

Iron Age West End

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An Iron Age settlement in West End was discovered in August 2017. It came to light during an archaeological survey and subsequent rescue dig in fields around Malthouse Farm, Benner Lane, prior to developer Martin Grant Homes building 95 dwellings there.

The findings consisted of two Iron Age roundhouses, a granary store, pottery, and a field system. These were tentatively dated to about 500 BC.

There is a strong possibility that more roundhouses had stood in the area. Even a single Celtic family might need more than two buildings and a granary store, and a small tribe would certainly need more. If so, the remains may be in nearby unexcavated areas. It is probable that the Iron Age fields which archaeologists identified were only a small part of a field system which extended over a much wider area in the vicinity of Benner Lane and Fairfield Lane.

The archaeologists, from specialists Cotswold Archaeology, removed soil samples from the Iron Age ditches, distributed across the large excavation site. Analysts will be looking for evidence of what crops were grown, animals bred, what the landscape was like (presumably heathland), the local flora, and what the Celtic people ate. They will also be trying to determine a more precise dating for the finds, narrowing it down from the whole Iron Age period which in Britain is defined roughly as 800 BC to about 100 AD.

The roundhouses would probably have been much like the reconstructions which can be seen today at the Stonehenge visitor centre: a circle of wooden posts supporting walls of wattle and mud, with a conical roof made of material such as reeds, straw, furze or gorse. Our two roundhouses were of different sizes: one was approximately 28 feet in diameter while the other was approximately 40 feet.

Another discovery nearby was a Bronze Age storage pit which contained pieces of pottery. It may be up to 5,000 years old. No other Bronze Age traces have been found there, but it's unlikely that a storage pit would be completely isolated. There's an implication that some sort of scattered dwellings might have existed within a few hundred yards of the pit – though all traces could well have vanished after 3000 - 5000 years. Many decades ago four Bronze Age burial mounds were identified on Brentmoor Heath, West End; such burials were typically built at a distance from the main settlement area, often to serve as boundary markers between different families or tribes. The newly discovered storage pit is at the right kind of distance from the (possibly) boundary-marking burials to be the location for a family's homes, which reinforces the notion of there being a Bronze Age settlement somewhere in the vicinity of Benner Lane.

Full records of the excavation site were made, prior to house-building taking over the land: modern 21st century homes where roundhouses had stood 2,500 years ago!

Cotswold Archaeology and Martin Grant Homes have undertaken to give a public lecture in West End to describe in full the excavation results, when the laboratory analysis has been completed and the report written. This will probably be around May 2018.

Meanwhile we can already see a pattern of continuous occupation for about 3000-5000 years in West End: a Bronze Age community, possibly dating back to about 3000 BC; an Iron Age family or tribe; the Romans, and the Romanised-Britons, who built a road through West End (discovered during construction of the M3 in the 1970s); through to recorded history up to the present time.