

Worthing Archaeological Society Journal

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The opening of the revamped Finds Shed at Slindon

Courtesy of Jennie Williamson

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Dear Members

Once again the articles written by our members and published in this Journal reflect a wide range of topics and I hope will give some idea of the scale of the Society's members' interests.

Alex Vincent's article on fieldwalking of Possible Ancient Sites in Goring draws our attention to the fact that sites adjacent to urban areas can be candidates for development.

Connie Shirley discusses fresh and salt water sources from early medieval times around the Sompting Paddocks site which the Society has been investigating for the past few years, with especial reference to the well situated in the Malthouse complex. This complements Gordon Hayden's article "Between the Wet and Dry: Malthouse Field, Sompting in prehistory" in last year's journal.

Sioned Vos has been delving into the archives at Worthing Museum on the track of Major Arthur Roper's excavations on behalf of the Society prior to the erection of Church House, West Tarring in 1967, now being redeveloped. This, in effect, continues on from Sioned's work with Liz Lane on the large volume of work undertaken by Major Roper published in our 2018 Journal as "Major Arthur Cecil Roper and his wife Frances Ann Hubbard". We in today's Society have a splendid legacy to live up to.

Another village along the coast is highlighted by Amie Friend in her article on J. M. Barrie and his visits to Rustington and the family whose children inspired his major work "Peter Pan". Rustington has completed the move of its museum into the building in the car park at the rear of Waitrose previously used by the WRVS. It is now an airy museum space, thanks to a Heritage Fund grant, where the history of Rustington is clearly displayed, and previously hidden flint and pottery artefacts are on show. The Museum is also running a series of talks where our members (Gordon Hayden and Bob Turner) are speaking over the winter, more information on www.rustingtonmuseum.org. Well worth a visit.

And lastly a story from the First World War which in spite of a memorial in Littlehampton Cemetery lay unacknowledged for many years, an omission which has now been rectified.

And an especial thanks to Jennie Williamson for the photo on the front page. The Finds Shed was pristine and tidy back at its opening in January but we have filled every corner and when the team is all together there is danger of overcrowding. It seems we are never satisfied.

I wish you all good reading and a happy and fruitful New Year. And, if any of our members have a special interest they would like to share with us next year, please contact me.

Cheryl Hutchins
Editor

Possible Ancient Sites in Goring

By Alex Vincent

There could be possible Neolithic, Roman, Medieval and Post-medieval sites in a field north of the railway between Goring and Ferring level crossings. The author has searched the ploughed field from December 2018 to May 2019, and found artefacts, which are Neolithic, Roman, Medieval and/or Post-medieval in date.



Figure 1. Site No. 1 centre right; Site No. 2 foreground left; Site No. 3 far distance right

These artefacts are flint implements, brick, tile, oyster shell and pottery. The pottery dates from the Roman and Medieval periods, some of the brick fragments are Post-medieval, and fire-cracked flint and beach pebbles were also found. The field is called Goring-by-Sea/Rife Field.

The author has looked at three sites in the field just north of the railway, one is west of Goring-by-Sea station (site No. 1) centred at ca. TQ 103032, another just east of the ancient trackway to Highdown (site No. 2) centred at ca. TQ 099032 and the other just west of Goring Street and north of Goring-by-Sea station (site No. 3) centred at ca. TQ 104033. The latter was the site of an 18th century farm and the only remains today are flint walls on either side of Goring Street. Some chert was found on site No. 3.

The area the author field-walked and explored in Goring-by-Sea/Rife field was Site No. 1, 75 yards going north of the footpath and 80 yards east to west, Site No. 2, 65 yards going north from the footpath and 45 yards eastwards from the footpath, and Site No. 3 from start of wall in Goring Street to 50 yards northwards and 25 yards to the west.

Neolithic flint blades and scrapers together with debris flakes were found on site No. 1. Neolithic activity may have occurred here, possibly a flint knapping site or even a settlement. Some of the flakes may be Bronze Age in date. Roman pottery and Medieval material such as a floor tile, skillet and pipkin pottery sherds were also found on the site. The sites are just south of the Ferring Rife, which would have been an important water source for the people who lived and worked on the sites.

Site No. 1 seems to be the main site and there appears to be what may be a possible trackway leading to it from Highdown in Neolithic times. This is visible in the field north of the A259 main road as a sort of track and also on the hill as an earthwork. This joins the east-west footpath on the hill from Highdown and it is possible that flint was taken along it to be knapped at the site. This ancient trackway probably crossed the Ferring Rife on a ford or by a simple wooden bridge. A hedge may mark its site.

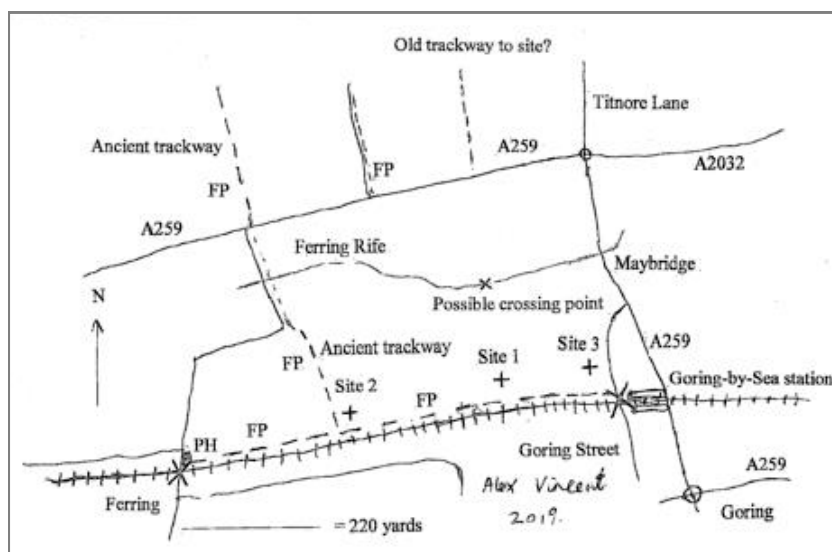


Figure 2. Map of Goring-by-Sea/Rife Field, Goring, West Sussex



Goring Street, which is east of the sites may be on or near the line of a Roman road or trackway. This is a south to north road, which probably went from the Roman site at Northbrook College towards the sea. The Roman artefacts may well have been washed into the field from Northbrook or was there a Roman settlement here as well?

The field could be built on in the future and hopefully field-walking and excavations will be carried out beforehand by archaeologists. All finds, plus a write-up, map and photographs were donated to Worthing Museum and Worthing Library.

Figure 3. Finds from site No.1: left Neolithic flint implements (the blade at the top left is the author's first find in the field); right - Medieval pottery which includes skilnet and pipkin sherds.

Of Water and Wells at Sompting

By Connie Shirley

Introduction

Last year's journal report on the Malthouse excavation looked at the site with respect to the prehistoric finds and focused on the landscape and use of the land in those periods. This year's report concentrates on later periods and in particular focuses on the Medieval period and how the landscape may have differed in that period to what we see today.

Excavation on the site began in 2017 with the intention of cleaning and recording the existing standing building structures within the field. All that was visible was this small section of wall (Figure 1) next to a tree to the south of the site and a small section of wall running north-south to the north of this building. Following the discovery of more building remains, excavations were extended with the objectives:

"To seek to identify the layout and dimensions of the "Malting house and Edifices and backsides thereto belonging" (1627) so as to form an idea of how and on what scale it might have functioned, and to seek to date its development, and its demise; also to identify whether the barn represented in Yeakell (1778) may have been a new building on the former Malting house site, and if so whether its design purpose appears to be malting as before, or some different purpose."(Tristram, pers.com)

Excavations over 2017, 2018 and 2019 revealed a pottery assemblage with probable dates from the Neolithic to modern. However, although not yet



Figure 1. Visible wall remains at the start of the project

verified, the excavation team believes that around 50% of the assemblage dates to the Medieval period.

The site location

The site is centred TQ 163 052 north of West Street in Sompting. The site is just south of the South Downs National Park boundary at the A27. The site is located between the two built-up areas of Sompting and Worthing and within fields used as paddocks for a livery business.

The ground rises steeply north from the A27 but slopes more gently across the fields between the A27 and West Street. The building remains are at about 10m OD.

The soil is a superficial layer of clay, silt, sand and gravel overlying the bedrock chalk of the South Downs (BGS, 2019a)

How near to the coast was the site in the Medieval period?

Examination of LiDAR data (DEFRA, 2019) (Figure 3) showed how close the site is to the low-lying and previously marshy area of the Broadwater Innings (Baggs et al, 1980a).

Since a substantial percentage of the pottery found in the excavations was provisionally dated to the 13th and 14th centuries, investigation was undertaken to review the potential access of the site to the coast at this time.

Kerridge's work in preparation for the book *Georgian and Victorian Broadwater* (Kerridge & Standing, 1983) shows that the silting up of the tidal innings was starting in the 13th century with the formation of a shingle bank caused by longshore tidal drift. However, the major infilling of the Broadwater innings took place in the 15th century – see Figure 4

Longshore tidal drift (Scopac, 2004) runs from west to east on the Sussex coast and in the 13th century the shingle bank was forming across the bay although access out to sea was still possible. By the 16th century the shingle bank had formed along the coast as far as the Adur and the Sompting Brook and Teville Stream flowed to the mouth of the Adur.

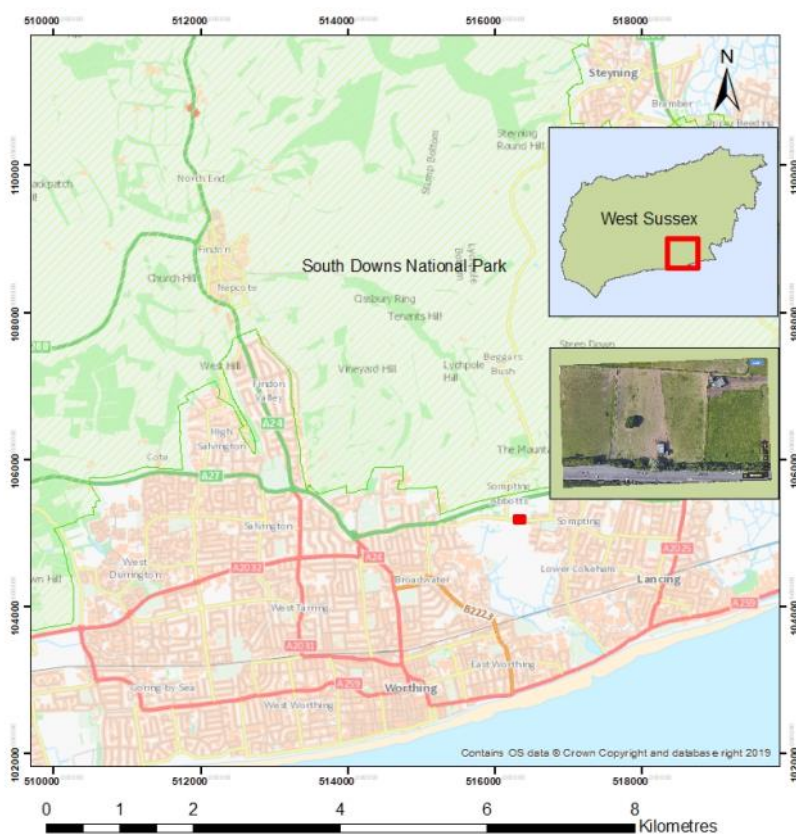
Drainage of the Broadwater innings land was undertaken from 1571 onwards when a dam was built at Shopsdam Road, Lancing, which blocked the tidal inflow (Kerridge and Standing, 1983). The Teville Stream broke through the shingle bank to the sea at its present location at East Worthing in 1820 (Baggs et al, 1980a).

The whole sequence of infilling can be seen in recent works for the EPIC project rerouting of the Sompting Brook.

A sequence of topsoil, silt, sand and beach pebble is visible see Figure 5.

(Details of the project are available at <https://oart.org.uk/epic/>)

The second image in Figure 4 shows Kerridge questioning whether the river Arun was constrained by the shingle bank to flow parallel to the coast. Vine (1986) makes reference to the Arun flowing to enter the mouth of the Adur at Lancing until the 15th century but Castleton (2013) suggests it is unlikely that the river would flow a distance of 18km although he does suggest “shared tidal compartments along the coast between the Arun and Adur”



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Figure 2. The Malthouse Field Site

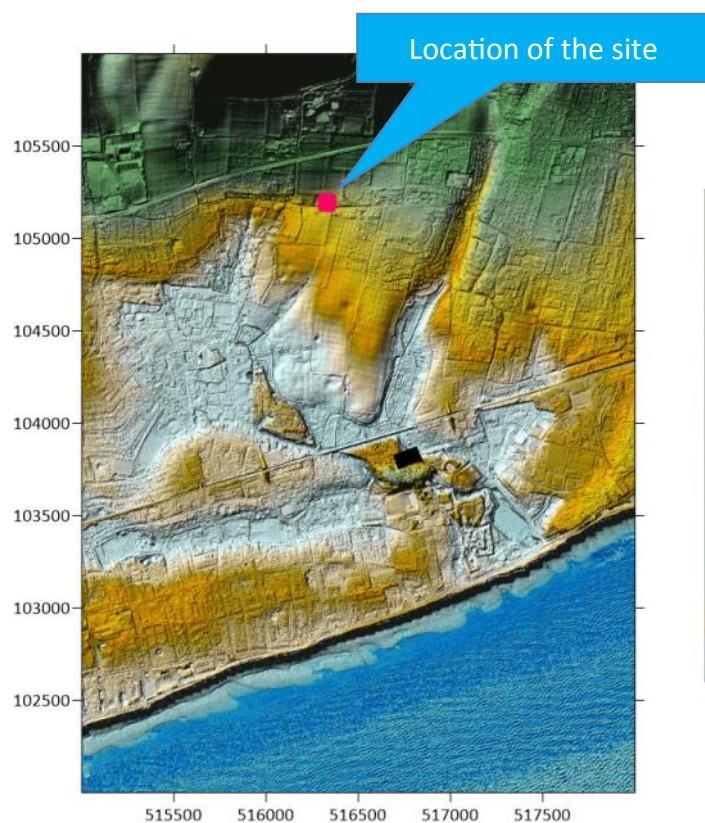


Figure 3. The site relative to the South Downs and the coastal plain

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(2018) and LiDAR data (DEFRA, 2019), map
generated using Golden Software LLC Surfer
Version 16.6.484

During the period in which the stone church of St Mary's was built at Sompting (early 11th century (Baggs et al, 1980b)), there appears to be an open route to the sea from all points around the innings.

Present day dry valleys suggest a number of streams draining from the Downs into the innings (Figure 3). It seems feasible that the Caen stone (Baggs et al, 1980b) dressings on the church were transported by sea to a point very close to the church.

This route from the innings to the sea cannot have been too constrained by shingle bank development in the 13th century since a harbour is recorded at Worthing in 1300 and 1324 (Rowland & Hudson (1983) and the port of Pende is recorded at Lancing during this period. (Baggs et al 1980c)).

Could the 13th century pottery found on the site have been imported by the sea route?

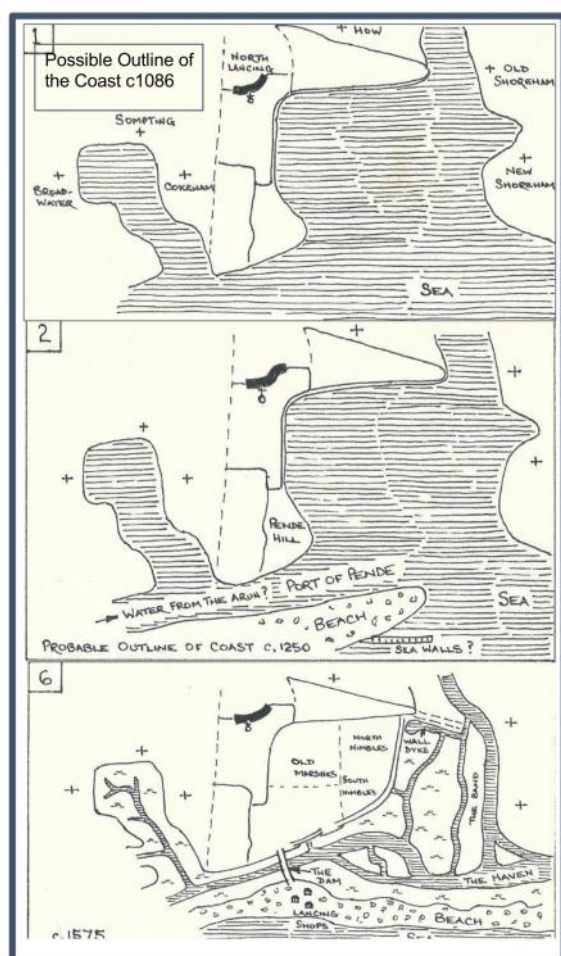


Figure 4. Kerridge (1983)
Sketches of Coastal Outlines

Figure 5. Section through the Sompting Brook Channel



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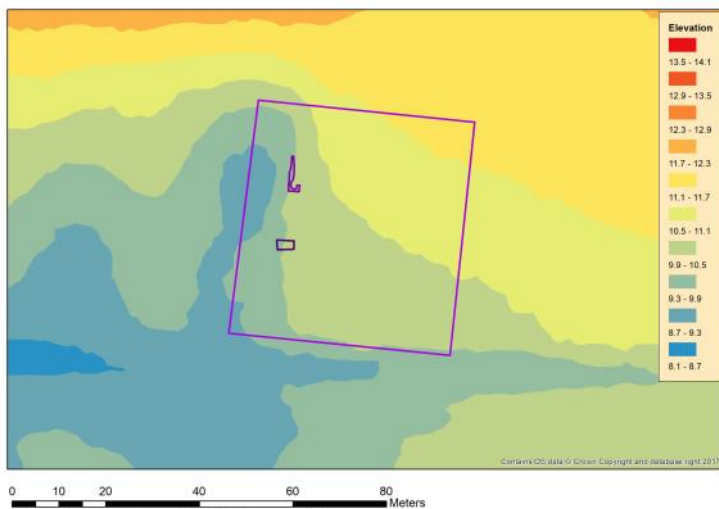


Figure 6. Building remains (in purple) on the edge of a slope



Figure 7. Old stream bed below the wall foundations

The Topology of the Site

The building remains first investigated sit on the edge of a slope. There appears to be a small innings adjacent to the buildings and the 1896 Ordnance Survey map (OS, 1898) does show a pond in this area.

Although the contours for the site do not show any obvious line of flow into the small innings, it appears that the area may have been fed by a stream since the remains of an old stream bed were visible at the base of the North/South wall (Figure 7).

The discovery of a Well

A well was uncovered adjacent to the North/South wall in the area interpreted as the interior of the malthouse building (east of the wall - Figure 8) and excavated to a depth of 900mm to reveal 7 courses of stone work (Figure 9)).

Excavation to this point revealed that the well had been filled with demolition rubble including some of the large blocks of chalk (approximately 300x150x150mm in size).

Augering indicated that the well was still full of large building materials so it was not possible to gauge depth. At 900mm, further work proved impractical and the well was recorded and then filled with soil. The excavation then focused on identifying the well-cut to review the construction of the well.

Figure 10 shows the plan view of the well before infill. This view implies that the well was built against one wall of the cut. It was slightly less than 1 metre in diameter and oval shaped rather than circular.

The well interior was composed of large rectangular blocks laid in layers with no mortar between them. The blocks then had a surround of large, loose, irregular blocks of chalk.

The well-cut became too hazardous to work at a depth of 1.6 metres. An auger was then taken down through the well-cut until a layer of chalk marl was encountered. At this point it became difficult to get the auger to cut any deeper. The auger depth was 1.9 metres giving an assumed depth of well-cut at 3.6 metres below ground level.

The well-cut was filled with darker, wetter soil and Medieval pottery was found in this fill. The assumption at this point was that the well was constructed in the 13/14th centuries, given the type of pottery found.



Figure 8. Overview of the site showing the well adjacent to the North/South wall



Figure 9. Well Interior

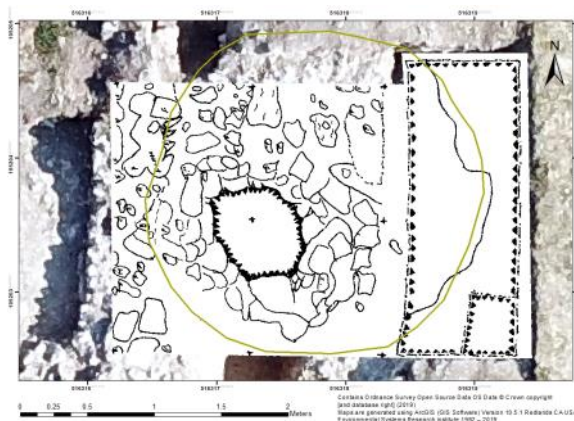


Figure 10. Plan of Well area before infill



Figure 11. The well-cut as first identified

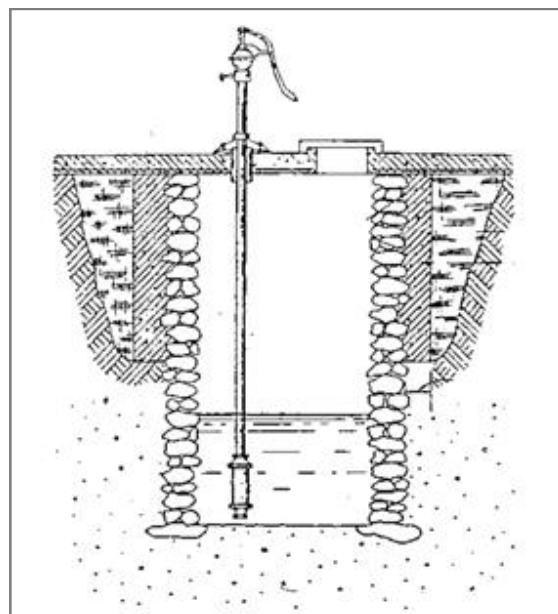


Figure 12. Hand-dug well construction (Salazar et al, 1994)

The sketch in Figure 12 comes from a modern Peace Corps manual (Salazar et al, 1994) on the construction of wells but the authors note that it is a "centuries old" method.

The survey of Sussex Wells and Springs gives details of the Rest Water Level below the top of the well for wells in the Sompting Area (Edmunds, 1928).

Most of the data related to wells which had been filled in but a new well was cut in 1938 in the area known as the Long Dole. This well is approximately 200 metres east of the malthouse well. BGS ID 577519 gives a sketch map of the site (BGS,2019b).

We can combine this data of the resting water levels to make an assumption about the level for the Malthouse well – Table 1.

This data implies that the resting water level was below the level reached by the auger but it is not clear whether the well-cut did extend into the chalk marl or whether the construction was that of Figure 14.

The wall shown in Figure 14 was not bonded to the well construction, and during the 2018 excavations it was found that the cut for the North/South revetment wall partially cut through the cut of the well indicating the well was constructed before the wall.

Looking at the land profile across the Broadwater innings (Figure 15) it could be assumed that the sea would be about 500 metres from the location of the well during the 13th century.

Assuming little change in sea level since the 13th century, the well would be able to access water above sea-level and based on the Ghyben-Herzberg principle illustrated in Figure 17 from Barlow (2016) there would be no salt water intrusion and it would be possible to access freshwater if the well extended below sea-level.

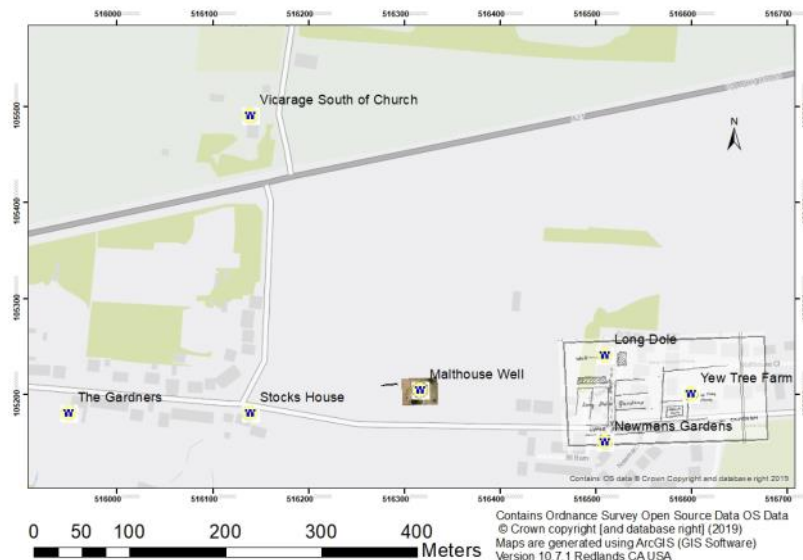


Figure 13. Local Wells around the Malthouse Field

Site	BGS ID	Date of Inspection of Bore	Date of last inspection	Ground Height mOD	RLW below ground m	Water table mOD
Long Dole	577519	1938	?	12.980	8.230	4.750
The Gardners	577507	1898	1940	8.300	3.350	4.950
Vicarage South of Church	577505	1914	1960?	24.380	19.810	4.570
Yew Tree Farm	577557	1983	1959	13.183	4.923	8.260
Newmans Gardens	577558	1893	1959	13.030	5.029	8.001
Stocks House	577505	1898	1947	7.620	3.353	4.267
Malthouse Well	N/A	N/A	N/A	10.380	4.580	5.800

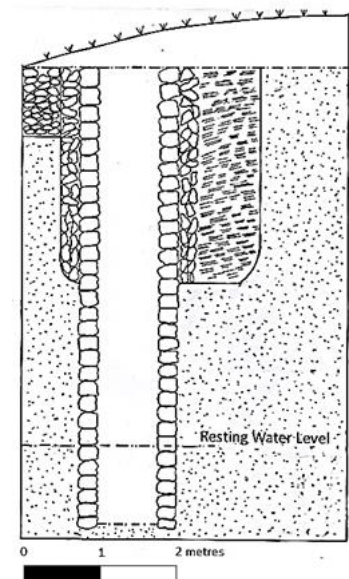


Figure 14. Notional cross-section of the well

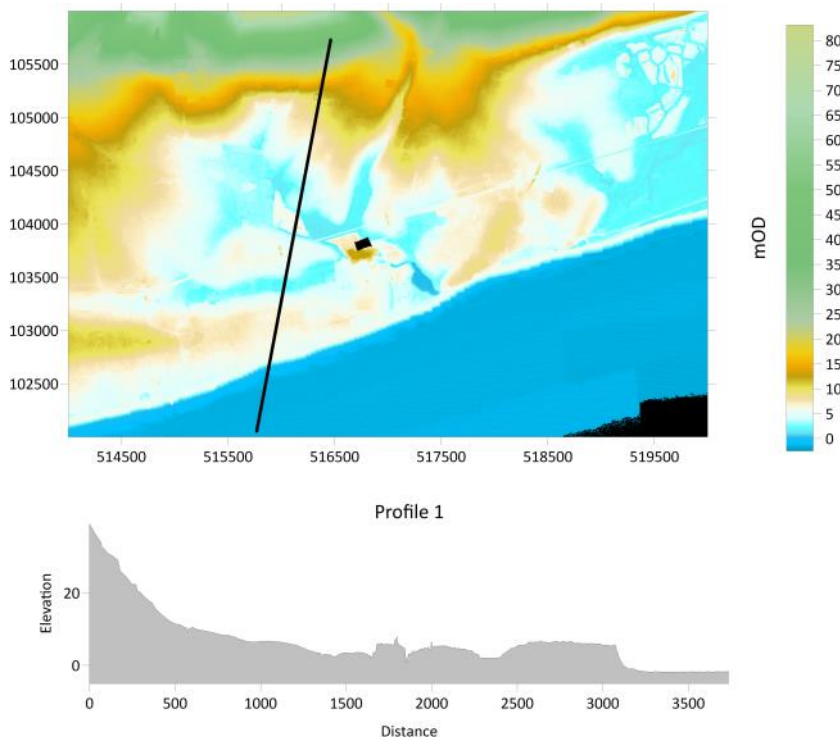


Figure 15. Profile of elevation across the Broadwater Innings

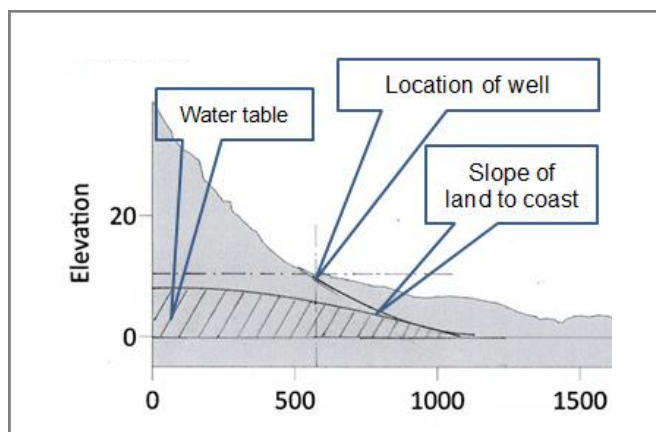


Figure 16. Notional water table and slope of land to sea

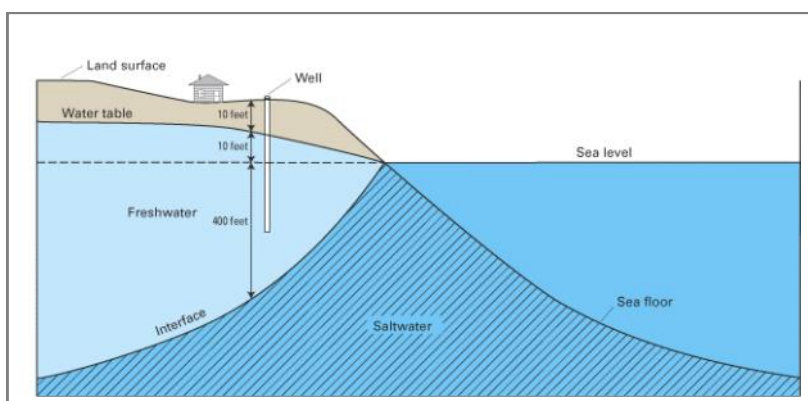


Figure 17. Illustration principles of salt water intrusion from Barlow (2016)

The Impact on Understanding the Malthouse Site

Understanding the Broadwater innings allows a review of coastal communications for the site during the 13th century. There appears to have been easy access for the transport of building materials and pottery to the site. Therefore, pottery could have been transported from Adur or Arun sites and the pottery bears a strong resemblance to that produced in Binsted at this time.

But was the 13th century the period when the well (although maybe not the malthouse building) was constructed? A well sited within the Malthouse Field could have functioned but would it have survived so intact and how long could it be expected to be in operation? No mention of it has been discovered yet within 17th century documentation, but this may be because a well was such a basic part of a residential site it would not rate a mention.

The well as constructed with loose blocks and no casing would have been susceptible to contamination from ground water run-off.

To avoid contamination from domestic sewage and livestock pens, the well would be best constructed higher than these and yet there is little land available lower than the well until the 15th century.

While the pottery sherds found on the site point to significant use or occupation of the site in the 13th century, their occurrence in the well-cut may simply be redeposit of surface artefacts during later construction.

For next season's dig we may need to rethink how to date the site.

Acknowledgements

Margaret Dean (WAS Member) for the drone images

Maggie and Ian Williams for all their cooperation in allowing us access to the site

Mike Tristram and Sompting Estates for suggesting and supporting the project

All the members of Worthing Archaeological Society who took part in the excavations and in the post excavation works.

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Mapping Data

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Research institute 1992 – 2019
Or
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West Tarring (Church House and other sites)

By Sioned Vos

This note arises from a request for information from our President, John Mills. The Church House sheltered accommodation, situated off Church Road, West Tarring and built in the 1960s, was being demolished and the site redeveloped in 2018-19. He wanted to know if there was any material in Worthing Museum (WMA) from archaeological observations during its construction over half a century ago. There was, and Liz Lane and I have been finding out more about it.

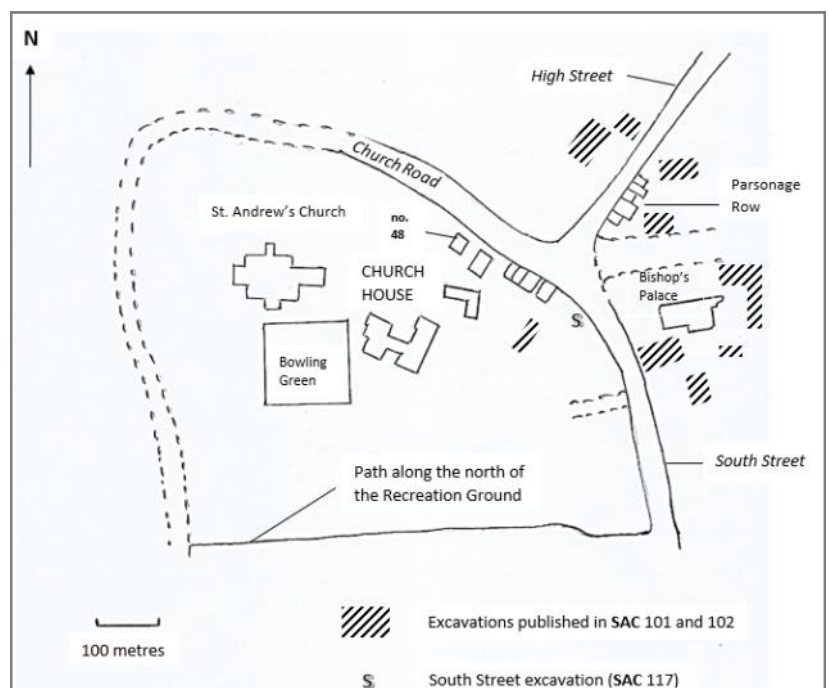
At that time, the Museum had an active "Correspondents' Corps" (Vos 2017) which monitored building works over a wide area, ranging as far as Pulborough and Shoreham. According to the *Worthing Herald* of 24 March 1967 Con Ainsworth was "directing operations", but Major A.C.Roper, one of the more active Correspondents (Lane 2018) was obviously on site more of the time and kept records of what was found during the redevelopment of the Church House site. As the latter was owned by the Borough he had reasonable access and was able to conduct some excavation prior to the building of the flats.

The Museum holds Major Roper's records and the finds under the accession number 1967/1273:

a typescript report, pencil-drawn sections, annotated building plans, two of which are reproduced below, and about 10 Kg. of pottery, plus a few other finds. Most of the pottery is marked with context codes, but it was difficult to make sense of the archive. The descriptions and numbering of features in the Report do sometimes match those on the plans, but seldom the codes marked on the pots/potsherds.

Figure 1 shows the central position of the Church House site, east of St. Andrew's Church, West Tarring and south-west of Market House, which lies on the junction with High Street and South Street. The dotted line along roads in this plan reflects the fact that a number of roads in this area are recent. Glebe Road (just north of the Bishop's Palace) was only constructed in the nineteenth century and involved the demolition of medieval houses south of Parsonage Row. Priory Close, running westwards off South Street, was built in the twentieth century. Church Road itself was only a path ("Church Lane") as late as the 1896 OS map, running westwards to a pond north-west of the church and then narrowing and looping round and back southwards, parallel with South Street. By 1909, this line had become a road "Parkfield Road", though by 1932 it was given its present name - Church Road.

Figure 1. Sketch plan of the centre of Tarring Village



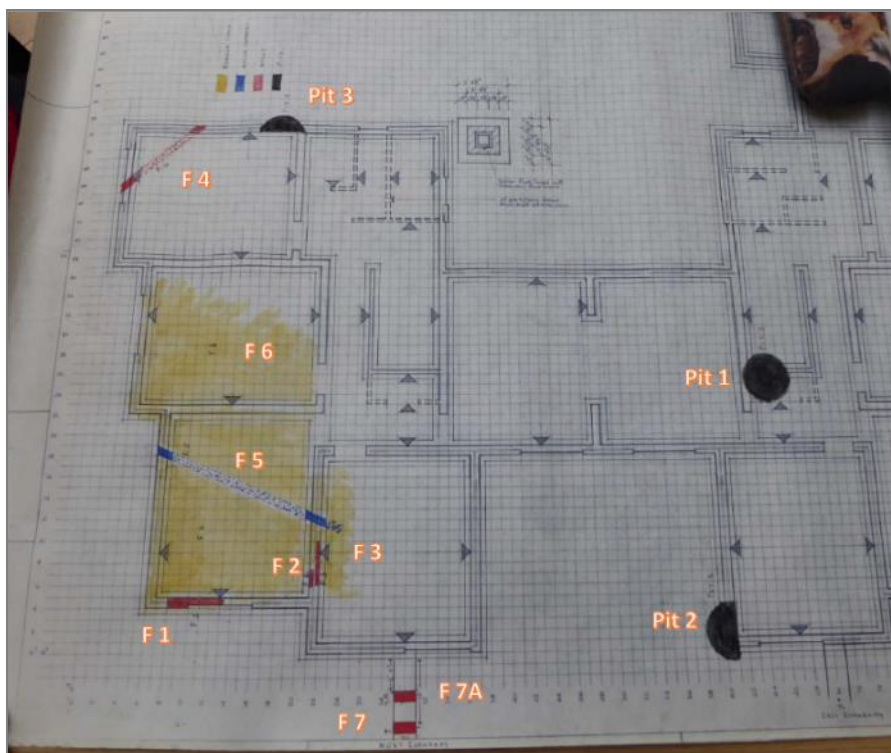


Figure 2. Borough ground plan

Figure 2 (WMA accession number 1967/1273/1/6) is the Borough ground plan of the new building (whose outline is shown in **Figure 1**), annotated by Major Roper: Feature and Pit numbers superimposed by the author.

The yellow area (F 6) is "rammed chalk". As some finds are labelled "A1 L1 chalk spread" it could be that this western portion of the new building is area "A". The black spots are pits, the red are walls and the blue (F 5) a "water channel".

The thin trench running south at the very bottom left of the plan is the "west soakaway", containing Features 7 and 7A of the Report.

A few post-medieval finds were marked "WS" or "E/S" (presumably west or east soakaways) – not "A". The finds from Pit 1 are so marked, but otherwise it is difficult to work out where the finds from contexts "B" and "C" were recovered.

The Features and Pits marked on the plan do match Major Roper's typescript Report, which is headed 27th February 1967 (WMA 1967/1273/1/1), and is quoted here [italics are my addition]:-

"PIT 1.

Only a small portion was dug through for the footing trenches.

Dimensions:- Diameter 5 feet.

Visible depth 2 feet 6 inches. The bottom of the trench was probed for another foot and the dark filling was found to be going still deeper, further probing was not possible.

Filling:- Four layers were found. See section drawing.

[WMA 1967/1237/1/4]

1. Disturbed top soil.
2. Grey filling.
3. A very black band consisting of almost pure charcoal.
4. Dark grey filling which continued to the probed bottom.

Finds in Pit:- Medieval pottery amongst which were three shards of chimney pot.

Food debris – oyster shells, bones etc.

PIT 2.

This pit was larger than Pit 1, but the ground was so broken up that exact measurements were not possible, the estimated diameter was 6 to 7 feet.

The bottom of the footing trench was probed to a depth of over three feet, but the bottom was not reached. The filling was black and grey, ash, charcoal etc. All the material recovered was post medieval.

PIT 3.

Only the top of this pit was seen. It was recognised by the dark colour of the soil and the quantity of charcoal that it contained.

Concrete foundations were laid over it before any investigation could be made.

FEATURE 1.

A five foot thick wall constructed with very heavy flints and large chalk blocks set in mortar.

FEATURE 2.

An eighteen inch wall built with small flints and chalk blocks set in mortar.

FEATURE 3.

A four foot wall built with medium sized flints and chalk blocks set in mortar.

FEATURE 4.

A lightly built wall running in a S.W. to N.E. direction, small flints and chalk being used in its construction.

FEATURE 5.

This feature consists of a square water channel, size one foot by one foot.

The roof was Horsham stone the sides being built with shaped chalk blocks cut so as to form the sides and part of the floor of the channel.

FEATURE 6.

This consists of an area of rammed chalk, large blocks being used in places.

As can be seen in the section drawing it extended roughly 40 feet northwards from the S.W. corner of the house footings.

In places the layer was three feet and more in thickness as it was visible in the bottom of the footing trench, probing was impossible.

The architect informed me that he had no idea what these features formed part of, in fact, he had no knowledge that they were present previous to the digging out of the footings.

Most of these features appear to run to the west or S.W. and under the bowling green so the likelihood of further excavation is remote.

Post medieval pottery and food debris was found spread over the whole site being especially thick in the south east corner.

FEATURE 7 & 7A.

These two walls were exposed when a trench was excavated to carry pipes to the west soakaway.

F.7.

The wall was exposed at a distance of 13 feet from the south wall of the building.

Depth of trench at this point 2'9".

Top of wall 1'8" below the surface.

Wall 1'8" thick.

Construction.

Heavy flints and cement mortar. The cement contained charcoal.

Date probably 18th century.

7A.

This wall was exposed at a distance 6'9" from the south wall of the building.

Depth of trench at this point 2'3".

Top of wall 1'3" below surface.

Wall 1'6" thick.

Construction.

Medium flints in cement mortar. No charcoal in the mortar."

The paragraph quoted below is at the end of this Report which was signed "A.C.Roper" on 29th June 1967, and refers to two figures, one the Borough plan of the whole site, annotated by Major Roper, and a tracing of the same area with almost identical notes (**Figure 3** below). The observations and finding of the ice house marked on the plan took place after those described above relating to the February work (confirmed by reading the Minutes of the Correspondents' Corps meetings of April and June 1967, held in History Files at the Museum, though the ice house was obviously discovered by the end of March, as it is the focus of the *Worthing Herald* article of 24 March 1967).

"TRACING & SITE PLAN MARKED 'A'"

A drainage trench was dug under the wall and through the garden of No.48, Church Road. This trench disclosed a heavily built wall south of the north wall of Church House grounds, it then cut through a 20 foot long pit which contained a whole range of pottery from early medieval through post-med. to the 19th century. About 10 feet from the north end of the pit another wall, or foundations, were exposed at a depth of 2'3", this feature ran in a N.W. to S.E. direction. No other features were found beyond this point."

Figure 3 1967/1273/1/2) is Major Roper's tracing showing the line of the trench into the garden of no.48 Church Road and is also the only information in the archive on the position of the ice house, just west of the eastern boundary of the site. The Borough plan of this area, also annotated by Major Roper, is headed "A" (1967/1273/1/5) and does not show the ice house. These are probably what he is referring to as the "Tracing and Site Plan marked A" in his Report before going on to the description of finds and features found in this narrow trench. This is not to be confused with the "A" context discussed above. There are a number of finds marked "IH" which presumably come from the ice house.

The long thin trench with the walls marked in red seems to have produced some of the earliest material from the site. Dr Ben Jervis, who has been leading the work on the Binsted pottery kiln material, has identified some potsherds as Saxo-Norman (mid-11th to mid-12th century): two sherds from the context described above, from a bag with the note "ex sewer trench S of 48 Church Road. Garden wall" and "unrelated to any feature" – so probably not from the pit – which were marked "CH/HO/T N".

He also considers a large reconstructed rim to be Saxo-Norman (**Figures 4 and 5**). This rim is marked with context "C1+": ie from an upper layer in Area C, whose position is unknown, but definitely from the Church House site.

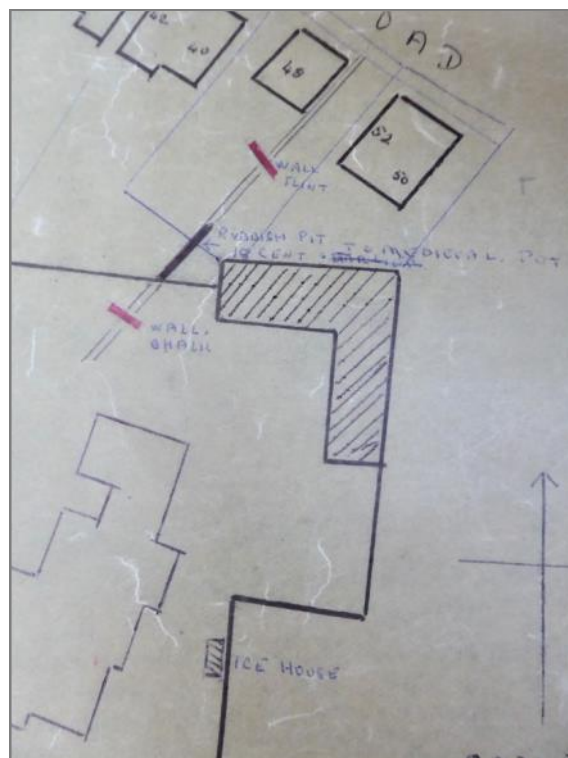


Figure 3.



Figure 4.

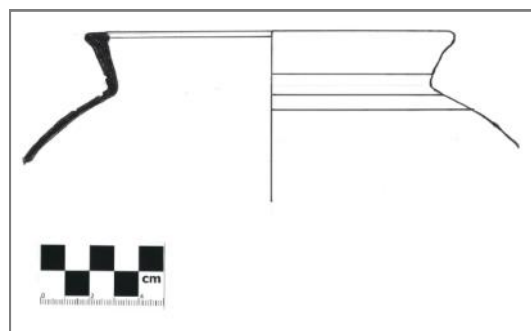


Figure 5. (Drawn by Chris Lane)

The finds from Church House thus show activity from the early medieval period right through to the last century. The *Worthing Herald* article of 24 March 1967 mentions “three or four sackfuls of 13th century pottery” but this is not reflected in the sherds now at the Museum, unless the sacks were very small. Most of the material was residual and mostly (about 70%) eighteenth and nineteenth century nor was it firmly associated with any feature. The exceptions were Pit 1, which contained only medieval pottery (nearly 600gm - though the possible fragments of chimney pot mentioned by Major Roper look more like part of a jug with a thumbled base), some animal bone and pieces of slate and also the ice house, which appears to have mostly eighteenth and nineteenth century pottery present. This structure would have been associated with the original Church Farm, which was replaced by Church House some time in the mid to late nineteenth century and which was the building replaced by the Church House sheltered accommodation which was being built in 1967 and demolished recently.

The walls found probably relate to the earlier buildings on the site. The Victoria County History (VCH) considers that Church Farm had probably become the manor house by the eighteenth century. This building can be seen in the 1876 edition of the 6” Ordnance Survey map, separated from what is probably a large range of farm buildings north east of the church on the other side of Church Lane. There was also a large out-building to the west at this time. The original Church House had replaced Church Farm by the time of the 1896 OS map, where it is named “Tarring Court”, then renamed Church House in subsequent editions (*pace* VCH which states that Church Farm was demolished in 1931). These were both substantial structures, with only the “L” shaped stable block associated with Church House still surviving on the site at the NE corner. Roger Davies’s book (Davies 1980) is a good source for depictions of these and other buildings in the centre of the village.

Other archaeological interventions and observations in West Tarring

The most comprehensive of these was the series of excavations carried out by Worthing Museum and its Correspondents, including Con Ainsworth, under the supervision of K.J.Barton in **1961 and 1962** (Barton 1963 and 1964) which examined several sites (see hatched areas in **Figure 1**). The finds are mostly catalogued under WMA nos. 1962/742-752 (the well in the Post Office garden, north of Glebe road) and 1963/2300 (mostly from the Rectory Gardens site east of South Street) and 1961/2095, the last accessioned in later years and assigned this number as the finds were known to

have come from the Museum excavations in Tarring – these last all appear to be a “representative collection of the contents” (Barton 1964, 10) of a nineteenth century brick-lined rubbish pit found in one of the back gardens of the Parsonage Row cottages. The nearest of Barton’s trenches to Church House produced only a few sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery and no structures (the trench in the garden of Market House: Barton 1964, 10 - 11). The conclusion drawn from what was found at all these sites was “that in the area investigated there was no occupation earlier than the thirteenth century. This would appear to correlate with the building of the Church and the Palace.”

The Church and Bishop’s Palace were constructed in the thirteenth century (VCH), but as there is a reference to a church in the manor in the Domesday Survey (VCH) it is likely that there was earlier occupation somewhere in West Tarring. The Saxo-Norman sherds from the Church House site also confirm that there was activity earlier than the thirteenth century around the village centre. With no associated features, however, we still have no idea whether this was related to permanent dwellings. There is no documentary evidence for commercial activity such as a fair or market being held earlier than 1314 (VCH) so it is possible that there was an earlier settlement in the immediate area.

An excavation was carried out by Con Ainsworth in **July-August 1967** in the back garden of 12, Parsonage Row (Vine Cottage), next to the wall of no.10. There is correspondence and a one-page typescript report relating to this held in the Museum’s History Files for Tarring. No material dating earlier than the eighteenth century seems to have been found here though Con did find some “rough chalk and flint” floors. I have been unable to trace any finds from this investigation at the Museum.

Owen Bedwin excavated a small area in South Street in **1978** (“S” in **Figure 1** – finds: WMA no. 1978/101) but only found evidence of occupation in the eighteenth and possibly sixteenth centuries (Bedwin 1979, 234.).

Further north along High Street in **1999**, Simon Stevens carried out an archaeological evaluation of the “Fairfields” site before flats were built but found nothing of note (Unpublished UCLFAU report at the Museum: acc.no. 1999/14)

There is, however, a site other than Church House itself showing signs of possible earlier occupation. This was south of its gardens, where Major Roper monitored pipes being laid in the north of the Recreation Ground in **April 1963**. His Correspondent’s Report is held in the Museum’s History Files and the finds accessioned as 1969/869. There is a

short note about it in SAC 103 (Barton, 1965, 84 and 88; ill., p 89 nos. 11 and 12), which also mentions Roman pottery. I have not been able to find any – so far – and Major Roper's Report, transcribed below, does not mention it. He considers that there were two separate areas of possible occupation along the pipe-laying line. [italics are my addition]

"SITE 1

This site was exposed during the operation of cable laying in early April 1963. The trench was dug along the north side of the Recreation Ground.

SITUATION

The west end of the habitation area was 99 feet from the east kerb of church Rd. and ran eastwards for a distance of 30 feet being parallel with, and 30 feet to the south of the wall of Church House Gardens.

DIMENSIONS

30 feet long. 3 feet deep.

DESCRIPTION

The colour of the soil was a very dark brown and contained an unusually large number of pot boilers with a quantity of daub.

A few feet from the west end of the area and at a depth of 2'4" an unbroken line of daub 4' long and 2' thick was exposed.

In spite of a very careful search NO pottery was found so any dating is impossible at the present time, though the large number of pot boilers may indicate an earlier date than site 2 which was undoubtedly Medieval.

SITE 2

This site was exposed during the same work as above.

SITUATION

The east end of this site was 131 feet from the edge of the west kerb of South Street and ran westwards for a distance of 59 feet being 31 feet to the south of the garden fence belonging to the houses further north.

DIMENSIONS

59 feet long. 3 feet deep

DESCRIPTION

The colour of the soil was again a very dark brown containing some pot boilers, oyster shells and pottery.

At the west end of the habitation area from the 52 foot point to the 59 foot point and at depth of 2 feet a line of laid flints was exposed.

FINDS

Medieval pottery (Marked T.R. S/2) [*320g in store at the Museum*]

Bronze metal fitting, probably from a scabbard. [*at the Museum*]

Pot boilers, oyster shell and a small amount of daub. [*not found*]

The report is signed by Major Roper and dated 17th May 1963. His sketch plans show that the cable-laying trench was south of the footpath shown in **Figure 1**. He gives the grid reference TQ 133 039 (which is nearer Site 2 than Site 1).

The details of the unpublished work carried out at the sites described here confirm that the area around the present centre of West Tarring did contain some settlement before the thirteenth century building of the Church and Bishop's Palace. The results from the limited opportunities for observation, especially from the 1963 example cited above, give grounds for hope of more finds in the future. Any building work (or gardening!) in these areas might yet produce more material of interest.

Acknowledgments

Photographs were taken by the author and reproduced with kind permission of Worthing Museum and Art Gallery.

My thanks to those who have helped me prepare this short survey: John Mills, whose enquiry started it off; Dr Ben Jervis of Cardiff University; James Sainsbury of Worthing Museum; Chris Lane for his drawing, and Liz Lane - her patience in sorting through material and reading through Correspondents' reports has been invaluable.

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Barton, Kenneth James (1964) **SAC** 102, 9 – 27 "Excavations in the Village of Tarring, West Sussex"

Barton, Kenneth James (1965) **SAC** 103, 83 - 93 "Worthing Museum Archaeological Notes for 1963" [although p84 states that there were fragments of R-B pottery on this site (p84), no obvious sherds were visible when re-examined]

Bedwin, Owen (1979) **SAC** 117, 234-7 "Excavations at South Street, West Tarring, in 1978"

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Worthing Herald article of 24 March 1967. [Roger Davies (1990, 146 and 205 fn.106) quotes a Worthing Gazette article of 7 June 1967, which I have not yet been able to find, and which might indicate that a 12th century date had been given to some of the pottery]

I suppose I always knew that I made Peter by rubbing the five of you violently together, as savages with two sticks produce a flame. I am sometimes asked who and what Peter is, but that is all he is, the spark I got from you. - J.M. Barrie

At the foot of the South Downs, by the sea, lies the village of Rustington. Home to a population of approximately 14,000 (Civil Parish Record, 2011), this small but vibrant place has a lot to offer in our modern world. A beautiful mix up of a quaint bygone age and a more modern seaside destination, the village is popular with holiday makers all year round. They come for summers on the beach with the family, walking holidays into the local South Downs or to take advantage of the easy travel distances to the many places of interest Sussex has to offer. The blue flag beach is also a popular spot with water sports enthusiasts, the soft waves and predictable winds making it ideal for both kite and windsurfers to practise and compete. Today, with all the interest the village and beach attracts, the streets and shore are often packed with people. But rewind over 100 years and the picture of this little Sussex village would have been very different.

Archaeological evidence suggests that Rustington has seen occupation since prehistoric times. Bronze and Iron Age objects have been located in local excavations, along with examples of Roman, Medieval and Modern activity. For the majority of this history the village seems to have existed mainly on small scale, agricultural commerce. Often described as sleepy, it had a tiny population, with little to no major movement of its people or fluctuations in its growth. However, this started to change with the addition of a railway station at Angmering, in 1846. Suddenly, wealthy, middle and upper class residents of bigger cities, including London, started to see the attraction of holidays away from the often polluted air of their homes. They sought the fresh clean feel of the seaside; the pleasant mix of excitement and peace that it offered. Rustington was no exception and the local people started to see many of their larger houses rented by these incoming summer visitors.

From this point the village started to grow. In the 1881 census, the village was recorded as having 71 occupied houses, 9 unoccupied and 4 in the process of construction, with a total population of 360 people (Census quoted in: Taylor & Taylor, 2015, 9). By 1891 the number of properties had

risen to 91, a small shop was thriving as were several public houses. All in all, by the late 19th century Rustington had become an inviting place for those who wished to have a relaxing holiday by the sea with friends and family.

Over the years, the beauty of the village, and its proximity to the sea, has drawn several famous names. For 40 years the composer Hubert Parry lived in the village, with other long and short term residents including the celebrated xylophonist, Teddy Brown, and artist Graham Sutherland (www.rustingtonvillage.co.uk). But perhaps the most famous visitor to the village is the internationally celebrated author J.M. Barrie, creator of the classic story *Peter Pan*.

Letters reveal that Barrie came to regard Rustington with a genuine fondness, his memories ones of happiness, relaxation and fun. But the village almost certainly holds an even greater distinction than that of a favoured holiday destination for this famous author. It is arguably one of the places in which Barrie's literary master piece was formulated. The village is by no means the only or most prominent of the places which inspired this now internationally known story, but its contribution is undoubtedly a tangible one.

So how did one of the world's most famous names, with the beginning ideas of one of the world's most famous stories, come to visit, and learn to love, a sleepy little seaside village at the base of the South Downs? The story begins long before Barrie first stepped into the village in 1899. It in fact goes back to 1860 to the heart of a Scottish village.

J.M. Barrie

James Matthew Barrie was born into a large family in Kirriemuir, Scotland, on 9th May 1860. He was the 8th child of Margret and David Barrie and joined their already thriving family of five surviving children, in a small cottage house. Barrie's father was a loom weaver and supported his family in a reasonably modest fashion. They were neither the poorest nor richest of the families in the local society, but comfortable and the adults were eager for the children to receive

good educations in order to improve their employment opportunities (Birkin, 2003, 3).

By all accounts, Barrie's early life was dominated by his mother, whose influence was strong over her youngest son and for whom he clearly cherished a long lasting devotion. Early references to him record his passion for stories and dramatics, something which seems to have enriched the lives of his fellow Kirriemuir children until the time he went away to school.

But Barrie's childhood was not all plain sailing. His elder brother David was his mother's undisguised favourite. This brother was a few years older than James - bright, cheerful and handsome. His mother cherished hopes that he would continue to do well in school and rise to become a minister for their church, as her brother had before him. However, these hopes were to be sadly dashed when David died suddenly in a skating accident the day before his 14th birthday. Barrie's mother was inconsolable. Her child was lost to her and she grieved for him for the rest of her life.

The young James was only six at the time of the tragedy, but the news of his brother's death did not affect him quite as much as his mother's reaction to it. In later life, Barrie is recorded as having said that, to their mother, whilst he became a man, David remained a boy (Birkin, 2003, 5). This early loss and its long lasting ramifications is sometimes argued to have been one of the earliest influences for the character of *Peter Pan*, the boy who never grew up. But the seed of this idea would not meet fertile soil until many years later.

Like his older brothers, Barrie received a good education, attending the Glasgow Academy where his eldest brother Alexander was a teacher, before moving on to the Forfar Academy, aged 10, and then the Dumfries Academy at 14 (Chaney, 2005, 24). Following his basic schooling Barrie studied at Edinburgh University and after a brief spell writing for the Nottingham Journal, he gained a post in London writing articles that were published in several papers. But he never gave up his desire to become an author. His first novel, *Better Dead*, came out in 1888, quickly followed by his stories of Scotland, *Auld Licht Idylls*, later that same year.

While his first novel was not a great success, *Auld Licht Idylls* proved to be very popular and Barrie quickly released a sequel, *A Widow in Thrums*, and then a third, *Little Minister*. It was this last book which brought Barrie international acclaim, on both sides of the Atlantic and throughout the British Empire. From here his reputation continued to grow. He was soon in contact with many of the most celebrated literary

names of the time, including P.G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, both of whom shared Barrie's passionate attachment to the game of cricket.

In addition to his literary work, Barrie also began to write for theatres and it was through his connections in this world that he met his future wife, Mary Ansell, to whom he was married on 9th July 1894. The couple settled within the vicinity of Kensington Gardens and it was here, in 1897, that Barrie first met the family who would change his life and career forever.

The Llewelyn Davies Family

Arthur Llewelyn Davies was an up and coming barrister when he met his future wife, Sylvia, in 1890. By all accounts there was an almost immediate connection between the couple and soon after they became engaged. The son of a clergyman, Arthur came from a serious, studious family which, although loving and supportive, prized hard work and achievement above all. Sylvia on the other hand was a Du Maurier. Daughter of the widely known author George Du Maurier, she was also the sister of actor Gerald and aunt to the now famous Daphne. Her family was one of light heartedness, amusement and creativity who prided themselves on their sense of fun and mischievousness (Chaney, 2005, 152). In the early days of their courtship many around the couple expressed doubts about their suitability, especially Sylvia's mother Emma, but in 1892 the couple finally married.

From the beginning, their marriage seems to have been a happy one and ultimately provided the couple with five healthy children. George was the first, born in 1893, followed by his brother John (more commonly known as Jack) in 1894, then Peter, 1897, Michael, 1900, and finally Nicholas (Nico) in 1903. The boys appear to have been typical children of their age - curious, imaginative and boisterous. The family settled into life in London well; the boys attending school and playing in the local gardens, where they eventually came across Barrie.

Barrie and his wife Mary would never have children of their own but Barrie, a man often described as childlike himself, always enjoyed time spent playing with the children of his numerous friends and acquaintances. One child, whose father was a friend of Barrie's and who spent time with the writer as a child, was Pamela Maude. She said, "He was unlike anyone we had ever met or would meet in the future ... Mr Barrie talked a great deal about cricket and wanted Margery [her sister] to like it and be boyish, but the next moment he was telling us about fairies as though he knew all about them" (Chaney, 2005, 152,121). As Chaney comments, "It was a rare

child who could resist the magic of Barrie's presence; a rare child who wasn't entranced by the stories of pirates, fairies and islands" (Chaney, 2005, 121).

Barrie seems to have loved the imagination and brave creativity of young people, feeling his own passion for stories come alive in their presence. In later years, the Llewelyn Davies family would become the role model for the Darlings of *Peter Pan*. However, when Barrie first came across George, his brother Jack and their nurse, playing in the gardens of Kensington, what seems to have drawn him to them was George, the precocious five year old, whose imagination helped to fire his own.

Not long after he first met the boys, Barrie was seated next to their mother at a New Year's dinner party, given by mutual friends, and an equally strong friendship seems to have blossomed between them. From this time on Barrie became increasingly part of the Davies family, holidaying with them, modelling characters in his plays and novels around them, helping both financially and emotionally when Arthur and Sylvia were dying and finally becoming a guardian for the five orphaned boys. They became his surrogate children, their mother a close friend. While some around the family seem to have found him reserved and moody, to the boys he was their Uncle Jim and even their father referred to him as a dear friend in a letter towards the end of his life.

Links to Rustington

It was through his links with the Llewelyn Davies family that Barrie first came to Rustington. The village had been a holiday favourite for Arthur and Sylvia from the early days of their engagement, when they went to stay with the Parry family in 1890. Following their wedding they again went to stay with their Parry friends, this time when Sylvia was pregnant with their second son Jack, and the place soon became a regular destination for them. The houses, gardens and, most particularly, the beach were places where the adults could meet and socialise, whilst providing ample amusement for five lively boys. Each visit seems to have been a very enjoyable experience, judging from the letters sent both by the family and the friends with whom they surrounded themselves. Indeed, Sylvia herself wrote that the village was 'a charming little place' (From a letter dated 8th August 1899: quoted in Birkin, 2003, 68) and it would be one that the family would retreat to time and again.

Barrie himself first came to the village in 1899. The Llewelyn Davis family was staying for the summer at Mill House, on Sea Lane, and, following a short stay in Germany, both Barrie and his

wife decided to relocate to the village. They took, as their summer residence, The Firs, which itself was only half a mile from Arthur, Sylvia and their children (Taylor, 2015, 68). Barrie had recently submitted his manuscript for his novel *Tommy and Grizel* and this was his opportunity to take a much needed break from the strains of his writing and theatre work.

However, from the time he arrived in the village Barrie became a regular visitor to the Davies family and seemed to enjoy the surroundings as much as they did. In subsequent years he would return to visit them on several occasions, including their stay in 1906 when Sylvia's mother rented Cudlow House, which still stands on Sea Lane.



The Games which Inspired a Legend

As previously seen, several aspects of Barrie's early life and career have been cited as key influences on his creation of *Peter Pan*. One of the most visible, and perhaps fundamental, was the death of his older brother, his mother's advanced state of grief and the lasting impact this tragedy had on the family. But there are other influences which can clearly be seen in the final composition of the famous story.

When he first met the Llewelyn Davies boys in Kensington Gardens, games of make-believe featuring fairies, pirates and explorations were all part of the mutual fun and excitement. These games were a lively mixture of the Scottish games Barrie played as a boy, his knowledge of story telling and the inexhaustible curiosity and imagination of two small boys.

These make-believe stories eventually found a focus around the then youngest of the Davies boys, Peter. Still in his perambulator at the time George and Jack met Barrie, Peter had only just passed his first birthday and was something of a nonentity in the older boys' games. But Barrie found a way to bring this younger brother into the adventures.

The story of Peter seems to have been a natural development from the boys' conversations with Barrie, beginning with the tale of the baby who believed it could fly. Barrie created a story for the boys in which he said all babies had once been birds, able to soar through the skies on their very own wings. Some babies, Barrie said, still thought that they could fly and wanted to rejoin the birds in the gardens. Peter, Barrie said, was one of these babies, but unfortunately the birds would no longer accept him. The story continued to develop with Peter being taught to fly without his wings by the fairies who lived in the gardens and eventually finding that he had been locked out of his nursery, never to grow up like a normal boy, due to his continual absence playing games in the gardens (Birkin, 2003, 62).

There is evidence that this story began to organically grow from early in the boys' acquaintance with Barrie. The character of the wandering child makes an appearance in *Tommy and Grizel* and then later in a chapter of the book Barrie produced subsequent to his first Rustington visit, *Little White Bird* (1902). The Peter Pan character would take shape from this initial creation, and arguably one of the most important times for the development of both the final characters and story plot was during the summer breaks when Barrie holidayed with the family.

There were several destinations that both the Barries and the Davies' frequented and they would often meet to spend days or weeks together. But there are two very prominent residences, at which there can be little doubt that early *Peter Pan* games were played and ideas for the story were refined.

The first was the Barries' holiday home, Black Lake in Surrey, which they bought in 1900. Here the continual amusement of make-believe games for the boys is well documented and Barrie even produced a small book, based on the pictures taken during the holidays, called *The Boy Castaways of Black Lake Island*. During these visits Barrie's dog, Porthos, became alternatively the pirate's pooch or the fearsome tiger stalking the jungle; a small punting boat was the pirate ship or the foundering vessel in need of rescue.

The other significant place was Rustington. Here the games were likely no less imaginative and the boys spent time playing with Barrie in the garden of their house as well as on the beach. Their games included cricket and lawn tennis, as well as a range of Scottish games and almost certainly the same expansive range of make-believe adventures that they played at Black Lake. Indeed, the fact that *Tommy and Grizel* contained glimpses of the wandering child, just prior to Barrie's first visit to the village, argues that the Pan games would logically have been part of the

Rustington games as the ideas for the story were so obviously germinating at this time.

Chaney writes that, to Barrie, "play, or crucially the fantasy element of it, not only liberated his imagination [but became an] integral part of what he wrote" (Chaney, 2005, 122). As such, it was in these places of holiday playtime, along with the original Kensington Gardens, that the ideas for *Peter Pan* and his adventures were expanded and developed into a rich resource of imagination from which Barrie could draw. He is often recorded as having watched as much as participated in the boys' games. He continually made notes in the book he carried with him, extracting from them the spirit of what would become one of the best-loved pieces of fiction ever to grace the stage, the bookshelf and eventually the television screen.

During these holidays, the character of Peter Pan transformed from the original wandering child into something we would recognise today. The first play was performed in 1904 and was a major hit. Barrie followed up the play's success with the novel *Peter and Wendy* in 1911. Threaded through each page can be seen the influences of the Llewelyn Davies family and the places where Barrie created make-believe worlds with the boys. Rustington was one of these places and even arguably received an acknowledgement of inspiration from the man himself in 1906. During his summer visit Barrie used the gardens of Cudlow house as the backdrop to the famous pictures of Michael, dressed as Pan, which Barrie intended to be used in the creation of the famous Peter Pan sculpture in London.

Conclusions

From the early days of their relationship, Rustington was a village of importance to Arthur and Sylvia Llewelyn Davies. It was a place where they could enjoy time together, firstly as a couple and later with their growing family, away from London and the barrister career, which often kept Arthur absent for long hours. They had, and gained, friends in the area who they would hold dear for the majority of their lives and the village itself seems to have been a place to which they retreated for calm and peace. At no time is this more evident than when Arthur was convalescing from surgery, which took half of his jaw, and seeking solace from the disease which would ultimately kill him.

Barrie was a regular intruder into these peaceful family times. His presence was described as 'lurking' by Dolly Parry (Chaney, 2005, 254) and was eyed with interest by many of the Davies' extended family. But to the immediate family he seems to have been a constant companion and friend. Their acceptance of Barrie provided the

muse for his greatest achievement. The children helped him to construct concepts for the story organically through the medium of play. The adults provided him with the illusion of the perfect family he seemed to crave, as well as a long-lasting friendship.

In reality, Rustington was only one of the places to host the fantastic games of magic and adventure which would ultimately lead to *Peter Pan*, but the village itself seems to have become a place for which everyone connected with the story came to hold in deep affection. While Barrie discovered the village thanks to the Llewelyn Davies family, he seems to have come to regard the place in much the same way as they evidently did. Nowhere is this affinity better expressed than in a letter Barrie wrote to George in February 1915, only a few short weeks before George fell in action during the Great War.

Letter to George - February 14th 1915

I don't feel as friendly to the moon as I once did. My own feeling about the moon is that it is at its best at Rustington, because we had many lovely moons there in the days when we were so happy together. However I hope your best moons are still to come . - J.M. Barrie

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In Celebration of Cherry Trees

By Cheryl Hutchins

This is the season for the Japanese to celebrate their Cherry Blossom Festival, and in my own way I make my annual pilgrimage by visiting the double-white blossom cherry trees in Littlehampton Cemetery. Littlehampton Cemetery lies just south of the busy Body Shop roundabout on the A259 and is an oasis of calm. And between two elderly cherry trees and flanked by a row of majestic pines, you will find the Commonwealth War Graves Commission section. There are four rows of British and Commonwealth graves from World War 2, reflecting named army, navy and air force men, and also those known only unto God. In addition there is a row of German named air crew graves and one unknown German soldier.



In contrast, World War 1 memorials are spread randomly throughout the cemetery. Some years ago I listened to a talk by a local historian who had come across a single Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial with three names i.e. Private Simon, Private Jim, and Segule (served as Smith) under the springbok design of the South African cap badge, with the date 21st February 1917. This historian described researching who these men were and why they were buried in Littlehampton. The internet proved invaluable and revealed the tragic story of the loss of the SS Mendi one February night in 1917.

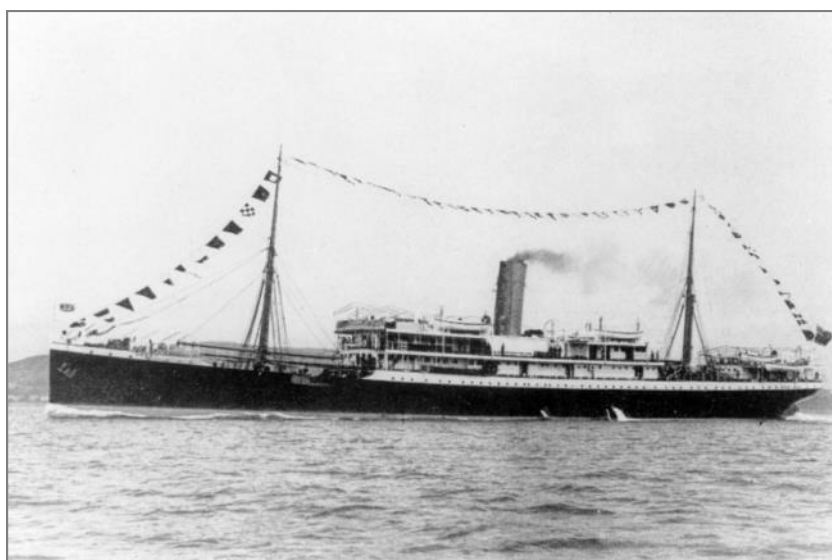
In 1916 Britain had requested the South African Prime Minister to provide men for the South African National Labour Contingent to work behind the front lines in France. Black labourers volunteered and, in spite of the concept of a trained black army being undesirable by the South African government as this could have led to armed insurrection on its return, freed up British soldiers from labouring duties on the front (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/ss-mendi>).

In response to this call, in the autumn of 1916 the SS Mendi was contracted to the British Government for war service. She was sent to Lagos, Nigeria to be fitted out as a troopship where three cargo holds were converted for troop accommodation. The officers were housed in the existing passenger accommodation above deck. She left Cape Town on 25th January 1917. Her last stop was Plymouth, England on 19th February and she sailed for her destination, Le Havre, the next day. Her role was that of a troopship carrying the 5th Battalion of the South African Native Labour Corps, consisting of 823 enlisted black labourers and their officers. Wessex Archaeology's website describes how on the night of 21st February she was steaming through the Channel in thick fog, escorted by the destroyer HMS Brisk. She was 11 nautical miles off the southern tip of the Isle of Wight when SS Darro, a mail ship twice the size of the Mendi and sailing at full speed, rammed into her, cutting into the hold where men were sleeping. Although lifeboats were launched and there were rafts and lifebelts, the men were surprised in their sleep below deck and few could swim. The Mendi sank in 25 minutes and 607 members of the South African Labour Corps were drowned with 9 officers and 33 crew members (<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/wreck-ss-mendi>).

SS Darro checked her own sea worthiness and then sailed on while men struggled in the water. She made no effort to search for survivors. Her captain, Captain Henry W Stump was later censured by the official Inquiry into the disaster "for not complying with the regulations as to sound signals and speed in a fog, and by his more serious default in failing without any reasonable cause to render assistance." He was punished by having his certificate to sail suspended for 1 year. The Inquiry found that almost all rafts were

launched and nearly all the survivors and those who had died were wearing lifebelts.
(<https://worldwarpoetry.com/blog/great-war-at-sea/ss-mendi/>)

The survivors, picked up by HMS Brisk and other ships, told tales of bravery and selflessness. About 250 men were rescued but some lifeboats were damaged in the collision and the majority died as a result of hypothermia after being in the icy water for too long. Bodies were washed ashore from Portsmouth along the coast to Brighton with some even reaching Holland and were buried in the communities where they were found. This explains the grave in Littlehampton Cemetery.



The SS Mendi

(<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/wreck-ss-mendi>)

The survivors were taken back to England before being assigned to other battalions and sailed for France to work in the docks and in construction. These survivors kept alive the memories of those who died. One such memory is that of the action of the chaplain, Reverend Isaac Dyobha who spoke to the men remaining on the deck and calmed them, bracing them to accept their fate with bravery. That he may also have led them in a “death dance” is an important component of the Mendi story but may not be strictly true. The ship sank very quickly, and later such a sacrificial myth became a useful political tool in the years of the apartheid struggle.

Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by English Heritage to undertake a desk-based appraisal of the wreck of the Mendi in 2006 and its website includes the revelation that, although the South African parliament stood to mark the loss of the Mendi, after the war none of the black servicemen, neither the survivors nor the dead, nor any other members of the South African Native Labour Corps, received a British War Medal or a ribbon. Their white officers did and this was a South African decision as black members of Corps from the neighbouring British Protectorates of Basutoland (modern Lesotho), Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Swaziland did receive medals. This story of injustice was unacknowledged at the time but in later years became part of the struggle for abolition of apartheid. Now the loss of the Mendi has become part of official histories and has been marked in many ceremonies both in South Africa, Britain and Europe.

(<https://www.wessexarch.co.uk/our-work/wreck-ss-mendi>).

At a site adjacent to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Delville Wood Cemetery is the South African National Memorial on which there is now a bronze relief and a panel listing the names of the drowned. There are monuments in South Africa such as the Mendi Memorial at the Avalon Cemetery in Soweto and the SS Mendi Memorial at the University of Cape Town, at the site where men of the South African Native Labour Contingent were billeted before embarking on the Mendi.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Mendi).

In March 2009 the UK Ministry of Defence designated Mendi’s wreck site as a protected war grave, thanks to a campaign by retired British Army Major Ned Middleton.

The centenary of the Mendi’s loss was commemorated in Britain by memorial services at Portsmouth, and at Newtimber near Brighton where drowned men from the Mendi are buried, and a ceremony at the Hollybrook Memorial in Southampton Cemetery where the names of all those who died that night are inscribed, alongside those of other service personnel who have no grave but the sea.

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Mendi)

An exhibition opened in 2017 in Port Elizabeth to honour the 607 black soldiers who died out of a total of 646 soldiers, officers and crew who were aboard when the SS Mendi sank.

(<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/pe-museum-to-remember-607-victims-of-ss-mendi-20170218>)



10020 PRIVATE SIMON LINGANISO
S.A. NATIVE LABOUR CORPS
21ST FEBRUARY 1917

9373 PRIVATE JIM MBOMBIYA
S.A. NATIVE LABOUR CORPS
21ST FEBRUARY 1917

9122 PRIVATE SMITH SEGULE
S.A. NATIVE LABOUR CORPS
21ST FEBRUARY 1917

On 8th August 2017 a commemorative granite plaque was placed at the wreck site. And from 29th June to 14th July 2018 at the Nuffield Southampton Theatres, NST City put on the world premiere of "SS Mendi Dancing the Death Drill", based on a book by Fred Khumalo.

So the story of the men who died and why they died is finally known to the world. The wreck off the Isle of Wight was lost for many years, then was located in 1945 but remained unidentified. Diver Martin Woodward identified it in 1974 as the Mendi through retrieving a blue and white saucer with the owners' company logo B&ASNC (British & African Steam Navigation Company). He has a museum on the Isle of Wight where some of the recovered artefacts are kept (The Shipwreck Centre & Maritime Museum).

In 2017 the ship's bell was handed in anonymously to a BBC journalist and in August 2018 the Prime Minister, Theresa May returned the bell to South Africa while on an official visit there. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SS_Mendi).

I attended a ceremony at the memorial stone of the three black South Africans in November 2017 where the story was read and the Reverend Isaac Dyobha's words brought alive again, accompanied by poems and thoughts by a mixed group of South Africans, residents of Littlehampton and a representative from the Littlehampton Gazette. At that time, the names on the memorial were still incomplete. On my visit this spring to see the cherry trees, I noticed that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission stone has been replaced by a new one giving the three black servicemen the dignity of their full names together with their service numbers (see left for photo and list).

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All contributions to the Journal are very welcome!

Supply in Word format with inserted photos and send to
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