

Update August 15: End Summary for St John Street Dig

Today we dealt with our final fieldwork at St John Street, Wirksworth. This was with the kind permission of Laura and Tony at number 32. The purpose was to see if we could add to our collection of pottery from the various digs we have had in St John Street and also to consider the embankment which divides the upper and lower garden.

From the Test Pit put in we have gained further examples of modern (post-mediaeval) pottery and another six shards of mediaeval pottery, an interesting little haul and not unduly difficult. The Test Pit went in towards the lower part of the embankment and this embankment visually consists of a series of levels, that is to say four stepped elevations which make up the terrace, lowest at the west, highest at the east. The Test Pit (1m x 1m) was 1 metre from the south boundary wall, and 18 and a half metres from the west boundary wall, and consisted of 10cm compost over geotext and then 20cm of modern garden soil including the various post-mediaeval pottery, on top of a layer of a further 20cm of (find free) limestone dust or chaff. Below this was 10cm of soil containing what appears to be exclusively mediaeval pottery. This mediaeval context overlays the usual fawn clay 30cm and shale and natural sand down to the maximum examined depth of 110cm. The limestone chaff is a bit of an oddity, one tends to associate this as being a modern by-product of quarrying, used for things like path making, rather than as something available to the Stuarts or Georgians, but it may possibly be a by-product of sough making or lead mining, hence its presence between a mediaeval context and a post-mediaeval one here.



Pottery shards in modern topsoil:

1. Blue and white china (china) from 1790 common in Georgian and Victorian ages to modern day
2. Nottingham Brown Stoneware (hard cream fabric, very shiny hard mid brown glaze with patterned indentations or incised lines) 1690-1790
3. Midland Yellow glazed ware (beige fabric) probably Ticknell 1650-1750
4. Brown mottled ware (beige fabric) 1750-1800
5. Modern blue and white pattern crockery (china) "Yesterday", but might be older.



Pottery shards in mediaeval soil layer: (Types and dates subject to confirmation)

1. Pink gritty ware (pale cream fabric) 1375-1500
2. Yellow rouletted Ticknell ware (pale cream fabric) 1596 to 1637
3. Green lead glazed incised ware (grey fabric, possibly Brackenfield) 1300-1425
4. Unglazed colour coated coarseware (fawn fabric) 1100-1300
5. Midland purple ware (coal measures fabric, probably Ticknell) 1475-1550
6. Midland purple ware (orange fabric) as Ticknell date range 1475-1550

Conclusion

The embankment is wholly natural. I say this for several reasons. We have been looking for a fortification and this is not it. Had the embankment contained, let us say, a robbed wall, we would have expected at least a mortar and dropped stone spread representing the robbing. There is no such material. Had the embankment contained, let us say, a bank upon which a palisade might have been constructed, we should have expected there to be a steeper scarp and for it to have been constructed of something more than natural geology and to contain pottery or artifacts of older date than that which we have found. Had the embankment represented a rampart, that is to say the back of a wall or turf revetment, again we should have found layers of material which it was built with. None of these things exist and I therefore conclude that the only feature we have found on the west side of St John Street which might represent a structure of a date more than 300 years old is the ditch. Although this ditch has quite a lot of stone dumped in it and was overlaid by a couple of eminently datable late or post Civil War clay pipe bowls, the dating material coming out of all the gardens adjacent to it is overwhelmingly mediaeval. I therefore conclude that the ditch is most likely the Burgage Boundary, that is to say the back boundary of a line of mediaeval houses and strip plots on St John Street.

A considered report on St John Street will now follow.

I wish to thank everyone who has helped with this long running, and now concluded, investigation.

An outstanding question about the name of St John Street

Related to our work in relation to St John Street, is a so far unanswered question about the name of St John Street itself. I am indebted to Lyn Murray who kindly drew our attention to two documents in the Record Office which have shed a light on the name of the street.



St John's Street looking north, from an old postcard. Waltham House on the left, Nether House on the right.

Up until this month we had thought St John Street's original name was Nether Street, because this is what is shown on the 1821 map. I cannot tell at the moment when the name Nether Street was changed to St John Street, but it was certainly so by 1880. What we can now say is not that the name was changed to St John Street, but that the name was *changed back* to St John Street. This is because Lyn kindly identified a document from 1712, a Feoffment from Sir Phillip Gell to John Holloby "of a house in St John's Street", and a second document from 1795 referring to Nether Street as having "formerly" been St John's Street. So, St John Street was only for a time called Nether Street, and it had originally been called **St John's Street** (also note this apparently original form with the apostrophe).

Now, until this point we have always thought that the only historic church in Wirksworth was St Mary's. St Mary's is supposed to have had 6 chapels or chantries associated with it, of which the name of three were immediately known to us: The chantry of St Mary's itself; the chantry of St Helen and the chantry of St Cross sometimes called the Chantry of the Holy Rood. In addition, there is a record from the will of Richard Blackwell in 1505 saying that he wished to be buried in Wirksworth church 'before St Edmunds altar'. There was a Blackwell chapel in the north transept thought to have been built or restored from the money left by the later Thomas Blackwell in 1525. In 1533 Alice Wigley died. She was the widow of John Wigley of Wirksworth. She asked to be buried in the chancel of Wirksworth church, and among her many bequests to the church she left money for the enlargement of a chantry dedicated to St Catherine and silver to be made into a chalice. However, this begins to get us in a tangle and it requires a greater understanding of the church than we have so far, but St John does not seem to occur in relation to it.

So what if St John's Street represents the remembrance of something now gone? I have been looking for a comparator. Wirksworth historically had two manors. The main royal manor was around St Mary's as the

minster church. There was also a smaller manor, known as the Holland Manor, sometimes referred to as the Richmond, the Exeter or the Dean of Lincoln's Manor (various people held it at various times).

So the town had two manors and the Holland Manor *may well* coincide with the burgaged area of St John's Street. A possible comparator is Southwell. Again there is a main manor around the minster church and a second smaller manor around an area called "Burgage Green". In the Southwell example there is an ongoing archaeological project a bit like ours (but with more money) see: <http://southwellarchaeology.org.uk/> and they had discovered a forgotten chapel associated with their small manor because a "chapel yard" was recorded in a deed of a house from 1833 which led back in a paper trail to a forgotten chapel demolished in the reformation, the chapel of St Thomas.

So, what are we looking for? I think we are looking for any further references prior to 1712 to "St John's Street", "St Johns", or any chapel or chapel place name possibly associated with the Holland Manor. In the Southwell example, the Manor House was at one end of the street and the chapel at the other, conceptually, if all these things were replicated here (a big if, as usual) then we are perhaps looking for a chapel site near the Wheatsheaf, at the south end of the street, because the Holland Manor House is at the north end (on the east side, along St Mary's Gate next to China House Yard). In any case St John's Street does not go to St Mary's church, and the plot at the south end of St John's Street containing the Wheatsheaf is not aligned properly to the rest of the street frontage but rests on a more pronounced east-west axis, especially evident in its northern boundary.