

Fieldwalking

In March 2011 a fieldwalking training event was held in a field at Clampits near Metherell. Twenty volunteers attended the day, run by Penny Cunningham from the University of Exeter.

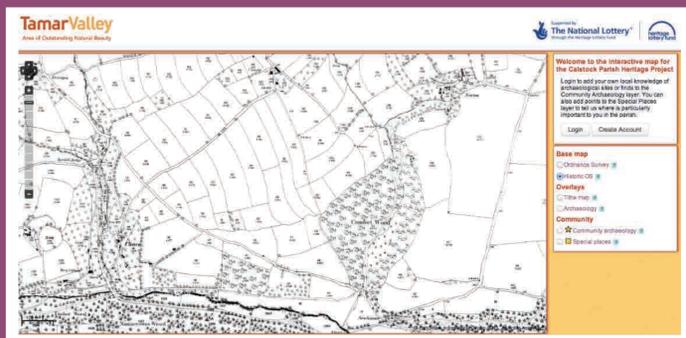
What is fieldwalking?

Fieldwalking is one of the simplest techniques used in archaeological fieldwork investigation. The main purpose is to collect artefacts from the surface of ploughed fields. The selected area is carefully defined and all finds accurately recorded. Clusters of pottery sherds, flint flakes or building debris may suggest centres of human occupation or activity; but a lack of obvious concentrations does not mean that occupation didn't exist!



Digitised Tithe map with the field shown in blue (images from the Calstock Parish Interactive map <http://heritage.tamarvalley.org.uk/>)

The area chosen for the fieldwalking was south of the hamlet of Clampits on the west side of the parish. The field was referred to as 'Wood Park' in the 1840s Tithe survey, and is a former medieval strip field situated between a historic settlement and the medieval Cotehele deer park.



Extract from the 1880s Ordnance Survey map showing the area

A system of thirty-five 10m x 10m square grids were set up in the field using pegs and tape. The locations of the grid pegs were recorded using handheld GPS, and the grid reference for each peg entered on a database and plotted onto a map.

With the volunteers lined up on the south east side of the taped area, each walked in a straight line and collected any finds visible in a two metre radius from their location and placed them in bags where they were found. The bags were then collected and recorded. The finds were then cleaned, separated by type, counted, weighed and identified.

What finds did we find?

The finds consisted of pottery, flint, bone, clay pipe and some metal artefacts (mainly nails). The most commonly found artefacts were pottery and glass sherds.

Lostwithiel Ware - oxidized bright orange surface with a grey core. These finds are broadly dated to the 12th-14th centuries, including two sherds from a late medieval jug. Lostwithiel was one of the main areas in Cornwall producing pottery in the medieval and immediate post medieval period.

Glazed post-medieval pottery – these finds were identified as being manufactured at Jackfield, Shropshire. They have a dense grey/black body with a rich black lead glaze with moulded decoration. They may be from good-quality tableware of the type produced by the pottery from 1750.

Majolica – a 19th-century ceramic often formed into leaves, flowers, shells and other objects from nature, with bright shiny glazes. The four sherds found at Clampits have different decorations, including a moulded leaf pattern and a possible tree bark pattern.

Slipware – slipware manufacture as we know it today was begun in the 17th century, mainly in Staffordshire. The sherds found have trailed slip glaze over a brown or green ground.

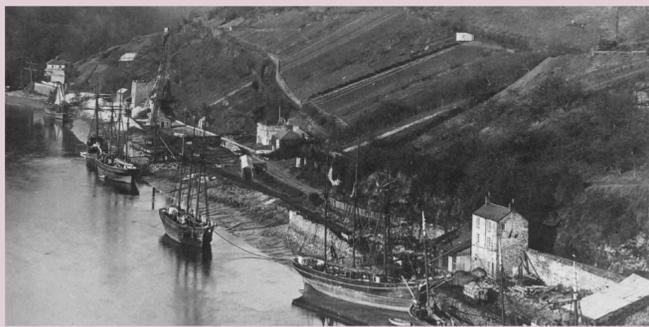
The finds were probably brought to the field in dock dung, suggesting that pottery from other parts of Britain was being used in Plymouth.

Dock dung?

In the 19th century a smelly collection of horse manure, fish guts, offal and other rubbish, including household waste thrown into the Plymouth streets, was shipped up the River Tamar in barges.

The muck was spread as a fertiliser across fields and boosted yields at the height of the market gardening era. The ships would then return to Plymouth loaded with Valley produce. A very sustainable method of production and distribution!

Barges lined up along the Calstock riverbank, with market gardens on the valley slopes behind (Photograph Calstock Parish Archive)



Clay pipes - manufacture began in London in the late 16th century, and pipes were being made in Plymouth in the 17th century. The pipe fragments found at Clampits were mainly located in the northern-most grids and have been identified as spanning a date range from the 16th to 19th century. The stem fragments were loosely dated using a method developed by Maldon Archaeological Group, Essex, based on decoration and the hypothesis that stem holes got smaller over time. One fragment found dates from the early-mid 18th century. The angle between bowl and stem is approximately 150°. This angle became less towards the late 18th and 19th centuries.

Two small pieces of flint were found when setting out the grid. One is a fragment of microblade and one a misshapen microlith, both dating to the Mesolithic period (10,000-4000 BC).



What can we learn?

The finds were evenly dispersed across the field, although more were found at the northwest corner. This corner is nearest to the entrance to the field and would be the likely location of the dumping of dock dung. The spread of artefact types across the field drew no obvious conclusions and did not produce any significant surprises, as they relate to common household objects that would have been discarded by the residents of Plymouth and scooped up as dock dung.

BUT - the surprise finds were the two small flints identified as microliths dating to the Mesolithic period. As flint is not natural to the area they do suggest that there was Mesolithic activity in the vicinity, however, it is hard to make any real conclusions from finding just two microliths.

The full report is available on our website.

Did you take part in this event? If so we'd love to hear from you! We are hoping to run another fieldwalking event in Calstock parish in 2013. Please leave comments in our visitors' book, and your details if you'd like to be involved!