A Ceremonial Center at the Charles Towne Site

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During the excavation of the site of the 1670 settlement of Charles Towne on the south side of the Ashley River in Charleston, South Carolina, a request was made by the Tricentennial Commission for a survey of the site chosen for location of the exhibit pavilion. This project was expected to take two days of exploratory trenching in order to determine if any features were present that should not be destroyed by the construction of the pavilion. The two day project revealed a Pee Dee Complicated Stamped, an incised vessel, one burial, and a line of postholes for a palisade. Due to these discoveries it was three months before the project was brought to an end by the construction of the Tricentennial Pavilion on the site.

This report is a general summary of the features found during this salvage project. The palisade enclosed an area generally two hundred feet square, and was found to have been rebuilt twice after the original construction. The first two palisades were not plastered, but the third had been covered with red clay daub, fragments of which were found in the postholes. Near the center of this compound, postholes for a structure with entranceway trenches were found. At the time of the first rebuilding of this compound an additional compound was constructed adjoining the north corner of the original enclosure. This enclosure is of particular interest in that it had a circular row of postholes at the west corner, measuring 32 feet across, which represented a bastion for protection of the entranceway found between this bastion and the original two hundred foot square compound wall. Destruction of the site by the pavilion construction prevented an examination of the features inside this smaller bastioned enclosure.

Inside the larger palisaded area a central building was represented by postholes and a pair of entranceway trenches. This structure was apparently the central focus within the palisaded area at the time of its original construction. At a later time, probably at the time the third palisade was constructed and plastered with clay daub, clay daubed sheds were constructed over the site of the original centrally located structure. These sheds, measuring 13 by 13, 10 by 20, and 10 by 12 feet were possibly square-ground sheds, or perhaps, communal corncribs such as those described by John Lawson. He mentions corncribs standing on eight posts and completely plastered with clay. The square-ground interpretation may be more valid, however, in relation to the enclosed compound which was apparently ceremonial in nature.

A number of burials, both flexed and bundle, were found inside the palisaded area. One of these was a multiple bundle burial containing a polished stone disc, mica fragments placed against the bundle, and one had a quantity of shell beads beneath the skull. Partial cremation was seen to have been carried out on several bundles, and one small pit contained a complete cremation. One bundle burial pit contained a small pot with an embryo beside which were seven quartz pebbles probably representing the position of a wooden or gourd rattle.

A particularly interesting feature was a Pee Dee Complicated Stamped urn
PLAN OF THE MAJOR ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES AT THE INDIAN CEREMONIAL CENTER ON THE SITE OF THE TRICENTENNIAL PAVILION AT THE 1670 SITE OF CHARLES TOWNE

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NOTE: Bundles, resent pits, and postholes not associated with recognizable architectural features are not shown in this explanatory drawing.

SCALE- FEET
0 5 10 20 30 40
that had been placed in a pit over a similarly stamped bowl containing a smooth-surfaced, constricted-neck jar lying on its side. The layer of humus material in the jar gave no clue as to the contents it once held, and we are left to speculate why a jar would be so placed in a bowl and covered by an urn in a pit. One thought that comes to mind is that it may have held yaupon leaves for the manufacture of the "black drink".

The pottery recovered from the site has not been studied in detail but with the exception of one complete cordmarked vessel, it appears to be Pee Dee Complicated Stamped and incised. One whole incised vessel was recovered from one feature just inside the northeast palisade wall.

No evidence of contact with European culture was seen in any of the features, and it appears that the site represents a ceremonial center of the Pee Dee Focus, probably dating from the sixteenth or early seventeenth century. A connection between the group constructing this ceremonial center and the Kiawah Indians occupying the area at the time of contact in 1670 cannot be demonstrated. However, some distance away, in the fortification ditches of the 1670 colonists at Charles Towne, a number of the Pee Dee pottery fragments were recovered, as were large quantities of Deptford and other earlier pottery types. In these ditches were fragments of a burnished, nontempered ware, some of which appear to indicate influence from European ceramic forms. It is this burnished ware of the Colono-Indian type that very likely represents the ware being made by the Kiawah Indians of the 1670's and brought to Charles Towne along with the almost daily supplies furnished the colonists by the friendly Kiawah. The Kiawah Indians cannot be identified as the makers of the Pee Dee pottery found in the fortification ditches at Charles Towne, and the question as to how late Pee Dee type pottery continued to be made will have to await other studies in the area before more positive answers can be forthcoming.

JOCASSEE SURVEY AND EXCAVATIONS

During the second week of June, John D. Combes and Paul Brockington, of the Institute staff conducted a five day survey of the last remaining unsurveyed area of the Keowee-Toxaway Project. This was an intensive reconnaissance of the upper reaches of the Jocassee Reservoir area. Several new sites were recorded and several previously recorded sites were visited in the steep, mountainous canyons of the Whitewater River. This area will soon be flooded by the dam to be built by Duke Power Company on this river. The Duke Power Company has generously supported this work during the entire Keowee-Toxaway Project activities.

This work was continued during the last two weeks of June and the first two weeks of July when Mr. Combes, with Paul Brockington and a crew of four conducted excavations at two of the sites in the Jocassee Reservoir area. Most of the sites in this area are small Archaic campsites or small villages of later periods. Several other sites were also tested briefly. This completes all the anticipated field work in the Keowee-Toxaway Project. Mr. Combes is writing up the report of this work and will use portions of it for his Doctoral Dissertation at the University of Kansas.