

# Archaeology on the Widdicom Tract at Hobcaw Barony

By **Heathley A. Johnson**

## Introduction

In 2014, I began working at Hobcaw North, a mixed component site on Hobcaw Barony, for Dr. Karen Smith, then Director of SCIAA's Applied Research Division. This early foray to the site was documented in the July 2015 issue of *Legacy*. Little did I realize at the time that I would still be doing work on the site five years later, having mostly taken over the project and turned it into the basis of a master's thesis. Countless hours have gone into doing research and fieldwork at the site, followed by the subsequent artifact analysis and conservation. The fieldwork portion of the first phase of work was completed this past summer. This article summarizes the work at the site to date, and looks forward to questions that still need to be answered.

Archaeological investigations of any

depth are rarely solo endeavors, and my work at Hobcaw North is no exception. Tamara Wilson of SCIAA has been a great benefit to the project, helping with every trip to the field, as well as providing guidance on the use of ArcGIS software. Karen Smith of South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) and Stacey Young, Director of SCIAA's Applied Research Division, volunteered in August 2019 to help with the excavation of test units. JoAnn Jarman, of the USC Baruch Marine Field Laboratory, also volunteered in August 2019 and had a chance to learn a bit more about archaeology, as well as providing wonderful logistical support for our stay at Hobcaw Barony. The Archaeological Research Trust (ART) provided a grant to help pay for logistics in August 2019. And, of course, none of this research would have been possible

without the support of the Belle W. Baruch Foundation. To all, go my appreciation.

## Background

Hobcaw Barony was originally granted in 1718 to John, Lord Carteret, one of the Lords Proprietors. The barony changed hands a few times prior to being split into numerous plantations that were sold off between 1766 and 1767. Before the barony was laid out, a 200-acre tract was sold to Alexander Widdicom in 1711; this tract subsequently had three different owners before passing into the ownership of John and Charles Cogdell by 1767, and later their heirs (Linder and Thacker 2001:11-14). The Hobcaw North site partially lies within the 200-acre Widdicom tract, which can be seen in a 1736 survey plat of Hobcaw Barony (Figure 1), when the tract was under the ownership of Samuel Masters.

Work at the site was originally oriented towards testing the ability of a metal detector survey to reveal site structure through artifact patterning analysis. Learning about the site in general was also one of the overall goals, as all that was known about the site was that it contained Native American pottery and 18<sup>th</sup> century European artifacts (Michie 1991). Towards this end, an arbitrary 51 X 51-meter search area was laid out to be surveyed with a metal detector. The search area was eventually expanded to roughly 60 X 70 meters in order to encompass the majority of the site as defined by metallic artifacts. The survey was completed during five visits to the site, spanning from 2014 to 2017.

It was also during this time that I began to think about developing my work at the site into a thesis, and I subsequently enrolled in the graduate school at St. Cloud State University in Minnesota, where I am pursuing a master's degree in the Cultural Resource Management Archaeology program. During the metal detector survey of the site, research questions and methods

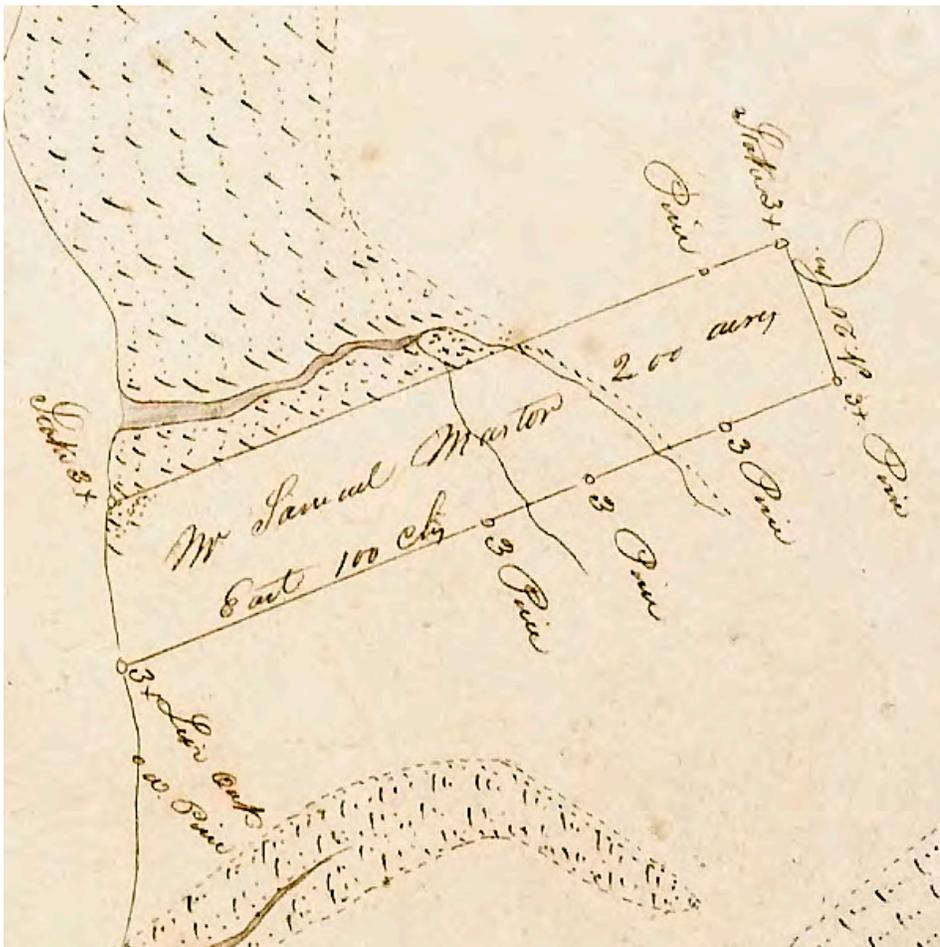


Figure 1: Detail of a 1736 plat of Hobcaw Barony showing the 200-acre Widdicom tract, then under the ownership of Samuel Masters. (Courtesy SC Department of Archives and History)

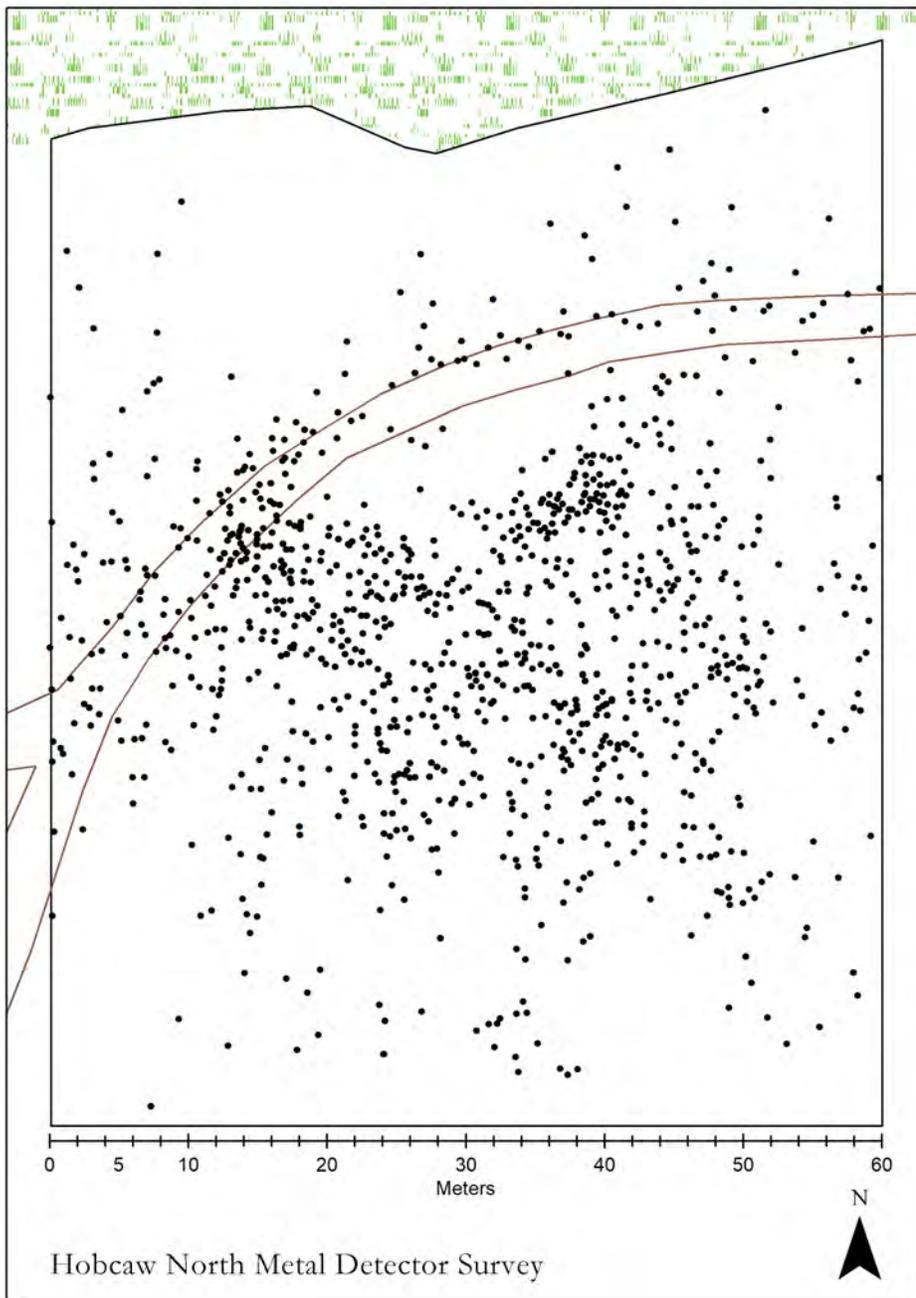


Figure 2: Metal detector survey map of the site. Black dots indicate the location of excavated readings. (Map drawn by Heathley A. Johnson)

were refined somewhat, and additional questions were also developed as part of my thesis. One goal was to see how the information gained from a metal detector survey compared to that gained from a traditional shovel test survey. Towards this end, in June and July 2019, the area surveyed by metal detector was surveyed by shovel testing. In August 2019, I returned to the site to excavate test units. The location of the units was determined based on the distribution and density of various artifact classes recovered during the metal detector survey and were

designed to test the viability of a metal detector survey to reveal site structure.

### Fieldwork Results

The metal detector survey of the site was intended to provide 100% coverage of the search area. In total, 1,085 separate readings were excavated (Figure 2). The majority of the artifacts were 18<sup>th</sup> century in origin, with small hand-wrought nails being the dominant artifact recovered. Other artifacts included gun parts, lead shot, buttons and buckles, cast iron pot and kettle fragments, European and

colonoware ceramics, bottle glass, brick, and tobacco pipe fragments. A modest number of artifacts dating from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries were also recovered, primarily small arms ammunition related to hunting. Also, Indian pottery and lithic debitage were prevalent across the entire site. Once the artifacts were analyzed, distribution and density maps were produced. Figure 3 shows a density map of all 18<sup>th</sup>-century artifacts. The map also shows that the main area of occupation of the site is in the middle of the survey area.

The shovel testing survey was conducted on a 10-meter interval grid; a total of 51 shovel tests were excavated, with 49 of them being positive. While the analysis and comparison of the two different surveys is still underway, a few interesting observations were readily apparent. The shovel testing revealed similar patterns of the site that were observed through metal detecting. The overall extent of the site as revealed by both methods was comparable (when looking at only the 18<sup>th</sup>-century artifacts), and both methods also indicated that the densest concentration of 18<sup>th</sup> century artifacts was the middle of the site. Another interesting observation was that there were entire artifact classes that were not found by shovel testing, such as lead shot, 65 of which were found during the metal detector survey.

During the testing phase of work, a total of 10 test units were excavated (Figure 4). The placement of the test units was determined by density maps for various artifact classes or functional groups found during the metal detector survey. The locations of the test units were based on the following artifact classes or groups: architectural, metal scrap (brass, lead, and pewter), lead shot, kitchen (cast iron vessels, ceramics, glass, utensils), and ceramics. Two units were also located in areas that had little to no metal. The analysis and interpretation of the results of this testing are still ongoing, but initial observations have been made. To some degree, the metal detecting data was able to successfully guide the placement of the

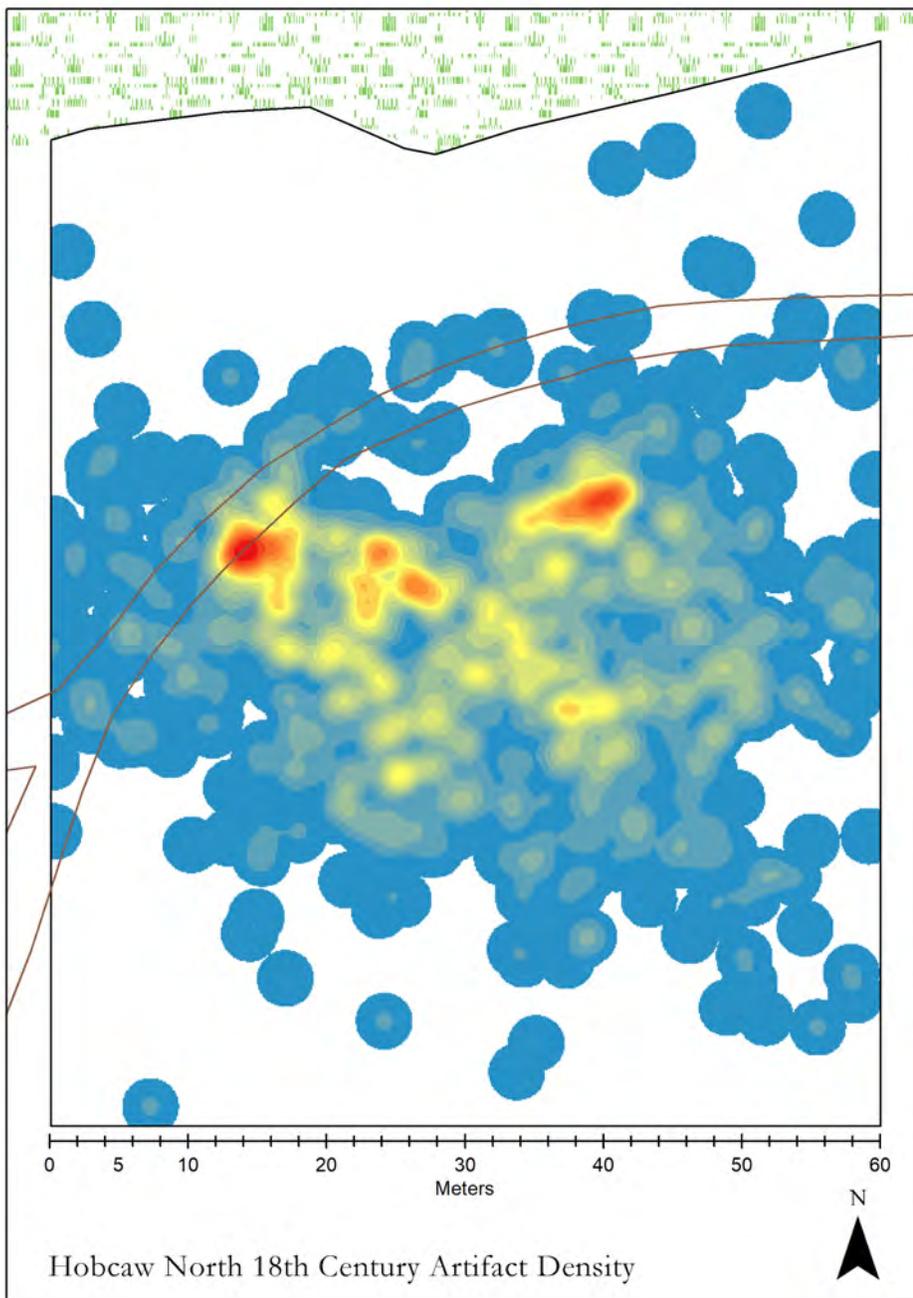


Figure 3: 18th century artifact density map of the site. Density increases from blue (low) to red (high). (Map drawn by Heathley A. Johnson)

test units such that features and activity areas were located. Two discreet features were found, one of which was a one-meter deep structural posthole. In the middle of the site, five of the units encountered a large sheet midden that averaged 20 centimeters in thickness. Sheet middens are amorphous deposits that form around areas of occupation and contain the accumulated refuse of the inhabitants. While the full extent of the sheet midden has yet to be determined, it appears to cover an area at least 25 X 15 meters. Given this large area and the number of nails that

were recovered from across it, it is likely that several structures were present at the site.

### Looking Forward

There still remains a lot of work to be done on the site, not just for this current project, but beyond that as well. The analysis of the work to date will be completed by summer 2020, and while it will answer many questions, it will also leave many questions unanswered, due to the limited scope of the work that has been completed. Historical documentation

suggests that the site was occupied by Europeans and Africans from 1711 to 1767, dates that are supported by the artifacts that have been recovered. The historical record also provides some insight into some of the people that lived there. For example, the second owner of the Widdicom tract, Lewis John, was known to be an Indian trader who continued his trade despite restrictions on trade between Indians and private citizens following the Yamasee War in 1715 (McDowell 1955:76, 264-265). Samuel Masters, the third owner, was granted the right in 1731 to operate a ferry from his property to Georgetown. In 1732, likely to raise the capital for ferry boats, he mortgaged seemingly all he owned: the 200-acre tract, two slaves, cattle, tar kilns, wood, and barrels (Linder and Thacker 2001:13). What is not documented in the historical record and must be addressed through archaeology is the actual living conditions and day-to-day life of the inhabitants. What style and size of house did they occupy? How many structures are present at the site? What was the economic situation of the inhabitants? Did they have regular access to imported European goods or were they more self-sufficient? Is there evidence that can be tied to specific owners, or to different inhabitants during one ownership? These types of questions and many more can be asked of the site and will require years of work to answer. Additionally, though the work thus far has been targeted towards the colonial occupation, the site contains an abundance of prehistoric materials, and offers the chance to further explore the entire history of human occupation and use of the site.

In closing, work on the Widdicom tract has shown that the site can offer many insights into the colonial occupation of the Georgetown and Winyah Bay region. Through the efforts of the Baruch family in preserving Hobcaw Barony and the continuing stewardship of the Belle W. Baruch Foundation, this site represents something that is increasingly rare along the South Carolina coast—a site that has not been destroyed by development or looting and that remains protected from

such. In the years to come, I hope to be able to report on many more enriching research projects from this important site.

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Figure 5: Heathley A. Johnson screening soil from a test unit in August 2019. (Photo by Tamara S. Wilson)



Figure 4: Dr. Karen Smith, Stacey Young, and Tamara Wilson excavating a test unit in August 2019. (Photo by Heathley A. Johnson)