

**An archaeological watching brief on
the rebuilding of the ha ha at
The Wakes, Selborne, Hampshire**

NGR: SU 741337

**by
Christopher K Currie
BA (Hons), MPhil, MIFM, MIFA
CKC Archaeology**

Report to the Trustees of the Wakes Museum, Selborne, Hampshire

September 2000

Contents

	page no
Summary statement	3
1.0 Introduction	4
2.0 Historical background	4
3.0 Methodology	5
4.0 Excavation results	6
5.0 Discussion	8
6.0 Conclusions	10
7.0 Archive	10
8.0 Acknowledgements	10
9.0 Bibliography	10

Appendices

Appendix 1: list of contexts excavated	12
Appendix 2: catalogue of photographs taken	13
Appendix 3: catalogue of photographs on The Wakes in the National Monuments Record (NMR), Swindon, Wiltshire	14

Figures

Figures 1-3	back of report
-------------	----------------

Summary statement

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in September 2000 by C K Currie of CKC Archaeology, at The Wakes Museum, Gracious Street, Selborne, Hampshire (NGR SU 741337). This was formerly the home of the Reverend Gilbert White, the famous naturalist. It involved watching the works regarding the rebuilding of the ha ha at the western end of the main garden. The work was carried out between 6th and 14th September 2000.

Documentary and archaeological evidence suggested that White's ha ha seems to have been rebuilt in the 19th century before 1870. This new structure had a flint face, a malmstone backing and brick cappings and quoins. There was evidence for a number of subsequent repairs in the 20th century. No evidence was recovered for White's earlier drystone ha ha, and few of the original materials (blue rag) seem to have been incorporated in the later structure.

A substantial stone base 0.88m by 0.98m by 0.72m, far in excess of normal requirements, was found below the sundial. This was built in a cut into the original terrace, and was not therefore part of the original building of the terrace and ha ha in 1761. The original sundial had been blown down in a violent storm in 1781. It was possibly to prevent a repeat of such an event that White may have been responsible for making this base in 1788. Although there was no dating evidence to confirm this, it seems possible that White had built this structure. The sundial base might therefore be one of the increasing number of structures on the site that might have a direct connection with the famous naturalist.

An archaeological watching brief on the rebuilding of the ha ha at The Wakes, Selborne, Hampshire

1.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in September 2000 by C K Currie of CKC Archaeology, at The Wakes Museum, Gracious Street, Selborne, Hampshire (NGR SU 741337). This was formerly the home of the Reverend Gilbert White, the famous naturalist. It involved watching the works regarding the rebuilding of the ha ha at the western end of the main garden. The work was carried out between 6th and 14th September 2000.

The trench excavated on this occasion continued the numerical sequence of archaeological trenches excavated at The Wakes since 1992, and was numbered trench 27. Context numbers began with the number 150 to continue the sequence begun in 1992.

2.0 Historical Background

A settlement is recorded at Selborne in Domesday Book (Munby 1982, 1:7; 47:3), where it states that the king gave half a hide of this manor and the church to Radfred, a priest. This settlement probably became one of the more significant in the area following the foundation of a small Augustinian priory nearby by Peter de Roches, Bishop of Winchester in 1233. A study of this foundation has been made by Le Faye (1975, 1990), and its charters were published by Macray (1891) in the last century. The priory was dissolved in 1484, and its lands granted to Magdalen College, Oxford.

The property known as The Wakes seems to have taken its name from the Wake family, who appear to have lived there in the 16th and 17th centuries (Meirion-Jones 1983, 145). The White family are first associated with the village when Gilbert White's father, another Gilbert White, was appointed to the living in 1681 (Mabey 1987, 16). The family lived at the Vicarage until the elder Gilbert died in 1728 or 1729, leaving his widow to move across the street to The Wakes (Mabey 1987, 19).

The younger Gilbert went to Oxford in 1739, but by 1749 he had returned to Selborne, where he was to spend much of the remainder of his life. His interest in gardening is shown by the rigorous entries he made in his *Garden Kalendar*, a journal of his activities from 1751 to 1767 (Greenoak 1986). During his life White became increasingly interested in natural history, and in 1789 his *The Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* was published. This work has gone on to lay claim to being the fourth most published book in the English language (Mabey 1977, frontpiece).

White was never a wealthy man, and, despite his Oxford education, never held a living in his own right, being a country curate all his life. He was curate at nearby Farringdon from 1761 until 1784, when he took on the curacy of the village of Selborne itself, a position he held until his death in 1793 (Mabey 1977, xii). However, this unambitious career allowed him to undertake detailed studies of the natural history of his locality, for which he became famous after his death.

White's early writings describe his garden activities. The earliest garden at The Wakes was much different in area from that of the present day. In the 1750s, much of White's gardening took place in the area known as Baker's Hill, and that adjoining part of the present pasture field on the west slope of the hill. In June 1760 White purchased an old orchard to the west of the house, and proceeded to lay out a new garden that terminated in the present ha-ha.

3.0 Methodology

The author watched the removal of about 0.9m of earth terracing behind the ha ha wall, plus the demolition of the wall itself. Some of this work had already been carried out before the author was called in. In particular the architect had three test trenches excavated to look for an earlier alignment of the ha ha. These were backfilled before the author could arrange to inspect them causing some concern amongst members of staff at the Wakes. This resulted in the author being officially called in to watch the rest of the works in person. The methodology followed a standard pattern adopted previously at the Wakes. This standard methodology is as follows:

All work will follow guidelines laid down by the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & guidance for archaeological watching briefs* (Birmingham, 1994). The work will also conform to the *Code of Conduct* of the Institute of Field Archaeologists, and any other principles required by that body.

1. An archaeological presence was maintained during all groundworks on site. This included to need to watch demolition works on the ha ha wall.
 2. The groundworks were carried out under the supervision of an experienced archaeologist. Where possible the contractor adopted groundwork methods to maximise the recognition and recovery of archaeological material, and to prevent the minimum of damage to archaeological remains marked for preservation *in situ*.
 3. Where, during groundworks or demolition, features of archaeological interest were encountered, the groundworkers gave the archaeologist proper access to excavate and record those features according to the standards laid down by the *Guidelines* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (in the absence of a Planning Department brief). The groundworks co-operated with this to ensure the minimum of delay.
 4. The archaeologist was given reasonable time to complete the recording of each discovery. Archaeological recording was usually undertaken in such a way that the groundworkers could continue with other tasks while the recording was in progress.
 5. The works were supervised by a full Member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists (MIFA) with the appropriate council-validated Area of Competence (Excavation).
 6. All archaeological finds or deposits were recorded using a context-based recording system. That used by CKC Archaeology is the *Site Recording Manual* (version 7; 1992) produced by the Central Archaeology Service (English Heritage). This will be supported by scale plans and
-

sections (at 1:20, or 1:10 in special circumstances; buildings are recorded at 1:50 or 1:20), photographs, and finds and environmental pro-forma records.

7. A full site archive will be produced according to present national standards detailed in L M Ferguson & D M Murray, *Archaeological documentary archives* (IFA Paper no. 1, no date). These will be microfiched for security. Microfiche copies will be deposited with the recipient museum and the National Monument Record at Swindon, Wiltshire.

8. Following appropriate post-excavation analysis, a report, with suitable illustrations, was produced giving details of the works undertaken, and the results forthcoming from them. The report was written according to the guidelines given in the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Standard & guidance for archaeological watching briefs*. Copies will be deposited with the client, the county Sites & Monuments Record, and the National Monuments Record.

4.0 Excavation results

The work recorded here comprised watching a trench, 0.9m wide being dug behind the existing ha ha wall. That part watched extended from the Alcove, at the south end, to the north edge of the bastion. It also included watching the demolition of the wall once the trench was dug.

The existing ha ha appeared to have been built in three distinct builds. There may have been other phases of rebuilding, but those referred to here can be divided by the position of straight joints between the three phases. These phases may have been roughly contemporary or separated by a number of years. The creation of straight joints might merely represent a clumsy way of uniting three parts of the ha ha. These joints form a convenient place to subdivide the ha ha wall for recording and discussion.

4.1 The south end of the ha ha

This is the last 4 metres of so where the ha ha wall turned through an angle of about 15 degrees at the south end. It lay immediately adjacent to the rebuilt Alcove.

The earth behind the wall comprised four layers. These were repeated more or less along the entire length of the excavated trench. The top layer was a thin layer of topsoil, 0.1m deep, and made up of a dark grey brown clay loam [10YR 3/1]. This overlay a further clay loam layer [5Y 3/1] containing many fragments of local stone. These fragments were normally less than 10 cms across. This layer was about 0.2m deep. It overlay a greyish clay layer [5Y 3/2] about 0.4m deep. Below this was a green-grey clay [5Y 4/2] that appeared to be undisturbed. This was excavated for a further 0.4m, which brought the trench down to the ground level of the ha ha wall. The top three layers contained occasional pieces of pottery. The commonest types were residual pieces of medieval ceramic, but late post-medieval pottery was occasionally mixed in with this, including 19th and early 20th-century transfer-printed fine earthenwares. The latter came mainly from the upper two layers, and was not considered to be good dating for the creation of the ha ha, or its later rebuildings, as it could have found its way into the soil during turf laying or other gardening activities.

The wall in this section was faced with knapped flint, with brick cappings. Behind the flint face was a mortared malmstone backing, with occasional brick fragments within. The stone was mainly the softer lighter local stone used in domestic building throughout the village, including the older parts of the Wakes itself. Darker pieces of blue local stone, known as ragstone or blue rag, were relatively rare, and normally only found in the lower courses of the backing wall. This backing wall was generally well made. The entire wall had an average width of 0.4m.

4.2 The main ha ha wall between the bastion and the south end

This section was about 13.5m in length. The soils behind the wall were much the same as described in section 4.1, as was the wall itself. There was some suggestion that the back part of the wall was not so well made near the base as the part described in section 4.1. At the north end, where the wall met the semi-circular bastion, there was a straight joint. There was also a brick quoin at the join. This quoin was repeated on the north side of the bastion.

4.3 The semi-circular bastion

The soils behind the wall were similar to those described in sections 4.1 and 4.2. The wall itself was of a similar build at the base, although the back part at the top was differently treated. There was considerable evidence for a cut filled with brick and stone rubble against the north half of the bastion. This was different to the southern half, where considerably less rubbly clay butted against the back of the wall. The back part of the wall was capped in concrete, about 0.12m wide, and forming a sloping step. Between the visible brick capping and the concrete was a line of bricks set on edge, forming a line about 60mm thick. This step had not been visible until the turf was removed. Although it was not excavated fully at the time, it was noticed that there was a substantial concrete backing of apparently recent date behind the north part of the ha ha wall where it adjoined the bastion.

About 0.8m behind the front face of the wall, in the centre of bastion, was a substantial stone base. This had been a foundation for the sundial, but it was only following the removal of the sundial itself that it became obvious that this base was much larger than one would expect for a relatively insubstantial feature. It was made from malmstone mortared together with a sandy lime mortar. The base was 0.88m E-W, 0.98m N-S with the surviving portion 0.72m deep. A narrow construction cut was identified around the feature that had been filled with mortar. This was often no more than 20-30mm wide, but it formed almost a rendered face over the stone base. Much of this came away during excavation, but its extent could be seen on the north and south sides of the structure in section.

Little was found in the way of accurate dating materials. Some blue and white transfer-printed wares were found in the upper levels of the terrace, but these could have been introduced during more recent repairs. The only finds encountered at any depth were residual medieval wares. These included a 13th- to 14th-century jug handle with knife cut decoration. Such wares were probably brought on to the site by White in the soils used to make up the terrace. Medieval ceramics have been found throughout the garden in previous excavations, demonstrating that Selborne was an active centre at that period, with some inhabitants of greater status than one finds in many contemporary Hampshire villages (Currie 1995, 199).

5.0 Discussion

Gilbert White's writings refer to the building of the ha ha in January 1761, and to the setting up of the sundial. The latter blew down in a storm in February 1781 and had to be re-erected. Oddly White appeared waited over seven years before he did this, putting it back up on his 'angle' in October 1788. The reader always hopes that White's journals will tell him exactly what was done. Perhaps the writer thought that his meaning was clear, but over 200 years later his writings are obscure, and give us oblique glances but never enough to be absolutely sure what is meant.

It is considered appropriate to quote the journals concerning the ha ha and sundial in full. The ha ha was erected in January 1761 following White's purchase of a piece of land about half an acre in extent called Lassam's Orchard. This enabled him to extend his garden to give a direct view across it towards the Ewel and the northern end of the hanger. The making of the ha ha is thus described on January 24th 1761:

'Long the mason finish'd the dry wall of the Haha in the new garden, which was built of blue rags, so massy, that it is supposed to contain double the Quantity of stone usual in such walls. Several stones reach into the bank 20 inches. The wall was intended to be 4 feet & an half high: but the labourers in sinking the ditch on inclining ground mistook the level, especially about the angle: so that at that part to bring it to a level it is 5 feet 8 inch: high, & so well fast'ned into the clay bank, that it looks likely to stand a long while. The workmanship, exclusive of carting the stones, cost 1:8:10.' (Greenoak 1986, i, 95).

Two days later work on the terrace behind the ha ha is recorded:

'Sloped, & finished-off the ditch of the terrass; & levelled most of the terrass' (ibid).

On the 29th White recorded that he had levelled the terrace 'as far as it can be, 'till it settles' (op cit).

The final levelling of the terrace behind the ha ha seems to have been completed between 16th and 18th March 1761 when White recorded that he had:

'Finished levelling the terrass, & new walks; & dug the new borders, & Quarters.' (Greenoak 1986, i, 97).

There is a view of White's garden, drawn in 1776 by Grimm (published in Currie 1995, 189, fig. 2), which shows the ha ha from the Great Mead. This shows the sundial roughly in the centre of the terrace above the wall. The picture seems to show an angular bastion surrounding it. This possibly explains White's reference to the 'angle' in January 1760. The sundial shown in this picture is similar to the one recently removed during the present works, which is supposed to be White's original.

In February 1781 the sundial was blown over during a storm. This storm was of considerable violence, destroying the alcove as well as throwing down 'the stone dial-post' (Greenoak 1988, ii, 346). It was not re-erected until late October 1788, when it is recorded:

'Set up again my stone dial, blown down many years ago, on a thick Portland slab in the angle of the terrass. The column is very old, came from Sarson house near Amport, & was hewn from the Quarries of Chilmarke [Chilmark, Wiltshire]. The dial was regulated by my meridian line' (Greenoak 1989, iii, 246).

These quotes may give some clue to the sequence of events that have occurred around the ha ha and sundial. The original structure appears to have been a drystone revetment made of ragstone, a hard blue-grey local stone (Greenoak 1986, i, 487), commonly used for paths and revetments, but seldom in buildings (pers obs). A path of this material has been discovered in previous excavations (Currie 1995, 190-2). From the evidence seen, it would appear that the present structure is not White's ha ha. A drystone structure would be expected to 'bulge' with the weight of the clay terrace behind it, and need rebuilding after fifty years or so, if not earlier.

The Grimm drawing of 1776 seems to show the bastion at the centre of the ha ha as an angular structure, a description supported by White's writings. This bastion had been converted to a semi-circular structure by the 1870s when it is shown as such on the 1st edition 25" OS plan. The tithe map of 1842 does not seem to show a bastion of any type, but this may be because it was not interested in showing such detail (HRO Tithe map for Selborne). This evidence might suggest that the present ha ha was in place by 1870. A likely candidate for its rebuilding is Professor Bell, an admirer of White, who lived at the Wakes from 1844-80. Wilkie (1993, 25) refers to the flint facing of the ha ha as dating from the early 20th century, but the source of this information is not given. There was some evidence to suggest that at least part of the bastion seems to have been rebuilt with a concrete step at its rear. A concrete backing to the northern (unexcavated) part of the ha ha also suggests 20th-century tinkering with the structure, but, in general, the form had been altered by 1870. It is therefore more likely that the general disposition and structure of much of the recently rebuilt ha ha had been erected by that date. There is no trace of White's original ha ha. The malmstone used in the backing contains very little blue rag, so it seems that little original material was used in the rebuilding, if White's description can be taken literally.

The large stone foundation to the sundial was a surprise, and one wonders why such a large structure was made to support such a relatively small feature. The base seems to have been cut into the original terrace, suggesting that it was not built when the original terrace was made in 1761. A clue to the need for a solid base is perhaps given in White's journals. It is possibly that, following the mishap of 1781, he decided to build a substantial foundation to prevent it from blowing down again. This occurred in 1788, and it is difficult to imagine anyone else thinking such a solid base would be required other than someone who had already experienced the consequence of a lesser foundation. It is possible therefore that the base is one of White's original structures, erected in the last years of his life. It remains a mystery what happened to the sundial between 1781 and 1788.

6.0 Conclusion

Excavations were undertaken around the ha ha at the Wakes prior to its rebuilding. Documentary and archaeological evidence suggested that White's ha ha seems to have been rebuilt in the 19th century before 1870. This new structure had a flint face, a malmstone backing and brick cappings and quoins. There was evidence for a number of subsequent repairs in the 20th century. No evidence was recovered for White's earlier drystone ha ha, and few of the original materials (blue rag) seem to have been incorporated in the later structure.

A substantial stone base 0.88m by 0.98m by 0.72m, far in excess of normal requirements, was found below the sundial. This was built in a cut into the original terrace, and was not therefore part of the original building of the terrace and ha ha in 1761. The original sundial had been blown down in a violent storm in 1781. It was possibly to prevent a repeat of such an event that White may have been responsible for making this base in 1788. Although there was no dating evidence to confirm this, it seems possible that White had built this structure. The sundial base might therefore be one of the increasing number of structures on the site that might have a direct connection with the famous naturalist.

7.0 Archive

The finds were retained by The Wakes Museum, together with a copy of the paper archive. Hampshire Museum Service took responsibility for the overall care of this archive, but allowed it to be retained at The Wakes.

8.0 Acknowledgements

David Standing, the staff and Trustees of The Wakes Museum are thanked for their support and consistent warm welcome. David is particularly thanked for his input to the discussions about the interpretation of the evidence. The groundworkers are also thanked for their willing co-operation and help in cleaning the trenches for photography and drawing.

9.0 Bibliography

Original sources in the Hampshire Record Office:

HRO Tithe map of Selborne, 1842
OS 1st edition 25" plan of Selborne c. 1870

Original sources in print:

J. Munby (ed.), *Domesday Book: Hampshire*, (1982), Chichester.

W. D. Macray (ed.), *Calendar of Charters and Documents relating to Selborne and its Priory*, (1891), Winchester.

F Greenoak (ed), *The Journals of Gilbert White*, 3 vols, London, 1986-89

G. White, *The Natural History of Selborne*, (edited by R. Mabey, 1977; 1st edition 1788-89), London.

Secondary Sources

C K Currie, *Archaeological recording relating to the Fruit Wall and the Stone Path at The Wakes, Selborne, Hampshire, June 1996*, unpublished report to the Trustees of The Wakes Museum, Selborne, Hants., 1996

C K Currie, 'Archaeological excavations at The Wakes, Selborne, Hants., 1992-94', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* 51 (1996, forthcoming)

D. Le Faye, 'Selborne Priory, 1233-1486', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 30 (1975), pp. 47-71

R. Mabey, *Gilbert White*, (1986), London

G. I. Meirion-Jones, 'The Wakes, Selborne: an architectural study', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 39 (1983), 145-169

D. Standing, 'Gilbert White's Garden' in *The Journals of Gilbert White, volume 1, 1751-1773*, (edited by F. Greenoak, 1986), London, pp. 12-14

Appendix 1: list of contexts excavated

Context no.	Description	Munsell colour no.
150	clay loam layer	10YR 3/1
151	clay loam layer	5Y 3/1
152	clay layer	5Y 3/2
153	clay layer (undisturbed?)	5Y 4/2
154	construction cut for sundial base	
155	mortar fill of 154 around sundial base	2.5Y 7/4
156	sundial base; irregular malmstone blocks	
157	Fill of cut behind wall	5Y 3/1
158	Cut for repair to wall?	
159	Semi-circular wall forming bastion, flint-faced	
160	Ha ha wall, main length, flint faced, stone backing	
161	Ha ha wall, southern angle, flint faced, stone backing	

Appendix 2: catalogue of photographs taken

Photographs were taken in both colour slide and monochrome prints as indicated below.

Photograph no.	Description	Date taken
1	south angle of ha ha (161) showing section through terrace	16/9/00
2	ditto	ditto
3	Wall 161 showing malmstone backing from SE	ditto
4	ditto	ditto
5	Wall 161 showing malmstone backing from N	ditto
6	ditto	ditto
7	top of sundial base (156)	11/9/00
8	ditto	ditto
9	sundial base, part excavated from W	ditto
10	ditto	ditto
11	Sundial base & bastion wall (159) fully excavated from W	14/9/00
12	ditto	ditto
13	close up of sundial base, west facing section from W	ditto
14	ditto	ditto

Appendix 3: catalogue of photographs of The Wakes in the National Monuments Record (NMR), Swindon, Wiltshire

The photographs (both ground based and aerial) in the National Monuments Record Centre at Swindon were disappointing. However, as a search was made for this important site, it is considered appropriate to record the results here for future reference.

AP - Air photograph, otherwise ground based

NMR number	Description	Date
NMR SU 7333/1	Oblique AP, almost overhead, Wakes & garden but small	2/5/1935
NMR SU 7334/1	Oblique AP, Wakes in corner	2/5/1935
NMR SU 7433/1-4	Four oblique APs showing Wakes & garden	24/6/1954
NMR BB83/5681	Wakes from hanger	c. 1900-14
NMR BB83/3242	Wakes (obscured) from hanger	1900-14?
NMR BB68/8906	Fruit Wall date stone; accessioned 3/12/1968	no date
NMR SU/74/337	The Wakes, south side from W by G Meirion-Jones	23/7/1969
No number	Post card of Wakes from W dated 1957	c. 1950
NMR BB68/8897	Wakes, street front from S, accessioned 3/12/1968	no date
NMR BB68/8898	Wakes, south part, from W, accessioned 3/12/1968	no date

As well as the above photographs, the NMR historic buildings photograph box for Selborne contains two articles from *Country Life* that contains photographs. These are:

'Gilbert White himself', *Country Life*, 22nd April 1954 (by Esther Meynell), contains a photograph of the Wakes and the ha ha with sundial.

'Selborne, the unchanging village', *Country Life*, 27th December 1962, pp 1644-45, contains air photograph of the Wakes.

The best, published collection of photographs and drawings of the Wakes is to be found in:

G. I. Meirion-Jones, 'The Wakes, Selborne: an architectural study', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society*, 39 (1983), 145-169
