

THE 2009 DIG – THE CHURCHYARD

Dr Gabor Thomas returned to Lyminge in 2009 to carry out an archaeological dig in the Churchyard. Dr Thomas reported on the dig as follows:

“2009’s excavation targeted a parcel of land located between the westernmost of the two trenches opened in 2008 and the southern boundary of the churchyard. The location provided the opportunity to examine a relatively large horizontal exposure falling within a 100m radius of the nucleus of the Anglo-Saxon monastic complex. This same locale was previously evaluated in 2005 and it was this earlier work ... under the Diocesan Archaeologist, Paul Bennett, which provided a spur for the current campaign of research by indicating the survival of Mid-Saxon occupation in accessible areas beyond the perimeter of the churchyard.”



“The chief result of 2009’s excavation was to demonstrate that the traces of Mid-Saxon activity found in 2005 relate to an intensively-occupied zone of habitation forming what can justifiably be called the ‘domestic sector’ of the Anglo-Saxon monastic precincts. This habitation included a concentration of small timber structures surrounded by clusters of rock-cut pits used for the communal disposal of human cess, kitchen waste and other domestic refuse. Further discoveries included a major ditched boundary which appears to have initiated the Mid-Saxon occupation sequence, superseded by a perpendicular arrangement of timber palisade trenches contemporary with the main phase of habitation.”

What was discovered enabled a picture to be drawn of the daily life that would have been encountered in the monastic community in Lyminge at the time. Dr Thomas concluded,

“The results from 2009 help to clarify and augment some of the conclusions set out at the end of the 2008 excavation ... First they reinforce the impression that the southern arc of occupation laying outside the monastic nucleus of mortared stone buildings was segregated into two distinct zones, comprising an inner core of domestic habitation ... surrounded by an outer penumbra of agricultural buildings and pit clusters sampled in 2008.

“2009 brought new evidence to bear on the use of boundaries to organise space and activities within the monastic settlement. At an early date in the history of the monastic complex, a major ditched-and-banked boundary appears to have been constructed across the chalk spur capped by the monastic church ... The boundary was subsequently encroached by a sprawl of domestic habitation with further signs of spatial organisation. This included a putative timber palisade, very likely the portion of a more extensive rectilinear framework, the north-south arm of which segregated a zone of buildings to the east and a zone of refuse disposal to the west.”

The artefacts found on the site and environmental analysis provided evidence of the domestic life. According to Dr Thomas there were *“large volumes of mineralised cess containing rich assemblages of digested fish bone and other food waste including ... butchered animal bone”*. Evidence from the finds discovered included,

“discarded tools, structural furnishings and other detritus from buildings; and finally insights into the personal attire and possessions of those who inhabited and passed through this settlement – dress accessories, coins, and the equipage of a specialist versed in the art of fine metalworking.

“Taken in conjunction with the results gained in other sampled areas of Lyminge’s monastic precincts, 2009’s discoveries help to paint a vivid picture of the busy outer domain of a Kentish double minster – a domain richly suffused with the material practices of daily life.”¹



Tray of finds washed by a Lyminge Volunteer
(Photograph © John Piddock)

Community Involvement

The 2009 dig gave volunteers from the local community the opportunity to take part in the dig for the first time. Residents from Lyminge and the surrounding area took part in washing and sorting finds and assisting the archaeologists to dig.

¹ Gabor Thomas *‘Daily Life in a Double Minster’: Interim Report on University of Reading Excavations at Lyminge, 2009, Report*



Further Information and Reading:

'Daily Life in a Double Minster': Interim Report on University of Reading Excavations at Lyminge, 2009, Report by Gabor Thomas

Bishopstone and Lyminge Article published in the British Archaeology Journal - July August 2011