

Peterstone Intertidal Training Project 8-11.4.2019

by Martin Bell and the project team

Introduction

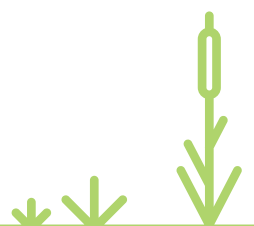
The course was attended by 19 community volunteers and 5 members of the University of Reading who were responsible for training. It was taught over 4 days. The first day was at the Newport Ship Centre (courtesy of the Curator Dr Toby Jones) and comprised an introduction to intertidal archaeological survey, the Peterstone site; previous finds from the site were viewed. The second and third days were spent on the foreshore at Peterstone recording finds, and the third day was back at the Newport Ship Centre washing, recording and processing the finds, doing some experimental woodworking and gathering thoughts towards a report.

Nature of the site

A series of Bronze Age palaeochannels have been undergoing erosion and over the last 25 years have produced many artefacts of two main periods: (i) Late Neolithic / initial Bronze Age; (ii) middle Bronze Age. The finds include many worked wood posts and some withy panels which may be part of fish traps; animal bones; and a little pottery. Apart from the posts the most significant finds are the wooden handle of a middle Bronze Age palstave axe and a wooden paddle or digging stick. Finds made between 2006 and 2011 were published in Bell, M. 2013 *The Bronze Age in the Severn Estuary*. York: Council for British Archaeology Research Report 172. Figure 1 shows the palaeochannels investigated then and the locations of finds. Finds made during a subsequent recording exercise in 2013 have not yet been published. Every few years more material is exposed and our team records what is found gradually adding to the emerging understanding of this site.

All finds were numbered in sequence and in the case of stratified finds the palaeochannel from which they were found was recorded. The position of stratified finds was recorded using a hand held GPS which locates to within c 4m; the position was then marked with a numbered tag which, where possible, was located by Differential GPS which provides location including height to within 1cm. The differential GPS was also used to plan the extent of the palaeochannels, including areas revealed since the last survey and to plan the saltmarsh edge to establish the extent of erosion since the last survey in 2011.

The first intertidal day concentrated on the main concentration of palaeochannels 3/8, 2/9 and 1. The channels themselves were clearly visible as slightly raised more peaty sinuous strips. The area had a cover of mud but bones and posts were visible because they projected through the thin veneer of mud. Because of the mud cover, conditions were not good for the identification of smaller finds such as pottery. Field observation suggested significant erosion of the saltmarsh since its position was last recorded in 2011 and this has led to exposure of Palaeochannel 1 further to the west where several animal bones were found. Stratified bones were also recorded in the other palaeochannels noted above. A number of wood posts were visible in Palaeochannel 2 contexts 6 and 4 and there were isolated posts in Palaeochannel 3/8. Some of these posts have survived from the time of the previous survey in 2011. No



posts in this area were excavated on the first day. The main groups of animal bones came from Palaeochannel 3 which has previously been dated to the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age and Palaeochannel 8 which has been previously dated to the middle Bronze Age. The other main concentration of bones was in the area of Palaeochannel 1 revealed by erosion since the last survey; this channel has dates in the middle Bronze Age, c 1414-1040 cal BC.

On the second intertidal day we focused on Palaeochannels 5 and 6, some 300m to the east of those investigated on the previous day. These two channels had been less fully investigated in the earlier surveys. Palaeochannel 5 was visible as a raised more curving band with a peaty top. In the fill of this channel a pottery sherd with Beaker decoration was found. 40m to the west Palaeochannel 6 was marked by a raised curving line with a more peaty top which had resisted erosion. Within this channel, and exposed where erosion gullies cut into it, a number of vertical roundwood posts were observed; two of these were exposed and lifted and they were found to have pointed cut ends. Peat capping Palaeochannel 5 has previously been dated 1879-1633 cal BC and an early Bronze Age date is confirmed by the Beaker sherd found during our work and a previously found Beaker sherd from the same channel. Palaeochannel 6 has not been dated but is also capped by peat so it, and the worked wood stakes recovered, are also likely to be late Neolithic or early Bronze Age.

On the final day at the Newport Ship Centre the finds were washed and recorded. Some samples of sediment from the palaeochannels were sieved and biological evidence from them was examined under a microscope projector. Participants were also able to work with Adam Turner experimenting with various types of prehistoric axe to see if they could reproduce the axe marks found on the wooden stakes excavated the previous day and those published previously from Peterstone.

Conclusions

See below for a report on some of the more important finds. The animal bones found will eventually contribute to an understanding of animal husbandry on the site and will help to establish whether activity at Peterstone was seasonal. The vertical wood observed in several palaeochannels and lifted from Palaeochannel 6 probably derives from wood structures such as traps in the palaeochannels associated with fishing but this remains to be established and it is to be hoped that sometime a well preserved structure or basket will be uncovered which will establish how these features worked.

Acknowledgements

Alison Boyes and Chris Harris of the Living Levels survey for facilitating the project.

Volunteers: John Bowler; Carole MacDougall; Jerry Cross; Barry Embling; Jeremy White; Martyn Davies; Stephen Cogbill; Maurice Turner; Tony Haycock; Ceri Meloy; Martin Gerrard; Huw Grant; Roy Scourfield; Martin Somerville; Nasreen El-Galy; Rose Hewlett; Sue Jenkins; Barbara Same; Jenny Smith.

University of Reading Team: Prof Martin Bell; Dr Jennifer Foster, Dr Tom Walker; Adam Turner; Jana Ewart-Blake.

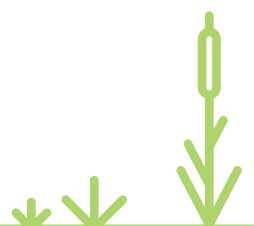




Figure 2. The curving line of Palaeochannel 3.



Figure 3.
Recording finds in
Palaeochannel 5



Figure 4. Finding the
antler in Palaeochannel 5

Figure 5.
A volunteer finds
Beaker pottery
on day 2 of his
retirement

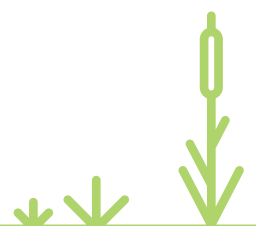
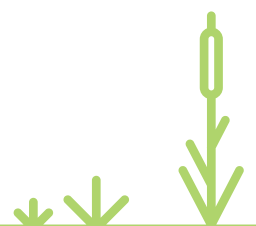




Figure 7 Two worked posts in Palaeochannel 6



Figure 9 Using a replica prehistoric axe to point a stake.



Peterstone 2019 Finds summary by Jennifer Foster

We found 195 artefacts in the two days on the foreshore, both stratified and unstratified (Table 1). Altogether there were 57 stratified finds from the palaeochannels, 7 stratified from a Post-Medieval drainage ditch and 131 unstratified finds.

| Stratified in palaeochannels | | Unstratified | |
|--|----|--------------------------|-----|
| Pot | 2 | Post-Medieval pot | 27 |
| Animal bone and teeth | 34 | Animal bone and teeth | 55 |
| Antler | 2 | Antler | 1 |
| Fire-cracked stone | 2 | Glass | 8 |
| Charcoal | 1 | Glass marbles | 24 |
| Wood (lifted) | 12 | Glass beads | 4 |
| Wood (not lifted) | 1 | Clay pipe | 4 |
| Other | 2 | Fired clay | 2 |
| TOTAL | 57 | Melted metal (?aircraft) | 2 |
| Stratified in Post-Medieval ditch | | Dog chew | 1 |
| Animal bones | 3 | Other | 13 |
| Furnace slag | 3 | TOTAL | 131 |
| Concrete | 1 | | |
| TOTAL | 7 | | |
| TOTAL = 195 | | | |

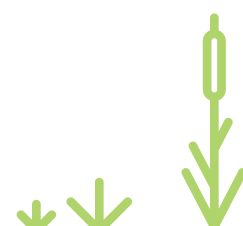




Figure 10 The Beaker sherd

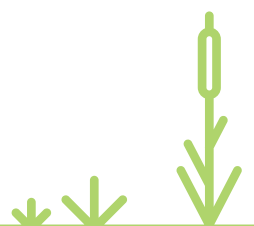
One of the stratified finds from Peterstone Palaeochannel 5 was a sherd of Beaker pottery (Figures 5 and 10, 2019.58), quite exciting because Beaker pottery is rare in Wales. This brings the number of Beaker sherds from Peterstone to five. These sherds date to the early Bronze Age, c 2300-1800 BC. It is decorated with incised lines of alternate dots with 3 impressed lines (cords or stamps) below. I found a parallel for this unusual decoration on a Beaker from Oxfordshire, Stanton Harcourt Grave 1 (Humphrey Case (1956) Beaker pottery from the Oxford Region 1939-55, *Oxoniensia* XXI, 1-21, fig 2, no 34). Another sherd of undecorated Bronze Age pottery was found stratified in the Palaeochannel 8.

Most of the stratified finds were bones. There were 34 bone fragments, of which 5 had cut marks made with a flint blade and one was split to remove the marrow. Nine bones had been chewed by dogs; one, a scapula (shoulder blade), had been chewed along both sides. We also found 2 stratified pieces of fire-cracked stone (probably used for cooking). We raised 12 stratified pieces of wood, of which 3 had cut ends. These are being studied at present.



Figure 11 The dog-chewed antler

The stratified antler pieces were interesting. One fairly complete antler (Figures 4 and 11; 2019.92, from Palaeochannel 6) had dog tooth marks on the lower tine. The antler had the burr cut off which suggests it was removed from the body of a red deer, rather than being collected after the antler was shed, which is more usual in the Bronze Age. Presumably it still retained its velvet so would be a tasty item for a dog to chew.



The other antler item (Figure 12, 2019.41 from Palaeochannel 3) retained its burr so was a shed antler. All the upper tines had been cut off, leaving only the first tine at right angles to the main part of the antler (used as the handle). The whole object was very polished through use, especially the first tine. There was also polish on the handle consistent with it being held in the right hand.

There were some notable unstratified objects such as the two fragments of melted metal, probably aluminium, possibly parts of 2nd World War aircraft. Then there were 24 glass marbles, probably nineteenth century in date. Some were decorated with swirls of coloured glass. We had quite a few items that were probably disposed of as rubbish, such as clay pipes and pottery; one was a teapot base made at Watcombe, Torquay. There were also lots of bones, probably modern, but one particularly heavy and stained bone could be from a prehistoric aurochs (the wild cow which became extinct c 1300 BC).



Figure 12 The antler tool.

