

ROMAN SLING-SHOTS FROM WALTON PARISH, SOUTH DERBYSHIRE

By Roger Thomas

In September 2014 Witan Archaeology¹ were invited to survey parts of the Catton Estate in South Derbyshire, as several areas were to be planted with trees as part of the National Forest development. The investigation included desk based study, field walking, metal detecting, a resistivity survey and excavation.

During the metal detecting survey of a field at SK 222160 (Figs 1 and 2), twelve Roman Type one sling-shot were recovered (Plate 1). These have been recorded individually on the Portable Antiquities Scheme website² (Table 1) and reports on the fieldwork have been lodged on the Historic Environment Record³. There is also reference to the discovery in a book by the Finds Liaison Officer for the Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire area (Willis 2016, 46-7).

As no Roman military activity has been recorded in the area, it is possible that they were intended for recycling, but the site's position is interesting. It is the highest point for some considerable distance, with commanding views westward over the Trent Valley toward Ryknild Street, northwards toward Walton hillfort, and eastwards toward the supposed route of the Via Devana. Other Roman metal finds from the same field include four coins dating from the 1st to 3rd centuries AD, as well as five 1st or 2nd century brooches. Most of the adjacent fields, unfortunately, have now been covered in 'green waste' which means that further detecting is virtually impossible. Field walking, however, in this and adjacent fields has produced many sherds of Roman pottery, and some roof tile and slate.

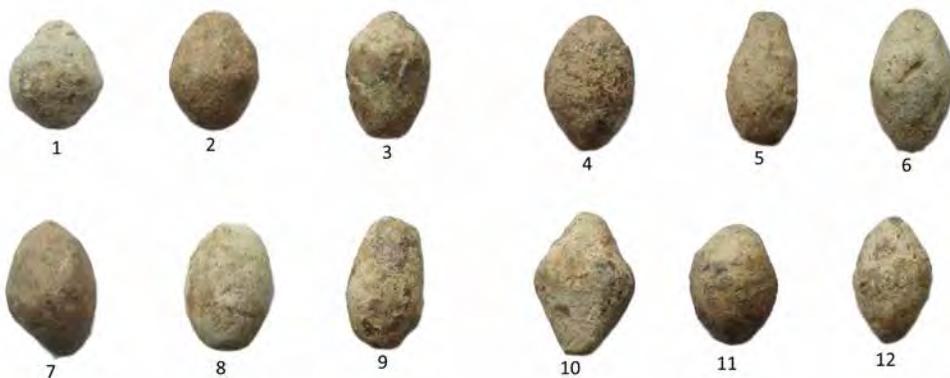


Plate 1: Sling shots

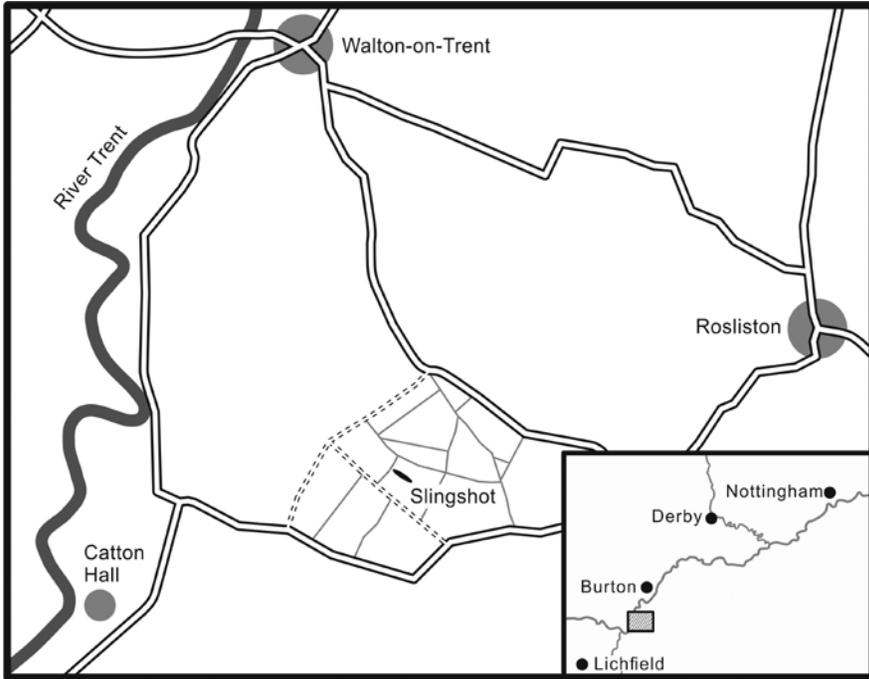


Fig. 1: General location.

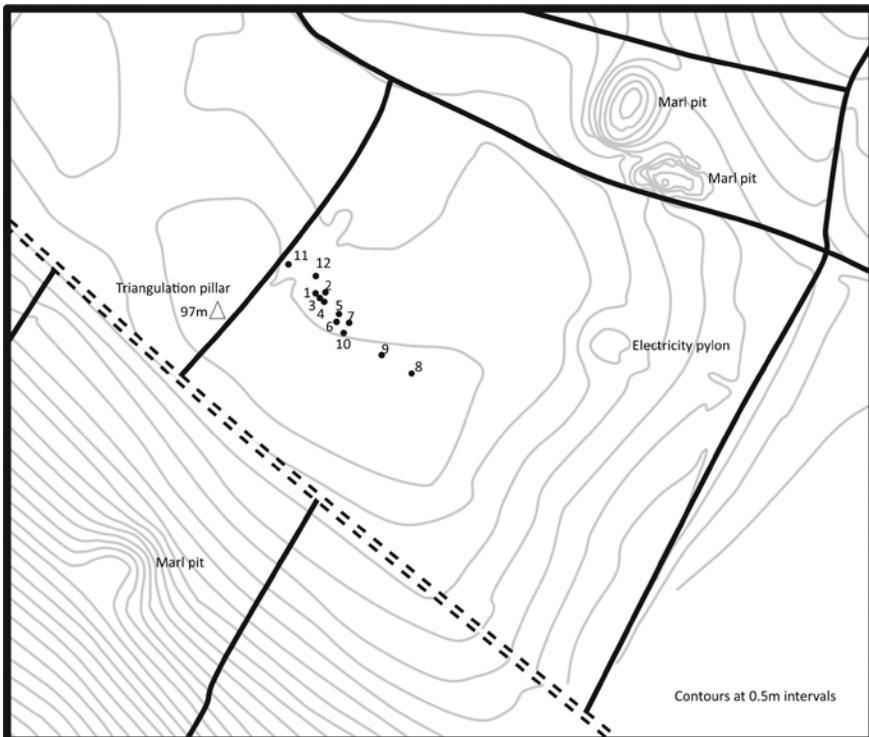


Fig. 2: Plan of find spots.

<i>PAS reference</i>		<i>Length [mm]</i>	<i>Diameter [mm]</i>	<i>Weight [g]</i>
PUBLIC-65B703	1	30.0	23.9	87.4
PUBLIC-65DD1A	2	33.8	21.2	67.3
PUBLIC-65F0F4	3	34.2	23.3	99.5
PUBLIC-6600C1	4	36.2	23.5	104.4
PUBLIC-66103F	5	36.2	18.9	70.2
PUBLIC-661C67	6	37.0	24.5	110.9
PUBLIC-662757	7	38.0	22.8	96.7
PUBLIC-66339B	8	34.6	22.5	106.7
PUBLIC-663F46	9	35.6	21.7	95.8
PUBLIC-664DFF	10	39.6	27.6	123.3
PUBLIC-640928	11	32.0	24.0	97.8
PUBLIC-07BA1C	12	33.8	21.2	67.3

Table 1: Summary of sling-shot data.

Lead sling-shot are not common finds in England, and all those known at the time were summarised by Stephen Greep (1987, 183-200) as part of a report on lead sling-shot from Windridge Farm, St. Albans, and, to the best of the writer's knowledge, no more have been reported since. This assemblage differs in several respects from those at Windridge Farm; they are larger, heavier and exhibit a more diverse range of shapes. They do, however, appear very like a group of nine found at Corbridge, and a further group of nine from Vindolanda. Some of these were from stratified contexts and are of 3rd and 4th centuries AD date.

Satellite and LiDAR images of the find spot have been examined and do not show any marks indicative of structural remains, but the area has been ploughed regularly for many years, and the topsoil is shallow, so it is thought unlikely that there would be any visible evidence remaining of a small fort or observation post, even were one to have existed. As the area is now covered in trees further investigation is not possible.

The finds were made in what appears to be possibly a significant array, in that they were in a line, with no outliers (Fig. 2).

NOTES

- ¹ Witan Archaeology is an amateur group, formed in 1997 by Steven and Paul Saunders, and based in North West Leicestershire.
- ² Records can be accessed at <https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/734024> etc.
- ³ Records are referenced by Derbyshire HER as no's 17901 – 17924.

REFERENCES

- Willis, A. (2016) *50 Finds from Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire*. Amberley Publishing, Stroud.
- Greep, S. (1987) Lead sling-shot from Windridge Farm, St. Albans and the use of the sling by the Roman army in Britain. *Britannia* 18.