



Update on the dig at the Herb Centre.

In 2011 we concentrated on examining the end of a Roman ditch, part of which was excavated in 2008. This proved to be backfilled in Roman times with ash, animal bones and pieces of ironworking slag. We had hoped to find the first evidence for Roman iron smelting on the Warwickshire ironstone geology, but experts identified it as smithing slag, much more commonplace. However, we continue to build a picture of activities on the site, with at least one and possibly two hearths close to the buildings uncovered in 2008.

Other discoveries this season include a series of intersecting Roman pits, one of which contained a horse's skull set in a circle of stones - a ritual deposit to go with the cat skeleton found in 2008? Our collection of interesting Samian sherds grows, with more decorated fragments as well as a bowl dated to around the late 2nd early 3rd century AD.



The bottom of a small bowl stamped "Tanc[onus]" the name of a potter active around AD150 in central Gaul. Found in 2010 season

Anglo-Saxon Burials

The recent discovery of Anglo-Saxon burials on the Edgell/Warmington boundary triggered enormous interest locally and nationally. The skeletons were uncovered when a homeowner was having foundations put in for a conservatory. The following extract was taken from the local media:

The archaeologists identified the remains as the bodies of two adult females, a young male and a child aged between ten and 12. It was determined that the find was of considerable historic importance and that any foul play had taken place a very long time ago.

An archaeological survey was carried out and radiocarbon dating showed the remains date back to about 650-820AD, known as the middle Saxon period. The council's archaeology manager, Stuart Palmer, said: "The discovery of this previously unsuspected burial ground is an extremely rare and important addition to what has previously been an archaeologically invisible period of Warwickshire's history.

"Detailed analysis of the skeletons has revealed an insight into the health of the middle Saxon population who clearly suffered periods of malnourishment and were subject to a wide range of infections indicative of lives of extreme hardship and often near-constant pain."

During the middle Saxon period England was divided into a number of kingdoms and Ratley may have been in a frontier war zone between the Saxon kingdom of the Hwicce and the eventually dominant Anglian kingdom of Mercia.

Resistivity Work

A small team of four has been surveying land near the current 'dig' at the Herb Centre, using geophysical resistivity equipment on loan from the Kenilworth History Society. The equipment can potentially detect and map subsurface archaeological features. The work involves marking-out a series of 20 metre square grids, followed by systematic probing along pre-marked lines in a zig-zag pattern, with readings collected by a data logger. This is downloaded onto a dedicated laptop and analysed using specialist software.

Adjacent 'grayscale' images from each grid can be aligned, enhanced and printed out to show areas of high and low resistivity. These images can be further processed to highlight areas of interest. A pattern of high resistance readings could indicate building foundations, whereas low resistance might suggest the organic deposits of a midden (a pit for domestic waste, associated with human occupation).

The survey involves good physical work - for each 20 metre square grid surveyed, the probe frame is lifted and moved 400 times. In the fresh air this must be better than a gym subscription! More members would be welcome to join us.
(Colin Clay)