



# Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

## NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 51

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### Editorial

Another busy year is coming to an end. This must rate as our busiest year to date, with numerous small fieldwork projects as well as the work at Barcombe Villa. A full update on Barcombe will appear in the next newsletter, but the uncovering of a large part of a new building, the discovery of numerous large pits and an intriguing feature that appears to be Saxon, has made for a very interesting year. We can look forward to another interesting year at the site in 2004.

Once Barcombe finished and was closed for the winter, we thought that things would quieten down. However this has not been the case. We returned to Arlington to undertake some trial excavations in early October, and carried out a large geophysical survey at Frog Firl. Some members then helped out on the emergency excavation of a site at Hamsey, whilst a small number of members (limited by the small size of the site) also helped on the excavation of an Iron Furnace site in the Weald. Reports on all of these projects are in this newsletter.

I would like to thank all members who have participated in the various projects throughout the year. That also includes those of you who have helped with finds processing and other non-field activities. I hope to see you all at our Christmas Party.

Chris Butler

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### Christmas Party

Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December

Malthouse, Cooksbridge

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### ***Christmas Party***

Our popular Christmas Party has been arranged for Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> December, at the Malthouse, Cooksbridge, commencing at 7.30pm.

- \* ***There will be a buffet provided, but please bring your own drink and glasses.***
- \* ***There will be an update on our work this year***
- \* ***There will be a bookstall, raffle and a display of recent finds***
- \* ***Barcombe T-shirts and other goods for sale***

**Entrance fee £6.00 per person payable on the door**

We hope that you will be able to attend, and make the evening a success. To ensure we are catering for the right numbers, please let Chris Butler or Bruce Milton know if you intend to come.

### ***MSFAT Web Site***

Please visit our web site, which can be found at [www.msfat.com](http://www.msfat.com). and have a look. This has been set up, and is maintained, by Barry Burfield who has produced an excellent web site for us. To keep up to date with our latest work and forthcoming activities keep a regular eye in it. If you have any suggestions or ideas for its content or format, then please contact either Barry Burfield or Chris Butler.

### ***Barcombe Churchyard Survey.***

I would like to thank all the people who helped with the survey this year from MSFAT, together with friends and family members.

So far we have managed to record nearly 300 graves, and I will be putting the data on the computer during the winter. We will recommence the survey in the spring and hopefully we will get lots of volunteers to help so that we can finish this during 2004

The Barcombe Churchyard Survey will also be included in the Barcombe Parish Project, which is being coordinated by Pam Combes, and we have had several village residents who have shown a willingness to help out next spring.

Jo. Miller

## **Test trenches at Arlington.**

Earlier this year we carried out a resistivity survey and fieldwalking at a Roman site near to Arlington reservoir. Over a number of years local metal detectorists had been finding Roman coins and other artefacts at the site, but now wanted to know more about their site.

The geophysics results suggested that there might be buildings and other features present, so over the weekend of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> of October a team of MSFAT members together with some of the metal detectorists and members of my Eastbourne evening class gathered at the field to excavate some test pits to examine some of these features.

A total of five test pits were excavated, features recorded and then backfilled. Trench 1 an east-west orientated wall constructed from flint, and incorporating a large ironstone block was found. Trench 2 revealed an area of flint metalling resembling the edge of the agger of a Roman road, again running east-west. The remains of a possible flint wall orientated the same way were also found in the trench. Trench 3 also produced an area of what appeared to be flint metalling, but could be a wall with a scatter of disturbed flints on either side. Trench 4 found the possible corner of a flint wall, whilst Trench 5 was completely sterile.

Small amounts of Roman pottery were found in each trench, together with some nails and the occasional tile fragment, but not in the same quantity or quality as we have been finding at Barcombe. The conditions were not ideal for this excavation as the ground was baked dry, making it impossible to see any cut features. It does appear that there may be a metalled Roman track or road heading east to west across the site with a number of possible buildings with flint wall foundations beside it. However, the possible flint walls were only bonded with clay and the small size of the trenches means that we were only able to see a small part of the site. The only way we are really going to be able to understand the site and answer the remaining questions is to be able to excavate a much larger trench.

The results of this excavation will be published in due course, and therefore the short summary above should be considered as an interim statement.

Chris Butler

## ***Frog Firl***

Over the same weekend Bruce Milton supervised a geophysical survey on a site near Frog Firl. The site comprises a spur that projects out into the Cuckmere valley, upon which are a number of earthworks. The dating and purpose of these earthworks is currently unknown, although they have been scheduled as an Ancient Monument. The survey has produced some fantastic results, and Bruce is currently producing a report for English Heritage, and the National Trust who are the landowners. A full report will appear in the next newsletter.

## *Great North Barn, Hamsey*

Lewes Archaeological Group was asked by the County Archaeologist to carry out a watching brief during the excavation of a lake at Hamsey. Anne Locke and Sue Rowland began to find various archaeological remains, and asked for assistance. On the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> October with various volunteers and members of MSFAT, we excavated the remains of a small rectangular building with walls built of mortared flint. Within the building were the remains of a cobbled floor, and a packed chalk floor, whilst another area of chalk floor extended through a possible doorway in the wall. Outside the building was another area of compact chalk floor partly overlain by rubble from the building's demolition. A section was excavated through a water channel in front of the building. The dating evidence suggests that this building existed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a building on the same location appears on the Tithe map, and it may have been demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is some speculation that it may have been a tide mill.

Nearby a scatter of Medieval pottery was found on the ground surface, and then when the mechanical excavators digging out the lake began digging deeper, a layer of sandy soil over 0.5m down below alluvial layers began to produce Medieval finds. Large quantities of un-abraded sherds of 12-13<sup>th</sup> Century pottery, together with animal bone, wood and a few pieces of leather (possibly from shoes). It is not clear whether this layer is the result of flooding, or simply the disposal of waste from a Medieval settlement into a watercourse.

The first reference to a mill at Hamsey is in the Feet of Fines for the County of Sussex for 1223 when land 'including the mill at Hamsey' and 'Roger the miller' are mentioned (SRS 2). The Inquisition of the Rape of Lewes for 1272 (SRS 44) talks of a water-mill and mill-race which was in need of repair. 'They say there is a water-mill there which would be worth 4li. 5s. a year if the flow of water were put right. The said mill and mill-race could be mended and diverted for 11li.'

In 1297 Simon, the miller of Hamsey was excommunicated (SAC 82) and in 1302 the priest was Peter de Molendinus meaning 'of the mill' (SRS 40). The next mention is in 1790 when Joseph Mighell was compensated for the loss of his mill-race as a result of works carried out by the Ouse Navigation Company when they dug 'The Cut' to by-pass the large river meander.

Two questions remain. Why was the mill known as 'Germany Mill' in 1774 (MOB1699) and why is there no record of it for over 400 years?

The accompanying pictures (which for members who receive their newsletter by email, can be viewed on the MSFAT Website) show the building under excavation.

Chris Butler & Sue Rowland

## *A Wealden Iron Furnace*

I was approached by Jeremy Hodgkinson of the Wealden Iron Research Group (WIRG) asking for assistance with the excavation of an iron furnace that had been found during one of their forays. In excavating a number of test pits to date a large slagheap, they had encountered the top of a furnace. The three sherds of pottery found in the test pits were East Sussex Ware, suggesting a late Iron Age or Romano-British date for the furnace and slagheap.

Over two weekends in October accompanied by a small number of MSFAT members, and ably assisted by enthusiastic WIRG members I directed a small excavation to uncover and record the furnace. The furnace appears to be substantially intact, and is located on a natural slope above a small stream. A platform had been cut into the slope to level the area, and the furnace had been constructed within a small rounded cut into the natural sandstone. The furnace appeared to be of the domed variety, although the upper part of its structure was missing, and was constructed from clay. The clay had been used as a lining against the sandstone, and then used to build the oval furnace structure, projecting out from the slope. A number of pieces of fired clay with rounded surfaces and finger mark indentations were found. The inner surface of the clay lining was lined with slag, and pieces of vitrified slag were adhering to the surviving wall of the furnace in places.

Inside the furnace a tumble of collapsed structure was first removed, and revealed below it a charcoal-rich layer of burnt material, presumably from the last firing of the furnace, and below that the fired clay floor of the furnace. Careful cleaning around the furnace revealed evidence for the rebuilding or re-lining of the furnace, perhaps as many as four times (see photos).

In front of the furnace was a large pit, although this area was very disturbed by rabbit diggings. The partial excavation of the pit revealed that it was much deeper and larger than the tap slag pits usually found associated with Wealden furnaces. The pit produced another few pieces of East Sussex Ware pottery. The opportunity was also taken to excavate two small test pits on two further terraces a little lower down the slope. One of these test pits located a compact area of slag, which may have been associated with smithing activity and another sherd of East Sussex Ware pottery.

Unfortunately we were not able to complete the excavation of the furnace in the time available, and will be returning next spring to complete the work. However, initial observations suggest that this is a large furnace, and may possibly have similarities with those excavated at Laxton in Northamptonshire (Crew 1998). The furnace appears to be the domed variety and would therefore probably date to the latter half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC or the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Cleere 1987).

Chris Butler

### *References.*

- Crew, P. 1998 Laxton revisited: a first report on the 1998 excavations, *Historical Metallurgy* **32/2**, 49-53
- Cleere, H.F. 1987 'The Iron-smelting Furnace' in 'Excavations in Rocks Woods, Withyham, 1982' Harding, A.F., and Ostója-Zogorski, J. *Sussex Archaeol. Collect.* **125**, 11-32.