

# KAFS Newsletter: No.15.

The Kent Archaeological Field School:

## Autumn 2017

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



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## Welcome to the Autumn 2017 Newsletter from the Kent Archaeological Field School



Dear Reader, we will be emailing a Newsletter each quarter 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 newsletter go to the home page of [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk) and on the bottom right hand corner click where it says 'Click Here'.

I hope you enjoy!

Paul Wilkinson.

## Breaking News: The debate on Stonehenge tunnel plans continues:

Recent letters in the London Times:



Stonehenge with its now closed (and removed) adjacent road: The A303 is top left corner

**Letters in the London Times have continued the debate:**

Sir, Tom Holland (letter, Sep 13) notes that archaeologists have found ancient remains across the Stonehenge world heritage site, and implies that a road tunnel would threaten more. He is correct, but this is a red herring. Any works close to Stonehenge must be preceded by an archaeological survey. In the latest announcement the proposed route has been adjusted to avoid newly discovered sites. It is inevitable, however, that not everything can be saved in this way, and then excavation must occur. Remains will be disturbed, scientific studies will be conducted and finds will go to the local museum. We will learn more about Stonehenge. The process — turning loss into enlightenment — is exactly the same for all excavations, including those that have impressed Holland. All archaeological excavation is both destructive and creative.

If there is a problem, it is that the two excavating sides — one led by pure inquiry, one by development — do not talk to each other enough. In the years ahead, it is vital that all organisations work together for the benefit of Stonehenge and the public.

**MIKE PITTS**

Editor, *British Archaeology*

Sir, Tom Holland is too hasty in suggesting that the government is ignoring Unesco in planning to build a tunnel under Stonehenge. Although we disagree with key aspects of its latest report, we are adopting its suggestion of a scientific committee to monitor the work, among other things. Moreover, the route has already been changed after concerns about the winter solstice alignment, and the National Trust, English Heritage and Historic England have all welcomed our plans.

On a visit to the site this week I was struck again by the utter madness of having a major main road, full of traffic, rumbling less than 200 metres from the stones. The tunnel will allow both sides of the site to be rejoined into a single whole. More widely, the new dual carriageway will help to open up the southwest, one of the poorest parts of the UK, giving a substantial boost to tourism and employment.

**JESSE NORMAN, MP**

Roads minister, House of Commons

Sir, Your report "Stonehenge tunnel to be moved" (Sep 12) indicates the value of Highways England's consultation on the route of the A303. More than 9,000 responses, including a powerful archaeological lobby, have resulted in an improved scheme that fairly balances the multitude of competing challenges, ones that have always made finding a perfect solution impossible. It will not "destroy one of the

world's great landscapes", as claimed by Andy Rhind-Tutt (letter, Sep 12), but enhance, protect and reunite it to the benefit of archaeology, biodiversity and public enjoyment. That its cost has risen by £200 million will be a small price to pay for the long-term benefit achieved by changing the western carriageway's route to preserve more archaeological sites and the winter solstice view.

**PETER SAUNDERS**

Curator emeritus, Salisbury Museum

Sir, The argument that the tunnel will clear a traffic bottleneck is risible: it will merely move the bottleneck another ten miles down the A303. There will be gridlock from the top of Wylie Down going west to Willoughby Hedge, some five miles farther on. The next stretch of dual carriageway is at Mere. The tunnel is not necessary. There are better uses for the forecast sum of £1.6 billion.

**JAMES BISHOP**

Wincanton, Somerset

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## **Breaking News/2: Unearthed near Hadrian's Wall: lost secrets of first Roman soldiers to fight the barbarians at Vindolanda at Hadrian's Wall**

Dalya Alberge writing in the Guardian reports on the discovery.

Archaeologists are likening the discovery to winning the lottery. A Roman cavalry barracks has been unearthed near Hadrian's Wall, complete with extraordinary military and personal possessions left behind by soldiers and their families almost 2,000 years ago. A treasure trove of thousands of artefacts dating from the early second century has been excavated over the past fortnight.

The find is significant not just because of its size and pristine state, but also for its contribution to the history of Hadrian's Wall, showing the military build-up that led to its construction in AD122. The barracks pre-dates the wall: the Romans already had a huge military presence in the area, keeping the local population under control.

"The native Britons took an opportunity, when the emperor Trajan died in AD117, to rebel," says Andrew Birley, who heads the archaeological team. "The soldiers stationed in the north before the wall was built became involved in fighting and were very vulnerable. The evidence we have from this [find] shows the incredibly rich and diverse lifestyle these people had."

Archaeologists stumbled on the site by chance and have been taken aback by finds in a remarkable state of preservation. These include two extremely rare cavalry swords – one of them complete, still with its wooden scabbard, hilt and pommel – and two wooden toy swords. One has a gemstone in its pommel.

As well as other weapons, including cavalry lances, arrowheads and ballista bolts – all left behind on the floors – there are combs, bath clogs, shoes, stylus pens, hairpins and brooches. Sections of beautifully woven cloth have also been unearthed. They may have come from garments and have yet to be tested.

There are also two wooden tablets covered in marks made in black ink. They are thought to be letters, but their contents have yet to be deciphered as they were rushed into a conservation laboratory to ensure their survival.

The barracks, which dates from AD105, was found beneath the fourth-century stone

fort of Vindolanda, south of Hadrian's Wall near Hexham, Northumberland. It is one of the site's earliest barracks. Hadrian did not begin his 73-mile defensive barrier –to guard the north-western frontier of the province of Britain from invaders – until 122.

The artefacts survived because they were concealed beneath a concrete floor laid by the Romans about 30 years after the barracks was abandoned, shortly before 120. The concrete created oxygen-free conditions that helped preserve materials such as wood, leather and textiles, which would otherwise have rotted away.

Birley said: "The swords are the icing on the cake for what is a truly remarkable discovery of one of the most comprehensive and important collections from the intimate lives of people living on the edge of the Roman Empire at a time of rebellion and war. What's exciting is that [they] are remarkably well-preserved ... There is a huge range of stuff – their hair combs, pots, wooden spoons, bowls, weapons, bits of armour, and their cavalry bling.



**Dig volunteer Sarah Baker with one of the rare Roman cavalry swords**  
(photo: Sonya Galloway)

"Even for us, it's very unusual to get things like complete Roman swords, sitting on the ground in their scabbards with their handles and their pommels. We were slightly dumbfounded by that. Then, to find another complete sword in another room next door only two metres away, two swords and a host of other cavalry equipment, all in beautiful condition, is just terrific.

"Archaeologists would never expect to find a Roman cavalry sword in any context, because it's like a modern-day soldier leaving his barracks and dumping his rifle on the floor ... This is a very expensive thing. So why leave [it] behind?"

He recalled feeling "quite emotional" over the discovery: "You can work as an archaeologist your entire life on Roman military sites and never expect, or imagine, seeing such a rare thing, even at Vindolanda. It felt like the team winning a form of archaeological lottery, and we knew we had something very rare and special before us."

Archaeologists lifted up a piece of concrete flooring while exploring the foundations of the fourth-century stone fortress. They were struck by a layer of black, sweet-smelling and perfectly preserved anaerobic soil in an area where it was completely unexpected.

Hidden in this soil, they went on to find, were the timber walls and floors, fences, pots and animal bones from the abandoned barracks. To their astonishment,

excavating about 3.5 metres down, they uncovered eight rooms, with stables for horses, and living accommodation, with ovens and fireplaces.



**Moments after being uncovered, the strap junction still shines because of the airless conditions in which it was preserved (below).**

**Photograph: Sonya Galloway**

They believe that the base was home to more than 1,000 soldiers and probably many thousands more dependants, including slaves. The Romans had covered over this early barracks with concrete and heavy clay foundations before building another above it. At Vindolanda, garrisons would arrive, build their forts and destroy them when leaving.

Birley said: “We have got successive barracks above them, some of which are also cavalry, but they’re much later and not preserved with anything like the range of material that has come from within the anaerobic conditions. What you’re seeing here is the full range of stuff, and all those little details that normally rot away completely.”

Cavalry swords are very rare, even across the north-west provinces of the Roman empire, he said, partly because they are so thin. “They’re very light, a couple of feet long, designed to slash somebody as you’re riding past, with a wickedly sharp blade and a point.”

Other finds include copper alloy cavalry fittings for saddles, strap junctions (above) and harnesses. They are in such fine condition that they still shine and are almost completely free of corrosion. The strap junctions are preserved so beautifully, he said, that they have all their alloy links – incredibly rare survivals.

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## **Breaking News/3: A spectacular Roman mosaic uncovered in Berkshire**

Martin Evans writing in the Daily Telegraph describes a spectacular Roman mosaic described as the best find of its kind in half a century has been partly uncovered in Berkshire, during a community archaeology project that only had two weeks left to run.

Anthony Beeson, an expert on classical art and a member of the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics, described it as “without question the most exciting mosaic discovery made in Britain in the last fifty years”.

Luigi Thompson, an artist known for his meticulous paintings of mosaics, called the find, which dates from about AD380, “the most delightful, lively and charming pavement I have ever seen”.

Less than half the mosaic, a six-metre strip richly patterned with mythical characters, was uncovered in the last two weeks. It has now been buried again to protect it.



### **The newly discovered Roman mosaic**

The central panels depict the Greek hero Bellerophon riding the winged horse Pegasus. They are shown attacking the fire-breathing monster Chimera, then being offered the king's daughter as a reward, a legend that would later be Christianised as St George and the dragon.

Other scenes on the mosaic include imagery not known from any other British site, according to the experts.

The find was made at a Roman site near Boxford where residents and amateur archaeologists and historians, supervised by Cotswold Archaeology, have been excavating since 2011.

Anthony Beeson, an expert on classical art and a member of the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics, described it as “without question the most exciting mosaic discovery made in Britain in the last fifty years”.

In the last three summers, backed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, they have found the remains of a large villa and bath house, a farm building, and now the mosaic.

The volunteer excavators, many with no previous experience, hope to raise funds to return next year.

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## **Breaking News/4: A recently excavated Roman site in Cyprus has unearthed a 2000-year-old floor mosaic which shows scenes from chariot races in a hippodrome**



Report by Menelaos Hadjicostis

Archaeologists in Cyprus have unearthed a 2000-year-old floor mosaic which shows scenes from chariot races in a hippodrome.

The 26-meter long mosaic is part of a gallery from an ancient mansion. The excavation began in 2013 and complete recently. The full mosaic was unveiled briefly last year, before authorities covered it up for protection.

Archaeologists have recently removed the layer of dirt to begin restoration works. Experts say it will take several years until it can be visited by the public. They believe the mosaic is the only one of its kind in Cyprus, and one of just nine other mosaics showing hippodrome scenes found in the Roman world.

Cyprus Antiquities Department archaeologist Fryni Hadjichristofi told the Associated Press that out of the many hundreds of ancient mosaic floors discovered around the world, only around seven depict similar chariot races at the hippodrome.

What distinguishes this mosaic is its ornate detail and the fact that it depicts complete scenes from race in which four chariots, each with a team of four horses, are competing. This may be representative of different factions in competition with each other in ancient Rome.

"The hippodrome was very important in ancient Roman times, it was the place where the emperor appeared to his people and projected his power," said Hadjichristofi.

The mosaic is 11 meters long and four meters wide (36 by 13 feet) but hasn't been fully uncovered yet. It's possibly part of a villa that may have belonged to a wealthy individual or nobleman when Cyprus was under Roman rule. The mosaic, about 30

km (19 miles) west of the capital Nicosia, also sheds new light on the ancient past of the island's interior, about which little is known

The shadow of archeologist Fryni Hadjichristofi is cast over a rare mosaic floor dating to the 4<sup>th</sup> century depicting scenes from a chariot race in the hippodrome



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## **Breaking News/5: Large Gallo-Roman villa with preserved 'thermae' discovered in Brittany, France**

Report by Herve Paitier

Conforming to the 'generalized' style of most ancient Roman villas, the structural ambit comprises different buildings (sections) all constructed in a U-shaped pattern around the central courtyard. The access points into this courtyard were bordered by colonnaded galleries, on three sides. In terms of dimensions, the total area of the entire floor plan accounts for a substantial 1,500 sq m (or 16,100 sq ft), which in turn is located on the 2.3 hectare site. In that regard, the complex in its entirety, being



'remodeled' over time from 1st century to 4th century AD, also encompassed secondary areas and landscaped gardens.

But beyond just its size factor, the Gallo-Roman villa boasts a number of fascinating architectural features. For example, a secondary structural extension, was built specifically with its southward orientation to face the sun. But arguably more interesting is the discovery of the spa area of the villa, with its opulent *thermae* (bathing facility) having private bathrooms that accounted for an area of 400 sq m (4,300 sq ft). These sections were accompanied by some rooms served by a heating system known as *hypocaust* (a Roman system of underfloor heating, usually with hot air).

Several rooms have a heating system by the floor, called *hypocaust*. Thus, people could walk in different rooms according to a specific route. Once undressed in the locker room, they borrowed a gallery leading them to a footbath before access to both cold and hot pools. Once bathed, they joined the *caldarium*, the hottest room equipped with a hot water bath and a sauna. They then went into the warm rooms to wash and be massaged. They finished their journey by a cold bath.

The impressive layout of the *thermae* was complemented on the visual scope by an assortment of paintings on the walls and ceilings of the bath, many of which are still in their well-preserved state. According to the archaeologists, previous examples of such paintings (with shell inlay coatings) have been found in Western Europe. But the Langrolay site has unveiled "an unprecedented collection" that would help experts in studying the embellished art style that was probably developed some time in 3rd century AD.



The preserved 'thermae' with central plunge pool discovered in Brittany, France

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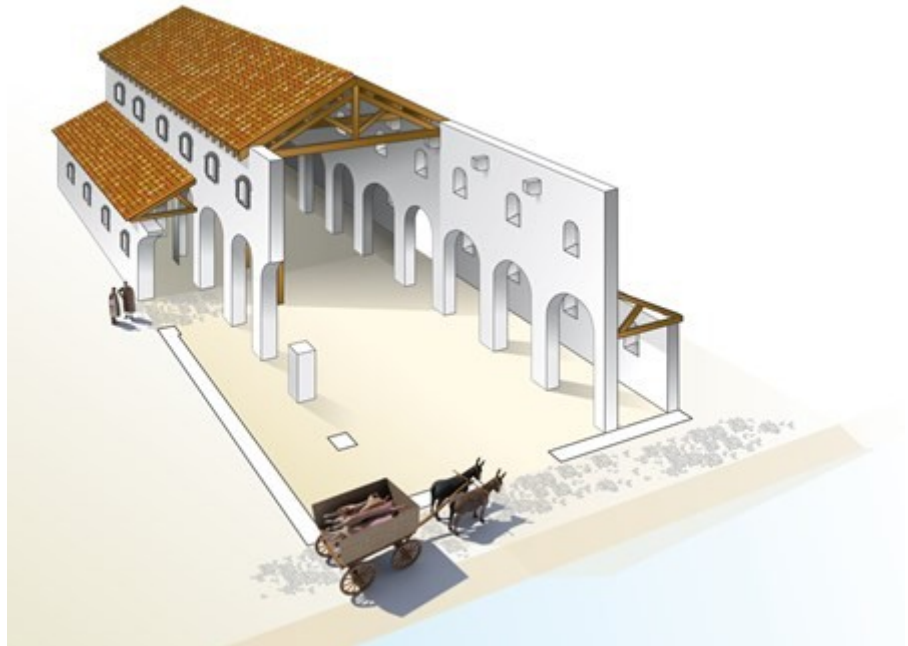
## **Breaking News/6: Roman aisled building in Faversham, Kent UK**

Report by Paul Wilkinson

Ongoing excavations at a previously unrecorded Roman building in Kent have uncovered evidence of an emporium serving the port at Faversham – then called Durolevum.

Discovered by Dr Paul Wilkinson of the Kent Archaeological Field School, recent work has shown that the waters of the Swale estuary lapped the buildings, which during the Roman period sat beside a large tidal inlet deep enough to harbour ships.

Current work on the complex's bathhouse has yielded prestigious small finds including silver jewellery, exotic glass vessels and large quantities of coloured wall plaster which, together with the structure's impressive dimensions, measuring some 45m by 15m, suggests a building of some importance.



#### **Artist impression based on excavation results of the Roman aisled building at Faversham**

A silver finger ring found in the demolition rubble has been dated to the Anglo-Saxon period and similar rings found at Dover have a date of c. 575-625 AD. The ring, only big enough for a child's hand suggests the building was demolished in the late 6<sup>th</sup> century to make a platform for a timber hall found in last year's excavation. Pottery in the cill beam slots dated this building also to the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

KAFS director Dr Paul Wilkinson says the latest findings suggest it had rather humbler origins, however.

'The building was originally built in the 2nd century AD as an aisled barn with a concrete and chalk floor,' he said. 'We have found the remains of stalls used to house farm animals in the Roman estate. But very soon afterwards the building was rebuilt as a huge bathhouse, with plunge pools, hot rooms, steam rooms, and warm rooms for massage.'

'The decoration has the feel of a municipal baths with none of the luxurious features one would expect of a private enterprise bathhouse,' he added. 'Given the size of the bathhouse it is far too large for a Roman villa estate and must have catered for another set of clientele. It is probably too far from the main Roman road to London (Watling Street) to have been an Imperial posting house with hotel but it probably sits astride the Roman port of Faversham and may have catered for the crews of visiting ships.'

Dr Wilkinson said that the current major investigation of the site has found even more exciting features

'Latest investigations have unravelled some of the mystery of the building's function but this work is still ongoing,' he said. 'Field walking has indicated there are other

Roman buildings alongside the inlet and future investigation – including geophysical survey – will focus on their chronology and function.’



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## **Breaking News/7: Oplontis near Pompeii in Italy. Excavation opportunities 2018**

The warehouse (above) is probably attached to the adjacent famous Roman palace at Oplontis and is focused on a central courtyard surrounded by a two-storey peristyle of Nocera tufa columns. The eastern side of the peristyle includes an entrance opening onto an unexcavated road running north south and detected through our coring campaign. Ground floor storage rooms open up into this central space whilst above on the second floor are residential rooms. To the south lies the remains of a colonnade and portico and, set back, a series of large barrel vaulted storage rooms which faced the sea. In these rooms, just as in the Roman port area of Herculaneum, dozens of skeletons were found of people waiting to be rescued by boat from the eruption of Vesuvius in AD79. Work in 2018 will continue excavation and recording on an earlier Roman building laying under the present structure.

**We will be back in Oplontis in the first three weeks in June 2018 for another season of excavation** and anyone can join our team. The only criteria is that you are a member of the Kent Archaeological Field School [www.kafs.co.uk](http://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](http://www.oplontisproject.org)

**The weekly fee is £175.** Please note food, accommodation, insurance, and travel are not included. 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](mailto:info@villademisteri.it) [info@hoteldegliamici.it](mailto:info@hoteldegliamici.it) For camping the site *Camping Zeus* is next to the hotel: [info@campingzeus.it](mailto: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](mailto: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 to start the new week.

**Paul Wilkinson**

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## **Breaking News/8: Historic aircraft recovered**

Epic: Recovering the last Luftwaffe Float Plane from a fjord In Norway 70 years after it sank

The twin-engine three-seater float plane was originally bought by the Norwegian Navy Air services in 1939. It was used by the Norwegians against the invading German forces in April 1940 and after Norway surrendered the Germans took over the airplane and used it against Allied convoys that were sailing towards the Soviet Union.

It was lost in December 1942. None of the crew were killed, and the Germans were even able to recover the starboard engine and the remaining floats before the bomber sank. It remained on the bottom of the fjord for almost 70 years

In 2005, the airplane was found by Norwegian mappers using sonar equipment and after a large fundraiser by the Sola Aircraft Museum they were able to raise it from the bottom of the fjord, suspending it below the surface from a barge.

The seaplane was towed to the shore where a crane lifted it out of the water. The plane was in remarkable condition, mostly due to the fact it came to rest in low-oxygen silt in a part of the fjord with minimal currents.

This is the only salvaged He-115 in existence and due to its condition it may yet be restored, with flying capabilities.



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**Breaking News/9: And finally a huge thanks to Current Archaeology who delivered two very large cartons full of bottles of beer during the classroom course in August!**



The Kent Archaeological Field School Training Course of 2017 was in full swing when a loud knock on the door announced the arrival of a delivery of specially brewed and labelled beer to commemorate 50 years of publication of the archaeological magazine 'Current Archaeology' and 25 years of association with the field school. So 'Cheers'

#### **Forthcoming KAFS Events:**

Join the KAFS expedition to Arles in September 2018, travel by train from London in just 6h39m for £64 changing just once and stay in a merchant's palace in the centre of Arles and be guided around 'Little Rome' by Dr Paul Wilkinson. Details will be in the KAFS Winter 2017 Newsletter. Email Paul Wilkinson at [info@kafs.co.uk](mailto:info@kafs.co.uk) to notify your interest.

**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 Rhône River in southern Gaul, *Arelate* developed into such a major economic, political, and cultural centre 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. A project led by the Museum of Ancient Arles is in the middle of a multiyear campaign to excavate the site of an eighteenth-century glassworks factory in the Trinquetaille district along Arles' right bank. The glassworks complex—itsself a designated historic site—was acquired by the city in the late 1970s. During the initial excavation of the property in the 1980s, archaeologists discovered a second-century A.D. Roman residential neighbourhood buried beneath it, but the investigation was short-lived. Over the past two years, a plan for rehabilitating and restoring the site has brought archaeologists back for the first time in decades. According to lead archaeologist Marie-Pierre Rothé, the renewed excavation has allowed researchers to dig deeper beneath the property and to unravel the surprisingly early history of the site. Beneath at least one Roman house discovered in the 1980s lies the much earlier foundation of an opulent Roman property dating back to the first decades of the Roman colony. Researchers know that as the new colony was incorporated into the Roman political and economic system, there was a sudden influx of wealth into the city, along with opportunities for advancement for both locals and Romans who migrated there. "One of our objectives," says Rothé, "is to better understand the development of the Roman city of Arles during this early period in a neighbourhood that was assumed to have been deserted."

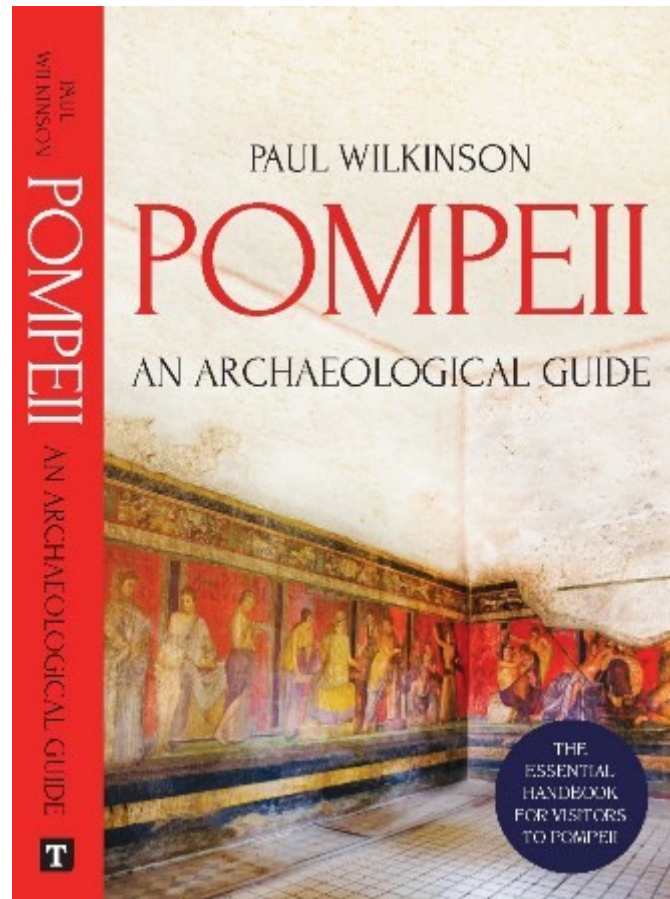


**We will travel to the south of France by train and stay in the centre of Arles (left) with its many famous cafes and galleries.**

Our tour will take in the Roman sites of Arles including the new discoveries on the right bank, the Pont du Gard. Nimes, Glanum and Orange.

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**Book Choice this month is:  
Pompeii: An Archaeological Guide by Paul Wilkinson**



The resonant ruins of Pompeii are perhaps the most direct route back to the living, breathing world of the ancient Romans. Two million visitors annually now walk the paved streets which re-emerged, miraculously preserved, from their layers of volcanic ash.

Yet for all the fame and unique importance of the site, there is a surprising lack of a handy archaeological guide in English to reveal and explain its public spaces and private residences.

This compact and user-friendly handbook, written by an expert in the field, helpfully fills that gap.

Illustrated throughout with maps, plans, diagrams and other images, Pompeii: An Archaeological Guide offers a general introduction to the doomed city followed by an authoritative summary and survey of the buildings, artefacts and paintings themselves.

The result is an unrivalled picture, derived from an intimate knowledge of Roman archaeology around the Bay of Naples, of the forum, temples, brothels, bath-houses, bakeries, gymnasia, amphitheatre, necropolis and other site buildings – including perennial favourites like the House of the Faun, named after its celebrated dancing satyr (ISBN 978 1 78453 928 3 Published by I. B. Tauris Books)

Reviewers have commented:

'This book written by an archaeologist with years of experience of showing visitors around one of the most visited (but often misunderstood) sites in the world, will be warmly welcomed by those who need an up-to date and reliable guide.'

**Andrew Wallace-Hadrill**, OBE, F B A , Honorary Professor of Roman Studies and Emeritus Director of the Herculaneum Conservation Project, University of Cambridge

'This guide is important as a bridge between the popular guide books and the specialised academic studies that are available to visitors to Pompeii. Paul Wilkinson is an archaeologist who specialises on Roman archaeology and recording historic buildings. In the lively introduction he explains in understandable terms how these world-famous buildings functioned and how people lived and worked in the city of Pompeii. The guidebook itself follows, illustrated with 30 new plans, allowing the visitor to explore the most important buildings in Pompeii following Wilkinson's clear room-by-room descriptions. This new guidebook, with its clear and concise explanations, will greatly enhance a viewer's experience of this fascinating UNESCO World Heritage site'.

**John R. Clarke**. Annie Laurie Howard Regents Professor of Fine Arts, University of Texas at Austin, author of *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 BC-AD 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* and of *Looking at Lovemaking: Constructions of Sexuality in Roman Art, 100 BC-AD 250*

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## Photograph of the Month is:

**Aerial Photo of the octagonal Roman building excavated by KAFS at Bax Farm at Teynham in Kent**



Some elements of a unique stucco ceiling had survived, and there was probably a large dome set on pendentives that would have echoed and reflected the sound of cascading water from the central pool with its statue facing the entrance hall, changing room or narthex.

Ceilings such as these would have been possible with the internal columns or arcading bearing the vertical pressure, and the surrounding ground floor rooms with



their walls set as 'spokes' providing a buttressing effect to counteract the outward thrust of the central clerestory tower.

This is very sophisticated Roman engineering indeed and belongs more to the late Roman and Byzantine Mediterranean world rather than on the edge of Empire of Roman Britain in the mid 4<sup>th</sup> to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century.



**The computer reconstruction by Bartek Cichy (left) is based on the excavated ground plan at Bax Farm and surviving still standing examples at Ravenna and Frejus.**

Some years ago we were field walking as part of an archaeological survey just to the west of Faversham in a remote field on what had once been an island overlooking the Swale Estuary. The field was littered with the remains of a Roman building, but in one area the Roman building material was dense and mixed with very fine decorated Roman pottery.

We returned to the field some years later and proceeded to excavate the structure which as it was revealed left us all puzzled, then suddenly it came to me- it was an octagonal building, and I knew instantly that it was very special indeed. No other Roman building of this type had been found in south-east Britain, and there was only two known from the rest of Roman Britain. I also knew what the function of this building was- it was a Christian baptistery from the time when the Roman Empire changed its state religion from the old pagan gods to Christianity.

Weeks later we had uncovered the most exciting Roman building ever to be found in Kent. The architecture was so sophisticated, an octagonal ring of stone walls and an inner ring of arcaded stone walls and at each of the of the eight corners a radiating stone buttress to hold up an inner tower, itself with upper windows which would have streamed light down on to the central plunge pool fed by its own aqueduct. Attached to the octagon were two furnace rooms and a large changing room or *narthex*. The rest of the building including the room with an apse was a Roman bath house dating from the time of Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor who was proclaimed as such in Britain.

But why an octagon shape? In Christian symbolism the number eight represents eternity and rebirth, because the world was created in seven days with life starting on the eighth day and Christ rose from the dead on the eighth day. For early Christians eight was the number which symbolised the resurrection of Christ and the

formation of the New Covenant.

The octagonal plan survives at the baptistery at Grado (c. 450) and at Frejus and Albenga. In some baptistery's the octagonal core expands in niches projecting outwards as at Nocera, or surrounded by ambulatory rooms, square at Aquileia (c. 450), Riva San Vitale (c. 500) and octagonal in the Baptistery of the Arians at Ravenna (c. 480). I knew the history of these buildings and on the last day of excavation I sat on the edge of the plunge pool pondering and sweeping the dust with my hand when I uncovered a large coin, I picked it up and blew the dust away and as I did I saw the engraving of a Jewish Menorah appear, I heard a sound and looked up and there was a man smiling at me and holding out his right hand. He said, 'thank goodness, we were looking for that'. I looked around and my world had been transformed- the walls were up, a blinding light from the windows in the tower were streaming down on to the plunge pool making it dance and sparkle in the sunlight, All around me I could hear the sound of cascading water and music, and it was so hot. I looked back at the man and asked why did he need the coin? Attalus explained that today was the baptism of his first born son into the Jewish faith and the tradition was to buy back the child from the priests with five coins engraved with a five-branched Menorah-'and I only have four coins, but come let me show you around'. We walked through the bath house admiring the decoration and Attalus explained that for most of the time the building functioned as a bath house but once a month on a Sunday Christians used it to baptise new followers, 'total immersion you know', Attalus said laughing. We got to the main entrance and Attalus unlocked the main door. 'Look, I have to go', and we said our goodbyes. I looked out the door towards the Swale and turned round to find the building once again a ruin with the dust of history blowing in the wind. I looked down and laying there was the key to the door, I picked it up and smiling walked to join the rest of my companions.

*The full archaeological report of Bax Farm can be found on [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk) and yes we did find the key to the front door!*

**Paul Wilkinson**

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## **Courses at the Kent Archaeological Field School for 2018 will include:**

***May Bank Holiday May 2018: An Introduction to Archaeological Field Walking and test pitting on the site of a recently discovered Roman Villa at Wye in Kent***



Aerial photo showing a Roman building located next to the River Stour at Wye

***June 2018 excavating at 'Villa B' at Oplontis next to Pompeii in Italy***

We will be spending three weeks in association with the University of Texas investigating the Roman Emporium (Villa B) at Oplontis 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. Cost is £175 a week which does not include board or food but details of where to stay are available (Camping is 12EU a day and the adjacent hotel 50EU or Airbnb).

Email Paul Wilkinson at [info@swataarchaeology.co.uk](mailto:info@swataarchaeology.co.uk) for further details



***August 2018. The final investigation of a substantial Roman Building at Faversham in Kent***

Two weeks investigating a substantial Roman building to find out its form and function. This is an important Roman building and part of a larger Roman villa complex which may have its own harbour. One of the research questions we will be tackling is the buildings marine association with the nearby tidal waterway. Cost for the day £10 (Members free).



**August 6<sup>th</sup> to August 12<sup>th</sup> 2018 Training Week for Students on a Roman Building at Faversham 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 best selling "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 a Roman villa near Faversham.

Topics taught each day are:

**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> August:** Why dig? **Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> August:** Excavation Techniques. **Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> August:** Site Survey. **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> August:** Archaeological Recording. **Friday 10<sup>th</sup> August:** Pottery identification. **Saturday and Sunday** (free) digging with the team

A free PDF copy of "Archaeology" 3rd 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. The day starts at 10am and finishes at 4.30pm. For directions to the Field School see 'Where ' on this website. For camping nearby see 'accommodation' in [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk) .

**September 10<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> 2018. Investigation of Prehistoric features at Hollingbourne in Kent**



An opportunity to participate in excavating and recording prehistoric features in the landscape. The week is to be spent in excavating Bronze and Iron Age features located with aerial photography and Geophysical survey. Cost is £10 a day for non-members, members free.

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**The Kent Archaeological Field School, School Farm Oast,  
Graveney Road, Faversham, Kent ME13 8UP**

**Tel: 01795 532548 Email: [info@kafs.co.uk](mailto:info@kafs.co.uk)**

**Director Dr Paul Wilkinson**



## **KAFS BOOKING FORM**

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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](#)

## **KAFS MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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You can download the KAFS membership form directly from our website, or [by clicking here](#)

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