

**New finds for a New Museum: Preliminary results of archaeological work  
undertaken by the Sussex Archaeological Society at Marlipins Museum,  
Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex, 2003**

The Heritage Lottery Fund's generous financial contribution towards the redevelopment of Marlipins Museum, Shoreham, West Sussex, has provided a springboard for a long overdue reassessment of one of the region's best-preserved medieval urban vernacular buildings, last surveyed in detail by Arthur Packham prior to the Marlipins' acquisition by the Sussex Archaeological Trust in 1925 (Packham 1924).

Initiated by a small-scale evaluation undertaken within the footprint of the museum's northern annexe in February 2002, the programme of work has so far included a comprehensive programme of structural analysis of the historic range by David Martin (Archaeology South-East), incorporating newly commissioned dendrochronological dating (Bridge 2002), ongoing documentary research (John Mills, West Sussex County Council/Christopher Whittick, East Sussex Record Office) and a full-scale archaeological excavation of the northern annexe footprint (undertaken by Sussex Archaeological Society volunteers under the guidance of its Research Officer, Gabor Thomas, assisted by two professional archaeological supervisors, Tom Burns and Adam Single).

Together, this complementary programme of fieldwork and research has led to significant new insights into the development of the building and its immediate archaeological setting from the 12th century to the present, an advance which will not only impact upon the archaeological literature but directly upon the way the historic fabric of the Marlipins is displayed to, and interpreted by, the public.

These pages principally report on the results of the four-week excavation undertaken during February and March 2003, although information gleaned from the structural analysis and documentary research will be highlighted where necessary; all three sources of evidence will be integrated into a synthetic study to be published in a future volume of Sussex Archaeological Collections. It should be stated that any conclusions given here are necessarily preliminary in advance of the results of ongoing post-excavation analysis. Comments on any of the interpretations made in these pages are warmly welcomed; please send them direct to the author by clicking [HERE](#).

For those unfamiliar with the architectural gem which has been known by the etymologically-obscure name 'Marlipins' (or its medieval precursors) since the 13th century, a heavily abridged description is here given (see Packham 1924). The Marlipins, a rectangular flint-built structure, measuring 13.85 x 5.80 metres internally, occupies a prime location within the planned medieval town of New Shoreham, a corner plot at the junction between High Street and Middle Street, c.170m SW of the parish church of St Mary de Haura, and a short distance away from the presumed location of the medieval waterfront and harbour (Hudson 1980, 138-148). In common with medieval urban buildings its southern, gable end, fronts on to the major thoroughfare (High Street).

It is two-storeyed, its first floor now partially sunken below street level, with a timber-framed roof substantially covered in Horsham slab apart from the hipped northern end, rebuilt in 1950, which is tiled. The most recent structural survey identifies four principal phases within the building's development (Martin 2002). To the phase 1 (12th-century) building can be ascribed portions of its east and west flint walls, the former with one extant architectural feature, a round-headed lancet window; recent tree-ring dating has also confirmed that the heavy joists supporting the first floor are also in situ survivals from the 12th-century building. The first major structural alterations were made in the late 13th/early 14th century (phase 2), when the front wall was replaced with a highly elaborate chequer-board façade which survives substantially intact with its two doorways, providing independent access to each of the two storeys, and two windows – the uppermost much altered and restored (Fig. 1). A century or so later (phase 3), the back (north) wall was entirely rebuilt on a foreshortened alignment and a new roof built using a simple crownpost design. Further modifications took place during the second half of the 16th century (between 1567 and 1599 – as established by tree-ring dating) principally within the timber framing of the upper storey to create an additional floor level and maximize the space within the roof void (phase 4). Changes made since phase 4 are more superficial and relate to various intrusions within the north wall (see below) and restorative work undertaken by the Sussex Archaeological Trust during the 1920s.

### **The Archaeological brief**

Designed in consultation with English Heritage and West Sussex County Council, the archaeological strategy was informed by the predicted impact of the planned development upon historic remains both buried and standing. In terms of the latter, the most crucial task was to record the north wall of the Marlipins historic range both internally and externally since the planned 2-storey annexe involved punching a new access point through its thickness (Fig. 2; in alignment with the first-floor window). As part of the building programme, the demolition of the 1970s annexe provided the first unobscured view of the exterior of north wall since 1935

The proposed development also involved lowering the ground level within the footprint of the annexe (an area of roughly 7 x 10m square) by 1.4m to create a flush surface with the sunken floor of the historic range. The evaluation undertaken during 2002 indicated that this process would result in the destruction of a complex sequence of archaeological occupation (to be expected in such a prime urban location), comprising the buried foundations of former buildings and associated domestic features such as rubbish pits extending from the medieval period to the 19th century. A further finding with logistical implications for the ensuing excavation was that whereas modern floor make-up in the southern half of the site immediately overlay historic foundations, archaeology to the north was masked by a substantial deposition of garden soil. Mechanical spoil clearance of the latter was thus a prerequisite to completing the recording and sample-excavation of all features down to the natural subsoil (except in cases where deep negative features penetrated well below the 1.4m sub-floor level) within the 4-week window allotted to the archaeological programme.

\*To capture the day-by-day progress of the excavation this report will depart from the standard, stratigraphic format of traditional publications by presenting the results sequentially in a diary format illustrated with digital photos.

## **References**

Bridge, M. 2002. Tree-Ring Analysis of Timbers from Marlipins House, Shoreham-by-Sea High Street, Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex (English Heritage Centre for Archaeology, 2002).

Hudson, T. P. (ed.) 1980. Victoria County History of Sussex, Vol. V1 (Part I) Bramber Rape (SE).

Martin, D. An Archeological Interpretative Survey of Marlipins, Shoreham, West Sussex, Archaeology South-East Historic Buildings Division Project Ref. 1501 – to be updated to take into account some of the archaeological discoveries presented within these pages.

Packham, A. B. 1924. “The Marlipins”, New Shoreham’ Sussex Archaeological Collections 65, 158-195

## **Acknowledgements**

On behalf of the Sussex Archaeological Society, the excavation team would like to thank Bramber Construction for their unflagging logistical support and cooperation during the excavation. The work could not have been completed without the voluntary input from the Shoreham Society, especially Mrs Joy Lampshire and Jean Beale, who undertook the finds processing, Sussex Archaeological Society ‘regulars’ directly involved with hole-digging and Jim and Val Peters of the West Sussex Metal Detecting Society. On a personal note, I would like to thank Helen Poole (Senior Museums Officer) for helping the project to run smoothly, John Mills and Judith Roebuck for their archaeological guidance and Tom Burns and Adam Single for providing such professional back-up, in the case of the former, through into post-excavation