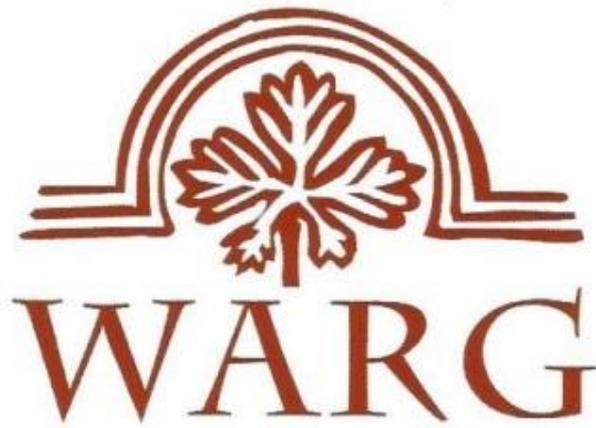




WARG Big Dig 2021 IBM Hursley
The search for
The Great Lodge



September 2021

In Nature's book of secrecy a little I can read.

William Shakespeare - Antony and Cleopatra, act1, sc.2, l.9-10.

Deep in the heart of our beautiful Hampshire countryside, on the lawns of a stunning mansion house, mingled with bird song, can be heard the gentle sound of trowel on soil, alongside the happy sounds of contented, well fed, archaeologists of all levels, shapes and sizes. The Big Dig is back and they are looking for the Tudor Mansion which stood on this site (known as The Great Lodge).

This year we have a wonderful host who not only has been very helpful with the logistics of the actual dig, but has provided safe storage and the necessary facilities, so we have not had to hire the usual port-a-loos, such luxury! Additionally, the host's social club on site has provided refreshments which replaced the need to make packed lunches at the end of a hard day.

Based on a dig diary by Stuart Rippon with support from David Key, Janet Backhouse, David Spurling and



Artist's impression



others including those who submitted some excellent photographs. Plus the whole WARG and Dig teams

This dig is important as the parch marks do not correspond with the accepted picture of the 'Great Lodge'. We aim to uncover what is really under the Lawn.

So, what did we find...

What follows is an edited version of the diary/blog that Stuart sent to the diggers and WARG members every day (except one when he fell asleep!). Where appropriate he has added some additional content and some elements such as instruction for the next day have been deleted to combine this into a single document.

So – here are Stuart’s end of day thoughts. Starting with the essentials!

Preparation - Day -2 and - 1 (23rd & 24th Aug) went very well. Essentials first, a coffee machine, water boiler, tea, coffee and biscuits were set up in the Gardeners’ garages. Hand washing and sanitising were also located there with plenty of hot water via a boiler and potable cold water. I must say I have never been on such a luxury dig. The diggers tried the club house out for lunch and sampled the Toasted sandwiches, Chilli and the Scampi. Reports on food were that it was great, although the toasted sandwich arriving with a full portion of chips and a salad was unexpected and meant we all had chips to share. Never mind, the walk to and from the club house, and the digging, will protect the waistlines. The club house was very welcoming for food and drink and the toilets were made available. (Muddy shoes off please). They were staying open so that we could use them after the dig each day as well, and it’s a lovely place to relax and wind down.

The generosity of our host made it possible to spend money on a turf removal tool which has really delivered. We had removed all the turf for 3 trenches by 1:30

As you can see this is really a stunning location and the current Hursley House makes a great backdrop for photographs.



Turf removal



British workman observing



First findings

The little bit of archaeology we exposed seemed to confirm that the main archaeology would be 200mm below the grass and the soil was nice and easy to dig at this stage.

So, on Day 1 (25th Aug) we were continuing the opening of the trenches. As expected, the archaeology seemed to be close to the surface although to be honest it did not feel like that when you are on the end of a mattock!

Everyone was having a wonderful time; the site is great and IBM are excellent hosts. You do not even need to bring a packed lunch as the club house also does take-away!!!

We are providing the usual coffee tea and biscuits but we also had a POD machine on site for those who prefer an espresso, latte

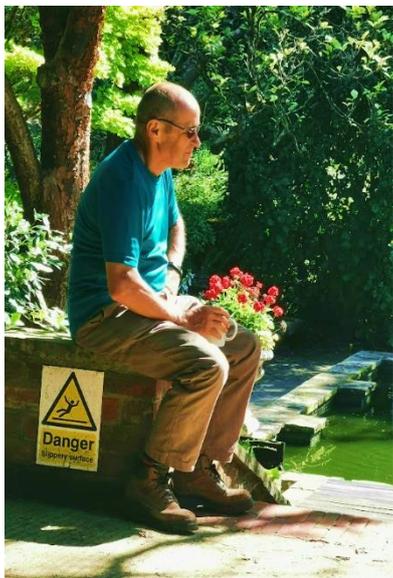


View of site from the top of Hursley House after turf lifting

chocolate, or just a quick cup of tea – we only asked users to donate a little towards the capsules. We had lots of fun and lots of hard work opening the trenches and I think you can see from this photograph (taken by IBM from “Hursley House”) that the site is a really good one.

This wonderful view is protected within the covenant of Hursley House.

The backdrop to our dig surely is the best but that still did not stop the archaeologists arguing about what we have found and what to do next. Can you spot the Wall, Feature, Surface, Platform, Rubble – Oh well with 5 of them they are unlikely to agree!!!



Lunch turned out to be a real pleasure with so much choice. The club house serves lovely eat in and take-out food, the grounds are enormous or you can just chill in the sunken garden as many of us did.

And there is still time for contemplation even if you ignore the warning signs!



Discussion of the features- will they agree

Day 2 (26th Aug) - The hard work of clearing the top and subsoil in both trenches nears completion. Once again, this year we have a gravel layer which for those of you interested looks to be imported and contains a significant number of fine worked flints. Trench 2 is already at this layer and you can see clear features appearing. This picture along with others is on the google drive, but for personal review only please. Most of them are high resolution so you can zoom in on the features.

Drive address - Please contact WARG for access

Trench 1 (the larger trench) was a little behind, although novel excavation methods have now improved the speed of removing the subsoil, and the effort needed to do this. This trench again has features that looked to be related to the building we were looking for. Although the wall we thought we had found turned out to be a modern drain when we discovered the rodding point at its far end. Oh Well, at least from the fill of this we know there is lots to find lower down.

Trench 3 remained in reserve to open if we had time and resources but we were learning techniques for excavating this site which would make opening this trench easier and therefore quicker to accomplish.

We asked people to sign in at the WARG orange tent (inside the compound we were digging in) so we could gather people, have an introduction chat & safety briefing and then despatch everyone to get the tools they required from the gardeners' garages. The Club house continued to provide facilities – the toilets were there (although it is a walk away) and the lunchtime food whether eat in (patio or inside) or take away is still getting great reviews and a cold glass of something before heading home is most welcome.

You can see why the diggers were having a good time.

On Day 3 (27th Aug) we had some serious digging to do to prepare for uncovering the archaeology. We had loads of finds already including a .22 bullet and loads of lovely worked flint tools obviously predating our building and likely to come from the source of the gravel used to level the site.



The top soil on the site is remarkable – very fine with almost zero finds – we had to stop diggers bagging it to take home. The subsoil below this has more clay but again apart from fragments of bricks and “modern” finds has little to offer. This descends to a layer of gravel and finds appear to be filtered onto this layer.

Trench 2 was more advanced and had now uncovered what are probably some of the walls of the building we were expecting to find. It's been hard work and fun as you might expect.

A Little Historical note - This estate was bought by William Heathcote, MP from the daughters of Richard Cromwell, son of Oliver of Civil War fame/notoriety (depending on whether you have Cavalier or Roundhead sympathies). Later, during the First World War, the estate was used as a nursing hospital for officers. Today, it is home to one of the leading IT services companies IBM, our generous hosts.

I have to keep kicking myself to remember that this is only day 4 of the dig (as my muscles keep telling me) but then I was digging last week and we started setting up Monday...

Day 4 (28th Aug) has been a day of uncovering. It was fairly clear yesterday that we were uncovering wall foundations from the Tudor Great lodge and I personally had hoped that trench 2 was over the kitchens. So what have we found...



Trench 2 was placed over a corner of the building facing South. We expected an external wall in the middle of this trench and I think you will see there is a good linear foundation running along the trench. Looking at the picture to the right is external and to the left internal as far as we can tell.

Ben – (in the trench) is just in front of what might be two fireplaces and to the right you can see the exterior of the building with structures which we do not (as yet) understand.

All of the gravel that we think may have been used to level

the site has been removed from this trench – it was clearly imported as evidenced by much earlier fine worked flint finds found in that layer.

In the centre of this trench and as we had seen on the geophysical analysis was a feature that looked like a fireplace or fireplaces. Our excavation has so far confirmed one of these as you can see... Apparently the tiles on their side are a typical feature through medieval and Tudor fireplaces and may have been used to protect the base from cracking and / or to provide ventilation into the fire. On the



opposite of what is probably a wall there may be a second fireplace but excavations in that area are continuing.

Finds from this area again indicate that food preparation might have been underway.

Then at the South end of this trench there is a feature which any of you as old as me may remember as the old copper in the garden shed used to heat water.



This wonderful feature, separate from the room and essentially outside of the building looks to be the site of a vessel to boil water for laundry or cooking food.

Fire damage to one side indicates how it was fed and contained within its walls would probably have been housed a large half sphere shaped tank in which water boiling took place.

As this is in an area associated with the large fireplaces this again indicates that this might have been the domestic / kitchen area.



Trench 1

Trench 1 is also progressing and is at the gravel removal stage. Yet you can already see building features emerging.

Where expected (from the geophysics) walls are emerging along with other features that could be surfaces or more walls.



However the linear feature that you can see at the far end of this view is a service trench for a drain which unfortunately cuts through the wall like features we are uncovering. (it was only found when we had excavated most of it and found a plastic lidded rodding point). We will give this a wide berth.

Let's see what Day 5 brings

Day 5 (29th Aug) has been interesting ...

But first the advert. Please post photos on the google drive so we can share them.

Please contact WARG for access you can also download what is already there...

In trench two - we now have two circular features that look like a base for a copper or an oven. Plus potentially two fireplaces. There is also clearly more than one phase of this building and we are wondering if other areas of the site were similarly developed over time. The trench includes external areas of the building that may indicate bases for external structures but more to come on this over the next few days. We have layers of archaeology – floor on floor and some puzzling fine worked stone. Excavation continues and we will learn much more over the coming days.

Trench 1 – which is larger and slightly behind has now been cleared of the gravel and some large wall foundations have been uncovered. We fully expected to find similar prominent features to those in Trench two as we uncovered the layers of archaeology. The big question is - Is the front of the building a courtyard, part of the main building or a later added feature or something else?

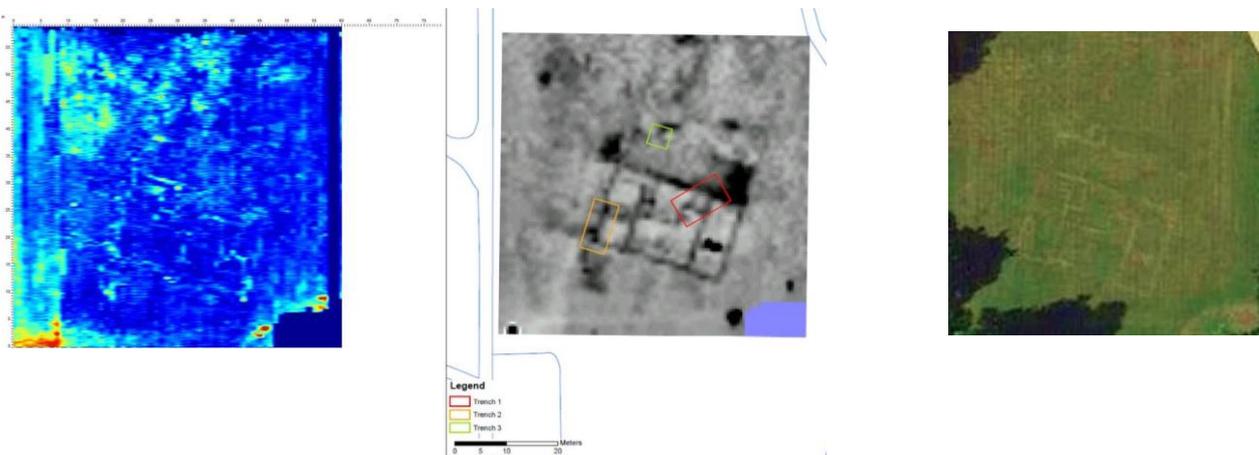
As the Trench 1 team gets lower finds become more interesting and the team cannot wait to get below the demolition rubble which is their next challenge. They are even playing finds bingo now!!!

There are again walls abutting walls so there may be multiple phases here as well – time will tell.

Trench 3 - **Has** not been opened yet – and we know how to take off the top layers without disturbing the archaeology.

I posted the Ground penetrating radar image on the google drive this morning but it was a little quick for some people so here is a slower version. It shows what was detected under the ground in slices from the surface to the lowest range the equipment can reach. (Post publication note. If you want to see this you will need to log onto the google drive as it is a movie derived from 50 radar image each 100mm apart).

What we hoped to find - shown in Geophysics (Radar and Resistivity and in parch marks



*Still from
Ground penetrating radar
At a depth of 0-100mm*

Resistivity

Parch Marks

Day 6 (30th Aug) Well..... We are 6 days into digging and 6 days to go and things are certainly heating up. Trenches 1 and 2 both have indications of multiple phases of archaeology. It's not surprising really as the building was in place for 200 years so you would expect modifications with each generation at least.

We have also opened Trench 3 to look at the features that appears to extend beyond the rest of the building and like Trench 1 examine what might be a courtyard or a room.



Trench 1 is complicated. We wanted to see if the front of the building enclosed a courtyard and trenches 1 and 3 were targeted at this.

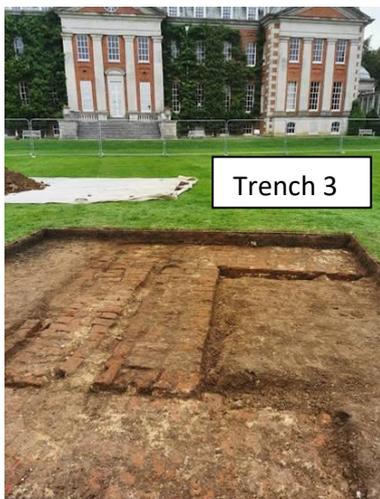
So far Trench 1 has uncovered the wall separating the building from the potential courtyard area and there is the base of a wall that is 1.9 meters wide.

Other features in Trench 1 are more difficult to explain as we appear to have periods of demolition and reconstruction throughout the life of the house.

Now we were under the gravel diggers were looking forward to uncovering the clues that will help us put

this together.

Trench 2 continued to interest us with again multiple phases of building. Now cleaned up you can see the hearth at this end with the wall of the building running in line with the trench. There are features under these elements so expect more from this trench as we continue to excavate.



Trench 3

Trench 3 looks to examine a feature that appears to extend beyond the building and to look again to see if we have a courtyard or if the North of the building is a very large room. We had learnt from trenches 1 and 2 and removing the overlying layers proved to be easy now we knew how to do it.

More on what we have found tomorrow.



Day 7 (31st Aug) - When my doctor told me I needed more exercise I don't really think he was thinking of a day of mattocking. Still despite the aches and pains – we were progressing across the site with the archaeology at the moment getting more complicated.

We clearly have multiple phases of the development of the building(s).

Trench 1 has cellars that we have painstakingly excavated (emphasis on PAIN) along with the 1.9m wide walls uncovered yesterday, trench 2 has complex layers of archaeology and really interesting features and trench 3 has uncovered the potential portico and the front wall of the building.

I wanted to focus a little on finds tonight....

We have some really lovely finds and the team are pulling some impossibly small finds out of the mud including little brass sewing pins and fragments of Tudor glass.



This hand painted tile possibly of Low Countries origin was a star find with the three pieces fitting together as you can see.

And this bell uncovered in a break from mattocking just to check on the line of the wall - just missed ending up on the spoil heap.



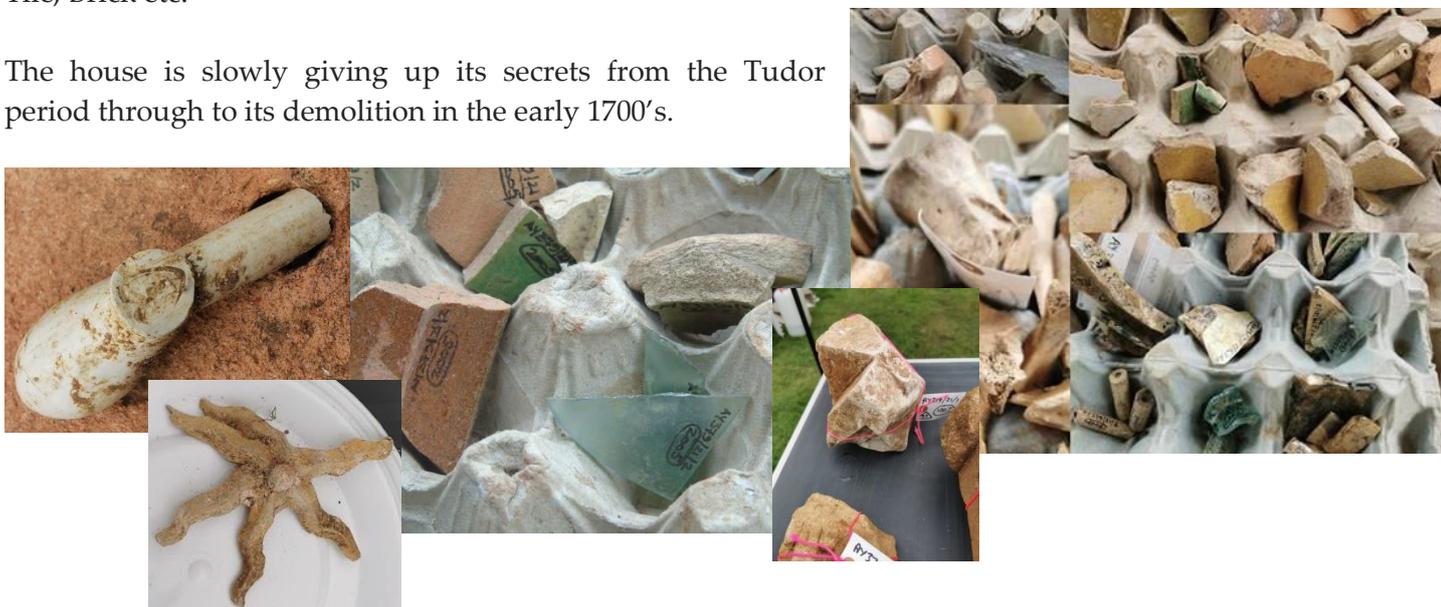
Plus as the house was systematically demolished (Then as you would expect) we have lots of Brick- so much in fact that Andy started to steal barrows to put it in.



We all think he is building a new patio at home.

We have found all the elements of life that we would expect, Glass, Animal Bone, Pottery, Clay pipe, Slate, Tile, Brick etc.

The house is slowly giving up its secrets from the Tudor period through to its demolition in the early 1700's.



Days 8 and 9 (1st and 2nd Sept)

Well - my back is holding up, and we are still going, although I think I missed a report for day 8 which I put down to Grandad duties and tiredness.

We have continued to uncover the archaeology and it's clear that the Tudor building was redeveloped massively at some time. This is no longer surprising nor unexpected.

Trench 3 has not moved forward but there is still work to be done here to understand if this was also included in the re-development of the building.



Trench 2 is still the location of a domestic area. The two back to back fireplaces have been cleaned and recorded and we started to remove layers of archaeology to see how they relate to each other.

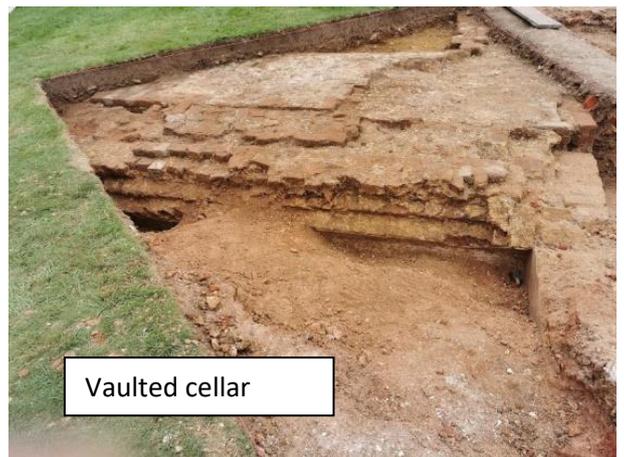


Then under the packed clay floor we have uncovered walls of a much older, most probably medieval, building. Fine reused stone can be seen.

The history says that until the Tudor mansion was built nothing was in "The park" apart from the medieval pale and a "wooden" hunting lodge thought to be located by the present Keepers lodge. The Park provided hunting for the Bishop of Winchester whose residence in Merton castle became increasingly neglected.

The great lodge is thought to have been the first major building in "The Park" built by Sir Phillip Hoby in the 2nd half of the 16th Century. It lasted until 1718 and was once the home of Richard Cromwell. In 1588 Ralph Treswell drew a map of Hursley Estate. At the heart of it is the earliest depiction of the Great Lodge

Trench 1 has uncovered a vaulted cellar probably about 2m high at the centre around 4-6m across. This is accessed by corridors and evidence of doorways can still be seen in the brickwork. We also believe that we may have found a stair well that accessed these cellars which was cut into undisturbed ground (apart from the odd Rat hole and Neolithic worked flints). So it's unlikely the front of the house was an enclosed courtyard.



Again, in this trench

there are multiple phases of development of the house and a potentially much older structure to the West. What has already become clear is that the drawings we had of the house do not represent what we have on the ground and that these will need re-evaluating in the light of our findings.



Hampshire Field Club visit - Trench 1

Day 10 (3rd Sept)



So, this is how day 10 started. We have so much to do and so much we don't understand and we have three days to do it!!!

Of course, that is not really true in our case as we lose ½ a day for the Sunday afternoon open day – so we have 2 ½ days to do it.... Time Team eat your heart out.

We are heavily into the last stages now. Teams are rushing to uncover diagnostic elements of archaeology along with others cleaning trenches ready for photography and drawing. So do not be surprised to hear GET OUT OF MY TRENCH when a footprint negates an hour's cleaning.

In the mean time we have drawings to complete and this is a complex site with many elements that have to be represented accurately in our drawings. Each trench is now measuring and drawing bricks (100's of them) as accurately and as fast as we can along with all the other features they can see.

Trench 3 uncovered a cobbled surface and loads of associated finds something our novice diggers were so excited about that we heard the whoops of celebration across the whole site almost continuously.



The finds have been tremendous, the little bit of pot where you can feel the potter's fingers, a Neolithic flint that has not been touched for thousands of years, fragile glass potentially from Tudor windows and fingerprints on a brick that the worker decided to put in the kiln anyway because it would never be seen until now...

Trench 1 - Opened an extension - this late in the day to examine the relationship between the Tudor foundations, a flint and chalk, platform/foundation/surface and a chalk surface.

A second chalk surface was sectioned to examine its makeup and to try to set it in context with the other features. These features seem to relate to the earlier Tudor house and may indicate a courtyard. This is still a puzzle!

Trench 2 progressed with cleaning and drawing as were all the trenches as far as possible so that final photographs could be taken and the archaeological records were complete.

Of course our finds processors were also hard at work cleaning documenting and labelling boxes of finds. The dig would not be successful without this team and all the hard work they put in.

Day 11 – (4th Sept)

Clean – clean - clean – and then I'm told it looks like some animal has clawed it AARRGGHHH – I hate clay!!!



But seriously we are on the last stretch and as usual things are popping out that need extra investigation.

Trench 3 had a wonderful day yesterday with Sally and Poppy waking the whole site up as they found some lovely items. The keys stand out as something thrown away when it was finally torn down.

The items found in this trench may give us a good insight into the domestic elements of this grand house.

The cobbled surface in this trench stands out as part of the outside of the building and the reused stone adds grandeur to what the house might have been.

Indications of cellars tie in with trench 1's discoveries today.

Trench 2 continues.

Tilly is exploring the West side to see if we have similar features and learning about context sheets at the same time. I think she enjoyed it ask her tomorrow!!!

As usual; as you clean additional features appear and a potential post hole needs to be looked at in the morning – but it's probably just someone who rotated on some chalk making a circle. (Post publication note – it was a post hole after all)

Drawing is underway big time with plans and sections being drawn across all the trenches. Helpers always appreciated - you can measure for someone who draws.



Trench 1 has had an extension "like the original building". The relationship between the chalk platform enclosed by flints and the Tudor walls needed investigation. So Trench 2 got an extension. – nice square extension Cliff

From this we should be able to understand the sequencing of the brick wall and the chalk surface and thus our key finding of what preceded what.

Kate had the horrible task of cutting through a flint floor, surface, or foundation etc... to follow the chalk that we could see going under it. The result as you can see is very inconclusive but may point us to

what is the natural surface.



In trench 1 - We worked a little late tonight to continue roughing out the drawings for the trench where every brick needs to be drawn. We had a wall that ended right at the bulk and investigating the actual end turned into a mini dig. The wall end exactly matches the entrance to the vaulted cellar and may indicate that cellars ran across the whole building. Investigations at arm's length under the modern pipe trench seem to confirm that this wall is indeed aligned with the vaulted cellar door and may indicate a large cellar central to the building.

The vaults give us an indication of height as well. The floor of the cellars are around 1m below our excavation (measured by probing) but the arch of the vault is likely to be about 1m above where we are (extrapolating its curve). So turn and look at the current house where the grand rooms are up a staircase but there are windows of rooms below. It's possible this house had similar "under floor" rooms and cellars

The End - Day 12 (5th Sept 2021)

I was almost going to leave this post at THE END... but today was such a great day that I have to add a few comments.

Firstly, I want to pass on all our thanks to IBM for letting us dig on this wonderful lawn (and I'm praying to go back ok) IBM and the Club have been wonderful with the Cheesy Chips getting the diggers top prize for lunch.... Plus, a cold drink at the end of a hot day. Seriously IBM has provided great facilities for us which has gone a long way to making this dig so much fun. The sunken secret garden to chill out in was magic and we all gathered there at breaks to chat and eat and the storage was a real step up from our usual containers.



Then I want to thank all those people who came along to the open day. I'd expected 71 but I think we were nearer the 100 and people were still arriving at 5pm. I hope you all had a good time and that what we found was of interest – I'm sure it was. I know the children enjoyed the spoil heaps and we had a great time explaining why there were so many oyster shells and as usual their sharp eyes found some lovely finds we had missed.

Unfortunately, things can get very busy on site so we sometimes do miss some interesting stuff but the children can usually be relied upon to find it.

We are not quite done and a few of us will be back tomorrow to complete the drawings and tidy up what we have left on site.

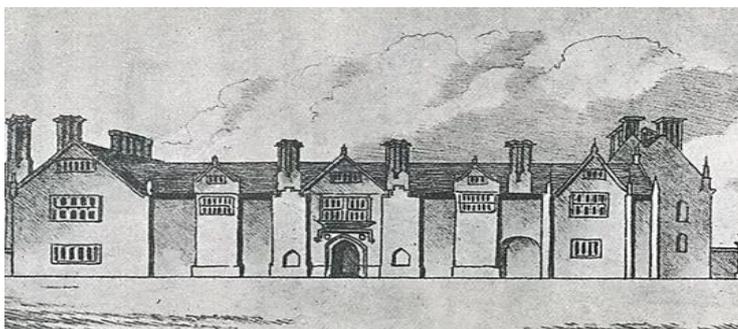


So, the question always is "did you find anything" ... Well yes most definitely.

Our finds team worked tirelessly to clean, document and label all of the items we dig up from the trenches. There were some great bits and pieces and you could hear whoops and hollers across the site when a digger uncovered one. I'm not sure my writing on a bit of pot is as neat as these pots so well done to all of you working on them. (We do have new very successful pen technology)



But we found more than just objects and these are the finds that are really interesting. We were looking for this ...



A large Tudor house that we knew was under the ground from the parch marks and geophysics. The features we have uncovered are not really in alignment with that representation but they also tell us so much more...

We believe that the house was built in the mid 1500's and was demolished in the 1720's but what we did not know was that it was also knocked down sometime between those two dates.



Now we know what to look for there are indications that the historical records might confirm this redevelopment theory but there is much work to do before that can be fully researched.

Reused stone (possibly from Merdon Castle) appeared from time to time some of it very fine associated with an even earlier building.

Then, excavating in the domestic area we uncovered wall like structures that resemble medieval walls and represent an earlier building on the site whether this was a timber building on top on this foundation or a wall of some form

we cannot tell.

Before I sign off, I have a little challenge.... Date the pipe.

I've rotated the image so you can see it better. If it's still hard to see it's a heart shape with a capital B inside. Serious answers with references to Andy and Stuart please.

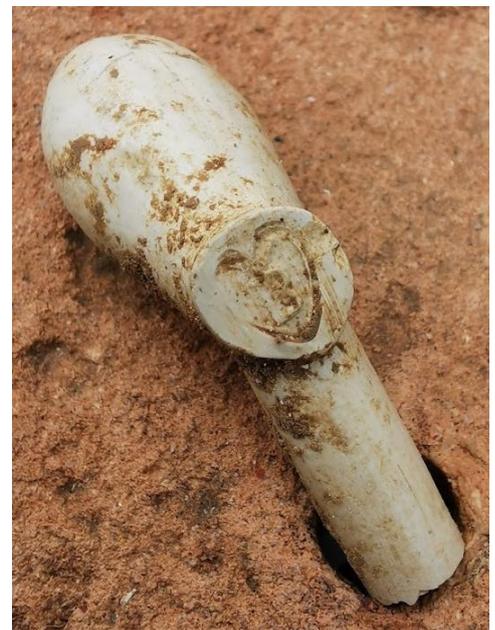
Thank you to everyone who took part - diggers, Finds processors, helpers, hard pressed families at home and those that took the time to visit us as well. I know we have interested a number of people in amateur archaeology and new members will be joining as a result.

We hope to see you all next year.

Best wishes from

The Dig committee and the whole team.

PS... There may be an interesting postscript to this diary/blog so lookout for more..



Stuart