



RECENT WORK BY THE TRUST IN COWBRIDGE

As many members of the local history society will already know, a small team from the Trust recently concluded investigations at the rear of the Midland Bank. The work was necessitated by the forthcoming extension to the adjacent Bear Hotel, and the Trust is most grateful to the owner, Mr Lewis, for his co-operation and interest.

The site was first investigated in 1981/82, when trial explorations revealed a sequence of features including the abutment for a bridge outside the north gate of the medieval borough, and one edge of a very large Roman ditch. This ditch ran at 90° to the axis of the military bath house which had been examined on the Arthur John Car Park site, and appeared to have fallen out of use during a period when troops were being redeployed in the earlier part of the second century AD; therefore a military function seemed likely for this feature. What was not clear however was the direction in which the ditch ran, or whether there were any associated features such as a rampart which would confirm its defensive nature. Given the extensive circumstantial evidence (such as the baths and several finds of items of military kit including crossbow bolts and part of a helmet), the questions raised by the discovery of this ditch were obviously crucial to the interpretation of the evidence for occupation during the Romano-British period which the Trust has revealed in several excavations since 1977.

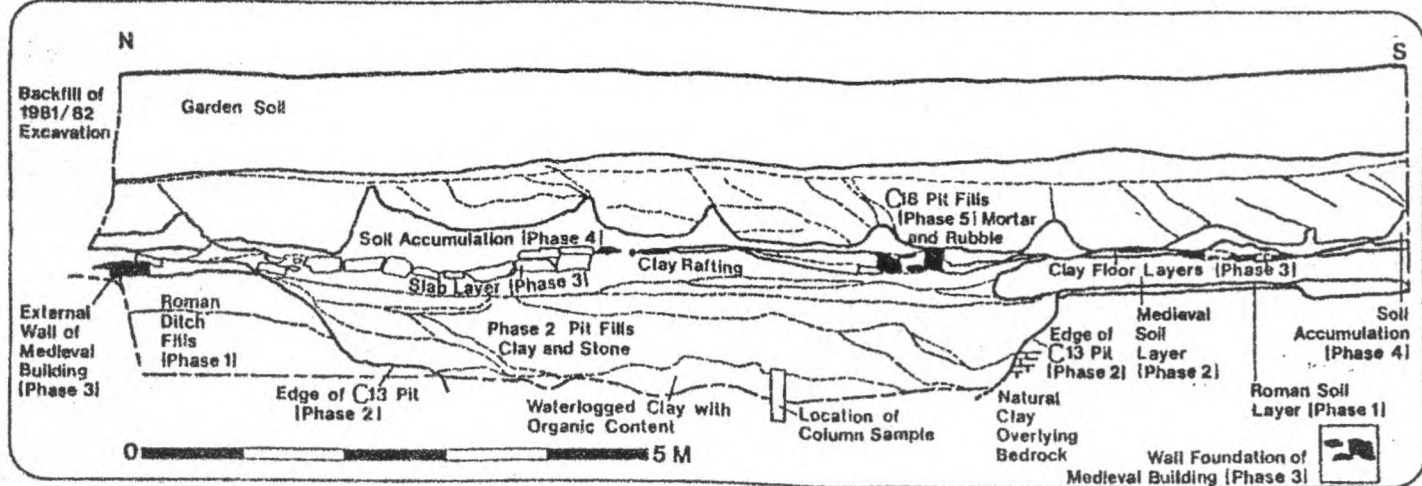
The ditch however was two metres down from the existing ground surface, so it was not until a relatively late stage in the excavation that it was realised that most of the evidence for the ditch had been removed during the thirteenth century, when some of the earliest inhabitants of the medieval borough had dug an enormous pit which had cut away most of the Roman levels. Sufficient remained however at one end of the excavation to show that it was most unlikely that there had ever been a rampart next to the ditch.

Although the question of the existence of Roman military defences at Cow-

a bonus, for the lowest layers within it had remained waterlogged since they were deposited seven hundred years ago. This meant that the organic material within it was remarkably well preserved, and included items such as off-cuts from leather working, wooden carpentry waste, and plant and insect remains such as beetle wing-cases. The diversity of species within the insect world is in itself a reflection of the way in which particular species adapt to particular environments; in other words the beetle species identified will be a very sensitive indicator of the environment in the period during which these deposits were derived. The wood and leather on the other hand add an extra dimension to what we know about the crafts and industries which were undertaken in the town centre.

Later on, probably towards the end of the thirteenth century, the pit was filled in and covered over with a thick rafting layer of clay and stone to prevent subsidence of the building which was constructed on the site. The building seems to have been a well constructed two-storey structure, probably with the principal accommodation on the first floor. On the lower floor there were at least four small rooms which may have acted as storage compartments. The clay floors were virtually at the same level as the floor of the vaulted undercroft of the medieval building a few yards away at the rear of the Bear Hotel. The building underwent modification on at least one occasion, and the masonry found in 1981/82 represented an extension to its northern end.

Traces of one of the surfaces of the road to the North Gate were discovered which were contemporary with the building. After the demolition of the building the road seems to have diminished in importance and a layer of dirt was left to accumulate over its surface. By the time it finally went out of use (along with the North Gate) shortly before 1630 it was described as a "footway", a description which seems to be confirmed by the archaeology.



*Cowbidge Midland Bank. Composite section showing main contexts in east bank.
Principal horizons are shown in solid lines.*

The final phase of activity on the site consisted of a complex sequence of episodes of refuse dumping, the most important of which took place during the late eighteenth century when the building at the front (High Street) end of the plot was demolished and the rubble buried in the back garden, there being no municipal tip at the time! Analysis of the rubble suggests that it was derived from a medieval structure with numerous later additions. The deposits also contained a substantial collection of pottery (some of reasonably good quality); indeed the site as a whole has

produced the best medieval and post-medieval pottery sequence which we have yet recovered from the town. This will provide useful comparisons for analysis of less well-dated material from other excavations in the Vale such as Llanmaes and Cosmeston.

Analysis of the environmental material and the other finds is still going on, but when completed the data should do much to enhance our understanding of developments in the town centre.

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