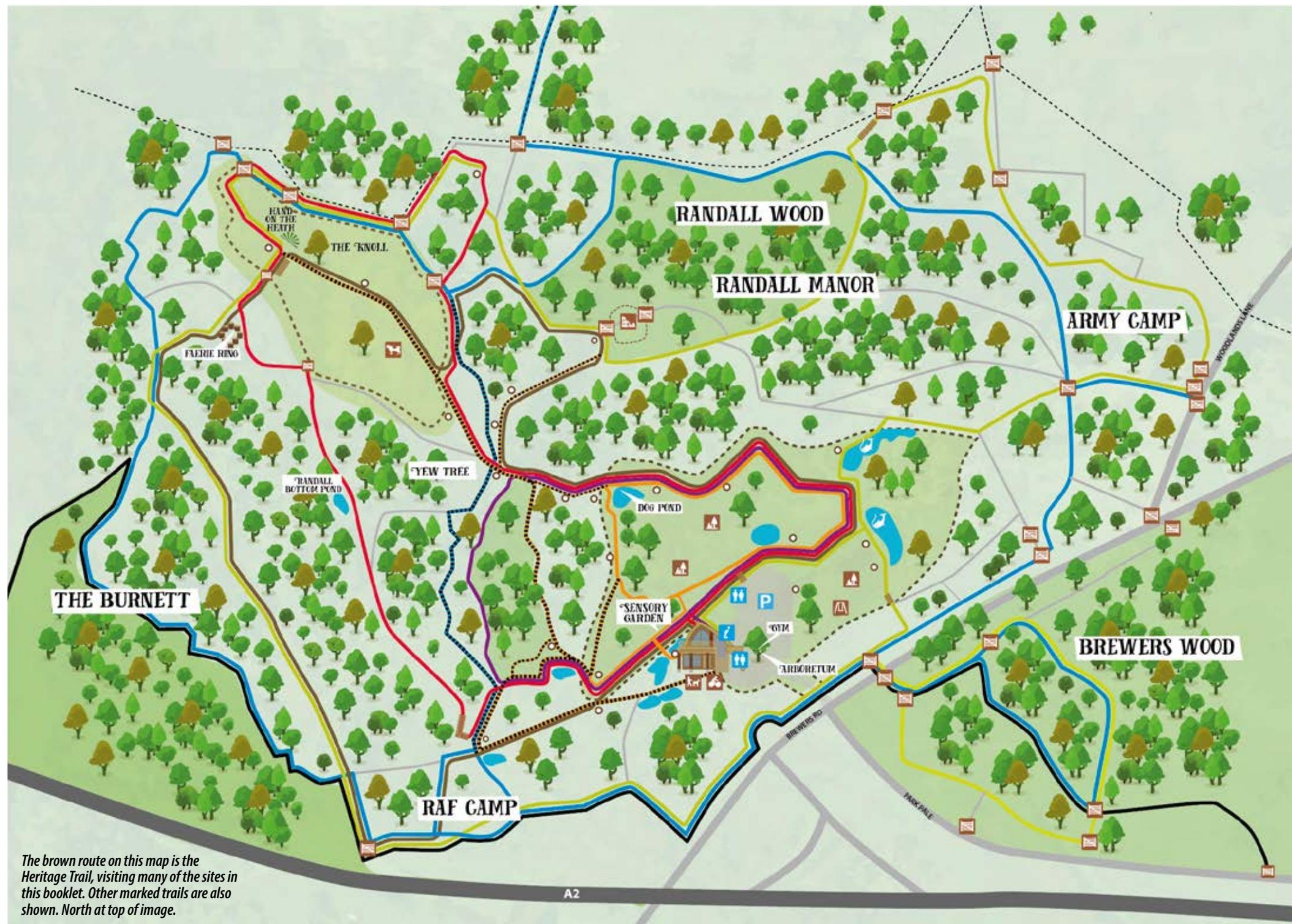




# Manor and mounds, camps and quarries

*the archaeology of  
Shorne Woods Country Park*





The brown route on this map is the Heritage Trail, visiting many of the sites in this booklet. Other marked trails are also shown. North at top of image.

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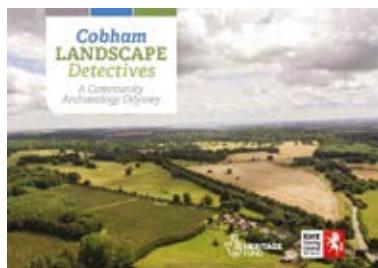
*Randall Manor excavations in 2013*

<b>PALAEOLITHIC:</b> 900,000 BC to 10,000 BC	<b>MESOLITHIC</b> 10,000 BC to 4,000 BC	<b>NEOLITHIC</b> 4,000 BC to 2,500 BC
<b>BRONZE AGE</b> 2,500 BC to 750 BC	<b>IRON AGE</b> 750 BC to AD 43	<b>ROMANS</b> AD 43 to AD 410
<b>EARLY MEDIEVAL</b> AD 410 to AD 1066	<b>MEDIEVAL</b> AD 1066 to AD 1540	<b>POSTMEDIEVAL TO MODERN</b> AD 1540 TO PRESENT

# Introduction

Welcome to this potted history of Shorne Woods Country Park (SWCP), from the ice ages over 12,000 years ago to the present. It's a celebration of community archaeology in the park and the work of the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group over the past twenty years! All this work has been made possible by the dedication, skill and good humour of hundreds of volunteers. This booklet showcases and celebrates our discoveries.

Our community archaeology projects have always aimed to involve a wide range of people of all ages and abilities, taking part in research, geophysics, fieldwork, finds processing and more. We have worked with many local schools, the Young Archaeologists Club network and nearby history and archaeology societies. Some projects have taken us out of the park into the landscape beyond; Cobham Landscape Detectives (2016-2019) sought to place the archaeology of the park in a wider context.



A booklet on our work at Cobham is also available.

The work continues today, with new projects planned for 2025, providing opportunities for the public to discover and explore the archaeology and history of this much-loved park.

Shorne Woods Country Park sits on the north side of the A2 between Gravesend and Strood. It opened as a Kent County Council Country Park in 1987 and is comprised of almost 300 acres of ancient woodland, wetlands and meadows. Archaeology projects at the park have always been in collaboration with park staff and their support and assistance remains invaluable. A very special thank you to Tim Bell, for his support for our archaeology projects from day one. We are indebted to Kent County Council's Heritage Conservation Group for their long-term support of project work, in particular Simon Mason for his advice and oversight.

We hope you enjoy reading about the park's history and archaeology. If you are visiting the park, please respect the sensitive archaeology and biodiversity of each site. Most importantly, do tell people about the park and share this booklet with them.

## The Shorne Woods Archaeology Group, Spring 2025

*Note: all photos are courtesy of Kent County Council and the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group unless where indicated.*

We are very grateful to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for their support of projects in the park and to National Highways designated funds for the Lower Thames Crossing, which funded this booklet and the new interpretation scheme in the park.



*The Shorne Pony sculpture at the visitor centre by sculptor Steve Portchmouth, including bits of clayworks machinery*



*New interpretation panels in the park, at the RAF camp*

# THE **Shorne Woods** **ARCHAEOLOGY** **Group** SWAG

In 2005 Lyn Palmer became the Kent County Council community archaeologist for the Lottery funded **Shorne Woods Heritage Project**. She sought volunteers for heritage projects at the park. In early 2009, I took over as Kent County Council's community archaeologist (having been a volunteer since 2006), and within a short space of time the **Shorne Woods Archaeology Group** came into being, as a loose affiliation of interested volunteers. Fast forward twenty years and this group, many of whom Lyn recruited (including the author) continue to deliver archaeology projects in the park. Community is key to the SWAG story, with new friendships as important as the new skills developed. During covid, these friendships acted as a support network for the volunteers, until volunteering could safely recommence. Post covid the loose affiliated group became a constituted group, with membership open to all. A huge thank you to everyone who has taken part in archaeology projects across the park.

On a personal note, I would like to thank Roger Cockett, Gerald & Gill Cramp and Trevor Bent for their invaluable support across almost twenty years of projects and to Pauline Roland, Don Blackburn, John Beaumont and John 'JT' Townsend for their support and for driving SWAG forwards.

This booklet is dedicated to much loved and dearly departed volunteers Dennis Rozier and Roger 'Roger2' Hornsby, who gave so much of their time and enthusiasm to archaeology projects in the park.

**Andrew Mayfield**



*New displays in the visitor centre*



*SWAG excavating part of the narrow-gauge railway in the park, 2020*

## How to get involved

SWAG meet regularly on Thursdays and Fridays to explore the archaeology of the park, undertake research and study & catalogue finds from the park.

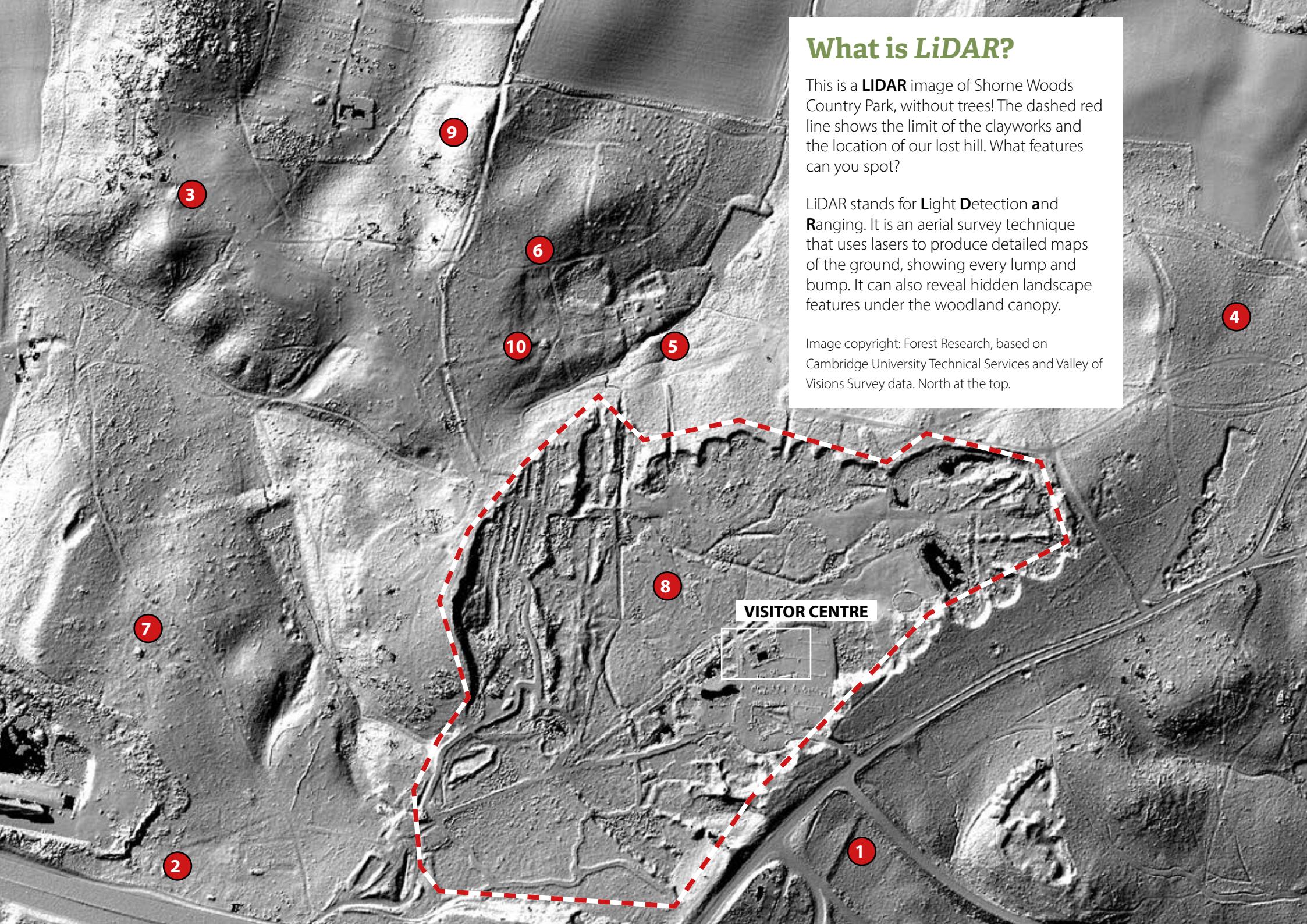
The group also run regular events and activities across the year and can be found at park open days.

Contact: [swagkent2023@gmail.com](mailto:swagkent2023@gmail.com)

Website: [www.shornewoodsarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.shornewoodsarchaeology.co.uk)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/archaeologyinkent](https://www.facebook.com/archaeologyinkent)

Visit: if you pop into the visitor centre, you will find a display of finds and further information on the archaeology of the park. You can also follow the heritage trail around the park (see map on p.2), where you will see interpretation panels at key sites.



## What is LiDAR?

This is a **LiDAR** image of Shorne Woods Country Park, without trees! The dashed red line shows the limit of the clayworks and the location of our lost hill. What features can you spot?

LiDAR stands for **Light Detection and Ranging**. It is an aerial survey technique that uses lasers to produce detailed maps of the ground, showing every lump and bump. It can also reveal hidden landscape features under the woodland canopy.

Image copyright: Forest Research, based on Cambridge University Technical Services and Valley of Visions Survey data. North at the top.

# Twenty years of DISCOVERIES!

SWAG has investigated a huge variety of archaeological sites in the park, from Mesolithic flint scatters to the remains of the twentieth century clayworks. Our very first project looked at the course of the earlier road in Brewers Wood (1 on the LiDAR map opposite). We then focused on the Second World War RAF camp in the southwest corner of the park (2 on the LiDAR map opposite), an enigmatic mound on the Heath (at 3 on the map opposite) and an Army camp in the northeast corner of the park (at 4 on the map opposite).

A highlight of every summer between 2006 and 2015 were the community excavations at Randall Manor (at 5 on the map opposite). We encouraged local schools and the public to get involved and help us reveal the remains of a seven-hundred-year-old complex of buildings, belonging to the de Cobhams of Randall. The site was rich in finds, including pottery, metalwork, animal bone and shell, not to mention the ubiquitous Kentish peg rooftile! A piece of medieval Syrian drinking glass was also recovered and two complete floor tiles. The pond system surrounding the manor was explored (at 6 on the map opposite), which we now think may predate occupation of the main manor site.

In 2009, following the clearance of invasive rhododendron, the Burnett (at 7 on the map opposite) was walked over, plotting where each flint was found. The Burnett is the name for the area running along the western edge of the park. We quickly identified an important Mesolithic site, with flint finds that were between 12,000 and 6,000 years old and a single Bronze Age axe fragment. These finds encouraged the volunteers to develop skills in identifying worked flint and to try flint knapping for themselves! Many test pits later the volunteers continue to explore the Mesolithic archaeology of the park, recording Mesolithic flint scatters at multiple locations.

In 2011 the maps produced by a LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) survey enabled us to find and explore key landscape features across the site. Some of the features were swiftly identified as modern, associated with the Second World War and the clayworks (at 8 on the map opposite). Others were much older, hollow ways and field systems shown by association to be part of the medieval manorial

landscape (at 9 on the map opposite). Much of our work was supported by Roger Cockett's detailed historical research.

We also worked outside the park, examining an Army camp nearby that had been hit by a V1 flying bomb (on Woodlands Lane) and supporting Dave May's investigation of Mesolithic flint scatters on Plantlife's Ranscombe Farm nature reserve. Trevor Bent organised an oral history project to collect the memories of the clayworks and of individuals who remembered living in the military camps after the Second World War (see the SWAG website).

Over time, features identified were also re-examined! The mound on the heath, originally interpreted as a possible Bronze Age barrow burial mound, was shown to be a medieval windmill mound. The clayworks revealed its secrets slowly. Highlights include the discovery of an air raid shelter, and during covid imposed socially distanced volunteering, the exploration of the engine shed cutting and branches of the narrow-gauge railway.

SWAG are currently investigating a new medieval site, west of Randall Manor (see 10 on the map opposite).



*One of the earliest volunteer activities in the park, clearing vegetation in Brewers Wood to look for the road feature, 2006*

# The park in PREHISTORY

The term prehistory refers to the huge expanse of time before Britain becomes part of the Roman Empire in AD43. Throughout the hundreds of thousands of years known as the Palaeolithic or 'Old Stone Age' our human ancestors have visited this landscape periodically. We have not found any definitive evidence for Palaeolithic activity in the park, but nearby Cuxton is a nationally important Palaeolithic finds spot.

More permanent settlement begins in the Mesolithic or 'middle stone age' some 12,000 years ago. The scene at Ranscombe (on the next page) shows a Mesolithic camp on the hillside above the River Medway at Cuxton. Extensive Mesolithic activity has been identified and recorded by Dave May on the Ranscombe reserve. We have recorded over 5,000 worked Mesolithic flints in the park, with two key sites at the Burnett and on the Heath (see LiDAR map on page 6).

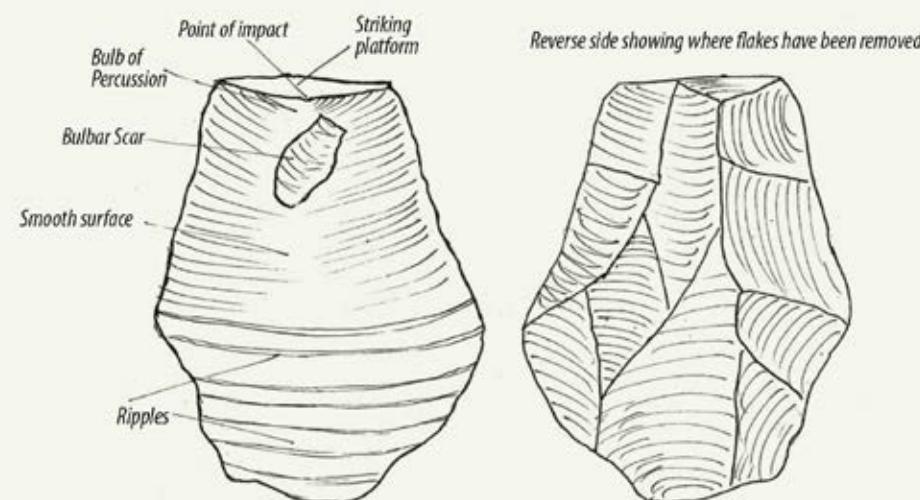
In the Neolithic period from 6,000 to 4,500 years ago, we see the construction of a series of long barrows in the Medway Valley, Kits Coty being perhaps the most famous site. We have yet to record substantial evidence for the Neolithic activity in the park, although we have logged a small collection of flints - including part of a Neolithic axe. By the Bronze Age, over 4,500 years ago, we see a wider range of settlement evidence and features, recorded nearby along the route of the Highspeed One rail link and on the Golf course at Cobham. Much of the flintwork we picked up from the fieldwalking during the *Cobham Landscape Detectives* project dates from the later Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age. In the park we have recorded a single, very damaged Bronze Age metal axe fragment.

We are yet to record any evidence for Iron Age activity in the park, but we know from our work over the road at Cobham that there was extensive Iron Age activity in the Jeskyns area, including ironworking and settlement. The historic line of Watling Street (which passed south of the park between Shorne Woods and Cobham) is thought to be pre-Roman in date and served as a key east-west routeway through the landscape.

## How do I know if I have found a piece of prehistoric flintwork?

If you are out walking in the park or the wider Cobham landscape, you could find your own piece of prehistoric flintwork. Even after thousands of years, they can still be found on the surface! There are several ways to tell if the piece of flint you have picked up is prehistoric in date:

- Knapped flint will often have a **small bulb** on one end where the flint was struck, which you can feel under your finger as a small lump!
- Some knapped flint will have **percussion rings**, spreading out from the bulb and looking like the ripples you see on a pond
- Most knapped flint will have a **striking platform**, a small flat edge, where the flint has been struck
- Knapped flint is often slightly curved, where the piece or 'flake' has been taken off the main block of flint, called the 'core'
- Some knapped flint will show signs of being reworked, often looking like nibbling along an edge, a process called '**retouching**'
- Knapped flint will often have a patina and look smooth or glossy. If it is very rough, it may have only been struck accidentally recently
- You may also find heat affected or '**firecracked**' flint. This is often white and looks criss-crossed and cracked. Fire cracked flint can be an indicator of prehistoric activity



## Where do I take my piece of flint, if I want to find out more?

Get in touch with the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group, either by using our contact information or attending one of our events. We should be able to tell you if it is worked.

Compare your flint to other examples on the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) website at [finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)

Kent has a PAS officer, known as a **Finds Liaison Officer** or FLO who you can contact through the PAS website, about the flint you are finding. They may want to record key pieces for the national database. Please also contact the FLO if you have found metal items that might qualify as Treasure see

[finds.org.uk](https://finds.org.uk)

Talk to the Historic Environment Record team at Kent County Council, see [www.kent.gov.uk/her](https://www.kent.gov.uk/her)

Contact the Kent Archaeological Society at [kentarchaeology.org.uk](https://kentarchaeology.org.uk)

## A Mesolithic scene at Ranscombe- what activities can you spot?



# Key site: THE BURNETT

by Trevor Bent, Shorne Woods Archaeology Group

I started volunteering with the group in 2006 and having gained much valuable knowledge, I was able to lead the investigation of prehistoric sites in the park. We have identified two Mesolithic sites and several areas where people have stopped and knapped flint in the past. The number of Mesolithic sites known nationally does not reflect the actual number, as there is often no evidence above ground and sites are usually found through archaeological work. Our key site in the park is the 'Burnett' (see 7 on the LiDAR image p.6). We are unsure where the name came from, Burnett is quite a common surname, but we have been unable to trace the name in the area. One definition of Burnett is 'burned grass', another is from the French word burnete which became brunete, meaning brown. All our identified Mesolithic sites sit on gravel geologies.

The Burnett site was discovered in 2009, after invasive rhododendrons were 'grubbed out' and pieces of worked flint were found on the disturbed surface, by one of our volunteers, James Elford. The Mesolithic site has no defined boundaries but from our test pitting, it covers an estimated area of some 22,000 square metres. So far, we have dug 41 one metre square test pits, finding a total of over 2,500 worked flints, so potentially there are still hundreds of thousands buried on the site. Amongst the finds there were 10 microliths (hafted on arrows and used for hunting) of varying styles which have been looked at and identified, confirming that the site could have been used for several hundred years. Apart from waste flakes and the microliths, we have found hammer stones, cores, blades, scrapers, adzes, burins, an awl and a piercer.

We excavated the test pits in 10cm layers, sieving everything that was dug out, keeping every piece of flint and recording finds from each layer separately. Each test pit was taken down to the iron pan, which is as hard as concrete, so we couldn't dig into it. It is impossible to date iron pan so there could be even more worked flint trapped in the iron pan. We have decided not to dig further test pits in what seems to be the centre of the site but may dig further test pits to identify the limits of the site.

The Mesolithic site on the Ranscombe Reserve has a large assemblage of primary flakes (the first flakes taken off before making tools) whereas Shorne has a large collection of smaller secondary and tertiary flakes (the flakes taken off when making the finished tool). Does this mean that Shorne could have been a 'satellite' site to Cuxton? We may never know but as we identify new sites, questions will be answered and the importance of the sites in the park and those at Ranscombe will become more apparent.

Why are we finding so many worked flints in the park? We don't yet know if we are looking at one group of people flint knapping over a short period of time, or longer return visits, but one reason must be the views! From the top of the heath, you can see as far as Essex. In the Mesolithic period, groups of hunter gatherers would have used these well drained vantage points. The flint itself probably comes from the chalk landscape below (the chalk was laid down over 100 million years ago!).



Volunteers working at the Burnett site, identifying flints and sieving!



A SWAG flintknapping session

## What is flint knapping?

The process of producing flint tools, creates much waste material. Most of the flints we find on the Burnett are unworked waste flakes, but we have also recorded worked flints which would have formed part of the Mesolithic tool kit. They were made by a process known as 'knapping' which involved knocking off pieces of flint from a larger nodule or 'core'. The flakes and blades created, as well as the core, can then be reworked to create finished items. *You can see examples of the worked flints found in the visitor centre.*

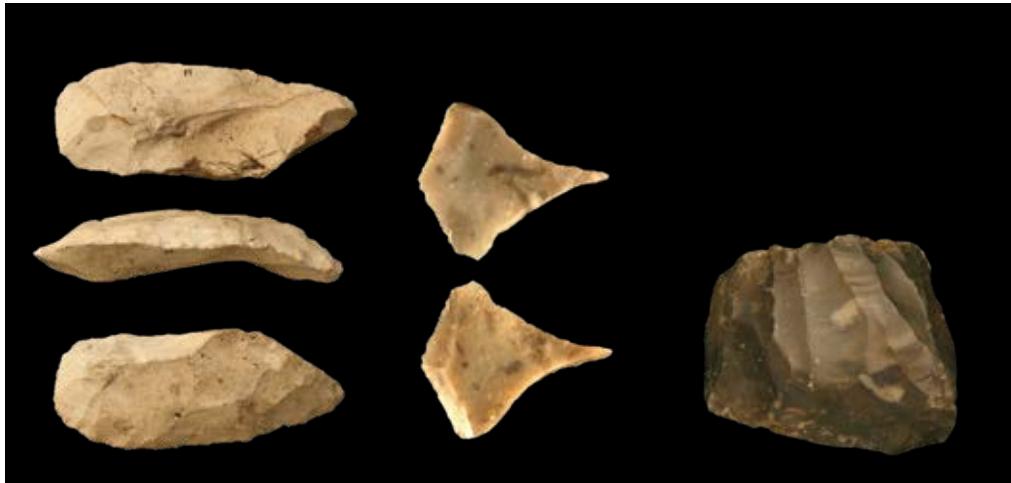
## Finds from the Burnett



Both sides of a scraper from the Burnett



A microlith from the Burnett (only 2.5cm long)



An adze from the Burnett

A burin from the Burnett

A core from the Burnett

Flint find photos by Ruiha Smalley



Volunteers working at the Burnett site

## What is the hand sculpture on the heath?

The wooden sculpture depicts a hand clutching a flint handaxe. If you look carefully at the sculpture, you might also spot the outline of a mobile phone. Our mobile phones today are as essential as a flint tool was in the past. In the Mesolithic period, 6,000 to 12,000 years ago, this area was a scene of great activity, with groups of individuals making flint tools.



The Heath and the Hand

# Crossing the LANDSCAPE

We have a large gap in the story of the archaeology of the park, from later prehistory up to the medieval period. At the time of writing, we have identified limited evidence for Iron Age, Roman or Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon) activity, a two thousand year stretch of time spanning 1,000 BC to AD 1000. The park is crossed by two main north-south running trackways, known as hollow ways. Highlighted on the LiDAR (see also 9 on the LiDAR image p.6), they are among the most visible archaeological features in the park. SWAG is identifying and mapping these routes, as part of work to understand the wider landscape. The western hollow way (on the left in the LiDAR image) was described as an 'ancient waie' in a 1614 deed. If you follow this track out of the park and turn right, a little way down the Shorne Ifield road you will see one of the terraces of farm cottages built by the Darnley family for

their estate workers. This track was still used in the twentieth century as a logging route, with the logs sometimes dragged out by horses. Along this route you can also find an interpretation board, part of the park's heritage trail

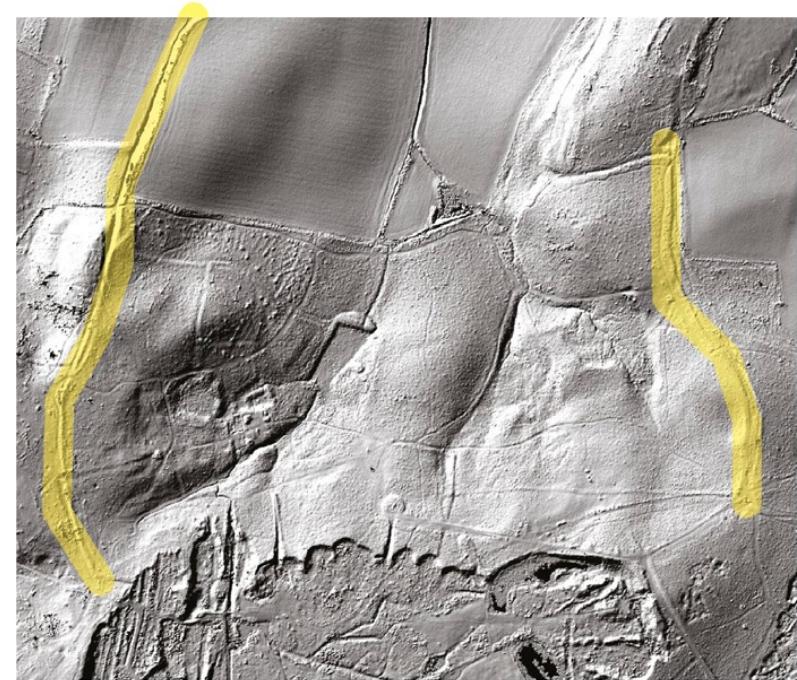
Composed of banks either side of sunken paths, the hollow ways connect several of our archaeological sites together and some acted as boundaries between different pieces of land. Medieval visitors to Randall Manor would have used these routes to walk from Shorne to Cobham. Trodden for hundreds, possibly thousands of years, these features help bridge the gap in time between our prehistoric sites and the medieval archaeology we have recorded across the park. When you visit the park, it's amazing to think how many people have walked these routes before you ...



The north end of our great western hollow way



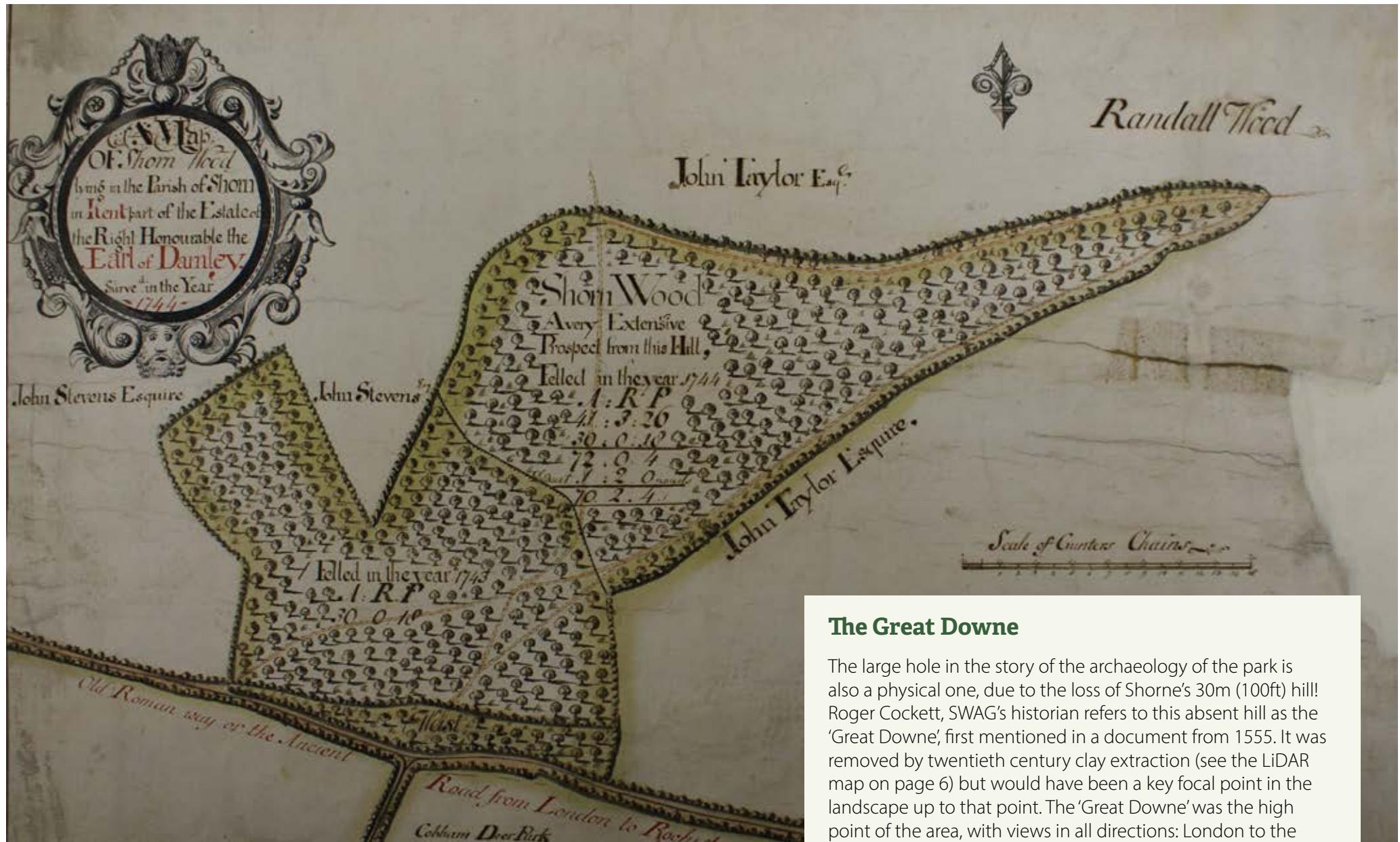
The hollow way as a single bank feature in the park



An excerpt from the park LiDAR, highlighting our two main hollow ways  
Image copyright: Forest Research, based on Cambridge University Technical Services and Valley of Visions Survey data

## What are hollow ways?

The term *holloway* comes from the Old English 'hola weg' meaning sunken road. It is difficult to date hollow ways. They often started life as trackways, level with the surrounding land but were worn deep by the passage of time, people, animals and weather. Some of the hollow ways in the park are still used as footpaths today, whereas others are grown over and abandoned.



1744 estate map, showing Shorn Wood. Reproduction courtesy of Medway Archives Centre.

### The Great Downe

The large hole in the story of the archaeology of the park is also a physical one, due to the loss of Shorne's 30m (100ft) hill! Roger Cockett, SWAG's historian refers to this absent hill as the 'Great Downe', first mentioned in a document from 1555. It was removed by twentieth century clay extraction (see the LiDAR map on page 6) but would have been a key focal point in the landscape up to that point. The 'Great Downe' was the high point of the area, with views in all directions: London to the west, the Thames to the north, the Medway to the east and Cobham to the south. On the 1744 estate map, reproduced above, it refers to a *very extensive prospect from this hill*. We do not know if archaeology was removed by the clayworks, but given its extensive prospect it is possible sites went unrecorded and were lost...

# A medieval FISH FARM?

What's in a name? 'Randall Wood' in the park is named after the lost medieval manor, home to the de Cobhams of Randall. We are not totally certain where the 'Randall' name comes from. One possibility is that it derives from the large and ancient round pond, just northwest of the Manor platform. Place-name expert J K Wallenberg suggested the name Randall came from roundel, meaning a round hollow. We may never know for certain, but recent research by Roger Cockett is giving us a clearer timeline of the development of the site before the Manor was built.



SWAG and the team from Archaeology South-East sampling the ponds.

## The creation of Randall, research by Roger Cockett:

In 1191, a party of nuns from Fontevrault Abbey in France arrived in Thong, to carry out a major project related to the land of Henry de Shorne. The work was funded by the Exchequer and confirmed by Royal Charter, as recorded in a Pipe Roll (a medieval financial document).

Although not made explicit in the historical documents, we believe this project entailed the organisation and construction of three great ponds around the future site of the manor, which still exist today. The construction technique for each was simply to find a narrow valley and to build an earth dam across it. They are not mill ponds; fish farming is the obvious purpose, though no contemporary documents mention the topic. The top pond appears to have been a circular water storage tank, the middle pond a complex handling pond, feeding a lower large pond to the northeast.

The Fontevrault nuns had experience of fish farming at their English "house" of La Grava, or Grovebury in Bedfordshire. The Pipe Rolls record that in AD1191 the Exchequer paid the Fontevraud nuns more than £40 (over £30,000 today), in "the service of the land of Henry de Shorne", which King Richard had granted them by his charter. Similar payments, including for food and clothing continued and increased until AD1199. Longer term, the Abbess of Fontevrault became the tenant in chief of Randall manor for over two centuries.

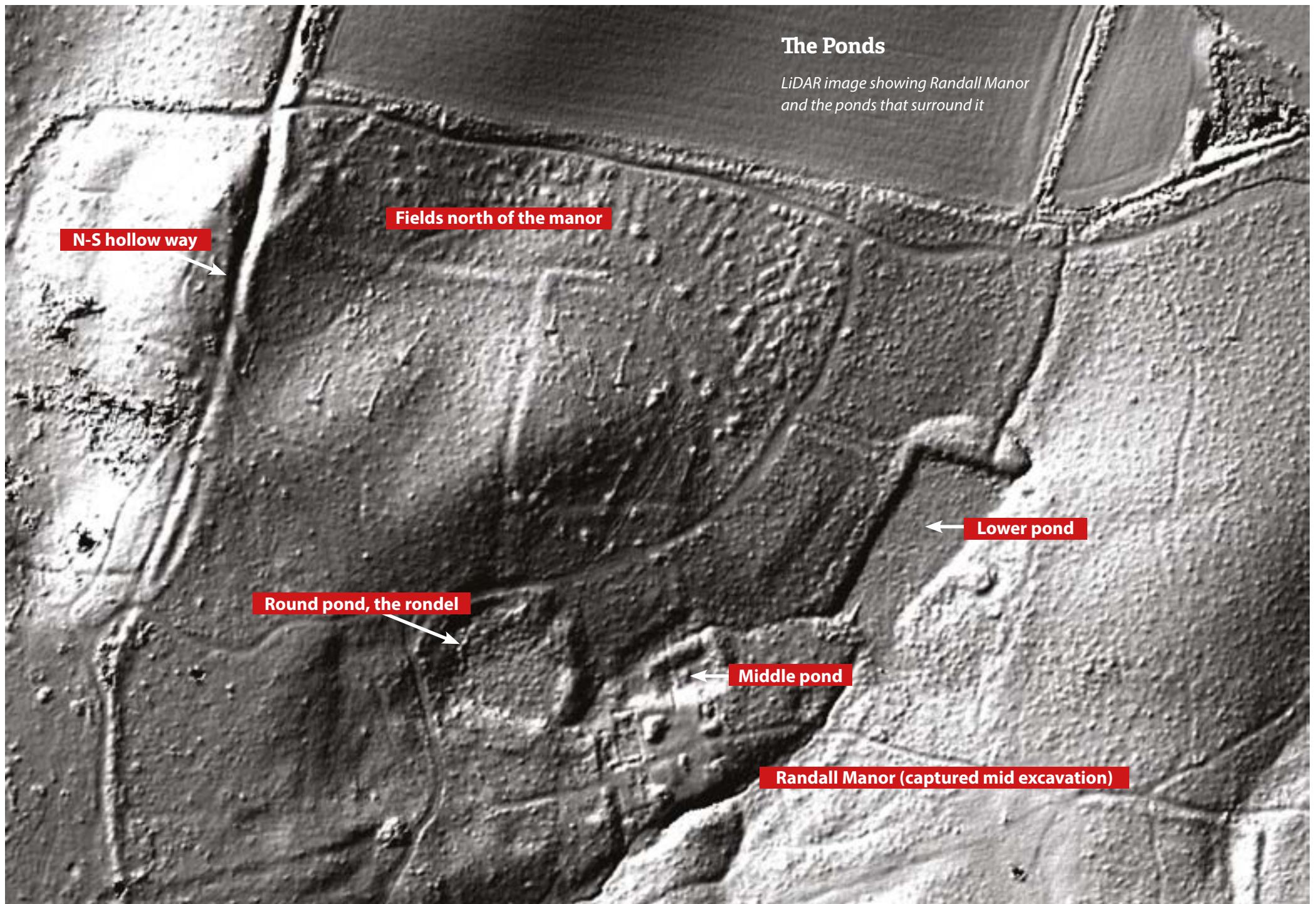
We also know that in AD1191 the Fontevrault nuns began to receive 4s annually (c.£150) "in the service of Henry de Shorne" by Royal charter, in Milton, Gravesend. We can speculate that the reason for Milton's link with Randall and the nuns was transport of the fish from the rondel on the Shorne hillside. It would take less than an hour for a wagon or packhorses to go down the hill to the wharf and the fish shipped on to London within the same day. These payments continued until AD1311/1312 when the record system changed. Were these fish destined for the Royal Court at Whitehall, in London?

It is interesting to note that in AD1198-99, Henry de Shorne was summoned to come before the justices "to make known why he had made waste and destruction of the wood of Cobham." Was this wood of Cobham the place in Shorne where the Fontevrault nuns had been busy since AD1191, carving out the fishponds from the woodland of Henry de Shorne? We know that the boundaries to 'Cobham' often came north of Watling Street and the 20th century clayworks was called Cobham claypit.

In 2024, SWAG worked with Archaeology South-East to sample the sediments in the ponds at Randall. This survey revealed deep sequences, which demonstrate that the ponds make use of natural features, with indications of early medieval activity at the site.

## The Ponds

*LiDAR image showing Randall Manor and the ponds that surround it*



# Key Site RANDALL MANOR

Despite its humble origins as a fish farm, Randall became home to sheriffs of Kent. Most recently, it was the focus of a ten-year community archaeology project (2006-2015). We were not the first archaeological team to excavate at the Manor though! In the early 1960s, local teacher George Dockrell spent two seasons digging at the site with his students. They uncovered part of the kitchen building and service wing...we have even found one of their spades!

## History and archaeology:

The first known occupier of the manor was Sir Henry de Cobham of Randall, whose tomb can still be visited in Shorne Church (see image). The Randall de Cobhams were a branch of the main de Cobham family at Cobham Manor (now under Cobham Hall). Henry was the younger son, and we presume he was given land and buildings associated with the fish farm, though no trace of them has been found to date. Nestled into the side of the 'Great Downe', our lost clay hill, and surrounded by fishponds, Henry started to develop the site in the later 1200s. Randall Manor looked north, towards the more open chalk farmland and the marshes along the Thames.

Sir Henry and his son Sir Stephen oversaw two key phases of building work on the site. In phase one, a rectangular platform was created by levelling up the site. The first building constructed was the aisled hall (see Roger Cockett's reconstruction drawing). This large barn-like structure, with squat walls and a huge, tiled roof, had a central tiled hearth. To the north of the aisled hall, a detached kitchen structure was built, with tiled hearths and a tiled cauldron pit. Henry died in AD1316, and his son Stephen inherited the site and in due course was made a Baron. Sir Stephen later inherited Allington Castle. It seems likely that he split his time between his several properties. We presume that Sir Stephen oversaw

phase two. A large octagonal stone chimney was built onto the south end of the aisled hall, and a two storey stone cross wing was added to the north end. From the upper floor of this new wing, Sir Stephen would have had fine views towards the Thames. A service wing was added to the cross wing (with its own loo or garderobe!) and the kitchen was rebuilt with a substantial stone hearth and range. A brewhouse was also added to the northeast corner of the site. Stephen died in AD1332 and his inquisition post mortem (a medieval record of death, the estate and the heir) mentions a 'capital messuage' (the manor), a windmill (see p.25) and 294 acres of land- a mix of arable, pasture, wood and marsh.

If you visited Randall Manor at this time, you would have stood in a yard, surrounded by a collection of buildings on its south, west and north sides. After Stephen's death the family continued to hold the site into the 1400s, when it was tenanted out. A later range was added to the south side of the platform, though it lacked the grandeur of the principal buildings. The last reference we have to buildings comes in an inquisition post mortem of George Brooke, Lord Cobham, in 1558, which mentions the "manor of Randall with a house and its appurtenances". In the early 1580s we believe the site was comprehensively demolished and used as source of stone for the construction of Cobham Hall. Shortly after this the whole area was covered in coppice woodland, ready for harvesting in 1601 (according to the steward of Lord Cobham). By 1631, the historian Weever writes of the site, "scarce the ruins appear to direct one where the house stood".

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of two key individuals to the excavations at Randall Manor. Albert Daniels was a titan of Kent archaeology and key member of the dig team in the early years. His experience and advice are much missed. Nigel Macpherson-Grant shared his vast knowledge of pottery

with us, with enthusiasm and good humour. He was responsible for spot dating much of our pottery and creating a fabric reference collection. We miss them both.



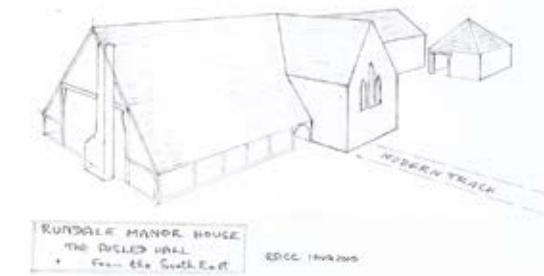
George Dockrell and team, standing at Randall Manor



The east wall of the kitchen, exposed by George and his team



Henry de Cobham of Randall's effigy in Shorne Church



Reconstruction drawing of the manor, by Roger Cockett, showing aisled hall, cross wing and detached kitchen building



Randall Manor c.1320

Looking east, looking across fields and hollow ways to the ponds and buildings of the Manor.

# KEY BUILDINGS of the Manor and new discoveries



*The kitchen at Randall Manor, illustrated by Alan Marshall*



*View of the excavations in 2011, photo by Ken Walton*



*The kitchen under excavation in 2014 (aerial photo by Dean Barkley)*



*The aisled hall under excavation in 2011*



*Excavating the chute of the garderobe or toilet in 2010.*



*The cross wing in 2011, photo by Ken Walton*



*The brewhouse dig underway in 2011*



SWAG gather to see a new wall emerging in 2024

## Recent discoveries at Randall Manor

In 2022, SWAG began to investigate a large platform or terrace to the west of the manor site. Initial test pit investigations yielded a large assemblage of roof tile. Over the course of 2023 and 2024 it became clear that they had found the remains of several medieval buildings. The largest building measure 28m by 14m, though only the flint and stone footings survived. At some point this larger building was replaced by a smaller one, built within the footprint of the larger one. This structure had chalk footings. A third, narrower building sits to the south. The footings of the buildings also contained worked stone, probably recycled from the manor. We do not think these buildings served a domestic purpose, as we have had so few finds! It's more likely that they were used for storage or as barns. Investigations will continue in 2025.



Maidstone Museum's young curators working on the new site in 2024

# KEY FINDS *from the Manor*



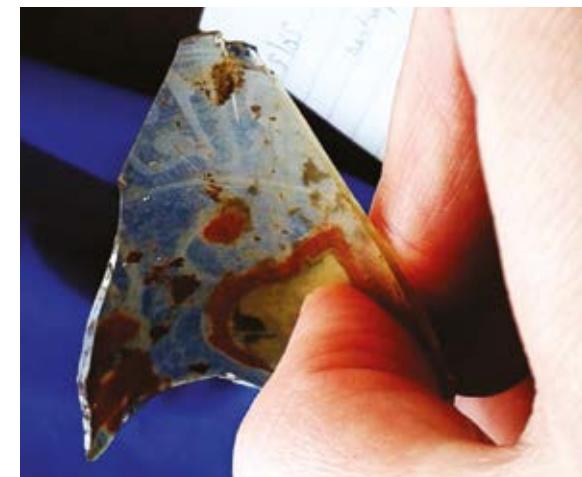
The buckle, a personal item from a belt



A cat paw print on a roof tile, left when the tile was drying



The broken fragments of a carved stone cross, possibly a reused grave marker (50cm scale)

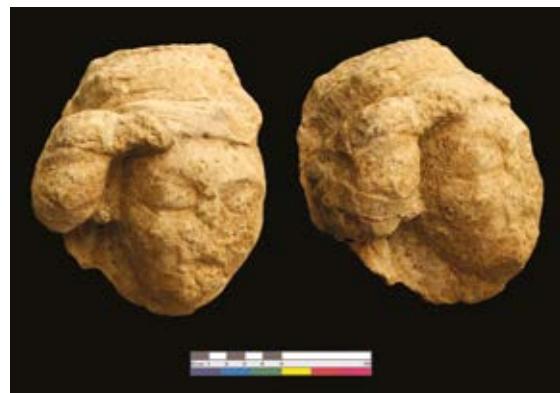


A fragment from an Islamic glass vessel, can you spot the Islamic script?



A lead flask or kostrel, buried under one of the buildings

Finds photos by Ruiha Smalley



A carved stone head or labelstop from a doorway



Two decorated floor tiles from the Manor (the lady tile has a parallel from a church in Hastings)

# Thanks to all Randall Manor **VOLUNTEERS!**

These two pages celebrate many of the amazing volunteers who helped excavate Randall Manor between 2006 and 2015.  
As you can see, we had a keen sense of fashion...



2006 team photo



2007 team photo



2008 team photo



2011 team photo



2012 team photo



2013 team photo



2009 team photo



2010 team photo



2014 team photo



2015 team photo

# *The medieval landscape in c. AD 1300*



*Looking southwest over the medieval landscape, with Randall Manor in the right foreground.*

# The wider MEDIEVAL landscape

Randall Manor was not the sole manor in the area. Research conducted as part of our Cobham Landscape Detectives project revealed a patchwork of medieval estates. Principal amongst these was Cobham Manor, home of the powerful de Cobham family. Recent archaeological work by Alan Ward in the east courtyard of Cobham Hall, suggests there is a substantial medieval building under the hall. The reconstruction painting on the left gives an impression of the medieval landscape. You can also read about some of the other manors in our Cobham Landscape Detectives booklet.

Within Shorne Woods, SWAG have identified an additional medieval feature in the wider park, away from the manor. Up on the heath there is a mound, thought at first to be a prehistoric burial site. Excavation work in 2007 and 2013 revealed a more interesting story. It became clear that gravels in the area (containing Mesolithic flintwork) had been scraped up into a mound, to anchor a medieval post mill. Digging the site presented the interesting conundrum of recording (redeposited) Mesolithic flints in layers over a medieval structure! We believe this is the windmill mentioned in Sir Stephen de Cobham of Randall's will.

The 2013 excavation also revealed that at some point after construction, the cross-shaped trestle timbers had been dug out, perhaps reused elsewhere. Several centuries later in the post medieval period, the location proved the perfect spot for a small brick folly, built to take in the views. The brick footings of the folly can still be seen on top of the mound. In the centre of the footings, we recorded a small, backfilled hole. Research suggested that this was a hole dug by antiquarian George Payne, in 1895! He noted in *Archaeologia Cantiana* "as soon as we commenced digging, the foundations of brick walls were met with" and that "although the result of the excavations was disappointing, by recording what was done future antiquaries will be saved the trouble of reopening the mounds". Little did he know what we would discover 118 years later...

If you visit the site, walk to the western edge of the heath and look at the incredible old, coppiced Chestnut. We know from historical research that this woodland has been coppiced since at least the late 16th century, that's over 400 years!



The windmill mound in the park



The folly structure under excavation in 2013

## What is a post mill?

Post mills are the earliest type of windmill used in England to mill grain in medieval times, from about AD 1300. The whole body of the mill, that housed the millstones and gearing, was mounted on a single vertical post. This allowed the body of the mill to be turned, to bring the sails into the wind. Early post mills were quite small with four sails between 3 and 5 meters long. Post mills often have an arm projecting from them on the opposite side to the sails, that reaches down to near ground level, to facilitate the turning of the mill. Early post mills were also quite liable to blow over in high winds, a solution was to bury the bottom of the trestle in a mound of earth. Our post mill mound sits on the Knoll near Cardiac hill.



A reconstruction of a post mill (image courtesy of Madeleine Smith)

# *The LATER HISTORY of the park*

With the disappearance of the manor and the planting of dense coppice woodland, 'Shorne Wood' (see the 1797 map on the opposite page), enjoyed several centuries of peace and quiet. During most of the 17th century, the Randall lands were held by the Dukes of Richmond (of Cobham Hall), until they were sold in 1695 to pay debts. During this period Randall Heath Farm was built on the western edge of Shorne Woods. In 1696 the farm was bought by Captain Robert Porten, who lived at what became 'Randle Hall' (see the map opposite). Captain Porten attempted to farm the western side of the wood and got into dispute over the payment of tithes, as he claimed he made no profits! He died in 1711 and was buried in Shorne Church, near Sir Henry de Cobham's effigy. After passing through various hands the site was sold to John, Earl of Darnley in 1793. The Darnley family pulled the hall down in 1810 and constructed a carriage drive along the western side of the wood, coming out at Thong Lodge. This building dates to the 1840s and can be seen to the east of Thong Lane. Later, the drive was planted with Rhododendrons and people paid to promenade along the drive and enjoy the colourful displays. To the west of the walk, Laughing Waters (now the Inn on the Lake) was developed in the twentieth century as a boating lake and swimming pool with a Restaurant and Tea Rooms. Shorne Woods also had its very own observation tower, a wooden structure on the top of our lost clay hill (and still remembered by people who contributed to the park's oral histories).

If you wander along the carriage drive today, you will notice that very few rhododendron bushes from the original planting scheme survive. Rhododendron is a non-native invasive species that suppresses the growth of all other species in the woodland. To conserve and enhance the native species, an extensive removal programme took place from 2006-2011 to eradicate the rhododendron (during this process, we discovered the Mesolithic site on the Burnett!). Volunteers help rangers to hand pull any individual plants remaining, to allow the native plants and wildlife to thrive.

## **Shorne Woods' very own gravel quarry**

At some point in the 1800s a gravel quarry was opened on the west side of the carriage drive. The black park gravels were used to surface the carriage drive and the avenues at Cobham Hall. Test excavations on the edge of the pit revealed further evidence for Mesolithic activity.



ENTRANCE TO RHODODENDRONS, COBHAM.

No. 4089

*Postcard of the entrance to the carriage drive (Roger Cockett collection).*



The 1797 ordnance surveyors drawing  
of the park (north at the top).

From the British Library  
Collection: (identifier)  
002OSD00000027BU00446000

# The CLAYWORKS

In 1936 Lord Darnley (who lived over the road at Cobham Hall), leased part of his estate to the Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Ltd (APCM). The 'Great Downe' in the park, was geologically important as a large deposit of London clay. This clay, when mixed with chalk, formed two of the key ingredients in cement. The first task was to clear the extensive chestnut coppice. Over a thirty-year period, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the clay hill was dug away, turned into a slurry and pumped along the A2 to the Bevans Cement works in Northfleet, some 7 miles. Water for the process was piped uphill from Martin's cement works on the banks of the River Medway and held in a reservoir on-site. Raw clay was also transported by truck to Crown & Quarry cement works at Frindsbury. The clay was excavated by 'navvies' - excavators with a large bucket - into a 'hopper' and moved across site on conveyor belts and 2' 6" narrow-gauge railways. Even the extracted flint had a use. A company called Flintag crushed and coloured it to use as aquarium gravel; some was sent to potteries for use in ceramics and it even ended up as a component in non-slip floors! Many of the ponds and banks in the park are a legacy of the quarrying activity. If you find yourself walking along a straight path in the park, chances are you are following the line of a former conveyor belt. The works also feature on an interpretation panel by the *spider tickling the worm* sculpture.



A reconstruction of the clayworks in operation, looking south towards the A2, by artist Alan Marshall



1967 aerial photo, showing the extent of the clayworks, with the A2 below (Kent County Council collection)

## Memories of the clayworks

SWAG have collected the memories of people who worked at the clayworks. One of these workers was Peter Dadson, who remembers:

*As far as general operation was concerned, the navvy (mechanical digger) dug the clay out and tipped it into a hopper, the hopper fed the conveyor belt, and the conveyor belt fed the clay into the coarse (also known as rough) wash mill.*

*There were two wash mills, the first was the coarse/rough wash mill and the second, the fine wash mill. The clay was tipped into the coarse/rough wash mill and washed and sent through sieves to the fine wash mill. The men would have to go into the coarse/rough wash mill monthly to clear out the flint and gravel that had built up. From the fine wash mill, it went into the slurry tank and was then pumped all the way to Bevans cement works at Northfleet.*

*The conveyor belt would be moved as and when required. The train track was also moved but they had to be careful that the ground could take the weight of the engine and loaded wagons. There is one section of the conveyor, left in situ, that could be seen above the surface of the larger of the two fishponds but has now sunk into the clay.*

*The slurry was pumped from Shorne, through a pipeline, alongside the A2, to the 'Tollgate pumping station' there were three Orenco pumps that pumped the slurry to Ebbsfleet. I'm not sure of the exact route the pipeline took from the Tollgate, but I think it followed the line of the river Fleet and finally to the quarry. The three pump operators were Billy Tremain, Albert Stroud and Mr Taylor. The pumping station was kept running 24 hours a day and was covered by the three-shift system. An example of one man's shift pattern is: Saturday 10 to 6, back in Sunday 2 to 10, back in Monday 6 to 2. Only one man allowed off at a time and the shifts would be covered by the other two men doing 12-hour shifts. Nobody took weekends off as these were paid at a higher rate, time and a half for Saturday and double time for Sunday. If there was a need for extra cover there was a backup man, trained to run the pumps, at both Shorne and Northfleet that could step in.*

*On one occasion, the pipeline split at the Tollgate and there was slurry all over the A2 that stopped the traffic. A mechanical shovel was sent out to clean up. They were working into the night when the police stopped them as there was no rear light on the shovel. The problem was solved by two men with red lights walking behind the shovel for the rest of the night.*

*We used to go into the canteen for a sit down and a cup of tea, it was a typical works canteen, not particularly inviting!*

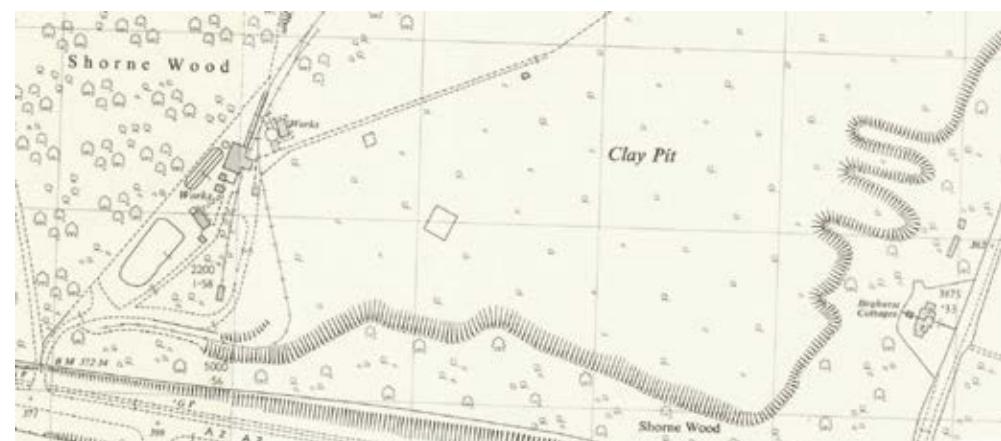
Jack Hollis grew up at Laughing Waters, Cobham and had childhood memories of exploring the clayworks:

*I have fond memories of my sisters and friends playing in the clay works on the other side of the A2, now known as Shorne Country Park. We used to watch the big digger load buckets full of clay onto the rubber conveyor belts that ran on two short v-shaped upright rollers and one wide flat one underneath to move the belt. There were large gaps between the clay on the conveyors while the digger dug the next load, so we used to jump on the belt for a ride but were often chased off by an employee. The belt ran right across the clay pit from the Brewers Road end to the slurry tank near the A2.*

*From another part where clay was dug there was a small narrow gauge railway track with an incline up to a large hopper. The engine was possibly a coal fired box shape. It hauled v-shaped wagons which had a central pivot up the incline. They could tip either way up into the hopper, where they were tipped out to a fleet of open back lorries waiting below. I think each wagon load was one lorry load. They were then transported off possibly to Aylesford.*

*When work finished for the day we would play on the tipper wagons rocking them from side to side. I also recall helping ourselves to coal from a large heap that was used to fire the engine.*

**Visit the Shorne Woods Archaeology Group website to read more oral histories of the park.**



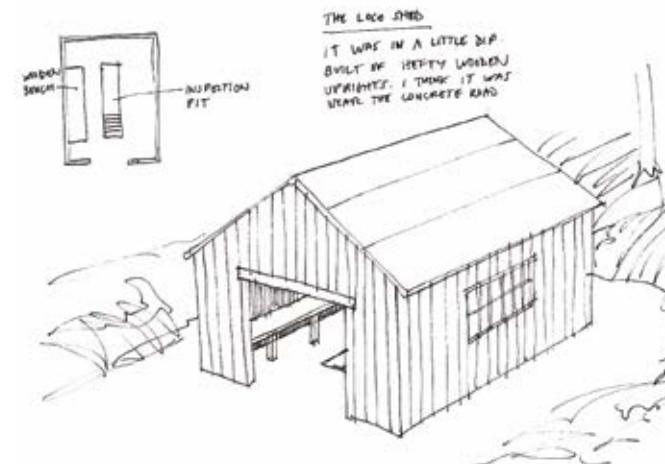
A 1964 OS map extract showing the extent of the works

# Key structures at the CLAYWORKS and discoveries in lockdown

## Excavating the engine shed (SW corner of the site) by John Beaumont

The Shorne Woods Archaeological Group excavated the site as part of a wider study to record the remains of the clay works infrastructure. We began, with help from the North Downs Young Archaeologists Club, by uncovering about 80 metres of the track bed up to the engine shed. Most of the wooden sleepers were still present, many with the spikes for holding the rails still in situ. As we progressed nearer to the building, we found several angle irons driven vertically into the ground with evidence of a timber revetment holding back the bank on the west side. On the east side very close to the shed entrance we uncovered a dump of discarded parts that included: bolts, nuts, locomotive axle boxes, cylinders, piston liners, gaskets, spikes, chain drives, leaf springs, cogs and conveyer belt rollers...

Only the concrete base of the shed survives, and our excavations confirmed its width and the location of the backfilled inspection pit. When the clay works closed, contractors were brought in to demolish all the buildings and take everything away. It was hard work digging out the clay backfill but slowly we extended the trench south until we found the first step down into the inspection pit. It was constructed of concrete with timber sleepers set flush within the concrete and running along both sides on which the rails would have been laid. We had several finds, including an R. A. Lister & Co. Ltd. cylinder head (dated 1929). Conspicuous by its absence was any evidence of those that worked there. No tins, bottles, tools or any other waste that you would expect to find in such a workplace. Maybe they were just very tidy!



Reconstruction of the engine shed, courtesy of Alan Marshall and his memories of the site



The steps down into the engine shed inspection pit



*The tree in the cart: on the edge of the clayworks an abandoned narrow gauge railway cart hosts a hornbeam tree which has grown out of it, over the past 60 years.*



*The engine shed railway cutting, with in-situ sleepers, excavated in 2021.*



*Remains of the clayworks air raid shelter, excavated in 2016*



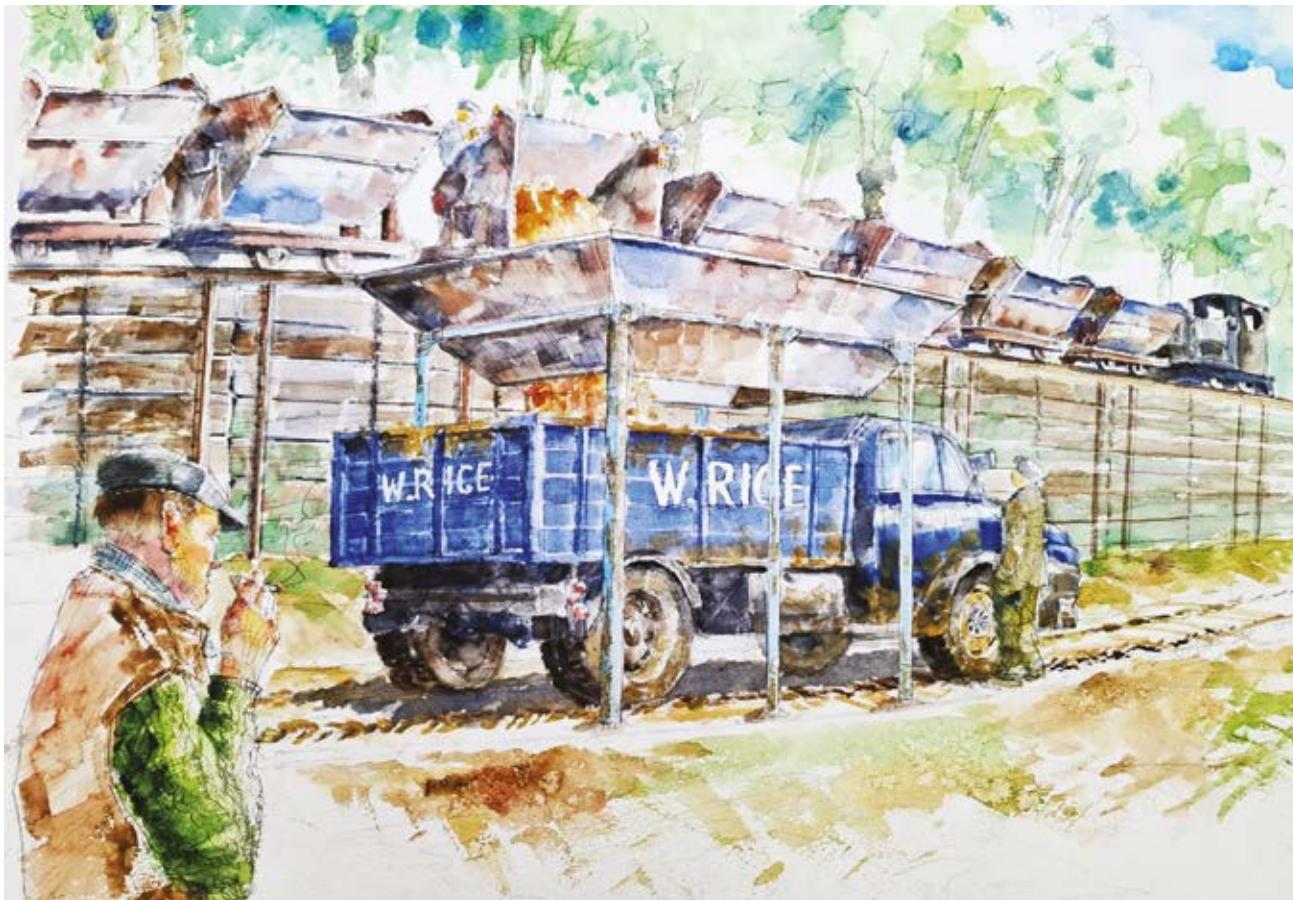
*The exposed foundations of the clayworks canteen block in 2022 (1m and 2m scales)*



*Finds from the clayworks, including an axle!*



*Excavating the narrow-gauge railway (laid on a base of corrugated iron) in 2021. The site used Ruston and Hornsby diesel engines*



An illustration by Alan Marshall of how the revetted, lorry loading bank may have worked.



Revetment for the lorry loading bank (1m and 2m scale)



Exposed pipework at the site (2m scale)



The spider tickles worm sculpture, made from clayworks machinery, by sculptor Steve Portchmouth

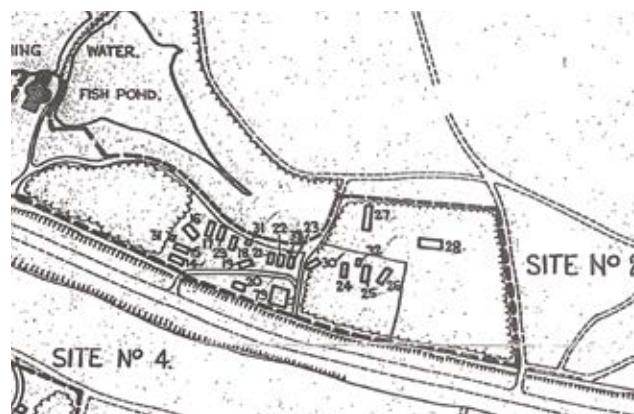
# An RAF CAMP for an airfield

During World War Two, Shorne Woods hosted the Royal Air Force (RAF) at RAF Camp number 2, one of five camps built to serve Gravesend airfield. In contrast to the quiet park of the present day, in the 1940s this was the front line in the Battle of Britain. German fighters and bombers passed daily overhead to bomb & strafe the airfield, Gravesend and London. The area shook as Anti-Aircraft (AA) batteries targeted German planes. One AA battery was just over the road at Cobham and there was a mobile battery on Woodlands Lane. In the park we have found hundreds of pieces of anti-aircraft shell, fired at enemy aircraft and primed to explode at set altitudes. We even have evidence from the LiDAR survey that Brewers Road was straddled by two bomb craters, and we believe there is at least one further crater in the park. The camp was part of a network of dispersed sites, built in late 1940/early 1941, housing RAF personnel away from the Airfield, under the natural camouflage of the woods. The land was leased from the Cobham Hall estate by the war department for the princely sum of £7.15s per annum (equivalent to £300 today)!

The remains of the camp sit on the southern boundary of the A2, near the Inn on the Lake (which also hosts camp structures). The site consists of two air raid shelters, built to protect RAF servicemen from German bombs and red-hot AA shell splinters raining down on them. There were also several nissen huts and a lavatory block, built as temporary accommodation. Our structures were home to the 'other ranks'. Some of the officers were billeted at Cobham Hall. Elsewhere in the area, we know there were two military radio masts, one in the grounds of Boghurst Cottages, now a kennels and one on our lost clay hill (see Ben Parish and Reg Rootes memories on the SWAG website). The archaeology team have excavated and recorded the location of the hut bases, and the camp has its own interpretation board on the heritage trail around the park. Part of this work has seen the shelters restored, with bat grilles added. Please respect the sensitive archaeology and biodiversity of the site if you visit.



An RAF camp in the woods, a sketch by James Elford



Wartime plan of RAF Gravesend. Building no's 14-28 are quarters, 29 and 30 washrooms, 31 and 32 toilet blocks, 33 a picket post and 79 (now under the A2) a fuel compound.



1946 aerial photograph of RAF Gravesend

# Finds from the RAF CAMP



Reconnaissance Corps badge



Collection of AA shell splinters and fuses, which rained down on the camp



Military webbing slider



Collection of Bovril jars

All photos by Ruiha Smalley

# Post war activity at the RAF camp

After World War Two there was a severe shortage of housing. A combination of bomb damage, returning military personnel and shortages of building materials put a great deal of pressure on local authorities and government to provide suitable accommodation. As military camps such as the one in Shorne Woods became vacant, homeless families would move into the huts and adapt them for family living. Often labelled as 'squatters', there was a great deal of resistance from the authorities to the camps being taken over. In late October 1946, the Ministry of Health made arrangements to transfer the lease and the running of the camp to Strood Rural District Council. The nissen huts in Shorne Woods were made of corrugated iron, providing little protection from the cold weather in winter and the hot weather in the summer. The families left the camp to take up residence in newly built homes by 1954. Many of these new homes were at Riverview Park, built on the old airfield!

Finds from the post war occupation of the camp include floor polish & biscuit tins and even the remains of lost toys, found by some of our Young Archaeologists. Other items from the buildings include parts of beds and drainpipes from the loos!



Green Line Bus biscuit tin (Photo by Ruiha Smalley)



Mansion floor polish tins (Photo by Ruiha Smalley)



Toy car, possibly an RAF staff car  
(Photo by Ruiha Smalley)



HMS Vanguard battleship toy model  
(Photo by Don Blackburn)

# An ARMY CAMP

On the east side of the park, along Woodlands Lane, we know that the Army also had a temporary tented embarkation camp, in preparation for D-Day (which emptied of troops by the end of May 1944). Our survey work has recorded the concrete base of the canteen block, a large circular concrete fuel bund and several foxholes or slit trenches. Reg Rootes in his *Memories of Shorne Woods* (available on the SWAG website) takes up the story:

*Leading up to D Day, 6th June 1944, a tented army camp was set up with a few soldiers arriving at the start and eventually about 200 men in 30, 8 man tents in the woods next to Woodlands Lane. The Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, The Royal Engineers, The Royal Artillery and the Durham Light Infantry were among the different regiments, there were others but I can't think what they were. We used to go to the camp to ask the soldiers for cap badges and ended up with quite a collection but they have long since disappeared. There wasn't much evidence of heavy artillery but one day we did see a truck towing a cannon.*

*During the hours of darkness there was a guard at each end of Woodlands Lane who issued the famous challenge 'Who goes there friend or foe?' we were never brave enough to say 'foe' just in case they shot us!*



*The concrete base of the canteen block in 2010 (2m scale)*



*The excavated concrete steps to the canteen block (0.5m and 2m scale)*



*Young volunteers in one of the excavated slit trenches in 2010*



*The excavated concrete bund in 2015 (2m scale)*

# Post war to present...

Following the closure of the clayworks in the 1960's, structures and buildings were demolished over the next decade. In 1977 the then Lord Darnley offered the 'former Cobham clay pit' to the County Council for a park, with Shorne Woods Country Park opening to the public in 1987. In 2001 Randall and Brewers Woods were purchased with Lottery funds to expand the park and in 2006 the new visitor centre opened to the public. Community archaeology projects began the same year, with our first season at Randall Manor...and continue to the present day!

Thank you for reading this booklet and showing an interest in the fascinating history and archaeology of the park.

Andrew Mayfield

Spring 2025.



Burnt out car by the lake, 1980s, now one of the fishing lakes!  
(KCC archive)



Main events area, playground and picnic site, 1980s. At the back of the photo you can just see 4 concrete blocks, possibly the footings for one of the lost radio masts (KCC archive)



Shorne Woods visitor centre today (KCC image)

Add some colour to  
Randall manor!  
Enjoy this  
colouring in sheet  
by local artist  
James Elford



**For more information:**

Shorne Woods Archaeology Group: [www.shornewoodsarchaeology.co.uk](http://www.shornewoodsarchaeology.co.uk)  
(including the park oral history project)

Contact: [swagkent2023@gmail.com](mailto:swagkent2023@gmail.com)

Pop into the visitor centre to learn more and visit our archaeology displays

Follow us on Facebook at ArchaeologyinKent

