

Hanleys' Village Society Community Archaeology Dig 2012

During three weeks in late September to October 2012 the Hanleys' Community Archaeology Dig was undertaken, where five trenches, amounting to a total length of 160m and an excavated area of about 240m², were excavated. Up to twenty volunteers a day attended this training dig run by Worcestershire Archive & Archaeology Service for the Hanleys' Village Society and, despite the site conditions being very wet indeed (rainfall being about twice normal), good progress was made in uncovering and recording a Roman site of some considerable interest. An unusual amount of Roman industrial activity (ironworking) was present, and the finds indicated background activity from the earlier prehistoric period (ie worked flint) to modern times – a substantial gap was also noted, as there was no sign of Sub-Roman/Anglo-Saxon or early medieval activity.

The site was located towards the River Severn to the east of Hanley Castle village (approximately NGR SO 843 421), and the trenches were first opened by a JCB using a toothless bucket to remove the ploughsoil/subsoil, thereby revealing any archaeological features.

Methods

Excavation methods were applied in accordance to standards set by the Institute of Archaeologists (see <http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/ifa> for a list of relevant standards). In the course of this training excavation the dig participants all had the chance to first learn, and then, under supervision, put into practise each aspect of field archaeology. The resulting data (field records) were intended to be of professional quality, so that the report could be in accordance with professional standards, and thereby useful as part of wider research into the archaeology of the county. Finally, given the nature of the project, the final report has been adjusted to accommodate a broader readership and to take advantage of the latest digital technological advances in terms of its presentation.

When displayed on your computer screen the map shows the position of the trenches that were excavated, and the features and surfaces/layers that were revealed by excavation. All trenches were numbered and each stratigraphic unit was given a context number reflecting which trench it was within ie the Trench 5 context numbering series starts at 5000, and Trench 6 at 6000 etc. To investigate the archaeological site the following guidance may be useful:

- click the 'key' button first to show the conventions used to represent archaeology in the form of cut features, or surfaces/layers or the natural geology (ie no archaeology);
- then zoom into a trench, and, by hovering your cursor over any archaeology within a trench, you can find out more information by left-clicking on your mouse. Where ditches are indicated, continuations are shown on the screen plan by coloured lines (arrowed) either side of the trench (a single line colour is designated for each ditch so that the overlapping/intercutting of ditches can be represented);
- to see general information about a trench click on the Trench label;
- to see finds information position the cursor over a feature and click – the file label indicates the relevant context number, and a basic listing is provided, and;
- click on individual photographs to enlarge the view – photographs of each feature are provided where available.

By clicking through the base maps in chronological order you can also see the changing landscape of the site through time with the trenches still in view. Here you can also compare the results of the geophysical survey and the excavation trenching. Click the other buttons available to find out more about the excavation experience and about some of the finds that were discovered.

Excavation results

Prior to the digging of trenches a geophysical survey and fieldwalking had provided much information so that the trenches could be effectively positioned for more in-depth investigation of the site. (Note: some of the eight trenches opened are not mentioned below, as Trenches 3, 7 and 8 were not excavated due to insufficient time to complete the excavation of all trenches. Therefore a select

number were prioritised, especially those where industrial activity seemed most evident). All the datable features were Roman or later, with any earlier finds being residual.

Trench summaries

Trench 1 (10m long) – Possible enclosure ditches 1008 and 1010/1004 of Roman date. Cut 1006 was considered a later cultivation feature.

Trench 2 (max 29m long E–W) – A series of intercutting ditches of a probable enclosure of Roman date with a single posthole (2021); these features were flanked to the west by a stony area (2008) which may be natural but had some Roman pottery associated.

Trench 4 (10m long) – A remarkably straight and vertical-sided trench (4004) seemed best interpreted as a palisade trench. Roman finds were associated.

Trench 5 (39m long) – At the north end of the trench there was a possible trackway (5015) with a ditch (5011) alongside; in the centre of the trench there was a large feature (5014) of uncertain character, perhaps a large quarry pit; and to the south there was a raised area which included patches of fine gravel (5022) on the surface of which large quantities of hammerscale and amorphous iron had been left, with a pit (5028) adjacent; the latter was full of miscellaneous-type iron slag pieces and, just beyond, lay a posthole (5005). This evidence has been provisionally interpreted to represent the site of an industrial building, possible a smithy. All the features described for this trench, except for 5015, were associated with Roman finds.

Trench 6 (34m long) – The short length of shallow gully (6013) at the north end of this trench had a slight curve compatible with its being the gully for a roundhouse of about 10m diameter. Such buildings were typical of Iron Age/Roman Worcestershire and the great amount of Roman pottery in this gully may have been a modification to aid drainage of rain water coming off the roof. To the south of this there was a large ditch (6020) which had extensive cobbling (6021) on its south side. The cobbled area was peppered with some poorly defined pits/postholes (eg 6027). At the south end of the trench there was a substantial hollow (6034) which the geophysical survey plot indicated might be the same feature as the large hollow (5014) in Trench 5. All the Trench 6 features were associated with Roman finds.

Roman (AD43–410)

Site overview

The remains revealed by the trenching were almost exclusively of Roman date, consisting mainly of ditches and pits/postholes. Since such a large area was evaluated and the trenches were only a very small sample (about 1.5%), there is much uncertainty about the detailed nature of the remains, but certain more general conclusions could still be drawn, and these are summarised as follows:

- that activity dated to about the mid 2nd to mid 3rd centuries AD;
- that several ditched enclosures were present (Trenches 1, 2, 5 and 6), one of which had a possible roundhouse (see Trench 6), and;
- that the amount of industrial waste suggested a different economic basis than for most rural settlements of this period (especially in Trenches 5 and 6; see more below).

The possible roundhouse was particularly interesting as it would indicate the presence of a newly discovered Roman settlement. Though essentially a prehistoric house type, this remained in use well into the Roman period; and, if about 10m in diameter, the possible Hanley example would fit well the normal size range. The archaeological evidence adjacent suggested that there was a prodigious amount of industrial activity taking place nearby. Metalworking waste was well represented in Trenches 2, 4, 5 and 6 (ie widely across the site), but one specific area (in Trench 5) produced large amounts of waste slag from a single pit in the vicinity of a fine gravel floor in association with a great amount of hammerscale – the latter is particularly informative, as it would normally not travel very far from its point of creation. Such a combination of evidence would, therefore, favour the idea that this

was the location of smithing in the Roman period. The presence of the hammerscale is helpful for distinguishing the type of activity taking place; it may imply either finishing of raw iron, or the working up of iron objects (perhaps nails, of which quite a few were recovered). In addition the presence of tap slag waste, also found generally across the site, could be taken to suggest that iron smelting was also being practised in this general locality during the Roman period. Presently all these features are considered to be broadly contemporary, and datable to the mid Roman period.

The finds

In total 1902 finds were collected (omitting quantification by count of the iron-working slag fragments), and these were mainly Roman pottery sherds. The whole site finds assemblage weighed 142kg including the iron-working slag.

There was a range of finds types from the Roman levels:

- pottery - Droitwich briquetage, Malvernian handmade ware (fabric 3), Severn valley ware (fabric 12), grey ware (fabrics 14 and 15), ?grog-tempered ware (fabric 16), wheelmade Malvernian ware (fabric 19), Black-burnished ware (fabric 22), Nene valley ware (fabric 28), Mancetter/Hartshill mortaria (fabric 32), Oxfordshire white mortaria (fabric 33), amphora (fabric 42), samian ware (fabric 43), unidentified Roman (fabric 98) - see <http://www.worcestershireceramics.org/> for more information about individual fabric type;
- ceramic objects - roof tile and ?brick, Malvernian circular (?baking) plates, ?loomweight, fired clay;
- iron object - nail;
- copper alloy object - ?brooch spring;
- glass - blue lump;
- ironworking waste - hammerscale (plate and spheroidal), smithing slag, tap slag and miscellaneous slag (some with fired clay adhering), and:
- other materials - coal, burnt stone (pot-boiler).

There was a very small amount of animal bone, and of cremated bone (from fill 5007 in ditch 5011).

The level of intrusive finds was low (mainly just a small amount of medieval material in Trench 6), and in the Roman levels there was little obvious sign of residual material having been incorporated.

Comparison with other Roman sites

The results suggest a strong Roman presence on the west bank of the river, and in the vicinity of what later became established as Quay Lane. The presence comprised a number of ditches (Trenches 1 and 2), which suggest that enclosures are represented of a size and type often seen on Iron Age/Roman sites in the region (eg Griffin *et al* 2005; Hurst *et al* 2010). Such sites are often associated with domestic buildings and, therefore, would be where the local population was living. The large ditch at the north end of Trench 6 possibly marked the site of another enclosure. Unfortunately marrying together the geophysical survey evidence with the excavated features has not proven straightforward, and so the form of any enclosures cannot yet be completely established.

Trenches 5 and 6 presented a different picture where a more unusual collection of features were recorded. Most notably an intact floor surface was recorded in Trench 5 in an area where the signs of metalworking (generally scattered across all trenches) were at their most evident. The fine gravel character of the floor surface was more in keeping with its being from within a building, and, since this was where hammerscale from working hot iron was most prolific, it is suggested that this is most likely to have been a smithy. This would be a rare discovery. Other features in this area included a large rather amorphous pit, possibly a quarry area for clay which would have been extensively used in this period for structural purposes, such as building walls or even the hearths or furnaces that an ironworker would need. The pit was probably drained southwards (ie connected with the large hollow at the south end of Trench 6) towards the river, otherwise it would have become a pond and silted up, and there were no signs of that.

All in all, the Hanley Castle site provides some of the first solid evidence for the importance of Roman riverside sites on the Severn outside of Worcester. This should be no surprise as the river would have provided a major means of transporting goods both in and out of this area. The association with iron working is tantalising, as it begins to suggest that the specialised ironworking (certainly smithing, but possibly also smelting), so long associated with Roman Worcester (Jackson 2004), can now be seen to have had a wider base, which starts to cast rural Roman Worcestershire in a different light other than the agricultural food-producing role usually assigned to it. At present the evidence points to this being a 2nd century AD development. The smithing is somewhat of a surprise as it would have relied on coal, and there was no local source of this. However, the supply of coal could also have been river based, either travelling along the same route as iron ore if from the Forest of Dean, or possibly coming downstream from the Coalbrookdale area (Shropshire), while in later times documentary evidence shows it was supplied from Staffordshire (eg Pensnett). In contrast, the smelting would have utilised charcoal, no doubt from adjacent woodland, presumed to have been widespread in the vicinity at the time. The quantity of waste suggested that this activity lasted some while, and since it surely represented quite an investment, a villa might, therefore, be expected, as such ventures would have required considerable resources to become established.

The evidence from the 2012 trenching amounts to an exciting discovery, as it is intriguing to speculate how the iron-working here relates to an already identified focus on iron production up river to the north, in Roman Worcester, and at other sites down river, on the lower Severn (eg Fulford and Allen 1992). These riverside sites have all long been acknowledged as having a deep involvement in the local ironworking industry (presumably somehow associated with the Forest of Dean iron source) - the Hanley evidence may now suggest a wider spread of iron working along the river in this period by including areas in between those previously identified as being involved.

Incidentally it now seems, therefore, that Hanley Castle's rural industrial prominence, well known for the medieval period when it specialised in pottery production, might now have Roman antecedents. This presumably implies that the river was once of key importance, so that the quay now tucked away down a quiet lane, must once have been right at the centre of the economic life of a busy and industrious Hanley Castle.

Post-Roman (AD410–1066)

Nothing relating to this period was revealed.

Medieval (1066–1539)

One possible feature (1006) in Trench 1 was provisionally identified as a remnant of ridge and furrow cultivation. In addition medieval pottery was associated with the ploughsoil.

Post-medieval (1540–present)

The main evidence for this period comprised pottery sherds and other finds, such as ceramic building materials, found in the ploughsoil. By this time the site can also be viewed on old maps, including an enclosure map and Ordnance Survey maps (click the 'base maps' button to view these).

References

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Griffin, S, Griffin, L, and Jackson, R, 2005 *Salvage recording and evaluation at Throckmorton Airfield, Throckmorton, Worcestershire*, Worcestershire Archaeological Service unpublished internal rep, 917. Online access, <http://public.worcestershire.gov.uk/sites/archaeology/Reports/wr10190.pdf>

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Archive

The project archive will be placed at the County Museum at Hartlebury.

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Project management

The overall project was managed by Derek Hurst with the fieldwork being led by Jon Webster.

Report authors

This report was prepared by Derek Hurst and Jon Webster, with illustration by Laura Templeton, and web design by Mark Smith (Worcestershire County Council).

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