WANTED: NEW SECRETARY

WIRG is looking for a new Hon. Secretary, following David Brown’s announcement that he intends to stand down at the 2011 AGM in July. If you feel you would like to get more involved in the running of the Group, and have some time on your hands, please consider offering your services. Hon. Secretary is probably the most important role in the Group, and the job includes taking Minutes at Committee meetings, processing applications from new members and helping to organise meetings. If you are interested, David will be happy to give you more details. His contact details are on the last page.

WINTER MEETING 2011

About 30 members met at Nutley Memorial Hall on the 29th January to hear two talks given by WIRG members. Simon Stevens recounted the archaeological project he organised with children from the primary school at Newick to investigate the site of a possible deserted settlement site that had been identified by the late Fred Tebbutt. Simon had outlined the project, which was supported financially (and appropriately) by the Tebbutt Research Fund, in Newsletter 52 (Autumn 2010), so an account of his talk here is unnecessary, but he elaborated entertainingly on the delights and pitfalls of working with children, and impressed the audience with some of the survey techniques he had been able to employ with his colleagues from Archaeology South-East.

Tim Smith and Brian Herbert, similarly, employed a range of techniques in their presentation of the Group’s involvement in the Historical Metallurgy Society’s Conference on Experimental and Accidental Archaeology, held at West Dean, near Chichester, in early September. In a combination of video and straight delivery, they expanded upon the description Tim had also written in the last Newsletter. WIRG had gone to the conference well prepared, and it had been an excellent opportunity to meet with others working in experimental iron-making, as the range of furnaces of all shapes and sizes demonstrated. The pictures and film showed that there were many different variations of the process by which bloomery iron could be made, and that we are a long way, still, from a clear grasp of how iron makers in antiquity worked.

After the talks, the usual, delicious tea laid on by Nutley WI provided the opportunity for members to chat and exchange news.

Chairman, Shiela Broomfield, with Professor Henry Cleere in discussion over a cup of tea
ANNE DALTON  
1920-2011

Many members will be saddened by the passing of Anne Dalton in her 91st year, on 29th January 2011. A regular attender at meetings until last year, Anne had been an active member of WIRG for more than thirty years. She had been a past member of the Committee and had contributed to the Bulletin on a number of occasions. Anne had been a regular forayer until the years caught up with her, and many will recall that what ever piece of kit suddenly became necessary, her rucksack invariably contained it.

Much of her life and background was involved in the Diplomatic Service, but she became interested in archaeology after she and her late husband moved to Sussex in retirement. As well as Wealden iron she enjoyed many other historical pursuits, among them a key role as leader of groups recording in detail the interiors of the churches at Mayfield and Buxted for the National Association of Decorative and Fine Arts Societies (NADFAS).

Those who knew her delighted in her straight-forwardness, her probing questions and her enquiring mind, which led to her pursuing projects with great determination. She will be greatly missed.

AN EXPERIMENT IN NATURAL-DRAUGHT SMELTING

Some time ago the idea of a “convecting furnace” was tried out at Pippingford, but the furnace was too short and the air-holes not quite big enough. If you make a bloomery furnace tall enough, a chimney effect should draw enough air in to reach iron-smelting temperatures. Some fairly straightforward arithmetic suggests that about two and a half metres is high enough, provided that the air inlet is big enough. There are good examples from other parts of the world where bellows do not provide the draught for smelting.

We tried the tall furnace idea in my garden at Rushlake Green in September and again in November. It roared and sucked in the approved manner, but the results were mixed. At the first attempt it was allowed to get very hot as quickly as possible and the charge of ore melted, ran through the charcoal, and set into a lump. There were some isolated flakes of iron in this lump, but it could not possibly be called a bloom. On the second try the air-inlet was constricted to start with, and a smelting temperature reached after about four hours. This time iron was formed in abundance, but the furnace was not hot enough to allow the slag to run freely and no single bloom formed. Air intake control is an important issue!

We will try to forge iron from the second smelt later on.

The natural-draught furnace at Rushlake Green

Six WIRG smelters took part and were joined by Jake Keen (one of the most experienced bloomery smelters in the country) and who is now interested in convection-only furnaces. The research issues that are connected with this experiment are:

- The shortage on convincing tuyeres in the archaeology of Wealden iron
- The manpower (and hence social history) implications of not using bellows, and,
- The relative efficiencies of large and small furnaces.

Two design ideas were tried out in building this furnace. First, it was set into a bank, rather like the furnaces at Little Furnace Wood seem to have been. Second, the top part was formed of loam and straw daub around a large bundle of sticks. The sticks were burned out later. Both of these ideas seemed to make the process easier, so it might be useful to think of how either practice might show up in the archaeology.

Schematic view of the convection-only furnace described.

There will be at least one more “bellows-free smelt” and members who want to join in can e-mail me: jonathan@avens.co.uk

Jonathan Prus

WEALDEN IRON
Bulletin of the Wealden Iron Research Group
Volume 31, 2nd series, 2011
Contributions to the Editor, David Crossley, by 31st March (contact details on back page)
FORAY REPORTS

Furnace Field and Strawberry Wood,
Benenden
October 2010

Furnace Field

South of Benenden, local historian Dr Ernie Pollard had located a Furnace Field on a 19th century map. A visit by Brian Herbert and Reg Houghton some years ago failed to find any evidence of a furnace. The purpose of this foray was to see if a second search would shed light on the origin of the name. The geological memoir for Tenterden refers to granules of sphaero-siderite in the local clay, and to a pond bay possibly associated with the iron industry.

The stream to the east of Furnace Field was searched for slag from about 100m downstream from the south. No slag was found. An earthwork in the form of a sinuous bank appears to have been spoil from excavations on the east bank. A further earthwork having the appearance of and position appropriate for a pond bay, would have dammed the stream at the northern end of Furnace Field. Furnace Field itself could have been the site of a quarry, as its profile did not match that of the bank on the east side of the stream, and a certain amount of quarrying had taken place to the south of Furnace Field on the same side of the stream.

It was considered unlikely that Furnace Field had any connection with the iron industry. Possible sources of the name included a corruption of a local family name, ‘Furner’.

Strawberry Wood

Some large lumps of slag had been located in a stream in Strawberry Wood having appeared since the winter’s rains of 2009-10. This site is close to two other bloomery sites found in March 2009 at New Barn Shaw and sharing similar geology. The lumps of slag were located in the stream bed within 10m upstream of a newly-restored culvert. A slag heap approximately 0.3m thick and measuring 2.5m long by 1.5m wide was seen in the eroded bank of the stream on its NW side. No other slag was found within 50m upstream. The search was not continued further upstream as it was considered the geology did not warrant it.

The slag lumps were subsequently removed by WIRG member, Victor Kellett, and cleaned.

David Brown

Brede High Wood
November 2010

This foray looked at the main gill in Coneyburrow Wood on the eastern side of the Woodland Trust’s Brede High Woods complex. It had been postponed from the previous year due to the weather but this day was mild and dry and ten members attended. During the archaeological assessment of the site by Nicola Bannister in 2008/9 bloomery slag was found in the stream. In addition there is an outcrop of Wadhurst Clay in the north-eastern corner of the site and the Tithe Map identified the former farmland NE of Coneyburrow Wood as Minepits Field.

The stream was followed from where the public footpath crosses it on the southern edge of Coneyburrow Wood. Some sections were impossible to access due to the dense vegetation that has come up since this part of the wood was coppiced a few years ago. The stream and banks of the gill were regained above this area and small quantities of slag were occasionally found in the stream but no evidence was found to indicate where it had come from. The gill was followed to its head below Goatham Lane where the frequency of slag increased. After some investigation of the verges of the lane it was discovered that the road itself appeared to be the source of the slag which had been used to build up the surface, presumably where the stream had cut back into it over the centuries. Modern brickwork now prevents run-off from the lane from eroding the bank.

At this point we were approx 1000m from the site of the Chitcombe bloomery with its plentiful supply of slag.

From here we followed the woodbank that marks the northern edge of Coneyburrow Wood and found the small pit in Minepits Field, now a 50 year old broadleaved plantation. We then re-entered Coneyburrow Wood to inspect the very large pit that lies just within the old wood and just on the edge of the Wadhurst Clay. The shallower northern half holds...
water but the deeper southern part does not, suggesting that the clay deposit had been dug out and the bottom is now in the underlying Ashdown beds. Discussions suggested that the workings could have had various phases of use including mining ore, brick clay, marl and most recently clay for the dam of Powdermill reservoir. We then returned to the cars with two people checking the partly silted up tributary gill that runs down from the smaller pit for a 100m or so before joining the main gill.

Dave Bonsall

Weald Forest Ridge Woodland Survey and Identification Tool Kit Testing
Waste Wood, Buxted
November 2010

In November 2010 nine members of WIRG met in Waste Wood, Buxted to trial woodland survey toolkits for the Weald Forest Ridge Project. Waste Wood has been split into different plots in multiple ownership. The part of the wood surveyed is called Garth Wood. The underlying geology is the Ashdown Beds and the wood is on a fairly gentle slope from the main track. To the north and east the wood is incised by a typical deep woodland gill whereby the ground drops abruptly away to a small stream. It was a bitterly cold day but dry.

The group was split into three groups of WIRG members accompanied by a member of the Weald Forest Project Team. The aim of this survey was for the three groups to trial the toolkits and suggest how they might be improved. Two of the groups had a LiDAR image to help in locating archaeological features during the survey and all three groups had an OS map, both maps were at a scale of 1:2500. The various groups located and identified banks, trackways, charcoal platforms and two potential bloomery sites.

In two locations where the ground had been disturbed by rabbit burrows, slag was found on the surface. In this area the ground has been levelled over a considerable area, say approx 150 metres by 90 metres, forming a sizeable platform. On the lower edge of this area slag spreads out along the top edge of the gill stream for approximately 20 metres, possibly from two separate sources. This may not be the case as the slag was most evident at the surface where there had been animal activity. The ground drops steeply away to the valley bottom at an angle of 45 degrees for about 8-10 metres where the slag has been tipped over and spread out.

Another possible bloomery site was located some 100 metres to the north-west at 0.25 metres above present stream level stream level. There was a sub-circular spread of darkened, fine burnt soil with some large lumps of slag.

The results of the survey and the participant’s comments will be fed back into the process of refining these toolkits which will be available on the internet when they have been further tested and refined.

Vivienne Blandford

Tabell Ghyll, Ashdown Forest
January 2011

Members of the Field Group paid a visit to an area known as Tabell Ghyll, which is directly north of Garden Hill along a stream that belongs to the Medway river system. It was mainly an overcast day; there had been heavy rain overnight and there were many ephemeral streams. The geology is the Ashdown Beds and the stream cuts through the woodland, dropping steeply for 500 metres after which the ground levels out. This stream is upstream of the iron working site at Newbridge. The woodland cover now is young, mixed woodland mainly of young birch but with older stands of yew. To the north of the gill is coppiced chestnut woodland. Along the stream boundary bank is evidence of older, managed trees of coppiced hornbeam, beech, some yew and holly. The bracken cover is fairly light except to the south where the tree cover is less and the ground levels-out at the top of the woodland gill limits.

One bloomery was already known and another was found, with uneven, disturbed ground, some tap slag and possibly part of the furnace lining found in a

On looking at the LiDAR Slope Analysis it has been noted that there may be further bloomery sites along the stream edge as what was previously thought would be charcoal platforms may be similar to the second site found. This underlines the importance of ground truthing LiDAR images but also how these images can inform what may be found before going out on site. In areas with woodland cover and a ground cover which would otherwise mask features this is very helpful.
tree throw. It is interesting to note that both bloomery sites had, in close proximity, both a charcoal platform and a circular platform which showed no evidence of burning. It is possible that these could be either working or living areas.

During the foray evidence of more than fifteen charcoal platforms were found. A boundary bank ran alongside the stream and along the top of the gill edge. On the stream side, running roughly in an east-west direction, was an older hollow way which dropped down to stream level at an obvious crossing point where three to four hollow ways from the south converged. There was possibly a sandstone slab in the stream (at some depth) and a single hollow way ran in a north-easterly direction uphill towards the road. At this point, on the north side of the stream was a raised level platform area bounded on two sides by a hollow way. The soil on the platform was dark and contained pieces of charcoal. Whilst this was not a charcoal platform it may have been where charcoal was stored before being carted away. The soil in the hollow way was, in places, very dark with some evidence of charcoal leading to the conclusion that charcoal had been carted out of the immediate area, in some quantity. Also noted in the survey area were a couple of saw pits and possible military dug outs.

Once again we have proof, from the extant archaeological features, that this woodland has retained the evidence of a busy working landscape associated with the early iron industry and perhaps the production of charcoal was also associated with the nearby later iron working site at Newbridge.

**Vivienne Blandford**

**Witley Park Furnace**  
**February 2011**

A small but select group ventured into the westernmost reaches of the Weald to a site that was not discovered until the 1970s. Witley Park is one of a group of ironworks in south-western Surrey whose history has yet to be fully revealed. Yet it was clearly a productive site as the abundant glassy slag testifies. First visited by WIRG in 1977, a detailed survey was made by Haslemere Archaeological Group three years later but it was not annotated. The purpose of this latest visit was to add flesh to the bones of that survey and to reconsider the interpretation of the site in the light of more than 30 years’ Group experience of examining blast furnace remains.

The site is pleasantly accessible for, although wooded, there is little undergrowth so the topography can be easily appreciated. The HAG survey proved to be very thorough and work began by individually exploring the site and annotating copies of the plan. The team were then able to compare notes and re-examine areas where opinions differed to arrive at a consensus. In some particulars the interpretation of the earlier visit was disagreed with, but with many we concurred.

Of particular interest was a part of the site that had neither been noticed on the previous Field Group visit nor had been included in the survey. An apparent former spillway channel lies to the north of the site, under different ownership, and the lack of evidence of where the water might have been run off the pond (long since drained) caused much debate.

The present owner of the site showed a few of the team around his house, which appears to have been contemporary with the ironworks, and may have been built to house key workers.

**COUNTRYWISE - ITV**

Members might like to watch out for the new series of the ITV series, *Countrywise*, which will be broadcast from April this year. Each programme focuses on a particular area of the country, and in the new series the Weald is given special attention. A sequence on the Wealden iron industry is to be presented by Bettany Hughes who is better known, perhaps, for her broadcasts on the archaeology and history of the Classical world. Filming for the sequence took place in early January at three sites in the Buxted area: Waste Wood, Heron’s Ghyll and Oldlands.

**SNAPE WOOD, WADHURST**  
**Opportunity to view old mine workings**

Kent Underground Research Group (KURG) is resuming its investigations of the short-lived, mid 19th-century iron mine in Snape Wood, south of Wadhurst.

Mike Clinch, KURG’s Secretary, is willing to show WIRG members some of the workings when his group is on site. If you are interested in taking a look at this fascinating relic, Mike can be contacted on 01322 526425 or mike@mikeclinch.co.uk.
The southern end of the Crawley High Street has been the setting for several archaeological investigations in recent years, all of which have uncovered evidence of medieval ironworking. Further archaeological work was carried out on the site of the former Iceland store last year, resulting in the discovery of more evidence of ironworking, including a hearth apparently used for the roasting of iron ore.

A small-scale archaeological excavation was undertaken in early 2010 following an evaluation of the site by trial trenching in 2009. The investigation was hampered by heavy falls of snow and the presence of Japanese Knotweed at the site, necessitating the implementation of containment measures to stop the spread of this highly destructive invasive species. Despite the problems, an area measuring c.30m by c.20m was successfully examined.

The most obvious remains were those of a group of partially demolished post-medieval buildings. Examination of historic maps had suggested that masonry would probably be encountered, but in the event the ground plans of a number of buildings shown on the maps of the 19th and 20th centuries could be reconstructed from their surviving brick and stone foundations. The remains of a blacksmiths shop and associated yard survived set back from the High Street. Documentary research suggests that a blacksmiths was operating at the site from at least the 17th century. Large quantities of contemporary post-medieval pottery were also recovered.

The probable ore-roasting hearth under excavation

Underlying features included a number of small pits, nearly all containing smelting and smithing slag. Although pottery dating from as early as the late 11th century was indentified at the site, confirming the presence of medieval ironworking in the vicinity, the majority of the features contained mid-14th to the mid-16th pottery. These included the ore roasting hearth which consisted of a pit with evidence of burning in situ (shown by a ‘halo’ of clay baked to a reddish orange). Unfortunately the feature had been somewhat mutilated by a modern drain, but the complete absence of smelting or smithing slags in the fills suggested it was not used for either of these processes. Therefore it is presumed to have been used for the roasting of ore prior to smelting, indicative of the continuation of smelting in the town at this time. The presence of pits almost entirely backfilled with smelting slag (with some pottery of a similar date) supports this view.
However there is very little evidence of any activity at
the site between the mid-16th century and the
establishment of the blacksmith's probably 100 years
later; there is certainly no evidence of smelting at or
in the vicinity of the site after 1550. This decline was
arguably representative of a wide-scale
transformation of Crawley's fortunes at that time, and
has been noted on a number of other sites. With the
introduction of water-powered forges in the 14th and
15th centuries, and the appearance of the blast
furnace in the Weald by 1500, iron production sites
simply moved away from the town, leaving it 'high-
and-dry'.

Simon Stevens

HAMMER AND FURNACE PONDS
a new website
www.hammerpond.org.uk

"... Oh, the hammer-ponds of Sussex
and the dew-ponds of the West
Are part of Britain's heritage,
the part we love the best."

So sang Flanders and Swann, and the hammer ponds
of the Weald, probably half of which are furnace
ponds, are a legacy of the iron industry that lend
distinctive character to the landscape of the region.
Too often, in fact, a great many ponds have been
quite erroneously claimed to be hammer ponds when
they are not. Helen Pearce's website dispels some of
the myths surrounding these lovely stretches of water
and draws attention to them, both as evidence of their
past industrial use but also as places of beauty that
can be visited.

The pond at North Park furnace, near
Fernhurst

After the introductory page the website is
organised under four main headings. A section
entitled History provides the background to the
industry and its products, setting the ponds in their
industrial context. The most important section is the
Gazetteer, which is divided into county pages and
lists over 40 ponds, all of which can be seen from
public footpaths. Many of these ponds are illustrated
in attractive photographs and each is located with a
grid reference and accompanied by brief details of the
associated iron workings and other features of local
interest. A section on Museums lists places open to
the public where there are displays or artefacts
relating to the iron industry, and a link to the
museum's website is given. Finally, Sources for
further reading and links to organisations, such as
WIRG, are to be found on a further page.

This is a useful website for denizens of, and
visitors to the Weald, as well as those with a deeper
interest in the industrial archaeology of the region.
Helen Pearce will be publishing a book on the same
subject for potential visitors to the sites she has listed,
to keep in their pocket as they discover some of the
most beautiful parts of what Kipling described as "the
secret Weald".

RECENT PUBLICATION

Hodgkinson, J.
British Cast-Iron Firebacks of the 16th to mid 18th Centuries, 2010; hodgersbooks, 277pp; illus;

This long-awaited book provides a comprehensive
history of the manufacture and decoration of
firebacks, tracing their production from the early 16th
century until the middle of the 18th century.

Designed to protect the rear walls in domestic
fireplaces from heat damage and deflect warmth into
the room, firebacks' manufacture is outlined in detail;
from the earliest simple wooden boards to ever more
sophisticated carved stamps. Different means of
assembling the patterns are explored, including use of
edging stamps and the application of tools to the
mould, with a particularly attractive example of a
fireback patterned by repetitive use of pastry and
butter moulds. Recurring examples of the same

16th Century fireback with pastry moulds and
furniture fragments used as decorative stamps

'stock' stamp in varied patterns on different plates
allow us to recognise the likely furnace source.
Firebacks are often thought of as mere by-products of the
Wealden blast furnace industry, yet they seem to
have had greater local economic significance than we
perhaps imagined. Crown gunfounder John Browne
attempted to establish his own monopoly of fireback
manufacture in order to keep his furnace and staff busy during lulls between ordnance contracts. Firebacks soon became a lucrative sideline for cast-iron producers.

Most of the book is devoted to illustrations with extremely knowledgeable discussions of shape and design. It is rewarding to see some old favourites included as well as many rare and unfamiliar examples. There are useful classifications into different series, such as the Royal Armorial, the Pounsley, and Livery as well as ‘personal’ or family patterns, and variations on these. As well as recurrent decorative trends such as family crests, Tudor roses and fleurs-de-lys, later ‘whole’ patterns often reflected various local political issues of the time, including the Marian persecution, the Civil War and Charles II ‘commemoratives’.

Eventually demand seems to have exceeded national, at least Wealden, supply as continental producers met the London market for firebacks. In the 17th century imports from the Netherlands and Siegerland in Germany filled the gap, their higher, narrower design more suitable for new domestic hearths, and their popularity stimulated by the accession of William of Orange. Continental influences are revealed in the local adoption of various biblical and classical themes used and reused in later elaborate designs. The section on continental examples assists us to identify these more easily. The author even provides various clues to help recognise original firebacks from later (sometimes much later) recast copies.

This work provides a welcome in-depth look at one aspect of Wealden iron production, building extensively on the previous monograph on the subject by Manwaring Baines and demonstrating how firebacks reflect contemporary social history. The text is presented in an attractive format with 342 well-defined illustrations - fire backs are notoriously difficult to photograph well – with notes on each. It was also nice to read about the history behind the collections of fire backs at Hastings and Lewes museums.

This book will be very helpful when out fireback spotting on trips to the larger houses, hotels and sundry other places in the southeast where firebacks surprise us. It should also interest owners of these plates and anyone involved with the history of domestic interiors.

Helen Pearce

We welcome the following new members:
- Phil Lambert, Stockport, Cheshire
- Mr & Mrs Withers, Smarden, Kent
- Dean Langridge, Furnace Green, Crawley
- Keith Mason, Hove

The Eden Valley Museum, in Edenbridge has recently been given the artefacts, plans and report on the excavations at the blast furnace at Scarlets in Cowden by David Crossley, who led the dig in 1975.

The museum has mounted a small exhibition of the finds, which opened on 2nd Feb, and which will be of interest to members. Details of opening times etc. can be found at [www.evmt.org.](http://www.evmt.org/)
DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

FERNHURST FURNACE OPEN DAYS 2011
Saturday 10th September
Sunday 11th September
www.fernhurstfurnace.co.uk

TEBBUTT RESEARCH FUND

Grants are available towards research into any aspect of the Wealden Iron Industry or subjects pertaining to it. Applicants may be individuals or groups, and the application can include any associated expenses, such as travelling and photocopying. The applicant should write a letter giving details of themselves together with relevant information concerning the research envisaged.

Applications to the Hon. Secretary

WIRG CONTACTS

Chairman: Shiela Broomfield, 8, Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, TN11 9HD.
s.broomfield@elementi.demon.co.uk

Vice Chairman: Tim Smith, 15 Hazelwood Road, Partridge Green, Horsham, RH13 8EX.
tjsmith560@btinternet.com

Hon. Secretary & Field Group Secretary: David Brown, 2, West Street Farm Cottages, Maynards Green, Heathfield, TN21 0DG.
wirghonsec@hotmail.com

blandford@blandford.co.uk

Publications: Brian Herbert, 1, Stirling Way, East Grinstead, RH19 3HG.
brianherbert@btinternet.com

Bulletin Editor: David Crossley, 5, Canterbury Crescent, Sheffield, S10 5RW.
d.crossley@sheffield.ac.uk

EDITOR’S NOTE

Thank you for your contributions and please keep them coming. Newsletters are published in March and November each year. Items for publication, normally not exceeding 500 words, should be received by 14 February and 14 October, respectively, for inclusion in the forthcoming issue. Please send by email preferably, by CD or hard copy; I can work with most PC formats. Line drawings and photographs are welcome (colour or monochrome; the newsletter is printed in monochrome but is published later on the internet in colour). Please send them separately, not embedded in the text. Digital images need to be at least as big as their expected published size, ideally at 300 dpi or more.

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Publications are available from the Publications Officer, Brian Herbert (see Contact List above)
Cheques payable to WIRG (except where marked* - payable to J. S. Hodgkinson)

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