

KAFS Newsletter: No.21.

The Kent Archaeological Field School:

Christmas 2021

Have you seen
the KAFS website?
It is amazing...



Contents

WELCOME

CHRISTMAS 20AD AND 2021 AD

THE KAFS YEAR (AGAIN) WAS CURTAILED BY THE PANDEMIC BUT WE LOOK FORWARD TO 2022

KAFS 2021 GEOPHYSICAL SURVEYS AT WYE WITH MORE ROMAN BUILDINGS REVEALED

TRAINING WEEK IN AUGUST 2019 AT THE KENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD SCHOOL IN FAVERSHAM

CHRISTMAS GIFTS/NOT TOO LATE!

DOES THE STORY OF BEOWOLF EXPLAIN THE OSEBERG, GJELLESTAD AND SUTTON HOO SHIPS?

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING DIFFERENT FOR THIS WINTER: BEOWULF IN KENT BY PAUL WILKINSON

A DAY OF PAGAN RITUALS BY PAUL WILKINSON

ARCHAEOLOGICAL GUIDE TO POMPEII.

THE KAFS EVENTS FOR 2021

COURSES AT THE KAFS FOR 2021

KAFS BOOKING FORM

MEMBERSHIP FORM

*Welcome to the Christmas 2021 Newsletter
from the Kent Archaeological Field School*



Dear Reader, we will be emailing a Newsletter during the year to keep you up to date with news and views on what is planned at the Kent Archaeological Field School and what is happening on the larger stage of archaeology both in this country and abroad. To become a member or subscribe to the free newsletter go to the home page of www.kafs.co.uk and click where it says 'Click Here'.

I hope you enjoy! Paul Wilkinson.

Christmas 20AD and 2021 AD!



It was a public holiday celebrated around December 25th in the family home. A time for feasting, goodwill, generosity to the poor, the exchange of gifts and the decoration of trees. **But it wasn't Christmas. This was Saturnalia, the pagan Roman winter solstice festival.**

But was Christmas, Western Christianity's most popular festival, derived from the pagan Saturnalia?

The first-century AD poet Gaius Valerius Catullus described Saturnalia as 'the best of times': dress codes were relaxed, small gifts such as dolls, candles and caged birds were exchanged.

Saturnalia saw the inversion of social roles. The wealthy were expected to pay the month's rent for those who couldn't afford it, masters and slaves to swap clothes. Family households threw dice to determine who would become the temporary Saturnalian monarch. The poet Lucian (AD 120-180) has the Roman god Saturn say in his poem, *Saturnalia*:

'During my week the serious is barred: no business allowed. Drinking and being drunk, noise and games of dice, appointing of kings and feasting of slaves, singing naked, clapping.....an occasional ducking of corked faces in icy water- such are the functions over which I preside'.

Saturnalia grew in duration and moved to progressively later dates under the Roman period. During the reign of the Emperor Augustus (63 BC-AD 14), it was a two-day affair starting on December 17th. By the time Lucian described the festivities, it was a seven-day event. Changes to the Roman calendar moved the climax of Saturnalia to December 25th, around the time of the date of the winter solstice.

[BACK TO MENU](#)

The KAFS year (again) was curtailed by the pandemic but we look forward to 2022



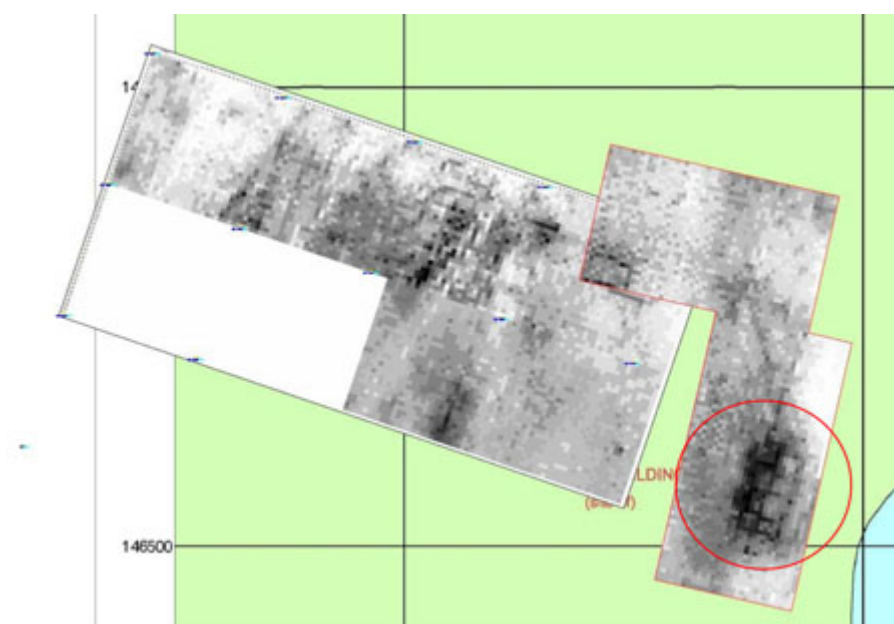
KAFS 'dig' at Abbey Barns at Faversham- can you name the year? First answer on a postcard wins a free course!



For 2022 we will be continuing to explore the Roman villa and watermill at Wye (below)



The aerial photograph (Google Earth-left) shows the walls of the postulated Roman watermill (red circle) and to the east side and running north to south the footprint of the potential Roman leat (watercourse- red arrow)



[BACK TO MENU](#)

KAFS 2021 geophysical surveys at Wye with more Roman buildings revealed

Excavation by the Kent Archaeological Field School over the 2019 -2020 season revealed a Roman building with all the hallmarks of a Roman water mill (above circled in red) and a follow on geophysical survey identified more buried buildings to the north-west (above) which may be the main Roman Villa complex which was

partly identified and excavated by Jim Bradshaw in 1972 with a plan published by Alec Detsicas.



The foundations discovered included a room with hypocaust underfloor heating (below left) and pottery retrieved included Samian ware dating from the late 1st early 2nd centuries and two coins dating from the 3rd century AD. Just 24m from this building is the River Stour which when dredged retrieved a mass of Roman pottery dating from late 1st early 2nd century (Burnham C. P. 2003).

[BACK TO MENU](#)

Training Week in August 2019 at the Kent Archaeological Field School in Faversham



Fifteen newcomers to archaeology sat down with experts and specialists from SWAT Archaeology and KAFS to go through what is required in excavating and

recording on a modern archaeological site.

A full house of eager young and old and in between all coming together to participate in the mysteries of modern archaeology including understanding the amazing aerial photography taken this year (left) of the site by Google Earth! With red lines showing the location of the Roman foundations

In addition survey and excavation techniques were explored and practised on the Roman aisled barn, part of a Roman villa estate in the adjacent town of Faversham in Kent which was found through field walking a number of years ago by the Kent Archaeological Field School.



This was the last year at this site and the focus is now getting the report together and published. The until now unknown Roman stone building is 150 feet long and had been found by the Kent Archaeological Field School in Faversham in Kent close to the Roman villa excavated in 1960 by Brian Philp and has now completed its final area of excavation.

The building was investigated by over 20 students who attended the field school training week in August 2019 and for them it was a unique experience on seeing how an investigation of an important Roman building was undertaken.



The work has shown that the survival of the building was amazing with stone walls, *opus signinum* floors (polished terracotta floors), under floor hypocaust heating, all untouched, and covered by tons of ceramic roof tiles and the collapsed stone walls covering huge amounts of box flue tiles which were used to direct hot air up the interior walls. Painted plaster from these walls is mostly white but the hot sauna room on the north side of the building had plaster walls decorated in green, red and yellow panels.

Outside the north wall recent work has shown that the tidal waters of the Swale estuary lapped the building and investigation has shown a large tidal inlet existed here in the Roman period, and was deep enough to form a harbour for Roman ships.

The Roman building itself has a coin and pottery range from the 1st to the late 4th century and numerous Roman domestic articles were also recovered including silver jewellery, bone hair pins and the remains of exotic glass vessels.



The building is huge, in fact the largest so far found in this part of Kent at 45m (150ft) long and 15.40m wide, which is about 50 Roman feet wide. The outside walls were built of mortared Kentish rag stone and flint nodules with the collapsed walls indicating a height of about 3m for the outer walls. Levelling courses of Roman tile were also a feature of the walls.

Large quantities of window glass have also been retrieved. Investigation has unravelled some of the mystery of the buildings function and this work is still on-going. Excavation has shown the building was originally built in the early 2nd century AD as an aisled barn with a mortar and chalk floor.

Forensic investigation has revealed the remains of the stalls used to contain the Roman estate farm animals. Very soon after, the building was rebuilt as a huge bath house with hot rooms, steam rooms, and warm rooms used for massage. The decoration has a feel of a municipal baths with none of the luxurious features one would expect of a private enterprise bath house. Given the size of the bath house it is far too large for a Roman villa estate and must have catered for another set of clientele most likely the passing trade of visiting Roman merchant ship crews and passengers waiting for the tide to take them to London.

[BACK TO MENU](#)

[Christmas Gifts/Not too Late!](#)



Stuck for a Christmas Gift – then try www.danegeld.co.uk who make accurate historic jewellery and include Celtic to Early Roman to Victorian to Art Deco at affordable prices...Everything from Roman pottery Terra Sigillata to the Ancient Roman folding stool of Hadrian and all can be found at <https://theancienthome.com/collections/romanpottery-terra-sigillata>

[BACK TO MENU](#)

Does the story of Beowulf explain the Oseberg, Gjellestad and Sutton Hoo ships?

The new Netflix film “The Dig” tells the story of the excavation of the Sutton Hoo ship in England. A Norwegian professor believes that a 1500-year-old poem can explain why a number of large ships were buried during the Viking Age. The Beowulf poem describes heroes, monsters and dragons who lived in southern Scandinavia a long time ago. The epic inspired J.R.R. Tolkien to write “Lord of the Rings”.

But might it have also been the inspiration behind the burial of large Viking ships in Norway and England? And the construction of the world's largest ship mound in Denmark? This new Beowulf theory has been proposed by Jan Bill, an expert on ship burials and a professor in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Oslo's Museum of Cultural History. The poem that he contends contains the explanation for the ship burials has more than 3000 lines of verse. It was probably first written down by an unknown poet in England in the 700s. Left is the real excavation at Sutton Hoo. (Photo: British Museum)



The Netflix movie "[The Dig](#)" is based on a novel of the same name. The film has received good reviews. "A beautiful tribute to a bygone era," wrote *Aftenposten*, one of Norway's national newspapers. "[A refreshingly accurate portrait of archaeology,](#)" wrote British archaeologist Roberta Gilchrist in *The Conversation*.

Both the novel by the author John Preston and Netflix's new film are probably close to what really happened to the people who took part in the dramatic excavation in Sutton Hoo, which was started just as World War II broke out. You can read more about [the dig at the British National Trust website](#).

[BACK TO MENU](#)

And now for something different for this winter: Beowulf in Kent by Paul Wilkinson

Gary Budden writes:

It's a compelling thought; the monster Grendel inhabiting the bleak marshlands of the Isle of Harty (part of what we now call Sheppey), just over the water from the town of Faversham, separated from the mainland by The Swale. These islands tend to overfeed the imagination; lost tribes can dwell there, grisly remains, evolutionary dead ends, the sons of Cain.



Sheppey, and the other small islands that appear as odd unmarked blanks of green on Google Maps, hold dark histories. Deadman's Island and Burnt Wick Island, so close to home and practically unknown, are borderline inaccessible. They hold the mass graves of Napoleonic French prisoners who died on the prison hulks (you'll know them from *Great Expectations*) and their bones now rise from the silt. Walk the Hollow Shore between Faversham and Whitstable, look out over to the island across the Swale, no one else around and the wind stinging the eyes. It's easy to feel Anglo-Saxon in such a place.

More than anything we want the monsters to be there.

I remember looking at the *Beowulf* manuscript in the British Library for a long time the first time I saw it. It exerted a pull over me that beat any Chinese scroll or Lewis Carroll diary. I read the Heaney translation, discovered American writer John Gardner's monster-perspective novel, *Grendel*, as part of the *Fantasy Masterworks* series (terrible cover). I even watched the film written by Neil Gaiman and with Ray Winstone as our founding English hero, getting entangled with a version of Grendel's mother who was rather sexier than I'd always imagined.

When I started researching the areas of north east Kent where I grew up, especially the stretch of coast along the Thames estuary, I came across a curious piece of information on the Faversham website:

Nearly ten years ago Dr Paul Wilkinson, a Swale archaeologist, and Faversham journalist and business woman Griselda Mussett contributed a Faversham Paper which makes a strong, and believable, claim based on topographical and oral and written folk history that the Beowulf legend had its origins among place names that were commonplace and are still to be seen around the Faversham area.

I tracked down the papers via the Faversham society and duly received them in the post. I felt like I was falling down a rabbit hole of crackpot theories and dubious speculation. If I'm honest, I wasn't much interested in the truth of any of the theories. The story appealed. Ray Winstone's cockney accent suddenly made a sort-of

sense. Beowulf as the ex-Londoner moved out to the estuary.

Paul Wilkinson's colour booklet, *Beowulf on the Island of Harty in Kent* proudly proclaims AS SEEN ON TV in its bottom right corner, and features the Sutton Hoo mask as its cover, which already seems to be muddying the issue. Near the beginning, he does concede what we're really dealing with here is mythology, not archaeology or science:

Mythology, on the other hand, is concerned above all with what happened in the beginning. It's signature is 'Once upon a time' and our English beginning could be a small island called Harty just off, but belonging to, the port of Faversham in Kent.

In this Kentish interpretation of the tale, Harty becomes Heorot (Hrothgar's hall). Heorot sits at the heart of a large Lathe, or administrative area, the schrawynghop, an area 'inhabited by one or several supernatural malignant beings'.



The theory even goes as to suggest that Beowulf was buried under Nagden mound (a possible artificial hill that was destroyed in 1953 by men contracted to rebuild the sea wall between Faversham and Seasalter, after the great North Sea flood.), though by this point the theory has fallen more into wishful thinking and a lot of 'maybes' rather than anything that could approximate a credible argument. In my fictional landscape, Grendel and his mother fit in well with the bodies of those dead Frenchman, the prisons across the water on Sheppey, the bleak marshes, the boxing hares and the black curlews of my own fictions.



I know these tidal flats and malignant bogs were dry land once, attached to the Doggerland landmass that connected what was to become Britain to the coasts of Germany and Denmark. My mind already is flowing with ideas, stories of the last remaining malignant supernatural beings that inhabited Doggerland making a last stand in the Kentish marshes. Wiped out by Ray Winstone. Grendel having his arm pulled from its socket on the demon marsh in the Thames estuary. A dragon banner flying above Faversham.

It's a good idea for a story, right? Maybe that's enough
For TV clip see: [Beowulf in Kent - YouTube](#)

[BACK TO MENU](#)

A DAY OF PAGAN RITUALS by Paul Wilkinson

The Winter Solstice is the moment when the sun reaches its most southern point, after which days get longer again. It creates an alignment at Neolithic sites around the world, including Stonehenge, Newgrange in Ireland, and Iwade henge in Kent. Neo-druids, neo-pagans, and Wiccans - a variation on paganism - gather to chant spiritual mantras and bless the sun.

Many of our traditional Christmas tokens, including the Yule log, mistletoe, and decorating evergreen trees, started as Winter Solstice rituals.



Many people – not least dairy manufacturers – believe that the Winter Solstice always falls on 21 December. But the celebration of the winter solstice is not fixed to a specific calendar date – this is because of a mismatch between the calendar year and solar year. The solstice is traditionally celebrated at the sunrise closest to the time when the sun is stationary before beginning its transit to the north or south. This year this occurs at 23.03 GMT on Sunday 21 December, hence the winter solstice celebrations take place at sunrise on 22 December.

The Winter Solstice was a time in prehistory when most cattle were slaughtered (so they would not have to be fed during the winter) and the majority of wine and beer was finally fermented. For us in Kent in the Northern Hemisphere, the December solstice marks the longest night and shortest day of the year. Meanwhile, on the day of the December solstice, the Southern Hemisphere has its longest day and shortest night.

It takes six months for the point of sunrise (setting) to move from one extreme to the other or twelve months to complete the full cycle. Notice that the direction of Summer solstice sunrise is opposite to the Winter solstice sunset and the Winter solstice sunrise is opposite to the Summer solstice sunset. The same principle applies throughout the year. Risings (settings) that occur either six months before or after a particular day, are opposite to the settings (risings).



North of the Equator all heavenly bodies appear to move from left to right (clockwise). Given clear conditions, the apex of the rising sun suddenly appears on the horizon, almost like a car headlight coming into view over a hill-top. Slowly the full orb comes into view, which takes about four minutes. Meanwhile the sun will have moved nearly one degree to the right. When exact alignments are required, they are usually taken either on the point of first flash (or gleam) or at the point where the full orb appears tangent to the horizon.

Setting phenomena of sun are in reverse order. The full orb first descends to the horizon and the point where it finally disappears is referred to as 'last light' (or gleam).

Day and night hours at the time of the Equinoxes are equally divided. The further north of Faversham one goes between March and September, the longer the daylight hours become until daylight endures continuously for six months on reaching the Arctic Circle.

Between September and March all is in reverse.

The word Solstice (Latin from sol, the sun and statum to stand still) denotes the time when the sunrise reaches its extreme positions, when it appears to remain static or stand still for several days. This made it difficult to know the exact day of the solstice, so prehistoric people marked the point of sunrise well before the solstice day, and then counted the number of days before it returned to the marked position. Half this number would define the Solstice day.

The Heelstone at Stonehenge or post 1431 at Iwade Henge could have been used for this purpose. For example if it took 20 days for the point of sunrise marked by both posts to return to the same position, so 10 days after the first reaching of the posts alignment would be the actual solstice day.

No matter where you live on Earth's globe, a solstice is your signal to celebrate. For us in Kent on the northern part of Earth, the shortest day comes at the solstice. After the winter solstice, the days get longer, and the nights shorter. It's a seasonal shift that nearly everyone notices. The universe holds its breath and when it breathes again we are in a new cycle of life.

Paul Wilkinson 02/14/2019

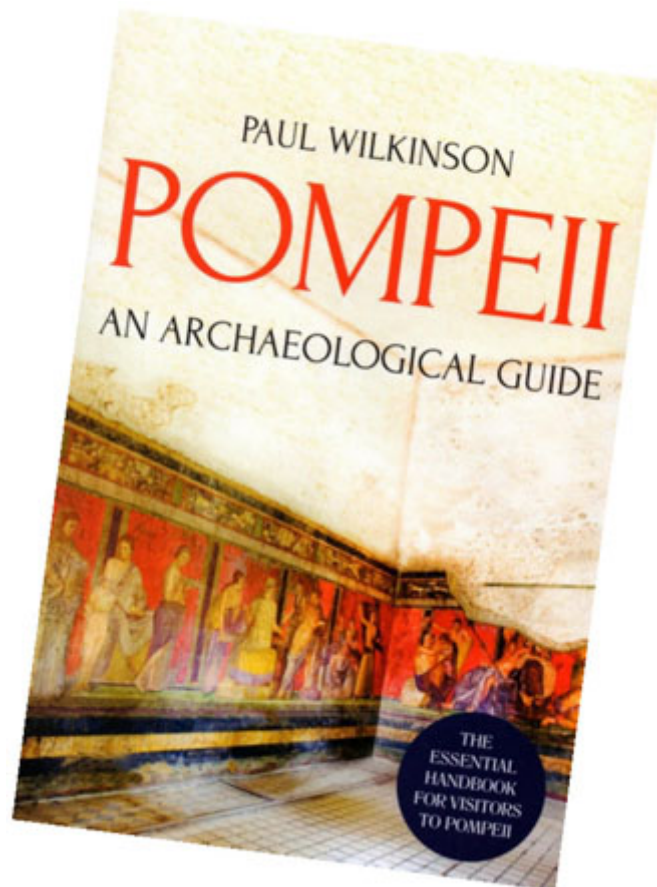
[BACK TO MENU](#)

Archaeological Guide to Pompeii.

Rating: 5 stars



Author Paul Wilkinson and published by Taurus Books 1st Edition and Bloomsbury 2nd 3rd & 4th Editions.



Pompeian pilgrims will be in good hands with Paul Wilkinson, an old Pompeian hand, archæologist, journalist, tour-leader and BBC documentary maker.

The index is serviceable, though somewhat choosy on no obvious principle, especially regarding the names of modern scholars. After a tersely helpful Timeline from antiquity to AD 1997, the Introduction and trio of chapters survey everyday life in Pompeii, plus detailed descriptions of the Amphitheatre Riot of AD 59 and the eruption itself, with full transcriptions of Pliny the Younger's pair of autoptic accounts. These pages display how well Wilkinson knows his Pompeian onions.

This book stands or falls with the archæological sites-guide that makes up its second part.

Here, Wilkinson is faultless. His diagrams are clear, the relevant information dispensed without fuss, with due acknowledgement to the many archæologists and epigraphers involved. All this written in clear, jargon-free English, nicely leavened with wit.

The Romans had Pompey the Great. In Wilkinson, we have a Great Pompeian.

Professor Barry Baldwin

[BACK TO MENU](#)

The Kent Archaeological Field School Events for 2022 may include:

We will be back in Oplontis (To Be Advised) for another season of excavation but be quick as last year we were fully booked. And if you are booked the only criteria is that you are a member of the Kent Archaeological Field School www.kafs.co.uk and that you have some experience or enthusiasm for Roman

archaeology, Italian food and Italian sunshine! See also the website for the project at www.oplontisproject.org. Please note food, accommodation, insurance, and travel are not provided.

Flights to Naples are probably cheapest with EasyJet. To get to Pompeii take a bus from the Naples airport to the railway station and then the local train to Pompeii. Hotels are about 50eu for a room per night.

We are staying at are the Motel Villa dei Misteri and the Hotel degli Amici. info@villademisteri.it info@hoteldegliamici.it For camping the site *Camping Zeus* is next to the hotel: info@campingzeus.it and is about 12eu a night. Transport to Oplontis from Pompeii is not provided but most of the group use the local train (one stop). Please note it can be hot so bring sun cream and insect repellent! Any queries email me at info@kafs.co.uk or in Naples call my mobile on 07885 700 112. We will meet up at 8am every Monday morning of the dig at Motel Villa dei Misteri to start the new week.

Paul Wilkinson

[BACK TO MENU](#)

Courses at the Kent Archaeological Field School for 2022 will include:



Field Walking and Map Analysis (TBA)

Field work at its most basic involves walking across the landscape recording features seen on the ground. On this weekend course we are concerned with recognising and recording artefacts found within the plough soil. These include flint tools, Roman building material, pottery, glass and metal artefacts. One of the uses of field walking is to build up a database for large-scale regional archaeological surveys. We will consider the importance of regressive map analysis as part of this procedure. The course will cover:

1. Strategies and procedures,
2. Standard and non-standard line walking, grid walking,
3. Pottery distribution, identifying pottery and building ceramics.

We will be in the field in the afternoons so suitable clothing will be necessary. Cost £20 if membership is taken out at the time of booking. For non-members the cost will be £25.

Wye Roman Villa and Water mill: Dates to be advised (TBA)

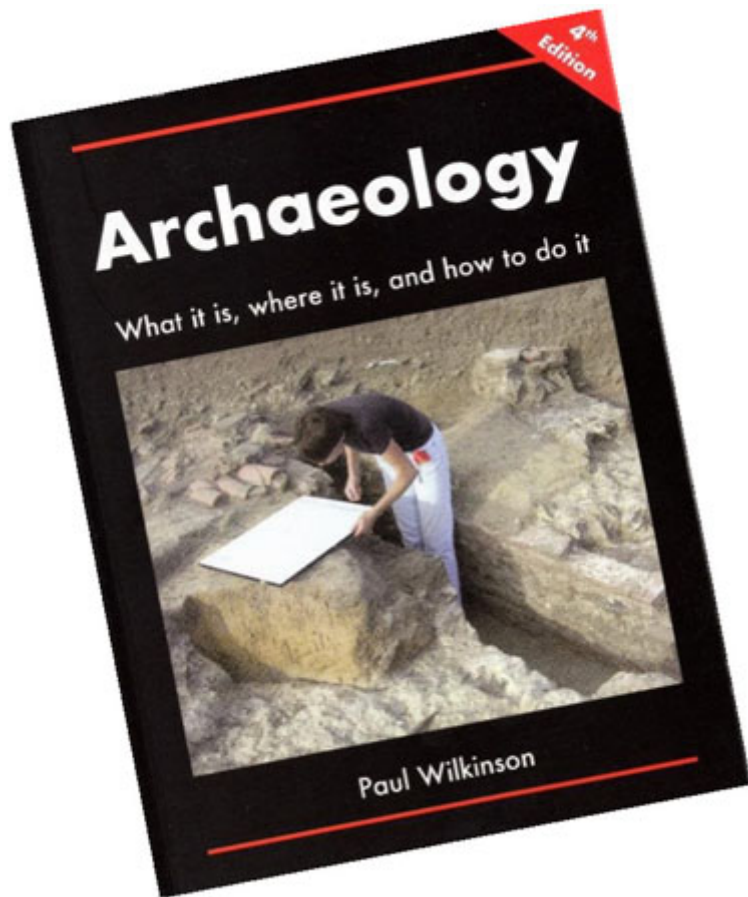
Archaeological excavation on the site of a recently discovered Roman Villa and water mill at Wye in Kent



On this ten day investigation we shall look at the ways in which archaeological sites are discovered and excavated and how different types of finds are studied to reveal the lives of former peoples. Subjects discussed will include aerial photography, regressive map analysis, HER data, and artefact identification. Within this investigation there is a **five day course TBA** which will be especially useful for those new to archaeology, as well as those considering studying the subject further. After tea break we will participate in an archaeological investigation on a Roman building under expert tuition. Expert diggers are not required to participate in the tool box talks.



Training Week for Students on a Roman Water Mill at Wye in Kent It is essential that anyone thinking of digging on an archaeological site is trained in the procedures used in professional archaeology. Dr Paul Wilkinson, author of the bestselling "Archaeology" book and Director of the dig, will spend five days explaining to participants the methods used in modern archaeology. A typical training day will be classroom theory in the morning (at the Field School) followed by excavation at the Roman Water Mill at Wye.



Topics taught each day are:

Monday. Why dig?

Tuesday: Excavation Techniques.

Wednesday: Site Survey.

Thursday: Archaeological Recording.

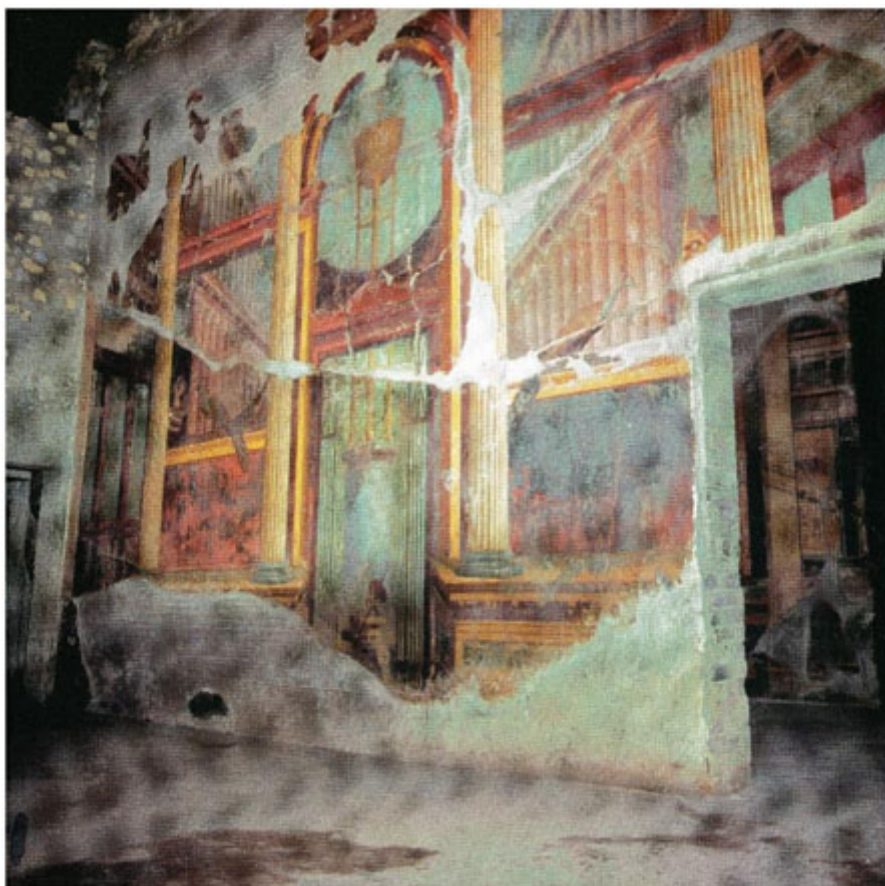
Friday: Small Finds.

Saturday and Sunday (free) digging with the team.

A free PDF copy of "Archaeology" 4th Edition will be given to participants. Cost for the course is £100 if membership is taken out at the time of booking plus a Certificate of Attendance.

Excavating at 'Villa B' at Oplontis next to Pompeii in Italy: TBA

We will be spending four weeks in association with the University of Texas investigating the Roman Emporium (Villa B) at Oplontis adjacent to Villa A (left) next to Pompeii. The site offers a unique opportunity to dig on iconic World Heritage Site in Italy and is a wonderful once in a lifetime opportunity.



The only criteria to book is that you are a member of the Kent Archaeological Field School www.kafs.co.uk and that you have some experience or enthusiasm for Roman archaeology, Italian food and Italian sunshine! See also the website for the project at www.oplontisproject.org. Please note food, accommodation, insurance, and travel are not provided.

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September TBA. Investigation of Roman buildings at Bax Farm near Sittingbourne in Kent



An opportunity to participate in excavating and recording Roman features in the landscape from this iconic site with its Roman octagonal bath house.

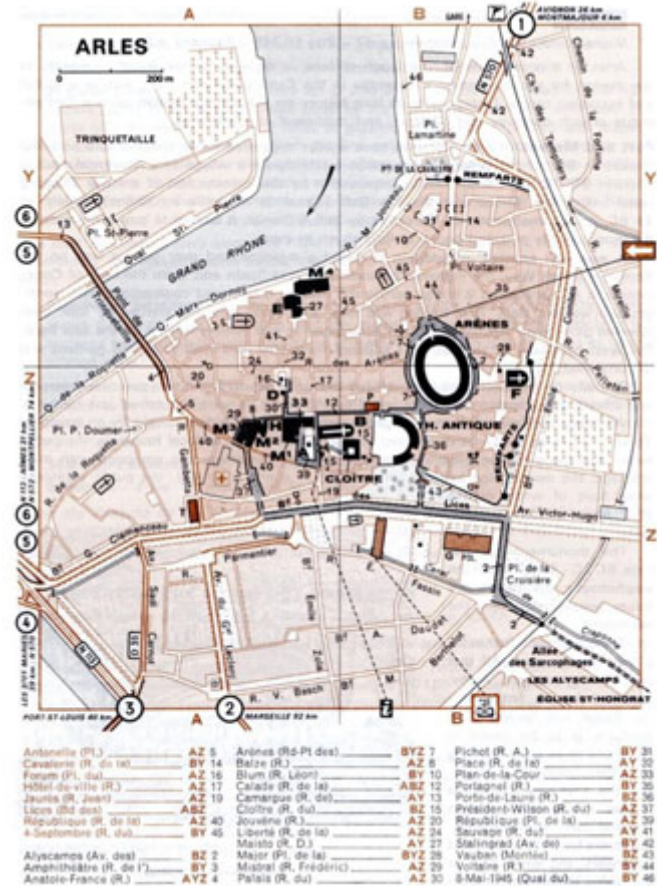
Starry starry night.....



The Roman city of Arelate, today known as Arles, France, was one of the most important ports of the later Roman Empire. After siding with Julius Caesar during his civil war against Pompey, the town was formally established as a Roman colony for Caesar's veterans in 46 or 45 B.C. Strategically located along the Rhone River in southern Gaul, Arelate developed into such a major economic, political, and cultural center that it was referred to as the "little Rome of the Gauls" by the fourth-century poet Ausonius.

Today, the city's left bank, which served as the Roman settlement's civic and

administrative heart, is strewn with the remnants of ancient monuments: a theatre, an amphitheatre, baths, and a circus. It has long been thought that the city's right bank was far less developed in the early Roman period, only witnessing significant growth decades or centuries later. However, this perception of ancient Arles is beginning to change as an ongoing investigation uncovers parts of a wealthy Roman residential area, providing new evidence of the early development of Arles' periphery and also revealing some of the finest Roman wall paintings found anywhere in France.



The Kent Archaeological Field School is planning to take a group of KAFS members by train from Ashford in Kent down to Arles and staying at a medieval hotel in the centre of Arles with day trips to Nimes, Pont du Gard, the Roman city of Glanum and lots lots more. To register your interest email info@kafs.co.uk for further details. Price of the trip will be at cost.

Merry Christmas from all at KAFS!





For all booking enquiries email info@kafs.co.uk

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You can download the KAFS booking form for all of our forthcoming courses directly from our website, or [by clicking here](#)

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[BACK TO MENU](#)



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