# Buckland Rings 2016 Excavation Project Report

**New Forest National Park Authority** 

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with contributions from Dr A D Russel

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Excavation Buckland Rings 2016

Excavation at Buckland Rings

Accession Number LMGLM 2018.30 St Barbe Museum, Lymington. Hants AHBR Site Number: 21843 National Monument Number: 1008706. Historic England List entry Number: Parish: Lymington and Pennington: National Grid Reference: SZ 31487 96850

#### Summary

The archaeological work resulted from a long-term wish by Hampshire County Council site land managers to underground electrical cables adjacent to the Buckland Rings Scheduled Monument to improve the landscape and visual setting of the monument. Initial archaeological observation work of trenches excavated to establish ground conditions in advance of using a mole plough to insert the cables indicated that the trench closest to the site boundary with the A337 highway to the east contained a developed soil containing fragments of medieval pottery. A small hand-excavated archaeological trench was excavated in June 2016 (see Fig. 1) to recover a better sample of ceramics and to take soil samples. The ceramics were reported on by A D Russel; see Appendix 1. The soil samples were processed by volunteers as part of a training exercise through the New Forest 'Our Past Our Future' Heritage Lottery Funded Landscape Partnership Scheme. The work took place in the offices of the Southampton City Archaeological Unit under the present author's supervision. The evidence indicates that the lower slopes of Buckland Rings were taken into cultivation probably by the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Recent geophysical work has confirmed the presence of field boundaries in this area; see discussion below.



Figure1 Site location

# Background

The work was instigated between the Hampshire County Council land managers and The Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN). The initial observation work was to be undertaken by the present author in the absence of any funding arrangements for archaeological work then being available. The scheme that was developed in March 2013 by SSEN was instigated in early 2016 and SSEN contributed £1,000 towards the cost of the excavation project.

Plate 2 shows the contractor's trench excavated on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016 situated close to the boundary with the A337 highway. The trench was excavated to establish the ground conditions for the subsequent use of a mole plough. From this location the new cable was to be placed in a machine cut trench and then from the adjacent hedge line was to be placed into a conduit that had previously been inserted under the A337.

The machine excavation removed the top soil in spits of about 200mm. Hand troweling of each spit revealed small quantities of abraded unglazed medieval pottery. The initial assumption being that the material originated from manuring associated with past use of the land for arable purposes.

It was considered that a small controlled excavation where the cable trench was to be excavated from the end of the mole ploughing to the conduit positioned in the adjacent hedge could provide a more useful sample of ceramics and that the recovery of soil samples might provide a clearer indication of any plant species or other biological materials that might survive in the developed soil. Any results could add to our knowledge of the more recent use of the land adjacent to the Buckland Rings hillfort.

Discussions took place with SSEN and the HCC land manager and it was agreed that excavation could take place on Thursday the 9<sup>th</sup> and Friday the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The excavated trench was immediately to the east of the contractors evaluation trench Plate 2.The work was undertaken by the NFNPA archaeologists and the Park's seasonal rangers.

# **Site Location**

The Scheduled Monument is Centred on NGR SZ 31487 96850 within the New Forest National Park approximately 750m west of Lymington River (Figure1) and under 1km north of the town of Lymington. The Scheduled Monument lies between the roads leading to Brockenhurst from Lymington; the A337 and the Sway Road.

# Geology

The underlying bed rock geology of the site is sand of the Barton Sand Formation in the east, and Headon and Osbourne beds (undifferentiated) in the west of the site (Figure 4. British Geological Survey 2011). The site lies on a flat-topped upstanding

knoll, 90 feet above sea-level, situated on a gravelly ridge that extends from Burley down to the Lymington River (Hawkes 1936, 125-127).

# **Site Description**

The hillfort location is described in detail by Hawkes (1936, 125). The area comprises an area partly of open grassland with a tree lined boundary to the highway on the east side. The excavated trench was located within an area of open grassland, the land use that characterises most of the site.

The adjacent scheduled monument is defined as a small multivallate hillfort, such forts are characterized as "fortified enclosures of varying shape, generally between 1ha and 5ha in size and located on hilltops" (Historic England 2017).

# Introduction

One of the earliest records that recognised Buckland Rings as a significant landscape monument was published in the transactions of the Royal Society consisting of a letter from Mr Thomas Wright to James Theobald in 1744. (Vol 43; 273-275 and the associated Plate). The site was subsequently referred to in a wide range of publications and these have been summarised and reproduced in Buckland An Anthology (Marsh 1991, 1). The site was regularly referred to as being of Roman date and often as Buckland castle in antiquarian publications. The seminal publication An introduction to Field Archaeology in Hampshire by J P Williams Freeman (1915, 209-2010) describes the site as a plateau fort and clearly pre-Roman in date. The site is further discussed by Heywood Sumner in The Ancient Earthworks of the New Forest (1917, 5-19). Excavations were conducted on the site by Christopher Hawkes in July 1935 (Hawkes 1936, 124-164). In 1985 a watching brief on a water pipeline to the south of the Scheduled Monument was undertaken by Rosemary Cook (1985) and this work and the finds were reported in the Newsletter of the New Forest Section of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society and details were also reported in the Buckland Anthology (Marsh 1991, 31-32).

Most recently a comprehensive geophysical survey has been undertaken of much of the interior of the Buckland Rings Scheduled Monument. The work also extended outside the scheduled monument and included the grassland and the area of the excavation (Hagen, Shaw, Brown, 2017).

# The Excavation

This was conducted in dry weather and excavation conditions were good, with only a light fall of rain as backfilling concluded on the 10<sup>th</sup> June.

A trench 3.5 metres by 1.5 metres was laid out between the contractors evaluation trench (Plate 2) and the site boundary in a generally east-west orientation. The trench was located in the area that was to be subsequently excavated by SSE for their

cabling. The trench was entirely hand excavated and all finds were recovered from the turf-line downwards. The trench was sub-divided for training purposes (Plate 1). The intervening balk was fully excavated and all finds recovered.

The soil structure consisted of a light brown sandy matrix with a high silt content. Soil samples of 5 litres each in total 30 litres were removed from the 3 identified contexts for subsequent processing. Whilst nearly 150 sherds were recovered from this small excavation it was noticeable that charcoal was virtually absent and only consisted of highly abraded fragments mostly less than 2mm in size. Animal bone was completely absent other than small fragments associated with modern glass and brick in the turf horizon.



Plate 1 trench looking west



Plate 2 Contractors evaluation trench looking north

#### Results

The excavation has revealed nearly one metre of developed plough soil on the lower east facing slope at Buckland Rings. The significant depth may reflect the proximity of the adjacent site boundary and the build-up of soil lynchet-like. The plough soil contains what might be considered a higher than expected density of abraded medieval ceramics most likely associated with manuring of the field system for which boundaries were located through geophysics in 2017 (see Fig 2). The evidence indicates that the fields were probably heavily manured throughout the earlier medieval period from around the 11<sup>th</sup> to possibly the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.



Plate 2 Field system outlined in red from geophysics work 2017.

# Conclusion

The recent excavation and geophysical work has added in a small way to our knowledge about the use of the site and landscape in the medieval period. The land formed part of Buckland manor. The pottery suggests that the manuring was not associated with domestic refuse of high social status and probably represents waste from manorial tenants farming the land.

In the event that further undergrounding of electric cables is proposed for the site then it would potentially be worthwhile if possible to examine in more detail the field boundaries located by the geophysical work.

# Acknowledgments

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New Forest National Park Authority archaeologists. James Brown, Lawrence Shaw.

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# Appendix 1

# Buckland Rings 2016 pottery report

By Dr AD Russel BA PhD MCIfA

#### 1. Introduction

Archaeological work around Buckland Rings in 2016 produced pottery from trenching for an electric cable close to Buckland Rings hill fort. Further pottery was recovered

from observations on the digging of a post-hole, and from fieldwalking. The three groups will be reported on separately.

# 2. The cable trench pottery

An assemblage of 160 sherds weighing 1199g were recovered. Although recovered from a number of layers all the pottery dates from the medieval period, and shows signs of much abrasion, and it is considered that all the contexts were part of a colluvial deposit and therefore the pottery has been treated as a single group.

The pottery was sorted into fabrics with the aid of a binocular microscope at x10 and x40. Eleven fabrics were identified. They have been allocated codes based on the inclusions added to the clay during manufacture. Ten fabrics containing predominantly quartz sand were allocated fabrics Q1 to Q10, one fabric that contained distinctive flint inclusions was allocated code F1. Quantities of each fabric, including pottery recovered from soil samples, are shown in Table 1.

	No of	Wt in		
Fabric	sherds	g	No %	Wt %
Q1	125	949	78.1	79.1
Q2	6	61	3.8	5.1
Q3	1	2	0.6	0.2
Q4	1	4	0.6	0.3
Q5	2	5	1.3	0.4
Q6	1	4	0.6	0.3
Q7	1	6	0.6	0.5
Q8	13	137	8.1	11.4
Q9	6	19	3.8	1.6
Q10	2	3	1.3	0.3
F1	2	9	1.3	0.8
Total	160	1199		

Table 1. Quantities of fabrics present in the cable trench assemblage.

## 2.1 The Fabrics

### Q1

A total of 125 sherds were present, the majority of the pottery collected. It was manufactured from a fine silty clay to which were added coarse quartz sand and occasional flint grits. The proportion of sand ranged from rare to abundant which could indicate subdivisions within the group but there was a continuous spectrum with no obvious steps. The quartz grains were ill-sorted, sub-rounded, with some polished grains, and were up to 2.6mm in size. The flint grits (small white patinated pebbles) were up to 3.2mm in size. The sherd colour ranges from dark grey to red, with the majority a pale buff (10YR 7/4). The vessels include cooking pots (7 rims), some with exterior sooting, and jugs (one glazed handle and one thumbed base). The cooking pot rim forms range from simple everted rims to better finished squared-off examples, which can be matched with those found on Anglo-Norman (1066-1250) coarseware forms in Southampton (Brown 2002, fig 6). The jug handle is of strap-type. The thumbed jug base is sooted where the jug has been used over a fire to heat the contents.

#### Q2

Six sherds in a clay tempered with abundant quartz grains up to 0.55mm in size. The quartz is sub-rounded, with some polished grains. There are occasional larger milky, clear and pink grains up to 1mm in size. All the sherds are oxidised red, and probably come from a single cooking pot, which shows signs of sooting on two sherds. The rim form is an 'eared' form, found on Southampton Coarsewares during the High Medieval period (1250-1350) (Brown 2002, fig 8).

#### Q3

A single body sherd, form unknown, in a fine sandy fabric. The temper is well-sorted quartz sand consisting of sub-rounded grains up to 0.24mm in size with occasional larger quartz grains and fragments of flint up to 1.6mm in size. An Anglo-Norman or High Medieval date is likely.

# Q4

A single sherd from the basal angle of a vessel, which sooting on the base suggests is a cooking pot, but the sherd is only 4mm thick so may come from a jug or tripod pitcher. The clay was tempered with abundant, ill-sorted, sub-rounded quartz grains up to 0.73mm in size with occasional fragments of flint of the same size. An Anglo-Norman or High Medieval date is likely.

# Q5

Two sherds oxidised red. A fine sandy fabric with abundant, well-sorted, sub-rounded and polished, quartz grains up to 0.24mm in size. A High Medieval date is likely.

# Q6

A single sherd from a pale brown, green-glazed jug. The clay includes numerous tiny red clay pellets and was tempered with common sub-rounded, polished quartz grains up to 0.5mm in size. A High Medieval date is likely.

# Q7

A single sherd, probably from a jug. The clay is tempered with abundant, well-sorted, sub-rounded and polished, clear quartz grains up to 0.24mm in size. There are occasional larger quartz grains up to 1mm in size, and occasional soot-lined voids where organic matter has partially burnt out. A High Medieval date is likely.

# Q8

A group of 13 well-fired sherds, 12 from jugs, with one sooted base possibly from a cooking pot. Seven of the sherds are glazed, and three of those show lightly incised group of lines made by a three-tooth comb beneath the glaze. A jug with similar decoration has been dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> century in Southampton (Platt and Coleman-Smith 1975 fig 150, no 418). The clay is tempered with abundant, well-sorted quartz grains up to 0.2mm in size, with occasional grains up to 0.5mm. A High Medieval date is likely.

# Q9

Six sherds in a fabric characterised by abundant sub-rounded, cloudy quartz grains up to 0.26mm in diameter, with occasional well-rounded and polished grains of the same size. Three sherds have the distinctive surface of Anglo-Norman 'scratch marked'

wares, and another sherd has a glazed surface suggesting it comes from an Anglo-Norman tripod pitcher.

# Q10

Two sherds in an pink, iron-rich clay marked by small black iron flecks and larger red iron lumps up to 1.4mm in size, with abundant quartz up to 0.1mm in size. One sherd has a bright lead glaze, and the edge of what is probably an applied clay pellet. The fabric and decoration match the fabric known in Southampton as 'South Hampshire Redware' which has been found in Southampton, Winchester, Portsmouth and Romsey in High Medieval contexts (Brown 2002, 14-15).

# F1

Two sherds, probably from cooking pots, in a silty clay matrix tempered with fine, wellsorted, sub-rounded quartz grains up to 0.3mm with added coarser quartz sand, white quartz grits, and red and black flint grits up to 2mm in size. The distinctive flint temper places these sherds in the Late Saxon to Anglo-Norman period, *c*.850-1100 (Brown 2002, 9).

# 3. The post-hole observation pottery

Eleven sherds of pottery, weighing 110g, were recovered from the post-hole. They are all in fabric Q1. Nine sherds come from a large cooking pot-type vessel, although there are no signs of sooting, so it may have been used for some other use such as storage. The other two sherds come from the body of a large vessel, and exhibit three finger impressions, probably where a handle was smoothed into the body, and perhaps come from a pitcher.

# 4. The fieldwalking pottery

The fieldwalking pottery consisted of 25 sherds, all very abraded. Two sherds weighing 28g, came from thin-walled, wheel-thrown vessels in near-white fabrics, and they are perhaps from Roman flagons. Sixteen sherds weighing 290g are in medieval fabric Q1, with diagnostic sherds showing cooking pots and jugs were present. One thick heavy everted rim is probably Anglo-Norman. Two sherds in a coarse sandy fabric Q2 probably also came from medieval cookpots, one seems to be a squared-off everted rim. Also present were five sherds of early post-medieval wares comprising 4 sherds of early Verwood, and a sherd that is probably from a Spanish olive oil jar. The latter has a purple and white organic coating and traces of marine growth that suggest it has been in the sea until recently.

## Discussion

Recent work at a site north of Alexandra Road, some 500m to the southwest, has recovered abraded sherds of fabric Q1 and Q9 from manuring of fields that probably belonged to Buckland Manor Farm in the medieval period.

The pottery recovered in 2016 suggests a long-lived medieval settlement lies nearby, with its origins around the time of the Conquest, and given the lack of Late Medieval wares, lasting probably until the time of the Black Death. The pottery is all domestic in character, with cooking pots and jugs, and the majority was probably made locally. Two fabrics are likely to be imported into the area, the scratchmarked ware Q9, and the South Hampshire Redware Q10. There were none of the French wares that are commonly found in Southampton, suggesting the site was not of high status nor occupied by a merchant.

# Appendix 2

# By F J Green BA Phil MSc MCIfA IHBC

Three soil samples were taken of approximately 10 litres each from the excavated horizons to recover any biological or artefactual materials they might contain. The samples were processed in the Southampton City Council's Archaeological Unit's office and the work was undertaken by volunteers as a training exercise.

Standard techniques were used to process the samples involving hydrogen peroxide to disaggregate the soil matrix. The floated portions of the samples were recovered in a 500 micron mesh sieve and the residues were water sieved through a 1mm sieve.

Once dry the 'flots' were examined using a binocular microscope at x10 and x30 magnifications and the residues were visually examined for any finds. No biological materials were located in the 'flots' and only very small ceramic fragments were recovered from the residues.

The absence of any biological materials, in particular the absence of charred plant remains was disappointing and has not added to our knowledge of the range and types of crops, their health and any associated weed flora from the Medieval period in the New Forest.

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