

Welcometothe2008BIGDIGDIARY

HerearethewordsandpicturesfromtheBIGDIGBLOG, summarisedasadigdiary. **Text-OnlyVersion**.

St. Cross Hospital was founded about 1136 by Bishop Henry de Blois. It was more a retirement home than a hospital in the modern sense, as its main purpose was to look after 13 poor and ailing men of good character, and hospitality to travellers, a tradition that is continued today by the provision of the 'dole' of bread and ale.

The church was begun in the 12th century but not finished until the 13th. The other existing buildings, forming three sides of a quadrangle, date mainly from the 15th century and were probably the work of Cardinal Beaufort at the time of the second foundation of 1445. These buildings continue to provide accommodation for the Brothers.

The land to the south of the Hospital buildings, known as 'the Park', contains a number of intriguing bumps and hollows which are likely to contain clues to the long history of the area. They had not been archaeologically investigated until last year when WARG began geophysical survey and small-scale excavation. This work has been expanded in 2008 to explore some of the key landscape features.

Sponsorship

WARG was lucky and extremely grateful to individuals and organisations who have kindly donated funds to allow our dig to happen.

Awards for All – National Lottery
Churches Maintenance Services
City of Winchester Trust
Winchester City Council
Hampshire Field Club

Preparation

On Wednesday and Thursday 23rd and 24th July, all the volunteers met up at Hundred Men's Hall at St. Cross to meet the team and each other. Dr. John Crook, archaeologist-in-residence at St. Cross (or so it seems) gave a talk on its history and the background to what we might find.

Other contributions over the two evenings told the diggers about the planned trenches, the geophysics, findings processing and Ken Qualmann, overall site director described the "conduct" of the dig, including the all-important Health & Safety.

Don and Dick gave a summary of the plans for this year and Giles filled us in on some of the more technical aspects we'd all encounter.

2nd August 2008

Today we re-opened, on a larger scale, two of last year's evaluation trenches, and immediately began finding deep features, as well as building rubble. Trench 3 has revealed more fragments of floor tiles.

The dig began in earnest with a dozen volunteers braving the forecast and the rain to begin work on the two large trenches. The westerly one straddled a supposed boundary ditch and much mattocking and earth-shifting started to show the ditch structures.

Further east, our second trench is positioned over what is a putative fish pond, and the subject of a small 2007 trench which revealed decorated tile. Hopes were high for some interesting finds here, and we have so far found three pieces of medieval decorated tile, possibly with the same derivation as some of those in the church. Further research will allow that to be tested.

Meanwhile, we are now in the hands of the weather. So far we've lost notimetotherrain, motivation is high, and Julia continues to ply us with tea and biscuits. Ahap py bunch indeed!

Sunday 3rd August

Today we continued with these trenches, particularly working on recording, and set out Trench 4. The total station was set up, and surrounded by its own anti-co-warmour as Garrard, newly returned from archaeological work in Iran, got to work enabling the positions and heights of the trenches and finds to be recorded.

Meanwhile, an ample number of diggers got to work trowelling back the first contexts lying underneath the topsoil. Trench 5 has provided a clear differentiation between ditch and bank material, with some areas of possible burning being revealed. The plan over the next few days is to put in a metre wide section (more matted) to reveal the depth of the ditch and its relation to the surrounding boundaries and pathways.

Trench 3, on the east of the site, provided the most diggers with the most finds. Our 2007 dig had produced some decorated tile, but today it came thick and fast. It was all fragmentary, indicating that it had been part of a dump of material, possibly to create a platform.

With shards of medieval pottery, and bits of what are thought to be stained glass, everyone was satisfied with the day's proceedings, some more than others.

And for the most part the rain held off, until about five-thirty, by which time any digger worth his or her salt was either in the shower, or in the pub!

Monday 4th August

The heavens were not good to us today. A series of heavy showers dampened spirits a little, but still good progress was made, and magnetic resistivity work started.

In trench 5 a metre wide half section was begun across what now appears to be a quite massive 4m wide ditch. There is clear evidence of burnings suggesting its use over time as a disposal pit.

Trench 3 was the scene of continued trowel cleaning and finds were ably cleaned by Kerrie and will be a central part of our presentations to the public at the coming Open Days. Also Trench 4 was de-turfed in readiness for the full extent of the feature is exposed. Yesterday's opening on Tuesday with an initially more focussed extent.

Morale, as they say, remains high!

Tuesday 5th August

Today those heavens finally opened up and drenched the whole site. Little progress was made, but I think you'll agree that the decision to abandon work for the day was the best to try and keep the trenches clean and not to damage the archaeology too much, and also for the safety of our volunteers.

Tomorrow is another day.....

Wednesday 6th August

...and so it proved to be. The rain held off and there were brief periods of brightness. Enough to get stuck into the new trench, Trench 4, which immediately began to show up the square feature we have seen on the magnetic resistivity maps. Also a potential wall made an appearance and a gravel surface which could be a pathway alongside the wall.

Trench 5 continued to intrigue as we took the one metre section down. The made-up eastern side of the ditch continues down, while the west bank looks distinctly un-made and more of a build up of continuous scatter, implying indeed that the now-disappeared allotments may well have been clearing the land and depositing debris in an unsorted manner.

Thursday 7th August

A new trench, Trench 6, was opened and we immediately found what might be a wall, matching last year's resistivity and an 18th century map. In Trench 3, recording continues and digging through rubble layer is

producing an interesting mix of material. In Trench 5 more work continues on examining the in-filled ditch, although the extension is running into serious tree roots. In Trench 4 we are still looking at the flint and gravel, tentatively a wall and a path, uncovered earlier in the week.

Friday 8th August

The new trench, Trench 6, continues to reveal the wall that matches last year's resistivity and an 18th century map. Close to it is a mix of bottle glass and old clay pipes. In Trench 3 digging through the rubble layer is producing a combination of material both across the medieval period and from the 19th century. In Trench 5 more work continues on examining the in-filled ditch. What was identified tentatively as a wall and a path in Trench 4 has been revealed as a series of layers of soft fill in a nearly dry ditch.

Saturday 9th August

The first of our Open Days, dozens of hardy visitors braved the increasingly wet and windy weather to watch what was going on and marvel at the professionalism of the sodden scrapers.

The forecast wasn't good, but it didn't stop dozens of interested members of the public and friends of history to look at what we've been upto.

Hampshire Field Club set up an information point next to our find stable and people were welcomed and given guided tours of the trenches by our volunteers.

Today work continued in Trench 3 to section the rubble making up the edge of the putative fish pond. Although probably mainly secondary, this has been the most prolific trench for finds, mainly decorated tile, early Medieval pottery and glass (with some tantalising stained glass).

The new Trench 6, which was positioned over a wall, revealed just that, plus two "buttresses" which appear too big for the wall, and has started speculation as to whether we have a "lean-to" structure. One of them is a post-hole? Soggy?

In Trench 5 Giles swung the mattock to section the west side of the ditch, and in Trench 4 Techer and Garrard picked their way through the various contexts of the path and ditch infill. On Sunday we, and the public, hope for slightly improved weather to make this fascinating dig even more engrossing.

Sunday 10th August

Sunday's weather bodewell for a busy second Open Day, and interest was high from the off. In the afternoon all the volunteers giving the guided tours were kept busy and some trench supervisors spent the entire afternoon telling the public what was being revealed by their particular hole in the ground—although some fanciful explanations were heard emanating from Trench 4 with its 1950's maypole posthole!

We were also joined by such luminaries as Graham Scobie, Dick Whinney and Steve Teague who were much impressed by what WARG has achieved in just a week.

While all the Open Day fun was going on, work in the trenches carried on with renewed vigour in the patchy but welcomes sunshine. Trench 5 became the scene of frantic mattocking to try and find the bottom of the ditch and the natural. This section of Trench 3 was completed, and all the many small finds catalogued and logged.

Trench 4 saw Garrard, Techer and Chris attempt to define the limit of the "path" ditch, by the end of Sunday reaching down to a layer of broken rubble and masonry full of voids. Also by the end of Sunday Giles & Co. had cleaned the wall and supposed buttresses in Trench 6 and had undertaken painstaking, professional recording of the site, which still begs a interpretation—animal stalls, lean-to, multi-period construction. There's all to play for!

Tuesday 12th August

Well into the second week now. Nobody's fallen out too much, things are starting to resolve themselves and parts of the jigsaw are falling into place. In trench 5, the ditch now seems to be two ditches: a wide boundary

ditch separating the St. Cross land from the King's highway, which cuts into an earlier, more steeply sided possibly defensive structure. Not unreminiscent of Oram's Arbour or Owslebury. And we are surely close to the natural...

Massive reworking of Trench 4 has revealed a rubble filled ditch, possible a moat which has eroded into its south range—the result of its removal in 1789.

In the Trench 3 section further work was done to establish the level of the pre-dump ground, and also came up with our most spectacular find to date—a two thirds complete, though unfortunately headless, bird of prey design, so very similar to those of the Retro choir in Winchester Cathedral.

The surfaces in Trench 6 are now being examined in more detail to try and establish the form and function of the walls and buttressing, and work started on Monday at the west door of St. Cross Church, an opportunity given by the necessary construction of a wheel-chair ramp.

Here in Trench 10 it was hoped to find evidence of a connection between the south range and the church buildings. Not only do we appear to have found such evidence in the form of a porch, but a stone pathway leading to that doorway. This meticulously dug trench is proving to be a real connection with the people who homestead here seem to have been represented by demolition rubble and tantalising glimpses into Medieval life at St. Cross.

Wednesday 13th August

On Wednesday, The Mayor of Winchester, Cllr Michael Rea, arrived to see what was going on, presumably because he's been reading the WARG BLOG. He spent time with Dick et al examining the trenches and chatting with diggers.

Saturday 16th August

As we head towards the end of this summer's project, so "digging" is being replaced by recording, before we fill in the trenches. Recording includes both photography and very detailed drawing, ensuring that future archaeologists can have an accurate picture of what we have discovered. Work started on restoring Trench 3, and will soon be in Trenches 4 and 5. Trench 6, with the 15th century garden wall and evidence of smoking g and drinking, will be the last to be closed.

This was the scene today of the main body of work, with the top context being cleared back exposing over 250 small finds, mainly of glass bottles and coloured glazed ceramics. Clay pipes were in profusion and the sheer quantity of finds and the necessary care to be taken in their recording seemed to slow progress as time begins to run out. Some idea of the task can be seen in the tea-break shot below.

Yesterday, Trench 7 was opened in the south-west corner of the Brothers' gardens, to establish whether there was a connection between the garden wall we found last year, and the current boundary of the gardens. So it proved to be and a multi-phase wall has appeared which presented quite a conundrum. Having a trained surveyor and technical artist on site in the shape of Geoff paid dividends as this evidence can now be taken away for further interpretation.

Part of the wall (far lower than the present ground level) was finely dressed, making it more than just a boundary, but an ornamental element to the gardens.

Our opportunity to dig in the vicinity of the St. Cross Church western end had led to the discovery—though predicted—of the remains of the front of the south range. A porch has been uncovered by Ken Qualmann (below) which appears to lead to a blocked doorway in the west wall on the church. The associated "pathway" could be a larger cobbled courtyard which was later replaced with the grassed quadrangle. Excavation has stopped, and detailed recording is underway to help the St. Cross authorities decide how best to continue their work building the wheel chair access, and whether to undertake more in-depth work.

Sunday 17th August

The party's over for another year. Today after some frantic last minute trowelling, cleaning and recording in Trenches 6 and 7, we set about the task of filling in our hard won trenches, and returning the field to a state which would content the cows (and the horse that think sit's a cow).

Before the relaxation, though, the study continued. Trench 6 had brought up some near complete clay pipe bowls, which Winchester Guide Mike was able to pin down to the 17th century Winchester pipe manufacturer Richard Waldron. Comparing the finds we were getting with typologies helped to start dating our massive haul of small finds.

The late flurry of activity had been made possible by the generous supply of a mini-digger by the tenant, together with its driver who charmed everyone with the fuelled good humour, as well as removing the need to shovel tons of soil and debris. As it was the return of the dig continued until 6 o'clock. Cutting it fine indeed. A few last-minute Total Station levels and it was all over.

Then all the fortnight's volunteers, together with our supervisors and organisers sat down to barbecued sausages, chicken and a superb spread of salad-bits and let our communal hair down. The prommers (led by Don the cigar) presented Julia with a gift which would help her overcome her snagged nail which she had been bemoaning, as overheard earlier by a poor digger on his hands and knees desperate for rehydration and medical attention.

This excavation has, unsurprisingly, raised more questions than answers, and its smooth running and happy volunteers auger well for a third event in 2009, dates for your diaries: 1st-16th August. Now, does anyone have a direct line to whoever controls the weather?