

## CHARTERHOUSE ON MENDIP: INTERIM REPORT ON EXCAVATIONS IN 1995

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The third season of survey and excavation was carried out from July 8 to 31, 1995, on three sites at Charterhouse on Mendip. The main objectives of the work in 1995 were to complete work on the 'fortlet', to examine further the area of ancient mining on the western side of the Charterhouse valley, and to survey in detail this area using the Pen-Map system. These objectives were achieved, bringing this three-year programme to a conclusion (Todd 1994; 1995)

### MINING AREA (Site 3)

#### RAKE 2

Examination of Rake 2 was prompted by the finding of Roman pottery on the surface to either side of the declivity. From an early stage of excavation it was evident that this rake had not yielded galena but haematite. Large lumps of haematite were found discarded in the filling of the rake and the layers of earth incorporated in that filling were stained reddish-brown. As in the case of Rake 1, the material from the filling was early Roman in date. It included samian ware of Julio-Claudian date and a few sherds of Iron Age pottery. One coin was recovered from the upper filling, a denarius of Julius Caesar dating to *c.* 48 BC; Sydenham 1013. This coin was slightly worn but could have been lost about a century after its date of minting. Excavation of this rake was continued to a depth of 3.1m, at which depth Roman material was still being recovered.

#### RAKE 1

Two further lengths of this, the longest rake on this site, were excavated, following the examination of three lengths in 1994. Both of the stretches examined in 1995 produced evidence of working in the 1st century AD and no later in the Roman period. One (Trench 5) yielded evidence of modern intrusion, probably in the 17th century. The deepest excavation was achieved in Trench 4, in which the rake lay between a vertical natural limestone face and an artificial cutting through yellow-green clay. Excavation was continued through clay and loose rubble to a depth of 3.6m, without locating the bottom. Early Roman pottery was found throughout the filling, mainly samian ware. At a depth of 2.06m an imitation Claudian *as* lay in the rake. As in other lengths of this rake, lumps of galena were found at intervals.

Trench 5 revealed a narrow length of rake, similar to that seen in Trench 1 in 1994, though a little wider. A fissure varying from 0.4m to 0.7m was filled with loam, clay and loose stones. Early Roman pottery was present throughout the filling, along with three or four late Iron Age

sherds. In a slight widening of the fissure, fragments of post-medieval pottery and clay pipe stems indicate more recent activity.

The results obtained from the two rakes examined in 1994-5 indicate that the main period of mineral extraction was the mid-late 1st century AD, with the possibility of late Iron Age activity. The occasional modern intrusion occurred, but by and large these rakes were closed well before AD 100. Their working appears to be closely related to occupation of the 'fortlet', the main periods of which seem to be *c.* AD 50-65 and *c.* AD 70-75. Thereafter the focus of mining seems to have shifted to other sites, the most likely areas being the ground west of the Charterhouse valley, on Ubley Warren. Here the wide and deep rakes which are so notable a feature of the landscape must be seen as plausibly Roman in origin, though no doubt with later phases of exploitation. These immense rakes have never been surveyed, much less examined by other archaeological methods.

### THE ROMAN 'FORTLET'

Further excavation of the ditch of the Period I 'fortlet' was undertaken to either side of the section examined in 1994. As before, large quantities of Claudio-Neronian pottery were recovered from the middle and lower filling of the rock-cut ditch. The bulk of this material consisted of amphorae, flagons, samian ware platters and cups, fine ware beakers and jars. Coarse wares were present in relatively small quantities. Deposits of animal bones had also accumulated in the ditch, including the remains of sheep, pig, cattle and horse. As in 1994, various objects of bronze and iron were also recovered, along with sherds of glass drinking vessels and an imitation Claudian *as*. Contrary to expectations in 1994, the ditch was not interrupted for a gate-causeway at this point.

The dating evidence for this first phase of the 'fortlet' may be summarized as follows:

#### 5 Claudian *asses*

1 Greek silver coin; probably of the 3rd century BC

Decorated samian ware of predominantly Claudian-early Neronian potters

Plain samian ware in which the following forms predominate: Ritterling 9; Ritterling 12; Dr. 15/17; Dr. 18; Dr. 24/25; Dr. 27

*Terra nigra* beaker with basal stamp of ATTIALUS

The pottery deposit in the first phase 'fortlet' ditch is unusually large, probably representing one of the largest single Claudian/early Neronian assemblages known in Britain. The vessels, especially the decorated samian form 29s, the plain samian cups and platters, the potters' stamps (including OF AQVITANI, PASSENI M, PAVLIN and SECVNDI M), the fine ware beakers, flagons and amphorae, align the deposit with the material from such familiar Claudian sites as Hofheim, Oberstimm, Camulodunum and Richborough. What is particularly remarkable is the fact that the Charterhouse material derives from one deposit made during a brief interval of time in a short length of ditch.

In sum, the dating evidence for period I of the 'fortlet' speaks firmly for an occupation from *c.* AD 50 to *c.* AD 65. There may then have been an interruption before the construction of the second phase work, probably in the early 70s AD. The occupation of the second phase was brief to judge from the slight amount of pottery from the ditch of this period; it was probably ended by AD 75/80 at the latest.

The character of the 'fortlet' remains uncertain. Clearly it was a work of the army on the evidence of the associated finds, but it may well not have housed a small garrison of the kind well known in northern Britain at a later date. More probably it was a centre for the processing of ore

and storage of metal. This is supported by the quantities of galena found in the phase I ditch, along with smelting waste and lead slag. The need for such a control centre in a situation like Mendip is fairly obvious. This hypothesis however, raised a problem: where was the main base for the troops who were on detachment at Charterhouse in the reigns of Claudius and Nero? Current orthodoxy locates *Legio II Augusta* at Exeter (80 miles from Charterhouse) from c. AD 55. This date is probably too late by about five years. The two well known inscriptions on lead of AD 49, found at Charterhouse, put it beyond doubt that Roman control of the Mendips and the adjacent Somerset lowlands was secure by that date. It might be added that further advance to the west would not have been impeded by geography, at least. If the legionary base at Exeter was not founded before c. AD 55, it follows that an earlier base remains to be discovered, presumably between the Avon and the Exe. The involvement of men from this unit in the mines of Mendip by AD 49 suggests that a base closer than either Exeter or Kingsholm (Gloucester) existed by this date.

#### TEST EXCAVATIONS ON THE ROMAN TOWN

Two test holes were dug to examine the stratigraphy of the Roman township immediately east of Town Field, the scene of excavation in the later 19th century. One test-pit produced nothing, natural clay lying immediately under modern plough-soil. The other test-pit yielded the remains of a stone-built hearth, without evidence of date. Neither of these pits suggested that the Roman settlement extended to the east of the present road from Charterhouse towards Blagdon.

#### PREHISTORIC OCCUPATION

As in 1993-94, worked flint was found in almost all the areas examined. The main concentration appeared in the area of the 'fortlet', where early Bronze Age implements were found in 1994. In 1995 flint implements, mainly scrapers and blades, were found on the 'fortlet' site and in the area of ancient mining. A broken Neolithic polished axe was found in the first phase 'fortlet' ditch. As in 1993-4, however, no secure archaeological context could be defined for the prehistoric material.

One of the most important problems presented by the Charterhouse complex obviously concerns the possible exploitation of silver/lead in the pre-Roman period. The presence of small quantities of Iron Age pottery in the rakes, noted in 1994, has been significantly augmented in 1995. The possibility of late Iron Age working within the Charterhouse rakes is still very much alive, though final proof is not yet attainable. The fact that veins of galena appear to have lain close to the surface at Charterhouse means that the earliest phase of working will always be very difficult to identify. On the evidence at present available, the early Roman working of minerals here seems likely to have succeeded at least sporadic activity in the later Iron Age.

#### FUTURE PLANS

The three seasons of 1993-5 completed the field-programme in broad outline. It remains to survey the area of ancient mining in detail during 1996. The post-excavation on finds has already begun and will proceed throughout the winter of 1995-6.

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## REFERENCES

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