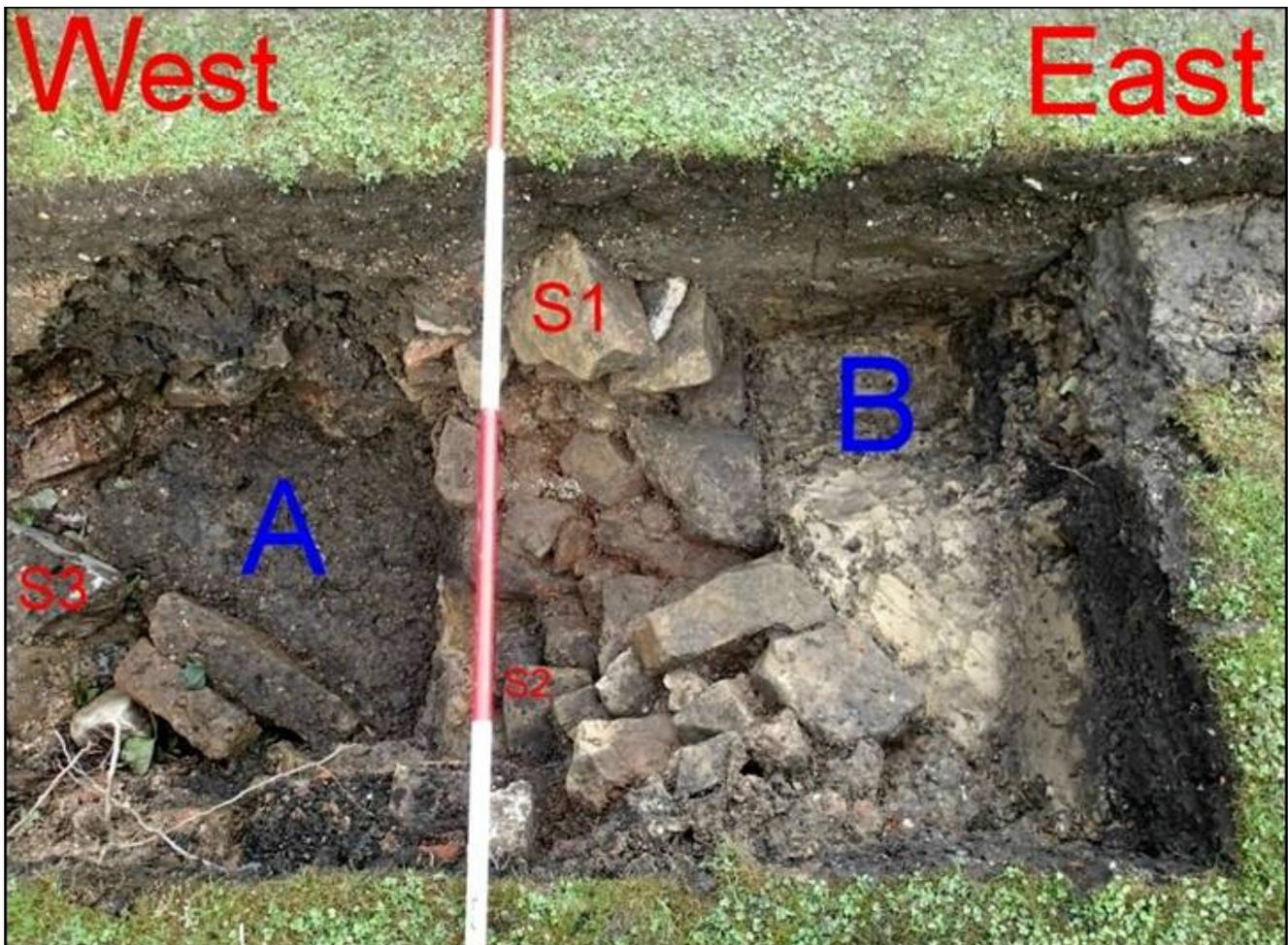


## Update November 2014: Interim Summary

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A few words about where we currently are in the garden of no 42 St John Street. For the last four weeks we have been backfilling what, for us, was the vast second section trench at the bottom of the garden and this process will take at least another two weeks. In the course of doing so we have helped clear a clay fall in the Ice House which is part of the modern garden and next week, I hope to record the Ice House itself. Although this is peripheral to our main activities we always try to note things of even passing interest, lest there be no record of them, and to the best of our knowledge no Ice Houses have been recorded in Wirksworth, but they were a relatively common feature of higher status houses in the past, in the days before people could buy fridges.

In terms of our main work, I can give you no certainties for what we have found. Backfilling the section trench has given us the opportunity to reflect on our findings so far and the evidence for what is in the garden conflicts. The remains in the lower garden of a feature in excess of 3 metres wide and of unknown length running through the first section trench do not lend themselves to certainty. To take the simplest explanation the remains could be thought most likely to be the remnants of a forgotten garden terrace wall cut into the natural shale bedrock: but bearing in mind that the current garden terrace wall, between the upper and lower garden, is a very modest structure required for its purpose, sitting on top of fawn clay and not cut into the shale.



The image above shows the wall remains. A represents the stripped back foundations below the wall remains and B shows the fawn clay substrate which the wall remains are cut into.

The two terraces, the modern one and the strange lower remains, do not appear to be in any way similar in construction.

Then we have a berm or relatively clear and gently sloping space covered in mediaeval pottery and which appears to have been turned over by enthusiastic gardeners in the eighteenth century, for it also has shards of an unusual thin-walled ware in it. This thin-walled ware is Staffordshire Blackware. It probably dates from between 1720 and 1740 but the peak production dates appear to be before 1750, after which its popularity gradually declined. The shards are wasters and this type of material was often used for road repairs and for drainage projects such as filling field drains. Its presence in our garden may be part of an attempt to break up the heavy clay soil and improve the drainage of the garden. There is the question of why it appears in Wirksworth but this is more understandable when you take into account how affluent Wirksworth was from the lead industry in the early eighteenth century and that if Wirksworth was sending lead to Stoke for use in glazes, that the pack horse trains being used for this would need to have return loads: the return loads might be finished pottery or might have been sacks of wasters to use in this kind of garden drainage or similar work. A few of the wasters had a residue on them that we considered might be the potential remains of a glaze, we therefore took a small shard and fired it. The residue was indeed a glaze, a very dark brown colour

Below the berm we have the one feature which we might regard with a passable degree of probability - the edge of a ditch which is filled with an unusual quantity of large stone. This was overlain by two datable seventeenth century clay pipe bowls, the earlier of which appears to date it from the years immediately following the civil war and this might imply that the ditch was filled with the stone at that time.

This brings us to our main interpretation problem. Were it not for this ditch it would be simple to interpret the wall remains as a garden terrace, and this is the simplest and most straightforward interpretation.

If however we cannot reconcile the odd size of the wall remains with them being a forgotten garden terrace, and with the presence of the ditch, this leaves us with few options. It is not a building (for it apparently has no floor) nor, given its curious size, is it any other kind of obvious garden feature. Consequently there are limited alternatives, one of which is that the wall remains are not a garden terrace but the faint and fleeting remains of a fortification, and it is associated with the berm and the ditch. The stone and datable pipe shards might suggest that were this the case it was demolished after the civil war and a second and thorough bout of removal and stone robbing took place in the process of remodelling the garden in the last years of the eighteenth century.

At the present time we have to conclude that we have the remains of a forgotten and partly demolished garden terrace or wall in the lower garden of number 42 St John Street, we will attempt to make some comparisons in other gardens which might enlighten us further.

Our final work, once we have backfilled everything and recorded the Ice House will be to attempt to trace the line of the wall remains by small test holes as it crosses the garden so that we have recorded as much as we can within the lower garden.