

Peeling Back the Layers

A Community Archaeology Project at Under Whitle, Sheen

A report on the excavations of the extension to Trench 3 from 7th to 16th September 2016
on behalf of The Tudor Farming Interpretation Group for Peeling Back the Layers
Community Archaeology Project

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Summary

As a result of the inconclusive excavation of Trench 3 in June-July 2016, it was agreed with TFIG to undertake further work on the platform where Trench 3 was located. This took place between September 7-16 2016. In an effort to reveal more detail of any potential structural remains, the excavation overlay the northern edge of the original trench and was extended by 5 metres to the north-west. The excavation produced a significant number of finds in relation to the first excavation, with over 200 being recorded. The majority of the finds were ceramic with the typological range of this material suggesting a date range of over 200 years, perhaps as far back as the late 16th century.

A.1 Methodology

A.1.1

The findings of the excavations carried out between June 20-July 9 2016 were presented and discussed with the TFIG in relation to the proposed fieldwork. It was agreed that further fieldwork should be undertaken in the area of the platform/Trench3 in a renewed effort to meet the project's objectives and these were agreed in negotiation with both TFIG Natural England and the HLF. It was agreed to place the trench as close as possible to the previous excavation to allow continuity. The location and extent of the trench (named Trench 3 extension) is shown in the figure below.

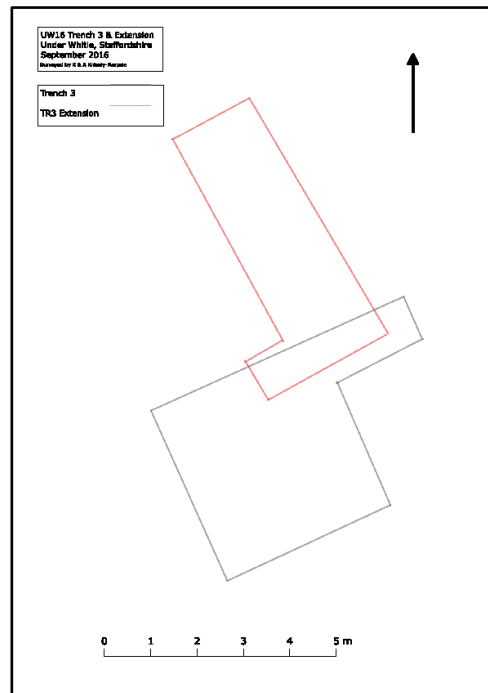
A.1.2

The trench extension was set out with respect to the topography of the edge of the platform and located on the OS National Grid (NGR) co-ordinates using a Sokkia Set 4 total station.

A.1.3

The trench was de-turfed and excavated by hand in accordance with the agreement reached with Natural England. All excavation was undertaken under archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon or the natural substrate, whichever was encountered first.

Fig. A.1 Location of Trench 3 extension



A.1.4

All artefacts recovered were processed in accordance with Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials (CIfA 2014).

A.1.5

Subject to the agreement of the legal landowner, the artefacts will be deposited with the Potteries Museum, Stoke-on-Trent, along with the site archive. A summary of information from this project, set out within Appendix , will be entered onto the OASIS online database of archaeological projects in Britain and be forwarded to the ADS in appropriate electronic format.

A.1.6

All elements of the excavation were recorded. Each context or feature was given a unique identifying number and associated record. All photographic recording was made using digital cameras and in colour.

A.2 Results of Fieldwork

A.2.1

This section presents a summary of the excavation results. Further details can be found in the datasets from the investigation presented in the appendix section; Context list (Appendix 1) Drawings list (Appendix 2) Photographic list (Appendix 3) and Finds register (Appendix 4).

A2.2

The work was undertaken over an 8 day period from September 7-18 2016. Overall the conditions were good. The degree of overlay of the extension trench and Trench 3 was a maximum of one metre, and whilst not a perfect right-angle, it did allow for contexts to be matched. The turf topsoil was regular across the trench much in keeping with that encountered on Trench 3. The topsoil was between 6cm to 15cm in depth with a mid-brown sandy clay natural encountered below and this subsoil was between 3cm and 15cm deep. Following the excavation, the trench was re-instated using excavated spoil and re-turfed by hand.

A.2.3

The subsoil (202) was a mid-brown loamy silt as was found in the first excavation, and varied in depth along the length of the extension. Almost immediately finds appeared in the context, including a horseshoe, part of a clay pipe stem, a range of 19th century ceramics and the remains of a small wooden vessel.

A.2.4

On removal of the subsoil (202) three distinct areas were revealed. The clearest was (205) a hard, dry and compacted band of grey clayey silt which was in the centre-southern end of the trench. It ran diagonally across the trench in a broadly East-West orientation and was approximately 1.9 metres wide. Toward the northern end of the trench a softer mid-light brown silty clay context (206) abutted (205) and followed the contour of the downward slope of the bank. A further context (207) was revealed in the north-west corner of the extension. This was mid-brown in colour but was distinguished from (206) by a higher level of inclusions, with a higher proportion (c30%) of small, sub-angular stones up to 2cm diameter. On further excavation (207) was found to be stratigraphically beneath (206) and extended some 2.5m on a N-S orientation and the width of the extension at the north end.

Whilst (205) and (206) produced over 50 finds, (207) produced just 4. (207) was a firm/compacted silty clay containing a similar proportion of inclusions to (206) including flecks of charcoal and occasional pieces of coal.

Fig. A.2.1 Contexts (205) and (206) general view. Scale is 1 metre.



Fig. A.2.2 Detail of Context (207). Scale is 20cm.



A.2.5

The removal of the next spit revealed two areas underneath (205), both with a broadly east-west orientation. (208) was similar to and abutted (207), but was a slightly darker brown with fewer inclusions. Both (207) and (208) contained lenses of damper clay-like

material. The other context, (209), was a friable, mid-brown silty loam with few inclusions which closely followed the alignment of (205). To the south of these lay (212), a friable mid-brown silty clay with 5% inclusions. It had a slightly higher moisture content than (209) and more inclusions than (208) and must be considered to be a distinct event.

Fig A.2.3 Detail (208). Scale is 20cm.



Fig. A.2.4 Detail (209). Scale is 20cm.



A.2.6

There were four contexts of some interest at this level – (210), (211), (213) and (214). Each of these appeared at the trench edge, three (211, 213 and 214) emerging from the

west facing section. Each was broadly sub-circular and two (210 and 211) were characterised by a hard, compacted clay material. (213) and (214) consisted of a friable material, a very similar mid-brown in colour but (213) had fewer inclusions (>5%) than (214) (c20%). (214) was very similar to (207) and may be an occurrence of the same. On further excavation (211) (213) and (214) were removed indicating their shallow depth. The remaining context of the four (210) proved to be more substantial and was embedded within context (212).

Fig. A.2.5 Detail of (210). Scale is 20cm.



Fig. A.2.6 Detail of (211). Scale is 20cm.



Fig. A.2.7. Detail of (212). Scale is 20cm.



Fig. A.2.8. Detail of (213). Scale is 20cm.



Fig. A.2.9. Detail of (214). Scale is 20cm.



Fig A.2.10 Plan of Trench 3 extension after removal of spit 3.

Insert figure here

A.2.6

The removal of the final spit of this excavation revealed a more complex picture as can be seen from the figure below. Initially a soft, friable layer (215) emerged, but this gave way to a harder, more compacted area (216) in the central area of the trench in which no finds were recorded. Each of the contexts will be briefly described, moving from the north to south end of the trench. In the north end of the trench (217) was an orangey-brown compacted deposit with occasional small sub-angular stones within it. There was a damper area in one corner, but this was probably the result of recent rain and drainage. On the down slope from this was (218) a grey-brown deposit of compacted clay. This contained approximately 10% larger sub-angular stones, up to 10cm diameter. These were poorly sorted and suggested tipping into the deposit. (219) was a grey-brown deposit of very compacted clay with less than 5% inclusions. (220) was orange-brown very compacted clay, similar to (217) but slightly lighter, moister and with more inclusions. (221) was similar in colour to (218) but more compact and with more inclusions (20%) whilst (222) had fewer inclusions of gravel at 5%. Between (215) and (222) lay (226) and within this was (229). (226) was hard, very compacted grey-brown clay, similar to (210) and (211). (229) however was a moist, silty mid brown loam which was sticky on excavation. (223)

was stratigraphically below (205) and (209) and the hard, dry character these contexts was present in this deposit too, though with significantly more (c50%) gravel present. At the south end of the trench (224) was again a very compacted deposit of mid-grey/brown but there were occasional lenses of soft, silty material. Within this matrix there was a mix of c30% gravel and occasional small stones. It was within this deposit that a possible stake hole was found. (227) was a soft mid-grey silty loam, sitting in a cut (228) approximately 10cm diameter and 6.5cm in depth.

A.2.7

In an effort to establish the presence of medieval material a sondage approximately 80cm in depth was excavated in (218) in the north end of the extension. Initially 1m x 1m it was extended by 70cm to the south to assess the extent of (230). This deposit was a mottled reddish-brown moderately compacted silty-clay and in plan appeared to respect the edge of the platform. Of great interest was the emergence of (233), a white/beige clay-like deposit which appeared very much like degraded daub or plaster. Less than 2cm in depth, the material rapidly oxidised, becoming indistinguishable from (230). Both (230) and (233) appeared to be part of a 'corner' which seemed to follow the alignment of the platform. There were two key finds in (230) – a single piece of pottery and a sample of charcoal.

A.2.8

In the south end of the trench a further sondage of approximately 5cm was taken out. In order to gain a fuller picture of some of the deposits encountered this cut through (210), (218), (225) and (224). Beneath (224) a friable light brown silty clay deposit (232) contained a number of finds, including three sherds of green-glazed ware, thought to be late-medieval in date.

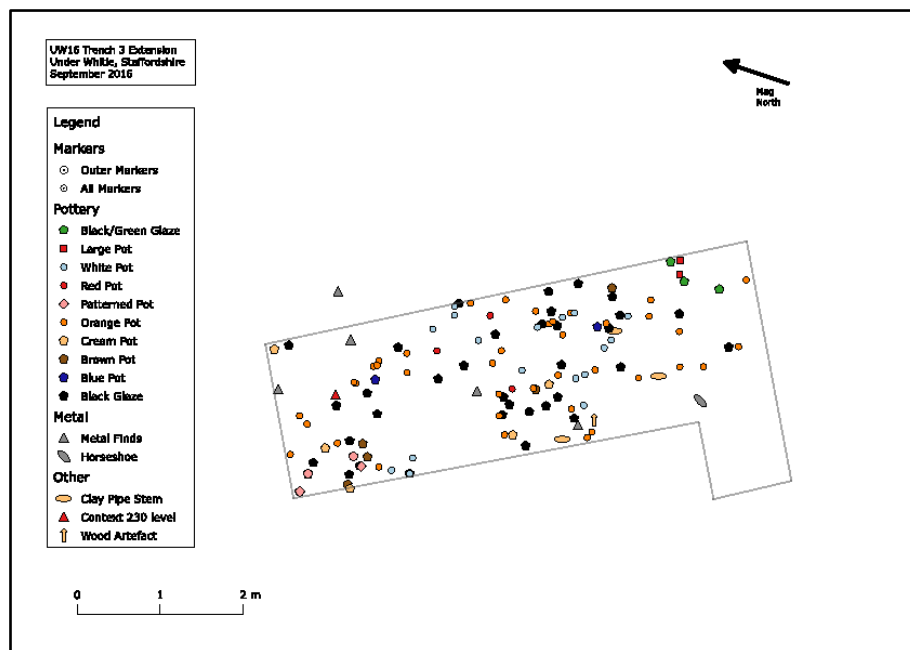
A.3 Artefacts

A.3.1

The range of material recovered during the excavation was limited to metalwork, wood and ceramics, and the latter formed the overwhelming majority of the finds. The distribution of the artefacts is shown below. It will be seen that there is a spread of material across the trench, although a full analysis of the finds in terms of their dates and typology is still on-

going. It should be noted that the green-glazed ware found in (232) has been tentatively dated to the late 16th century (J. Goodwin, pers. comm.). A further diagnostic piece which may assist in dating the site is the horseshoe, although the context in which it was found was possibly a later one.

Fig. A.3.1 Spread of artefacts in T3 extension. (Courtesy of R Kinsley-Marpole)



A.4. Interpretation and Conclusions

A.4.1

The excavation involved the extension of an earlier trench as part of the 'Peeling Back the Layers' project. This was largely due to the disappointing results of that excavation. The aim of this excavation to establish the presence of a dwelling on an artificially created platform. Earlier geophysical surveys had suggested that there was a strong likelihood of archaeology on this side of the platform, and in terms artefactual evidence at least, this appears to be the case.

A.4.2

In terms of structural evidence of occupation, then again excavation has yet to reveal anything substantial. There are hints of such, but we cannot be certain at this stage. Certainly (205) and (209) may be interpreted as artificial and suggest a bank or small earthwork running almost east-west across the platform. This is likely to be post-medieval given the ceramic evidence associated with earlier contexts. It may be part of a small enclosure for agricultural activity possibly related to the period of occupation of the farmhouse revealed in trench 2. There was briefly the possibility that (211) (213) and (214) may have been post holes for a dwelling. However, they proved to be too shallow to be medieval features, although (210) which has a similar size, shape and matrix, proved to be more durable on excavation and remains to be fully explored. The appearance of (230) and (233) in colour, consistency and shape strongly suggests that there may well be value in further excavation at some future date. What we do have is a *terminus post quem* or the earliest date so far for the creation of the platform which at present relies on the green-glazed ware found in (234). As was stated above, this pottery has been initially dated to the late 16th century and is the earliest evidence we have. The dating of the charcoal sample from (230) would give us a more secure date for the platform.

A.4.3

In conclusion then, the excavation has been useful in providing both artefactual and structural evidence of settlement of Under Whittle dating back to the 16th century. In the absence of reliable, modern maps, we have been able to show that the platform dates to at least the 16th century and that there is a strong possibility that it was constructed before this. Evidence of any house or dwelling on the platform is at yet ephemeral, although promising, and excavation at some future date would very likely shed more light on this.