

Report on the excavation of a sawpit in the National Trust Yard, Slindon Estate, West Sussex, April 2008

Following a request from the National Trust, members of the Worthing Archaeological Field Unit undertook the excavation of a sawpit in the national Trust Base Camp yard on the Slindon Estate (grid reference SU 956085). The archaeological objectives were to:

1. Excavate, record and assess the condition of the sawpit;
2. To investigate the construction technique.

The work was carried out between the 11th and 14th April 2008.

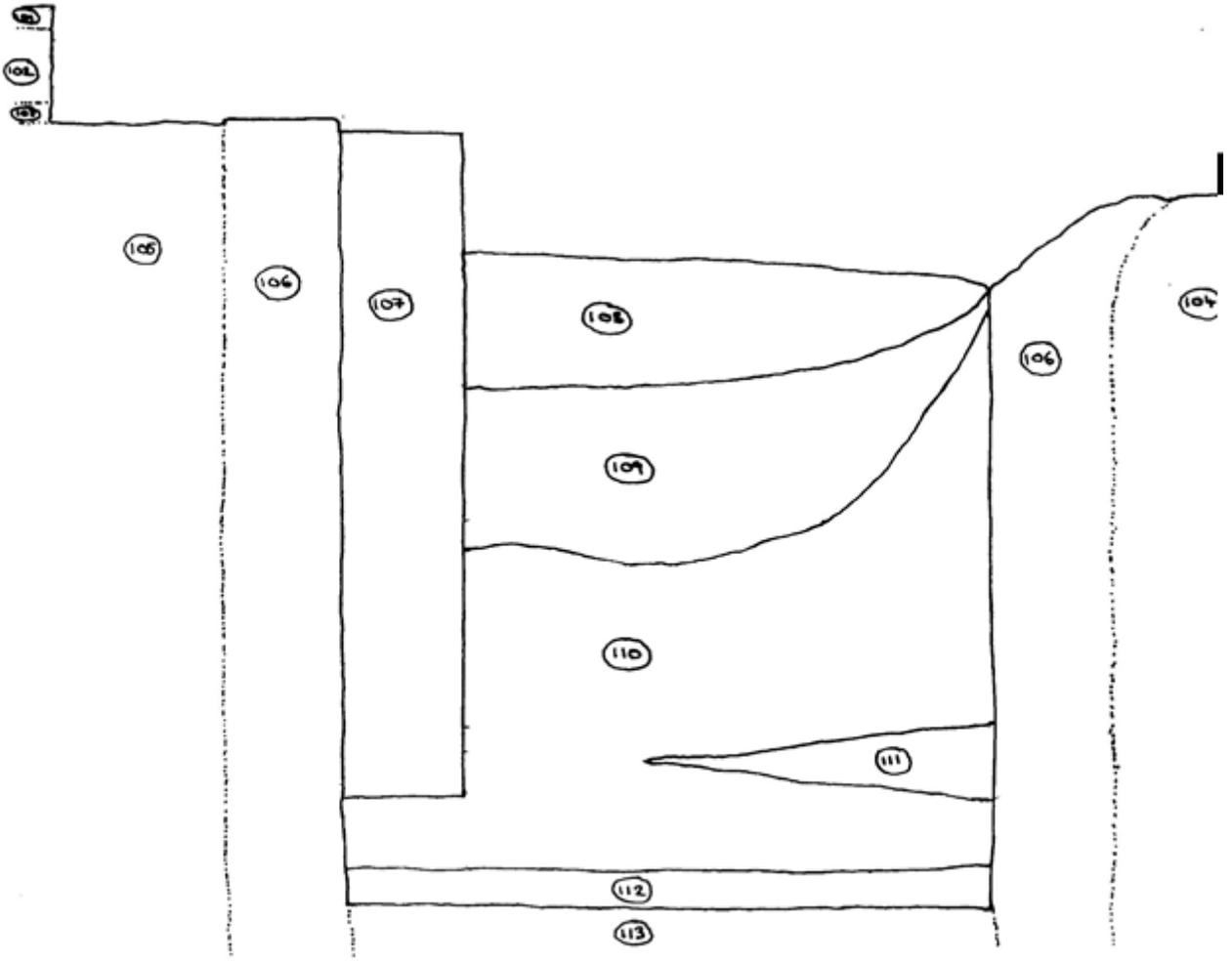
The excavation technique.

A single trench (approximately 6.8m (E-W) by 2.4m (N-S)) was opened over the visible remains of the sawpit to define its extent. Once this was established, the eastern section of the interior of the sawpit was excavated to a depth of approximately 1.4m. Originally it was intended to excavate the entire interior and to insert a sondage against the outer wall of the structure. However, given the condition of the structure these aspects of the project design were not carried out.

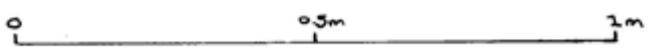
The Structure

The sawpit is 6.4m long and 2.2m wide. It appears to have been built in two phases. Phase one was the digging of the original pit and its lining with flint walls. These walls were 220-240mm thick and extended to a depth of at least 1.4m. The walls were well made, with sandy mortar bonding the cobble sized flints. A small amount of brickwork was observed in the northern wall. This may have originally formed a niche of some form.

The second phase consisted of the addition of a brick lining to the southern wall and insertion (or replacement of earlier) steps at the eastern end. The wall was made up of 14 courses of white brick (brick size 225x104x67mm), well mortared together, giving it a depth of 1.14m. The top of the brick wall was capped by a layer of mortar, which extended over and originally covered the earlier flint wall (see Plate 2). A large crack ran up from the base of the brick wall to 2/3 rds of its height approximately 3m from its eastern end. Observations beneath the level of the bricks suggest that this structural damage did not penetrate into the earlier flint structure. The brick wall was constructed on top of a laid brick floor (see Plate 3). The bricks of the floor were not mortared together and were placed on a layer of crushed charcoal that contained some brick. The wall and floor were originally joined by a thin layer of mortar, which still adheres to the lowest course of the wall. The floor had collapsed towards the centre creating a void area beneath the brick wall (see Plate 6). The original level of the floor was clearly marked by staining on the northern wall (see Plate 1). Integral with the wall are a flight of steps at the eastern end of the sawpit (see Plate 4). The steps are brick built, there being 5 well-spaced steps, although the drop of the lowest was considerably more than those above (36cm compared to about 22cm).



SLY08 Section 1 Scale 1:10



The Fill of the Sawpit

The fill of the sawpit (see Plate 5) consisted of the following:

- o A top layer of soil with a maximum thickness of 12cm (context 101). This contained areas of burning, though conversations with National Trust staff suggest that these are mostly likely very recent.
- o A layer of well compacted chalk (context 108) with a maximum thickness of 27cm. This contained what appeared to be fresh flints and a few pieces of abraded ceramic building material.
- o 32cm of small blocks of chalk and small flints in a chalky soil (context 109). This was very loose, containing a few small pieces of building rubble, various iron objects and a sheep's tooth.
- o A dark layer, 86cm deep and extended to the brick floor of the structure (context 110). This consisted of dark soil, charcoal and much (at least 25%) building rubble. The latter consisted of large blocks of flint, slate, tiles and brick. The ceramic roof tiles recovered were identical to those used on the adjacent furnace building. Several still had nails in the holes, and these displayed a characteristic hexagonal head. Also recovered was a black glazed ridge tile, identical to others stored by in the yard. Other finds included large fragments (up to 20 by 20cm) of reinforced window glass), much iron work (including a five tine fork, a scythe and various other fragments of tools), several sherds of what appeared to be early 20th century pottery, glassware in the form of broken jam jar style containers, broken bottles and a complete champagne style bottle, and a number of bones (cow and sheep being represented and showing clear signs of butchery). A representative sample was retained for the archive. This layer was very loosely packed and contained many large void spaces. It is likely that these resulted from the collapse of the brick floor and subsequent settling of the material above. Within this context there was a lens of coarse, yellow sand (context 111).

The fill showed very clear stratigraphy and its arrangement suggests that the sawpit was filled exclusively from the northern side.

Interpretation

The Saw pit was built shows two clear phases of construction.

- o Phase 1. A pit was dug and lined with flint walls.
- o Phase 2. The southern wall was reinforced with a brick wall and a brick floor added. The steps at the eastern end were constructed. We are not able to tell whether these replaced a previous set of steps.

At some point the saw pit went out of use and was filled. It may be that this occurred when the building to the north was constructed. Excavations for this building may have provided the chalk that was used to pack the top of the saw pit and this appears to form a layer of much of this area of the yard (context 102 is a thin layer of chalk that covers a soil horizon, context 103).

Unfortunately, the excavation provided no evidence that enables us to date these Events.

Recommendations.

1. That the Worthing Archaeological Society carry out a desk based assessment of the available maps to try to establish the period that the saw pit was in use
2. That the area of the saw pit be fenced off to prevent vehicles parking over it.
The structure is in poor condition, and it is possible that excessive stress may cause the brick lining of the southern wall could collapse. The top of the northern, flint wall is also fragile and several courses of flint have already been lost on the inner face. A fenced off area, perhaps with a display board showing the results of the excavation to inform visitors about the feature, would help to prevent further damage to the archaeology.