



IfA Finds Group newsletter - Autumn 2013

Welcome to the latest edition of the Finds Group Newsletter. Apologies for the lateness in sending it out. We are a bit short of material this time, which is the main reason for the delay. Many thanks to everyone who contributed.

Please could you spare a few minutes and let me know what you think of the newsletter? Any comments (good or bad!) would be appreciated. My email address is:
stephen_0902@yahoo.co.uk.

Stephen Brunning - Editor.

Weekend Workshop by the Vindolanda Charitable Trust, 22nd – 23rd March 2014

This workshop will cover aspects and techniques of advanced carved and worked stone under the tuition of Mark Hoyle BA (hons): P.G.C.E; MAAIS; MIfA.

For further details (including cost) please contact: Vindolanda Trust, Chesterholm Museum, Bardon Mill, Hexham, Northumberland, NE47 7JN: Tel. 01434 344277, email: barbarabirley@vindolanda.com, or see the website www.markhoyle.com.

“Does he drink small beer from a silver jug? Or a bowl? Or a glass? Or a cup? Or a mug?”

Duncan Brown (Medieval Pottery Research Group), Jane Evans (Study Group for Roman pottery) and David Knight (Prehistoric Ceramics Research group)

The Akond of Swat session at this year's IfA conference included a joint presentation, compiled on behalf of the Prehistoric Ceramics Research Group, the Study Group for Roman Pottery and the Medieval Pottery Research Group. This developed a joint paper presented at the Insight from Innovation conference, held in Southampton 2012 in honour of David Peacock. These two papers reflect a commitment by the three specialist ceramics groups to collaborate in areas where they have shared ambitions and methodologies, and in particular to ensure that appropriate standards of analysis are maintained in the face of increasing commercial pressures.

There is increasing concern amongst ceramic specialists of all periods that pressures upon excavation budgets are impacting negatively upon standards of recording, analysis and reporting,

forcing undue emphasis upon basic questions of dating to the exclusion of other, no less significant, themes. This is especially the case where additional expenses might be incurred by further petrographic, chemical and other scientific analyses to pursue crucial research issues such as ceramic production and distribution. To address this problem, members of the ceramic study groups are currently liaising to explore the options for preparing a 'best practice' guidance document that may be applied across the period divisions. This would supplement rather than replace the variety of existing documents prepared by the period groups, which would remain essential for describing the specific methodologies required in the analysis, of prehistoric, Roman and later pottery.

A summary of the paper, with more details about this initiative, has been published in the most recent edition of *The Old Potter's Almanack* (Volume 18, June 2013).

Recent Excavations at Cardigan Castle, Ceredigion, South Wales

Rebecca Sillwood

In 2012 and 2013 NPS Archaeology undertook excavations at Cardigan Castle in South-West Wales. The excavations were part of a programme of renovations by the Cadwgan Building Preservation trust, to bring this important site back to life, and make it a part of the community again.

The Castle itself was the first castle built in stone by a Welshman, Rhys ap Gruffydd, known as Lord Rhys after he was acknowledged by Henry II as the lawful Lord in South Wales. Rhys moved his court to Cardigan, and in 1176 the first National Eisteddfod, a festival of the arts, was held here, drawing bards, musicians and singers from across Europe, a tradition that continues today (although not always at Cardigan). Cardigan changed hands from English to Welsh many times in the intervening years, with multiple sieges, and varying amounts of building and rebuilding. During the Civil War Cardigan was taken by the Royalists, and was besieged by the Parliamentary forces in 1644, who eventually took the Castle and destroyed much of its stone and timber buildings, making it unusable defensively. After this period the Castle came into private hands, and was first landscaped to create a bowling green in 1713, which presumably further destroyed many more of the medieval and post-medieval buildings on the site. The present house on the site, Castle Green House, was begun in the late 18th century, with the current layout established around 1805-8, and changed hand a few times before being sold to Barbara Wood in 1940. During the war the house was divided into two and was partly used by the military. The house was inhabited until the 1980s, after which it became derelict, and decay set in. In 2003 the Local Authority bought the site, and it is now on course for a re-vamp, bringing the site back into the public domain.

The recent excavations recorded evidence for medieval buildings inside the Castle walls, with new evidence for the size and layout of the surviving north tower found under the floors of Castle Green House, and other, previously unknown, stone buildings found in the castle grounds.

The finds were an eclectic mix of medieval and post-medieval, with a little of the modern thrown in for good measure. Medieval pottery in the form of local wares, such as Dyfed gravel-tempered ware, and imported material such as Ham Green Ware, were recovered, along with a rare possible medieval lamp base in Dyfed gravel-tempered ware. The post-medieval and modern pottery was a

vast collection of over 3,000 sherds, including a lovely redware dish (see photo) and a complete NAAFI teacup.



Fig.1.Redware Dish

Other interesting finds included a shell paint container, complete with pigment (see photo) and a medieval iron arrowhead and silver coin.



Fig.2.Shell paint container

Interesting links with the wider community in Cardigan were found with one 19th century glass Codd bottle, made for Havard & Co, located at Pendre House only 300m to the north of the Castle, and probably produced between 1875 and 1913. Pendre House was again a source of material for the owners of Cardigan, as a little bronze watch winder was also found with the name 'D Evans Cardigan Watch Maker and Jeweller', who now occupy Pendre House,, embossed around the central circular portion.



Fig.3.Havard & Co Codd bottle (left)

Fig.4. D Evans Watch Winder (above)

The finds from Cardigan Castle form a cohesive and fascinating assemblage, from the medieval occupation of the Castle through to the post-medieval, more domestic, usage. Work is ongoing on the assemblage, with work on site still continuing. The finds assemblage will be deposited with the Cadwgan Building Preservation Trust, who hope to use many of the artefacts as part of displays at the Castle itself, providing continuity for them that is not often seen.

A brief discussion of the prehistoric finds from Stainton West, Carlisle, Cumbria

Fraser Brown

Introduction

In 2009, during work on the Carlisle Northern Development Route, a new bypass built around the western side of Carlisle, a multi-period prehistoric site was uncovered to the west of the village of Stainton, perched upon an early Holocene terrace of the River Eden (figure 1). Excavations unearthed a large assemblage of finds, dating, predominantly, from the very end of the Mesolithic and the start of the Neolithic periods. The site covered 0.6ha, within the footprint of the road, but seems to extend outside this, towards both the north and the south. It comprised a series of palaeochannels, with a dense, *in situ* scatter of struck lithic material (c 300,000 pieces) occurring on an island between two of these. Finds of worked wood and stone, within the channels, associated with well-preserved palaeoenvironmental assemblages, indicate various phases of human activity. The fieldwork was undertaken by Oxford Archaeology North (OA North), in 2009, and a programme

of post-excavation analysis has also been coordinated, involving specialists from a wide range of fields and different organisations.



Fig.1. Stainton West from the air, looking southwards

Lithic Scatter

The lithic scatter, on drier land between the channels, was associated with hearths, cooking pits, hollows and stakehole structures, suggesting that a semi-permanent camp or settlement once occupied this area. Scientific dating suggests that this site was most likely in use from c 4800-4300 cal BC, or slightly thereafter, and, as such, it seems to fall between phases of activity identified in the channels. Overwhelmingly, the lithic material is characteristic of a narrow-blade, geometric microlithic technology (figure 2), including a very large assemblage of 5911 microliths and microlith fragments, and so is, in general, consistent with a late Mesolithic date (OA North 2011), although other types, such as leaf-shaped points and polished stone pieces, were also recovered, which are usually considered to be later. One possible conclusion is that the site is transitional, encompassing the Mesolithic-Neolithic continuum. The raw materials represented had been sourced from an exceedingly large catchment area, including beach pebble flint from western Cumbria, good-quality flint, probably of eastern Yorkshire origin, Lake District 'tuff' (Borrowdale Volcanic Group), Arran pitchstone, quartz, ochre and a variety of cherts, including those that can be sourced locally and materials that most probably derived from both the Pennines and from the southern Scottish uplands.

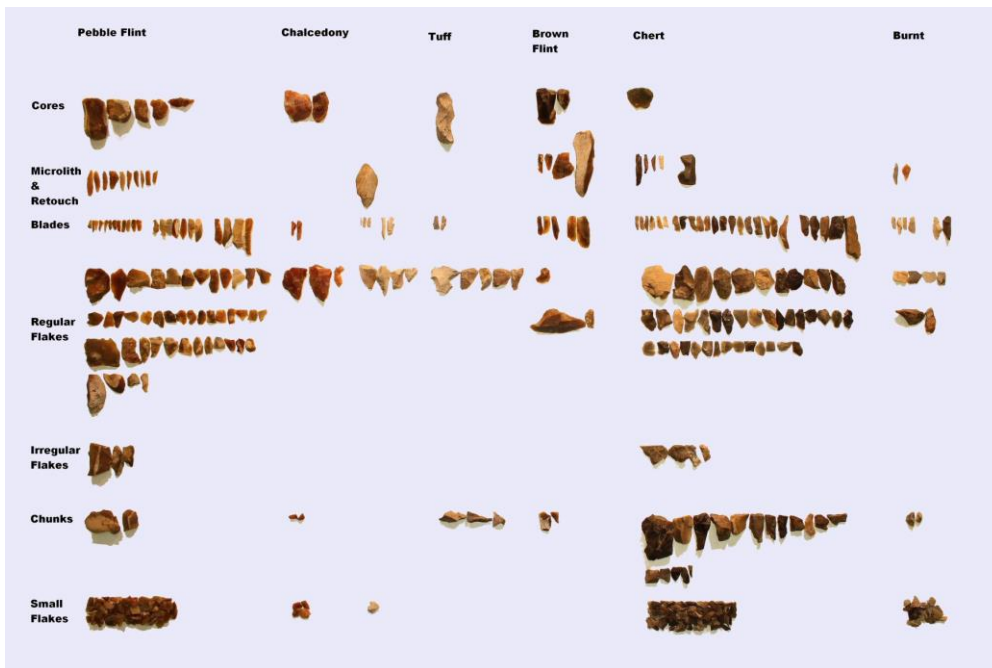


Fig.2. A worked-lithic assemblage

A range of innovative techniques was successfully employed during the course of the Stainton West investigation and the results, including the raw data, will ultimately be made available online, in an indexed digital format. In order to retrieve the huge, *in situ* lithic assemblage, in a way that preserved its spatial integrity, a wet sieving methodology was imported from the Netherlands (figure 3). The site was divided into 886 1m² grid squares, and the sediment from these was whole-earth sampled by context. Approximately 270,000 litres of clay-rich sediment was then wet sieved on site, to 2mm, employing water pumped from the palaeochannel excavations. This was a very gentle process that has successfully preserved the microwear on the lithic fabric, enabling their study by the University of Bradford.



Fig.3. The sieves in action

Palaeochannels

Within the palaeochannels, finds of worked wood and stone, associated with well-preserved palaeoenvironmental assemblages, indicate various phases of human activity. The earliest of these, dating to the sixth millennium cal BC, probably represents the opportunistic reuse of beaver-made structures by people. Subsequently, a later Neolithic phase of activity (starting in the early part of the fourth millennium cal BC) comprised the construction of a wooden platform and other structures in a channel and the discard/deposition of various wooden and stone artefacts, including two large wooden 'tridents' carved from single oak planks, several polished axeheads and fragments of *polissoirs* (stones for polishing stone axeheads). Additionally, several hundred flakes and cobbles, some of which had been crudely worked, were recovered from sediments in the palaeochannel where they had been deposited. These were made from volcaniclastic rocks (belonging to the Borrowdale Volcanic Group), of a sort which did not occur within the site boundary and, originally, would have derived from the central Lake District (although they were probably transported fairly closely to the vicinity of the site by natural agency; Davis 2013).

This collection of artefacts is interesting in a Cumbrian context, as a similar assemblage was retrieved from Ehenside Tarn, near Egremont, in the nineteenth century (Darbishire 1874). Indeed, the presence of *polissoirs* at Ehenside Tarn has inspired the theory (eg Manby 1965; Bradley and Edmonds 1993, 144) that rough-out axeheads, manufactured in the highlands central Lake District from rock types belonging to the Borrowdale Volcanic Group, were transported to more permanent places of settlement, on the coast, for completion. It is of some interest then that a comparison (Davis and Edmonds 2009) of a thin-section slide through one of the axeheads from the Stainton West site (far left, figure 4) should prove to match very closely with thin-section slides (556 and 557), labelled 'Ehenside Tarn', held by the Implement Petrology Group. This observation means it is likely that the Ehenside Tarn and Stainton axeheads were from the similar central Lake District source, probably an area between Pike o'Stickle, Harrison Stickle and Thunacar Knot, with a preference westwards towards the former of these.

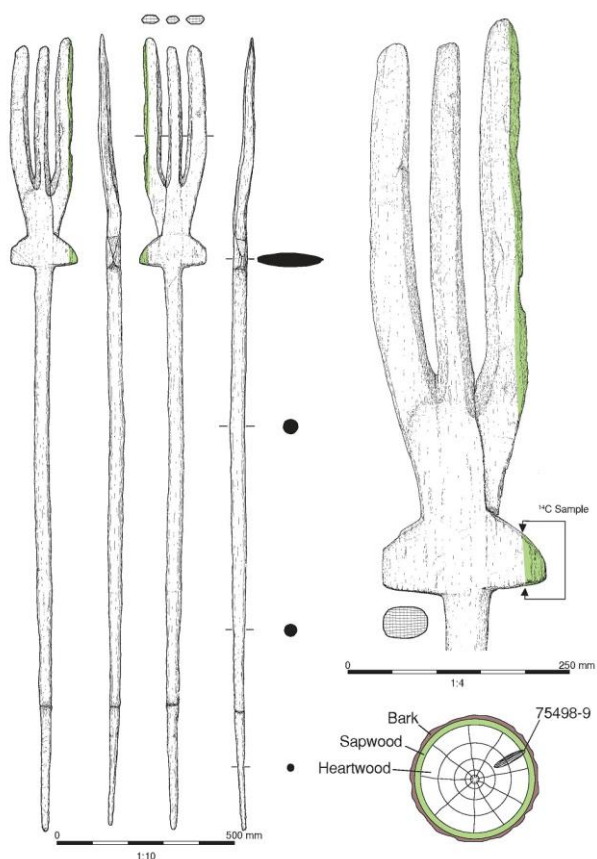


Fig.4.Stone axeheads from Stainton West

Further comparison between Ehenside Tarn and Stainton West is encouraged by the enigmatic oak tridents. Inspired by the unearthing of the Stainton West tridents, a study of the illustrations of the wooden artefacts recovered from Ehenside Tarn (Darbishire 1874), revealed two possible comparators. However, the illustrated tridents from Ehenside Tarn seemed, as they were portrayed, to be grossly warped and distorted. Enquiries revealed that the Ehenside tridents were still within the collections of the British Museum, and it was the rather inexpert (by modern standards), pre-illustration, conservation methods of the time that had occasioned their malformation (Gillian Varndell *pers comm*), but that, in light of the Stainton West finds, it was evident, that all belonged to the same class of object. Further study of the literature revealed two additional objects of this type, also nineteenth-century finds, from Co. Armagh, Northern Ireland (Wilde 1857), although if they still exist, their whereabouts is not known.



Fig.5. Photograph and illustration of one of the Stainton West tridents



Both the Stainton West tridents, which have been conserved and are now held by Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery Trust, Carlisle, have the same general form (figure 5), originally being in excess of 2m in length, ‘...with three [flattened and blunted] tines, which are all parallel sided, and parallel to each other. Above the tines, instead of curving smoothly into the handle, there are two projecting wings, or steps, above which the handle begins. The handle is oval in section at the bottom end, gradually tapering and becoming more rounded.’ (Taylor and Bamforth 2013). Interestingly, the internal edges of all the tines are carefully chamfered, which, presumably, relates in some way to their past use.

Despite detailed study of the Stainton West tridents (*ibid*), the function of these objects still remains a mystery – they do not seem to be well-suited for use as digging forks or fishing spears, being too fragile, and of the wrong proportions, for the former, and too heavy, and lacking in barbs, to be the latter. If they were once covered in skin and used as paddles, as was speculated in the case of the Ehenside tridents (Darbishire 1974), there was no evidence for this, and they do not seem ideally formed for use as such. Generally, it is not possible to deduce the function of the objects from patterns of wear on the tines or elsewhere, as none is evident. Indeed, it would seem that neither object was subjected to heavy use, although both the Stainton West examples have detached tines due to longitudinal splitting in antiquity, along medullary rays. Taylor and Bamford (2013) have considered the tridents in the light of evidence for other fork-like implements in the archaeological record, and in comparison to wooden forks of known function, and have concluded that there are no clear parallels suggestive of the function of the Stainton West tridents, although they tentatively posit a use associated with boat mooring or net fastening.

Whether the tridents were used for farming or for hunting/fishing or something else entirely, they clearly demonstrate proficiency in woodworking and woodland husbandry. The logs from which they were fashioned were at least 0.4m in diameter, harvested from mature, slow growing, oak trees, with rings 1-4mm thick (Taylor and Bamforth 2013), and the oak will have necessarily been worked when green. So, the effort expended, in the procurement of the wood by felling a large tree, and the manufacture of the tridents, would have been considerable. They were very finely finished, so that no visible tool marks remain, and it is clear that the objects were expertly crafted by someone who had a good understanding of the properties of the wood. The trident blanks, which were radially aligned, were probably split, using seasoned-oak wedges, and roughed out with stone-headed axes, but the tools used for the carving and finishing cannot be determined from the evidence (*ibid*), although these were likely to be flaked blades of some sort.

Whilst perhaps not as immediately impressive as the polished stone axeheads or oaken tridents, one other type of wooden artefact, retrieved from the palaeochannel at Stainton West has the distinction of uniting them in practice. In each case, the tridents were made on wood harvested from a newly felled oak tree, and, if these were not the casualties of ancient storms, then they were probably cut down by people. Amongst the other wooden artefacts found within the channel were several parallel-sided, rectangular slab-form pieces of woodworking debris, that were cut tangentially to the grain (figure 6). These are interpreted (Taylor and Bamford 2013), as the woodchips produced by felling a large tree with a stone-headed axe and are a very rare find type, with only a few others being found in either Britain or mainland Europe to date. Despite the presence of several of these woodchips, their distribution does not suggest that felling occurred in the immediate vicinity of the Neolithic-phase channel, and there was no other evidence to suggest this. Moreover, the silting channel was probably still too wet for large oak trees to flourish there,

whilst these might be expected further up the Eden terraces. As such, the woodchips are probably not in their primary context and, whilst it is possible that they might have been washed into the channel, the general impression is that they were put there.



Fig.6. A tree-felling woodchip, apparently placed in association with a split cobble in the channel

It might be concluded, therefore, that although the *polissoirs*, axeheads and tridents may, to modern and perhaps ancient sensibilities, be the most spectacular artefacts found within the channel, they were part of a varied assemblage deposited within it, including apparently more everyday objects such as the crudely-flaked cobble tools and wood-working debris. Together these artefacts, and the substances they were made from, in the acts of their deposition, could have referenced and embodied the wider practices and experiences of the community that deposited them; and, presumably, these acts were intelligible and appropriate, enabling social life to continue more or less harmoniously. In light of this, it is a great shame that the relative acidity of the channel sediments was not suitable for the preservation of bone — as some suspicion remains (in my mind at least), that, had bone been preserved, physical (biological) evidence for the Neolithic people themselves may also have been retrieved.

The similarity of the Ehenside Tarn and Stainton West sites, in terms of their waterside locations, and the artefact assemblages they have produced, is remarkable. It is also of note that, in the immediate area of Ehenside Tarn, evidence for probable Mesolithic activity is provided by surface scatters of struck-lithic artefacts (Anthony Dickson *pers comm*), so, like Stainton West, the Neolithic phase may there have had a precursor. There seems to have been a distinctive earlier Neolithic culture in west Cumbria, exemplified by the Ehenside and Stainton sites, that probably had its roots in the Mesolithic period. The two sites are fairly remote from each other, being approximately 60km apart, the former lying on the coastal plain and the latter in the Eden Valley, just before it widens into the Solway Firth. However, connections could have been forged between these two lowland communities, by interactions between them, as they made regular forays into the uplands of the central Lake District — motivated in part by the quest for axeheads. It seems likely that other such sites await discovery, and it is hoped that they come to light before another century has

passed.

References

- Bradley, R, and Edmonds, M, 1993 *Interpreting the axe trade: production and exchange in Neolithic Britain*, Cambridge.
- Darbishire, R D, 1874 Notes on discoveries in Ehenside Tarn, Cumberland, *Archaeologia*, **44(2)**, 273-92.
- Davis, V, 2013 Stainton West excavation, Carlisle: lithics report, unpubl rep.
- Davis, V, and Edmonds, M, 2009 An assessment of four stone axeheads from Stainton West, Oxford Archaeology, unpubl rep.
- Manby, T G, 1965 The distribution of rough-out 'Cumbrian' and related stone axes of the Lake District, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **7**, 50-72.
- OA North, 2011 Stainton West, Carlisle Northern Development Route: Archaeological Assessment, unpubl rep.
- Taylor, M, and Bamforth, M, 2013 Waterlogged wood analysis report, CNDR 08, unpubl rep.
- Wilde, W R, 1857 Catalogue of the antiquities of stone, earthen and vegetable materials in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.

Acknowledgements: Ann Clarke (coarse stone and lithics), Antony Dickson (lithics), Adrian Evans (lithic microwear), Randolph Donahue (lithic microwear), Mark Edmonds (stone axeheads), Vin Davis (implement petrology), Maisie Taylor (worked wood) and Mike Bamford (worked wood) have undertaken the artefact analyses very briefly summarised in the above, and most of the ideas and interpretations (the good ones) are theirs. I, however, must accept responsibility and apologise for any misuse of these. Alex Sperr produced the trident illustration. The project team at large should also be thanked and acknowledge, as should Rachel Newman and Antony Dickson who commented on early drafts of this piece. ADC ArcheoProjecten is credited with the invention of the sieving methodology, and Oxford Archaeology is very grateful for their help in installing the system.

Bridge Farm, Nr. Barcombe Mills: a truly momentous year

David Millum & Rob Wallace, Directors of the Culver Archaeological Project

The first year of excavations at Bridge Farm, Wellingham (Nr. Barcombe Mills) proved to be truly memorable not only for the archaeology revealed but also for the terrific response from the 180 volunteers of all ages and experience who signed up for a total of over 1000 work days. During the 6 weeks of excavation an estimated 400 visitors had tours of the site and the five organised local school fieldtrips attracted 150 pupils. The wide range of workshops gave 120 people the opportunity to share the knowledge of 6 specialists in subjects as diverse as handling human bones to recording pillboxes.



Fig.1. A typical turnout during the 6 weeks of excavations (CAP archive)

The partnership between the Culver Archaeological Project (CAP) and their appointed contractor, AOC Archaeology, was an overriding success made possible by the generous grant that CAP received from the National Lottery via the Heritage Lottery Fund. This grant not only funded the dig, workshops and visits, all of which were free to participants, but also the crucial post-excavation works including conservation and specialist reporting. So we think we can justifiably claim that as a community project Bridge Farm 2013 was a resounding success but what about the archaeology?

Our main aim for 2013 was to evaluate the state of preservation of the archaeological features indicated in the geophysical survey produced by David Staveley (figure 2). We also wanted to establish the phasing between the apparent open settlement and the double ditch enclosure. We excavated four open area trenches totalling 1150 sq m in locations which balanced obtaining the best results with causing the least disturbance to both the archaeology and the running of this busy farm (Figure 3).



Fig.2. A map of the 4 trenches excavated to the south of the main settlement



Fig.3. An aerial photograph of the site under excavation in July 2013 (S. McGregor)

Trench 1 was dug just into the edge of the sweet corn crop inside the double ditched enclosure over the central N/S roadway of the open settlement. This proved to be our most difficult trench to interpret with the roadside ditches proving difficult to distinguish. The task was not helped by the series of deep pits that had been cut into the ditches although these rewarded us with some large sherds of pottery from the basal deposits, which will be crucial for dating purposes (figure 4).



Fig.4. A pot from a deep pit in Trench 1

Trench 2 was positioned in the meadow and was placed over the intersection of the same road ditches with the outer enclosure ditch so that the phasing of these 2 elements could be resolved. It became clear after both stratigraphic excavation and box sectioning at the intersection that the enclosure ditch cut, and was therefore later than the more ephemeral roadside ditches. This was supported by pottery sherd spot dates of 1st century from the roadside ditch and late 3rd from the enclosure ditch. Two star finds from Trench 2 were a quern stone made from West Sussex greensand (figure 5) and a Samian base marked Cinnamvs II, a maker from Lezoux in Central Gaul in the late 2nd century.

Trench 3 targeted a series of anomalies clustered around a crossroads to the southern edge of the settlement. This was arguably our most successful trench exposing the remains of a possible tile kiln (figure 6), a rectangular pit lined with tegular roof tiles (figure 7), postholes of a small rectangular building, roadside ditches containing fragments of water-logged timbers, patches of flint road metalling, flint-packed pits/postholes, and charcoal and ash filled pits; all suggesting a busy working area close to the river. In the centre of the kiln was a greasy fill from which a sample has been sent for further analysis but is thought to be extracted animal fat possibly from tallow production.



Fig.5. The quern stone from trench 2.



Fig.6. The half-sectioned tile kiln



Fig.7. Tile-lined basin with possible lime mortar

Trench 4 offered us our only chance to examine both enclosure ditches together and these were successfully located and excavated. But this trench also brought us our most intriguing find; a human cremation in a nearly complete urn (figure 8). This was lifted whole and taken back to AOC's headquarters in Twickenham where Osteoarchaeologist Dr Rachel Ives carefully excavated the contents finding 652g of burnt human bone. With no duplications in the larger fragments, which included elbow, wrist and vertebrae as well as several teeth, this appears to be the remains of a single adult. No date has yet been attributed to the cremation but its location within an upper context and inside the enclosure may suggest a date towards the end of the settlement.



Fig.8. Catherine Edwards (AOC) and Sarah Foster (CAP) wrap the cremation urn prior to lifting.

Geoarchaeologist Dr Mike Allen noted that the alluvial nature of the site encourages rapid soil formation (pedogenesis) which has caused a merging and obliteration of some archaeological contexts making recognition of the stratigraphic interfaces in excavation difficult whilst leaving some artefacts 'floating' within the deep silty soils. During the dig everyone was kept up to date with the results by the Excavation Diary on CAP's website which is still being added to and available to view at www.culverproject.co.uk.

In future years it is hoped to examine areas of the main settlement and its arterial roadways, further away from the effects of the river (which runs close by the current dig site), although this may require excavation to be conducted outside the crop growing season. There is much post-excavation work to be undertaken and specialists reports to be commissioned before any serious interpretation of the site can begin but in the meantime CAP are continuing with geophysical investigations around Bridge Farm and also along 'Stroude Street', the Culver Roman road, as it heads towards Offham.

The IfA Finds Group was first formed in 1989 in order to represent the interests of finds workers to IfA council and in all the activities of the Institute.

www.archaeologists.net/groups/finds