

HARLOW TEMPLE EXCAVATION, 1987.

1. Introduction.

The third season of excavations on the Harlow Temple site lasted from the 4th June to the 8th July. Despite some bad weather most of the major objectives were achieved and many unexpected finds made at a cost greatly below what would normally be required for an excavation of this scale. Lack of resources made it impossible to complete the investigation of one area of the site because of the number of unexpected features found elsewhere.

We were less successful this year in obtaining sponsorship, but we are pleased to thank Harlow Chemicals once again as well as Longmans and Booker Foods for their generous assistance.

2. Finds, Pre-Roman.

The remainder of the ring ditch discovered in 1986 was cleared and its entrance located. The amount of votive material recovered from this area confirmed our previous conclusion that this was a pre-Roman religious site. From the terminals of the ditch came a large amount of animal bone and the substantial remains of several pots dating from around 300-100 BC. Of similar date was the most interesting find from here which was the bronze edging of a dagger scabbard, the first example of this type of object from Harlow. Inside the area several pits and postholes of, as yet, unknown use were discovered. Some 600 Iron Age coins ranging in date from around 50 BC to the Conquest in AD 43 have come from this area in the 1987 and 1986 seasons.

Large numbers of post holes and post pits, some in close set groups were discovered outside the ditch to the north. They seem to include the remains of at least one rectangular building. Once the plans, have been completed and co-ordinated with those from earlier excavations we may be able to work out what they are the remains of. It is, however, clear that a substantial Iron Age settlement underlies the Roman Temple with the majority of the structures still waiting to be found.

The variety and quality of the finds further emphasise the wealth and importance of the site. At least 280 Iron Age coins were found this year comprising 4 gold, 8 silver and 268 bronze. As the finds are cleaned and identified, this total will increase. The site as a whole has now produced some 800 Iron Age coins, the largest number known from any single site in this country. The coins include several types new to this area. All the bronze and iron brooches bar one date from before the building of the temple and include several high quality ones. Much of the ironwork is also of similar date. The vast majority of these objects would have been left as votive offerings. The pottery ranges in date from Bronze Age material of about 500 BC through to late Iron Age wares made during the period of the Conquest. A number of flints have also been found and all these groups of objects will need specialist reports. Additional resources will be needed to produce these as most of the expertise has to be bought in.

3. Finds, Roman.

About half the length of the east wall of Room J which runs down the west side of the temple courtyard was fully excavated. Much of the masonry was very well preserved and survived 5 courses high in places. The flint and rubble wall

includes several pieces of re-used worked stone. Faint traces of a possible party wall were found as were broken slabs of mortar which probably formed the floor. On the courtyard side of the wall a small circular structure of flint, stone and tile had been built in the late destruction levels. As yet we do not know what this was.

The large number of finds included several items not previously known from the site. Two additional pieces of the inscription found last year were recovered. We still do not have enough to read a single word but the complete item was possibly mounted on the building and may have been of considerable size. The inscription is carved in Alwalton Marble from near Peterborough. Most of the rest of the imported stone, including that used for Minerva, is Lincolnshire Limestone; though the altar fragments found last year are sandstone from Sussex.

80 Roman coins have been found, again including types new to the area. They range in date from a commemorative issue of Augustus (31BC - AD14) issued by his successor Tiberius (14-37) to one of Honorius (393-423). This is only the second coin of this ruler to be found in Harlow. The pottery also covers the first four centuries AD and includes fragments of Amphora dating from before the building of the temple. Harlow thus joins the many other Iron Age sites which obtained imported Roman wine in the years before the Conquest in 43. The pottery also includes pieces of incense burners while other votive items include silver nails, a bronze leaf probably from a wreath and an unusual miniature pewter vessel. The large amount of ironwork includes knives and a wide range of tools, though many of these items will not be properly identified until they are x-rayed. The jewellery includes a fine inlaid bronze ring, an iron one with an inset and a carved intaglio.

4. Post-Excavation Work

The processing of the excavated material is now underway with all items having to be conserved, studied and recorded. The site plans and other records have to be written up and matched with the material from the previous two years work at which point it will be possible to draw some conclusions about the features found. Work has also started on some of the specialist reports though only a few of these can be done at the museum. Most of the groups of finds and the large number of soil samples collected will have to be sent away for specialist study. All this has to be done before work can begin on the final report and will require considerable resources. Many of the items found will eventually be placed in a new Harlow Temple display once all research has been completed. This work is essential if we are to extract all the information that the site has to offer.

5. Future Plans.

The last three years have shown that there is still a great deal of both national and local importance to be learnt from this site and we wish to take advantage of the two years remaining under the terms of the original scheduled monument consent.

This period will also see the museum deeply involved in essential rescue excavations in advance of the Gildea Way and Brenthall Park developments in addition to possible work in the Tylers Cross area. We already know of a large number of sites that will need our attention before they are destroyed for ever. If these opportunities are not to be lost, as many were in the 1950's and 1960's, extra resources will be needed and a report will be presented to a

future meeting of the Committee outlining the important work that needs to be done.

6. Conclusion.

Once again I am pleased to record my thanks to the museum staff, members of the Harlow Archaeology Group and other local volunteers who worked on the site, at times from dawn to dusk. Their work has both added greatly to our understanding of Prehistoric and Roman Harlow and further enriched the museum's collections.

Recommendations.

1. The report be noted and thanks extended to all who took part in the work.
2. The sum of £2,000 be made available in this financial year to help meet the costs of important post-excavation work.

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