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Photo by courtesy of Robin Bennett

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Editor

Dear Members

Welcome to this year's Journal with a variety of articles reflecting the Field Unit's work at the Burpham Big Dig in 2024 and from this year's Big Dig at Highdown. The photo on the cover shows enthusiastic diggers at the Highdown Big Dig where we and volunteers from Worthing Museum and local metal detectorists stormed the hill's defences to erect our finds tent and excavate a number of trenches under the leadership of James Brown of the National Trust, James Sainsbury of Worthing Museum and our Field Unit Director, Keith Bolton. And every day we were visited by numerous interested people. Never before have there been so many people on the summit, and, hopefully, going away with more knowledge about what lies under the soil and a new interest.

Alex Vincent had discovered a round barrow on Highdown some years ago and this year was rewarded by taking part in excavating it. He has written up his discovery for us, and I have to add that the only undisturbed skeleton was excavated in this very barrow. A very good year for Alex!

And I am particularly delighted to have two articles by younger members, firstly Portia Ceccarelli-Drewry's experiences as a student archaeologist, and secondly Felix Bowler's informative article on The First Battle of Alton.

James Sainsbury has taken us back to 2024 when we and students from Worthing Museum assisted the villagers in digging metre-square test pits in their gardens in Burpham and Wepham. He gives Luke Barber's analysis of the pottery and Bob Turner's of the flint from the gardens. In the spring of 2025, the Society went back to the burh ditch when 2 long trenches were dug. The results were surprising and, hopefully, will appear as in article in next year's journal.

However, following on from the work in 2025, Keith Bolton has been digging in the records to discover the story of whether the ditch at Burpham was repurposed as a possible siege castle in the early medieval period.

I hope you enjoy this year's offering and, once again, I would like to thank all the contributors to this year's Journal for their energy and time in pursuing their research. And a happy New Year to you all.

Cheryl Hutchins
Editor

Highdown Round Barrow

By Alex Vincent

During the Highdown Big Dig from July 19th to August 1st 2025 several trenches were excavated with the Worthing Archaeological Society, Worthing Museum and The National Trust. One of these trenches "Trench H" is the site of a possible Bronze Age barrow, which the author of this article had proposed a few years ago due to there being a slight mound there.

The excavations proved that the mound is that of a barrow and a skeleton was discovered in it. This probably dates from the Romano-British period and it is of a young adult (possibly of a female) aged between 14 and 18. There is another burial and possibly a few others in the barrow. The barrow was probably much larger at one time, but mainly destroyed by ploughing and looting by antiquarians.

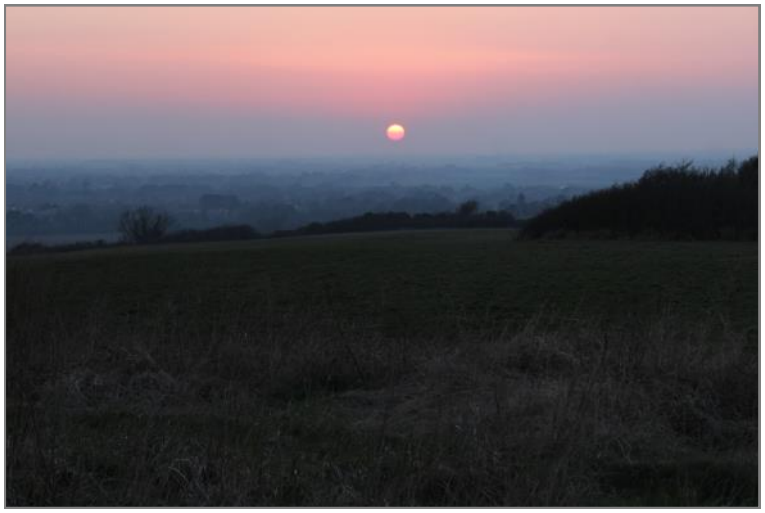
The author came about the idea of this slight mound being a possible barrow after visiting Patching on September 16th 2021. The Sun was quite low and the mound stood out and he took a photograph of it. From this, the author went to Highdown on several occasions to look for other possible barrow sites and had found several other slight mounds. This means there could be a possible barrow cemetery on Highdown. The mounds get smaller the further west they go. The field name "Barrow Acre" in Ferring may have been derived from these barrows, as they would have been visible from there.

The site of Highdown Windmill on the south-western end of the Iron Age hillfort may well be standing on the site of a barrow. A number of Bronze Age barrows were reused as windmill-steads in the medieval period. The medieval windmills, which existed on Highdown, may well be on the same site as the mill, which John Olliver milled. These earlier windmills were much smaller than the later examples and were open trestle sunken post mills. The roundness of a barrow was suitable to place a windmill onto.

The author has noticed that these barrows could be aligned with the Spring and Autumn Equinox Sunset. On March 20th and September 22nd 2022 and September 22nd 2025 he went to Highdown and noticed that this was the case and took some photographs.



1. The barrow as first seen by the author on 16th September 2021 (Alex Vincent)



2. The barrow plus other possible ones aligned with the Equinox Sunset on March 20th 2022 (Alex Vincent)



3. The Author's shadow aligned with the barrow half an hour before sunset on September 22nd 2025 (Alex Vincent)

It is possible other barrows went eastward (some destroyed by the hillfort) and that they were also aligned with the Equinox Sunrise as well. There could be a few rows of barrows on Highdown or just three barrows in one row, the windmill site, the newly discovered barrow and one just west of it where there is a slight mound.

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Vincent A. Highdown: Possible Bronze Age Barrows.
WAS Journal Vol 5 No. 6. 2023. Pages 18 - 20

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4. Barrows aligned with the Equinox Sunset on September 22nd 2025 taken from the windmill site (Alex Vincent)

Highdown Hill

By Portia Ceccarelli-Drewry

As an aspiring archaeology student studying A-Levels, my experience at the Highdown Big Dig was absolutely amazing. Not only did I learn how to use a trowel and a handshovel, to recognise the 'bulb' on a flint flake and the texture of pottery fragments, I also had the opportunity to learn from the many experts and volunteers on site. Seeing everyone come together, with different skills and different stories was like seeing how cogs interlace to form the mechanism of a great clock.

In a talk given by Professor Sue Harrington, I learnt the importance of recording a find properly - it seems that much of this dig was trying to figure out what on earth happened in the last one in the late 1800s! From Professor Andrew Reynolds, I observed that a trowel can be used to butter toast just as easily as it can be used to find artefacts! It was Mike Allen who taught us that where pollen dies (such as in the chalky soil of Highdown Hill), land snail analysis can save the day, since the species of snails present can indicate what the environment was once like. Mike Allen even generously allowed me to help take a soil sample, providing me the chance to observe the sampling process.

Metal detectorists swept the fields, sometimes even finding Roman coins, and one was kind enough to show me how it was done; how they first hear the beep that hints at something metallic, how then they cut the block of earth and use a hand-held machine that vibrates on contact with metal to find the source of the sound, before returning the earth to the ground and patting it down. Apparently more often than not the metal will prove to be tinfoil, or perhaps a long-lost dog tag since replaced, but the thought it could be something else, something more historic appears to be exciting enough to keep the detectorists going, continuing their sweeps of the field.



1. Soil sampling with Mike Allen (Portia Ceccarelli-Drewry)

Seeing everyone else at work was thrilling enough on its own, working with everyone else even more so, and yet as well as these amazing conversations there was still the excitement of having my own find. There is something so profound in finding a sign of human activity with each flint flake, each oyster shell, each fragment of pottery. My most exhilarating find was a pot base in trench G, one so delicate I was using tools akin to those used by a dentist to excavate it. At the time we did not know it was just the base of a pot, Keith Bolton explained that the side of the pot could be in the ground, so I had to be careful and find where the edges of the pot were before it could be removed. The next day, when I returned, the volunteers had cleaned it, and it had been dated by Professor Reynolds to 1100-900BC! It was an honour to be able to handle something that old; I'm still amazed I was trusted enough!

On the last day, I was somewhat sad to leave but ultimately fulfilled and excited to see what the others would find, since the dig still had a week left. James Sainsbury signed off on my archaeology skills passport, a passport given to me on this dig which hopefully I will be able to continue adding to in the future.

Thank you everyone for making this experience not only possible, but wonderful, and hello to all my buddies from trench G! Special thanks to Karen and Allen, who supervised me in the trench, it was brilliant meeting you both.



3. The pot sherds cleaned up (Portia Ceccarelli-Drewry)





2. Digging in Trench G (Portia Ceccarelli-Drewry)

The First Battle of Alton wasn't at Alton

By Felix Bowler

In 927 AD, King Æthelstan successfully annexed Northumbria from the Norse and arguably became the first king of all of England, expelling the Viking rule. This didn't last long, and the Kingdom of York repeatedly fell into Danish hands, until the Battle of Stainmore in 954. England was united under Anglo-Saxon rule, and the English would no longer have any need to worry about the Scandinavians. But only for about 34 years. Due to religious disagreements, there had been a large rebellion in Denmark, and resources and land had been taken from the rebels as punishment. Searching to replace that which had been taken from them, Norse rebels raided the English coastline, so successfully that the Danish kings took over the attacks and in 991, they sacked Ipswich and the English commander was killed at the Battle of Maldon.

The King of England at the time, Æthelred (or Ethelred) the Unready, did nothing militarily to stop the attacks and the Vikings raided when and wherever they wanted. The only real attempt made by the ineffective and unwise king was the payment of Danegeld, large sums of money given to the invaders to stop them from pillaging an area. Of course, all this did was incentivise the Danes to return more frequently and amass more and more wealth. Æthelred the Unready's name is actually a sort of joke, with "Æthelred" being Old English for "well-advised" and the "Unready" part being closer in meaning to "poorly-advised". So, King Well-Advised the Poorly-Advised paid off the Danish raiders, which didn't work.

In 1001, the local populace had had enough. A Norse army had landed off the Sussex coastline and was moving westwards, marching rapidly but plundering as they went. The army went as far as a place named Æthelingadene, before being met by a combined army of the men of Hampshire and of Sussex. In the battle that ensued 81 English warriors died, including some fairly high up in the class system of Anglo-Scandinavian England. A translation of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle informs us, concerning the First Battle of Alton, that *"There was slain Ethelwerd, high- steward of the king, and Leofric of Whitchurch, and Leofwin, high-steward of the king, and Wulfhere, a bishop's thane, and Godwin of Worthy, son of Bishop Elfsy"*. The Chronicle also tells us that of the Danes *"there was slain a much greater number".*

However, this didn't stop the attackers, who continued onwards to Devon, defeating a second English force at the Battle of Pinhoe.

The site was originally thought to be Alton, Hampshire, hence the battle's name, but it is now believed to have taken place nearer to either West or East Dean, West Sussex. Ætheling (or Atheling) was an Anglo-Saxon title meaning prince and Dene comes from the Old English Denu meaning Valley. Therefore Æthelingadene means Prince Valley or Valley of the Prince. It is likely that over time the "Æthelinga" bit was dropped, and the settlement grew to become Dene, which transformed into Dean and then split into West Dean and East Dean.

312 Years before the First Battle of Alton, so in 689 AD, King Nothelm of the South Saxons gave some land at a place named Dene to Bishop Eadberht of Selsey. This village is believed to be East Dean. One proposed reason for the temporary name change, is that what is now East Dean is where Queen Ælfthryth raised the sons of King Æthelred the Unready, who were Ælfthryth's grandchildren, and, because Æthelred was the king, these children would have been the princes, or Æthelings, hence the shift in the town's name.

The First Battle of Alton was the second of three battles between Norse and English troops that occurred between the Viking's first invasion of England (or at least Danelaw) and Cnut's invasion of 1016. The first was the Battle of Maldon, and the third, the Battle of Pinhoe. The Battle of Pinhoe was another Danish victory, but won at such a cost that the invaders were forced to return home. This was, at last, the end of the Viking troubles in England. For about 15 years. The Anglo- Saxons just cannot catch a break.

The Burpham Big Dig 2024 - - Interim Report 1

By James Sainsbury

The Society, in partnership with Worthing Museum and residents of Burpham parish, undertook an extensive two week community Big Dig within the villages of Burpham and Wepham in August 2024.

Burpham is known for its Saxon promontory fort, recorded in the Burghal Hidage[1], though Helen Sutermeister suggested the origins of the fort could be Iron Age.[2] One of the unusual features of Burpham village is that the settlement as we know it grew outside the defensive walls of the burh. Sutermeister's excavations in 1972/73 demonstrated that there were at least two structures, with associated rubbish pits, immediately within the entrance way where the village hall now stands.[3] Burpham is one of only three examples in England where the Medieval settlement grew outside the walls of the burh itself.

The intention of the Big Dig was to investigate the development of the two villages, in addition to engaging with residents about their historic landscape, with a view to further work in the parish in the upcoming years. With generous funding from the South Downs Community Fund, a large number of W.A.S volunteers and a superb response to a call out to residents, we began our work on a sunny Saturday 10th August.

A total of 35 test pits (1x1m) were excavated across the gardens of 30 properties. Test pits were excavated in 10cm spits to the chalk bedrock, or down to a metre if the depth of the soil was greater. Test pit 1 (TP1) was a demonstration dig on 1st June in Hillside Cottage, and was backfilled after reaching a depth of 10-15cm. It is included in the data sets for the Big Dig as there were finds but it cannot be regarded as a completed excavation. In addition to these we excavated three larger trenches, investigating the proposed defensive ditch of the burh itself (Trenches A & C at Hillside Cottage, Trench B at Forge Field). A further two trenches were excavated at Forge Field in April 2025. All five trenches will be dealt with in a separate report, though they will occasionally be referred to here if relevant. Digging and backfilling was done by hand.

This paper (Paper 1) covers the period up to the Late Medieval (ie Prehistoric-1600AD). The flint report for the project was undertaken by Bob Turner and the ceramics report was compiled by Luke Barber, both of which are utilised extensively in the following paper.

Figure 1, below shows the spread of test pits across the two villages, with the majority (22) in Burpham and the remainder (13) in Wepham.



Figure 1. Accurate location of test pits and trenches (2024)

In a handful of cases multiple test pits were opened in a single garden, or in the case of Burpham House (TP11) the single test pit was extended slightly to take in a post-hole feature. There were two instances of test pits not being excavated - at Elmbank (TP3B) was abandoned after turf removal, owing to extensive root systems near the surface. At Stopples Barn (TP29) no test pit was excavated owing to the extensive remodelling of the garden landscape in the recent past, proven by photographs shown by the owner.

One of the striking trends seen during the excavation was a lack of stratification across *all* test pits. Furthermore, with the exception of TP11 no features were seen in any of the test pits. This suggests that horticultural activities and landscaping over centuries had resulted in mixed soils, though we did see older ceramics at a greater depth than later examples, as a general rule.

Prehistoric

Despite evidence of significant prehistoric archaeology in the parish[4] we found relatively few worked flint tools, and only two prehistoric pottery sherds.

A total of 227 worked flints were recovered from test pits, with the majority (82, see Figure 2 below) being undatable flakes, likely to be associated with knapping activity related to the construction of flint walls and buildings from the 18th century onwards.

The Mesolithic period was represented by 21 worked flints, including 3 microliths and a number of bladelets. Two cores were recovered from TP11 (Burpham House) and TP23C (Splash Farm Barn). There were also 10 flints from the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic.

A total of 76 worked flints dated to the Neolithic period, with 6 of these dating to the Early Neolithic. The spike in activity in this period suggests people had begun to clear the wood-land and settle within the parish by 3500BC, if not slightly earlier. Most of the datable Neolithic material is represented by flakes, some of which were retouched. A Neolithic axe was found historically in Burpham[5] and another was recovered during field walking north of the church by the Arun Valley Archaeology Project in February 2025.

There were significantly more worked flints of all periods found at Burpham (159) than Wepham (68) though we have to bear in mind that of the 35 total test pits 63% were in Burpham and only 37% in Wepham.

The two sherds of prehistoric pottery from TP20 (Troy House) and TP25 (Flintwood House) are suspected of being Iron Age in date and appear to represent a general background scatter, perhaps the result of manuring cultivated land with domestic waste.[6]

Romano-British

Despite historic finds of Roman activity in the parish, notably the discovery of a tessellated pavement under the north-east transept of the Church in the early 19th century,[7] very little from the period was uncovered. A total of three sherds were excavated, two of which were local Arun Valley ware types from TP8 (Down Cottage) and TP9 (Aruncraft Cottage) whilst another from TP8 was an Overwey type and may suggest later activity. It may be significant that all three

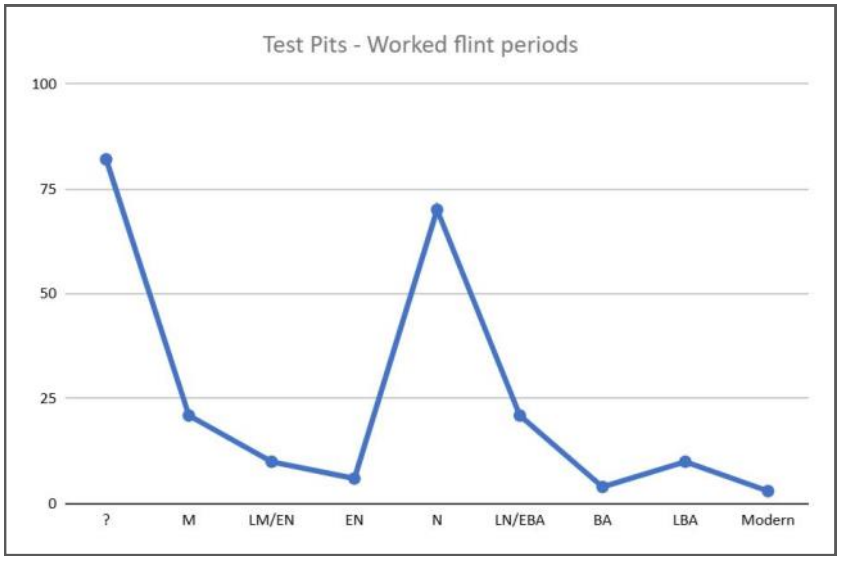


Figure 2. Test pit worked flint periods. '?' denotes undatable flakes

sherds were found in the same area of Burpham, a location downslope from High Field, where Roman coins have been found during a metal detecting survey in 2019.[8] The single Roman coin from the Big Dig was found at TP2 (Church Cottage). It is a very worn 4th century nummus, from the House of Constantine. The location of the find is possibly significant - a sestertius of Antoninus Pius was found at Burpham House (TP11) next door around 1960,[9] and the findspot of the tessellated pavement is only 80 feet to the north. Considering the intensity of Romano-British farmsteads in the northern half of the parish,[10] and the concentration of finds therein, it is surprising to find so little evidence of activity in Burpham. No finds from this period emerged from the Wepham test pits.

Saxo-Norman

A total of 164 sherds of Saxo-Norman (950-1225AD) pottery were found in the test pits. There was a clear discrepancy between the villages - at Burpham only 19 sherds were found, in comparison to 145 sherds in Wepham. Nearly all of the sherds come from cooking pots showing domestic use, with most being post-Conquest in date, "the general trend is toward quite well-fired oxidised wares that are perhaps better placed in the 11th to 12th centuries."[11] As such it is futile to make assumptions about the settlement pattern in the parish at the time of the Burghal Hidage in the early 10th century.

The vast majority of Saxo-Norman sherds at Wepham came from TP16/TP16B (Well Cottage) and TP17 (Thomas Cottage) with a total of 72 and 59 sherds respectively. Relatively large sherds were found at Well Cottage, including a single sherd of Pingsdorf ware, imported from the Rhineland. The gardens of these properties are long and narrow, with the houses standing hard up against the sunken road now known as Wepham Ford, leading down to the brooks. Terraces form the north-south boundaries between the gardens along the southern side of Wepham Ford (see Figure 3) and are likely to be surviving earthwork remains of burgage plots, possibly dating back to the 11th century.

This is a significant development in the chronological narrative of the villages, and a number of theories have emerged. On the one hand this seems to strongly suggest that Wepham was the earlier established settlement in the parish, perhaps being the village that provided the mainstay of the garrison for the burh. For example, did the tenants of the burgage plots provide services for their tenure, such as maintenance of fortifications? The complete lack of Saxo-Norman ceramics from Trenches A-E (i.e the defensive ditch) and our uncovering of a major refortification of the burh post-Norman Conquest,[12] does indicate that the burh was reused, perhaps in an emergency, centuries after the threat of Viking attack had subsided.

If Wepham is the main (or only?) settlement until the 12th century, did Burpham only emerge as a village in its own right once the church was fully established outside the walls and significant investment was made into its structure? Or was there already a settled community who lived within the ramparts well beyond 1066?

High Medieval

This period sees a huge increase in the amount of pottery in the villages, with ceramics from this period (1200-1350) recovered from nearly every test pit on the project, often in significant quantities. Once again the largest concentration was seen at TP16/16B & TP17 in Wepham, with 167 sherds and 114 sherds respectively, suggesting that occupation ran seamlessly on from Saxo-Norman activity on the site of the burgage plots. As noted by Dr Luke Barber, "it is clear that occupation and expansion intensified at



Figure 3. Blue lines indicate surviving terraces representing burgage plot boundaries. Red dots indicate test pit locations. On the left are TP16 & TP16B, on the right is TP17. You can see the deep cut of the historic road known as Wepham Ford, and the drop in elevation from the high ground on the right, to the alluvial at the brooks

most sites at this time".[13] The most notable assemblages outside of TP16/16B/17 are those from the five trenches, which are dealt with in a future paper. The pottery from the test pits, in both villages, attests to locally produced wares, typically domestic in nature. Cooking pots dominate in the form of mutely decorated jugs. Bowls, storage jars and pipkins are poorly represented. Some of the 13th century jugs are from Chichester and Binsted, though "most sherds are from uncertain sources though likely to be from production sites in or close to the Arun valley".[14] Non-local pottery is scarce, though there were a handful of sherds from Surrey and two imported French pieces, one from Trench A and another from Splash Farm Barn (TP23B).

Locals clearly had access to external goods, though perhaps a lack of wealth prevented more from being in use in the parish. The assemblage continued uninterrupted into the mid-14th century, with wares generally getting finer and better fired at this time. It is worth noting again the discrepancy between the number of ceramics found in the test pits from Burpham (106) and Wepham (318) from this period, suggesting Wepham was the larger of the settlements, despite the fact that we know the church at Burpham was extended in this period and given a vault.[15]

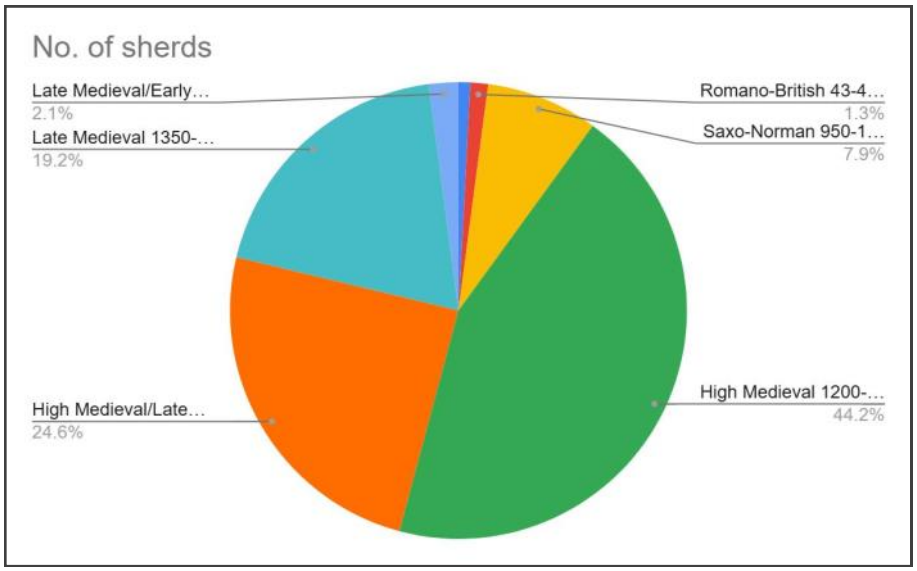


Figure 4. Proportion of sherds to period from Burpham, up to 1600AD. Note the similarities in the % of ceramics from each period in both settlements, with the exception of the discrepancy in Saxo-Norman pottery.

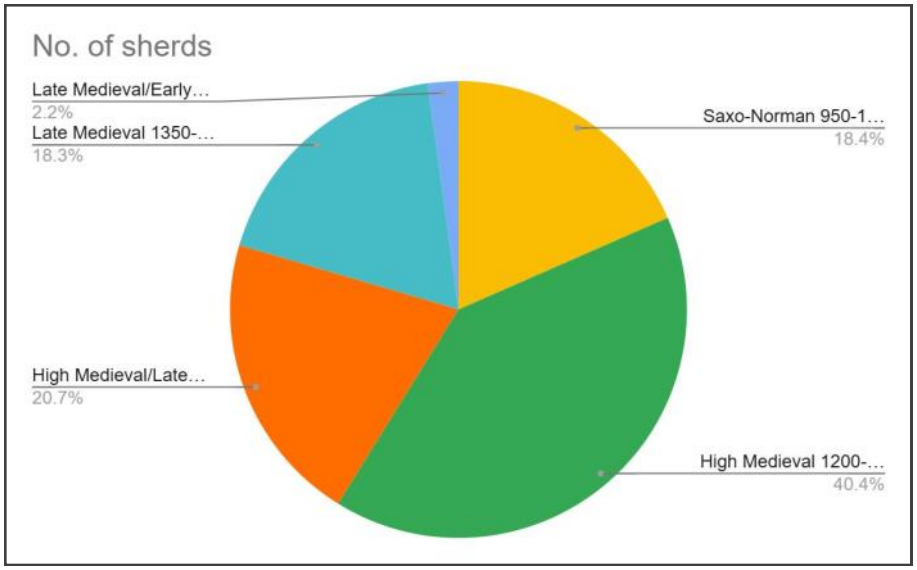


Figure 5. Proportion of sherds to period from Wepham, up to 1600AD. Note the similarities in the % of ceramics from each period in both settlements, with the exception of the discrepancy in Saxo-Norman pottery.

Later Medieval

At many sites in Sussex there is a break in activity in the mid-14th century, related to the arrival and consequences of the Plague. There is a downturn at Burpham and Wepham but most sites appear to continue in occupation. Once again TP16/16B and TP17 contained the largest concentration of ceramics, with 88 and 53 sherds respectively. Sherds representing bowls, cooking pots, jugs, jars and pipkins were recovered from sites across the project, with a notable upturn in sherds from the mid-15th century onward. The main local ware of the time, LM1b (Painted ware) is well represented, being produced at Chichester, Binsted and Graffham. The only imported wares came from Trench B (Raeren stoneware mug c.1525) and Trench C (Iberian Meria-type c.1500) There was also a notable lack of English regional wares, particularly from Surrey.

Some metalwork was recovered from this period, mostly represented by buckles found in the five trenches. One buckle and strap was recovered from TP16B, dating 1350-1500AD. No coins were found in the test pits.

Conclusion

Figures 4 & 5 show the breakdown of pottery, by era, in Burpham and Wepham respectively. Despite the opening of nearly double the number of test pits in Burpham compared to Wepham, we can see significantly more individual sherds emerge from the latter. As argued above, this seems to represent a more intense settlement of Wepham, though we have to bear in mind that the nature of test pitting means particular concentrations of finds may have been missed which could change the narrative. It is also worth noting that TP16/16B and TP17 make up a large proportion of the sherds from across all 35 test pits up to the Late Medieval period, and this paper does not deal with the significant quantities of ceramics found in the five trenches. A future interim report will deal with this element of the excavations, and the post-Medieval ceramics and metalwork.

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2 H. Sutermeister, 'Burpham: A settlement site within the Saxon defences', *Sussex Archaeological Collections,* Volume 114. p.194

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4 C. Russel, 'An Archaeological Watching Brief at Burpham Camp, Burpham, West Sussex', *Archaeology South-East Report, No. 2011185.* P.4, 2011.

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7 Reverend Foster, notes

8 J. Sainsbury, Arun Valley Archaeology Report, forthcoming

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11 L. Barber, Burpham Big Dig Ceramics Report, 2025

12 Burpham Big Dig, Interim Report 2, forthcoming

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14 Luke Barber, Ceramics Report, Burpham Big Dig, p.13

15 T. Cooper, A tour of the church of St Mary the Virgin, Burpham

Burpham Burh as a possible Siege Castle

By Keith Bolton

Introduction

The genesis for this article was a discussion at the end of the Burpham Forge Field excavation in May 2025. John Mills who supervised the excavation of the southern end of trench D had noticed that the original ditch had been recut and significantly extended to the north.

One possible reason for this extension was to quarry chalk to add to the existing bank, to reinforce it. If this was the case – then the question why came to mind.

The on-site discussion was expanded to include the known military activity around Arundel in the middle-ages. This author was aware of the very short siege during the Stephen-Matilda war but nothing else.

It was also noted and confirmed what trenches A and C had revealed during the Burpham Big Dig in 2024, that there was a distinct lack of early Medieval or Saxo-Norman pottery (the pottery from the Forge Field excavation has yet to be dated, but looks to be 12th century and later).

Having undertaken further research it is possible that the re-cutting of the ditch could be linked with one of three military campaigns in the period of 1101 to 1216, with two directly associated with Arundel castle. These are:

1. Henry I's siege of the castle in 1102
2. Stephen I's siege of the castle in 1139
3. Louis of France's invasion of England in 1216

Siege Castles and Archaeological Evidence

What is a Siege Castle?

Siege or 'counter' castles

A major feature of medieval warfare was the use of siege or 'counter' castles. These temporary fortifications were used for several purposes, one being to form a defended and sheltered base from which a besieging force could attack.

These temporary fortifications were also used to blockade castles to contain the defending forces. These fortifications were built just at the edge of cross and long bow range i.e. c250 yards.

Other temporary castles were built up to fifteen miles away from the enemy castle. Their function was to protect lands that had been subject to raiding, to make it difficult for the enemy garrison to forage for supplies and to hinder any forces sent to raise the siege.

Use was made of existing topographical features and structures such as churches and ancient earthworks (Creighton 2016, 98-100).

Evidence of Siege Castles in the Arundel Area

Several sites have been put forward as being siege castles/field works associated with the two known sieges of Arundel Castle. Unfortunately, the two excavations undertaken in the 1920's and 30's did not yield any dating evidence to support this view. The sites are:

Patching

Purton states that Patching is an improbable site for a siege castle, the only evidence being the fact that it is marked as a settlement on the OS Pathfinder map (Grid Reference TQ089096).

Warningcamp

Purton is more optimistic with regards to the site at Warningcamp, which is 280m from the Arun with a good view of the castle. This round work (diameter 182m) was excavated in 1927 but no artefacts or features were identified (Curwen 1932, 180).

The Historic England Listing No. 1012177 classification states that this site is a Ring Work and dated to the period between 1066-1070, but queries this interpretation as there is no apparent evidence to support this. Curwen assigns this earthwork to the reign of Henry I (Curwen 1932, 180).

Lyminster

Circa 460m to the south of Warningcamp Purton identifies another site towards Lyminster (TQ028064).

On ground rising quite steeply from the Arun, there is a low mound, roughly circular, with a diameter on the top of about 25m and lying to the north there are signs of a bank enclosing a rectangular area stretching about 75m from the mound (Purton 1998, 13-14).

Rackham Banks

The other site identified as potential siege castles/ field works) is located on the South Downs and Arundel Castle is visible from both.

The site at Rackham Banks (NGR TQ050126) was excavated by E.C. Curwen (Curwen, 1932). The Banks are a prehistoric earthwork with an ellipse shaped earthwork attached. The excavations yielded two artefacts and no features associated with the medieval period. The interpretation that this structure is part of the 1102 siege activity is based on A.H Allcroft's "historical enquires" (Curwen 1932, 178).

Pulborough

Allcroft suggested that the castle at Pulborough (Park Mount), five miles north of Rackham, played some part in Henry I's operation in 1102. However, due to its distance from Arundel, Purton dismisses this site as part of the 1102 siege (Purton 1998, 14).

Siege castles up to 15 miles from the besieged castle were constructed (or existing facilities reused) to deny access to the countryside and interfere with attempts to provide supplies and reinforcements (Speight 2000).

Henry I's Siege of Arundel Castle

Key Players

William (the Conqueror) I

William I 1028-1087 (reigned 1066-1087). From the perspective of this article his main role was defining his succession, with his eldest son (Robert) to inherit the Duchy of Normandy, William the middle son being nominated for King of England, and his youngest son – Henry - being gifted money and little else. Another son – Richard - had died in a hunting accident in the New Forest in 1075.

However, none of his sons or the most senior members of the aristocracy accepted the Conqueror's bequest and the subsequent division of Normandy and England. Within a year of William's death, a period of instability ensued, which would last until Henry's victory over his eldest brother at the battle of Tinchebrai in 1106.

Henry I

Henry (c1068-1135) was the fourth son of William I. He became king of England (1100-1135) on the death of his elder brother William (Rufus) II.

Immediately after the death of William II, Henry rode straight to Winchester to seize the Treasury, was elected King of England the next day and three days after the death of his brother Henry was crowned at Westminster (Poole 1955, 114).

Whilst Henry enjoyed support for his claim, there were others who supported his eldest brother Robert Duke of Normandy.

Robert Duke of Normandy

Robert (c1053-1134) was the eldest son of William I. Nicknamed "Curthose" (short-boots), he was heir to Normandy and Maine and succeeded as Duke in 1087.

Robert always had ambitions towards the English throne (including an attempted coup against William I in 1077), and whilst he made half-hearted attempts against both his brothers, he lacked the drive and determination of his father and as a result all his "invasions" ended in a whimper.

As a leader Robert was seen by his contemporaries as being a bit of a soft touch, with his local barons preferring his governance so that they could undertake their private wars safe in the knowledge that Robert's attempts to interfere would come to nothing, thereby resulting in a period of anarchy (Poole 1955, 105).

This would allow both William II and Henry I the opportunities to impose their control on Normandy.

William (Rufus) II

William (c1057-1100) King of England (1087-1100), succeeded his father in 1087 but immediately faced a rebellion in favour of his elder brother Robert in 1088.

However, inertia on Robert's part and action by William (mainly involving the distribution of money and the promise of "better" government) quickly quelled the rebellion.

William then planned a campaign to take control of Normandy, again involving the use of bribes and invaded Normandy in 1091, beating Robert, and subsequently retrieving lost territory.

William Rufus is probably best known for the nature of his death in a hunting 'accident' in the New Forest in August 1100. Whilst accidents were not uncommon (his brother Richard died in the New Forest in 1075), there have always been doubts as to whether William's death was accidental or not.

Regardless of whether this was premeditated or not, Henry took complete advantage of the situation, leaving his brother's body and travelling immediately to Winchester to take possession of the treasury and the crown.

Robert of Bellême, son of Roger de Montgomery

Robert of Bellême (c1052-after 1130), 3rd Earl of Shrewsbury, was considered to be the most dangerous and repellent of the Norman Barons (Poole 1955, 106).

By 1098 Robert of Bellême had inherited significant estates in England, including the lordship of Arundel, thereby becoming the most powerful of the barons in England. His continental holdings, included large estates and castles on the borders of Normandy, Maine, and Perche, plus property of his wife, daughter of Count Guy of Ponthieu.

The contemporary chroniclers were particularly harsh in their assessment of Robert, and given the usual level of brutality for the period, would imply a level of vindictiveness and oppression beyond that acceptable at the time. However, it should be noted that the key chroniclers were keen to emphasise the differences between Robert and Henry I.

In 1092, Henry became lord of Domfront, at the invitation of the inhabitants who were oppressed by Robert.

However, Robert was considered by his contemporaries to be the finest military architect of the day, as evidenced by fortifications of Shrewsbury and in the building of the impressive castle at Bridgnorth in 1101 (Poole 1955, 289).

1101 Rebellion

However, his elder brother Duke Robert of Normandy had claims to the throne, which resulted in a rebellion in 1101, supported by Norman nobility in both England and in Normandy.

In his challenge to his younger brother, Duke Robert was supported by essentially the same coalition of magnates and families who had supported him in his attempt to take control from William Rufus in 1088.

Whilst there appeared to be chaos, the danger was exaggerated, and the conspiracy ended without a fight, and Henry bought off the conspirators with bribes and the "promise" of a general amnesty (Poole 1955, 116).

However, the main conspirators including Robert of Bellême (Earl of Shrewsbury) were pursued through the courts, fined and deprived of their English lands (Poole 1955, 117). Another key conspirator was William de Warenne (Earl of Surrey) (Crouch 2002, 170).

Siege of Arundel and Banishment

The King made his move in 1102, by bringing charges against Robert of Bellême. Rather than attend his trial, Robert put his strongholds in a state of defence. However, the castles including Arundel were taken by the King after a series of sieges (Poole 1955, 117).

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* says Henry marched to Arundel but found "he could not take it quickly", so he "had castles built before it and garrisoned them with his men" before marching off to attack the rebel's main stronghold at Bridgnorth. William of Malmesbury repeats the story and Orderic Vitalis tells that Robert authorised Arundel to surrender to the king after a blockade lasting three months (Hollister 2001, 158).

Robert was banished to France, with his brothers. He was the last man ever to take up arms against Henry in England (Crouch 2002, 175).

Robert then proceeded to take to the battle field against the ineffective Duke Robert. However, by 1105, a common enemy in Henry I, meant that Duke Robert and Robert of Bellême became allies against Henry's attempts to gain control of Normandy.

In 1104, Henry "invaded" Normandy with the aim of restoring order. Henry's control was finally established after three campaigns with victory at the battle of Tinchebrai in 1106. This significant encounter involved small losses on both sides, and resulted in the capture of Duke Robert (who would spend the remaining 28 years of his life in captivity). Robert of Bellême, commanding the rearguard decided that discretion was the better part of valour, and fled the battlefield.

A further war in 1111-1113 saw Robert of Bellême taken by Henry (whilst acting as an envoy for the King of France, Louis VI). Robert was subsequently imprisoned for life and whilst the date of his death is unknown, he was still alive in 1130 (Poole 1955, 123 fn 3).

Stephen and Matilda, the Anarchy

Key Players

King Stephen

Stephen of Blois (1092/6-1154), King of England 1135-1154. His claim to the throne was via his mother (Adela) who was the daughter of William the Conqueror.

When Henry I died in 1135, Stephen quickly crossed the channel and took the throne with the help of his brother, Henry, Bishop of Winchester. This was despite having taken an oath to support the claims of the Empress Matilda.

The civil war (the Anarchy – a term used by Victorian scholars) started in 1139 and effectively ended with Stephen's death.

Stephen was captured by Matilda at the battle of Lincoln in 1141 and imprisoned in Bristol Castle. Later that year he was released in exchange for Robert, Earl of Gloucester, who had been captured at Winchester.

After the battle of Winchester, the war continued for another 11 years, neither side achieving overall victory, but towards the end of his reign Stephen was gradually gaining the upper hand.

By the early 1150's most of the participants were war weary and favoured a negotiated long-term settlement.

Following the death of his eldest son (Eustace) in 1153, Stephen recognised Matilda's son Henry as his heir, passing over William, Stephen's second son.

Empress Matilda

Matilda (1102-1167), the only daughter of Henry I to survive to adulthood was nominated by Henry I to succeed him.

She was first married to Emperor Henry V (1110-1125) and subsequently, Geoffrey of Anjou. Geoffrey's role during the civil war was to gain control of lands in Normandy.

Queen Adeliza

Matilda's step-mother Adeliza (widow of Henry I) married the lord of Arundel, William of Albini. Adeliza was one year younger than Matilda. It is probable that Adeliza was sympathetic to Matilida's cause and took part in the negotiations to provide Matilda with safe passage to the west country.

William of Albini

William of Albini (who remained loyal to Stephen, becoming Earl of Sussex in 1140) married Adeliza.

Henry, Bishop of Winchester

Henry of Blois (1096-1171), a younger brother of King Stephen. Appointed Bishop of Winchester and then a papal legate, making him the most powerful churchman in England.

Apart from a brief period in 1141, he was a constant supporter of King Stephen.

Robert, Earl of Gloucester

Robert (1090-1147), first earl of Gloucester and illegitimate son of Henry I, was half-brother to Empress Matilda. Robert was her chief military supporter and led Matilda's forces during the civil-war. His main power base was centred around Gloucester and Bristol. Captured by Stephen's forces at Winchester in 1141, he was part of the prisoner exchange, which saw Stephen released from Bristol Castle.

Upon his death in 1147, Matilda lost her main supporter and returned to Normandy with her son (the future Henry II).

Siege of Arundel Castle 1139

Robert of Gloucester and the Empress Matilda arrived in Arundel on 30th September 1139 (Bradbury 1996, 60). Arundel had recently been granted by King Stephen to William of Albini. It is more likely that it was his wife Adeliza who "invited" Matilda to Arundel.

The force accompanying Matilda was an escort, rather than anything on a larger scale, consisting of 140 knights (Bradbury 1996, 69).

Apartments in the Norman Gateway were placed at her disposal and preparations made for a vigorous defence (Eustance 1922, 36). However, the intelligence awaiting Robert of Gloucester on his arrival in England, was not good. The overwhelming majority of barons were not seeking to abandon their allegiance to Stephen and only a small handful could be relied upon to uphold the oath they had sworn to Empress Matilda (Lewis 2024, 69).

Robert left Matilda at Arundel on hearing that Stephen was advancing on Arundel. He travelled towards his power base at Bristol accompanied by a small party of retainers.

When King Stephen reached Arundel, he left a force to blockade the castle and set off in pursuit of Robert to capture him. Unsuccessful in this attempt, Stephen returned to Arundel.

The contemporary sources are silent as to how far Stephen proceeded with his siege arrangements. Normally he would construct siege castles to contain the inhabitants of the castle, stop supplies reaching them and providing shelter for his forces. Did Stephen make any use of Henry I's sites or did he construct new ones or did the speed of negotiations meant that none was required? Unfortunately, we do not know.

King Stephen was uncertain as to what Matilda's intentions were. If he laid siege to the castle, he risked the perception that he was attacking a woman, who was his own cousin, a daughter of the previous King and a non-combatant, who had not openly threatened him.

Any attack would result in dishonour or risk creating an outrage and sympathy towards the Empress's cause.

The solution probably suggested by Bishop Henry was to allow Matilda to leave Arundel under a safe conduct and travel to Gloucester (Lewis 2024, 71).

An agreement was reached whereby Matilda was given safe passage to join Robert in the west country. It is possible that Matilda promised not to make war against Stephen. If so, this promise was not kept.

There has been (with hindsight) a great deal of debate over Stephen's motives for releasing Matilda, who was blockaded and isolated in Arundel. Did Stephen have the advantage in any agreement reached? Was he posing as a merciful and chivalrous King? Was he hoping that Matilda would be excluded from the conflict?

The removal of Matilda from Arundel Castle meant that forces blockading the castle could be deployed elsewhere and there was no guarantee that any full-blown siege would be short or successful.

Finally, what other options did Stephen have? Imprisonment as per Henry I of his elder brother or execution? Either would have delivered the wrath of the Church on Stephen's head.

Whatever the motives or thinking behind the decision, it was probably influenced by the advice given by the Bishop of Winchester (Bradbury 1996, 71).

According to Eustance, this advice was "treacherous", and based on the councillors' representing the castle as being impregnable and by permitting Matilda to escape to the west country, all of Stephen's opponents would be corralled in one corner of the Kingdom and thus making it easier to execute the war (Eustance 1922, 36).

Louis of France, Invasion in 1216

Key Players

King John

John (1166-1216), King of England 1199-126, was the fourth and youngest son of Henry II. His reputation as a poor king, is based on several factors, primarily the loss of Normandy to the French in 1202-4 and the 'signing' of the Magna Carta in 1215, which involved John giving concessions to the barons, to end their revolt.

This reputation is not helped by:

A. the suspicious death of his nephew Arthur (the son of his elder brother Geoffrey) and a rival claimant to the English throne, whilst a prisoner of John;

B. John's attempted rebellion against King Richard I's councillors, when Richard was on a Crusade; and

C. His excommunication by the Pope in 1209.

Louis of France

Louis (1187-1226), King of France, as Louis VIII 1223-1226.

Louis's tenuous claim to the English throne was via his wife (Blanche of Castile) a descendant of Henry II.

Magna Carta 1215

The 'signing' of the Magna Carta in 1215 at Runnymede, brought a temporary truce between the royalist faction and the rebelling barons. Whilst some of the agreements were actioned, the tardiness shown by King John on other aspects, made the barons realise that the King was not prepared to capitulate. Therefore, they began making plans to renew battle.

However, King John acted first, feinting to travel from the west country to the continent, instead landing his forces in Kent and making his way to Rochester, where the royal forces besieged and took the strategically placed castle.

The barons communicated with the French King (Philip Augustus) asking for help and offering the English throne to his eldest son – Louis. At this point the advantage and impetus favoured King John. John decided to divide his forces, one part staying in the south under the command of his half-brother (the earl of Salisbury) primarily to keep the barons penned up in London and secondly to ravage East Anglia. The second force under the king headed north to punish his enemies.

The advantage continued to lay with King John into the early months of 1216, when he returned from the north and combined his forces. Louis of France had yet to appear and French forces had yet to arrive in sufficient numbers to make a difference.

By the end of March 1216, King John had completely subdued the rebel forces in East Anglia and turned his attention to London. However, a stout defence by the Londoners (assisted by a growing French presence) meant that by April the King had retreated to Reading and the chance to take London had gone.

Louis finally landed at Stonar, near Sandwich on 21st of May 1216. Plagued by indecision (and probably conflicting advice), King John retreated from Sandwich towards Winchester via the south coast, thereby leaving the south east at Louis's mercy. Louis arrived in London and shortly afterwards set off towards Winchester. On this journey, the castles at Reigate, Guildford and Farnham submitted to Louis with little or no resistance. John abandoned Winchester and moved further west. Winchester surrendered at the end of June 1216, with most of south-east England in his enemy's hands. By this time, John's supporters were deserting him, including the earls of Surrey and Arundel (the earl of Arundel returned to the allegiance of Henry III in July 1217).

This time, it was Louis's turn not to push home his advantage, and rather than pursue John, he led his army south-east to besiege the castles at Porchester and Odiham (in Hampshire). Again, the motives for this change in strategy are unclear, but given the quick nature of his advance, he was probably keen to take those royalist strongholds (including Windsor and Dover castles), which had yet to surrender. Whilst besieging Dover castle, the French forces in Kent and Sussex found themselves fighting a guerilla war in the Weald against royalist forces led by William of Kensham (Morris 2015, 281).

Whilst the French army was bogged down with besieging Windsor and Dover, King John moved his forces from the west country towards East Anglia to harass rebel holdings in this area. It was during this campaign that John fell ill and lost most of his baggage and treasury in the tidal estuary of the Wash. By 15th October it was clear that the king was dying and he passed away at Newark on the 18th October.

Following King John's death, his eldest son (Henry) was, at the age of nine, knighted and crowned on 28th October 2016. With William Marshal elected as his guardian and effectively the regent, the royalist fortunes changed.

Victory at Lincoln in May 1217 and at a sea battle off Sandwich (which destroyed the French fleet and much needed reinforcements) in August 1217, led to Louis agreeing to make peace (as part of the Treaty of Lambeth), resign his claim to England and return to France.

Whilst the war in 1215-17 involved campaigns and castle sieges in the south-east, including Kent, Surrey and Hampshire, this author has been unable to find any evidence that Arundel Castle was involved in any of the fighting between King John, the barons, or Louis of France.

Conclusion

If the recutting of the Burh ditch was associated with a military campaign in the Arundel area; of the three wars discussed above, that between Henry I and Robert of Bellême is the most likely candidate, purely based on the length of the siege (lasting three months). The siege involving Stephen and Matilda was over before it began but it is possible that the existing siege castles etc, were reused by Stephen.

It should be noted that all the sites identified as potential siege castles or field works associated with the 1102 siege are located either to the east of the river Arun or to the north. This leaves the area to the west of Arundel Castle open and exploitable to the castle's garrison. However, the duration of the siege suggests that the defenders' options for foraging for food and receiving supplies were limited.

Whilst the defenders may have been lukewarm in their attempts to keep the siege going (the lack of reinforcements and defeats elsewhere would have contributed towards this), is it possible that the besieging forces made use of existing defences i.e. the Arun War Dyke to complete the encirclement of the castle?

With regards to the rebellion in King John's reign, to date, this author has not been able to find evidence that the French invasion in 1216 involved Arundel Castle or in any of the subsequent fighting taking place in the south-east of England.

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Just a footnote to the 2025 excavation season at Sompting



Whitehouse 2025



Whitehouse 2018

The end of the 2024 season at the Whitehouse site in Sompting was marked by the apparent discovery of a possible well. This should have been the end of the excavation but the best features always turn up on the last day. The circular ghost outline of a few stones was carefully put to bed for the winter and was revisited in the spring. During a series of Fridays between our other excavations at Burpham Forge Field and Highdown it was cleared and alas the circular feature turned out to be another large pit. However, adjacent to the pit, a circle of chalk blocks did indeed turn out to be a well. The well is built of carefully cut chalk blocks and is very similar to the well which was excavated in the east of the field in 2018 .

The above photographs show the splendid construction of both wells. The Whitehouse well provided one of our more intriguing finds, a lava quern stone. And the Whitehouse well has been lovingly packed with sand and tucked up for the winter, to await an unveiling in the summer of 2026 when we will be at Sompting for a 2-week excavation.



C Shirley & C Hutchins

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All contributions to the Journal are very welcome!

Supply in Word format if possible with inserted photos, and send to Cheryl Hutchins, Editor

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