



The National Trust

Report for the Bucks Historic Environment Forum meeting

12th September 2019

Stowe Gardens

As part of the continuing restoration programme for the gardens we have recently undertaken a number of archaeological projects to provide evidence to inform the restoration process. The most recent of these has been a drone-mounted camera survey to produce a photogrammetric plot for the south lawn and golf course. This should visualise for us any of the subtle earthworks surviving from the 18th century landscaping and should assist with the process of reinstating historic paths and statuary when the golf course is relocated to the park in 2020. We would also aim to complete geophysical surveys of these areas in 2020 – the south lawn has huge potential to reveal evidence for the various late 17th and 18th century garden layouts – as suggested by last year's parch marks.

Several excavation projects are currently underway, perhaps the most revealing being excavations to reveal surviving evidence for the Temple of Modern Virtue in the Elysian Fields. The site of this building – erected in the 1730s as a counterpart to the Temple of Modern Virtue – has been known for a number of years and indeed stumps of surviving masonry on the site were first excavated in 2002. Current excavations by Stephen Wass of Polyolbion Archaeology have revealed more of these masonry stumps and confirmed that the largest section sits on a plinth of finely-dressed masonry. Original ground levels have been confirmed and suggest that the site was concealed by an earth mound when the temple was demolished in the 1770s. We are currently uncertain if sufficient evidence survives to allow for an accurate recreation of the temple, 19th c. landscaping having apparently removed much of the western half of the temple. Investigations are currently held up by tree-safety issues and associated bat issues.

Excavations to locate the statue settings of Apollo and Nine Muses around the Doric Arch have unfortunately not borne fruit, although we have discovered further evidence for the path which runs alongside the east side of the arch. Three of the rubble bases for the statue plinths were located in 2002 and a further base was located in 2016. In the absence of further evidence the recreation of the statuary group will be based on the spacings we have for the four bases, plus evidence derived from historic maps. Some compromise from the original layout is inevitable as mature trees occupy the site but these are unlikely to have been present when the statues were first laid out in the 1760s.

Also at the Doric Arch site, a recent ground penetrating radar survey of the lawn in front of the arch by Museum of London Archaeology has revealed a distinct 5m square anomaly, raising the possibility that this could be the site of Spring of Helicon mentioned in several mid 18th century accounts. We have placed an evaluation trench over this feature and this has exposed substantial masonry walls up to a metre in width enclosing a 2m deep cellar. The nature of

construction, including an earth/lime core to the walls suggests a pre 18th c. date for this structure, perhaps 16th-17th century. It could be one of the village buildings but the substantial size of the walls suggests something of higher status, perhaps associated with the Tudor house which pre-dated the current 1680s house site. Excavations continue.

The radar survey has also confirmed surviving evidence for the foundations of the original locations of the two lake pavilions on the south side of the Octagon Lake. Recent excavations have also confirmed earlier ground levels across the Worthies causeway spanning the outlet from the Worthies River in the Elysian Fields. An evaluation trench across the Octagon Lake cascade is proposed for late October to determine if evidence may survive below ground level for 18th century configuration of the cascade. 18th century engravings suggest an elaborate arrangement of culverts and statuary mounted on the cascade.



Wall footings currently under excavation at the Doric Arch

Gary Marshall, National Trust archaeologist 10/9/2019