

2008 SEASON

Work undertaken in 2008 fell into 3 main categories.

- a) Continuing excavation of the medieval chapel and its graveyard.
- b) Investigation and excavation of a second Late Bronze Age ring-ditch, along with the partial exposure of a third circular enclosure.
- c) Geophysical survey of two previously unexplored areas.

THE Chapel Site

Some 80 whole or partial burials were excavated, primarily from the western graveyard and the nave. A few were also recovered from the chancel, an area now completely devoid of graves.

The burials are currently undergoing intensive and extensive study by teams of students from John Moore's University (at Liverpool) and the University of Liverpool. As well as ongoing research into pathology, trauma, dietary and weaning habits, new approaches will include DNA analysis and facial reconstruction.

The chancel has now been excavated down to a known Roman level. It is now evident that a modest timber structure once stood on the Chapel site, long before the advent of Christianity.

Prehistoric Area

A second ring-ditch has now been fully exposed, 80 metres to the north of the chapel. It lies immediately to the south of the Late Bronze Age reconstructed timber-circle monument.

Comparable in size to the latter, the ring-ditch has two entranceways. However, its form and function is totally different. Whereas the timber-circle is enclosed by a ditch and bank, the second ring-ditch has close-set posts erected within the ditch itself.

Intriguingly, it appears to have been constructed and abandoned in a very short space of time, as if its conception and function was for a one-off event. Quantities of human cremated bone, pottery and animal bone were recovered but they are minimal compared to that retrieved from the timber-circle.

However, one rare and potentially very important artefact did come to light from the bottom of the ditch, close to the south-east entrance-way. This is a fragment of limestone incised with abstract lines, a piece of Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age "art".

The third ring-ditch is only partially exposed and is later in date. Only minimal investigation has been undertaken, but there is enough evidence to demonstrate that it is very different from ring-ditches 1 and 2.

It has produced large quantities of human cremated bone, charcoal and ash (perhaps from a funeral pyre?), pottery and animal bone.

Analysis of the finds is being undertaken by PHD students at Sheffield University.

Geophysical Survey

Two geophysical surveys were undertaken. The first concentrated on an area immediately outside and to the west of the medieval graveyard. Circular features were identified and rapidly evaluated. Both Roman and prehistoric artefacts were recovered from across the surface. Interpretation and positive dating of these potential structures must await future excavation.

A second area was intensively surveyed, some 1000 metres north east of the chapel site. The area is almost adjacent to the monastic grange, confirmed by the visit of "Time Team" in 2006.

Early indications suggest that a substantial building is present. Its form, function and date can only be determined through future long-term excavation.

Overall, the 2008 season proved to be the most successful yet. Archaeologically, the site(s) have thrown up many new questions to be answered. There were also a record number of students undertaking the training courses.

Work for the 2009 season will include ongoing excavation of the chapel and its graveyard, particularly the relatively untouched southern area. This will be complimented by continued exploration of the Roman structure underlying the chapel.

The Bronze Age ring-ditches will also be completed.

Students from John Moore's University are to undertake an extensive and long-term environmental survey of the site and its environs.

It is also hoped that some limited evaluation can be undertaken on the new sites revealed through geophysical survey.

MMEmercy (November 2008).