

VILLAGE ECHOES

SCOTNEY 'DIG'

Some of you may have read about the archaeological dig at Scotney Castle that took place during the week beginning 17th July. It was part of a countryside event held at National Trust venues called Festival of Archaeology and organised by the Council for British Archaeology. The week presented fine weather making it easy for visitors to see the action. However, as you will remember June was hot and dry, not the most helpful weather for digging. The proceedings took place under National Trust specialist Nathalie Cohen and Archaeology South East with some of their volunteers.



The areas for excavation were in and around the Old Castle site in preparation for a new sub-tropical garden to be planted next spring. Any digging in a protected site like this must be supervised by official archaeologists. Experts don't get many chances to dig in these spaces and nothing much had happened at Scotney for some time and so expectations were high. When a couple of ponds were de-silted a bayonet and a selection of cartridges dating from the late nineteenth century were found.

It is not thought that there are any prehistoric or Romano-British sites on the estate but that may be because of an absence of any significant excavation. Place names suggest that, in common with the surrounding Wealden landscape, the estate was heavily wooded. Old Scotney Castle dates from between 1377-80 and it was hoped that finds, such as pottery, might be discovered from this period.



The Old Castle before demolition

The original building was first constructed as a quadrangle castle with round towers at each corner. Only one of the towers survives as it was incorporated into the later 16th/17th century fortified manor house. The estate was bought by the Hussey family in 1778 and in c 1840 the new mansion we see today was built above the valley and away from the old fashioned, damp and draughty home. The old castle was reduced into 'gothic' ruins as part of a landscaped garden, in a similar way to local Bayham Abbey.

Unfortunately, the finds were unspectacular, producing a few slates and masonry from the earlier building together with the broken remains of a 17th century glass bottle. However, the dig attracted many visitors of all ages and after a short explanation by the archaeologist, they were invited to inspect the exhibition set up under two tented areas where they could ask further questions and see volunteers washing the finds.

We can look forward to visiting the newly planted garden feature next year and by a happy coincidence Nathalie Cohen will be giving a talk to the History Society on 7th November. She will no doubt update us with the findings together with items on Bodiam Castle and Knole under the title **Palaces, Pots and Parks**.

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