

The excavation of the Portioner's House, Beddington Park

This year's excavation was on the site of the Portioner's House in Beddington Park.

In the Middle Ages the Portioner was a cleric who was entitled to the tithes of the land belonging to the manor of Huscarls which consisted of 200 acres of land on the west side of what is now Beddington Lane. The Portion was an odd institution as all the tithes of a parish normally went to the rector. We do not know when it began or why. The office presumably once had some duties attached to it but the late Middle Ages it had become a sinecure in the gift of the Carew family.

Various documents show that the Portioner had a house on a site which is now in the southeast corner of Beddington Park between the New Churchyard and Croydon Road. We know that the house was rebuilt around 1360 by Adam Houghton, an associate of the Carews, who later became Bishop of St Davids. The last Portioner was appointed in the mid-16th century and at some point after this the house became the rectory. In 1789 the rector sued the Carews for the Possession of the Portionary tithes. He won these but lost his rectory. The Carews then let the house to tenants until 1843 and then had it demolished.

I hoped the excavation would provide some information about the medieval house and its subsequent development.

We uncovered part of the floors and cellar walls of the house. I am still working through the information that we collected so the interpretation is still fairly tentative. I think the building was in two phases with the oldest part – including the main cellar – to the south largely outside the trench. An extension was later put on the back or north side, and a passage added to the cellar to give access from the new area. There were two sets of steps leading down into this passage. One of these was later blocked possibly to better support cracking cellar walls.

The dating of these phases is still fairly uncertain. I think the cellar passage and the north wall of the house are 18th century but where in the century I can't tell. There is even less dating evidence for the older south side and the main cellar.

There was some painted and moulded plaster from the internal decoration of the house. I have not yet had a detailed look at this so I have yet to arrive at an interpretation of it.

We also found three pieces of tin-glazed tile with flecked decoration. These appear to date from the late 16th or early 17th century and are very unusual. A few smaller pieces of similar tile have been found in our excavations in the former gardens of Carew Manor. The tiles would have been expensive and I suspect they were made for the Carews and reused in the rectory. The Executive Committee have agreed to get these analysed in the hope of finding out where they were made. This won't happen until after Christmas as the tiles and other key finds are going on display in Honeywood from 17 October to 13 January. The results will appear in a future newsletter.

I want to thank parks for their helpful and friendly attitude towards the excavation and also everyone who took part.

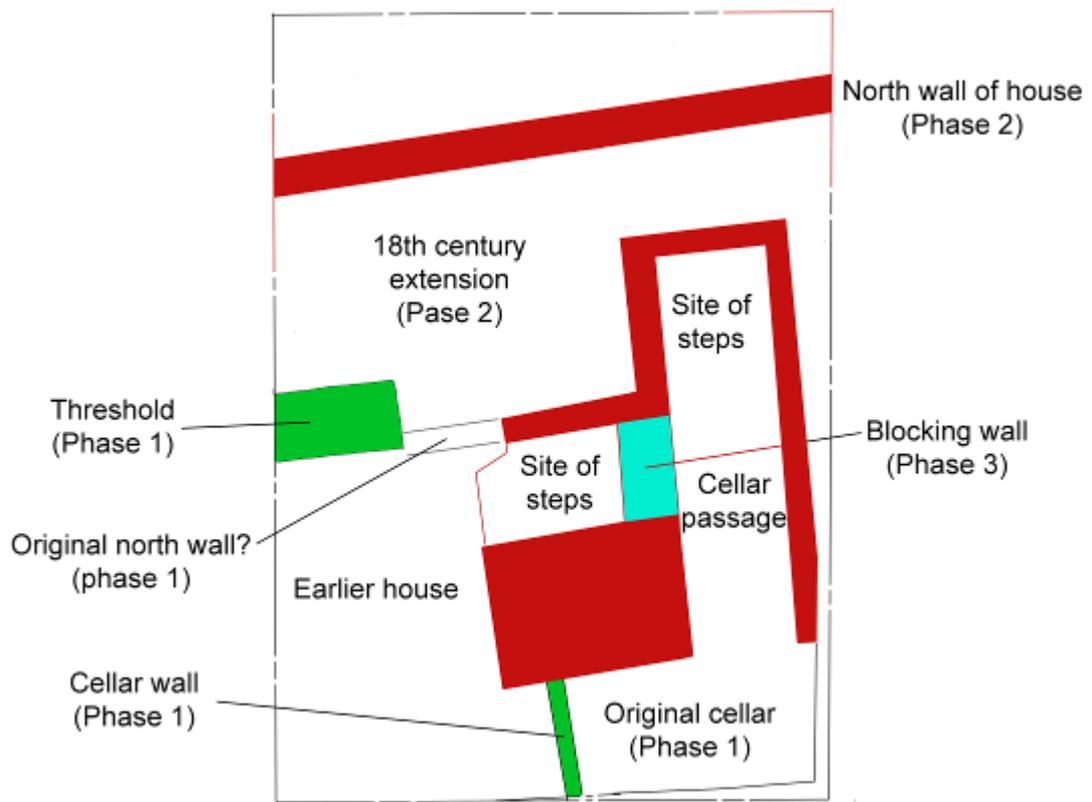


Diagram of trench A showing the main features and phases.