

Brede High Wood Archaeology Project

An update on recent achievements: March 2012

Geophysics survey at Brede High Farm

We recently carried out a geophysics survey at Brede High Farm. This involved two types of survey, firstly magnetometry, which picks up variations in magnetism, and secondly resistivity which picks up differences in resistance to an electrical current. Both methods are designed to find buried archaeological features.

Although we know there are remains of the walls of buildings still surviving below ground at the farm, neither method really picked up much in the way of identifiable archaeology. The magnetometry seems to have picked up some of the buildings and trackway at the southern end of the site, and may have picked out the remains of the farmhouse at the north end of the site, but it is not particularly clear. According to David Staveley who carried out the survey, there was a lot of interference from metal objects in the soil.

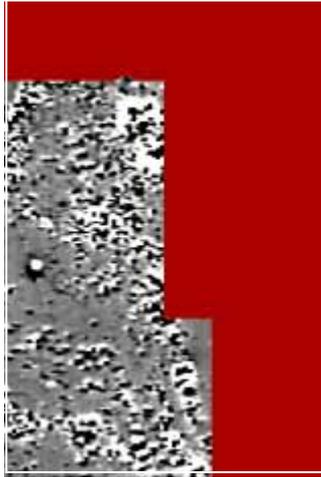


Resistivity Survey



Magnetometry survey

The resistivity was a much slower technique, and therefore we only managed to look at two parts of the site, but it did give the volunteers a good opportunity to try it for themselves. The results were disappointing, with nothing really showing up clearly, however the outline of two buildings at the south end of the site can be made out, and a large anomaly at the north end may be the site of the farmhouse. The recent dry weather means that tree roots can have an effect of the results. However there is some correlation between the two sets of results, and a comparison with the Ordnance Survey map showing the layout of the farm helps to identify the buildings that seem to survive at the site. Below is the raw data, we will publish some interpretation once we have made more sense of it.



Mag survey



Resistance survey

Trial excavations on the ironworking site and hop pickers camp

Over two days in March we carried out some trial excavations at the Iron working site, helped by some 20 volunteers. Five 1m square test pits were excavated on the site, based on the results of the magnetometry survey carried out earlier in the year. The first two test pits were excavated on area of high magnetism, and sure enough below the topsoil in both of these test pits a large deposit of iron working slag was found. Further down we found areas of burnt clay, usually an indication of furnace structures or burning. We also found parts of furnace structure, including fragments of the lining and part of a rounded fired-clay brick using to make the wall of the furnace. All the elements of the ironworking process were present including iron ore, roasted ore, and various types of slag (the waste product).



The Ironworking site

The third test pit also found similar deposits of slag and fired clay. The fourth and fifth test pits did not find any evidence of the ironworking site, but were useful in that they have helped to define the limits of the ironworking area.



Excavating a test pit and a bucket of slag

Although no definite dating evidence was found, all the indications are that the site belongs to the Roman period. We will return to the ironworking site in 2013 to carry out a large scale excavation, and hopefully will find the iron furnace(s) and other elements of the iron production process.



Volunteer drawing a section of a test pit

A trench was also excavated over a deposit of pottery, glass and metalwork that was lying in a depression, not far from the hop pickers camp that was there in the early 20th century. However it proved to just be a surface midden of rubbish, but a useful assemblage of material was collected and will be analysed to try and find out more about this interesting part of the Brede story.

Finally we took the opportunity to investigate and record a section through a woodland boundary bank, where it had been disturbed by wild boar. This showed that the bank had been created in a single operation from the upcast resulting from digging out the ditch. The ditch had subsequently been kept reasonably clean. Nothing was found to date the bank and ditch, but it seems likely that it dates to the 19th century.

We would like to thank all of the volunteers who have helped with the project.