

4.5 Excavation Results; Trench 20

Excavation of trench 3 suggested that in areas where the boulder clay was present the archaeological features survived to a greater degree than those in which the bedrock was close to the surface. In March 2002 17,1m x 1m, test pits were excavated in a 10m grid pattern in a triangular shaped field (area C) to the east of the Old Vicarage.

The purpose of the test pits was to try and ascertain whether or not the boulder clay layer extended into Area C. The boulder clay was found in all of the test pits at an average depth of 0.50m below the surface. Despite this only one test pit (24) contained a definite archaeological feature. This was a stone lined post hole cut into the boulder clay and filled with a light grey clay silt. There was no dating evidence from the fill of the post hole, however, from the interface of the subsoil and the boulder clay thirteen sherds of pottery were recovered from test pit 24 and its 1.0m square westerly extension. From the initial pottery assessment four appear to be Iron Age, three from the same vessel. Three sherds have a date range from the 1st to early 2nd centuries AD. Another three date from the mid 2nd century three more can only be characterised as Roman and two appear to be medieval.

Patches of the grey clay silt which filled the post hole were present in several of the other test pits but it was not clear whether these represented the fill of archaeological features or were the product of geological processes. In order to answer this question a 3.0m x 3.0m trench (20) was opened immediately to the south of test pit 24.

Excavation of 0.30m of topsoil and subsoil in trench 20 revealed the natural boulder clay, layer (179) over the whole area of the trench. The boulder clay in this trench was reddish brown in colour. In texture it was more compact than layer (67) in trench 16 but was very similar to layer (76). Several areas of grey silt were visible within the trench and thanks to the larger area these could be seen to be reasonably regular in shape and more indicative of man made archaeological features rather than natural processes.

Seven archaeological features were identified cut into the boulder clay within trench 20. Three of them [140], [184] and [186] were similar in shape and dimensions to the post hole excavated in test pit 24. All appeared to be roughly circular between 0.30m and 0.38 m in diameter with near vertical sides and between 0.20m and 0.25m deep. All these post holes also contained evidence of packing stones.

Running north west to south east immediately to the south of post hole [140] was a short linear feature, [187]. Gully [187] was 1.80m long with both the north west and south east curved ends visible within the trench. The sides of [187] sloped steeply down to a curved base.

[141] was a 0.90m diameter circular feature within trench 20. This feature was 0.35m deep with steeply sloping sides and a flat base. A flat stone was embedded into the base of the feature. Many of the post holes excavated during the summer contained on-edge or steeply angled stones within their fill; in the case of feature [141] these stones were the main component of the fill.

Extending out 0.70m from the east section of trench was what appeared to be the west half of a 2.0m wide circular feature, [139]. Excavation of [139] showed it to be 0.36m deep with gently sloping sides and a flat base. Feature [139] had a fill of mid grey silt with occasional flecks of charcoal. However like [141] the vast majority of the material filling [139] were small to medium sized fragments of sub angular sandstone derived from the natural bedrock. The availability of this material was demonstrated by the presence of a spread of sandstone revealed in a 1.0m extension excavated on the south east corner of trench 20. The full extent of this

spread [182] was not revealed nor was it clear whether it was part of a layer set onto the boulder clay or the fill of a cut feature.

Discussion

Trench 20 was excavated to try to answer the specific question of whether the patches of grey silt clay seen in some of the test pits were a natural occurrence or the result of human activity. It seems clear from the excavation that the features found in trench 20 are man made and that the archaeology found in the Old Vicarage garden extends into Area C. It is tempting to see feature [141] as a large post hole containing a large central upright timber with the smaller post holes [140], [184] and [186] and the post hole found in test pit 24 as part of a grouping around it. However the nature of trench 20 means that it is too soon to attempt any detailed interpretation of these features. It is hoped that further excavation will provide evidence as to the nature and date of the occupation in this area.

It was also hoped that trench 19 would provide more information about the method in which the ditch was originally excavated. As with all the other trenches on the enclosure ditch no evidence of a rampart was found.

This reinforces the theory that this field has been heavily ploughed over the years flattening any remains there may have been of a rampart and ditch. It will be interesting to see in future years whether there will be any evidence that the flattening process was assisted by a deliberate dismantling of the Iron age defences by later occupants of the hilltop. Trench 19 did reveal the point at which the enclosure ditch changes alignment and turns south west to head towards the Old Vicarage. It also seemed to confirm the hypothesis suggested by trench 15 that the daunting task of cutting the enclosure ditch through the bedrock was made easier by following natural bedding planes. The result may not have produced the most regular or straight ditches but it would have made their excavation considerably easier than working exclusively to a predetermined plan. Although Trench 19 was located adjacent to Trench 15, excavated in 2001, no further sherds of Iron Age pottery were found.