

The Lives of the Common People – Project Update July 2012

Test-pitting in Castleton

After all the rain the test-pitting largely proceeded as planned with the help of two gazebos which were invaluable.

In Castleton we dug twenty two test pits in gardens and fields, as well as a larger trench in the Bulls Head car park. This last trench, located at the edge of the town ditch, was dug in order to follow up the finding of a piece of medieval pottery on a layer of cobbles by the Cambridge HEFA team in 2009 (led by Carezza Lewis from TimeTeam). After about 1.7 metres of mostly modern rubbish (including at 1.6 metres, a Maltesers wrapper with a sell-by date of 1986) and a lot of spirits bottles, a layer of limestone was indeed found but our Sheffield University experts on-site believe this to be a natural feature. No medieval (or even historic) artefacts were found, which was disappointing after all the effort that went into it.

At the time of going to press, our finds have not yet been identified. However, in Castleton, possible medieval pottery was found at three sites. Part of a human jaw with teeth was found near Joules Yard as well as a few other human bones. This supports the story from a 1930s newspaper article describing the discovery of skeletons in this part of the village. A number of gardens had sherds of 18th century slipware and glazed blackware. We found quite a few clay pipe stems, including a possibly relatively early thick, wide-bored section from a house on Peveril Close. Many animal bones were found, as well as glass and metalwork that may be dateable. In the field adjacent to the Methodist chapel, a flagged area was found in one of two test pits. And some pieces of worked flints were found on two sites. All in all, despite the fact that we haven't found much medieval pottery, this is a varied and interesting haul. The next step will be to bring together our own village data and that of Hope, together with the findings from the 10 test-pits dug by the HEFA team during 2008 and 2009, with the aim of coming up with a view of where and how people lived in the two villages over the centuries. Perhaps the villages were sparsely populated? Perhaps most people lived on outlying farms? In that case why were the planned town and town ditch created? Lots of questions – with any luck, by the end of this project (including the documentary research that's going on) we might have one or two answers. March 2012 Update

Grateful thanks to all those villagers who have allowed test pits in their gardens and fields, to the volunteers and especially in Castleton, to the Bulls Head for letting us store tools in their garage, and to the Methodist Chapel for access to the Walker

Room at lunchtimes that provided dry respite for the test-pitters! Also to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The next Documentation meeting for the Hope-Castleton project will be 7pm, 19th September, in the Old School, Hope.

Don't forget to come and see what the finds were, at Loxley Hall Hope, 29th July 2012, 1-4pm.