ARCHAEOLOGY AT COBDEN 2015
An education project in the grounds of Cobden Primary School, West Yorkshire, UK

Text and photographs by Dave Weldrake
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1.0 Introduction
The project was commissioned by D. Smedley on behalf of Cobden Primary School (Cobden Rd, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS12 5LA) and took place during the week beginning on the 1st of June 2015. The project was led by Dave Weldrake.

2.0 Aims and Objectives
The aims of the investigation were twofold:

2.1 Archaeological
To investigate the potential for archaeological survival within the school grounds

2.2 Educational
To provide children in Year 5 with a basic understanding of the principles of archaeology

3.0 Location
The site was located at SE 256 318 on a rise near the north–eastern corner of the school grounds.

4.0 Historical Background
The first surviving mention of the village of Farnley comes in the Domesday Survey prepared for William I in 1086 (Faull and Moorhouse 1981). However, the settlement is probably somewhat older in origin as the name Farnley derives from two Old English words meaning fern and woodland clearing (KEPN). The ley ending is common to many place names in this region (Armley, Bramley, Calverley, Morley, and others) and would suggest that the area was heavily wooded when first colonised by the Anglo-Saxons in the 7th century.

Although the lords of the manor of Farnley can be established with some accuracy during the medieval period there is little that can be said about the layout of the medieval village itself. By the later medieval period it seems to have become two distinct settlements called Great and Little Farnley (Faull and Moorhouse 1981 p. 369).

The only historical event of any note to take place in township was the Farnley Wood Plot. This was a conspiracy against the government of Charles II about which opinions are still divided. It is a fact that on the 12th of October 1663 a group of men met in Farnley Wood with the intention of starting a rebellion against the king and that they were forced to disband as they failed to receive the support which they were expecting. However, historians disagree as to the extent and seriousness of the plot. Some believe that the Farnley Wood Plot was a serious threat to the government which was only thwarted because traitors within the ranks of the plotters disclosed the conspiracy. Others feel that the whole thing was a deliberate attempt on the part of the government to foster a conspiracy so that they would have an excuse to arrest and execute people with anti-government sentiments in the north of England. A fuller discussion can be found in Smith p 19-24.
The first O. S. six inch to the mile map of the area (Yorkshire 217, published in 1852, accessed through the National Library of Scotland website) shows Farnley as a largely rural settlement and the area where Cobden Primary School is now situated has not yet been built on. Field names can be gathered from the Tithe Award map of 1844 (accessed through Tracks in Time). The field in which the school stands is called Cow Stand. Long Tongue Wood is situated to the south where there are now allotment gardens. Cook Wood (now known as Little Wood) lies on the west of the school site. Further south in the area now occupied by the Whitehall Trading Estate there are several fields with the place name element Stank, suggesting boggy ground.

Although there are some small pits shown on early mapping, it is not until 1844 that large-scale industry was to reach Farnley. In that year the Armitages of Farnley Hall established the Farnley Iron Works to exploit the mineral resources on their land (Grace’s Guide). The company had to be re-established in 1871 but at its height occupied the whole of the area now covered by the Whitehall Trading Estate and built many houses on Low Moor Side to accommodate its workers. The company also produced bricks and later merged with the Leeds Fireclay Company (Old Bricks). The site was occupied by various owners into the latter half of the 20th century, one of the most recent being Dunlop and Ranken whose iron and steel stockyards were situated there (Leodis).

By the 1890s the area around the present Cobden Primary School had acquired the name New Blackpool and the first houses were being built along Cobden Road. It is not clear where the name Cobden comes from. It is certainly not a pre-existing local place name. The footpath through Gilbert Royd and along the line of the modern Cobden Road is marked as Farnley Lane on Tithe Award map and as Bridge Lane on the 1852 O. S. map. It is not marked as Cobden Road until the appearance of the first house on the 1892 O. S. map. This might suggest that Cobden was the name of the developer. It was fashionable in the Victorian period for a developer to name a street after himself or members of his family. A similar example can be found at Saltaire, where several of the streets are named after Sir Titus Salt’s children (M. Lawson pers. comm.).

5.0 **The Archaeological Background**

A search of the West Yorkshire Heritage Environment Record (a database of all known archaeological sites and find spots) via Heritage Gateway has revealed no archaeological activity in the immediate area.

6.0 **Archaeological results**

6.1 **The garden pottery survey**

Each child in Year 5 was issued with a plastic zip-lock bag and asked to collect any surface finds which there might be in his/her garden. The material produced by this process was then analysed and returned to the pupils.

The majority of the finds were what one would expect from such a methodology – fragments of 19th and 20th century pottery (including whitewares, transfer glazed...
pottery and plant pot), some clay tobacco pipe stems, decimal coins and a plastic bracelet. However one child retrieved two pieces of flint which may be significant. These are discussed in more detail in Section 7.*.

6.2 The Excavation
(See Appendix 1: Images 1-4)
Initially two 1.5 x 2.0 metre trenches were excavated. However, when it became apparent that these were beginning to bottom at a depth of c. 10 cm a further 1.5m x 0.5m sondages was also opened up. This was not bottomed although one small section of it was excavated to a depth of 15 cm.

All the soil which was removed was a dark brown humic topsoil which has been treated as a single context for the purposes of the finds analysis. This overlay a dense yellow clay with inclusions of sandstone fragments. This may represent the natural subsoil.

7.0 The finds
Finds from the site were not numerous. They included the usual 19th/20th century pottery, fragments of clay pipe and other ceramic objects, vessel and window glass. The excavation finds have been retained by the school for display purposes. Only selected examples are discussed in detail below:

7.1 Pottery (See Appendix 1: Images 5 and 6)
All the ceramics retrieved from the site were 19th or 20th century in date. They included whitewares, transfer-glazed wares, fragments of clay pipe, a ceramic doorknob, a fragment of the lid of a casserole dish, and part of a glazed tile.

7.1.1 Whitewares.
This form of pottery became popular in the 1830s when it began to replace the earlier pearl and cream wares such as those made by the Leeds potteries. The fragments represent plates, saucers and other table ware. The vessels are machine-made and mass-produced. Similar vessels are in use today.

7.1.2 Transfer-glazed ware.
Another 19th/20th century mass-produced machine-made product in which a complex pattern is drawn out and glued to the surface of a plate or other vessel. This can then be sealed in place by the glaze. The process enables the mass-production of complex designs at a relatively low cost. The most popular design was the Willow Pattern, designed originally for the Minton potteries in the late 1700s. However, cheap copies quickly became popular and the characteristic blue and white design is easily distinguished. A single small fragment of Willow Pattern was recovered from site. (See Appendix 1: Image 5.)

7.1.3 Brown-glazed wares.
The tradition of making hard-fired pots with a dark glaze goes back into at least the 1500s, (Moorhouse and Roberts 1992) though the fragments recovered from the site are likely to be of a much later date.
7.1.4 **Clay Tobacco Pipes**
Six sections of pipe stem were recovered and one fragments of bowl. None of the fragments bear maker’s marks and so they cannot be identified.

7.1.5 **Ceramic door knob** (Appendix 1 Images 6)
With a diameter of only 3.5 cm this door knob would seem to be too small for a full scale door. It seems therefore more likely that it was originally a fitting for something like a jewellery chest or perhaps a small set of drawers.

7.1.6 **Fragment of lid of casserole dish** (Appendix 1 Images 6)
This is part of an earthen ware vessel with a brown glaze and is probably the handle by which the lid of a casserole could be removed and replaced.

7.1.7 **Glazed tile**
This fragment of tile is unusual in that it is almost square in section with a deep rebate on the side not shown in the photograph. The tile is incomplete and its original length cannot be established. Its function is unknown but the brown glaze and the robust construction are suggestive of sanitary ware.

7.2 **Flint** (Appendix 1: Image 7)
Two pieces of flint were retrieved during the gardens survey. They are of a similar weight and size (maximum dimension 5.0 cm and 5.5cm). Neither shows any signs of being worked. However, the finds are interesting since, as has been noted elsewhere (Weldrake 2015), there is no natural source of flint within the locality. These examples must therefore be classed as imports to the region. Flint in West Yorkshire often derives from the Yorkshire Wolds but this is unlikely in this case. Wolds flint has a pale core and these two finds would seem too dark for his.

8.0 **Discussion and interpretation**

8.1 **The excavation**
The small size of the finds would suggest that they result from night soiling. In the days before regular household rubbish collection, rural houses would make a heap of all their household waste along with the sweepings from stables and barns. This material was then spread onto the fields as manure. Any organic materials decay over time leaving only the pottery and other non-perishable items though these are broken up into small pieces by ploughing. Such a view is consistent with the available map evidence which shows the area on which the school now stands was a greenfield site at least into the 1950s.

The depth of topsoil was slightly greater in the small sondage than in the two tranches. This might be the result of soil washing down the slope over time. The depth of topsoil may be even greater further downslope.

8.2 **The garden survey**
This is little that can usefully be said about the results of the garden survey. On the whole the material is what one would expect to find. The exceptions are the two pieces of flint described in Section 7.2. However, some caution should be exercised here. The finds could have come in with imported garden soil and in any case two
flints would be too little evidence from which to assume the presence of a prehistoric site. Further work would need to be done to resolve the question.

9.0 Educational Outcomes
(See front cover and Image 8)
This project was not just about history. It involved Year 5 in a variety of activities which helped to develop thinking and reasoning abilities as well as physical skills. The classroom activities closely modelled the processes of archaeology and science in general. In consequence the pupils were well prepared for the practical element of the project.

Excavation can be a physically demanding process but the majority of children seemed able to cope with it and stayed on task for the whole of the session. This is one of the benefits of outdoor work: it engages all children, especially those which are not comfortable with more formal methods of learning.

Year 5 also seem to have had fun. Because of this, it was easy for them to learn and the skills which they have acquired can form a firm basis for further work in Year 6.

10.0 Potential for further work
A project such as this could be repeated in future years and although it is true that the potential for buried archaeology still remains small similar educational outcomes could be obtained.

Some consideration could also be given to the garden survey element of the project. The sample taken this time was really too small to generate meaningful data. However, if it were repeated as a whole school exercise, it could offer pupils an opportunity to develop skills in data handling and presentation in a practical rather than a theoretical context.

11.0 Conclusions
The archaeological project at Cobden has confirmed the value of practical experience as a learning tool. It has given the children a basic understanding of the way archaeology works and provided them with an experience about which they will talk for a long time.
## 12.0 References

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Appendix 1: Images

Image 1: An overall view of the excavation
The image shows the site looking north. The small sondages is in the foreground, Trench 2 in the centre and Trench 1 to the rear. The tape has been extended to 1.0m for scale.
Image 2: Trench 1 looking south
This trench was almost fully excavated and the yellow subsoil can be seen in patches over the bottom of the trench. The tape has been extended to 1.0m for scale.
Image 3: Trench 2 looking west
The image shows Trench 2 after the removal of most of the topsoil. Patches of the yellow subsoil can be seen at the bottom of the trench. The tape has been extended to 1.0m for scale.
Image 4: The small sondages looking north
This sondage was not bottomed despite a slightly deeper area dug out in the south-west corner. All that can therefore be seen in the photograph is topsoil. The tape has been extended to 1.0m for scale
Image 5: 19th and 20th century pottery
This photograph shows examples mainly of whitewares and transfer-glazed wares (blue and white). The blue and white piece in the top centre of the photograph may be a fragment of a willow pattern plate.
Image 6: 3 ceramic items
A number of ceramic items were recovered in addition to fragments of pottery and clay pipe. This photograph shows (from left to right) a ceramic door knob, what may be the handle of the lid of a casserole dish and a fragment of tile (See discussion in Section 7.1)
Image 7: Two pieces of flint found during the garden survey
(For description, see Section 7.2)
Image 8: Work in the classroom
As preparation for their practical work, pupils carried out a simulated excavation in the school classroom. In the photograph they are discussing their 'finds' to see how they represent evidence of human activity in the past.