

2004 Excavation Results

5.2 Trench 27

Figures: 15, 16 and 17.

Trench 6 which was excavated in 1999 had confirmed the presence of an enclosure ditch in Area B at a point some 10m to the north of the Old Vicarage wall. Trench 6 was one of series of 5 trenches which established the line of this ditch across Area B. They were by design relatively narrow trenches as their purpose was simply to confirm the presence of the ditch. Along with 3 larger trenches excavated over the ditch in the east half of Area B they provided a perfectly logical basis on which to project possible routes for the ditch south and east out of Area B.

The natural southerly extension would link the ditch in Trench 6 with the section of ditch revealed in Area A by Trench 1 during excavations between 1998 and 2000. The ditch in Trench 1 was larger and deeper than the sections seen in Area B. However with the evidence available at the time it did not seem unreasonable to assume that this was a consequence of the ditch fulfilling different requirements at different points on its circuit of the hill top. The discovery of what was possibly a large post pit adjacent to Trench 1 raised the possibility that the ditch in this location was cut larger as part of an entranceway. Although only partially excavated in 1999, the ditch was visible in Trench 2 running into the churchyard of Saint Thomas's. Although excavation and geophysical survey are not practical within the churchyard it does seem likely that the line of the south arm of the ditch is marked by the eastward curve of the churchyard wall.

In 2003 Trench 18 was excavated at the opposite end of Area A to Trenches 1 and 2. Trench 18 contained a section of ditch comparable in size to that in Trench 1. Trench 26 showed that this section of ditch did not continue directly north across the drive of the Old Vicarage into Area C. This suggested that it curved west and followed the line of what is now the drive towards Trench 1.

The implication of this was that there were probably two ditches in this part of the hilltop. A large inner ditch running between Trenches 1 and 18 following the line of the drive and the south churchyard wall encompassing the area occupied by the church and the Old Vicarage and a less substantial but more extensive ditch enclosing a much larger area of the hilltop.

While it is believed that both ditches have their origins in the Iron Age there are difficulties in making a more precise interpretation of their chronological and stratigraphical relationship to each other. Although Iron Age pottery has been found in both ditches the lack of a regional typological sequence means that only the broadest date ranges can be assigned to these finds. In terms of excavation if the two ditches do merge then potential intersection probably lies somewhere below the Old Vicarage.

In order to investigate the possibility that the two ditches did not meet, Trench 25 was excavated just to the north-west of Trench 1. The purpose of this trench was to look for the outer enclosure ditch its presence would provide strong evidence that the two ditches did not join up. While there was no sign of the ditch the trench did reveal the fascinating fact that the flat nature of this part of the garden was the result of an extensive piece of possibly 19th century landscaping which had levelled up the natural slope of the hill.

In 2002 Trench 17 was excavated in the field immediately to the north of the Old Vicarage wall. The purpose of this trench was to provide another section across the enclosure ditch and to see if any evidence survived of a track way running into the field from the Old Vicarage drive. While

the surface of a 19th century cinder track was uncovered it was found that quarrying had removed any evidence of the enclosure ditch at this location.

The need to investigate the extent of the quarrying and landscaping and the desire to gain as clear an indication as possible of the alignment of the outer enclosure prompted the excavation of Trench 27. The trench measured 5.2 metres wide and 14 metres in length and was orientated north to south. It followed a very gradual slope within Area B towards the boundary wall with Area A. Upon removal of the topsoil and subsoil natural bedrock (510) was encountered almost immediately. Cut into the bedrock the outer enclosure ditch [501] ran the length of the trench. At the north end of the trench it was 1.55 metres wide and 1.15 metres deep. These dimensions are very similar to those seen in other trenches to the north and east in Area B. As it ran south in Trench 27 the ditch became shallower and narrower. At the south end of the trench it measured 0.55m wide by 0.25m deep.

The ditch was completely excavated in Trench 27 with 6 sections being recorded. Several similarities were visible between the sections. They all contained the same upper fill, (502) this was a mid brown sandy silt containing moderate amounts of small sandstone fragments. This was the only ditch fill present in the 2 most southerly sections. Context (502) did not appear in section 165 as this was the location of Trench 6 and consequently only contained backfilling material. At the north end of the trench, in section 173, fill (502) was 0.38m deep. This depth remained consistent through sections 171 and 168. In section 166, towards the north end of the trench, (502) was slightly deeper at 0.55m. Below this, in the three most northerly sections, was context (503). This was a distinctive mid orange brown sandy silt containing frequent small and medium fragments of sandstone. Below this, in the two most northerly sections, was fill (504). In terms of stone inclusions (504) and (503) were very similar they differed mainly in colour (504) being much paler with a yellowish brown hue.

Discussion

There is a discrepancy in height between the Old Vicarage and the part of Area B immediately adjacent to it, north of the boundary wall. Standing on the stone flags of the Old Vicarage when one looks over the wall the field of Area A is some 1.80m lower than the flag stones. The difference in size between the two ends of the ditch in Trench 27 might indicate that the ditch in the southern half has had the top 0.50m truncated. It is possible that this was because a segment of the slope in Area B has been terraced away. The excavated material could have been used to level up the slope within Area A and the boundary wall built to retain the levelling material and formalise the terrace. This would fit in with the evidence from Trench 25 of a deliberate landscaping programme to create a level garden on the east and north side of the Old Vicarage. No artefacts were recovered from the ditch itself; however a large quantity of post medieval pottery was recovered from the topsoil and the subsoil which could possibly be indicative of the owners of the Old Vicarage depositing their waste over the wall into the field. A similar abundance of post medieval pottery was found in 2002 during the excavation of Trench 17. To the south of the trench there was an area which shows the continuation of the post medieval quarrying identified within Trench 17. It is possible that the quarrying, terracing and landscaping were part of the same works with the quarrying providing stone for the construction of the boundary/retaining wall. The evidence from Trench 27 excavated over the enclosure ditch seems to support the theory that the hilltop at the west end of Area A has been extensively landscaped. It would seem that the natural slope of the hill between Area A and Area B would have followed a line drawn between the natural bedrock at the side of the ditch in Trench 1 to the natural bedrock approximately half way along Trench 27, at the side of the enclosure ditch.