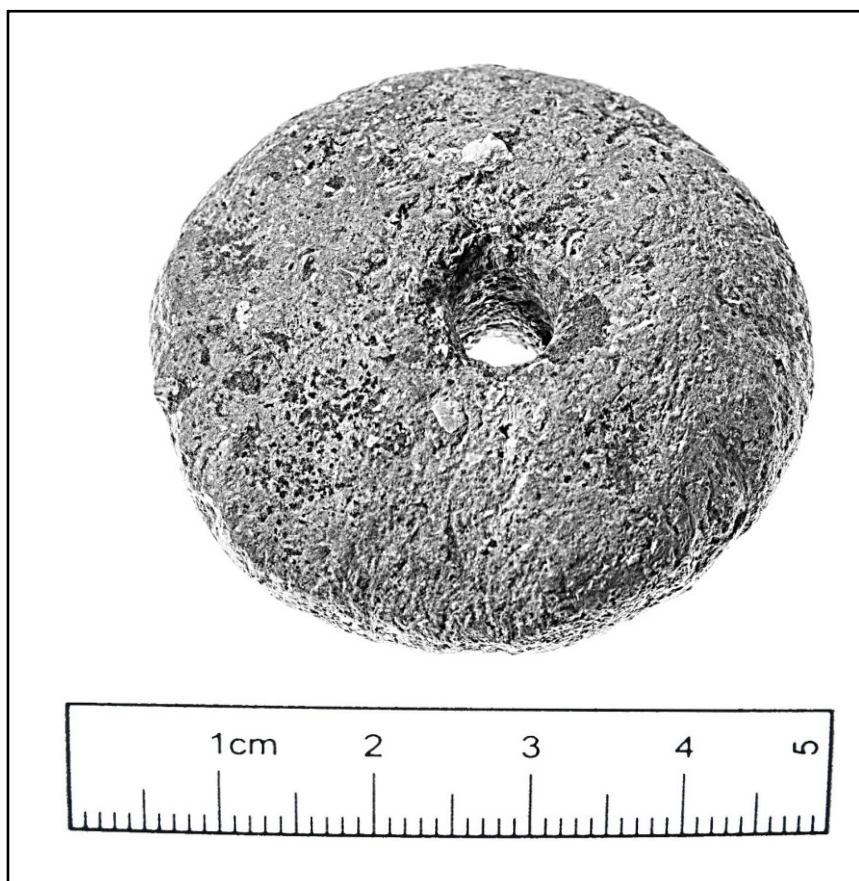


# Bulletin

SOAG



SOAG Bulletin No. 70





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Cover illustration: *A moulded clay spindle whorl from Test Pit 3 at High Wood.*  
(See article on page 27.)

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# Chairman's Report

Dave Carless

*Given at SOAG Annual General Meeting 24 April 2016*

## Introduction

2015 proved to be another strong year for SOAG with major excavations at three sites and an excellent series of lectures and events. Our communications have been strengthened by additional publicity and our technical capability has been enhanced by a generous donation of surveying equipment. The Group has grown in numbers and our financial position is secure. Perhaps most importantly for an amateur society, we had a lot of fun doing it.

## Membership and Finance

It was very pleasing in 2015 to see an increase in membership of over 11%, reversing a declining trend in 5 of the previous 6 years. There is no single reason for this – but promotion of Gatehampton and the new Highwood digs, and lecture publicity has all played a part. I am delighted that Mike Grinsted has agreed to take on a publicity role in SOAG, and this is already bearing fruit in increased interest in our programme.

Gift Aid continues to keep us “in the black” with about £300 adding to membership income, and 50% of members now pay by standing order, which is a great help in easing the administrative burden.

The policy of projects being self funding has continued. In particular, new and old avenues were explored to enable the High Wood project to go ahead, and the success in obtaining grants will hopefully be continued into 2016.

## Publications

In 2015, ten issues of our newsletter, *SOAG Messenger* were published under the editorship of Mike Green. The latest edition of our annual journal, *SOAG Bulletin No 69*, was once again produced by the editorial and production team of John Hefferan and Janet Eastment. At the time of writing the 2016 edition is already under way as we are hoping to bring the publication date forward to the first half of the year. In addition to our own publications, we also publish results of our research projects to a wider audience through the CBA South Midlands Archaeology annual report. The SOAG website

continues to be maintained by Mike Green as our main channel of communication with the outside world.

Eighteen months ago we started a new project to safeguard our old paper archive which includes:

- Copies of almost every edition of *SOAG Bulletin* and *SOAG Messenger* produced since the founding of SOAG in 1969
- The detailed logbooks maintained by our founder, Cynthia Graham Kerr, during her 30 or so active years
- The supporting paper documentation from many SOAG field projects between 1960 and 2000

By the end of the year good progress has been made. All the *SOAG Bulletins* and *SOAG Messengers* have been successfully digitised and by mid 2016 will be available on the SOAG website. Early versions in searchable form have been made available to SOAG project leaders and are already proving valuable in enabling access to earlier SOAG research and fieldwork. Cynthia's logbooks are likely to be available in digital form in a similar timescale, and the paperwork from old projects is likewise slowly being digitised with discussions ongoing about the most appropriate place for long term archiving.

## Lectures and events

The SOAG lecture season ran monthly from January to March and September to November and featured a wide range of seven very interesting speakers and topics, attracting increased audiences of between 30 and 40. Thanks are due to our new Publicity Officer, Mike Grinsted, for ensuring that the lectures are well advertised. This year, the popular new ‘tradition’ of devoting the meeting in November to talks by our own members was repeated, presented this year by SOAG members Lindsey Bedford and Ian Clarke. This was followed by our usual Christmas celebration, enjoyed enthusiastically by all.

Our AGM meeting was held in April and was followed, as usual, by a review of SOAG archaeology undertaken in the previous year and our annual



social. The review covered a number of projects, including long-standing work at Gatehampton Roman Villa and newer projects at Blewbury, High Wood and Exlade Street, demonstrating the breadth of our research while focussing on plans for the future. Also presented was a summary of the continuing project led by Mike Green to archive the many SOAG documents and records in order to provide public access to this rich source of material.

The SOAG summer visit this year, organised by Nancy Nichols, was a well-attended guided tour of Witney, including the Bishop's Palace and local museum. In addition at short notice a visit was arranged to the excavations at Thame Meadow Park led jointly by Oxford and Cotswold Archaeology. This massive site contained remarkable evidence of Iron Age, Romano-British and early Saxon activity, including SFBs, as well as a recently uncovered Neolithic enclosure. Pub lunches organized as part of these outings continue to be a popular part of the SOAG social calendar. In addition to these SOAG events, our project leaders have continued to give lectures to other archaeological organisations promoting our activities widely.

## Fieldwork and Research

### *High Wood:*

The first season on the High Wood Romano-British site, under the direction of David Nicholls, was focussed around a sequence of test pits excavated between March and June on 8 long weekends – an early season as work had to be completed before pheasant rearing commenced in the woods!

Because of the impact of illegal metal detecting, it was not possible to obtain any certain results or imaging from Geophysical Surveying, including sessions of Magnetometry, Resistivity, and a trial of Ground Probing Radar. The exploratory test pits were therefore aligned through the primary area of disturbance with an additional 3m x 6m grid positioned over what was believed to be evidence of an exposed retaining wall.

Two test pits revealed flint masonry, although this had been severely disturbed by the looters' activities and/or by earlier robbing to extract flintwork. These two test pits were later combined and extended, but no undisturbed stratification was encountered. However, in all test pits, each level yielded varying amounts of CBM and pottery sherds, bone, small quantities of iron slag and nails and scraps of bronze – pins, sheet and waste.

In the large trench, a 'gully' was formed by this wall, which extended over a length of approximately 6m – but this feature may have been formed within the last forty years. At the north end of this gully was a flintwork chamber and alongside, five plastic bags had been buried – full of Roman pottery sherds, some iron slag, but also four pieces of iron chain mail in conglomerate form. This has been X-rayed and a full report received confirming this remarkable find. A reputable team of metal detectorists from Oxford scanned the site both prior and during the season, to prevent further losses of metallic elements. Their results include eight 3rd/4th century Roman coins and one British gold quarter Stater of Cunobelinus 10 – 40 AD, and a piece of gold foil, now with the Coroner's Office as Treasure Trove, and which has been provisionally dated to the Bronze Age but is possibly Iron Age.

Digging will continue in 2016, focussing on the masonry found in 2015 and a section of wall showing above ground, and we hope to determine something of the shape and extent of buildings on this site.

### *Gatehampton:*

Participation in this project was very good this year with over 60 people digging at the site during 2015, nearly half of them SOAG members. The excavation always attracts a steady stream of people new to the site, often with little experience of archaeology. There were over 30 newcomers during 2015 and more than half were students or children; encouraging the participation of young archaeologists is an important aspect of the project. The annual open day in September was the most popular yet with over 100 people on site including a large group from The Goring and Streatley Local History Society.

2015 saw a shift in focus to the eastern end of the villa with excavation in four smaller trenches, after a reduction in the size of the largest trench in the site field, extension of the trench in the car park area and the opening of two small trenches between. Confirmation of a different building to the east is emerging with the discovery of a clear south west corner. An interesting development late in 2015 was the presence of deeper foundations on the south side that appear to be earlier than any of the walls excavated so far. Initial work in the two new small trenches is showing that although the parallel lateral walls continue on the south side, there is most probably a different internal layout in this part of the villa and much more extensive use of opus signinum cement, a material only seen in significant quantities

in the bath house. The extension of the trench in the car park is leading to a better understanding of the use of this part of the building and a further bone filled pit outside the building has added to the theory that this was a working area. It is hoped that the excavation of the eastern end of the villa building will be completed during 2016 with only minor extension of the current four trenches.

### **Blewbury:**

Last year we reported on a number of geophysical surveys in open areas within the village and on potential evidence of early Saxon settlement found by our test pit programme. In 2015 we excavated one of the geophysical anomalies (at the Rectory) revealing a lost farm track made of small flints. Finds of pottery and an iron arrow head suggest that this path may have been made in the medieval period.

With the support of a large team of SOAG and Blewbury diggers, the early Saxon site was fully

excavated revealing a fine sunken featured building with two post holes. A vast pottery assemblage of over 1400 sherds was mostly early Saxon and included pieces decorated by incision and stamping. A good selection of small finds made of glass, amber, metal and worked bone was also recovered from the site and analysis of these continues.

For 2016 we have one remaining village site to investigate (the Manor) and we are beginning to move outside the village itself to examine some very interesting cropmarks showing rectilinear enclosures in the surrounding fields. It seems likely that this will take us back into the Roman period but as yet this is uncertain.

### **Thanks**

As ever, the projects, the events, the administration and the support activities of the Group depend on the great efforts of its members. I am very grateful to them for their sterling work.

## SOAG and the local community

SOAG's constitution includes in the aims of the Group: *"to advance . . . education for public benefit in the archaeology and historical heritage of South Oxfordshire and its surrounding area"*. To this end I'm pleased to say that SOAG provides as much public access to its field archaeology as it is able, and its members also provide external lectures to local community groups. Here are a few examples from 2015.



*Left: January 2015. Hazel Williams lecturing on SOAG's activities to the Henley Historical and Archaeological Society*



*Above: September 2015. At our Gatehampton Roman Villa dig, Mike Green guides a tour by alumni from Linacre College, Oxford, and their families*

*Left: July 2015. Community Day at the Big Dig in the Rectory garden in Blewbury - training the next generation!*

# Lectures, Events & Visits in 2015

## Lecture Series

*22 January*

Dr Steve Ford (Director Thames Valley Archaeology Services (TVAS))

**Excavations at Elizabeth House (St. John's College) Oxford - a Neolithic Henge, Medieval Farm and the victims of the St. Brices's Day Massacre?**

*26 February*

Dr Wendy Morrison (University of Oxford, School of Archaeology)

**Enduring significance: the past, present and future of archaeology at Dorchester-on-Thames**

*26 March*

John Leighfield CBE

**Putting South Oxfordshire on the map: from Gough to Google**

*26 April*

**46th AGM and Review of SOAG Archaeology**

*24 September*

Anne Dodd (Oxford Archaeology)

**Oxford before the University**

*22 October*

Dr Alex Smith (University of Reading)

**New Light on the Romano-British Countryside: Current results of the Roman Rural Settlement Project**

*26 November*

Two 30 min lectures by SOAG members:

Lindsey Bedford

**Revealing Roman Boxford**

Ian Clarke

**Ascott Park - a small house and a large garden**

## Events and Visits

*9 July*

**SOAG Summer visit to archaeology at Thame**

*28 August*

**SOAG Summer visit to Witney**

*27 September*

**Open House at SOAG Gatehampton Roman Villa Excavation**



## Open Day at Gatehampton 2015

Hazel Williams

The annual Gatehampton Open Day for 2015 was held on Sunday 27 September, the weather was perfect and it was one of the most popular Open Days so far with estimates of over 100 visitors. With two new trenches open and Trench 7 reduced in size the site looked a little different this year for SOAG members. Mike Green and Dave Jobling did an excellent job of explaining the site and our plans for it to the assembled visitors. There were the usual displays of site information, finds and CBM and most importantly, tea and cake completed the afternoon.

Alan Winchcombe, the Chairman of the Goring and Streatley History Society, brought a group of twenty-five members to see the site. (This was followed up with a well-attended talk to the Society in Goring in December by Hazel Williams). The group included John Farr who lives at Gatehampton Manor and who has seen the progress of the excavation at

Gatehampton over many years and allowed us access to his fields for the extensive geophysical surveys of the landscape around the villa. It is always interesting to discuss the site with people who have local knowledge of the area and its history.

Other visitors included SOAG members, friends and family, many people who heard about the site through our listings on the CBA website, and passing walkers.

My thanks to all the Gatehampton team of diggers for their hard work both in preparing for the day and for their excellent work in the trenches in the months before, providing an interesting and informative afternoon for the visitors. The day attracted new diggers, a group of visitors, including some young children, joined in the excavation on the day and returned to the site in the following weeks.



*Fig. 1: The Open Day Team . From l. to r: Becky Morrisson, Joe Skerry, Brenda Austin, Mike Green, Hazel Williams, John Hefferan, Edmund Palka, Nancy Nichols, David Cox, Roelie Reed, Dave Jobling, Derek Birks, Phillippa Wray, Meg Haynes Latham. (Photo taken by Richard Miller using his 'pole cam')*





*Fig. 2 (above): Displays and discussions  
(and tea and cakes in the background)*



*Fig. 3 (left): Perfect trowelling  
techniques from our youngest visiting  
digger*

*Fig. 4 (below): A tour of our main open  
trench*





## SOAG summer visit to archaeology at Thame

Report by Mike Green

On Thursday July 9th, seventeen SOAG members joined a dozen members of the Berkshire Archaeology Society in response to an invitation to tour a remarkable excavation underway half a mile west of Thame.

The 4 hectare site, at the junction of the A418 and the A329, is scheduled for housing development. An exploratory dig undertaken 18 months ago by John Moore Heritage Services suggested the presence of

significant Iron Age and Roman archaeology, following which a consortium of Oxford and Cotswold Archaeology won a contract for a thorough wide-area excavation. Begun in January this year, what has been discovered is extensive evidence of apparently continuous settlement from early Neolithic to mid Saxon times, the archaeology being so rich that the digging period has been extended several times.



*Fig. 1: Excavation pits as far as the eye can see!*

We were split into three groups to tour the site and to visit the finds hut, guided by the dig's excellent and enthusiastic senior archaeologists. It seemed as though almost everything in the text books has been uncovered, including Neolithic henges, Iron Age banjo enclosures, Roman field systems, and Saxon SFBs (Sunken Featured Buildings). The latter attracted special attention from those SOAGs who were planning to take part in the Blewbury Big Dig later in 2015, as there was a chance that we might well be excavating an SFB. It was especially thrilling to watch as artefacts that many of us have only ever seen under glass in museums, were passed out of the pits as they were found and straight into our hands. In the finds hut too we were able to handle all the

finds (including one of the most interesting flint assortments to be found on one site).

The full story of the site is too complex to do justice here, and it is still evolving, but most of us came away with special memories and anecdotes to re-tell, of which here are just two. Nancy Nichols was intrigued by the Iron Age human burial in which the skull had been removed and replaced with that of a horse. Apparently several such altered burials have been found elsewhere recently raising the likelihood that the continental idea of the chimera did indeed spread to Britain. Mike Fulton was intrigued by the notion of a 'perched water table'. In answer to a question about access to water, (the site is some



Fig. 2: The SOAG Team

30m above, and a mile distant from, the nearby river), we were told that one part of the plateau was very boggy, so much so that the Romans had dug ditches to drain it. Apparently very near the surface is a water table sitting above, but independent of, the underlying river-connected water table beneath – hence ‘perched’!

We just hope that the occupants of the housing estate that will soon cover the entire site will be given the opportunity to know something of the 5,000-year history of previous occupation.

After the field visit thirteen SOAGs and friends retired to The Six Bells in Thame for a sociable lunch

(photo below), and in the afternoon a smaller group visited Thame Museum which was opened specially for us, for which thanks are due to SOAG Meg Haynes Latham. Following this an even smaller number embarked on a walking tour of the town. The layout of the market town we experience today is largely the creation of the Bishop of Lincoln in 1299. Old Thame, as recorded in Domesday, is tucked away at the western end of the High Street, and we thank SOAG Roelie Reed for preparing a walking guide to this charming and historically rich area. The day ended with a few of us taking tea back at The Six Bells.



Fig. 3: Neolithic bowl fragment fresh from the ground



Fig. 4: SOAG lunch at the Six Bells in Thame



## SOAG summer visit to Witney

Report by Mike Green

The second SOAG summer visit of 2015 was to the town of Witney, on Friday 28 August, attended by 22 SOAG members and friends.

We gathered at the site of the so-called Bishop's Palace where we met our guide for the day, local historian Stanley Jenkins. 'So-called' palace because, as Stanley said, the bishop in question was that of Winchester which is where his palace would have been; Witney was just one of several outlying manors under his control. The remains of the 'palace' were nearly lost in the 1970s when English Heritage declared it to be of no particular merit. It was however excavated in the 1980s by Oxford Archaeology and the substantial foundations and

wall footings are now protected under a modern tent-like structure that is both attractive and effective. What can clearly be seen is the motte-and-bailey origins of the building. In this instance it is an example of the type whereby the tower was built from ground level up and the earthen motte built around it to give the impression of a tower built on top of a mound: only the lowest levels are now visible. The adjacent interpretation centre, which was opened specially for us by David Moon from the Oxfordshire Museums Service, includes a model of the building and illustrations of its surroundings, although Stanley explained that much of the detail was speculative and very open to doubt.



*Fig. 1: the SOAG team under the awning protecting the remains of the Bishop's Palace*

Little is known of Witney's origins, although Stanley's personal speculation is that these lie in the Dark Ages; dangerous times, during which Saxons were penetrating from the south and Angles from the east, and when many settlements chose locations in the forest, away from the potentially dangerous thoroughfares of the main rivers, in this case the rivers Evenlode and Thames each three miles away, respectively to the north and south.

The layout of the town as we experience it now was established by the bishop in the 12th century and resembles many 'new towns' created at this time

such as Marlborough, Thame and Henley. They were all laid out along both sides of a wide main road created to accommodate markets and other gatherings. In Witney's case this has left us with the verdant Church Green running south of the town centre, and the High Street to the north. Like several other examples the new town was built as an extension to its early medieval precursor, and although little archaeology has been done that would establish which area represents the Saxon town, during our walking tour we stopped in Corn Street where Stanley explained to us the evidence for his



theory that this was the earlier town's main thoroughfare.

Typical of new towns of the time were burgage plots, running out either side of the wide main road. Our walk took us along The Crofts which defines the back of the plots on the west side of the town (and passes Wychwood Brewery on the way). Later we walked down the east side along the river Windrush river which defines the extent of the plots on that side of town. For those of us familiar with the similar layout in Henley, the plots here seemed to be about double the length.



*Fig. 2: SOAGs at the Buttercross*

On our walk between the two sides of town we stopped at the Buttercross, the medieval marketing and meeting place where women from neighbouring villages gathered to sell butter and eggs.

After lunch at The Fleece, our guided walk continued north along the High Street ending at Witney's small but charming local museum. It was here that we learned about the town's more recent history. It was once famous across the world for its blanket making, gloves and other woollen goods, and much of Witney's architecture reflects the prosperity brought by the woollen trade.

It was in the museum that our second guide of the day, Helen Bridge, introduced us to her special project, the history of the nearby village of Crawley. In summary, a rewarding day for all who came, enhanced by the expertise and friendliness of our guides, and last but not least, wonderful weather that surprised us in what had otherwise been a wet and windy late-August week



*Fig 3: Stanley Jenkins explaining the model of the Bishops Palace to SOAG chairman, Dave Carless*

# Reports and Articles

## Gatehampton Farm Roman Villa Excavation

### Interim Report 2015

Hazel Williams

#### Introduction

At the beginning of 2015, half of the largest trench at Gatehampton, Trench 7, was backfilled and for the first time in many years there was no longer a sizeable area of the villa exposed in one trench. More areas have been opened and now the excavation is split among four smaller trenches as the focus of the excavation has shifted eastward. The aim of the project is to find out more about the character and layout of the eastern end of the building; geophysical survey and evidence of a different building methods suggested the east end of the villa was of an earlier and different construction. Some of the developments during 2015 have already

been reported in the previous *SOAG Bulletin* No. 69 (pp 14-25) and the following will complete the account of the excavation to the end of the 2015 digging season.

An important aspect of the Gatehampton project is participation; the excavation continues to be a popular site for volunteers, experienced or beginners, with record numbers taking part in the excavation during 2015 and visiting on the annual Open Day (see separate report). Open Day was also an opportunity for taking high level photos of the trenches to add to the series that covers the whole building.



Fig. 1: Site Plan 2015

### Backfilling and new trenches early in 2015

In May 2015, major changes were made to the trenches on site. Trench 7, the largest trench, was reduced by half, Trench 16 in the car park area was extended further south and west, and two new smaller trenches, 17 and 18, were opened.

The western half of Trench 7, covering Rooms 5, 6, most of Room 7 and part of the South Corridor Room 3, was backfilled. The remaining section of Trench 7 is a long narrow trench that runs right across the building over Rooms 7, 8, South Corridor Room 3 and part of the enclosure. Trench 7 also covers part of Rooms 9 and 10 and a new area, designated Room 11 on the south side. The trench measures 20

metres by a maximum of 6 metres and just overlaps the original Trench 3, the first large trench on the site.

Trenches 17 and 18 were positioned to look at an area that was quite ambiguous in the geophysical survey, it was not clear that the building to the east had the same layout. Trench 17 merges with the extended Trench 16 at the eastern end. Trench 18 was positioned over what may be the continuation of the parallel walls of the South Corridor Room 3 or other small rooms on the south side of the building.

### Trench 7: South Corridor Room 3 and Room 11

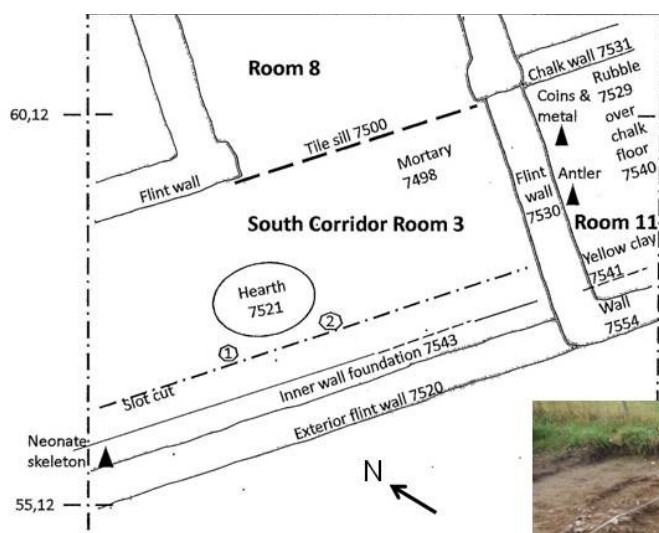


Fig. 2: Plan of Room 3, 8 and 11

Viewpoint  
for Fig. 3,  
below

Fig. 3: View of Room 11 foreground  
and South Corridor Room 3



The main focus of excavation in Trench 7 during 2015 was on South Corridor Room 3 and a small section of the adjacent room to the east, Room 11. The two rooms are separated by a wall 7530 that forms the south end of the only wall line that extends right across the building. Evidence of a different building style to the east of the wall line suggests that this may form the end wall of a separate earlier building. More support for this theory emerged late in 2015 when the south east corner of Room 11 was excavated. Walls 7530 and 7554 appear to form a

right angle that may be the corner of a building; there is a consistent layer of thick mortar supporting the corner with courses of flint stones above and below. This discovery is particularly important as what would be the corresponding 'corner' on the north side of the building (in Room 7) was robbed out.

The section of the corridor currently exposed in Trench 7 is just over 6 metres in length and just under 3 metres in width. This is the east end of a



long 20 metre corridor that extends from the bath house to wall 7530 at the eastern end.

The exterior wall 7520 of South Corridor Room 3 appeared initially to consist of two foundation courses of flints below floor level with one or two courses above and a spread of flint stones outside the building; it appears to be a more substantial wall than seen in the central 'veranda' section of the long corridor. An important discovery was that of deeper wall foundation 7543 on the inner side of 7520. It is also constructed of flint and mortar, is at least two courses deep, and appears to extend under 7520. Both walls are over half a metre wide. The foundation 7543 also seems to be present in Room 11 although more work will need to be done to confirm it. It does suggest that there was an earlier wall that may pre date both the eastern part of the villa and the later extension westward. This area will be looked at more closely in 2016.

A neonate skeleton was discovered within the width of the exterior wall 7520, closer to the interior of the wall. It is probable that it was placed there during the construction of the wall but insertion into a cavity in the wall at a later date cannot be excluded. The condition of the bones was generally good but the skeleton was not complete and there appears to have been disturbance post burial, probably by animals as they are below the level of plough disturbance. Further work close to the inner side of the wall produced more bones and these appear to be part of a second infant burial, with fewer bones found and more scattered.



Fig. 4: Neonate skeleton

There is emerging evidence of two floor levels in this part of South Corridor Room 3. The terracotta tile 'sill' that separates it from Room 8 is over 40 cms deep; the tiles are placed vertically. There is an upper floor surface close to the top edge of the tiles that consists of small patches of laid terracotta tesserae butting the sill. The tessellated area may have been more extensive as the surface of the deposit 7498

was quite mortary. There is a shallow hearth 7521 cut into this level and two possible stake holes were found close to the hearth when the slot along the inner wall was dug.

There are signs of an earlier floor level; both close to the sill and close to the deeper inner wall foundation. Pottery fragments were found at the lowest level of 7498 close to the bottom edge of the sill tiles. In the slot cut along the inner side of the south wall part of a hard concrete surface 7536 was found at a similar level, adjacent to the deeper wall foundation 7543. Most of a large storage pot, with a rim diameter of over 30cms, was found tucked in close to 7543, the vessel is handmade grog ware, probably produced locally and has a black burnished finish (Paul Booth Pers. Comm.).



Fig. 5: Pot fragment showing keyed lines where a layer of clay was added before firing

### Room 11

Room 11 lies south of Room 10 and was partially excavated in Trench 3; the edge of Trench 3 was seen clearly as a darker backfill deposit cutting cross the edge of the area. Room 11 is quite a small space, less than three metres square, bounded by wall 7530 and a chalk wall 3090 to the east in Trench 3. Part of a firm chalk floor surface 7540 underlies the demolition rubble and the same chalk surface 3040 was found in Trench 3. Deposits of yellow clay 7541 were found both in the south west corner of the room and in the centre of the room in Trench 3 (yellow clay 3091) near burnt deposits. This type of clay is found in many places in the building, usually associated with industrial activity, used as a base for a hearth for example in Room 6 and in Trench 16 (SOAG Bulletin No. 69, pp 15 and 20).

The most notable aspect of this room was the large number of finds that appeared during the removal of the demolition rubble including eight copper alloy *nummus* coins that were discovered within a small area and close to the presumed floor surface. These are listed in the table below, one or two are in poor condition and some characteristics are not clear.

<i>Small find no.</i>	<i>Obverse</i>	<i>Reverse</i>
528	Helmeted head of Constantinopolis facing left	Victory on a prow with sceptre and shield
530	Head facing right	Two soldiers holding standards GLOR IAEXERC ITVS Mint: TRP •
531	Head of Constans facing right: FL IVL COSTANS NOB C 	Two soldiers holding standards GLOR IAEXERC ITVS Mint: AQT? 
532	Helmeted head of Roma facing left URBS ROMA 	Wolf & twins with two stars Mint: SMAE? 
533	Helmeted head of Roma facing left URBS ROMA 	Wolf & twins with two stars, wreath encircling star 



<b>Small find no.</b>	<b>Obverse</b>	<b>Reverse</b>
536	Head facing left, poor condition, possibly Constantine/Constans	Very corroded
538	Head of Theodorus facing right 	Pietas holding infant --- ROMA 
540	Helmeted head facing left, possibly Constantinopolis (poor condition)	Victory on a prow

Table: Nummus coins found in Room 11

There are two each of the common types of low value coins issued by Constantine 1 in the early fourth century from the period 330-335 AD. The Gloria Exercitus, the Urbs Roma Wolf and twins and the Constantinopolis/Victory on a prow. The Theodorus/Pietas coin is likely to be slightly later in 337-340 AD. One coin 536 was too corroded to identify but is possibly of a similar date. Apart from Coin 528, found close to wall 7530, all were found in a very small area in close proximity to several metal objects; three fragments of thin narrow bands of iron, two of which fit together and two iron 'bosses' or large studs with circular heads and long nail like projections and a fragment of a pewter alloy plate. Half a metre away, in the same deposit, a well preserved, quite large and almost complete antler, possibly of a roe deer, was discovered laid on a large piece of tegula roof tile

The question arises of how this group of coins was deposited and what relationship there is between them and the other objects. It may simply be that these low value coins and metal items have remained undisturbed since the abandonment of the building because they were left in the corner of a small room. A more appealing interpretation is that the metal strapping and bosses were part of a wooden chest and that a few low value coins were left within, perhaps after the rest of the contents were removed when the villa was abandoned or shortly after, but before the building was completely collapsed. The fragment of pewter alloy plate may have had some scrap value. The antler is a fine example (Dr Elise Fraser Pers. Comm.) and may have been decorative, alternatively it may have been intended for carving into items of jewellery or handles for tools and knives.



Fig. 6: Antler pick deposit



## Trench 16



Fig. 7: Trench 16 view north with end wall of villa in centre

Much of the work done in Trench 16 during 2015 was reported in last year's *SOAG Bulletin* (No.69 pp 20-23). Early in 2015 the trench was extended south and west past the hedge to form an L shaped trench, linked to Trench 17.

A start was made on the somewhat mixed layer across the newly opened area at the southern end of the trench, the line of the end wall of the building appearing to continue south but only the initial demolition layers have been removed so far. Many loose tesserae and patches of chalk suggest some sort of surface within the building but these are at a higher level than the adjacent floors and the chalk surface found in Trench 17.

In the area outside the building a neat pile of broken roof tiles were found, perhaps awaiting re-use as building material or for cutting into tesserae. Part of a pit containing animal bone was also found close to the edge of the trench and the trench will be extended slightly in 2016 to explore more of the area east of the building.

## Trench 17

This trench is four metres square and is close to the end of the large field hedge. During 2015 only a narrow slot, less than one metre in width was excavated along the southern edge.

As expected large quantities of demolition debris 17000 were found, mostly flint stones and mortar. The large size of some of the flints and the quantity suggest a substantial wall in the vicinity but as yet this has not been found.

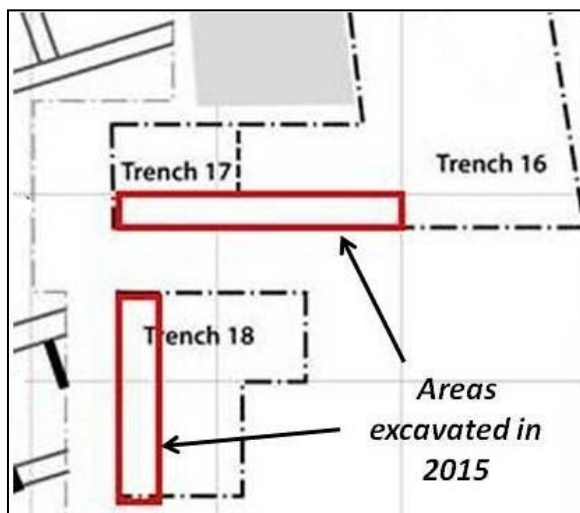


Fig. 8: Trenches 17 and 18

A large number of animal bones, most probably cattle bones, was found in the lower levels of the rubble. Beneath the rubble was a firm chalk floor surface 17001 that extends east into Trench 16 and also into Trench 18. Late in 2015, lumps of opus signinum (a reddish mix of lime mortar, crushed tile and chalk bits), were coming up at the eastern end of the slot and further east in Trench 16 as well.

The opus signinum was used extensively in the bath house but only small quantities were used in the rest of the building. A well preserved coin of Chrispus was found when the remaining topsoil was removed after the trench was opened by machine; this dates to 324-5 AD, issued just prior to the sequence of three coins of Constantine 1 found in Trench 7.





<i>Small find no.</i>	<i>Obverse</i>	<i>Reverse</i>
516	Chripus cuirassed facing left FL IVL CHRISPUS NOB CAES	Camp gate with two turrets and a star PROVIDEN.....CAES. Mint; STR
		

Table: Coin of Chripus with Camp gate reverse

Trench 18

The new Trench 18 is positioned to cover the continuation of the parallel walls that form the South Corridor Room 3 and Room 11 along the south side

of the villa building. It was not clear from geophysical survey how far this pattern continued eastwards. A start was made on a narrow slot, one metre wide, along the west side of the trench (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: Trench 18 (foreground) and Trenches 17 and 16 close to the field hedge



The demolition layer consisted of large flints and mortar very much like that seen two metres away in Trench 17 but with more chalk blocks and stones and more roof tile. The parallel walls appear to continue; a chalk inner wall 17003 was excavated and is on the same alignment as the inner chalk wall 7531 in Trench 7. Late in 2015 a chalk floor surface was found on the north side of this wall and is likely to be part of the same floor found in Trench 17, two metres away. A probable flint exterior wall is not yet fully exposed.

### Summary

A start has been made on the excavation of the eastern section of the villa building and will continue in 2016 when it is hoped that the work in the current four trenches will be completed. The aim is to complete the picture of this substantial building, to understand how the building developed during the period from the mid third century to the eventual abandonment late in the fourth century. It is hoped that more dating evidence can be found to confirm the theory that the eastern end of the villa is the earliest part of the building.

South Corridor Room 3 is one of the biggest rooms in the villa at twenty metres long. Several sections have been excavated over time as the excavation of the building has progressed eastward from the bath house. The central section of the corridor had a half height exterior wall, probably enclosing an open veranda. In contrast, at both the extreme western end of the corridor and in the eastern section just excavated the exterior wall appears more substantial suggesting the two ends of the corridor were more enclosed spaces.

The discovery of the south east corner in Room 11 is important as it is further confirmation that there was an earlier section of the building to the east of the long wall line that divides this part of the villa. Early work in Trench 3 showed that the pattern of parallel lateral walls forming a series of small rooms (including Room 9) continues on the north side of the building and recent work in Trench 18 on the south side indicates that the parallel walls there continue for at least five metres into another room beyond Room 11. However, the same pattern is not yet appearing in Trenches 16 and 17 over the east end of the villa; is this because it is of a different layout and construction? Is it the earliest part of the building or a later workshop area added on?

The surprise discovery late in 2015 was the deep wall foundation on the inner side of the exterior wall of

South Corridor Room 3. The feature appears to continue under the south east corner of Room 11; is this evidence of a much earlier phase of the building that pre dates both the extension of the building westwards and the part of the building currently under investigation to the east?

### Participation and acknowledgements

2015 was a busy year when there was a record number of 60 people digging at the site. My particular thanks to the SOAG diggers, more than 30 of them, for their expertise and enthusiasm for the site. Visiting diggers came from as far afield as Australia and London, Birmingham and Derby in the UK. It is particularly pleasing that 15 of our diggers were under 16 years old; they are quick learners and



Fig. 10: General view of working in Trench 7

we hope that they are the archaeologists of the future. My thanks to SOAG member Richard Miller who organised high level photos of the site using a pole camera. These are a valuable addition to the sequence of high level photos that cover the whole villa building. Our thanks also to Dr Elise Fraser for her comments on the finds and for spending a day with us examining the coins and other objects from Room 11. Thanks too, to Paul Booth for his comments on the pottery. We greatly appreciate the support given to the project by Bob and Liz Jones and Daisytown; for allowing us to extend our trenches and occupy some of their storage space. Our usual thanks also to Robin Cloke who has been a supporter of the project for many years.

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# Blewbury Big Dig

## 4th Interim Report

Lindsey Bedford and Dave Carless

### Introduction

The project continues to run as a very successful partnership between SOAG and Blewbury Local History Group in which both parties provide equipment and members of both can take part.

Last year we reported on the geophysical programme which had identified three sites where further fieldwork would be desirable: the Manor, the Rectory and the Early Saxon site which had initially been found by the test pit programme. The Manor remains for future investigation but the fieldwork at the Rectory and the Saxon site is now complete and reported below. Post excavation work on the Saxon site is ongoing.

### The Rectory

Following a geophysical survey completed in 2014 and reported last year in *SOAG Bulletin* 69, a linear feature with high resistance was noted. Strong

magnetic signals were seen on one side of it. It was thought that the feature might be a path or a collapsed wall and so the primary aim of this excavation was to determine which, if either, it was and extract any available dating evidence.

### Summary of Excavation and Findings

The 4.00m x 0.75m trench was dug at 90 degrees to the linear feature identified on the resistivity plot. After the turf was removed, the first context recorded (01) was the top soil, to a depth of approximately 150mm below the ground surface where a flinty surface was found. It was noted that either side of the flinty area, presumed to be the feature, the soil was wetter and more clayey.

The second context (02) was comprised of subsoil becoming increasingly alluvial and taken down to a depth of approximately 350mm in areas where the flinty surface was not found.

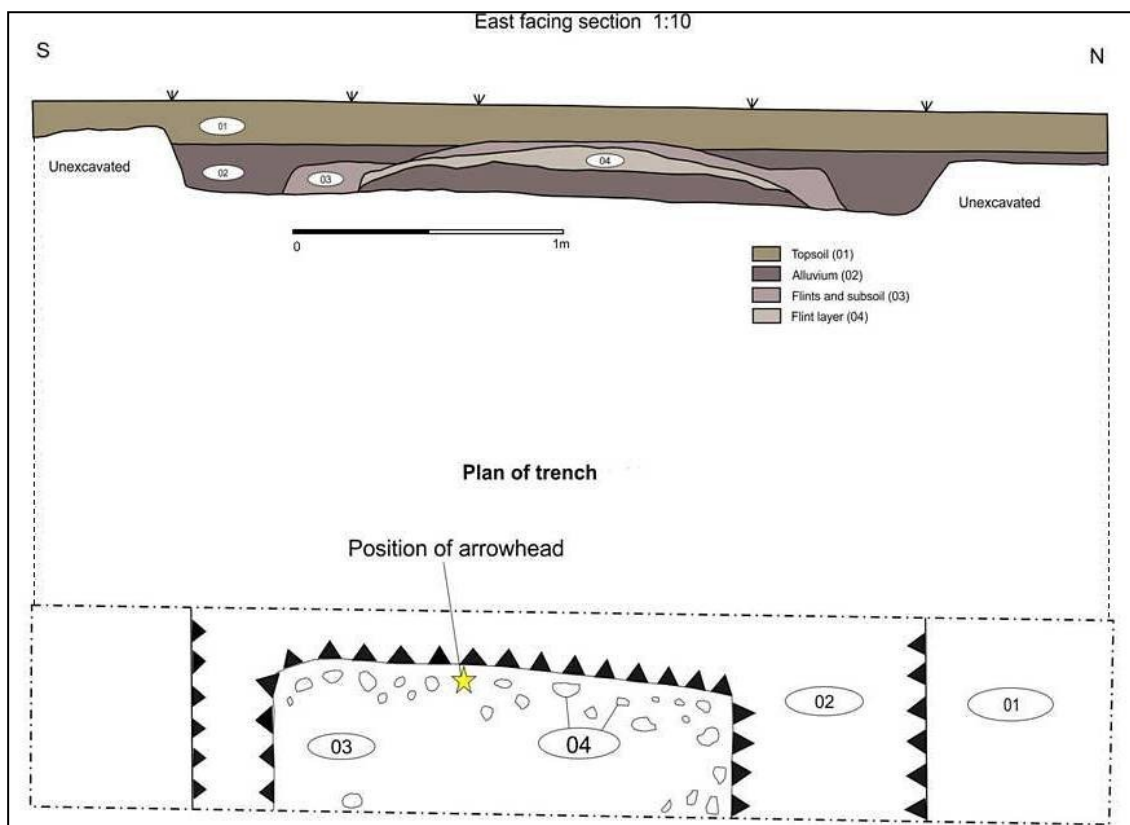


Fig. 1: Plan and Section and plan of Rectory trench

(drawn by Lindsey Bedford)

Once the edges of the surface had been located it was clear that it was not necessary to excavate the full length of the trench to this depth.

After the flinty surface had been photographed and recorded it was sectioned to a depth of 350mm (Context 03) to establish its thickness and what lay beneath – more alluvium

The feature was clearly identified as a path made of small (circa 20mm to 50mm) flints, lying approximately 150mm below the modern surface. It was 1.7m wide and appeared to be cambered. Either side of it and underneath the flint layer was a dark grey alluvial deposit which remained wet despite little recent rain. Local knowledge suggests that there is a ford across the stream in line with this path, leading to Parsonage Farm.

The excavated material was not sieved but pottery and other finds were recovered where seen. The spoil heap was scanned with a metal detector. It was noted that in contexts 01 and 02 there was a mix of pottery sherds dating from medieval to modern. Context 03, which appeared to be undisturbed, had a few Medieval sherds but no Post-Medieval or Modern, and a few sherds of undated CBM, so the path could be Medieval.

There were few other finds of note with the exception of a medieval arrow head (see photo below) lying in Context 01 on the flinty surface. This was later identified by Hector Cole as a Chippenham Type 1.



Fig. 2: Chippenham Type 1 arrow head (Photo by Richard Miller)

### Test pits

Two test pits were dug within the area where strong magnetic anomalies had earlier been identified by

the geophysics programme. In the first a great deal of 20th century domestic rubbish was found above a muddy alluvial deposit from the nearby stream. The second, on slightly higher and firmer ground, also contained rubbish and below this the continuation of the flinty path was located. The rubbish in these pits included ferrous metal which would account for the strong magnetic anomalies.

### Conclusion

The linear feature was a well made path of small flints across a boggy alluvial area probably running from the corner of Church Road, across the stream, to Parsonage Farm. Its construction was of Medieval or later date.

The magnetic anomalies were caused by domestic rubbish close to the surface.

### The Early Saxon Site

Last year, in *SOAG Bulletin* 69, we reported on the seven test pits that had been dug and the rich early Saxon material which had been recovered from some of them. We also reported the geophysical, metal detector and auger surveys which had subsequently been undertaken. The auger survey indicated an area of deeper soil above the natural chalk of a few meters length and width. We concluded that it was most likely that this represented “the remains of a sunken featured building in which secondary or tertiary deposit of 6<sup>th</sup> century material has taken place”.

In the summer of 2015 a full excavation of a 5m x 5m square was undertaken to ascertain the nature and date of the feature and recover any further material from it.

### The Excavation

In our test pit programme we routinely dig in artificial contexts or “spits” of 100mm depth and collect and record finds from them by spit. As we had this information from the two test pits that we had already dug within the 5m x 5m trench area, we extended this approach to the whole excavation. Furthermore, at the lower contexts of the test pits we had introduced spatial contexts by subdividing the spits into 0.5m x 0.5m grid squares. This division was also adopted for the whole trench (as can be seen in Fig. 3) so all features and finds we recorded spatially. This affords the possibility of analysis of the deposits in three dimensions.

As with the test pits, Spits 0 to 2 (0 – 250mm depth) contained mainly modern and later medieval material but below this large quantities of Saxon



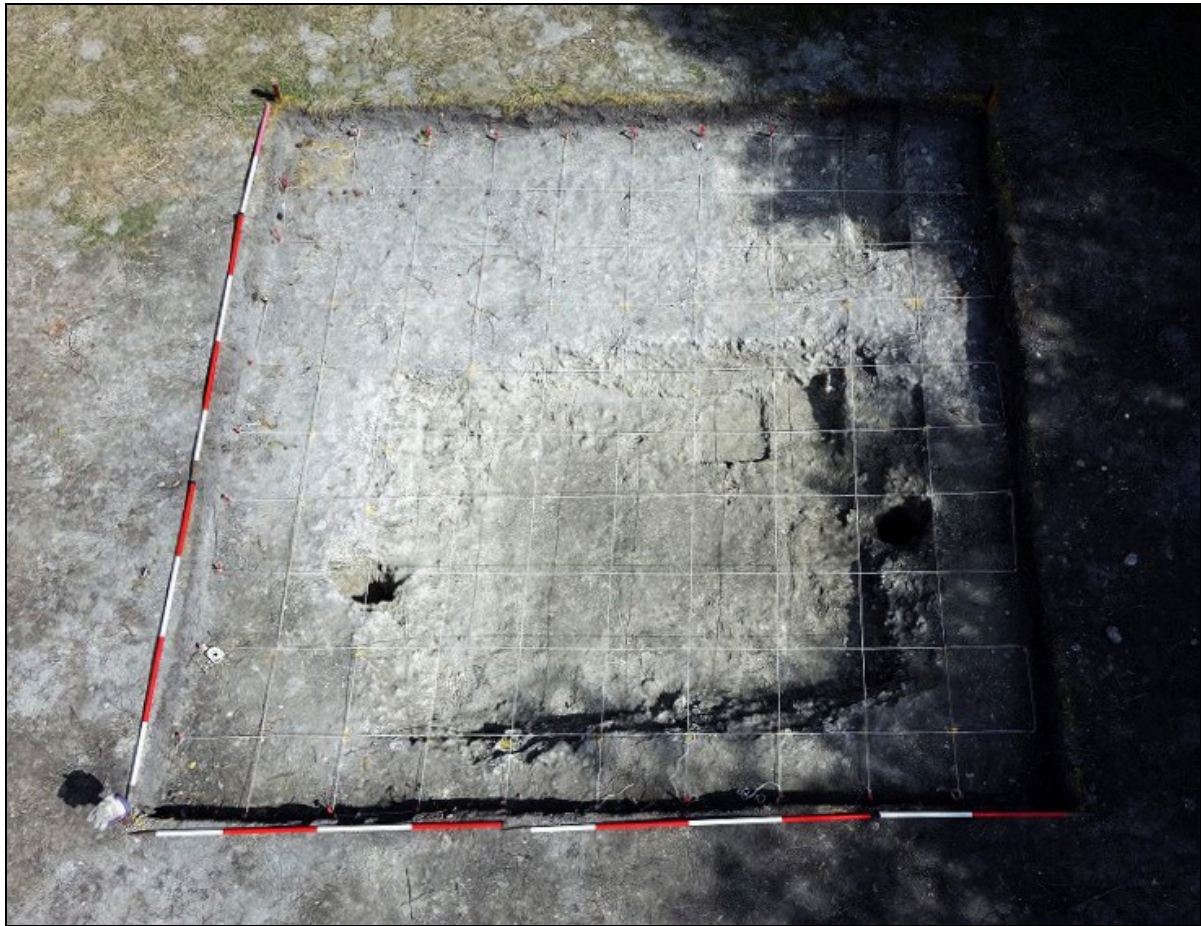


Fig. 3: Overhead view of excavated Sunken Featured Building

(Photo by Richard Miller)

material was found (see *The Finds*, below). This Saxon material was located within the deep area which measured approximately 3.5m x 3.0m. There were two post holes located roughly at the centre of the two short sides (Fig. 3, and Fig. 4) showing that this was indeed a classic two post sunken featured building.

#### **Environmental Study**

In free-draining chalk lands, organic material including pollen does not survive well and hence the opportunities for environmental sampling are limited. However calcareous material does survive well in the alkaline conditions and hence a mollusc survey was carried out at the edge of the trench by Tom Walker. From Tom's report "A total of 1577 microscopic shells representing 21 species were present. Species associated with open country (*Vertigo pygmaea*, *Pupilla muscorum*, *Vallonia costata* and *V. excentrica*) account for the majority of shells in every sample, especially in the most superficial topsoil sample. Shade species are poorly represented, with only sporadic numbers in the topsoil and subsoil, and non in the underlying chalky sediments. The mollusc column was taken very close

to the sunken feature building, and its location is likely to have been in an area associated with the building, perhaps used as grazing for domestic animals. When the building went out of use the land remained open and grazed, possibly as part of a 'green' area within the developing medieval village."

Tom concludes "The molluscs from this site show that the land surrounding the location of the sunken feature building has been open since sediment accumulation commenced, with little or no woodland or scrub in the close vicinity; the shade trees now present on the site are likely to be a very recent introduction. The superabundance of *Vallonia excentrica* suggests short grazed grassland throughout the period of sediment deposition."

#### **The Finds**

Finds from both the test pits and the larger excavation will be discussed together as they are associated and all recovered from the fill of the Early Saxon sunken featured building (SFB). The finds are grouped into their categories of pottery, glass, bone, metal and natural. At the time of writing the post excavation analysis is not complete so this should be considered an interim report.

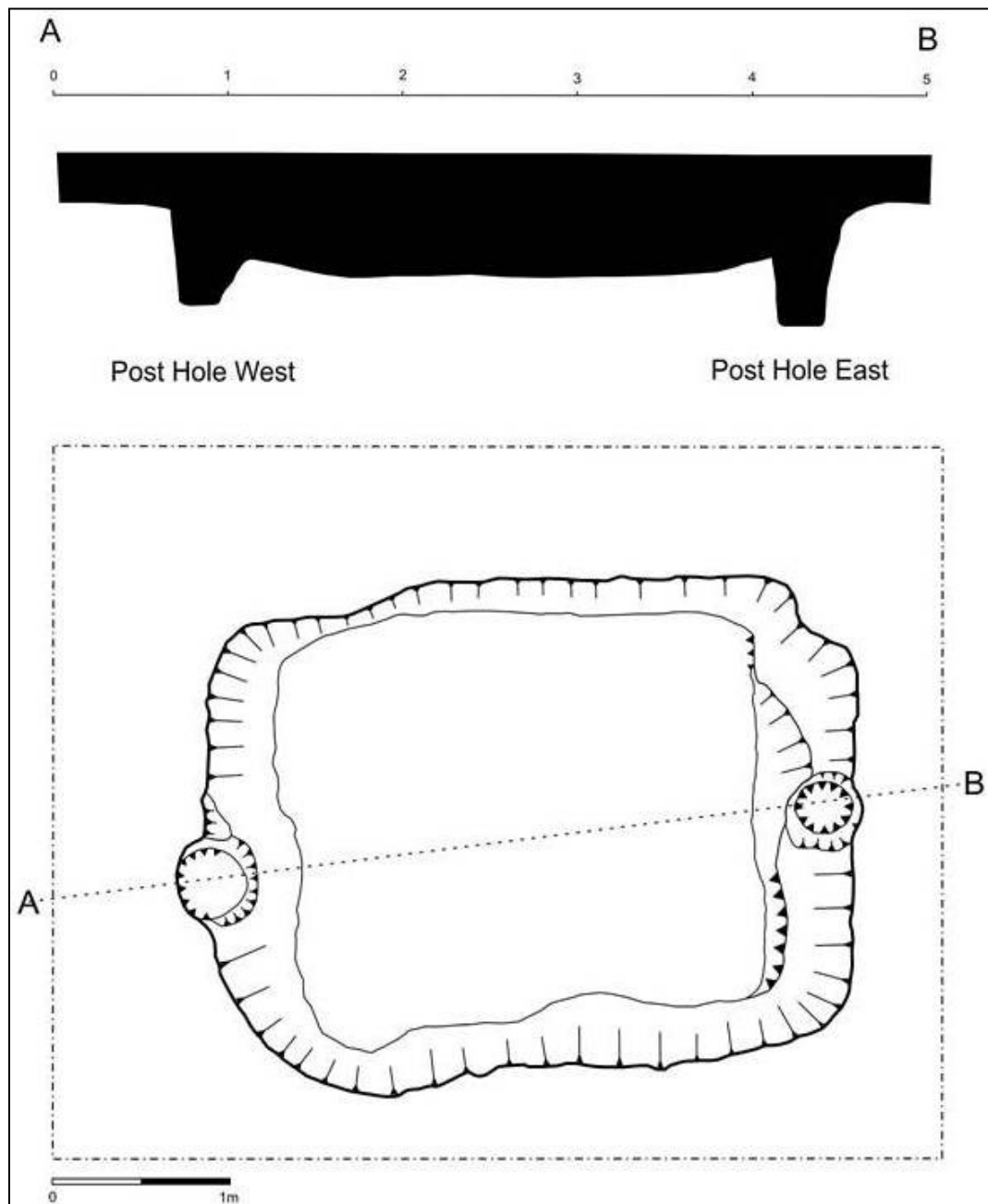


Fig. 4: Section and plan of Sunken Featured Building (drawn by Lindsey Bedford)

#### Pottery

The 1428 sherds of pottery are awaiting professional post excavation analysis but it is clear that all the Modern through to Post Medieval pieces (just 4% of the total assemblage) came from the top 3 spits (0 – 250mm). Beneath that, from Spit 3 to the bottom at Spit 7, it was entirely Saxo-Norman to Early Anglo-Saxon. When the distribution of sherds was examined, unsurprisingly it showed that the majority were located centrally within the SFB and the numbers diminished towards the edges.

The majority of Saxon pot sherds were black, organic tempered ware with the tell-tale linear voids where the grass or chaff had been burnt out during firing.

Some of these pieces were quite large and some had been burnished.

In addition to the organic tempered material were 20 sherds of incised and stamped pottery with a number of different decorative styles suggesting these were the remains of several different vessels. Some of the designs included flower motifs, small triangular patterns, circles, squares, double lines and zig-zag lines (Fig. 5) This type of decoration on pots was usually reserved for cremation urns. To further our understanding of these pieces they are to be examined by expert Diana Briscoe from Archive of Anglo-Saxon Pottery Stamps.

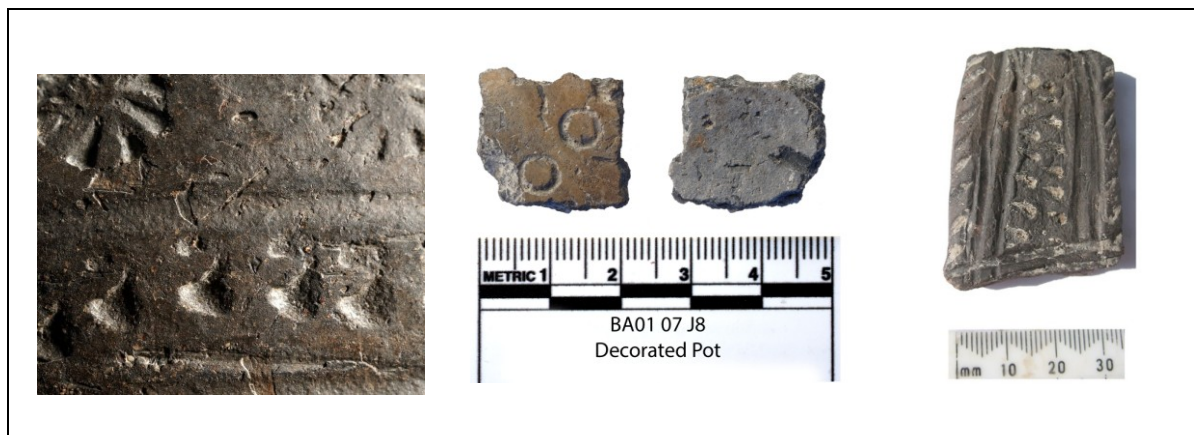


Fig. 5: Decorated Saxon Pottery

A small number of earlier, Roman pieces were also recovered including some Oxfordshire Colour Coated ware.

Other interesting pottery finds included a sherd showing a scar where a handle had once been attached and a semi-circular handle with a round cross section.

One sherd had a small 'boss' where the clay had been pinched out to form a small protrusion. There would have been several of these spaced out around the pot and were probably purely decorative rather than functional. A fine example of a flat strap handle is most unusual and parallels have yet to be found. The decoration is elaborate with diagonal scores cut into both edges with 2 sets of lengthways grooves running from end to end and 2 rows of sub-triangular impressions lined along the centre. The back is flat and undecorated.

A small number of earlier, Roman pieces were also recovered including some Oxfordshire Colour Coated ware. This material would appear to have been "curated" by the Saxons as it was found in and above secure early Saxon contexts. Roman pottery is has only been found in one other location in the village of Blewbury. Roman pottery had also been used to create 3 gaming counters. Two of these were made from grey ware and measured approximately 25mm diameter and the third was made from a red ware and was smaller with a diameter of approximately 17mm. Possibly these were 2 'sides' from the same game or 2 different games. A very similar piece was discovered in an SFB at Sutton Courtney just 5 miles away (as the crow flies) in the 1920s.

#### Glass

All the glass finds were beads of which 4 were recovered (Fig.: 6) (plus 1 of amber, bottom row, far left). All of these were very different in size, form and colour.

It is impossible to say whether these beads came from a single piece of jewellery or from more than one. They all were recovered from spit 6 but not found together.



Fig. 6: Four glass and one amber Saxon beads (photo by Richard Miller)

#### Bone

The bone has not yet been analysed other than the initial counting and weighing. It is believed to be all animal bone but as other finds indicate possible burial deposits we need to confirm none of our assemblage is human. A small number (25) of burnt bone fragments were found which also need to be identified to check whether they could be from a human cremation.

These bones probably represent the remains of meals with a few displaying butchery marks. In addition to these there were also some worked bone artefacts, described below.

A section of a double-sided bone hair comb and a few snapped off comb teeth were found in Spit 6. Several such sections would have been fixed together, held in place by a long length of bone attached with small rivets.

Other bone finds included some weaving tools including: a broken pin/needle tip, a double ended pin beater, used for untangling knots and pushing the weft up on a warp weighted loom, an intact needle with a triangular head with thread hole, and a spindle whorl. The latter was a fine example of a



whorl decorated with incised concentric circles, similar to one in the British Museum found at Long Wittenham, 5 miles away. It was made from the proximal terminal of a long bone (possibly a cattle femur).

#### *Metal*

As with the other finds the metalwork has yet to be fully examined. Finds included a tiny iron annular brooch (possibly Medieval), a copper alloy tube which may be a metal bead, an iron pin (fragmented), numerous nails, possibly fuel ash slag pieces and unidentifiable metal fragments. In the upper spits the typical array of topsoil finds were present but also included a lead seal, a musket ball, wire and a hinge.

In addition, an Early Anglo-Saxon, undecorated, square headed brooch (incomplete) was found in a small hole dug by the landowner approximately 10m away from the SFB.

Once funding is finalised then it is hoped that several of these items (tube and pin) will be sent for X-raying to see if the corrosion masks what lies beneath.

#### *Natural*

The rest of the finds assemblage comprised natural (non-bone) finds. These included several nodules of pyrites (or thunderstones after their fire-lighting capabilities) which have also been found in other Saxon burial deposits and included for their reputed amuletic properties.

Previously small lumps of a yellow coloured mineral had been recorded which broke down in water and stained the fingers yellow. During the main excavation a much larger lump (nearly tennis ball size) was found. This is to be sent for chemical analysis to ascertain the nature of the material. There is a possibility that it is yellow ochre.

Finally, right at the base of the western post hole, with no other finds present, someone had deposited a small, rounded, quartz pebble, possibly placed to bring good luck or to ward off evil spirits. This, together with the thunderstones and amber (bead) makes for quite a significant presence of amulets.

#### **Conclusion**

What is quite striking about the finds assemblage is its singularity of finds types. If the SFB had been used as a working space, for example a weaving room, then it would be quite likely that we would have found more than one of the tools employed. Instead there was one spindle whorl, one pin-beater, one needle, one comb fragment, one brooch etc. Even the glass beads (and one amber) were single examples of different sizes and colours.

The presence of many animal bones, broken pot sherds (several different cremation urns) and this particular finds assemblage suggests that the SFB was a living or working space during the 6th century and for whatever reason it later fell out of use and was 'closed' and filled in with what may be funerary deposits. There is no evidence that this is the primary burial site and the general jumble of finds suggests that this is all re-deposited material. The deposits are predominantly female accoutrements and, although obviously impossible to say, perhaps they once belonged to the person who had connections with this small building.

#### **The Forward Programme**

The Blewbury Big Dig continues into 2016 and beyond with one remaining investigation within the village (The Manor) to be concluded and a number of possible archaeological targets in the surrounding fields. These include a probable late Roman farm and a possible Iron Age or Roman rectangular enclosure as well as some older features. Plans are being developed!

#### **Acknowledgements**

Once again we are immensely grateful to all the people who have offered their gardens to make these investigations possible.

As ever, many people have kindly supported the programme with their time and efforts and we thank them all. In addition to those, we are most grateful to Richard Miller, our photographer for his work on site and with the finds.

We are also very grateful for generous financial support from the *Blewbury Bulletin*.

#### **BLEWBURY BIG DIG**



# High Wood Roman site

## Interim Report 2015

David Nicholls

### Introduction

The High Wood site is situated on the Phillimore Estate in Harpsden. The preliminary works to clear vegetation, conduct initial geophysical surveys and attempt to establish the recent history of this enigmatic woodland site has previously been described in *SOAG Bulletin* 69. The aim of the 2015 programme was, first, to conduct further geophysical survey scanning to determine where test trenching should be placed on a site severely damaged by illegal metal detecting, and secondly to investigate a separate area to the south of the assumed core site position where imaging had suggested the presence of further possible features. Widespread illicit digging activities have virtually destroyed a significant structure, and this has been confirmed by initial results of the season's work.

Nevertheless, some unusual and unexpected results were obtained, primarily from recovered finds and their analysis. At this early stage it is impossible to indicate precisely what type of structure was erected on this high position site, but certain factors strongly suggest a Romano-British temple on an earlier Iron Age site. The extraordinary discovery of cached finds, resulting from looting during the 1980s and later, cannot be depended upon for uncontaminated archaeological evidence. However it has provided useful, site based comparative material. It is highly unlikely this collection of material would have been brought to site from elsewhere, and some of the pottery is identical, if not from the same vessels, as recovered from excavation finds from the test pits and trenches. These carefully excavated areas have yielded useful information to provide a basis for understanding the nature of the site.

We also benefitted in obtaining help from the Oxford Blues metal detecting group – a highly regarded team from Oxford who have been instrumental in gathering important information by scanning the site before, during and after our activities to ensure that potentially vulnerable finds were not available to further illicit searches.

### Excavation

We laid out a 30m x 30m area for potential excavation. Within this we opened eight 1m x 1.5m test pits in a linear array, and also a 3m x 4m trench to investigate a possible wall feature that had been exposed in previous site activity. An excavation report by Roelie Reed, the site supervisor, follows this article. By the end of the digging season finds included CBM, a large quantity of building flint, pottery sherds, bones, nails, plaster, mortar and (rarely) bronze fragments. Summaries of the finds in each of these categories are included in *Finds*, below.

### Geophysical surveys

In 2015 a resistivity survey and a further magnetometry survey were undertaken by Mike Green to supplement the magnetometry and GPR surveys undertaken respectively by Dave Thornley and Rafael Korzsinsky in 2014. A summary report of all the geophysical surveys undertaken is included later in this document.

### The finds

Finds are described under the following headings:

- CBM
- Querns and millstones
- Bones and Molluscs
- Chain Mail
- Coins
- Pottery
- The Spindle Whorl
- Glass
- Metallic Finds

Several of these descriptions are supplemented by specialist reports later in this document.

### CBM

A total of 3612 pieces of Ceramic Building Material (382.76 Kg) were recovered (mainly roofing) from all the test pits and grid and extended areas. Approximately 1.0% was thick (40mm) floor tiling. Apart from this a further quantity - some 10 Kg - of CBM was found on the surface resulting from the looting of the site. This is a large amount of material from a relatively small part (amounting to 38.25 sq m) of the overall indicated site area of approximately



1500 sq m. A high concentration occurred in context 4001 (24%) but otherwise distribution was fairly uniform. The tegula were of normal size and a few pieces found on the site were at least 50% complete.

#### **Querns and millstones**

The incidence of quern and millstone fragments recovered - 30 pieces - is apparently unusual for such a rural site and the quantity again comes from a limited area of investigation, primarily the retaining wall in Trench W. The report on this, by Ruth Shaffrey from Oxford Archaeology, is included later in this *SOAG Bulletin*.

#### **Bones and molluscs**

The detailed analysis of bone recovered from the site has provided extremely useful information and clues relating to possible use of the site, and this is also covered in the report by Janet Ridout Sharpe and Phil Carter, included later in this *SOAG Bulletin*.

#### **Chain mail**

The remarkable discovery (in the cache) of the Chain Mail, Lorica Hamata, on a rural site is rare but in recent discussions it has been revealed that this item of personal armour has also been found on a very few sites of military significance and may indicate association with burial or internment of an individual. The report by Quita Mould from Barbican Research Associates is included later in this *SOAG Bulletin*.

#### **Coins**

The limited number of coins recovered from this site (11) are predominantly mid-late 4th C and none can be regarded as from a secure context, with a high proportion being found by our metal detecting team. The exceptions in date are a heavily corroded copper coin of Domitian ? (81-96 AD) found on the surface and a coin of Gallienus or Claudius 11 (253-268 AD or 268-270 AD), and, from context W005, a nummus of Urbs Roma, Trier Mint (332-333 AD). This latter coin was in remarkably good condition with virtually no wear. Coins recovered from High Wood are very similar in date to the limited number found on Harpsden Roman Villa site, some 1.2 kilometres to the NNE.

#### **Pottery**

More than 1600 sherds of pottery were recovered, although the great majority of these were found in the cache referred to above, that had been deposited during earlier modern activity on the site. A separate report on the pottery finds is included later in this *SOAG Bulletin*.

#### **The Spindle Whorl**

A single moulded clay spindle whorl was found in TP3 Spit 1. It is made of a baked clay fabric, grey/buff in colour changing slightly to a light red. It has small 1mm inclusions of fragments of tile red brick or clay and slightly larger impurities of limestone up to 3mm in particle size. The weight is 27g. It is almost flat on the underside with the upper side of low dome profile. It is pierced by an almost central hole of 6.5mm. The overall size is 42.5mm diameter with an average thickness of 15mm. It appears to have been used, as contact surfaces are slightly smoothed. This pattern is very similar to examples found at various Iron Age sites, in particular to those from Meare Lake Village, Somerset.

#### **Glass**

Three pieces of glass were recovered from W003, W004 and W005, but the third sample may not be Roman and could well be a shard from a modern bottle. Sample A is 20mm by an average of 12 mm. It is very slightly curved, translucent, but with a faint green hue. This shows few bubbles and imperfections and is probably from a small vessel. It is 1.5mm thick and weighs less than 1 gram. Sample B is a clear translucent example, 14.3mm by an average of 6.5mm. It has two 0.5mm diagonal 'ribs' at 5mm centres with indications of a further rib at 3.5mm centre and possibly a short return in one corner. The sample is slightly squared off on one side indicating that it may be from a small vessel. Impurities are fewer than sample A. The thickness is 1mm and weight less than 1 gram.

#### **Metallic finds**

A considerable number and variety of ferrous metal objects, along with a small quantity of copper alloy objects, have been found and recorded. Some of those metal finds are listed below:

- Eighteen hob nails
- Two hundred and fifty two various nails. Small to very large
- Part of a knife blade
- Part of a sickle or horseshoe
- A small bracket
- A small cleat
- A possible key shank
- Seven pieces of iron slag
- Two lumps of iron
- Eight small pieces of bronze sheet, strip and wire
- Six pieces of lead scrap

## Summary

The 2015 season's work has provided extremely useful information, as recorded in the reports that follow. But it has also raised a number of questions primarily: is this a robbed out temple site? Another year's work may well provide the answer.

## Acknowledgements

Extreme thanks are due to all those who have been involved, in whatever capacity, but in particular to Roelie Reed for her excellent supervision and application of meticulous recording, to Mike Vincent for his co-ordination and administration (and digging), to Nick Coome for logistics and enabling us to achieve access (and digging), to Ken Beck for his acumen in finding the chain mail (and digging), to the

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- Lord Phillimore's Charitable Trust
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- The Fuellers Charitable Trust Fund
- Blake Morgan LLP
- Staples Ltd



*Fig. 1 (left): Sieving on an industrial scale!*

*Fig. 2 (below): A general view of the working trenches*



# High Wood: Excavation Report 2015

Roelie Reed

## Introduction

This report is a brief description of the 2015 season of the excavations at High Wood, Harpsden, on the Phillimore Estate. A plan of the site is shown in Fig. 1.

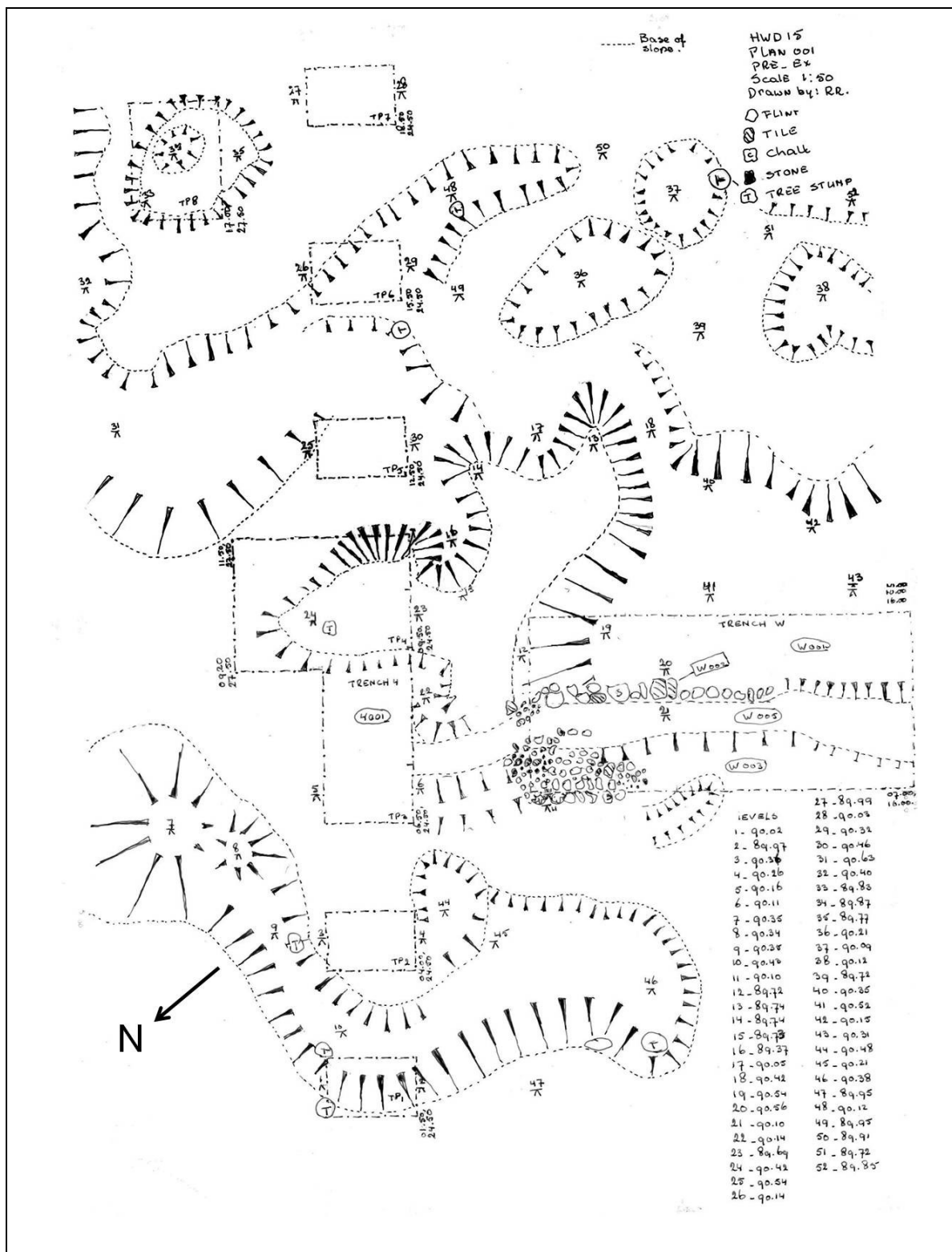


Fig. 1: Pre excavation conditions, location of test pits and trenches (Drawn by Roelie Reed)

During a visit to High Wood in February 2015 by Jerry Anderson, David Nicholls and Roelie Reed, a 60 metre base line was set out, running approximately NE/SW, together with control points. Fig. 2 shows the 30 metre square area in which the grid was set out, together with the location of Trench W and the area in which the test pits were located. The plan also shows the areas where geophysical surveys were undertaken marked Grids A and B and Grid 2.

### The Test Pits

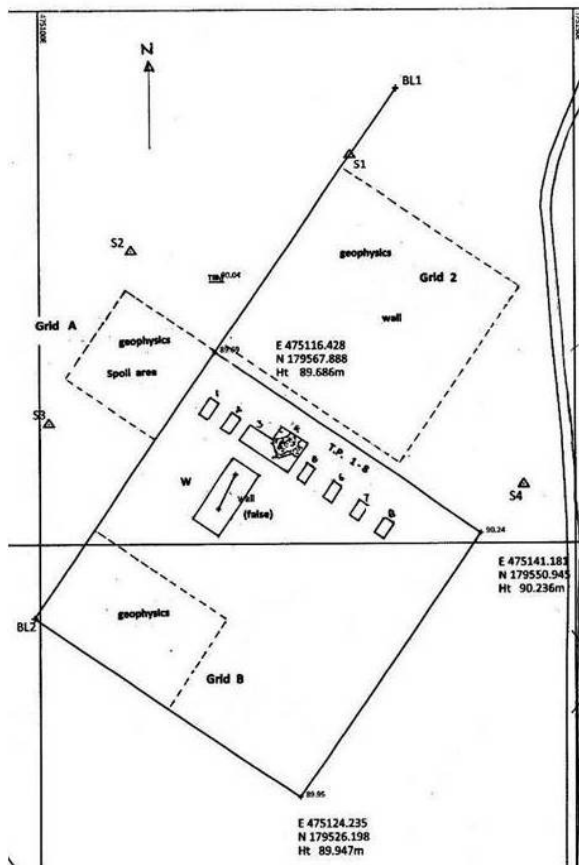


Fig. 2: Plotted base line, geophysical survey areas and trench positions

The test pits were planned along a length off the base line (East), starting at 24.50N to 26.00N (1.50m). Test pits measured 1.50m x 1.00m. TBM for site is 90.04m

TP1:	01.50 E
TP2:	04.00 E
TP3:	06.50 E
TP4:	09.50 E
TP5:	12.50 E
TP6:	15.50 E
TP7:	18.50 E
TP8:	17.00 E/27.50N

Due to the discovery of a wall in TP4 (assumed to be running westward), TP3 and TP4 were combined to

become Trench 4, measuring 4.00m along the south baulk. It was extended at 09.20E by 1.50 metres northwards and 2.30 metres eastwards. The wall was constructed of flint nodules; the foundation consisted of 2 rows of pieces of flint without any mortar; the remaining layers were well mortared in. There was no sign of any of the nodules being dressed – which indicates a low status farm building rather than a dwelling.

TP5 showed two distinctive layers: at a depth of approx. 0.60m a very compact layer was found and the spit recording was changed to context numbers:

- The west side of the test pit, context (5004), consisted of a mid-yellowish brown sandy clay, which was very compact and dry. This layer could be a floor with a thickness of approximately 0.10m
- The east side, context (5005), consisted of a loose dark blackish brown sandy silt that continued underneath context (5004). The area underneath context (5004) was packed with pebbles that also contained CBM and pottery sherds
- A sondage at the north end of the test pit revealed no further features

All other test pits revealed no signs of any structures although a significant amount of Roman roofing tile was found together with pottery. Both TP1 and TP2 contained some large flint nodules at the bottom of the test pits, however, there was no sign of any mortar and the flints were easily moved.

### Trench W and the cache

Trench W: originally measured 3.00m x 4.00m, 07.00E/16.00N, but was later extended northwards by 2.00m.

The reason for the excavation of Trench W was an apparent wall that became visible during the clearance of the site. Also, a large number of broken quern stones was noted within the area, and this was thought to be significant. The “wall” was constructed without any bonding material and contained flints, Roman tile and quern stones. The layer of top soil seemed to be very deep without any features; the augur was used to determine if there was any change in the soil. At a depth of 89.85m an impregnable area was encountered and it was decided to investigate this further. A man made construction, covered by a very large flint (Fig. 3), was discovered at this level, looking suspiciously like a cairn. When the flint was cleared of all soil and lifted, a void was found,



stretching in a northerly direction with the remains of a modern garden fork and spade buried at that end. The feature was fully excavated but its use or function is unconfirmed: it may have been connected with game snaring.



*Fig. 3: Large flint from over the void*



*Fig. 4: The first of the plastic bags from the cache*

Alongside and partly under the wall, a total of five plastic bags were found, full of mainly Roman pottery but including metal objects and other items.

The careful forming of this retaining feature, together with the deep re-deposited layer of disturbed soil, could indicate that it was created especially. The plastic carrier bags have been dated by their design to late 1980s/early 1990s. It is puzzling why someone would go to so much effort to bury material that must have been excavated at an earlier stage. There is no indication of where the finds originated; they could come from the site, but this is by no means certain. Although the whole area had been disturbed by metal detectorists during this period, it seems unlikely that they buried the pottery and did not retain all the metal objects.

### Conclusion

The site is very extensive and interesting although rather frustrating, due to the overall disturbance. However, this does not explain the large quantity of broken CBM found on site (over 350 kg) as well as further afield. So far, no indication of type of building, or use of the site, has been discovered. The lack of any dressed flints in the wall in Trench 4 implies low status or farm buildings. As usual the site poses more questions about its purpose than it provides answers.

In one way the excavation was rather disappointing, as the only constructed wall does not indicate the presence of a high status settlement. It was, however, very useful for the training of new, local and inexperienced volunteers, some of whom have subsequently joined SOAG.



*Fig 5: Work in progress in Trench W*

# High Wood: Geophysical Surveys

Mike Green  
Dave Thornley (University of Reading)

## Introduction

Three types of geophysical survey have been undertaken at the site; resistivity, magnetometry and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). As reported in *SOAG Bulletin* 69, Dave Thornley from Reading University conducted a magnetometry survey over the two grids marked Grid A and Grid B on the site plan. In 2015 Mike Green conducted a magnetometry survey over the area marked Grid 2, and a resistivity survey over Grids B and Grid 2 (although note that the resistivity survey over Grid A covered a larger grid area than that marked on the site plan). The results of these surveys are shown below.

Whilst none of the surveys reveal clear diagnostic features, in Grid 2 the apparently blank area in West quadrant of the resistivity survey (shown separately) does faintly suggest features. The survey data for this area was therefore reprocessed to increase the local image contrast and the result does show some linear features which may guide future excavation.

(In 2014 Rafael Korzsinsky undertook a Ground Penetrating Survey (GPR) of the core areas of the site, but, as reported in *SOAG Bulletin* 69, no useful information was obtained from that almost certainly due to the massive extent of ground disturbance in the past, and the results are not therefore included here.)

## Survey results

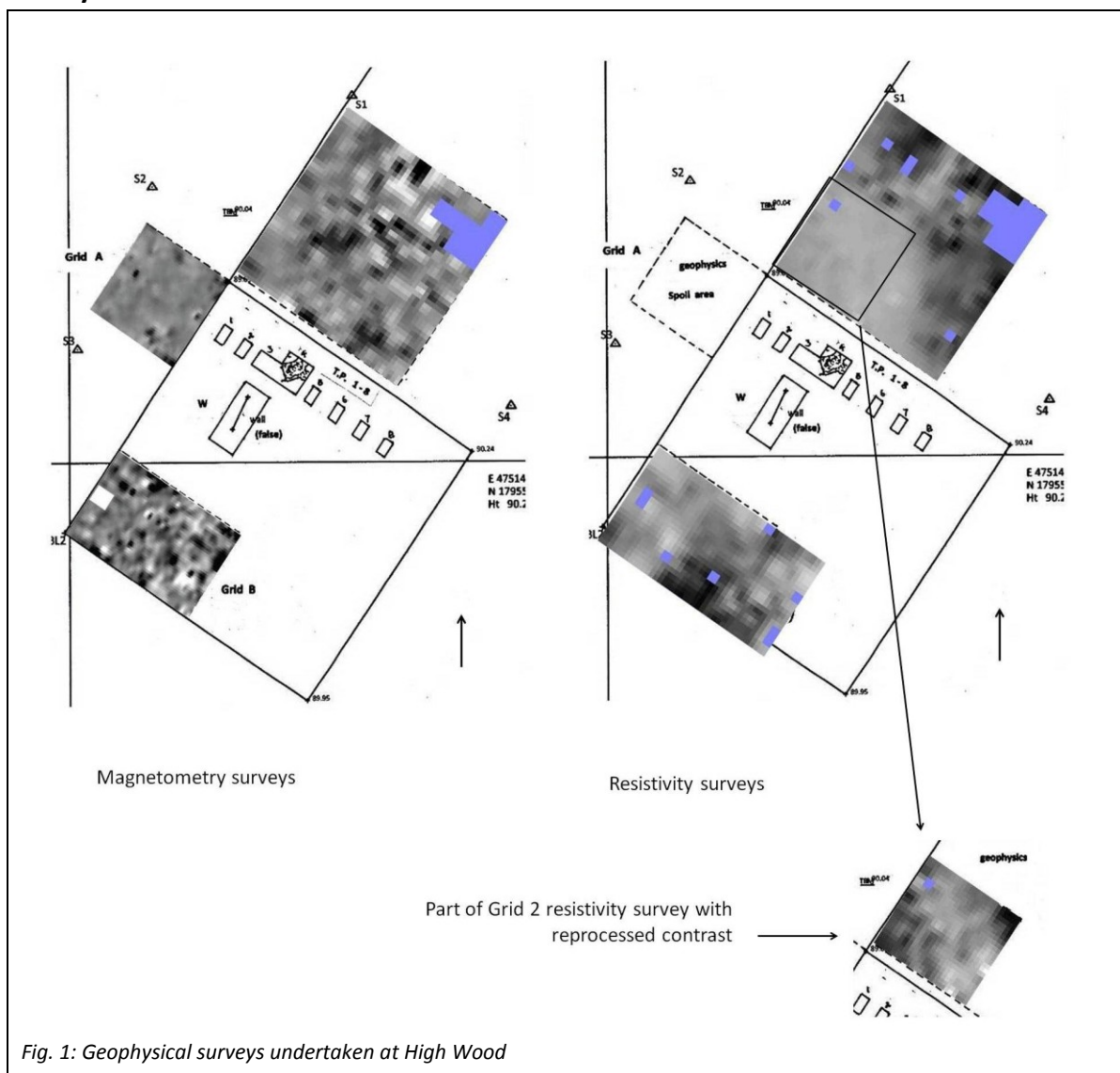


Fig. 1: Geophysical surveys undertaken at High Wood

# High Wood Finds Report - Querns and Millstones

Dr Ruth Shaffrey (Oxford Archaeology)

## Introduction

Work at High Wood in 2014 and 2015 produced a total of 30 rotary quern and millstone fragments from a maximum of 29 objects. An initial report was produced on the 2014 fragments with some recommendations for onsite recording. Those finds have been included with the 2015 season finds here. The term 'quern' is used in this report as a generic term to include both rotary querns (hand powered) and millstones (mechanically operated).

## Description

Of the possible 29 quern fragments, a total of six fragments are likely to be from millstones. One of these (Q11) is a thick fragment (95mm) that lacks any circumference but has thick flat faces typical of

millstones. A second fragment is from a millstone measuring approximately 55cm diameter (Q10), also with flat faces. The other five fragments seem likely to have been part of the same millstone originally. Fragments Q5 and Q7 adjoin and provide enough circumference for the diameter to be estimated at 90cm. The other two fragments (Q8, Q9) seem highly likely, on visual appearance and dimensions, to be part of the same millstone, but they do not adjoin either each other or Q6/Q7. A fragment from the 2014 season (Q3) could be part of the same millstone if the thickness increased towards the centre. This would give an estimate of between 3 and 6 millstones originally. All the millstone fragments are made of Millstone Grit, imported from Derbyshire or Yorkshire.

<i><b>Lithology</b></i>	<i><b>Millstone</b></i>	<i><b>Rotary quern</b></i>	<i><b>Either</b></i>	<i><b>Grand Total</b></i>
Lodsworth Greensand		4	2	6
Millstone Grit	6		6	12
Old Red Sandstone		4	6	10
Old Red Sandstone /Millstone Grit			1	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>29</b>

A total of eight specimens have been identified as rotary querns. Only one of these is sufficiently complete for its diameter to be ascertained: Q14 is a fragment of Lodsworth Greensand measuring approximately 40cm diameter. Seven other examples do not have measurable diameters, but look stylistically to be from rotary querns rather than millstones.

The remaining 15 stones are small fragments that could be from either millstones or rotary querns, although given their size, most seem more likely to be from rotary querns. Three stone types have been used at High Wood. All the millstones are made from Millstone Grit, whilst all the rotary querns are made from Lodsworth Greensand (LGS) or Old Red Sandstone (ORS). One fragment is of a less distinctive type that would require a thin section before it could be identified as either Old Red Sandstone or Millstone Grit.

The full catalogue of stone fragments will to be published and maintained on the SOAG website, <http://www.soagarch.org.uk/>

## Discussion

There are two aspects of the quern assemblage that raise further questions. The first relates to the size of the assemblage, which is large considering the small test pit areas that have so far been excavated along with the presence of millstone fragments. The second relates to the stone types used for them:

### ***Organisation of grain processing***

Between three and six millstones have been found at High Wood so far. These certainly indicate the existence of organised and centralised grain processing in the area, although not specifically at High Wood. The number of fragments is disproportionately large for the area excavated suggesting that wherever they originated there was an emphasis on arable crops and their processing.

If the stones are from an animal- or man-powered mill, that mill could have been located in the immediate vicinity of High Wood, however, doubt is now being cast on the existence of such mills in Roman Britain and research currently underway is looking at whether most mills could have been water-powered (Andrew Wilson pers. comm.). The



structural remains of very few mills have been found in England but the hundreds of millstone fragments found in the midlands and south of England point to mills being a much more common feature of the landscape than the structural evidence alone indicates. Since the millstones provide the best evidence of intensive milling, it is important to carefully consider where each of them was found. In the case of High Wood, the millstone fragments have been reused and are not from stratified contexts, but are nonetheless unlikely to have moved particularly far from their original place of use. A provisional look at map data reveals that springs rise close to Harpsden. Whether it would have been possible to dam such a stream in order to create the head of water needed for a watermill is difficult to say, but in

any case, High Wood is only about two miles from the River Thames, from which it may have been possible to redirect water.

### **Stone types**

All three stone types found at High Wood are typical of the region during the Roman period but the precise spatial and chronological interaction between the three types is not yet known. There are many research questions to be answered - at High Wood we might ask whether there is a difference in the use of Millstone Grit v ORS and LGS? Could MG have been used only for millstones and the other two stone types for rotary querns? Only the recovery of more fragments in future seasons will help us answer that question.

## **High Wood Finds Report - Bones and Molluscs**

**Janet Ridout Sharpe  
Phil Carter**

### **Introduction**

The study of animal bones from archaeological sites can provide insights into the economy of the people who used the site and sometimes into the function of the site itself.

At High Wood, bones, teeth and shells were removed by hand and by sieving (10mm mesh) as excavation progressed. The bones from the 'cache' and random surface finds were also included in the assemblage. The bones were identified to species and body side and part as far as possible, using the authors' reference collection and a good bone atlas (Schmid 1972). The extent of fragmentation and the presence of burning, butchery marks and dog-gnawing were recorded. The extent of wear on the teeth and the state of epiphyseal fusion were used to estimate the age of the animals at death. Measurements were taken where possible. Because of the degree of fragmentation and the insecurity of most of the contexts, the relative frequency of the different species is expressed as NISP (Number of Identified Specimens) rather than MNI (Minimum Number of Individuals); in other words, the results are expressed as bone rather than whole animal counts. The raw data will form part of the site archive.

A total of 363 animal bone fragments and teeth were recorded, plus one human tooth and eleven oyster shells.

### **The human tooth**

An upper right human canine tooth was recovered from the top spit of Test Pit 6 (TP6/Spit 1, Bag 25). The tooth was found out of context in topsoil in association with two sheep bones including part of a mandible with teeth, one pig canine, two unidentified bone fragments, potsherds, CBM and some mortar. The tooth could not be attributed to sex but was relatively unworn and came from an adult, possibly in their late 20s or 30s.

### **The animal bones**

The NISP and weight of the animal bones and teeth (a jaw fragment with teeth was counted as 1) are shown in Table 1. It was possible to identify a relatively high proportion (52.07%) of the bones. Unidentified fragments accounted for almost one-quarter of the total assemblage in weight. Rabbits and pheasants were rare exotica in Roman times and their bones at High Wood are regarded as intrusive and are not considered further: none of these bones had been burnt, butchered or gnawed. Of the remaining animals, sheep/goats (but probably sheep) comprised 51.63%, cattle 24.46%, pigs 23.37% and equines (one small pony or possibly a donkey) just 0.54% of the identified NISP.

The main feature of the bone assemblage was the overall small size of the fragments: 85% were less than 50mm long.



Species	NISP		Weight	
	No.	%	g	%
<i>Sheep/goats</i>	95	26.17	349.5	18.59
<i>Cattle</i>	45	12.39	850.0	45.21
<i>Pigs</i>	43	11.85	201.5	10.72
<i>Equines</i>	1	0.28	22.0	1.17
<i>Rabbits</i>	4	1.10	2.5	0.13
<i>Pheasants</i>	1	0.28	0.5	0.03
<i>Unidentified</i>	174	47.93	454.0	24.15
<b>Total</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1880.0</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1: The animal bones recovered from High Wood

The smallest fragments measured less than 10mm, the largest (part of a cow tibia) reached 190mm. The bones showed different degrees of wear and erosion, which could be partly due to soil conditions and disturbance but also to age, suggesting that the site was used for feasting over a long period of time. There was plenty of evidence for butchery. Some fragments exhibited knife cut marks (Fig. 1) and others appeared to have been chopped or split with a cleaver. A relatively large proportion appeared to have been chopped evenly across or split longitudinally, perhaps to extract the marrow. The small size of the fragments might indicate that the meat was chopped small for cooking in stews rather than roasting as whole joints (Hamilton 1971). Some of the bones had been burned black throughout, a few had been exposed to very high heat and were calcined, some had been charred unevenly and others, although not burnt themselves, were covered in a black ashy deposit. Overall 123 (34.36%) bones fell into these categories. Rather than providing evidence for cooking, the bones were probably either deliberately burnt as rubbish or accidentally burnt in a wider conflagration. Ten (2.80%) had been gnawed by dogs, showing that some at least were left on the surface as waste, rather than buried.



Fig. 1: Rib fragment with transverse knife cuts

Relatively more of the larger cow bones and fewer unidentified fragments were found among the cache and surface finds, distinguishing these artificially selected categories from the more randomly

distributed bones within the excavated areas. The proportion of burnt bones was least among the surface finds, as dark-coloured fragments are more difficult to spot among the leaf litter.

The excavated bones were not evenly distributed. Assuming that the depth of the test pits and trenches was roughly the same throughout the site, the density of bones in the excavated areas was estimated by dividing the number by the approximate surface area to give the number of bones/m<sup>2</sup> (Table 2).

Test Pit/Trench	No. of bones	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )	Total NISP/m <sup>2</sup>
Test Pit 1	2	1.5	1.3
Test Pit 2	6	1.5	4.0
Trench 4 plus TP3 and TP4	96	13.8	7.0
Trench W	125	18.0	6.9
Test Pit 5	35	1.5	23.3
Test Pit 6	15	1.5	10.0
Test Pit 7	0	1.5	0
Test Pit 8	0	3.0	0

Table 2: Density of animal bones from the excavated areas

The results show that Test Pit 5 contained the highest density of bones and that the amount dropped significantly to the north-east (Test Pits 6-8) and to the south-west (Trenches 4 and W, Test Pits 1-2). It is possible that Test Pit 5 is close to a midden or dump of waste material. The vertical distribution of bones within the excavated areas was not significant because of the disturbed nature of the deposits. In the two trenches, most of the fragments were found in the topsoil. Bones were found to a depth of 600mm only in Test Pits 5 and 6, and ten fragments were found below this level in the humic soil of context 5005.

Not all parts of the skeleton were represented and the body parts recorded according to species are shown in Table 3. The number of fragments does not match the total NISP as some could be identified to species but not to body part (for example, metacarpal and metatarsal fragments of sheep) and teeth in situ in the jaw are here counted separately.

The preponderance of teeth and the relative absence of more fragile parts of the skeleton are indicative of differential preservation: the weaker elements have disappeared through attrition or have been broken down into unidentifiable fragments, whereas the stronger elements have survived in recognisable form. This attrition implies that the bones were not buried or that the site had been disturbed over a long period of time. Allowing for differential preservation, the results suggest that sheep and

cattle were utilised similarly with a preference for hind leg meat, and the relatively high proportion of pig teeth and jaws may hint at a predilection for pigs' heads.

<i><b>Bone</b></i>	<i><b>Sheep</b></i>	<i><b>Cattle</b></i>	<i><b>Pigs</b></i>	<i><b>Horse</b></i>
<b>AXIAL</b>				
Horn core		5		
Skull fragment	1			
Ribs	17	10	1	
Maxilla			3	
Mandible	6	1	5	
Teeth	20	8	22	
<b>FORE LIMB</b>				
Scapula		1	5	
Humerus	2			
Radius	6	5		
Ulna				
Metacarpal	8	1	3	
<b>HIND LIMB</b>				
Pelvis	1			
Femur		2		
Tibia	17	5	2	
Fibula			1	
Metatarsus	5	2	5	1
Astragalus		2		
Calcaneum	1	1		
Phalanges	3	2	2	
<b>Total no. of fragments</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>1</b>

*Table 3: Body parts represented (see text for details)*

The state of eruption of the teeth and their extent of wear (Payne 1973, Grant 1975) showed that over half (63.12%) of the sheep that could be aged (NISP = 29) were slaughtered between four and eight years; nearly three-quarters were aged over three years at death. This conforms to the pattern of exploitation for secondary products (wool and milk). Where sheep are raised primarily for meat most are slaughtered in their second year (Maltby 2002) and none from High Wood fell into that age category. However, three lambs had been killed unusually early at 6-12 months.

Most of the cattle (80%, NISP = 15) were also slaughtered between four and eight years. The prime age for meat production is one to three and a half years (Evans 2006) so the cattle seem to have been exploited mainly for milk and possibly traction before ending up in the stew pot. In contrast, over 90% of the pigs (NISP = 22) had died before the age of two years and nearly three-quarters had been slaughtered between 12-18 months. Epiphyseal fusion data, where available, supported the evidence from tooth wear.

The sheep bones were generally small and gracile and probably represented 'unimproved' animals similar to Soays and Shetlands which are typical of Iron Age and rural Romano-British assemblages. Small 'Iron Age-type' cattle were also present but most measurable bones were from larger animals. Two astragali from High Wood measured 67.0mm and 67.2mm long, which can be compared with mean size ranges of 57.0mm - 59.5mm for Iron Age cattle and 58.0mm - 65.2mm for Romano-British cattle (Parrington 1978). This suggests that the High Wood cattle included an 'improved' breed or simply that the larger animals were bulls.

### **The oyster shells**

Relatively few oyster shells were recovered: nine fragments and two almost complete valves. Traces of *Polydora* sp. worm tubes on two of the shells indicate that the oysters were imported either from the south coast or the Thames estuary. The absence of shells damaged by the boring sponge *Cliona celata* argues for an earlier (Roman, oysters are not known to occur on Iron Age sites in central southern Britain) rather than later (Medieval) date (E. Somerville, University of Sussex, personal communication).

The paucity of oyster shells, which are usually common on Roman sites, was an unexpected finding, although both archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that shellfish were not generally consumed at religious sites (Grant 2007).

### **Discussion and conclusions**

The relatively high proportion of sheep bones at High Wood is a hallmark of temple sites. At Lowbury Hill temple, the assemblage was dominated by sheep with cattle and pigs secondary and the remains of other taxa including horse negligible (Hamilton-Dyer 1994). Most bones were fragmentary, some exhibited butchery marks and a few were burnt or dog-gnawed.

The relative frequency of teeth suggests differential preservation, as at High Wood, which affects sheep more than cattle so the original proportion of sheep to cattle was probably higher. Sheep also predominated at a Roman shrine at Faringdon (Hamilton-Dyer 2005) and a similar phenomenon was recorded at Roman temple sites at Harlow and Chelmsford in Essex, Great Chesterford in Cambridgeshire and Uley in Gloucestershire. In contrast, cattle and pigs tend to dominate bone assemblages from Roman villa sites where the general pattern is cattle 40-60%, sheep 20-40% and pigs 10-25% (Payne 1997). This is not a hard and fast rule since sheep were kept on the downs, pigs in

woodland and cattle in lowland pastures so the species represented would depend partly on the location of the villa and partly on the extent of its 'Romanisation'. Nevertheless, the predominance of sheep at temple sites has been described as 'striking' (Hamilton-Dyer 1994).

The presence of very young lambs as well as older sheep might have religious significance (Grant 2007). Other features of the High Wood assemblage that might signify a religious context include the frequency of butchery knife cuts and the apparent absence of chickens which are relatively common on non-religious sites.

The human tooth may be compared with the Late Roman east-west inhumations at Marcham/Frilford and could represent the Christian 'closure' of a pagan site (Kamash et al. 2010), and also with the Saxon burials at Lowbury Hill. At both Lowbury and Marcham/Frilford dumps of animal bones were located in a corner of the temenos or temple precinct: is Test Pit 5 near the temenos wall at High Wood?

It will be interesting to compare the animal bone assemblage from High Wood with the small but as yet unstudied assemblage from Harpsden villa one kilometre to the north. The differences and similarities between these two assemblages may further our understanding of the enigmatic site in High Wood.

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## High Wood Finds Report - Chain mail

Quita Mould (Barbican Research Associates)

Four masses of links were X-radiographed by The Wiltshire Conservation Service (C2015423, J2187) at 80Kv with an exposure time of 2 minutes and 4 minutes, and the largest piece (3) for 6 minutes. For clarity the four pieces are referred to as 1-4 and have been numbers 1 to 4 in the order they appear on the X-radiograph plate 12614 reading from left (1) to right (4).

### Summary

Four masses of articulated mail rings (1-4) were recovered from the site of a Roman structure, at present of unknown purpose, during the first season of exploratory work by SOAG in 2015.

Pottery and coins from the site indicate third/fourth century activity with late Iron Age activity also suggested. Each concretion is comprised of a series of interlocking rows of links, which could be seen by eye to be 7mm in diameter and approximately 1-1.5mm thick. The broken links were either round in section or slightly flattened on the upper and lower faces. Each concreted piece appeared to be folded so that one row of links now lays on top of another. Piece 1 could be seen to be comprised of 8 rows of 10 or more links; piece 4 at least 8 rows of 8 links. Such detail was visible because the iron was not heavily encrusted; a feature also noted on mail links found elsewhere. The iron was in good condition with a small amount of surface cracking; small pieces of charcoal were present amongst the encrustation. The dimensions of the four concretions are given below:

Piece	Length	Width	Breadth	Weight
1	36mm	27mm	15mm	13g
2	45mm	43mm	20mm	22g
3	68mm	50mm	20mm	62g
4	34mm	33mm	16mm	13g

Mail is comprised of rows of joining links (rings) each link passing through four others. Roman mail (*lorica hamata*) may be comprised of alternating rows of riveted and welded links or of 'solid' rings (that is rings without a joint or weld) and riveted or welded links (Bishop and Coulston 1993, 190; Sim 2002, 108-

9 figure 54). The process of manufacture and the tools involved have been reproduced experimentally by Sim (1997; 2002, 108-114).

Few constructional details were recognisable on the majority of the links when the concreted lumps were viewed in X-radiograph (at 80Kv) but the cross section of broken links were revealed more clearly. The majority of the cross-sections visible were of round section suggesting that those links were made of wire. A very small number of riveted links, at least three individuals, were visible in the radiographic image under low magnification (x4 and x40) located around the perimeter of the groups where individual links are most clearly visible. A riveted link, visible at the lower edge of piece 2, and another at the lower edge of piece 3, each articulates with a ring of notably flatter section to each side; other links of flatter section are also visible elsewhere. These links with flattened upper and lower faces are likely to be 'solid' rings (that is complete rings not riveted or welded together) punched from sheet. No examples of butt or scarf welded joints were noted during examination of the X-radiographs.

### Comparison with mail (*lorica hamata*) from elsewhere

Mail is often found as encrusted lumps and, as James has noted (James 2004, 116) oxidation of the iron makes exact measurement of the individual links impossible. These pieces from High Wood are in good condition and measurement of exposed individual rings did not differ markedly from those measured from the X-radiographic image. A rapid survey of other examples of mail where measurement has been attempted would indicate that these mail links from High Wood fall within the size range commonly recovered. A large group of individual links, recovered by sieving, from the Chester amphitheatre, dating to the last quarter of the first century measured by eye between 7-9mm in diameter and about 1mm thick. The increased accuracy provided when measured from enhanced radiographs showed little significant difference, with the vast majority falling between 6mm and 8mm in diameter. Links presumed punched from sheet, riveted links, and butt jointed links were all present in the group. Six measureable ring links present on corroded mail of late first century date recovered from the sand floor on site VI8 at the Deanery Field,

Chester, were also 7mm to 9mm in diameter (Newstead 1924, 78). One of these same pieces had ring diameters of 7mm and employed alternating rows of punched rings and riveted wire links (Manning 1985, 146). Probably the best preserved mail to be recovered to date comes from Dura-Europos, Syria, and is of third century date with ring diameters measuring between 6mm-10mm (James 2010, 111, 116--9). The Fragments of Roman mail of third century date found at the Roman-Germanic battlefield at the Hartzhorn, in Lower Saxony, Germany had individual rings measuring about 5mm in diameter. No significant distinction can be seen in the size of the individual links employed throughout the Roman period. For this reason no independent dating can be suggested for the four concretions of mail from High Wood on the basis of the link size or constructional features.

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## High Wood Finds Report - Pottery

David Nicholls

### Introduction

Pottery recovered from test pits and the cached deposit has been provisionally assessed before final expert examination. Table 1 below indicates the range of wares found.

The pottery found is of a relatively broad variety of oxidised and reduced wares with a high proportion of jars and dark flanged dishes. A large percentage is of light to dark grey unsophisticated ware including some vessels of the 'warty' grey fabric found at Harpsden Villa.

Also represented are a number of large rimmed storage jars. Other wares provisionally identified are Oxford Red ware, white mortaria from the Oxford potteries and a few fine grey ware examples from Alice Holt and elsewhere. Six small sherds are of Terra Sigillata - one with a base potter's stamp of PINNA or PINNAE or PINNAF of late 2nd - late 3rd Century. The sample is not excessively worn.

It is believed that a few examples of coarse ware are from the unreported Swan Wood, Nettlebed Kiln(s) and these are comprised of distinctive cream, sandy fabrics as well as buff grey wares with sharply flared

rimms. Black burnished wares are not common at High Wood.

A representative collection of one hundred and twenty two pieces have been drawn and photographed for a core example of the fairly wide range found on this site. They await final identification prior to the record being deposited with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS).

Two pieces of ring-necked flagons and three pieces of vessel handles were recovered mainly from the cache collection and these were very worn. Three pieces of black, non wheel-thrown coarse ware were recovered that incorporated large grit, possibly from the same large jar or pot, with inclined lozenge indentations, in bands. Two pieces came from the cache, the third piece - interestingly - came from TP3 Spit 1. These may be early Roman - i.e. 1st Century - or even late Iron Age? The total weight of pottery from excavations amounted to 29.858 Kg of which 36% came from Trench W contexts. The table below records the cache pottery finds, the mortaria sherds and surface pottery finds. Pottery from other contexts has been omitted pending final determination of the collection.

<b>Type</b>	<b>Number of finds</b>			<b>Weight (kilograms)</b>		
	<i>Pottery</i>	<i>Rims</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Pottery</i>	<i>Rims</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Large Pink Coarse Ware. Large Storage Jars – general ware</b>						
Cache	187	3	190	8.210	0.810	9.020
<b>Dark Coarse ware Large Storage Jars – general ware</b>						
Cache	111	29	140	3.700	0.384	4.084
<b>Dark Grey Medium Coarse ware</b>						
Cache	88	10	98	1.300	0.308	1.608
<b>Medium Coarse Light Grey</b>						
Cache	238	11	249	3.460	0.120	3.580
Surface finds	305	16	294	1.838	0.260	2.098
<i>Sub Total</i>	543	27	543	5.298	0.380	5.678
<b>Medium Paste Light Grey</b>						
Cache	342	71	433	3.350	0.860	4.210
Mortaria	3		3	0.076		
<i>Sub Total</i>	345	71	436	3.426	0.860	4.210
<b>Dark Grey Fine(ish)</b>						
Cache	52	6	58	0.220	0.015	0.235
<b>'Red' ware</b>						
Cache	170	7	194	2.160	0	2.160
<b>'Tempered'</b>						
Cache	10		10	0.100		0.100
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,454</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>1,611</b>	<b>24.194</b>	<b>2.742</b>	<b>26.821</b>

Table: Pottery finds



Fig. 1: Pot washing outside the onsite storage facility



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## NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Contributions are invited for the next issue of the *SOAG Bulletin*. Articles should preferably describe original field or documentary research undertaken by the author and priority will be given to items relevant to South Oxfordshire. Short reports of SOAG visits and other meetings are also invited.

Authors are reminded that copies of the *SOAG Bulletin* are sent to the six legal deposit libraries in the United Kingdom, to local libraries and Universities, Oxford Archaeology, the Institute of Archaeology (Oxford) and the Oxfordshire Museums Service. the reputation of SOAG therefore rests largely on the quality of the *SOAG Bulletin*.

In order to ease the burden on the editorial and production team, it would be appreciated if potential authors would also bear the following points in mind:

Articles are accepted at the discretion of the Editor, who reserves the right to edit material prior to publication.

Contributions should ideally be between 500 and 2000 words in length. With the agreement of the author, shorter articles may be published in the *SOAG Messenger*. Longer items may be accepted depending on the availability of space.

- Articles should not have been previously published elsewhere.
- Any quoted material should be inside quotation marks and sources, including material freely available on the internet, should be given. If your information comes from a website you must cite the full www address and the date you consulted it.
- Articles should be submitted in Microsoft Word format, preferably by email. However, cleanly typed and/or clearly handwritten articles may be accepted. When sending copy by email, please ensure that you include 'SOAG Bulletin' in the email title and include a few lines of text in the message: unidentified attachments will not be opened.
- Please be as concise as possible, omit non-relevant material and avoid needless repetition.
- Illustrations are welcomed, if appropriate. Drawings and photographs are also invited for consideration for the front cover. Maps,

drawings and photographs may be submitted in paper or electronic format as separate attachments. Photographs and original artwork will be returned to authors after publication if requested.

- The use of footnotes is discouraged.
- The text should be single-spaced; the title and author name(s) should be included at the beginning of the article. Numbered figure captions should be placed in the text to indicate the approximate position of illustrations, and the source of the illustration included where appropriate.
- Metric units must be used where feasible. When imperial measurements are used, as in documentary studies, the metric equivalents should be added in square brackets if appropriate.
- Pounds, shillings and pence need not be converted into pounds and new pence.
- The Harvard System should be used for references whenever possible but the author's principles will be followed when items do not lend themselves to this system, subject to discussion.

e.g. Articles from journals and magazines:

Margary, I. D. (1943) Roman roads with small side ditches. *Antiquaries Journal*, 23: 7-8.

e.g. Books:

Henig, M. and Booth, P. (2000) *Roman Oxfordshire*. Stroud, Sutton.

e.g. Chapters from edited books:

Karali, L. (1996) Marine invertebrates and Minoan art. In: Reese, D. S. (ed.) *Pleistocene and Holocene fauna of Crete*. Wisconsin, Prehistory Press. pp.413-419.

To assist Oxford County Archaeological Services HER database collection, and with landowners approval where appropriate, please include a National Grid Reference (NGR) with any site information.

Contributions before 28 February for publication in that year to the *SOAG Bulletin* Editor John Hefferan, 41 College Road, Reading, Berks. RG6 1QE. Email: [bulletin@soagarch.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@soagarch.org.uk).

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SOAG was established in 1969 and now has over 120 members. The aims of the Group are to promote an active interest in archaeology and its allied disciplines, particularly in South Oxfordshire. It works in close cooperation with the County Archaeologist and Oxford Archaeology, is a member of the Council for Independent Archaeology and is affiliated to the Council for British Archaeology South Midlands Group.

- Monthly meetings are held from September to April when lectures by professional speakers and members are given in an informal atmosphere
- There are opportunities for members to take part in excavations, fieldwalking, surveys and post-excavation work. Visits are made to places of interest in the summer – sometimes to sites not open to the public
- Members receive the annual *SOAG Bulletin*, which contains reports of the Group's activities and original articles focused on South Oxfordshire, and the monthly *SOAG Messenger*, which carries details of forthcoming events and brief news items
- Experts and complete beginners of all ages are warmly welcomed as new members.

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