



WARG
1972-2012

Recent Excavations – St Cross

St Cross Park, the land to the south of the main Hospital buildings at St Cross, is a mass of lumps and bumps, clearly man-made and mouth-watering for an archaeologist. WARG's excavations between 2007 and 2010 project has related some of the lumps and bumps to features in maps and documents and has also discovered what may be some of the earliest buildings of the Hospital.

Hospital of St Cross and Almshouse of Noble Poverty

St Cross Hospital was founded by Bishop Henry of Blois around 1130 as a refuge for 13 old men, too feeble to look after themselves, and to provide a daily meal for 100 poor men from Winchester. In the 1440s Cardinal Beaufort, Bishop of Winchester, founded the Almshouse of Noble Poverty, and rebuilt much of the site, creating the quadrangle we see today. By the end of the 18th century the hospital was in poor repair and in 1789 the south range, close to ruinous, was demolished and replaced by the current low wall and iron railings, opening up the courtyard to the light from the south.

Drains and water features

A thread through much of the digging was the artificial stream, called the Lockburn, which today runs behind the western range of the Brothers' apartments and then through a conduit into an open stream that eventually flows into the River Itchen. The original function of this stream was to act as a sewer for the Brothers' lavatories, and as we exposed the foundations of the demolished south range, it was clear that the same, well-engineered sewer ran behind them. But originally it ran not straight into the river but into a deep "water feature" - a rectangular island with water on all four sides - before going to the river. Much of this was filled by demolition rubble, almost certainly from the south range, and at the same time there was landscaping to make the most of the revealed view. The function of the "water feature", which John Crook found on a late 18th century map, is unclear, but it may have been a fish pond, for Friday meals.

Boundary walls, ditches and pits

To the south of the wall to the Brothers' gardens it is easy to see a large rectangular feature in the ground. This has been the cause for much speculation, but excavation revealed that it was a wall and a map found by Dr Crook showed a wall surrounding the garden for the inhabitants of the south range. Running south through the park and then along the southern boundary is a ditch. This was found to be very deep, and not to have held water. At the northern end of the ditch it cuts through a Saxon period pit, possibly for tanning. This means

that the ditch was dug after the pit was closed, probably as the boundary to the hospital property.

A small trench just inside the quadrangle and outside the chapel found what might be a well, and confirmed that the boundary fence is on the foundations of the missing south range.

Foundations

A geo-physical survey through the bowling green, to the east of the main quadrangle, showed strong signals. A very short dig, over a weekend, revealed the large stone foundations of a previously unknown range of buildings, which extends into the Brothers' graveyard. These are probably the original Blois buildings, later demolished when Beaufort's buildings were completed.

Other bumps

Some of the bumps, which initially revealed medieval material, later produced Victorian discarded rubbish. This is probably where the material from the mid-nineteenth century restoration was dumped, to create landscape interest. In the same area a small building - possibly a pig sty - was found.

Conclusions

The foundations in the bowling green are an important discovery, and when excavated will throw light on the early days of St Cross. The rest of the excavations were an example of archaeology providing the physical evidence to support the documentary evidence of the history of the site, from a functioning south range which closed the quadrangle, to an open view with nineteenth century landscaping.

Acknowledgements



Everything stops for tea

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Trowelling away earth to expose archaeology



The foundations of the south range, with different conduits for the Lockburn



These may be the foundations of the original buildings of St Cross, previously unknown.



A disused conduit for the Lockburn



The bowling green – site of the original buildings



A bowl buried in a layer of kitchen rubbish



The boundary ditch cuts through a Saxon pit