

Archaeological Watching Brief on a water pipe trench at St John's House, Warwick

An archaeological watching brief was carried out on the trenches for the installation of a new water pipe at St John's House Museum, Warwick. Two trenches were observed; Trench 1 ran to the rear (south) of the house and west of the east wing; Trench 2 ran across the car park entrance to the north-east of the house.

Trench 1

Trench 1 was only observed after its excavation and after the base at least had been backfilled over its full length (Fig. 1). In some areas the trench had been almost completely backfilled without being observed. The trench measured 0.30-0.40m wide. Its deepest observed depth was 0.73m below the existing ground surface and it must have been at least a further 0.05-0.10m deep prior to backfilling.

To the north, along the southern wall of the existing building, a possible wall (8) ran roughly north-west to south-east across the trench (Figs. 2-3). This measured c.1m wide and was made of irregular or roughly squared sandstone blocks up to 0.20m thick by up to 0.40m across. Its top lay at 0.30-0.40m below the existing ground surface and it appeared to be bonded with reddish brown sandy silt. A patch of stone uncovered in the base of the trench appeared to form part of this wall and ran under the foundation for the existing building (12) which it pre-dated. This makes it possible that the wall formed part of the medieval or early post medieval structures that occupied the area before the existing mid 17th century building. A single squared sandstone block (10), 0.35m wide by 0.25m thick was recorded in the base of the trench further to the south-east. This may have belonged to an *in situ* wall but is just as likely to have been a random lump of stone from construction work.

The earliest deposit in the observed trench was a layer of reddish brown-dark reddish brown sandy loam over 0.25m thick. This was numbered 5 in the northern half of the trench and what appears to have been the same layer was numbered 6 at its south-east end. The layer represented an early horticultural or garden soil.

Layer 6 appeared to be overlain by a wall of sandstone blocks up to 0.30m thick by over 0.40m long (9) that ran north-east to south-west along the line of the trench (Figs. 4-5). The base of the wall was at 0.40 below the current ground surface and the top of the wall at 0.65m below the current ground surface. Only the north-east end of the wall was observed due to the trench having been backfilled. It appears to have been a continuation of a medieval or early post medieval wall recorded in this area during the observation of a cable trench in 2008 (WJ08, context 34).

Layer 5 was overlain by a single sandstone slab (7) that measured c.0.35m wide by 0.10m thick close to the east wing of the existing building (Figs. 6-7). The slab had been laid horizontally on the surface of garden soil 5 and may represent the remains of a former path.

In the northern half of the trench layer 5 and slab 7 were overlain by a layer of dark greyish brown sandy loam (4) c.0.30m thick that represents a former garden soil. To the north-east wall 8 was overlain and foundation 12 abutted by a variation of the same layer, mixed with existing topsoil, that measured up to 0.55m thick (13). Layer 4 was cut by a c.0.50m wide modern brick and concrete service duct (2) that ran along the south-west side of much of the northern half of the trench

At the south-east end of the trench wall 9 was overlain by a 0.30m thick layer of dark brown loam and sandstone fragments (13) that probably represents a former garden soil mixed with modern construction deposits for the east wing extension. Layer 13



Fig. 2: Wall 8 looking south-west



Fig. 3: Wall 8 location looking south-west



Fig. 4: Wall 9 looking north



Fig. 5: Wall 9 location looking north-east



Fig. 6 ; Slab (path?) 7 looking north



Fig. 6 ; Slab (path?) 7 location looking north-east

was cut by the over 0.65m deep concrete foundation for the modern east wing extension that incorporated a ceramic drain (11). Virtually the whole length of the trench was overlain by the modern sandstone flag path that, together with its make-up, measured c.0.15m thick (1). This was abutted to the north-east by a 0.15m thick layer of modern flower bed (3).

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 0.35m-0.40m wide by c.0.75m deep and ran roughly south-west to north-east across the (inside of the) car park entrance north-east of St John's house. Geological natural sandstone (21, Fig. 7) was recorded at a depth of 0.55m-0.65m below the existing ground surface. Towards the north-east end of the trench natural 21 was cut by a vertical sided pit whose north-east edge was not uncovered (22, Fig. 8). Pit 22 was probably a quarry pit for the construction of the existing house or for earlier structures that once occupied the site. It was backfilled with brown sandy loam containing a few sandstone fragments (23). Fill 23 also contained a few fragments of hand-made ceramic roof tile and a fragment of human tibia. The find of a human bone fragment suggests that the pit had cut through, or at least been backfilled with material from, the medieval hospital cemetery that lay to the north-east of the existing house. This would imply that the pit was of post medieval rather than medieval origin.

Fill 17 merged with a layer of brown sandy loam (25) that overlies the geological natural 21 to the south-west of pit 18 to a depth of up to 0.12m. Layer 25 contained a moderate-frequent amount of sandstone fragments, a few small pebbles and a few fragments of hand-made ceramic roof tile. It may have represented a construction or demolition deposit associated with the existing house or earlier structures on the site.

In the south-west half of the trench the geological natural was overlain by an up to 0.18m thick layer of reddish brown/strong brown sandy clay that contained frequent small pebbles and a few sandstone fragments (18). Layer 18 may have formed the make-up for a former path surface; to the south-west two small hand-made bricks were recorded set level adjacent and at right angles to each other in its surface. It is perhaps more likely to have been a construction or demolition deposit, a variation of layer 25 to the north-east. Layers 18 and 25 and backfilled pit 22/23 were overlain by a c.0.12m thick compact layer of small pebbles in very dark grey silt (17) that would have formed a former path or yard surface. Layer 17 was cut by a series of service trenches (water, drainage etc) to the south-west (19/20, 26/27). Layer 17 and the backfilled service trenches (19/20, 26/27) were overlain by a 0.25m-0.30m thick layer of machine-made bricks over cinders and brown sand (16) that acted as the make-up for the existing 0.10m thick tarmac surface (15). In the centre of the trench the tarmac had been cut by two modern service trenches, one aligned north-south the other north-east to north-west, that had been observed by archaeologists in 1995 and 2008. These have been given the single number 24.

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Fig. 7: Geological natural sandstone (21) south-west end of Trench 2, looking west



Fig. 8: Pit 22 looking south (edge against natural sandstone 21 below right of board)