

Archaeology At Copped Hall in 2012 The Taster Weekends and Field Schools

The Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project 2012 series of Taster Weekends kicked off with the successful Spring Dig, during which a significant number of WEAG members braved the difficult weather conditions to continue the excavation and investigation of trenches G (the Rose Garden) and P (the Dovecote). This was followed by the Copped Hall Trust Archaeological Project series of three Taster Weekends in July and two 5-day Field Schools in August.

During the Spring Dig it became clear that the existing trenches would be unsuitable for inexperienced diggers: -



A view of the water in Trench P around the Dovecote, after the rain in June.

Trench G, the Rose Garden, containing the flooded foundations of the west wing.



As a result of this, it was decided to open up two new trenches for the Taster Weekends and Field Schools, near the bank between the upper and lower lawns. This provided two major benefits:

- a) New trenches, being shallower, would allow participants to work in drier conditions
- b) The larger trench allowed the investigation of features (found by a ground penetrating radar survey) that suggest a curved wall foundation and a possible base for a set of steps, while the smaller trench would examine a section of the North - South garden that has been less disturbed, to better understand its construction.

Trench R



The positioning of the larger trench was also suggested by close examination of part of the 1735 Farmer drawing of the old mansion, indicating a set of steps between the sections of garden.

The new trench R over the possible curved foundation, ready for the start of the first Taster Weekend.



Despite the damp conditions on the first Taster Weekend, the dig proceeded well in both trenches, with a substantial number of finds, including plenty of glass and ceramics. The larger trench, R, revealed several separate brick features running North - South, more bricks running East - West, and a layer of loosely laid cobbles across two thirds of the trench, on the South and East of the bricks - interestingly, there was a dip or 'gully' running East - West in the cobbles, with no obvious purpose.



One of the North - South brick features in trench R.

The odd depression or 'gully' in the layer of cobbles in the south of Trench R.



Further digging revealed a flat, compacted cobble layer between the North - South walls and the West edge of the trench - possibly part of a late garden path.



Cobble layer between the N-S walls and the West edge of trench R.

As the area to the South of the East - West brick structure was cleared, a circular depression containing soil, and partly cutting into the bricks, was found - this may have been a planting hole, similar to those found in other trenches here.

Possible planting hole cut into the brick structure.



A slot had been cut into the East end of the brick structure, which revealed a land drain running North - South across the trench.



Land drain running North - South through a slot cut into the brick structure.

Further excavation of the North face of the brick structure showed that it was a substantial structure of at least 6 courses, suggesting a wall on top of a foundation.

Substantial structure suggesting a wall on top of a foundation.



This view looking to the East across the trench shows the East - West wall with the drain at the far end. At the near end there can be seen an irregular brick structure running across the trench (this is not on the line of the garden wall that runs South from near the dovecote) that has been cut into at some time, possibly for a pipe. The structure suggest that this may have been steps, based on the partial absence of mortar on some of the bricks and the flattish surface.



Split brick structure with possible steps.

The lower, flat layer contains several shaped bricks - 2 at the extreme left and right ends have got cut-off corners, and the one in the middle of the right-hand section is rounded - these bricks have probably been re-used from earlier demolished features.

Re-used shaped bricks in the possible steps.



On the North side of the large East - West brick wall (the area on the right in this picture), near the drainage pipe, another section of foundation was found running to the trench edge, and next to it an area of a possible brick floor was found - however later excavation showed that this was just 2 layers of un-mortared bricks running North, possibly a wall base.



Un-mortared bricks on the right (North) of the large E-W brick feature.

The area between the wall and the North edge of the trench appeared to be relatively undisturbed, so a slot was dug into it, revealing clean deposits of glacial and London clay.

Clean deposits of glacial and London clay.



When the layer of cobbles on the South side of the wall were cleared away it revealed the remains of an irregular layer of bricks along the bottom of the wall - this may have been a floor surface.



Irregular layer of bricks that may have been a floor surface.

The investigation then moved to the West end of the trench, trying to track down the North - South garden wall. In the South West corner this revealed clean clay beneath the brick 'steps', with an area of grey, stony, silty material below the clay, while in the North West corner another brick structure was found.

Grey silty material and brick structure in NW corner.



Cutting further into the side of the trench exposed what appears to be a brick drain running East - West, that has been truncated by the jumbled brick and rubble running North - South.



Truncated possible brick drain running East - West.

As there was no trace of the North - South garden wall in trench R, a small test pit was dug, on the line of the wall, between R and the bank to the upper lawn. This revealed the foundation of a wall, with what may be a brick drain running North West - South East beneath it. This indicates that the garden wall originally continued South towards the bank (where there may be a retaining wall between the different levels), but it was damaged by whatever was done to create the structures found in trench R.

Possible foundation of the North - South garden wall in the test pit near trench R.



Trench S

The smaller trench, S, also proved to be more complicated than expected - there was a lot of brick rubble across the trench, including broken field drains, and yellow bricks found on site for the first time. The top of the wall was found below a layer of rubble and cobbles, possibly part of a path.



A view across the smaller trench, S, showing the brick rubble and cobbles covering the garden wall.

Further excavation showed a repaired break across the wall, with a rough line of bricks running to the East away from the wall - this appears to be a channel cut across the wall to allow a brick drain to be installed - curiously, there is no matching line of bricks on the other side, just a densely packed jumble of bricks.

Channel for possible brick drain across the North - South garden wall in trench S.



As the trench had achieved the aim of locating and studying the wall, it was back-filled.



Group discussion about the findings in Trench S prior to closing and back-filling the trench.

Trench C

In addition to the new trenches, trench C (near the path towards the Rose-Garden) was re-opened to allow further examination of the 'grey silty layer' to see if it was linked to the similar layers found in G and P. This layer was clearly visible in the lower section of the trench below a thick layer of fairly clean clay, and could be found along the full length of the trench.

Grey silty layer visible below layers of clean clay in trench C.



The trench was extended by about 2 metres to the South to try to find the extent of the layer, and this revealed a brick structure across the trench.



Brick structure revealed in the extended trench C.

Further digging showed this to be a drain, very similar in construction to the ones running across the dovecote in trench P.

Brick drain structure running across the extended trench C.



Part of the drain was lifted, revealing the grey layer running under it towards the South then stopping at the edge of the cut for the drain.



Gray layer running under the brick drain in trench C then stopping.

Excavating down beyond the cut for the drain eventually revealed the grey material, suggesting that the grey silt had been dug out in order to to build the drain, and then clay had been deposited behind the drain to support it. This also revealed another odd pile of bricks with no obvious structure - no purpose for this has yet been established. Levels were taken on the layers in the trench, and samples of the grey layer were extracted for examination, in order to establish if this layer matches those in the other trenches. Following this work trench C was closed down.



Gray silty layer beyond the cut for the brick drain, and additional bricks, in trench C.

Throughout the year excavation continued in trenches G and P.

Trench G (The Rose Garden)

Once trench G had dried out, work continued in two main areas: on the odd mixture of old walls and foundations in the South East corner, and on the East side of the trench to investigate any links between the multiple sections of wall.

The South East corner has a mixture of curved and straight walls and a large, disturbed block of wall foundations.



Mixture of walls and foundations in the South East corner of trench G.

Work in this area was difficult due to the slippery clay and difference in levels, but it revealed the 'curved' wall appears to be loosely placed bricks on top of a well laid-out curved foundation, both having been truncated at some point.

Poor quality 'curved' wall on better foundation in trench G.



Digging outside the curved structure exposed more of the grey silty lane found in previous years, which may be linked to that found in trench C.



Grey silty layer found outside the 'curved' in the South East corner of trench G.

More of the adjoining brick structure in the corner was exposed, showing clearly how it consisted of multiple sets of bricks of varying sizes laid, with different coloured mortars, at various times.

Multiple sets of bricks with different mortars identified in the large block in the South - East corner of trench G.



In the North - East area of the trench the material around the large mass of concreted masonry (uncovered last year) was cleared away,



Removing the material around the large mass of concreted masonry.

revealing a flat brick foundation with a sandy surface running East - West. This foundation was exposed further, showing that it turns and runs North - South past the other walls found in previous years. This newly exposed foundation has been useful in linking together the known walls, and it also fits well with the old plans of the mansion.



Flat brick foundation with sandy surface that runs past the other walls in trench G.

Cleaning the sides of the walls showed how the bricks in the upper and lower sections are different in size and bond, so may have been laid at different times.



Cleaned-up walls showing the variations in brick sizes and bonding.

Trench P (The Dovecote)

In trench P the investigations were looking particularly at the South - East corner of the old mansion, and the various layers around and below the dovecote.

View looking north across trench P showing the Dovecote, the layers beneath it, various brick features and the South - East corner of the old mansion.



Despite the occasional poor weather (particularly during the Spring Dig), good progress was made in excavating the multiple layers of tiles across the Northern part of the trench, with at least 4 separate layers being identified. It is possible that these tiles were laid on the surface of the clay at various times to provide a reasonably safe surface to walk on and reduce the risk of slipping.



View across the trench looking South showing the multiple layers of scattered tiles.

In the middle of the tile area a small, round, dark area of material was found that may have been a post-hole - the only one found so far.

Round dark feature, possibly a post hole, found in trench P.



A series of three linked 'walls' of piled up tiles was uncovered on the West side of the trench (two of them running into the side of the trench) - they may have formed the retaining sides of a water feature, possibly to handle the rain water from the roof of the dovecote and the mansion. A section was dug in the base of this feature to compare the clay here with the layers found around the rest of the trench.



Two of the three tile 'walls' possibly enclosing a water feature to handle rain water from the roof of the mansion.

Below the floor of the dovecote, and on the West and South sides of it, there are sloping layers of grey and orange clays, indicating that the building of the dovecote was preceded by the back-filling of an earlier excavation.

Sloping layers of grey and orange clay back-filling a trench that pre-dates the Dovecote.



A thin horizontal layer of ash was found cutting through these sloping layers - the purpose of the ash layer is unknown.



Thin horizontal layer of ash cutting through the sloping layers of clay back-fill.

In the North - West of the trench is a small section of the foundation of the South - East corner of the old mansion. The work this year revealed this to be a complex structure, with a straight-sided base and angular upper layers, and additional courses added roughly at one end. Understanding how this fits the known plan of the house will require further investigation.

Part of the foundation of the South - East corner of the mansion.



Overall, and despite the poor weather, it has been a very successful digging season, thanks to the enthusiasm and pro-active participation of all the attendees, supervisors and supporters.



During one of the Taster Weekends the attendees and supervisors got together with the dig director, John Shepherd (standing in the nearer end of the trench), to review the finds from, and consider possible interpretation of the features in, Trench R.