

## SHORTER REPORTS

### HIGHLIGHTS FROM TRENT & PEAK ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST 1996

by

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#### NOTTINGHAMSHIRE (DG)

The staff of the Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust have spent a busy year in fieldwork and reporting on a wide range of projects in Nottinghamshire, many prior to gravel extraction within the river valleys. The highest profile excavation, because of media interest, was at *Langford*, just north of Newark, where Later Neolithic skulls and partially articulated bones were recovered from a log jam in a former course of the River Trent. The recovery of a number of juveniles is a poignant reminder of high Neolithic mortality rates. The excavations were designed to try and find out why these human remains were in the river in a period when burial in barrows is widespread. Boating and flooding accidents can probably be discounted because of the lack of personal artefacts. The most convincing interpretations are linked with the river as a means of disposing of those dead who were not accorded barrow burial, perhaps resulting from the clearance of an excarnation area. Such riverine finds are widely known, but are usually found during dredging operations, and this is the first excavation that has set out to investigate their context. The excavations were partly run as a training exercise with students from the University of Nottingham and local volunteers, to whom our thanks are extended. At the British Archaeological Awards in Cardiff in November 1996, the quarry company, Tarmac Quarry Products (Eastern) Ltd, gained a commendation in the BP Award for their prompt reporting and support of the project (jointly funded with Nottinghamshire County Council).

The Romano-British period has been the focus of two other river valley projects: one near *Gonalston*

where settlement enclosures and rare organic artefacts were located (interim report in this volume); the other near *Blaco Hill, Mattersey*, where cropmark field-systems were excavated prior to quarrying. Here the peat-infilled ditches were extensively sampled for palaeoenvironmental information, but more immediately exciting was the recovery of Roman tool marks (spade or mattock) in the clayey ditch bottoms. Casts have been made of some these, and a display replica will be built. Outside the river valleys, a watching brief at *Oldcotes* identified Romano-British features and stratified deposits in an area well outside the known extent of the Roman villa.

The first Anglo-Saxon settlement has been found in Nottinghamshire, on a sand-dune in the river valley of the Trent, just to the north of the present village of *Girton*. Evaluation of an area prior to submission for planning permission, together with a watching brief in the current quarry area, have identified sunken-featured buildings containing considerable quantities of loomweights and Anglo-Saxon pottery. Other artefacts range from a fragment of a 6th or early 7th century AD cruciform brooch to Saxo-Norman wares recovered from fieldwalking, which may indicate a long-lived settlement on the dune before the village moved to its present location.

Excavations ahead of quarrying at *Tiln*, just north of Retford, have focused on dating a linear earthwork complex, identifying the context of a Civil War coin hoard, and excavating an Earlier Mesolithic flint scatter. The high densities of tiny flakes and spalls at the Early Mesolithic site suggest that it was a spot where primary knapping was undertaken. Interest-

ingly, flint derived from the Cretaceous Chalk of the Lincolnshire Wolds some distance to the east was used in preference to the locally available river-gravel flint. This knapping was probably one of the earliest activities, with other prehistoric occupation denoted by Neolithic leaf-shaped, and Early Bronze Age barb-and-tang arrowheads, all located on a sand-dune at the edge of the River Idle. This was also the site for the deposition of a forger's coin hoard. Some 700 lead forgeries of Charles I shillings and blanks were recovered from a small pit in an entrance within a contemporary field system and a pit with lead waste indicates that at least some part of the forging process was probably conducted at this spot, rather than this being merely the hiding place. The linear earthworks may have been part of this same field-system and were built over a late medieval ploughsoil, with blown sand enveloping the original banks to create large banks up to 20m across. These earlier boundaries were partly re-instated by the 18th century Enclosure hedges which were set into trenches along the original ditch lines, and may indicate a continuation of field layout from the later Medieval period.

The third and final year of survey around *Nottinghamshire villages* was completed, bringing the number of earthworks recorded to over 800, many relating to the Medieval landscape. The recorded earthworks range from isolated and indeterminate features, through various ploughing regimes and field-system types to elements of shrunken village plans. This information is being integrated into the *Sites and Monuments Record* to aid the planning process, and it will also allow new research questions about Medieval landscape development and village form to be addressed. One contribution to the latter has come from a watching brief at *Laxton*, where a pit and ditch containing early Medieval pottery were recorded some distance away from the main street frontage, in a village whose form suggests that settlement activity was concentrated along the main street. Even with the high number of records made during the village survey, new earthworks are still being discovered in areas outside the villages. For example, at *Bothamsall*, some 1-2 km west of the motte and bailey castle, a small ditched platform and other possible platforms have been discovered alongside the canalised River Meden. Evaluation excavations suggest a later Medieval or early post-medieval date for these

earthworks, though their function, on the edge of the floodplain, is obscure.

Work on *Nottinghamshire towns* has continued in advance of development. Excavations in *Southwell* revealed a late Medieval building probably associated with the Minster (interim report in this volume). In *Newark*, watching briefs have identified some early Medieval pits and a clay pipe dump within the town centre. Outside the town a watching brief has revealed a large ditch, interpreted as the front of a fort forming part of the line of circumvallation, a Civil War earthwork surrounding the town and constructed by Parliamentary forces during the siege. This fort was known previously only from an inaccurate contemporary plan transcribed on to the Ordnance Survey base by the Royal Commission of Historic Monuments, so this watching brief has confirmed its position. Another part of the Civil War earthworks, the rampart of the town defences, was also recorded in an evaluation prior to redevelopment at Newark Friary.

### NOTTINGHAM (GK)

At *Boots Island*, an intermittent watching-brief has been maintained on the remediation works on this contaminated site. So far there has been no sign of the anticipated medieval bridge carrying London Road over the River Leen, although river silts have been shown to be extensively if intermittently preserved across the site. Remnants of the Nottingham Canal have also been located.

At *Trivett Square* a desk-top assessment traced the documentary evidence for the scarping of Hollow Stone and other destructive earth-moving operations in the 18th century and identified areas of potential preservation of archaeological deposits in the area to the north and south of Malin Hill. Chance finds made in the past indicate that a substantial stone wall was located on the top of the cliff adjacent to Malin Hill, where a fragment is still exposed. This wall is undated and although archaeological evidence for the southern defences of the medieval borough is otherwise lacking, a medieval date for this wall cannot be ruled out.

Another desk-top assessment connected with the City Council's lottery application for the develop-

ment of a new *Ice Centre*, summarised the work of Charles Young and others, and indicated areas of great potential archaeological significance on the east side of the Anglo-Saxon burh and medieval borough. Work in progress at the *Shire Hall*, in

connection with the development of phase II of 'The Galleries of Justice', has revealed a new cave system, possibly including elements of medieval date, and it is hoped that further work will provide firm dating evidence for this important newly discovered system.

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