

Report on Excavation for the Dulverton Weir Project 2022

by Nigel Dymond (NDAS)



Introduction

In March 2020 it was agreed with Phillip Hull and Peter Romain (two of the Dulverton Weir and Leat Conservation Trust trustees) that NDAS would carry out four trial trenches (later reduced to three) which had been proposed in the Project Design for a Community Archaeology Project (2020). The first two trenches were excavated in September 2021 when the pandemic restrictions had lifted sufficiently for the work to be undertaken. The third excavation, a small trench to be dug in the leat, to establish the construction of the base, was postponed until early 2022.

On 16th May 2022 three members of North Devon Archaeology Society (NDAS) met with Philip Hull in Dulverton to complete the work.

The third trench (Trench 3) was located approximately 1 meter upstream from the North face of the bridge, close to Leat House. (Fig 1.)



The flow of the leat was reduced and Phillip Hull constructed a small cofferdam around the area to be excavated. Whilst the amount of water entering the area of Trench 3 was greatly reduced, it proved impossible to prevent the ingress of water into the trench.



Figure 2 – Marking out the trench.

Trench 3 (1m x 1m)

The top layer (300) of the deposits over the leat floor comprised of small pieces of natural gravel and small stones – brown, black and white. Beneath this was (301), a layer of more compact mid brown/grey silted clay, containing water borne pebbles 1cm to 5cm. Finds included coins (all decimal), broken glass (mainly broken bottles), a piece of ‘Bridgewater’ roofing tile, sherds of pottery, ceramic beads from a modern bracelet/necklace (Fig. 7) and part of a brick (manufactured). Beneath this was (302) a reddish-brown silt layer which still contained modern finds: decimal coins, broken bottle glass and ceramic beads. Beneath this was (303) the lime mortar base (with stone inclusions) of the leat. The base had been covered by approximately 30cm of silt (Fig 3).



Figure 3 – Showing the floor of the leat. Scale = 30cm



Figure 4 – This photo was taken approximately 30 seconds after the one above (Fig 3) and illustrates the rate that water was ingressing into the trench.



Figure 5 – A selection of pottery recovered during the excavation.



Figure 6 - Selection of broken glass recovered during the excavation. The broken bottle base (top left) is embossed 'SWC Co') and the broken car headlight lens (top right) is embossed 'Right hand drive'.



Figure 7 – Ceramic beads recovered during the excavation.

Conclusions

The lime mortared base of the leat at this location was something of a surprise. Previous reports had suggested it was cobbled, although this may have been a description of the stone inclusions in the mortar. The lime mortar suggests a later resurfacing of the leat base and in general, its use in Devon suggests a post-medieval date.

The finds (including decimal coinage) in all contexts above the mortared surface suggest that the leat had been cleaned out in the modern era. This in fact had been reported by local residents, who stated that the leat was regularly dredged/cleared by the local authorities and the last time this occurred was likely to have been in the 1960s/1970s. This would explain why the earliest coin that was recovered during the excavation was dated 1971.