

WARG Summer Dig 2009

Excavations at St Cross Park, Winchester

This is the third year that WARG, the society for Winchester archaeology and local history, has dug at St Cross Park. The objective of the programme is to discover what underlies the various "*lumps and bumps*" in the park and to try to understand how the landscape developed to look as it does now.

WARG is grateful for the support of the Trustees of St Cross, Mr and Mrs Skeats, who farm the park, Churches of Winchester, Hampshire County Council, Awards for All and Winchester City Council. We are particularly grateful to the City of Winchester Trust, which has supported the publication of a brochure for use during our Open Days (Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th August).

St Cross & Henry of Blois

St Cross Hospital was founded by Bishop Henry of Blois around 1130. It was intended as a refuge for 13 old men, too feeble to look after themselves. It was also to provide a daily meal for 100 poor men from Winchester. With St Cross Hospital and the leper hospital at Magdalene Down, also currently being excavated, presumably Henry was making an investment on earth to help in the afterlife.

Why Henry built here, rather than elsewhere, is not clear. It would be particularly interesting to discover signs of earlier settlement or religious activities. Construction of the church began about thirty years after the foundation and took over a hundred years to complete. It is one of the only hospital buildings surviving from the 12th Century.

Cardinal Beaufort

From our point of view, the next important change at St Cross was in the 1440s when Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, founded the Almshouse of Noble Poverty, and rebuilt much of the site, creating the quadrangle we see today.

The Almshouse of Noble Poverty, intended to run alongside the old charity of the Hospital of St Cross, provided sheltered housing for a larger group of men from higher up the social spectrum than the de Blois foundation. These were provided with apartments to live in, in the new buildings.

St Cross in the 18th and 19th centuries

By the end of the 18th century the hospital was in poor repair and, in particular, the south range was close to ruinous. It was demolished, in 1789, and replaced

by the current wall and iron railings, opening up the courtyard to the light from the south.

Fifty years later, after a prolonged court case which was used in part by Trollope for his novel, *The Warden*, the governance of St Cross was transferred to Trustees.

In 1864/5 the Trustees and the new master, the Reverend L. M. Humbert, set about modernising the hospital and restoring the Church, using William Butterfield as architect.

Excavations 2007

In the summer of 2007 WARG was given permission to excavate in the park. Over two weekends we dug a number of trenches. The first of these was at the south west corner of a rectangular feature that had been the subject of considerable speculation. We discovered the corner of a wall, which later research showed was that surrounding a southern area of the Brothers' gardens.

Another trench, dug into a raised area in the field, uncovered a lot of fragments of medieval glass and tiles. Among them was a large piece of encaustic tile. This was identified by Dr John Crook as a part of one of a set of four with complete examples still in the Church and in the Cathedral. These tiles were made by William the Tiler of Otterbourne in the 1370s.

A full resistivity survey was also undertaken.

Excavations 2008

Summer 2008 was a two week dig involving many volunteers and five trenches. Each of the trenches presented a whole host of questions and not many answers.

We revisited the earlier trench and discovered, among the mediaeval material, a small amount of Victorian debris. This leads to the tentative conclusion that this is the material removed during the Butterfield restoration of the church in the middle of the nineteenth century. However why it has been placed here, and what is underneath is still unclear.

A new trench produced a great deal of building rubble that probably came from the demolition of the south range in 1789, and was used to fill a ditch. The ditch running along the west side of the site was a further puzzle, as it is deeper than 2 metres but with very few artefacts it is difficult to date.

Another new trench revealed the east wall of the lost area of the brothers' garden along with a lot of odd debris such as pipe stems and broken glass.

Excavations 2009

This year we are continuing to work on the trenches containing the rubble from the south range of buildings and the rubble from the Butterfield restoration. We will be taking a further look at the boundary ditch and opening two new trenches.

The first of these will be on the Bowling Green, an area to the east of the church, where geophysics has shown a building very close to the surface. The second will be where the garden wall joined the missing south range. This is likely to include a missing stretch of the Lockburn, a stream which ran below the privies at the back of the buildings.

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