

## Wirksworth Archaeological Society

### Progress Report Members Day 19th June 2021

Work has continued in the Meadow Croft field during June and the charms of the British summer mean we have had to put tarpaulins over the dig site to stop it flooding. A members dig day took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> June and I am most grateful to all those who attended.



**Work starting on the Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> June, looking east towards the boundary wall**

We have had to extend the trench to try and identify the south wall of the structure and we believe we have succeeded in doing so now. The current ground level falls north to south at a gradient of about one in twenty and similarly from west to east, so the ground slopes gently down towards the south east corner of the structure. Consequently the foundations of the north wall are deeper under the modern ground level and appear to have survived better than the south wall, which seems to have been robbed of larger stones.



**The remains of the south wall of the structure running across the picture, looking north**  
The colour change in the ground makes the interior and exterior more obvious in this picture

It has now been possible to measure the extents of the building to the outside of its wall foundations, the structure is 5.10 metres north-south and 3.80 metres east-west: its about the size of a modest living room. The walls vary in thickness, perhaps an average of 80cm, so the internal area is a bit smaller, but we have still to expose the interior surface of the east wall in order to provide a final measurement of it.

We continue to find medieval pottery from the period 1200-1400 and a sherd of gritty ware was found above the floor surface of the interior of the structure on the south side and we will have this sherd checked for an opinion about its date, but there is no reason to suppose it varies much from this time frame.



Sherd 1: Medieval buff oxidised gritty ware    Sherd 2: Roman Nene Valley colour coated ware

On the other hand we continue to find small numbers of Roman sherds, almost always in contact with the underlying substrate. The possible reason is that when this (presumed medieval) building was built they had to level the ground to build it on. To do this you would have to strip off the turf and what was already there to get it level. If that already contained Roman sherds of pottery (for example), then stripping it off would take most of it elsewhere - you would dump it in a pile nearby until you had finished building and only a few sherds would be left to be trampled into the the surface you were working on. After that the building would then be constructed and either your pile of stripped turf and stuff would be relaid or used somewhere else. In order to test this theory we would have to try and find a place near our building which has not been touched to see if the soil contains more Roman pottery, not just bits lying on top of a stripped surface.

In addition to the Roman pottery issue our modest building is constructed not only of random stone of various kinds but it also has some big weathered dressed reddish gritstone which has clearly been re-used from a previous building nearby. Given that before the medieval date of this building most structures were timber unless they were Roman, then a Roman building or structure may perhaps have existed fairly close to this site, for its stone to be robbed by medieval builders: a Roman structure we have not found yet.



**Small metal finds from detecting at the end of each day's dig**

A spoon (perhaps a tea caddy spoon) and a small lead token with a bee on it.

At the end of each dig day we detect the site and the spoil heap for anything metal we might have missed and this is gradually adding to our list of small finds, some are old, some are "modern".

Finally, John Wheeldon has indulged in a little experimental archaeology by taking some of the grey clay from the site and making a test piece to see what the pottery would look like in terms of colour and texture, the result was most surprising:



**Test Piece**

A fine little piece of orange pottery

For those of you interested in the making of pottery, we find a great deal of medieval pottery (for example) around Wirksworth: often this is plain, but sometimes it is decorated and glazed, such as the example below, where you can see the potters thumb prints and the sherd has a green glaze made from galena (lead ore).



**Example Medieval Pottery Sherd**

From the causeway ditch, probably made at the kilns at Burley Hill at Duffield

Follow this link to see a video about medieval pottery making:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0mjgrPH564k>

We continue to work in the Meadows to see what else will be revealed, so far things have been very fascinating and we still have a number of questions to answer about our small building before we restore the site to its original ground.

The date of the next members dig day will be Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> July.