

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Progress Report April 2025

Work continues at the site at Ian Avenue and further progress has been made on Test Pit 7, the current focus of our efforts.



Test Pit 7 showing contexts including the clay and rubble layer (“raft”) and the lower darker soil which comprises the field surface before the Ian Avenue housing estate was built in 1963.

The clay and rubble across the garden where we are working is very deep. A chance conversation with a long-standing resident confirmed what we had suspected, that this is indeed the result of work done by the estate builder, who constructed the houses and their surroundings on a clay raft in 1963. It is also important to bear in mind that clay is a major natural component of the substrate here. Test Pit 7 also gives an indication that this is the edge of the raft, because the clay drops away on the north side at about 45 degrees and that side of the Test Pit is levelled up to the

current garden with a kind of ashy fill and more assorted rubble. This is the same as we found in Trial Trench 1, which is about 20 metres away to the east.

Below the clay raft is the pre-housing estate field surface, whose upper layer is mixed soil and redeposited clay lumps containing large amounts of dressed stone, and assorted pottery and finds of all periods prior to the housing. Finds today including clay pipe sherds, a Victorian glass bottle neck, Derbyshire stoneware (1770-@1900), a sherd of grass tempered ware, which could be Saxon (700-950AD) and a handmade brick, which cannot be earlier than about 1790, due to its size - bricks became larger due to a government brick tax in this period and this one is pretty chunky but has no frog (indent).

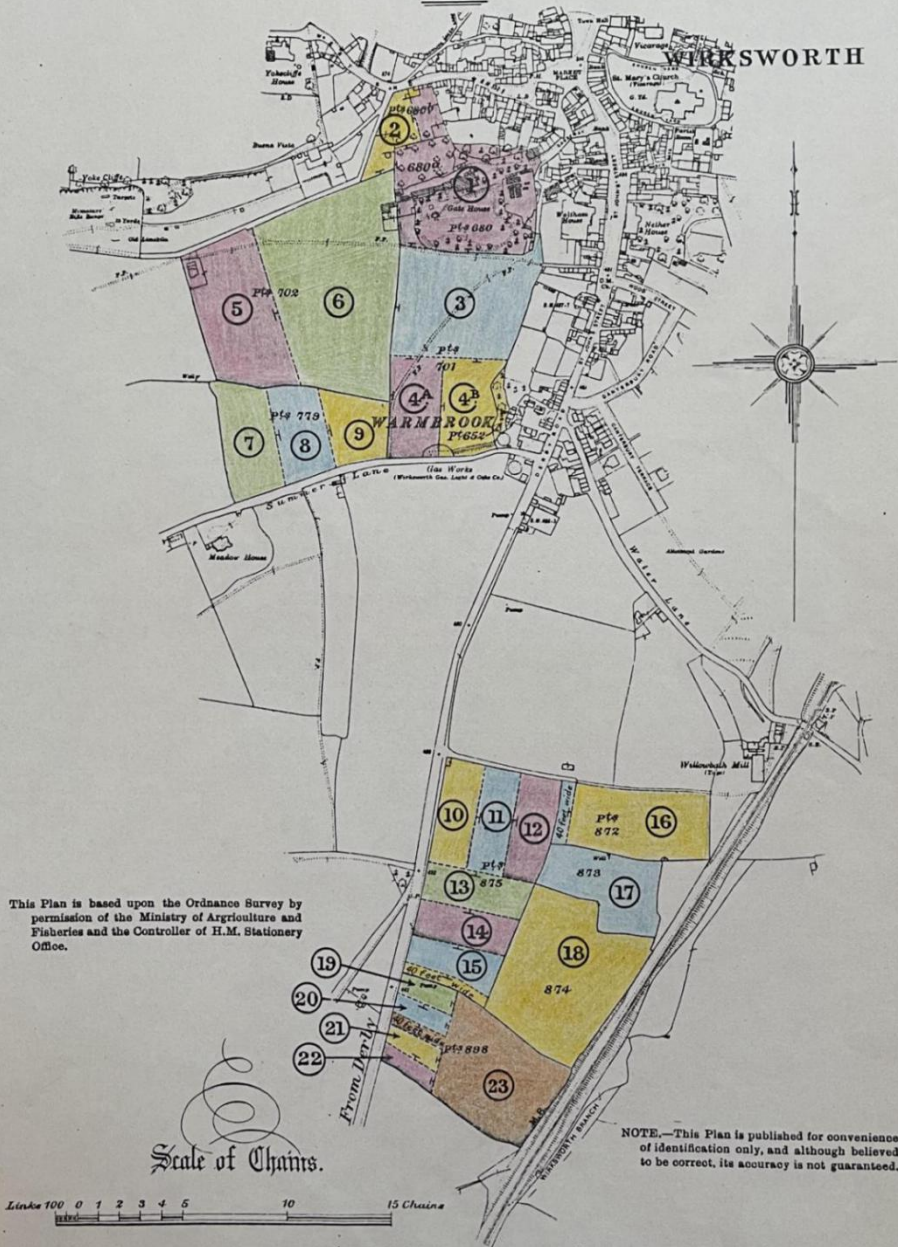


Test Pit 7 with sondage containing dressed stone

Both in Test Pit 5 and now again in Test Pit 7, there is a distinct context of dressed building stone mixed in with the field surface below the clay. We have noted previously that this stone appears local to this site and there is a great deal of it. So far we have not been able to identify the source: the field contained no buildings before the housing estate and no field walls crossed it as far back as mapping goes, the first map to show the field being the 1709 map of the Gell Estate, with mapping at regular intervals from 1806 until the present day. Below is a 1924 example, courtesy of Barry Joyce.

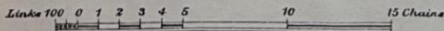
Plan
OF
**GATE HOUSE PROPERTY,
WIRKSWORTH.**

For Sale by Auction by
MESSRS. KNIGHT, FRANK & RUTLEY,
1924



This Plan is based upon the Ordnance Survey by permission of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

Scale of Chains.



Messrs. KNIGHT, FRANK & RUTLEY,
Auctioneers and Estate Agents,
20 HANOVER SQUARE, LONDON, W. 1
90 PRINCES STREET, EDINBURGH;
78 ST. VINCENT STREET, GLASGOW; and
41 BANK STREET, ASHFORD, KENT.

Martin, Hood & Larkin, Photo Lith., 20, Newport St., W.C.

1924 plan of the Gate House estate. The square field in the middle, above number 11, is Short Oat Hill, where the Ian Avenue housing estate is now. The boundary running on the north side of the field is a Victorian metal fence, near our current location.