

## Webmaster's Diary 2013 (Most recent days first)

### Day 15 6<sup>th</sup> September

And so it was that the happy diggers approached that time when we said goodbye to our trenches and committed the past back to the darkness of being covered with soil. But not before our final important visitor, Councillor Ernie Jeffs, the Mayor of Winchester. had the honour of kicking off the backfill process after his tour of the trenches. Unfortunately I didn't take a picture as I was stuck in Trench 1 doing some drawing!



In fact there were people still milling around in trenches doing various last minute things. Briony and Jo James set to work clarifying the hearth under the western wall, and after some hours of careful trowelling came up with a magnificent example of a small Medieval smelting platform, with some lead ingots still in place (section left). This may enable us to date when this hearth feature was used relative to the demolition process.

We are researching how this hearth would have worked, and are interested to know whether the same thing was going on in the eastern part of the trench, where a very late section across the two hearths was showing some more interesting features.

Meanwhile the backfilling continued apace while planning of both trenches continued, and by the end of the day good progress had been made – at least enough to give us a good insight as to how long the rest of it would take!



There are Medieval tiles here!



And a large hole under here.

## Day 14 5<sup>th</sup> September

Wrapping up a WARG dig is a balancing act between competing objectives. On the one hand the logistics dictate the date on which all the hired equipment: containers, loos, transit van, total station, must be returned. Secondly we have to fill up the trenches we emptied, and return the ground to the original state we found it in. The third hand must ensure that the maximum information can be derived from the site and we record what we have exposed and to a large extent destroyed, to make the whole exercise worthwhile.

Our four backfill days – i.e. when everyone turning up on site can expect to be shifting dirt – are meant to ensure that balance is possible, taking into consideration such other variables as weather, resources, size of trench, nature of backfill and so on.

Today the number of people turning up was down, as expected, but the jobs required to be done suited that number. There was trowelling in Trench 2 where the front of the larger building or aisle had the best array of dressed stone, with the doorway and various internal features, pilaster bases, dressed corners and a superb piece of scrollwork on a block of limestone though possibly out of context.

We bottomed out Trench 1 where we had found the supposed oven hearth area over the demolished eastern wall. We have reached “natural” there, and the day was spent by Briony, Gareth and Chris Elmer cleaning the eastern end of the trench prior to photography.

Stuart, James and Ed got stuck into recording parts of Trench 1 and the eastern wall in Trench 2 while Techer and Steve began the very complex planning of Trench 2. I finished planning and sectioning the middle part of Trench 1 while Ray did some detailed analysis of the *in situ* tiles in terms of size and colour – important facets in trying to date the floor.

Our breakthrough though is due to an early visit by John Crook which enabled us to consider the notion that we had two phases of building and that the bulk of our finds were a later build, not Henri de Blois. This was largely predicated on finding some slate, seemingly under the main wall foundation. Two things happened. After recording this dark layer its removal revealed it to be a fill from above, a pit into the foundations filled with soil and rubble.

The second piece of evidence is that the dressed stone in the internal north-west corner is Quarr limestone. This Isle-of-Wight quarry was worked out by the 12<sup>th</sup> Century and is here relatively early. All in all this confirmed the likelihood that we have indeed found and recorded Henri de Blois’ original hospital buildings.

Objectives are therefore being hit from all directions and more importantly, without tipping over those balance scales.

## Day 13 4<sup>th</sup> September

Are you still there, dear reader? I have been most pleased by comments I've had back from people as to how interesting they have found my diary. After a convivial day it can be a bit lonely sat here talking to my keyboard. But I do hope it has been informative and we'll keep going to the bitter end when all those holes in the ground are tidily filled in. Hopefully it will have given you a rounded view of what a dig can be all about.

That filling-in stage is getting closer as we accelerated away into the process of drawing and photographing the trenches. They will be left exposed until Friday morning as we have a final evening visit planned for Thursday.



Today, though, it was the turn of the St. Cross brothers to be given the low-down on the current situation, and after Matins, about a dozen of them and the Master were shown around the site by the tireless Techer. It is fascinating to realise what a collective knowledge these men have of Winchester, their home at St. Cross, and various other parts of the country and how the histories of all these knit together.

Back in the trenches, work carried on as drawing and photography proceeded around the diggers. We opened a new slice of Trench 2 in order to try and establish whether we had one large hall which had the smaller building added later on, and also pinpoint the position and quality of the internal corners of the north side of the buildings. Rapid trowelling progress was made through the rubble layers, and we at last seem to have a clear view of the internal layout.

Here in Trench 2, many hands make light work as a surprised Val Pegg drops her guard and is caught briefly *not trowelling* next to Obergruppenfuhrer Steve Taylor.

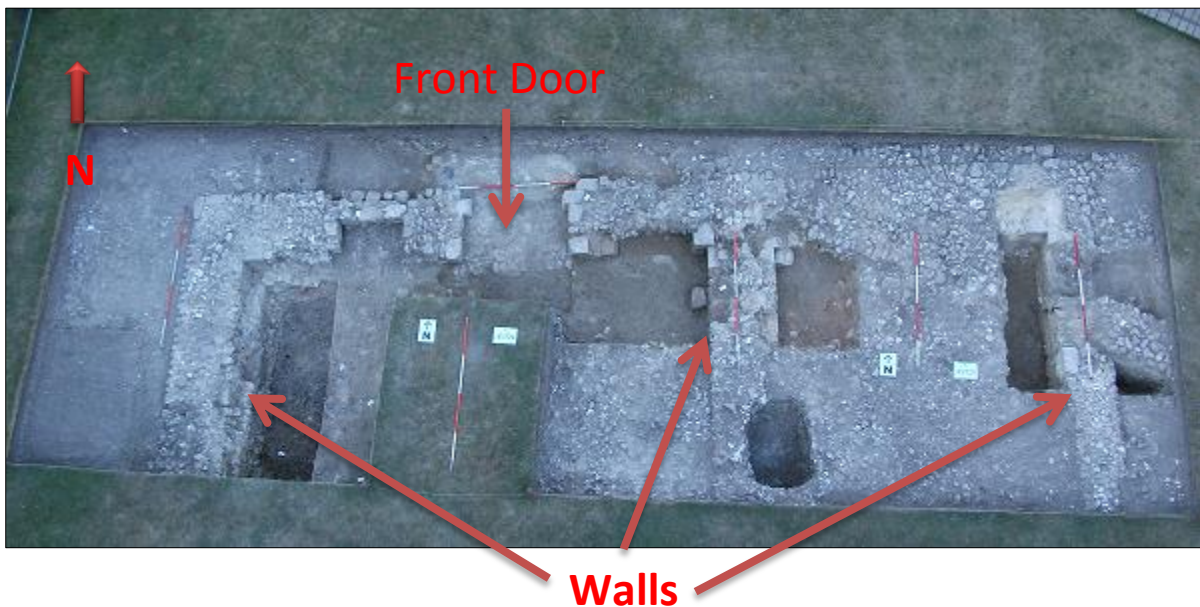


Late on in a day which saw temperatures of 28°, the prearranged cherry-picker arrived and was put to work ferrying a number of people aloft to get some photographs for both the scrapbook and the archive record. John Hare had a broad grin on his face after returning to the Earth, and Brother Clive, a keen photographer, continued to document his story of “the day WARG came to town”.



I was lucky enough to be earmarked to take the archive shots which involved getting as vertical as possible over the trenches. To avoid parallax the cage was raised to some 70 feet above the ground as you can see, and I have to say the view was quite astonishing. I took some lovely shots of St. Cross and St. Catherine’s Hill for my own archives, but the height (or should I say altitude) allowed us to record the layout of the buildings as fully as this year’s timescale will allow.

You can clearly see below in this test shot of Trench 2 how our trenches are positioned to bring out the important structures and their relationships. The archive shots are, of course, much clearer.



## Day 12 3<sup>rd</sup> September

Visitors: when you're at home you anticipate them, they arrive and drink all the good wine, and after a while you can't wait for them to go – using hints like “I must wind up the alarm clock, I always do at bedtime,” go unheeded.

Not so at WARG digs, we can't wait to drag 'em kicking and screaming off the pavement. As well as our highly successful Open Day we have a number of evenings where societies and invited guests are given detailed guided tours respectful of their own interests and knowledge levels. Tonight it was the turn of the [Hampshire Field Club](#), of which I am a member, forty members of which turned up for wine and nibbles in our mess tent and guided tours by Don, Dick and me.

What is interesting about these visits is that the story is never the same twice. This isn't down to our memories (honest), but the fact that the archaeology keeps changing day-to-day means we have to rethink our patter.



That is coupled with the other sort of visitor we get, those who have knowledge of the St. Cross establishment, its history, and of Winchester as a whole and can add their two-penneth worth. John Crook is a regular visitor who has been especially eyeing-up the dressed stone which is located at strategically important architectural points in our building(s), such as the inside and outside corners of the walls, the jambs of the doors and mouldings which match those in part of the St. Cross Church.

Today, however, we were honoured by the presence of Professor Martin Biddle, who spent a couple of hours talking through ideas with the supervisors, meeting some of the diggers and generally taking in the ambience of this most friendly of excavations.

Various theories have been put forward during this dig, not least of which the multi-phased nature of the development of these buildings – oh yes, we may well have a range of buildings which have developed over time. The most dramatic of these is the possibility that the original de Blois-age building, represented by the chalk block foundation, was itself soon superseded by another, possibly larger, longer and *itself* multi-phased, structure.

This whole dig is beginning to throw us some challenges in our understanding and interpretation capabilities. What is absolutely clear is that everybody is learning from the experience.

## Day 11 2<sup>nd</sup> September

Well we've all heard of beginner's luck, and some of us have experienced it. Some of us still consider ourselves beginners after six or seven years of digging and are waiting for the elusive find that brings the month-long smile. Well, Matt and Rob Greening turned up this morning to sample for the first time the delights of excavating. And there was plenty to do. Trench 2 was about to have much of its rubble removed near the main door to both expose the door structures and examine the north-west corner to see what was below the demolition levelling layer.



Also in Trench 2 we have decided to examine the interaction between the diagonal wall/path and the north-east corner, and understand the build of the north-east foundations in the process. Experienced digger Rick Sharp was given the responsibility of sorting out the order of play and recording these relationships and did a fine job as you can see.

Budding archaeologist James Bannister is back in action as he was given the task of setting out an extension to Trench 1 to capture the other door jamb of the blocked up door and fast work he and his team of two more first-timers made of it.

Back in Trench 2 more door structures were found of massive dressed limestone blocks with chamfers, the largest having chamfer and arris decoration which could only be described as "top quality". John Crook believes the types of blocks show a series of construction phases.



And back in Trench 1, as Briony's team made her way down the levels with Mike, Caroline and Rory, our new boys on the block, Matt and Rob, clearing away to the east of the central wall suddenly announced that they had found some *in situ* tiles. And what tiles! Not just a couple but a whole line of glazed tiles, mortared in place and disappearing under the southern edge of the trench. Debate began as to grandness/status, whether later than de Blois floors, whether utilitarian or high class residential etc. etc. Nothing detracts from the fact that while yours truly asked the finders to "bring that layer down to define the edge of the wall", that the beginners luckily achieved just a tad more.

## Day 10 1<sup>st</sup> September

Yes, I've had to start another document. Apparently one or two people were having difficulties as my previous diary entries were taking so long to download! It would seem that people couldn't get the diary downloaded quickly enough to hear the latest news from the trenches (as it were).

Well this month certainly started with a bang as the dig Open Day hit town. As in some previous years the site was converted into a tour route, with Dick Selwood giving visitors an initial chat about the history of St. Cross and why we were here, and Techer, Dick Whinney, Steve and Don giving short but thorough tours to groups of about 20 or so. We weren't actually counting numbers but at lunchtime Techer reckoned that he'd "toured" 70 people. Times that by four for the guides, then times two for the afternoon, well, you get the idea. So all in all we had hundreds of visitors, and it was constant from 10am to 4pm.



Not only tours, of course, but Robin Iles, Helen Rees and Mark Barden from Winchester Museums turned up with a stall showing medieval pottery and pilgrims' badges, Julia was showing finds from the dig and selling local history and archaeology books, and Val Pegg entertained the children with a "Discover What's Buried in the Sand" game – as you can see.



The main business of the day continued, of course, with a mixture of recording and extension of trenches, most especially, taking the baulk out in Trench 2 to clarify the situation around the main door of our building. Here more dressed stone was revealed, some of which had been reused in the blocking of the gap to the west of the main door. The longer the dig goes on, the clearer it becomes that this building has a complex history of redesign and re-use. If only we could get more dating evidence, of an older nature than a George III penny!