

## Cox Bank 2013

The society is investigating a burnt mound near Uttoxeter.

A burnt mound is typically a mound of heat shattered stones and charcoal, associated with a trough and a hearth. It is assumed that the trough was filled with water and heated stones dropped into the water to heat the water. Some of the mounds are large, indicating a long period of use, and may have had several troughs and hearths.

They are typically from the middle to late bronze age. This is very true for the recorded mounds in the west midlands. The carbon dates we have for the two near Uttoxeter are both centred around 1300 BC.

The geophysics performed at Cox Bank clearly indicated the area of burnt stones and charcoal. This was true for the resistivity and the magnetometry. However the area of the mound had been ridge and furrow ploughed, this tends to spread the area of stones and charcoal. The geophysics shows lots of anomalies within the area of the mound. These anomalies have now been all investigated. Most were areas where there were heavy concentrations of charcoal (we are not very sure how to interpret these). One anomaly was, what we are sure was, a post hole (quite an important feature). Finally we discovered a trough (probably 2 troughs, but the second one will be investigated next year).

The trough is interesting and unusual. It is large 2.7 metres by nearly a metre and approximately 50 cms deep. It clearly had vertical posts in the corners (probably holding horizontal rails in place to prevent the sides from collapsing). It also looks like the floor was timber lined, with continuous planks or split timber about 10 cms wide running the length of the trough.

There is continuing discussion about the use made of the hot water from the troughs. The most persistent are cooking and the sauna ideas. However some of the newer ideas: brewing; wood bending; and shrinking leather to cover items like shields; are gaining support.

The extreme length of the Cox Bank trough would make some of the above ideas less likely.

Normally in England the burnt mounds are not associated with an occupation site. At Cox Bank there is increasing evidence of occupation although this may not be contemporary with the use of the site as a burnt mound. Certainly the trough seems to have been partially covered with a "floor" or working surface. It appears the trough was cleared out after its last use, then remained open for a short while (only a thin layer of silt built up in the bottom), before being filled and covered over with a very compact "floor" layer.

The finds from this years dig are quite interesting as follows:

Flints:

A broken barb from an arrow head, this is covered with tiny pressure flakings. This has to be bronze age;

A scraper, this was found in an area of small water rounded pebbles pressed into the natural clay;

A possible broken aard.

Chert:

A thumb nail scraper.

Sandstone:

A sharpening stone (whetstone).

Pottery:

A fragment of a large (cooking?) pot. The fabric of this has large white inclusions. It was found in soil above what we think was a bronze age floor.

Observations:

Interestingly, there was no soil beneath the mound of stones and charcoal which sat directly on the subsoil. There are indications of possible bronze age ploughing (triangular section grooves in the subsoil).

So, was the plough soil all removed from the area to be used for dumping the heat shattered stones and charcoal before the trough came into use?

Background to the use of Burnt Mounds:

In the West Midlands the investigated burnt mounds seem to belong to a consistent period approximately 1600 to 800 B.C. Mike Hodder suggests that this period is significant being the time between two periods of stress. The first period is caused by a rapid deterioration of the climate to a cooler wetter one. The second was the result of lack of good agricultural land, this is indicated by deforestation and the digging of boundary ditches.

Future:

It is hoped that we will be able to return next year to dig the second trough. We also want to see if we can find more evidence of bronze age occupation on the site. More resistivity and a reappraisal of the existing geophysical results will be done before any new excavation.