

# WIRG

Wealden Iron Research Group

NEWSLETTER No.9 NOVEMBER 1988

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Withyham, Hartfield, Sussex, TN7 4BH.  
Tel: Groombridge 754.

Letter from the Chairman

Dear Fellow Members,

In 1967, at a well attended meeting at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, WIRG was born. Twenty one years have passed since then and we might feel some justification for a glance back at what has happened during that time. No more than a glance, mind, for too much looking back inhibits our forward vision.

The original aims of the Group; surveying of known sites, exploration, records searching and excavation, all continue and as the primary structure of the Group has developed from a confederation of, what turned out to be, a few local sections to more centralised organisation, so too has the nature of the membership, with a smaller nucleus still in the Weald but a greater number beyond its boundaries. What has also changed is that the goal of a book to supercede Straker's has been attained.

To trace the history of the Group would be superfluous as that has already appeared as an appendix to 'the Book'. More important, in my view, is that the future continues to hold exciting opportunities for WIRG. The number of recent publications listed below is a testament to the lively interest in Wealden Iron that exists in academic circles, and the

imminent publication of reports on the excavations at Broadfield and at Beauport Park, and the very recent excavation at Blackwater Green Forge (the first of a water-powered site for ten years) will provoke further discussion and pose further questions for WIRG to seek an answer.

Furthermore, Wealden Iron is an important element in the heritage of South East England and public knowledge of the industry is, on the whole, very limited. I was amused and somewhat amazed at the surprise, evinced by the reporter of a lecture I gave in Guildford last March, that there had been an iron industry in the Weald as early as Roman times! We do have an educative role and must be more effective in it, but our primary purpose, that of research, should have first claim on our attention, and that is why both the programme of forays carried out by the Field Group and the researches of individual members are equally important elements in the Group's continued existence.

Please keep the Committee informed of any aspects of Wealden Iron and its related subjects, especially recent publications, locations of locally gleaned information about sites and also possible threats to them. As usual, I wish you all a very pleasant Christmas and an interesting New Year.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Hodgkinson.

## CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Edmund Teesdale on the award of a Doctorate of Philosophy for his study of the Wealden Gunfounding industry in the sixteenth century (see below).

## WINTER MEETING

The Winter Meeting was held on 23rd January in the Friends' Meeting House in Lewes, where we had a most interesting talk about the lives of members of "The Westernes and Gotts: two inter-related families of ironfounders" given by Ms. Ruth Brown, a senior curator at the Royal Armouries, Tower of London.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING held on 25th July 1988

In the morning we met at the Rye Foundry and were given a very interesting guided tour by Mr. Tom Lucas of the foundry, which, fortunately, was closed down for its annual spring-clean so we were able to have a good look round in safety. He took us through the process of casting, from making the mould from sand mixed with resin then to the furnace where the iron is melted and then to the casting bed and finally we saw where the finished products are tidied up by having the rough edges filed down. Mr. Lucas had made a special fireback with the initials 'DMM' on it which he presented to Mrs. Dot Meades.

After lunch we met again at the Rye

Community Centre Association Hall where we listened to an illustrated talk about the Armada connection with Rye by Mr. Kenneth Clark who had many slides from the Armada exhibition in Greenwich.

The AGM followed. The following were elected:

Officers and Committee for 1988/89

Chairman: J. Hodgkinson, 7  
Kiln Road, Crawley Down,  
Crawley, Sussex.

Vice Chairman: Mrs. D.M. Meades,  
Brackenside, Normansland, Fairwarp,  
Uckfield, Sussex, TN22 3BS

Hon. Treasurer: R. Houghton,  
17 Woodland Close, Crawley Down,  
Crawley, Sussex, RH10 4JZ

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. S. Broomfield,  
8 Woodview Crescent,  
Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent.

Hon. Editor: D. Crossley, Division  
of Continuing Education, The  
University, Sheffield, S10 2TN

Executive Committee:

D. Combes, B. Herbert, A. Scott, A.  
Stevens, E. Teesdale, Mrs. S. Swift,  
Mrs. D. Hatswell.

## FIELD GROUP ACTIVITIES

The annual meeting of the Field Group was held on 11th September and ideas were discussed for the coming foray season.

The following programme was arranged:

22 October

A foray to Cocking Forge, near Midhurst to be led by Mr. T.E. Evans.

26 November

A foray to Bardown, a Roman iron-working site, to be led by Dr. H. Cleere

17 December

A foray to Panningridge Furnace to be led by Mr.B.Herbert

21 January

A foray to Heathfield Furnace to examine the site thoroughly, to be led by Mr. J. Hodgkinson and Mr. R. Houghton

25 February as above

18 March as above

22 April

An excavation of a bloomery in the Sharpthorne area to be led by Mr. J. Hodgkinson.

Field Group members please note different description of activity on the 22nd April foray to Sharpthorne.

Further details of these forays may be obtained

from Mrs. S.Swift, Hamfields, Withyham, Hartfield, Sussex, TN7 4BH.

## TEBBUTT RESEARCH FUND

Applications are invited from individuals and groups for grants from the Tebbutt Research Fund towards research into the Wealden Iron Industry.

It is anticipated that approximately #200 will be available from the fund in 1989 and anyone interested in receiving a grant should write a suitable letter of application, giving details of themselves together with relevant information of the research envisaged.

Applications should be sent to the Hon. Secretary of WIRG, Mrs.S. Broomfield, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge,Kent, TN11 9HD, to reach her by 31st March 1989 when she will pass them on to the Research Fund Panel for consideration.

## YOUNG ARCHAEOLOGISTS OF SUSSEX

YAS has just been formed as part of the Sussex Archaeological Society and wants to hear from young people in Sussex. It has two sections, one for 8 - 12 year olds and one for 13 - 17 year olds. It is hoped to start activities in various parts of Sussex during 1988/89. If you are looking for a lively, informative introduction to archaeology and history then this could be the club for you.

Membership of YAS will bring:

The YAS Newsletter - and the chance to write your own articles.

Fieldwork.

Workshops and Events.

Exciting Outings and Field Trips.

Digs.

The YAS Badge.

Local History.

Membership of YAS will cost #2.50 a year. A small charge will be made for some activities, and trips will be priced according to demand and cost of transport.

If you, or anyone you know, are interested in becoming a Young Archaeologist of Sussex please send your name and address and age together with an S.A.E. to: Paul Smith, Education Officer, Barbican House, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1YZ.

DO NOT SEND ANY MONEY YET you will be sent a proper application form in due course.

#### NEW PREMISES FOR THE WEST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE

In Spring 1989 the West Sussex Record Office will be moving into a new purpose-built building. The new Record Office is already rising on a site not far from the present office. When completed it will provide more spacious searchrooms, and better facilities for visitors. By bringing all the Record Office's holdings under one roof, it will also enable a more efficient production system to be provided, than is possible

in the present cramped accommodation.

Moving the entire Record Office is of course a mammoth job, involving as it does the removal of thousands of boxes of precious original documents from both the John Edes House, and the archives out-repository and Modern Records Section at Tangmere Airfield, outside Chichester. Interruption of the Office's service to the public is inevitable, although every effort is being made to keep it to a minimum.

The timetable of closure and restricted services is dependent on the completion date of the new building. At the moment it is anticipated that the Record Office will be completely closed from 20 February to 31 May 1989. From 1 June it is hoped to be able to provide a very restricted service. It will still not be possible to produce any original documents, since they will still be in transit or being re-stored. However the Office's large collection of microfilm and parish register transcripts will be available.

There will be slight delays in dealing with correspondence throughout the period of the move, when all available staff are fully occupied with re-boxing, re-storing and compiling indices for the original document collection. From October 1989 we hope to resume our full services to the public.

Any changes in this timetable will be announced as they are

decided, and firm dates for the closure period and the restricted service will be given as soon as it is possible to do so. Some disruption to people's research is inevitable, but the County Archivist hopes that all past and potential users of the West Sussex Record Office will appreciate that the purpose and the end result will be to provide an even better service to our public.

Further details of dates may be obtained from Mrs. McCann of the West Sussex Record Office, tel: 0243 777983.

#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS - compiled by J.S.H.

H.L. Blackmore, *The Boxted Bombard*, *Antiquaries' Journal* 67;1 (1987), 86-96; with photographs and illustrations from contemporary manuscripts.

The provenance, construction and possible origin, of what is better known in the Weald as the Eridge Mortar, are discussed. Mr. Blackmore reveals that the piece, which was recovered from Boxted Hall in Suffolk in 1979, is indeed a wrought iron bombard, and can be compared to a number of similar examples in Europe which date from a lengthy period between the end of the fourteenth and the middle of the sixteenth century. From contemporary pictorial and documentary evidence of pieces of the same type, he places the example from Boxted in the mid-fifteenth century and suggests, such was the increased activity in the Wealden ironworks of that period, that there is no reason to suppose otherwise than

that the bombard was a product of the Weald. The piece is now on display in the Tower of London.

An interesting footnote points to the demi-culverin preserved at Pevensey Castle being among 28 such pieces cast by William Levett in 1548. Thus the 'ER' below the tudor rose on the barrel might refer to Edward VI and not to Elizabeth I.

R.M. Willatts, *Iron Graveslabs: a sideline of the early iron industry*, *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 125 (1987), 99-113; with tables, map and photographs, and a catalogue of early Wealden iron graveslabs on microfiche.

The subject of the WIRG Summer meeting in 1987. Miss Willatts considers the geographical distribution, design, execution and subject matter of these plates. Of the 106 known to the author, all but 20 are of Wealden origin (the 107th plate, subsequently discovered in Essex, is also from the Weald).

The catalogue referred to above has been reprinted in *WIRG Bulletin* 2nd Ser. 8 (1988) 16-47.

B.G. Awty, *A Cast-iron Cannon of the 1540s*, *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 125 (1987), 115-23; with photographs.

Brian Awty, who is well known to WIRG members, has drawn together evidence for the provenance of an

iron saker, of unusual dodecagonal section, which has been brought to the Tower of London from Padstow in Cornwall. He concludes that it was probably cast in late 1544 at Buxted, possibly by Arcangelo Arcano, an Italian bronze founder responsible for a number of pieces of contemporary ordnance characterised by polygonal sections. It would thus be the earliest extant example of cast Wealden ordnance.

R.F. Tylecote *The Early History of Metallurgy in Europe* Longman; 1988; 391 pages with diagrams, tables, photographs, index and bibliography.

Professor Tylecote's latest book is, the flyleaf states, intended primarily as a practical aid to the professional archaeologist, and as a reference source for the student. After an initial discussion of the origins of metallurgy and trade, the subsequent chapters include ores, the origins and design of smelting furnaces, the smelting of iron, forging and hammering techniques, slags, and the coming of cast iron to Europe.

It has often been said that our interest in Wealden iron should be examined more in the wider context of British and European technology, and with this volume and Professor Tylecote's recent *Prehistory of Metallurgy in the British Isles* (1986), the texts for such an examination are to hand.

E.B. Teesdale *Wealden Gunfounding in the Sixteenth Century with reference to Ralph Hogge and other Leading*

*Gunfounders*. Unpublished Brighton Polytechnic D.Phil. thesis. 201 pages inc. 2 appendices, 8 tables, 3 maps, references and bibliography; no index. Copy at Sussex Archaeological Society Library, Barbican House, Lewes.

In this important study, Dr. Teesdale examines the factors which led to the growth of the gunfounding industry of the Weald, and details the state of the industry in the last quarter of the 16th century. He describes, in particular, the career and importance of Ralph Hogge through an analysis of the accounts of Hogge's ironworks kept by John Henslowe, and compares the Buxted gunfounder with his contemporaries.

In company with the work of Crossley, Awty, Cattell and Goring, this is a major contribution towards our understanding of what has become the most extensively researched period of the Wealden iron industry. It deserves to be more widely available.

P. Drewett, D. Rudling & M. Gardiner *The South East to AD 1000* Longman; 1988; 384 pages with photographs, maps, plans, drawings, index and bibliography.

One of a new series which examines the regional history of England. Each region (except the West Midlands & Welsh Borders) is covered in two volumes, pre- and post-AD 1000 and the one in question examines the counties of

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Kent, Sussex and Surrey. The authors will be well known to many WIRG members, being officers of the Field Archaeology Unit with which WIRG has had many contacts over the past few years, and the text is fairly well equally divided between the three.

As might be expected the evidence of archaeology is crucial to the period covered and, although there are places where over-indulgent description of the evidence masks its interpretation, the development of society is traced clearly and evenly, with effective use of theoretical models. It would have been useful in an introduction to describe briefly the extent to which the various parts of the region had been studied, by archaeologists in particular, as in the earlier chapters it might be thought that, in his choice of examples, the author was biased towards one part of the region. The unfolding of the political landscape of the South-East in the early Saxon period was particularly lucid and I suspect that, to many as to myself, it will reveal an aspect of our history which hitherto has been rather vague.

From the point of view of the iron industry, the use and manufacture of iron in the pre-Roman period are dealt with appropriately, as is the scant evidence of ironworking in the Saxo-Jutish South-East. However the comment that, in addition to the sixty or so known Roman sites, '...there are others which are thought to be Roman...' considerably understates the evidence of the WIRG survey published in the Sussex Archaeological Collections in 1981 under Fred Tebbutt's authorship. In that paper 16% of 246 bloomery sites were dated. 82% of the

sample were found to be of Romano-British date. By extrapolation, some 200 of the 246 sites could be of similar date and, on the same basis, taking all the known bloomery sites (nearly 500 listed in Cleere & Crossley's book), as many as 400 could be Romano-British, suggesting a very extensive iron industry in the Weald at that time. Nowhere in the chapter on the Roman period in the South-East is it suggested that the industry could have been on anything like that scale.

There will always be critics of regional studies who will claim that regions change their boundaries and therefore cannot be identified as distinct entities simply because of their geographical position. But this volume recognises the fallibility of the region and the authors are prepared to look beyond the bounds which have been imposed on them and include the South-East in wider areas, as well as recognising the sub-regionality of the Weald, the Downs, the Kingdom of Kent or the land of the Haestingas. J.S.H.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE from WIRG are available from:

Mr. B.K. Herbert, 1 Stirling Way,  
East Grinstead, Sussex, RH19 3HG

PRICE by post (at meeting)

The Excavation of a Late 16th/early  
17th Century Gun Casting Furnace  
at Maynard's Gate, Crowborough,  
Sussex 1975-76 By: O. Bedwin  
0.78 (0.60)

A Middle Saxon Iron Smelting Site at Millbrook, Ashdown Forest, Sussex By: C.F. Tebbutt 0.93 (0.75)

Wealden Bloomery Iron Smelting Furnaces. Survey of Wealden bloomeries in an area of approx. 200 km. By: C.F. Tebbutt 0.78 (0.60)

The Finch Foundry Trust and Sticklepath Museum of Rural Industry. (A Water powered Smithing Forge on Dartmoor). By: R.A. Brown 1.18 (1.00)

The Fieldwalker's Guide and an Introduction to the Iron Industries of the Weald. By: B.K. Herbert 2.90 (2.50)

A Gazetteer of Charcoal-fired Blast Furnaces in Great Britain in use since 1660 By: Philip Riden 3.40 (3.00)

The Bewl Valley Ironworks, Kent, 1300-1730. By: D.W. Crossley 3.20 (2.50)

The History of Watermills, the Wealden Iron Industry, and Geology of the Southeast, Third updated edition. By: C.E. Woodrow, B.K. Herbert & C. Smart 1.00 (0.80)

Bulletins of the Wealden Iron Research Group:

Volume 1, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15 & 16  
each 0.75 (0.50)

Volume 1 to 3, new series  
each 1.18 (1.00)

Volume 4 to ~~11~~ new series  
each 1.68 (1.50)

VOLUMES 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 17 ARE OUT OF PRINT AND WILL NOT BE REPUBLISHED.

Henry Cleere can obtain copies of the book "The Iron Industry of the Weald" by H. Cleere & D.W. Crossley for the sum of #31.68 plus postage of #1.70, total = #33.38; a distinct saving on the published price of #47.50. This offer is available to WIRG members only, who should send "money with order" to: Dr. H. Cleere, Acres Rise, Lower Platt, Ticehurst, Wadhurst, East Sussex.

HADRIANS WALL

The Sussex Archaeological Society are arranging a study tour of the wall from 29th March to 3rd April 1989.

Travel will be by coach with accomodation at Durham Castle, the tour will be led by Mark Hassall. A few places are still available; contact the membership secretary (Mrs. Janet France) at Barbican House for further details.

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