

Nothing resembling a Villa has been found to date. It is more likely that a Villa would have been built on the north bank of the Medway, indeed a building described as a Villa was discovered in the 19th century almost opposite this site at Barming. Its exact location was not recorded and subsequent attempts to find it has been unsuccessful. The buildings at East Farleigh may have formed part of its estate, assuming of course that it was a Villa!

The earliest features found are two ditches, believed to be pre Roman due to presence of small amounts of Iron Age pottery. Earlier this year an Iron Age coin was found. It is an Atrebatean Minim, dating from around 1AD. It is only the third example of these coins found in Kent and the only one for which the find location is known. A few 1st century Roman coins have been found – from the reigns of Vespasian (AD70-71) and Nerva (AD96). An interesting aspect of the site is that we have found no evidence of human occupation from the end of the Roman period until the 19th century when the field was converted into a hop garden.



This being the journal of the Marden Society the obvious question is – what does this have to do with Marden? Your humble author is a member of the regular digging team as was Trevor Simmons until his untimely passing. Trevor's knowledge of the land and farming practices often lead to new avenues of exploration and we often commented that Trevor found more pottery and small finds than the rest of us put together.

A detailed explanation of the dig is available at:

<http://www.maag.btck.co.uk/ExcavationsatEastFarleigh> Sadly we have just heard that the landowner has recently accepted an offer for the property. If the sale is completed the purchaser has made it clear that we will have to vacate the site. *Mike Lockett*

PLANNING NEWS: CHURCH FARM, MAIDSTONE ROAD, PUBLIC ENQUIRY

You may be aware that a Planning Application for up to 150 dwellings was submitted by Gladman Developments in May 2016 on this site to the west of Maidstone Road. This would include a new 50 space car park for the station on the north side of the tracks, a play area and informal public open space. This application was rejected by Maidstone Borough Council on 21 Oct 2016, on the grounds that it is “outside any defined settlement boundary and would consolidate sporadic development in the area, causing unacceptable visual harm to the character and appearance of the countryside hereabouts, when viewed from Maidstone Road and surrounding public footpaths.” It would therefore be contrary to policies of the Local Plan. MBC has been consistently against any development north of the railway line.

An appeal against this decision was lodged by Gladman in June this year and the Planning Inspectorate has decided that this will be decided by a Public Inquiry. This will take place on 28th February 2018. *Steve McArragher*

The Parish Pump

THE JOURNAL OF THE MARDEN SOCIETY – SEPTEMBER 2017

Our first autumn talk will be on **27th September** when **Dawn Page** will speak about **“Teston and the anti-slavery Movement”**. Teston became an important centre in the fight against the slave trade due to the actions of Sir Charles and Lady Margaret Middleton, and their protégé the Rev. James Ramsay who became vicar of Teston. He published a damning essay on the treatment of African slaves in the British sugar colonies after fleeing the Caribbean island of St Kitts, where he had criticised the treatment of slaves on the sugar plantations. Then on **25th October** **Colin Brown** will be speaking about, **“The Ordnance Survey Ancient and Modern”**. This is the story of how Ordnance Survey came into being and a little about the speaker's work with large scale OS mapping. Both meetings will be back in the **Vestry Hall at 7.30**, with refreshments and raffle as usual.

MARDEN SOCIETY SUMMER OUTING TO MILL FARM

52 people assembled at Mill Farm for a tour of the bird habitat and the wetland being created by Peter Hall. Overnight heavy rain had left the terrain very muddy but although the sky was very grey nothing could dampen the enthusiasm of Peter and Ray Morris, a dedicated ornithologist who works with Peter. Peter described the layout of Mill Farm, which he had acquired 18 months previously, and his existing Little Mill farm. His 400 acres are spread around the village and are divided between fruit and arable rotation, but acreage was also given to the production of bird seed. To qualify for High Level Stewardship, the ‘feather, fuzzy and water’ elements must be maintained. ‘Feather’ was Ray’s speciality and, with the



help of the RSPB and Natural England, he has advised Peter on ways to encourage and enhance the wildlife on the farms. Mill farm on acquisition had been in a derelict state, used in the past mainly for strawberry growing, but has now been carefully cleared, leaving tall hedgerows for nesting. The undergrowth has been encouraged to grow and provide ground cover for other wild life.

Ray led a guided walk along the hedgerows, describing the many birds which were now to be found, woodpeckers, both green and lesser spotted, grey wagtails, snipe, red kites, chaff, blue tits, garden warblers and bull finches. He commented on the absence of tree sparrows, but more unfortunately the presence of mink. Buzzards were around and boxes had been set up for barn owls; there were also little and tawny owls. In particular Marden is a turtle dove friendly zone and the tall hedgerows are ideal for nesting to produce up to three annual broods, each containing 2 eggs. A kestrel box had also been occupied, but probably by a squirrel! Kingfishers, reed warblers and black caps were also around and, in particular, yellowhammers. To encourage the yellowhammers Peter had purchased 2 tons of bird seed, which had been spread for them resulting in a rich growth in their population.

After the bird walk we transferred to Peter's ongoing wetland project on the other side of Underlyn Lane. With a heron flying overhead, Peter explained his plan to 'park' excess flood water on his five acre site, which would then gradually be released back into the River Teise, slowing the flow of water towards Yalding. On its own this will not prevent the flooding which has occurred in the past, but this pilot project has only cost £25,000 and is being watched with interest by the Environment Agency and others. If successful, this could be a prototype for many others to be constructed, which would make a difference. It will also, of course, produce another wildlife area to be managed and landscaped to attract waterborne wildlife.

After the walks the group returned to Little Mill Oast for tea with strawberries and cream, and we were pleased to sign up several new members. We would like to thank Peter for his generous hospitality and both Peter and Ray for their time and very informative tours. Hopefully we can return at some future time to catch up with these inspiring projects.

Barbara Dubois

TEASING OUT THE TEASELS

Everybody knows the Wild Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) a tall (3m) spiky plant that grows almost everywhere and whose seeds are enjoyed by goldfinches and other small birds. Its name gives away the use of its spiny dried flower heads to 'tease out' the fibres of wool, a process known as carding or to raise the pile (or nap) of fine cloth. A subspecies, the Fuller's Teasel (*D. sativas*), which has curved spines, was widely cultivated for this and is still grown in

the Somerset Levels. Fullers were the craftsmen who cleaned and finished cloth. Use of teasels is still considered by some the best way to finish cloth that needs an exceptionally fine and even pile, especially for billiard tables. The reason is that the spines are not rigid and 'give' a little if they meet a snag in the cloth, which steel brushes will not do. Another unusual property of the

plant is that its lower leaves are connected by a membrane to form a cup which stores rainwater for prolonged periods. This traps insects, and Francis Darwin (Charles' son) wrote a paper suggesting teasels may be carnivorous! This 'dew' (without the dead insects!) was thought to have rejuvenating powers, and in the 18th century was believed to remove freckles.



But those who went on the Mill Farm visit will know that Marden is home to another form of teasel, the Small Teasel (*D. pilosus*). This is a scarce plant in Britain and is very rare in Kent. The 2010 Atlas of Kent Flora lists only 8 sites, 3 of which are around Marden, including Mill Farm. As its name suggests this is a smaller plant (1.5m) with small globular flower heads showing white flowers with purple tipped spines. Sadly it does not have any special uses or properties, but is still an attractive plant. It is biennial and prefers calcareous (chalky) ground alongside water (e.g. the Mill stream) and flowers in July-August. On a recent visit to Mill Farm I saw at least a dozen plants, one very close to the bridge by the parking area.

Steve McArragher

EXCAVATION OF ROMAN BUILDINGS AT EAST FARLEIGH

During the 1830s a Roman era building was discovered near the south bank of the Medway to the west of East Farleigh bridge. A plan of the building, described as a Roman Villa, was published in 1839 but the precise location of the building was not recorded. During work on a hop garden in 1938 wall foundations were discovered but, as archaeology was not a priority at the time, no investigations were carried out.

In 2005 the Maidstone Area Archaeology Group began digging on the site expecting to find the building excavated in the 1830s. After 12 years nothing corresponding to that plan has been found. Far from being a waste of time however six buildings have been discovered to date. These were numbered in the order of discovery. The earliest building found to date (Building 2) appears to have been constructed in mid-2nd century AD. Only one corner and a wall belonging to this still exist, as it was demolished and replaced by Building 3 around AD250. Buildings 1, 3, 4 and 5 all appear to have been built around AD250, all on the same alignment. They served their original function for only a relatively short time as there is evidence for installation of ovens and hearths for corn drying from around AD300 until end of 4th century. There is also posthole evidence for construction of wooden buildings during the later Roman period.

There are only 2 buildings for which we have a complete floorplan. Building 1 is the larger, measuring 29m by 15m. Only the foundations for this remain. The most interesting building found to date is Building 5, which measures 13m by 11.5m. The surviving walls stand over 1 metre high in places; until excavated they lay hidden almost 2 m below ground level by 1,700 years of accumulated hillwash. Unlike the impression given by Time Team that Roman Britain can be found a few inches below the surface, on this site we must dig out 1 to 2 metres of soil before reaching Roman layers. One of the ditches excavated reached a depth of 3.5 m.

The most significant finds have been found in Building 5. The star find was a lead scroll (Defixio) bearing the names of people being cursed. A hoard of 154 coins was also found and some could be identified dating to 335-365 AD. Building 5's original use is believed to be as a Romano-Celtic temple. Its later conversion into a farm building may have coincided with the official discouragement of traditional religions that began under Constantine. In 2016 we began digging in a new part of the site. Several sections of wall were discovered. These are now referred to as Building 6. Excavation of this structure (or structures) is now in progress. As yet no conclusive evidence for either construction date or purpose of the building has been found.