

Section L: Future Directions

By Darren Griffin and Specialists (as indicated)

L.1: General Recommendations

Carrying out this project to completion has meant that some general recommendations on how post-medieval domestic sites are investigated can be suggested. These recommendations can be incorporated by English Heritage in order to direct future post-medieval archaeological projects. In relation to excavation the standard English Heritage archaeological procedures should be strictly adhered to, with the addition of the following recommendations:

- Detailed historical research should be conducted first and a report submitted. This is vital in determining the direction of the research, the formulation of the research aims and questions, the location and extent of the trenches, as well as helping the archaeologists during the excavation and interpretation stages of the project;
- Geo-physical surveys should be conducted well in advance of the excavation and a detailed report submitted. The conclusions and recommendations in the report are important for the same reasons outlined above. This project highlighted the fact that geo-physics results were still important on a post-medieval site, and that the results were clear even on a site which may seem overgrown or too disturbed;
- 100% recovery of artefacts is important in order to answer the research questions which deal with consumer choice and consumption as well as the availability and frequency of commodities. Therefore all contexts apart from the topsoil layers should be sieved. When the topsoil layers are excavated a representative sample of all artefact types should be kept as well as all diagnostic pieces. The sorting strategy for the topsoil layers should be done in the field. The process of discard for all other cultural deposits should be done in the laboratory during the post excavation phase;
- When sieving the contexts a 5cm mesh should be used. If it is clear that the context excavated is an under floor deposit then a 2cm mesh should be used;
- A representative sample of building materials from each context should be taken. This includes wood, slate, sandstone tiles, bricks etc. The sorting and discard of building materials can be done in the field.

L.2: Site Specific Recommendations

- Excavation should continue in all units opened during the 2003 season in Area B until the natural profile is reached across the trench. This will probably uncover more artefacts from the earlier periods which will help to further illuminate social economic status and structural evidence. Areas to target are the original brick extension including all the wall trenches, the external front, and the privy;
- Excavation should continue in Unit 3 and 4 of Area A, and the southern extension should be recorded and then removed so that the stratigraphy underneath can be recorded and the methods of construction for the cottage examined;

- A further 5m X 5m trench should be opened up to the east of Unit 4 in order to determine how far the demolition spread, what the external structure at the rear of the cottage looked like and if the middens for this cottage were located in the bank;
- Further test pits should be opened up where the anomalies picked up by geophysics appear. This includes the bank to the north and east of Area A and at the top of the bank in National Trust land in order to locate the middens and possible privies relating to all phases of the site;
- Another Area should be opened up where the original mine office was situated in order that the structure and material culture can be compared with the other cottages.

L.3: Artefact Specific Recommendations

L.3.1: General

- The ASP 2003 artefacts returned from specialist analysis should be entered in to the same database used to catalogue the rest of the collection
- These should be entered in to the eMU database system, which is administered by the Manchester Museum.
- The artefacts in general need to be inspected by conservators to ensure they are not deteriorating and are properly packaged for long term storage. This should be carried out at least every ten years.

L.3.2: Ceramics

By Chris Cumberpatch, ARCUS, University of Sheffield

General recommendations

The principal recommendation, upon which many of the specific suggestions below are based, is that the principles set out in The Management of Archaeological Projects II (MAP II; English Heritage 1991) should be fully adhered to and the structures designed to enhance communication and collaboration between those working on different aspects of the project should be put in place prior to the commencement of fieldwork (see also Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 1998 and 2001 for more general comments on the institutional structure of archaeological fieldwork). The intention behind this application of existing standards would be to enhance the role of specialists in the planning and execution of the fieldwork in such a way that the post-excavation phase of the project should proceed more efficiently, informatively and cost effectively.

While established practice in commercial archaeology generally takes no account of the provisions of MAP II (contrary to the statements made in most project designs and in briefs issued by archaeological curators), there would seem to be no reason why the higher standards represented by MAP II should not be applied to research excavations, particularly those undertaken using funding from English Heritage. While MAP II should be applied in its entirety, the following issues are ones which

have arisen in relation to the Alderley Sandhills Project specifically and may be of wider applicability:

- Circulation of the project design and methods statement should be arranged at an early stage and the views of those undertaking post-excavation analysis should be incorporated into revised and updated versions of the project design and the methods statement
- Timescales and objectives should be arranged so as to facilitate the excavation, post-excavation analysis and the interpretation of the site, not to satisfy the requirements of accountants and the annual financial timetable.
- Consultation with specialists should take place prior to the commencement of excavation with a view to incorporating issues related to specific artefact categories into the overall project design;
- Site plans and matrices (even if of a provisional nature) should be available to those undertaking post-excavation analysis at an early stage and prior to the commencement of the detailed phase of study;
- The development of artefact sampling strategies should take place in collaboration with specialists and these individuals should be directly involved in decisions as to when and how to use sampling strategies to reduce the volume of material examined. With regard to the pottery specifically, this should involve discussion of the relative merits of on-site and post-excavation sampling of large artefact groups (such as those recovered from the topsoil);
- Improved communication between managers, excavators and post-excavation specialists should be established with a view to producing reports which are more closely integrated in terms of the project aims and objectives should be a priority. Paths of communication, (perhaps via an e-mail discussion group) between excavators, specialists and managers should be established at an early stage and maintained throughout the course of the project with a view to improving understanding of the site and the possible avenues of investigation which might be pursued during the post-excavation stage of the project;

Specific recommendations

The following suggestions relate specifically to possible future work on the unexamined part of the pottery assemblage from the Alderley Sandhills site:

- Time for basic research should be written into the project design. The relatively unusual nature of the project in terms of the time period being considered and the general lack of easily accessible parallels means that more time than normal is required for the assembly of comparative data from other sites. In comparison to archaeologically better known periods (Roman, medieval, post-medieval), the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries are characterised by a lack of readily accessible, quantified data which can serve as the basis for judgements regarding the nature of the Alderley Sandhills material. Such comparative data as is available has been produced as a result of sites funded under the PPG 16 scheme and so are unpublished or accessible in archive form only, often with rudimentary quantification and little or no interpretation. To use such data, time is required in order to locate and examine the data and, where necessary to reorder it in useful

ways. Project funding should take account of this until such time as developer funded archaeology can be reformed so as to bring it up to minimally acceptable standards (see Cumberpatch and Blinkhorn 2001);

- Suggestions for illustration have been presented in Table 14. The intention is that a combination of traditional drawings and scanned images (colour or monochrome as appropriate) should be employed with the additional cost of publishing photographs offset against the saving in time achieved by the use of digital photography and scanning;

L.3.3: Metal

By Joan Unwin, ARCUS, University of Sheffield

The excavation of these cottages has provided metal finds which date from within living memory. The items are made all the more interesting because there are representatives of the families who lived in these houses still alive and able to contribute to the information about the site. Therefore the use of the items to reconstruct the lives of the people is not so difficult in that there is associated material for information. This does not demean the finds. In fact it they go a long way to confirm images surviving from the early 20th century. The following recommendations are specific to the Alderley Sandhills artefacts but also form more general recommendations for future projects dealing with 19th and 20th century metal artefacts:

- The more complete items should be photographed in order to compare them with contemporary illustrative material. For example, the repair of an aluminium saucepan with washers could be compared with advertisements for the washers found in Buyers' guides and trade journals;
- The majority of metal finds could be compared to the availability of such items as seen in trade journals, for instance in cutlery catalogues;
- More metal artefacts should be recorded as Special Finds. This would enable the researcher to know a more precise location for the artefact which could add to the conclusions on the probable owners of the items.

L.3.4: Plastics

By Joan Unwin, ARCUS, University of Sheffield

The following recommendations are specific to the Alderley Sandhills artefacts but also form more general recommendations for future projects dealing with 19th and 20th century plastic artefacts:

- The more complete items should be photographed in order to compare them with contemporary illustrative material, such as trade journals, advertisements and magazines. However, the role of plastics in the 1930s in families such as those examined at the Alderley Sandhills site is worth expanding;

- Because of the flammability of some of the plastic finds, care should be taken in storage.

L.3.5: Soils

By Laura Brenton, University of Manchester

The small investigation into the levels of lead, copper and cobalt has shown the potential for informative research into the geochemistry of the Alderley Edge area, and particularly the site of the excavation. Future research at Alderley Edge might benefit from:

- Routine analysis of geochemistry of all contexts – ICP-MS or XRF may be useful for multi-element analysis, although AAS may be better for elements with very high or low concentrations.
- Integration into research design of geochemical analysis to allow specialised storage and collection methods to be used.
- Further investigation of the potential of metal contents for dating, possibly using a peat core from Adder's Moss.
- Investigation of significance of other elements – for instance whether phosphates relate to middens.

L.3.6: Floorcoverings

By Sophie Sarin, Independent Consultant

The following recommendations are specific to the Alderley Sandhills artefacts but also form more general recommendations for future projects which may include post-medieval floor coverings:

- The fragments on which a recognisable pattern is still distinguishable should be separated out and conserved. The rest could be discarded. This process should take place in the laboratory;
- The fragment representing pattern 1 should undergo an analysis of its chemical composition, in order to establish if it contains any cork, in which case it, too, is linoleum, rather than floorcloth.
- The fragments could be displayed in the manner suggested above, having first been pieced together as far as possible. This display, and their inclusion in the Alderley Sandhills Project could form the foundation for a new effort to raise the consciousness about the importance of these artefacts in general.