

Summary of
Archaeological Excavations at
Tonge Hall Meadow
Middleton,
Greater Manchester

(THM)

2012 -2014

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2.0 Site Location and Description

Middleton lies 4.4 miles north north-east of Manchester city centre. The excavation site is located at the north-west corner of Tonge Hall Meadow about 15 metres east of Tonge Hall in the area previously occupied by Tonge Hall Farm measuring about 35 metres east-west by 30 metres north-south. Situated at about 101 metres O.D. National Grid Reference SD 8779 0585.

It is at the high point on a spur of land separating the valley of the river Irk to the north and Wince Brook to the south. To the north the ground slopes steeply down to Oldham Road 140 metres away at 90 metres O.D. To the south the ground slopes down more gradually and falls away very gently to the east and west.

The site is mostly grassy and there are no major obstructions on the site.

The superficial geology is “Till Devensian Diamicton” and bedrock geology “Pennine Lower Coal Measures” (British Geological Survey).



Fig. 1 Site Location

3.0 Site History and Previous Excavations

We have little documentary information relating to Tonge Hall Farm. The building is shown on the Tithe Map (1839) and OS maps through the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries and seems to have the same ground plan until the 20th century when the southern end of the building was extended eastwards.

The building is not named on OS maps or on census returns until the 20th century.

During much of the 19th century the farmer seems to have resided at Tonge Hall but in 1890 the when Tonge Hall was under threat of demolition the farm buildings were converted to provide accommodation for the farmer.

A mid 19th century photograph of Tonge Hall shows part of the southern end of the farm. This seems to a barn with an external stairway.

We are not aware of any previous archaeological excavations on this site.

4.0 Methodology (2013 - 2014)

A review of the documentary evidence was made. 19th and early 20th century O.S. maps show the ground plan of the farm and its development over the period from the 1840's to the 1950's. The maps were used to establish the location of Tonge Hall Farm on the ground. A site grid was set up measuring 20 meters by 30 metres. The grid was divided into 10 metre squares. The base line for the grid was set parallel to the field boundary fence and 0.5 metres to the south of it. This field boundary is shown on all the 19th and 20th century OS maps and is easily accessible.

In order to accurately locate the building the initial test pits were positioned over the corners of building and at wall junctions. It was hoped that this would also give us information on the different building phases.

The excavations were carried out as a series of weekend digs of 2 or 3 days with test pits and trenches being marked out on the day prior to excavation. The site is accessible to the public which meant that trenches had to be backfilled at the end of each weekends dig. This imposed limits on the size of trenches and the depth of the excavations.

Training was an essential element of the excavations. For most of the excavation team Tonge Hall Meadow was their first archaeological dig. Training involved excavation techniques and recording (including the completion of context sheets, drawing plans and sections and levelling). This also imposed limits on the speed of excavation.

Members of the community were invited to participate in all the excavations.

All trenches were dug by hand.

The MOLAS single context recording system was used throughout the excavation (MOLAS Archaeological Site Manual Third edition 1994).

Context records, plans and when appropriate sections and wall elevations were drawn and together with a photographic record are maintained in the site archive.

5.0 Excavation Results

The 2012 excavations were directed by Ryan Forde.

The excavation was intended to establish the presence and condition of the archaeology and consisted of 4 small test pits in August 2012. In October 2012 one of the test pits was expanded into a small trench measuring 4 metres x 1 metre.

At this time a site grid had not been established and there was no formal system for the recording of contexts in place. Consequently test pit locations are approximate and context numbers are created retrospectively from notes made at the time.

The 2013 – 2014 excavations were directed by R.J. Huddart.

A site grid was established and a formal system introduced for the recording of contexts and small finds. A total of 9 test pits and small trenches were excavated.

5.1 Tonge Hall Meadow 2012 Excavation

August 2012

4 test pits were opened. Accurate positions were not recorded. Figs. 2 and 3 show the approximate locations.

Test Pit TP01

1m x 1m. Excavated only as far as the demolition layer.

Test Pit TP02

1m x 1m extended to 1m x 2m. Under the top soil on the west side of the trench is a gravel layer [004R] which is the buried eastern edge of the gravel path running south from William street. Underlying the top soil and gravel was a thin scatter of demolition rubble (mainly brick) [005R] overlying a sandy loam [006R] and below this undisturbed yellow medium sand (natural) [007R]. This test pit was devoid of any archaeological remains.

Test Pit TP03

1m x 1m. Removal of the top soil revealed a 10 cm layer of demolition material. Partial removal of demolition material exposed a short section of brick wall [011R] running approximately parallel to the west wall of the farm.

Test Pit TP04

1m x 1m. Removal of topsoil revealed a row of 3 modern, machine made bricks [010R] running parallel to the north wall adjacent to the pathway. This may represent the remains of a boundary wall running along the north side of the farm building. The test pit was closed at this point.

October 2012

Trench T03

TP 03 was reopened and extended to 1m x 4m.

Excavation revealed a section of wall with a total length of about 2.1 metres. The wall appears to have been constructed in 2 phases. The northern section is 1.6 m long [011R] and is butted against the shorter and probably earlier section measuring about 0.5 m [012R]. At the join of the two wall sections a second wall runs eastwards at 90 degrees to the first wall for about 0.5 metres before entering the trench section [013R].

The walls are constructed from a double row of machine made brick laid with stretchers and without a cavity. They stand to 3 courses on a foundation layer of a single course of brick laid with headers. The mortar, where visible, was dark grey. No mortar was visible in the shorter wall [012R]. The walls were cut through the natural sand [014R] with the foundation laid on the underlying clay [018R].

The eastern (internal) area has the fragmentary remains of a stone paved surface [015R] set directly onto the natural clay [018R]. At the northern end a vertical metal pipe was found in situ [018R]. Traces of coloured wash were still present on the inner wall surfaces.



Tongue Hall Meadow Trench 03 - October 2012

5.2 Tonge Hall Meadow 2013 - 2014

Trench T05

Positioned to locate the north-west corner of the farm building was initially opened as a 1m x 1m test pit in 2013 but reopened and extended later to a final size of 3.3 metre East-West by 2.4 metres North-South.

A 3.2 metres of the north wall foundation [009] and a 1.6 metres of the west wall foundation [010] was exposed during the excavation.

The north wall was constructed from 4 rows of brick laid with stretchers. The first 3 rows on the south side were of hand made brick whilst the fourth row on the north (external) side of the building was of poor quality machine made brick.

At 1.4 metres from the north-west corner an opening 0.8 metres wide had been constructed with two rows of handmade bricks laid with headers.

The wall is 0.5 metres wide and stands only as a single course over most of its length four bricks of a second course, all machine made, were found still in situ adjacent to the opening. The opening probably representing a doorway.

A deposit of demolition material and sandy-loam [006] covered an internal surface of sandy clay [012] probably forming the base for a paved floor. Fragments of flagstone 2 cm thick were found on the surface but not in situ.

The west wall is approximately 0.5 metres wide and used a different construction method. Only handmade bricks were present and the foundation had been built from 3 rows of brick with the outer and inner rows laid with headers and the middle row with stretchers. Only a single course survives. The west wall appears to be of an earlier date than the north wall which abuts it.

At the point where the west wall intersected the trench section there was a suggestion of a change in construction but time did not permit a further extension of the trench.

Both walls retained traces of a light greyish-white mortar.



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 05 – July 2013

Trench T06

Originally opened as a 1m x 1m test pit (TP 06) it was subsequently extended into a 3m x 2m trench across the north-east corner of the farm building.

This trench revealed several well preserved features.

A section of wall constructed from unmortared stone laid in regular courses extended from the southern trench section northwards for about 90 cm [064]. The wall consisted of 2 courses of a foundation layer of unfaced sandstone stepped out by about 8 cm. Above this are 2 courses of faced sandstone measuring about 10 cm x 10 cm and varying in length between 20 and 40 cm. Abutting this on the north side is the eastern end of the north wall about 0.65 m wide [063]. This was constructed from brick with four rows of handmade brick faced on the north (external) side with a single row of modern machine made brick (see T 10). The wall stands to 5 courses at the north-east corner with the bottom course probably being of older handmade brick.

To the east of the walls outside the building a surface of cinder 15-20 cm deep extended across the trench [004]. The upper levels contained a large quantity of 19th/20th century pot sherds. Cutting the cinder layer adjacent to the north east corner was a badly damaged earthenware drainpipe [018]. This extended from the wall to northern trench section. The cinder layer had also been cut by a shallow trench 50 cm wide and approximately 15 cm deep extending from the stone wall in a north-easterly direction. This was filled with a sandy-clay [016]. A quantity of modern bricks were present (not in situ) and it is thought that the sandy-clay represents a foundation layer for the boundary wall shown on 19th/20th century OS maps.

Removal of the cinder deposit revealed a deposit on stone and brick rubble [066] at the eastern end of the trench, possibly laid to level the area and provide additional drainage. This covered a cobbled surface [023] which extended across the trench but became sparser as it approached the walls. The cobbled surface had been cut to take a short section of land drain [068]. The cut had been backfilled with early handmade brick fragments and stone rubble and covered at its northern end by a modern machine made brick. Close to the north-east corner of the wall the cobble surface was again cut. The cut curved eastwards from the junction of the stone and brick walls before returning westwards and running parallel to the north wall at a distance of about 25 cm from the north wall [071]. The cut is filled with a dark greyish-black silty-sandy and humus and probably represents the foundation cut made when rebuilding the north wall in the late 19th century. The fill of this cut had been cut again by two post holes both about 20 cm in diameter and 25 cm deep. One is located adjacent to the eastern face of the brick wall [020] and the other about 5 cm to the east of the first post hole [026]. These post holes had been filled with a soft black humus containing some 19th century pottery sherds. The purpose of these is unknown but might have supported a boundary fence prior to the building of a brick boundary wall.



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 06 – May 2013

Test Pit TP 07

A 1 m x 1 m test pit opened to evaluate an internal wall of the farm house. This test pit was closed after 1 day in order to concentrate efforts on T 05 and T 06.

Immediately below a thin scatter of brick demolition rubble [008] and against the south facing section was rectangular post hole measuring 22 cm x 6.5 cm [057] still with part of the post in place. Machine made bricks on the south and west sides were positioned alongside the post presumably to provide additional support for the post. Extending south from the post was a double row of stake holes [060a-f]. Each row consisted of 3 stake holes about 8 cm in diameter and irregularly spaced cutting a layer yellowish-brown sandy loam thought to be the pre-demolition ground surface [062]. It was expected that this test pit would reveal features internal to the building but the features excavated suggests an external fence line. The test pit was covered prior to backfilling to facilitate further investigation at a later date.

Test Pit TP 08

A 1m x 1m test pit positioned to locate the SW corner of the farm building and subsequently found to be about 1 metre too far south. The test pit revealed an excavation cut [017] 80 cm wide by 60 cm deep constructed to take a modern plastic service pipe [029]. The backfill [028] contained significant quantities of machine made and handmade brick rubble and occasional stone rubble.

An extension of 0.8 metre on the east side revealed a flimsy linear feature of brick and stone 1 metre long and orientated NE-SW. This feature is situated immediately below the top soil on a deposit of sandy loam. Possibly the base of a garden feature associated with the farm.

A 1 metre extension to the north was opened but almost immediately abandoned due heavy rain but did reveal the service pipe cut continuing in a northerly direction.

Trench T 09

A trench 4 m x 1 m over the 20th century extension of the south wall. The wall is not shown on the 1909 OS 25 inch map but is present by 1922.

Excavation exposed a brick wall [039a] formed by 2 rows of modern machine made brick laid with stretchers and set with a hard dark grey mortar. The wall was built with a cavity between the rows measuring about 10 cm at the west end but widening slightly to about 13 cm at the east end and partially filled with reused handmade half-bricks. The wall stands to 2 courses and on a foundation layer of 2 courses of modern brick laid with headers and each course stepped out on both sides of the wall.

On the north side (internal to the building) is a surface [039] composed of pebbles 2-5 cm in diameter set in a hard yellowish-brown clay through which the cut [040] for the wall foundation was made. On the south side the cut for the wall [042] is through a deposit of compacted sandy-clay and pebbles [043] similar to [039] and which probably formed a continuous surface prior to the construction of the wall.



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 09 – June 2013

Trench T 10

A 4 m x 2.5 m trench located over the north wall of the farm house. Removal of the top soil and partial removal of the demolition layer revealed a section of the north wall spanning the entire width of the trench [050]. The wall was about 0.64 metres wide and consisted of 5 rows of brick laid with stretchers. The outer row on the north side is machine made brick and the rest earlier handmade brick. The wall at this point is one brick wider than at the western end in T 05 but identical to the section of wall revealed in T 06.

A small area in the south-west corner of the trench was cleaned to remove demolition material from the south (internal) side of the wall. This exposed a surface composed dark grey clay [051]. Poor weather and lack of time prevented further excavation in this trench and unfortunately prevented us from examining the western side of the stone wall excavated in Trench 06.



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 10 – July 2013

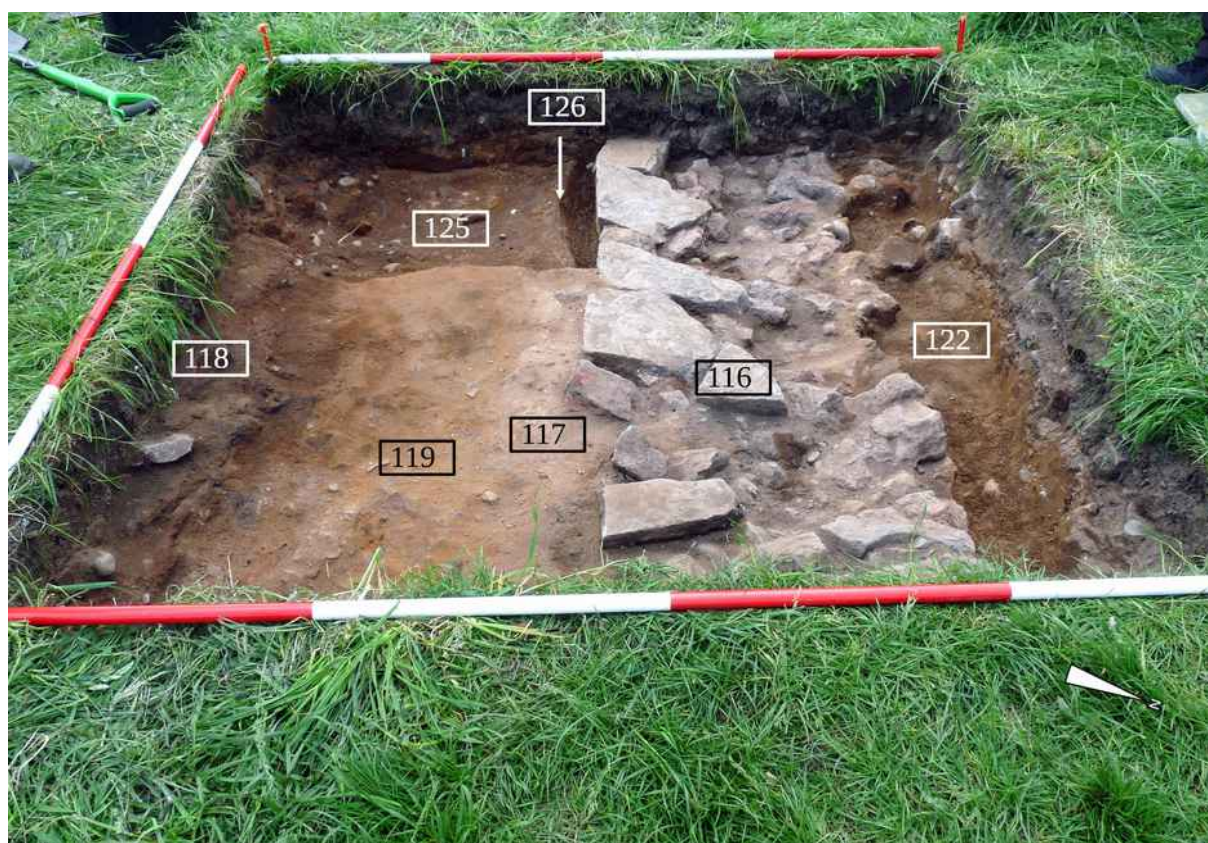
Trench T 11

A 2m x 2m trench positioned at the intersection of the south wall and an internal wall shown on the 19th and 20th century OS maps.

Only a single course of the south wall was intact. It extends the width of the trench (2 metres) and is 0.5 metres wide. The wall is constructed of stone rubble with large faced stones on the external south face. Although fragmentary it appears that the north (inner) face was composed of small faced stones [116]. Its construction resembles that of the east wall.

We found no firm evidence of the internal wall shown on the 19th/20th maps but a compacted deposit of stone rubble covering the western end of the trench north of the wall [021] and a band of dark grey clay protruding from the northern trench section [120] suggests a change in the internal structure at this point.

Adjacent to the wall on the south side and extending the full length of the wall was band of light brownish-yellow sand about 17 cm wide and up to 5 mm deep overlying a band of orange-brown sand containing small pebbles [119] which extend across the entire area south of the wall. It is thought that this might have been a bedding layer possibly for a paved surface. Along the southern side of the trench was a band of compacted clay containing brick dust and brick fragments up to 5 cm deep and overlying [119]. Only about 5-15 cm was visible in the trench but might form part of a floor surface for an out building. A small area of [119] was removed in the south-west corner. This revealed a deposit of dark reddish-brownish sand with patches brownish-black sandy-loam [125] through which the foundation cut for the wall had been made [126].



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 11 – June 2014

Trench T 12

A 2m x 2m trench opened over the intersection of the east wall and southern range.

The continuation of the east wall found in T06 ended at its junction with the east-west wall. Only a single course remains. Constructed of stone it is 0.8 metre wide. The eastern side (external side) is made up of large faced stones up to 25 cm wide. The west side is composed of smaller aligned stones up to 10 cm in width. The wall core is of stone rubble [103].

The east-west wall is of two phases.

The eastern section extends from the stone wall to the eastern trench section. This consisted of a foundation layer about 0.5 metres wide and composed mainly of brick rubble [105].

The western end appears to be of later construction and stands to four haphazardly arranged courses utilising machine and handmade brick and occasional large pebbles. It is 0.6 metres wide [108] and at the east end adjacent to the eastern stone wall the bricks are arranged to form a socket measuring 20cm x 20cm [109]. This may have held a door post since 20th century maps show an entrance at this point.

At the junction of the two brick walls there is a clear division in the floor surfaces. These would have been internal surfaces. The western end is composed of a yellowish-red sand [123] whilst to the east a 2 cm deep layer of yellow clay [106] overlies the sand. The north-east corner of the trench would have been external to the building and had a moderately compacted surface of reddish-yellow sand containing some gravel and occasional larger pebbles which might suggest that there had originally been a cobbled surface in this area [111].



Tonge Hall Meadow Trench 12 – April 2014

Test Pit TP 13

A 1m x 1m test pit subsequently extended by 1 m on the east side was opened over the expected location of the south-west corner of the farm building. Evidence from TP 08 had suggested that this corner may have been destroyed by the cutting of a service pipe trench. This seems to have been confirmed during the excavation. The western end of the trench contained a large amount of rubble mainly consisting of machine made brick but also handmade brick, cobbles and angular stone fragments [124]. This appears to be part of the backfill of the service pipe trench. At the eastern end of the trench a single row of unmortared machine made bricks [128] was revealed. Two courses were visible and extended westwards from the eastern trench section for 0.6 metres. This probably the remains of the south wall of the farm building. A stone foundation layer was not found but lack of time prevented further excavation and it is possible that the stone foundation underlies the brick wall.

6.0 Conclusions

A total of 13 test pits and small trenches have been excavated during a series of weekend digs. The archaeological remains are generally only 15 -20 cm below the present ground level.

The buildings were converted to accommodate the farmer in about 1890. The archaeology indicates that there were several alterations to the original building both before and after 1890 conversion. Pottery from the site dates from the latter part of the 19th and early 20th century and consequently is consistent with the known period of occupation.

The absence of earlier finds might suggest that the buildings had not be previously occupied and possibly that they had always been out buildings to Tonge Hall until the 1890 conversion. We have however only excavated a small proportion of the site down to natural (about 5%) and earlier finds may be present in areas not so far excavated.

The archaeology is quite well preserved particularly to the north and east of the site. The south-west corner appears to have been destroyed by the laying of a modern service pipe which may also have removed part of the west wall. Very little excavation has been carried out on the interior of the building but T 03 did show well preserved archaeology in this area also.

We think that earliest structural remains so far investigated are the east wall and south wall foundation. These are constructed from unmortared stone 0.5-0.8 metres wide. The Hall is thought to have been built in the late 16th century and it is quite possible that these walls date from the same period as the Hall and consequently are of local importance.

It is intended to carry out a further excavation during 2015.

7.0 Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the MAS members and volunteers who took part in the excavation.

8.0 Site Archive

The site archive consisting of context records, drawn plans and sections, photographic records and small finds is currently maintained by Middleton Archaeological Society.

