

A Romano-British Saltern at Street House NZ 7390–1930

Excavations in the Summer 2023

In recent years (2016–22), I have been undertaking excavations on a Neolithic saltern at Street House (Sherlock 2021). Indeed, some readers will recall some earlier excavations at Street House that revealed the evidence for Iron Age salt making at the site (Sherlock & Vyner 2013). It was with that information about a potential pattern of salt manufacture at the site that led to a critical evaluation of the geophysics to assess the potential for other salterns. Further work by James Lawton (AoC Archaeology) suggested there were other locations indicative of kilns or salterns.

An area 12m x 8m was selected for evaluation and excavation by initially stripping the topsoil by machine in late August. The area was located within a known Romano-British enclosure that has been dated to the late fourth century AD and the provisional dating of the pottery is in accord with that Late Roman date. The full excavation account will be published in due course, but this note focuses upon a saltern that was probably Romano-British in origin.

The features directly associated with salt manufacture included structure [1838] and a large circular pit, [1815] (not shown on Fig. 1). The pit measured 1m in diameter and was located 0.75m to the north of the saltern. It was probably a storage pit for the brine.

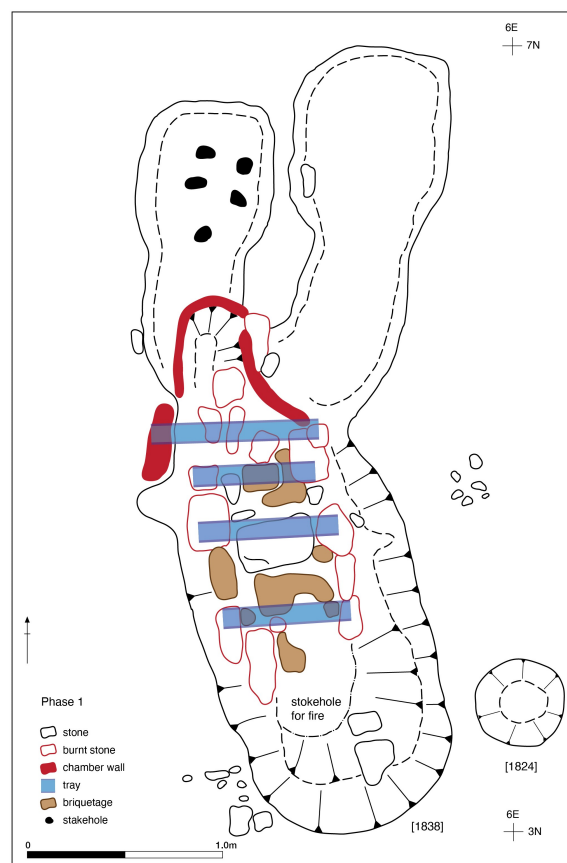


Fig. 1 Plan of Street House Romano-British saltern excavated in the summer, 2023; probable positions where evaporation trays were placed are shown in blue.

The saltern was aligned north-south and measured 3.90m long by 1m wide, with a stokehole as the main heat source at the southern end of the structure and two flues to the north. Recorded as [1838] the feature was cut into the natural boulder clay. The edges of the feature were heavily burnt. The southern lobe of the structure was edged in stones and within this part of the feature there was a series

of graded burnt stones that stepped up a gradual incline towards the north end. Fragments of briquetage were recovered from the interior of the structure. It is suggested that a series of four trays or troughs (Fig. 1, shown in blue) were placed across the stones with hot air drawn beneath, from the fire to the flue, south to north.

The site is provisionally dated by a number of Romano-British pottery sherds found within features in the immediate area and I am awaiting spot dating of the ceramics. Radiocarbon determinations are expected in the new year from the glume and wheat chaff that formed part of the fuel for the furnace.



Fig. 2 Pole cam view of saltern feature showing the stokehole (left), burnt stone supports of the evaporation chamber (centre) and flues (right)

References

Sherlock, S J, 2021 “Early Neolithic salt manufacture at Street House, Loftus, north-east England” *Antiquity* 95, 648–669. <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2021.25>

Sherlock, S J, and Vyner, B E, 2013 “Iron Age salt working on the Yorkshire coast at Street House, Loftus, Cleveland” *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 85, 46–67