

HILL TOP, ALCONBURY WESTON 2020 SAWTRY HISTORY SOCIETY EXCAVATION SITE DIARY

Site Details

Site Reference Code: ALW171-20

Location: NGR TL1877 (OS. Explorer Map 225. Huntingdon and St Ives - West)

Site Bench Mark (SBM):

Description – South corner of tree line bordering residential gardens.

Lat and Long – 52°23'2.03"N, 0°15'43.89"W (Google Earth 2018)

NGR – TL18374 77628 (OS. Explorer Map 225. Huntingdon and St Ives - West)

AMSL – m (Mapping)



Figure 0.1: Montage of pre-Season 3 images

Aims and Objectives

Investigate the pit revealed in the south end of Trench #1 in order to:

- determine its form and use(s)

- excavate the fill of the pit for 100 percent environmental sampling in order to further understand the pit's use(s)

Investigate the possible wall and post-hole in close proximity to the pit in order to determine whether they are indeed structural and to further determine whether the post-hole respects a supporting post or a door post.

Investigate the marked differences immediately south of the pit and possible structural features; marked differences include soil type, colour and texture, and the absence of CBM, *tesserae* and other archaeological artefacts.

Conduct geophysical earth resistance survey.

Project: Romano-British Settlement on Hill Top

Season: 03

DAY 1 - 30 JAN 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast and breezy, the ground conditions were damp - with some areas of the site waterlogged, and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Trench #1 extension was laid out to overlap the south end of the original Trench #1 by 0.5m to the east, west and south.

The geophysical survey grid was aligned with the site grid north-south axis.

Started laying out the survey grid aligned to and immediately west of the site grid north-south axis. 8No. 20m x 20m survey squares complete.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was overcast and breezy, the ground conditions were damp - with some areas of the site waterlogged, and the forecast temperature was 11°C.

Continued laying out the survey grid. 12No. 20m x 20m survey squares complete.

DAY 2 - 31 JAN 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast and breezy, the ground conditions were damp - with some areas of the site waterlogged, and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Retained 4 survey squares west of the reference axis and tested the procedure. New procedure proved simple, quick and accurate.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was overcast and breezy with some drizzle later in the



Figure 2.1: Partial de-turfing, looking north

afternoon, the ground conditions were damp - with some areas of the site waterlogged, and the forecast temperature was 10°C.

Continued laying out the survey grid. 50No. 20m x 20m survey squares complete. Started to de-turf the Trench #1 extension; half completed.

DAY 3 - 22 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was strong wind and broken cloud with sunny intervals, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Finished de-turfing. Marked out width of Season 2 Trench #1 within de-turfed area. Removed 5cm depth (approximate).

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was strong wind and broken cloud with sunny intervals, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 12°C.



Figure 3.1: Excavation commences, looking south

Marked out 1m slot from south end of excavation area. Excavated to depth of 30cm (approximate). The tops of side berms in the Season 2 Trench #1 were revealed. Slot over the berms and associated slot walls were cleaned-up.

Finds: Several pot sherds, hypocaust fragments, several *tesserae*

DAY 4 - 23 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast with occasional drizzle and sunny intervals, the ground conditions were wet and the forecast temperature was 12°C.

Some site admin was carried out then the backfill was continued to be removed to a depth of 0.3m (approximate).

Finds:

No finds from the context features were recovered.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was strong winds and overcast clearing to sunny, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 12°C.

Continued removing backfill. Levelled excavation at 0.3m (approximate) and dressed trench sides. Tops of side berms appearing. Possible new feature of similar compacted building rubble to side berms appearing in SE corner and along south edge of excavation.

Finds:

No finds from the context features were recovered.

Notes:

As the backfill is redeposited spoil from last Season's excavation, it is out of context and finds are not ordinarily recorded.

DAY 5 - 24 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was windy and raining - clearing later, the ground conditions were saturated and the forecast temperature was 9°C.

Delayed start due to weather. Started at 1100 with the surface of the trench a slimy layer of primordial gloop with small puddles of water. Under the gloop (which was removed by the simple expedient of it sticking to your boot soles then scraping it off on the grass) was the usual claggy clay that clung to boots and tools with equal tenacity. Removed a limited depth of backfill between and south of the side berms due to a very high water table.

Finds: None.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was windy and overcast, the ground conditions were saturated and the forecast temperature was 11°C.

Dressed off edges of the side berms. Continued removing backfill south of the side berms to the depth of the water table. Closed early as any continued work would have destroyed the exposed archaeology. If the weather gods are taking note, a dry night with strong winds would be very helpful.

Finds: None.

DAY 6 - 25 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was windy and sunny with scattered clouds, the ground conditions were saturated (trench floor) and damp/claggy (other trench surfaces), and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

The remaining backfill was removed to the level of the water table. The surface and faces of the side berms and south edge were then cleaned of all the pressed soils that had accumulated through excavation of the back fill, and the trench walls were also dressed.

Finds:

Some *tesserae* and hypocaust fragments.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was windy and overcast with occasional showers, the ground conditions were saturated (trench floor) and damp/claggy (other trench surfaces), and the forecast temperature was 6°C.



Figure 6.1: Side berms containing Season 2 archaeology and saturation of trench floor, looking north

Measured excavation of the side berms and south edge was started by trowelling back. The purpose of this was to reveal both archaeological features and stratigraphy in order that they could be correlated with archaeological features from last season and enable any new features to be put into context. Archaeological features on the side berms that were comparable with those from last season were revealed. Similarly, archaeological features revealed on the south edge also had a similarity with archaeological features from last season. Sketches of both the south elevation and south edge plan were drawn.

Finds:

Some *tesserae*, hypocaust fragments mortar and a pot sherd.

Notes:

Correlate archaeological features with previous season's context numbers and mark up accordingly.

DAY 7 - 27 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was cloudy with snow/sleet, clearing mid- to late morning, the ground conditions were wet and the trench inundated, and the forecast temperature was 2°C.



Figure 7.1: Side berms containing Season 2 archaeology and saturation of trench floor, looking north

Labelled original contexts exposed in the excavation; [01001] - top soil, [01002] - sub-soil, [01003] - compacted building rubble, [01005] - compacted clay layer. Marked centre

point of both the features of interest from last season's excavation that are the principle subjects of investigation this season; the storage pit (possible votive pit) and post-hole. Removed backfill from area south of side berms. Cleaned and dressed side berms and south edge.

Finds:

Some *tesserae*, some shell tempered pot sherds, some small lumps of mortar and *opus signinum*, a few animal bones.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was breezy, sunny with scattered clouds, the ground conditions were wet and the trench inundated, and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Continued dressing off the side berms and trench walls to provide clean section faces in order to provide better stratigraphy and feature definition. Labelled new features in south edge; [01040] - compacted clay layer and [01041] - feature consisting of dark brown friable soil.

Notes:

The natural in the southwest section did not suffer from much ingress from the water table and it is hoped that there is better drainage in this area. On that premise the standing water between the side berms was channelled in to the southwest section in the hope that the inundation in the area between the side berms is reduced, facilitating excavation to the features of interest.

DAY 8 - 28 FEB 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was a stiff breeze and light rain - worsening throughout, the ground conditions were wet and the trench inundated, and the forecast temperature was 3°C. It didn't get any better.

Continued excavation of backfill from the south area. Continued excavation of the eastern side berm through the collapsed building rubble [01003]. Started to excavate the fill from the cut in the western side berm believed to be a field boundary ditch that predates OS mapping.

The most amazing find so far (this season and last season), an exquisite 2cm square bone token, was excavated from the collapsed building rubble.

After exhausting the combined supply of dry gloves, as tools became increasingly slippery and difficult use, it was decided to call it a day.

Finds:

East side berm - CBM, *tesserae*, pot sherds, bone token (gaming/religious?). West side berm - animal bone, pot sherd.

Afternoon:

Cancelled due to weather.

DAY 9 - 3 MAR 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny, the ground conditions were wet and the trench inundated, and the forecast temperature was 0°C.

Mostly bailing out the rainwater and cleaning up the surface of the trench.

Finds: Romano-British pottery and small animal bones.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny giving way to light cloud and drizzle, wet and the trench inundated, and the forecast temperature was 5°C.

Taking out the eastern baulk down to the level of the bottom of the trench and cleaning around the collection of stones in the western baulk.

Finds: Romano-British pottery and small animal bones

Notes: Natural geology identified at the southern end of the trench and along the eastern side. Possible wall lines identified centred on the large post hole in the

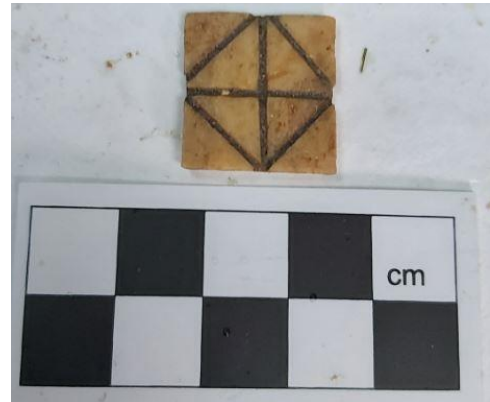


Figure 8.1: Bone token with scale



Figure 9.1: Post hole with possible wall lines, looking north

centre of the trench and at 90°. Further investigation necessary.

Options: Remove the remaining western baulk down to 'natural' to make identification of the pit easier.

DAY 10 - 5 MAR 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was overcast with a breeze making temperatures feel lower, the ground conditions were wet and the forecast temperature was 5°C.

Cleaning up the surface of the trench and removing the western baulk down to 'natural'. Attempting to identify deliberate consolidation by clay layers. Geophysical earth resistance survey - three 20m x 20m squares surveyed.

Finds: Romano-British pottery and animal bones.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was light cloud and drizzle with a breeze making temperatures feel lower, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Taking out the western baulk down to the level of the bottom of the trench and removing the collection of stones in the western baulk. The stones are a deposit (not natural) but have no obvious form. Upper clay surfaces removed to expose a large pit, much larger than previously thought; pit has been deliberately filled and then sealed with a further clay layer. This layer has 'sunk' and has been further levelled with another silty-clay deposit. Geophysical earth resistance survey - four 20m x 20m squares surveyed.

Finds: All of these layers contain Romano-British pottery.

Notes: Natural geology identified at the southern end of the trench and along both sides. Pit surface exposed and more than 90% of the circumference is visible in the trench. The remaining piece is under the backfill from 2019. Further investigation necessary.

Options: Half section the pit.

DAY 11 - 6 MAR 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 2°C.

As well as excavating the large pit on site work consisted of plan and section drawings and sorting and labelling finds bags. Geophysical earth resistance survey, three 20m x 20m squares and one partial 20m x 20m square surveyed.

Finds:

Romano-British pottery and animal bones.



Figure 11.1: Selection of finds from the pit fill

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny with light cloud, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 5°C.

Half section excavation of the pit.
Geophysical earth resistance survey, one 20m x 20m square surveyed.

Finds:

Romano-British pottery and animal bones.

Notes:

The sides of the pit are almost vertical in the layer currently exposed.

Options:

Continue to half section the pit.



Figure 11.2: Selection of finds from the pit fill



Figure 11.3: Pit half section excavation showing different fills and stratigraphy of section face, looking northwest



Figure 11.4: Pit half section excavation showing different fills and stratigraphy of section face, looking northwest

DAY 12 - 7 MAR 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny with clear skies, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 5°C.

As well as finishing the excavation of the large pit on site work consisted of plan and section drawings and sorting and labelling finds bags.

Finds:

Romano-British pottery and animal bones.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was sunny with light broken cloud, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Finish excavating the pit and site admin including labelling all finds bags.

Finds:

Romano-British pottery and animal bones.

Notes:

The pit has an severe undercut and has the form of a late Iron Age/Romano-British storage pit of the 'beehive' or 'bell' variety. A common feature of sites of this period.

DAY 13 - 8 MAR 20

Morning:

At the start of the morning session the weather was sunny with broken clouds, changing to drizzle and light rain showers later, with a chill breeze, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 5°C.

Site admin and backfill. Geophysical earth resistance survey, four 20m x 20m and one partial 20m x 20m squares surveyed.

Afternoon:

At the start of the afternoon session the weather was light rain showers with heavy cloud, clearing to sunny with scattered clouds later, and breezy, the ground conditions were damp and the forecast temperature was 7°C.

Complete backfilling and replacement of turf. Geophysical earth resistance survey, three 20m x 20m and two partial 20m x 20m squares surveyed.