

## Barton Quarry & Archaeology

Over the past half century quarries have been increasingly highlighted as important sources of information for geologists, palaeontologists and archaeologists, both through the planning system and on a voluntary basis. Excavations on quarry sites have brought to light geological sequences, fossil remains of flora and fauna including extinct species such as mammoth and woolly rhino and the stone tools of some of our earliest ancestors. Modern planning practices help ensure that many of these finds are properly collected and recorded without them being lost, as has happened in the past. Many development sites contain artefacts of archaeological interest but it is sand and gravel quarries that tend to contain more significant finds from across the ages.

The investigation of important archaeological remains has been embraced by Hanson, who engage with professional archaeological organisations to mitigate the impact that quarrying may have on any significant finds. One such site where the close collaboration between the developer and the archaeologists takes place is Hanson's long-established Barton Quarry on the banks of the River Trent in Staffordshire.

Hanson's twelve-year relationship with Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd has resulted in a number of excavations taking place across the quarry, with significant archaeological items being recovered dating from the Neolithic period (c. 3,500-2,000 BC) through to Medieval times (1066-1500). The potential for archaeological interest was originally highlighted following an evaluation of the site (geophysics and trial trenching), undertaken as part of the planning application process for the quarry.



*Following the initial soil strip archaeology is sprayed up prior to planning and excavation*

The earliest archaeology found on the quarry is of **Neolithic** date and is represented by the occasional isolated pit containing burnt stone and flint tools. This period is a time generally associated with the introduction of agriculture to the British Isles. The beginnings of agriculture led to a more sedentary existence, being evidenced by domestic crops and animals and the clearing of tracts of woodland for farming activities.

The Neolithic period also saw the construction of large communal monuments, such as henges and barrows for ritual activities and the burial of the dead. To the immediate west of the current investigations is the important Catholme Ceremonial Complex. Here two henge monuments have been identified together with several pit alignments. It is likely that a significant 'monument complex' existed during this period close to the confluence of the Trent and Tame.

Actual settlement sites are far less well understood, but concentrations of artefacts, including flint and stone tools and pottery sherds, are generally assumed to indicate areas where Neolithic groups settled.



*The slight remains of a Neolithic pit which contained worked flint c. 5,000 years old*

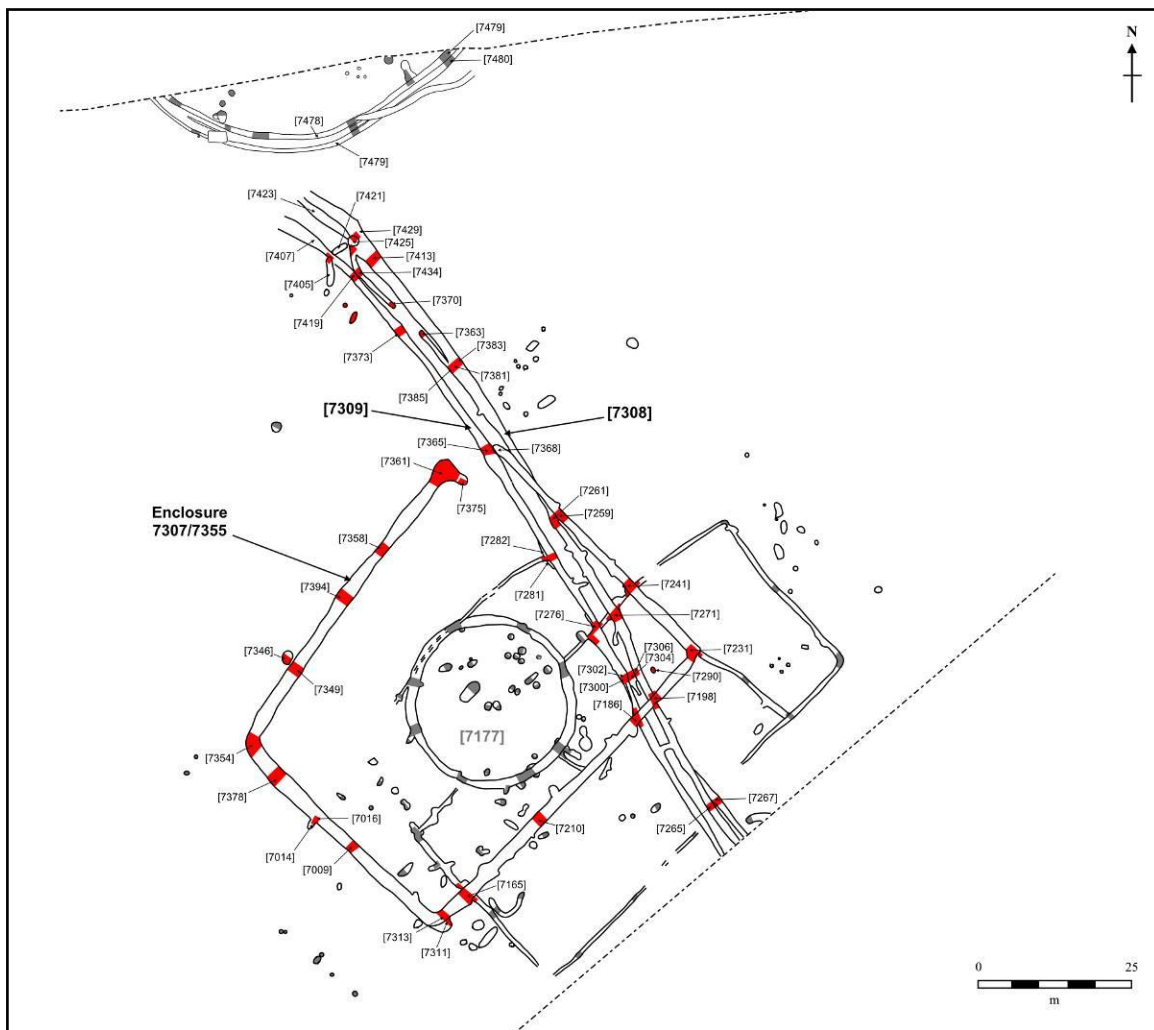
The **Bronze Age** (c. 2,000-1,000 BC) is better understood, being largely represented by the cropmarks of ring ditches (being the ploughed out remains of former burial mounds). They are distributed across the general study area and are particularly frequent around the confluence of the Rivers Tame and Trent. Prior to the Barton Quarry investigations, an air photographic survey had indicated the presence of one such ring ditch across the northern part of the quarry. Following machine stripping, the burial feature showed up clearly, however, despite careful excavation no central burial was identified. This suggests that the former occupants of the feature had been eroded through centuries of agricultural ploughing. Aside from the barrow, several other features on the quarry have been shown to be of Bronze Age date, including several pits, gullies and ditches.



*Excavation of the Bronze Age ring ditch in progress*

Excavations at the southern end of the quarry has identified a concentrated area of **Roman** (AD 43-410) activity, represented by a series of overlapping agricultural enclosures and stock pens. These areas corresponded to formerly recorded cropmark plots which survive well on the elevated gravel terrace. A large pottery assemblage has been recovered, together with several quern stones for the grinding of corn. The lack of settlement features, such as house structures and rubbish pits, suggests that occupation did not take place on the site, but that it was not far away. The bulk of the Roman pottery comprises local coarse wares, predominantly cooking pots, with close affinities to wares produced in Derbyshire. Low quantities of regional imports, notably Dorset black-burnished ware and Mancetter-Hartshill white ware mortaria (grinding vessels) are consistent with supply patterns in the hinterland region between Wall and Rocester.

At the quarry's northern-most extent a **late Saxon** (AD 900-1050) square enclosure, positioned over the earlier Bronze Age ring ditch (burial barrow), has been excavated. The superimposition suggests the reuse of a specific area for activities that were perhaps considered 'special'. It perhaps implies the secondary use of an ancient monument to reinforce Saxon identity. The Saxon enclosure was quite an impressive feature, which contained a sizeable assemblage of pottery showing that activity associated with it lasted no more than 100 years, beginning sometime in the early 11th century AD. Recent research suggested that such Saxon enclosures were performing similar functions as their Prehistoric predecessors, acting as houses for the dead or ancestral shrines. The reuse of Bronze Age barrows in the Saxon period is well-known.



*Plan showing the rectangular Saxon enclosure positioned over the earlier Bronze Age ring ditch*

Saxon activity has also been recorded close to the southern extent of the quarry, where a series of small rectangular enclosures and a post-built structure of 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century AD date have been investigated. The Saxon pottery comprises a limited range of ‘baggy’ vessels almost entirely associated with the occupation of a few short-lived hut features, but providing further evidence for domestic occupation of the landscape surrounding the major settlement at Catholme. Indeed, the remains are likely to represent outlying activities associated with the more extensive settlement to the north known as the Catholme Saxon Village, which is nationally significant. This particular site was discovered and excavated in the 1970’s and lies under the present plant operations area of the quarry. Compared with Roman and later Medieval periods, Anglo-Saxon activity lay very lightly on the landscape: houses were short-lived and built of timber, boundaries were marked by fences or relatively slight ditches, and

household goods were made largely of textile, wood, and leather, which do not usually survive in the archaeological record.



*Excavation of a rectangular Saxon enclosure*

The Barton Quarry excavations are successfully piecing together the jigsaw of the past. A decade of investigations have identified an extensive archaeological landscape dating back to early Prehistoric times. Ongoing research into the artefacts is allowing for an increased understanding of the social and economic aspects of this part of Staffordshire over the past four millennia.

Hanson Aggregates remain fully committed to supporting these (and numerous other) archaeological investigations. Barton Quarry alone has revealed a plethora of significant archaeological evidence providing a valuable source of information to historians and the local community about the past. Careful planning at the outset has ensured that the information can be obtained without causing impact to the day-to-day running of the quarry or impeding the supply of essential raw materials. A mix of careful planning and positive management has enabled the archaeological resource to be successfully '*preserved by record*' and reduce any conflict between development and heritage.

Dr Andy Richmond

Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd

