

SEDFORD HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT: INTERIM REPORT 2004

by Gabriel Moshenska

This report summarises the results of the eighth season of work by SHARP. For further information on our work, including the 2004 season Weblog, please visit www.sharp.org.uk.

Fieldwalking

During the Easter season two fields in the south of the parish were fieldwalked. Despite poor weather, we recovered artefacts dating from the Neolithic to the present, including fragments of Beaker, samian ware and carved masonry. The most spectacular find was the missing terminal of the Sedgeford Torc, a large piece of electrum (gold/silver alloy) with La Tène decoration, which is now reunited with the rest of the torc in the British Museum.

Boneyard Old Trench

A large portion of the southern and northern ends of the trench were excavated down to the level of natural natural deposits. This showed an area in the western side that was respected by the burials, suggesting the presence of a boundary of some kind. Two ditches appear to mark this boundary, containing large quantities of animal bone and other Saxon era household refuse. Other Saxon features included two east–west aligned linear features, four pits and two small sub-circular cut features.

Further work took place in the area where an Iron Age hoard was recovered in 2003, revealing a small ditched enclosure in the northern end of the trench, while in the southern end a pit was excavated containing Gallo-Belgic pottery; archaeo-environmental work revealed charred grain of various types.

A substantial ditch running E–W across the trench yielded a sizeable assemblage of Roman fineware along with imitation Gallo-Belgic wares. The Roman material comprised around eleven vessels of various types, dating to *c.* AD 70–80, and appears to have been deliberately deposited in the ditch. The majority of the vessels are of a drinking or dining type, rather than cooking or storage.

Over the years a large quantity of Mesolithic microliths have been found on Old Trench, principally in the hillwash layers. This season we uncovered a broken Mesolithic tranchet axe approximately 12cm long, supporting the theory that there is a Mesolithic site in the area, probably to the south of Boneyard.

With the trench nearing completion, the area of excavation has been drastically reduced. However, there are estimated to be at least 30 burials remaining in this area, probably requiring at least two further seasons work.

Human remains

This season 28 skeletons were excavated from the Boneyard, including seven from New Trench, bringing the total to 238. Of this year's remains, ten appear to be male and five female, while the others, particularly those from New Trench, were too badly fragmented to be analysed successfully. We have enjoyed some success in reuniting chanel with incomplete articulated human remains. It had previously been thought that the burials in the cemetery had either shroud or coffin, but one of the earlier skeletons recovered this season appeared to have both.

Notable palaeopathological findings include an unusual ossified larynx, the second case of this rare condition found at Sedgeford. Another skeleton was found to have suffered from severe osteo-arthritis and curvature of the spine, resulting in heavy eburnation on the second vertebra.

Several research projects took place using the SHARP skeletal archive this season, including work on cribralia, metrical approaches to sorting disarticulated bones and degenerative bone disease. Research into inter-operator variability in the recording of human remains examined the problems inherent to a working collection created and used by a range of different people over time.

Boneyard New Trench

This season we traced and fully re-excavated the trenches from Peter Jewell's 1958 excavation of the site. Examining photographs and the archives from this earlier excavation showed which trenches had been opened at different times, easing their re-excavation.

The most significant discovery on New Trench was a structure in the middle of the trench, running east-west along the slope. It is thought to be an Anglo-Saxon hall or church, or possibly a more mundane building or enclosure. The two corners that have been found are 17m apart, but the width of the building is unknown as the terracing that would have supported it has been eroded by hillwash.

The burials in the south-east corner of the New Trench represent the western extent of the cemetery. Other significant finds include Anglo-Saxon comb fragments, a dress fastener, a violin brooch and a double spiral-headed pin.

A charcoal-rich context in a ditch produced burnt grain including barley, rye and wheat; most interestingly, a piece of burnt bread probably represented sweepings from a nearby oven. Evidence of this kind from Anglo-Saxon rural settlements is rare.

Village survey

The village survey team excavated 24 test-pits this season, completing the survey. These were spread around the village with five in Littleport, five along Docking Road, seven in Cole Green and West Hall, three along the Fring Road and four around Glover's Farm. One test-pit near West Hall revealed a large post-hole cut 30cm into the chalk bed-rock, and a carved antler awl. Pottery finds dated from the Roman period to the present, with a preponderance of medieval finds.

The findings suggest the village spread to the north of the river in the late Anglo-Saxon period, and by the 12th or 13th centuries had become truly polyfocal, remaining thus until developments in the last 40 years began to bridge the gaps and create the modern-day village of Sedgeford.

Sedgeford Hall Park

Following dredging and tree removal, a surface survey on Sedgeford Hall Park produced over 5kg of pottery, predominantly Late Saxon or early medieval. Five test-pits were excavated, one of which revealed what appeared to be a floor surface with evidence of a wall, while another revealed a deep cut into what appears to be the natural chalk. Significant finds include a tiny annular brooch of ivory or bone and copper alloy. Further evaluation is planned for next season, and we are hopeful of revealing more of the Anglo-Saxon settlement.

Archives

This season the finds and paper archives were given a thorough overhaul, with an inventory of all materials created and a reorganisation of storage space. A digital photographic archive was created, principally for finds photography. This season we will further address conservation issues, a process that will include re-packing some of the finds.