

## Book Review

### **LIVING WITH MONUMENTS: EXCAVATIONS AT FLIXTON – VOLUME II, BY STUART BOULTER**

*East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 177, 2022. 339 pages, 137 figs, 35 photos, pb, ISBN 978-0-9934545-8-5, (£35).*

A bi-product of the ongoing plethora of mineral extraction quarries across East Anglia in the last 30 years has been the archaeological investigation of landscapes in rural areas. The ongoing publication of the excavations at Flixton Park Quarry in the valley of the River Waveney demonstrates extremely well the breadth of evidence that may be brought to light, and provides an excellent example of how this evidence can be disseminated to an archaeological audience. It presents high degrees of detail and good regional discussion, yet invites the reader to interrogate and question the evidence further. Volume 2 contains chapters dedicated to the prehistoric (Ch.3), late Iron Age/Early Roman and Roman (Ch.4), Early Anglo-Saxon (Ch.5), and Medieval to post-Medieval periods (Ch.6), which superficially provide a straightforward chronological narrative around which to navigate the volume. However, the introduction carefully explains the extent of the different areas of the excavation and signposts their respective results, including the division of these results between the previously published Volume 1 and the forthcoming Volume 3. It is clearly explained that for financial reasons, the publication of the site had to be divided thus, therefore the reader should be aware that the three end-volumes should be used in conjunction with one another. Results from contemporary periods are divided across volumes. For prehistorians, this includes Neolithic pits, early Bronze Age ring-ditches and a barrow, and Bronze Age to Early Iron Age structures and pits in Volume 1.

Focussing solely on Volume 2, Chapter 3 on the Prehistoric period includes an early Neolithic long barrow, late Neolithic pits, early Bronze Age ring ditches and pits. The presentation of each of these components is first class, emphasised by the provision of the textual description, figures and sections that are such an admirable strength of East Anglian Archaeology volumes. This is aptly demonstrated by the clear plan of the early Neolithic long barrow supplemented by multiple section drawings, demonstrating the numerous ditch fills that support the textual arguments for its phased construction. The text also provides a good discussion of associated artefact distributions and dating

evidence, with some use of this data on the graphical representations perhaps the only minor enhancement that might be desired. It is also noted that the Optical Luminescence Dating provided anomalous dates from multiple samples, the latest of which was in the Mesolithic period, and while it is noted there were reasons to dismiss this discrepancy, the reader may benefit from slightly more justification, though this no reason to doubt its veracity. Immediately reflecting; these are very minor comments on an excellent presentation of the excavation of a long barrow. The subsequent presentation of Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pits containing either Grooved Ware or Beaker pottery is straightforward and acknowledges the limitations of defining chronology absolutely by these markers, though as on many sites in the region there are no obvious artefact groups that demonstrate the co-existence of the two ceramic traditions. Structural groups are clearly picked out, as they are for succeeding Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pits. As with the long barrow, the details of the early Bronze Age ring ditches, equating to ploughed out barrows with one or both of either inhumated or cremated remains are presented with a degree of detail designed to enable analysis and comparison by the reader. This archaeological narrative/description is followed, within the chapter, by detailed non-synthesised specialist reports. While perhaps slightly more linkage could be made to these reports in the preceding narrative and more-so some of the figures, to have the breadth of these reports presented like this is a pleasure. The depth of the analysis of fabric, form type and deposition with regard the prehistoric pottery must be saluted as a model of what can be achieved. Parallels with regional assemblages, many of which were constrained by being recorded many decades ago, are maximised, while the decision to invest in illustrations that integrate line drawing and sherd photos pays off in all the additional information conveyed. The form types and decoration presented on the Grooved Ware and Beaker pottery in particular may not be new in the East Anglian repertoire, but the manner in which they are presented should be a model for future projects, perhaps with each period (i.e. early Neolithic) presented alongside the pertinent features (i.e. the long barrow and pits). It is, however, acknowledged that this would require further specialist and editorial time. The specialist reports on the animal bone, environmental remains and struck flint present similar exemplary detail, including discussion divided by association with Grooved ware and Beaker pottery and a concise discussion of the conclusions of this comparison.

The prehistoric small finds may lack the volume of other prehistoric artefact types, but are of intrinsic interest because of their character. They include an early Neolithic ‘monster bead’ and early Bronze Age faience beads, including a star-shaped pendant and necklace. Their importance is highlighted by the depth of specialist and scientific analysis and discussion, but perhaps underplayed by only simple line-drawn figures, lacking either plates or integrated photos, as in the section on pottery vessels. Smaller reports on loom weights and querns are provided, while the report on the

human remains, including cremated remains from four urned cremations and five un-urned cremations is necessarily constrained by the paucity of the evidence. The chapter on prehistory concludes with a relatively lengthy but easy to follow discussion (enhanced by judicious sub-headings to aid navigation). This brings together the varying strands of narrative and artefactual analysis into a clear picture of the local landscape, presented relative to the site and the river valley, as well as the East Anglian context. At appropriate intervals the discussion veers into academic and theoretical themes, but it remains concise and focussed, such as in discussing Neolithic monuments in the landscape, or the structure and orientation of late Bronze Age roundhouses. In all, the prehistoric archaeology accounts for 151 pages of the 339 pages that make up this multi-period volume, making a significant contribution to the archaeology of the region. It is presented in a fashion that is both highly satisfactory to read and of a high level of detail that allows comparison and critical thinking relative to past and future archaeological investigations in this region and beyond.

Chapter 4 on the late Iron Age/early Roman and Roman periods presents evidence for two foci of activity in the southern area of the site, each associated with substantive post-built structures. The phasing/dating is slightly broad and arbitrary due to the limitations of the artefactual evidence, but the bulk of the evidence is assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> to early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD, potentially including the decades preceding the Roman Conquest. The three, curiously consistent post-built structures are all relatively large: 14 x 11 m, 8.5 x 8.5 m, and 11 x 8 m, each with 3 or 4 aisles, and 5-6 large posts per side/aisle. Also present was a multiple inhumation grave, numerous pits and two pottery kilns that include fixed pedestals (one split) and large rake pits, with associated evidence for perforated clay plates. A detailed discussion and illustration of the local coarse wares produced by the two kilns is presented, including the complications of mis-fired sandy/gritty wares common across kilns in Suffolk, but it is the range of form types that holds most interest. Notably they include dishes with bead-and-flange rims or grooved rims that suggest a date from the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards, associated with archaeomagnetic dates of *c.* AD 90-150 and AD 285-450, and although the presence of earlier (mixed) material is noted, a firmer assertion of a late Roman date might have been made. Certainly, the presence of rusticated, stabbed and roulette decorated jars, and bifid rim jars bears close comparison with late Roman kilns at Hacheston, Wattisfield and the Nar Valley (north-west Norfolk). Comparisons beyond the typology developed for Colchester, however, remain rather sparse and have the potential to be explored further; nevertheless the actual evidence is presented in great detail. As in the prehistoric chapter, the presence of ‘un-synthesised’ specialist reports is both welcome and very useful, including a report on late Iron Age coins that comprise two gold staters and two silver units (as well as contemporary Colchester derivative brooches), with the former gold coins perhaps dating to the initial decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. These further support a pre-Roman Conquest

commencement of occupation and further invite the reader to pose chronological questions (an invitation extended in the introduction to the site phasing). The overall discussion of the Roman phase of the site takes a significant but informative step away from the archaeological narrative, focussing on the character of the rural settlement as well as potential tribal and military connotations. It includes well-thought through arguments on the post-built structures being *'horrea'* or copies of Roman granaries, potentially of Roman military origin, and on craft/industry, notably how local pottery production aligns with production in Norfolk and Suffolk. Intriguingly, there appears to be more consideration of the implications of vessel types relative to other industries and chronology than is in the specialist report on the pottery from the kilns (text may have been moved). An argument for a more extended period of pottery production is less than convincing, given the proximity of early Roman deposits, which may have been re-deposited and backfilled into the derelict kilns.

The final 'major' section is Chapter 5 on the early Anglo-Saxon period, specifically an area of settlement in the northern part of the site, with reports on two contemporary cemeteries presented separately in Volume 1. The settlement included six wall-post buildings or 'halls', five other post-built buildings and thirteen sunken-featured buildings; all reported on with the same level of rigour, detail and illustration that was so admired of the prehistoric monuments and structures in this volume. These structures provided a modest assemblage of early Anglo-Saxon pottery compared to many domestic sites in the region, including plain, bossed and stamped vessels; and the report includes a very useful breakdown of specific groups from structures. Similarly, a modest assemblage of small finds receives ample specialist reporting, and include brooches, a coin pendant, wrist clasps and ceramic spindle whorls. The concluding discussion on the Saxon chapter is a fascinating consideration of the character, layout and construction of early Saxon settlements, focussing on Suffolk (unsurprisingly given the wealth of evidence). It includes notes on the lifespans of structures and their relationships with cemeteries, although it wisely refrains from speculating further on questions of population and settlement size, as this settlement clearly extended beyond the confines of the area of excavation.

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*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor.*