

# Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team

## NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 60

November 2006

### Editorial

Another year draws to a close, and I cannot believe how quickly it has gone. As usual we have been quite busy with Barcombe and a number of smaller projects. This coming year at Barcombe (2007) will definitely be our last year working on the main villa complex in Dunstalls Field. There is still a lot to do, so we will need maximum support from members every weekend from mid May through to September, when we have to leave the site.

Anne and Tim have organised another Post Christmas Party at the same venue as last year. I am sure all of you who joined us on that evening had a good time, and we look forward to another successful evening in January (see below for details).

There will be a number of projects coming up in the New Year, including fieldwalking at Barcombe and some excavations as well, so keep an eye on the web site or let me know if you are interested so that I can contact you.

Thanks to those of you who responded to my request for information about defence sites in Sussex. The information provided has been really useful, and I have included a short resume of my work so far in this newsletter.

Finally, can I ask for any contributions from members for future newsletters. Your own research projects or interests, or perhaps a resume of something archaeological you have been involved in.

- Chris Butler

## News

The Holleyman Lecture 2007 will be entitled Boxgrove and Beyond, and will be given by Prof. Chris Stringer at the University of Sussex on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007. Tickets obtainable from the University.

## Post-Christmas Party

As last year, MSFAT will be having a post-Christmas Party. This will be on Saturday 13th January 2006, in the upstairs room at the Royal Oak pub, Station Street, Lewes, from 7.30pm.

- There will be buffet-style snacks provided and you can buy your own drinks at the bar.
- Chris will give an update on our work this year.
- Tim and Anne will devise another quiz, by popular request not quite so fiendish as last year's.
- There will be a bookstall, raffle (prize donations welcome) and a display of recent finds.
- Barcombe T-shirts and other goods for sale

All for just £6.00 per person payable on the door.

The Royal Oak is up the hill from Lewes railway station, just before the crossroads on the right. The nearest parking is on-street in Southover Road or in the West Street car park the other side of the High Street. We hope that you will be able to attend, and make the evening a success. So that we can give the pub the right numbers for catering, please let Anne or Tim Locke know (ideally by Christmas) if you intend to come. Phone 01273 475381, email [anne@timlocke.co.uk](mailto:anne@timlocke.co.uk)

## Forthcoming Fieldwork

There should be some fieldwalking coming up soon near Barcombe, A reconnaissance has picked up a scatter of probable Mesolithic flintwork in a field to the north of Barcombe, and once the field is in a suitable condition we hope to fieldwalk it.

Other forthcoming fieldwork projects include the excavation of the barrow at Peacehaven, possible excavations at Hassocks, and possible surveys and excavations of some defence sites.

As always, please let me know if you are interested in taking part in any of these, and keep an eye on the MSFAT website ([www.msfat.com](http://www.msfat.com)).

If any members are interested in undertaking some documentary and map research, then please let me know, as I have some research ideas.

- Chris Butler

## **Barcombe and Beddingham Roman Villas: buying into the “Roman Dream”. But how did the builders afford it?**

Barcombe Roman Villa (BV) and its southern neighbour in the Ouse Valley, Beddingham Roman Villa (Bed V), were built as status symbols on existing farming estates. They were built with considerable disposable or surplus income as a mark of wealth and social status: the builders aspired to and were able to afford to buy into the “Roman Dream”. BV and Bed V are examples of winged corridor villas, a prescriptive house plan and form of classical architecture also common on the near Continent. They would have been built with great confidence and with a feeling of certainty about the future. The roundhouses they replaced required enormous investment in natural resources. The building of a roundhouse of about 12-13m in diameter required over 200 mature trees, 12 tonnes of thatching straw (from 4 hectares of cereal yield) and 10 tonnes of clay to make the daub. It has been suggested the life span of these great roundhouses was well in excess of two centuries. So what gave the builders such confidence and enough income to invest in a home in the Roman style?

### ***An industrial landscape***

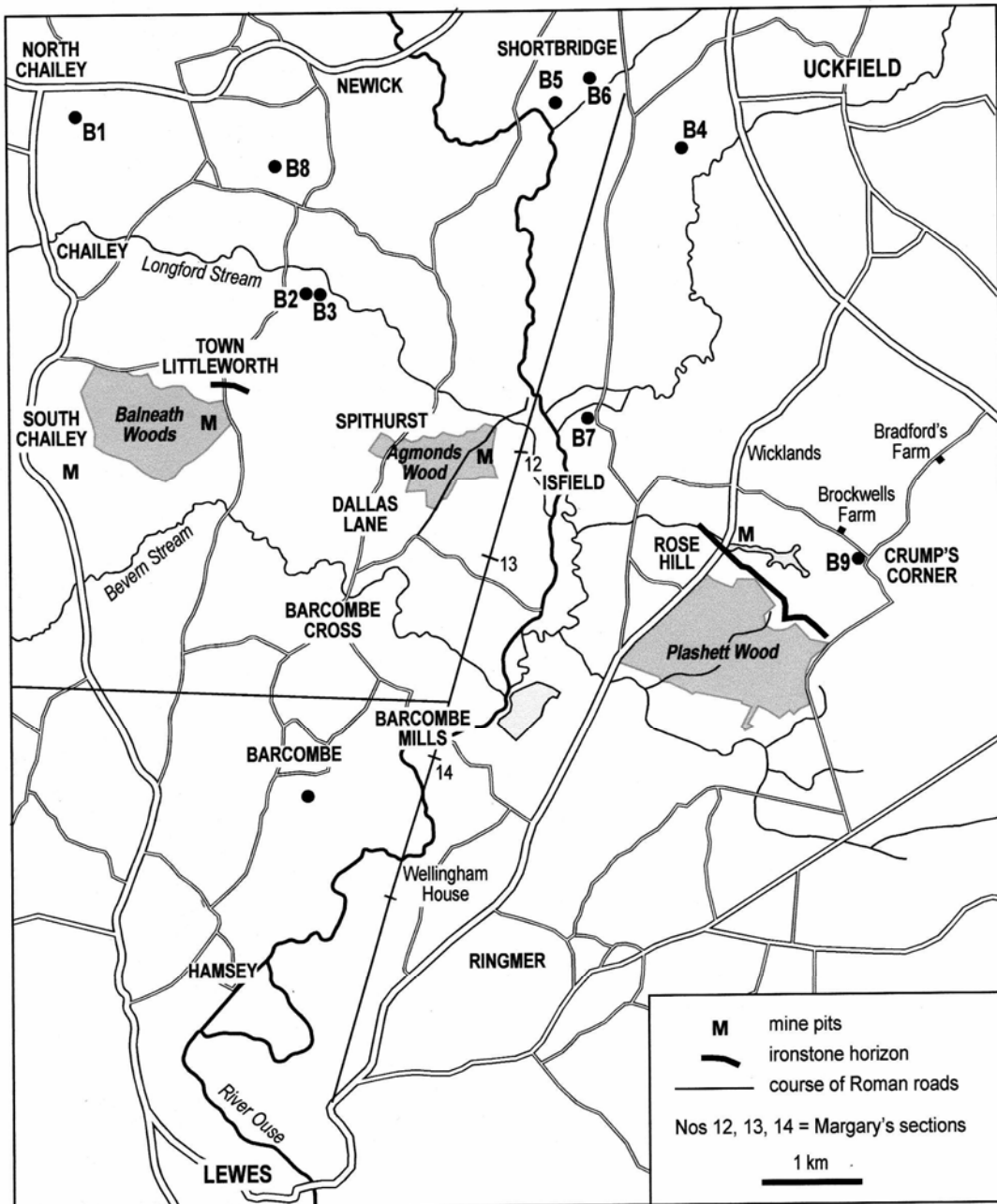
In November 2004 I wrote a piece for the Newsletter where I identified the closest possible sources of the ironstone found in the fabric of BV during excavations in 2003. Bed V also had ironstone as part of its fabric and ironstone lined the well. The ironstone for Bed V could have been sourced from the same sites as those for BV, but also from others nearby at Bradford’s Farm (see Fig. 1). All these sites are close to recorded bloomery or iron smelting sites.

Just a quick glance at the map *OS-Roman Britain* will show you that these two villas and the bloomery sites are situated at the edge of a huge cluster of blue symbols indicating “Mineral Extraction Sites”: in this case—iron. The villas were built at the edge of a huge industrial landscape that was the centre for iron making in Britain for two hundred years from the time of the Roman occupation. Both villas are situated at important N-S and E-W Roman road junctions providing connections to routes to London, to the coast at Pevensey, to Chichester and to routes over the Downs to Seaford.

### ***A client kingdom***

Another glance at the map of Roman Britain and you will notice that this industrial landscape sits to the east of the kingdom of the Regni, which was a client kingdom of the Romans and whose leader, King Cogidubnus (or whatever his name was!), did very well out of the deal as evidenced by the lavishness of Fishbourne Palace. But why were the Romans so keen to court the leader of the Regni?

Empire building is a lot about exploitation and the Romans were after our natural resources: silver, lead, tin and iron. It has been suggested that the importance of iron in the Roman world can be equated with the dependence of the modern world on steel. Iron was needed for equipping the army: for weaponry, armour, transport vehicles and fort building. It was needed for shipbuilding and for the structural fittings involved in mortared masonry building, a skill the Romans brought with them. Iron was needed for all the tradesmen’s tools involved in these industries. So how convenient for the Romans that by the time they arrived in 43AD there was “a vigorous and technologically well advanced iron making industry in existence on the fringes of the Weald, a region that was rich in iron ore and woodland, the two essential raw materials for this industry” (Cleere and Crossley p55). No wonder the Romans were so keen to keep Cogidubnus “on-side”!



**Fig. 1:** Barcombe Villa and the Ouse Valley (Drawn by Sue Rowland)

### ***Roman villa estates***

Professor Edith Wightman has described a villa as “any solid building or building-complex in the country, provided that it is built partly out of stone....and provided that it appears to be the centre of an agricultural unit”. “Villa” in Latin means “farm”. Prior to the Roman occupation Britain’s economy was based on agriculture and the army of occupation was confident it could be fed. Rome did not increase the fertility of the land, but by her system of roads and the enforcement of peace she made more of it accessible and allowed it to be more extensively worked (Rivet p100).

BV and Bed V would have been very productive mixed farms, positioned as they are in the Ouse Valley and the poorer soils on the chalk Downs would also have been exploited. The landscape at this time would have been much wetter: the river would have been tidal beyond its tidal point today and the river south of Lewes would have been a broad tidal estuary. There was a ford across Glynde Reach at its shortest crossing point just by Glynde Station and the Romans built a wide earth causeway to the east of this, to avoid a steep climb on the south side of the Reach. The Bevern and Longford Streams to the north of BV would have been substantial waterways and there was a creek (20-30m wide in places), which ran for some distance E-W just south of the BV site. These streams probably silted up in the 18C after canalisation of the Ouse and their routes can be seen aerial photographs of the area.

### ***How big were BV and Bed V estates?***

As dependent as the Roman world was on iron, a late IA/Romano British farm was dependent on wood. The tree cover probably extended as far south as Barcombe Mills and such were the demands, woodland management would probably have extended up into the High Weald. The old drove routes provided access to the High Weald, where the animals were driven for pannage and clay and stone would also have been sourced. Based on a map of the drove routes and known positions of Roman villas and farms it is possible to suggest “boundaries” for farm estates along the Greensand Way and for Bed V. The routes of droves are present in today’s roads and I suggest that BV used The Drove just to the west of the river and the A275, which forks to North Chailey and Town Littleworth and goes onto Fletching, Maresfield, Danehill and Forest Row parishes, which during the Roman period were at the heart of the iron industry in the Western Weald. Bed V would have used the A26 to Isfield and then forked left towards Shortbridge, Fletching and Maresfield. The droves from the NE corner of the proposed Bed V estate go to Chiddingly, Framfield, East Hoathly and Buxted, where alone 48 Roman bloomery sites have been recorded. Did the owners of the villas consider these areas in the High Weald “their land”?

### ***Did the builders of BV and Bed V make their money from the iron industry?***

Rivet has described a villa as a farm, which is integrated into the social and economic organization of the Roman world. John Percival has suggested a villa could not exist in isolation and that what makes it a villa is obtained from outside it from markets, craftsmen and a pattern of exchange. He has suggested the economy of the Roman villa is ultimately the economy of the Roman Empire itself. BV and Bed V had an enormous iron making industrial landscape on their doorsteps and although there is no evidence to suggest how the industry was organized in the Western Weald, all historians agree it was in some way in “private hands”. It has been calculated that Bardown, the military iron making settlement in the Eastern Weald, produced 40-5 tonnes of iron annually from 7-8 furnaces and the amount of wood that had to be charcoaled would be nearly 6,000 tonnes !!! (Cleere and Crossley pp74-79). Even if the iron making sites closest to the two villas had a more modest output, there would have had to be woodland management on a huge scale. Inevitably there would have been contact between ironworkers and farmers to be able to maintain vital supplies of wood for both industries. Perhaps some farm workers became ironworkers?

### ***Conclusions***

Yes, I think they did make their money from the iron industry either directly or indirectly. Maybe those who built the villas were the “private hands” which organized the industry in this part of the Weald. Maybe there was some kind of franchise system, which would have encouraged maximum output: the more you produce the more you earn. The Romans would not have wanted to get their own hands dirty, but made it attractive for others to do so. This is why they were so successful at empire building. Contact with the iron industry would have been unavoidable for the reasons outlined above and BV and Bed V farms would have been the “bread basket” for a large part of the industry. There is no doubt there would have been officials recording the local output of iron etc and organizing its transport to London or to the coast for export by sea to other part of Britain or to Gaul. And what better place to organize export from the Western Weald, than from these two villa sites both at such important transport junctions. There would also have been a local market for iron, especially for the building of villas and everything that went with living in the Roman style.

And finally....to those who say I can't suggest there is a connection between the iron industry and the building of the villas, because there is no evidence of iron making at the villa sites, I say this. Iron making was a dirty industrial process that took place up in the woods very close to sources of iron ore. You would not expect to find evidence of coal mining in the gardens of large houses built by wealthy Victorian pit owners! Ironically there is evidence of iron making at the villas---iron ore in the fabric of both villa buildings, which is where all this started!

- Ann Best

Cleere H.& Crossley D. 1995 *The Iron Industry in the Weald*, ch 3 p55, ed Jeremy Hodgkinson, Merton Priory Press. Chapters 1-4 on the Roman iron industry.

Percival, J. The Villa Economy: Problems and Perspectives p5 in *Villa Economies: Economic Aspects of Romano-British Villas* eds Branigan K. & Miles D, University of Sheffield. Also, the introduction to the papers.

Rivet A.L.F 1966 *Town and Country in Roman Britain*, p100, p104, Hutchinson &Co.

## **Finding and Recording Defence sites in Sussex**

When I started this project I thought it was going to be a simple process; firstly gather together all the information about known sites, then go out and visit the sites and record them, then write it all up into a handy guide so that others can also visit them. A bi-product would be the compilation of a database of all surviving defence related archaeological sites in the two counties. Practice has shown that this would not be the case.

A good starting point has been the Defence of Britain Database administered by the Archaeological Data Service (<http://www.pillboxesuk.co.uk/>). This was compiled during the later 90's and has a large number of the surviving sites on it. However there are problems as I have found, and an example will serve to demonstrate. The database showed four pillboxes surviving along a stretch of the River Rother south of Mayfield. However, after much searching I could only find two. Then looking more carefully on the database it was obvious what had happened; these pillboxes were recorded by two different individuals, one of whom had quoted completely incorrect grid references that resulted in four entries being created for only two actual sites!

Many of the sites I have looked at have been pillboxes, and it is surprising how many different varieties there were. Although the official records have a limited number of pillbox varieties, because the actual construction was left to soldiers or civilian contractors under the command of an NCO or officer, they used whatever materials were available, and changed the designs to suit local circumstances. One of the most common local types is the Type 24 pillbox, an irregular hexagonal shape with an entrance in its longer rear wall. However, just this weekend I have found a local variation along the River Uck, where three smaller "squashed" Type 24's had been built covering bridges across the river. Interestingly one of these still has its original metal door.

I have also found that it pays to ask questions when out looking for sites. I have lost count now of the number of times when having asked permission to visit a site on someone's land that they have said; oh do you know about this or that, and often a completely unknown site is identified, or some previously unrecorded information is revealed. Yesterday, one landowner described the 'haystack' disguise used during the war for the pillbox I was recording; no evidence for that disguise survives today.

A couple of weeks ago someone put me onto a possible site north of Hastings, at a place called Baldslow. A quick search of the DofB database showed that this had been designated a Nodal Point in 1940, although there was no record of any surviving sites. A Nodal Point meant that it was put into a state of defence, and should have been able to hold out for five days against a German attack, possibly in the case of Baldslow it was due to the important road junction situated there. I therefore went to take a look. I knocked on the door of the house where the site was supposed to be, and having told the owner what I was looking for, was taken out into the garden where a line of 28 intact concrete anti-tank cubes lined the bottom of the garden (Fig. 2). These would have formed part of the northern perimeter of the Nodal Point. The owner then said was I interested in this? and proceeded to open a double door, which revealed a partly buried pillbox that I duly recorded. Talking to his gardener (who had been a child during the war) then gave me more information about other potential sites around Hastings. I then wandered around to see if there was any other evidence for this Nodal Point in Baldslow. I spied a familiar piece of concrete in a nearby car park; that was an uprooted anti-tank cube, and further investigation located another three in-situ forming part of the eastern side of the perimeter.

Knowing from past experience that the lines of cubes often followed footpaths, I searched for the southern perimeter, and a short while later located the concrete bases of three cubes emerging from the bank of a footpath. Unfortunately I could not find any evidence for the western perimeter, but a follow-up conversation informed me that they were buried within Beauport Park. A very successful afternoons work.



Fig. 2: Line of Anti-tank cubes at Baldslow

An aspect of defence that is often overlooked is civil defence; air raid shelters, ARP posts, ROC observation posts and so on. An excellent survey of these sites has been undertaken for Lewes (Elliston 1995), but elsewhere in Sussex these sites are little known, and have often been demolished without any form of recording. It always gives me a buzz to come across these sites. I have found previously unrecorded air raid shelters in Hastings, Bexhill, Pevensey and Seaford, based on a reference in a book or by word of mouth. There must be many more of these sites elsewhere, especially in the grounds of schools and public buildings.

My survey is ongoing, so if anyone is aware of any potential sites then please get in touch. If anyone would also like to start researching their local town or villages' participation in the defence of the realm, then please get in touch and I will point you in the right direction.

-Chris Butler

### *Reference*

Elliston, R.A. 1995 Lewes at War 1939-1945, Seaford, S.B. Publications.