

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Progress Report October 2025

Work continues at our dig site at Ian Avenue and will while the weather is good enough.



Trial Trench 2 general view looking north-west



South end of Trial Trench 2 showing the top of Context 7:
the post medieval dark-grey field soil.

Work has concentrated on removing the overburden from the Trial Trench, which consists of layers of bulldozed rubble and clay, with all kinds of dating items mixed up from the Roman to the modern, which is the result of bulldozing all kinds of things into a big pile. Once this was removed, there is a very clear horizon to the original field surface. The field surface is a very dark grey, nearly black, fine silty layer with a little post medieval pottery in it, such as Blue and White China, but most usefully, sherds of Staffordshire slipware, which takes the conceptual dating of this context back to after the English Civil War, that is to say after about 1660, when this type of pottery became popular.

Under this is Context 8, which is comprised of a slightly lighter, harder, more mid-grey soil containing lots of charcoal flecks and sherds of definitive medieval pottery. This context is diffuse with Context 9, which is a Roman context comprised of redeposited clay with soil lenses (this means its been built). We need to do more work on all three of these contexts to confirm that we have correctly identified this dating sequence and try to focus the dating more closely. In addition, at the moment, there is no disuse horizon between the Roman and the medieval. What this means is that the feature we are considering may have remained in use for some town related activity through time. While this might seem unusual, it may not be. We know that the amphitheatre at Dorchester remained in use for public hangings until the eighteenth century and that our site in Wirksworth is next to the field which was called Hanging Acre in 1539 (until recently the site of the Breasley Foam factory). In the case of Wirksworth, however, public hangings were moved to Derby after the civil war and this move might possibly fit with the nature of the archaeology, where the post civil war Context 7 appears to represent disuse.

On the east side of our trench, a large dressed stone had been sticking out of the trench side for some time and we had been unable to move it. However, it was decided that we should make the effort to get it out. It was in the lower overburden, not in one of the dated contexts, but having got it out, when it was turned over and cleaned, it was found to be a door sill stone (a doorstep). This is yet another of the collection of dressed stone which has emerged from this site and its possibly relevant to note we have already found voussoirs, that is wedge shaped stones which would make up an arch, such as the arch you might have over a doorway.



The door sill stone, note the socket on the right which is the socket for the door post

All in all an interesting day, with, inevitably, more to do.

Reference: Cameron, K. 1959, The Place-names of Derbyshire, Cambridge, University Press, Part II, pp413-421