



# Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

## NEWSLETTER

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### Editorial

Your 2006/7 subscriptions are due on 1<sup>st</sup> April, and we have held the rate at £8 once again. Please send your cheque for £8 payable to MSFAT as soon as possible, using the form at the end of this newsletter. You can also register your interest in digging at Barcombe using the same form.

The Christmas party was very successful, with around 40 members attending in the new venue. A short presentation of our work over the last year was followed by a quiz and raffle, whilst a buffet was provided by the venue. Many thanks to Anne and Tim Locke who organised this event for us.

Barcombe starts again in early May, with our first planned weekend on site being the 6<sup>th</sup>/7<sup>th</sup> May. The week before this, we will be machining off a new area to investigate the courtyard area in front of the main villa building and will need one or two members to assist with this exercise. We will also be opening a number of exploratory trenches around the main site to investigate features suggested by the geophysics and to look for boundary ditches etc.

Our main excavation season at Barcombe this year will be the four weeks between the 17<sup>th</sup> July and 11<sup>th</sup> August. During this time there will be training courses run through the CCE at the University of Sussex, and opportunities to volunteer. MSFAT members can obviously volunteer to dig at any weekend throughout the whole season (May to August) without charge.

Keep an eye on our website for the latest information on this and other fieldwork.

Chris Butler

## **Barcombe Roman Villa 2006**

This year we will be extending the excavation area to investigate the courtyard area in front of the main villa building. We will also be opening a number of exploratory trenches around the main site to investigate features suggested by the geophysics and to look for boundary ditches etc.

The main excavation will start on 17<sup>th</sup> July when public training courses in Excavation Techniques, Surveying, Conservation, Drawing and Photography will be organised through CCE at the University of Sussex. Students on these courses, or participants of courses in previous years, may also volunteer to dig during the four week period between 17<sup>th</sup> July and 11<sup>th</sup> August. Those doing so will be asked to contribute £50 per week towards costs.

MSFAT will be organising the weekend work throughout the whole excavation period, and as the number of weekend volunteers may be limited, to excavate at the weekend you must be a member of MSFAT, no further contribution is required. To volunteer for a particular day or weekend, you will need to contact me by telephone on 01323 871021 or by email on [chris@reltub.fsbusiness.co.uk](mailto:chris@reltub.fsbusiness.co.uk) to book a place during the week leading up to that weekend. You can also book a place for the following weekend when you attend the excavation.

Toilets and portacabins will be available at the site, but you should bring your own food, drink and appropriate clothing. You will need your own 4" pointing trowel and a kneeling mat, but other equipment is available on site. Please make sure that your tetanus is up to date. If you are not working on the site, but wish to visit (at weekends only), please contact me to make the necessary arrangements, as parking is limited.

We also want a number of volunteers to help with organising the finds processing part of the project during the four-week period in July and August. All you need to do is be able to commit to attending one or more days each week, have experience of processing finds and preferably have attended the CCE artefacts course. If you are interested in this please contact me as soon as possible.

We will also be having another open day after the successful event in 2005. This will probably be on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> July, so please put this in your diary as we will need volunteers to help as site guides, car parking as well as having people working on the site.

Chris Butler

## **Baths, pits, walls and a road: discoveries at Barcombe Villa in 2005**

By the end of the 2004 season of excavations we had fully revealed the large aisled building which formed much of the eastern side of the courtyard of the villa complex. In 2005 additional work was undertaken in order to further investigate and record this structure. Of particular interest was a large block of shaped sandstone which was used to support the first western aisle post at the junction with the cross-wall forming the southern side of rooms 1 and 2. This block is the only surviving pad-stone for any of the aisle posts, although at least one base may have been formed of mortared flints. Finally, in advance of backfilling and a return to arable cultivation, we lifted the small area of *in-situ* tessellated floor in room 1. This action further revealed the extent of plough furrows and thus the cause of destruction to this floor, and presumably also that in the adjoining room (2) where a few tesserae were also found *in-situ*. Unfortunately no dateable finds or features/deposits were discovered beneath the red tile tesserae.

### **Early Baths**

During 2004 we had discovered part of an earlier building mid-way along, and at right angles to, the west wall of the aisled building (*Sussex Past & Present* **105**, 6-7: Masonry Building 3). In 2005 this earlier structure, which is cut by the foundation trench for the wall of the aisled building, was fully revealed and identified as a small, heavily robbed out suite of baths approximately 12 metres long and 6 metres wide (see Photograph 1). To the west of the wall of the aisled building were the flint foundations of an entrance/cold room and, on its southern side, a cold plunge bath. To the east of the wall of the aisled building the remains were much less well preserved but probably included a hot room/bath within a semi-circular area at the east end (with presumably the stoke-hole, and perhaps a *praeefurnium*, to the east of this).



Photograph 1: The early bathhouse

Further to the east were traces of an east-west orientated ditch, which may have been used to drain all, or part, of the baths. This ditch was cut by several features, including the east wall of the aisled building. Part of the eastern side of the baths was cut by a large trench which is inside, and parallel to, the west wall of the aisled building. At its southern end this feature also cuts the sunken rectangular area, which lies within the

west aisle of masonry building 3. Although the primary function of this rectilinear trench is unknown (perhaps an unfinished ditch), it contained large quantities of building material (see Photograph 2), including some examples of tiles with unusual cut-away decorative edges (i.e. some type of facing or edging material). The dating evidence for both the baths and the rectilinear feature which cuts it have not yet been studied in detail and thus remain of uncertain dates at present. It is possible however that the baths, which some have suggested might never have been completed, may date to the period of the first masonry building (1) on the site of later winged corridor house (2). Alternatively, the baths may have been built during the early usage of the winged house but prior to the construction of the aisled building.



Photograph 2: Ditch with building material

To the west of the bath-house was a large pit containing a large quantity and variety of finds. In contrast, to the north of the western end of the baths was a square pit containing a distinctive deposit of clay, but few finds. In between these two pits, and to the west of the baths, was a continuation of the line of post-holes found in previous seasons to the north. Somewhat surprisingly the previously discovered north-south orientated ditch which lies to the west of the north-west corner of the aisled building proved not, as was suspected, to continue alongside and beyond the whole length of the building. Instead it turned to the west at the north-west corner of the large square pit (see above), which cuts it.

To the north of the aisled building work continued on the cluster of mainly later Saxon pits in the north-eastern of the excavations. One of these pits, which continues under the edge of the trench, proved to be Roman in date.

## Courtyard Wall

One of the main aims of the excavations in 2005 was to investigate the southern boundary of the courtyard and to see if we could locate an entrance. The excavation trench was therefore extended to the west in order to re-locate a small stretch of chalk wall footings, which had been located by trial trenching in 2004. The wall was duly re-located and could be seen to follow the alignment of the south wall of the aisled building to the east (Photograph 3). A large gap in between the aisled building and the chalk foundations to the west is interpreted as a main entrance. The eastern end of the newly exposed wall-footings is considerably wider (i.e. c. 2m wide) than its continuation to the west. It may perhaps represent part of a structure associated with the adjacent entranceway. At the western end of the southern boundary wall the chalk footings turn northwards. A small westwards extension to the trench revealed that flint masonry butts the corner of the chalk foundations and that this continues to the west along the same alignment as the rest of the southern boundary. Further work in 2006 will aim to fully reveal these flint foundations, which may belong to a building forming part of the west side of the courtyard.

The area of the courtyard which was newly exposed in 2005 was found to contain a number of post-holes, two pits (one of which is later Saxon in date) and an area of possible flint metallurgy. An important aim in 2006 will be to investigate the area immediately to the north of the 2005 western extension to the excavations. Ultimately, in 2007, we hope to have investigated all of the courtyard area fronting the winged corridor building, including further parts of the Bronze Age ring ditch, Roundhouse 4 and the enclosure ditch which appears to contain the four known roundhouses.



Photograph 3: The courtyard wall

## **Church Field**

Further preliminary investigations were undertaken in Church Field, which is located immediately to the east of the villa investigations. Previous work in this field (fieldwalking and geophysics) had revealed the presence of a Roman building/s with masonry foundations. The investigations in 2005 included additional survey by ground penetrating radar and two small test trenches. One of the trenches revealed a compact area of building rubble just below the ploughsoil.

David Rudling and Chris Butler

## **The Roman road at Barcombe**

In the summer of 2005 I was a supervisor at Barcombe Roman villa, when Chris Butler suggested that a good research project would be to look at the archaeology around the villa site. So I took the gauntlet and ran with it. Following a conversation with the farmer Mark Stroude, he informed me of a major flint scattering in Court House Field, which ran across the field and covered approximately 30 meters in width. In July 05 my colleague and friend Rhw Mitcheson and with help from fellow UCL students carried out some geophysics. It should be noted at this point that sweet corn was growing in the field, and we were fortunate that one of area of interest was barren on sweet corn and Mark gave us permission to put a test trench in. Which Rhw supervised. The results were amazing. We had what we believed to be an unknown Roman road (I say believed because we had no dateable artefacts from the trench). The road had a metalled surface, under that was an agger and then flint foundations. Unfortunately the remainder of the width of the road lay under sweet corn. The trench was recorded and back filled.

On the 13 November I had decided to try and find the road in Pond Field, which is to north east of Court House Field. For these test trenches I had help from Chris Butler and his MSFAT team, also Bob Durrant who works at the farm, and drove the JCB for us. Our first trench went just inside Pond Field, I had roughly lined up our previous excavation in Court House field and Bob, and the JCB set to work eagerly being watched by the workforce with trowels in hand. It all looked good from the start plenty of large flints, bits of pottery, but the further we went down the less came up, we thought we had a possible ditch in the east end of the trench but this was not the case. We opened up 16 metres in all; 7 metres from the west end of the trench we did find a ditch. We left a team cleaning back whilst we took the JCB to north to the other side of the field, here we started Trench 2. We started this trench further to the east, again lots of flints coming up, we got to a depth of about 500mm and we thought we had our metalled service, the area was cleaned up and photographed and planned, we had a possible ditch at the east and west ends (although the west end turned out to be natural) the east end ditch did line up with the end of the road, and we found Roman pottery in it, also roman pottery was found in the surface of the road, including East

Sussex Ware and Samian Ware. The road was taken down another 300-400mm we was expecting to find the agger and the foundations of the road, but we found nothing just clay, so we had an emergency reinterpretation of the trench and the conclusion was that the layer of flints we had at 500mm was in fact the bottom layer of the foundations and everything else had been plough away. The land is higher in this part of the field so the road is nearer the surface in Pond Field than it is in Court House Field. The road is 8 metres wide.

Going back to Trench 1 the ditch we thought was the Roman ditch in fact turned out to be possibly late Bronze Age (a piece of pottery found in it at the bottom). Chris Butler carried out some dowsing and picked up a few possible features quite evenly spaced out (this will look good in my PhD write up) one possible hypothesis is that these could be Bronze Age field boundaries. He did the same on Trench 2, again evenly spaced apart from one which was just at the east end of our trench, so we dug it out by hand and found a modern plastic field drain (ok so it does seem to work for Chris but it certainly does not work for me, I must have too much natural magnetism). The next exciting and possibly very important feature we found in Trench 2 was a post hole at the west end of the trench right at the side of the road, this had flint packing, we half sectioned it and found pieces of Roman pottery and the post ghost. The question on everybody's lips was, was this a one off post hole (road sign saying London this way) or could it possibly be a structure next to the road, (I had watched a Time Team episode the week before, where at Sedgefield a Roman road was discovered and alongside the road were wooden structures (post holes) and at the back of them they discovered a pottery kiln (complete) and it has been interpreted as small industrial sites along the edge of the road to minimise transport ([www.channel4.com/history/timeteam/2003\\_sedgefield\\_t.html](http://www.channel4.com/history/timeteam/2003_sedgefield_t.html))).

So we decided to open another trench southwest along the edge of the road to see if there were any further post holes, three metres in and yes a second post with flint packing and Roman pottery. Here is were the story so far ends; the post holes were recorded and on 10 December the test trench was back filled and then the field was ploughed, I have just started planting sweet corn in Pond Field and further investigation will have to wait until August at the earliest.

I will start new excavations at Culver Mead (the next field where I'm sure the road continues) in August this year. I will keep you posted, I would like to thank all the MSFAT members who came down and helped with the excavation especially Chris Butler, Keith Butler, Barrie Basset, Dave Cudmore, and Sue Birks, also thanks go to Mark Stroude for letting me dig up his land and for the loan of the JCB and Bob Durrant for driving the JCB. And I would also like to thank the UCL students who helped in Court House Field.

Rob Wallace