

Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

Excavation Proposal for July 2011

Wimpole Hall
23rd to 31st July

Mr Ratford's House

BACKGROUND

The Council for British Archaeology's festival of archaeology will run for two weeks, from the 16th to the 31st July. We have agreed with Angus Wainwright, archaeologist for the National Trust, that members of CAFG will continue excavation of the site started in 2010 at Wimpole Hall. This will take place from Saturday 23th July to Sunday 31st July with preparatory work on the 16th and 17th July. The NT's local staff will hold an archaeological/history fair on the second weekend.

In 2010 members of CAFG excavated five trenches on the site of what is called Mr Ratford's House on a plan, dated 1795, by John Soane for the new farm buildings for Lord Hardwicke. During the laying of a telephone cable in 2009 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 when Hare drew his map in 1638. On the evidence of the 2010 excavations, this house was replaced sometime in the middle of the 17th century. At that time there was a track leading from the Hall to the junction of what is now the lane to Cobb's Wood Farm, and the building sits just to the north of that track. In the 1790's the buildings of Home Farm were constructed and the track went out of use; the house found in the excavation was demolished sometime in the early 19th century.

The results of the excavations by CAFG in 2010 show that Mr Ratford's house was built of a brick foundation on which there was probably a timber frame structure. At the south end, against the track between Cobbs Wood and the Hall, there was a massive brick foundation, perhaps of a gable end. To the west of the house a cobbled area was overlain by a midden-like deposit containing 18th century and medieval pottery, the latter appearing to be mainly on the cobbled surface. The cobbled surface was not further explored due to time constraints.

PROPOSAL

In this proposal for 2011 we intend to excavate more of the massive brick feature at the south end of the house. We will also try to establish the relationship of the cobbled area to the west of the 17th century house to that house and in addition to further investigate what may be a medieval house under that of the 17th century. We would hope to be able to further enhance our understanding of the date range and use of the building. The excavations in 2010 showed that we need to establish the context boundaries and the accurate position of structures and finds. We expect to sieve some soil samples and would like to get some finds washed while we are still on site. Detailed plans for the excavation will be worked on between now and the start date. The attached plan shows where we expect to place the trenches.

MANAGEMENT

Angus Wainwright, archaeologist to the National Trust, Eastern Division, will oversee the project. Work on the site will be directed by M A T Coles with T Dymott as deputy.

METHODOLOGY

The turf will have to be removed by hand as there is very little soil overlying the features, as demonstrated by the 2010 excavation.

Fencing will be provided by the farm staff in the week beginning 11th July and erected by Saturday 16th July.

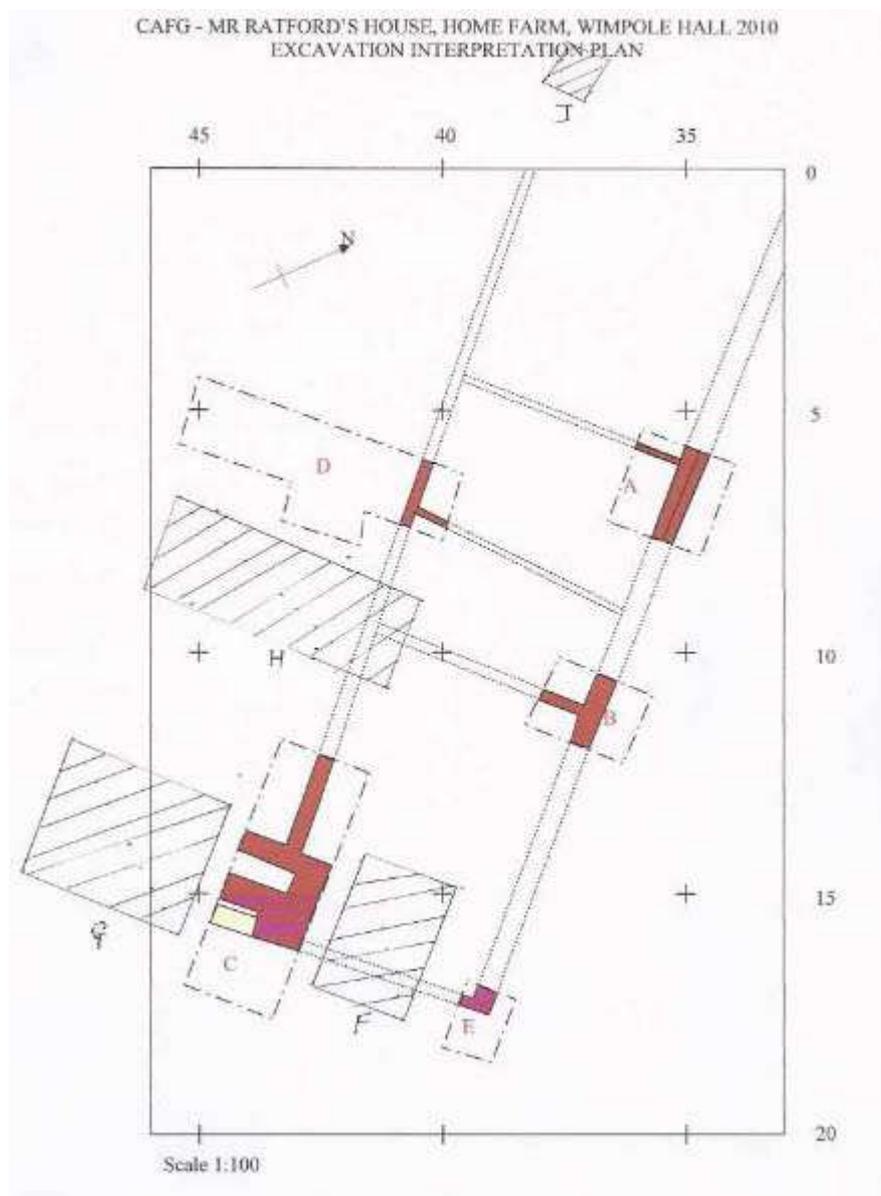
Spoil heaps must be kept near to the trenches but with at least 1m clearance.

Wheelbarrows will be borrowed from the Head Gardener and must be returned at the end of each day.

Trenches F and G are intended to establish the nature of the large brick structure at the south end of the house. They may not need to be as large as shown but it is important to find the complete outline of the feature.

Trench H should allow a detailed look at the underlying cobbled area.

Trench J will be small investigation to establish the position of the north-west corner of the house. This appeared as a parch mark in the next paddock in 2010 and is already visible in May 2011.



PROGRAMME

Work will commence with turf and top soil removal on 16th and 17th July. Excavation will then continue from the 23th July until the 31st July.
It is hoped to backfill the trenches by machine.

RECORDING

A record sheet will be completed for each context and, where practicable, labels will be nailed to the context showing the assigned number. Please help ensure there is a record sheet for the contexts within which you work.

Plans and sections will be drawn as work progresses: it is particularly important to plan features as they appear.

Frequent digital photographs of work in progress will be taken by a named individual.

The site director or his deputy will keep a daily record.

SAFETY

All workers must be members of CAFG.

Each day an assessment of the work programme must be made by the CAFG Supervisor and any safety issues brought to the attention of members.

A record must be made each day of the members working on site and any accident must be recorded in the site diary. Accidents must also be reported to a National Trust manager.

Members are recommended to wear protective footwear and gloves. Protection from UV radiation is important and suitable clothing and barrier creams should be used.

Cuts and grazes are the most likely injuries caused to hands while trowelling or digging with spades or shovels. Gloves should be worn.

The use of mattocks and other heavier tools poses a potential risk of injury to operators and those nearby. The user should ensure that there is sufficient space without other people and should wear heavy footwear.

Wheelbarrows must not be overfilled or filled with more than the operative feels capable of moving, and a clear route must be maintained to any spoil heap.

A first aid kit will be kept on site. The supervisor must have a working mobile phone and know how to contact a National Trust manager. A manager will be found either in the Home Farm or via the reception staff at the Stables.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Members of the public will be encouraged to visit the site and CAFG members should be prepared to discuss their work with them. Members of the public must be kept behind the barriers and not allowed near trench edges nor must they be allowed to cross the electric fence from the Park into the excavation area and thence into the gardens or Home Farm.

PARKING

From the A603 take the signposted road to Wimpole Hall, pass the entrance drive to the House and take the next right, the lane to Cobbs Wood Farm. Park, neatly, in the field 100m on the right.

Please do not use the volunteers' car park by the stables.

EXCAVATORS' ACCESS

Walk back along the lane from the car park, cross the road, and pass through the swing gate.

Members will be issued with an ID card which will allow access to the farm and grounds to use the facilities.

Michael Coles
Field Officer