

## 2017 Dig Diary – Warnford Park in the River Meon valley

**DATE: 4<sup>th</sup> August**

The 2017 excavations have a series of objectives based on extending our knowledge of the phasing of this multi-period site. The single trench of 2016 showed us where the main structures were, how they seemed to relate to each other and potentially where there were more diagnostic areas and even the key area, the location of the original 17<sup>th</sup> century Neale buildings.

Important too, was the position of the original house in relation to the church, roads and tracks running north to south, and any remnants of the pre-Elizabethan village of Warnford. To this end it was planned to open five trenches close to that of 2016, some of which extended its coverage.

And here they are:



### Trench 5

This trench, to the west of trench 1, would investigate whether the large western wall found in trench 1 bounded a garden, or a road. It would also allow further investigation of the slope westwards towards the course of the River Meon.

Directly to the west was the full extent of the paved area from 2016 which appears to overlay storm and cesspit drainage from the period when the Regency house was built. Inserted into this but possibly contemporaneous was further soakaway drainage which seems to date the paved area to the Second World War.

Underneath this was evidence of a garden/courtyard wall which appears on the 1894 drainage plan. This was in two parts, the lower section poorly mortared, the higher courses having dark mortar and meant to be seen from downslope. No indication of its full height, of course.



Opportunity was also taken on this slope to understand the deeper levels by augering. David Ashby first dug a one metre sondage which came up with a series of layers of flint, packed chalk mixed with alluvium indicating terracing or layering events as you can see above.

### **Trench 3**

It became clear in 2016 that our trench (1) had, on its east side where the “Canadian latrines” were, more structure under the baulk which could well be the main part of the Jacobean house. Trench 3 thus extended five metres to the east to establish the position of this. The latrines quickly surfaced but soon more substantial flint and brick structures appeared below. We were helped by the 1894 map which clearly showed walls and larger structural elements. So far we have revealed two walls on the same alignment, but slightly offset. In the recess of that offset is a large (1m x 1m) feature of large limestone blocks topped by a brick structure, currently being interpreted as a buttress or even support for a roof-height girder, perhaps inserted to support or strengthen the roof space of the older building when they were converted into the west-wing of the Regency house.

Another potential explanation is that there are two older houses, slightly offset, and of different periods. The answer may lie under this metre-square “buttress”.





*Detail of the “buttress”, relationship with the flint wall as yet, unknown*



*The two offset walls with the “buttress”*



#### Trench 4

Extending south from trench 1, trench 4 followed a covered drain leading from the latrines and therefore WW2 in date. Quite quickly it became clear that some exposed bricks were in fact a brick surface of a small, probably WW2, room. Surrounding brickwork is of the usual wartime inferior nature, but at least one wall butts up against a flint wall, so maybe we have re-use in a very disturbed area from a dating viewpoint. Early days in this trench.



*Kate and Jo exposing the WW2 (?) floor*

#### Trench 2

In order to orientate buildings with some old pictures we have which show the west-wing outbuildings to the main Regency house, a trench was planned as close to the gatehouse as possible. This was positioned on a substantial depression in the ground.

However, when the surface was taken off by digger it was clear that the ground was not only very disturbed, but it was full of very recent rubble, including a complete 6ft x 6ft wall which, as the digger couldn't move it, was going to be beyond the scope of our meagre resources. So that trench has been shut down for the moment, and work concentrates on what we believe to be the key targets.

## Trench 6

Although our initial 2016 brief and objectives did not include the last major residence structure, Belmont, or Warnford House, the opportunity afforded itself to examine part of the structure that was demolished in the late 1950's. This would give a clear indication as to the building methods used and support, or otherwise, our knowledge of the owners of the house.

What we have found so far has been intriguing. Positioning the trench over one of the bay windows, which could be seen as parchmarks in the grass, the foundations of the house are well-exposed and indicate at least two phases of building, or possibly "improvement". Clearly the building was razed to floor level and parts of the ground-level brick surround was visible and intact. Indeed, there was some discussion about whether the bay had been remodelled in WW2, with a "step" being seen under the bay window perhaps being created to service an inserted door in the bay (by the Canadians?).



*Bay window – looking west*



*Bay window front – with the Canadian "step" with utility channels for original and "improved" services including "central heating"?*



The structures inside the bay are interesting in their inconsistency. A utilities culvert runs some two metres behind the bay carrying 5cm steel pipes (gas?) and also wooden and iron channels for cables or small-bore copper pipes (now long-gone). Perhaps a late improvement to central heating?

The top surfaces of the structures (which would have carried the floorboards) were packed flints which so far is about the only consistent building aspect in what is a surprisingly complex building structure. We could learn many interesting facts about nineteenth century buildings from this trench.

All in all, the 2017 WARG dig is shaping up into one which starts to answer some of the questions posed by 2016. There is a public open day on Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> August and we'll be happy to show people around, and hope that more of the locals, like last year, will be pleased to offer us explanations and snippets of their own history to help us tell the story.



*Lunch*