

Aerial Photograph
of the site taken 1957



In 1996 volunteers from Datchet Village Society began searching a field at Southlea for archaeological evidence of a prehistoric village.

The site had been identified from aerial photos which revealed traces of ancient ditches, banks and trackways beneath the soil. Deep modern ploughing was bringing ancient flint tools and broken pottery up to the surface where they were found by careful fieldwalking, carried out for many weeks over several winters.

Thousands of finds were very soon being made and archaeological advice was called in, funded by a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This paid for professional surveys of the field and for dating and identification of the flint and pottery. Volunteers continued to process the finds, marking them all with a grid reference to show in which 10-metre square of the huge field each piece had been found.

Surveys showed that people had settled here on an 'island' of higher ground within the low-lying land close to the Thames, just high enough to keep their dwellings dry and cattle safe.



Why was there no excavation?

With such a huge multi-period settlement, and one which remained under cultivation throughout, the group knew that it would not be possible to excavate as amateurs, although a small dig was carried out near Southlea Road. Archaeologists recommend fieldwalking to assess the significance of a site while leaving it untouched for the future, when full-scale excavation might become possible or necessary.

How important is the Southlea settlement?

'A rare survival of a complete prehistoric landscape', is how one of our expert advisors described the whole huge area. It has survived untouched because no development has ever taken place there due to it being so prone to flooding – apart from the higher island of habitable land. Southlea Farm is now on this high spot and it may represent continuous occupation of a rural farmstead from the prehistoric past.

Finds on display at Datchet Library



All of the thousands of finds were eventually bagged, labelled, boxed, and deposited at Reading Museum, and the investigations recorded on the Historic Environment Records for Berkshire.

Because this was a community project, some finds are on loan to the Royal Borough Museum so that the Datchet Village Society can borrow items for exhibition and education. In 2014 the Society's display case has been installed at Datchet Library, where a selection of flint or pottery can be seen.

Finding out more

The full reports and a short report for non-specialists can be found at: www.datchet.com/historical or ask at the Library. Email: janet@datchet.com

**British Archaeological Society Awards 2008
Highly Commended for
Best Amateur Project:
Fieldwalking at Datchet**

Collecting the prize bowl and certificate at the British Museum ▶



**Datchet Village
Society**

archaeology

Southlea, Datchet

Fieldwalking Group 1996–2008



**A prehistoric settlement from
Neolithic to Romano-British times**

2 Bronze Age Pottery

Several different types of pottery were found, including thick sherds from storage or cooking pots and decorated fine wares. Some of these are like pots mainly found in Wiltshire and suggest long-distance links between settlements.



1 Neolithic Flint

Large ceremonial knife (11cms)

Flint tools for many specific purposes were made on the site, though ceremonial objects may have been traded in. Very few arrowheads were found, but large numbers of more domestic tools. Flint tools were also used through the Bronze Age, when only prestigious objects were made of the new metals.



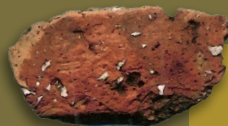
Blunt-nosed scrapers, for cleaning animal skins

Piercing tools, for sewing animal skins

Thin sharp cutting blades

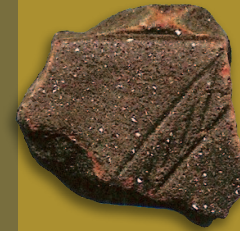
Neolithic Pottery

One of just four small fragile shards of early Neolithic pottery.



3 Iron Age Pottery

One of the most unusual features of this site is that it continued in use from the late Bronze Age through to the Iron Age, while many settlements in this region were abandoned then. A great deal of pottery was found in the area above the ditch of the big Iron Age enclosure, maybe as rubbish – but perhaps deliberately deposited for a ritual purpose.



Decorated early Iron Age pottery

4 Roman Pottery

Roman traders were active along the Thames even before the invasion in 43 AD, and local people took on board their superior pottery, made on a wheel and fired at higher temperatures. Before long the new technologies were being used in Britain, but some luxury items were imported.

Roman-period pottery made in Britain



Rim of a dish imported from Gaul

Computer-generated image of a Bronze and Iron Age enclosure, very like the one at Southlea seen top right in the aerial photo.

