

# Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

## Excavation of Mr Ratford's house July 2010 Wimpole Hall

Members of CAFG have made a contribution to The Council for British Archaeology annual Festival of Archaeology by excavating the site of a 17<sup>th</sup> century house with visitors invited to talk to the excavators about what was being found. The site was just to the south of the buildings of Home Farm, Wimpole, the location of the National Trust's rare breed collection.

During the laying of a telephone cable some months ago, the trench cut through some brickwork in the paddock to the south of Home Farm. No building has stood on this site in recent times but there appears to have been a house at this point, occupied by William Stok, when Hare drew his map in 1638. At that time there was a track leading from the Manor House (roughly where Wimpole Hall now stands) to the junction of what is now the lane to Cobb's Wood Farm. The building sits just to the north of this lane. In the 1790's the buildings of Home Farm were erected and the track went out of use; with the house demolished sometime early in the 19th century. We hoped to establish the position of the house, its state of preservation and if there was any evidence of earlier buildings.

Unfortunately the geophysics results were not very helpful, but the long dry period in the months up to our start in late July, has meant that there were parch marks in the grass. These outlined clearly the walls of a long building aligned north to south, in the position expected from the structure labelled 'Mr Ratford's House' on the design drawing for the 1794 farm buildings.

Five small trenches were positioned to explore this structure. The result is that we now know there was a house, one room wide and perhaps five rooms long, built sometime late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Short red brick walls supported a timber frame, probably two floors tall. With no great evidence for roof tiles it seems that it was thatched. At the southern end there was a substantial brick gable end probably rising to two floors, abutting the lane. This may well have incorporated an inglenook fireplace on the ground floor. A complex of brick walls to the west may be part of stair, cupboard or garderobe (a latrine, privy or toilet), but further evidence lies outside the trench. On the west side of the house, a late extension had been built using white-yellow bricks. This had a brick floor and probably a timber framed structure, some of which was plastered and painted a light blue colour. The archaeological evidence shows that the house was deliberately levelled and the land turned into a meadow which has never been ploughed since – the brick walls were only 5cm below the surface in places.

Below the western extension and extending to the west was an area of cobbles, perhaps a yard. Over this had accumulated about 40cm of soil containing much ash and in places oyster and mussel shells. Much of the pottery from this feature appears to be late medieval as does that sealed below the ground floor of Mr Ratford's house. The only feature found that could be medieval was one slot cut into the underlying natural clay. This contained medieval pottery, and was perhaps part of an earlier house.

There is much work to do on the finds, drawings and photographs before we understand all that we have found. Perhaps we will have to go back next year to answer questions arising from this work.