YCCCART

Yatton Congresbury Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team

Newsletter July 2018

Chairman's chat

Welcome to the latest issue of our Newsletter. This month we are concentrating on excavations that we have undertaken in recent years to demonstrate the scope of our explorations, finds made, documentuary evidence, recording and conclusions. Our digs are based on our geophysical surveys. However, we hope you may be inspired to offer part of your garden for a one metre square test pit and YCCCART will be there to help and advise you. You can find details of test pitting on the last page of this newsletter.

If you want to learn more about the Group why not come and visit our tent at the Yatton Village Fete on July 28th.

Peter English

Congresbury Village Cross excavation 2016

This evaluation excavation was carried out by YCCCART for Congresbury Parish Council in August 2016 at Congresbury cross. Despite severe damage by a recent BT pipe trench to the area immediately adjacent to the cross, it was revealed to have significant basement structures, engineered in the 14th century to provide a stable base for the cross. This adds to our currently sketchy knowledge of how crosses were constructed. This basement and the lower part of the first step, probably not previously seen in their entirety for 200 years, are most likely responsible for the baseless local story of there being two further steps under the adjacent roads.

Limited details of possible pre-cross structures were recorded, although no dating evidence was uncovered in the tiny area available. The sequence of road construction next to the cross was recorded. Overall very few finds were made, mostly local and post-1620 in date.

Congresbury village cross, not to be confused with the cross in Congresbury churchyard, also a Scheduled Monument, was constructed before 1390, almost certainly to act as a market focus for the Congresbury Market and Fair. There seems to be no specific charter for the fair, but documents from 1227 imply it's existence. The market survived long enough to be photographed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is possible that the very irregular wear patterns seen on the stonework of the steps of the cross are partly a result of this use.

Initially the owners of this cross were it's commissioners, the bishopric of Bath and Wells. At the Reformation, the manor passed to Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, and from him through the Owen and Carr families, who passed it by will to found Queen Elizabeth's Hospital in Bristol in 1586. This body's successors handed the ownership of the cross to Congresbury Parish Council in 1975, and it is now a formally registered asset of the Council. The cross is in a vulnerable setting, lying as it does immediately next to the link road from A370 to A38 (Congresbury to Churchill), with a heavy and seemingly increasing traffic load.

Congresbury village cross c 1890 (courtesy of Congresbury Local History Society)

Note the damaged nature of the edge of all the roadside stones.

Such damage to a parish-owned and Scheduled asset has focussed the community mind on the vulnerability of Congresbury cross, and in discussions in early 2016 between parish council, district council and Historic England, initial thoughts were put forward as to how some degree of protection for the structure might be achieved.

The cross was reputed to have two further calvary steps which were buried when the level of the road was raised some time before the mid 19th century. The remains of the buried calvary steps are included in the scheduling. The tarmac and make up of the road around the cross is excluded from the scheduling where this falls within its protective margin, but the ground beneath is included.

The village cross lies on the alluvium of the Northmarsh: the Wentlloog blue clays were revealed at the lowest point of the excavation some 0.86m below current ground surface. There is insufficient geological information to be sure, but the alluvium may overlay the Mercia Mudstone Group at this point.

The prime and initial research aim of this excavation was to explore the sub-surface components of the Scheduled cross. This clarification was aimed to both improve our understanding of this structure (and perhaps medieval crosses in general), and put the reasoning for the area Scheduled at the cross on a firm knowledge base.

Excavation showing one of the large basement stones with first step stones chocked level with small stones.

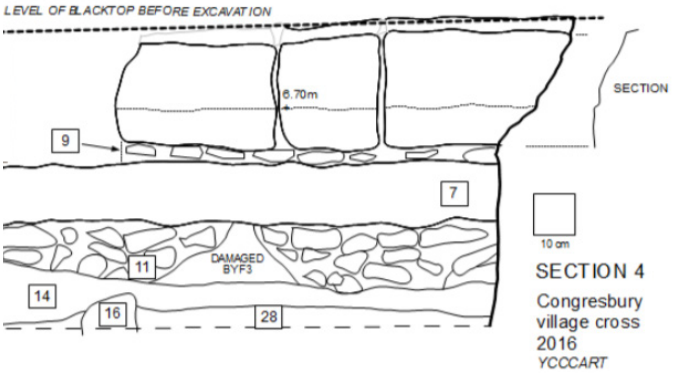
The pre-cross levels produced no dated or datable finds. The first act in the construction of the cross itself seems to have been to spread the rubble sub-basement, a well-packed layer with occasional mortar and a completely level top surface supporting the basement stones. It is not clear if the rubble sub-basement of the cross extended beyond the basement stones.

The basement stones projected by an average of 0.30m below the base of the constructed cross. The stones of the lowest step of the cross were chocked with a line of stone fragments of various lithologies, with no apparent mortar. The upper surface of these stones marks the limit of what was probably intended to be seen of the cross.

No recognisable layer of detritus from stone working was detected at the site, and it is probably safe to assume that the

cross was manufactured elsewhere (possibly at the known medieval masons yard on the south side of Wells cathedral) and assembled at site. The success of this medieval engineering in stabilising such a large structure in Northmarsh conditions is remarkable.

Finds



Drawn section showing basement and lower stone of cross

The modest number of finds is not unexpected in a small, non-domestic evaluation, largely beneath the surface of an active road.

The ceramics from the site are mostly of hollow vessels, largely of mugs or tankards, hardly surprising in the vicinity of a long-lived public house and market / fair. Clay pipe was also a common find (presumably for the same reason), although only one marked bowl was found (a mid-18th century bowl fragment with 'I S' marking the spur).

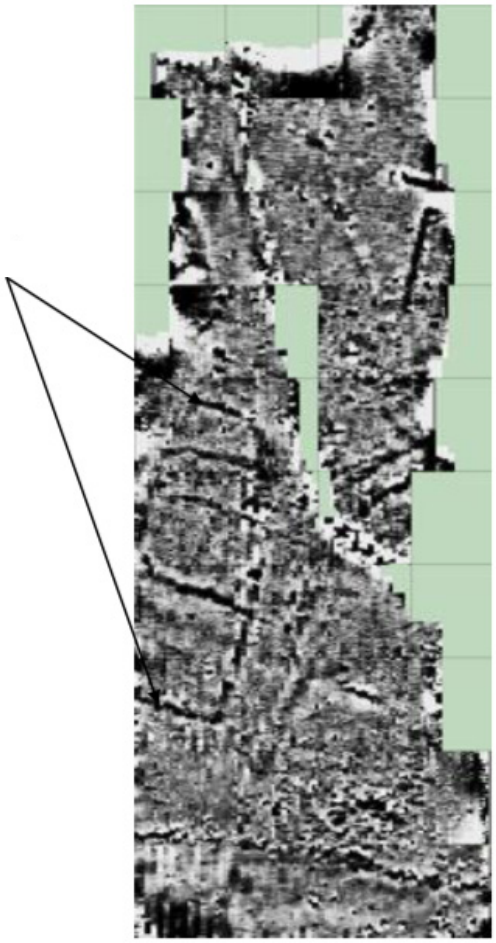
Ceramics were identified by comparison to the Bristol Pottery Type series (since in view of the strong tenurial links, this seemed appropriate). By far the most typical ceramic in all the contexts were the products of east Somerset ('Wanstrow'), with a few sherds of south Somerset ('Donyatt') wares, and occasional travelled ceramic, such as North Devon wares and two sherds of 17th century Frechen tankards from Germany, a fairly common find in Bristol.

Non-ceramic finds were largely small iron nails (some identifiably horse-shoe nails), small numbers of post-medieval glass bottle fragments, and the tip of a 19th century slate 'pencil'.

In conclusion there is not another step below the road surface.

Iwood – Evaluation excavation in Mr Collins 2 Field. June 2012.

In 2010 YCCCART carried out a gradiometry survey of a field in Iwood, Congresbury. This was part of a continuing project to investigate the archaeology of Cadbury Hill Fort and its environs. The survey revealed linear anomalies which were considered worthy of future investigation.



Gradiometer result showing enclosures in 2012

The north end of the field lies on Keuper Marl, which is overlain in the southern part by the alluvial clays of the Northmarsh. The current course of the Yeo runs along the southern boundary of the field.

Excavation Objectives -

1. The excavation was undertaken on 26 June 2012 to attempt to clarify the nature of the anomalies (enclosures?) revealed by the gradiometer survey of July 2010.

2. To obtain dating evidence for these apparent enclosures.

3. To confirm that the interpretation of gradiometer results is correct.

4 To establish if it was possible to accurately locate features in gradiometer results.

The excavation revealed a post hole on the line of an apparent enclosure identified by the gradiometery survey. This post hole formed a clay plug of approximately 500mm diameter in

YCCCART members excavating the trench and checking the spoil with a metal detector.

an area of deep loam. The section taken through the feature revealed the plug to be sitting on further loam. At the bottom of the clay layer (Depth approximately 0.65m) was a layer of organic black material. All indications suggest a large post hole. Only one find was discovered, a shard of Iron Age pottery

Above top left is a photo showing an aerial view of the clay plug

from the spoil heap. Because of the depth of plough soil, it was not possible to determine the horizon from which the post hole had been originally cut.

This post-hole (if originally sufficiently deep) could have held a sizeable post, perhaps some metres in height. With only one post-hole, it is impossible to determine its use. If prehistoric, it could be part of a palisaded enclosure. Since it does not fall on any recorded or expected field boundary, it seems unlikely

to be modern in date. The response to gradiometry, producing a linear feature, implies some other structure along with the post-hole, and this needs to be tested by further evaluation.

The photo above shows the size of the trench and depth of the feature which most probably is the lower part of a post

Above is the section containing organic material.

Conclusions -

The excavation revealed a feature thought to be a post hole on the line of the apparent enclosure shown in the gradiometer results.

Although a shard of Iron Age pottery was found it was not in context, so dating the likely post hole was not possible.

The presence and size of the post hole and no evidence of stone walls supports the conclusion that the features shown in the gradiometry image are indeed large enclosures.

This excavation has proved that the team are able to accurately record the position of features using the Bartington 601 gradiometer.

Shard of Iron Age pottery found on spoil heap

Iwood – excavation in Mr Collins 2 Field. June 2015.

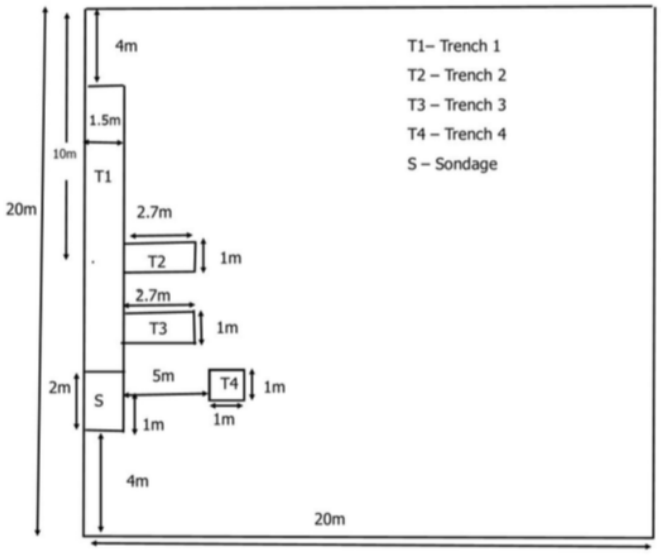
Like the previous excavation in Collins 2 in 2012, this excavation is also based on the gradiometry survey undertaken in 2010. The trenches were much closer to the river and initial thoughts were of a possible mill and leat.

Dave and Clive. Digging or relaxing at Iwood?

The excavation had the following objectives -

1. To attempt to identify and date the nature of the anomalies revealed by the resistivity surveys undertaken during the period 2010 to 2013.
2. To use the excavation to train YCCCART members in excavation techniques.

In order to investigate a section of a possible leat and building, it was decided to lay out a 12m by 1.5m trench to the east of the 20m x 20m grid. This is trench 1 is shown in the excavation plan as shown below.



View looking north of Trench 1 being excavated.

A second trench 2.7 m long by 1m wide was dug at right angles to trench 1, 0.5 m each side of the mid-point of the 20 x 20m grid. This trench 2 was to investigate a feature revealed in Trench 1.

Trench 2. Wall area centre.

Trench 3 was dug south of the 2nd trench. A sondage 0.5 m deep was cut on the south side of this trench in the search for significant features.

Trench 4 was a 1m by 1m exploratory trench, dug to a depth of 0.75m, to identify the extent of a possible building.

A sondage 1.5m wide by 2m long was dug at the southern end of Trench 1 to try and find evidence of the leat.

Sondage in Trench 1 looking north.

Conclusions -

The results of the excavation bore out the resistivity surveys. The large quantity of pottery sherds and other finds suggest the presence of a domestic building/s. Analysis of the pottery sherds revealed that they mainly consisted of Wanstrow, Donyatt and Somerset Red Wares dating occupation to a period from 1580 to 1650.

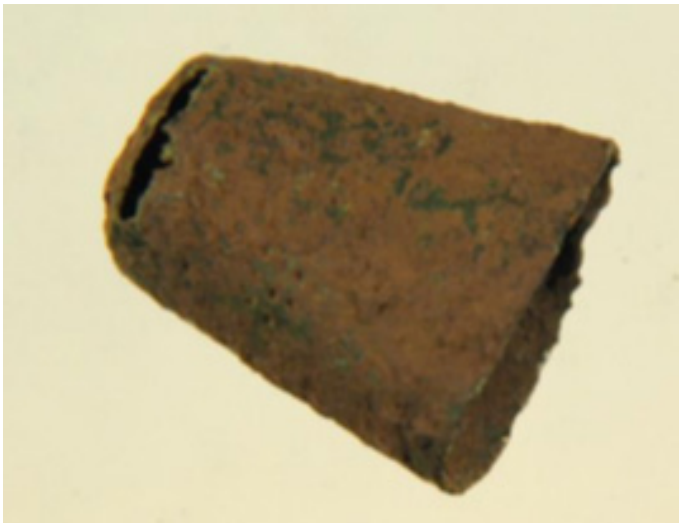
Trench 1 sondage revealed a scatter of large stones probably from a structure which seems to have tumbled into the possible leat.

Trench 2 revealed a likely structure / base of wall.

Photos of selected finds

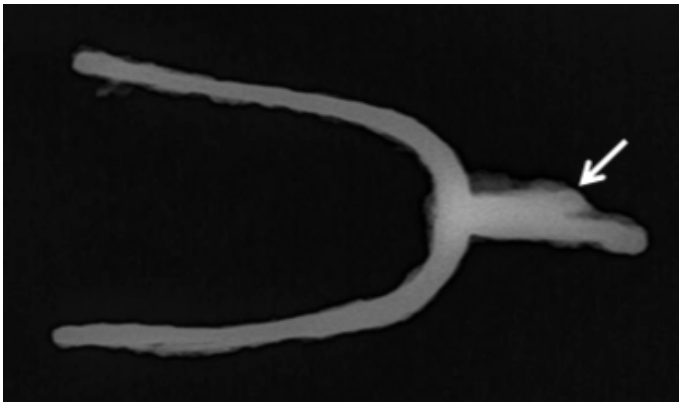
Two separate pieces of a spur were identified, from separate locations within the trench. It is possible that the two pieces belong to the same spur. They comprise a heel band/yoke and shank (shown above) and a separate rowel

The star shaped rowel was approx. 40mm wide with 8 points (one slightly damaged, with the detached fragment measuring approx. 4mm diameter). The period in which the spur was forged has not been determined and requires further research.

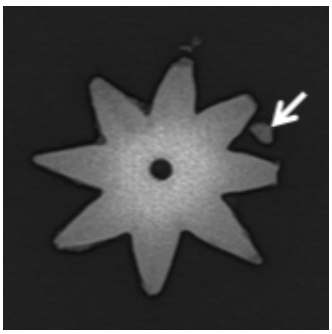


This is one of two thimbles found of copper alloy. These were often worn to protect the finger ends when gathering wheat into stooks.

Sherd of Somerset Red Ware, one of a number of shards of this type of pottery found across the site.



The broken edge of the shank can be clearly identified (arrow) on this X-ray image of the heel band/yoke and shank of the spur.



Rowel with central hole. The small broken fragment can also be seen (arrow). X-ray image.

This is one of a number of shards of Wanstrow Ware. This sherd is from pipkin.

Part of buckle from trench 3.

Congresbury Church. Graveyard Excavation June 2011

At this time the site was in an unconsecrated section of the new graveyard. The solid geology is a low knoll of Mercia Mudstone, surrounded on all sides by the alluvium of the North Marsh.

In 2008 a piece of pre-Conquest pottery together with human bone fragments were recovered by Vince Russett, North Somerset County Archaeologist from the spoil heap of recently dug graves at the western of the current graveyard.

The above was stated in the report YCCCART 2010/Y14, which also highlighted anomalies revealed during resistivity surveys and recommended that in view of these anomalies being close to the current graves in the new church yard, a small trial excavation should be undertaken before the digging of further graves destroyed any feature.

It was agreed to excavate a 5m by 2m trench across a possible feature that had been revealed by the a resistivity survey. During the resistivity survey the carved stone below was discovered on the graveyard spoil heap and subsequently examined by Vince Russett. Vince considers that this could be the head section of a stone coffin from 12/13thc.

Carved stone found at western end of the current graveyard.

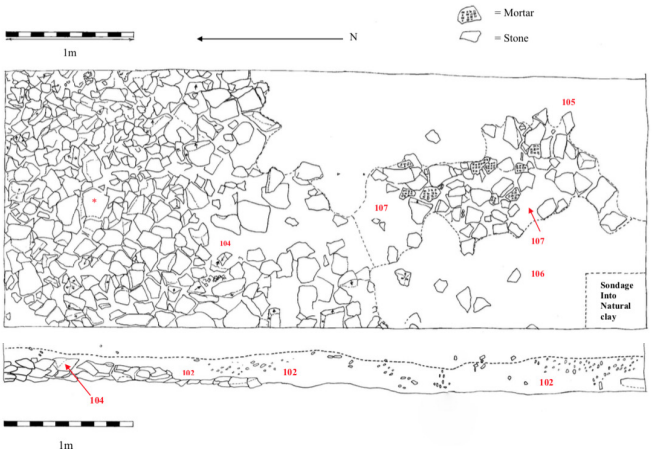
The excavation had the following objectives -

1) To attempt to identify the nature of the anomalies revealed by the resistivity survey undertaken during the period April to June 2010.

2) To use the excavation to train YCCCART members and members of Community Archaeology in North Somerset (CANS) in excavation techniques.

Some 300mm below the surface a layer of stones and rubble was revealed. This was spread across the northern half of the trench. Towards the centre of the southern section running south-east further stones were laid. These were less densely packed and included a number of stones with mortar attached, which appear to be from a wall or structure. Directly above the stones, and sometimes embedded within them, were a number of animal bones and teeth (sheep and pig). Just above the stones a possible pre Roman or pre Norman shard of pottery was found. Two pieces of Roman 3/4th c Oxford ware from separate bowls were found in the south elevation of the trench. Other finds included two pieces (which join) of pennant sandstone with two adjacent sharpening grooves were found together with a pennant sandstone roof tile with nail hole, a section of a Roman clay roof tile (tegula) and shards of Romano British Congresbury ware.

Aerial photo of excavation



Drawings of excavation plan and west facing section. Context layers are indicated by the red numbers

The results of the excavation bore out the resistivity surveys over the site as the spread of stones found accurately matched the pattern identified by these surveys. A layer of stones and rubble was uncovered which has no delineated lines of a wall or similar structure. However, the presence of mortar attached to some of the stones suggests that all, or some of the spread, came from a nearby wall or structure.

The presence of the late Roman roof tile (tegula) and the stone roof tile with nail hole suggests that the excavation is close to a building of some status. Oxford ware is of relatively high status and the presence of two unworn shards supports the supposition that the rubble could have come from a building of some status.

Congresbury was a centre of the early Christian Church in Somerset and early churches were invariably associated with Roman sites. This excavation suggests that such a site is in the in the vicinity.

Vince's Corner - Test Pitting

You can help to find out about the story of your area by test pitting (digging a 1m square archaeological pit) in your garden. The point about test pitting is to eventually build up a map of things found in the pits across your area of interest (say, Congresbury village), but it may also tell you something about the site of your house. Just because your house is modern, doesn't mean to say there isn't archaeology there! If you would like to dig your test pit yourself, YCCCART are here to help and advise. Don't be too disappointed if you don't find archaeology: in this effort, negative findings are important too!

Ingredients

You will need (on the day)
A spade (for deturfing if necessary)
A measuring tape and string (for laying out)
A couple of trowels (flat builder's, not garden trowels) and 'coal shovels'
A large garden sieve
A tarpaulin or covering to put your soil on
Trays for finds
Someone with a camera or smartphone
Some plastic labels for the finds trays (and a black permanent marker to write them)
2 washing up bowls and old (or cheap) stiff toothbrushes and lots of newspaper

You will NOT need on the day
Bad back
Inability to see something through...

Recipe

1. Mark out a metre square, and carefully remove the turf if digging in a lawn. Store the turf ready for replacing at the end of the pit.
2. If in dug soil, carefully remove the loose topsoil until you find something firmer. Pick up finds and put in tray 1, then sieve all the soil, and add finds from the sieve to the tray. If in doubt about whether something is a find or not, keep it (it can always be thrown away later if not).
3. If there are identifiable layers in the pit, dig each one separately, and give each a number. The archaeologist with you will help you on this, and on the best way to trowel. No digging random holes, please! Otherwise, dig in 10cm 'spits'. Remember the archaeologist's advice: 'Keep your sides steep and your bottom clean!'
4. If you encounter a wall or stone surface or obvious pit, ask your archaeologist how to deal with it. It may be necessary to do some plan drawing and photography if you do, and they will help you.
5. Someone should be washing the finds (NOT the metal ones, they are cleaned dry) and putting out on layers of newspaper to dry, making sure the label from the tray stays with the finds. Make sure it doesn't blow away.
6. When you reach the 'natural' (what is definitely not disturbed by people in any way) or 1.2m deep (the limit for safe digging without shoring up the sides) STOP.
7. If there are layers in the sides of your pit (the 'section'), make a measured drawing, and photograph.
8. Once you have made certain you have made all the records you need, and the finds are securely bagged (with the labels!) backfill with the soil, replace the turf, and if hot weather, water it in. Job done!
9. Your archaeologist will then help you identify the finds, which can be added to.

Vince Russett

YCCCART members test pitting in Yatton. The central figure is trowelling a gravel yard surface which has turned up in the pit.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Don't forget Yatton village fete which is being held in The Village Hall and grassed area opposite on Glebelands. - Yatton, Saturday July 28th