

Interim Report of the Rainbow Bar Community Research Project

The Excavation at Crofton Hammond Junior School **13 -17 June 2022**

Paul Ramsay with Ivan Gray.

Alex Walker (HCT), Alexander Cook, Holly Baker (MsC students at the University of Southampton) and Elly Lawrence (volunteer) comprised the RBCRP team.

Staff at Crofton Hammond Junior were enthusiastic and supportive, with particular mention of the Head Teacher Ali Russell, Year Teacher Elizabeth Gore and Teaching Assistant Hazel Kimberley for their input.

Overview

The excavation at Crofton Hammond Junior School was conducted by the Rainbow Bar Community Research Project in partnership with staff and year 4 students, between the 13th and 17th of June 2022. It was the second school excavation project undertaken in line with the 2021 Alan Saville Legacy grant awarded by the Lithics Studies Society. Please cross reference this interim report with the Excavation Proposal and the final report of the Wicor Primary School excavation in November 2021 for full background details and outline of the general curriculum intent and design of the Crofton Hammond Junior School excavation. The Year 4 cohort size was approximately 60 students. The full report will be published in January 2023 following completion of the post excavation work in partnership with Southampton Young Archaeologists' Club.

Context

Review of the historical mapping shows that the Crofton Hammond Schools' site (comprising the separate Junior and Infant campuses) occupies land that was previously agricultural and that the schools' grounds are co-terminus with historic field boundaries. The land was used for soft fruit (strawberry) production dating back to the late C19th. This exploited the fast rail connection to London and the markets there. Prior to this, wheat, barley, turnips and oats were grown. Military use during the second World War, and in particular the martialling of Allied troops in the lead up to the D Day landings, may also have been a temporary but significant land use.

Crofton Hammond Schools opened in 1973 since when the land has seen no further development.

Method

The original excavation plan was to open up two trenches: with a 3m x 4m primary trench excavated stratigraphically to natural, and 1m x 3m secondary trench across what appeared in aerial photography to be a rectangular feature. In the event, the ground conditions were such that it was only practical to spit dig at 10cm increment a 1m x 1.5m primary trench. The ecological analysis, although undertaken, was limited by the excessively dry conditions that were already present in early summer 2022. In addition to the excavation, two new activities were added to support the learning experience for the year cohort: first a human skeleton 'excavation' and bone identification activity, and second a timeline activity. The former of these activities used a plastic, full size medical anatomy skeleton placed in pre-prepared trenches and partially re-covered with spoil to allow easy exposure and recovery by students. The timeline activity used the school 100m running track along with pre-prepared materials to physically realise the timescale back to the lower Paleolithic era.

Findings

Stratigraphy was linear with no cuts or features identified. Description of the degree of compaction of all layers was problematic given the drought conditions, thus this criterion is omitted from the descriptors. Layer (001), 8-10cm deep, was a dark greyish brown sandy silt with nil inclusions and represents the humus build up since 1973. Below this, layer (002), approximately 8cm thick, was a mid brown sandy silt with dark brown organic inclusions and is interpreted as the soft fruit growing medium. The only small find (a Queen Elizabeth II 5 Pence coin date 1975) was found at the interface of (001) and (002). Layer (003), 8-10cm thick, was a dark yellowy brown sandy loam with a high density¹ of flint, coal, charcoal, pottery, glass, brick, tile and ferrous object inclusion. The pottery fragments (with one possible exception) are all post-medieval of late Georgian and Victorian date. The current proposition is that this was imported destruction material intentionally deposited for drainage improvement to support soft fruit production rather than indicative of

habitation adjacent to the trial pit. Layer (004) was light brownish yellow silty sand consistent with the anticipated natural surface of a superficial river terrace deposit (Undifferentiated) of sand, silt and clay –predominantly sand and gravel with local lenses of silt, clay or peat (British Geological Survey data, 2022).

Conclusion

Subject to full analysis of the artefacts retrieved particularly from (003), the excavation found evidence consistent with the post-medieval agriculture processes of the locality but no evidence of occupation or land use prior to this era. Thus whilst the much reduced scale of the excavation still served the pedagogical purpose well, it provided too limited a picture to draw broad sweeping conclusions. If the opportunity to rerun the activity with next year's Year 4 cohort arises and ground conditions permit, then a more detailed understanding can be developed. It nonetheless provides focus for further desk-based research into land improvement strategies in the locality to facilitate the significant shift in agricultural production from what would have been low yield, mainly cereal cropping to a highly profitable activity.

1 Preparation and full analysis of this material will be part of the collaboration with Southampton YAC.