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Yatton Archaeological Research Digs – YARD

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM & CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCCART)**

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Summer in the gardens of Yatton

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Abstract

During the summers of 2007 and 2008 Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) conducted a programme of test pitting in the gardens of 13 residents of Yatton. It was hoped that the chosen area, close to the church, would provide some enlightenment of the early history of the village. However, there is no indication from these test pits and the finds discovered that any structures were in existence prior to the modern village being constructed.

Acknowledgements.

YCCCART would like to acknowledge and thank the residents in Yatton at the addresses listed below who willingly agreed to let them dig holes in their gardens during 2007 and 2008.

1) 36 HIGH STREET,	19-4-2007
2) LITTLE PADDOCK, 30 HIGH STREET	3-5-2007
3) 21 HIGH STREET	7-6-2007
4) 6 HIGH STREET	5-7-2007
5) 40 CHURCH VIEW, GLEBELANDS.	12-4-2007
6) HIGH STREET	9-8-2007
7) GLEBELANDS	16-8-2007
8) THE RECTORY, 1 WELL LANE	4/18-10-2007
9) THE CAUSEWAY	6-9-2007
10) 13 CHESCOMBE ROAD	17-7-2008
11) 23 CHURCH ROAD	27-7-2008
12) 15 CHESCOMBE ROAD	28-8-2008
13) 19 CHURCH ROAD	18-9-2008

Grateful thanks are also due to Vince Russett for editing this report.

Introduction

YCCCART is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across North Somerset, supported by the North Somerset Development Management Team. The objective of the Community Archaeology in North Somerset (CANS) project is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording the activities and locations of the research carried out.

Site Location

The village of Yatton is in North Somerset, approximately 12 km. south-west of Bristol, and 1 km. north-west of the A370. The centre of the village is situated at O.S. ST 432654.

Land Use and Geology

The area of the survey is now covered by modern housing apart from some small parcels of open community usage. One of these sites had a test pit located in the area, namely Glebelands.

The geology of the area is Westbury Formation and Cotham member Mudstone and Limestone interbedded (undifferentiated) Bedrock with overlaying alluvium, Burtle Formation sand and gravel, etc.

Historical and Archaeological Context

The earliest buildings appear to be adjacent to the existing church of St Mary's which was commenced in the early 13C although it is possible that there was an earlier church in the area. We do know that there were temples on the nearby Henley Wood hilltop both pre-Roman (pagan) and of the Roman period, near to the Iron Age hill fort of Cadbury Congresbury.

This existing church is a very large and prestigious building and one would expect it to be located in a large community, not in an area that was probably composed mostly of scattered agricultural holdings with what seems to be a comparatively small population.

Survey Objectives

This test pit programme was carried out with the objective of finding any evidence to prove the existence of an earlier community to justify the building of the beautiful religious building being built in Yatton. Any archaeological evidence would help to fill the void in our knowledge of the agriculturally based community. The aims of this project also included the possibility that some trace may be found of an earlier church or similar building and also enabled training of the members of the group to be undertaken.

Methodology

a. Locations

The locations of test pits Nos. 1 to 9 were determined initially by the limits of the Conservation Area in Yatton which was considered to be a suitable starting point for the investigation of possible early medieval dwellings. Having determined this area as a satisfactory starting point we then invited residents in that area to allow access to their gardens to investigate for any early artefacts and arranged suitable times for the work to be carried out. The position of the test pits was determined on site to suit the owner and to take into account the existing planting, pathways etc.

The test pits Nos.10 to 13 were located in the possible area of an early church between Church Rd and Chescombe Rd. Again where residents allowed access to their gardens to carry out test pits the existing planting, pathways, etc. were taken into account when locating the pits.

b. Dimensions

For practical reasons a pit size of one metre square on plan was decided upon. This it was felt was a size that could be excavated, sieved and back-filled by a small team

during one day. It was also a suitable size to be accommodated in the average size garden without causing difficulties for the occupier. The disadvantages were difficulties in seeing and interpreting any changes in the context when excavating, and only a quite small sample of the existing archaeology of the site would be obtained. However it was felt that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages particularly as if some existing condition required more examination then further access could be agreed with the occupier. (Gerrard and Costen 1997)

c. Labour

Excavations were carried out by members of YCCART under the control of an experienced archaeologist who was responsible for controlling the excavation and ensuring that records were made of the location, the contexts and any finds. This included plans, sections and any other relevant information.

d. Procedure

The material excavated was sieved in situ and any finds were noted, placed in suitable receptacles and sorted into groups by contexts. These items were then washed, identified, sorted and described. The results are shown below.

Results

The following is a brief resume of the test pits with a description including the contexts and a possible interpretation of the findings.

1) CHURCH VIEW, GLEBELANDS

This test pit was carried out in the rear garden of the cottage which was uninhabited at that time, in what appeared to be a rubbish tip. The contexts were as follows:-

Context 1:- 0 to 25cms.

Consisted of dark soil with some ash and clinker and containing many fragments of pottery and glass. At the 22 -25 cms. level a compacted surface appeared to the area of the pit with a spread of small pebbles and stones of 1 to 2 cms. in diameter at the centre of the south west side, about 40cms wide apparently continuing beyond the test pit.

Context 2:- 25 to 40 cms.

Soil was browner in colour and with more clay content again containing many fragments of pottery and glass but fewer than Context 1. Close to the north west corner a square stone measuring 13 to 14 cms. on plan was found a few cms. below the compacted surface of Context 1 and immediately below was an irregular shaped stone only 4 cms. thick. There was no evidence that they were part of a structure

Context 3:- 40 to 60 cms.

This soil was redder in colour and contains much more clay. There were few finds in this layer which seemed to be a natural sub-soil at 60cms depth with no finds although there were many flecks of charcoal or rotted wood and also flecks of mortar which suggested some previous disturbance. However we judged that there would be little further information to be gained and the pit was back filled.

Interpretation– no structures were recognised.

2) 36 HIGH ST.

This test pit was carried out in the rear of the property in the south east of the garden.

Context 1:- 0 to 38 cms.

Consisted of a dark soil, loose in texture with many fragments of glass, pottery and a 1956 coin.

Context 2:- 38 to 50 cms.

Soil very dark colour and a very loose texture with many fragments of pottery.

Context 3:- 50cms.

A small excavation of this layer revealed a heavy clay giving appearance of natural, undisturbed with no finds. The pit was terminated at this level and back-filled.

Interpretation – no structures were recognised

3) LITTLE PADDOCK, 30 HIGH STREET

The test pit was in the rear garden of the property.

Context 1:- 0 to 10 cms.

Lawn grass removed with dark brown soil, many roots present. No finds.

Context 2:- 10 to 21 cms.

Soil has more stones with some mortar and rubble. Some large pottery fragments found.

Context 3:- 21 to 32 cms

Soil below rubble layer, down to layer of ash over all the excavation. Few finds.

Context 4:- 32 to 51 cms.

Evidence of burning. Few finds but decayed and rusted metal pieces found.

Pit closed at 51cms level.

Interpretation – no structures were recognised

4) 21 HIGH STREET

The two test pits were in the rear garden behind the shop.

Test pit 1

Context 1.

A considerable number of finds, mostly 19 to 20th C.

Context 2.

A considerable number of finds, mostly 18C but with some pieces of 13C pot.

Test pit 2

Context 1

A considerable number of finds, mostly 17 to 20th C

Context 2.

A considerable number of finds, mostly 15 to 19th C

Interpretation – no structures were recognised

5) 6 HIGH STREET

The test pit was in the rear garden of the property, adjacent to boundary wall

Context 1:- 0 to 30 cms.

Dark, loamy soil with many finds 17C to 20C.1 piece Congresbury grey ware Roman, and 1 piece of Ham Green 12/13C

Context 2:- 30 to 55 cms.

Brown, clayey soil with many finds, 19C and 20C.

Context 3:- 40 to 50 cms.

Black, gritty, burnt soil only in south east corner of pit, Some finds including 20C plastic label and pottery.

Interpretation – no structures were recognised and finds in context 3 indicate recent disturbance.

6) 40 HIGH STREET

The test pit was in the rear garden of the property, adjacent to boundary wall

Context 1:- 0 to 20 cms.

Dark, loamy soil with few finds, all 20C.

Context 2:- 20 to 40 cms.

Stone layer with gritty soil between and no finds.

Context 3:- 20 to 40 cms.

Black, ashy soil to north west corner of pit with a thin layer of ash on top and at the same level as context 2. Few finds but including one piece of 12-13C Ham Green pottery.

Context 4 at 40 cms.

Clay with large stones.

Interpretation – no structures were recognised but the find in context 3 indicates a possible earlier occupation of the site.

7) GLEBELANDS

This test pit was situated in the grassed area of the present recreational area near Church Road by permission of the Parish Council. It was in the location of cottages demolished in late 19th and early 20th Centuries.

Context 1:- 0 to 10cms.

Dark loamy garden soil and some finds including one piece Roman and some building rubble.

Context 2:- 10 to 30cms

Very compacted, dry with some finds from early 18C and some building rubble.

Context 3:- 30 to 38cms

Dry, compacted, gritty soil with no finds.

Context 4:- 38 to 100cms

North west corner had scatter of stones to an 'edge' with rubble layer at 85cms level and gritty soil down to 100 cms level with one 18C find.

Context 5:- 38 to 100cms

South east corner had compacted gritty soil down to stone scatter with larger stones at 85 cms level with no finds.

Interpretation - no structures were positively identified although context 5 had larger stones which may have been associated with cottage walls as the area had a history of occupation until demolition in early 20C.

8. THE RECTORY, 1 WELL LANE

The test pit was situated adjacent to the greenhouse and boundary wall in the rear garden.

Context 1:- 0/9 to 24 cms.

Considerable variation was found in the depth of this layer.

Dark brown soil with a few stones with no finds.

Context 2:- 16 to 24 cms. (variable)

Soil dark brown and more gritty with more stones and no finds.

Context 3:- 24 to 77 cms

Soil became very gritty, still dark brown in colour and no finds.

Bottom of pit at start of clay layer.

Interpretation - no structures could be recognised. This site is a new property to replace the original Rectory (demolished in the 1960s) and was built on the original Rectory gardens.

9) THE CAUSEWAY

This test pit was located in the front garden adjoining the Causeway.

Context 1:- 0 to 15 cms.

Dark brown hard packed soil with many tree roots but very few finds including 14/15C upright jug fragments and some medieval red body pottery.

Context 2:- 15 to 25/35 cms.

Very compacted but with more clay content. A few finds including one piece of 17C jug. Part of the layer was excavated down to the 35cms level without any further finds.

Interpretation – no structures could be recognised and the finds were disappointing considering the site location.

10) 13 CHESCOMBE ROAD

Test pit located in rear garden of property.

Context 1:- 0 to 20 cms.
Dark brown garden soil. No finds

Context 2:- 20 to 35 cms
Red and blue/grey clay in south and east corner, elsewhere mixed with brownish clayey soil. Very few finds.

Interpretation– no structures could be recognised

11) 23 CHURCH ROAD

Test pit located in rear garden of property.

Context 1:- 0 to 8cms.
Brown garden soil with few finds.

Context 2:- 8 to 32cms.
Stony red clayey material with stone patches and blue clay lumps with mortar flecks. Rusty iron pipe found at 16 cms. down in centre of pit and at 20 cms. down at side, all covered by large stones. SW corner of pit comprised large stones at 25 cms. and large stones with rubble under. Various finds of 19C to modern.

Interpretation – no structures could be recognised, pipework probably associated with 20C wood yard previously on this site. Obviously very disturbed.

12) 15 CHESCOMBE ROAD

Test pit located in rear garden of property adjacent to garage.

Context 1:- 0 to 20/30 cms
Dark brown topsoil with few finds, down to 20cms on east, 30cms on west sides. Various finds of 19C material, some pottery.

Context 2:- 20/30 to 30/35cms.
Increased clay content and more compacted with flecks of clay and grit. Finds were mostly recent building materials and generally burnt with fire clag.

Context 3:- 30/35 to 55cms.
Rubble and red clay with finds of plaster, burnt material (some quite large) and piece of unusual shaped brick at bottom of pit.

Interpretation– no structures could be recognised.

13) 19 CHURCH ROAD

Test pit located in rear garden near conservatory.

Context 1:- 0 to 12cms.

Dark, loamy and sandy topsoil with some finds including piece of 17C Somerset jar, otherwise only 19C material.

Context 2:- 12 to 18cms.

Stony and sandy soil with few finds, mostly recent building material.

Context 3:- 18 to 28cms.

Layer of clay with very few finds of little significance.

Context 4:- 28 to 31cms.

Black oily soil with coal/charcoal. Some roof tile 19/20C with bottle glass and pottery.

Context 5:- 31 to 34cms.

This layer contained a lot of mortar including some larger pieces together with fragments of roof tile but no other finds.

Context 5:- 34 to 46cms.

A brown soil with mortar which became less abundant the deeper the pit. No finds.

Interpretation – no structures could be recognised.

Discussion

The earliest pottery from the garden digs seems to be Ham Green ware (12th to 13th century) which was found mainly in locations excavated in the High Street and two sherds of Roman pottery from the public area of the Glebelands and 6 High Street.

There is no indication from these test pits and the finds discovered that any structures were in existence prior to the modern village being constructed. The objective of finding the location and spread of a pre-medieval village of Yatton has not been met.

The close proximity of the Iron Age hill fort which was re-occupied in the post-Roman period suggests that there would have been a local population on the lower levels after the hill dwellers left the hill fort. This may have been only a scatter of individual dwellings which became farms in due course, without a cohesive centre, probably with their own live-in work force and/or family members to undertake the various activities of farming.

It is almost certain that these original dwelling house sites were used for many centuries, probably many are at the same location as the existing farms as we know them. If this is a true reflection of the early community then we are unlikely to locate many archaeological artefacts in what is now the village centre and it seems to be necessary to investigate the existing farm sites, in order to confirm or disprove this theory.

The fact that literally nothing has been found suggests that there was not a pre-medieval village on the present village site, which would seem to confirm the theory of Yatton being a scatter of individual dwellings without a cohesive centre. (Aston, 1988)

Recommendations

- 1) Extend the search to include garden digs at known older sites of properties away from the church and conservation area, including the outlying farm houses.
- 2) Dig more test pits on other sites in the High Street.

References

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