

Angel's Nursery Archaeological Dig Open Day 25th October 2014

The site has been excavated prior to development. West Sussex County Council, the owner of the land, has planning permission for 100 houses. The Council purchased the land after the First World War and erected 2 houses (semi-detached) which, with the adjacent land, were leased as small holdings. The last occupiers of the site were Mark and Becky Hillsden who set up a commercial enterprise, Angel's Nursery, with a large glasshouse selling plants to the public. There was also a small amount of bought-in fruit and veg. A small orchard was planted alongside Yapton Road where pigs and free range chickens roamed. It was a popular enterprise characterised by a bright pink fence and sign. Becky's mother had previously been in the trade and was very knowledgeable and hard working. When she was unable to continue with the back breaking work, the nursery folded. At one time Becky also ran the bakers and the florist in Barnham. The other house was occupied by an elderly couple who had worked the smallholding, Hyde End Nursery for many years. They sold eggs and veg from a stall in the front garden. The husband died (he was instrumental in obtaining a house in Bognor for the homeless and was a very intelligent, well-spoken man) and the widow tried in vain to stay in the house. A fire in her kitchen meant that she had to be moved out and she died not long after in a care home in Yapton.

The archaeological team dug 32 exploratory trenches and found evidence of field boundaries. These showed as darker deposits and were full of broken pottery. Simon Stevens, the archaeologist, explained that discarded broken pottery is like today's packaging – goods arrive in it and the packaging is then thrown away. Accurate satellite navigation mapping produced a working plan of the site enabling the team to focus on areas of interest. Nothing was found behind or to the east of the houses. Small round pits and field boundaries could be seen on the western side of the site and these were being excavated by hand. Soil samples were taken and 'floated' to hopefully reveal grains and insects. Certain beetles are found in certain vegetation and this could provide a picture of trees etc on the site.

Finds:

- imported Gallo-Belgic butt beaker (AD10-80) finely made drinking vessel made in northern Gaul early Roman
- high status imported Samian-ware bowl made in central Gaul (AD90-150)
- New Forest-ware beaker (AD270-400) late Roman ware
- Numerous pieces of broken pottery

No metal or coins have been found – any metal has turned out to be 'mush'. Gaps in the digital map may indicate the position of a dwelling although no evidence has been found. Simon's view is that there were at least 2 dwellings – a 1st century one to the front of the site near Yapton Road – a collapsed Roman well has been found there to support this - and a 2nd century house towards the back of the site in an area surrounded by ditches and clear of any rubbish pits. The site may have supported several families. Because of the method of building Roman dwellings, it is quite possible that no evidence would remain

No medieval pottery has been found indicating that the site was abandoned and not occupied again until the smallholdings were built. Indeed, on the 1849 tithe map, plot 69 is 'Poorhouse 5 acres' arable and plot 70 is 'Strood Field' arable. These are the nearest I can find. No maps show any dwellings in recent years prior to the smallholdings.

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25th October 2014