

## Wirksworth Archaeological Society

### Progress Report October 2021.

As previously noted, we have extended our trench to the west a little in order to examine the stone spread which was found by probing. The first work on the 16<sup>th</sup> October looked like this:



Trench section looking west with stoned surface

In the picture you can see we have added a section off the side of the water channel which runs through the site. The new section is on the opposite side of the channel to the building.

Our first reactions to this stone spread are:

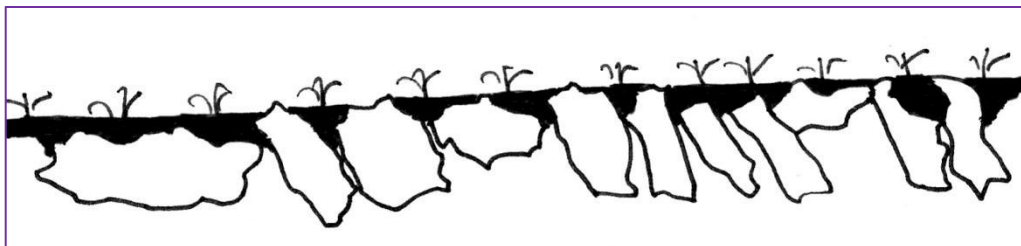
1. Its not random building collapse: its quite coherent and its also fairly level with maybe a slight slope to the south.

2. It might look rough, but the stone which it is composed of is worn, there are no sharp edges, even though the stone lining the channel next to it has quite sharp edges. So this layer must have been more exposed to the weather or some other wearing action such as walking or sweeping.



Yard or path?

3. On examination the stone is imbricated (today's new word), this means the stones are laid against each other in a kind of dog tooth pattern:



Imbrication: stones are leant against each other and rammed down.

So it looks like a rather uneven but compacted surface where the gaps would be probably be filled with soil and small grass would grow over it. Its maybe a path, yard or some other yet to be determined feature.

Its like a irregular version of cobbles. The result seems to be a surface (if it is exterior) perhaps covered in small grass which would not require much cutting. In Saxon and medieval times, cutting grass isn't a pastime: it would be really hard work and the best tool you might have to deal with grass might be a scythe, on a big area you just would let sheep graze it. Therefore if you can lay a surface which, by its nature, keeps your grass short then you've saved a lot of work. Secondly, the



worn edges of this rough dog-tooth arrangement would be a little proud of the surface and would give a grip in wet and other weather.

What are the advantages? Its cheap to do, you just have to lay stones on edge, brush soil into the crevices and wait for the grass to grow a bit. After that you can walk on it, perhaps in all conditions and you might only need to scythe it in late spring or summer to stop it getting out of hand. In addition, if it was being walked over by, say, elderly people, if one fell, then the grass might save an injury, whereas if you had laid a hard surface a fall on it might do someone real damage.

In our final work of the season, on Saturday the 13<sup>th</sup> November, we cleared a little more of the imbricated surface and it appears to have another edge of large stones, this time running diagonally south-east to north-west:



Yard/path? Surface with newly cleared edge of large stones on the left of the picture.

We have not cleared enough of the possible edge yet to know what it is. This will now have to wait for the new season. We have partially backfilled key areas of the site to make it safe over the winter. We have also left the covers off and although this means it will be exposed, people will be able to see it and we will check it on a regular basis to make sure the fence is intact and all is well. We will clear it again when winter is over and the examination begins again. I don't exclude occasional days looking at other features, there are several ditches etc on the aerial photos that could do with a single intervention to check what they are, but I don't propose to do anything more at the Saxon building until the spring.

We are not sure what the building was used for yet, but it is certainly unusual. Its construction suggests exceptional care and effort for its time.