

**West Wood, Rayleigh Road, Thundersley Essex**

**Report of 1950s Pottery Finds**

**Report by AGES Archaeological and Historical Association (T Barclay, Chairperson, December 2022)**

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## Summary

Samples of finds by a child in the 1950s inside West Wood were identified and found to include Bronze Age, Romano British and Medieval pottery.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Location and scope

In the late 1950s, a group of schoolboys found pottery sherds in West Wood, a wood crossing the boundary between Thundersley and Hadleigh parishes in Essex. The finds were made in the banks of a pit (located at TQ 8061 8855) and more generally in the area near that pit.

In 2022, AGES AHA arranged for samples of the pottery to be identified by Paul Blinkhorn.

Except for samples kept by AGES AHA for local display, the finds were returned to the finder.

### 1.1 Geology and Topography

All the finds were from near the surface from the banks of the very many ditches which run through the woods which remain largely undisturbed further until this day

### 1.2 Archaeological and historical background

The woods are thought to be ancient with the northern part of the woods, from where the finds came, being largely cleared in the 1960s but regrown since.

No firm evidence appears to exist of any dating of the ditches, but they have been generally taken to be medieval or possibly earlier.

Mesolithic: Scattered Mesolithic worked flint finds including axes have been found 500m to the west.

A single (unstratified) Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead was found south of Sayers Farm, 1,700m to the south-east. In recent years, Late Bronze Age pottery has been found on St Peter's hill 2,800m to the west and in 2014, a posthole 400m to the north-east was dated as Bronze Age by the age of a worked flint lying above the fill.

Romano British: No Roman finds have been recorded in the immediate nearby area. A Roman villa has been reported in Daws Heath, 1,400m to the east and a possible Roman fortlet in Hadleigh, 1,700m to the south.

Early Medieval (Saxon): Following the Roman period there was an increase in wooded areas on the Rayleigh Hills in this area. A number of Romano British finds have been recovered from areas now wooded (Oxford Archaeology East report 2014 on Sayers Farm/Rippon 1999). This is supported by all three surrounding place names ending in "leigh", recorded as Old English "leah" in local charters and the Domesday Book, which is regarded as meaning a clearing in a wood.

Post Medieval and Modern: From maps, this area has always been wooded since 1777 with no signs of any settlement.

## 2 Aims and Methodology

### 2.1 Aims

The principal aim was to date the finds to determine the possible age of the ditches and any settlement.

### 2.2 Methodology

The collection was stored in three boxes, two associated with a particular pit and one more generally with the area around that pit. Samples of differing pottery fragments were taken from each and sent to Paul Blinkhorn for identification.

### **3 Results**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

It is important to recognise that this material was originally collected by children as a fairly random selection from unstratified levels from probably the banks of ditches, built up over time as the ditches were cleaned out after becoming silted with leaf fall. All rims and base sherds and apparently similar body sherd fabrics were sampled to be sent for identification. There is therefore limited correlation between the numbers identified and the proportion of each fabric present. The results have been divided into different periods with the full identified list appearing in Appendix A.

#### **3.2 Phase 1: Prehistoric**

Bronze Age body sherds were found.

#### **3.3 Phase 2: Roman**

Romano British sherds formed the bulk of finds.

#### **3.4 Phase 3: Medieval**

A range of medieval pottery was found, the earliest being Early Medieval Shelley ware (early 11<sup>th</sup> to mid 13<sup>th</sup> century).

#### **3.5 Post Medieval**

Only 1 sherd of later pottery was found.

### **4 Discussion**

#### **4.1 Prehistoric**

It seems likely that the presence of Bronze Age pottery reflects a limited settlement in the area now bounded by deep ditches within the northern part of West Wood. A properly executed excavation of sections through the ditches and banks might confirm the earliest age of the various ditches. A review of past surveys of the ditches might indicate whether other ditches may be of a similar age and whether such ditches may form one or more enclosures, perhaps in what was then an open area of fields within the present wood.

The total absence of any Iron Age material may indicate that this north eastern area of the wood may not have been occupied into the Iron Age, perhaps due to the growth of the wood, but potentially other areas of the present wood may have been so occupied at that time.

#### **4.2 Roman**

The presence of Roman sherds implies that this part of the wood was brought back into use at that time. A similar presence has been found on other local woods. There has been speculation that this was by charcoal burners.

#### **4.3 Medieval**

The medieval sherds would be consistent with charcoal burning within the woods.

#### **4.4 Post Medieval**

It may be significant that only 1 sherd of later pottery was found, implying that this area of the wood may have been little used after about 1600AD.

## Appendix A - Pottery and Tile Inventory

### Pottery Inventory

	Fabric Description	Basic Form	Sherd Count	Context Date Range (from Chelmsford and Colchester comparison reports)
	Bronze Age	Body sherd	3	2.300 to 800BC
	Roman	Body sherd	12	43AD to 410AD
	Roman	Rim sherd	2	43AD to 410AD
	Roman	Base sherd	3	43AD to 410AD
	F12A: Early Medieval Shelley ware		1	Early 11 <sup>th</sup> to mid 13 <sup>th</sup> century
	F20: Medieval Sandy Grey ware	Body sherd	3	c1150AD to 1400
	F20: Medieval Sandy Grey ware	Base angle	2	c1150AD to 1400
	F20: Medieval Sandy Grey ware	Rim sherd	4	c1150AD to 1400
	F21: Medieval Sandy Orange ware	Body sherd	4	15 <sup>th</sup> century to c1600AD
	F21: Medieval Sandy Orange ware	Rim sherd	2	15 <sup>th</sup> century to c1600AD
	F22:Hedingham ware	Body sherd	4	c1140 to 1350AD
	F40: Post medieval red earthenware	Rime sherd	1	1550 to 19 <sup>th</sup> century

All the pottery was identified by Paul Blinkhorn. (Paul has previously indicated Hedingham ware to date from late 12th – 14th century. Pots usually glazed jugs).

### Tile Inventory

Paul Blinkhorn also identified 2 fragments of 10mm thick red tile – undated.

Appendix B Pottery Photographs

Bronze Age, Roman and Medieval



Bronze Age



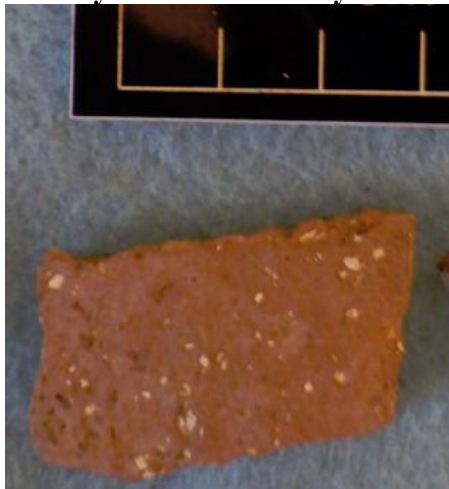
**Roman**



**Post medieval red earthenware**



**Early Medieval Shelley ware**



**Medieval Sandy Orange ware**



**Medieval Sandy Grey ware**



**Hedingham ware**



## **Appendix C – Bibliography**

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