

## SHORTER PAPERS

### EXCAVATIONS AT HAM HILL, STOKE-SUB-HAMDON

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Archaeological excavations were conducted at Ham Hill during the summers of 2011 and 2012 as part of a three-year programme undertaken in partnership by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit and the Department of Archaeology of Cardiff University. A 1.28ha area situated in the southwest corner of Ham Hill was opened up as a condition of planning consent for the expansion of the Harvey Stone Quarry. Geophysical survey (GSB 2001) revealed a large rectilinear enclosure within the development area, and evaluation trenching showed this to date to the Middle to Late Iron Age (Slater 2009). The 1.28ha was divided into four areas, three of which have now been fully excavated (fig. 1), with investigation of the final area forthcoming in 2013. In addition to these investigations, trenches were opened in 2012 at three locations over the hillfort's ramparts in order to characterise their condition, age and construction sequence. One of these trenches, on the northern spur of the hillfort, is a re-opening of a trench excavated in 1929, and yet never published, by Harold St. George Gray. The following statement is a brief overview of interim results that have been presented in full in Slater *et al.* (2012) and Brittain *et al.* (2013).

#### Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age

Considerable quantities of prehistoric artefacts have been recovered by systematic surface finds collection and test-pitting of a buried land surface

that covers much of the main excavation area, and from later archaeological features. There is an even distribution of Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age lithics across the excavated area, along with more concentrated areas of pottery that indicate Ham Hill was densely occupied throughout early prehistory. Features of this date have proven to be elusive in the main excavation area but the terminal of a ditch, or large pit, was found at the base of Gray's 1929 trench through the rampart. This contained a cow skull and a flint assemblage of blades, which suggests an Early Neolithic date. It is tempting to suggest this feature is the ditch of a causewayed enclosure but further work will be required before such an interpretation can be made. Nevertheless, whatever it is it does represent the first direct modification of the hilltop so far discovered.

#### Middle Bronze Age

An extensive ditched coaxial field system extends across and beyond the main excavations. Intensive sampling of the system, involving at least 50 percent excavation of the ditches, has identified multiple recuts, construction breaks and entrances, indicating ongoing management, modification and access points between rectangular fields. Finds of lithics, saddle querns and a stone macehead from the ditches suggest a provisional Middle Bronze Age date.



*Fig. 1 Ham Hill, site plan*

### Late Bronze Age

A rectangular six-post structure and a nearby small pit have been dated by pottery to the Late Bronze Age. The six-post structure has the same alignment as a line of posts and that alignment is markedly different to the preceding field system. This tentatively suggests a phase of activity on the hill that precedes the Iron Age occupation and is contemporary with the large collection of Late Bronze Age metalwork that has been recovered from the hill.

### Iron Age

Trenches 1 and 3, situated over the south and north ramparts, have produced pottery that indicate a date for construction of the hillfort in the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age transition or Earliest Iron Age. This is a surprising discovery confirming that the primary hillfort was enormous from its outset, enclosing an area of c. 88.1ha. Trench 3 (Gray's 1929 cutting) showed there were up to four phases of enlargement of the rampart, combining formal stone architecture and less structured dumps of rubble and domestic waste with periods of ground stabilisation and soil formation. These phases remain to be individually

dated, but the final phase of construction is sealed by Early Roman material culture. This has been examined in detail in Trench 2 (which will be completed in 2013), where a stone chamber with an adjacent metal surface may represent a hitherto unknown secondary entrance into the hillfort. By contrast, the sequence in Trench 1, across the southern rampart, was restricted to the primary, Early Iron Age phase of rampart construction. An additional trench will be opened here to ascertain whether this is indicative of a limited construction sequence or of later truncation. A circular stone-walled house was found built into the rear of the rampart in Trench 1.

No interior archaeology contemporary with the Early Iron Age rampart has thus far been identified from the main excavations. Here lies a distribution of Middle to Late Iron Age pit clusters and a ring gully lying to the east and outside of a large rectilinear enclosure. The entrance to the enclosure faces southeast, and the approach may originally have comprised a stone revetted bank with a series of timber posts directing access to the north and leading towards a large ring gully and a pennanular gully. The ring gully had an internal diameter of c. 20m and enclosed a single posthole with a number of pits containing 'special deposits', including bronze and iron metalwork, quern fragments and pottery, including a fine Glastonbury Ware bowl. Evidence suggests that the structure was for domestic use. Additional pits and postholes in the enclosure are likely to be contemporary, but structures are difficult to discern.

Three human burials have been excavated from the enclosure ditch, and each appeared to have been deposited prior to the partial backfilling of the inner bank. Deposition of fauna over this backfilled layer also displays elements of formality, which is further highlighted by the placement into the ditch terminals of a large quantity of hamstone slabs that probably represent the dismantled revetment. Domestic waste, with significant quantities of black mustard seed (*Brassica nigra*), gradually filled the remaining hollow of the southern arm of the enclosure ditch. This may indicate a longer duration for settlement outside of the enclosure, but further analysis will be undertaken to verify the exact chronological relationship between these.

### Romano-British

Limited quantities of Early Roman finds have been recovered from the main excavations and these appear to be associated with a rectilinear field system with a double ditched track way. Early Roman material has been found in greater quantities in the rampart trenches along the northern spur, suggesting that occupation was focused on the spur with agricultural activity covering the southern plateau.

### Conclusion

The current excavations at Ham Hill are transforming our understanding of the development and character of the archaeology on the hill. This comprises a potentially unbroken sequence of occupation from the Mesolithic through to the Early Roman period. The long term importance of the hilltop is demonstrated by a possible early Neolithic monument on the northern spur and an extensive Middle Bronze Age field system that covers the plateau and suggest the construction of the hillfort rampart is an acknowledgement of the importance of this location. The hillfort boundary clearly goes through several phases of modification and the internal occupation also clearly has a history that changes during the Iron Age and which culminates in a significant Early Roman occupation.

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### Endnotes

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## NEW RADIOCARBON DATES FOR SOMERSET

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A further six samples were selected by Jackie McKinley and submitted to Gordon Cook for dating at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre. The dating was undertaken using a Maltwood Fund grant. It was hoped that they would all be of post-Roman / pre Anglo-Saxon / early medieval date and that they would contribute to the Society's 'Somerset in the Age of Arthur and Alfred' project.

Five of the samples were from museum collections – three from the County Museum and two from Weston super Mare Museum. Those in the County Museum came from Dom Ethelbert Horne's excavation of a cemetery at Camerton near Bath in the 1920s and 1930s (Horne 1930, 1934; Wedlake 1958). Those from Weston super Mare came from two sites: Coronation Road, found in 1901; and from the construction of a reservoir at Ashcombe in 1934. The final sample was from a skeleton unearthed at Whitethorn Cottage, Barton in Winscombe in 1973.

The radiocarbon results were:

Ashcombe, Weston super Mare  
 SUERC 41734 (GU 28000)  
 428-580AD (95.4% probability)

Coronation Road, Weston super Mare  
 SUERC 41736 (GU28002)  
 385-197BC (95.4% probability)

Camerton Grave 12  
 SUERC 41731 (GU27997)  
 665-774AD (at 95.4% probability)

Camerton Grave 16  
 SUERC 41732 (GU27998)  
 712-767AD (95.4% probability)

Camerton Grave 28  
 SUERC 41733 (GU27999)  
 694-765AD (95.4% probability)

Whitethorn Cottage, Barton, Winscombe  
 SUERC 41735 (GU28001)  
 301-415AD (95.4% probability)

### Weston super Mare

The burial in Coronation Road, Weston super Mare, was aligned east-west over the top of two pits with burials of the Iron Age. A sketch was made by H N Davies at the time (Fig 1). This burial was accompanied by a pebble with a cross scratched on it. The pebble, plus the stratigraphy and the east-west alignment (even though the head was to the east) suggested at the time of the initial discovery in 1901, that this might be an early Christian burial. It is however clear from the radiocarbon date that this is another Iron Age burial, along with the two below, and there is no connection with early medieval times. The scratch-marked pebble may be no more than a weight for securing string, possibly for fishing as a net sinker.

The burial from Ashcombe in Weston super Mare was found in 1934 during construction of a covered reservoir. At the time it was thought to be of Anglo-Saxon date and there is an early report by (Emeritus) Professor Fawcett discussing the racial (sic) characteristics of the burials. It was one of two found. The radiocarbon date places the burial firmly in the early medieval period with the most likely possibility that this is a 'British' or late Romano-British person dating to before the arrival of Anglo-Saxon influence, or even people, in the late seventh century into Somerset



*Fig. 1 Pit burial, Weston super Mare*

under the Wessex king Cenwalh, who drove the British back beyond the river Parrett in 658. This is the first evidence for an early medieval presence in the Weston super Mare area and is thus of some significance. It raises the possibility that Worlebury, the great Iron Age fortress above Weston was reoccupied in Roman times.

#### **Camerton**

The three burials from Camerton are perhaps the most enigmatic. Camerton was a small Roman town on the Fosse Way, a little south of Bath, which was excavated by Bill Wedlake and published in 1958. A cemetery was found a little to the north of the town where quarrying for limestone began in 1926. It is possible that burials had been found

before but twelve graves were excavated after quarrymen found two gold bracteates in the new work. No digging took place in 1927 as it was too wet, but in 1928 and for the next four years, Dom Ethelbert Horne came in and excavated graves as the face of the quarry moved westwards: 14 in 1928; 14 in 1929; 16 in 1930; 28 in 1931; and 20 in 1932 when again quarrying ceased. In all, Horne records that 109 graves were opened (Horne 1929, 1933).

On the plan produced in 1933 (and redrawn and reproduced here as Fig. 2) the quarry face of circa 1926 is shown with datum lines which probably roughly reflect the annual rates of work. Apart from the gold bracteates found in destroyed graves to the east, other graves with bracteates and discs were located at 5 and 32. The current radiocarbon dates were taken from burials in graves 12, 16 and 28. Helen Geake comments that the finds from the cemeteries are almost certainly 7th century and that the 'significance of the crosses does seem to be Christian, whether personal ornament (quite likely I'd think) or political allegiance' (Helen Geake pers. comm.).

It has long been suggested that occupation at Camerton Roman town continued into post-Roman times and some 'Anglo-Saxon' presence has long been attributed to the burials in this cemetery. But to some extent these dates are equivocal. They *could* be those of Romano-Britons continuing to live in the town or its vicinity well on into the post-Roman period but still before any Anglo-Saxon presence in the area. Equally they could be the first of any groups of Anglo-Saxons arriving (and dying) in the mid to late seventh century, at a time when the influence of the Anglo-Saxon kings of Wessex was growing in Somerset. These burials were all east-west and there were few grave goods (though two bracteates had 'crosses' on them). Two of the three dates could be earlier and we are inclined to think these burials are of Christian Romano-Britons, ie non-Anglo-Saxon people. Only when further work, with oxygen-isotope analysis for example, is carried out to see if these people are local or not, will this be clearer.

#### **Barton**

The skeleton found during the construction of a patio at Whitethorn Cottage by Peter and Margaret Jones in March 1973 was of a young adult male. When found, the top half of the skeleton including



Fig. 2 Camerton, Anglo-Saxon cemetery showing sampled graves

the skull was missing dug away in earlier garden alterations. The radiocarbon date makes it clear that this was a late Roman, probably pagan burial. There are other Roman finds from the east end of the hamlet of Barton suggesting there is a late Roman rural settlement somewhere in this area.

It is proving very difficult to locate many of the other burials that have been excavated in the county and which may be of the 400-900 period, even when they are recent acquisitions. The whereabouts of the two burials from the top of Glastonbury Tor, excavated by Philip Rahtz

(1970, 61) and from the post-Roman building on the Roman temple site at Brean Down (ApSimon 1965) seem at present to be unknown. Both of these would warrant radiocarbon dating, both are likely to be early medieval. The late Roman burials from Gatcombe (Branigan 1977, 65 and plate 17) said wrongly to have sherds with chi-rhos scratched on them (Mawer 1995, 38, 116), also seem to be missing. Even more disturbing is that burials excavated at Portishead in the 1970s and 1990s cannot at present be located in Bristol City Museum.



Until further skeletons from sites likely to have been used in the post-Roman centuries turn up, the authors have no plans to sample further skeletons at present.

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### THE WINSCOMBE PROJECT, SOMERSET, 2012

Mick Aston, Maria Forbes and Teresa Hall

Research in the Winscombe Project in north Somerset (Aston, Forbes and Hall 2009, 2010, 2011) continued in 2012 with documentary research, map regression analysis, test-pit digging and vernacular building surveys. The medieval field system of arable and pasture and the extent of upland and lowland grazing were studied using principally the long series of *compotus* or account rolls for the manor and the few court rolls that survive. These have been transcribed and translated by Martin Ecclestone (Aston et al, 2012). The pre-tithe maps of 1792 by William White for the Dean and Chapter of Wells Cathedral, the owners of the manor, and the enclosure map of 1799, when the upland open commons were enclosed, were particularly useful. The survival of field names on these maps and the tithe map of 1840 could be related to names recorded in the medieval documents. These showed that there had not been a regular two or three field common field system in the parish by the time surveys were compiled in 1290, the fourteenth century and in 1540. It is possible that there had been a regular system, possibly established by Glastonbury Abbey which owned the manor from the late tenth to the early 13th century, but it is more likely

that a fully developed system never materialized, a tribute to the abundant pasture in the parish and the rather loose type of management by the stewards of the Dean and Chapter. The parish farming was always dominated by cattle breeding, milk production (with lots of cheese), horses and sheep.

A comparison of the research at Shapwick (Aston and Gerrard 2013) with Winscombe, with the differences observed and the lessons learned was published in 2012 (Aston 2012).

The survey of vernacular buildings has continued and it is now clear that there is a greater survival of early buildings (16th to 17th centuries) in the outlying hamlets of Barton and Sandford than in the village of Winscombe itself, which has the parish church. This became very gentrified later on and there was whole-scale removal and rebuilding of early houses in the 19th century. In fact this 'gentrification' process is proving to be a key factor in the development of settlement in the parish and is being studied by Maria Forbes and Ann Brooks. Between around 1820 and 1900 very many small farms and small holdings were upgraded from working farming units to gentlemen's residences with the removal

## BARTON in Winscombe Somerset

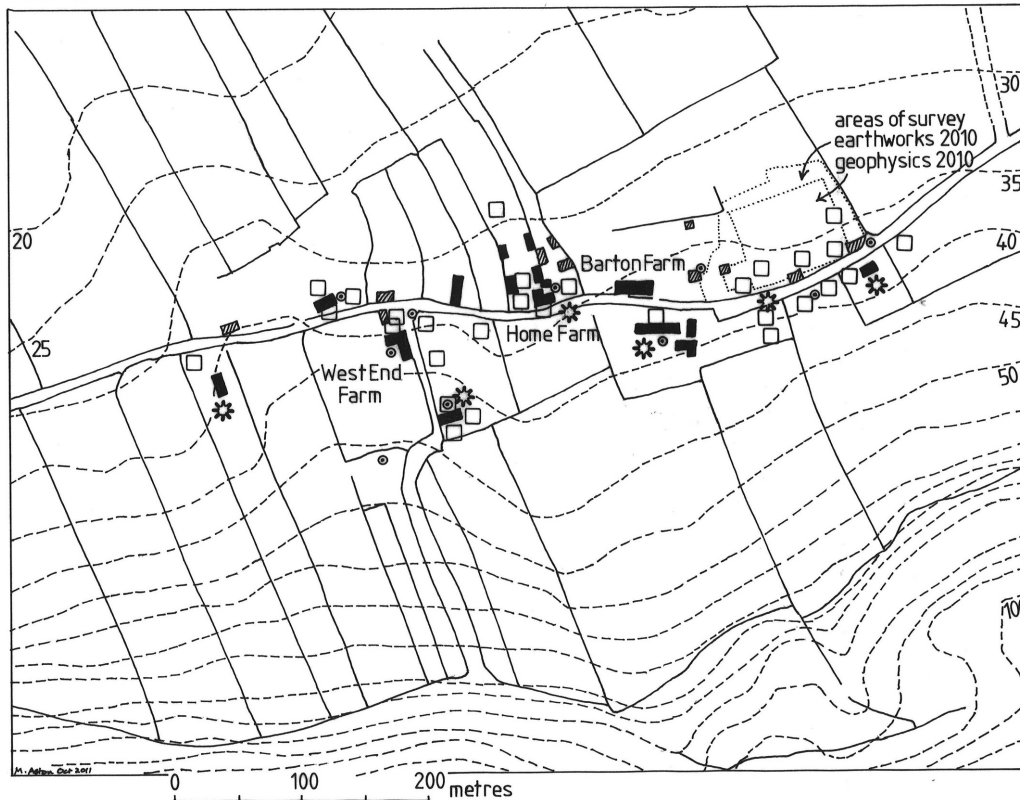


Fig. 1 Sidcot, Winscombe, Somerset, air view from the north-west with Sidcot School and Quaker Meeting House left and hamlet of Oakridge right

or burying of cobbled farmyards, drains and outbuildings, often seemingly with removal of accumulated layers of medieval and later debris, to be replaced with dumps of garden soil, flower beds and turf.

The reasons are partly to do with the arrival of the railway in the parish in 1869 but other reasons are more significant. The Quakers have had a public school in the parish, Sidcot School, since the seventeenth century, and Mendip was a popular holiday destination for walkers, climbers and artists in the nineteenth century: many visitors then retired to the area in later life.

A further 53 (1m x 1m) test pits were dug in 2012 making a total of 128 in the settlements of the parish so far. These were mainly in Sidcot, on the land of the Quaker school, and in the western half of Barton. (Figs 2–3) In Sidcot a possible

Neolithic polished stone axe was found associated with fragments of late medieval glazed jugs, next to a wall on a stone floor. In Barton two test pits were dug close to West End Farm which has been dated by dendrochronology to 1278 and 1280, but the ground around the house had been dug away to the bedrock removing any contemporary material.

Other test-pits were dug in the west end of Sandford including two in the grounds of the local pub, the Railway Inn. Subsequently, a display has been put up in the pub which shows some of the activities and findings of the project.

The project again had a stall with finds and explanation panels at the two annual fairs held in the parish and also at the school fete at Sidcot School.

Further test pits will be dug in 2013, in Winscombe and Woodborough.



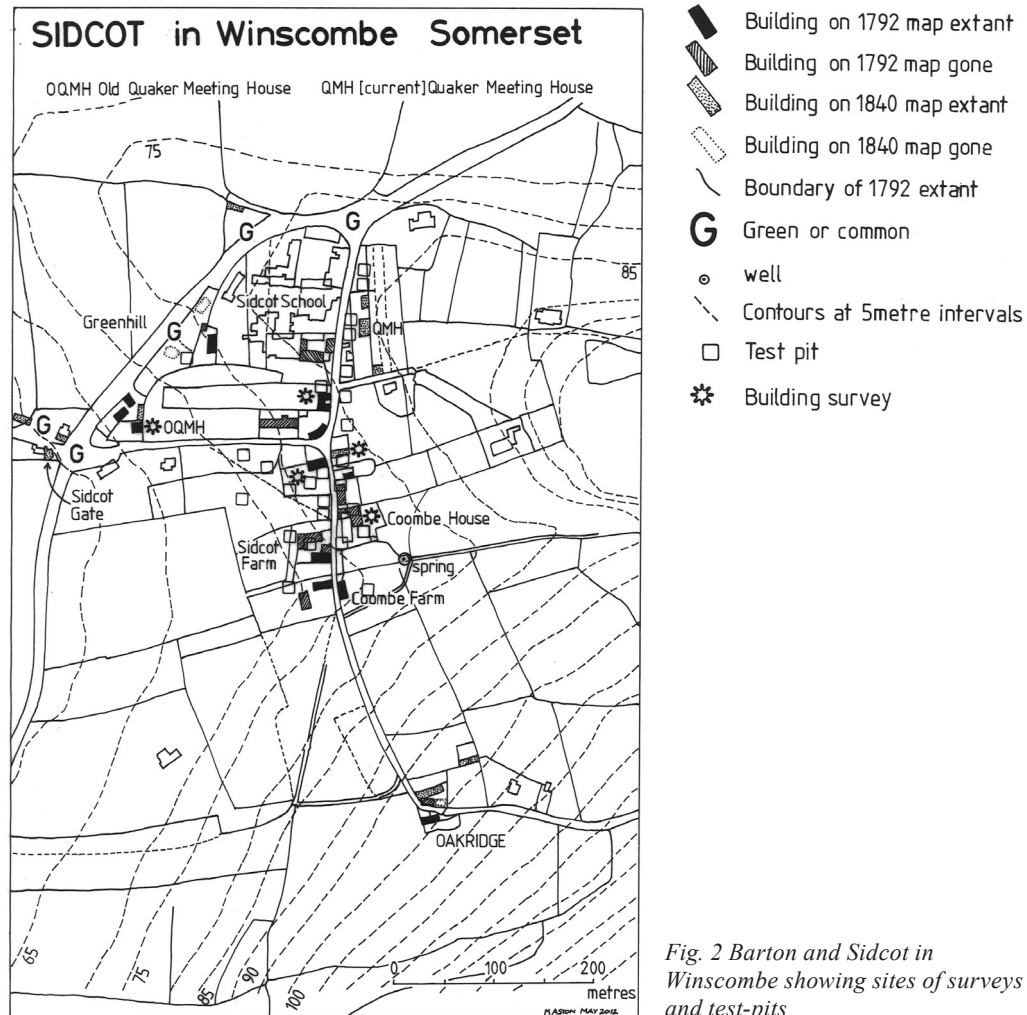


Fig. 2 Barton and Sidcot in Winscombe showing sites of surveys and test-pits

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