

Wirksworth Meadows Examination.

Work on Saturday sought to identify the north end of the yard which exists on the west side of our site and which appears to be a cheese wedge shape, with the slightly curving thick end of the wedge to the south and the pointy thin end to the north. In this we seem to have been successful and the thin end of the wedge appears to terminate, more or less, at our baseline 15 metre marker.



Yard surface looking south.

Tentatively, our final work will next seek to determine in which direction the water supply channel comes into the site, but given what we now know of the Warmbrook, if this source were tapped for the water supply then it lies further north and quite a long leet or bolt would have been needed from the source to the site.

Additionally, today we removed a section of the yard stoning to examine the underlying structure. The stoning lies pushed into or rammed into an underlying orange/fawn clay context (207) which contains some charcoal and a single sherd of Burley Hill type ware (the nearest equivalent being fabric 1) (Cumberpatch, 2004, Reference Collection). This sherd has a hard pale grey fabric and dark olive green glaze. It is possible (and the subject of some confirmation work) that this context is the same as 107/N1, that is to say its the upper part of the natural clay which is the normal substrate at this site. There was no intervening soil between the stoning and the clay, this implies that the topsoil was cut and removed and the stoning laid directly into the clay.



Sherd of possible Burley Hill ware of context 207

We have considered the dating range of Burley Hill ware before and this type of pottery begins perhaps in the 1160s or 1170s, has a peak production period of perhaps 1200-1250 and continues for some time afterwards. A single sherd is not enough for us to nail any kind of flag to a mast, but we have to bear in mind that it fits a continuing pattern from the site and might (as a straw in the wind) even imply the yard was constructed later than the building.

### Discussion

Having had the time to digest and review all the information we have from the site, the simplest explanation for what we have is a small farmhouse or croft. This would accord with the single long-lived building. The existence of a water supply, which has undoubtedly been the major surprise at this site would be accounted for as to provide for animals and also domestically. The yard, even if it is a later addition and an odd shape, would be a utility, somewhere to be outside on a sunny day, wash and dry one's clothes or deal with an animal. There is no evidence of the yard being bounded, but a wattle fence (for example) would leave no archaeological trace in these ground conditions. That the building contains a lot of stone is, because, well, Wirksworth is knee deep in stone and that means its a cheap, easy to find building material, it can be packed in clay to make walls and the site has both in abundance.

We should also prudently note that some of the stone on site, perhaps 2-3%, is dressed, some of it carefully and finely so: this dressed stone comes from a building or nearby structure of an earlier date.

The pottery, predominantly spanning a time frame between 950 AD and 1250 (Cumberpatch 2004) places us in the Saxo-Norman period and is robustly domestic in character, but not poor, and is composed most often of cooking pots and jugs of various types. There are no finds which suggest industrial, trading or mining activity of any kind.

It is the blessing and burden of archaeologists to spend our time writing caveats and hedging about what something might be, because we're never going to find a sign under the floor saying "Grimbold the Cheerful lived here" but it would be nice to indulge our better selves and observe that this field is called Meadow Croft and here, indeed, we have a croft.

### References

Cumberpatch CE, 2004, Medieval Pottery in Derbyshire: a review, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal, Vol 112, pp86-112

Cumberpatch CE, 2004, South Yorkshire / North Derbyshire Medieval Ceramics Reference Collection, York, Archaeology Data Service, accessed at <https://doi.org/10.5284/1000242> on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2022.