

A PROGRAM OF TEST EXCAVATIONS AT DELTA (FARM 944), FRANSCHHOEK

Prepared for

Prof. Mark Solms

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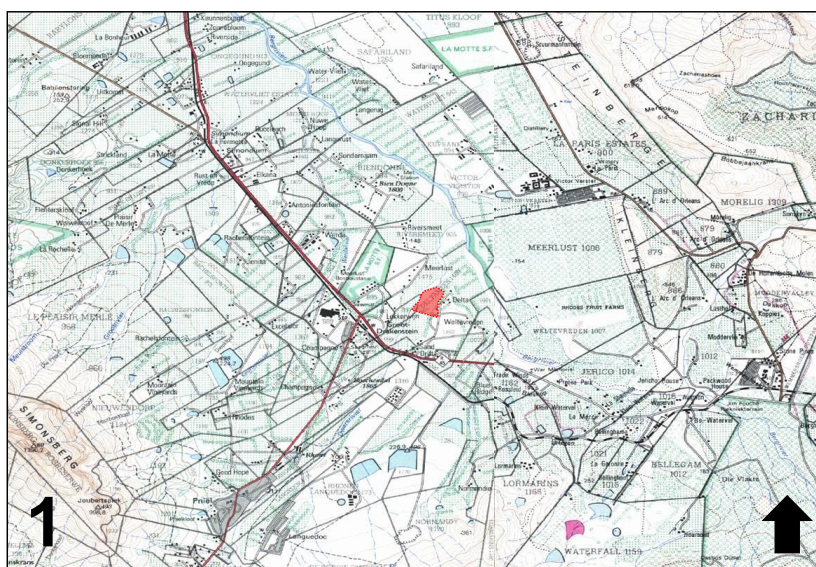
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1. Introduction

The Archaeology Contracts Office was appointed by Prof. Mark Solms to conduct a program of trial excavations on Delta Farm, Franschhoek. Prof. Solms would like to establish a museum on the property. ~~The and the~~ excavation program, carried out from the 16th to the 18th of February, was intended to explore the history of the farm, including its buildings and surroundings. Delta Farm is located on the eastern bank of the Dwarsrivier, just north of the R45 road between Paarl and Franschhoek (Figure 1).



Composite of 3318DD Stellenbosch & 3319CC Franschhoek
(Mapping information supplied by - Chief Directorate: Surveys and Mapping. Website: w3sli.wcape.gov.za)

Unfortunately a number of subdivisions have taken place on the farm over the years with the result that the farmhouse now lies on only a small portion of the original farm. One of the outbuildings remains associated with the main farmhouse, but others now lie on a separate ~~portion of the subdivision of the original~~ farm immediately to the north-east.

The main house (Plate 1) was restored in 2001 by Munnik Visser Architects but little recording of the original fabric took place. A separate plaster sampling program on the main farmhouse is still to be conducted and reported on at a later stage. This will attempt to explore and record the architectural history of the building. Plates 2 and 3 show the northern and southern end gables of the main house as they stand today, while Plate 4 shows the front gable of the farmhouse dated 1831. Further description of the house will be provided in the plaster sampling report.



Plate 1



Plate 2



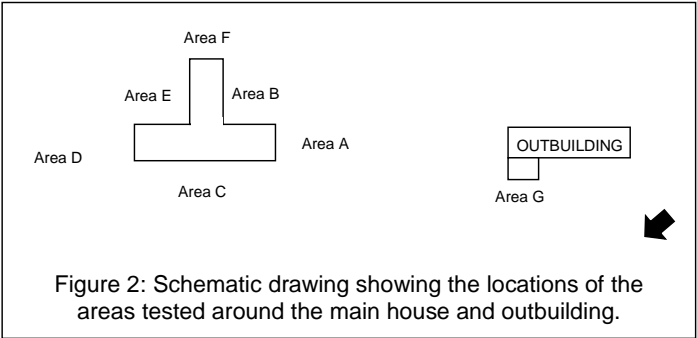
Plate 3



Plate 4

2. Methods

The aim of the trial excavations was to attempt to find any archaeological remains that might inform on the history of the property and buildings. As such, numerous small shovel test holes and trenches were excavated in eight different areas around the main farmhouse and an outbuilding (Figure 2). The size, shape and depth of the holes varied according to location and requirements and some were enlarged as necessary.

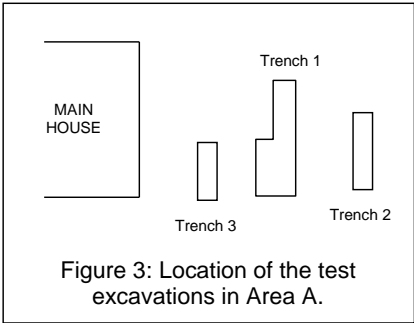


Each hole was recorded photographically and where appropriate schematic sections were drawn. Artefactual material was collected by hand with no sieving having been employed except in one instance where it was deemed to be useful. All finds were retained and bagged according to their provenience.

3. Findings

3.1. Area A

Area A is located between the main farmstead and the outbuilding to its southwest. A slightly raised and levelled platform appears to be present in this space (Plate 5) and it was hoped that testing this area might provide clues as to whether any other buildings had originally existed there. Three trenches were dug within about 60m of the farmstead (Figure 3).



3.1.1. Trench 1

The first trench, measuring 9 m by 0.3 m, was located 18 m from the south-eastern end of the farmhouse. The first observation to be made below the brown, loamy topsoil was that the palaeoriver terrace, composed of pebbles, cobbles and river sand, is very close to the current land surface. Along most of the length of this trench we found sporadic cobbles within a few centimetres of the surface. These became denser at about 0.2 m and were accompanied by river sand from this point downwards. Towards the north-western end of this trench a slightly better 'packed' cobble surface was encountered (Plate 6). In places tiny fragments of charcoal and brick were noticed in the soil. To explore this surface further, part of the trench was widened to about 0.9 m (Figure 4).

The cobbles are undoubtedly part of the natural river terrace but it is suspected that some modification may have taken place in the region of the denser cobbles.

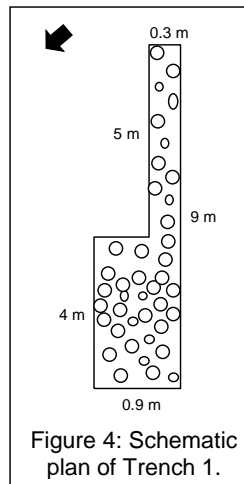


Figure 4: Schematic plan of Trench 1.

3.1.2. Trench 2

Trench 2 was located some 56 m from the end of the farmstead and measured 6 m by 0.3 m. Here the river cobbles and sand were encountered at about 0.35 to 0.4 m below the surface of the brown loamy topsoil. Only occasional historical artefacts similar to those from Trench 1 were found, but a few stone artefacts, most likely of Early Stone Age (ESA) origin, were also recovered. One of these demonstrated some scraper-like retouch to one of its edges.

3.1.3. Trench 3

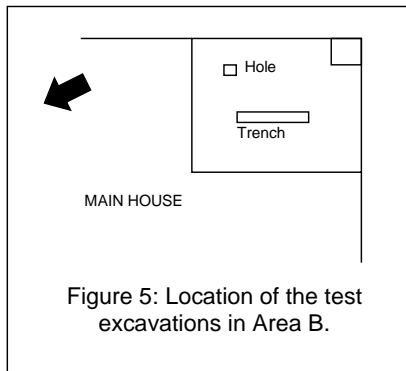
The third trench was placed between the first trench and the house, some 8 m from the latter. It measured 2 m by 0.8 m and was only dug to a depth of about 0.1 m as a thick bed of cobbles and ferricrete nodules was encountered immediately below the surface. A few fragments of modern bathroom tile indicate fairly recent disturbance in this area.

3.2. Area B

This area is located in the courtyard on the south-western side of the rear portion of the house (Figure 5, Plate 7). One trench and one hole were dug. Being near to the kitchen, this was one of the areas tested in the hope of finding remains of a kitchen dump.

3.2.1. Trench

This trench was placed 7 m from the kitchen wing and 9 m from the main portion of the house (Figure 3). Besides looking for remains of a kitchen dump, this trench aimed to locate evidence of a circular feature visible on an early aerial photograph of the property. The trench measured 6 m x 0.3 m and was excavated to a depth of approximately 0.35 m. At this point *in situ* river cobbles and sand were reached. No evidence of the feature was found and the assumption is that it had no structural component.

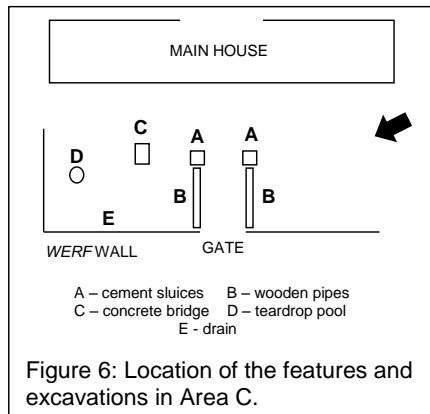


3.2.2. Hole

This excavation was sited just south of the present kitchen entrance and just inside the gate into the courtyard area. It measured 0.4 x 0.5 m and was excavated to 0.45 m. The soil consists of a brown sandy loam lying over the river cobbles. A considerably higher density of material was noted here and, to maximise recovery of finds, the soil was sieved through a 3 mm mesh sieve. Much glass, some iron fragments, some ceramics and a few Stone Age artefacts were recovered.

3.3. Area C

This area (Plate 8) is enclosed on two sides by the *werf* wall and a series of cement features relating to drainage and water diversion occur within it. In addition a wooden pipe had previously been uncovered here by farm workers alongside the cobbled pathway that leads through the gate in the wall. Excavations in this vicinity were less formal with as much area being opened up around each feature as was deemed necessary. The features are discussed in turn.



3.3.1. Cement sluices

The two cement sluices, one on either side of the path, appear to be made from relatively modern cement and are probably not very old. Their function is enigmatic as it is very difficult to tell where they are meant to channel water to. Each has one sluice on its northern side and a second on the down slope (western) side. The western sluice in each case leads only into a small chamber with no exit points (Plate 9).



3.3.2. Wooden pipes

Two wooden pipes were found alongside the cobble pathway. One of these (on the southern side of the path) was discovered and removed to a place of safety by farm workers. The other was excavated and recorded *in situ*, but left in place (Plate 10). This pipe goes into a ceramic pipe which goes through the wall and comes out above ground level on the western side (Plate 11). Beneath the concrete sluice on the eastern end of this pipe, there were some red bricks under the pipe. Their relationship to the pipe was uncertain. The pipes are made of planks bound together by wire and have an outer diameter of approximately 165 mm (Plate

12). Although the eastern end of the latter pipe ended just beneath the western edge of one of the cement sluices it seemed clear that the two were unrelated.



3.3.3. Concrete bridge

Just north of the sluices and cobble pathway is a small concrete bridge with a circular opening beneath it (Plate 13). Although a section of channel was uncovered on either side of the bridge, this did not continue far and it is again unclear what other features the bridge may relate to. A thin patch of concrete just north of the bridge looks like a place where the concrete was mixed and is therefore not directly related to the bridge. The bridge is not very old, perhaps dating to the mid-20th century.

3.3.4. Teardrop pool

Just inside the northern *werf* wall is a small teardrop-shaped pool (Plate 14). It is made from modern cement and river cobbles and has an iron pipe draining from the base. This pipe continues beneath the *werf* wall and over the large drainage channel to the west. It was clearly put in after the wall was built and penetrates the footing below ground level. Despite an opening at the highest end of the pool, it has nothing leading into it and there is no suggestion of where any water feeding into this pool may have come from.



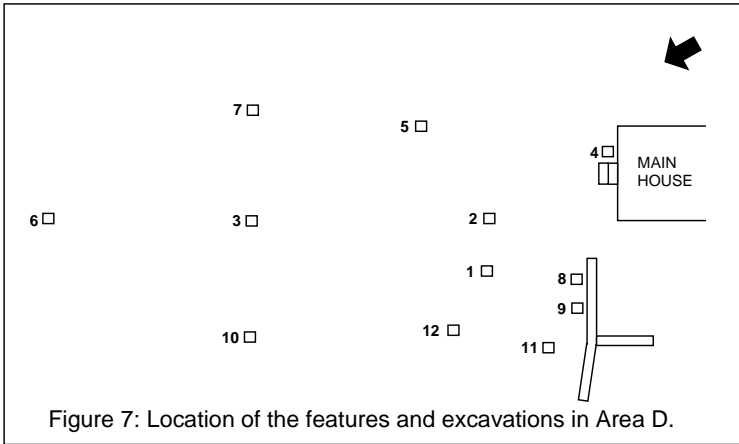
3.3.5. Water slot in *werf* wall

Near the centre of the northern part of the *werf* wall we exposed a small slot, presumably to allow collecting water to drain through (Plate 15). It appears to have been built into the wall and must be the same age as the wall. A frog brick was found in this excavation (foreground in Plate 15). Such bricks date to the 19th century British occupation of the Cape.



3.4. Area D

This area lies to the north of the farmhouse. It is open space but with several trees and bushes of varying age including a line of large camphor trees along the lower (western) edge (Plate 16). The surface has been raised and levelled somewhat such that the gradient down to the west is steeper than the natural slope of the river terrace beneath. Twelve holes were dug in this area, again with the hope of finding indications of a kitchen dump. The depths of the holes varied considerably with the eastern ones tending to reach river terrace cobbles within about 20 cm. In such cases a few cobbles were removed to check for material that may have filtered down between them. The western holes were taken much deeper as these went through a rich loamy soil, most of which is undoubtedly the infilling of the palaeoriver channel. Figure 7 shows the approximate locations of each of the excavations.



3.4.1. Hole 1

This hole penetrated a modern soil fill and contained modern glass and plastic. Excavation proceeded to 50 cm with no cobbles reached.

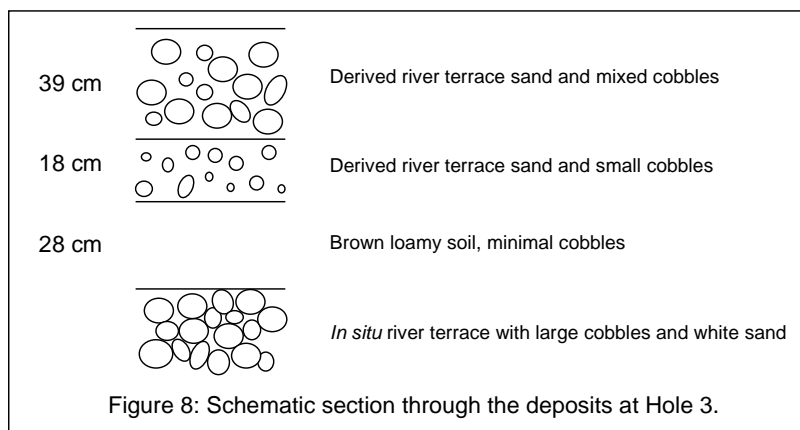
3.4.2. Hole 2

This hole was situated in the middle of the open driveway area (foreground in Plate 17) and as a result the surface was highly compacted. Cobbles, in a matrix of pale orange-brown sand, were reached almost immediately. After 35 cm the cobbles became far denser, clearly representing *in situ* river terrace material. The sand colour gets progressively paler as one moves down towards the *in situ* terrace. An electricity pipe trench was intersected in the one corner of this hole and two tiny fragments of modern glass were found in the trench fill. Besides these, all material recovered was historical and consisted of glass, ceramics and a single pipe stem, all within the top 30 cm of deposit.



3.4.3. Hole 3

This hole showed an inverted stratigraphy indicative of material being dumped here from elsewhere. The strata are shown schematically in Figure 8. Finds included some bone and ceramics along with fragments of modern plastic. Total depth excavated was 88 cm.



3.4.4. Hole 4

This excavation was sited just outside the northern end room of the farmhouse, just east of the steps leading down from the *stoep* (background in Plate 17). Again, being located in the driveway, the surface was quite compact. River cobbles in a pale brown sandy matrix were encountered directly beneath the surface and after 35 cm the *in situ* terrace was reached. Here the cobbles are larger and the sand paler. Some fragments of modern glass were found in the company of a good historical ceramic collection including several fragments of coarse porcelain.

3.4.5. Hole 5

Here no artefacts were found and the brown sandy soil continued down to the terrace cobbles. A pipeline was intersected near the surface.

3.4.6. Hole 6

In this hole a thin layer (7 cm) of dark brown soil, cobbles and modern debris was found overlying the river terrace cobbles and pale sand.

3.4.7. Hole 7

Here the first 30 cm of deposit was composed of gravelly material which might have been an old road surface. Beneath this the natural river terrace was present.

3.4.8. Hole 8

This hole was placed against the outside of the *werf* wall on its northern edge (foreground in Plate 18). The excavation was shallow and only brown loamy soil was encountered. Some fragments of modern cement were found and a good collection of ceramics was made.



3.4.9. Hole 9

This hole was sited just to the west of Hole 8, also against the *werf* wall (left of the tree in Plate 18). The same soil was found and some fragments of white plaster (possibly early 20th century) were seen. Again, a large number of ceramic sherds recovered from this excavation.

3.4.10. Hole 10

This excavation was down the slope to the west of the large camphor trees. The first 50 cm contained humic, dark brown loamy sand. Thereafter only natural riverine deposits were found. Very few artefacts were noted.

3.4.11. Hole 11

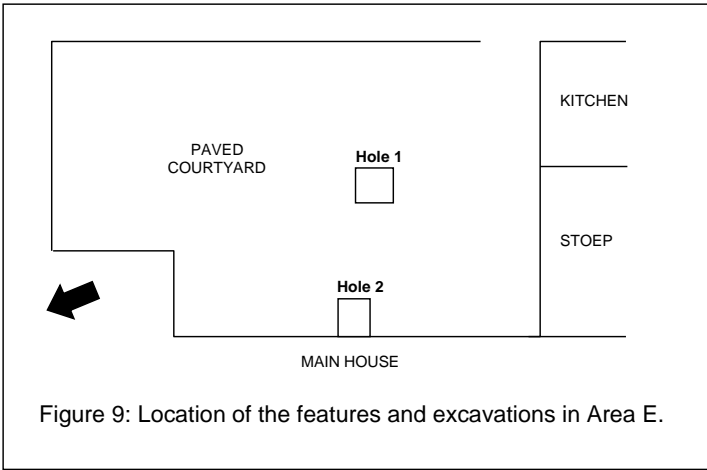
This hole was sited in a similar location to Hole 10 but further south towards the *werf* wall. Here the dark, humic sand was 65 cm deep and it contained some modern rubbish. Beneath this, the sand became slightly redder in colour and contained too many tree roots to allow further excavation.

3.4.12. Hole 12

Again this excavation was sited below the camphor trees, but between Holes 10 and 11. It too contained the same brown sand and only 50 cm was dug.

3.5. Area E

Area E is the courtyard on the northern side of the kitchen wing. With the exception of a small circular section in the middle, the courtyard area was completely paved (Plate 19). One excavation in this courtyard examined the foundations of the main house while both again sought to find remains of a kitchen dump. A schematic layout of this area is presented in Figure 9.



3.5.1. Hole 1

A small unpaved circular area was present in the centre of the courtyard and this was enlarged to accommodate an excavation. Three layers were discernible in this excavation as follows:

- Layer 1: This layer was some 15 cm thick and was composed mainly of modern rubble and yellow sand and included a large number of fragments of indoor wall tiles. Several ceramic sherds and a silcrete Stone Age artefact were found.
- Layer 2: This was a very thin layer of black material and a large number of fragments of coal. The thickness was variable but generally ranged between about 1 and 5 cm. A patch of yellow sand was also present at this level.
- Layer 3: This layer is comprised of the natural riverine sand and cobbles. A single fragment of bone found in this layer probably originated from one of the higher layers.

Plate 20 shows the excavation after Layer 1 had been removed. The surface of the black material (Layer 2) is visible along with some of the river cobbles from below. Between the edges of the excavation and the paving the modern rubble and sand fill is visible. It is likely that this material was spread out here in order to level the courtyard area prior to its paving.



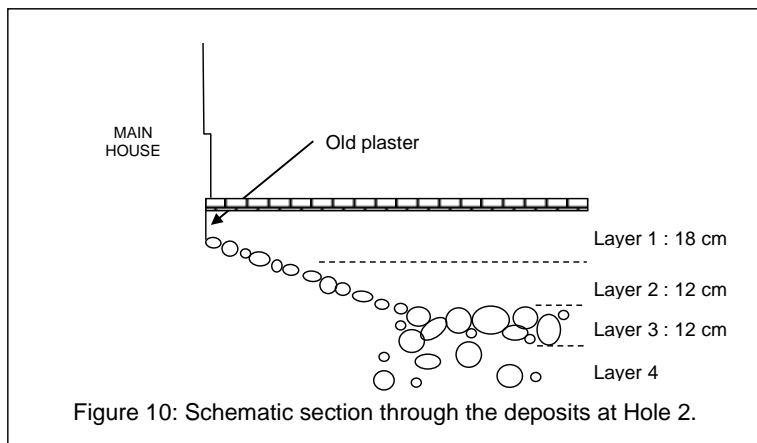
3.5.2. Hole 2

This excavation was placed at the western edge of the courtyard against the wall of the main house. The bricks were removed and below these, four layers were identified (Figure 10 & Plate 21):

- Layer 1: This comprised 13 to 18 cm of sterile yellow river sand that is assumed to have been brought in to level the surface prior to paving. It is the same sand as encountered in Layer 1 of Hole 1 but without the rubble inclusion.
- Layer 2: This layer looked rather like the typical yellow brown sand commonly seen in historical contexts. It contained a few fragments of bone and ceramics as well as a pair of iron tongs.

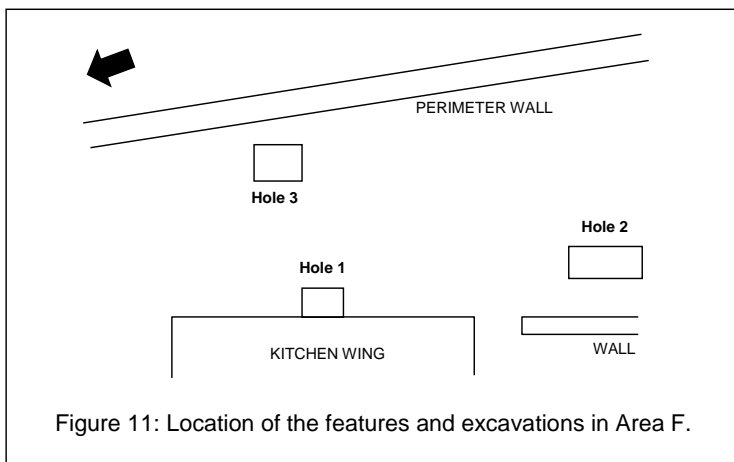
- Layer 3: This was composed of relatively large, tightly packed cobbles and dark coloured sand that may have been introduced to create a building platform for the foundations of the main house.
- Layer 4: At the bottom of the excavation we reached the natural river terrace with pale sand and cobbles, although the cobbles were less dense here than was the case in most other areas.

Beginning against the wall of the house and angling down away from the house is a surface of small to moderate sized cobbles (Plate 22). These may have been laid to stabilise the foundations and prevent erosion by water dripping from the edge of the thatch roof. Both Layers 1 and 2 come down onto these cobbles (Figure 10). None of these were removed and Layers 3 and 4 were only excavated in the part of the hole furthest from the house. Between these cobbles and the brick paving an old plaster layer is still intact. This plaster is visible as small white patches to the left of the name tile in Plate 21.



3.6. Area F

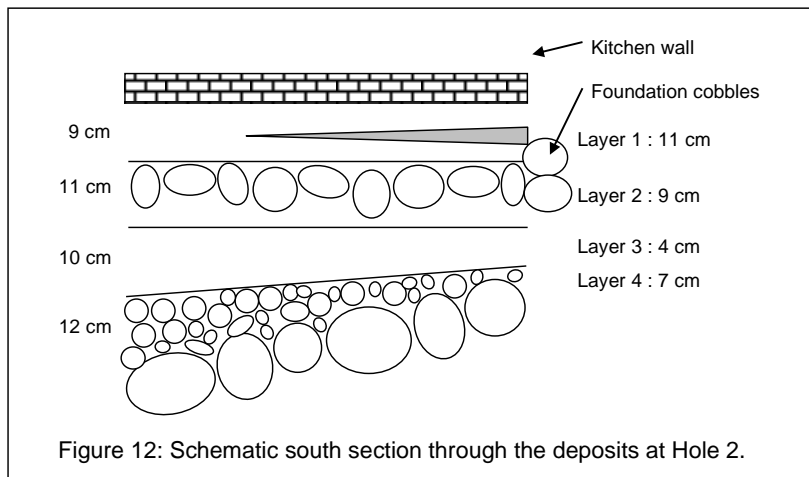
Area F is the paved area to the rear of the current kitchen (Plate 23). Unfortunately, due to past subdivision of the property, the perimeter wall runs quite close to the house thus offering only a small area for exploration. Three holes were dug in this area.



3.6.1. Hole 1

This hole was placed against the rear wall of the kitchen wing and revealed a foundation of relatively loosely packed cobbles. This is clearly far less formalised than the foundations of the main house as exposed in Hole 2, Area E. Four layers of deposits were identified during the excavation as follows (Figure 12 – note that depths are given on both sides of the figure as the deposits are variable in thickness):

- Layer 1: A sterile orange sand was encountered below the bricks and was clearly used to level the area prior to brick paving. The sand was brought in during the building and plastering of the kitchen wing in two stages, as a thin stringer of cement is visible within the orange sand and the lower orange sand penetrates beneath the plaster (Plate 24).
- Layer 2: This layer consisted of cobbles laid on a thin layer of white sand. The cobbles were carefully placed to form a relatively compact surface and some were placed on edge to fill spaces (Plate 24 & 25). Although containing no historical material, a piece of plastic among the cobbles indicates that this layer is not very old (Plate 25).
- Layer 3: Beneath the cobbles was a layer of yellow clay with orange clay-brick fragments.
- Layer 4: This comprised small cobbles and sand and overlay the larger cobbles of the river terrace. It seems as though this layer may have been introduced to level the ground above the river terrace as similar material was not observed above the terrace in any of the other excavations.



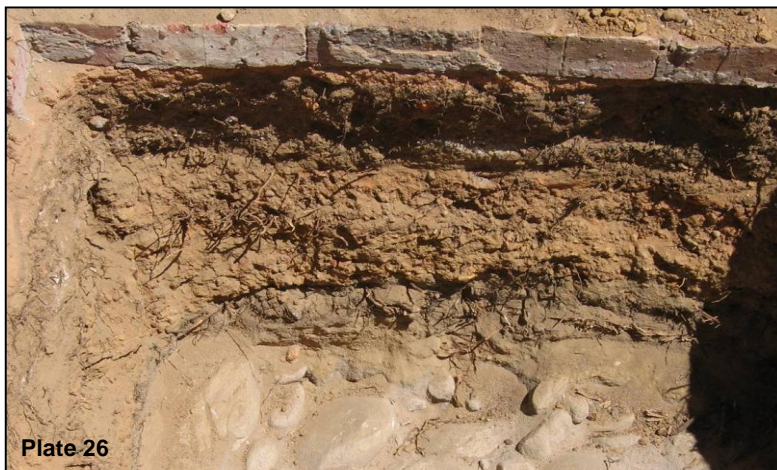


3.6.2. Hole 2

This excavation, located 3 m south of the southern kitchen wall, only proceeded to 40 cm depth at which point the *in situ* river terrace was reached. The deposits were comprised of brown soil and fine gravel throughout and they contained a small amount of modern rubble.

3.6.3. Hole 3

Despite being just 5 m away from the house and Hole 1, the deposits here are quite different to those in Hole 1. Many small rootlets were encountered throughout. Four layers were identified as follows (Plate 26):



- Layer 1: This layer comprised of the same orange sand described in Layer 1, Hole 1. It is much thinner in this area and again was clearly used to level the surface for paving. No sign of the cement stringer is evident (4 cm).

- Layer 2: This consisted of brown loamy sand with small stones and fragments of brick and cement. A few pieces of glass and ceramics were found along with fragments of modern tiles (17 cm).
- Layer 3: This was a thick layer of heavily compacted orange/brown sand with numerous ferricrete nodules. The layer was virtually sterile with just one bone fragment having been recovered (21 cm).
- Layer 4: This was a layer of compact, pale brown sand containing a reasonable amount of glass, ceramics and iron fragments. The sand got softer towards the base shortly before the river sand and cobbles became visible (18 cm).

3.7. Area G

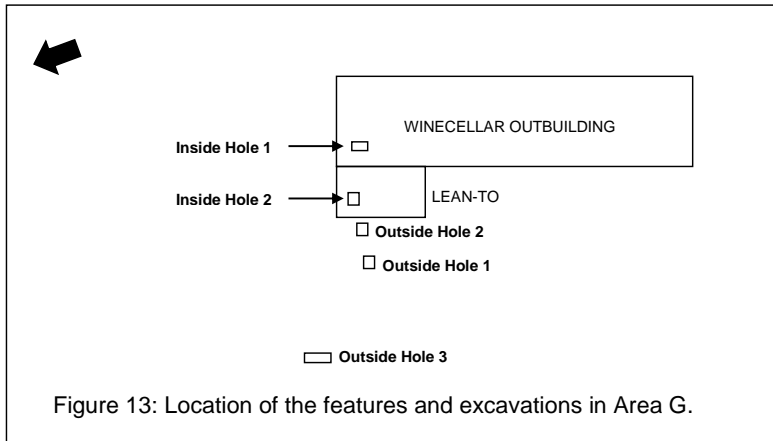
To the south of the main farmstead is an outbuilding (wine cellar) which has an extra room built onto its western side (lean-to) (Plates 27 & 28). This building has also been restored with the majority of it having been converted into accommodation for farm workers. Just the northern end room and lean-to are still used for storage of farm implements. One hole was dug in this room and another in the lean-to (Figure 13). Three holes were also dug outside, to the west of the outbuilding (foreground in Plate 28, Figure 13).



Plate 27



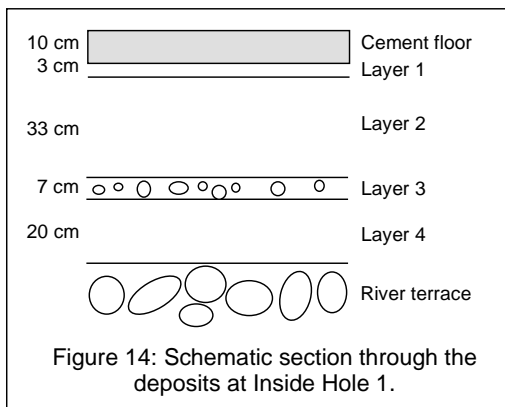
Plate 28



3.7.1. Inside Hole 1

This excavation was placed just inside the big doors on the northern end of the wine cellar building. Beneath the present cement floor four layers of deposit were identified (Figure 14):

- Layer 1: This was a thin layer of light brown sand.
- Layer 2: This was a rather thick layer of darker brown material with numerous nodules of charcoal and small brick fragments. The charcoal and brick is clearly visible in the section photographed in Plate 29.
- Layer 3: This comprised a thin layer of white sand and small cobbles.
- Layer 4: The final layer was comprised of pale brown silty sediment and it lay above the *in situ* river terrace.

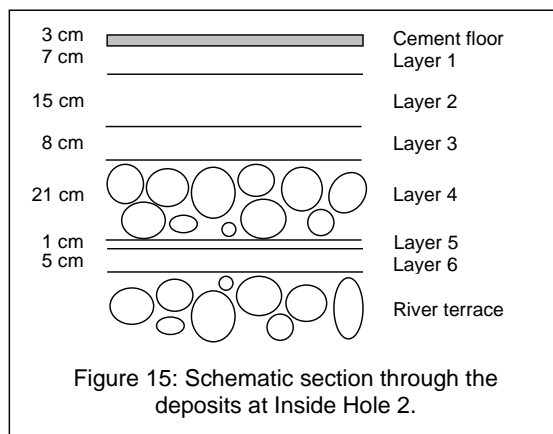


The large amount of charcoal in Layer 2 potentially indicates that a fire may have occurred here at some point. Considered along with the many brick, plaster and wood fragments, some of which were burned, they may suggest that the roof of the building burned and subsequently collapsed.

3.7.2. Inside Hole 2

This hole was dug in the lean-to on the western side of the cellar, again just inside the door. In this area six layers of deposit were identified (Figure 15):

- Layer 1: Beneath the cement was a layer of soft, brown sand.
- Layer 2: The second layer was composed of compact brown sand with chunks of red brick.
- Layer 3: This was a hard layer of brown clay with some pebbles in it. This layer seems to have formed a surface at some point in time.
- Layer 4: This layer contains large cobbles and white sand, material that must have originally been derived from the river terrace. There seem to be odd fragments of charcoal in between the cobbles. An Early Stone Age core was found near the top of this level.
- Layer 5: This was a very thin layer of crushed red brick which also appears to have been a surface.
- Layer 6: Just above and leading down onto the river terrace cobbles was a layer of brown to grey sand.



3.7.3. Outside Hole 1

This hole was placed in the roadway to the west of the lean-to. It comprised two main layers (Plate 30). The first was a layer of compacted road material and crushed bricks and rubble (17 cm), while the second was of brown sand with occasional fragments of rubble (30 cm).

3.7.4. Outside Hole 2

This excavation was done in the grass immediately outside the western wall of the lean-to and revealed four layers (Plate 31).

- Layer 1: Grass and brown soil (25 cm).
- Layer 2: Orange brown sand (20 cm).
- Layer 3: Crushed red bricks (5 cm). This looks like it may have been a surface and might correspond with Layer 5 of Inside Hole 2.
- Layer 4: Yellow brown river sand (15 cm).



3.7.5. Outside Hole 3

This hole was dug some distance to the west of the wine cellar and lean-to between four oak trees. It proceeded through dark brown soil with much modern rubbish and occasional historical artefacts. At the bottom of this hole some bricks were encountered. They looked like the top of a wall and it was thought that this might be a well. A further excavation of this area was planned and is described in the following section.

3.8. Test excavation of the well.

On the 9th and 10th of March we returned to Delta and carried out a larger test excavation at 'Outside Hole 3' in Area G with the aim of exposing the brick wall feature discovered during the earlier test excavations.

Several layers were visible in the deposits, and considerable amounts of modern rubbish were present throughout the excavation. This included a dried out tin of paint which was found about 15 cm below the level of the top bricks. Some material was separated according to layer but, since all these layers are likely to be less than some 10 to 20 years old, the majority was removed as a single entity. A witness section was left in place along the southern edge of the hole in order to allow stratigraphic excavation of a portion of the deposits if this is deemed necessary. This may allow a reconstruction of the very recent history of this particular area.

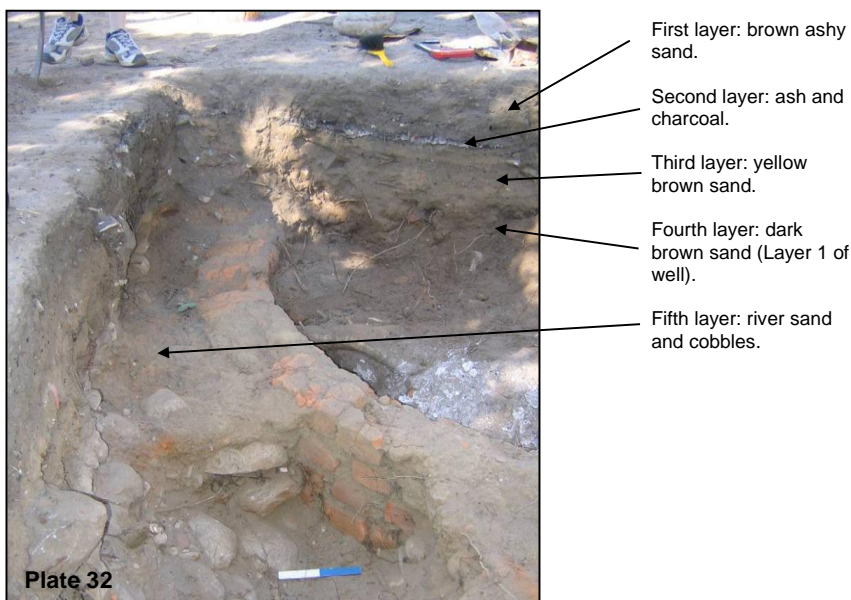
The layers encountered, are approximately as follows:

1. The uppermost material was a layer of brown ashy sand with plenty of modern rubbish. This layer was variable in thickness.
2. A 1 to 3 cm thick layer of burnt material with much ash and charcoal occurred below the brown sand. This layer occurred in a large shallow depression and probably indicates that a rubbish pile was burned here. The depression may be the result of subsidence of the infilling of the well.
3. The third layer comprised of yellow brown sandy clay and also contained many artefacts. There did not seem to be any material in this layer indicating deposition within the last few years, although the majority was still modern.
4. This was essentially the first layer to be contained within the well and was named 'Layer 1'. During further excavation of the well the numeric layer labelling will continue. This layer is composed of a mixture of the terrace material noted in the next layer and some brown sand. It appears that the brown sand overlies the terrace material and

may have been pushed into the well from the southern edge as it is thicker to the south than to the north. There is also relatively modern rubbish, including the paint tin, which shows that the topmost part of the well was only filled in relatively recently.

5. This layer appears to be derived from the river terrace as it is composed of river cobbles and pale sand. It contains little artefactual material and lies over and around the top of the walls of the well.

These five layers are shown schematically in Figure 16. It is thought that the well may have been filled in some time ago and the deposits within the well subsequently settled as they became more compact. Modern rubbish was then thrown over the top into the hollow formed by the slumping deposits. This in turn sagged as well with the process continuing until the ground surface was eventually level and stable.

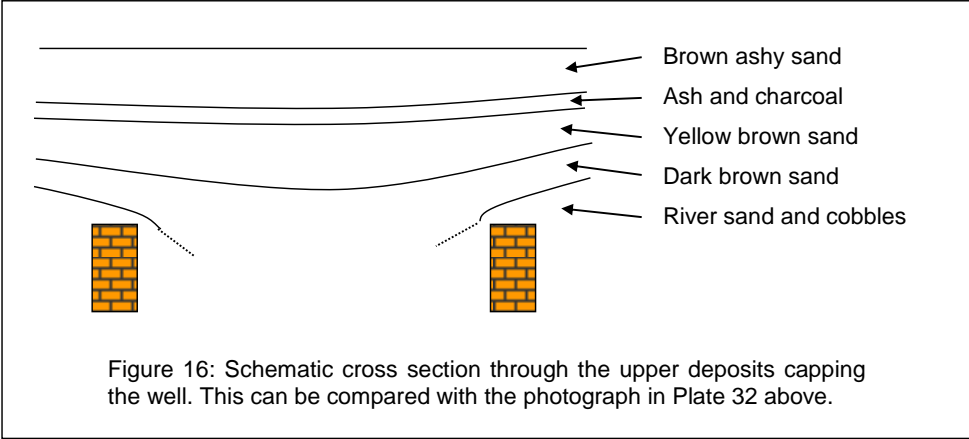


The frequency of historical ceramic and glass fragments did increase with depth indicating that proper historical deposits may occur just below the levels exposed during the trial. Excavation ceased just below the level of the bricks as the permit that we had at the time was only for trial excavations on the farm. Further work requires a separate permit to excavate the well itself. This will be done at a later stage.

The well has a fairly large internal diameter of 1.8 m and the wall is constructed of bricks laid with their long axes across the wall (Plate 32 & 33). The bricks are all similar in size and measure 250 by 120 by 80 mm. No plaster is present on the bricks as exposed but yellow clay has been used as a cement to hold the bricks together. Most bricks are fairly well preserved although some have crumbled and parts of the wall have been affected by the roots of the nearby oak trees. These roots have grown into and through the clay between the bricks and have unfortunately resulted in some cracking of the wall (Plate 34).

Plate 35 shows the northern half of the well as at the end of the trial excavation.





4. Conclusions

Altogether about thirty test excavations were carried out around the Delta farm buildings. Due to the rocky river terrace occurring over most of the farm, very little material of interest was found. However, certain areas, for example that around the northern end of the main house, did produce some meaningful finds of glass and ceramics.

The well, which was uncovered just to the west of the wine cellar building, is the most significant find and will hopefully be able to produce a good artefact assemblage when it is excavated.

5. Investigation Team

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