pit or ditch have been uncovered.

At the north end of the site an area immediately to the east of the main villa building is also covered by building demolition material. Below this are a number of pits that have produced some remarkable finds, including large sherds of pottery and animal bone, together with a complete pot from the bottom of one pit and fragments of a stemmed glass beaker from another.



**Fig. 1: The complete pot having just been removed from its pit**  
(photo- Keith Edgar)

There are still a few weekends left to dig at Barcombe before this season's excavation finishes. Please phone or email me to book a place.

It's nice to see that in this issue we have contributions from some of our members. Any contributions for the next newsletter should reach me by the end of October.

- Chris Butler

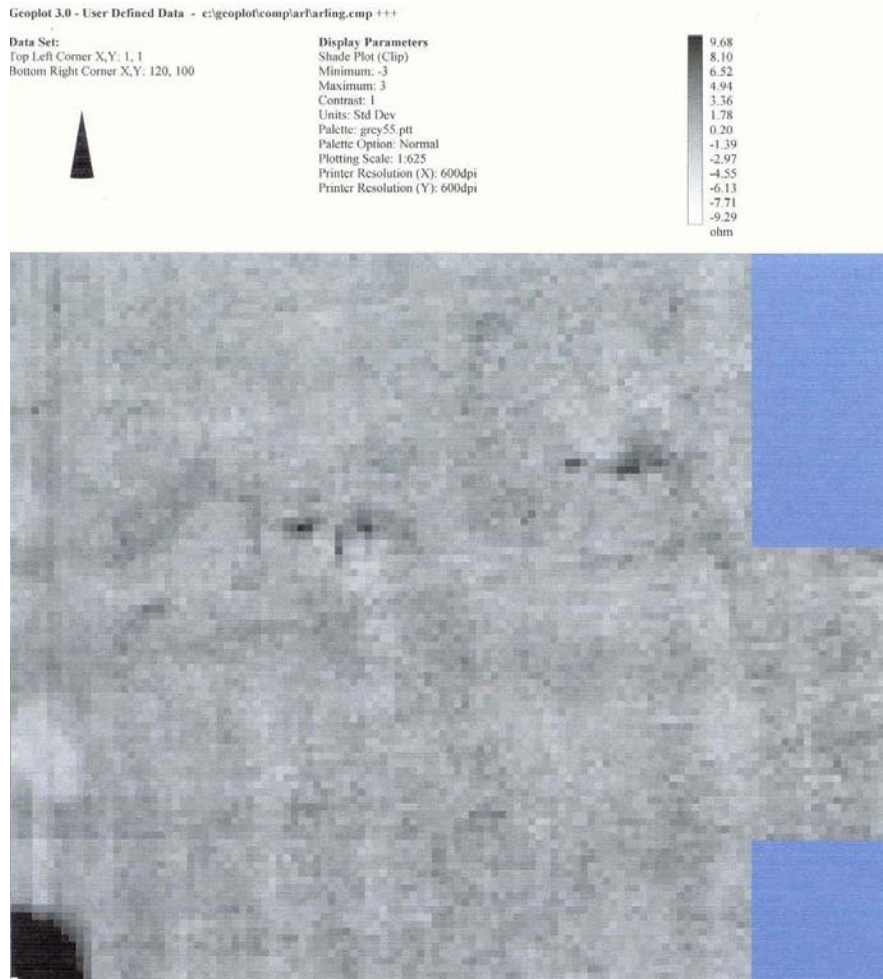
## **Arlington - It's a matter of interpretation ?**

No, I hadn't been drinking – although my eyesight could have been attributable to the bacchanalian orgies much described in my previous years digging at Barcombe! It was more in common with those weird 3D pictures that were all the rage some years ago – you know the ones where you had to vacantly stare at a spot in the image and hey presto (if you were blank enough) you would see a faint grey shape suddenly emerge from the background. Perhaps I have the gift to stare blankly at any time of the day, whether I am at work, at home listening to the wife and/or kids or even staring at a bit of flint, but these 3D images seem to work for me more often than not even if I don't necessarily see the correct image that emerges from the picture.

But hey, you are probably staring blankly at these words wondering what on earth I'm talking about; let me explain. I was manipulating and studying the results of some resistivity work that was undertaken by MSFAT & BHAS members in a field near Arlington on weekend of 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> March and trying to decipher the data in front of me when suddenly features seemed to jump out at me. Alarmed by this unique insight I asked my wife to come and have a look at the size of the irises in my eyes in case I was 'on' something and to confirm that she could see the same things I could see. Bless her, I wasn't; she could; and even pointed to one or two more features which seemed to complete the picture. Read on; more on our vision later.

We were alerted to this field by a metal detector club via Sid Jeffrey who confirmed that a lot of material (mainly Roman) had been found scattered on the ground; but was concentrated around a level platform within the sloping field, close to a stream and within a short distance of a Roman road – reminiscent of our site at Barcombe but facing north and without such a great view. This was worth an investigation. We surveyed the site using our trusty RM15 resistance data logger and initially covered 5x5 20m grids using the zig-zag transverse method with a sample interval of 1m. (you're not staring blankly are you?) The data was downloaded on David Stavely's laptop and processed on site. It was then decided to survey 2 more grids – to make sure we had captured all the possible features within the site. David then e-mailed me the results to further process a couple of days later.

I suppose now I'd better get to the point, having filtered, de-spiked and smoothed out the data, some features immediately stood out (see fig. 2). These dark features shown on the untouched plot denote high resistance, and can be seen running from the west of the site and turning a 90 degree angle at the east of the site. Further high resistance readings and concentrations can also be seen which could possibly denote walls and buildings. A circular feature in the south-eastern corner could show a possible roundhouse – it seems to be the correct size. There also appears to be some low resistance areas within the plot, particularly the 'lollipop' in the south-western corner and the square platform in the eastern side. Don't ask me to speculate on what they are. The features that 'popped' out at me included more roundhouses, circular ditches and even a large enclosure ditch running north/south at the eastern edge. I must stress (and no doubt you will assume that this is all part of my usual ramblings and weird outlook on life) that these features only appear clearly on the monitor. No matter how hard I try I cannot transfer the features clearly on the printed copies - so you just have to take my (and my wife's) word for what we saw.



**Fig. 2: The results of the Resistivity Survey at Arlington**

So there you go, evaluating resistance data not only depends on what you see clearly before you, it can also depend on your interpretive abilities. This data can give you clues and, possibly, red herrings of what lies beneath, but the only way to find out for sure is to excavate, at least the resistivity can indicate to you where to dig. I'm off to have another delve, why don't you have a go. First look at the image yourself and then start staring, staring, staring, perhaps you may see the features I can see, or perhaps you can see something different.

- Bruce Milton

## **Barcombe Churchyard Survey/Recording**

We are progressing slowly with recording the gravestones at Barcombe. We have now completed approximately 200/250 of them, but we have a very long way to go. At the moment the section we are recording is extremely overgrown which is hampering our progress quite a bit, including getting stung by nettles and losing our equipment in the long grass!

This is just the beginning. All the graves have to be photographed and a computerised record made, followed eventually by entering into a database, so I will also need volunteers to do this as well - a lovely job for a boring winter weekend!

I would appreciate as much help as possible as my volunteers have tailed off recently. Perhaps anyone who is interested in doing the survey would email me at [jm@gouldco.co.uk](mailto:jm@gouldco.co.uk) and I will be able to contact you with dates for the recording. At the moment I am notifying everyone on the main e-mail list and, although this goes out to over 70 people, I am lucky if I get 1 or 2 replies.

Recording is very simple. We have an A4 two-sided sheet that has to be filled in answering various questions (e.g. condition of stone, orientation, number commemorated). The full inscription has also to be transcribed and a small sketch drawn of the grave together with measurements - and that's it. The equipment needed is a pen and/or pencil and rubber, ruler, clipboard, tape measure, trowel, chair/stool (optional), insect repellent and suntan lotion (also optional). Other items that could be useful are flour, a mirror and a water spray bottle! (*the mind boggles - ed*)

- Jo Miller.

## **Churchyard Recorders Wanted for Burwash**

One of our MSFAT members, Claire Goodey, has been recording some of the memorials in St Bartholomew's Churchyard in Burwash. This was for her Recording and Interpretation of Churchyard module at the University.

Claire would like to complete the work of planning and recording the entire churchyard but would like some help - as there are at least 850 memorials!

Claire says: "If the churchyard was fully recorded we would have a record of what was there in 2003, and where in the churchyard particular stones could be found. This would be of benefit to both people living in Burwash and to family historians. There are many old stones some of which are in poor condition - we need to try and record these now before everything is lost."

If you are interested in helping with this project as part of a team, have an eye for detail and like puzzling things out, phone Claire 01323 849396 (evenings).

- Claire Goodey

## **Reaching the places other archaeologists cannot reach – with watching briefs**

One of the many good points about Sussex archaeology is the way that the county archaeologists have been encouraging voluntary groups such as MSFAT and Lewes Archaeology Group (LAG) to take on ‘watching briefs’ on small-scale sites, recording any archaeological remains in places where otherwise no record would be kept.

In November Andy Gammon and I were involved in an interesting watching brief with LAG in Lewes, a new extension behind a town house at 15 Mount Pleasant (opposite the Elephant and Castle pub), in a yard backing on to the north side of Brack Mount – almost certainly where in 1838 a probable Iron Age or Romano-British burial of a human skeleton and a boar’s head was found.

Unusually for a watching brief there was a serious quantity of finds – David Gregory is reporting on two bags of animal bones and Liz Somerville is analysing a tray of oyster and snail shells in her laboratory at Sussex University. Pottery included medieval (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century local ware, probably Ringmer) and 17<sup>th</sup>-century items.

There were differences in the subsoil across the site which suggested a depression or ditch across the area and perhaps surrounding Brack Mount. Unfortunately the builders’ trenches did not go deep enough to get to the natural surface, which might have given further dating evidence. The curve of the feature however does appear to be parallel with the curve of Brack Mount. Only a fully-excavated trench across the site (unlikely unless the owner decides to dig a swimming pool!) and a complicated survey to model Brack Mount in three dimensions could establish for sure whether it was once surrounded by a ditch, and how old it is. However I did use my report to recommend that, if rebuilding ever does take place, there should be a fuller research excavation – with local archaeological groups involved.

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### ***Litlington***

We have now received the Section 42 Licence from English Heritage giving Scheduled Monument consent to carry out a resistivity survey at Litlington near Alfriston. The site is located on a spur in the Cuckmere valley where there are some earthworks, including the remains of a possible flint built barn. The survey will start in September and, to comply with the terms of the licence, must be completed by the end of November. If you would like to help with this survey, then please contact either Chris Butler or Bruce Milton to add your name to the list.