

# WARG Summer Dig 2009—St. Cross Park, Winchester

## Webmaster's Diary

### To begin....

Well the first weekend has kicked off with some excitement. The last day of July was spent by the work party stripping turfs and helping the farmer's digger to excavate some of the trenches down to the plastic sheeting left after the 2008 dig.

On the morning of Saturday 1st August eager volunteers turned up to see what tasks they had been allocated, after a guided tour of the site and the proposed trenches by site director Ken Qualmann. The trenches would be supervised by Don Bryan, Giles Carey, Garrard Cole, Techer Jones and Chris Sellen. We were joined on our tour by the latest inquisitive addition to the Park's animal life, Michael.

Saturday's weather was pretty dire, but a full day's work was done. Sunday fared much better, and it was sun-screen and hats for most of the day, though not too hot—a perfect day and we made the most of it.

Trench 11, on the bowling green to the east of St. Cross church, was the most frustrating and exciting at the same time. Initial promise from the geophysics that there were structures, possibly relating to the earliest hospital, produced very sterile results, but patience paid off and walls began to appear just where the geophysics said they should be. Unfortunately no dating evidence as yet but we do have walls in a T-shape and a possible door. We must close this trench down after Monday but it augurs well for later years' excavations.

In newly re-opened, though slightly realigned Trench 3, Giles was trying to make sense of the relationships between rubble fill from Butterfield's 19th century work and some of the park landscaping features, while another new trench, Trench 9, saw "Chris and his Maidens", begin to unearth the remains of the demolished south range of the hospital. Several walls have appeared, on varying alignments. The garden wall from last years Trench 6 has made an appearance and the relationships between some new partial-walls will require, literally, piecing together.

An encouraging start. All we need now is the weather to hold and the diggers' stamina to hold up. Tracey's lunchtime doughnuts seem to be working wonders.

### The First Tuesday....

Frantic work in the bowling green trench has revealed not only walls and a wall junction, but metalwork which is clearly part of a door or gate hinge. Everybody is excited by this, of course, not least the consultant archaeologist to St. Cross, Dr John Crook who, after visiting the site today, pronounced himself well pleased with the find.

The walls are very clear and solid with a fine edge on the north side. The masonry seems to continue underneath one of the walls, perhaps the foundations. We can also see the metal hinge to the bottom right of its retaining slab.

Back in trench 9, further walls have been exposed which are making for interesting interpretation. There seems to be agreement that there is a lot of wall-robbing going on, as walls which would be expected to be solid aren't, whereas a wall which seems to represent the side of the latrine culvert to the south range is a solid mortared mass.

We have still only just taken off the top layer exposing the plan and have got to the "more questions than answers" stage. It looks like this trench will start to see much more vertical work very soon.

## **Saturday 8th August**

By the end of the first week, and by the Open Day on the first Saturday, we had made significant progress in all the trenches we have opened.

The bowling green trench (11) has been opened and closed, and the marquee erected over it for today's wedding.

Trench 3, the landscape feature, had Giles disappearing into an ever-deepening hole as he sought to bottom out the rubble fill.

Trench 10, the most southerly, across the park boundary ditch, had started to threaten prehistoric features as the ditch profile began to be clarified. A pre-Roman field or property boundary, which has been respected over time?

Trench 5, in the meantime, continued to be deepened by some heroic mattocking by the heavy gang. Layer upon layer of deposits over the years from the field to the west had confused the basic profile of the ditch, and as the team began to bottom out the trench it encountered a circular cobbled surface alongside an even larger circular pit. Not yet possible to understand the cut relationship between the two we can expect this trench to yield the biggest surprises. But as yet no clear dating evidence. Perhaps in the bottom of the pit?

Finally, the trench (9) which was revealing the remains of the South Range of St. Cross almshouses. As a training trench this is allowing first-time diggers to get stuck in and experience some of the trials and fascinations of excavation. The exact alignment and remains of the range walls is still not clear, but some of the sequences of events around the demolition are becoming apparent.

The open lock-burn which channelled effluent from the west and south range garderobe towers was redirected about demolition time and a culvert built over it to disguise its use (and impact). Part of the brick arc is now fully uncovered, and a rougher, mortared section leading off to the south-east (and respecting the geophysics) is being cleared.

## **Sunday 9th August**

The most cracking weather today. It was sunshine all the way and the highest factor sun-block (especially for those of us follicly challenged). It was also our second Open Day,

traditionally a busy time for the volunteers giving the public the run around—sorry, guided tour. Generally our visitors were indeed an erudite bunch.

Real progress has been made since the last report. Trench 4 had produced some superb stratigraphy, illustrated by an immaculate section showing a turf layer on top of Butterfield's rubble, crowned with further rubble in a later episode. One for the historians here? Well done to Garrard and Dave for the highest level of presentation.

In trench 3, Giles's isolation trench, a deep cut into the rubble had failed to find the bottom on what was now a well-defined fill. But on the southern end a cobbled platform had been revealed. A metalled road? A fishing platform? All bets are on.

Back in trench 9 the structures continue to be revealed. The culvert top is a simple arc resting on foundations built onto the original Lockburn retaining walls. Onto that, rubble from both the demolition of the South Range, and also potentially from St. Cross Chapel, was used to level the ground above the new culvert, which disguised the purpose and effects of the garderobe stream.

Some glazed tile has popped up and more material lies buried adjacent to the culvert—a case of “Dump that there, lad. No-one'll notice.”

The culvert itself has taken its change of direction, but it's not clear this evening what structure forms the new branch. A mortar-surface appears to be flanked by brick wall which has been broken or robbed out. Is this the current course of the water from the lock burn? It may indeed be necessary to send a small urchin, with a context sheet and a compass with knotted string, through the grilles to measure the position. (Parents apply to WARG please)

Of course it may just be that today's sun got to your imaginative webmaster!

## **Friday 14th August**

What a week it's been. In the true spirit of the enthusiasts' dig, we have been hosts to a number of groups and luminaries as word has spread of the fascinating knowledge arising from our trenches.

The Mayor of Winchester, Cllr. Dominic Hiscock, paid a return visit and Dick Selwood explained each of the trenches and their relationships. The Hampshire Field Club and the City of Winchester Trust were also treated to private tours and detailed explanations as to what was going on.

Trench 5 has produced Anglo-Saxon pits (their dating confirmed by one of the HFC visitors), which are cut by the ditch we have been unable to date thus far. While trench 4 (the park landscape feature) has now been bottomed out and extended over its full width to show not only the infill from the South Range demolition but also Butterfield's 19th century rubble from the church, and various levels of deposition (including much work by rats!).

Your webmaster is going to hold back on the other trenches for the moment because they will show their full glory in due course. But the fun continues to be had in trench 9 where Techer and Steve (and latterly your webmaster-truly) bottomed out the easterly extension of the Lockburn. Expecting a deposit layer of stream debris, we hit (at 1.60 metres depth) roof

tile followed by bottles, clay pipes and ceramic pieces. That's where people threw in their passing rubbish.

Indeed it was, but into *such* a stream bed. Half an hour before closure of work for the day, Techer hit a solid mortar floor. This was no use of a stream for simple removal of sewerage, this was high quality planned drainage, maximising the ability of water over a smooth surface to sluice away the mucky stuff, with a precise 1:100 gradient.

That post-1796 when the South Range was demolished, it was still felt necessary to redirect, through a culvert, later realigned (about which many theories are being put forward over a pint in [The Bell](#)), gives some indication of the care, and expense, being lavished on the almshouses and their surroundings.

Even as a behelmed Techer Jones basked in the glory of a major piece of archaeologically derived knowledge, further finds in trench 9 were casting new light on the layout of the gardens and structures in this fascinating dig. The final day looks to be a classic.

## **The Last Weekend (almost the Lost Weekend)**

Saturday and half of Sunday was taken up with recording the evidence and the results of our travails over the preceding 15 days. Sections and plans were drawn, and finally photographs taken, from a gantry, of the cleaned and annotated trenches. Interpretation of some of the final features was left to the last minute, however, and it was only on the Sunday morning that an all out effort revealed the bottom of Trench 10, the section across the ditch.

Trench 9 made a pretty picture from the gantry after a detailed plan and several sections showing the relationships between the various walls, robbed or changed walls, culverts and fills (especially that of the Lockburn).

Giles' Trench 3, which had hit the park's water table some days before, continued down with frantic mud-mattocking not revealing the final depth of the infilled "garden canal" feature. Nearby Trench 4 saw Garrard and Dave's exemplary sections showing excellent stratigraphy and therefore the history of their features—and a few rat-runs to boot.

Finally Chris and Geoff in Trench 5 could finally put to rest the sequence of strange pits and infills deep in the chalk rubble/rock basal layers. Anglo-Saxon in nature, the large pit had animal bones including whole sheep or goat heads. The pits predated the ditch which continues into Trench 10, but the reasons for, and indeed nature of the cobble surface in the smaller pit remains a mystery. No one seems to have seen such a feature before. Perhaps someone reading this can shed some light.

Which left the filling in and partying. Unfortunately the former took so long, well into the evening because we started so late, that fillers were not easily able to mix with partiers. Indeed some fillers were so exhausted the partying barely got started. Something that maybe should be addressed if we dig here again next year

However, your webmasters personal verdict on the dig: ***Absolutely Great !***