WREST PARK HYDROLOGY WREST PARK BEDFORDSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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'Key Terms

Throughout this report the following terms or abbreviations are used:

Albion	Albion Archaeology
BCC's CAO	Bedfordshire County Council's County Archaeological Officer
Client	BEA Landscape Design Ltd
HER	Historic Environment Record (Bedfordshire's sites and monuments record)
IFA	Institute of Field Archaeologists
Procedures Manual	Procedures Manual Volume 1 Fieldwork, 2 nd Edition 2001. Albion Archaeology

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation was required as a result of proposals to dredge Old Park Water as part of the Wrest Park Hydrology Restoration Scheme. An assessment of the survival and significance of deposits undisturbed by more recent dredging of the lakes was required to provide additional information prior to the works.

An archaeological evaluation comprising a series linear trial trenches was undertaken in order that English Heritage can agree an appropriate archaeological mitigation strategy for the dredging of Old Park Water. Ancillary works being undertaken in preparation for the dredging also required archaeological monitoring.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Kathy Pilkinton and Marcin Koziminski (Assistant Supervisors). This report was prepared by Richard Gregson (supervisor.)

Site Description and Location (Figure 1)

Wrest Park is located on the southern margins of the greensand ridge on a gentle south-facing slope, at the eastern edge of the village of Silsoe and approximately 15 kilometres south of Bedford. It is centred at National Grid Reference (NGR) TL 09100, 35100. The soil is a calcareous gley type of the Wicken association over gault clay.

Old Park Weir links Old Park Water with Serpentine Water and lies on the western edge of the current park. It is one of a number of weirs forming part of a complex water management system linking the various waters, canals and lakes, most of which were laid out in the 18th century.

Archaeological and Historical Background

Wrest Park is Listed Grade 1 on the English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens. In addition the house and garden areas are within a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM no. BD48). The park and surrounding land has been designated as a conservation area by Mid Bedfordshire Council.

The 40 hectare designed landscape at Wrest Park dates from the 1650s onwards, when Amabel (second wife of Henry Grey, 10th Earl of Kent), her son Anthony and his wife Mary began constructing a 'new' garden using Amabel's personnel wealth and, from 1871, that inherited by Mary after the death of her father. Although much of the visible form of the gardens dates from 1758-60 when the park was landscaped under the direction of Lancelot Brown, significant elements of the pre-existing formal garden survive, making Wrest Park one of the best remaining examples of pre-landscape formal gardening in England. The encircling canals, including Old Park Water and the Serpentine, achieved their present form during the landscaping works carried out by Brown, although, for the most part, these were created by modifications in shape to earlier water bodies constructed from the period 1702 - 1720.

The system of canals at Wrest Park is man-made and relies on a series of built structures to control and retain water. The present pumped system was adapted in 1972 and relies on a circulating pump since the original spring in the Bath Ground no longer flows. The banks of the water bodies are formed in natural clay and prone to erosion, particularly if there is regular fluctuation in the water levels (Land Use Consultants, 1993). Ongoing repairs of the banks and weirs still involve puddling of the clay to prevent leakage (Slatcher pers. com.). The farm ditch entering at the north-west corner has significant catchment and also carries storm water run-off from the A6 Silsoe bypass. It appears to have some silt load which has caused deposits at slack points in the system such as the head of Old Park Water and its overflow (Land Use Consultants, 1993).

Although the precise date at which Old Park Weir was built is unclear, it is known that Old Park Water and the Serpentine were completed around 1760 and that the great variation in levels necessitated at least the need for a bank (BLARS: crt 190/45). It is quite possible that Old Park Weir was created at this point, or soon afterwards, as the requirements for managing the water systems became more apparent.

Various works to repair and restore elements of the water management system have been undertaken since the late 1940s. However, this work has been of varied success and in some cases has contributed to the current drainage and erosion problems which exist around the park. In 1983, The Department for Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings commissioned an historical survey of Wrest Park and began to develop a management strategy for the continuing restoration of the gardens (Land Use Consultants 1983, 1993). These reports on the historical background and development of the gardens were drawn up by Land Use Consultants and contain useful summaries of the chronological development of the park, copies of many of the relevant maps and plans and documentary references, many of which refer to the Estate Records held in the Lucas Archive at BLARS.

Previous archaeological investigations within Wrest Park Gardens include a survey of garden features and archaeology (Albion Archaeology 2002) and several excavations and geophysical surveys carried out by BCAS/Albion Archaeology (Dawson, 2001) and the Ampthill & District Archaeological and Local History Society (BLARS 120 SIL acc, 12056) during the late 1980s and 1990s. Most recently, a desk based study and survey of Old Park Weir (Albion Archaeology 2007a) was undertaken.

Project Methodology

Methods employed during the project complied with the Institute of Field Archaeologists' *Code of Conduct* and *Standards and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (1999), English Heritage's *Management of Archaeological Projects* (1991), and Albion Archaeology's *Procedures Manual* (2001).

Description and results of the Evaluation (Figure 1)

Three trial trenches were hand excavated on the western bank of Old Park Water at c. 150m intervals (Figure 1.) Because these trenches carried on from earlier works, they were numbered trenches 4, 5 and 6.

Trench 4

Trench 4 was excavated through the western bank of Old Park Water towards its northern end. It was 7.7m long, 1.4m wide and up to 1.1m deep. Two separate episodes of lakeside alluviation (40004 and 40002) were recorded close to the edge of the present day lake. The earlier alluvial deposit (40004) was overlain by a bank

deposit (40003) containing numerous fragments of mortar. It is likely that this material was imported to consolidate the bank.

Trench 5

Trench 5 was excavated through the western bank of Old Park Water in between Trenches 4 and 6. It was 9.8m long, 1.4m wide and up to 0.88m deep. One episode of lakeside alluviation (50007) was recorded close to the edge of the present day lake. It overlay two bank deposits (50005 and 50006). The lower bank deposit (50005) contained occasional fragments of brick. The upper one (50006) contained more frequent fragments of brick and mortar. It may have been contemporary with a similar deposit in Trench 4 (40003.) It is likely that this material was imported to consolidate the bank. Four wooden posts in two parallel alignments were also recorded within alluvial and bank deposits close to the current edge of the lake. These posts may have held wooden beams which could have further consolidation of the bank.

Trench 6 (Figure 2)

Trench 6 was excavated through the western bank of Old Park Water towards its southern end. It was 16.4m long, 1.4m wide and up to 1.2m deep. A 0.65m thick make up layer (60003) of re-deposited natural containing occasional brick fragments was observed, extending 10m from the western end of the trench. The bricks within it were from 5.5 to 6.8cm thick. Some of them may date to the 17th Century, although others were considerable later. It is probable that this material was brought in and deposited here in order to fill in part of the lake. However, the outer western edge of the former lake was not reached within the trench. The eastern edge of deposit (60003) was truncated by a ditch-like, linear feature [60004]. The deposit (60005) within the ditch was clean, re-deposited natural clay. This suggests that the feature was backfilled shortly after it was dug. It may have been formed to create an impermeable barrier within the bank. On the eastern side of it there was an earlier alluvial deposit (60007) representing part of the former extent of the lake. This was overlain by a series of dumped deposits which form the core of the current bank (60008, 60009, 60010 and 60013.) The dumped deposits were truncated by linear feature [60004] and overlain by a later alluvial deposit (60011.)

Conclusions

The sequences of alluvium and bank material immediately on the edge of Old Park Water were similar in all three trenches. The make-up layer (60003) behind the bank in Trench 6 suggests that the edge of the lake used to be further to the west at the southern end. However, documentary evidence shows that the original, straighter line of the lake before it was modified in the time of Capability Brown was further to the east in this area.





N-facing section with bank



Oblige shot of trench 6



Continuation of N-facing section with bank material

Figure 2: Trench 6 - section photographs

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