

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Progress Report July 2026

A summary of work for this month: Trial Trench 4 (an expansion of Test Pit 9) was opened up to a length of 3.5 metres. Most of the trench and the south end in particular only represents where the builder has truncated (and backfilled to) context 009 - a redeposited streaky grey / buff clay, with no finds, at 80 cm depth. This truncation has cut the top off the context and everything originally above it. The truncation horizon appears to be marked by a thin layer of gritty ash along the trench, probably a result of repeated runs by the digger over it. This understanding is a development from May where we had thought that the context was untouched and its undulations were a function of the feature being examined. This current work confirms they are not, they are a product of the 1963 builder running a digger over the remains and the scooping action of the digger bucket, which creates a gentle curve in the opposite direction to the normal gradient (which gradient rises from its low point at the north to the point at which it has been destroyed at the south end). This discovery also confirms that the builder used a digger not a bulldozer during the construction works of the house and garden at the time.

We took an auger sample a metre from the south end and this brought out a very black sticky context with almost particulate organic material at 1.25m down - to the limit of the auger at 1.5m. We take this to be context 010, the field surface before anyone at all did anything to it (i.e. possibly the notional pre-seating bank field surface). This is consistent with the deep Test Pit, but where the context depth of 010 there was at 2.5m

At the north end we have achieved the maximum dig depth for this trench with finds such as clay pipe stem and a sherd of very worn feather trailed slipware. Usually, sherds like this are regarded as Staffordshire slipware, with a date range of 1650 to 1740. This find was at 65cm, so its presence represents another

builder's context with out-of-place finds mixed up in a clay mass which the builder has put back to level the garden.



Trial Trench 4 in process of expansion

Therefore its possible to say the builder has machined off the presumed seating bank to a more or less level position and then backfilled over it, first with another layer of clay as a "raft" then with everything else he could find, finally a bit of topsoil. The horizon between the truncated seating bank and the builder's overlying clay raft is characterised by the point at which the clay raft peels off the underlaying archaeological context like an orange and this peeling point is characterised by a thin gritty rather crumbly brown ashy horizon. At this horizon was a sherd of Ticknell Black Ware (a successor of Cistercian Ware) whose dating

range is approx 1550 to 1725, this appears to confirm the horizon is the outcome of work by the builder, as its not in its correct context, its intrusive again.

The two clay contexts look almost exactly the same, but the builder's clay raft also contains lots of sherds of broken salt glazed stoneware drainpipe at the north end, whereas the underlying context contains nothing but very occasional small stone and pebble with small random soil and sand lenses.

Under all of this is the dark, very organic strangely fibrous black silty clay soil of the original (pre-amphitheatre) field surface. We had originally taken the view that this context didn't fall much to the north but have re-measured the gradient slope of the garden surface and adjusted the whole measurements to find that the context does indeed fall from south to north.

In so far as there is no medieval context protecting the archaeology in Trial Trench 4, unlike that in Trial Trench 2, as well as the notional seating bank having been extremely truncated and destroyed, Trial Trench 4 will be backfilled as having yielded all the information it reasonably can. Work on Trial Trench 2 will now resume, because it has the known and correctly sequenced archaeology in it.