

SPEKE HALL: EXCAVATIONS IN THE GARDENERS' COMPOUND, 1987

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Introduction

In advance of the redevelopment of the gardeners' compound east of the stable block at Speke Hall, an excavation of the proposed vehicle inspection pit was carried out under the auspices of the Field Archaeology Unit of the University of Liverpool.

The excavation

A trench of approximately 1m x 2m was excavated to a depth of 90 cm.

A concrete skimming, of an average depth of 8cm, was removed from the area, revealing one side of a garden path running in a north-south direction along the trench. The path had a brick lining resting upon and butting up against garden soil deposits and retaining a cinder levelling and a gravel/pebble surface. The garden soil was up to 60cm in depth in the disturbed northern section of the trench and 40cm in the south. The variation in depth of this deposit was probably caused by gardening activities on the site and complicated by the existence of a post-hole in the northern end of the trench. Beneath the garden soil there was a layer of pure sand. Resting on the sand in the southern section were a number of triassic sandstone blocks which may have represented an earlier phase of building nearby. The sand was coloured a dark brown in the undisturbed upper surface but was otherwise more leached similar to the Shirdley Hill sand at Rainford, Merseyside and lay on top of natural boulder clay. The clay was yellow and orange in colour with many variations in both tone and consistency and with extensive lenses of grey or white sand contained within it. Near the upper surface of the clay were a considerable number of pebbles and boulders.

The northern third of the trench was heavily disturbed principally by a post-hole which had penetrated into the natural clay and was represented in the eastern section (Fig. 1).

Two further small trenches were excavated within the gardeners' compound area to verify the stratigraphic sequence of the main excavation. Trench 1, which was excavated 8m to the southeast of the site of the inspection pit, produced a more complex stratigraphic sequence, probably due to the disturbance caused by the construction of a garden wall, with gravel and sand mixed with the soil and artefacts to a much greater depth.

Trench 2, 20m to the east of the inspection pit, was again disturbed by the presence of a wall in the northern section but the southern section corresponded well with the sequence observed in the main excavation.

The finds

Inspection pit

The excavation of the vehicle inspection pit revealed a relatively small number of finds associated with the garden soil deposits. The majority are of a late date 19th or 20th century with the notable exception of a very small rim sherd from a combed slipware cup. There were no finds of a date earlier than the seventeenth century.

Trial Trench 1

This trench produced two base sherds from a 17th century drinking vessel along with a number of modern finds.

Trial Trench 2

This trench only produced finds of a late date.

Interpretation

It seems clear that this area of land has not been subject to domestic rubbish disposal, probably due to the close proximity of the Hall itself. It may have been at various times a farmyard, parkland or even permanent pasture which prevented its use for this purpose.

An earlier estate plan suggests that a larger stable block existed (see Addison's 1781 map, reproduced in Nicholson 1983) the line of which should have crossed the excavation. No evidence for this building was found.

Implications

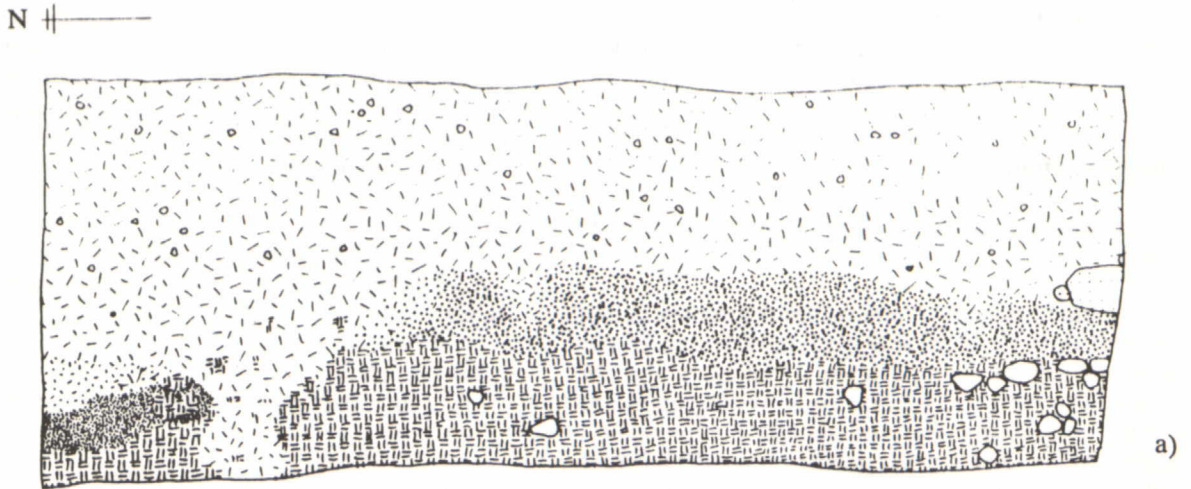
It seemed very unlikely that the construction of the garage complex in the gardeners' compound would do any archaeological damage and therefore it was considered unnecessary to undertake any further excavations in front of the garages when built.











Acknowledgements

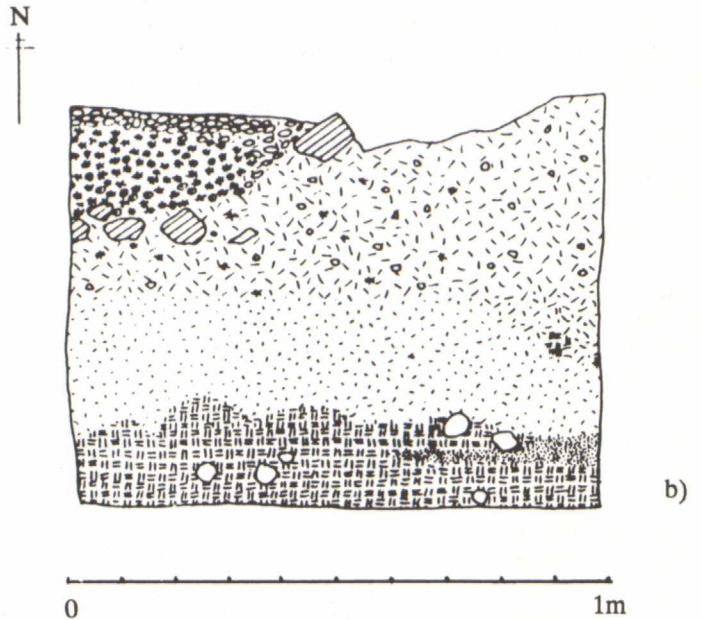
Thanks to Mark Cook and Christine Phillips for their great efforts on the excavation and to the North West Archaeological Trust, in particular Mrs J. Lewis, for its assistance and cooperation. Christine Phillips drew the sections. The photographic record and section drawings are held in the archives of the Field Archaeology Unit.

Reference

Nicholson S. 1983 'Farming on a south Lancashire estate 1066-1795: evidence from Speke Hall' *J Merseyside Archaeol Soc* 3 (for 1979), Fig. 2, page 15.



-  Pebbles
-  Pebbly soil
-  Charcoal & clinker
-  Topsoil with charcoal & stones
-  Fine brown loam
-  Boulder clay
-  Brick
-  Sandstone
-  Light grey sand
-  Red-brown sandy soil



Christine Phillips

Figure 1: Section drawings: a) northern section; b) eastern section (trench 1.95 x 0.96m).