



### **Roman Villa & Mosaic Project**

Lying beneath farmland between the villages of Halberton and Sampford Peverell is what is believed to be the remains of a Roman Villa, probably of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The site was originally identified as being of archaeological interest over ten years ago, when a local metal detectorist started to find coins and other metal objects dating from the Roman period. There then followed a collaboration between Tiverton Archaeological Group and the Sampford Peverell Society, with the support of the County Archaeologist, to explore the area further, but without disturbing the soil. This revealed surface finds of tesserae (small cubes used in mosaics), pottery, roofing slates, and tiles. Technology was also used to 'map' features that lay underground, such as foundations of buildings.

#### **Test trenches**

Two small test trenches were opened up in 2019 by volunteers under professional supervision, which revealed a partial mosaic floor. This was covered up again and left until a larger area could be excavated. COVID funding was obtained during 2021 for a local company, AC Archaeology, to excavate thirteen more test trenches, with the aim of establishing the extent of the buildings and their remaining foundations. Having done so, and having meticulously recorded all the finds, the trenches were carefully filled back in again awaiting further decisions.

#### **Importance of the site**

Whilst Roman villas are to be found at many sites in the south of England, they are rare in Devon. Only two others have been confirmed by excavation, with a small number of other 'possibles'. An additional feature of this one is that, in a field nearby, iron-making was taking place (as evidenced by large quantities of iron slag), which is thought to be associated with the Roman villa complex. The Devon Archaeological Society's Committee consider that 'the Roman villa is a very significant site and there is high risk of loss due to ongoing agricultural activity'.

## **A full excavation**

There is a strong desire from all parties involved to undertake a full excavation. Such a venture is very expensive, because it requires a great deal of input from professionals. Funding is hard to come by, but a small team, led by archaeologist Greg Chuter, is working hard to put a bid together.

Apart from gaining a much better understanding of the site, the intention is to lift and conserve the mosaic floor, which would then be displayed at Tiverton Museum. The project will require considerable participation from volunteers, who would be trained in the various aspects of archaeological work, such as excavation, cleaning, sorting and recording the finds. In addition to on-site activities, there will be volunteer opportunities to contribute remotely, for example by involvement in the production of the materials that will provide an interpretation of the site.

## **Community Project**

Above all, the team wish to involve the local community: apart from members of the two societies, local residents, students and school children, we will encourage other groups, that do not normally get involved in such projects, to participate. This project provides a great opportunity for local people to meet others, to learn, to take part in satisfying work and to celebrate their achievements together.

## **Timeline**

We do not envisage any on-site work taking place in 2023. We will continue to work behind the scenes, exploring funding opportunities and developing links with organisations that can assist us in taking the project forward. If we are successful with a bid for funding, then we would hope to start on site in the summer of 2024. However, firms of professional archaeologists can get booked up a year or more in advance, so even that timescale now seems optimistic. Please bear with us!

In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like to meet any of the group to discuss the project, please do get in touch via the contact page on the Sampford Peverell Society's website:  
[www.sampevsoc.co.uk](http://www.sampevsoc.co.uk)



Archaeologist Isabel Richardson (dec.) shows children from Sampford Peverell Primary School some of the finds at the site in 2019.