

**The Trendles Project: Exploring Marcham's Past**

The Vale and Ridgeway Trust was set up in 2003 to 'promote advancement of the knowledge and understanding of the past of the Vale of White Horse and the Ridgeway and adjoining areas'. The Trust has been focussing all its efforts on the continuing University of Oxford excavations near the Noah's Ark - last July was the fifth season's digging. You can find details about the dig in back copies of Coral Rag (the Marcham Society Journal) or on the University website - [http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research\\_projects/marcham](http://www.arch.ox.ac.uk/research/research_projects/marcham).

The Trust was awarded a Lottery Grant in 2005 to investigate and promote the heritage of Trendles in partnership with the local community. One aspect of the grant is to give free basic training and supervision to local volunteers: most people have to pay to take part in professionally run digs!

The Project was officially launched in All Saints' Marcham on 6th December, and there was a good audience to hear about future plans and past activities. Some of the best finds from the Trendles dig were on display, and there was a surprise visit from two Roman soldiers in their late Roman Empire uniforms.

The Project started last July with opportunities to volunteer at the site, and will continue in 2006 with workshops and, in July, four weeks of digging on the site. The first workshop was on 24th January - Coin Identification with Ian Leins of the British Museum (as seen on Time Team Big Roman Dig!) - followed by Field Walking in the Spring, a Human Bones Workshop in the early summer, and a Finds Identification Workshop during July.

If anyone is interested in any of these activities, or in volunteering on the Dig during July (Sundays to Fridays) please get in touch with Janey Cumber for further information at Manor Farm, Marcham, Abingdon, Oxon OX13 6NZ 01865-391327 [janey.cumber@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:janey.cumber@tiscali.co.uk)



**MY DAY AT THE DIG**

*a lay volunteer's experience*

Well two days actually. In an unguarded moment at Marcham Society's enjoyable annual barbecue I was approached by Janey Cumber to 'volunteer' to dig (or more accurately scrape) in the new People's Trench - well who can resist Janey's lovely smile?

So it was I found myself in July 2005, biking down to Manor Farm to catch the transport at the unearthly hour of 8.15am. It was good to see the familiar face of Eric Dunford. Various sleepy bods emerged from a collection of tents in a field by the dovecote. Clambering onto the trailer was the first test of agility, especially for the vertically challenged. If less than alert earlier, the spine-jangling tractor ride brought me to my senses as I hung on for dear life.

Eventually the small group of volunteer diggers were given a short talk by Dr Gary Lock, Co-Director of the excavation on dig procedures and common sense health and safety. Assigned to the People's Trench we met our cheery volunteer trench digger supervisor Roger and were issued with a scraper (miniature trowel), bucket for soil (spoil), tray for 'finds' and the (essential) kneeling pad!

I was teamed up with Cheryll Sewell, whom I was impressed to

February 2006

learn had 'signed up' for three days. After 20 mins and wondering if my knees would withstand half a day let alone two, I spotted a dark green round object and nonchalantly commented to Cheryll it was an odd place to find a plastic Ludo button.... 'SPECIAL' calls out Cheryll. People came running from all around to see my 'find' which was declared a Romano-British coin (very old) I would have crawled into a hole had I not already been at ground level.



During the two days Cheryll also found two similar coins, all of which were whisked away to the 'finds hut' for labelling and identification. Meanwhile a mini white marker giving the number and location of the find was pinned to the spot.

Up at the posh end of the PT where Eric and Dennis were scraping there was great excitement when Eric

uncovered a bronze artefact resembling a flower approx 2" in diameter. Apparently too heavy for jewellery its function has yet to be defined. Also found, a tiny rivet from the sole of a boot.

Tea breaks were eagerly awaited when a shout went up (which I interpreted as 'everybody out') when we emptied our spoil into the nearest wheelbarrow, upended our buckets with scraper beneath, so we knew where to return) and hobbled to the tea tent\*. Here steaming hot navy-size mugs were ready with cake, biscuit or fruit on offer. (\*An impressive canvas structure of WW1 vintage but I swear the wheelbarrows came from the 19th century canal creation days - solid!?) Once filled, quality pecs were needed to shift them to the spoil heap where I discovered a full barrow can run back swiftly if you don't tip it over fast enough. I didn't get buried, this year anyway!

Our packed lunches we had brought seemed especially good at 1pm. We were glad of the flimsy awning as the sun was strong. The professional diggers, many were archaeological research students who came from several countries were interesting to talk to (with their immaculate English).

At the end of the first day I needed a bunk up on to the trailer and made sure I didn't sit hear to where the two trailers were linked valuing my remaining teeth. And was grateful for a comfy lift in Cheryll's Smart car the second day.

On Friday at 4 we all cleaned and returned our tools and had a guided tour of each excavated section. An archaeological expert leader explained what had been found and postulated on the significance with some changes in theories from last year's 4th dig.



I enjoyed the experience more than anticipated especially as it was dry and not too hot.

With the recent launch of the Trendle's Project: "Exploring Marcham's Past" (see opposite), which with lottery funding, will be offering lectures/workshops on Coin Identification and other topics, I may be tempted to scrape again. If I can't get down to ground level I gather there is always 'pot washing'.



GG

What was it? A grey squirrel!