



c/o The Reading Room
12 High Street, Barkway, Hertfordshire, SG8 8EE
info@barkwayhistory.com

Our First Archaeological Dig

Saturday the 16th of July saw our group carry out our first archaeological dig. With the kind permission of Nicholas and Meriel Tufton, we dug two test pits in their grounds opposite the Red House.

In a map of 1780, the plot had a row of cottages extending along the roadside and forming a "T" shape. In the enclosure map of 1808 gaps had appeared, as properties were demolished or fell down. Prior to commencing the dig an auger was employed to check whether old foundations could be located and were quickly successful in hitting solid material about 20 cm down. That decided the position for the first test pit.

The rear boundary of the plot had not changed since 1780, and so we decided to sink a second pit at the rear where middens or cesspit may have been sited. So, on the morning of a hot day, we commenced work. Our party was led by professional archaeologists James Danter, and his wife Shannon who was also the finds expert. Part of her contribution also included accurate measuring and photographing.

Carefully uncovering soil in the first pit of 1 metre square, we quickly exposed a short course of brickwork and a quantity of mortar. Then gradually many other items were found - broken glass, pottery, china, a clay pipe, several old iron nails, and a lead musket ball. Some of the glass from possibly wine bottles, was exquisitely coloured. Because of the quantity being recovered we only succeeded in going down about 20cm. Separation out of viable material from unwanted items, and subsequent washing, cleaning, bagging, and numbering also took time. The midden pit was not so productive, but its placing was a guess.

At the end of the day, we back filled the two pits, with the expectation of a return.

All the findings were taken away for expert analysis. We hope that some will eventually end up on display in the Reading Room. We have already been offered other village sites for carrying out test digs.