

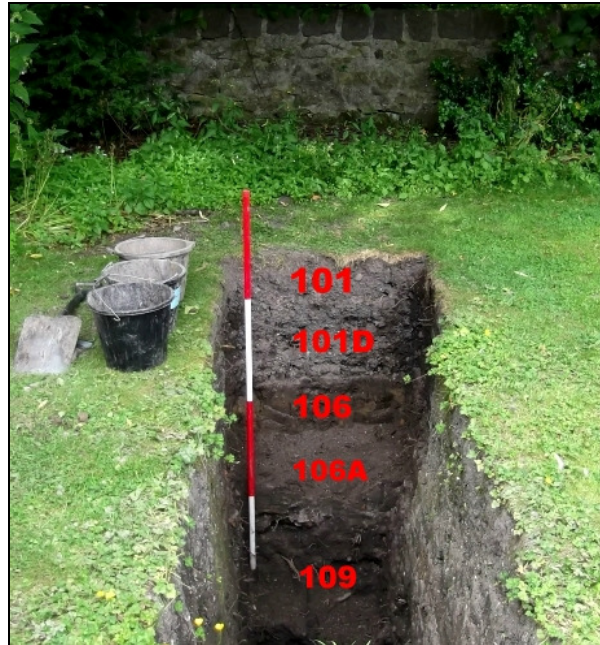
Update July 2014: Section Trench 2

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We continue our examination at 42 St John Street Wirksworth. We are currently lengthening Test Pit 4 at the bottom of the lower garden towards the boundary wall between the garden and the Meadows (the west boundary wall). Most of the depth of this Test Pit is composed of modern dumped soil and other items, only towards the bottom of the Test Pit do we reach a layer of material which includes mediaeval pottery (such as orange gritty wear and splash glazed wares), though this layer also contains some post mediaeval items such as clay pipe shards and bits of white china. We conclude that this must have been the original ground level for a very long time and only when the garden was terraced nearly two hundred years ago was this covered with deep layers of modern soil. The map evidence would suggest that this work took place between 1821 and 1837, as the 1821 Duchy map doesn't show the garden terrace as it now is, but the 1837 Tithe map does.



Overall view looking west towards the Meadows



Detailed view with contexts shown

The contexts in the Test Pit are composed of these materials:

101 Modern topsoil

101D Redeposited modern topsoil

106 Layer of heavy lumpy black clay

106A Fine friable grey soil with post mediaeval, mainly Georgian and Victorian, pottery shards

109 Mediaeval context with upper parts containing mortar remnants, large shards of brick-red tree pots, clay pipe shards, mediaeval and Georgian pottery shards of various kinds.

Between context 109 and the (perhaps) natural substrate N1 is a thin, patchy layer 1-2 cm of red and fawn sand with muddy inclusions, almost as if they were footprints, and in this context

(number 110) a number of shards of a single type of thin-walled pottery have been consistently found. This context (110) was present in the section trench, in a similar thin and fading way, but

was interpreted at that earlier stage merely as the top of natural substrate N1. The red sand was also present amongst the stones of wall foundation 104.

This brings us to the enigmatic and, given the number of shards we now have, oddly frequently occurring thin-walled ware, almost exclusively from 110 and the bottom of 104. We now have several samples and they are both of a plain dark brown fabric and of the same or similar (sometimes rather sandier) dark brown fabric but with a colour coating: the colour coat being a cream colour. This colour coat tends to adhere to the surroundings so that in extracting a shard only some of the colour coat remains adhered to its fabric, presumably from the action of acid soil on it.



Shard of colour coated thin-walled ware



Rim shard of thin-walled ware from a small vessel

It is of the most serious importance that this pottery is identified without any element of doubt. This being so, I have taken some examples of it to the Corinium Museum at Cirencester, as their collection is very extensive and they may be able to tell us what it is.

Finally, we have to consider that the thin-walled ware might be something else: let's say the product of an unknown local pottery, from perhaps the eighteenth century. In such a case what scenario would have to operate? Well, let us suppose that in 1750 Fred Householder decides to terrace his garden. He digs out the lower garden to substrate level to build up the upper garden with the material. He spreads red sand on top of the substrate to help plan his garden features and builds a heavy duty terrace wall. In the process his workmen drop, break up and spread around the local pottery in which they have been having their beer and sandwiches. He puts in his garden features and then refills the lower garden with some soil he bought from a poorer person down the street, which happens to have the same kind of mediaeval pottery in it that we might expect to find in Wirksworth: and so, when we dig it we think we've found a bunch of Romans, when what we've actually found is a Georgian Alan Titchmarsh smoking a clay pipe and drinking near beer from a small brown vase.

*** The thin walled ware was eventually confirmed by Stoke on Trent Museum as broken waster shards of "Staffordshire Blackware" dating from between 1720 and 1740, and which were often used in drainage projects. The presence of a colour coating was an unfired glaze. When a small test shard was fired this was found to be a very dark brown. ***