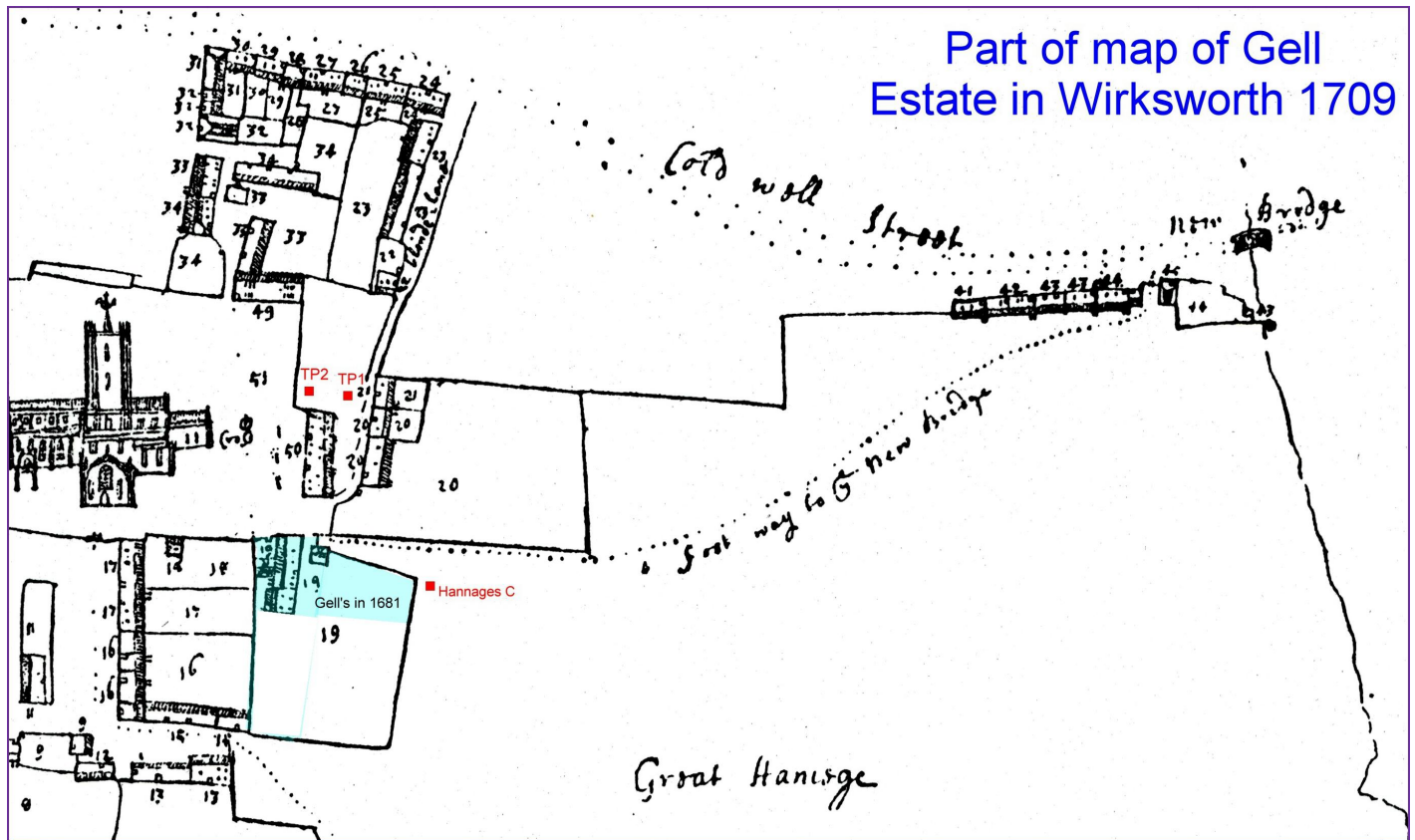
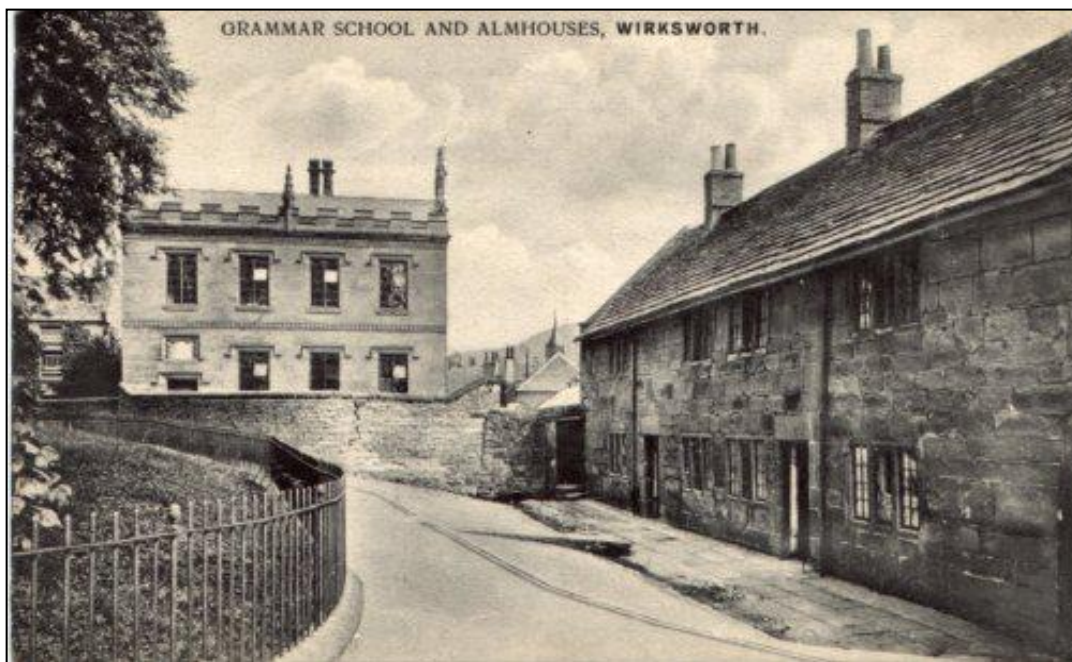


August 2017 Update (Revised 2018 and 2023)

Wirksworth Almshouses Garden Test Pit 2



In our July 2017 report we referred to work on a first Test Pit in the garden of the Anthony Gell Almshouses adjacent to Wirksworth churchyard. This Test Pit wasn't particularly instructive, given that the oldest item found was post-mediaeval, yet the Almshouses themselves date from the 1580s. This being the case, we asked the Almshouses Trust for permission to put in a second Test Pit to see if the first had been giving a correct reading, so to speak.



Wirksworth Almshouses (RH side of picture) in 1907 looking north.
Test Pit 2 was behind the gate in the centre of the picture.



Test Pit 1: Wirksworth Almshouses TP1 looking north west: Oddly modern with few finds.

Test Pit 2 was put in 10 metres west of Test Pit 1, 2 metres from the west boundary wall and 2 metres from the north boundary wall on the 5th of August 2017.

Test Pit 2 was startlingly different from Test Pit 1 and it contained over 100 shards of pottery and other small finds, the most items we have ever had out of a single Test Pit anywhere in Wirksworth.

In addition to the astonishing number of items was the range of dating of them. Starting at the top we have modern items and working gradually back in time, with one or two exceptions due to the garden being dug over and the context horizons being diffuse because of it. For example context 6 was not continuous but appears to have been dug through during gardening activities and turned over, leading to materials which might have been below that context being above it and vice-versa.



Slipware 1650-1800; Clay pipe bowl 1650-1680.

The range of materials contained not only pottery of all periods but also glassware, clay pipe shards and bowls (in the upper contexts), oyster shell, canine teeth and animal bone and metalworking slag. In this respect the contents were remarkably wide-ranging and informative.



Metalworking Slag



Shard of Bellarmine ware 1500-1700

The various contexts in Test Pit 2 were interesting, in so far as there were eight contexts from the topsoil down to the natural substrate which is here limestone rubble (solifluction) at 1 metre 10 cm depth, though this does not explain why Test Pit 1, only 10 metres away had no such limestone rubble substrate to a greater dig depth of one and half metres.

Contexts and materials.

Context 1 (To 25cm depth). This is the topsoil of the current garden which is a dark soft loamy soil with a wide variety of largely (though not entirely) post mediaeval pottery and other small finds. This is diffuse with:

Context 2. (To 50cm depth). A slightly greyer loamy soil with bits of charcoal and some animal bone and canine teeth also with largely (though not entirely) post mediaeval pottery and other small finds. This lower part of this context, overlaying Context 3 contained slipwares, clay pipe shards, some Bellarmine ware (Bags 1-2 from contexts 1 and 2).

Context 3. (To 60cm depth). A layer of small limestone pieces which may represent a modern gardening horizon including some gritstone demolition items including a flat shaped small octagonal gritstone and part of a large ball finial such as one might find on top of gatepost or as a finial on the end of a house ridge line (Bag 3)



Smoothed gritstone (LH) and part of Ball Finial (RH)
 These items were interspersed with some slipwares (1660-1690)

Context 4 (To 70cm depth). Drier, greyer friable soil with some limestone pieces with lots of bits of mortar, charcoal, small coal (“slack”) and bits of small gritstone. The small finds included green glazed shelly ware, midland purple wares and part of a Pipkin Handle.



TP2C4 Pipkin Handle



Example of a Pipkin

Context 5 (To 80cm depth). Similar to above but also containing chert, far fewer finds - much less pottery, some metalworking slag, buff gritty ware and other gritty wares (tending to be mediaeval) (Bag 5)

Context 6 (Between 80cm and 90cm depth). A layer of partly continuous, but partly dug through, small limestone pieces 5-10 cm in size, predominantly in the SE corner of the test pit, also less obviously and continuously on the east side of the test pit. No finds.

Context 7 (to 1m depth). Similar soil layer to Context 5

Context 8 (At 1m and to 1.10 metre depth). Random limestone pieces 5-10 cm in a layer on the west side of the test pit within fawn clay, also containing some spot glazed ware, shell tempered ware, purple ware, (Bag 6) below which were several pieces of a hard red-orange ceramic building material (Bag 7).



Hard red-orange ceramic building material (CBM)
 The ceramic is unusually consistent in colour and fabric - unlike brick
 Three pieces found fit together and appear to be a thick tile.

Finally, at 1.10 metre depth, limestone solifluction, which we take to be the natural substrate N1 “Bedrock”, appeared to drop away to the east (Blind Lane).

Finds list:

| Ref | Description | No of shards | Date range | Type | Comments / Provisional Opinion |
|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|---------------|--|
| | Bag 1 (of storage) | | | | |
| 1. | Metal belt buckle end | | Probably Modern | | Extremely rusted. |
| 2 | Glassware | | Modern | | 5 items |
| 3 | Button | | Modern | | Bone |
| 4 | Clay pipe stem shards | | 1700-1920 | | 4 items |
| 5 | Oyster shell | | | | 1 item |
| 6 | China shards and flakes | 6 | Modern | Body | |
| 7 | Blue and white china | 5 | 1800 to present | Body | |
| 8 | Tin glazed earthenware china | 1 | 1600-1800 | Body | Surface cracking and faint blue pattern |
| 9 | China | 1 | Modern | Handle | |
| 10 | Salt glazed stoneware | 4 | 1800-1900 | Body | Shiny brown |
| 11 | Salt glazed stoneware | 2 | 1800-1900 | Base shards | Shiny brown |
| 12 | Salt glazed stoneware | 1 | 1800-1900 | Handle | Shiny brown |
| 13 | Brown glazed earthenware | 6 | 1690-1890 | Body | “Coarse blackware” |
| 14 | Blackware | 1 | 1720-1740 | Body | Staffordshire or Wirksworth Blackware. Dark red fabric |
| 15 | Cistercian ware or Midland blackware | 1 | 1600-1700 | Handle of cup | Orange fabric black lead glaze |
| 16 | Mottled ware | 2 | 1680-1800 | Body | 1 flake possibly slipware though |
| 17 | German mottled | 1 | 1600-1720 | Body | Apparently late example |

| | | | | | |
|-----|--------------------------------------|---|-----------|--------------|---|
| | stoneware | | | | |
| 18 | Midland yellow ware | 3 | 1550-1650 | Body | |
| 19 | Unglazed red earthenware | 2 | 1800-1900 | Rim and base | |
| 20 | CBM flake | | | | Brick but may be a pottery flake |
| 21 | Reduced sandy ware | 1 | 1300-1500 | Body | Very small shard |
| 22 | CBM brick pieces | | | | Brick (sample) (Post 1670) |
| | Bag 2 (of storage) | | | | |
| 23 | China | 2 | Modern | Body | |
| 24 | Glassware | | Modern | | Large shard has "orth" presumably "Wirksworth" |
| 25 | Clay pipe bowl | | 1690-1750 | | Decorated small green circle, pronounced small foot. |
| 26 | Salt glazed stoneware | 4 | 1800-1900 | Body | Shiny brown |
| 27 | Brown glazed coarseware | 4 | 1750-1900 | Body | |
| 28 | Mottled ware | 2 | 1680-1800 | Body | Small shards |
| 29 | Blackware | 1 | 1720-1740 | Body | Embossing |
| 30 | Lead glazed Midland purple ware type | 1 | 1650-1700 | Body | |
| 31 | Midland yellow ware | 2 | 1550-1650 | Body | 1 might be slipware |
| 32 | Slip Trailed ware | 4 | 1650-1800 | Body | |
| 33 | Feather Trailed slipware | 1 | 1650-1800 | Body | |
| 34 | Slipware | 1 | 1650-1800 | Body | Cream on black ground. |
| 35 | Purple bodied blackware | 1 | 1650-1800 | Body | |
| 36 | Bellarmino ware | 1 | 1500-1700 | Body | German mottled stoneware |
| | Bag 3 (of storage) | | | | |
| 37 | Blue and white china | 1 | Victorian | Body | |
| 38 | Clay pipe stem | | 1650-1680 | | Associate with 39 |
| 39 | Clay pipe bowl | | 1650-1680 | | |
| 40 | Blackware | 2 | 1700-1800 | Body | Red fabric black lead glaze |
| 41 | Blackware | 1 | 1720-1740 | Body | Staffordshire or Wirksworth Blackware dark red fabric |
| 42 | Feather Trailed slipware | 1 | 1650-1800 | Body | |
| 43 | Midland yellow ware | 2 | 1550-1650 | Body | Rouletting |
| 44 | Midland purple ware | 1 | 1380-1600 | Body | |
| | Bag 4 (of storage) | | | | |
| 45 | Slip Trailed ware | 2 | 1650-1800 | Body | |
| 46 | Cistercian ware / Blackware | 5 | 1600-1800 | Body | Various |
| 47 | Midland yellow ware | 2 | 1550-1650 | Body / Rim | |
| 48 | Midland purple ware | 1 | 1380-1600 | Body | |
| 49 | Midland purple ware | 2 | 1380-1600 | Body | |
| 50 | Splash glazed ware | 1 | 1275-1500 | Handle | Pipkin |
| 51 | Green glazed sandy ware | 1 | 1275-1500 | | |
| 51A | Metal splash slag | | Undated | | Possibly pewter |
| | Bag 5 (of storage) | | | | |
| 52 | Glassware | 1 | Undated | | Appears to be painted |

| | | | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|------------|---------------------------------------|
| 53 | Metalworking slag | | Undated | | Ferrous |
| 54 | Burnt fineware | 1 | Unknown | Rim | Unknown rouletted - Post med? |
| 55 | Midland purple ware | 1 | 1380-1600 | Body | |
| 56 | Buff gritty ware | 1 | 1075-1300 | Rim | Large, worn square rim |
| 57 | White Buff sandy ware | 2 | Unknown | Rim/ body | Small sand and red inclusions |
| 58 | Gritty ware | 1 | 1100-1250 | Body | Small shard slip or colour coat |
| 58A | Green splash glazed grey sandy ware | 1 | 1075-1275 | Body | |
| 58B | Pale orange oxidised sandy ware | 1 in 2 parts | Unknown | Body | |
| | Bag 6 (of storage) | | | | |
| 59 | Pale green glazed, buff sandy ware | 1 | 950-1200 | Body | Shiny - Query Stamford ware? |
| 60 | Oxidised gritty ware | 1 | 1100-1260 | Body | Splash glaze grey core |
| 61 | Midland Purple Ware | 1 | 1380-1600 | Base shard | Badly made seems early |
| 62 | Shell Tempered Ware | 1 | 970-1200 | Body | Abraded. Lincolnshire fine shell ware |
| 63 | Oxidised hard grey | 1 | Unknown | Body | Small sherd, orange colour coat? |
| | Bag 7 (of storage) | | | | |
| 64 | Red-orange ceramic | 3 | Unknown | Heavy tile | Compared with Roman tile: possible |

General Discussion

Test Pit 2 has been extremely useful, this intensity of finds, their high quality and the breadth far exceeds anything we normally find within one test pit, and the comparison with Test Pit 1 is startling. Indeed Test Pit 2 has much more in common with Trench C of our Hannages work, which we undertook in 2008, than anything else. These two features are quite close, perhaps no more than 50 metres apart, yet between them lies Test Pit 1 in which we did not obviously find the natural substrate. We cannot draw the evidence beyond a point which it would naturally reach, but it is possible that the absence of the natural in Test Pit 1, whilst such natural exists in Test Pit 2 and Hannages C, may imply the presence of a ditch which we failed to identify because of the depth.

It is also significant to note that there were no human remains in Test Pit 2 despite it being within 10 metres of the churchyard and there being anecdotal reports of such remains being found during drainage work associated with the path at the east end of the churchyard, only 5 metres away. It is not possible to draw certain conclusions from this without an area excavation, but the lack of such remains might imply that the churchyard boundary did indeed lie here in past times.

Test Pit 2 Discussion

Contexts 1-3, storage bags 1-3. These contexts from the surface to a depth of 60 cm contain almost exclusively modern finds generally not earlier than perhaps 1600.

Context 4, storage bag 4. This context appears to represent a horizon between modern finds and medieval finds at a depth of 70 cm, with bag 4 containing both modern finds and some medieval finds notably the pipkin handle.

Context 5, 6 and 7, storage bag 5, From 70 cm to a depth of 1 metre, appear to be part of the same fill with finds which are predominantly but not exclusively medieval.

Context 8, storage bag 6. Is a mixed layer of clay and stony material with the finds being again predominantly medieval overlaying the natural substrate, at the very bottom of this layer were three pieces of heavy fine fabric red-orange tile (compared with the Roman tile from Carsington villa).

Natural substrate 1 at 110cm, being limestone solifluction (a kind of hard rubbly limestone, a bit like rough cement in texture and hardness).

Summary

In summary, then, in terms of the pottery, we have material dating back to the Norman conquest from Test Pit 2. Test Pit 1 only yielded modern materials such as china and salt glazed stoneware from an oddly greater depth, thus giving the impression that we had not reached the natural substrate and so this might represent a ditch or other feature beyond our dig depth. We note that in Hannage Trench C undertaken in 2008, the natural substrate of limestone solifluction was at a similar depth to Almshouses Test Pit 2 and its finds also yielded a comprehensive date range from the modern, through the medieval to the Roman.

Previous report:

Issues in the archaeology of Wirksworth, Wirksworth Archaeological Society, March 2009 (for 2008 dig season - Great Hannage and Vicarage Garden)