

Chapter 7 - Wroughton Mead Interpretation

Enclosure A - Cuttings 3 & 3a
Enclosure E
Wroughton Mead
B1 North & South - Cutting 2

Enclosure A

An almost rectangular enclosure (Enclosure A) lay to the W of the main settlement area. Its eastern bank was formed by the bank into which the W wall of B4 had been built. The N bank measured 17.5m (58ft), the W and S ones 28.8m (96ft) and the W one 41m (136ft), giving a total length of approximately 116m (386ft), almost exactly that of Enclosure B.

Excavation across the northern bank of Enclosure A (Cuttings 3 & 3a) was undertaken in May 1959 to establish the composition and nature of the bank, to obtain dating evidence for the construction of Enclosure A and to ascertain whether a gap in the bank at this point indicated an entrance to the enclosure. Investigation revealed the bank, 0.9m in height from crest to the natural Clay-with-Flints subsoil, consisted of a slightly clayey soil with flints. On the S slope of the bank a large sarsen boulder was revealed, as were three to the E. The latter formed the end of the bank at the apparent entrance to the enclosure. Smaller sarsens, possibly tumble, were noted towards the S end of the bank. A ditch, c. 0.6m in depth, was revealed to the north of the bank (AWCXXX).

Cutting 6L across the pit north of B4 sectioned part of the eastern side of Enclosure A. Although the evidence is indeterminate, there is a suggestion of a bank on the eastern side of Enclosure A made up of brown soil, flints and some chalk, with a 'step' cut on the eastern side through part of the fill of the pit.

Discussion

The material recovered from the investigation of the thin layer of brown soil above the flinty bank of Enclosure A included RB, 13th century and 15/16th century pottery sherds, as well as a Norman horseshoe fragment (GF13) and a late 12th-13th century iron prick spur (GF44; TWA, 9). Evidence from the bottom of the ditch, on the other hand, produced late 13th century glazed sherds (GF45), which allow us to date the utilisation phase of the ditch, and thus presumably the bank of Enclosure A. The sherds of an early 13th century date over the bank represents material thrown up during the construction of Enclosure A. Material of a later date, such as the hard-fired sherd from the 15th or 16th century (GF22), indicate Enclosure A may have continued to serve a purpose some two hundred years later.

It is fairly certain the gap in Enclosure A at this north-eastern corner was the entrance. The bank came to an end here, as did the shallow depression to its north where the ditch had been.

The stones lying on the old turf-line of the bank, with some poking through the topsoil, seem to have been laid as a simple embankment to the entrance or to demarcate it. The entrance way into the enclosure itself was not represented by a well-defined layer or paving, although a shallow depression at the centre of the cutting (Cutting 3a) may be from wear, whilst it is possible the heavy flinty material noted in section formed part of a simple, loose cobbling, similar to the one found around the entrance to B4 and S of B2. The gap was 3m across, from bank foot to bank foot, narrower than the entrance to Enclosure B.

Unlike Enclosure B, where a ditch was apparent on the inside of the enclosure, the ditch around Enclosure A was on the outside. If one surmises that the bank was in the region of 1.5m high, coupled with the ditch, this would have given a combined rise from ditch bottom to bank top of around 2m. This fairly substantial undertaking suggests that the enclosure was dug to provide extra protection from incursions by livestock or predators, *i.e.* it was to keep certain animals *out*, possibly wolves, whilst, naturally, keeping others safely *in*. As such, it may have been a penning for sheep, although the height of bank and ditch suggest larger animals such as horses were kept in this enclosure, an interpretation endorsed by the material evidence.

Enclosure E

Enclosure E forms the largest enclosed space within the Mead, covering the area S of the main settlements and Enclosures A, B and D. Its banks measured approximately 907m (3,020ft). Cutting 7X investigated the bank and ditch of Enclosure E in its far NW corner where it joins the south-western corner of Enclosure A. Here a ditch was found on the internal side of the large enclosure with a maximum depth of 0.5m and 1m from the top of the bank, similar to the bank and ditch of Enclosure A. Although the site records refer to 'IA sherds' from this cutting, this has not been corroborated (or denied) and the only diagnostic sherds from this area are from 13th century vessels (CW38). Enclosure E is clearly an addition to Enclosure A, and as Enclosure A was constructed in the late 13th century, Enclosure E is therefore late 13th or early 14th century in date.

Wroughton Mead

The medieval limits of Wroughton Mead were not fully determined during the Fyfod investigations, though it is believed to be an amalgamation of Enclosures A, B, C, D and E, giving an approximate length of 972m (3,240ft).

Building 1 (B1)

Situated some 20m to the NE of B4, three further buildings were uncovered during excavation. Building 1 (B1), found to be of two phases, lay about 6m away from Buildings 2 & 3 (B2 & B3) across what is thought to have been a farmyard. B1 and B2/3 were not set parallel to each other; whereas B2/3 lay in a more or less exact N-S alignment, B1 sat at an angle of 70° to the N-S axis (see *Discussion* in **Enclosure B**).

The Excavation

A brown clayey humus (topsoil) c.28 cms thick was removed to reveal a Chalk surface or, in some quadrants, a surface of small flint nodules. These layers appeared to have been deliberately laid or puddled on top of the natural Clay-with-Flints or Chalk. It also became apparent that the underlying Clay-with-Flints and natural Chalk had been cut through, especially towards the northern end. This was interpreted as being where the ground had been dug away to produce a level area on the 3° slope and as such these layers of disturbed Chalk and/or flint nodules were considered to be the 'floor level' of the building.

At the edges of this 'floor', stone footings or low walls were uncovered, most with their straight sides exposed, where possible, towards the inside of the building. The walls were covered by an agglomeration of sarsens, stretching 1m to 2m either side of the wall proper, and were some 0.6m thick and approximately 0.3m high on the N and W. At the E and S, however, there was no walling at all, only a spread of sarsens on the E and a single course sarsen kerb. The S lacked even a kerb, although large sarsens lay in the SW and SE corners. B1 was thus found to be set longways into the slight south-falling slope and was, in its latest form, 17.4m long with a width of 6m in the N and 4.2m in the S, giving a total internal floor area of approximately 88m².

Excavation has revealed that this building was of two phases. The original B1 was altered when a S extension was added. That the original building underwent substantial improvements is suggested by the slightly skewed plan of the building, the occurrence of a set of post-footings *and* post-holes, the existence of a blocked entrance in the N part and the material evidence. As such, Building 1 is thus discussed under two separate headings: 'B1 Phase I' being the earlier building, consisting of the northern section of B1 ((B1 North), and 'B1 Phase II' being the later, longer structure, consisting of both B1 North and B1 South.

B1 - Phase 1

Walls, postholes & roof

The interpretation forwarded in this chapter sees B1 Phase I as constituting a building 8.7m (29ft) in length, with a width of 6m (20ft), giving an internal floor area of 52m². This building is illustrated in Fig XXX.

The presence of two postholes* set into the floor level of B1 North indicate the centre of the original building. As the postholes lie 3m from the outer E and W walls of B1 North and 1.8m from the N and S walls, the roof would have been hipped, with diagonal beams reaching down to four corner stones (see Fig XX). As noted above, the walls were in an advanced stage of collapsed, though the N wall of B1 was found to be in a better state of preservation in comparison to the E and W walls, indicating it had been remodelled during Phase II. The remains of what was interpreted as the S wall of B1 Phase I were uncovered across the central area of B1, though the SE corner of B1 Phase I was uncertain and the SW corner more so as it was certainly destroyed when B1's S extension was added.

Entrances

Two lines of sarsens leading up to the centre of the W wall (Entrance 1) suggest it had once been possible to enter B1 at this point. However, this entrance was subsequently blocked, possibly when the chimney for the hearth was constructed. In the E, a further entrance was uncovered (Entrance 2), though here a line of sarsens did not block the entrance but acted as kerb to the rough flint cobbling of Entrance 2, thus forming a slight step down into B1. Two small patches of Chalk in the NW and SE corners of Entrance 2 appear to have been post-footings, showing where a door or gate pivoted or where small timbers held up a porch. One similar post-footing is noted inside the southern wall of Entrance 1, mirroring the example at the SE of Entrance 2 (AWC214).

Why Entrance 1 was blocked (and Entrance 2 not) is unclear, though perhaps with the construction of B1 South with its entrance (Entrance 3), Entrance 1 ceased to serve a purpose. Whatever the reason why the orientation of B1 changed from being East *and* West, to being East only, it clearly indicates a move from looking towards B4 and Enclosure A, to looking towards the B2 and B3 across the farmyard.

Recesses

Two areas inside the E wall of B1 North were interpreted as recesses (Recesses 2 and 3), with another possible one in the NW corner (Recess 1). Patches of charcoal in the centre of Recess 2 and associated ceramic evidence suggest this area was used for cooking, with a patch of dark humic material in Recess 3 indicating this one may have been used for storage. To the S of Recess 3, N of Entrance 3, a small area of black soil and cooking-pot sherds, from the same vessel as found in the pit inside B2 (Pit X; Cross-fit 3), would also indicate a possible cooking function here, possibly related to two large sarsens. There was a possibility of a further recess (Recess 1) in the NW corner of B1. At the junction of the internal wall of

Recess 2 and the N wall of B1, a large sarsen, which is not integral to the N wall, indicates Recess 2 was added to the NE corner of B1 North after the external walls were completed. As such, Recess 2 was built into the NE corner, and Recess 3 into the SE corner, of B1 North after, though not soon after, its completion. Being inside B1 and considering the angle of the roof, the height of these recesses would have been so low as to mean it would have been impossible to stand up.

The number of sherds (33) from the floor of B1 North, as opposed to around 230 from the amongst the wall stones, indicated thorough cleaning of the floor with rubbish accumulating along the edges of the wall and outside the building. The 230 sherds were mostly from Recesses 1 (98 sherds: 43%) and 2 (87 sherds: 38%), with a further 35 sherds (15%) coming from the floor of Recess 3. The rest (10 sherds: 4%) came from the area around Entrance 1. This accumulation of ceramic material show that recesses of the sort uncovered in B1, with their low stone walls on the internal sides, were more difficult to sweep out or, being for storage or sleeping, they were swept less frequently. It is also possible that the sherds formed part of the rubbish which accumulated outside the building, and on the lower section of the roof, so that when the roof rotted and collapsed, the sherds fell into the recesses. Other possibilities, such as a hen-house or wood store, neither requiring regular cleaning, cannot be ruled out. Clearly such outshuts, whatever their precise function, would have increased the space available and may well have served a variety of purposes (Beresford 1989, 80 & 115, Fig. 20A, 109).

Hearth

A hearth, cut 23cm into the floor 1.2m from the W wall of B1 North, was found to be full of a dark humic material with much charcoal. A semi-circular recess in the wall of B1 directly to the W of this hearth was interpreted as being where the chimney to this hearth had been situated.

Pit 3

A rectangular pit, c.75cm in length (E-W) by 30cm in width (N-S) was uncovered against what appeared to be a one-course high stone kerb at the northern edge of Cutting 2J, just inside the N wall of B1. The top of the pit filling was found to be of burnt chalk, lying on a pit fill of burnt clay over humus, chalk and flints, with most of the lowest section of the pit being clay with flints (not natural). Ceramic evidence dates it to the 13th century (CW38; GFs 102 & 116). The function of the pit is uncertain. It had clearly experienced burning and the possibility of a low platform between it and the inner kerb of the N wall would suggest it was for cooking, with the platform acting as a bench or shelf. The near absence of sherds does not preclude this interpretation, as B1 was regularly and thoroughly swept. As such, it appears likely that Pit 3 and the low platform formed the cooking area of B1 Phase I.

Pits 1 and 2

Pits 1 and 2 underlay the E wall of B1 South and are thus Phase I or earlier, thus allowing a *terminus post quem* for B1 South.

Pit 1, which was cut into the deeper Pit 2, had a clayey fill with flints. This filling was brownish rather than reddish and contained much charcoal. The Norman horseshoe fragment in the pit filling (TWA, 8; GF187) indicates a date range from the mid 11th to the mid 13th century, with the ceramic evidence indicating a 13th century date for the filling of this pit.

The E wall of B1 South was built on soil which sealed a filled in pit; namely Pit 2. This had been deliberately and carefully cut into the Chalk with almost vertical sides and was unlined. The fill consisted of a humic material and charcoal fragments at the top, which was clearly darker in colour around the numerous stones also uncovered in the filling, though towards the bottom it became lighter in colour. It was also observed that the filling became damper towards the bottom, so much so that pieces of wood were recovered in a good state of preservation. Many stones, some large, were uncovered loosely packed and lying at angles, as if dumped in when filling had reached a certain stage. Several iron objects were also recovered.

Amongst the ubiquitous coarseware sherds found across the site, two later 13th century glazed pottery sherds (GF66 and GF82) lay on the floor above Pit 1. The ceramic material from the pit itself revealed 'coarseware Fabric 38', except for one early-glaze sherd (GF187) which came from the top layer of Pit 1 and/or Pit 2. The position of this sherd, above chronologically later ones, points Pit 1 or Pit 2, or both, being disturbed or filled in deliberately rather than naturally.

Amongst the coarseware Fabric 38 sherds from Pit 2 came two glazed sherds interpreted as dating from the latter part of the 13th century (GF202 and GF204). This is clear evidence of B1 South having been built towards the end of the 13th century or into the 14th *i.e.* after the use of this glazed jug. Two Fabric 38 sherds, one from the lower section of the pit, the other from the top fill, were from the same vessel (Cross-fit 22: GF190 & GF196). This, and the fact that the wall of B1 South had not sunk into the top of Pit 2, implies Pit 2 was deliberately and carefully filled in to ensure the wall was not left unstable.

Pit 2 contained several further items of interest. An iron axe (GF210) found 0.25cm from the bottom of Pit 2 in the damp, clayey soil, would seem to be a wood-working axe for dressing timber as opposed to one used for warfare (TWA, 3/4). The 'unravelling' iron staple (GF204) may well have been used to attach fittings to masonry and/or to attach wood to wood (TWA, 5). The thin iron object (GF208) may represent part of a lock mechanism (TWA, 7), possibly a padlock hasp, and the figure-of-eight hasp (GF210) could have been used in conjunction with a padlock to secure a chest (10th-15th century - TWA, 7).

In addition to this metalwork, pieces of wood are also noted as having survived. All in all, Pit 2 may have been dug to hold a chest as part of a foundation deposit for the new building. After the chest was positioned in the bottom of the pit with the axe, glazed jug and cooking pot, large stones were carefully placed on the chest and the pit filled with earth. The E wall of B1 South was then built over the buried chest. The 5cm layer of humic material uncovered between the top of the pit and the wall (AWC216) may have built up naturally, though it is more likely, as the wall showed no signs at all of sinking into Pit 2, that this was part of a clearly well effected in-filling.

Pit 2 was uncovered at the end of the ditch at the entrance to Enclosure B, which is why it lay at an angle of 35° to the wall of B1 South and not directly under or at right-angles to it, as would be expected. As such, it is fairly certain that the chest was initially a deposit at the end of Enclosure B, which may have had later ceramic goods added to it before the construction of B1 South.

The position of Pit 1 is equally of interest. Its shape and fill leads one to suggest it is in fact a 'robber's pit', dug to retrieve the goods buried in Pit 2. Maybe the occupants of Wroughton Mead were leaving and the items which they had buried years previously were of sentimental or monetary value. They therefore dug down, took the lid off the chest (breaking the pots and leaving the remainder of the chest, its hinges and lock; suggesting they were in a rush) and took the contents they sought. The axe (GF210) was left as it was not in the chest but tucked into a corner of the pit and was therefore missed.

B1 - Phase II

Walls

The southern extension to B1, judging by the stonework of the walls, was carried out by a well-trained mason. At probably the same time, B1 North appears to have been modified**. This S extension was 9m in length by 4.2m in width, that is 1.8m narrower than the northern part, giving an internal floor area of 36.5m². Like B1 North, a surface of flints was regarded as the floor level and again the area seems to have been regularly swept, with rubbish piling up along the edges of the interior and exterior walls.

Although the remains of the W wall of B1 South, and to a lesser extent the E wall, were clearly well constructed, the reason for the lack of a substantial S wall suggests that the S wall was periodically removed to sweep the building out. The presence of over 250 sherds in the SE and SW corners of B1 South (GF139 & GF188) is due to them accumulating up against the large corner sarsens which were too heavy to move. Evidence of similar quantities of sherds found outside B1 around, and S of, Entrances 1 and 2, (e.g. GF154) are also the result of cleaning inside B1, but this time with rubbish being thrown out of the doorways.

Post-footings & roof

Two small lumps of packed Chalk forming grey, slightly raised patches, 0.3m to 0.6m across, on the reddish-brown floor were evident in B1 South (PF3 and 4), with another along the partition wall between B1 North and B1 South (PF2). These were interpreted as post-footings, indicating the position of three uprights which held the roof to B1 South. Considerable amounts pottery, including glazed ware, were recovered from around PF4, in contrast to sparse finds in centre of building, showing that rubbish accumulated against the post.

These post-footings show a new roof was constructed along the length of B1 South. Post-Footing 4 was found to be 2.1m from the E and W walls, that is to say at the centre of the axis of B1 South. Post-Footings 2 and 3, however, were 1.5m from the W wall and 2.7m from the E wall. This positioning meant that the roof of B1 would have had a steeper pitch in the west than in the east and been off-line, *i.e.* not parallel to the walls. Why these post-footings were

set back from the E wall is explained by the proximity of Entrance 3. Any closer to the E wall and the posts would have hampered access for livestock and machinery. Thus the roof of B1 South was held up by central posts in a XXX manner, whereas, unusually, to the north the roof appears to have remained hipped in design. If this interpretation is correct, then there would have been a space between the vertical N wall of B1 South and the S, sloping wall of B1 North, making a partition wall between the two ends difficult to conjecture. **ANY IDEAS ??**

Entrance 3 & partition between North & South

In the NE corner of B1 South, an entrance (Entrance 3) 1.5m in width, was evident. A rough layer of flints, presumably a coarse cobbling, ran up to this entrance. The remains of a partition wall dividing the N and S ends of B1 was hinted at, with a gap in the line of partition stones near the E wall, suggesting where access between the two ends may have been possible. A complete cooking-pot was found inside B1 South, at the S end of Entrance 3, buried with its rim at floor level. Its function is unclear, though it is unlikely to have been for cooking as no carbon was associated with it. Perhaps it was a piss-pot.

Building 1 - Conclusions

Dating Phase I - B1 North

A few later 13th century sherds (*e.g.* GF167), coupled with horseshoe nails from between the collapsed wall stones dated to the second half of the 13th to early 14th century (GFs 96, 110, 158 & 201), indicate B1 North was in use in the late 13th century, however the the great majority of the evidence points to a long period of activity throughout the middle and later 1200s.

Dating Phase II - B1 North & South

After careful analysis of the ceramic evidence, it is clear that of the 148 medieval glazed (latter C13th) sherds from Wroughton Mead, 89 come from B1 (60%). Of those, 83 came from B1 South (56% of the total), mostly from the occupation layer. This evidence, coupled with that from Pits 1 & 2, demonstrate that B1 South was built and in use in the latter part of the 13th century. The 'Transitional' horseshoe fragment uncovered under the W wall of B1 South (GF212) supplements this date and further shows that this extension must have been constructed in the second half of the 13th or early 14th century. That B1 South was in use at the same time as B1 North is shown by the pieces of the same jug found in the occupation layers of both ends (X-fit 4).

B1 (North and South) seems to have been in a state of abandonment after the mid-14th century and certainly by the early 15th century. This is illustrated by the 'later medieval' horseshoes above the wall tumble in B1 South (GF7) and near Entrance 2 (GF122) and a button, comparable to one dated 1418-1434 (GF128; TWA, 1), found in the lower level of the humic material covering the site.

B1 North was therefore built and occupied from the middle of the 13th century, at the earliest, with its southern extension added in the late 13th or early 14th century. Both were in use until the early to mid 14th century.

Function

The hearths, deep humic layer over the floor level, animal bones and recesses clearly indicate B1 North was the habitation end. That no evidence of a sump, drain or stalling was found in the floor of B1 South, coupled with the number of sherds and metal items related to agriculture, leather-working and horses***, implies B1 South was not used as a byre, but as a storage and work area.

The finds from this area also illustrate the types of activities the occupants of B1 undertook. The amount of metal objects associated with binding wood shows that substantially built furniture may well have been used in the house, along with storage chests. There is also evidence of shutters and doors, both requiring catches, hinges, locks and bolts (GF199). The leather working tools, such as the awls, could well be associated with the working of cattle hides. In addition, the knives and wood-working tools point to the building and repair of hurdles, predominantly for the penning of sheep.

The faunal evidence indicates that the sheep were of a type kept primarily for wool, and though some were consumed at Wroughton Mead, the main source of meat was cattle with some chickens and ducks (TWA, 28). It is therefore likely that the majority of the sheep, their fleeces and skins, were taken off site to markets or central stores. In addition, the equipment associated with the preparation and spinning of wool, such as the pair of shears (GF89), also indicate use on a domestic, rather than an industrial scale, although being expensive, such equipment would have been taken off the site when it was abandoned.

* The northern posthole, uncovered in the I/J baulk, was approximately 25cm to the E of Pit 4 and 1.50m from the N wall. The southern one, 23cm deep, was 1.5m NE of the hearth and 1.80m from the presumed S wall of B1 North.

** The similarities between the walling techniques in the N wall and those of the Phase 2 extension suggest the N wall of B1 was altered, even rebuilt during Phase 2.

*** knives (GF31, GF158, GF160); 13th-14th century shears in the entrance to B1 South (GF89); awls (GFs88, 149, 147 & 175) found at 'occupation level'; horse equipment (GF151, GF172, possibly also GF59, GF76 & GF188); heckle teeth and small piece of binding comparable to ones dated c. 1280-1434 (GF199; TWA, 6); lock bolt (GF199), comparable to a 10th 12th century example (TWA, 7); arrowhead (GF199) dating from the 11th - 14th century (TWA, 10).