

# *KAFS Newsletter: No.27*

*The Kent Archaeological Field School Christmas 2024*

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



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*Welcome to the Christmas 2024 Newsletter  
from the Kent Archaeological Field School*



Dear Reader, we will be emailing you an Newsletter once a 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](http://www.kafs.co.uk) and click where it says 'Click Here'.

I hope you enjoy! Dr Paul Wilkinson.

## Breaking News: Christmas 20AD and 2024AD!

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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, Christianity's most popular festival, derived from the pagan festival of 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 in 2024 was curtailed by the pandemic but we have spent the time in catching up on reports but look forward to greeting you in 2025 on site or courses-**

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KAFS 'dig' at Abbey Barns at Faversham- can you name the year?

First answer to [info@kafs.co.uk](mailto:info@kafs.co.uk) wins a free course!

The report now out! See [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)

The report on the 'henge' at Harrietsham (right) is now also published and can be accessed at [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)



*Archaeological Investigations on  
land to the south of Court Lodge  
Farm, Harrietsham, Kent*

Site Code: HARR/2001/2

NOR Site Centre: 506802 153246

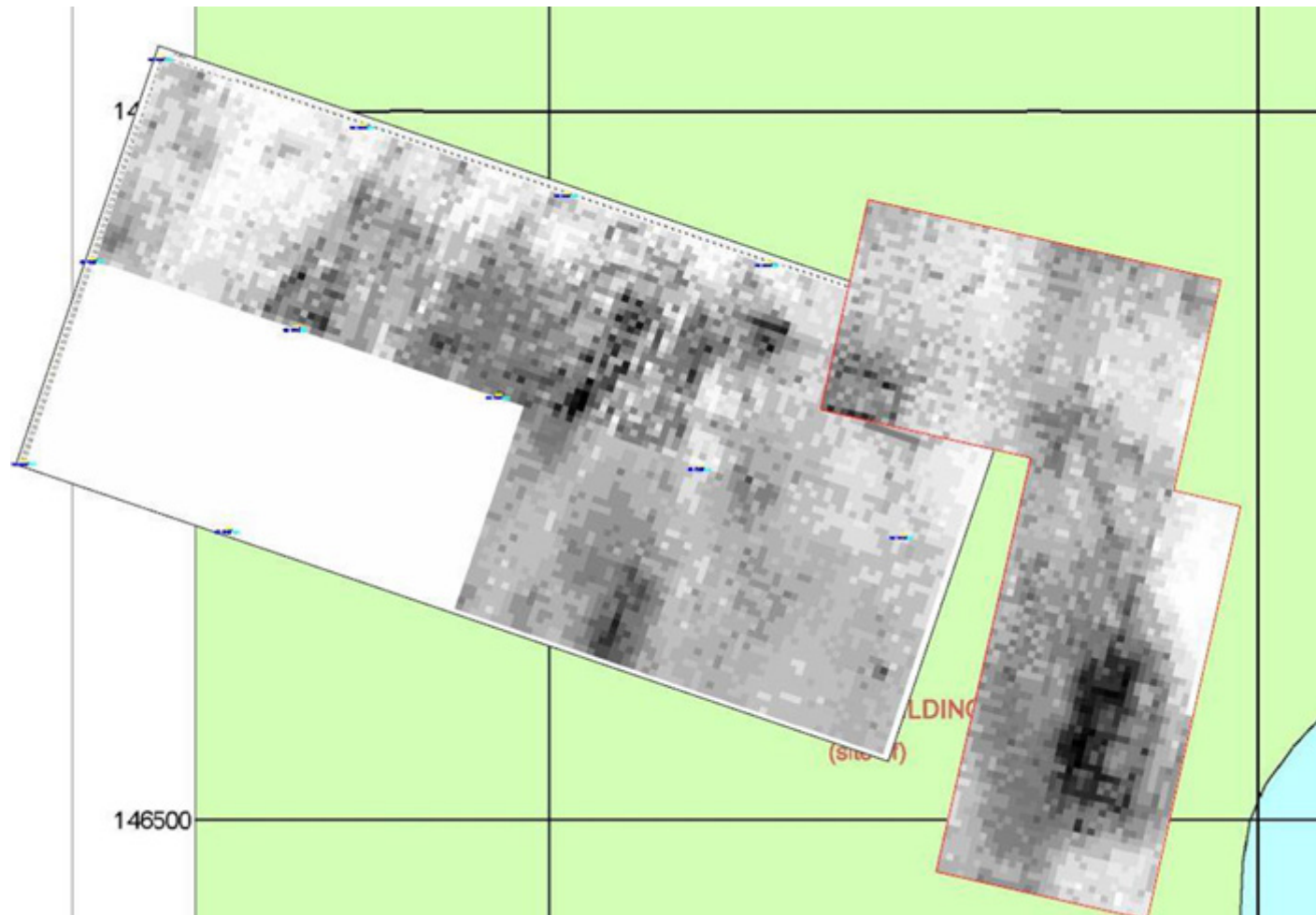


Dated 24 August 2024

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**KAFS 2023 geophysical surveys at Wye with more Roman buildings revealed are now published (below)**

Excavation by the Kent Archaeological Field School over the 2020 -2023 season revealed a Roman building with all the hallmarks of a Roman water mill (above circled in red) and a followon geophysical survey identified more buried buildings to the north-west (above-red arrow) which may be the main Roman Villa complex.

The foundations discovered by KAFS included a room with hypocaust underfloor heating and pottery retrieved included Samian ware dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries and two coins dating from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Just 24m from this building is the River Stour from which Roman pottery dating from late 1<sup>st</sup> early 2<sup>nd</sup> century (*Burnham C. P. 2003*).

*Excavation of a Roman Industrial  
Building to the east of Harville Road,  
Wye, Kent*

Site Code: HARV/2019

NGR Site Centre: 604783 146517



Dated 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024

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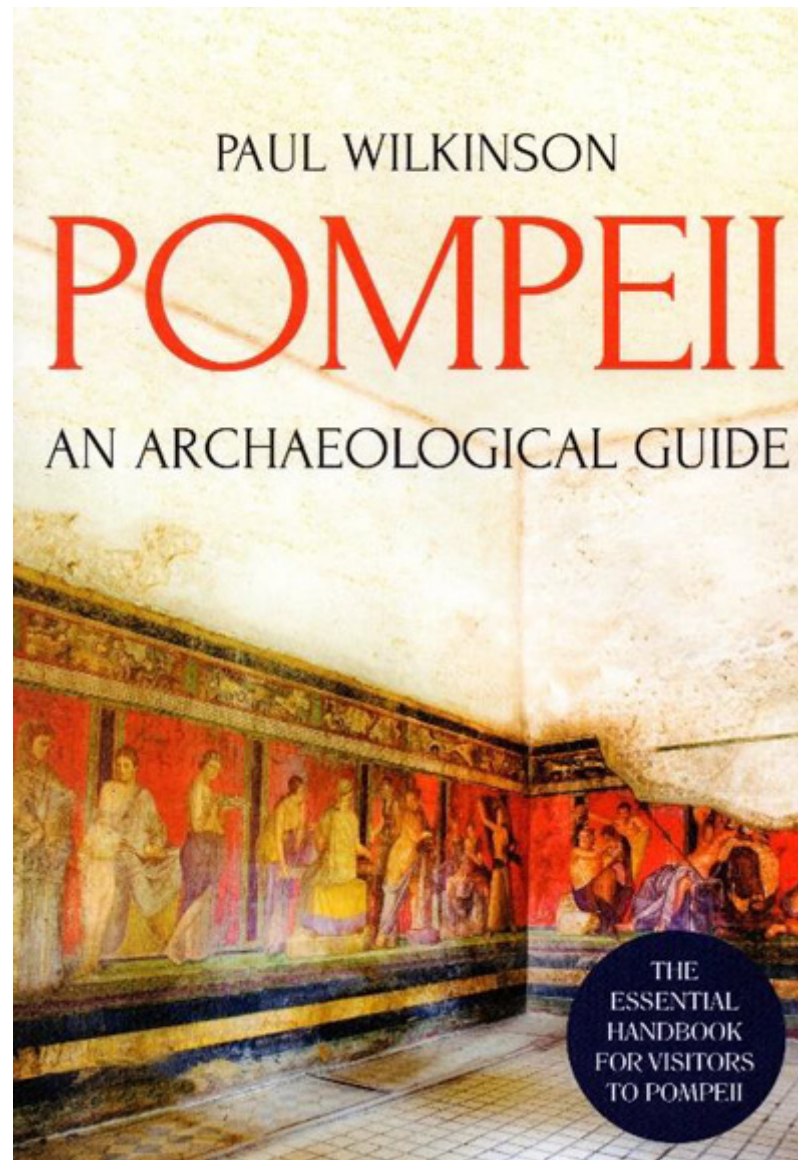
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Must watch this Christmas! “Pompeii: The New Dig” on BBC



It's the return of "Pompeii: The New Dig": New Documentary "Pompeii: The New Dig," a riveting documentary series from the esteemed creators behind "Secrets of the Saqqara Tomb" and "Saving Venice," offers an unprecedented look into the most comprehensive archaeological excavation in Pompeii of the current generation. Spanning nearly two years, this documentary provides exclusive access to a groundbreaking excavation and the dedicated all-Italian team of archaeologists at its helm. The series meticulously documents the excavation of an entire city block in Pompeii, revealing profound insights into the daily lives of its inhabitants before the catastrophic eruption of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79.





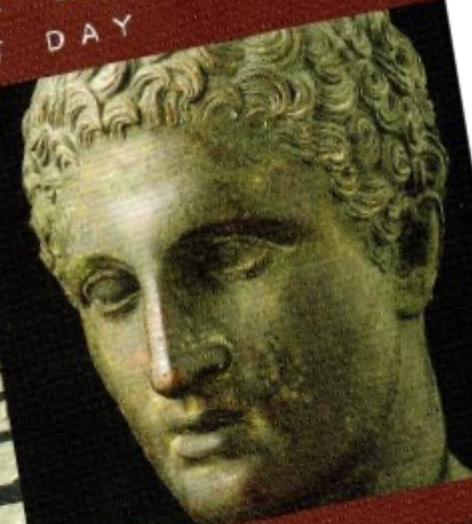
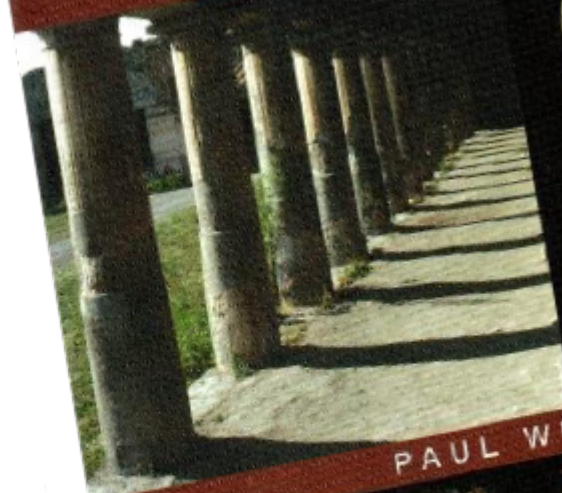
One of the most astonishing discoveries highlighted in the documentary is the unearthing of a fresco resembling a pizza. This 2,000-year-old artwork was found in the Regio IX section of Pompeii's archaeological park, close to Naples— the birthplace of pizza. The fresco, located on a wall that appears to have been part of a hallway in a house possibly linked to a bakery, offers a fascinating glimpse into the culinary practices of ancient Pompeii and suggests a cultural continuity that has persisted into modern times.



ACCOMPANIES THE GROUND-BREAKING TV DOCUMENTARY **BBC**  
BOOKS

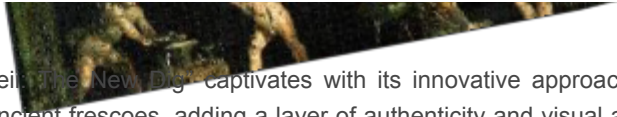


**BBC**  
**POMPEII**  
THE LAST DAY



PAUL WILKINSON





The first episode of “Pompeii: The New Dig” captivates with its innovative approach to storytelling. The documentary employs illustrations reminiscent of ancient frescoes, adding a layer of authenticity and visual appeal that enriches the viewer’s experience. The inclusion of a diverse range of experts—from volcanologists to construction workers—provides a multidisciplinary perspective on the ancient city, illustrating the timelessness of certain trades and practices.

(Both Pompeii books by Paul Wilkinson available online).

### **Christmas Gifts/Not too Late!**

Stuck for a Christmas Gift – and don’t leave it too late! Try [www.danegeld.co.uk](http://www.danegeld.co.uk) who make accurate historic jewellery (right) 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/roman-pottery-terra-sigillata>



**“Can I buy a present as it is Christmas”...What’s Christmas!!**

However, inside Pilate's palace, the PFJ encounters another revolutionary group who had the same idea which sparks a violent argument. Brian is the sole survivor of the fight but is captured by the palace guards. The guards bring Brian before Pilate, but his questioning is cut short when the guards began uncontrollably laughing at the names of Pilate's friend from Rome Biggus Dickus and his wife Incontinentia Buttocks.

(From Life of Brian)





**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, meaning 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**

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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 diary 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. See Stonehenge in action below on: <https://youtu.be/PuLyPLXXUd4>



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.

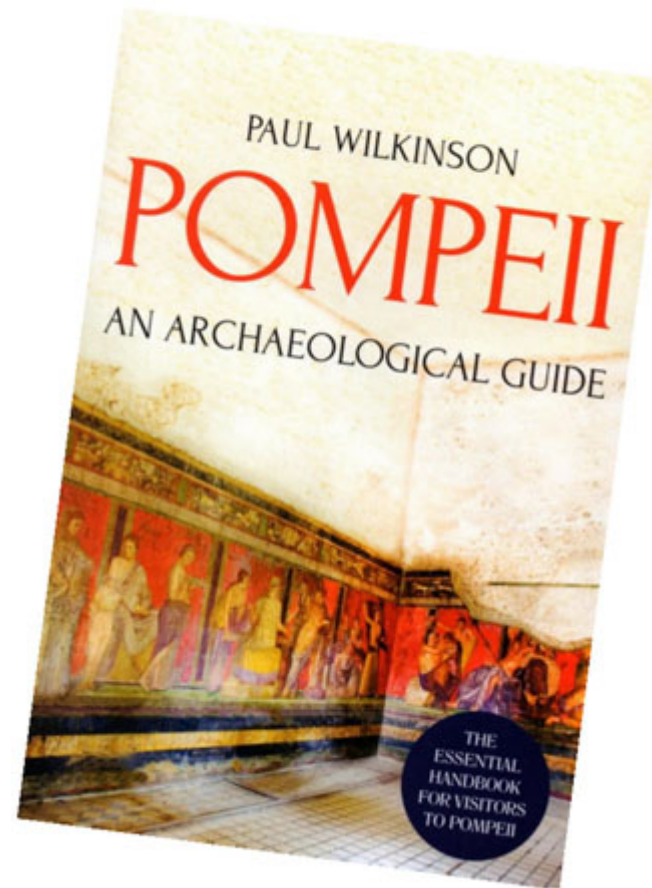
No matter where you live on Earth's globe, a solstice is your signal to celebrate. For us in Kent on the northern part of Earth, the shortest day comes at the solstice which this year is Wednesday 21st December at 21.47. After the winter solstice, the days get longer, and the nights shorter.

It's a seasonal shift that nearly everyone notices. The universe holds its breath and when it breaths again we are in a new cycle of life.

[BACK TO MENU](#)

## Books for Christmas / Archaeological Guide to Pompeii. Rating 5 Stars

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**Author Paul Wilkinson** and published by Taurus Books 1<sup>st</sup> Edition and Bloomsbury 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Editions.

Pompeian pilgrims will be in good hands with Dr 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**

*The Kent Archaeological Field School Events for 2024 will  
include:*

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**Courses at the Kent Archaeological Field School for 2025 will include:** *Field Walking and Map Analysis (Spring Bank Holiday Sat 19th April to Sunday 20th April)* 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 £40 if membership is taken out at the time of booking. For non-members the cost will be £45.

**Book online at [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)**



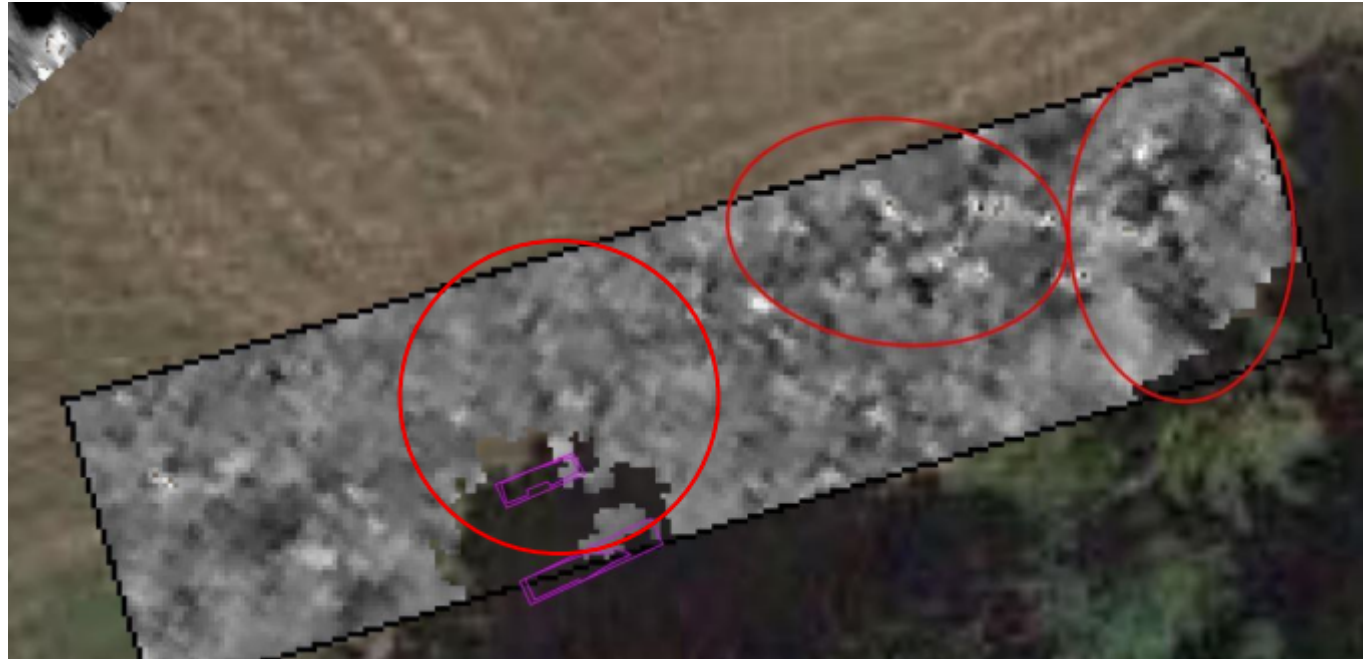


*Photo 1. Snagbrook Farm 'dig' in July 2023*

### **Snagbrook Roman Villa and Water mill Excavations and Training Course (Sat 19th-Friday 25th July)**

KAFS will be returning to the Roman Villa complex at Snagbrook where we will continue with previous season work on planning, survey and archaeological investigations to clarify the function and extent of Roman buildings identified in archaeological excavations in 2023 by KAFS. In addition recent geophysical survey work by the Kent Archaeological Field School (KAFS) and Brook Archaeology has identified substantial and important Roman buildings and infrastructure to the west and north of the initial investigations of the KAFS in May 2023. Please note that the initial evaluation work is just the first stage of a phased programme of

work and if archaeology is located the evaluation is Stage One and a Stage Two will be required of excavation/watching brief/preservation in situ which may be necessary. Stage Three will be post-excitation and publication.



*Photo 2. Geophysical survey by Brook Archaeology (above) has recognised buildings to the north-east of our 2023 archaeological investigations (purple rectangles) at Snagbrook, Hollingbourne.*

**Training Week (Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July) for Students on a Roman Villa and Water Mill at Hollingbourne 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 SWAT Archaeology will spend seven days explaining to participants the methods used in modern archaeology. A typical training day will be classroom theory (on site) in the morning followed by excavations at the Roman water mill and villa at Hollingbourne in Kent.

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. An opportunity to participate in excavating and recording Roman features in the landscape from this new site first identified by the local Lenham Archaeological Society and the aerial photography research shows a number of potential archaeological sites which may include a Roman villa, aisled barn and watermill and recent investigations by the KAFS have identified Roman building remain in the vicinity of the stream (left).

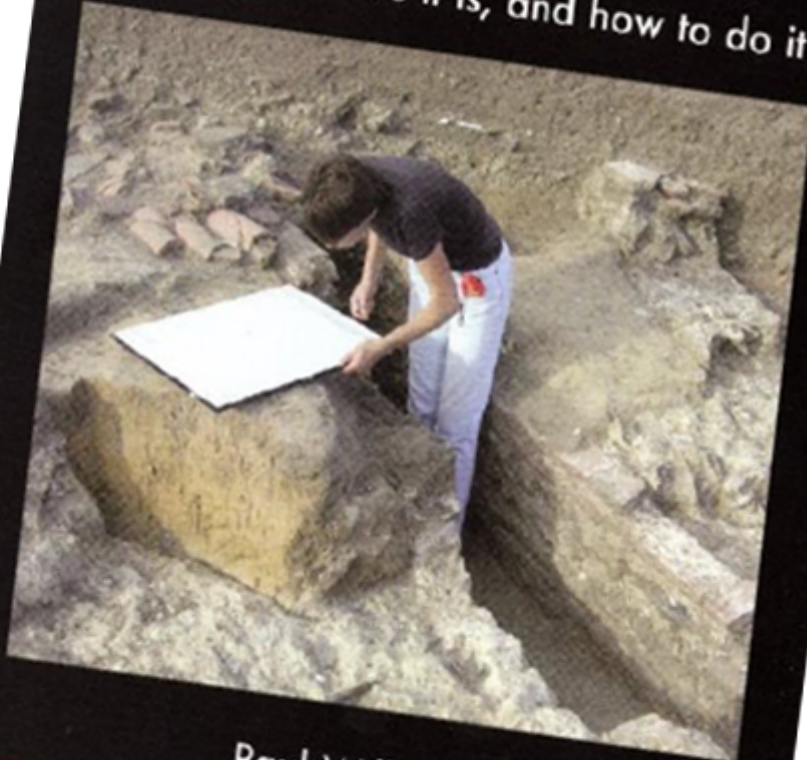
A free PDF copy of "Archaeology" 4th Edition will be given to participants. Cost for the course is £100 if membership is taken out at the time of booking plus a Certificate of Attendance.



4th  
Edition

# Archaeology

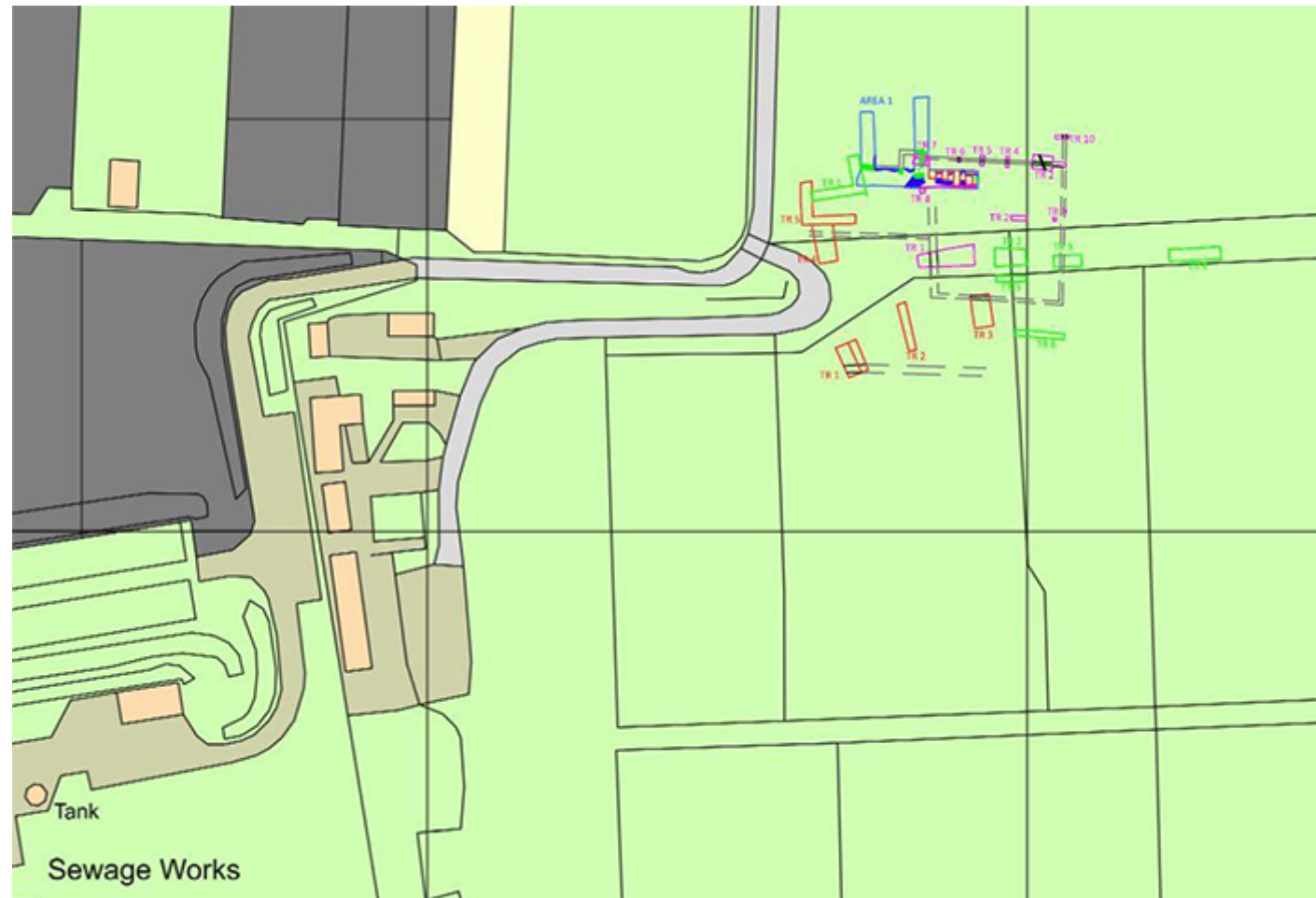
What it is, where it is, and how to do it



Paul Wilkinson



Thanks for reading the newsletter and supporting the Kent Archaeological Field School. Your donations and membership fees over the last two years have paid for the research and report writing which is essential to any archaeological investigations and all reports are available free on our website [www.kafs.co.uk](http://www.kafs.co.uk)





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