



**Chris Butler MfA
Archaeological Services Ltd**



**Archaeological Watching Brief
At
Place Farm,
Firle,
East Sussex**

SDNP/12/03412

Project No. CBAS0427

By
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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a 20m long service trench at Place Farm, Firle, East Sussex. The Excavation was carried out from the entrance of the yard to the barn using a 400m wide toothless ditching bucket to a depth of approx. 840mm. No archaeological features or finds were encountered during the watching brief other than a modern soakaway and some 16th to 18th century roof tile which may have derived from the barn that stood on the site until the 1970's.

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Appendix

HER Summary Form

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1** Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd were commissioned by G.M. Moore and Associates on behalf of Firle Estates Management Ltd to carry out an Archaeological Watching Brief during the groundwork's associated with the proposed change of use of agricultural barn to micro brewery at Place Farm, The Street, Firle, East Sussex. NGR TQ 4705 0705 (Fig. 1). As a result of the site's location, and the archaeological potential of the area, the local planning authority put a condition on the planning consent for the development (SDNP/12/03412/FUL), requiring an appropriate programme of archaeological work to be undertaken.
- 1.2** The site is situated within an Archaeological Notification Area defining the medieval and post medieval village of West Firle (Fig. 2), and is also within the Firle Conservation Area. The agricultural barn has already been converted and is a replacement for a post-medieval barn that burnt down in the 1970's and has no above ground heritage significance.
- 1.3** The geology, according to the British Geological Survey sheet 319/334, is at the boundary between Head deposit to the west and West Melbury Marly Chalk Formation.
- 1.4** The appropriate programme of archaeological work comprised of an Archaeological Watching Brief as specified in a brief prepared by the Archaeology Team at ESCC. The written scheme of investigation¹ covering the watching brief was duly submitted to and approved by the local planning authority.
- 1.5** The aim of the Watching Brief was to record any archaeological remains that may have been damaged or destroyed by the development, and to determine whether there was any evidence for the origins of the Medieval and Post Medieval settlement and farm, with the aim of understanding how the farm may have developed over time.
- 1.6** The watching brief was carried out by the author on the 17th December 2013.

¹ Butler, C. 2013 *Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Watching brief at Place Farm, Firle, East Sussex*. CBAS

2.0 Historical & Archaeological Background (HER Ref 181/13)

- 2.1** The only site pre-dating the Bronze Age in the vicinity of the site is a group Mesolithic flintwork (MES1243) from Beddingham Hill, about 1km to the south-west of the site
- 2.2** Bronze Age activity is evidenced by two ploughed-out barrows to the south-west of the site (MES1399), and a Late Bronze Age hoard found immediately to the south of Place Farm, including a dagger (MES1415), a chisel (MES1416) and an axe (MES1418), whilst a macehead was found to the west of the site (MES1420).
- 2.3** To the south of Firle village a large concentration of late Iron Age and Romano-British pottery including East Sussex Ware and fire fractured flints (MES7212) was found by fieldwalking, and is likely to represent the site of a small farmstead (MES15551). Metal detectorists have also recovered Iron Age and Romano-British metalwork in this area. A Roman spur road left RR 144 at Heighton Street, in Firle Park and is marked by old lanes NW through Wick Street direct to Glynde (MES1920).
- 2.4** Cropmarks and 10th-14th century pottery found at Court Farm to the north-west of the site may mark the site of a Saxon Monastery which was located at Beddingham. The barrows at Firle Bostal may mark the site of the Totnore Hundred Moot (MES1399).
- 2.5** Ferla/Ferle (West Firle) was in the Totnore Hundred, in Pevensey Rape, and was held by the Abbey of Wilton St. Mary in 1086, and had 83 villagers, 11 smallholders, land for 40 ploughlands, 77 acres of meadow, woodland for 40 swine and 3 mills. In 1086 it was held by the Abbey of St. Pancras, Lewes.
- 2.6** West Firle seems to have originated as a medieval market village (MES21979), with hamlets at Heighton Street (MES21978) and Beddingham ('Prestetone') (MES21980). Earthworks from a DMV are present in Firle Park (MES1395). Medieval pottery has been found at Court Farm (MES22374). St Peters Church in West Firle dates from the 13th-14th century (MES1392).
- 2.7** Firle Place was built about 1470. It is not probable that any part of the original building is now remaining, and though part of the present edifice bears evident marks of antiquity, yet it is of much more recent date than the original structure. It was in the 15th century that the Gages built, or more probably rebuilt Firle Place, and it was rebuilt or remodelled between 1727 and 1744.

- 2.8** Yeakell and Gardners Map of Sussex, 1778 - 1783, shows the site to be open, with a large house (West Place House) shown immediately to the north of the site (Fig. 3). The farmhouse is a Listed Building (DES1695) dating to the 18th century. An 18th century barn (DES1362) is recorded as being to the east of the farmhouse and on the other side of the road, with a further 18th century barn (DES2275) located to the south-east of the farmhouse, although neither of these are shown on the Yeakell & Gardner map.
- 2.9** The 1st Edition OS map (1874) shows Home Farm (Fig. 4) with the farmhouse and two barns, together with other buildings. The farm is still called Home Farm in 1910 (3rd Edition OS map), but by 1956 has become Place Farm. The 18th century barn to the south-west of the farmhouse was burnt down in 1970's and has been replaced by a modern structure.

3.0 Method Statement

- 3.1 The archaeological work was carried out in accordance with ESCC's *Standards for Archaeological Fieldwork, Recording and Post-Excavation in East Sussex* dated April 2008 (Recommended Standards).
- 3.2 The work consisted of a 20m long service trench for a water pipe from the entrance of the site to the barn. The trench was 400mm in width and excavated in shallow spits by a JCB using a flat-bladed 400mm bucket under archaeological supervision to a maximum depth of 840mm, approximately 170mm into the underlying natural Chalk.



Plate 1: Route of service trench.

- 3.3 All exposed sections and surfaces were inspected for archaeological features, structures or finds. The spoil from the excavations was inspected at regular intervals to recover any artefacts or ecofacts of archaeological interest. A Garrett 150 metal detector was also used at regular intervals to scan spoil derived from the excavations. No signals were noted.
- 3.4 All deposits were recorded according to accepted professional standards and to the ESCC Recommended Conditions. Deposit colours were recorded by visual inspection and not by reference to a Munsell Colour chart.
- 3.5 A full photographic record of the work was kept as appropriate and will form part of the site archive. The archive is presently held by Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd. A site reference of PFF13 has been allocated and after any further analysis, will be offered to Lewes Museum.

4.0 Results

- 4.1** Context **1** was the soft/friable, mid-brown clayey-silt of the topsoil and was 100mm in depth. It contained roots at 5% and ceramic building material (CBM) in the form of tile and sat above the modern made ground deposit of Context **2**.
- 4.2** Context **2** was a fairly clean, modern made ground deposit below the topsoil deposit. It was a soft to firm light-grey clayey-silt with roots at 1% and chalk pieces (<70mm) at 10%. This deposit was 240mm in depth and sat directly above Context **3**.
- 4.3** Context **3** was another modern made-ground deposit. It sat directly below Context **2** and was 250mm in depth. It was a mixed mid brown-grey clayey-silt with bioturbation in the form of roots which were present at 1%, along with CBM at 1% and sat directly above Context **4**.
- 4.4** Context **4** was the natural underlying West Melbury Chalk. This was a light grey-white chalk deposit excavated into some 170mm to the limit of excavation. The trench quickly filled with water due to the high groundwater levels at the time.



Plate 2: Section showing Contexts **1** to **3**.

- 4.5** Two modern features were noted in the service trench; a modern pipe running across the trench, and a modern soakaway. Both contained bitumen piping and flint shingle bedding. No archaeological features or deposits were noted.

5.0 Finds

5.0.1 A small assemblage of artefacts was found during the watching brief, and is described below.

5.0.2 The assemblage is isolated, from an open context with no pottery dating. As such there is no potential for further analysis and the material has been discarded.

5.1 The Ceramic Building Material by Luke Barber

5.1.1 A small assemblage of peg tile was recovered from Context 3. Three distinct fabrics are represented in the assemblage:

T1 – Quite well formed and medium/well fired, tempered with sparse fine sand and moderate swirls of marl. Tiles normally 12-13mm thick (3/336g).

T2 – Quite well formed and medium fired, tempered with sparse fine sand and common iron oxides to 1mm. A single tile (282g) measuring 14mm thick.

T3 – Quite well formed and well fired, tempered with sparse fine sand, sparse iron oxides and flint to 2mm. A single tile measuring 14mm thick (496g).

5.1.2 None of the tile shows significant signs of abrasion and this, combined with the large average size of the pieces, suggests the material has not been repeatedly reworked. Although none of the pieces are particularly diagnostic of date all probably can be placed within an early 16th to early 18th century date range.

5.2 Glass by Chris Butler

5.2.1 A single fragment of clear window glass weighing 10g was found in Context 3. This fragment of glass probably dates to the early 20th century.

6.0 Discussion

- 6.1** The watching brief failed to yield any significance archaeological results. This may due to the small area sample, but also due to late post-medieval/modern activity on site masking or destroying any earlier evidence.
- 6.2** The two modern deposits associated with the modern activity appear to belong to two distinct but undated phases, although that it is not to say they are not associated with the same period of overall activity. The presence of 16th to 18th century tile in the made ground Context **3**, suggests that the tile derives from the 18th century (or earlier) barn that originally stood on the site, and perhaps the made ground originates from the time of its destruction in the 1970's.
- 6.3** It is possible that both these deposits relate to the rebuilding of the barn after the fire in the 1970s, but apart from this modern activity, no evidence for the origins of the farm or earlier human activity were noted. However, as in all watching briefs of this nature, it must be borne in mind that the area under investigation is very small compared to the overall site, so may not be indicative of past activity in other parts of the site.

7.0 Acknowledgements

- 7.1** I would like to thank the client Firle Estates Management Ltd for commissioning the archaeological watching brief, and G.M Moore and Associates for making the arrangements. The project was managed for CBAS by Chris Butler. Luke Barber and Chris Butler reported on the finds.

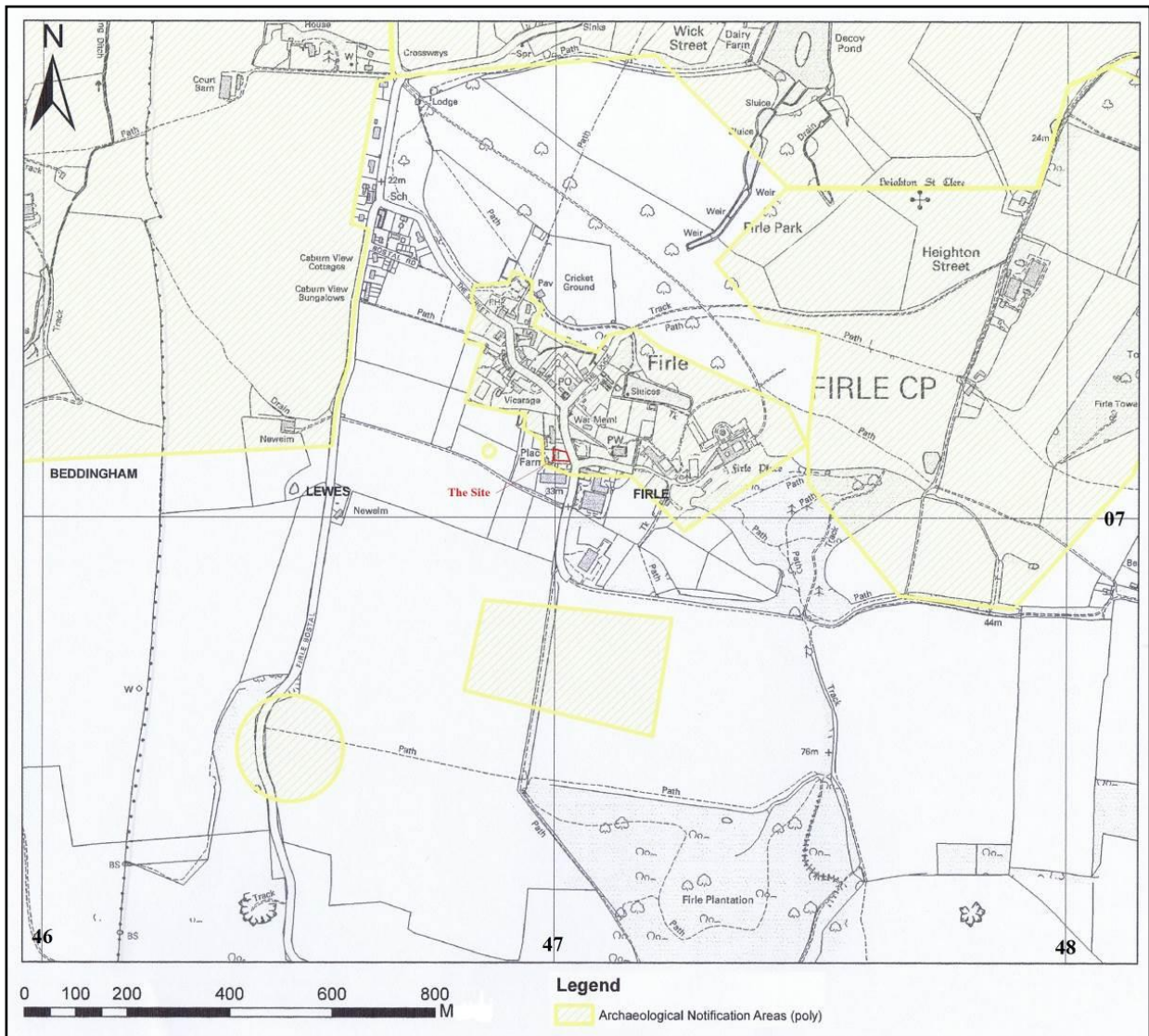


Fig. 1: Place Farm, Firle: Site Location and Archaeological Notification Areas.
(Adapted from map provided by ESCC)
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Fig. 3: Place Farm, Firle: Yeakell & Gardiner Map 1778-83

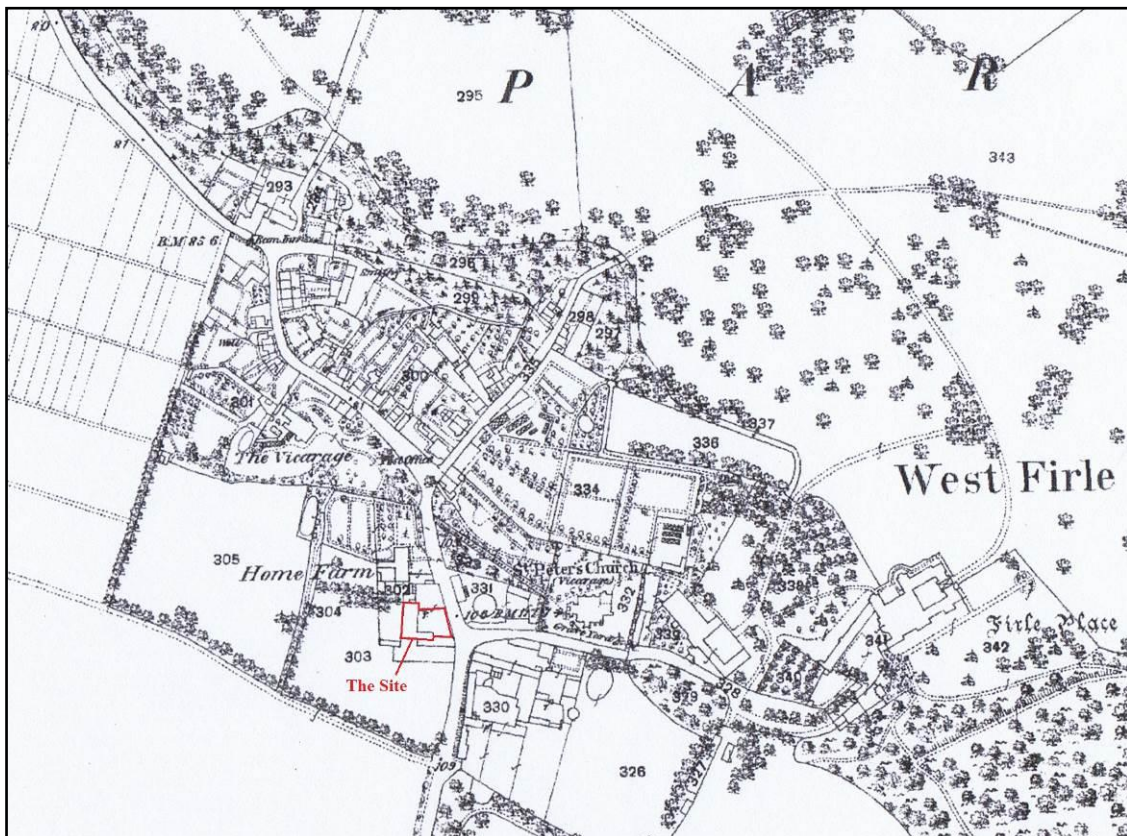


Fig. 4: Place Farm, Firle: 1st Edition OS Map (1874)

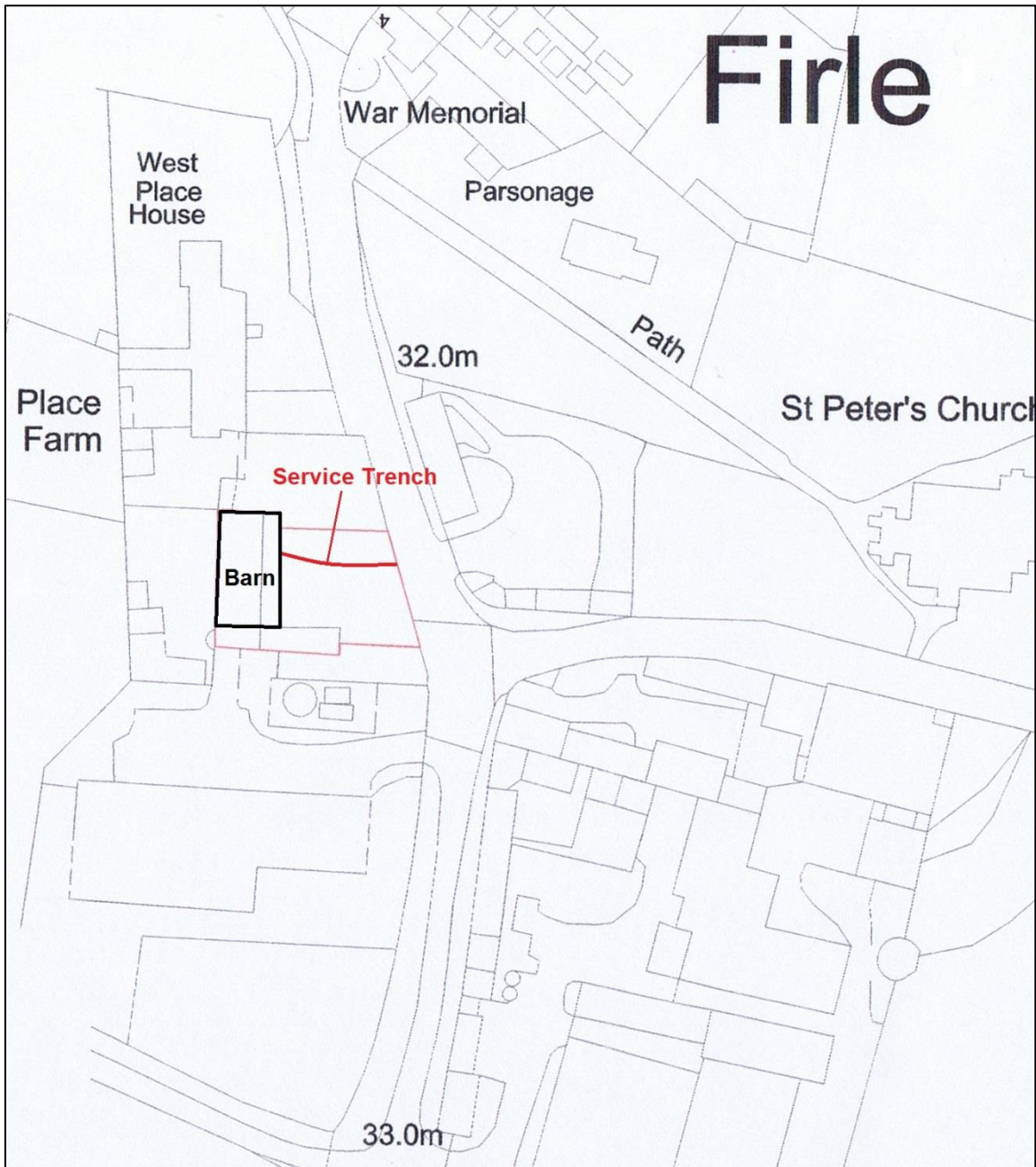


Fig. 5: Place Farm, Firle: Plan showing location of Service Trench

Appendix 1 HER Summary Form

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|-------|
| Site Code | PFF13 | | | | | |
| Identification Name and Address | Place Farm, The Street, Firle, East Sussex. | | | | | |
| County, District &/or Borough | SDNP | | | | | |
| OS Grid Refs. | TQ 4705 0705 | | | | | |
| Geology | West Melbury Marly Chalk. | | | | | |
| Type of Fieldwork | Eval. | Excav. | Watching Brief X | Standing Structure | Survey | Other |
| Type of Site | Green Field | Shallow Urban | Deep Urban | Other Rural X | | |
| Dates of Fieldwork | Eval. | Excav. | WB. 17/12/13 | Other | | |
| Sponsor/Client | Firle Estates Management. | | | | | |
| Project Manager | Chris Butler MifA | | | | | |
| Project Supervisor | David Atkin | | | | | |
| Period Summary | Palaeo. | Meso. | Neo. | BA | IA | RB |
| | AS | MED | PM X | Other | | |
| <p>100 Word Summary.</p> <p><i>An archaeological watching brief was carried out during the excavation of a 20m long service trench at Place Farm, Firle, East Sussex. The Excavation was carried out from the entrance of the yard to the barn using a 400m wide toothless ditching bucket to a depth of approx. 840mm. No archaeological features or finds were encountered during the watching brief other than a modern soakaway and some 16th to 18th century roof tile which may have derived from the barn that stood on the site until the 1970's.</i></p> | | | | | | |

Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd

Chris Butler has been an archaeologist since 1985, and formed the Mid Sussex Field Archaeological Team in 1987, since when it has carried out numerous fieldwork projects, and was runner up in the Pitt-Rivers Award at the British Archaeological Awards in 1996. Having previously worked as a Pensions Technical Manager and Administration Director in the financial services industry, Chris formed **Chris Butler Archaeological Services** at the beginning of 2002.

Chris is a Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and was a part time lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Sussex.

Chris specialises in prehistoric flintwork analysis, but has directed excavations, landscape surveys and watching briefs, including the excavation of a Beaker Bowl Barrow, a Saxon cemetery and settlement, Roman pottery kilns, and a Mesolithic hunting camp. He has also recently undertaken an archaeological survey of Ashdown Forest and Broadwater Warren.

Chris Butler Archaeological Services Ltd is available for Flintwork Analysis, Project Management, Military Archaeology, Desktop Assessments, Field Evaluations, Excavation work, Watching Briefs, Field Surveys & Fieldwalking, Post Excavation Services and Report Writing.

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