

8. 2005 Excavation Results

8.1 Trench 33

Figures: 26,27,28,29,30,31,32, 33, 34, 35 and 36.

During the 1998, 1999 and 2000 seasons, excavation was conducted over a geophysical anomaly identified at the western end of Area A. The subsequent excavation of Trench 1 identified a large rock-cut enclosure ditch measuring 4.00m at its widest point and 2.10m deep from the present ground surface. Trench 2, located in the south western corner of the garden, identified the continuation of the inner enclosure ditch and the presence of a possible associated palisade slot.

Trench 33 was specifically designed to clarify whether or not this ditch could be identified in between Trenches 1 and 2. By excavating a greater area within the garden than previously attempted, it was anticipated that not only would the nature and extent of the ditch be revealed, but that any surrounding archaeological features which could possibly relate to the ditch, such as the continuation of the palisade slot, and any internal features indicative of an entranceway and associated structures would be identified.

The trench was machine excavated to a height immediately above the archaeological layers and the remainder hand excavated. Measuring approximately 19.6m by 12.0m, the irregular outline and shape of the trench was determined by the need to protect as much of the garden and accompanying trees as possible. The geology of the trench varies across its entirety. An area of solid sandstone bedrock was identified within the central and eastern segments of the trench, overlain in the majority of the remainder of the trench by fractured bedrock and mottled natural sand, the remainder was a silty sand extending to the western and southern portions of the trench. The material represents the remains of an ancient river delta and therefore differs over the area as the processes upon the river altered. The fractured nature of the bedrock made identification of the smaller features problematic, as it was to establish if a feature was man made and shallow, heavily truncated or just a naturally occurring undulation within the make up of the fractured geology (see appendix 5). The natural solid geology is a sandstone known locally as Woodhead Hill Rock, the lowest sandstone development in the Westphalian A succession, laid during the late Carboniferous Period.

Within Trench 33, many archaeological features were identified, dominated by the ditch to the west, the continuation of the palisade slot, two separate rows of post holes, three post pits to the east and four horticultural trenches to the south, and a number of unassociated separate features.

8.1.1 The Inner Enclosure ditch.

In 2000, a geophysical survey undertaken by Geoquest Associates (see figure) identified a linear anomaly running roughly north to south arching along the western extent of Area A between Trench 1 and Trench 2 within the garden. The excavation of Trench 33 showed the anomaly to be the same ditch as seen in Trenches 1 and 2. To the north end of Trench 33 it was possible to excavate a 4.00m long section across the full width of the ditch (A). The excavated section A, was sub-square in shape, 3.10m along the south side and 4.05m along the north, 2.23m to the east and 4.72m to the west. Initial excavation of the topsoil and subsoil in this area was achieved through the use of a six tonne machine using a ditching bucket. Subsequent removal of the remainder of topsoil and further trench enlargement was achieved by hand.

This showed it to be 3.10m wide, and 1.95m deep. As the ditch angled to the south west its western edge disappeared underneath the western wall of the old vicarage garden. Therefore slot B, 4.50m to the south of A, and slot C, a further 1.80m to the south, were only partial excavation of the upper fills of the ditch. Slot A was 3.10m wide at the top, and 1.95m deep, from the top of the archaeological layer to its 'v' shaped base, in total a 4.40m wide area was excavated and stepped

Slot B was 1.30m wide and 1.56m long, at right angles to the trench edge. Running along the eastern edge, the angular cut for the inner enclosure ditch [007] was identified. Identical to that within slot A, the ditch is cut into plated bedrock and quickly descends in a steep angle towards the centre of the ditch. Only partially excavated for reasons of space and health and safety, the maximum depth achieved was 0.42m.

Slot C was 1.30m wide and 0.72m long, at right angles to the trench edge and almost identical in results to those found within section B. Both sections possessed identical fill and layer morphology to that identified within the main slot A. Any dateable material recovered from these sections was grouped together under the relating fills of [007].

In profile the ditch is unlike those seen in Trench 1 and Trench 18 in that it does not possess a wide flat base, however it does have a large irregular 'v' shaped base cut into the angular bedrock. The trench is cut into the natural bedrock and as a result the immediate direction of the ditch is dictated by the natural fractures within the bedrock, these fractures are different from those in trench 1 and trench 18 where the plated bedrock was flat whereas, within this trench the plates occur at approximately 30 degrees toward the base.

The primary and secondary fills of the ditch [007] are (037) and (095) respectively. These fills contain a relatively high proportion of small to large fragments of sub-angular sandstone. It is therefore suggested that these were formed naturally, as material collapsed into the ditch from the sides and possibly the bank or palisade.

The ditch then appears to be re-cut by [088], which cuts into (037) and (095). (031) the fill of [088] also represents a period of natural silt and stone build up. This in turn is then re-cut by [089], it is at this point that the deposition of fills within the ditch section would appear to alter. After an initial period of silting (031), a large deposit of (022) large angular fractured bedrock was identified, with the stones all tilted at a 30 degree angle. The stones appear to tip into the ditch from the outer side.

Above this there is another smaller tip line present (021), containing a similar type of stone, however much smaller in size, but respecting the same tip lines and directions as those identified within (022). The remainder of the ditch is then backfilled with a considerably less stony fill. Possibly indicative of a period of abandonment, however this could also represent a period of deliberate levelling of the site.

A small amount of roman pottery was uncovered from the upper most fills of the ditch, this was, however small in comparison to the amount retrieved from the upper fills of Trench 18. The lower fills of the ditch contained no finds. 70% of all ditch fills were hand sieved and produced only small flecks of charcoal and small unidentifiable fragments of burnt bone. No environmental samples were taken due to the extremely poor level of organic survival.

The ditch fills (Figure 33) were as follows :-

The uppermost fill of [007] was (020) a dark brown friable sandy loam. Fill (020) had a maximum depth of 0.40m and lay immediately below the subsoil. Occasional angular and sub angular material

ranging from 0 – 0.10m were present along with occasional flecks of charcoal. Multiple fragments of Roman pottery were recovered from this fill.

Fill (021) was a friable mid/dark brown grey clay silt containing very frequent large angular 0 – 0.20m stones, occasional charcoal flecks and occasional small un-diagnostic flecks of burnt bone, with a maximum depth of 0.25m, containing a few sherds of Roman pottery.

Fill (022) consisted of a compact dark grey silty sand containing very frequent large angular and sub-angular 0 – 0.50m stones sitting in a horizontal position, along with occasional flecks of charcoal and a maximum depth of 0.22m, containing a few sherds of Roman pottery.

Fill (031) was a friable light brownish grey silty sand containing frequent 0-0.20m angular and sub-angular stones and a maximum depth of 0.40m. No finds were recovered from this fill.

The primary fill (037) was a friable light brown silty sand consisting of over 80% 0-0.20m angular stones, with a maximum depth of 0.45m. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Fill (092) constituted a friable mid brown sandy loam containing very few 0-0.05m rounded inclusions existing to a maximum depth of 0.14m. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Fill (093) consisted of a re-deposited natural layer of coarse light orangey brown sandy silt, with a maximum depth of 0.10m and being predominantly made up of small rounded 0-2mm stones. No finds were recovered from this fill.

Fill (094) was a friable light brown sandy loam with a maximum depth of 0.20m and containing very few stone inclusions.

Fill (095) was a friable mid brown sandy loam containing frequent 0-10mm rounded inclusions and a maximum depth of 0.15m.

Fill (096) was compact light grey sandy clay containing frequent regular rounded and sub-angular 0-20mm inclusions and a maximum depth of 0.20m.

Discussion

The excavation of the slot A across [007] has shown that the ditch does indeed continue unbroken between Trenches 1 and 2. Yet again the inner enclosure ditch is a substantial feature and would have been 0.76m deeper than identified in Trench 1. The main difference is the profile of the original cut; where Trench 1 possessed regular cut sloping sides onto a flat base in slot A, in the distance of 8.50m the profile the ditch in slot A becomes more 'v' shaped, possessing angular undulating fractures within the bedrock and as a result step sloping sides and an undulating narrow base.

The difference between the two separately excavated ditch sections, Trench 2 and Trench 18 is that the fractures within the bedrock are entirely different, within Trench 1 and 18 the bedrock was plated horizontally, therefore it would have been extremely easy to cut a trench down onto a flat base and keep very regular sides, whereas if the plating is at a steep angle, such as that found within trench 33, then it becomes almost impossible to excavate a neat flat bottomed ditch. The direction of the ditch in the immediate locale appears to follow the paths allowed by the natural solid bedrock, and therefore the ditch follows the direction of the fractures for as long as is possible, until the direction of the ditch becomes the overriding concern.

The two re-cuts of the ditch would appear to represent large scale maintenance of the ditch, cleaning and reinstating as needed. However it would appear that after an initial period during which fill (022) accumulated, a deliberate phase of backfilling occurs after the re-cut [089]. This may relate to the suspected deliberate phase of backfilling identified previously within trench 18 and possible closure of the ditch at some point during the 4th Century AD in Trench 33. The levels and deposits of this period of backfilling are almost identical in nature to those found within Trench 18. They would seem to demonstrate a wholesale deliberate backfilling of the ditch at a similar time along its entire length. The presence of such large and frequent fragments of re-deposited angular sandstone stones would indicate the possibility the deliberate destruction of a wall or structure which would have stood on the internal edge of the ditch maybe even the remains of a rampart.

The discovery of a large amount of Roman artefacts recovered from Trench 18, and in particular, their form of deposition, suggests that material was tipped into the ditch and combined with the charcoal and daub, hints that such rubbish deposition could be associated with the main abandonment of the site in the 4th century AD. The differences in quantity and quality of Roman pottery recovered from Trench 18, in comparison to Trenches 1 and 33, indicate that settlement in the Roman period may have been concentrated towards the eastern end of Area A.

The continuation of the ditch proves that there was no entrance way located on the western side of the inner enclosure ditch. Due to the difference in material recovered from the excavation of the different trenches across the inner enclosure ditch, and its continued presence within the Old Vicarage garden, there is a strong possibility that the entrance way would have been located to the east, near Trench 18, and therefore taking advantage of the natural flat area of land, as the hilltop begins to rise.