

RECONNECTING PEOPLE WITH THEIR HERITAGE

July 29, 2011 hartk Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2011, Education, Excavation, Iron Age, Roman Archaeology, Britain, C7th Royal Minster, Canterbury Christ Church University, Castle Hill, Cinque ports, Dover, English Channel, Folkestone, France, important site, Kent, Lecturer, Lesley Hardy, less compromised scheduled site, Lympe, Pitt-Rivers, project director, Rescue archaeology, UK

This summer a hardy band of volunteers and one or two paid professionals began a second season of excavation at a 50 room villa and extended Iron Age/Roman site, which stretches across and beyond the East Cliff at Folkestone, Kent, writes **Dr Lesley Hardy, Project Director for A Town Unearthed: Folkestone before 1500 and Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University.**

Rescue archaeology on a cliff-edge

Folkestone sits in a liminal position on a bed of greensand rock which juts out between the chalk Down-land and the clay weald. It is the closest crossing point to France and so also, depending on your perspective, marks a boundary or a route-way between Britain and the continent probably used for millennia.

The site overlooks the English Channel and is in a stunning though precarious location on the edge of the chalk cliffs there. Its direct sight line is Boulogne and on a clear day other Roman bases at Dover and Lympe can be seen, as can the North-Downs Way which ends abruptly interrupted by cataclysm at the cliff edge above Folkestone.

Erosion makes this rescue archaeology and has justified excavation which would not have been allowed on a less compromised scheduled site.

A Town Unearthed

The dig is a part of a three-year Lottery-funded community archaeology project based in Folkestone called 'A Town Unearthed'. It's a title of double meaning, intended to reflect multiple meanings attached to community archaeology in general and in particular to this project's aim.

It aims not only to deliver community archaeology in the sense of fieldwork but also to 'dig' in the more critical sense of understanding how the community of Folkestone sees and understands itself in relation to its past: an archaeology of itself.

If we want to understand the processes by which communities identify with certain archaeological and historical places, this is an important site.

Folkestone

Folkestone is a town which has come to be defined by a relatively recent history. The town was developed at a rapid pace in the 1860s and 70s as a health resort.

If you visit today you would see a somewhat modernised but largely Victorian/Edwardian resort. The decline slowly eroded the prosperity of the resort from the 1940s also continues to leave its mark.

Reconnecting townsfolk and their heritage

We hope that by re-awakening interest in the larger time-span and the rich ancient landscape that surrounds the town to contribute towards challenging this narrative of decline and to reconnect people with the significant and rich ancient heritage that surrounds them.

These include the Bayle – the site of a C7th Royal Minster; Castle Hill- a large Norman earthwork (one of Pitt-Rivers' first excavations) and also the large amount of unpublished reports, artefactual collections and other material which trace a history dating from earliest times.