

Progress Report April 2021

Our examination in Meadow Croft field has continued over the last four weekends, with restrictions on attendance easing after the 12th of April. A members dig therefore took place on the 24th of April and the finds in the trench are increasingly fascinating.



Members of the Society proudly exhibiting their socially distanced buckets on Saturday the 24th.

In our March report we noted finds of a stoned surface and medieval pottery at the edge of the Causeway Ditch. The stoned surface may still represent a road or yard surface, but part of the west end of it was overlain with what appeared to be demolition material. Over the past four weeks we have gradually extended the examination trench westwards and we have had to widen it.

The material overlaying the surface(s) in the trench was comprised of a great deal of random mixed stone of all sizes and types with some quantities of small broken sandstone roof slates and nails. There were no whole slates but we surmise that intact ones would have been valuable and would have been taken away by enterprising locals. Once cleared of this collapsed material, the removal of the overburden revealed a line of large stone running up the trench east-west and a further one running across the trench north-south.

The pottery around this collapse is largely, but not entirely, medieval, perhaps 1100 - 1300. It was partially unstratified (that is to say we can't attach it directly in time to its surrounds) but one large piece of medieval oxidised sandy ware came from the backfill of the wall which runs across the trench in the north-south

direction and is stratified: the remains of this wall are three courses high and it appears to be a retaining wall, that is to make a small terrace and keep the field from falling into the ground below it.



Large rim sherd of medieval oxidised sandy ware.

In addition to medieval pottery we also have some Roman Derbyshireware and Greyware and also Saxon Stamfordware



The west end of the trench on the 17th April showing the three course retaining wall running across it. Pole of 20cm intervals.

It was necessary to widen the trench on Saturday the 24th in order to try and see if the line of stones running up the trench was an edge or whether that was just a field wall running at right angles to the retainer you can see in the above photograph.

The work on Saturday the 24th became more exciting the more we cleared of loose stone and bits of stone slate from the trench. By the end of the day our work had revealed a clay and stone floor separate from the retaining wall, although the two are perhaps related given the likeness of materials, construction and pottery.

As of today, then, our trench contains what is most likely to be the floor of a medieval building. It is constructed in a simple way, without any great finesse, but would have been perfectly adequate for the time. There is no evidence of industrial activity, no slag or other metal residual materials and the pottery, bits of charcoal, coal and animal bone suggest a domestic building.

We are both surprised and delighted to have found the remains of a medieval building here. Much more needs to be done to determine its extent and confirm this preliminary view. It is known, for example, that lead miners lived around Wirksworth “every which way” (Defoe, 1727) and that cottages of all kinds were built haphazardly particularly in the wastes around the town (Arkwright, 1912), although it is not clear to us what the term “in the wastes” really represents.



Examination trench showing the medieval building floor surface

Much more needs to be done, not only in terms of us attempting to confirm our hypothesis of what this is, but also its extent and to see what other finds might emerge. Although the feature is mainly of rough limestone, both it and the retaining wall contain worn dressed (“cut”) stone, whose date and source raise a further intriguing question about the origins of that kind of stone: which can only be a building or major structure in the vicinity dated prior to it being re-used here.

References

Arkwright WH (Reverend Canon), 1912, A survey of the Soke and Manor of Wirksworth in 1649, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 34, pp13-28

Defoe D, 1727, A tour through the whole island of Great Britain, divided into circuits or journies, London, JM Dent and Co, 1927 (reproduced), Letter 8 part 2.

Note on a clay pipe found in the overburden.



We often find bits of clay pipe at digs, they are very common indeed, however it is quite rare for us to find sufficient parts of one to recreate something recognisable.

Clay pipes are very useful dating material if found in stratified contexts and are extensively researched. As usual, none of that extensive research is so extensive that it mentions Wirksworth, but there is a section about Derbyshire in the National Pipe Archive.

The heel (the sticky out bit at the bottom) when turned upside down to look at it, contains the possible inscription “IV” and these are most likely the makers initials. The lip of the pipe has a rough edge line near the top but no milling or rouletting (moulding if you like) and is otherwise quite plain.

We can therefore only generalise a little about this pipe. It perhaps dates from 1660-1680 based on its design in comparison to known others. It will probably have been made in Wirksworth because pipe makers tended to be local and distribution was typically no more than about 10 miles from the maker.

If you find any nearly complete ones like this in your garden do let us or the Heritage Centre know.

Websites:

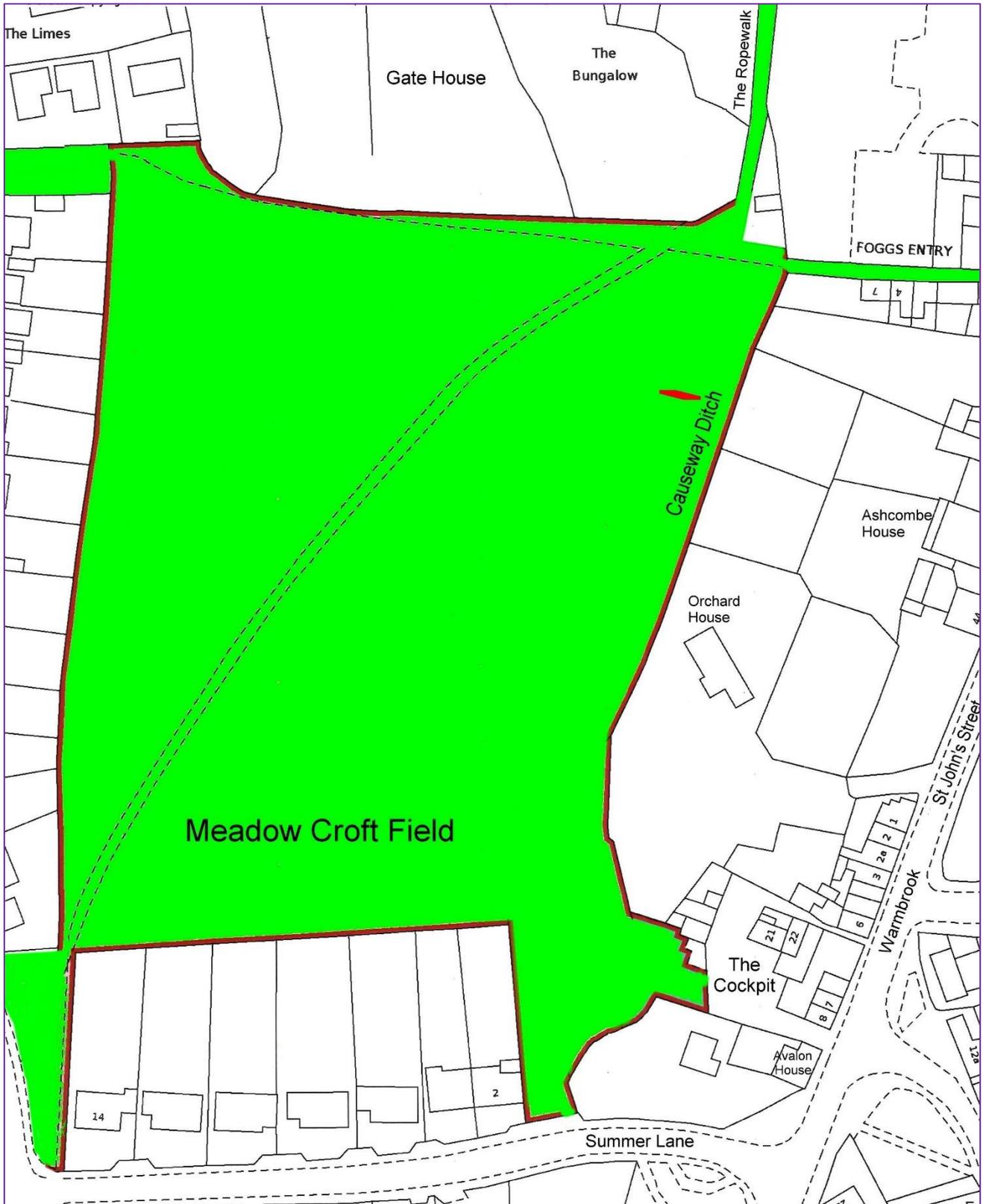
National Pipe Archive at:

<http://www.pipearchive.co.uk/index.html>

Society for Clay Pipe Research

<http://www.scpr.co/index.html>

NORTH



Plan of the Meadows showing location of the archaeological examination in red