



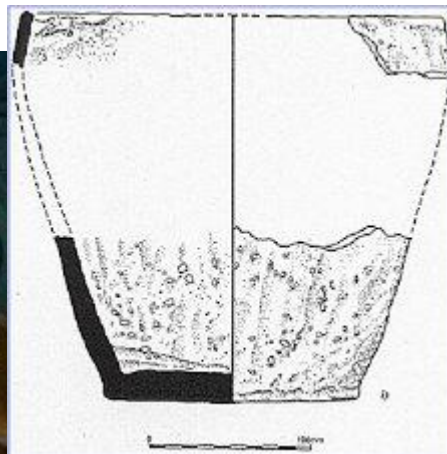
Archaeology on the Wyre Piddle Bypass

In 1997 an evaluation was carried out along the line of the proposed Wyre Piddle bypass in East Worcestershire. This was followed in June 2001 by a much more extensive programme of excavation, prior to the start of construction work. The team are now working on collating and analysing the huge number of records, artefacts and environmental samples for the final report.

The excavations focussed on two areas along the bypass, which were identified through work undertaken in 1996-7.

Furzen Farm area

Excavation at Furzen Farm in 1997 revealed the remains of a Bronze Age cremation cemetery. The remains of four burials in urns were found. All traces of this site had, however, been removed by ploughing between 1997 - 2001. This is a good illustration of the fragility of our rural archaeology.



Fragment of Bronze Age cremation urn and reconstruction drawing.

Excavation in 2001 to the east of the cemetery area revealed the remains of a Romano-British farmstead which was occupied from the 1st to the 4th century AD. We think that the focus of the settlement lay to the north of the bypass route where fieldwalking and metal detecting revealed late Iron Age and Roman occupation. To the south, on the bypass route, large drainage ditches contained late Iron Age and Roman pottery showing that during the 1st to early 2nd centuries AD this area lay within fields.



The lines of enclosure ditches, marked out in paint to assist excavation as the site baked hard in the sun.

During the 2nd century, the settlement seems to have expanded. Fields were subdivided into small plots marked out with shallow ditches. A yard surface was found within one of these plots while a scattering of postholes showed that there were also some small timber buildings. The yard surface was covered in broken Roman pottery and may have been an area where domestic refuse was piled before being taken out to the fields and spread as manure.



Hard standing for a Romano-British midden

Evidence was also found for smithing, an activity which often took place on the edges of settlements. Overall our initial impressions are that the people who lived here were everyday farmers.



Romano-British enclosure ditch containing evidence of iron-smithing waste.

George Lane area

Our second site, at George Lane, also has a long history of settlement with at least four different periods of occupation identified. The bypass crossed the southern margins of a Late Iron Age and Romano-British settlement.



Aerial photograph showing the complex pattern of enclosures dating from the Bronze Age to Roman periods.

On the southern part of the site a Bronze Age farm enclosure was found. This produced Middle Bronze Age pottery, dating to around 1500 BC. What initially looked like a simple ditch now appears to have held a large palisade or fence.



*Bronze Age
ditch with slot
for palisade*

On the west side of the site lay the remains of a Middle Iron Age farm enclosure. The excavation revealed three sides of a substantial enclosure ditch with an entrance in one corner. Within the enclosure were at least three roundhouses. The evidence for these were the 'eavesdrip' gullies which drained away water running off the thatched roofs. We also found the stone settings which supported internal posts and a scorched patch of soil which showed the position of a hearth. Pottery within the gullies dated the houses to somewhere between the 4th and 2nd centuries BC.



*Iron Age hut
circle*

The most significant Late Iron Age feature was a substantial ditch forming the northern boundary of an enclosed area dating from the 2nd century BC onwards. Much of the settlement lay to the north of the bypass and investigations undertaken during the evaluation of the site in 1996 showed that this area was filled with roundhouses and ditches.



*South boundary
ditch of the Iron
Age enclosure*

Two Roman graves were discovered during the 1997 evaluation, dug into the top of filled-in Iron Age ditches, but no more graves were found during the 2001 excavation.

Fieldwalking and metal detecting showed that the Roman settlement dated from the 1st through to the 3rd or 4th century AD and that it lay to the northeast of the Iron Age settlement.



*Romano-British
grave*

Environmental remains suggest that there was little cereal cultivation at the site and that its economy might have been pastoral, based on cattle and horse husbandry. Since the settlement lay in a particularly wet area, it might even be true that it was seasonally occupied.



*Animal bones
(Sheep/goat
and pig) from
an Iron Age
ditch*

A detailed picture of the changing settlement pattern in the Avon Valley is now emerging for a period of over 3000 years.



Reconstruction of Iron Age farmstead on George Lane