

## **Uncovering Arun's past: archaeological discoveries along the route of the A284 Lyminster Bypass**

Archaeological excavations undertaken ahead of the A284 Lyminster Road Bypass construction are adding to our understanding of Lyminster's past. Read on to find out more on what this might mean for our understanding of life, death and belief during the Bronze Age to Roman periods.



**An early stage artistic reconstruction drawing of the site during the Bronze Age, based on the evidence revealed whilst the excavation was underway. Post excavation analysis of the artefacts retained from the excavation and ecofacts produced from the geoarchaeological boreholes will further refine our understanding of the landscape. Copyright WSP.**

### **Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman discoveries**

Five Bronze Age (2500-800 BC) urned cremation burials were uncovered within the floodplain of the 'Black Ditch', which resemble other urns unearthed close by at a Bronze Age settlement found at the Toddington Nurseries site on the Ditch's southern side. A Bronze copper implement has also been found, although its function is currently unknown. It is hoped that the objects use will be determined during the 'post-excavation' process of analysis, when the object will be assessed by an expert in the

field of ancient metallurgy (known as 'archaeometallurgy'). Other artefacts recovered include pottery, animal bone and charred seeds, which informs us about the diets and subsistence of the peoples living in the Lyminster region during the Bronze Age.



**LEFT: Two Bronze Age cremation urns under excavation on the A284 site. RIGHT: Nick carefully packing a cremation for its safe transportation back to the lab.**

On the site we have found evidence that a system of agricultural fields, subsequently developed during the Iron Age and Roman periods (800 BC–AD 410). This system consisted of large wide-spanning ditches that may have aided drainage and helped define field boundaries. More artefacts have been found within these ditches, including pottery and a spindle whorl (used in weaving) which suggest that a settlement was situated close by.



**LEFT:** The unusual copper implement of probable Bronze Age date. **RIGHT:** a Roman ceramic spindle whorl

### **Ancient Settlement Patterns in the Lyminster Area**

It was previously thought that Bronze Age activity in Lyminster was only situated on one side of the Black Ditch ([click here to find out about the Black Ditch](#)). Thanks to the A284 excavation, we now know that this activity extended across both banks of the river and further work will hopefully refine the dating of these Bronze Age discoveries. Analysing these finds could enable us to determine whether settlement in the vicinity of Lyminster shifted over time, or whether multiple settlements may have existed at the same time on either side of the Ditch.



**A Bronze Age pit under excavation on the A284 site**

Iron Age to Roman activity is concentrated in the north of the site, where archaeological work is presently ongoing. Several ditches dated to these periods have been identified and appear to show a series of adjoining fields within wider farmland. They are probably associated with small settlements lining the Roman road to Chichester, which was situated about 900m to the north of the site.

### **Liminality and Belief Systems in Ancient Britain**

During the later prehistoric and Roman periods, ancient peoples across a swathe of western Europe appear to have placed particular emphasis within their belief systems on 'liminal' aspects of the landscape, such as watery places, boundaries, deep shafts into the earth, thresholds, and corners. This belief is represented archaeologically through the intentional placing of valuable or unusual items in such 'in between' places. Items have included complete animal carcasses, complete or near complete pottery vessels, metal objects and even human remains. Archaeologists have long speculated that these items represent offerings that were made to mitigate or gain some advantage from whatever power such places were perceived to possess.

Excavations along the route of the A284. Bulletin 3: The results of the excavation and the wider archaeological context



**AOC Archaeologist Jenny takes a close-up photograph of a partially excavated cremation urn from the A284 site**



**This detail of a cremation urn from the site shows how the top of the vessel has been lost, probably to modern ploughing**

Excavations along the route of the A284. Bulletin 3: The results of the excavation and the wider archaeological context





**The complete, miniature Roman pot**

A possible example of this phenomenon on the A284 site may be found in the location of the five Bronze Age cremation burials that were located close to the Black Ditch. This watery place was wet and marshy in antiquity, and this characteristic may have increased its suitability as a burial place. Cremation was a common burial rite in this part of Britain during the Bronze Age.

A complete, miniature Roman pottery vessel, found alongside a large amount of fragmented Roman ceramics, was recovered from a boundary ditch on the A284 site. Complete pots possessed value and were usually only disposed of if accidentally broken (unless used as grave goods). Near complete or intact pots like this example were occasionally deliberately placed along boundaries during the Roman period and have usually been interpreted as ritual offerings. Further work is required, however, to determine whether the A284 pot represents such an artefact.

Excavations along the route of the A284. Bulletin 3: The results of the excavation and the wider archaeological context

***For general information on Bronze Age to Roman settlement in Britain:***

<https://historicensland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-enclosed-prehistoric-settlements/heag203-enclosed-prehistoric-settlements/>

<https://historicensland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-prehistoric-romano-british-settlements-structures/heag215-prehistoric-romano-british-settlements-structures/>

<https://historicensland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-roman-settlements/heag231-roman-settlements/>

***For general information on prehistoric and Roman field systems:***

<https://historicensland.org.uk/images-books/publications/iha-field-systems/heag204-field-systems/>

***For general information on belief systems in the prehistoric and Roman periods:***

<https://historicensland.org.uk/images-books/publications/dssg-religion-ritual/heag252-religion-and-ritual-pre-ad410-ssg/>