The Lossenham Project

Newsletter 7

May 2021

Welcome to the Lossenham Project newsletter.

We will be regularly keeping you up to date with the latest news and any events you can get involved in.

To sign up to the project or for further information email info@lossenham.org.uk

Where there's a will...

Rebecca Warren

Lockdown may have stopped archaeologists getting out into the field, but the 'Wills Group' of the Lossenham Project has continued its research undaunted. The National Archives has generously provided free access to its collection of wills over the last few months. Eager to make the most of this resource, we have downloaded a wealth of wills made between 1400 and 1700 for the parishes of the Upper Rother valley. In a short series for the newsletters of the Lossenham Project, I'd like to share a few snapshots of the people who lived and worked in the project area, as seen through the wills that they left behind.

Wills speak to us so powerfully across the centuries, articulating people's wishes and laying out the intimate detail of their daily lives and their relationships. Yet it's worth remembering that they can be very deceptive: William Shakespeare famously left his wife, Anne Hathaway, his 'second best bed', from which it has been interpreted that he held her in low regard. But perhaps the 'second best bed'

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was their marital bed, where they had loved and she had laboured, and perhaps she had asked for it specifically? We'll never know.

Anne Hathaway was not the only widow to be left a 'second best bed'. In 1562, William Watts of Sandhurst made his will, in which he left bequests to his wife, Alice, and to his eight children. William was a man of some standing; he had at least three separate properties in the area and seems to have been involved in the cloth trade. The Weald of Kent was known for its production of woollen cloth, and it is not surprising to find a wealthy yeoman passing on the means of cloth production to his sons. So how did he divide up his property?

On this probate will (11/46/145) there is a doodle of a man in a hat (with smallpox?) and a dragon.

William mentions no grandchildren, so it seems that his three eldest sons, John, William and Herbert, were probably as yet unmarried; perhaps they were still young men? John, the eldest son, was to inherit his father's house and workhouse and associated buildings, but John's brother, William, was to retain access to the 'workhouse and dyehouse' and 'the implements of the same', so it would seem that both men were working in the family cloth business. William (the son) was also to receive twenty-two acres of land, fifteen cows and a 'trotting gelding'. Herbert, however, was to receive property that his father had recently bought at 'Copbeche' and a house that William's first wife, Johan, had brought to the family. William's three youngest sons - Edmond, Thomas and Robert - were to receive a single payment of £20 each and then 40s a year until they were 14. Perhaps at this age William expected them to be apprenticed?

William left £15 to his daughter Anne at her marriage but his daughter Martha was to receive only £10; was that a sign of favouritism? Or had he already given Martha £5 and in his will he was making sure that Anne was treated equally to her sister?

It is through William's bequests to his wife, Alice, however, that we see something of the personal lives and status of this family. Alice was William's second wife. It is unclear whether she was the mother of any of his children, but the tenor of the will suggests that William, John and Herbert, at least, were the sons of his first wife, Johan. The care with which William itemises Alice's legacies and rights suggest that his eldest sons might be less concerned with her welfare during widowhood than if she were their mother.

William left Alice his 'second-best featherbed and second-best coverlet, with a second-best pair of blankets and a flock bed, a covering and a pair of blankets and three pairs of sheets of the best, and three pairs of the coarsest…' Like Anne Hathaway, it is unclear why Alice was to receive the second-best bed and bed-linen; was it her own bed? or was the best bed a piece of 'status furniture', on show in a semi-public room but not used for daily sleeping? William also left Alice some domestic pewter and brass, his 'black ambling mare' with her sidesaddle and bridle, two cows and a considerable stock of grain. And he ensured that she would retain a roof over her head by specifying that she was to have 'the chamber over the parlour with free egress and regress to the same during her widowhood. And to have free coming & going into the bakehouse and brewhouse…'
William also stated that his son John was to provide the wood that Alice needed 'in the parlour and kitchen' and that she was to have 'free coming and going' to the 'herber [herb garden] and garden as her necessity shall require.'

It seems clear then that, as was normal, William's main property was to pass to his eldest son (John) but that he expected Alice to remain in the house, provided with the necessities for a continuing degree of comfort. One can only hope that his careful arrangements were carried out and that the family managed to get along harmoniously in the years after William's death.

William Watts died in the early years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. He had lived through decades of enormous religious change and uncertainty but through his will we are able to peep into the everyday life of a well-to-do Tudor yeoman in rural Kent, concerned with his family, his business and his relationship to the land and community of the Upper Rother valley.

Rebecca Warren
Lossenham Project 'Wills Group'

Archaeological Fieldwork: The Story So Far

Andrew Richardson

In terms of fieldwork, the Lossenham Project was launched in a very difficult year; as you can imagine, our activities in that regard have been considerably constrained by the social restrictions necessitated by the Covid19 pandemic. Hopefully, this Summer will be a very different story, and we have an ambitious programme planned, which we hope as many of you as possible will be able to take part in. This includes several weeks of excavation at Lossenham Farm; check the events diary elsewhere in this newsletter for details. However, we have managed to undertake some fieldwork over the past year, in between the various lockdowns, and this has yielded some interesting and tantalising results that hint at the potential of this ancient landscape.

A one-day metal detector survey in October, in collaboration with the Kent Archaeological Metal Detecting Support Unit (KAMSU), recovered a small assemblage of metal finds from across the farm. As reported in Newsletter Issue 2, these finds reflected agricultural activities on the farm over the past couple of hundred years, though a fragment of a copper alloy cauldron of possible medieval or early post-medieval date provided evidence of much older activity in a field just to the north of the so-called 'pit lake'. This large feature is old. It appears on the earliest maps of the farm and may have originated as a quarry pit for iron ore. It has recently been cleared of silt and remodelled. A range of material recovered from the dredged silts includes sherds of medieval and early post-medieval pottery. Nearby, in the same field as the fragment of cauldron, we have recovered fragments of what appear to be furnace lining. Thus, it may be that this represents an area of industrial production connected to the Wealden iron industry, though at what date we cannot yet say.

Whatever its age, once established the pit became a place where artefacts accumulated over the subsequent centuries, both through casual loss and deliberate disposal. Indeed, a spread of glass bottles and pottery down the slope at the western end of the pit probably represents years of use as a rubbish dump. One of the more interesting finds to emerge so far from the lake is the bowl of a clay tobacco pipe.

This is a nineteenth-century pipe, with elaborate moulded decoration depicting grapes on the vine.

Much earlier evidence was recovered from a series of ten boreholes, bored to a depth of 7m, into the levels south of the Hexden Channel. These have provided a fascinating insight into the formation of the levels, and the evolution of the landscape we see today either side of the Hexden. At a depth of around 6m below the modern ground surface, we encountered a grey clay. At the time of the survey, we suspected this might be Wadhurst Clay, a geological deposit that underlies much of the Weald and which dates to the Early Cretaceous, roughly 140 to 100 million years ago. However, subsequent analysis revealed that in fact we had hit a much more recent, post-glacial, deposit of silty clay that had been laid down as a result of marine flooding of the valley. How thick this deposit is, what lies beneath it, and how deep the Wadhurst Clay, and the top of the natural geology, actually is, remain unknown. Finding out will require further work, including boreholes down to a depth of perhaps 10m. Above this marine deposit of silty clay lie thick deposits

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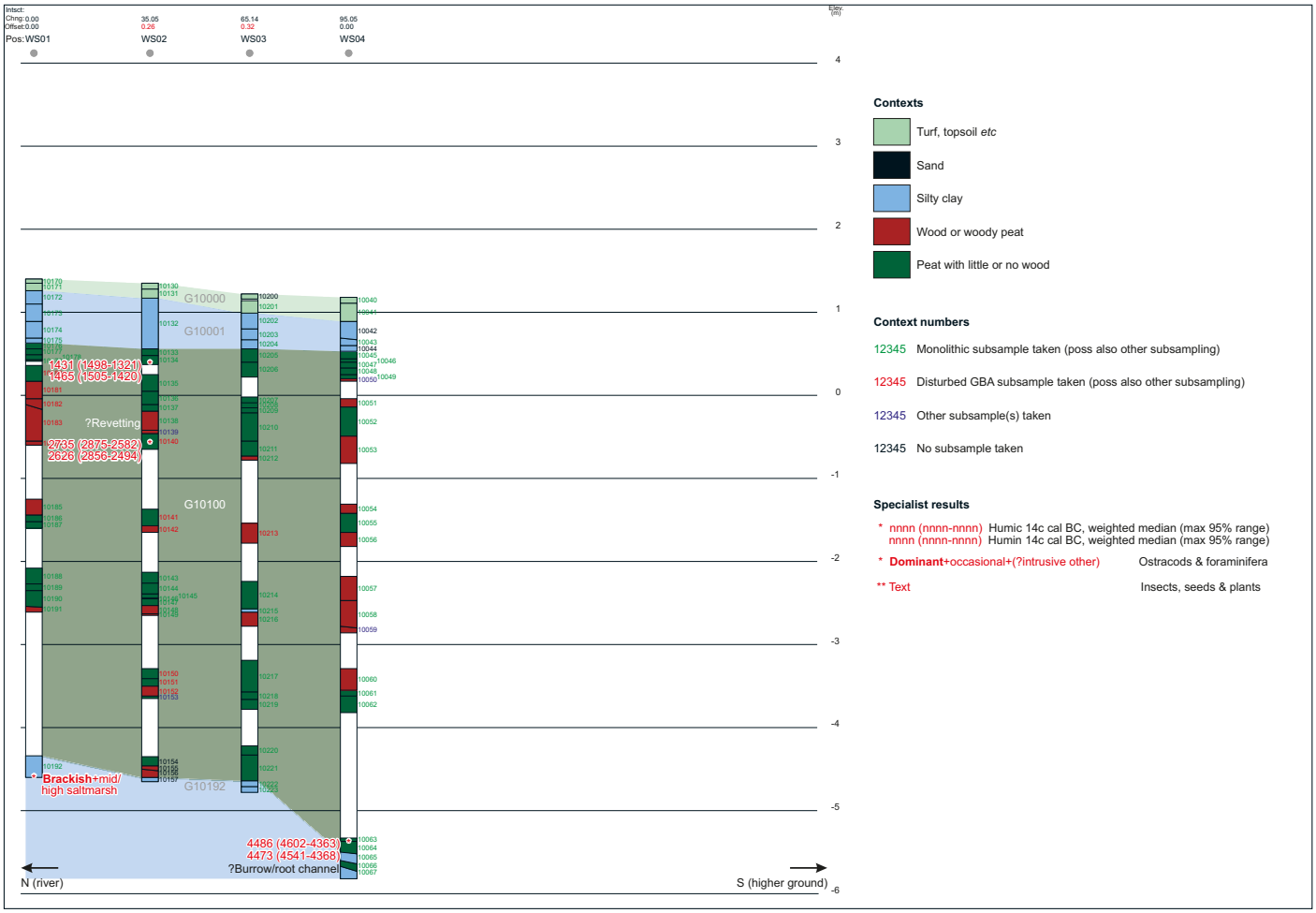


Fig ## Transect TX1 (vertical scale 1:40, ave. horizontal spacing 1:1000).

Results of borehole survey

of highly organic peat, some containing quantities of preserved wood. For the most part these deposits are about 5m thick, more in some places, representing a long period of peat marsh formation within the valley. Radiocarbon dates towards the bottom of this sequence ranged between 4602-4368 cal BC[1], so around 6500 years ago, during the Mesolithic (or Middle Stone Age) period. By this time Britain had only recently become an island, as sea levels rose following the end of the last Ice Age. The island was inhabited by a small population of hunter-gatherers and would have been heavily forested and rich in game and wild plants. Farming was yet to be introduced by Neolithic migrants from the near Continent, though it would not be long in coming. The top of the peat deposits, only some 1.2m below the modern ground surface, dated to much later, 1505-1321 cal BC, the Middle Bronze Age. By this time metal working was a well-developed art, and the monuments of the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age exemplified by sites such as Avebury and Stonehenge were already ancient.

Interestingly, one of the boreholes passed through a compact section of wooden rods overlaid on one another. This could be natural, or it could be evidence of some kind of built structure, such as a wicker revetment. A radiocarbon date from immediately below it yielded a result of between 2875-2494 cal BC, equivalent to the Late Neolithic period. This possible structure is less than two metres below the ground surface. At the right time of year, when the water table is low, it should be possible to reach it by excavation, to see if this is indeed a human-built structure or not.

[1] *Radiocarbon dates are expressed as calibrated date range, representing the years within which there is a high probability that the organism being dated died.*

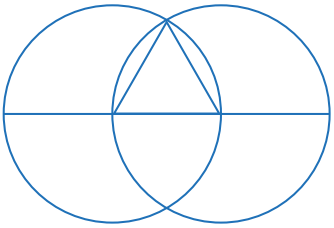
The peat deposits were sealed by a further layer of silty clay and sand, representing another episode of marine flooding at some point after the Middle Bronze Age. This deposit is very shallow, just below the topsoil. We can see from aerial photographs that across large areas of the levels along both the Hexden and Rother valleys, extensive and complex field systems have been cut into these upper deposits in the past. Investigation of these field systems, and their dating, are a key research priority for the future.

Further insights into what lies below ground at Lossenham have been provided by geophysical surveys, including both an electro-magnetic (EM) survey carried out by palaeo-environmentalists Martin and Richard Bates, and magnetometry undertaken by members of the Hastings Area Archaeological Group (HAARG). As part of the Lossenham Project HAARG have also carried out a magnetometer survey across the area of an abandoned farmstead at Kensham (the medieval Cassingham), on the other side of the Hexden in Rolvenden parish. During this survey HAARG members recovered part of the handle of a medieval pottery vessel, as well as pieces of iron slag, suggesting that occupation at the site is of considerable antiquity. The results of the geophysical surveys will be presented in future editions of the newsletter but suffice to say they have provided further targets for excavation in the months and years ahead. We hope that many readers will be able to join us in exploring these sites and adding to our understanding of this ancient and fascinating landscape.

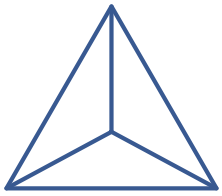
Andrew Richardson

Garden of the silent ringing bell

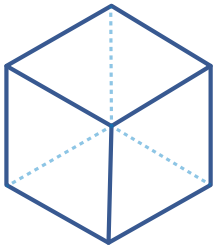
By Russell Burden



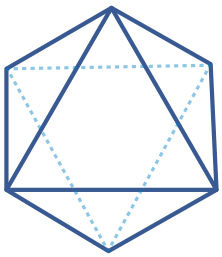
As 'Artist in Residence', I have been given the opportunity to create a concept for the small walled garden attached to the lodge at Lossenham Farm and have chosen the underlying theme of 'thresholds' for this work.



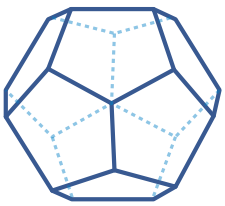
The processes and forms born of Nature have always fascinated me, more precisely how energies such as sound appear to be at the heart of Nature's structures and geometries, from the spirals of galaxies and the microscopic shells of diatoms or radiolaria, to sand ripples on a tidal beach. Our human senses are naturally and emotionally attuned to such visual harmonies and, together with the vibrational language of music or the tone of a voice, can we can imagine that similar forces are at work throughout our universe, endlessly manifesting patterns and order from fields of apparent disorder.



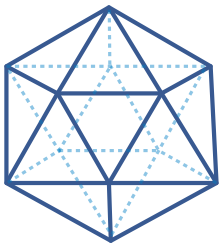
Returning to the subject of our little garden, I wish to introduce you to the Californian polymath Frank Chester, whose dicovery of a specific polyhedron is central to my inspiration for the garden's concept: a stainless steel geometric sculpture from under which water upwells to pour and pulse into a triangular, oxidised iron pool.



Chester's trip to Europe in the 1990s, specifically to Rudolph Steiner's Goetheanum in Switzerland, fueled his personal interest in the unusual geometry he had observed in the building, especially that of sevenfoldness, and upon his return, he started a long search for a seemingly missing seven sided platonic solid, not understanding at that time that only five forms were mathematically possible. After much exploration, in the year of the millennium, a hitherto unseen polyhedron made up of four triangles and three quadrilateral planes of equal surface area was born, the Chestahedron. This was not a true platonic solid but nevertheless still quite extraordinary, with many points of connection to the five existing forms.



However, it is one particular geometric quality in connection with the human heart that is the focus of the garden: a discovery that the Chestahedron, when slightly inflated, mirrors the shape of the left ventricle of the heart and, amazingly, when the shape is spun on its vertical axis it manifests as a perfect bell. When spun underwater, the shape of the heart's left ventricle attaches itself as a bubble and, when digitally modeled, a section of the whole mirrors the complete heart including its voids. Furthermore, when the left



form is compressed and released verically it rotates slightly, moving fluid between the two voids. This has formed an anthoposophical view of the heart as a flow-form rather than the traditional idea of a mechanistic pump.

After several attempts to find the ideal person to fabricate the sculpture, I contacted Andrew Baldwin, an old friend who, as serendipity would have it, has a workshop only one mile from the site of the medieval Carmelite Friary at Sandwich. The connection with Lossenham's lost friary felt too good to be true, so Andrew was commissioned to begin work on the sculpture, which is now complete.

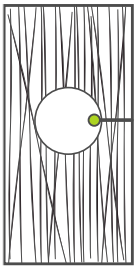
Beyond refreshed planting, altered ground work and seating, other existing elements of the garden are being redesigned. The gates and wall openings will entail crastmanship in wrought metal and cast glass. It falls to Euclid's 'first proposition', the plotting of the equilateral triangle via line and circle as inspiration for these elements. The garden's entrance gates have a circle each that overlap to form a vesica, a mandorla in Christian iconlonogy. They are set amongst vertical reed-like lines reaching from earth to sky. The six wall openings will hold columns of coloured cast glass set in waves of lines that remind one of water, growth and land. Almost needless to say, Euclid's triangle is formed as the base of the sculpture and its pool.

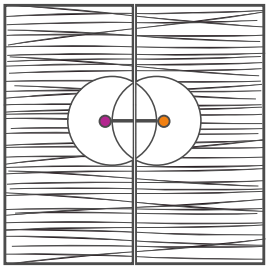
My hope is that the garden will be a space for quietude and contemplation, perhaps as a starting point for individuals who wish to explore the Lossenham landscape as a place of retreat from our increasingly busy world.

The imaginative process for the garden began with a poetic sketch which can be read at:
http://embertree.uk/garden-of-the-silent-ringing-bell/
Images will also be posted here as the project develops.

Sevenfoldness in architecture is fairly unusual. There is an example of its use at St. Thomas a Becket Church on the Romney Marsh in the form of a heptagonal font. If anyone spots such features using the indivisible number seven, I would dearly like to know!

For those of you interested in the subject of sacred geometry, I would recommend reading the work of Keith Critchlow who, as a professor of architecture and co-founder of Temenos Academy, spent a lifetime studying the subject, including the sacred proportions of buildings such as Chartres Cathedral.
https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keith_Critchlow



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Upcoming Events - Dates for the diaries!

Having successfully passed the second key date in the road map out of lockdown, we are now going to release the dates for the rest of the year. Please note these dates are subject to change should the government deem it necessary to alter their lockdown easing plans.

You do not need to sign up to a full week on the excavation but we do ask for a minimum half-day commitment. Days start at 10am and will finish at 4.30pm, with breaks. No experience is necessary and all equipment is provided, all you need is weather appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear. Finds washing positions are available but subject to finding something first!

We endeavour to make all our projects as accessible as possible. If you have particular requirements please let us know in advance so we can make adjustments to accommodate you.

If you are looking to pursue a career in archaeology let us know and we can look at designing a training program to fill in any knowledge gaps.

Excavation dates (please email annie.partridge@canterburytrust.co.uk to book a place):

Monday June 21 to Sunday June 27 (Thursday June 24 is a rest day)

Monday July 19 to Friday July 23

Saturday August 14 to Sunday August 22 (Wednesday August 18 is a rest day)

Monday September 13 to Sunday September 19 (Thursday September 16 is a rest day)

Saturday October 2 to Friday October 8 (Wednesday October 6 is a rest day)

Other events

- **Survey and set-up days Thursday June 10 to Saturday June 12.** We are looking for some people to help support a metal detecting survey being done by KAMSU. We need people to help mark and bag finds, and to help us clear and set-up a base for our operations. If you can lend a hand email Annie.
- **Sunday June 27th**, 10am until noon, guided walk at Lossenham Farm (repeat of May 29). Contact Annie Partridge to book a place.
- The excavation will be absorbing a lot of our time but we expect to run some digital workshops later in the summer/autumn.
- After October there will be regular meetings to process, record, and archive the finds from the excavation.