

4.3 Trench 25

In November John and Ann Hearle gave permission for a further trench (25) to be excavated to the north and west of Tr1 through part of the Old Vicarage vegetable garden. This trench was excavated to ascertain the level of archaeological survival in this part of Area A. In particular it was designed to see if there was any indication of the Iron Age ditch found in Area B running as a separate entity to the west of the ditch in Tr1. This is a field owned by Mr Peter Hodgeson who has graciously allowed excavation on his land adjacent to the Old Vicarage for several years.

A single trench was excavated running east to west. The trench measured 12.0m by 1.5m. Removal of topsoil and subsoil revealed natural sandstone. In the western two thirds of the trench this was fractured bedrock while in the western third a lack of silica to bond the sand together into rock meant that the natural was an orange brown friable sand. No evidence for the Iron Age ditch was found in Tr25. However two other possible archaeological features were observed. One of these was a possible post hole or small pits located at the extreme west end of the trench. On excavation this feature proved to have very irregular sides and base suggesting that it may be a geological feature or perhaps a tree bowl. In the eastern half of the trench a layer of flat stones were uncovered. This layer was 1.5m wide and ran for 3.2m north east to south west within the trench. On excavation it appeared that this layer of stones was set on a 0.25m deep levelling layer of sand. It would seem that this feature represents a path. No dating evidence was obtained from either of these features.

Although no evidence for a ditch was found Tr25 proved extremely useful by providing us with valuable information about how the topography of this part of Area A has been altered as a result of landscaping. At first glance this part of the Old Vicarage garden appears relatively flat. The garden level fell dropped by only 0.27m within the 12.0m within the area of Tr25. It had been assumed that this reflected the ground surfaces during the hilltops previous occupations, as had been the case in trenches excavated elsewhere within the garden. The evidence from Tr25 shows that at some point this part of the garden has been extensively built up by the importation of topsoil to form a level garden. The natural sandstone surface in fact dropped by 1.26m along the length of the trench (Figs 8 & 9). Pottery recovered from the topsoil suggests that the levelling occurred sometime in the 17th or 18th century.

Discussion

The discovery that this part of the garden has been landscaped has some important implications for our interpretation of the site. As seen today the ditch excavated in Tr1 sits above the break of slope within a flat part of the garden. However Tr25 has shown that in the Iron Age it would have stood on the break of a steep slope. This would have made it far more effective in regard to any defensive function it had and also a far more visible, and imposing, feature within the landscape, especially if it was in conjunction with a bank or palisade.

Given the evidence from Tr25 it seems likely that the land immediately to the north of the Old Vicarage has also been raised. This means that if the ditch in Area B extended into Area A it would probably have to run up a fairly steep slope. Also if the ditch in Tr1 does curve eastward towards Tr18 it is likely that it would be running along the top of that slope.