

EDAS EXCAVATION AT WORTH MATRAVERS - 2008

As most members will know, during the summer of 2008 work continued in Football Field, Worth Matravers, near the site of five affordable houses. In 2007, seven trenches were excavated to investigate apparent anomalies shown on geophysical (magnetometry) plots. Of these trenches, only one was considered worthy of further archaeological investigation. This was Trench 3, which had yielded a remarkable stone-lined pit feature, some Romano-British artefacts, and near which a burial was found (see EDAS Newsletter, February 2008).

It was decided that in 2008 we should investigate the relationship, if any, between last year's Romano-British finds and the area to the West of Trench3, excavated by Southampton University in the early 1990s, revealing a Romano British heated field barn with a grain drier and earlier Iron Age settlement. A rectangular area of about 200 square metres, incorporating the West end of Trench 3, was machine-stripped, and subsequently extended manually to clarify some of the archaeology revealed. The stripped surface suggested that there would be complex archaeology beneath. Work started on July 20th and continued for three five-day weeks, followed by two-day weeks until 19th October.



Cleaning-back the North West of the site during the first week

As expected, the site was complex archaeologically, due mainly to the dense scatter of limestone. In the event, most of the area was cleaned-back, with hand tools, at least three times. Possible features were identified by marking the site with the locations of anomalies on the geo-physical plot. In most cases, these anomalies were 'ground-truthed' by clusters of artefacts and/or soil colour variations on the surface. Most were then excavated. During the excavation several pits were revealed, presumably used initially, at least,

for storage. Subsequently, most appeared to have been used as middens. All pit features yielded a range of artefacts, including IA pottery, worked shale, animal bones, worked flint and, rarely, ferrous objects. Two large pits were excavated; one (half-sectioned) complex, two-phased and 1.5m in depth, and the other, shown left, also multi-phased and including a seat-like structure which was probably the top of the pit at one phase. Both these pits were partially lined with a carefully laid limestone structure, similar to that seen inside most of the pit excavated last year. The bottoms of all three pits were also horizontal and of natural limestone.



View from the South of the pit feature with a seat-like structure.

Two further probable pit features were left intact and unexcavated for the archaeologists of the future.

Other features investigated included a complex area of stratified occupation layers, containing a range of Iron Age pottery, within what appeared initially to be part of a roundhouse (the remainder being under the N-S baulk to the W, i.e. towards the area excavated by Southampton University). A structure resembling a horizontal, shallow flue was uncovered, pointing towards the putative roundhouse. It was not completely excavated. A cluster of arranged sling-shot was found near several post-holes.

Evidence was uncovered of probable stone structures, lying in a wide band between Trench 3 and the pit revealed last year and the heated field-barn, previously excavated by Southampton University. High status Roman, or Romano-British, artefacts were found in this vicinity, including two pairs of tweezers, pins, Samian pottery and other fineware.

A burial, shown below, was uncovered, some 5m north from that found last year. The skeleton was flexed, lying on the left side with the skull resting on a horizontal slab of limestone, possibly a pillow. Small sherds of (probable) IA pottery were recovered from next to the skull and the remnants of a pig 'joint' were found in the crook of the legs. The body was that of a woman aged 35 to 45 years, of stature 5ft 2 to 4 ins. Thanks go to Steve McDonald for his work and report on the burial.



Inhumation, with approximately N/S orientation, viewed from the east

We believe that we have the evidence to satisfy this year's research objective, so to continue work on the site currently open would be largely a finds-retrieval exercise. We have no reason to think that further excavation will add anything, other than more finds to be processed, to our current knowledge potential. We had hoped that we might uncover structure(s) which, when included with the grain-drier, could be conserved and made into an exciting visitor attraction. Unfortunately, we did not discover the villa or temple for which many of us had hoped!

All considerations taken into account, we have decided regretfully not to work on the site next season. This does not necessarily preclude a return in the future.

The project will, of course, be completed in accordance with a comprehensive post-excavation plan. Much work remains to be done on collating, processing and interpreting the results of our fieldwork, in order that a final report may be written. It is hoped that as many members as possible will take part in this work.

As a Society, EDAS has been very fortunate to excavate such an interesting site, in such a superb location and we are very grateful to Bob and Bridget for the opportunity and for their constant support.

I would like also to record my own personal gratitude to Bob and Bridget and to everyone involved in the investigations. I particularly valued the support from Lilian and Janet, and especially Dave to whom I hand over the reins.

Phil Roberts

6 January 2009.