



Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 54

November 2004

Editorial

Yet another busy year is coming to an end. They seem to get quicker and quicker! Members have worked on a number of projects over the year including Barcombe Roman Villa, smaller excavations at Hamsey and Keymer, and watching briefs at Ditchling and Hurstpierpoint.

A full update on Barcombe will appear in the next newsletter, but the uncovering of the rest of Building 3 and the excavation of numerous Saxon pits and other features has made for a very interesting year, with the promise of another new structure to come next year.

Members also took part in a small excavation at North End Barn, Hamsey where we found some Medieval features, whilst an evaluation excavation at Keymer Burial Ground for Clayton Parish Council discovered a prehistoric ditch and further Medieval features. A small number of members also helped on the excavation of a Roman Iron Furnace site with the Wealden Iron Research Group, whilst others took part in the second excavation on the Wilmington Long Man.

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

Christmas Party

Saturday 4th December

Malthouse, Cooksbridge

Christmas Party

Our popular Christmas Party has been arranged for Saturday 4th 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 & guest speaker***
- * ***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 (01323 871021) or Bruce Milton (01444 244290) know if you intend to come.

MSFAT Web Site

Please visit our web site, which can be found at 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. There are many pictures and a week-by-week progress summary of the Barcombe excavations available on the website as well. 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 Roman Villa, ironstone and the Roman iron industry

Ironstone

In 2003 excavations at Barcombe Roman Villa (BV) site revealed ironstone in the wall foundations of Masonry Building 3 (MB3) to the SE of the villa. The stone was in slabs that had been squared on two sides. It has been suggested by Luke Barber that these were to be used as corner or quoin stones in the construction of the villa and that perhaps too many were brought to the site so they were used as foundation stones in MB3, which is contemporary with the villa. (Ironstone was used as quoin stones in the construction of Beddingham Roman Villa where it was also used to line the well). The ironstone was probably sourced locally and conveniently because a more suitable building stone could have been sourced just a little further afield.

The stone is a clay ironstone or siderite mudstone, which occurs as nodules or layers in the clays of the Wealden Beds. Its main constituent is ferrous carbonate in the form of the mineral siderite, which contains up to 48 per cent by weight of iron. This rock was used as iron ore in most iron smelting furnaces or bloomeries. If the builders of BV were using iron ore as a building stone, were they also smelting iron?

Local sources of ironstone

The geologist Bernard Worssam directed me to three areas in the Weald Clay that would have been the closest possible sources of ironstone for the builders of BV. The stone was dug from shallow quarries or bowl-shaped pits, which became known as minepits from the old local word for iron ore, which was “mine”. Clay ironstone from the Weald or Wadhurst Clay cannot be differentiated and clay ironstone does not have a “fingerprint” to help identify its source.

The BGS map sheet 319 (Lewes) shows an ironstone horizon just to the north of Balneath Wood near Town Littleworth (TQ410180) and the associated Geological Survey Memoir mentions iron stone horizons with associated large pits occurring in this area. In the opening chapter of *Iron Industry of the Weald* Bernard Worssam mentions that: “Dr. Bristow has recently reported Weald clay pits at Balneath Wood, Barcombe”. Balneath Wood was an area of ancient woodland that was cleared in the 1980s and the owner of the land at that time does not recall pits in the wood. However field trips have confirmed there are pits (possible minepits) in the area.

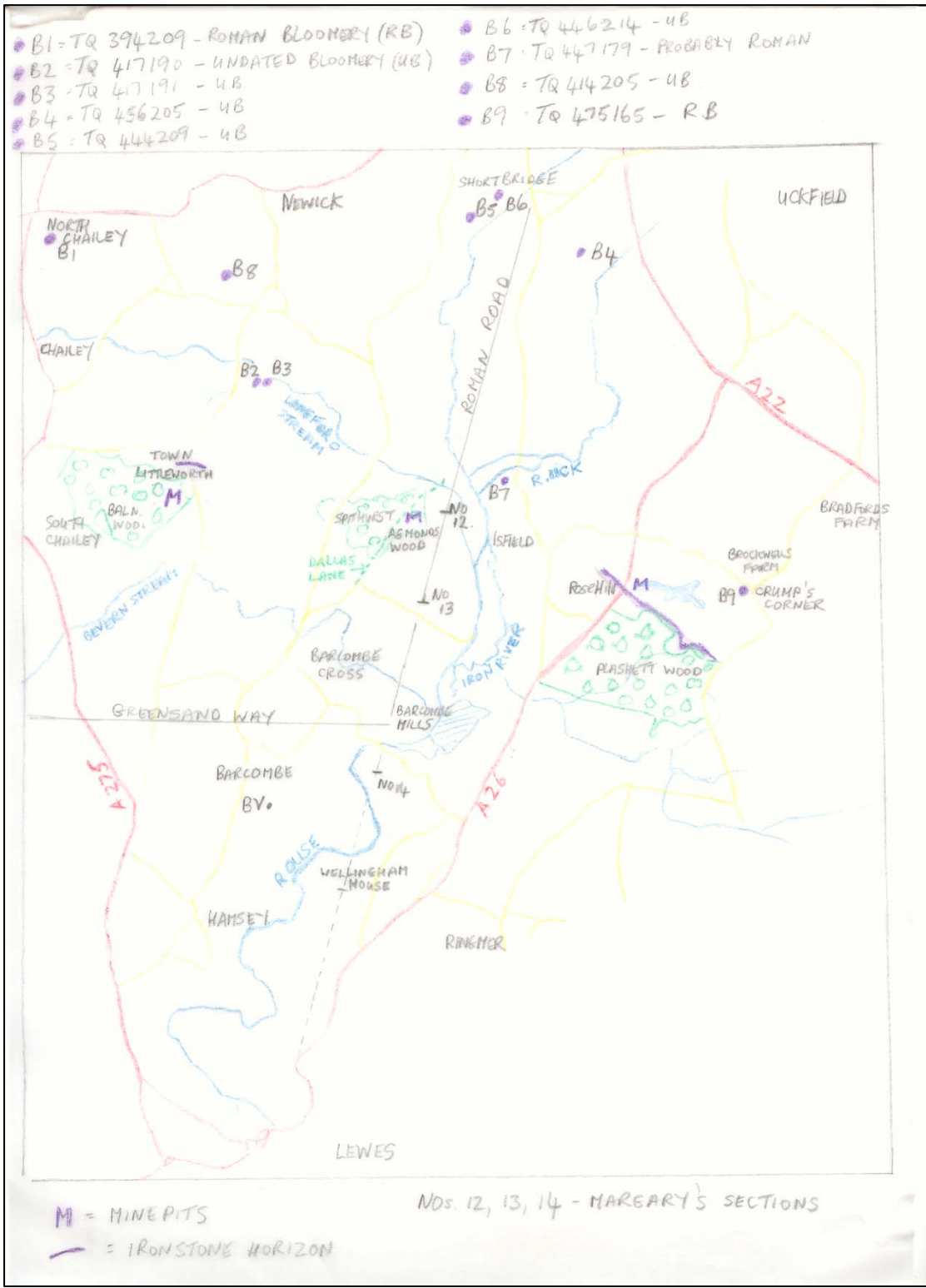
The same Geological Survey Memoir mentions minepits at Dallas Lane (TQ 435173), a path that runs though Agmond’s Wood in the north of the parish. Here there are three huge quarry type pits typical of minepits dug in the Romano-British period, the largest approximately 100m wide and 5m deep. The chances of ever finding dating material such as pottery, are pretty remote as the landowner recently “excavated and made the pits sound with a bulldozer”.

The third possible source is an ironstone horizon that runs east from Rose Hill (TQ 458165) along the northern border of Plashett Wood to Mount Farm. Here we recently found a large quarry type pit (similar to those in Agmond’s Wood) on the dip slope of the iron escarpment. There are more pits in this area that we hope to locate and investigate this winter.

The iron industry

On the map (see next page) I have noted the positions of all recorded bloomeries in the area. Most of the sites are undated except B1, which Chris recently excavated, and B9 which have been dated as Romano British from the pottery found there. B7 is probably a Romano British bloomery site from evidence of “black earth” and the nature of slag found there. The site borders the River Uck where a footbridge is soon to be refurbished and I have permission to do a watching brief.

The western group of Roman iron working sites in the Weald is orientated on major highways north south. BV is situated at the junction of the EW Greensand Way and the NS London/Lewes Road or “Iron Way” as I. D. Margary described it. In 1933 Margary found cinder (referring to the general waste products of iron smelting) in the metalling of the London/Lewes Road in sections dug at approximate positions Nos. 12, 13 and 14 on the map and found cinder scatters on the alignment of the road up to a point just beyond Wellingham House. At No 13 the section revealed: “the road thick made of cinder, gravel and small flints rusted together into a very hard concrete mass, very similar to that at Holtye”. As the Romans used the most convenient local sources of material throughout the length of this road there must have been bloomery sites not far from this section of the road some, perhaps, as yet undiscovered.



Barcombe Villa and the Ironworking Industry.
 See text for details

At section No 14 on the edges of the cambered surface Margary found Roman pottery pointing to a date about 100AD for the construction of the road. The earliest masonry building at the BV site is dated from 150-200AD. Did the iron industry and transport of iron along the London/Lewes Road play a part in the economy and development of the BV site? How big was the Barcombe Villa estate? Did it perhaps extend as far north as the bloomeries at Chailey and Newick and to the east of the River Ouse? (Interestingly, today the eastern Barcombe parish boundary is marked by the Iron River a tributary just to the east of the Ouse).

Chapter 4 of *The Iron Industry of the Weald* mentions the *collegium fabrorum* of Chichester and the goes on to state: “limited companies or guilds of this type could have ensured a steady revenue from relatively modest iron making activities along the main highways, supplying markets at their two ends”. During the first, second and into the third centuries there were hardly any military establishments in the south and it is “therefore presumed that iron making operations of this western group of sites were in the hands of civilians and based on land transport of their products”.

I therefore suggest the landowners of the BV site were in the right place at the right time when the Romans arrived and expanded the local iron industry!

Ann Best
August 2004

As a footnote: I am indebted to Ann Bacon for her help and company on field trips—without her map reading skills I would have been lost!

Finds Processing & progress with past sites

I have finds from a number of sites, including Barcombe, which need to be washed and marked. We will probably arrange a couple of days in the New Year at Cooksbridge to do this, but if anyone would like to take some in the meantime, please contact me (01323 871021).

The Streat Lane Mesolithic site excavation report is finished and once the illustrations are ready, this will be submitted to the Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society for publication. Hammonds Mill Farm is in the final stages of preparation and will shortly be submitted to Sussex Archaeological Collections. After this, the Saxon cemetery at Keymer with the Park Barn site and a number of smaller sites are next in the queue.

Remember that reports on sites we have worked on in the past can be found in Sussex Archaeological Collections, whilst Friars Oak and Wickham Barn are available as BAR's (I still have a few copies for sale). Other reports on Marshall's Manor, Cuckfield, Tilgate Forest Lodge and Clayton Manor are available from me as MSFAT Monographs, priced at £5 each.

MSFAT Accounts

Unfortunately we did not publish the 2002/3 accounts last year, so this year you have both the 2002/3 and 2003/4 accounts presented below.

<i>Income</i>	<i>2002/3</i>	<i>2003/4</i>	<i>Expenditure</i>	<i>2002/3</i>	<i>2003/4</i>
	£	£		£	£
Subscriptions	1,342.00	1,312.00	Postage etc	25.50	22.12
Donations	570.24	1,189.39	Equipment	283.64	467.04
Grants	0.00	0.00	Subscriptions	0.00	28.00
Interest	19.83	6.34	Fees	183.46	985.00
Christmas Party	252.00	166.00	Insurance	211.50	228.30
Other income	117.00	150.00	Films	360.94	317.15
Book sales	<u>167.10</u>	<u>20.00</u>	Newsletter	25.50	49.95
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,468.17</i>	<i>2,843.73</i>	Stationery	293.83	17.44
			Hire charges	85.00	562.50
			Photocopying	<u>0.00</u>	<u>4.80</u>
			<i>Total</i>	<i>1,469.37</i>	<i>2,682.30</i>

At end of 2003/4

	£		£
Balance brought forward	4585.06	Building Society a/c	4746.49
Income	2843.73	Cash	<u>0.00</u>
Expenditure	<u>2682.30</u>		4746.49
<i>Carried forward</i>	<i>4746.49</i>		

Summary

Although the accounts appear to be very healthy, we should remember that included within the carried forward balance is a substantial amount earmarked for the Barcombe project. At the end of 2001/2 this amounted to £907.20 (arising from donations from visitors and other grants and donations received), and now includes £564.24 from the 2002 season and £369.39 from the 2003 season, making a total of £1,840.83. The money earmarked for the Barcombe Roman Villa project will go towards paying for the analysis of the finds.

Our income in 2003/4 includes donations from Hassocks Parish Council and Stirling Design & Construction in respect of the evaluation excavation and watching brief carried out at Keymer and Hurstpierpoint.

On the expenditure side in 2003/4, we purchased a few new items of equipment, including more excavation and surveying equipment together with an auger. Some large fees were incurred, including £750 for the analysis of the Hassocks Roman pottery, and £540.50 for the hire of a JCB and portaloos for the Keymer project. The high expenditure on stationery in 2002/3 was for specially pre-printed drawing film. The general cost of films and stationery reflects the costs associated with the fieldwork at Barcombe and other sites. Our insurance premium to the CBA insurance scheme for local groups also creeps up each year.

Chris Butler