

# THE DRIFT ROAD MYSTERY

THE FORGOTTEN WORKSHOP OF MAIDEN NEWTON



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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

BY

DORSET DIGGERS COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP



## **Acknowledgements**

This programme of excavation was allowed by the landowner, Mr John Sargent. We would like to thank Mr Andy Eliot for the initial identification of the site.

The excavation was carried out by site supervisor Chris Tripp and Dorset Diggers members Cyn & Alan 'Ben' Bennett, Catherine Bramble, Angela Carman, Richard Cosgreave, Ania Driver, Jenny Ford, Ann Fudger, Doug Hislop, Pat Marler, Peter May, Rachel Mowbray, Paul Sargent, Lawrence Shillingford, Chris Simmons, Brian Squibb, Leah Wallbank, Dave Wicken, Vaughan and Alison Williams and Susan Wreford plus non-member volunteers.

The archive was collated and all post-excavation processes were undertaken by members of DDCAG. A special mention for members Brian Squibb and Jenny Ford for archiving finds.



## Beginnings

The Dorset Diggers Community Archaeology Group was set up in 2012 to work in the community so as to facilitate the study of Dorset's deeper past. That means that we are not just a hobby group, out to satisfy our own longing to make contact with past people through their lost artefacts, but to actively engage local communities in doing all aspects of research into that past. Wherever we work as many people as possible will know what we are doing and have the chance to visit or actively participate in unearthing the story of their local landscape.

Out of this ethos came our first major project in Maiden Newton. I was sitting in the village cafe having a quiet coffee (I avoid the noisy ones) when Andy Elliot, who's family have lived in the village for some generations, came up to me and asked if I would be interested in looking at a mysterious structure up on the right of the Drift Road lane. We made an arrangement to do so and a few days later we walked up the lane and through a gate, whereupon I saw what looked like an uninspiring water trough. From the trough a narrow bank of grass ran towards the hedge lining the lane and was obviously not natural. From the first examination it was obvious that the trough was made from brick skimmed with concrete, so not that old at first glance; but I am used to digging sites that have features going back thousands of years. From the style of brick I thought that the structure was probably about one hundred years old. The site was covered with bramble but the sheep had kept the grass down, so that made it easier to access the area of the structure. I took some pictures and we left.

At the next meeting of DDCAG we looked at the pictures and discussed the possibility of excavating this structure, so the first thing we needed to do was to get permission from the landowner, Mr Sergeant, which we did through Andy's representation. It would not take much money to do the project, more a case of finding enough members with shovels, mattocks, trowels and dedication to do it. The first job was to clear away the brambles. But before I turn to the excavation of the site let me fill in some background details about Maiden Newton and its delightful situation.

## **Maiden Newton & its Landscape**

Maiden Newton is set in a shallow chalk valley with uplands that form rounded narrow ridges with long views across West Dorset. Deep coombes give the valley a sinuous form with the rivers Frome and Hook meandering across a broad and open valley floor with chalk rivers that are famous for their flora and fauna.

On these uplands arable farming dominates, with large and small fields bounded by hedges, where the dry slopes give way to pasture and scrub and small copses have grown up on some of the steeper slopes giving minimal cover in a generally exposed landscape. The trackways, including the Drift Road, are bordered by hedges, some overgrown, and mark from a distance their routes to higher ground.

In this landscape there has been a community living in the area, of what is now Maiden Newton, for millennia. The site of the village, virtually at the head of the Frome Valley, is one which can be recognized as a prime site for human habitation and those of us that are lucky enough to live in this beautiful place are just the latest generation to do so.

## **Archaeological Characteristics**

Many sites and individual finds have been recorded on the Historic Environment Record in this valley, from prehistoric eras into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Due to the poor soil many of the monuments have survived being destroyed by the plough, both above and below ground.

During the Bronze Age, roughly four and a half to five thousand years ago, round barrows were set up on Hogscliffe Hill and Notton Down. These barrows sat over a single inhumation or cremation and were usually surrounded by a small ditch. From 700BC on, Iron Age people created an earthwork enclosing 26 acres which was interpreted in the 1958 excavations to be a stock enclosure next a small village of roundhouses, where someone had lost a brooch only for it to be found over two thousand years later.

Along the eastern ridge the A37 was created by the Romans as General Vespasian (later Emperor) and the Second Legion Augusta conquered the west country. Many villages are still connected to this Roman road by a network of tracks, including the Drift. A mosaic was found next to the Frome in a field called Nunnery Meadow in 1794 by a Mr Channing's men when they were digging for flints to build houses and part of an L-shaped structure, probably a rich farmstead rather than a villa. King George III, who was visiting Weymouth in 1796, visited the site along with the Queen and three of their children. A drawing was made by James Engleheart and it is seen in the details that there is a monogram XP,

meaning Christ, so the mosaic must be around the time of Constantine the Great, the first Christian Emperor, who was baptised in 312AD, but there are also pictures of the pagan gods, including Neptune, Venus and Jupiter. It was not uncommon for early 'Christian' people to 'hedge their bets' when it came to religion.

In another field called Court Close a grey coloured Roman urn was found in 1857 on the northern side of St Mary's and contained bones that were probably human, as they did practise cremation at this time.

When the Germanic peoples came to dominate this land and called it England they also, like the Romans before, turned to Christianity and built a church here, the wooden door now the only evidence still existing, surrounded by its Norman stone. Maiden Newton is in the Domesday Book (1086) and King John made four visits to what must have been a well established village with substantial properties, and a Letters Patent was granted to establish a market in 1221.

Now we have left archaeology and entered into history and that is not the subject of this booklet. However, our site is part of our recent history and it could be said, and it was, that it is not archaeology at all, so why dig this site? Archaeology is about our collective memory. In this case the structure we are looking at has been forgotten, even though it is only a century old it has been lost to us and the only way to recover that memory is to undertake an archaeological investigation.



## The Excavation



1888 map. The Bench Mark is located on the south face, not the east shown here.

The first 'port of call' is maps. So we looked at the 1837 and 1902 maps of Maiden Newton and found that the structure was not marked on the former but was on the latter, so that obviously gave us the fact that it had been built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As can be seen above the structure was sitting in the northwest corner of a small field which has since been expanded to its much larger, modern, size. But what was a water trough doing sitting in this field, on its own, seemingly connected to nothing and having no purpose? And what was the mound that ran from it to the hedge?



The clearing team

As I mentioned above the site was partly covered in brambles and the task of clearing them was down to some gallant volunteers armed with loppers and muscles. Once this growth had been cleared away it was now possible to begin the task of excavating the mound.



This task was not going to be easy. We soon found that the mound was made up mostly of brick and tile and would need some serious hitting with mattocks and then shovels and wheelbarrows to clear it away. Now, many of our members are very keen but not in the first flush of youth, so it was with great glee that two young chaps turned up for a short time and they were able to make great inroads into the mass of the brick and tile and it soon became clear that we had much more than just a trough structure to deal with. We had found a whole building with the trough attached to it!



Three of these walls were made up of an outer flint and inner chalk construction.

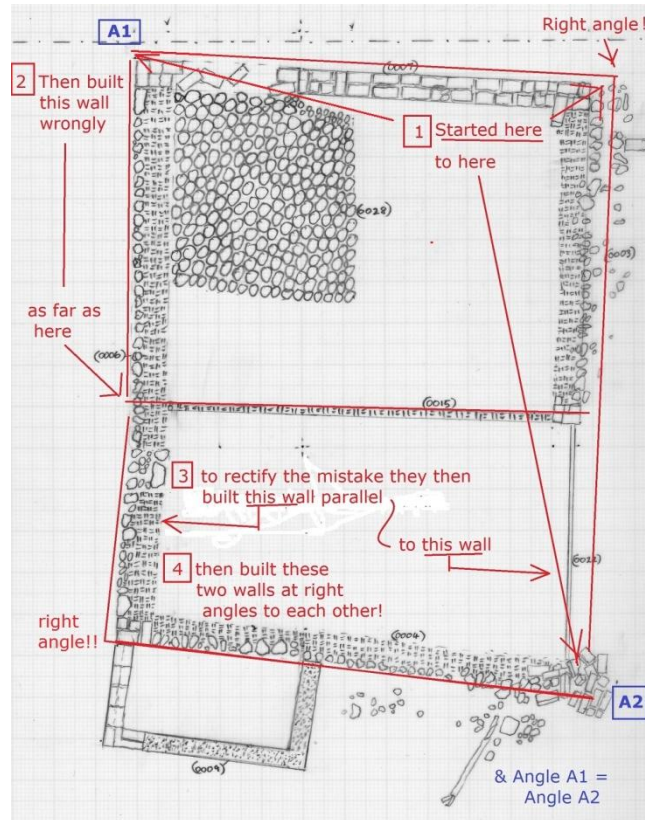


The trough was attached to the outside of the southern wall. The structure was divided into two rooms by a narrow chalk wall, with one to the north and one to the south. The northern room had a brick wall on top of a flint foundation facing the Drift Road hedge line which, being composed of young trees, may not have existed during the use of the structure, thus it would have been visible and accessible from the lane. The wall was composed of a single course of bricks and no evidence of mortar was found, but this material may have decayed. This wall would not have been load-bearing and may have supported a timber partition that could have been opened to the lane, but this is speculation. The floor was divided into two parts, one cobbled and the other compacted earth.





## The Drift Road Excavation



Along with the layout of the structure and the finds it is highly probable that this was a small workshop dealing in metalworking relating to the repair of cart wheels and other related horse equipment. It is also likely that a cart was kept in the structure and one or more horses in the field. Passing trade would have been found from people travelling to and from Maiden Newton on the Drift Road/Old Sydling Road and coming off the main Dorchester-Yeovil road to the east (now the A37).

## **The Finds**

The pottery assemblage was exclusively of modern material of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries of various glazes and decoration, including a large number of plain white, blue and white, green and white and yellow china plate sherds. Some sherds had a brown flower decoration. There was also various examples of stoneware jars and lids, some with incised rims. One whole pot was inscribed 'M. Knowles & Son, Chesterfield'. This was a firm of potters based in Sheffield trading from the premises of the widow of William Blake in the late 1820s and which, by the later 19<sup>th</sup> century, was owned by Mathew Knowles with help from his son Henry. They employed 22 men, 4 women, 23 boys and 14 girls at this time. A leading line was for jars used in the delivery of ginger beer, ales & stout for family consumption.

There was a large output of 'Bristol' stoneware jars for spirit merchants & brewers for home & export markets (1899). The clay was prepared by steam. It was first 'blunged' or mixed and then passed through a fine sieve, driven at a considerable speed onto a large flat iron boiler which was heated by steam, where it was boiled to a proper stiffness. It was then passed through a 'pug-mill' and then was ready for use; previously the clay was wedged by hand before use. Mr. Knowles' works was the only firm to adopt this process.

The tile used on the structure was made by a company in Bridgwater. Dunball wharf was built in 1844 by Bridgwater coal merchants and was formerly linked to the Bristol and Exeter Railway by a rail track which crossed the A38. The link was built in 1876 by the coal merchants and was originally operated as a horse-drawn tramway. In 1875 the local landowner built *The Dunball Steam Pottery & Brick & Tile Works* adjacent to the wharf. 'Steam' means steam-driven machinery, not a special firing. To have such tile on the roof the building must have been quite robust in construction, with its chalk and flint walls carrying a heavy load.



**Dunball & Co. Tile**

As for the brick they were more locally made by William Symons who opened a brick yard in 1851. By 1859, Colthurst & Symons & Co were leading brick makers in the Powerstock area. By 1881 large numbers were employed, 85 by one manufacturer. The largest yard was the Crossway Brick and Tile Works. By 1887 there were three yards, Crossway, Fursland's Somerset Yard, and New Yard. New Yard was held by William Symons in 1898. Brick making in the area declined in the early 20th century. There was a two way trade across the Bristol Channel, coal from South Wales and tile from the West Country, especially Bridgewater.

There were large quantities of metal waste on the site comprising of sheets, nails, bars, hooks, brackets, door bolts and wheel rims, all consistent with the structure and for use on carts. Two penknives were found made of bone and in very good condition, except for the blades.





A bridle bit with a twisted mouth piece was dated to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century or early 20<sup>th</sup> by a visiting horse rider who arrived within minutes of the artefact being found.



The only tool found was a metal T-shaped head that an agricultural worker tentatively identified as for use in hoeing.



A large circular lid was identified as a milk churn top. The presence of charcoal may indicate some form of metal working on the site, although this may be residual from the steam ploughing.

The glass was particularly informative. A Square section Camp coffee bottle was found intact, embossed on three sides with the legends “ESS CAMP COFFEE & CHICORY”, “GLASGOW”, “PATERSON” plus a blank side where the label would have been. Camp was founded in 1876 and the bottle is probably c.1900, but the same design appears on an advert for in the 1940s. The label used to show a sitting Scots officer being served coffee by an Indian



servant. This was later changed to both being seated and the two sharing coffee together. A vet's bottle was found close-by on the same day, intact, with a glass stopper. It was embossed "ELLIMAN'S ROYAL EMBROCATION FOR HORSES MANUFACTORY SLOUGH" and is possibly late Victorian, but this was still being used in the early 1980s. The height is 19cm and it is a BIM style bottle with a crown top and a second lip under the crown. The colour is clear with perhaps a slight tint of green. The base is smooth and has an embossed "4" in the centre. It was for rheumatism, sore throat, sore shoulders & backs, capped hocks and elbows, broken knees etc.



One glass stopper was found with the stamp WRIGHT & CO. based in Staffordshire. Further research was done on this company and it closed after an industrial accident where a glass kiln exploded. One worker was killed by the explosion and two others were killed by being engulfed in molten glass. Once the glass had cooled it was found that only some hobnails and belt buckles had survived, so the remains were kept in glass blocks and then the whole was buried. It was reported that the owner of the company told the men at the funeral that "they would have to work harder to make up for the loss of two employees"! However, the firm did not last long and went out of business soon after.



## Trench 2



The investigation in Trench 2, 30m to the east of Trench 1, brought further understanding of the use of this field in modern times as well as establishing that strip lynchets do not survive in this location, this being the reason we opened this trench. Its longer 9m edge ran west to east up the hill and the northern edge sloped downhill from the south edge and running towards the Drift Road.

The marks cut into the chalk surface appear to represent several episodes of ploughing, probably with a metal plough. The scratches may have been made by a coulter blade, but a metal tipped share or mouldboard would probably also be required to disturb the chalk to this extent. No medieval evidence has been found within Trench 2 and the residual flint found in this area did not prove to be struck artificially and was probably flaked by steam ploughing, as evidenced by charcoal fragments within the topsoil and subsoil. Sometimes archaeology can only say what is not there, as well as what is there and both are valuable evidence.

## And Finally

The significance of this excavation lies not only in its site-specific detail, but also in its potential for comparative study with other lost, modern industrial rural structures in Dorset and the southwest. Analysis of the site record followed by publication and dissemination of the results is thus useful for future study of post-medieval structures lost to both the archive and local memory.

This site comprises an added corpus of information about the economy of Maiden Newton and the rural economy of similar villages in this area and Dorset as a whole. Further analysis of rural workshops concentrating on specific types of metalworking debris and tool artefacts in relation to small settlements would be useful in determining a population size that needed such a structure and which would have allowed it to survive by servicing the settled community and passing trade, such as that which used the Drift Road. The site is also useful in relation to how materials were traded and transported to the more isolated rural communities by the new routes carved out by the rail network in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as the tile and glass artefacts, and how they were used with more local materials, such as the brick from Powerstock.

Further to our ethos of working in communities we had an open day for people to come and see the site and a temporary information board in the village cafe, so that people could read and see what we had uncovered in the Drift Road. Anyone can now go and see what remains of this building, as we have kept the walls uncovered.

So next time you are walking the dog have a look and think about how this structure would have been used by the people of our village in the past and how that it was once lost and is now found and once again part of our village story.





Thanks to all the Dorset Diggers who came along to help out on site, to those unsung heroes that processed the finds and supported the our first successful project in all sorts of ways and to the people of Maiden Newton who showed an interest in one of the forgotten buildings of our village.



<http://www.dorsetdiggers.btck.co.uk>