

Progress Report August 2021

I would perhaps wish to say, at this point in our examination, that we know what this building is, but it grows ever stranger. The building itself is hardly a work of great finesse but it appears to have stone and clay foundations as well as a clay floor, plus having evidence of stone walls and a stone roof, in terms of the collapsed material around it. We have believed, on a couple of previous occasions, that we had found the east wall but this was not the case and the building continues to expand towards the Causeway Ditch, to be honest it can't expand more than another 50 cm eastwards because it would be in the ditch, that cannot be so and will be the target of our next most immediate work.

The astonishing discovery at our last dig day was that a drain runs on the inside of the north wall from the north-west corner towards the east side and the Causeway Ditch. This drain was fed from the channel which we had previously discovered on the west side and appears to fall from a water source apparently from the direction of Gate House.



The stone-built box drain looking north. The metre pole is lying in the interior of the building.

We know that Gate House had a warm water spring (in the "Dog Kennel Watershaft") and it is possible that this channel was fed from the warm spring. Our puzzle for today is that the drain runs *inside* the north wall: why would you bother doing this if it was just drainage? You would cut a channel outside the building, which the ground easily permits, for any run-off. They've not done this, they've built an actual drain inside. Conceptually, if this drain was fed from a warm water source it might be some kind of strange rudimentary heating was our first (rather implausible) thought, but far more simply and much more likely, its a water supply: drain is not really the right word if that is the case. They have no interior pumps or taps in this far-off age, but they could easily fill a jug with water by lifting one of the capstones. At the moment we need to think more about it: I do not currently know of any comparable discoveries, but I am entirely open to the research or knowledge of other archaeologists. It begs the question: what kind of building of this age merits an engineered water supply?

The pottery seems mostly of a date range of perhaps 900 to 1200, or what we might refer to as Saxo-Norman, it does not seem to be much afterwards and there are no later medieval wares (such as Midland Purple Ware) of any kind. Here is an example:



Sherd of shelly ware

This particular type of pottery, which is tempered with broken or powdered shell, was made in Roman times and in the middle ages. This particular example is not wheel made, the Romans had wheel made pottery and the fast wheel started to re-appear in places after 900. In this case, the pot is made by hand not on a wheel. Shell-tempered cooking pots were popular from 1100 to the end of the 1300s (Laing, 2014) in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire: they were originally fairly flat sided but rounded pots took over somewhat after the 1150s. This sherd is of the rounded type and was not found in a stratified context, it had been redeposited from a tree throw (where a tree had been) but its an interesting piece of pottery nevertheless. We also find “splash glazed” wares which may not be so much splashed but where the spotty glaze may be put on dry in rough patches, over a quite fine red-orange kind of pottery. The time period for this kind of pottery in this area appears to be of the range 1100 to 1250. We also have Stamford wares which are a late Saxon glazed pottery and these cover a date range from 850 to 1150, with jugs being made from it towards the end of its production. The range and differing ages of the pottery we are finding in the Meadows are, in fact, a cause of considerable difficulty in us determining the actual age of the building we are currently examining.



A medieval cooking pot being demonstrated.

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Reference

Laing L, 2014, Pottery in Britain 4000 BC to AD 1900, Witham, Geenlight Publishing, p88, p98