

WIRG

Wealden Iron Research Group

NEWSLETTER

No. 3 November 1982

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Editor's Note

This third annual Newsletter comes to you with the notice of the Winter Meeting at which we look forward to meeting a good number of members and friends, hoping that the weather will not disrupt the arrangements this year.

Following the note on cannon in Newsletter No. 2, particular thanks are due to T. Evans, P. Hutchison and J. Shelley for their valuable contributions. If any member is interested in pursuing this line of research the Secretary will be pleased to pass on the information so far received. Thanks are also due to those who sent information about minepits.

The publications of other societies are frequently a source of items of interest to WIRG, and the Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society No. 32, Spring 1982 contains a note by Miss R.M. Willatts on the iron grave slabs in St. Swithun's Church, East Grinstead. Further afield, the restored blast furnace of Abbey Tintern at Chapel Hill, Tintern, Gwent is fully described in Historical Metallurgy vol. 16 No. 1, 1982. It is hoped that this site, which has been visited by some members, will be officially open to the public during summer 1983.

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Members,

I little thought, when I took on the job of Chairman, that there would be so many things that I would become involved in; for, though not outwardly so, perhaps, WIRG is an active group on many levels. One has only to cast one's eyes through this newsletter to see that. And much of the impetus for this is due to your enthusiastic committee, to whom my first thanks are extended. I will single out two of its members, ironically though, for it is on the occasion of their departure. Roger Adams decided to stand down this year, though he continues in active membership and will, I hope, carry on with his bloomery experiments at The Pheasantry. Leaving for further afield is Stella Bellem, who was largely responsible for the excellent development of the Iron Gallery at Anne of Cleves' House, Lewes. To both of them my particular gratitude for their contribution to WIRG.

WIRG is undergoing a process of change. Through the national recognition of the Chronicle Award, in particular, the group is being turned to, increasingly, as an authority. The evolution of the group in eastern central

Activities which were suggested and discussed were:-

1. To carry out a survey of bloomery sites in a different area to that previously covered. A second area surveyed would be compared with the findings in the first area. The new area to be covered will be half the size of the first area surveyed. It was agreed that the new area chosen should be in West Sussex, centred on Balcombe and Handcross, east of Horsham, north-west of Haywards Heath and south of Crawley.
2. To investigate a bloomery site in Scallands Wood. Pottery found at this site indicates that this site is likely to be pre-Roman.
3. To carry out a foray on Ashdown Forest in the Camp Hill area.
4. To investigate several known water-powered sites where bloomery slag has been found to see whether there is any evidence that the site was previously in use as a water-powered bloomery. Three sites were suggested - Roffey, Woolbridge, Coneyhurst Ghyll. B. Herbert agreed to research into known water-powered bloomeries in other parts of the country to find out what one would look like.
5. To follow trackways related to iron-working sites.
6. A foray to look for bog iron at a site near Blindley Heath.

It was decided to include nos. 1 - 4 in this year's programme and the following activities and dates were agreed.

2 Oct	-	Water-powered site	Roffey		
6 Nov	-	"	"	"	Coneyhurst Ghyll
4 Dec	-	"	"	"	Woolbridge
9 Jan	-	Bloomery survey			
5 Feb	-	"	"		
5 Mar	-	"	"		
9 Apr	-	Foray to Camp Hill, Ashdown Forest			
7 May	-	Foray to Scalland Wood			

Any member wishing to know more of the Field Group's activities should contact the Secretary.

Huggetts Farm

Excavations have continued on this most interesting medieval site although most of our team of diggers took a break during August and September helping Mr. Money on his site at Garden Hill and also at the Roman Tile Kiln at Cansiron. Prior to this other activity we planned most of the site and washed the many bags of pottery. A fair amount of glass has also been found, some of which is very fine and obviously of a high quality. Another interesting find was the bowl and partial stem of a clay pipe which is to be examined by an expert.

We started again at the beginning of October and the first Sunday's work mostly consisted of weed clearing and general tidying of the site. Our general plan this year is to investigate the ditch and dig a section across it to ascertain the composition of the various layers to try to decide on its probable use. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking everyone who helps us and to say that we are always looking for further help so that we can complete the excavation. If anyone is interested please contact either Dot Meades (Buxted 3131) or Sheila Broomfield (Hildenborough 838698). We dig on alternate Sundays and previous archaeological experience is not necessary but a 4-inch pointing trowel is!

S.B.

Sussex has left a nucleus of our members in that area, and I believe that, if we are better to fulfil this increasingly important role, we must spread our membership more widely and thoroughly across the Weald, and seek out new members particularly in areas where our present first-hand knowledge is insubstantial. Furthermore, as WIRG becomes more nationally known and respected, so we, in turn, must be more aware of research in other areas, both in Britain and abroad, and of the relevance of seeing our own studies in relation to and in the light of those of others.

Two manifestations of our role have been invitations to address the Archaeological Conference of the Sussex Archaeological Society in Lewes and the Symposium on Early Furnace Technology at the British Museum, both in October.

By the time you read this, I hope you will have received your Bulletin. I am sorry for the delay, but I hope the contents will make waiting for it worthwhile. Richard Saville's paper on the Fullers is somewhat of a departure for WIRG, in its scale. I hope we shall be able to publish others of similar importance in the future.

With my best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Yours sincerely,

Jeremy Hodgkinson

Field Group Activities

Early in 1982 the group completed the walking of the route of the proposed Uckfield bypass, in order to record finds of archaeological interest prior to their possible destruction. On 13th February about fifteen members traversed the route from Horsted Pond (TQ 472189) to some 300m beyond Iron Peartree Corner (TQ 489179), and on 6th March a party of about ten members completed the route from Horsted Pond to the River Uck (TQ 462207).

A description of the finds follows, beginning at the River Uck and going on to Iron Peartree Corner.

The first item of interest was a flat area of about 50m x 100m, beside a bend in the river and a little to the SW of the route (TQ 467197). It appeared to have been artificially flattened, and a fulling mill was postulated although no finds were made other than teasels growing along the river bank a few metres away.

At TQ 470193 a levelled area of about 100m x 30m ran parallel with the river and about 300m SW of it. This again was slightly SW of the route. Slag, broken brick and tiles were found, and a scattering of slag continued to a small wooded hollow at TQ 471193. On the eastern side of this was discovered a layer of red brickdust about 15cm thick, and the possibility of a brickworks was discussed.

Nothing further of interest was seen until the eastern side of the A26 was reached, when a scattering of bloomery slag was found on the fields from TQ 472189 to 475188, together with a few pieces of clay pipe stem. Two pottery sherds were found in Horsted Pond Wood, one of them probably medieval. There were no further finds, and it was concluded that this section of the bypass would not damage any sites of archaeological interest.

R.L.

Field Group Activities for 1982/83

On 12th September 19 members met at Huggetts Farm for the annual Field Group meeting to discuss ideas for activities for the coming season. Apologies were received from S. Broomfield, K. Butler, R. Ogilvie-Watson, B. Jacomb-Hood.

Awards presented included those by Lloyds Bank, British Gas, Country Life, Illustrated London News, and Legal and General. Dr. Peter Fowler, as Chairman of the judges for the BBC Chronicle Award, described and praised the WIRG entry. Although other entries had been scarcer than formerly, and of lower quality, that of WIRG was fully up to previous short list standard. Your President then accepted the winner's goblet from Mr. Macfarlane, and a cheque for £100 was later received from the BBC.

At the informal party which followed WIRG representatives were able to meet notables and friends from the archaeological world. C.F.T.

The WIRG Exhibition in the new Ashdown Forest Centre

The new Ashdown Forest Centre, TQ 433324, on the road between Wych Cross and Colemans Hatch is composed of three old Sussex barns reclaimed and made into one building. Here will be the Forest Rangers' Depot and the Conservators' administrative offices. An Exhibition Hall with permanent displays and information stands with leaflets etc. will be on the ground floor, upstairs a gallery for temporary exhibitions. The Wealden Iron Research Group has been asked to mount the first exhibition there.

With photographs, drawings and text it is intended to show the development of the Iron Industry on and around Ashdown Forest from the bloomeries of the Iron Age to the late 15th century, followed by that of the blast furnace and forge introduced into England from the Continent in 1494.

The introduction to the exhibition deals with the geology, metallurgy, ore and charcoal without which there would have been no iron smelting here. From this follows the early history of the industry, the bloomeries, the direct method, that is, man-power only, of making small quantities of wrought iron in a day from pre-Roman times until the late 15th century. Then with the introduction of the blast furnace and forge and the use of water-power as much as a ton or more of cast iron could be made in a day. This had to be refined in a conversion forge to remove the impurities to produce wrought iron and the products required, from cannon and shot to the ordinary domestic articles, firebacks, etc.

Lastly, an account of WIRG's activities and objectives will explain the part the Society has played into the research of the history of the industry. L.F.

The Welsh National Museum at Cardiff

As reported in Newsletter No. 2, in 1981 a group from the Museum visited Roger Adams' experimental bloomery and took video tape recordings for the Iron Age exhibit and the redesigned Archaeological Galleries.

In the Spring of 1982 an invitation was received to attend the reopening of the Galleries as part of the Museum's 75th Birthday Celebrations. Unfortunately, Roger was unable to attend, but, being on holiday near Hay-on-Wye, my daughter and I were able to go to the evening ceremony.

It is quite a fast road down through Merthyr Tydfil and the first part over the Brecon Beacons has marvellous scenery.

The Museum is a fine building and I wish we had been able to see more of it but we had little time to spare before Professor Glyn Daniel opened the proceedings in the Lecture Theatre. His theme "The Mirror of the Welsh Past" surveyed the study of Welsh History, its historians and their ideas from its semi-folk lore beginnings to the present day, ending with such names as Mortimer Wheeler and Cyril Fox under whom he had started his career at Cardiff.

Then moving upstairs, he cut the ceremonial tape to declare the re-designed Galleries open.

Little Cansiron Roman Tile Kiln

While field walking in the area of Little Cansiron Farm, Hartfield, Giles Swift noted a scatter of Roman tile on the ploughed surface at TQ 456384. Bloomery slag was also present on the field, possibly from the surface of a trackway where it would have been used as metalling. The site was threatened by further cultivation, so with the helpful co-operation of the land-owners a rescue excavation was carried out by the Sussex Archaeological Field Unit under the direction of David Rudling and with help from many WIRG members. This revealed a tile kiln and associated structures, which have now all been covered up prior to completion of the excavation during 1983. The site lies about 1km from the large Roman ironworking centre of Great Cansiron, with which it may be assumed to have been connected. M.T.

Walk and AGM, 17th July 1982

On 17th July, a perfect summer's day, some 35 members of WIRG and their families met to explore the remains of the iron workings of St. Leonard's Forest. We were led by Mr. Peter Benner and accompanied by Mr. Gregory, who had been with E. Straker during his original study of the site. We visited the sites of the forges and furnaces on the bays of Hammer and Hawkins Ponds, both ponds looking much as they did in Straker's day, and on the smaller bays further down stream. Following our foray, during which we disturbed a deer, we adjourned to Warninglid Village Hall for a reviving tea and the AGM.

Our Chairman reported on the varied activities of WIRG during the past year, including the progress of the book "Iron Industries of the Weald" and on preparation of an exhibition at the Ashdown Forest Centre. The presentation of the Chronicle Award, fully reported in national and local papers, had increased awareness in many national institutions and local societies of WIRG's work. It is hoped that the Chronicle Goblet, which was on display at the meeting, will be put in the Iron Gallery of Anne of Cleves Museum in Lewes. The BBC's cheque for £100 and that for £250 from the Robert Kiln Trust will go on deposit.

The officers and Committee elected for the coming year were:-

Chairman - Jeremy Hodgkinson

Vice Chairman - Dot Meades

Secretary - Sue Swift

Treasurer - Reg Houghton

Bulletin Editor - David Crossley

Committee - Sheila Broomfield, David Combes, Pam Combes, Lillian Funnell, Brian Herbert, Alan Scott, Giles Swift, Margaret Tebbutt

Auditor - Daphne Abbott

Following the meeting Mr. Peter Benner gave an interesting and amusing account of his researches into the history of the Gratwick family and of the ironworkings in the Forest between the early part of the sixteenth century until their destruction by the Parliamentary forces in the 1640s. A.D.

British Archaeological Awards 1981

On 20th April 1982 your President, Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Secretary and one other member of the committee (the number invited was limited) attended the presentation of these awards at the British Museum. In the absence of the Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, Secretary of State for the Environment, at an emergency Cabinet meeting, the presentations were made by Mr. Neil Macfarlane M.P., the Under Secretary. On the platform to welcome the Minister was Dr. David Wilson, Director of the British Museum, and the chair was taken by Mr. Robert Kiln, founder of the Kiln Archaeological Trust (a benefactor of WIRG).

The new layout is very well organised, with exhibits from Neolithic to Medieval times displayed in large glass cases. A painted wall frieze depicts reconstructions ranging from "A libation in 3000 BC" to the Roman villa at Glantwit Manor.

Each display has a tape recorded talk in Welsh or English, available by plugging a small ear-phone set into an adjacent socket.

The video displays are similarly bi-lingual. One we saw showed present day flint knapping. Alas, we discovered that our recording was one of several which could not be processed in time for the opening. I must say that the excellent refreshments provided consolation, and when you pay a visit, it will undoubtedly have been installed. R.G.H.

Yorkshire Iron

Last August I stayed at the village of Lastingham on the edge of the North Yorkshire Moors in one of a range of cottages originally built for miners working the Rosedale iron mines some four miles away.

The mines commenced working in 1856. The last finally shut down in 1926. A railway was built up the dale and northward over the moors to feed the furnaces of Middlesborough - it closed in 1929.

Several reminders of this period appear in this beautiful countryside. Sketchily guarded mine shafts, grass covered furnace slag beds of the old railway line and its sidings and scattered stones. On the hillside above Rosedale village still stand the great stone arches of the calcining kilns where the ore was burnt before transportation. In front of them are the heaps of waste half covered with vegetation.

There is some evidence of Iron age and Romano-British iron working in the general area though not in Rosedale. Medieval bloomeries are documented and have been found in neighbouring dales. An interesting example excavated in 1963 at Postgate Farm in Glaisdale is reported as being "built in an oval hollow, partly rock cut and partly stone lined measuring 8 ft long, 3 ft wide and $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft deep. A mass of iron stone and slag was embedded in the base". The site was situated high on the valley side and sherds of the 13th and 14th century were found associated with it.

The Ryedale Folk Museum at nearby Hutton le Hole is well worth a visit. Among many fascinating exhibits and rebuilt and restored buildings 'a la' Singleton may be seen a collection of tools and wares from small local firms, who in the latter part of the 19th century cast their own iron ware from posts to fireplaces and cooking ranges in sand and other moulds. R.G.H.

'When Sussex was Middlesbrough'

Our member Bob Dyer has in his possession a cutting from the Observer newspaper for Sunday September 27th 1931 which contains a review, under the above heading, of the then newly published 'Wealden Iron' by Ernest Straker. The reviewer enthusiastically recommends the book, referring to the author as "the arch priest of the Sussex and Kent Bloomery" and suggesting that his extensive researches make him "perhaps the only man who could tell the full story" of the Wealden iron industry. WIRG's debt to Straker will be fully recognised and acknowledged in the publication of the new 'Iron Industries of the Weald', which we hope will attract equally enthusiastic reviews. M.T.

Corrections

WIRG Bulletin 14 (1978) p.5. Rushlake Green Bloomery. The correct grid reference should read TQ 614172.

Index to Bulletins 13 to 17. Coin, Roman XVI 14-15.

75
350 11.95
60 12.00
300
60
390

WIRG Publications for sale

The following publications are available from:

Mr. B.K. Herbert
1 Stirling Way
East Grinstead,
Sussex, RH19 3HG.

Prices quoted include postage.

A Gun-casting Furnace at Scarletts, Cowden, Kent	By: D.W. Crossley	£0.90	75
An Abandoned Medieval Industrial Site at Parrock, Hartfield	By: C.F. Tebbutt	£0.35	20
The Excavation of a Late 16th/Early 17th Century Gun-casting Furnace at Maynard's Gate, Crowborough, Sussex 1975-1976	By: O. Bedwin	£0.75	50
The Excavation of Three Roman Bloomery Furnaces at Hartfield, Sussex	By: C.F. Tebbutt	£1.15 90	70 100
Wealden Bloomery Iron Smelting Furnaces (Survey of Wealden Bloomeries covering area of approx. 200km ²)	By: C.F. Tebbutt	£0.75	50
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*a Middle-Saxon iron smelting site
at Millbrook, Ashdown Forest, Sussex,
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CBA Research Report No 29

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