

Report On An Archaeological Watching Brief In The Walled Garden, Cowdray Ruins, Midhurst, West Sussex.

Background

As part of the creation of a Tudor garden within the walled garden associated with the Cowdray ruins, planning permission (EB/04/03667/FUL) and Scheduled Monument Consent was obtained for the erection of a greenhouse. A condition attached to both these consents was for archaeological observation and recording of any associated groundworks. West Sussex Archaeology have been appointed to carry out such archaeological works and this report details the ensuing results. The archaeological observation of groundworks took place on the 2nd February 2005. The archive will be deposited with West Sussex Records Office.

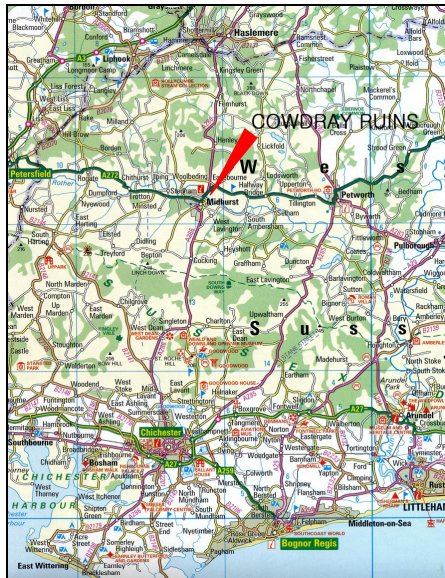


Fig.1 Map showing the location of the Cowdray ruins. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL100036068.

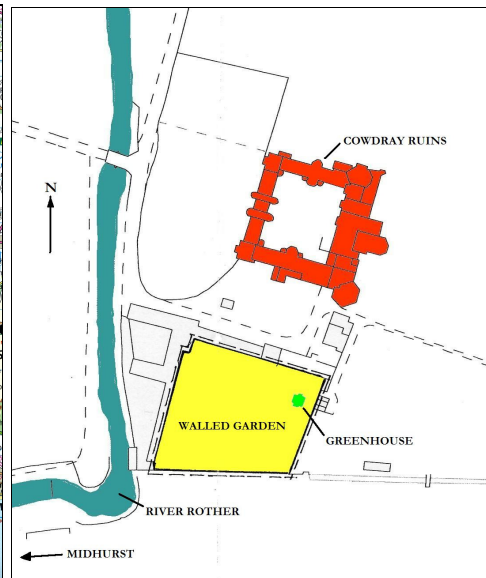


Fig.2 Map showing the location of the greenhouse within the Walled Garden. © Crown Copyright. All rights reserved. Licence No. AL100036068.

Nature and Location of Works

The Cowdray ruins lie to the immediate north-east of the town of Midhurst in West Sussex, at 20m aOD, OS grid reference SU 89162172 (Fig.1). The walled garden lies to the south of the ruins themselves (see Fig.2). The underlying geology of the site is Lower Greensand (Selham Ironshot). The greenhouse is situated in the north-east corner of the walled garden, and is roughly cruciform in shape, approximately 5m north-south and 6m east-west. The foundation trench was c.500mm wide and c.500mm deep. The depth had originally been set at 600mm, but due to the presence of archaeological remains at a depth of 500mm it was decided that it was expedient and sufficient to raise the depth by 100mm. The foundation trench was hand dug under the archaeological supervision of George Anelay of West Sussex Archaeology.

Results

A depth of 450mm of a dark brown topsoil was found within the foundation trench, containing occasional modern domestic and horticultural rubbish. The homogenous nature of this deposit, together with its contrast to what lay beneath it, suggests that it is a layer of imported topsoil brought in to improve growing conditions within the walled garden. Below the topsoil a number of different deposits were visible (see Figs.3 & 4). The south-eastern parts of the foundation trench contained two deposits which are probably geological, both being sands.

The western of the two was an orange/yellow, while the eastern a green/grey. Both contained occasional flints and brick fragments, but the latter is thought to be intrusive from the layers above. The north-western parts of the foundation trench contained a number of deposits which are man-made. In the north-east corner a rectangular post-hole was revealed (200mm x 250mm), which, judging by its fill, is probably modern. To the west of this lay an area of green/brown clay/silt. This deposit contained fragments of brick, mortar and tile, together with oyster shell, clay pipe, animal bone, glass and pottery (dating from the late medieval to early modern period). Cut into this deposit were two roughly north-south aligned trenches, filled with a mid-dark brown clay/silt. This in turn appears to be cut by a possible pit in the south-east corner of the foundation trench, filled with the same mid-dark brown clay/silt, but rich in oyster shell. None of these deposits were investigated beyond recording them in plan.



Fig.3 Photograph of the greenhouse foundation trench, indicating the layers revealed under the topsoil.

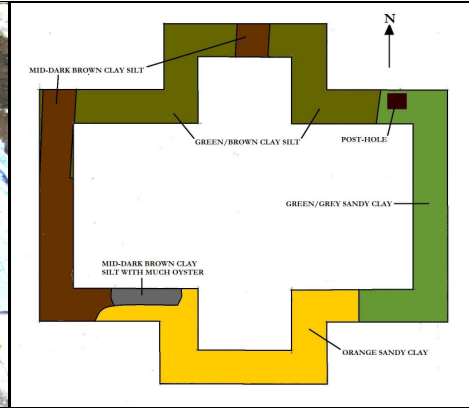


Fig.4 Plan of the greenhouse foundation trench, indicating the layers revealed under the topsoil.

Interpretation

The date for the creation of the present walled garden at the Cowdray ruins is not known. The first specific indication of a garden at this location is not until the 1847 Tithe map, where it is shown in much the same form as it was before the commencement of the current landscaping works. The apportionment, which accompanies the Tithe map, does however refer to the garden as “ Old” which would indicate at least some previous history. The buildings surrounding the walled garden on its north side were erected in around 1700, although there is some evidence at their eastern end of earlier survivals. The buildings on the western side where created in 1726. It is uncertain when the enclosing eastern wall of the garden was built, but the bricks have some parallels with those of the western range. It is therefore likely that the walled garden in its current form was created in the early 18th century.

The evidence from foundation trench of the new greenhouse can add little to this historical outline. It is apparent that at some point in the past a considerable quantity of topsoil was imported into the garden which raised the ground level by 450mm, at least in the area investigated. It is also apparent that this topsoil covered earlier features dug into the sand geology. The precise nature of these features it was impossible to determine due to the limited nature of the investigation, but several phases of activity were represented. It is perfectly possible that some of these features may relate to pre-1700 gardens or structures on the site, some to the walled garden created c.1700 and some, notable the topsoil, to a 19th century re-working of the garden. More extensive archaeological trenching would be required to clarify the history of this part of the Cowdray ruins.