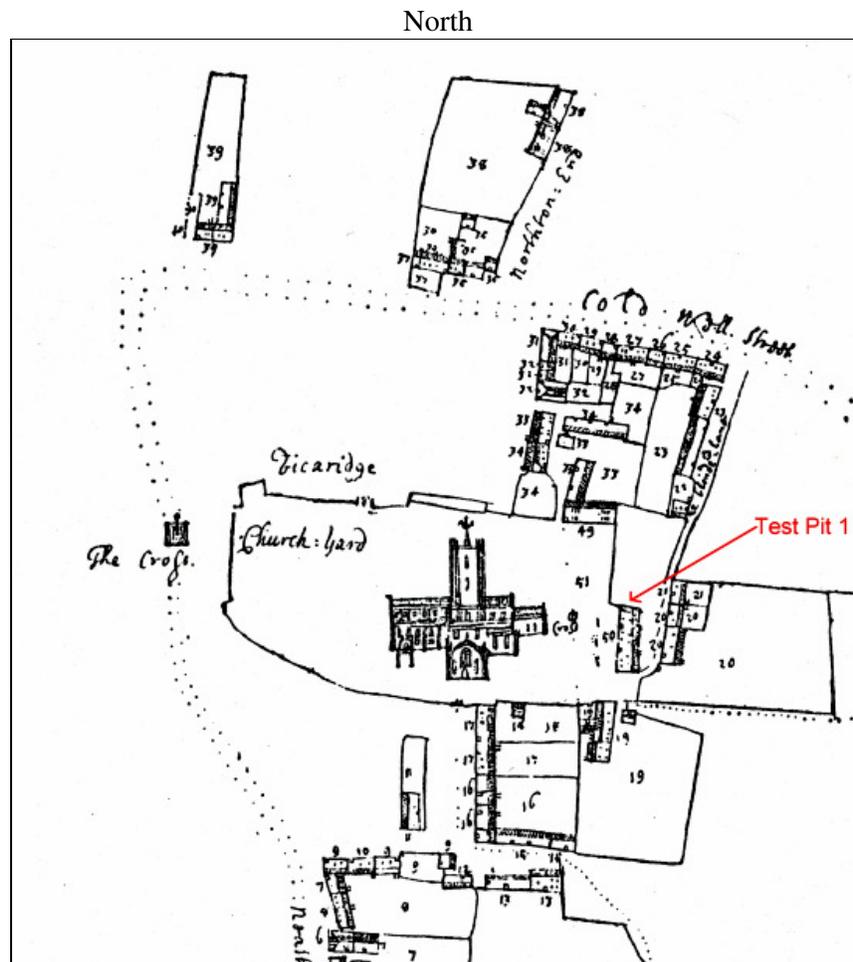


Update July 2017

## Chesterfield to Wirksworth Roman Road / Wirksworth Almshouses Garden

In our May report we recorded the work done on the Roman Road between Wirksworth and Chesterfield and we noted that the likely origin point of that road was the churchyard in Wirksworth as shown on the 1709 draft map of the town. This being the case I wished to look again at the churchyard, but being extremely conscious that our work in 2008 in the vicarage garden did not reach the lowest archaeological contexts because we encountered human remains of mediaeval date. I am also conscious that most of the Roman pottery we have found has been in the vicinity of the churchyard, mainly to the south and east because the north and west is largely built up. For this reason we had sought permission to look in the garden of Gell's Almshouses on the edge of the churchyard, shown on the 1709 map here:



On Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> July we put a test pit into the north border garden of the Almshouses. I had high hopes of this test pit, but the results are almost entirely about what we didn't find. The earliest possible pottery from the pit dates from post 1660, some slip ware, along with a rim shard of a brown glazed ware which seems to bear Midland Purple origins and looks like a tobacco jar. Given that the Almshouses date from an instruction in Anthony Gell's will of 1583, I had at least expected to find some pottery of a late Tudor period or indeed some medieval wares. On the other hand and rather to my relief, there was no dead humanity in the test pit (unlike the Vicarage garden) and I take from this that we are outside the circuit of the medieval churchyard. We reached a maximum depth of 1.5 metres.

The contexts in the Test Pit (2.5 m from N boundary wall with "The Cottage", 4.5 m from E boundary wall with Blind Lane) were:

1. Modern clean sand, the infill of a former pond in this part of the garden to 40cm

2. Modern brick and carpet, the “lining” of the pond to 45 cm
3. Dry ashy dark soil, the former garden with modern, Victorian and Georgian pottery and clay pipe shards to 80cm, piece of slipware on horizon between 3 and 4 (dating 1660-1750)
4. Dark grey dry hard soil with charcoal to 100cm
5. Thin layer 1-2cm of small limestone and gravelling, not deep enough to be a path or yard, perhaps simply ornamental or edging, containing rim shard of brown glazed ware (dating 1690-1750+)
6. Grey dry soil with chert to 120cm
7. Fawn sandy light clay with chert and occasional 1-3cm pieces of small gritstone to 150cm, no evidence of underlying Till, shale or limestone solifluction.



Test Pit in development at 80cm depth

Probably, though not certainly, the fawn sandy material in context 7 is the natural substrate, but it was not possible to achieve a greater depth within the limits of the pit and normally we would have found Till, bedrock shale or limestone by then. In the Hannages, the nearest prior Test Pit, 50 metres to the south east, the limestone solifluction bedrock was at 1 metre depth and above it was a context of mediaeval and Roman material. We have requested permission to put in a second test pit and this permission has been granted.

Meanwhile, on Canterbury Avenue, or the back of the east side of St John's Street at the East end of Bannister's Yard if you like, a new householder who has taken over Lilac Cottage is building an extension which necessitated digging out foundations. He kindly invited me to inspect the spoilheap from this fine endeavour and without wishing to go through all 34 tons of it, I had a modest look around and pulled out quite a chunky sherd of the handle joint and rim of a large medieval serving dish with a very thin clear and patchy slightly green glaze, perhaps 1200-1300. It will be destined for a greater expert than me when I get round to doing the report; but is entirely consistent with the kind of medieval pottery we find around St John's Street and happily didn't involve us doing the digging.