LETTERS AND NOTES

FIELD EXCURSION TO THE STONEHENGE RIVERSIDE PROJECT
EXCAVATIONS, 11TH SEPTEMBER 2006

On a warm and sunny Sunday morning in September a strong contingent from the Lithic Studies Society converged on Durrington Walls, Wiltshire to visit the excavations of the Stonehenge Riverside Project. The project is under the joint directorship of Mike Parker Pearson, Josh Pollard, Chris Tilley, Julian Thomas, Colin Richards, and Kate Welham, and is currently in its third season of excavation with many more projected. The project represents renewed research into Stonehenge and aims to develop new interpretations of the monument by exploring the wider landscape and establishing relationships to surrounding monuments and natural features. The excavations have, to date, focussed on the massive henge monument of Durrington Walls, but this season also included excavations at Woodhenge and test-pit sieving beside Fargo Plantation, adjacent to the Stonehenge cursus.

Figure 1: A late Neolithic rectangular house with a large central hearth located in the interior of Durrington Walls (Image © Huge Lamdin-Whymark)

The day began with a visit to two trenches excavated by Julian Thomas in the interior of Durrington Walls, close to the western entrance of the henge. The excavations targeted two circular anomalies identified on geophysical surveys. These were proven to date from the late Neolithic and each encircled a rectangular house with central hearth (Figure 1). These houses were both surrounded by a palisade of small posts and the larger of the two encircling ditches
had two massive posts located close to the ditch terminus. Earlier in the season, Julian Thomas had completed excavations on part of the southern timber circle investigated by Geoffrey Wainwright in the 1960s and which was reconstructed in 2005, to dramatic effect, as part of a Time Team documentary on the project (Figure 2).

After negotiating the bypass, which since the 1960s has dissected Durrington Walls, the society visited Mike Parker Pearson’s excavations at the henge’s eastern entrance and were treated to a wonderfully comprehensive and animated site tour. The archaeology was simply outstanding, not least for the remarkable state of preservation. The excavations have revealed the remains of several rectangular structures, with intact floor surfaces, associated with a midden crammed with Durrington Walls-style Grooved Ware, animal bone, worked stone and

Figure 2: A reconstruction of the southern timber circle at Durrington Walls by moonlight (Image © Huge Lamdin-Whymark)
tens of thousands of flints (Figure 3). Members from the society also witnessed the discovery of a human mandible, which represents one of the few human bones recovered from the excavations. The trenches also exposed a wide avenue, metalled with flint, leading from Durrington Walls towards the river Avon, which represents part of the processional route to Stonehenge, long sought by Mike Parker Pearson.

At Woodhenge, Josh Pollard guided the society around his re-excavation of some of Maud Cunnington’s postholes and a large stone socket at the rear of the monument. The excavations have revealed some undisturbed stratigraphy and new stone sockets, suggesting that the stone phase of the monument was more elaborate than speculated in Cunnington’s report. A second trench through the henge bank revealed evidence of pre-henge activity in the form of a tree-throw hole filled with a rich deposit including Carinated Bowl pottery.

A selection of artefacts from the excavations were examined over lunch, whilst Phil Harding knapped in the background, keeping the crowds enthralled as they attended one of the many public open days held over the excavation season. The artefacts examined included a selection of oblique arrowheads and flint implements, from the massive assemblage amounting to tens of thousands of pieces, including over 200 arrowheads which are now being analysed by Ben Chan at Sheffield University. A selection of worked stone tools, bone pins and pottery was also viewed.

Following lunch, the tour processed past Stonehenge and visited Colin Richards’ test-pits.
alongside Fargo Plantation and the Stonehenge Cursus. The test-pits sought to locate a scatter of bluestone purportedly found in the 1930s and 1940s, but bluestones were proving elusive. The test-pits had however revealed an extensive scatter of late Neolithic and early Bronze Age flintwork and pottery. It was here the tour was concluded and members left to explore the Stonehenge landscape for themselves.

On behalf of the Lithic Studies Society, I would like to thank the Stonehenge Riverside Project team for such a fascinating day and particularly Mike Parker Pearson, Josh Pollard and Colin Richards for such an enthralling insight into their excavations and new interpretations of the Stonehenge landscape. Further details of the excavations and interim reports are available from the Sheffield University website:

http://www.shef.ac.uk/archaeology/research/stonehenge

Hugo Lamdin-Whymark

JOHN WYMER BURSARY 2007

The first of the John Wymer bursaries (for 2007) were awarded earlier this year to Adrian Evans (Division of Archaeological, Environmental and Geographical Sciences, University of Bradford) and Karen Ruebens (Centre for the Archaeology of Human Origins, University of Southampton).

Adrian’s bursary is supporting his microwear analysis of a Mesolithic assemblage from Runnymede Bridge. This assemblage represents a microlith cluster, and Adrian’s analysis is a unique opportunity to study what could potentially be individual multi-hafted tools or a location of re-tooling. The bursary is funding the travel costs associated with preliminary analysis of the assemblage, and analytical expenses.

Karen’s bursary is supporting her analysis of the Sesselfels collection. The Sesselfelsgrotte (Germany) is a key cave site for understanding the relationships between the Mousterian and Micoquian industries, as it contains stratified assemblages of both industries, dating to OIS 3. The bursary is funding travel and subsistence costs associated with the analysis of the collections.

Short reports by Adrian and Karen on their work will be published in a future volume of Lithics.

Lithic Studies Society Committee