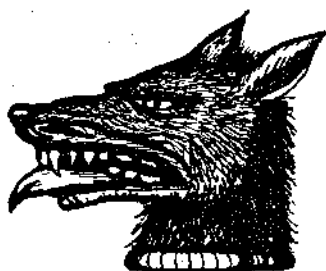


BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

WOLSELEY HALL



The Excavation
(1st interim report)

B.U.F.A.U.



This interim report is divided into two sections. Section 1 describes the first season's excavations at Wolseley Hall, which took place over six weeks in June and July 1989. The excavation was carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit as a training excavation for the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology at Birmingham University. Section 2 details a series of proposals for the presentation of the results of this work to the public.

Section 1 - The Excavation

Introduction

A 12m x 15m area was excavated, covering structures already partly defined by the earlier evaluation (Buteux, Cane and Litherland, 1989). Work is now proceeding on the production of the site archive as well as on the analysis of the the finds. The contents of this report must be seen as provisional and subject to modification when the analysis, especially of the finds, is complete.

The Sequence (early - late)

Phase I

The earliest excavated features were a series of shallow post holes cut into the natural sands and gravels, and sealed by the dumped soils of Phase II.

The natural was only available for examination in two areas. Firstly, against the eastern perimeter section and in the interior of Structure 1, a later building. Cleaning of the first area revealed a shallow, but well-defined, post-setting c.0.20m deep and c.0.50m in diameter. Two similar features were excavated under Phase II layers within Structure 1. It seems likely that these features supported timber structures belonging to an early, possibly pre-moat, phase of occupation. No finds were recovered from these features.

Phase II

After the demise of the structures represented by the Phase I post holes, a wide moat ditch was dug around the site. The outer edge and side of this feature were excavated during the evaluation phase and a section of the inner edge and fills was excavated during the recent area excavation. The ditch was c.8m wide and c.2m deep. The upcast from the ditch was dumped to form a raised platform on the interior of the enclosure. This dumping was probably intended to compensate for the low lying area of the site towards the river. It was on this platform that the first identified stone buildings were constructed. The earliest known is Structure 2, a substantial sandstone building which may represent the Great Hall. Its orientation remains unclear but it seems likely that the excavations have recovered the northern side of this building, and that it was orientated east-west. This presents some problems in the interpretation of contemporary drawings of the Hall before its demolition in 1820, which may not be resolved until further excavation is undertaken to the south of the present site.

A quantity of 12/14th century cooking pot sherds was recovered from the upper part of the dumped material. These probably represent domestic refuse.

Phase III

The moat of Phase II was probably modified as a defence in the 17th century by the addition of a substantial moat wall (Structure 3). This wall was built on the same line as the ditch, effectively using it as a huge construction trench. The moat behind the new wall was backfilled. This operation would have increased the area available within the enclosure and also considerably enhanced its defences. It is not clear how high the moat wall rose above the enclosure ground level; it may have formed a true curtain wall or simply a parapet. In either case, it would have formed an impressive obstacle.

The soil dumped behind the new moat wall contained large quantities of pottery and animal bone. The pottery is mostly 17th century in date and includes a fine 'puzzle' pot in glazed Black Ware. There are also examples of jugs which may be earlier, including one almost complete jug in a Midlands Purple fabric.

Phase IV

During the late 17th and 18th centuries the gap between the Hall and the moat wall was filled by the addition of two buildings. Firstly a large rectangular building was added (Structure 1). Its foundations were of sandstone, but the building itself may have been timber-framed. We have no evidence for the function of this building, but it was probably built late in the 17th century, since its walls, overlaying the inner edge of the moat, showed cracks resulting from the subsidence of the fills below,

Phase V

The next addition was of an almost square room in the angle of Structures 1 and 2. Although technically representing a later phase, the construction of this room (Structure 4) may have been effectively contemporary with Phase IV. Its north wall utilised the moat wall. Initially, its floor was of sandstone flags and it was originally sub-divided with a partition. The northern part of the room had drains built into the floor and may have functioned as a buttery or pantry. The entry to this room, the floor of which was c.0.70m below ground level, was by a flight of three sandstone steps set against the northern wall of the Phase III building (Structure 2).

Phase VI

By the end of the 18th century the partition wall of Structure 4 had been removed and a new brick wall built to form a corridor-shaped room against the western and southern walls. The corner angles in this area were filled in with similar brick work at the same time. The reason for this operation is not clear, but it necessitated the building of another flight of entry

steps, this time against the moat wall. Another set of brick steps were built leading down through a gap cut through the moat wall. This probably led into the, by then, partially backfilled and dry moat.

Phase VII

During this phase the sandstone floor in the remaining area of Structure was removed and replaced by a well-made brick and tile floor, with sandstone and brick drains running around the whole room. Between the drain and the walls, the remains of brick piers indicate the presence of shelves for barrels etc, suggesting that the room continued in use as a buttery/pantry.

Phase VIII

At some time during the latter half of the 18th century the moat was filled in. Deposits belonging to this phase were restricted to the drain between the moat wall (Structure 3) and the outlying building to the north.

A fine 18th century Black Ware jug was recovered virtually complete from the top of the latest silts in this feature. A complete but broken bottle was also recovered.

Phase IX

In 1820 the existing hall was demolished to make way for the new, 'Neo-Gothic' building. The old buildings seem to have been destroyed to foundation level and the lower rooms such as Structure 4 filled with the resulting rubble.

A wide range of 18th century artefacts was recovered from the demolition rubble in Structure 4. Pottery was common, including coarse wares and finer stone and cream wares. Large quantities of bottle and window glass were recovered. The remains of other house-hold implements, such as fragments of a set of knife and fork handles survived remarkably well. In addition,

animal bone and large numbers of oyster and mussel shell were found. Building ironwork such as nails was common as was window lead.

Phase X

This phase represents the construction of the new Hall designed by Trubshaw. The brick and sandstone foundations of the northern side of the hall were uncovered and a variety of pipe trenches associated with the building was excavated.

Summary

The excavations reported here have more than lived up to early expectations, both in terms of the survival and complexity of the structural remains and in terms of the richness of the finds. Both will add significantly to our knowledge of the development of the site and to our understanding of how the range of artefacts in use in the region has changed over the last 700 years.

Section 2: Archaeology and the Public at Wolseley Hall

The following proposals for the management of public access to the archaeology of Wolseley Hall consider four basic areas of presentation.

- A. The physical remains of the buildings
- B. The artefacts and interpretations of the archaeology in a separate display
- C. Information in the form of publications.
- D. Facilities for educational visits and activities.

This report is concerned with Category A - access to the remains themselves. Summary recommendations are offered concerning the remaining categories but discussion of how the archaeology will fit mesh with other activities is needed before firm proposals can be made. These discussions should take place as soon as possible.

A. The Presentation of the Archaeological site

These proposals have been drawn up with four basic criteria in mind. Firstly, the remains need to be effectively protected from the elements and from wear and tear caused by visitor access. Secondly, access needs to be as unrestricted as possible. Thirdly, the remains and the the information boards etc must be as easy to understand as possible; the more the visitor understands during their first visit the more likely s/he is to come again. Lastly, the need for complex maintenance should be kept to a minimum.

The accompanying plan shows the excavated site presented according to these proposals.

The exteriors of the buildings should be grassed over, perhaps using the same reinforcement as used on the carpark areas. The edges of the excavated areas should be battered to allow a gradual slope up to the surrounding lawn level; this would leave the walls standing c.0.20m proud. The fully excavated area on the eastern side, including the deep section through the inner moat, should be backfilled and turfed leaving the eastern walls of the buildings standing slightly proud. The moat to the north of the wall

should be contoured and turfed virtually as it is. The lowest part should be revetted to prevent problems when the moat floods. The brick features associated with the interior of the latest Hall should be reburied and turfed as indicated to protect them until further work can place them in full context.

The interiors of excavated buildings should be gravelled to enable visitors to walk inside them. This would involve the backfilling of the excavated areas to bring the ground level up to just below the tops of the walls. Access could be via a shallow sloped ramp from the southern side of the site, which would also allow easy wheelchair access. The interior of the square structure to the north of the moat wall should also be backfilled and gravelled.

How the sunken area with the brick floors is dealt with depends on how well the floors can be expected to withstand the wear of visitors feet. The floor will certainly need to be consolidated to protect it from frost damage. Two options would then be possible.

- a) The area could be isolated using a low fence (perhaps a single chain). This would not stop everyone (especially children!) but it would restrict access enough to make damage negligible. This option is not ideal, in that it restricts access to the most impressive section and requires a fence which may be obtrusive.
- b) The area could be opened to the public on a trial basis. If damage was carefully monitored, a decision could be made after, for example, the first six months whether Option (A) was needed. A low wooden ramp at a convenient point (perhaps over the southern set of steps) would enable access for wheelchairs and prevent damage to the remains of the steps.

The perimeter of the northern, damaged section of the brick floor could be revetted in the manner shown on the plan.

At present the site probably only needs a single information board which might best be sited on the square structure to the north of the moat wall, which could act as a viewing platform. Obviously further information boards will be required as work proceeds.

B. The Display

The initial display would obviously have to be designed with its position in mind. Care should be taken to ensure that it is not too ambitious too soon. The sophistication of the interpretation and reconstructions, for example, should progress with further seasons of excavation. Perhaps the initial display could concentrate on the techniques used, as well as the results of the first season's work. This could then act as the core to further additions.

C. Publications

Discussion of the production of a popular booklet describing the excavations should take place as soon as possible. The booklet should be as colourful and as attractive as possible, ideally in the same house style as other Wolseley Hall publications.

D. Education

Consideration should be given to the production of an education pack about the archaeology. This might be discussed in conjunction with other educational facilities being offered by the Garden Park to avoid duplication of effort and resources. An education pack combining contemporary theatre and music with the archaeological display would probably be uniquely attractive to schools.

Summary

In general the more accessible the monument is to the visitor the more s/he will appreciate the visit. The interest thus engendered can be put into context not only through displays, but also through the gardens and through theatre and music to provide a unique and exciting experience.



INFORMATION



GRAVEL



TURF



SANDSTONE



BRICK



WOODEN REVETMENT



CEMENT



EXCAVATED AREA

0 5m

Wolseley Hall

