

Discovering Arun's past: excavations along the route of the A284 Lyminster Bypass

A large-scale archaeological excavation took place ahead of construction of the A284 Lyminster Road Bypass. Over 300 archaeological features have been revealed across nearly 2.5 hectares, providing tantalising clues of a buried ancient landscape. This fascinating archaeology was uncovered by [AOC Archaeology](#). Excavation is an incredibly important piece of archaeological work and is adding new details in the story of Lyminster's past. This and the two following newsletters will outline the findings from this site.

Arun District, West Sussex, and the coastal plain – what do we know?

Lyminster sits within a landscape of great antiquity. This was one reason why an excavation along the route of the A284 was necessary. Whilst prehistoric people did not live in towns or cities as most of us do today, they did live in communities and roamed widely. The coastal plain is filled with evidence of ancient people who built their homes and sustained their livelihoods. Their lives and beliefs can only be unravelled through the traces they left behind.

The Prehistoric People of West Sussex

In deep prehistory, early humans roamed Britain during and between successive Ice Ages. At the end of the last Ice Age, the climate improved and woodland gradually began to take hold. In West Sussex the sea tide reached further inland, perhaps as far as Lyminster, creating a marshy environment prone to flooding. Areas of higher, dry land dotted about between marsh and water would have been used by the hunter-gatherers of the early Stone Age, (the Palaeolithic) and the middle Stone Age (the Mesolithic). During the Neolithic period (4000-2000 BC) people settled and began farming, clearing forest and building enclosures. Some of these enclosures were ambitious building projects, and served as focal points for Neolithic communities.



LEFT: An aerial photograph of the Trundle, a large Neolithic causewayed enclosure near Chichester (public domain). RIGHT: our archaeologists excavating a possible enclosure ditch, with a row of sample "slots" every 8 metres (AOC Archaeology).

Mapping territory and industry

Sussex was an important region during the Roman occupation of Britain. Chichester was the powerbase of the Iron Age *Regni* people and later an important Roman town known as *Noviomagus Reginorum*. The most important industry in Sussex throughout the Roman period was iron making, which was supplemented by farming, pottery and tile manufacturing, salt production, forestry, and stone quarrying. Villas are known at Bignor and Walberton and settlements such as these formed networks associated with rural industry and farming. Our site contains several large Roman ditches, which appear to form part of a system of field boundaries for farmland.



AOC's archaeologists sample excavating ditches found on site (AOC Archaeology).



Numerous artefacts are being found including flint tools (LEFT), early pottery (RIGHT), metal work, ceramic objects, butchered animal bones, charred seeds, and excitingly, burials too. (AOC Archaeology).

It's spelled Lullyngminster – according to the Anglo-Saxons!

In later times, villages emerged, many of which grew and endure as our historic towns and cities. The Norman Conquest saw the construction of castles, priories, and churches, in a Christian world where religion reigned, and where country was portioned into parishes and estates, or “manors” owned by lords.

Lyminster was a royal manor, first recorded as *Lullyngminster* in AD 901 when King Alfred the Great bequeathed the estate to his nephew Osfred in his will. Saint Mary Magdalene's Church located 600 metres to the west, probably replaced an earlier Saxon church, and *Minster* within the place name suggests a religious community of some note living here.

We have yet to find much medieval evidence on the site to date, suggesting that activity during these periods was focused elsewhere, but there are other places we can look for clues of the medieval life of the area.

The following link leads to a historic map, which shows the location of the site in 1808, when it was made up of fields, with a small hamlet clustered around Lyminster Road and the church. Snaking east to west, was a waterway known as the “Black Ditch”. To the north of the site was a busy patchwork of enclosed fields, but to the south was “Common Field”. Perhaps this area of common field was much less managed, in comparison with those privately owned?

<https://aocarchaeology.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5f2894ea5bcd44adaff13c81971bb875>

Want to know more?

More details on the findings are forthcoming in two further newsletters.

Image source

Curwen, E.C. [Aerial photograph of The Trundle iron age hill fort and neolithic causewayed enclosure]. (1925). Curwen, E.C. (1929). "Excavations in The Trundle, Goodwood, 1928". *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 70: 32–85.