



Belle Vue House Salisbury, Wiltshire

Archaeological Investigations

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Portway House
Old Sarum Park
Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP4 6EB

www.wessexarch.co.uk

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Trust for Wessex Archaeology Site W290: BELLE VUE HOUSE

by P.W. Williams

INTRODUCTION

The Trust for Wessex Archaeology was commissioned by Friends Provident to undertake the archaeological investigation of their proposed new development at Belle Vue House, Salisbury. The area of development lay on the line of the medieval city defences as suggested by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments and the Ordnance Survey, and also the line of a watercourse known as Hussy's Ditch.

Method of excavation

Initially three staggered trenches (A - C) were laid out so as to cut across the suggested line of the medieval defences. The top-soil and post-medieval overburden were removed using the back-actor of a JCB and then the features which cut into the natural sub-soil were excavated by hand. No evidence for a substantial ditch or bank was recovered from these trenches so, in the belief that the defensive line may have lain further to the north, a fourth larger trench (D) was excavated in similar manner. The central area of this trench (2m wide) was machine stripped to a depth of approximately 0.5m into the natural sub-soil to ensure that no large cut features were sealed by a layer of redeposited natural. Trench reports.

Trench A

A layer of modern garden soil overlay a series of late-post medieval layers consisting of construction/demolition rubbles and the fills of modern service trenches (1). These sealed a thick layer of grey-brown clay loam (2), which directly overlay the natural sub-soils, a mix of gravel and brickearth (3), which in part overlay a thick deposit of light yellowish-brown weathered brickearth.

Three features were identified cutting the natural sub-soils. The first of these, a roughly circular small pit (5), contained a fill of dark grey-brown clay loam (6). This fill was almost indistinguishable from the overlying buried soil (2) and it is almost certain that the pit (5) was cut from a much higher level than that at which it was recognised. A mid grey-brown clay loam (7) filled a shallow cut feature (8) which again was almost certainly cut from a much higher level than the base of the buried soil. The vestigial remains of a ditch/gully (9) were also identified running approximately east-west across the trench. This feature was also filled with a mid grey-brown clay loam (10) and was once again cut from a much higher level.

Trench B

A layer of garden top-soil (100) overlay a layer of mixed post-medieval construction/demolition rubble, and the fills of modern service trenches (101). These rubble

layers overlay a dark grey- brown clay loam (102), which in turn overlay the natural brickearth sub-soil (103).

Trench C

A layer of modern garden top-soil (200) overlay a layer of mixed post-medieval construction/demolition rubble, and the fills of modern service trenches (201). This sealed a layer of grey-brown clay loam (202), which overlay a layer of mid orange-brown slightly loamy silt (203), probably a transitional layer between the buried soil (202) and the underlying natural brickearth. Several features were identified cutting the surface of 202. A roughly oval vertically sided post-hole (205) contained a fill of mid grey-brown clay loam (204) which merged imperceptibly with the overlying buried soil (201). A shallow ditch/gully (207) ran east-west across the trench, (a continuation of feature 9 Trench A) and contained a fill of mid orange-brown clay loam (206). A roughly rectangular pit (209) contained an upper fill of mid grey clay loam (212) and a lower fill of dark grey silty loam (208). Although only excavated from a level corresponding to the base of the buried soil, in section this feature could be seen to have been cut from the base of the late post-medieval overburden (201). Another pit (211), roughly circular in plan, contained a fill of mid grey brown clay loam (210). At the southern end of the trench the edge of a linear cut feature (214) was identified. This feature, running east-west, was only partly excavated owing to the depth of the overburden. It was found to have a steeply sloping northern side, and contained a fill of pale grey silty loam (213). A further shallow cut feature (216), which was probably the vestigial remnant of a pit, contained a fill of orange-brown clay loam (215).

Trench D

A layer of modern top-soil (300) overlay a layer of mixed demolition/construction rubble and top-soil (301), which in turn overlay a layer of dark brown clay loam (302). This buried soil sealed a heavily disturbed layer of dark yellow-brown clay loam (303), a disturbed weathering product of the underlying natural sub-soils, which comprised a light yellowish-brown brickearth (328), and an underlying layer of yellow-brown silty clay gravel (329).

In plan the surface of the clay loam (303) appeared homogeneous both in colour and texture, with the exception of several darker patches which, on excavation, were shown to be the fills of cut features, of a structural character, discussed below. In section, however, this layer appeared far from uniform and it was possible to resolve it into the fills of a large number of pits. A sample of these was excavated (see below).

The structural features

A series of post-holes were identified cutting the surface of the clay loam (303). 315 fill 314, 317 fill 316, 323 fill 322, 346 fill 345, 351 fill 341, 363 fill 364, 367 fill 368, 371 fill 370 and 378 fill 377. Two of these post-holes (363 and 367) contained fills with discernible post-pipes. One (315) contained a layer of peg tiles at its base, these probably functioned as a post-pad. All

these post-holes contained broadly similar fills which ranged from dark brown to dark grey brown in colour and slightly silty clay loam to clay loam in texture. One post-hole (351) lay between, and was almost certainly associated with, two shallow slots/gullies (342 and 344) which ran approximately east-west across the trench, and continued into the western section. The fills of these gullies (341 and 343 respectively) were similar in character to those of the post-holes. This may perhaps suggest that all these features were broadly contemporary in date.

The pits

305 fill 304, 307 fill 306, 309 fill 308, 311 fill 310, 313 fill 312, 319 fill 318, 321 fill 320, 325 fill 324, 327 fill 326, 333 fill 332, 335 fill 334, 348 fill 347, 350 fill 349, 353 fill 352, 355 fill 354, 359 fills 360 and 381, 361 fill 362, 373 fill 372, 380 fill 379, 383 fill 382, 386 fill 385.

A sample of the discernible pits cutting the clay loam (303) was excavated, and a stratigraphic sequence was resolved (Fig. 3). Bulk soil samples were taken from a randomly selected group of the pit fills for subsequent environmental analysis. With the exception of 359 all of the pits were very similar in character; roughly circular in plan, with sloping sides and rounded bottoms, containing almost identical fills of dark brown clay loam. The exception to this rule (359) contained an upper fill of very dark greyish-brown clay loam (381) and a lower fill of grey silty loam (360).

^h _λ**Cronological Development of the Site**

The earliest activity represented in the surviving archaeological record is the construction of a large number of pits. Preliminary analysis of the ceramic material recovered from their fills suggests that this phase of activity occurred in the period between c.1250 and c.1350. The functional identification of these features awaits the results of detailed environmental analysis.

The second phase of activity on site is represented by the structural elements identified within Trench D, probably dating to the later medieval and early post-medieval periods.

Only the bases of both the medieval pits and the structural features survived, and an examination of the soil matrix through which they were cut suggests that perhaps as much as a metre has been removed from the medieval land surface (S. Staines pers. comm.).

This sequence was sealed by a deep deposition of "black earth", which contained only later post-medieval ceramics and which, probably represents deliberate dumping, together with a large number of rubbish pits, of which only a small percentage were visible in section. This layer was sealed by late post-medieval construction/demolition rubbles, cut by modern service trenches, which were then in turn sealed by modern garden soil.

Conclusions

No evidence was recovered to suggest the presence of the city defences, though feature (214) Trench C is almost certainly the watercourse known as Hussy's Ditch. The archaeological evidence suggests that the excavated area lay within the confines of the medieval city, a

hypothesis reinforced by the location of the ward boundary which lies somewhat further to the north.



Wessex Archaeology Ltd registered office Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP4 6EB
Tel: 01722 326867 Fax: 01722 337562 info@wessexarch.co.uk www.wessexarch.co.uk

