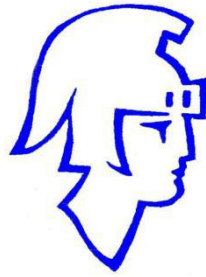


Wirksworth Archaeological Society



Annual Report 2022



and Archaeological survey of Meadow Croft field, Wirksworth, Derbyshire

Anton Shone
29th December 2022

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Co-ordinator's Annual Report

Progress during the year

There were some after-effects of the Covid epidemic but work continued in the Meadow Croft field from 15th April of 2022 and concluded on the 13th November. I am most grateful for the efforts of our members and friends in helping us undertake this work and in terms of other activities such as research notes, as well as for the kind support of Wirksworth Town Council and of Steve Baker, the County Archaeologist.

For the most part our work during the year has been centred around the Meadows in Wirksworth and the summary report which follows deals with this. In the background Bill Bevan, our President, has been assisting St Mary's Church with a funding bid for restoration work at the church, including some of the archaeological needs which our regrettably unsuccessful lottery bid hoped to cover last year, with a specific aim of getting to the bottom (once and for all) of how old Wirksworth really is and what its origins really are, for example, we wish to identify the sarcophagus presumed to be below the altar pavement to which the Wirksworth Stone belongs. This bid will be submitted in the New Year.

We have also reported on our research and finds such as with study notes (short papers) on the local Roman lead industry and its products in March; on the Meadow Croft Sough in June; on the Warmbrook and historic water temperatures in July and the Wirksworth Old Bath and the waters of Wirksworth in October, these have all been most interesting papers to prepare.

I give notice that the AGM of the Society will take place on Friday the 27th January 2022 at 7pm. The AGM will take place by video call using Zoom, a final notification will be issued nearer the event for members to join if they wish.

Financial and membership matters 2022

Balance brought forward from 2021			£ 40.60
Income			
Subscriptions and Donations		£255.00	
Expenditure			
Insurance	-£171.20		
Bank Charges	-£62.96		
Research and aerial photography	-£10.00		
Transfer from reserves		£150.00	
Balance carried forward to 2023			£201.44

We have 18 members.

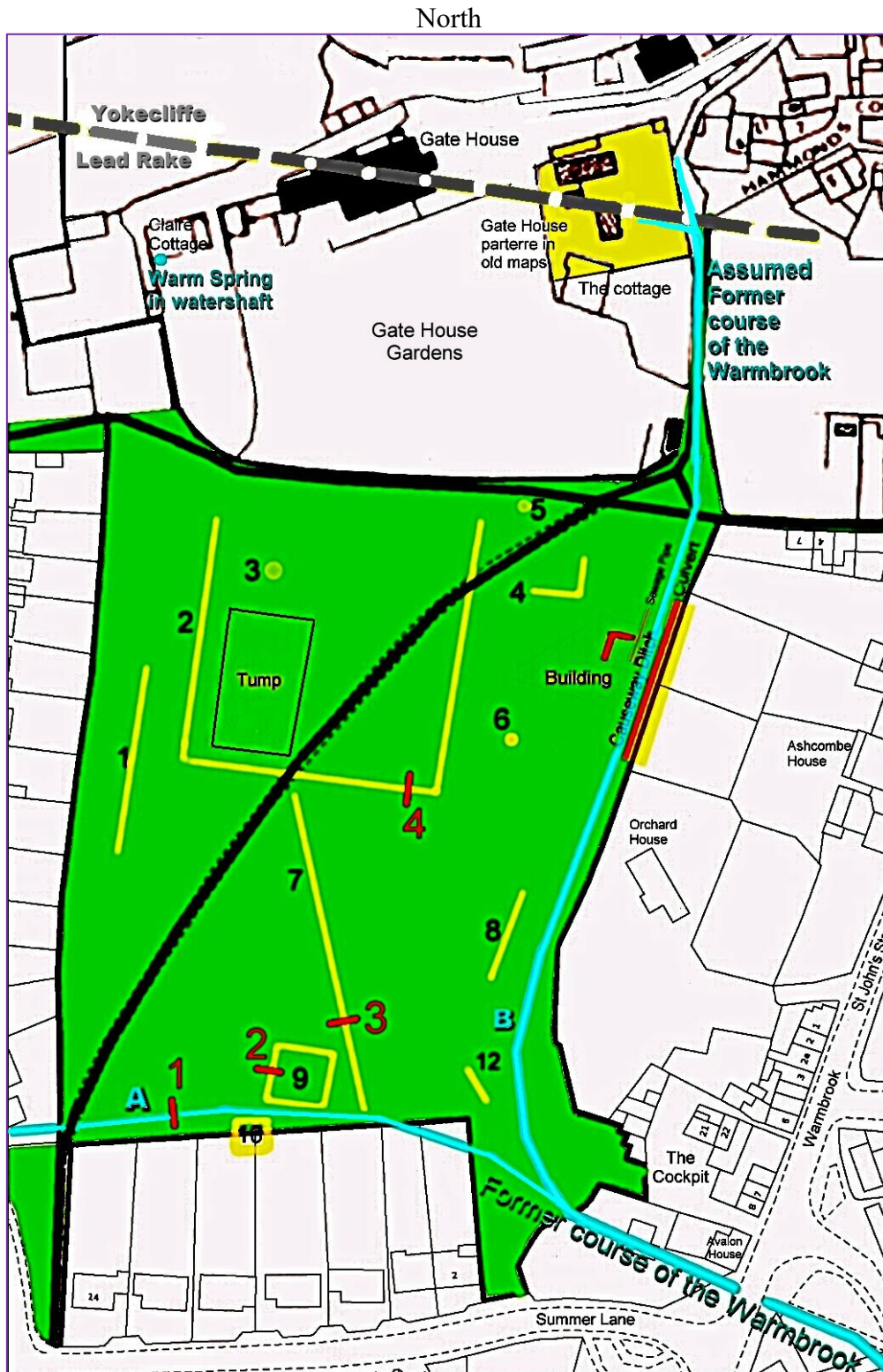
In conclusion

In looking forward, our focus for 2023 will be the origins of Wirksworth. Fieldwork work is also continuing on the Roman road network around the district and we have further matters of fieldwork around the town itself to address.

I trust all those who have taken such an active interest in our work will continue to support us and I thank you all for your engagement and efforts on our behalf this year.

**Interim summary: Meadow Croft field, Summer Lane, Wirksworth, Derbyshire, DE4 4EB
Grid Ref: SK 2849 5374**

“The Meadows” was originally a much larger field than now: most fields around the town were walled into smaller units by different owners and by the Enclosure Acts of the late Georgian age. “Meadows” is first mentioned apparently as “Meadow Wall” in 1420 (Cameron, 1959). In this case it is not known whether “wall” refers to an actual wall or it may be a dialect corruption of “well” (originally meaning spring). It was first mapped in 1821. The first Tithe Award of 1837 calls it Meadow Croft, this would have differentiated it from the Great and Little Meadows, which were where the Yokecliffe estate now is. Returning to the archaeology of the Meadow Croft field, we have summarised in the report which follows our surveys and fieldwork.



The Meadow Croft field and its surroundings (subject to amendment in final report)
The main features examined are discussed in the text but the index numbering in the plan above also shows:

1. Possible ditch or relict field boundary: not examined
2. Possible enclosure ditches in U-shape: examined - medieval
3. Circular feature on Lidar: not examined
4. Small L shape ditches: not examined
5. Small circular feature on Lidar: not examined
6. Further small circular feature on Lidar: examined: some medieval stoning but indeterminable
7. Possible drainage ditch feature: not examined but in the light of final knowledge considered to be likeliest candidate for the Meadow Croft Sough
8. Possible small drainage ditch: not examined
9. Square enclosure, possible building remains: examined, no remains or archaeology found, natural
10. Very small square enclosure, possible building remains: not examined
- 11a and 11b. Features beyond the Meadows boundaries on aerial photos (between Derby Road and Water Lane). Not shown on above plan. Small square feature (1945) and large elliptical feature (1950) since destroyed by development; not examined
12. Possible sough tail of the Meadow Croft Sough: examined, no remains or archaeology found, natural.

In attempting to find the stream bed of the Yokecliffe stream (feature A), two attempts were not successful and we conclude that it is a little further south than shown here, perhaps in the gardens of the houses of Summer Lane. Feature B is the former course of the Warmbrook.

As an overview, the archaeology of this field is very exciting and hugely interesting for the history of Wirksworth. The archaeology is much busier than we expected but the field has never been examined before and with the exception of occasional property and place-name references to it, was rather a blind spot in our understanding of the town. Wirksworth, like many of the towns of the Peak District, has never, until the last few years, been archaeologically examined in detail.

In the above image the path which runs diagonally through the Meadows from the town towards Summer Lane can be seen, as well as what appeared to be a building platform to the north-west of the path, known as "The Tump". This feature has been investigated and we have not been able to find any building remains on it, no (pre-modern) finds were identified from it that were datable and only a single residual sherd of Roman pottery came from under it. In talking to local people it was even suspected from personal comments that the Tump might have been the result of random dumping from the construction of the Yokecliffe Estate in 1971. Efforts were made by the Society to collect old photographs but none are exact enough to show the Tump. On examination the entire Tump feature seems to be composed of a dark grey, almost black, clay which lies on top of the natural field surface. We are not able to confirm it as an archaeological feature.

This is an important lesson in the interpretation of Lidar features, fieldwork is necessary to support or eliminate their interpretation. A similar lesson applies to features such as cropmarks in the aerial photographs of the field. There were, interestingly, several different cropmarks shown on three available aerial photographs, which had been taken in different years, at different seasons and from different lighting angles. Again, some of these features contained no archaeology, they were geological or topographical features masquerading as human activity. However, there were a number of features shown on the aerial photographs which were indeed archaeological and which, on investigation by fieldwork, help shed some light on the history of the Meadow s Croft field.

Finally, and not apparent on any of the aerial or Lidar images were the below-ground remains of what we initially regarded as a possible defensive ditch (the Causeway Ditch - and the course of the former Warmbrook - see final report to follow) and the foundation remains of a Croft or small farm building next to it, in the east side of the Meadows near the boundary wall with the back gardens of St John's Street. In so far as these features were below ground they could only be identified through fieldwork and this has been taking place over three digging seasons, albeit in difficult and restricted circumstances due to the Covid epidemic.

In many respects the late Saxon and Norman date of the croft building remains is extraordinary, because structures of this time are both uncommon finds in themselves and even rarer to be examined or reported in the national archaeological record. Yet, we do know that Wirksworth was an important Anglo-Saxon (Mercian) centre. A charter dated 835AD calls Wirksworth a town; St Mary's church is an important ancient Christian site, with the Wirksworth Slab dating from early times and, because it is unweathered, must (conceivably) have come from inside a church standing at that date. A Sceat coin of King Eadberht (737-758AD) also having been found in Church Street. Later, Domesday Book of 1086 lists Wirksworth as a Royal manor with the second largest population in Derbyshire and under the deFerrers was one of the six ancient borough towns of Derbyshire. We should therefore not be surprised to find something of the Saxo-Norman period here.

Finds by period

Prehistoric / Iron Age

A very small amount of prehistoric pottery has been found, generally underlying other activities, which might be construed as being Iron Age, however, the caveat for this is that some of it might be Saxon, as we are dealing with handmade and rather roughly made and poorly fired materials which often have similarities in terms of the two periods. In the case of all our pottery finds these will be listed in the later report.

In addition a hammerstone was found below the imbricated surface of the yard of the Croft, we cannot date such a stone except to say it would not be later than the yard below which it was found, indeed you might still hammer something with a stone today. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to regard such hammerstones as being more common from the prehistoric age.

Roman

There is a small amount of both residual and stratified Roman pottery from the site as a whole, with the oldest piece dating from the later first century and most pieces being commonly of the second or third centuries. These are not present in large amounts and only a single sherd of Roman Derbyshireware was found in a context adjacent to the foundations of the north-west corner of the croft building. A sherd of Roman floor tile was found under the imbrication of the yard of a type consistent with the fourth century date of the villa at Carsington, whose comparators are kept at Buxton Museum.

Undated

A curiosity of the foundations of the croft building is that although it is constructed largely of gathered rough limestone, there are several pieces of well-dressed gritstone, one of which is very fine indeed. We cannot date such stonework, all that can reasonably be said is that it must pre-date the construction of the croft. A further observation is that such stonework must have come from close by: some of it is extremely heavy and cannot have been carried by a single person. A final observation about the dressed stonework is that there is more than one type of both the dressing and the gritstone used and the very finely dressed piece is of an extremely hard, almost granite quality: the implication is that there may have been more than one nearby building source or ruin from which these worked stones were brought.

Saxon

In considering the pottery finds a relatively long tail of Saxon pottery of handmade types is apparent in the build up to the main period of occupation of the croft site. Some of this pottery is quite excruciating, that is to say it has been made by hand by a person who knew little or nothing about how to make pottery and has simply dug up some clay, left all its imperfections in it, constructed it into some form of pot then fired it by putting it in a bonfire. Nevertheless, this still represents an aspiration or need for pottery rather than using wooden or (expensive) metal alternatives.

Once we get to more recognisable, or more accurately, kiln made pottery by knowledgeable individuals we also begin to get recognisable Saxon types such as Stamford Ware and these suggest that we are not dealing with people using or occupying the croft who are poverty stricken or desperately poor. The pottery sequence continues well into the Norman period and is resolutely domestic: of cooking pots and jugs. We feel the start of the croft building is of the second half of the tenth century and continues through to the late thirteenth.

There were no finds which would indicate any industrial, mercantile or trading activity of any kind. For this reason we regard the building as domestic and a croft or small farm on the edge of the town next to a convenient water supply in the form of the Warmbrook, which in those days would have passed pleasantly by on the east side of the farm. It is considered that a small farming family of five might require between 10 and 12 acres of land for a basic existence.

The Society excavated the area around the structure to identify it and this revealed part of the foundations and remains of a building. It appears to have stone and clay foundations, a clay floor, stone walls and had a (sandstone) stoned roof. Around the building was a wide spread of fallen stone, which is believed to be part of the collapse of the building, there were also sandstone slates and nails lying over the foundations.

This brings us to the real eye-opener about the building. It had a water supply. Running down the west side of the building is a stone-lined channel that served a little covered culvert on the inside of the building's north wall. The operative and extraordinary word here is "inside". This caused us considerable excitement and we initially felt that the building should represent something more than a croft, perhaps a small grange, hospital or almshouse. However, this is not the case, there was no evidence to support it and in the end we felt that we should take the simplest possible explanation - that the croft had a water supply, primarily for its animals, but also because it would make domestic life easier.

The dimensions of the building, as evidenced by the surviving north and west walls, is approximately 4 metres by 5 metres. Much of the east side had been dug away by a Victorian sewage pipe. Overall, the building would have been about the size of a big modern living room. It cannot be said that all the area was examined in detail, the presence of mature trees in and around the excavation area made this an uncharacteristically difficult site to deal with. It was constructed in its final phase at least (there may have been more than one phase) of gathered stone set in wide clay walls and a roof of stone slates nailed to the roof structure. Stone and clay represent the cheapest and most easily available materials in this location.

Norman

The building has been dated from associated pottery, which runs from approximately 950AD to 1250 or a little later, but does not appear to stretch beyond 1300. The pottery suggests that the building originated in the late Saxon period and continued to the Norman age, a date range either side of the Norman Conquest and stretching into the period in which the deFerrers were Lords of the Manor of Wirksworth.

The pottery finds associated with this are typical of the time and include amounts of Burley Hill wares, Shelly wares and orange gritty coarsewares. The unity of these finds helps us identify pottery sherds which we have not been familiar with of the same time period and which may be local products as they are not known in the record from some of the better understood parts of Derbyshire.

The end of occupation of the croft site is almost certainly the last quarter of the thirteenth century as the pottery record stops abruptly in the 1270s or 1280s. This timing coincides (as it happens) with the dating change in lordship of the manor from the deFerrers back to the King in 1269 and when the Causeway Ditch appears to have been re-cut. It is even possible that the end of the croft as a small occupied farmhouse may coincide or be attributable to the re-cutting which would have impinged upon its curtilage.

Medieval and Post Medieval

Thereafter the pottery sequence has to be taken from the surroundings and the site appears to become a backwater just used for agriculture until the watercourse (the Causeway Ditch) begins to be used as a

dumping ground, or is being deliberately infilled, in the years immediately following the English Civil War after 1660. The Causeway Ditch is later referred to as the “Common Midden” and dumping of domestic pottery, fireplace ash etc. continues in it until the early years of the twentieth century.

The field contains medieval ditches and the central path was constructed over one of these, most probably in the Tudor Age when changes in ownership took place and while lead mining was being undertaken around the headwaters of the Warmbrook in what later became the garden parterre of Gate House.

Finds from the ditch and other parts of the field reflect domestic and other life, for example fairs, from the medieval period onwards, with large quantities of pottery of all kinds increasing to huge amounts of dumped pottery in the ditch after the English Civil War, as well as finds of things like gaming pieces and musket and pistol balls in surprising numbers, suggesting the field may have been used for shooting practice or the shooting of small animals such as rabbits for dinner.

Modern

Archaeology does not stop for the modern world, that is to say the last 250 years or so. The field was used consistently for agriculture as it always had been in the past, probably wheat or oats as these were two main local crops and the field occurs in documents and maps, as well as within living memory, for the making of hay, the grazing of cattle and sheep. Significant change in these practices only occurred from 1971 when the Yokecliffe estate was built on the Great and Little Meadows and drainage changes were made through the south side of Meadow Croft, which, whilst it remained as a field, lost its agricultural importance and appears to have been used in some parts for dumping of spoil and other materials when the estate was built.

After that point little or no agricultural activity took place with the possible exception of some hay mowing for a few years and the field was increasingly used for casual recreation, the archaeological finds from the modern age reflect this in terms of a range of items such as penknives, knives, forks, spoons, plate and cup sherds of modern machine made wares, all indicating picnic type activity from the days before disposable plastic. There are also considerable amounts of modern glass bottles of all kinds including beer and ale bottles, small spirit bottles for products such as whisky, vodka and brandy, indicating the extensive consumption of recreational alcohol, in case this causes any “shock horror” Daily Mail type responses we would cordially point out that the date of such items indicates it was inhabitants now of the age of your granny and grandad who were probably trolled and dancing the late summer evenings away, because the range of such glassware does not extend as far as alcopops. Presumably by the time these came into fashion the Meadow Croft had become too neglected to be comfortable in, that is to say once the mowing and haymaking stopped the field gradually became the four acres of nettles, thistles, brambles and weeds which so regrettably characterise it today and which do not represent its historic nature as a meadow, which it owed to centuries of human intervention.

In other recreational finds there are large numbers of footballs, the tump in particular was used for recreational and casual football by the miscellaneous pupils of Anthony Gell Grammar School and the Wash Green Secondary Technical School for years and there are also quantities of golf balls and golf tees which suggest the casual practice of golf in the field by local residents. Naturally, there are also finds of small toys lost by children through the ages and the most recent finds are of soft drinks cans and plastic chocolate, biscuit and crisp wrappers of all makes and origins.



Late Saxon building foundations and water channel in the Meadows, looking south.
All features have been left in situ and re-covered with the soil on the site. Paint dots on stonework represent stones which have been moved or replaced: unmarked stones are in their original positions.

A full report will be made in due course of the interesting archaeology of the Meadow Croft field and a verbal presentation given to the public once the report had been completed. The time frame for this late spring 2023.








Appendix: Coins and Tokens from the Meadow Croft Field

Coins

List No	Date of Find	Find Context	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Denomination	Notes
1	24.04.2021	101	George V	Britannia	1936	Half Penny	
2	26.06.2021	102	George V	Britannia	1927	One Penny	
3	09.06.2021	102	Edward VII	Britannia	1904?	Half Penny	Terrible condition
4	09.05.2021	Spoilheap	Edward VII	Britannia	1907	One Penny	
5	16.09.2021	101	George III	Britannia	@1799	Farthing	Britannia faces left with a trident and laurel leaves
6	23.06.2021	101	George V	Britannia	1912	One Penny	
7	23.06.2021	101	George II	Britannia	1729-1739	Half Penny	
8	23.06.2021	101	Elizabeth II	Britannia	1965	One Penny	
9	31.07.2021	Spoilheap	George V	Coat of Arms	1920	One Florin	
10	20.04.2021	101	George V	Britannia	1927	One Penny	
11.	20.04.2021	101	Bust	Corroded	Victorian?	Farthing?	Wholly corroded. Outline of bust facing left appears to have a short que. Possibly early Victoria

Information and photographs on post medieval coins is extensively available on the internet.

Tokens - Items 4,5, and 6 are not from the Meadows dig but are included for comparison

List No	Image	Date of Find	Find Context	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Notes
1		23.06.2021	101	Symmetrical design	Blank	Medieval to post medieval	Lead token 2 grams Perhaps Powell Type 3
2		19.06.2021	102	Spider	Blank	Medieval to post medieval	Lead Token 2 grams Powell Type 19
3		29.08.2021	Spoilheap	Human	Blank	Medieval to post medieval	Lead token 2 grams Powell Type 32
(4)		Before 2015	Metal detection Wirksworth	"WL.T" "9.K.	Short squared cross	1500-1800	Lead token 10 grams Powell Type 8. May be related to cloth working
(5)		Before 2015	Metal detection Wirksworth	Cross with dots	Blank	Seventeenth or Eighteenth century	Lead token 5.5 grams Powell Type 14
(6)		2019	Garden works 18 Wash Green	Symmetrical design (shown)	Stylised horse or lion	Medieval - Fifteenth century	Lead token 6 grams Powell Type 1
7		06.06.2021	Spoilheap	Shield / Lettering	Lettering	Seventeenth Century	Copper alloy Says "Thomas Baguley in Ashurne" (Ashbourne)

The Powell typology of Leaden Tokens can be found here:


<https://www.thetokensociety.org.uk/leadtokens/newsletters/LTTApril05asPDF.pdf>

Uses of medieval and post medieval tokens known from records:

As pieces in various games including draughts and hopscotch; As tavern tokens or receipts; As entry tickets to view relics in a church or other kind of event entry; As counters when calculating accounts or counting and recording an activity; As alms given to beggars who came to a charity's door seeking the price of a meal; As tallies to record attendance at church services or entitlement to monthly remunerations; As tokens of membership of various charitable organisations; As receipts for dues or tolls paid by traders who set up stalls on market days.

In the case of 1,2 and 3, there is a certain family similarity. We note that stalls were set up at medieval fairs all around the town, including at nearby Marten Ash Green, it is therefore possible these might be stall or gaming tokens from medieval fairs here.

Silver Object

List no	Image	Date of Find	Find Context	Obverse	Reverse	Date	Notes
1		29.05.2021	101	Inscribed	Blank	Twentieth century	Silver dog tag, oval with holes at either end. Inscribed by hand "H Higton" then "AB" probably a blood group, then "P" probably Protestant and a number "?247740"

Note: Context 101 is topsoil and 102 is subsoil.