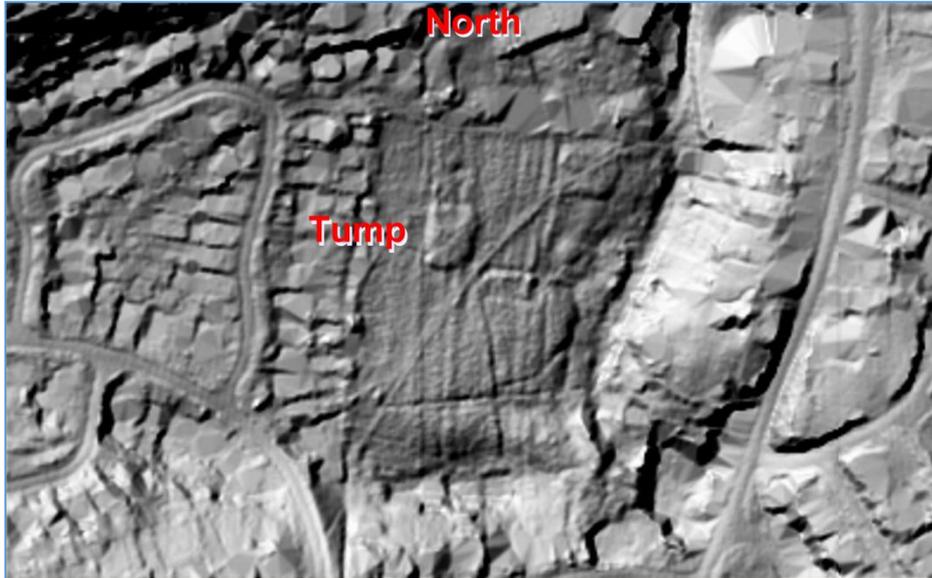


Update August 2020 - Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Archaeological Investigation of the Meadows, Wirksworth

Introduction

This investigation is being carried out with the kind permission of the owners, Wirksworth Town Council. It took place on the 26th of July and the 2nd August and continues previous work, already reported.



The Meadows: Lidar Satellite Image.

The Tump is the object slightly to the side of the diagonal path, also known as "Area A"

The archaeology

The Tump

The work carried out in the Meadows field these past two weekends has been to try and identify how large the Tump is (that is to say the possible building platform) because we can't scale very accurately from the Lidar image. Measuring from what may be its outer boundary, that is to say where the feature returns to what appears to be the normal contour of the field, the platform is 25.1 metres wide on the east-west axis and 27.9 metres long on the north-south axis, of which the levelled area on the top is 15.4 metres east-west and 17.6 metres north-south, so about 270 square metres. By way of a comparison, the floor area of my flat is about 70 square metres, which is a typical average home size in the UK.

This possible building platform is constructed of very heavy black clay up to a metre deep over the natural substrate: this in itself is rather odd. Let us suppose you were a farmer in olden days (antiquity) and you wanted to build a house or a barn: in the normal way of things you would level the ground and spread perhaps 10cm of clay and pebble on it to give you a sound floor, you wouldn't (seemingly) strip the topsoil from the substrate and lay nearly 300 tons of clay on it a metre deep: this is a lot of work. Secondly, so far we have found no evidence of a spread of building stone or broken floor tile nor the remains of wattle and daub or timber beam slots: nothing giving an indication of a building on this large human made feature has been found so far.



Surveying the possible building platform, after hand cutting a way through.
The image also gives an indication of how overgrown the field is.

Continuing work

The Tump is larger than we expected and our initial plan to test pit across it at intervals risks missing any walls there may be. For this reason we will trial trench right across the east-west axis, probably near the centre of the feature in the hope that this would pick up walls, of whatever kind. A trial trench is essentially a continuous but narrow trench (half metre wide) which we will run over the top of the black clay of the feature. This will take some time and while it might be useful to operate say on alternate Sundays, the problem with this is the current unpredictable weather. For this reason we will continue to work "as notified" at the moment.

The Causeway Ditch

This ditch runs along the east side of the Meadows and may have formed the medieval rear boundary of the houses on St John's Street (Waltham House side). The 1821 map of Wirksworth appears to show it as a tree-lined walk, but a test pit has found the ditch to be filled with tipped rubble, ash and Georgian and Victorian pottery and other domestic items to a depth of at least a metre, suggesting it was at some point in the past used as a town tip. This is not unusual, until the advent of late Victorian and modern public health legislation, towns just dumped their rubbish in any old convenient hole. We would like to find the natural bottom of it though, as whatever is in the bottom may tell us how old it is and perhaps its function.