

MID-SUSSEX FIELD ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEAM

NEWSLETTER

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November 2001

Editorial

This year has been hectic, with our participation in the large-scale excavations at Barcombe, as well as fitting in a number of smaller projects along the way. The Roman Villa excavation at Barcombe has proved to be fascinating; not only due to the archaeology that has emerged (see interim report below), but also as an example of how amateur and professional archaeologists can successfully work together.

During the year we have also carried out an assessment in Church Field at Barcombe, trial excavations at Clayton Manor, and a watching brief at Danny. Brief details of all of these are in this newsletter.

After last years successful Christmas Party, we have organised another on Saturday 8th December. Please do try and come along for the evening, as it is a good opportunity to catch up on what we have been doing over the year, have a good time, and raise some funds for MSFAT. We will also arrange for a guest speaker to come and give a short talk on an interesting subject.

CHRISTMAS PARTY

**Saturday 8th December
7.30pm at
the Maltings, Cooksbridge**

A light buffet will be provided, but please bring your own drink & glasses

Talks, Raffle, bookstall & an opportunity to see some of our recent finds

Entrance fee £5.00 per person

We hope you will all be able to come and make the evening a success. Please let Bruce Milton on 01444 248626 know if you intend to come.

Payment can be made in advance or on the evening

Looking forward into next year, we will be returning to Barcombe Roman Villa for another season, probably starting in May, when we will hopefully complete the excavation of the main villa building. There are plenty of finds from this year's excavations still to be processed, so if you are looking for something to do on those long winter evenings please contact me for a box of finds to be washed and marked.

We have also organised, in conjunction with the Brighton & Hove Archaeological Society, a number of workshops early in the New Year. Details of these are in the newsletter, along with dates of forthcoming lectures in Lewes and Brighton.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped in the various projects we have worked on this year, and hope to see you all again next year.

Chris Butler

EXCAVATIONS AT BARCOMBE 2001

This summer was the start of a major new archaeological research and training project at Barcombe, near Lewes, East Sussex, and the fieldwork revealed important evidence concerning the transition from timber roundhouses to masonry villa. The project, which is being jointly organised by the University College London Field Archaeology Unit and the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team, is based upon a site, which is subject to annual plough damage.

Previous work

Although evidence of Roman activity had been noted at Barcombe since the early 1990s, it was in 1999 that the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team surveyed and evaluated the area by fieldwalking, geophysics and test trenches, and confirmed the presence of a large Roman villa, together with evidence of additional Roman buildings in the adjacent field (C. Butler 1999, *The Romans in Barcombe, Sussex Past and Present* 88, 7).

The results of the geophysical survey showed a number of interesting features, including a winged corridor villa, some 45 metres long and 20 metres wide, orientated almost northeast to southwest along its longest axis. This orientation allows it to look out across the Ouse valley towards the South Downs, and gives it a very powerful setting. It is this building which has been uncovered and partially excavated in 2001 (N.B. it is our intention to return to the site in 2002 and complete the excavation).

The winged corridor villa

The excavations revealed that the winged corridor villa consisted of at least 12 rooms (including corridors) and had a porch structure for the main entrance (*see* Fig. 1). Unfortunately the building has suffered badly over the centuries due to a combination of stone robbing (perhaps to build the nearby parish church of St. Mary) and plough damage. Although no floor levels have survived, the discovery of some small white, red and grey mosaic cubes and many larger red tesserae cubes provides information about the destroyed flooring, and finds of painted wall plaster indicate other aspects of interior decoration. Most of the tesserae cubes are made from pieces of tile, and many are of a larger size than normal (i.e. cubes with sides of approximately 25mm). It is possible that many of these tesserae were produced on site, and at least one tegula tile fragment has been cut to produce tesserae. Other sources of tile tesserae included box-flue tiles, as evidenced by having one surface with traces of combing which is typical of such heating-system tiles. Although the excavations also yielded uncut pieces of flue tile, none of the investigated rooms have revealed structural evidence for underfloor heating. It is unknown as to whether the box-flue tiles were re-used from an earlier phase of building activity on the site, or whether they were salvaged from another site in the vicinity of the villa. Immediately outside the villa to the west and north, and aligned roughly parallel to the walls of the building, were rows of postholes, probably from fence lines.

Earlier phases

From beneath the winged corridor villa has come exciting evidence for earlier occupation on the site, namely an earlier masonry building, and probably even earlier still, two timber roundhouses, one with a fire hardened clay floor, which was subsequently covered by a layer of flints. The roundhouses, and perhaps also the first masonry building, lie within a ditched enclosure, the ditch of which is partly overlain by the winged corridor villa. A preliminary analysis of the dating evidence suggests that the whole sequence of occupation outlined above spans the period late 1st to the end of the 3rd century, with nothing that need date to after AD 300.

Prehistory

Amongst the finds of other periods from the site (mainly flintwork), is an extremely important Palaeolithic (Old Stone Age) Acheulian pointed handaxe that was found in a palaeochannel that the villa and the roundhouses were built over. At the southwestern corner of the excavations and to the south of the wing room, excavations have investigated part of a large circular feature, which had previously been located by the geophysical survey. This feature is probably the ring ditch of a Bronze Age burial mound.

If you wish to be placed on a mailing list for information/application form, please send an sae to: Helen Dixey, UCL Field Archaeology Unit, 1 West Street, Ditchling, Nr Hassocks, West Sussex, BN6 8TS.

Please note that the site has now been covered over and there will be nothing to see until next summer.

David Rudling (UCLFAU) and Chris Butler (MSFAT).

Wickham Barn Pottery kilns published report

I still have some copies of the British Archaeological Report on the Roman pottery kilns we excavated at Wickham Barn, north of Lewes. Copies are available at the reduced price to members of £18 plus £1 p&p, and are available from me or at the Christmas Party.

Site Reports

Church Field, Barcombe.

During the early summer, we carried out a small investigation in Church Field, Barcombe between St Mary's church and the field that contains the villa. A resistivity survey established the presence of some underlying features, which were then investigated by trenching. A Post Medieval ditch, running northeast to southwest, was located in one trench, whilst a palaeochannel was found in the second trench. The palaeochannel appeared to contain small-sized gravel, which may have been washed out of the adjacent river terrace gravels, and contained a single Palaeolithic flint flake.

Other small test pits confirmed the continuing Post Medieval ditch, and the river terrace gravels, but did not locate any other features.

Clayton Manor

In August a small test excavation was carried out in advance of building work at Clayton Manor, Clayton. This is the site of previously located archaeological remains recorded in 19th and 20th century publications, although there are no above-ground surviving remains to be seen today.

The earliest reference to Roman remains at Clayton Rectory (now Clayton Manor), are in the Gentleman's Magazine of 1818, which states, "where a few years since, in the front of the Parsonage-house, a Roman bath was discovered". The most detailed description comes from the Victoria County History (1935), which states that the remains of a figured mosaic and of a Roman bath were found c.1810, and had subsequently been covered up by the rector.

An L-shaped trench was excavated in spits by machine over the footprint of the new building. The entire depth of the foundations comprised made-up ground which contained redeposited prehistoric flintwork, Medieval and Post Medieval pottery, through to modern flower pots and building material. The only feature was the remains of a Post Medieval track running north south through the site.

Two deeper test pits were then excavated at the ends of the trench to determine the depth of any potential archaeology. Both located water-lain shingle at a depth of approximately 1.5 metres, and lying on and within the shingle was Roman tile and pottery, together with some animal bone.

A full report on the results of this work will be prepared for publication in Sussex Archaeological Collections in due course. I would like to thank Michael Fairbrother who assisted me with this excavation. The owners of Clayton Manor, Mr & Mrs Wilde, have made a donation of £100 to MSFAT.

Danny Lake

During September, the dredging of Danny Lake, Hurstpierpoint, resulted in the dumping of the dredged material onto an adjacent field. Before this was carried out some 10 – 15 cm of topsoil was stripped from the field. The County Archaeologist asked us to observe this work to ensure that any archaeological features and finds were recorded. Michael Fairbrother and myself visited the site on a number of occasions and picked up finds exposed by the topsoil stripping. Michael also investigated the area with his metal detector. No archaeological features were observed, but this should be expected, as the topsoil that had been stripped was too shallow.

Most of the finds were of Post medieval date, and included pottery, metal buttons, coins and bullets. A small assemblage of 18 pieces of prehistoric struck flint was recovered, including a core and an end scraper. A single Roman 4th century coin, pierced for suspension was also found.

Chris Butler

Workshops

Finds Sorting day

A finds sorting day has been arranged on Saturday 8th December (our party is in the evening) at the Maltings, Cooksbridge. Starting at 11am, through to about 3pm, we will be processing finds from various sites, as well as sorting out our archive. There is no charge for this, but places may be limited. Please contact Chris Butler for details.

We have organised the following workshops in conjunction with the Brighton & Hove Archaeological Society. They will be held at the University of Sussex, and are exclusively for members of the two groups. A small charge will be made for each workshop. Please contact Chris Butler to book a place.

Prehistoric Flintwork (Chris Butler) Sunday 27th January 2002

An introduction to the identification of prehistoric flintwork, with the objective of teaching members how to recognise humanly struck flintwork during fieldwalking and excavation. We will also look at the different types of flintwork produced in the different periods of prehistory. There will be plenty of opportunities to handle pieces.

Supervisor Training Course 23rd February 2002 (to be confirmed)

There will be a small number of places available for individuals who want to learn more about running an excavation. This is a practical course, with the intention of training a number of people in MSFAT & B&HAS the necessary skills so that they can assist in the supervision of excavations. Subjects covered will include; organising an excavation, contexts, aspects of recording, and post excavation considerations.

Forthcoming Lectures

Lewes Archaeological Group/SAS (Corn Exchange, Fisher Street, Lewes @ 7.30)

Friday 14 th December:	History of Agriculture on the South Downs
Friday 25 th January:	Did the Romans invade through Kent or Sussex in AD43, and does it really matter anyway?
Friday 22 nd February:	Bottles, Bones & Bananas (conservation of finds)
Friday 15 th March:	Archaeology of Battles & Sieges of the Civil War
Friday 19 th April:	Excavations at Barcombe Roman Villa

Brighton & Hove Archaeological Society (Unitarian Church, New Road @ 7.30)

Friday 14 th December:	What can Churchyards tell us?
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Recent Finds

Shadows, Spring Lane, Clayton

Michael Fairbrother found two small fragments of Samian ware, together with three sherds of flint tempered 12/13th century Medieval pottery at the above house in Spring Lane, Clayton.

Tara, Underhill Lane, Ditchling

Michael also found the following items during building work at the above property, at the Ditchling end of Underhill Lane.

- 1 sherd Samian ware
- 1 sherd East Sussex Ware
- 4 sherds with grog, small-multicoloured flints and white quartz inclusions (Iron Age or Saxon?)
- 2 hard hammer-struck flint flakes

Barcombe Roman Villa

Interim Plan 2001

