

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Progress Report November 2023

Our investigation of the site at Ian Avenue in Wirksworth, where it overlooks Ecclesbourne Close and the Hawthorns, continues with the kind permission of David Beacham.

The site is not an easy one to investigate as it slopes steeply on the north side of the garden as can be seen in this photograph:



North side boundary of Ian Avenue looking west

This is the location of a further test pit and the land here slopes towards Ecclesbourne Close, which is on the north side of the boundary fence (right in the picture). There is a Victorian field boundary here which is denoted by a decrepit metal fence. The field boundary is not ancient and does not appear in older maps of the location.

The sloping nature of the ground makes our work slow and difficult and I am most grateful to our determined diggers for their hard work and persistence. At present the test pit is the usual metre size and we have gone down a metre and we are still in builder's rubble from when the house was built in 1964. This is unfortunately a greater depth of rubble than on the top of the garden where we put in a trial trench during October. The amount of rubble is quite excruciating. As usual it contains all manner of builder's detritus, in this case large amounts of complete and

broken modern brick, as well as plastics, tinfoil from jam tarts, Marley roof tiles, redeposited patches of clay, ash, soil, small stone, pebble and gravel as well as large quantities of both large rough limestone and finer sandstone, some of the latter giving every impression of being dressed. So far however, this only gives us two contexts, the top being leaf mould and the second being the rubble.

We cannot regard the rubble as being stratified in itself - it contains patches of all kind of things mixed together. Setting aside the plastic and tinfoil, sherds of china and bits of plastic plant pots, in today's collection of things from the rubble we have:



Left to right: Victorian or early 20th century blue glass machine-made medicine bottle. Sherds of Midland light bodied hand-made brown glazed ware (1680-1800) and two parts of what appeared initially to be a clog, but turned out to be the remains of a size six builders boot (1964).

The condition of the test pit is that we are a metre down and still in rubble. For the avoidance of doubt we are looking for a wall and the test pit may or may not be over it. Investigating by test pits and probing may hardly be cutting edge, but the difficult nature of this site hardly lends itself to the dizzy heights of modern electronic archaeology.

Once we get past the interminable rubble, we may be able to identify where we are relative to the (sought after) wall, even if the wall is not in the test pit. This is because the probability with this wall is that it would have a clay infill behind it and a silty loamy soil in front of it. Therefore, even if the test pit doesn't yield the wall, the materials under the rubble should give us a further indication of which direction to look in, depending on which of the two alternatives we might find.

Digging is now over for the season, it is too cold and wet for volunteers to be asked to work in the winter and so the examination will begin again after Easter.