

Christmas 2020 Andy Russel

ISLE OF WIGHT: Work at Hale Common, in the southern Yar valley, site of proposed gravel quarry: Phase 1 (two years ago) revealed early cremations and Bronze Age burials. In 2020 work started on Phase 3, surface stripping on sandy soil which required shallow scrapes to preserve marks of field systems. A number of Romano British finds suggested brief periods of settlement by small groups, disposing of rubbish in shallow pits. Sample pits produced pottery sherds such as Samian ware from first century AD and New Forest mortaria from 250-375 AD, with imports including a German stoneware beaker and a Mosel ceramic beaker with white paintwork, some bearing mottos. Sherds of local Vectis wares showed damage suggesting “waster” kiln sherds, but no evidence of a kiln: pots would normally be made near to a clay source but the clay came from some distance (although sand on this site would be used). Also unearthed was part of a possible ironstone quern (22 kilos) which may have been sourced from a local cliff face: two stones as needed for grinding could have combined weight of up to 200 kilos! A pit containing five Roman coins was found, late C1 to C2 date: three bore heads of women. [Earlier exploration in the area found nothing of note.]

SITE of former military port, MARCHWOOD: After the port was taken out of use, the land has been leased to local businesses. Most of this area was originally wetlands belonging to a farm, in places up to 4 metres in depth, which was reclaimed in the 1930s during dredging works in Southampton Water. In World War 2 a railway yard was built, and photographs show railway tracks with sections from Mulberry Harbours, but these lines disappeared after the war. Soil investigation was carried out on the site of former Husbands shipyard: bore holes and pits were investigated by Mike Allen for faunal remains. This revealed Barton clay at the bottom, an orange gravel terrace (probably Ice Age), alluvium and shallow peat layers above it, more alluvium above this, with modern soil and concrete used to level up the site for the Army. Soil samples from the peat dated to 6660 BC and 5550 BC, i.e. late Mesolithic, but no evidence was found of human habitation at that time (a pot sherd from the 1800s was possibly dropped down a hole dug later). Further work to investigate pollens and diatoms will be carried out.

BISHOPS WALTHAM: A site adjacent to the historic ruins of the palace at Bishops Waltham, formerly an estate of the Bishop of Winchester, where there has been much archaeological exploration in the past. There is evidence of a planned town, perhaps Saxon, and an earlier Saxon timber-framed palace pre-dating the Conquest, precursor of the Norman stone-built palace which survives as a ruin. There are reports of a high-status medieval building being discovered, and demolished to make way for the bypass (1968), though some timbers were rescued and carbon-dated to 1210. The recent excavation took place over two weeks, on a very restricted site with a post-medieval wall to one side, and part of a channel from the river to the palace moat. Ten trenches were excavated in total (5% of the site) revealing several rubbish pits which produced late Saxon or Anglo Norman finds. An unusual late Saxon pot was found which could be a costrel (?) or warming pan, of white sandy fabric and glazed with applied stamped strips, a similar material to French white ware found last year during the Bargate dig in Southampton, and it is hoped to compare the two pots. Another pot appeared to be a sieve and had a hole in the side probably made with the potter’s thumb, and smaller holes in the bottom, most of which were marked but not been punched through. Other finds included a cooking pot with spouts, and a tripod pitcher jug with strap handle and comb decoration. A filled-in cellar was located which contained 17th/18th flint

rubble and chunks of high-status mouldings and other stonework, possibly from the Bishop's Palace. The wall of a house also showed the use of recycled stone from the palace.

ST NICHOLAS CHURCH, NORTH STONEHAM: Watching brief on a trench dug through the graveyard to install a toilet produced two fragments of mediaeval floor tile: one a standard Dutch tile, and a Wessex floor tile (dated 1230s), similar to those found at St Denys Priory, Southampton and at Clarendon Palace. A further watching brief will take place during the second phase to connect pipes along the street frontage.

BEVOIS MOUNT, CEDAR ROAD: A site in Cedar Road was originally the site of Padwell Farm, owned by Queens College Oxford and shown on Speed's 1611 map of Southampton. It is said that Sir Bevois built a fort nearby to keep out the Danes. Bevois Mount House itself was very large, shown in an 1824 painting of the house by John Buckler. Built by a slave owning family around 1780-90, every family that lived in it until 1850 owned slaves on plantations in the Caribbean; the last owner received £900 from the Government as compensation when slavery was abolished. Remains of the stables of 1846 were discovered, featuring paved floor and separate compartments or stalls. The brick southern wall of the stable was overlooked by the house, and 'gentrified' by one owner adding a buttress and stucco to the wall. Beneath the stable remains, the site had been infilled with stonework from an impressive building, comprising entablature and mouldings often of Caen stone (but where other fabric was used, it was painted yellow to match). The original paving points to this building being stables, although latterly it was turned into a garage with a brick floor.

16 HAWKESWOOD ROAD, BITTERNE MANOR: This watching brief took place in Andy's back garden, where a conservatory is being replaced with an extension. Groundworks including a soakaway revealed gravel and brick earth, cut by a Roman ditch containing 4th century material. In the 1m of black soil above, a Roman coin was found faced with Constantine the First, showing a wolf on the reverse with Romulus & Remus. At this time, the Roman Empire was split between east (Constantinople) and west: this coin was minted in Rome.

BUILDING RECORDING: A dilapidated 1950s bungalow was recorded in Sholing, containing substantial remains of two early 20th century railway carriages. Once the asbestos roof was removed, it showed that two railway carriages had been placed facing each other, with an ~8 ft gap between. It is thought the original plot owner bought the two carriages from Brighton Railway and roofed them over. All rooms were approx. 8ft x 8ft providing kitchen, bathroom, bedrooms and sitting room. One carriage window preserved a "smoking" sign, with green railway paintwork and remains of a sign and the word "Railway", probably made in the London & Brighton carriage works. One leather window strap was stamped with SR (Southern Railway) and another stamped E&CP, possibly from Exeter and Crediton Railway (1865). The current plot owner has planning permission for a house on the site, but unfortunately no use for the carriages. During chat at the end of the talk, John Langran advised that there are several bungalows similar to this made from carriages at Pagham, and Sarah Hanna advised that others exist at Selsey (West Sussex). Andy stated that lots of rolling stock was sold off after the second World War which is probably when these were acquired.

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