

TASBURGH PROJECT : ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

A separate strand of the Tasburgh project described above was an archaeological investigation led by Giles Emery of Norvic Archaeology, including a resistivity survey and community test pitting.

Fifteen test pits were dug over four sessions (weekend 1, over 45 people; kids' weekend, scouts, Young Archaeologists Club, etc., 25 kids and 12 adults; Preston Primary School, over 100 children plus volunteers; weekend 2, over 50 people).

The finds included evidence of several thousand years of human activity, ranging from the Upper Palaeolithic to the modern day. Just over 1000 individual artefacts of a wide range of material types were collected; including worked prehistoric flints, pottery sherds, butchered animal bone, oyster shells, clay tobacco pipe, coins, buttons, ceramic building materials and iron-smelting slag.

The pottery finds amounted to around 350 individual sherds and included fabrics from vessels of Prehistoric, Roman, Saxon/Early Medieval, Medieval, Post-medieval and Modern periods. All but one test pit generated pottery sherds, and these ranged from highly fragmentary pieces distributed across former plough soils to sherds which represent localised activity and the deposition of household rubbish of medieval and later date.

The test pits in the area of the modern housing of Tasburgh have produced some very interesting results, successfully demonstrating that despite modern development, finds providing residual evidence of human activity still survive beneath garden soils

Evidence for prehistoric activity in the form of worked flints in relatively fresh condition was relatively common, with 97 examples of worked flint collected from eleven of the test pits. The flints include two blade flakes of Upper Palaeolithic date (both collected from test pits close to the river in Lower Tasburgh), a small number of snapped bladelets of Mesolithic date, a Neolithic end-scraper in particularly fresh condition and several *ad hoc* scraping and cutting tools of late Neolithic to Bronze Age date.

The recovery of burnt flints away from areas of possible modern rubbish burning may be an indicator of early hearth activity. Two test pits provided examples of worked flints which have been subsequently burnt, alongside fragments of burnt flint. This combination can tentatively be interpreted as an indicator of prehistoric hearth activity.

Four sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered from the subsoils of three of the test pits, located within gardens of the modern village. The discovery of even this small number of Iron Age pottery sherds is highly significant, as all three find spots lie to the south of the Tasburgh enclosure. These are the first Iron Age finds recorded outside the monument, where 43 sherds were recovered during excavations to extend the church cemetery. Their presence appears to indicate Iron Age activity along the gravel ridge here, although the nature and density of this activity remains unknown.

The area of the monument is thought to have occupied a well-used prehistoric landscape and this small sample appears to demonstrate that both the sand and gravel ridge and the marginal areas against the flood plain of the Tas were indeed well used by people for thousands of years prior to the construction of the defended enclosure

No evidence of a significant Romano-British presence was indicated by the results of the test pits, with only one or two residual sherds of pottery identified within the assemblage thus far; although, during the course of the project, metal detection of fields to the north-east of the village provided another C4 coin to those previously reported in this general area and a C1 to C2 coin was found from metal detection close to the river in lower Tasburgh.

Background evidence for iron smelting has been produced from five test pits, with a particular concentration from Test Pit 4 at Chestnut Road. Although difficult to assign to a particular period of activity, evidence for Saxon iron working has been previously identified just to the north; so perhaps this is evidence of additional metal working just to the south of the Saxon defensive bank.

Fragmentary clay tobacco-pipe pieces were collected from eleven of the test pits, in numbers not unusual for fields and plots close to a rural settlement. A slightly higher number were collected from Glebe Cottage (home to the Rector until the 1800s), where two fragments of C19 decorated pipe

bowls were found along with a snapped stem fragment bearing part of the maker's mark of one of the Brown family from St Stephen's Street in Norwich and manufactured c. 1820-50. The stem piece was collected from above a C19 metal surface, part of a former driveway and turning area adjacent to the cottage. Amongst the rubble and flint of the surface a small number of burnt limestone fragments were recovered, which may be from the medieval antecedent of the cottage.

Personal objects found both within the test pits and from metal detection surveys include a range of artefacts of medieval to modern date. They include a late medieval sexfoil copper-alloy mount from a belt or girdle, a C16 lead button and two post-medieval iron buckles. Three thimbles of C19 to early C20 date were found, along with buttons of similar date. C20 finds include a lipstick case of c.1950, part of a doll's glass eye and a .50 calibre machine gun bullet from the grounds of the primary school (presumably from a passing American Bomber c. 1943). A more recent find from below the playing field was a complete matchbox toy 'Caterpillar Traxcavator' of 1970-80s manufacture.

A small number of coins were found as casual losses, which include George III half-pennies, a Victorian penny, a 1952 half-penny and modern loose change from the playing field.

Several test pits encountered archaeological features.

A test pit within a field at Pinewood Lodge proved to be directly on top of a former east-west boundary ditch of probable medieval date. The ditch was on a similar orientation to the existing field boundaries and can be interpreted as part of a series of medieval strips off Grove Lane.

The test pit on Preston Primary School's playing field discovered a narrow gully below the subsoil, which may be of prehistoric date. Two small pieces of prehistoric pottery of Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date were found within its charcoal flecked fill. This is significant as a complete Bronze Age beaker was found in the adjacent field by workers laying pipes in 1974 and this discovery (which is likely to have been associated with a burial) could indicate that more evidence of prehistoric activity may well lie hidden beneath the school grounds.

The test pit in the rear garden of White Cottage on Saxlingham Lane recorded a flint cobble surface of medieval to post-medieval date, possibly a yard or trackway.

Two test pits at Commerce House on Low Road, close to the river, revealed silts and peats below C19 century rubble-laden soils. Metal detection here provided us with an intriguing metal find in the form of a C19 Temperance Medallion made of white-metal. It depicts the Good Samaritan on one side and the legend 'GO FORTH AND DO LIKEWISE'.

A test pit at Harvey Lane discovered a sequence of layers which can be dated by numerous pottery sherds to the late medieval period. Some form of deep and waterlogged hollow or pond had been used to dump household waste of c. C15 date, which included partially-glazed pottery sherds, butchered animal bone, shells of oysters, cockles and mussels and some medieval brick fragments (a medieval manor is suspected to have been located c. 100m to the east at Rookery House (formerly Rookery Farm), which may have been a source for this relatively high status material).

Prepared from notes kindly provided by Giles Emery (Norvic Archaeology)