

PALACES, POTS, and PARKS

ARCHAEOLOGY and the NATIONAL TRUST

Wednesday, 6 February 2013, by Nathalie Cohen

Based at Scotney Castle, Nathalie is an archaeologist with a Kent/East Sussex remit. Since the National Trust [NT] owns/manages properties and archaeological sites, Nathalie presented an assortment of those sites, before updating us on the exciting projects at Knole.

COLDRUM LONG BARROW, Trottiscliffe, is a megalithic chambered tomb 4000-5000 years old, with 19th Century excavation having already unearthed remains of 22 adults and children. A nearby tree has become bedecked with ribbons, bells, and notes, while a new interpretative panel provides information detailing archaeological progress.

MONK'S HOUSE, Rodmell, was home to Leonard and Virginia Woolf. Although mediaeval activity has been identified within an archaeological trench in the adjacent field, further excavation is necessary. This site being developer-led, NT must seek 'mitigation' for its archaeological purposes.

Dover's **WHITE CLIFFS** have offered up bottles and other glass vessels from the Great War era, and NT has recently acquired ('saved') a chunk of the cliffs, at the foot of which a clearly visible early 20th Century shipwreck invites exploration.

FAN HOLE (or BAY) BATTERY, Dover, is finely detailed on a 1943 War Department plan. Traces of concrete sound mirrors may also be in existence at the site, whose extensive tunnels system, decorated with wartime graffiti, may eventually be publicly accessible.

WINCHELSEA threw up a French silver jetton from 1260-1270, shortly before *New* Winchelsea came about. **BLACKFRIARS BARN CELLARS** nearby, a tripartite vaulted structure, probably served as a wine storage area. Interpretative graffiti, drawn (complete with fingerprints) on wet plaster possibly depicts a 1350 sea battle fought locally. A large, significant assemblage of post-mediaeval **pottery** is housed at Winchelsea in 70-odd crates, while a non-intrusive survey, using magnetronomy, is being undertaken at **ROOKERY BARN**.

BODIAM is the subject of a research project by the University of Southampton, examining both castle and immediate environs. Various construction periods are evidenced, topographic survey work indicating that Roman Bodiam may have served as a major trans-shipment port.

KNOLE in FLUX (*Phase 1*): The prime NT priority, with a £3m urgent repair programme covering its East and South ranges, Knole is unheated, lacking waterproofing and weathertightness. The work is a delicate 'balancing act', since the ground and upper levels are inhabited. Much graffiti has been uncovered, some of recent date, and many different construction periods are in evidence. Birds' and wasps' nests, a 1949 matchbox, and window sections from earlier centuries have come to light. Curiously, no previous survey appears to have been undertaken, so a ground plan and rooms survey are on the agenda.

INSPIRED by KNOLE (*Phase 2*): Audience development and understanding are paramount here, a recent 'word cloud' feedback producing observations such as *authentic, grand, historic, inspiring, interesting, and melancholy*, while tours of the scaffolding have allowed visitors a tactile experience of the work being undertaken. NT plans to reach its public via website, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. A £17m HLF-funded restoration, repair, and renovation project (of which HRH Prince Charles is an enthusiast), will stabilise the interior and explore beneath floorboards and behind panelling. Coincidentally, a PhD student has received permission to undertake a gardens survey.

In concluding her presentation, Nathalie remarked that the immediate environs of Knole provide equal fascination: St Nicholas' Church, Sevenoaks School, and older parts of the town, while, further afield, several Archbishop's palaces are scattered throughout the South-East, including a local example at Mayfield.

Stefan Gatward