

Excavation at 28–31 Wimbledon High Street

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Introduction

An excavation on the area of 28-32 Wimbledon High Street was proposed by the John Evelyn Society (now the Wimbledon Society) in early February 1979 in advance of redevelopment. The society thought it possible that the evidence of early post-medieval occupation on the site could well indicate earlier medieval occupation (see Milward, R. J., 1972 History of Wimbledon Part II: Tudor Wimbledon). The excavation was organised by J. S. McCracken of the S. W. London Archaeological Unit of the Surrey Archaeological Society. The excavation was started on 25 February and was subsequently handed over to L. & R. Adkins. The excavation continued to 11th March.

The Site

The site had been levelled by demolition contractors and much of the area adjacent to the High Street was destroyed by a large deep cellar (fig 1). The southern end of the site had been much disturbed by contractor's plant and contained several irregular trenches. On examination of the whole site, the southern end appeared to be devoid of features and finds, and so it was decided to continue the trench beside the cellar adjacent to the High Street begun by J. S. McCracken.

Permission to excavate had been granted only on condition that the excavation did not exceed a depth of two feet.

The Excavation

The excavation was carried out by hand and the following features were excavated:

F1 (wall)

Wall running length of trench north-south. 34cm wide. Survived to a maximum of three courses. Rested on a bed of yellow sandy gravel mixed with concrete. Coincided with and extended beyond boundary of 31 Wimbledon High Street.

F2 (manhole)

Brick manhole with remains of an iron cover or grating. Probably an inspection chamber for a drain or sewer that had been in use until very recently. Excavation of this feature was abandoned when the fill was found to be riddled with maggots. Associated with an iron pipe running north-south.

F3 (drainage channel)

Brick-built drain running east-west, curving northwards at its western end. Probably earlier than F1.

F4 (section)

This was a section cut east-west to investigate the nature of the rubble fill. The fill was gravelly soil with large pieces of concrete and drainage pipes. It could not be dug below the depth limit imposed by the contractors.

F5 (rubble)

Gravelly rubble to the east of F1 and north of F2.

F6 (rubble)

Gravelly rubble to the east of F1 and south of F2.

The remainder of the features were not excavated, but consisted mainly of a mixture of bricks, brick rubble and pipes.

Conclusion

No features or finds of medieval date were discovered, but it is possible that the depth limit imposed by the contractors may have prevented discovery of deeply stratified features of such date. However, from the overall nature of the site, it is probable that any such evidence for medieval occupation would have been very fragmentary, and it seems most likely that any evidence for medieval settlement on the site had already been destroyed by later buildings.

Of the modern remains which were discovered, F1 seems to be a continuation of the western boundary of 31 Wimbledon High Street, while the layers of brick and brick rubble at the southern end of the trench seem to be the remains of a yard surface. The decayed brick platform against the western edge of F1 halfway along its excavated length may be the remains of a fireplace. If so, this might be an indication that the wall F1 was originally part of a building rather than just a boundary.

Finds by Clive Orton

F5: small sherd of salt-glazed white ware (SGWW), open form. Usually dated c 1720/1730-70.

F4: (i) six small sherds of plain creamware (CREA), probably from four open forms and two closed. Date c 1770+.

(ii) two joining sherds of CREA, with blue floral decoration in imitation of contemporary porcelains. Footring base, probably of small dish or saucer. Date c 1770 - early 19th c.

(iii) two rim sherds of CREA with thin brown linear decoration at rim. From two different plates. One diameter 8 inches (200mm), other too small to measure. Date later than c 1770, probably 19th c.

(iv) four sherds of coarse post-medieval redware (PMCR):

(a) flat base sherd, probably of large jar. Clear glaze on interior

(b) two body sherds of closed form. Clear glaze on interior, spots and patches on exterior.

(c) body sherd of large closed form. Dark green glaze on exterior and interior; exterior very worn. Date: this fabric starts c 1650, but continues through the 18th c and into the 19th. Here, probably 18th - early 19th c.

(v) one thick flattish sherd - grey core with brownish surfaces. Coarse sandy surfaces. Not a usual local fabric, possibly a tile. Date unknown.

(vi) two small fragments of clay pipe stem. No marks. The size of the hole suggests an 18th - 19th c date.

(vii) fragment of dark green bottle glass, some opalescent decay. Glass of this type starts c 1650, but this piece is thin (2-3mm) and likely to date after c 1750.

(viii) fragment of similar glass which has been heated, probably after breakage. Not evidence for industrial process.

Topsoil

Pottery

(i) forty sherds of plain CREA, mostly small or very small.

Includes rim sherds: 2 of plate

2 of open form (bowl?)

2 of closed form (1 jar, 1 ?mug)

1 of chamber pot

base sherds: 2 of large footring form

1 of jar

several flat pieces, probably from plates

one handle fragment

one ribbed body sherd, probably from jar

(ii) two joining rim sherds with moulded lozenge decoration, possibly a plate, but rim straight and difficult to measure.

(iii) rim sherd of plate with brown linear decoration, as F4 (iii) but probably not the same vessel. Diameter 10 inches (250mm).

(iv) nine sherds of transfer-printed ware (TPW), willow-pattern or similar decoration in blue. Includes rim sherds of plate, bowl and cup. Also two very small similar sherds, possibly painted or transfer-printed.

(v) two very small decorated sherds CREA:

- (a) decorated with leaf? in brown on interior
- (b) decorated with cursive script on exterior,

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lade a stir f

l enough; nf

l I'll stir hil

l Five ligh

(vi) two fragments tile in white china -type fabric. Moulded decoration, part in blue. Basic thickness 12mm

(vii) four small sherds plain white china , similar to CREA but noticeably whiter.

Also one sherd apparently similar but possibly salt-glazed (SQWW).

(viii) three very small sherds Chinese porcelain (CHPO).

(ix) four sherds tin-glazed ware (TGW):

(a) rim and body sherd of small jar, degenerate albarello form, no decoration, diameter 3 inches (80mm); cf Bloice & Dawson 1971, no 96.

(b) very small sherd turquoise glaze, probably from rim of a bowl.

(c) very small sherd with sponged blue decoration.

Overall, the CREA can be dated c 1770+; the decorated examples are probably 19th c. The SGWW is mid 18th c and the CHPO 18th c. The TGW are relatively late examples, c 1690-1770.

(x) eight sherds PMCR, including:

(a) rim of large storage jar, diameter c 15 inches (380mm).

(b) base sherd of similar vessel, and two more probably of same vessel.

(c) two rim sherds of smaller open vessel, possibly a bowl.

(d) handle sherd of similar vessel.

For dating see F4 PMCR.

(xi) twelve sherds of Staffordshire combed slipware (STSL) plate, including 3 rim sherds. Could all be the same vessel.

Also fragment of thin (5mm) tile, similar fabric but no decoration, mortar on back. Date early 18th c.

(xii) handle sherd in English stoneware (LONS). Date 18th c.

(xiii) two body sherds of stoneware, 'Bristol' glazed. Date 19th c. Also small chip, possibly from a drainpipe.

(xiv) two joining sherds of stoneware inkbottle (SBLB). Date 19th c.

Clay Pipes

Twelve small fragments of clay pipe stems.

Nine have a small hole, suggesting an 18th - 19th c date

Three have a bigger hole and are possibly 17th c in date; these also have a larger diameter and are more abraded than most of the others.

Glass

Vessel Glass

(i) forty-five fragments of dark green bottle glass, from wine bottles. Includes two rims, two neck fragments and eleven base fragments. Most appear to be post-1750 in date, but one rim (with flat top and simple bead) and one base fragment could be earlier, c 1650-1750; [some fragments join but I have not attempted a total reconstruction. At least 3 bottles represented]

Also one fragment of bottle base in lighter green glass, smaller than other bottles, diameter 2½ inches (60mm) as against 3 inches (75mm).

(ii) 14 fragments thin olive bottle or similar. Date 19th c.

(iii) three fragments blue bottle glass, date 19th c.

(iv) mould-blown base in pale green bottle glass, and one fragment.

(v) neck and rim of flask in colourless glass, diameter ¾ inch (20mm).

(vi) three fragments colourless vessel glass.

(vii) most of a disc-shaped object in colourless glass, diameter 1.9 inches (48mm).

Window glass

11 fragments pale green, thickness 2mm; 3 with straight edge.

1 bulls-eye in similar glass.

2 fragments similar but thinner (1-1½mm).

1 colourless fragment (?corner).

1 thick fragment greyish (thickness 4½mm).

Bag of very small fragments colourless and pale green vessel and window glass, c 20 in all.