

2005.068

Event 1059

SU06NW161

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Full report 2010.052

Blackland, Calne Without (SU0190 6830)

Précis of the Initial findings

Construction of an extensive slurry pit, in July 2005, revealed evidence of early occupation on a north facing slope above the Blacklands to Calstone Wellington road near Calne and lying between two distinct lynchets.

Following machine stripping of the topsoil the discovery of human remains, pottery fragments and building traces by Mark Burnell, a local stonemason, prompted the tenant farmer, Rob Heslop of Sprays Farm to contact Roy Canham, the County Archaeologist. A visit by Roy to the site led to Bernard Phillips and others carrying out a rescue excavation. Willing co-operation by the tenant farmer also resulted in part of the site being preserved, through alterations to the slurry pit's width and depth.

Trench A

Three adjacent linear ditches were investigated within a trench measuring 14.0 metres by 2.0 metres. At the east end two parallel ditches 6.0 metres apart could be clearly seen in the machine scrape angling down the hillside. The western of U-shape measured 1.36 metres wide and 0.40 metre deep, the other originally of similar shape had been re-cut with steeply angled sides and a flat bottom, 1.70 metres wide and 0.48 metre deep. From the fills came much Early Iron Age pottery, animal bone a stone muller and a few Romano-British sherds. The latter located deep within the fills suggested that the ditches are of Romano-British date, but there infilling whether over time or in one deliberate action, included material derived from midden deposits of c. 600-500BC. It is likely these ditches represent a drove-way. Aligned straight down hill the third ditch, located towards the west end of the trench, was smaller measuring 0.50 metre wide and 0.20 metre deep, but of similar shape to the re-cut ditch. This contained Early Iron Age pottery and animal bone. A thin layer of silt cut through by this ditch contained many large un-abraded sherds of 600-500BC and patches of charcoal which may represent the location of a Late Bronze Age/ Iron Age midden.

Trench B

An area 4.0 metres x 5.0 metres was opened around the location of human remains discovered by Mark Burnell. Two adult skeletons were revealed, one male the other (?) female, laid extended on their backs in shallow, adjacent, grave pits aligned south to north. The arms of both were crossed at the waist and the legs of the male lay close together, whilst the legs of the (?) female were crossed mid thigh. Little of the latter's skull and none of the lower legs had survived most likely due to the machine scrape or past ploughing. The positions of the limbs suggest that they had been tied together prior to wrapping the bodies in shrouds. In the area of the male's right knee joint came a fragment of a bronze bracelet. Initial examination shows that the male aged 40-50 had an arthritic lower spine and a possible healed fracture of left fibula. The other burial was aged around 20-25. Pottery from the grave fills point to an AD third century date for their burial. A straight sided, linear cutting sectioned on the west side of the trench may signify a robbed out wall whilst a spread of chalk (not fully examined) to the south may also represent walling.

300
Upper Chalk

Trench C

A small cutting north of the west end of trench A was positioned across a ditch discernible in the machine scraped surface. This ditch 0.80 metre wide was on an alignment slightly different to the parallel ditches in trench A. The fill was not completely excavated, but was found to contain Early Iron Age pottery including part of a small lamp or crucible, and animal bone.

Trench D

Fifteen metres north of trench A a small ditch visible in the machine scraped surface and aligned approximately east to west was sectioned. Apparently linked to the smaller ditch recorded in trench A it was of identical form and depth, but tapered in width from 0.80 metre to 0.38 metre.

Trench E

Six metres north of the burials in trench B a further skeleton, badly crushed by machinery during the topsoil removal, was evidenced. Little trace of a grave pit was discernible. The skeleton aligned north to south appears to have been buried on its left side with the legs flexed. Body decay had however resulted in the upper body becoming supine. The pelvis and lower legs were missing probably as a result of ploughing in the past. Teeth and bone size indicate that the remains are of a juvenile aged 10-14. Little dating evidence was presented for the burial apart from a single Roman-British coarse ware pottery sherd.

Trench F

Located c. 9.0 metres down the slope from trench E; a shallow pit (not excavated) contained the skeletal remains of a (?) horse. Only two foot bones were retained, these showed fusion due to injury. No dating evidence was presented. A further 8.5 metres north the crushed remains of a stillborn infant were located. These remains were left in position.

Trench G

An area 9.00 metres x 10.5 metres was opened in an area of building traces revealed by the machine topsoil removal. A narrow chalk block wall, 0.40 cms wide, extended east to west across the trench for 8.49 metres. Parallel to this 3.96 metres to the north a more substantial wall was evidenced by a shallow robber trench 0.60 metres wide. Its fill comprised of mortar lumps and sandstone fragments derived from cleaning the robbed stone. Adjacent to the south side of the chalk wall a bread oven's firing chamber was evidenced by a horseshoe of stones and a shallow firing pit. The oven had clearly been in use over a long period, the stones being heavily burnt and alterations had taken place to reduce its firing chamber entrance width. Underlying the building a sequence of ditches were traced. A shallow, linear/curvilinear, U-shaped gully containing Early Iron Age and Romano-British sherds extended north to south though the trench. It varied in width from 0.60 to 0.40 metre and measured where sectioned 0.20 metre deep. The gully appeared to cut a larger ditch that extended east to west across the site before seemingly turning to the north and

extending down the slope. Measuring 1.45 metre wide and 0.38 metre deep, where sectioned, the ditch fill contained Early Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, and animal bone. This ditch had cut an earlier 0.80 metre wide and 0.40 metre deep ditch on the same alignment that extended across the trench without turning.

Immediately east of the trench an extensive area of sandstone building blocks and some sandstone roofing tile indicate a continuation of the building.

Trench H

Within a 7.0 metre x 3.0 metre trench, 6.0 metres north of trench G, a group of chalk blocks upon excavation proved to be the remains of a T-shaped, channelled drier, with a stoke pit at the south end. These structures were used to dry grain and other items, and in making malt. The walls of the central firing channel, surviving to a height of 0.50 metre, are corbelled and the firing arch survives intact. The drier appears to have not been used, no burning or ash being present. Pottery from the channel infill demonstrates a fourth century date for its demolition. Other finds from the fill include the skull of a dog, half a shale bracelet and terracotta box tile. The construction pit for the drier cut an earlier shallow pit that contained the rim of a first century Romano-British pot.

At the north end of the trench lay an east to west aligned U-shaped ditch 0.92 metre wide and 0.40 metre deep. It had cut an earlier shallow ditch. Cut through by this ditch a post pit measured 0.52 metre diameter and 0.30 metre deep. A second post pit was located a little to the south, originally 0.58 metre across and 0.32 metre deep it had been re-cut 0.40 metre in diameter and 0.70 metre deep.

Trench I

South of trench G small bones revealed by the removal of topsoil showed the location of an infant burial.

Trench J

Two metres west of trench G skull fragments indicated the location of a burial. Excavation revealed a grave pit containing an adult male skeleton laid north to south on its left side and with the knees of the flexed legs resting against the top of the grave pit's side. The right arm, bent at the elbow extended across the pelvis, whilst the left upper arm lay beneath the left chest area, with the lower arm, bent at the elbow, extending up the grave side. Numerous iron hobnails around the soles of the feet showed that he had been buried wearing leather boots. Strangely several large toe bones and iron hobnails also lay behind the knees. Initial examination of the bones indicates a tall, robust person with an arthritic lower spine; trauma indicative of hard work. Many sherds and animal bones came from the grave pit fill the former indicating a third/fourth century date for the burial.

Unstratified Finds

Collected surface and spoil dump finds include Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age pottery, notably decorated haematite coated sherds of All Cannings type, many

fragments of first to late fourth century Romano-British vessels including local coarse ware, South Dorset black burnished ware, Oxfordshire red coated ware and samian ware from Central Gaul. Other finds include a stone muller, a polishing stone, part of a rotary quern-stone, sandstone roofing tile, part of a bronze bracelet, an iron brooch, a bone pin fragment, and fragments of a shale bead and bracelet.

BP/BL2005