

Continued examination of the Meadows

The examination continued on the 21st March and, rather to our relief, we are out of the ditch. The current work is intended to examine the west side of the lip of the ditch where it appears to come up to the natural ground level.



The examination looking eastwards towards the back garden wall of St John's Street.

Once we were out of the ditch, whose edge is denoted by a final thin spread of ashy tipping which runs out at 9m 70cm from the wall, we expected to reach natural ground or at least for the archaeology to come to an end at the point. This is not the case and the archaeology continues, rather to our surprise.

About 30cm below current ground level and starting 8m 90cm from the wall is a layer of mixed stone of various kinds and this runs to 10m 70cm from the wall where it meets some redeposited fawn clay. So the stony feature is 180cm wide and has some dips which might represent ruts. In a way this feature gives the impression it might be a road or horse path but it seems rather random in its composition and is fairly uncompacted. It may be a number of things but the simplest thing it may be is the result of cleaning the ditch and this has resulted in a feature which is giving the impression of a road, or indeed it might really be a

road running along the edge of the ditch. For example, so far, the biggest stones (these are building stones) are nearest the ditch and the rest are medium to small stones of all kinds: if you are cleaning a ditch you are not going to be throwing big stones far from where you are working. However, is this perhaps our mysterious and elusive "Causeway"? (Remember, Wirksworth's current "Causeway" street was originally called "Gatehouse Street" and names sometimes wander around over time). The stone is mixed with soil overlain by post-medieval pottery but where we have so far extracted some of the stoning this lay on top of a large two part sherd of oxidised orange sandy ware, which is medieval, perhaps 1200-1400.



Medieval Sandy Ware. These two oxidised sherds appear to be from a pancheon (a large serving dish) in this case in an orange colour with a cream core. It has signs of burning or heating on the underside.

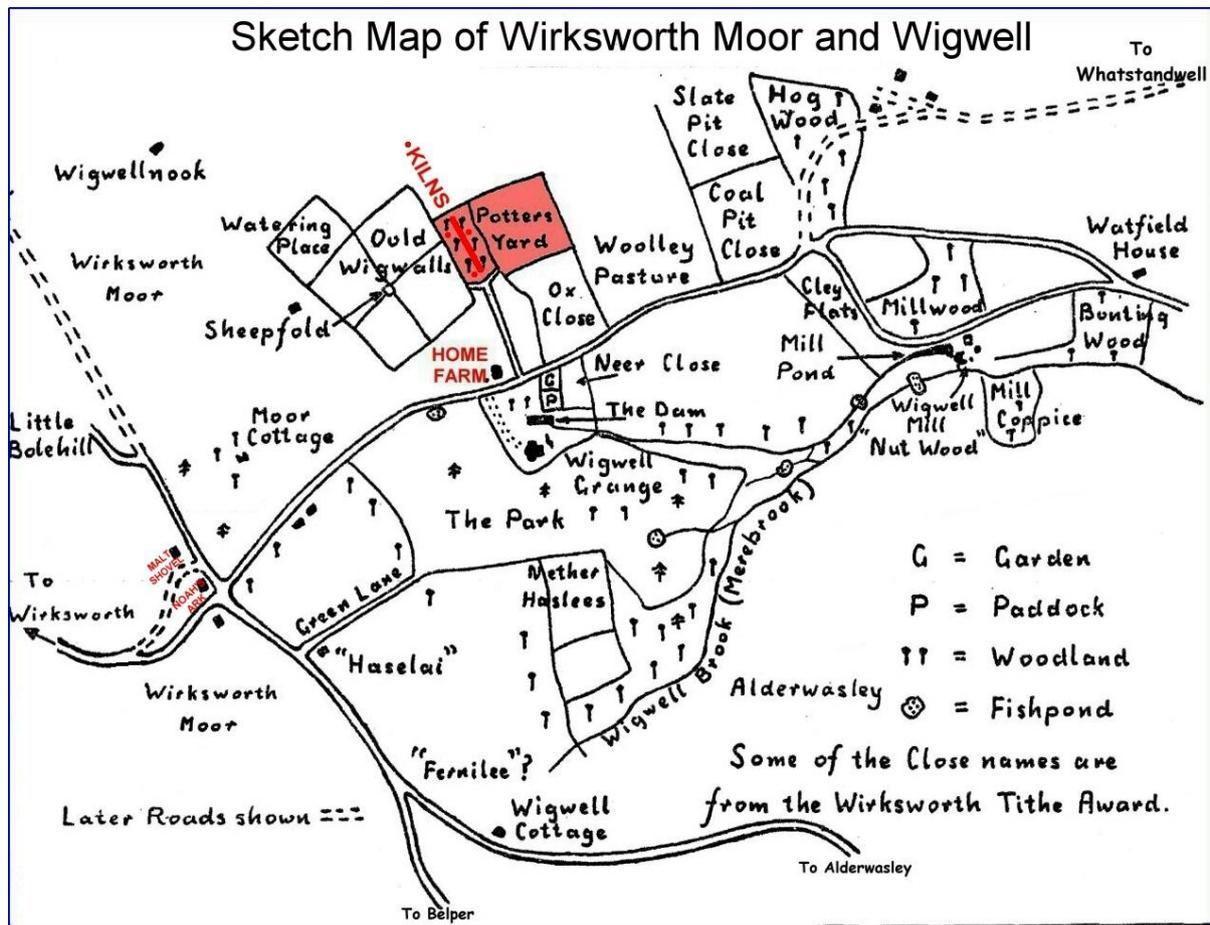
We have much more of the stoned surface to examine and we need to see if, for example, it is layered into contexts with different ages of pottery, or to speak plainly, if it is the result of ditch cleaning on several occasions over time or whether it is an actual made road. We don't know this yet without more work.



The trench looking westward showing the stony layer

The sandy ware pottery we have found is sometimes called Nottingham sandy ware but this is rather misleading because although it has often been found in digs in that area as well as Derbyshire, its kiln site of origin is unknown. I am most acutely aware that the extensive medieval kiln site at Wigwell Green on

Wirksworth Moor has proved intractable for us to examine, due to most of it being in a heavily wooded copse, there being a number of badger setts present to be careful of and (unfortunately) a rather large bull in the other target field, at the same time.



The medieval kiln site at Wigwell Green, Wirksworth (Sketch after the late Derek Wigley)

Although we have put some test pits in the copse plantation with the kind permission of the landowner and walked "Potters Yard" field, these have not proved enlightening, we ran out of time before our workload overlook us and I had rather hoped that other workers might take an interest. It is one of the features of archaeology which many of my fellow society secretaries will recognise, that we have more potential work to do than we can possibly cover with the resources and volunteers we have. I have not written it off but it will have to wait.

Progress

In the meantime, we will continue the examination of the Meadows Causeway Ditch and its ever expanding features on our next occasion. I hope, given the gradual improvements in the weather and the reduction of restrictions associated with the present epidemic, that we can eventually hold a day in which more than authorised staff can be involved. We do regard this examination as extremely important and the extent of the archaeology here is unusually substantial. It is very easy, when we talk about a ditch to have something quite modest in your mind's eye, but this ditch, at 12 metres, is wider than my house.

Reference

Wigley, D, 1966, A History of Wigwell Grange, Derbyshire Miscellany, Vol 3, No 8, June 1966, pp637-646