

Update January 2014: Plan of test pits

We had removed a large amount of tipped demolition rubble apparently containing Georgian brick, tile and mortar from the west end of the section trench. In continuing the examination it was apparent that there was no soil to speak of between the tipping and the apparently natural substrate of sandy clay, and no pottery or finds. This presents rather a conundrum. The only piece of pottery we have had which might relate to the tipping episode, from under one of the stones, was sufficiently odd that neither we nor Derby Museum have been able to date it.



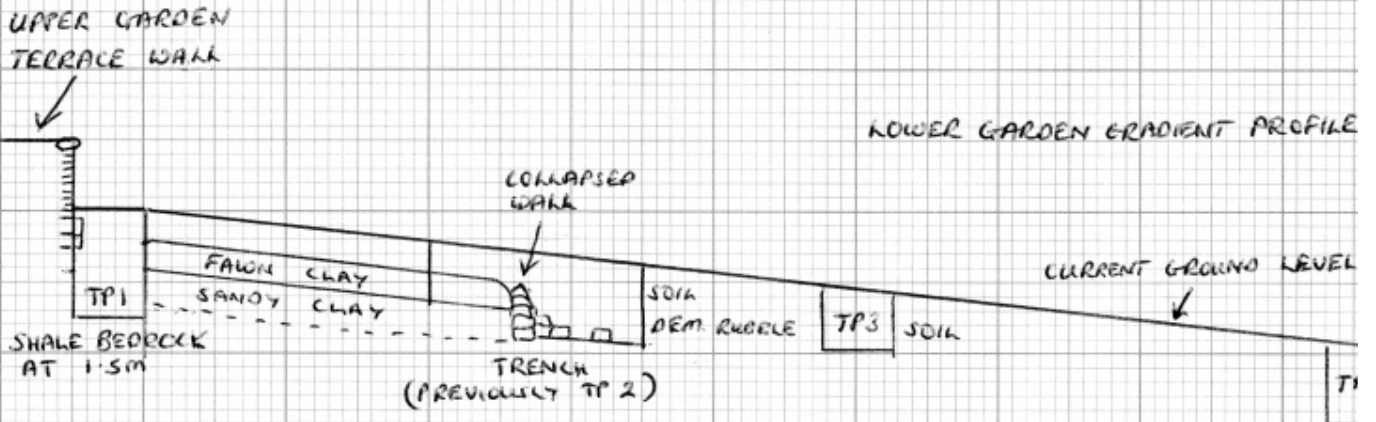
Unusual thin walled unglazed brown and orange fabric pottery shard

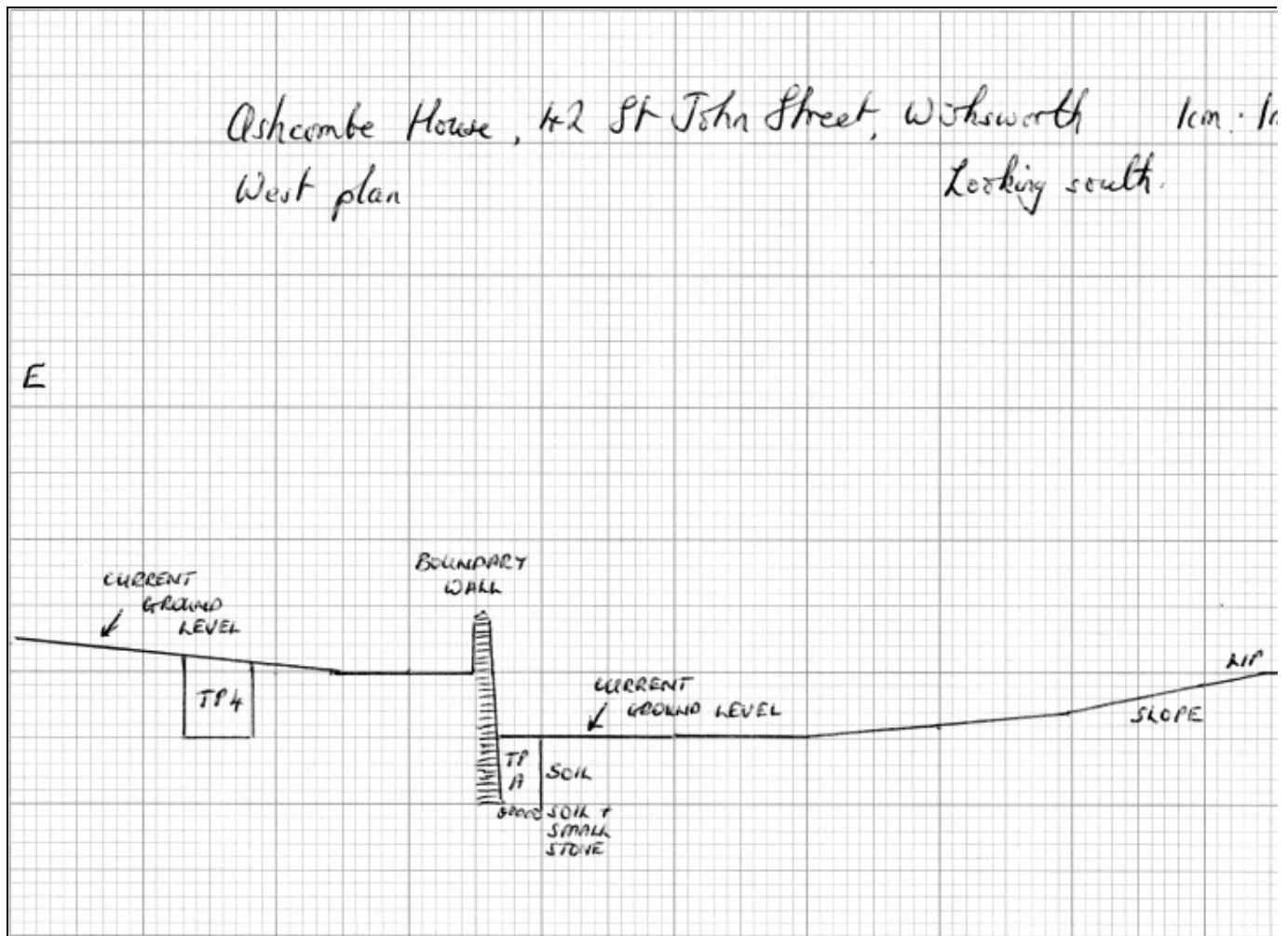
The trench is full of brick and mortar demolition rubble that is to say we assume an attempt to level the garden of no 42. Secondly, the absence of soil lower down might imply that the soil had been stripped off, put to one side and the tipping done to level the garden and then the soil put back afterwards. A householder might do this if they were short of money but had access to demolition material, a little manpower and time. Now it may be that the householder has demolished an outhouse and used it for levelling, the bricks are similar to the current outhouse. The amount of stone at the bottom of the tipping episode seems excessive for the fallen wall in the east end of the trench. I can draw no firm conclusions, but the stone might also be part of the tipping, because it is at the bottom might simply imply it was tipped first.

Returning to the examination, I propose to examine the subsoil again, perhaps an untouched square metre and see what comes out of it. We will have to compare the relative levels and depths we have taken as well.

Today has been mainly occupied with recording work and the products of this endeavour are attached. Most of our work is concentrated on Ian's garden, but some visual recording has been done in the Meadows to complete the gradient profiles you find here. We cannot undertake any examination work in the Meadows proper but I have stretched a point to look at the foundations of Ian's boundary wall, it's Ian's and therefore the ground upon which it rests is Ian's. You will see from the profiles that the lower garden falls gently from the Upper Garden Terrace Wall down to the boundary wall, and that our examination work in the garden has shown that this disguises some features such as a collapsed wall of what must have been a second terrace, and that and much of the rest of the lower garden has been filled with demolition rubble, this is very obvious when comparing the relative height of Ian's garden by looking over the boundary wall - you find a considerable drop to the ground level on the other side.

Ashcombe House, 1+2 St John Street, Wicksworth 1cm:1
East plan





It was not possible to find the actual foundation of the boundary wall, we examined the wall as it continued down a further metre before encountering a layer of mixed stone and soil which might represent the foundation or the original ground level when the wall was built. Now this throws a sidelight on what many local people consider to be a "coach road" running past this wall towards an opening in the south-east corner of the garden wall of Gate House, that is to say a lane serving Gate House (apart from the Causeway which serves the front door). You can see this, so to speak, in the attached photograph, which is looking in the opposite direction (south). In the picture Ian's garden is on the left behind the big trees. Now it might indeed seem that a lane runs here, but once we factor in that the wall goes down another metre, and the land rises a metre on the other side, this would imply that the depth of the ground when the wall was built was 2 metres below the lip of the slope. Why would you put a road here in such a dip? It would be wet or flooded most of the year and iced up to your knees in the winter. Why not run it above the lip of the slope where it would drain, and be a nice dry lane? To speak plainly, this won't do. I suspect we have another local myth. The space between the lip of the slope and Ian's boundary wall looks like a ditch, it feels like a ditch and I presently take the view that unless other evidence comes to light, we should probably regard it as a ditch.

Now this does not preclude there being more of it in Ians garden (the boundary wall might have been laid out to run down the middle of a ditch for example), or there might be two ditches and the boundary wall might lie upon the berm between such ditches. Or, of course, none of these things, and Gate House indeed just happened to have a boggy back lane. So our strategy for the present time is to continue in Ian's garden, working our way down the slope from the current section trench and see if there's anything more to find.



Finally, Ian noted a conversation with a local gentlemen who related that a retired school teacher living in Canterbury Terrace had found a well-preserved coin of William the Conqueror in his garden, we know no more than this, but we record it because knowing Wirksworth, no-one else will have recorded it. It is important when finding things that we or Derby Museum should be informed, any finds of whatever kind are significant in their own way.