

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

End of year summary

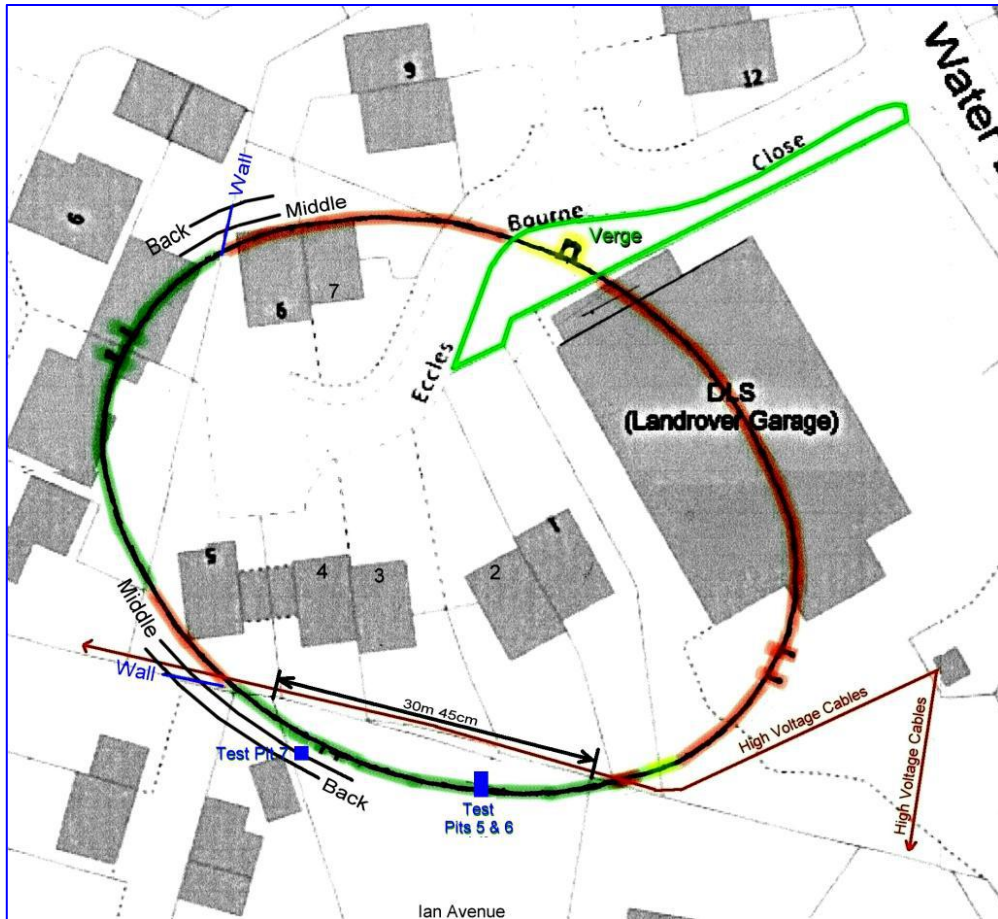
This entire digging season has been occupied investigating a suspected archaeological feature in the area between Water Lane and Derby Road in Wirksworth. Seven test pits have gone in to do this. Recent work has essentially been to close down Test Pits 5 and 6 and backfill them as well as tidy up that part of the garden. This leaves Test Pit 7 open for work.



Test Pit 6 and approach path closed down and tidied up, looking east.

We have considered why the wall we have been looking for (the suspected arena wall) isn't in Test Pit 6 and this may be due to making an incorrect assumption about the cropmark on the 1950 aerial photo. The assumption has always been that the cropmark represented the wall. However when we mark the wall as shown on the 1992 levels plan related to the cropmark, in both cases the cropmark is in front of the wall. If this is correct then the cropmark in 1950 doesn't show the wall, it shows the drop in ground level in front of it.

To explain this a little more, we have been digging the cropmark, but the 1992 plan would indicate that this is not the wall, the wall is *behind* the cropmark, only a little, but enough for us to miss it. Therefore in positioning the test pits to find the wall we should have based these on the levels plan (you learn as you go along, from doing the work). This being so, Test Pit 7 which we had originally positioned to take in what we thought should be the back of the wall (based on the cropmark) should actually be bang on top of it based on the levels plan.



Combined plan showing 1992 wall locations (blue) and cropmark (red, green and yellow)

This brings us to depth. Bear in mind our levels are based on a plan which is 32 years old and our own measurements: the upper garden (see Test Pit 7 location view) is considered to be at 143.28 metres Above Sea Level. The wall height, if it hasn't been robbed or destroyed any more than it was when the surveyor saw it in 1992, should be at 141.50 ASL. Currently the test pit is not deep enough.



Test Pit 7 location view (looking north west) with ranging pole and hedgehog plank

When the weather becomes drier and the temperature goes up to 10 degrees we'll go and carry on with Test Pit 7. This is going to be after Christmas realistically, its too cold at the moment to carry on.

In short, we have not been successful this season in identifying the feature, we will continue to search in the New Year in order to try and confirm, or eliminate, that it is an amphitheatre.

Summary of work as previously noted:

The assessment of the site originated in a study of aerial photographs of the town of Wirksworth, undertaken by the Society on the 28th November 2019 when a stereographic pair of aerial photographs RAF_541_551_rp_3176 and 3177, taken by the Royal Air Force on the 4th June 1950, were received, which showed an unusually large oval crop mark on land that had been an open field in 1950. This was between Water Lane and Derby Road, towards the south end of the historic medieval town core. This field had subsequently been built on with two housing estates, a tape mill and a clothing factory and by 1993 was entirely covered by development.



Crop mark between Derby Road and Water Lane in 1950

We considered that this unusual oval crop mark, which we have been trial trenching this season, could only represent a very limited range of archaeological features (and little else).

It is large, at about 60 metres on its long axis and about 45 metres on its short axis. This size might therefore suggest we are looking at a possible amphitheatre (generally these are of Roman date). However, in no way can this be regarded as definitive unless we can find and correctly date any archaeological remains, in particular the arena wall.

The site is exceptionally difficult, the most difficult we have ever worked. In the years since the photograph of the crop mark was taken (1950) the entire site had been gradually built on, there are no more than three limited and tightly constrained places where we can look for remains and two of those are in locations where the amount of builder's rubble used to level house gardens in 1963 and afterwards (as we now know) is extreme.

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