

Archaeological observation at 2 Millfield Place, Highgate, London, N6 6JP

NGR 52803 18660

Sitecode MLJ10

I was contacted by Kate Gavron of 2 Millfield Place in Highgate on 2 November 2010. A large hole had appeared in her garden and she had observed brickwork in the hole. On further inspection, through a small gap in the brickwork, she could see the interior of a brick-lined feature that she believed to be a well. Visits by a hydrological engineer and a drain inspection engineer confirmed that this was a deep brick-lined shaft. I was asked to give archaeological advice.

On 5 November 2010 I visited the site and, by going down a ladder into the hole and peering through a small gap in the brickwork, the buried interior of the feature could be seen. Drawing a measured sketch-plan and section of the brick-lined feature, it became clear that this was indeed the remains of a deep well. Using these archaeological observations, and a video recorded by the drain inspection engineer as well as photos taken by Kate Gavron (by inserting a camera through a small aperture in the brickwork), we can say that this is a post-medieval brick-lined well, capped with brick vaulting in the 19th century.

The internal diameter of the well is approximately 0.7 to 0.9m (lack of access renders it impossible to measure accurately). The depth of the well is approximately 14m below garden level (c. 12m measured by the drain inspection engineer, plus 2m depth of hole below garden level). The dating of the feature remains uncertain. The unfrosted pink-red bricks used in the well capping are probably of 18th- or early 19th-century date (brick dimensions are B 100–108mm, T 65mm, L 225mm). However, it was impossible to measure, record or sample the bricks of the original shaft lining.

The limited dating evidence – the capping of the well is roughly contemporary with the late Georgian date of the house – would suggest that the well predates the current house. Furthermore, documentary and map research by Kate Gavron shows that the well was originally in a different property to the south of no. 2 Millfield Place (this part of the garden has only been part of the property for about forty years). The property to the south of no. 2 Millfield Place is labelled 'The Laurels' on the 1896 Ordnance Survey map. The well is situated in the north-west corner of 'Lot 128' on an 1840 estate plan in the British Library Crace collection ('Fitz Roy farm and Highgate estate' plan), on which 'The Laurels' was built in 1843. Our well would therefore be part of an earlier property before this sale and subsequent house-building. On Rocque's map of 1746 there is a single house set back from Highgate Hill (to the east of 2 Millfield Place). Further research might be able to shed more light on the well and the property to which it belonged, by investigating the Fitz Roy estate, owned by Lord Southampton (presumably Charles Fitzroy, Baron Southampton). The well at no. 2 Millfield Place may well have supplied water to a 17th- or 18th-century house, perhaps built by the Fitzroy family.

Nick Holder, 12 November 2010