

## **EXCAVATION AT HURSLEY PARK 2021 – INTERIM REPORT**

Winchester Archaeology and Local History Group (WARG) undertook a two-week excavation in August 2021 in the grounds of Hursley Park, at the invitation of the landowners IBM. Parch marks in the lawn to the south of the current 18<sup>th</sup> century house had indicated the possible location of an earlier substantial building. Detailed documentary research by David Key (IBM volunteer historian) strongly suggested that this represented the remains of a Tudor house which was demolished when the 18<sup>th</sup> century house was constructed. The site, centred at NGR: SU 4225 2537, is situated to the south-west of Winchester on the edge of Hursley village.

### **HISTORICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE BUILDINGS IN HURSLEY PARK**

The site is located at the centre of the medieval deer park, the remains of which include extensive stretches of the park pale and fishponds, together with the remains of Merdon Castle which was itself built on the site of an iron age settlement. The deer park of 450 acres was created by Henry de Blois, Bishop of Winchester, following the accession to the throne of Henry II in 1154. Within the park the Bishop had a manorial court and palace at Merdon Castle, the defences having been slighted. At the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century historical sources indicate that the residence at Merdon Castle was increasingly neglected and a hunting lodge was erected in 1413 somewhere within the park (Peach 1995). In 1552 Sir Philip Hoby, a courtier to Edward VI, was granted the manor of Merdon and before circa 1555 he 'built the great lodge' (Marsh 1808). A detailed estate map of 1588 (Treswell 1588) depicts at its centre a building called 'The Plase'. The north facing building has a central entrance. Windows indicate two storeys and those on the first floor at the front of the building appear to be set into the roof in a dormer arrangement. A west wing projecting to the south appears to be single storey and has two prominent chimneys. Towards the eastern end of the building a smaller single-storey extension also projects to the south and appears to have one chimney. A fence or wall extends from the eastern and western ends of the building towards the south enclosing a possible garden. To the south-west and outside this enclosure there is a smaller rectangular building without a chimney. The red colouring of the roofs implies tile construction rather than slate or thatch.

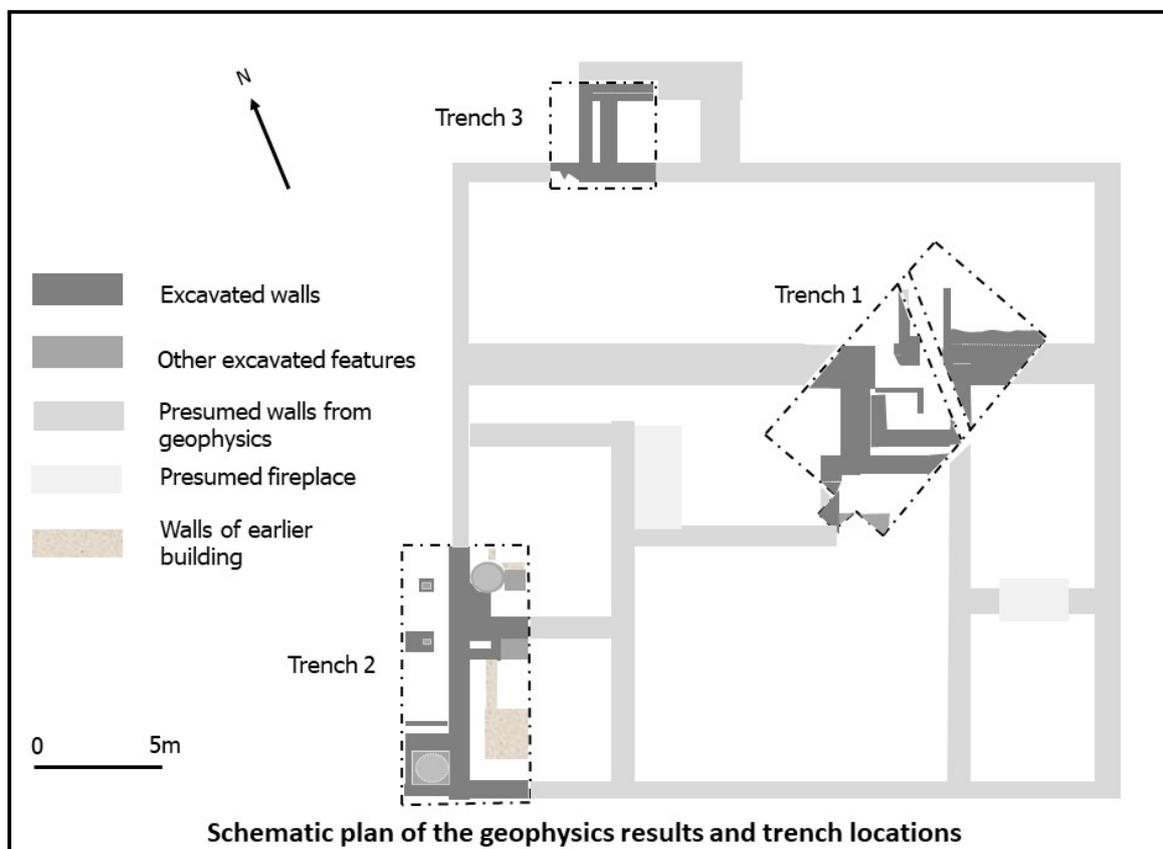
A very different building is suggested by the Hearth Tax of 1665 when the house was assessed at 28 hearths (Hughes & White 1991). This seems to be confirmed by a second drawing of the house which depicts a large number of chimneys (Marsh 1808). If the 1588 depiction is accurate the house must have been enlarged or rebuilt at some point between this date and 1665. One trigger for such enlargement might have been the purchase of the estate by Richard Maijor, a wealthy Southampton merchant, in 1639 (Barber 1991). In 1660 his daughter, Dorothy Maijor, inherited the estate. She was married to the son of Oliver Cromwell, Richard Cromwell, who had been Lord Protector for 9 months from 1658-9 following which he went into exile in Europe. After Dorothy's death in 1675 their son Oliver claimed the estate and lived there with his two elder sisters. When Richard returned to England around 1680, he didn't live at Hursley but used money from the estate to fund his

lifestyle in Middlesex and Hertfordshire. Oliver died in 1705 and in 1706 Richard described the house in a letter, noting the long gallery, porch with a chamber over, several chambers and parlours, together with details of the outbuildings which included a brewhouse, a dairy house, stables and gardens (Ramsey 1935). When Richard died in 1712 the surviving daughters claimed the estate and sold it six years later to William Heathcote.

Although William Heathcote intended to live in the house, he found it in a ruinous state. Documentary sources suggest that Oliver had neglected the estate and house while it was in his care (Malins 2010). This, combined with Richard's use of estate money to fund his own lifestyle, likely contributed to the dilapidation of the house. Heathcote planned to repair the roof in the spring of 1719 but eventually had to pull the building down and build a new house to the north. Letters written between 1721 and 1724, during construction of the new house, indicate that demolition was systematic and materials were re-used in the building of the new house. (63 M 84 / 232).

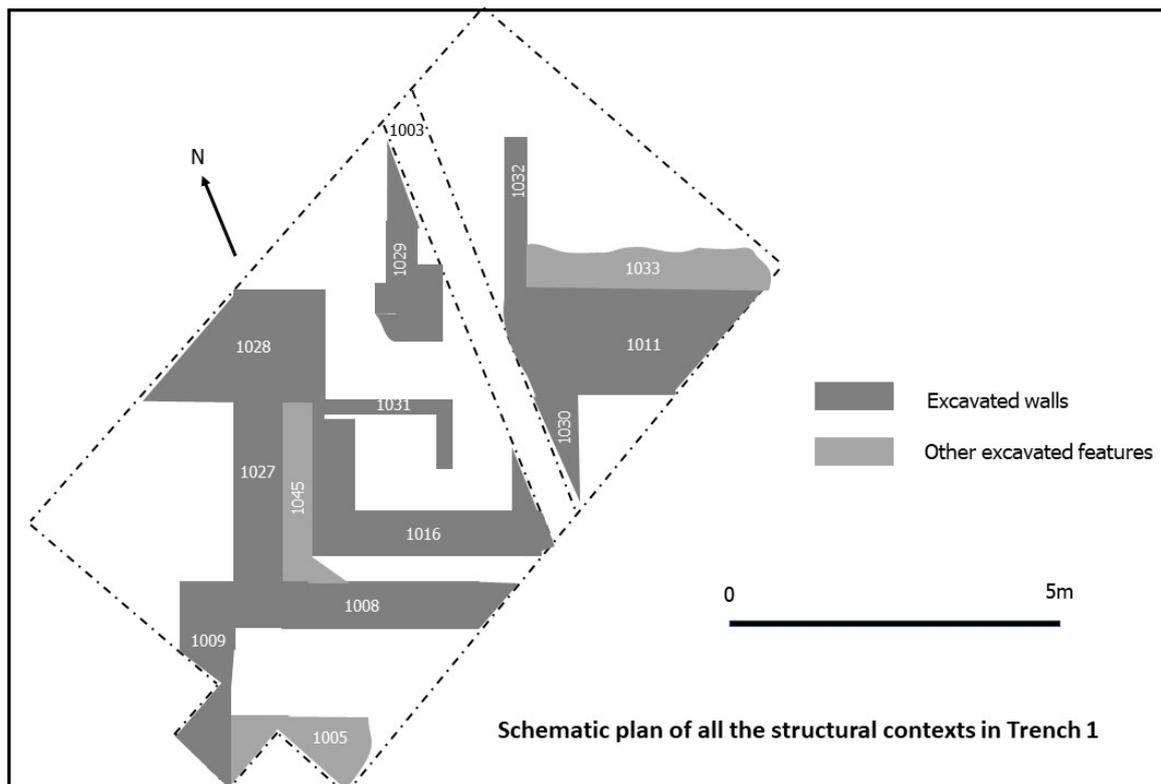
### EXCAVATION RESULTS

Prior to excavation a geophysical survey was undertaken using both soil resistivity and ground penetrating radar. The results confirmed the presence of a substantial building, indicating a rectangular north range c.30m long by 9m wide, parallel west and east wings projecting to the south c.14.5m, each wing 7.5m wide, with an enclosed area between them. This informed the trench locations.



Three trenches were opened. Trench 1 (10 x 6m) was sited over the north-east corner of the building to take in a large high resistance anomaly and a number of walls. Trench 2 (10 x 5m) targeted rooms at the south-west corner of the building including two high resistance features that could be fireplaces. Trench 3 (4m x 4m) was positioned to explore a rectangular feature extending beyond the assumed front of the building. The turf and remarkably clean topsoil were removed on each of the trenches (**1001, 2001, 3001**) to reveal a layer of gravel (**1004, 2002, 3002**) which had been imported to the site and contained a quantity of worked flint. The gravel was laid across the site to a depth of 50-120mm presumably to provide a free-draining, level substrate for the lawn. Demolition material came from both the gravel and the lowest levels of the topsoil as a result of settling and bioturbation over time. One modern feature was encountered: in Trench 1 a plastic drainage pipe with rodding point bisected the trench N-S (**1002, 1003**). It had presumably been laid using a mole borer as no cut was visible in the topsoil and it had disturbed the archaeology to a depth of c.0.50m. To protect the pipe a 0.50m baulk was left in place. During the excavation none of the exposed walls or wall footings were dismantled.

**Trench 1**



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Removal of the gravel revealed the tops of a number of brick structures separating areas of demolition material which in places was up to 120mm deep and overlay further walls and intervening surfaces (**1010, 1015, 1019**). In the area of the geophysical anomaly the demolition material was of a greater depth and consisted of larger pieces of masonry and

brick (**1007**). It was excavated to a depth of 0.5m and probing suggested a further depth of at least 0.9m indicating that it filled cellars or lower ground floor rooms.

In the wall plan revealed by removal of the demolition deposits the dominant feature was an E-W wall (**1011, 1028**) with a maximum width of 1.6m, corresponding to the south wall of the north range identified on the geophysics. The wall was interrupted at a point where three walls delineated a rectangular projection to the south measuring 3.5m N-S and 5.0m E-W externally. The eastern wall of the projection (**1030**) is in all probability the west wall of the east range shown on the geophysics. Therefore, this rectangular structure sits in the angle between the north range and the east wing. The south and west walls of the structure (**1008, 1027**) were 0.8m wide. The depth to the basal mortared flint foundation of **1008** was 0.3m from the top remaining brick course. There was a curious arrangement whereby an inner wall (**1016**) which was 0.65m wide, 0.45m to the pebbly mortar basal foundation, sat inside **1008** and **1027** with a gap of 0.35 – 0.40m between. The gap was filled in places with brick rubble and mortar (**1045**) and elsewhere by pre-existing soil. If not integral to the original design, this could be evidence for the alteration or strengthening of the building at this point. The rectangular area enclosed by these walls (1.56m N-S and 1.20m E-W) was filled with a silty pre-existing soil (**1012**), against which the walls had been built as evidenced by the poor finish and dribbles of mortar on their internal faces. **1012** was bounded on the north and partially on the east by a narrow retaining wall one brick wide (**1031**). A sloping surface cut into **1012** led directly towards the cellars/lower ground floor rooms and this lends weight to the interpretation of the rectangular projection as a stairwell, with the slope giving an indication of the angle of the stairs.

The stairs gave access to two corridors at the lower ground floor level, both 0.75-0.85m wide. From the foot of the stairs the eastern corridor continued due north while the western corridor turned a right angle west then north around an island wall (**1029**) before opening into a larger space or room. **1029** was wider at its southern end in line with the main house wall, presumably to support a lintel bridging the gap. Near the south entrance to the easterly corridor a door jamb was recessed into both of the flanking walls (**1029, 1032**) and beyond this the corridor widened to 1.25m. All of the walls associated with the corridors and lower ground floor rooms were rendered and plastered to a smooth flat finish, this even extending into the door jambs.

At 2.6m beyond the door jambs an opening in **1032** gave access to a vaulted room to the east of the corridor. The opposite side of the opening/doorway was beyond the limit of excavation but it was at least 1m wide. Assuming the doorway to be central a minimum internal width of the vaulted room has been calculated to be 5.2m. As elsewhere the demolition deposits in the south-west corner of the vaulted room were removed to a depth of 0.5m and not fully excavated. The barrel vaulting (**1033**) was constructed using whole bricks sprung from a wall parallel to the house wall (**1011**). If this wall was abutted directly against **1011** it was about 0.6m wide. As the vaulting progressed upwards the widening gap between it and **1011** was filled with mortared irregular brick rubble. The building had been demolished to 0.35m above the start of the vault springing so very little of it remained in situ. Assuming it followed the usual semi-circular construction for barrel vaulting and given

the minimum room width of 5.2m, the central height of the vaulting must have been at least 2.6m above the springing. This would give an internal room height of over 3.6m from the probed floor level of the lower ground floor. The walls and vaulting of this room were plastered to the same high standard as the corridor area. The plaster on the vaulting continued seamlessly down the face of the wall from which it sprung and round the corner onto the west wall of the room. However, above the level from which the vaulting sprung the west wall (**1032**) was seen to abutt the already plastered surface of the vault. This could represent two phases of building, the vaulted room belonging to the first phase and the west wall to the second, or it may be part of a staged building process.

### Trench 1: facing south (west of the modern pipe trench)



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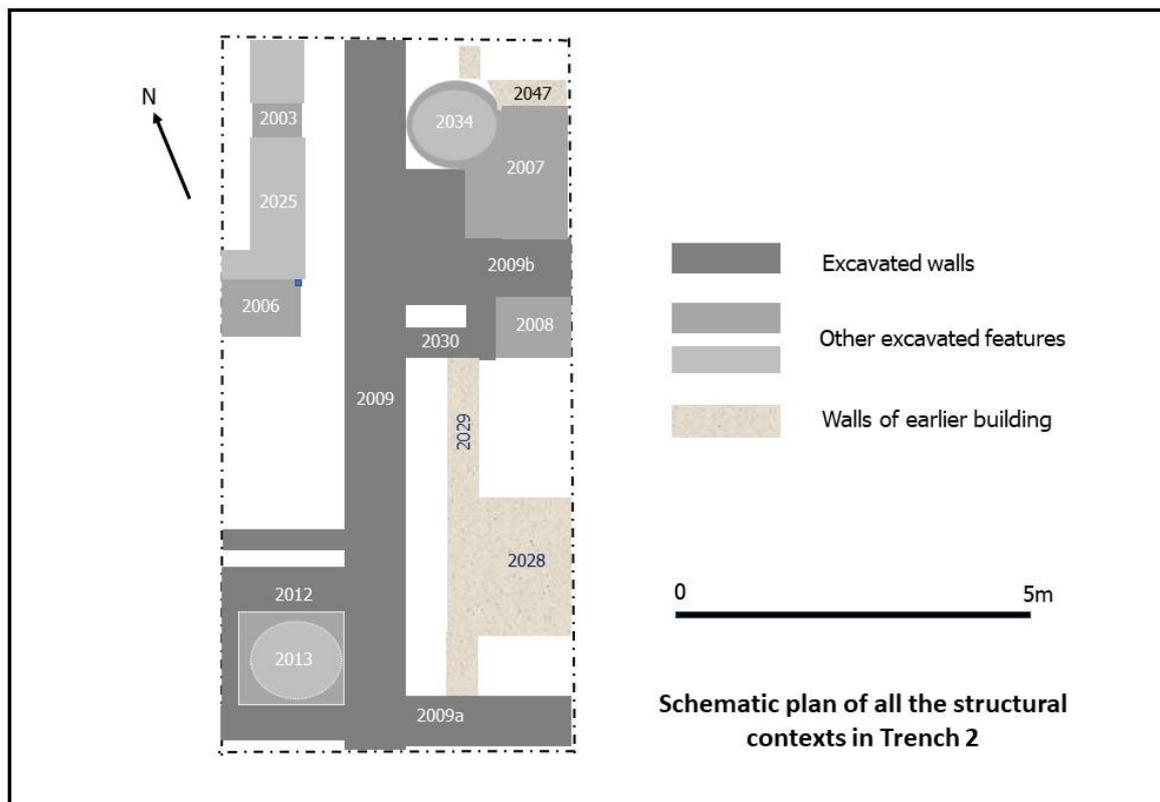
From the south-west corner of the stairwell, and bonded to it, wall **1009** (0.8m wide) extended due south to the edge of the trench. Bonded to **1009** and projecting from it at a right angle was a mortared flint platform (**1005**), 2.25m E-W (the dimensions N-S are beyond the trench edge). The flint nodules are poorly sorted (max 230mm x 180mm, min 110mm) and chalk appeared to have been rammed into the top surface. Towards the eastern edge of the platform and occupying a hollow within it, was a small area of unmortared bricks laid on edge and tightly set in six rows (**1006**), on a bed of yellow sand <10mm deep (**1042**). The bricks were soft and broke when lifted. To the side of the brick rows was a tumble of similar bricks which were not underlain with sand. A slot revealed a clayey silt soil (**1043**) underneath the sand. A chalk surface (**1013**) filled the space between the flint platform and the stairwell wall. The chalk particles ranged in size up to a maximum of 80mm and were set in a silty sand. The chalk surface was deepest to the north (max 80mm) and it thinned to the

south, petering out close to the flint platform. It was underlain by a silty sand (**1014**) containing roof tile fragments and charcoal. It is possible that the flint platform and chalk surface are within an enclosed courtyard/garden and it is hoped to clarify this in 2022.

In the west corner of the trench there was another chalk surface (**1020**) identical in composition to **1013**. It was 80mm deep alongside the stairwell wall **1027**, deepening to 150mm at a distance of 0.5m from the wall, from which point it sloped gently westwards. Cutting through **1020** was a single post hole (**1022**), 255 x 275mm x 440mm deep. Overlying the dip in **1020** in the extreme western trench corner was a layer of clean yellow sand (**1040**) 120mm max depth. The homogenous nature of the sand suggests that it does not represent demolition material. Above the sand was a layer of closely packed angular flint nodules (max 140 x 120mm, min 50 x 40mm) in a browny yellow clay (**1021**) 100mm deep, with occasional brick including two complete bricks laid end to end. Visible in the north-east and partially underlying **1020** was an orange brown silty clay (**1039**) with no inclusions. It was not excavated but its depth was revealed to be >0.3m in the cut of the post hole.

A small triangular area in the south-east also contained a patch of clean yellow sand (**1025**) directly beneath the demolition layer. The sand filled a depression in a sandy clay silt (**1024**) which contained occasional small flints, fragments of cbm (<50mm) and patches of charcoal. The geophysics suggests that this space is inside the east wing of the building which WARG hope to explore in more detail in 2022.

### Trench 2



The gravel in Trench 2 was underlain by a demolition deposit up to 80mm deep (**2005**) and when this was removed the dominant feature was a N-S wall (**2009**). This extended from the north baulk to within 0.25m of the south baulk where it turned a right angle, corresponding to the south-west corner of the west wing as depicted on the geophysics, before disappearing into the eastern baulk as wall **2009a**. Three metres south of the north baulk a spur from **2009** also projected eastwards into the east baulk (**2009b**). At the southern end of **2009** a small structure measuring 2.4m N-S and more than 1.6m E-W abutted it to the west. It was delineated by wall **2012** and inside there was a circular brick setting (**2013**) 1.2m in diameter. This showed evidence of burning and may have seated a large vessel or copper for heating water in relation to an activity such as laundry or brewing.

Wall **2009b** is a dividing wall between two of the rooms in the west wing with back-to-back fireplaces either side of it. The fireplace to the north (**2007**) was 1.6m wide and more than 1.1m long. It was constructed of brick and covered with blackened sand. To the west of **2007** was a sub-circular brick-floored structure 0.7m in diameter which may represent the base of an oven (**2034**). The fireplace to the south (**2008**) was 0.9m wide and more than 1.4m long disappearing into the east baulk, and was constructed of tiles on end with blackened sand between them. To the west of **2008** and occupying the angle between **2009** and **2009b** was a small enclosed space or cupboard 0.5 x 0.7m defined by wall **2030**, which had a chalk floor and a threshold to the south. The southern room, between **2008/2030** and **2009a** had a hard clay floor up to 0.35m deep (**2014**), this extended underneath fireplace **2008**. In the south-west corner of the room, c 0.4m from the walls but not parallel to them, a curious small brick-lined structure (0.35m square) had been sunk into the floor (**2042**). It is suggestive of a place of concealment. The contents included material that would not be out of place in the demolition deposit, but mixed with this was a concentration of metal objects including a small annular gold fitting/finger ring.

Removal of floor **2014** revealed two wall-like structures (**2028, 2029**). Wall **2028** extended 1.8m from the east baulk and was of a substantial size (1.8m wide). It had facings of large flints (max 300 x 150mm) and several dressed limestone blocks, including one 300mm square occupying its north-west corner. The core of the wall was packed chalk. The second wall (**2029**) abutted the NW corner of **2028** and extended north until it was truncated by wall **2030**. It was 0.3m wide and composed of mortared non-local stone blocks (max 210 x 160mm) and flints (max 200 x 140mm). Wall **2029** appeared to continue in the same alignment to the south of **2028** before being truncated by wall **2009a**. At the extreme northern end of the trench there was an indication that **2029** extended on the same alignment and into the north baulk. In the north-east corner of the trench another wall (**2047**), similar to **2029**, extended c 1.5m from the east baulk where it merged with the possible continuation of **2029**. A large block of re-used masonry was built into the north face of **2047**. These three walls must pre-date the brick building, or its latest phase, but it is noteworthy that they are on exactly the same alignment as the nearby brick walls and must have been visible when these were built and the clay floor was laid. There was no dating evidence associated with the earlier walls. This will be a key area for further investigation in the 2022 season.

Below floor **2014** in the area between walls **2009** and **2028/2029** there were two shallow dumps of material, **2022** to the south and **2036** to the north. The silty sand of **2022** contained some fragments of building material (glass and tile) and a large quantity of oyster shell, presumably consumed by demolition/construction workers. It is unlikely that this represents a habitation midden, given the small quantity of bone and other refuse and its position so close to a building. Deposit **2036** was composed of compacted flint and tile fragments (c70%) in a silty sand matrix and represents a small dump of demolition/construction material.

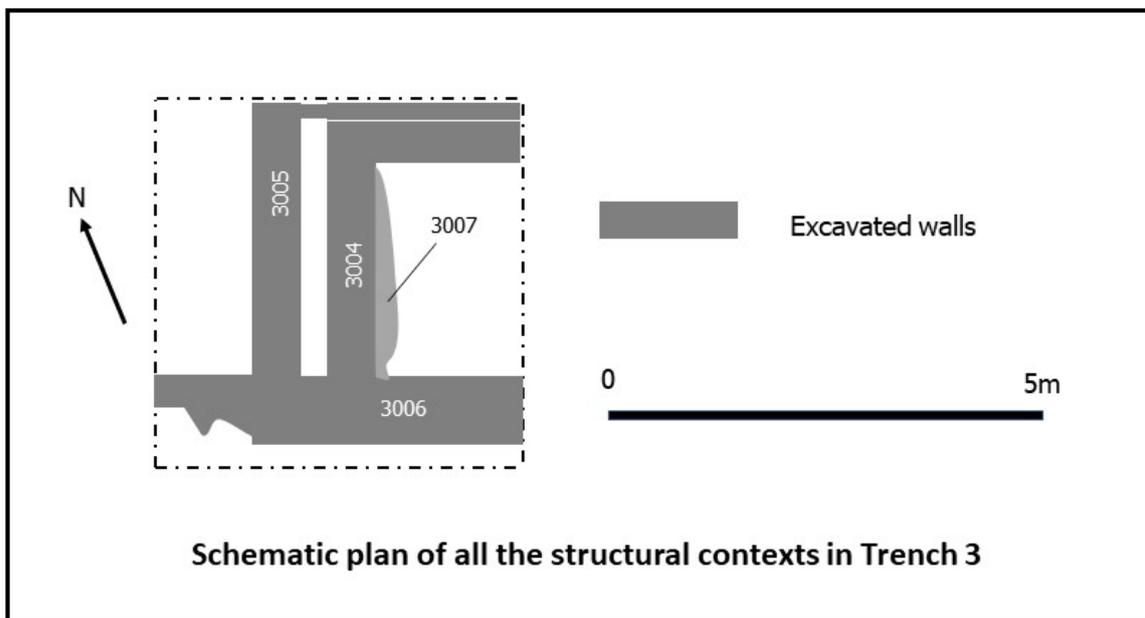
Outside the building to the west of wall **2009** there were two brick plinths (**2003**, **2006**) and a paved brick surface (**2025**) which were associated with a demolition deposit (**2017**) overlain by a chalk surface (**2004**). The plinths are suggestive of a verandah or walkway along the side of the west wing. The surface of **2025** sloped steeply into the north-west corner of the trench possibly indicating the presence of an earlier feature below. This will be further investigated in 2022. South of plinth **2006** there was a substantial dump of tile (**2055**), with no associated brick. This was below a layer of dark soil with minimal cbm inclusions (**2046**), which in turn was below a demolition deposit consisting of c70% crushed mortar (**2039**). This may represent two distinct demolition horizons, although only separated by a layer of soil 120mm deep (**2046**). Elsewhere on the site there was a similar occurrence of roof tile in layers low in the stratigraphic sequence which were likewise devoid of brick.

### Trench 2: facing south



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### Trench 3



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Removal of the gravel revealed an E-W wall (**3006**) corresponding to the north wall of the north range as depicted faintly on the geophysics. It was 0.8m wide and a sondage (1 x 0.2m x 0.4m deep) against the south face revealed six courses of bricks above a basal foundation of mortar and flint c.0.4m below the top surviving course. The sondage was cut through demolition deposits the depth and nature of which suggested that it may have filled a cellar/lower ground floor room similar to Trench 1. However, the relatively shallow foundation of **3006** calls into question the possibility of a lower ground floor room here. There appeared not to be a plaster finish to the interior face of **3006** which also argues against this being the wall of a lower ground floor room.

Recessed into **3006** at the western end of the trench was a window sill, 0.35m wide and >0.6m long before it disappeared into the western baulk. The sill was composed of two blocks of non-local stone, the completely exposed block being 0.45m long. These were chamfered on the north and south faces, with a moulding at the eastern end. A rough groove along the centre line, together with a square-section hole where the two blocks join, are indicative of glazing. If the lower ground floor rooms did extend to the front of the building this could be one of a series of windows that lit these rooms. Conversely, if the rooms at the front of the house were at ground floor level it is possible that the window sill had been re-used as a door threshold.

Outside the building to the north of the sill was an area of pitched pavements of non-local stone extending 0.6m from the building. It is unclear whether these represent a disturbed *in*

*situ* surface or a dump of demolition material. Beyond the paviments was a surface of tightly packed flint nodules (**3010**). The nodules were poorly sorted (max 200 x 100mm, min 40mm) creating an irregular surface.

To the east of the flint surface and paviments was a wall (**3005**) which abutted **3006** at a right angle. Wall **3005** was 0.7m wide and after 2.8m it turned through 90° to the east where it continued for 2.2m before disappearing into the eastern baulk. The geophysics suggests that there was a return wall creating an enclosed rectangular space. A second wall (**3004**), 0.6m wide, sat inside **3005** in an arrangement similar to that encountered in Trench 1. On the western arm of the rectangle, the space between **3005** and **3004** was 0.2m wide and filled with mortar. On the northern arm the two walls were abutted closely together leaving no space between them. The area within the rectangle was filled with a reddish orange clay (**3003**) and a small sondage which did not bottom it revealed its depth to be >0.20m. When **3003** was partially removed alongside **3004** it exposed a layer of mortared brick (**3007**) at least two courses deep. It appeared to be a stepped foundation to **3004** which extended along the full length of the western arm, protruding to a maximum of 0.4m. The function of the rectangular extension is unclear. It is not central to the building but nevertheless could be the foundation of a portico leading up to the main front entrance. Alternatively, it could be the base of projecting bay windows, in which case there would likely have been a twin the other side of a central entrance which has not been picked up by the geophysics. WARG intend to return to this area in 2022.

### Trench 3: facing south



## SUMMARY

Targeted excavation has confirmed the presence of a substantial brick-built house below the lawn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century house at Hursley Park and has established that the parch marks and geophysical survey provide an overview of the house plan. The presence of a main north range and a west wing has been confirmed. A stairwell projecting to the south of the north range gave access to lower ground floor rooms beneath it, including a vaulted room which extended the full width of the range. The smooth plaster finish on the walls of the corridors and rooms in the lower ground floor suggests that these acted as service rooms in addition to storage. The projected height of the vaulted room indicates that the upper ground floor of the north range would have been at approximately 2m above ground level. The west wing had rooms at ground level and is a service wing where activities such as laundry, brewing or cooking took place. Excavation confirmed the presence of a projecting structure to the front of the building but not set centrally. This may be connected with the entrance arrangement to the upper ground floor, or is the foundation of projecting bay windows.

The exposed walls were of a similar width throughout (0.65-0.8m) apart from the south wall of the north range which was much wider (1.6m). This width of wall does not appear to have been replicated at the front of the house where the north wall of the north range was only 0.8m wide. The wall construction followed a similar pattern throughout. Where foundations were exposed these were of mortared flint and reached a depth of 0.3-0.45m below the top surviving course. Above the foundations the walls were faced with brick in either stretcher or header bond and enough courses survived in places to assume the use of English Bond. The wall cores were of mortared brick and part-brick laid randomly. Several walls indicated the use of a levelling tile course at approximately ground level. The curious 'double walls' in the stairwell and the projection at the front of the house add strength to these structures and may indicate a second phase of building. The only exposed *in situ* floor surface was the clay floor/floor substrate in the west wing. The wall foundations below this floor are evidence of an earlier building.

The house had been systematically and carefully demolished with all the walls reduced to a similar height. Some of the resulting demolition material was compacted into the lower ground floor rooms and also spread as a layer up to 120mm deep over the site. This was then topped with a layer of gravel, presumably to create a level surface and to aid drainage of the immaculate lawn that was laid to the south of the new house. The selective re-use of demolition material is suggested by the minimal presence of decorative stonework, decorated brick, whole bricks, flooring material and window lead and glass. Low in the stratigraphic sequence in Trenches 1 and 2 a demolition horizon containing roof tile but devoid of brick may relate to an earlier building on the site.

## THE PORTABLE FINDS

The portable finds from the site have illustrated several aspects of the life of the house and its occupants.

Most of the finds of materials used in the fabric of the house came from the demolition deposits. It is important to remember that what survives on site is likely to be the 'dregs' of the demolition process, with documentary evidence suggesting that there was extensive re-use of materials in the new house. However, the fragments that were found provide important architectural details. Evidence for flooring materials, of which none were found *in situ*, took the form of limestone paving slabs and black-glazed floor tiles. Numerically the former dominate, but this may reflect the selective re-use of glazed floor tiles over limestone slabs. The building was roofed with clay tiles (280x178x14mm) with examples of both round and square peg holes. There was one piece of a cock's comb ridge tile. Nearly 3.5kg of slate was recovered from the site, but the average size of the pieces was just 15g and no peg holes were found so it is unclear whether these derive from roofing material or the slate was used in some other way. A few pieces of decorative brick were found, and there were many vitrified bricks which could have been used for patterned brickwork. The windows were leaded and glazed although no complete panes have been found. There was very little window lead amongst the demolition and several pieces were in a semi-molten mass indicating that the lead was probably melted down on site possibly for re-use in the new house. A few pieces of decorated masonry indicate the use of carved stonework for interior features such as fireplaces, and fragments of polychrome tile with geometric and foliate designs add colour to the interior decoration. A gilt lead mount in the shape of a six-pointed star again gives a hint of decorative detail.

Artefacts connected to domestic activity came in the form of pins, a thimble and a lead palm guard as evidence of sewing, and the foot of a copper alloy cooking cauldron. A few personal dress items such as a small rumbler bell, a buckle, numerous lace tags and the finger ring, together with the clay pipes, wine bottles and a halfpenny token from the Bush Inn, Bagshot, bring us closer to the individuals who lived here. As do the three keys found close together at the front of the house.

The pottery includes imported stonewares from the Rhineland and wares from Staffordshire, as well as more local wares from the Surrey/Hampshire border and the Verwood area of Dorset. Little of the pottery could be described as fine table ware, but fragments from stemmed glasses and a finely decorated bone cutlery handle speak of greater refinement at the top table.

Apart from a collection of flint implements brought in with the gravel layer, all the stratified finds sit comfortably within the mid-16<sup>th</sup> to early 18<sup>th</sup> century bracket for the site, and some artefacts such as the clay pipes, pottery and individual objects, for example the thimble, are enabling finer dating of some of the contexts.

Polychrome tile from Trench 2



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Decorated masonry from Trench 1



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