



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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EDAS Lecture: Bones, Ritual and Rubbish with Lilian Ladle

Last month we had a whirlwind talk by our own Lilian Ladle who gave an overview of the sensational excavations that have taken place in the Football Field, Worth Matravers. She covered the original excavations undertaken by Southampton University students under David Hinton between 1990 -1993, which uncovered two iron age round houses and a Roman barn, then the work initially undertaken by EDAS between 2006 – 2008, under the guidance of Phil Roberts, in preparation for the building of affordable housing by the Worth Community Property Trust (WCPT), which excavated a number of very impressive Late Iron Age storage pits. In May 2010 the project was handed over to Lilian, to oversee the preparations for an access road, luckily the development was delayed, because beneath the topsoil a lot of archaeology was discovered. This led to a five month dig of an area measuring 14m x 7m, all done by trowel, and it was completed in August 2010. In February 2011, the development was back on track and the site was extended by removing a length of the field boundary wall exposing an area that had been protected from ploughing. The team excavated in all weathers until May 2011, when the builders eventually moved in. Then, in August, whilst digging the foundations of the first house the builders uncovered the outline of a skull. The EDAS team returned assisted by several archaeology students and over the next five weeks a post Roman cemetery was excavated.

Lilian explained that the earliest structure is a Neolithic ditch which cuts the eastern edge of the site; containing fine pieces of flint which Peter Bellamy has stated are of a type from the Late Mesolithic/Early Neolithic period, accompanied by a small number of sherds which are of typical Early Neolithic pots (c. 3600BC). It is possible that the ditch was part of a causeway. The next structure exposed remains an enigma, it comprises two rows of small stone slabs set approx. 1 metre apart. Each row consists of two adjacent stones and they are arranged in two tiers. Many of the stones had a pointed end which was placed into the ground. This structure contained a few sherds of beaker pottery and a fine thumb nail scrapper, which date the feature to the Early Bronze Age (c 2200BC). At the next level was found a series of post holes which were stone lined and probably of the Late Bronze Age, but they contained no dating evidence. But there was also the post pits of a Late Bronze Age roundhouse, after the timbers had been removed pot sherds had been placed as a closure deposit and dated (c 8-900BC). There was no evidence of stone walls.

Above this is a cobbled layer which extends throughout the excavation site and well beyond. It was covered by a midden comprising 20 -30 cm of rubbish. This has been dated to the important transition period between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age (c. 800-700BC). With hindsight it is now realised that it extended to the areas excavated by EDAS in 2006 – 2009 and David Hinton also accepts it extended under the area he excavated as well. This is a very large area, and is of a type now being recognised as having great significance to the people of that time, and was used as a multi-purpose meeting place, where people would trade, undertake communal

business and of course celebration. The midden was full of material including; pottery of the All Cannings Cross type and a lot of shale, animal bone - predominantly sheep - bone tools, spindle whorls. At the top of the midden was found a miniature American socketed axe. And in a small pit covered by a stone (which when turned was seen to be a quern stone) was found a small piece of glass. It has been carefully analysed by a national expert and it dates from Late Bronze Age (c. 600BC) making it the oldest yet identified in Dorset. The glass originates from the Levantine then it was probably shipped in bulk to Spain where the discovered item may have been manufactured. Cut into this surface was a Middle Iron Age pit (c. 550 -150BC), one of the few to be found in Dorset, dated by a La Tene I brooch. A smaller pit was re-dug into it in the Late iron age.

There are a number of substantial Late Iron Age storage pits which were excavated between 2006-2009 some were carefully lined with stone. One had a broad stone lined shelf on the upper part and was named the Jacuzzi pit, others had been recut at a later period. One was in excellent condition, it was very carefully lined with stones and it was packed full of 2315 sherds, from over 130 pots. It also contained the skull of a large dog (c. 50BC – 50AD), which is a very important deposition, see item below. Also from the earlier excavations three adult burials were discovered, all females and all in a crouched position.

In 2010 the team had uncovered a length of wall from a Roman Building and in 2011 they uncovered another length containing impressive threshold stones. These are now believed to be the rear and front of a second Roman Barn. Associated with this area were found 17 or 18 infant burials, all less than 6 months of age. These are probably examples of infanticide; the Romans believed that the child did not have a soul until it had cut its first teeth. One infant of a slightly older age was buried within a stone cist. The building contained a great deal of shale, typically as lathe cores from the production of shale bracelets. There were also some fine metal objects such as tweezers. The presence of sherds from pie-crust pots show that the site continued to be occupied into the post Roman period.

The final surprise of the site was the excavation of a Post-Roman cemetery. This has been partially excavated because it extends beyond the development area. Over a five week period the team excavated 26 burials. One was a triple burial and three were double burials. They were laid in a roughly east-west alignment. There are no grave goods apart from one buckle which has been dated to c. AD550.

For those of you who have not seen it yet, Lloyd Morgan made a short film of the 2010 excavation which is available online at: <http://www.lloydmorganproductions.co.uk/corporate/edas-archaeology-dig/>.

Andrew Morgan

15.09.11

THE LOST HOUND OF WORTH MATRAVERS



As mentioned in Lilian's talk about the Worth Matravers excavations, in 2007 the EDAS team excavated a remarkable Late Iron Age storage pit. It was quite beautifully constructed and when no longer required it was filled it with a large quantity of material, mainly pottery but also animal bone and most significantly the skull of a large dog. The skull was carefully excavated and cleaned but then it just disappeared.

This skull is a very important find. It probably lies forgotten in somebody's shed or garage. Please check and if you find it contact Lilian Ladle, Phil Roberts or me directly so that it can be returned for proper analysis. This will be handled confidentially to avoid any embarrassment. There are only a few people who would have been allowed to take the item off-site and we are determined to retrieve the item.

Andrew Morgan