



Welcome to Issue 10 of the Lossenham Project newsletter, keeping you up to date with the latest news and any events you can get involved in.

An introduction

"Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards."

(Søren Kierkegaard)

The Project reaches its first anniversary on the 14th of this September. None of us, who attended the first meeting at Lossenham Farm, knew quite what to expect. We could not have imagined that, within one year, we would be so deeply engaged in a venture touching on so many aspects of the environment here at the intersection between Marsh and Weald. The discovery of Lossenham Friary has given us a focal point to work around and this month, the dig carries on for two weeks, boosted, we hope, by mellower weather.

I hope this issue of the newsletter gives a flavour of the many activities which you can join and help changing the well-being of people and nature locally, as well as our understanding of those who walked here before us.

Åke Nilson, Chairman, The Janus Foundation
(chair@janusfoundation.org)



Nick trowelling in Trench 2

Reeding the lie of the land

At Lossenham we were recently very fortunate to receive a visit from Richard Starling, an expert on the subject of reedbed management. Through carefully tending and harvesting this crop of grass, the reedbeds he manages have been providing thatching materials to the industry for decades.

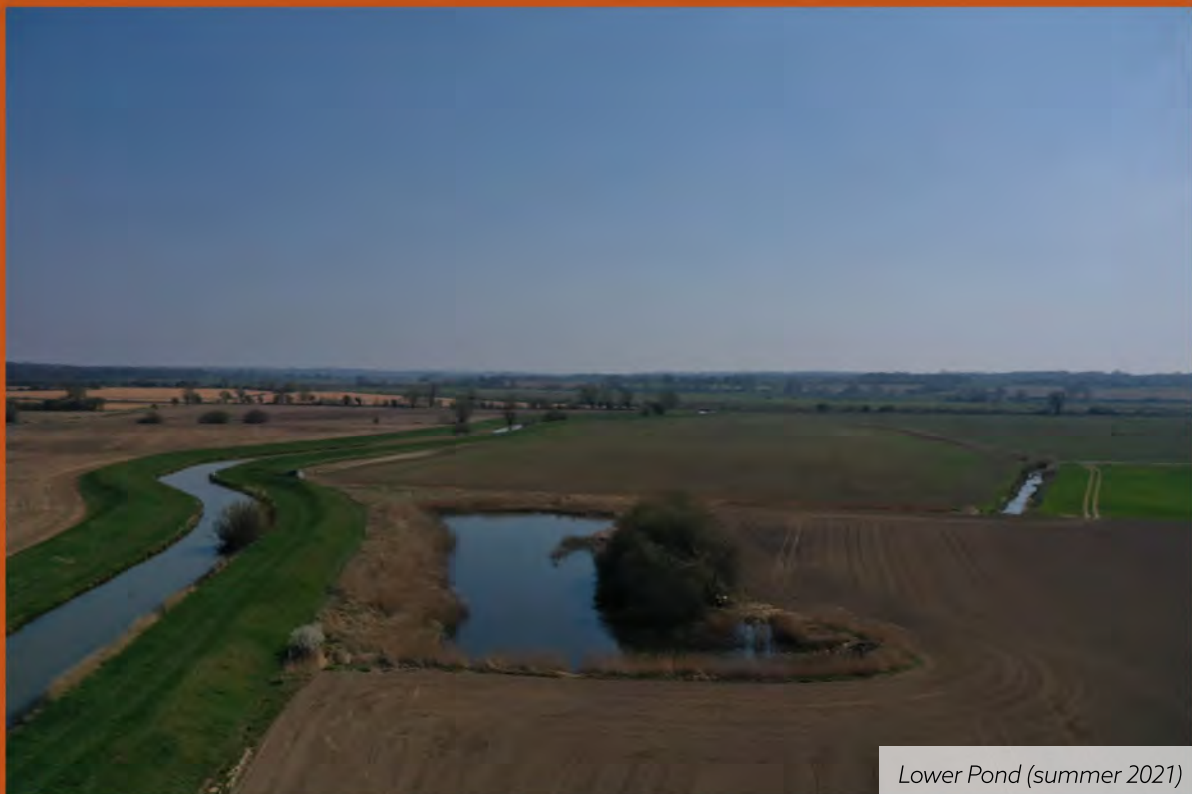
Early indications from existing reed at Lossenham suggests that we already have reed of good quality (wall thickness) and that 'straightness' will be enhanced by rotational cutting.

We will be assessing the most suitable areas on which we can produce reed for thatching, making use of existing drainage channels and low-lying areas to create the right hydrological regime for reed growth. We will trial several areas, 'seeding' them with our endemic reed from elsewhere on the farm.

The reasons are several-fold and in combination are somewhat compelling. Firstly, the financial return from reed production (once established) are likely to be better than existing use as grazing marsh. Secondly, it represents a productive use of low-lying land in a challenging environment. Thirdly, the root system (rhizomes) of reed helps to create soils (peat), raising the level of the land whilst also locking up carbon in the process. And finally, managed reedbeds support a range of wildlife including iconic species such as water vole, otter and bittern.

Unfortunately we have very limited historical information about the harvesting of reed in the Rother valley, and would keenly invite anyone who has any information about past reed cutting to please get in touch.

This is an abbreviated contribution by Simon Weymouth - Read the full article on the Project Blog at <https://lossenham.org.uk/blog/2021/09/06/reeding-the-lie-of-the-land/>



Lower Pond (summer 2021)

Working with wills for Newenden and beyond



Although the focus of the Lossenham Project this summer has been on the excavations at Lossenham Priory, the Wills group has continued to function in the background. Members have been expanding the Wills database, downloading more PCC (Prerogative Court of Canterbury) wills and transcribing others. Consequently, when we had our meeting on Zoom on 3 September, it was great to find that people remain enthusiastic and are keen to do more as we move into the autumn.

We are fortunate that Rebecca and Sue M are used to dealing with databases and they will produce a crib sheet for the group, making practical points on improving this growing resource. We are equally grateful to Jason for transferring the data from the original pilot database to the new spreadsheets.

We want to bring the results of this research to a wider audience next summer, when we hope to arrange a mini-conference. With that in mind, part of the meeting was devoted to discussing potential projects. Sophie, Jane and Sara will work on the relationships involving the friars and the local community, but that will require the Canterbury Consistory and Archdeaconry Court wills from the county archives, in addition to the PCC wills. The more modern history of Lossenham is more accessible and Jason has taken this as his project, while Annie and Keith are going to explore family alliances for early modern Newenden and Northiam. This is all very exciting and group members will be writing pieces for the newsletter as we move from 2021 into the new year.

*Sheila Sweetinburgh
(Principal research fellow, Canterbury Christ Church University)*



Rubble foundations - Trench 1

The glazed floor tiles from Lossenham Friary: A first look

A diverse range of decorated glazed floor tiles are known from Aylesford friary, founded by the Carmelites in 1242. So far, no decorated glazed tiles have been found at Lossenham; but we have several complete, and many fragments of medieval glazed tiles. The tiles are of several sizes. Most are just over an inch thick (25-30mm). The most common type seems to be tiles with a yellow (or very light brown) glaze, measuring just over 5 inches (127-133mm) square. This type can be found across the site.

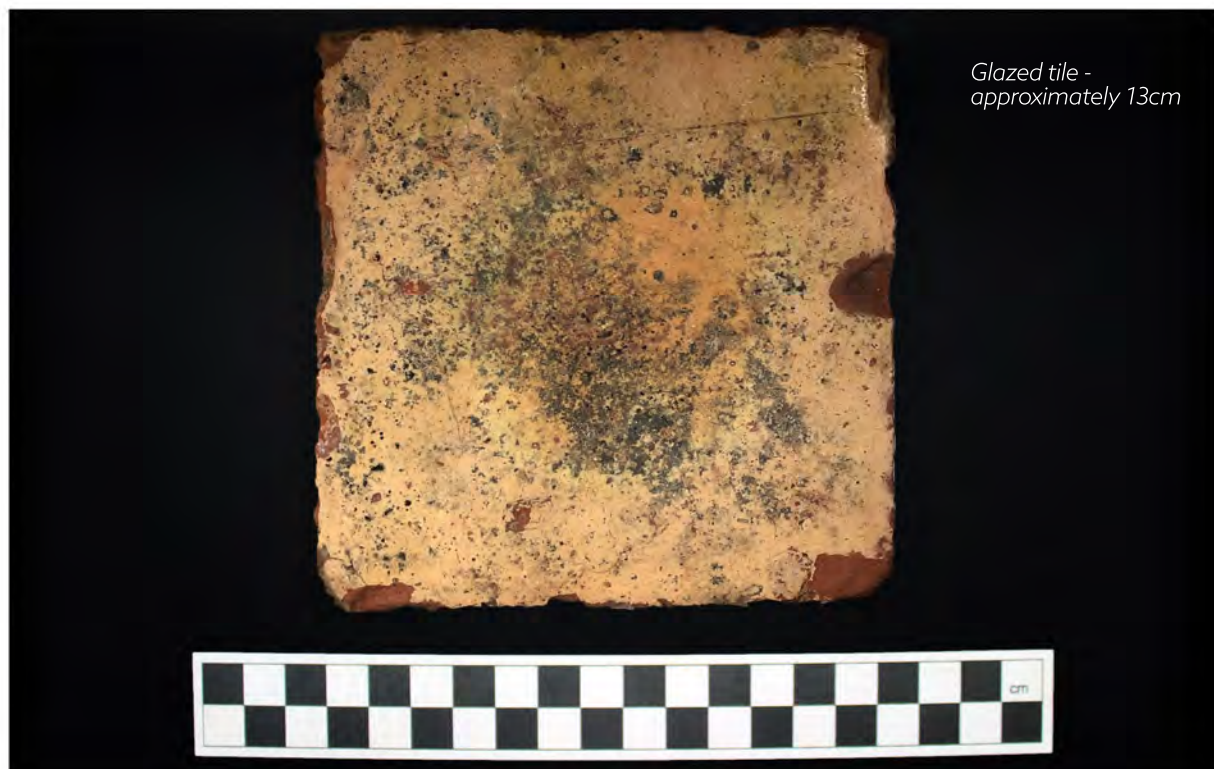
A smaller number of tiles have a dark green glaze, which can appear almost black when worn. An example from trench 2 measures 5 inches square, and thus may have been laid in combination with similarly sized yellow tiles to form a chequerboard pattern. A ditch in trench 3, however, produced part of a much larger, green-glazed tile, though still being only a little over an inch thick.

Finally, in trench 1, two fragments of a much thinner tile, just over half an inch thick (15mm) were found. These have a light green glaze and do not appear to have been found anywhere else on the site so far. If we are lucky some tiles will be found in situ, and some decorated examples may yet turn up. For now, it is fascinating to handle them and imagine those who walked across them when they formed the floors of the friary.

This is an abbreviated contribution by Andrew Richardson - Read the full article on the Project Blog at <https://lossenham.org.uk/blog/2021/09/06/the-glazed-floor-tiles-from-lossenham-friary-a-first-look/>



Fragments of floor tiles found



Glazed tile -
approximately 13cm

Quote by Brian Livesey, volunteer



Jane and I had a fascinating day volunteering - we were greeted by Annie who gave us a briefing on the history of the priory that is being excavated, including the murder of one friar by another and the fact that the local vicar was outraged to be undercut by the friars on the price of a burial!

After being equipped with trowels, buckets, brushes and kneeling pads, Andrew set us to work excavating (very slowly and gently) an area of wall. It is quite hard work, kneeling on the ground and carefully scraping the earth from the tiles and bits of pot, especially as on the day we were there it was also blisteringly hot! However, it is exciting to think you might be just a few millimetres from uncovering something really important and fascinating...



Andrew and Jason digging in Trench 1

Working at Lossenham, you can appreciate why the friars chose this setting for their priory - it is very peaceful and quiet, with beautiful views over the River Rother and surrounding countryside.

It was interesting to meet the professional archaeologists and the other volunteers - a mix of villagers and members of local archaeological groups. We will be returning to volunteer again - it is quite possible that the dig will continue for ten years or more, so it will be good to welcome the archaeologists (both professional and amateur) as they become part of our community.



Permissive Access withdrawn from Lossenham

The farm gates at Lossenham have been deliberately left open to allow the sheep to get on to the road and into the fields. This has happened over a dozen times in the last few weeks causing serious problems and putting the lives and welfare of the sheep at risk. If anyone knows who is doing this, please call the Police.

Permissive Access has therefore been withdrawn, but we are working hard to reinstate access for local residents, as soon as possible, once new security and access measures have been put into place.





Upcoming Events - Dates for the Diary!

You do not need to sign up to a full week on the excavation but we do ask for a minimum half-day commitment. Days start at 10am and will finish at 5pm, with breaks. No experience is necessary and all equipment is provided, all you need is weather appropriate clothing and sturdy footwear.

We endeavour to make all our projects as accessible as possible. If you have particular requirements please let us know in advance so we can make adjustments to accommodate you.

If you are looking to pursue a career in archaeology let us know and we can look at designing a training program to fill in any knowledge gaps.

Excavation dates

Monday September 13 to Friday September 24
(Thursday 16 and Tuesday 21 are rest days)

Saturday October 2 to Friday October 8
(Wednesday October 6 is a rest day)

You can find
Annie's Dig Diary
for this month on
the Lossenham
Project website.

