

SEDFORD HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT 2000: FIFTH INTERIM REPORT

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The summer of 2000 saw the fifth season of work by the Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project (SHARP), continuing our long-term investigation of a typical English parish in north-west Norfolk. During the season we made significant advances in all aspects of the Project's work: previous years' excavations continued, some of them being brought to conclusion, and new avenues of investigation were opened up. Here, members of the Project team present the results of the season's work, reflect on the last five years and discuss the Project's future research directions.

The 2000 season also served to demonstrate that public support for the Project is as strong as ever, with a constant stream of people visiting the site throughout the season and over seven hundred people attending our first Site Open Day. As always we are immensely grateful for this support, without which we could not continue our work, and would like to express our thanks to all those who have supported us over the last five years.

For the most up-to-date information about SHARP, and details of how to become involved with the project, please visit our website at <http://www.sharp.org.uk>.

Boneyard and Reeddam

Excavation continued to focus on the Boneyard and Reeddam area in the valley bottom south of the River Heacham. The area of the original 20m x 20m trench, open since 1996, was left under cover whilst work concentrated on the Anglo-Saxon settlement and cemetery on the lower slope of the Boneyard and into the Reeddam. The principle aims of this year's excavation were: a) to clarify the Middle Saxon, medieval and post-medieval sequence on the lower slope of the Boneyard and combine them with previous seasons' findings; b) to excavate the Middle Saxon burials in the Reeddam trench and sample any underlying Iron Age deposits; and c) to place the Boneyard excavation in a wider context by evaluating an area to the east of the field and by relocating trenches dug further to the west by Dr. Peter Jewell in the late 1950s.

Immediately to the south of the Reeddam trench, a large east-to-west ditch sequence was fully excavated and recorded. The original ditch was approximately 5m wide and truncated Middle Saxon burials. It was probably associated with the creation of the Reeddam in the Norman period, although no dating evidence was found. Much later, after layers of colluvium had moved down the slope, this east-to-west ditch was re-cut, probably with the establishment of an east-to-west tree line along the edge of the Boneyard.

On the lower slope of the Boneyard, fifteen articulated east-to-west burials were lifted, bringing the total number of articulated skeletons from the site (including those excavated in the 1950s) to 189. Many of the burials in this area appear to have been coffined; iron coffin fittings of various types have been found and, with many easily observable grave cuts, some brackets were recorded *in situ*. Some of the skeletons were cut by a series of north-to-south drainage ditches, similar to features found in previous years. One of the later ditches, dated by quantities of both Ipswich and Thetford-type wares, also cut other settlement features, including a number of post-holes and an oval sunken-featured building (S.F.B.) 2.5 metres long and 2 metres wide. This contained a large dump of oven lining or hearth rake-out material and produced some sherds of Ipswich ware, but no later Thetford Ware. The primary fill of a later north-to-south ditch cutting the S.F.B. produced a Middle Saxon dress pin with an octagonal head (dated to the 8th/9th Century), suggesting an earlier date for the S.F.B.

Evidence of this kind increasingly suggests a relatively 'early' (8th-century) date for some of the settlement features and parts of the cemetery itself, as does an initial radiocarbon date of one of the skeletons (GrN-25159, 1270±40 BP, 662-881 AD at 2 sigma), from an early burial from the Reeddam trench. The 'settlement' phase immediately post-dating the cemetery (which includes the S.F.B.) seems to indicate informal industrial use. Two pits excavated in 1999, immediately to the north of the S.F.B., also contained much burnt clay possibly representing further oven clearances.

The Reeddam trench produced further burials sealed by layers containing Middle/Late Saxon material; a further sixteen skeletons were lifted. In some areas at least four phases of burials have now been identified; at the base of the burial sequence, grave cuts were observed where a later burial had cut an earlier skeleton. Often, the chancel from earlier burials had been placed around the sides of later grave cuts; as such it may only be possible to recognise primary burial phases as disarticulated bone within later grave cuts, as at many other Anglo-Saxon cemetery sites.

As a result of the 2000 season the Reeddam trench has now been stratigraphically linked to the Boneyard trench. It seems likely that the Reeddam area represents one of the initial nuclei of the Anglo-Saxon cemetery that was reused for burial at a later date. Although the earliest inhumations have yet to be excavated from the Reeddam it appears that significant Iron Age deposits, containing large quantities of Late Iron Age Belgic-type pottery, are now being uncovered.

Forty metres to the east of the main Boneyard trench a 30m x 1.5m evaluation trench revealed no burials, but did contain a large north-to-south ditch, 2.7m wide and 1.7m deep. The pottery assemblage recovered suggests that this ditch was initially cut in the Iron Age and re-cut a number of times in the Anglo-Saxon period. To the west of the main Boneyard site, a smaller trench was opened to locate the excavations conducted by Dr. Peter Jewell in the late 1950s, the findings from which will be incorporated into our first monograph, to be written after the 2001 season. This trench formed part of a wider effort to examine previous archaeological work in Sedgeford, which also included an examination of twenty-two skeletons from Jewell's excavations now held by Cambridge University. A further examination of his excavation archive, now held by Norwich Castle Museum, will be undertaken during the 2001 season.

West Hall

The 2000 season saw the completion of five years of excavation in the Paddock at West Hall. Although hampered by heavily waterlogged ground, work confirmed the 1999 hypothesis that a probable chapel — thought to relate to an early medieval manor complex referred to in Domesday Book — lay beneath the previously-excavated medieval boundary system. This date was broadly confirmed by a radiocarbon date of a skeleton whose grave was cut through the 'chapel' floor (Beta-146084, 950±40 BP, 1010-1180 cal. AD). A grave cut immediately to the north was also excavated this season but, interestingly, this appears to have been robbed of its contents late in the medieval period.

Evidence of Late Saxon and Romano-British activity was encountered beneath medieval deposits in the Paddock. The Late Saxon remains were poorly preserved, having been disturbed by the later burials and boundary system. Even so there was clear evidence of a rammed chalk surface, and activity in this area appears to have been continuous right from the Late Saxon through to the modern period. Prior to this the land had been heavily waterlogged, with little evidence of occupation. The Romano-British inhabitants appear to have attempted to drain the land with a series of gullies and a shallow ditch, but this seems to have failed. The land was not significantly reoccupied until reclamation with dumped soil and sand to construct the chapel in the early medieval period.

To complement work in the Paddock and adjoining farmyard, an archaeological study of West Hall House was also begun. A detailed structural survey of the building was completed, and a comprehensive study of the surviving documentation relating to the site is continuing throughout the 2000/2001 academic year. It is thought that the present house stands on or near the site of a medieval manor. Although the work confirmed that no fabric from this earlier manor survives in the current building, six major phases of redevelopment, dating from the Tudor period to the present day, were identified. It is hoped that study of the surviving documentation will provide insights into the manor that lay at Sedgeford's heart in the later medieval period.

Pagan Saxon Sedgeford

An investigation into potential Early Saxon sites in Sedgeford was begun, using antiquarian accounts and museum records to locate some trial trenches within the Parish. It was hoped that this would provide some information about the people who pre-dated the Middle Saxon occupants of the Boneyard, where no pre-Christian material has yet been found. Work started with extensive desktop research into previous finds and excavation results, most notably by an owner of Sedgeford Hall, Holcombe Ingleby (Ingleby 1917).

Fieldwork was concentrated in an area to the east of the village, close to Sedgeford Hall. Three small trenches in Hall Wood were intended to assess the potential of a disused quarry where previous Pagan Saxon finds may have been made. No cremation remains were discovered; indeed there was very little archaeology of any sort apart from two post-medieval field ditches. An area to the south of the woodland may be a more promising location, and work here might be possible in future seasons.

The Bowling Green

In addition to his Pagan Saxon finds, Holcombe Ingleby recorded that his workmen had turned up pieces of British and Roman pottery during the construction of a bowling green near Sedgeford Hall in 1913. An effort was made to find the source of this pottery, and to evaluate the potential of the bowling green area (now under trees).

A five-metre trench was placed across the north-east bank and test-pits positioned off the green to the north-east, south-west and north-west. The results suggest that the green was constructed by cutting into the natural slope to create an appropriately-sized flat surface. The material removed appears to have been deposited fairly evenly to the north-east, building up the bank. Few finds were recovered by hand from this material, but numerous small sherds of Iron Age and later pottery were recovered from sieved spoil. Construction of the bowling green had probably removed the deposits containing the Iron Age and Roman pottery reported by Ingleby, but the quantities of pottery recovered do suggest an Iron Age site in the vicinity.

Facial reconstruction from Sedgeford skulls

Experimental reconstructions were made of the faces of Sedgeford skeletons. The aim was to provide visitors with a 'human' link to the 8th-century population and their way of life by giving the skeletons visual identities. Such reconstructions are usually done by modelling features in clay over a cast of the skull, a process that is expensive and time-consuming. It was decided that reconstructions would be attempted graphically: careful drawings were made of some of the better-preserved skulls before eyes, muscles, skin and hair were added according to anatomical principles. Reconstructions are often produced with a blank stare; ours were deliberately made with a variety of different expressions, with the intention of making them more accessible and 'real'. The faces were given a 'lean' look, appropriate to persons who led a healthy, active outdoor life — the Saxon people of Sedgeford were tall and well-built. The method used for producing these reconstructions has been refined and work will continue with more of the skulls. It is hoped that this project will be expanded in the forthcoming season to include three-dimensional modelling and colour pictures. Examples of this work may be found on the project website.

Palaeodietary analysis of the Boneyard population

Since the end of the 2000 season a new scientific investigation into the diet of the Saxon populations has been begun by Lorna Corr, a PhD student at Bristol University. A sample from each skeleton is subjected to four different stable isotopic analyses, specifically the bone's cholesterol, amino acid, collagen and apatite content. Each of these tests is intended to identify different dietary information, in order to build up as full a record as possible of the individual's diet. Analysis of the ratio of heavy to light carbon ($^{13}\text{C}/^{12}\text{C}$) may reveal the proportions of terrestrial, marine and leguminous foods in the diet, as well as the balance between plant and animal protein input.

The isotopic values of humans should correspond closely with the values of the animals in their diet and also the grass or fodder fed to the animals. A comprehensive study of the faunal remains from the Boneyard site will therefore also form a part of the study. The work on the assemblage from Sedgeford will represent the first time the four different methods of analyses will be performed on a single population, offering supplementary information about factors such as seasonal variation in diet, and will represent a significant development in this field of research.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ingleby, H. 1917. 'Roman and other remains recently discovered at Sedgeford', *Norfolk Archaeology* 19, 177-121.

MEDIEVAL SEAL MATRICES FROM NORFOLK, 2000

by Helen Geake, Andrew Rogerson and Steven Ashley

This paper is the third in an annual catalogue of medieval seal matrices from Norfolk (Geake *et al.* 1999 and 2000). As usual, impressions of all the matrices contained in this catalogue are available for study at Norwich Castle Museum.

