



# Lossenham Project Newsletter

ISSUE 21



## Introduction

*"Aut Caesar, aut nihil"  
("Either Emperor or nothing" – or maybe "Rome or bust").*

*An ambitious motto associated with  
Cesare Borgia (1475–1507).*

OCTAVIANVS CAESAR AVGVSTVS 3



The Latin sentence (also used by others) would fit in very well with what we know about Caesar Augustus, quite possibly the most power-focused and successful man in history. He was born Gaius Octavius in 63 BC and, having been made the sole heir of his great-uncle Julius Caesar, took over at the helm of what was soon to become the Roman Empire and rapidly debarrassed himself of all potential competitors, most notably Mark Antony.

The Roman Senate, in 8 BC, graciously renamed the old month of Sextilis in his honour, which is of course why we are contemplating Augustus in this issue. Julius had already had Quintilis named for him, which made me wonder why September isn't called Tiberius? It turns out that the Senate did indeed propose this, but Tiberius, being a rather stern sort, turned them down. So for the last four months, we are stuck with the old numerical names (the Roman year started in March, if you are worried about September appearing to be number seven).

The Lossenham Project is spreading its reach, in some ways (but not very many) like the Roman Empire under Augustus, and we hope this is reflected in the content of this newsletter, number 21. Enjoy this issue, the summer (while it lasts) and do let us know of any other features you would like to see!

Åke Nilson  
Chairman of the Janus Foundation







# Highlights of the July excavation

Our July session started off on the two hottest days ever recorded in the UK, so we postponed going to site until the forecast was for a more reasonable temperature. Anyone who has been to site knows how hot it gets up there... We welcomed six new volunteers and a small contingency from Texas State University, who not only learned about how archaeology is done in the UK but also the important cultural practice of hobnobs and ginger nuts at tea break!



Rose & Paul excavating the pot



The pot in situ

Archaeological highlights of the two weeks include the discovery of a Roman coin from the 3rd century and an enigmatic pot which may also be from that period. Pottery in The Weald can look similar from the Iron Age to the Medieval period so we need to get it looked at by a specialist to be sure. These two new finds, along with the other Iron Age/Roman finds, are pointing to a potential locally significant site underneath the Priory...something certainly to bear in mind when we return in August.



A drone shot of the current working trench





The intact lower course of the North Priory wall

The Priory church itself has now nearly been reduced to the top of the intact foundation. We can clearly see the trenches dug to rob the stones out but this activity is not uniform across the whole site. In places the foundations can survive up to the first courses of the wall, and as we have another third to uncover we have some small hope the wall will be more intact as we head west.

Annie Partridge  
Isle Heritage Director



# Friars' Marsh

This field name (which is quite self-explanatory, really), refers to an 18-acre part of Lossenham Priory Farm, next to the river Rother and at the westernmost end of the farm (next to the chalybeate spring by Lossenham Lane). If you have been past there in the last couple of years, you will have noticed the big green barn, which rather dominates the views around the area.



At the time of the Lossenham Priory, the field was also the location for a wharf, serving the needs of the friars, as well as of Lossenham Manor. After the dissolution, the wharf continued in operation and is marked as such on the Newenden Tithe Map of 1838. It would have been used both for bringing bulk materials (such as coal and perhaps also building stone) to Lossenham, and also for sending out produce of the manor and surrounding areas, such as pig iron, timber and maybe agricultural surpluses.

The landowners, together with the Janus Foundation, are now looking at various ways in which this field can be used to support the local community. As a start, we have opened a small part of the field for parking on summer weekends, to relieve Lossenham Lane and, not least, the pub car park, of non-customer cars. It is ideal for canoeists and other river users, as it is directly adjacent to the Rother. So far, this experiment has been successful, but we have been lucky to have dry weather and, should the parking become a permanent feature, some means of stabilising the ground will be necessary (as well as formal planning permission).

Excitingly, we are also looking at the possibility of putting in place a sports field, which could just about be the size of a full, regulation cricket pitch for NCC's senior players. More of this in coming issues of the newsletter.





# Keeping up with the Jonesy

As Boris Johnson's cabinet was rapidly emptying, Newenden were busy filling theirs as they took home the Wealden Wallop trophy.

This year saw a first, as the final was played at Tenterden's immaculate ground. We expected a tight game as both sides arrived unbeaten, having won their four previous games.

Having won the toss Newenden decided to field.

The game was over as a contest within the first eight overs as we were treated to a masterclass from Ian Jones, ripping through their top order. He took a wicket in each of his four overs, leaving him stats of 4-11. As the batsmen came and went they had a look of such resignation, I wouldn't have been surprised if Rishi Sunak and Sajid Javid were batting at ten and eleven.



The winning team



Jonesy & Phil Morris

Wickets continued to tumble, until Kutner was brought on to bowl at the death, and looked dangerous, mainly through his propensity to bowl head high beamers. There were so many free hits in one of his overs that I hear Amber Heard is considering an injunction against him. Gills Green crept through to 102-9 from their 20 overs.

Our reply started in explosive fashion, with Edwards looking to win the game in record time. He dispatched the first two deliveries for absolutely huge sixes that nearly ended up in Tenterden High Street. Then Parr strolled to the crease to join Bourne. They were patient in their play, with Bourne taking the holding roll, in fact his scoring rate was so slow it has only been matched by Finn Piper on Fresher's Week. Parr struck the winning runs in the 11th over.

Newenden had won by nine wickets.

*Phil Morris  
League Captain*



## Lossenham clay work

Our artist-in-residence, Russell Burden, has been busy experimenting with the clay found at Lossenham to see if it can be used to produce clay tiles and terracotta items in the styles found at the excavation of St Mary's Priory.

It turns out that the material lends itself very well to such exercises. The image shows Lossenham clay at four different stages of preparation (from L to R): with workable moisture content, bone dry, bisque fired and finally fired to 1120 degrees (earthenware).



Russell is now building a pottery wheel from an old cartwheel, using the same methods and technology as would have been available in mediaeval times. The next step, planned for late August/early September, will be to build an authentic kiln for firing the pottery being created (volunteers most welcome). Meanwhile, he is also experimenting with glazes from local materials (such as wood ash and iron), constructing a mould for making floor tiles, and experimenting with white earthenware slip (clay made liquid with water) for decoration purposes.

By the time you read this, the first pottery lesson will have taken place, but there is still time to join the second one – on Friday 12 August, 10.30am at Aylesford Pottery (see <https://school.aylesfordpottery.co.uk>). If you would like to join, please contact Russell as soon as possible via [russell@strangeleaves.com](mailto:russell@strangeleaves.com). Once the kiln has been built, it will be put to good use and the end results will be shown at the end of the project, probably late September.



## Challenging weather conditions

While climate change and extreme weather conditions can be major challenges today, when Thomas Potyn of Wittersham, a local baker, made his will in April 1466, he had just lived through an especially difficult time. According to John Stone, a monk chronicler at Christ Church Priory in Canterbury, the winter of 1464–5 had been exceptionally severe, with heavy snow and ice from Christmas Day until 10 February. Although thereafter farmers had a temporary respite and may have been able to plough and then sow their spring crops, in May they were confronted by drought conditions. Consequently, the harvest that year was probably poor and at his farmstead called Potyns his barns may have been empty by April 1466. Nevertheless, all was not lost because his wife was to have access to these barns to store her corn, then in the ground, and Thomas appears to have expected his two sons to work with their mother to ensure the family's survival.

Poor weather was not the only problem these medieval farmers faced, but by using information gleaned from chronicles, bedels' rolls and other manorial accounts, it is possible to link cause and effect. To take another example, the year after Thomas' death, the family's crops, both hay and corn, may have been severely damaged in June by "a great hail such as we had never seen in our time". Yet even though such families were remarkably resilient, back-to-back harvest failure was a major danger and the horseman symbolizing Famine was never that far away.

Famine on the Black Horse as depicted in the Angers  
Apocalypse Tapestry (1372–82): CC BY-SA 3.0



*Dr Sheila Sweetinburgh  
Centre for Kent History and Heritage*







# A Viking raid in 892

The “Great Heathen Army” was a somewhat fluctuating coalition of Vikings (and other adventurers) plaguing England in the latter part of the 9th century. After having had a go at a weakened France in the 880’s, they returned to England in 892, where they seized Appledore for their headquarters.



Castle Toll from the sky

What happened next is described in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles:

*And they came up with two hundred and fifty ships into the mouth of the Limne, which is in East-Kent, at the east end of the vast wood that we call Andred. ... The river that we before spoke about lieth out of the weald. On this river they towed up their ships as far as the weald, four miles from the mouth outwards; and there destroyed a fort within the fen, whereon sat a few churls, and which was hastily wrought.*



Castle Toll (late spring)

Now the Limne is an old name for the Rother, and if you sail up the river from the sea, you will get to the Weald, i.e. the forest, where the Lossenham ridge ends. This point is also about four miles from Bodiam, which is where the river ceases to be tidal and therefore, during maritime periods, Bodiam could be construed as the river mouth.

Does this mean that the “hastily wrought” fort which the Vikings destroyed was – Castle Toll? It might be – earlier excavations found nothing much except a single layer of burnt material. We have applied for permission to investigate Castle Toll from Historic England (it is a Scheduled Monument, so subject to special protection) and hope that this will come through very shortly. When it does, we will have two very interesting research targets at Lossenham – and even more need for volunteers!

## STOP PRESS:

Isle Heritage have just received Scheduled Monument Consent for Castle Toll – watch this space!

