

Sheepscombe 1-Metre Dig (4 August 2013) and Results

(7 April 2014. Written March/April 2014 by Hugh Tarran, with input from Roger Crowley & Mark Bowden)

With thanks to Mark Bowden for supervising this project and Duncan Brown, a pottery expert who works for English Heritage. Duncan worked through the finds to tell us exactly what we'd recovered. (History Society Meeting March 2014). Was it 1970s willow pattern or shards of Roman amphorae? The answer lay somewhere in between – but was absolutely fascinating.

The Dig

On a rainy August day village volunteers dug three small holes (1-metre square) in the gardens of Brooklands Cottage, Hazelhanger and Salutation. It seemed, at the time, a case of looking for needles in haystacks.

The Hazelhanger Dig

Hazelhanger is adjacent to Shetlands, the site of a medieval farm, and the garden of Salutation was also close to the farm and on a similar level to Hazelhanger. The maximum depth of excavation was 36cm. Few finds were found at Hazelhanger but it produced the most fascinating find of all – a dull piece of grey clay about an inch long. Duncan's eagle eye instantly identified this as medieval We'd chosen to dig at Hazelhanger as adjacent to Shetlands, the site of a medieval farm – and had come up with a small trump to confirm medieval people in Far End.



Photo 42.

Two clay pipes (one with two pieces)

Medieval pottery (fourteenth century).

*There were very few finds at Hazelhanger.
Depth dug xx cm.*

The Mill Dig at Brooklands

Mark selected the dig site using the 1820s plan of the mill, hoping to find evidence of a corner foundation of the mill. The final hole reached a depth of 50 cm and identified likely foundation stones of a mill building at 20cm depth. The extract material was mainly soil with a few stones.



(photos 23,44). The finds appeared mainly nineteenth century and included window glass and lead glazing bars, small coal fragments, pottery, china, bottle glass and a slate pencil.



Window glass (60 gm) and pieces of lead glazing bars. Probably nineteenth century. The glass is much thinner than current window glass – only 1/16th of an inch (1.5 mm approx). In all 110 gms of glass were found.

(Photos 57,60 crop. Not all finds shown)



Slate pencil

?shell-edged blue stoneware and white china? white?

Local red-glaze pottery

Various pieces of china and stoneware

Clay pipe, showing part of bowl. The smoking hole in the pipe is narrow, indicating a seventeenth century pipe The oldest find in this dig

Piece of green bottle glass

The Salutation Dig

The Salutation hole contained a bed of stones of 15-20 cm depth and appeared to be an area of hard-standing which could be a paddock area, farm-yard, road etc. The stone-layer started only 10-15 cm from the top of the grass. It appears at some time a light covering or soil was added above this 'yard' to create a grassed area. The depth of soil would not support vegetable growing. The maximum depth of the hole was 32 cm, a couple of cm below the stone level.



The spoil removed from the hole and the cut turf. The yellow bag has a pile of the removed stones on top, and both barrows contain stones. Possibly 30-50% of the removed material was stone

Photos 38,39,41



Above: The start (or near the top of) the stone layer

Left: This cross section shows the depth of the stone layer in the hole. The bottom is only just below the stone layer

The finds were many and mainly located within the stone layer, with very few below. They included pottery, china and stoneware galore – a wide spread of pieces spanning the eighteenth century – hefty chocolate-coloured chunks of thick glazed ware from cooking pots produced locally, through to more sophisticated pieces with wavy patterns in chocolate and cream and blue that were most likely produced in Bristol. There was also a selection of animal bones.

The mystery was that the pottery stopped pretty much dead at the nineteenth century. Either people gave up throwing crockery at one other, or more likely, some kind of stony path or the grassed/topsoil layer was added on top. Mark suggests the finds went into that build-up for a path/track or yard surface and date it fairly conclusively to the 18th century. When that surface went out of use soil was dumped or developed over it and it has seen little disturbance since, as what we were seeing was a fairly well sorted topsoil -- few stones near the surface, more stones just on top of the stony surface -- so the earthworms have been busy undisturbed for some time; i.e it is what you would expect of a well-established lawn.

Some of the Salutation Finds



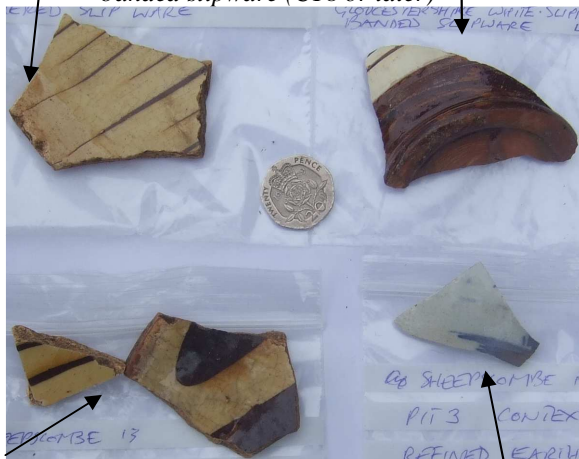
White Refined Earthenware –eighteenth or nineteenth century



Various Animal Bones

Feathered slipware

Gloucestershire white-slipped graffito banded slipware (C18 or later)



Feathered Slipware, possible Bristol, C18th Refined Earthenware



Local red clay pots, with red and black glaze. There were potters in Cranham and Painswick

This type of clay pot was typical for a long period from the thirteenth to nineteenth centuries.