



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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EDAS ARCHAEOLOGY- Druce Farm Roman Villa Excavation

Work has just finished at Druce Farm. For six weeks, 22 EDAS members together with several 'dedicated Romanists', investigated the potential courtyard villa which had shown up on the 2010 geophysics survey.

Three 1.5m wide trenches were put in to evaluate the underlying preservation, the hard topsoil and remains of the wheat crop were removed by Bernard Cox the tenant Farmer. Trench 1 in the centre of the site confirmed that there were no buildings in that area. Ten metres away, the 60m long Trench 2 was very exciting. It just clipped a northern building range and surviving wall bases indicate at least three phases of construction. The amount of building debris *in situ* was enormous. It would appear that part of a roof had slipped off. Limestone tiles, some with nails intact, lay one above the other and on top of these was a jumble of flint building nodules and fragments of stone and ceramic tiles.

One area bounded by two walls, produced a large amount of painted wall plaster. The colours were superb – shades of cream, red, green and blue, that latter two apparently very expensive colours. Although no floors were intact (at least in the area we looked at), there were huge numbers of loose tesserae. Some were red, probably chopped up ceramic roof tiles, some were cubes of white and grey limestone and a few were of brown Kimmeridge shale. They varied in size suggesting not only red and white borders but intricate patterns as well. Lumps of 'opus signinum' point to other well-appointed room flooring



Black burnished Ware 'dog dish' with unusual lead 'pot mend'



Limestone tiles lying where they had slid off a roof



High class painted plaster decorated some of the villa's rooms

The geophysics survey had indicated ditches enclosing the villa on at least three sides and excavation of three sections proved that they were all about 2.5m wide and just over 1m deep. Part of the northern ditch was excavated in Trench 3 and the western and eastern ditches were excavated in Trench 2. The ditch sections were full of finds. The uppermost fill contained much building debris; flint walling, roof tiles, occasional tesserae, mortar and odd bits of wall plaster as well as domestic rubbish and could have been associated with a re-building phase. Large amounts of animal bone had been dumped in all three sections; this included the substantial remains of a cow – the inhabitants obviously fed well! The pottery was mostly Dorset Black Burnished Ware (cooking pots, flanged dishes, bowls and flagons). One large dog-dish sherd had a very unusual piece of lead pot-men attached. 'Posh' pottery from the New Forest and Oxfordshire and Samian from Gaul was also present. Significantly, several sherds of 'Dorset Orange Wiped Ware' were identified; this coarse pink, pie-crust pottery is an indicator of activity into the 5th century. Five fragments of vessel glass all came from the ditch fills. Two finds were of note – a complete bronze hair pin and a perforated bone counter.



*A round-headed copper alloy hair pin
dates from AD 200-400*



The silver denarius of Vespasian

The Stour Valley Metal Detectorists were instrumental in locating the site in the early 2000s and several of their members came over to detect in and around the excavation. They found the earliest coin – a spectacular silver denarius of Vespasian dating to around AD 80 as well as bronze issues of the 200s and 300s AD.

All the finds will be assessed this winter, a report prepared for the Dorset Proceedings and we hope to return to the site next spring. Thanks are extended to Ann Ridout, the landowner for access to the field and for the loan of a vintage land rover, and to Bernard Cox for allowing us to 'mash up' his arable fields.

Lilian Ladle

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