ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS AT GUNSTON HALL PLANTATION (44FX113)

Report on 2013 Activities

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Acknowledgements

The archaeology program at Gunston Hall is a project of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, and funding to support labor costs is provided by that organization. However, the program is dependent on gifts and grants to cover the cost of supplies, equipment and other expenses. I am enormously grateful, therefore, to the support provided in this respect during 2012 by individual members of the Board of Regents and other persons and organizations.

The continued support, interest and encouragement given by members of the Board of Regents have been most gratifying. In past years, the archaeology program has been under the purview the Regents Archaeology Committee. During the current year, the various Regents committees have been suspended while a new strategic plan for Gunston Hall is being implemented (see Appendix I). In the interim, a Regents Task Group on Research, Collections and Archaeology has been established and which has proven to be very supportive of the program. The Staff Archaeologist serves as the staff liaison to the Task Group.

The program is indeed fortunate in that it is assisted by a corps of accomplished volunteers. Those providing assistance during 2013 were: Carol Boland, Amy Bovee, Janice Brose, Brandon Cavalho, Jerry Foster, Thomas James, Susan Marquis, Margaret Noel, Ann Oliver, Isabel Pease, Leslie Rakowski, Sarah Romano, Zack Steckman, Karl van Newkirk, Donald Ward and Claudia Wendling. In addition, a number of individuals who normally volunteer with Archaeological Society of Virginia worked with Paul Inasihma at the Newtown site. These volunteers are acknowledged in Paul's section of the report.

In addition to assisting with the archaeological field and laboratory work, several volunteers undertook a variety of document research projects. These have proved invaluable not only to the archaeology program, but to our understanding of the Mason family and Gunston Hall in general. The persons involved in these projects were Carol Boland, Jerry Foster, Paul Inashima, and Claudia Wendling. Special thanks are due Dr. Gary Knipling for helping clear the woody overgrowth from the Newtown burying ground site and the area to the west of the

family burying ground in order to facilitate the ground penetrating radar surveys of these sites.

Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to three individuals at the Smithsonian Institution for assisting in the identification of some of our faunal material. Fred Grady, Department of Paleobiology, helped identify some of the bones and teeth that had stumped us in the lab, and Jerry Haresewych and Ellen Strong, both of the Department of Invertebrate Zoology, identified two of our rather exotic mollusk shells.

Introduction

The objective of the archaeological research program at Gunston Hall is to gain an understanding of the landscape as it existed in the eighteenth century so that George Mason's exterior living space can be more accurately interpreted. This must be done in the absence of any contemporary documentation. Nothing is known to have survived that might describe the eighteenth century Gunston Hall landscape or its contents.*

Archaeology at Gunston Hall must therefore be done in a kind of "patchwork" fashion. The unearthing of a particular feature will often suggest where to look next. Or, a new finding might suddenly make sense of a feature found, perhaps, years previously. The projects undertaken during 2013 exemplify the kind of archaeology done to follow-up on previous findings. These projects were:

- Further explore a previously partially excavated deep artifact deposit, dating to the period 1770 – mid-1780's, to determine if this was a sunken road bed as originally surmised;

- Excavate a possible slave dwelling area, the location of which was suggested by a test unit survey done in 2001;

- Attempt to determine whether a cellar feature identified in the 1970's as being the seat of Newtown, a plantation established by George Mason's grandfather, is indeed what it was claimed to be;

- Use ground penetrating radar (GPR) to determine whether two side-by-side depressions seen near the Newtown site indicate the presence of a cemetery;

- Use GPR to determine whether a group of graves detected in a previous survey of the Mason family burying ground extend into a wooded area lying to the west of that burying ground.

* This must be qualified to a certain extent by the existence of John Mason's *Recollections* (Dunn 2012). This document was intended to recount John's boyhood life with his famous Father, George Mason. It was written in the 1830's and does mention, in passing, some landscape features. However, it does not give useful descriptions or exact locations of the features.

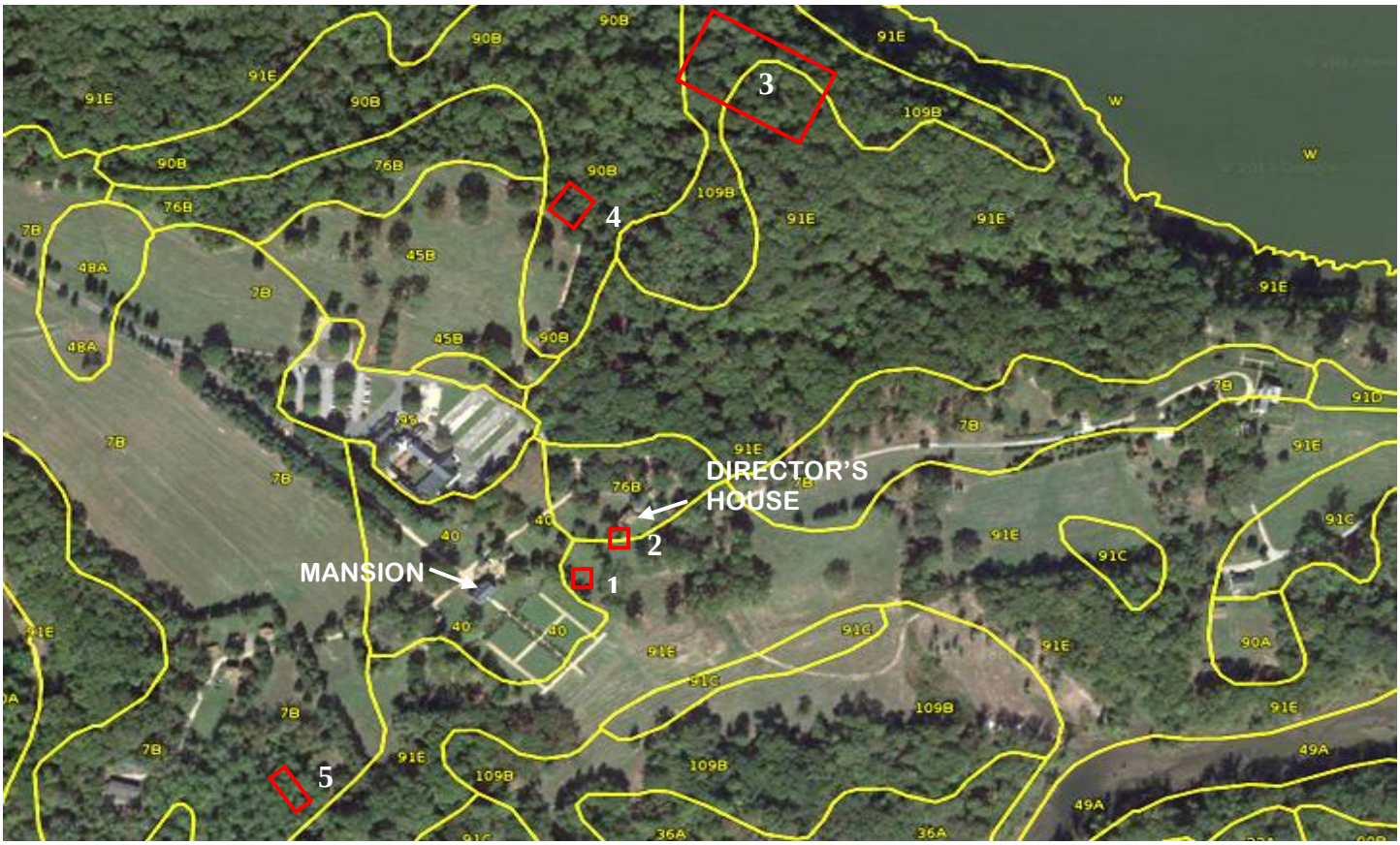

Figure 1. Areas investigated during 2013 (red lines): 1 – Road bed; 2 – Possible slave dwelling; 3 – Newtown site; 4 – 'Newtown" burying ground; 5 – Mason family burying ground. Soil types in investigated areas (yellow lines): 7B – Beltsville silt loam; 76B – Matapeake silt loam; 90B –Sassafras sandy loam; 91E – Sassafras – Marumsco complex; 109B – Woodstown silt loam. (Detail from California Soil Resource Laboratory 2014)

The study areas were near the east end of a ridge that runs in a more-or-less east-west direction across the Mason Neck peninsula (Fig 2). The landscape in the vicinity of the Gunston Hall mansion is generally flat and open, with a scattering of trees and buildings. The open areas are surrounded by woods most of which have emerged since the early 1950's. On the northeast side, bluffs form the shoreline with Gunston Cove, an embayment of the Potomac River. On the southeast and southwest sides of the ridge, the land descends a hundred feet to what was Mason's principal agricultural land. The soils in the area excavated are sandy or silty loams, often underlain by a nearly impermeable frangipan layer (Fig. 1).

The general study methodology followed that described in Shonyo 2008b:5–6.

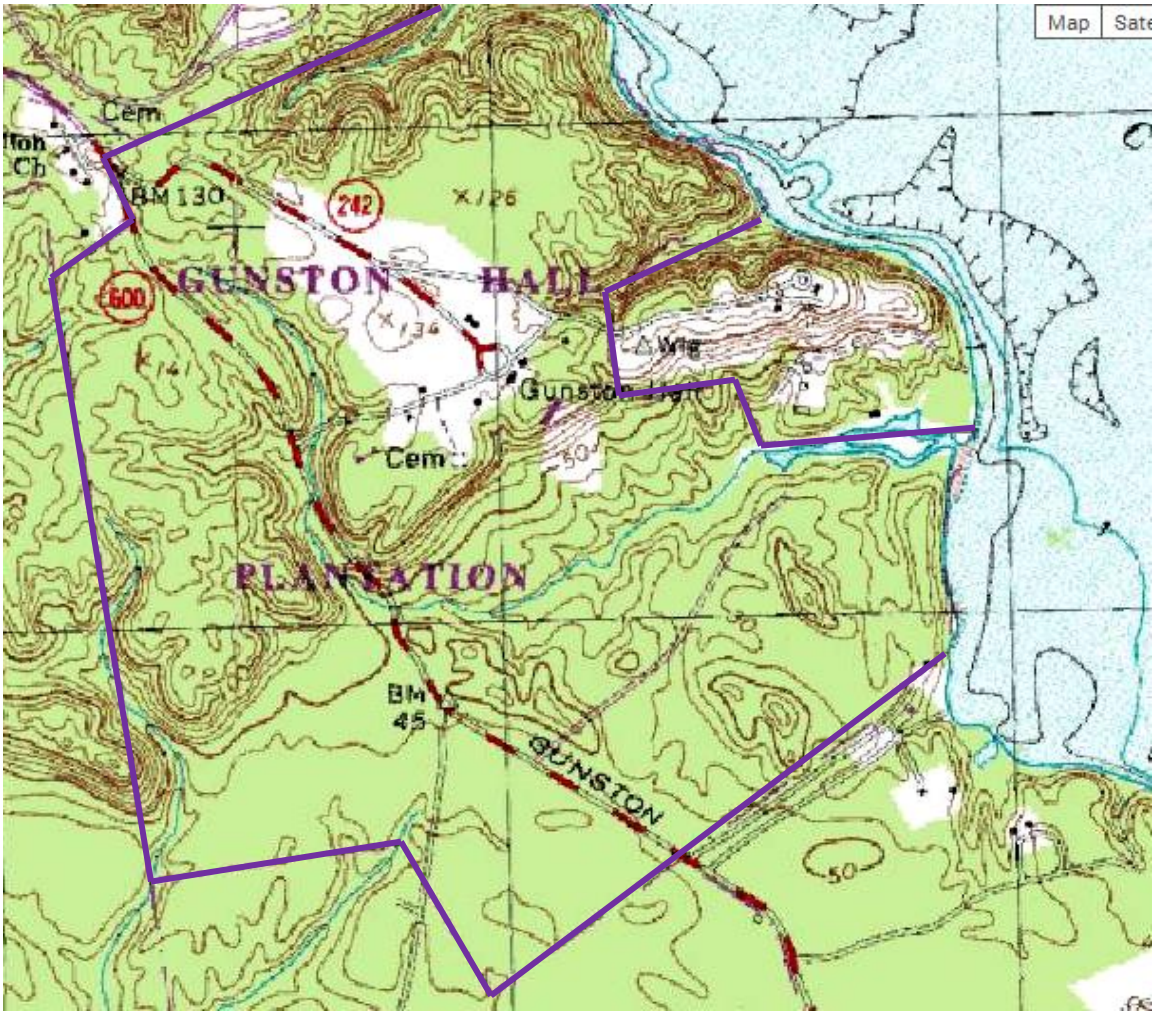

Figure 2. Topographic map of present day Gunston Hall Plantation. (Detail from USGS Fort Belvoir quad.)

Landing Road Bed

Beginning during the 2003 field season, and continuing off and on through the early part of the 2006 field season, a series of excavations was effected over a group of mounded eighteenth century artifact deposits (Shonyo 2013: 29 – 32). The deposits were in a depression which extended to a depth of somewhat over four feet below the top of the surrounding subsoil.

The artifacts within the deposits were particularly important in that they were discarded during George Mason's occupancy of Gunston Hall, during a period no earlier than 1770 and no later the mid-1780's. The *terminus post quem* (TPQ) artifacts were the necks and finishes of wine bottles (Fig. 3) that were made between 1770 and about 1800 (Noël Hume 1961: 101, 105). Associated with these artifacts were George and Ann Mason bottle seals (Fig. 4).

Figure 3. An example of one of the TPQ artifacts. The neck is pinched at the base and under the string rim, giving it a somewhat bulbous appearance. The string rim is more-or-less rectangular in cross section, and the lip is partially folded over the string rim.

Figure 4. Examples of detached George and Ann Mason bottle seals found in association with the necks and finishes shown in Figure 3. The seals were originally attached to the bottles at the area where the shoulders joined the cylindrical bodies. The date, 1760, is presumed to be the year that Mason considered the plantation established.

The *terminus anti quem* (TAQ) artifacts a ceramic type that was not in the deposit: pearlware. Usually any excavation on the plantation will turn up shards of pearlware, but none was to be found in the deposits. Pearlware was first manufactured in 1779, but it did not appear on the plantation until after the conclusion of the War of Independence – around the mid-1780's. So, it is very likely that the deposits were made before that time period.

Mitigation work done in the late 1990's, prior to the construction of a new office and conservation building, resulted in the discovery of a buried cobble-surfaced road which could be dated to the eighteenth century. The road was orientated in a site[1] north-south direction. It could be traced south, past the east side of the mansion to a row of boxwood plantings (Fig. 5). No evidence of the road could be found directly south of this point, and it was assumed that it had been destroyed by cultivation activities.

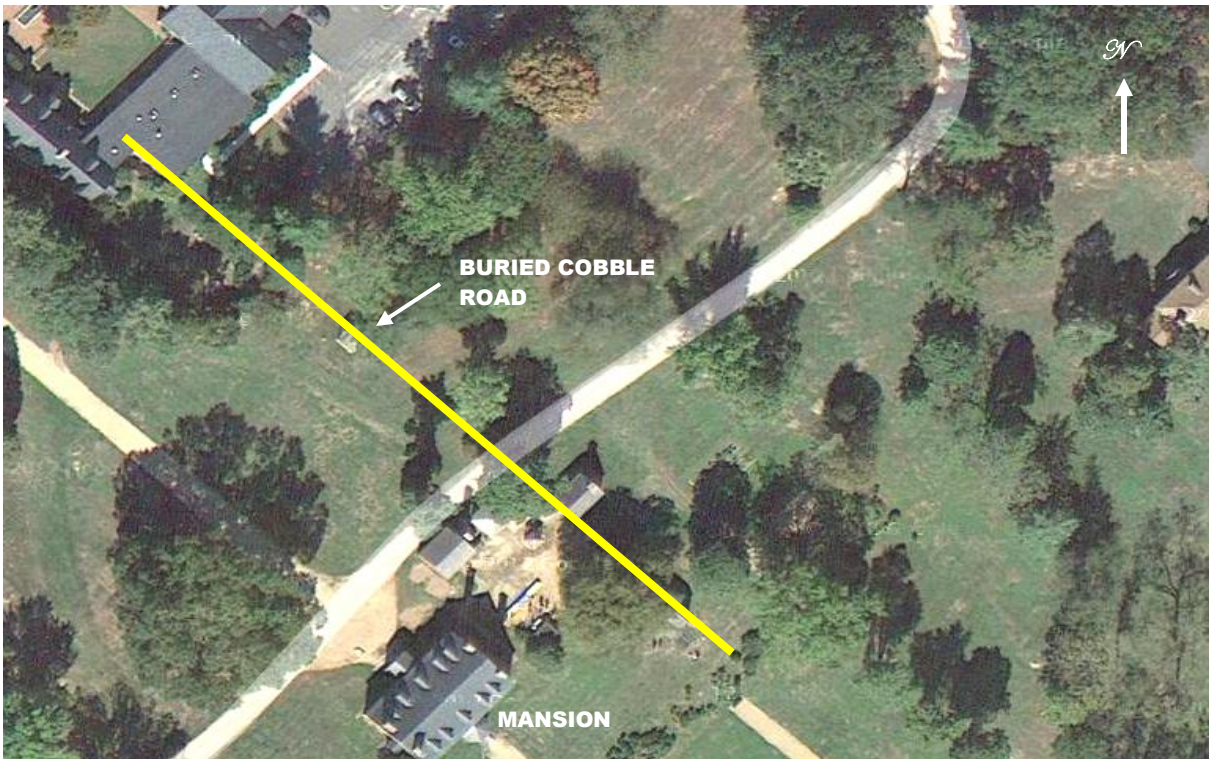

Figure 5. Position of the remains of an eighteenth century road.

During the 2002 – 2006 excavations, only the southerly margin was exposed of the depression was exposed. The margin was very well defined and formed a straight line over the 17 feet that it was visible (Fig. 6). A tape was stretched along the margin and extended toward the mansion. It was found to meet the line of the cobble road just where it seemed to have ended (Fig. 7).

[1] "Site" directions are orientated to the position of the mansion, and assume that the long axis of the mansion is orientated east-west (Shonyo 2008: 5).

Figure 6. A portion of the margin of the artifact-rich depression (yellow line).

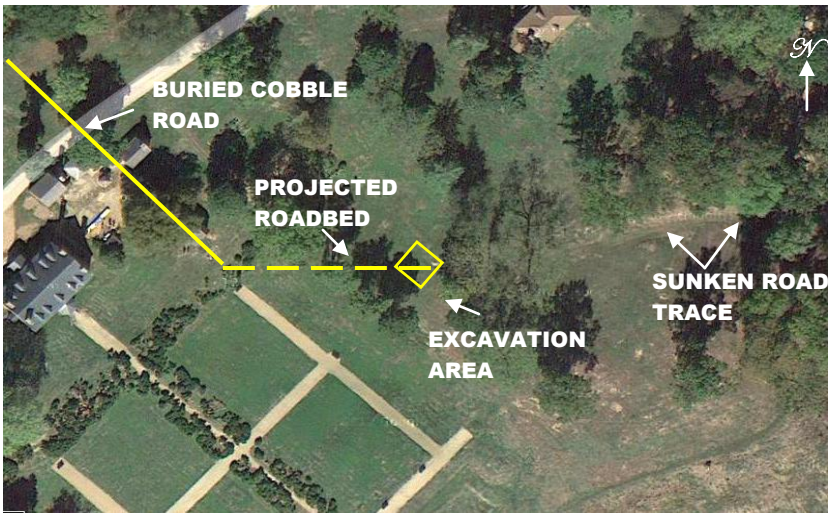

Figure 7. A line projected along the edge of the depression exposed in the excavation was found to meet a buried 18th century cobble road that had been identified earlier. In the other direction, it was continuous with a previously unrecognized road trace that lead to Mason's landing on the Potomac.

When the excavations began, the area to the immediate east was covered with a tangle of shrubs, bamboo and small trees. This was later cleared to unexpectedly reveal the trace of a sunken road descending ridge on which the historic core of Gunston Hall is located. It was possible to follow the road trace onto an adjacent property, which had been part of the original plantation, to a point on Gunston Cove. This was later shown to be the site of Mason's landing on the Potomac (registered as site 44FX3092).

All of this indicated that the excavated depression might be part of the bed of Mason's landing road. The land surface in this area originally sloped downward toward the east, which probably accelerated the erosion of the road bed[2]. Mounds of trash may have been

Figure 8. Additional units were opened late in the 2012 field season. Partially excavated mounds of artifacts are in the left-hand corners of this unit. The darker, upper soil is fill laid down during the nineteenth century

[2] A layer of fill soil had been spread over the area in the nineteenth century to form a more-or-less level surface. This layer served to protect the feature from disturbance from cultivation.

dumped in the depression in an attempt to raise the surface of the road[3], or perhaps the depression served as a convenient place to dump trash after the road went out of use.

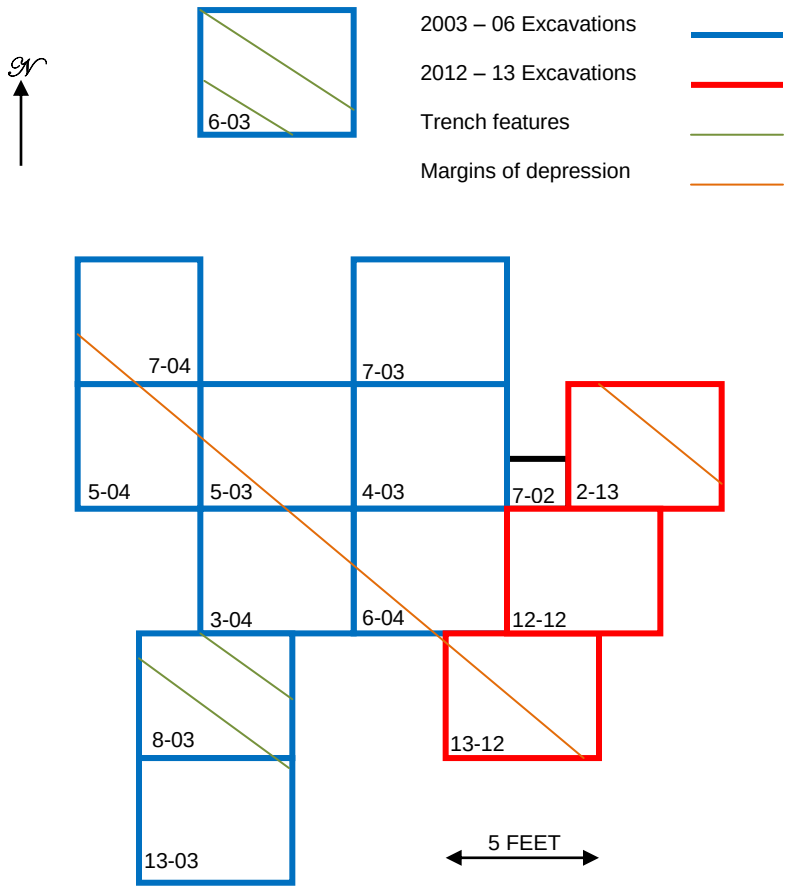

Figure 9. Units excavated in association with the depression feature. The numbers are the designations of the excavation units. Unit 7-02 was a test unit excavated as part of an earlier project, and which resulted in the discovery of the depression feature. The trench features were buried flat-bottomed trenches which appear to run parallel to the depression margins.

Late in the 2012 field season, excavation was begun on two units just to the east of those excavated in 2003 – 2006 (Shonyo 2013: 29 – 32). These were excavation units 12-12 (S185E190) and 13-12 (S190E188). During the 2013 field season, excavation of these units was completed and a third adjacent unit, 2-13 (S180E192), was partially excavated (Fig. 9).

[3] Large numbers of cobbles and brick bats were mixed with the artifacts.

The initial motivation for opening the units was to add to the sample of Mason-era artifacts recovered during the earlier excavations. It was also desired to identify the northerly margin of the depression feature. That had not been done during the previous excavations. It had been suggested that, rather than a road bed, the feature may have been a barrow pit. It was felt that exposing the both margins of the deposit should help resolve this.

Units 12-12 and 13-12 did, in fact yield an abundant assortment of artifacts[4]. The northeast corner of 12-12 contained a mound of apparent brick making debris (Fig. 10). The southeast corner contained what appeared to be brick construction debris, including mortar which had been dumped or spilled as slurry. The intervening feature fill contained material artifacts and bone mixed with cobbles. The fill in 13-12 was similar. In addition, the relatively straight margin of the depression and the deposit within it was readily apparent in the unit (Fig 11). This margin was aligned with that seen in the 2003 – 2006 excavations.

Unit 2-13 was excavated to a depth that the margin of the depression could be readily discerned. It proved to be relatively straight and parallel to the margin seen in unit 13-12 (Fig 9). The distance between was about ten feet. The interpretation that the depression feature in the eroded bed of Mason's landing access this seems quite reasonable.

[4] The artifacts had not been completely processed at the time of this writing.

Figure 10. Excavation unit 12-12, partially excavated. A mound of apparent brick making debris occupies the upper right corner. A mound of apparent brick construction debris has been removed from the lower right corner. Some of the numerous cobbles that were mixed with artifacts are visible. The plastic sheeting in the upper left was used to line test unit 7-02 when it was backfilled in 2002.

Figure 11. Excavation unit 13-12, partially excavated. The more-or-less straight margin of the artifact deposit is evident. The side of the depression sloped toward the upper right. Here, the slope has been removed between the margin of the fill and the margin of the deposit.

Possible Slave Activity Area

George Mason's Gunston Hall Plantation was divided into four agricultural units, or farms. In addition, the mansion or "home house" was situated on a plot of land called the "home farm." John Mason listed about 60 different crafts and light industries that took place on the home farm (Dunn 2012: 63 – 64). He also mentioned two slave quarters near the mansion, which apparently housed domestic servants as well as skilled and semiskilled workers. One of these was described as follows:

> "The north west side of the lawn or enclosed ground was skirted by a wood, just far enough within which, to be out of sight, was a little village called Log-Town, so called because most of the houses were built of hewn pine logs. Here lived several families of slaves serving about the mansion house. Among them were my father's body servant, James, a mulattoe [sic] man & his family, and those of several Negro carpenters." (Dunn 2012: 59)

The second quarter is given a briefer mention:

> "To the east [of the mansion] … were the corn house and grainery, servant houses (in them days called Negroe [sic] quarters), hay yard & cattle pens, all of which [were] masqued by rows of large cherry and mulberry trees." (Dunn 2012: 59)

The above remarks are the sum total of documentary information that we have concerning possible slave quarters at Gunston Hall Plantation.

No archaeological evidence of either of these quarters has previously been found, although several unsuccessful attempts have been made to locate Log Town (e.g., Shonyo 2008a:24-25; Inashima 2011:7-18). Not much archaeological work had been done to the east of the mansion. The most extensive investigation, in terms of area covered, was a test pit survey done in 2001 and 2002. In this case 2' x 2' test units were excavated at 20 ft intervals over a 10,800 ft^2 area.

A review of the field notes from this project revealed that culturally-sterile subsoil was usually encountered within one foot of the surface. In two cases, however, cultural materials were found at much greater depths, and the diagnostic artifacts recovered at the deeper levels were all items which could have been present in the eighteenth century. As was mentioned in the previous section, one of these test units, 7-02 (S180E190), prompted the discovery of the road bed feature. The second test unit of interest, 33-02 (S160E290), exhibited a rather complex stratigraphy, with the lower stratum having a dark soil with an abundance of charcoal and other artifacts. The field notes state that the unit was dug to a depth of one foot before being lined with plastic sheeting and backfilled. However, it was noted that artifacts could still be seen in the floor of the unit at that point. This seemed to be a good place to begin a search for evidence of the "servant houses."

An initial 5' x 5' unit, 1-13 (S165E290), was opened to the south and east of the location of test unit 33-02. This proved to contain a circular pit feature (F1-13), plus a portion of a second, larger pit (F3-13). Units 3-13 (S160E290), 4-13 (S165E285) and 5-13 (S160E285) were subsequently excavated in order to further explore these features (Fig, 12).

Small Pit Feature (F1-13). This feature was a nearly cylindrical pit became that became visible at about 0.35 ft below the unit datum corner (UDC)[5]. The pit was slightly over two feet in diameter and it extended into the subsoil to 1.20 ft below the UDC. The upper part of the feature fill was a dark brown sandy loam finely mottled with about 20% yellowish brown clayey loam. This was identical to the overlying stratum. Only a few artifacts of mixed vintage were present in the fill soil. Below the soil, the pit was filled with small cobbles in a sandy loam matrix (Fig. 13). This deposit extended from about 0.80 ft below the UDC to the base of the pit at 1.20 ft below the UDC. The cobbles on the surface appear to be arranged in a spiral pattern. It is unclear whether this is a deliberate arrangement, or a random accumulation of cobbles which can be perceived as a spiral.

[5] The UDC's for this series of excavations are always on the southwest corner of the units.

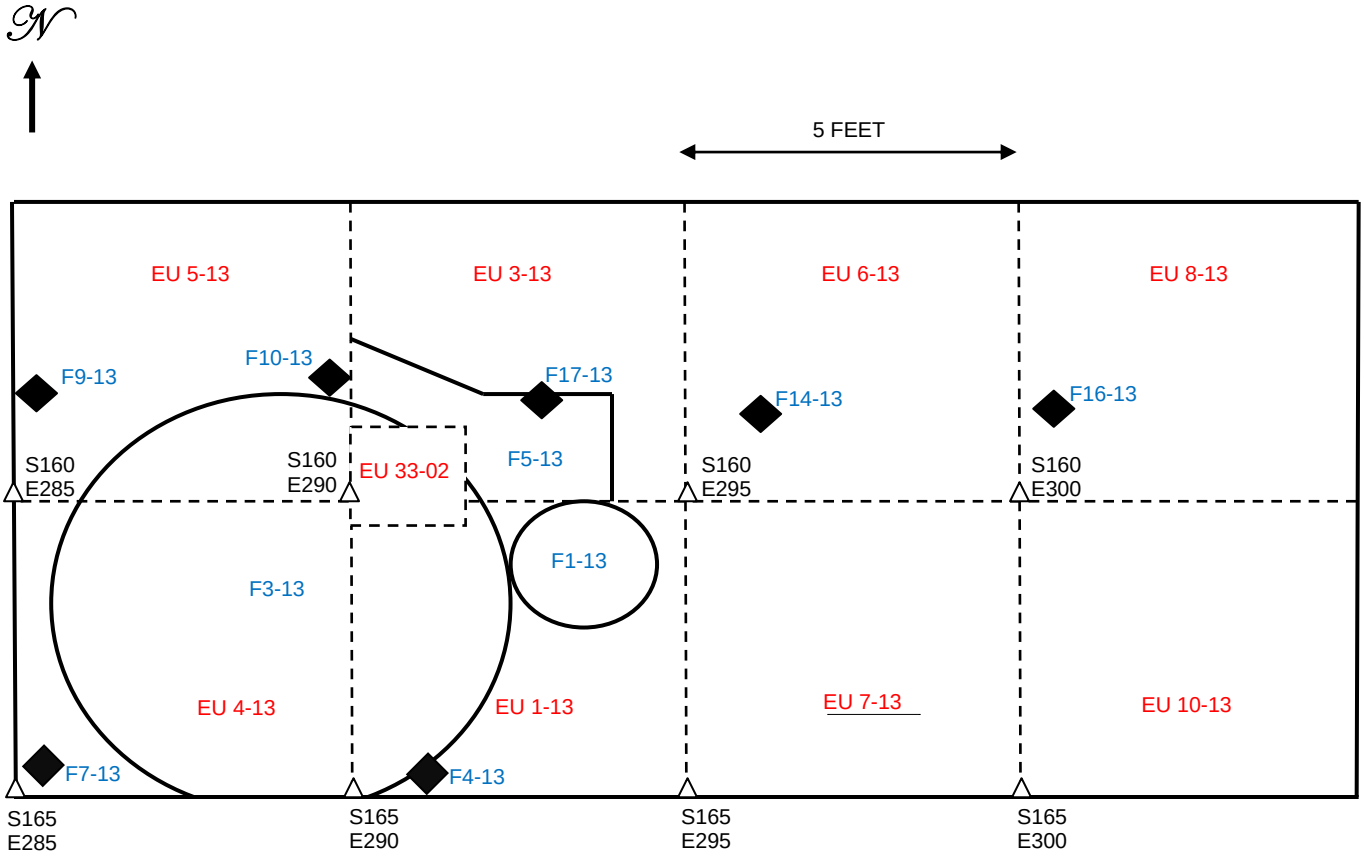

Figure 12. Diagram of excavation area. EU indicates excavation unit; F indicates feature; Δ indicates unit datum corner with coordinates.

Large pit feature (F3-13). A much larger pit, nearly seven feet in diameter, was uncovered in units 1-13, 4-13 and 5-13. The dark grayish brown soil in the pit contrasted strongly with the surrounding yellowish brown soil. The margins of the feature could first be seen about 0.80 ft below the soil surface. However, the soil overlying the feature contained artifacts characteristic of those found in the pit fill mixed with artifacts of a later period, indicating that the original upper parts of the feature had been at some point disrupted by cultivation. The floor of the pit was about 1.80 ft below the soil surface, and was covered with closely-packed cobbles (Fig 14).The pit fill contained an abundance of charcoal fragments, material artifacts and food remains.

Figure 13. The small pit feature (F1-13), showing the top of the cobble deposit. A spiral pattern can be traced starting with the cobble with the red dot. The effect became more apparent after some of the soil matrix had been removed from between the stones. The arrangement may or may not be intentional.

There was no visible stratification of the soil. To determine whether the artifacts themselves were stratified, the feature fill in units 4-13 and 5-13 was removed in 0.20 ft-thick levels[6]. The presumption is that if the pit was filled with a single dump of material, the artifacts should be found in a more-or-less random jumble. If the material was added to the pit incrementally, over time, there should be some indication of stratification by artifact type. The latter situation seems to be the case. For example, oyster shells were found mainly in the upper-most level, the density of charcoal fragments varied with depth and gar scales were found mostly in a single level.

[6] In addition to screening the soil through the usual quarter-inch mesh, a four gallon sample from each level was water screened through window screen.

Figure 14. The large pit feature (F3-13) as it appeared in excavation units 4-13 and 5-13. A balk separates it from the portion in unit 3-13. The level of the soil along the left edge of the photo represents the elevation at which the margin of the feature first became apparent. The photo was taken just prior backfilling the pit, and it is showing some effects of erosion.

Gravel surface (F5-13). This feature is a deposit of water-rolled pebbles with flat upper and lower surfaces. The margins are well defined and relatively straight (Fig. 15). This may, in fact be two separate features. The section on the left (in the photo) contained artifacts and was about 0.15 ft thick. The other section, with its north margin at an angle to the sides of the unit, was artifact free and was about 0.25 ft thick. The upper surface of the feature was 0.15 ft below the UDC. That would put it in the cultivation zone that resulted in the disruption of the pit features. Thus, this feature may not have been functionally associated with the pits.

Figure 15. Gravel feature (F5-13). The old test unit, 33-02, is in the upper right corner.

Post remains. A total of seven post molds were found within the area excavated (Fig. 12). Of particular interest was a row of five post remains positioned just north of the pit features. The molds are not exactly aligned and the spacing is close to, but not exactly, four feet apart. In all cases, the post features were in the subsoil. The post molds could be clearly seen. However, with one exception, the soil filling the post holes was of the same kind as that surrounding the soil, making them very difficult to discern. The exception was F17-13, which was positioned partially under the gravel feature (F5-13). In this case, both the post hole and mold were clearly visible.

Interpretation. A possible explanation for the complex of features found at this location is that they represent an activity area – possibly a dwelling – for the enslaved occupants of Gunston Hall. Here, we will discuss some of the evidence that might support such an interpretation. Then, we will look at some of the problems.

Subfloor pits[7] are common features of earthen floor slave dwellings (e.g., Kelso 2003:102–128; Samford 2007). The pits were variously used to store food, personal effects and ritual items. Sometimes the pits and their contents served as shrines (Samford 2007:149–173). When the pits deteriorated to the point of being no longer useful for their original purpose, they often served as trash receptacles. The fact that the circular pits were found in the general area where, according to John Mason, a slave quarter was once situated suggests that they may have been subfloor pits.

In the case of the smaller of the two pits, the cobbles in the bottom may have served to keep standing water away from whatever was being kept in the pit. The spiral pattern of the cobbles – if it was intentionally made – may have symbolic significance that relates to West African tradition. Typically, West African cultures regarded the spiral as a symbol for the structure of the universe and the path of people through time (e.g., Kyuk 2003:76–77). This, and the fact that the pit had no trash accumulation, suggests that it may have been used as a shrine of sorts.

On the other hand, it is the trash itself – the artifacts[8] – in the larger pit that indicates a possible slave occupation. The character of the artifact assemblage is quite similar to that reported by Pogue and White (1991) from the House for Families, a domestic slave quarter at Mount Vernon Plantation.

The most common ceramic type in the assemblage is white salt glazed stoneware, followed by a tin glazed ware (almost certainly English delftware). Various lines of evidence indicate that the Mason's, over the years, followed the same sequence purchases of fine tableware as did most other well-to-do English and English colonial families: Tin glazed wares replaced by white salt-glazed stoneware replaced by creamware replaced by pearlware.

Wedgwood introduced creamware (at the time called 'Queen's Ware) during the period 1760 - 1763 (Fisher 1965:89; Noël Hume 2001:209). George Mason's purchase records are

[7] These are sometimes referred to as "root cellars" or "hidey holes," terms which imply a function when a function is not necessarily known.

[8] At this writing, the artifacts had not been completely processed or analyzed. The comments are based on observation of the artifacts as they were recovered from the ground and handled in the lab.

incomplete, but those that are available show that he was buying creamware by 1766. It is reasonable to suppose that most of his then un-needed white salt-glazed table wares and remaining tin glazed wares were passed on to his slaves. This also seems to be exactly what also happened at Mount Vernon, as was reflected in the House for Families artifact assemblage (Borchert Cadou 2006).

Another aspect of the white salt-glazed stoneware shards is that many of them were unglazed, only partially glazed or had a very thin glaze. As the glaze of white salt-glazed wares almost never separates from the ceramic body, these shards were very likely imperfectly manufactured. Possibly the imperfects were included in a shipment of the tableware, or perhaps they were purchased – at a bargain price, no doubt - especially for the slaves. The latter is the more likely case, since some of the rims of the imperfects have a gadroon pattern which has not previously been found at Gunston Hall.

A very few shards of creamware were found in the pit. These had the rich cream color of the earliest creamware[9]. No ceramic type first manufactured after the introduction of creamware was found. This, again, is consistent with the supposition that at least some of the white salt-glazed stoneware shards represent table settings replaced by creamware and given to the slaves.

The food remains from the large pit feature can be compared to food remains recovered from excavations done over the years in the kitchen yard near the mansion. The latter, it can be assumed would mostly be the remains of food eaten by Mason family members and their guests. By far, the most common food remain found in the kitchen yard is oyster shells. Oysters do not live this far upstream in the Potomac, so there would be a cost involved in obtaining them. For that reason one would not expect them to be supplied to the slaves. However, some oyster shell was found in the upper part of the pit deposit. The limited distribution of the shells suggests available over a limited time only. The presence of shells is fortunate because the calcium carbonate leaching from them buffered the otherwise very acidic soil and permitted good preservation of bone and seeds.

[9] The glaze of creamware became increasing lighter over the years until that manufactured in the early nineteenth century was indistinguishable from the glaze of white earthenware.

As was the case in the kitchen yard, pig bones and teeth were present in the pit deposit. No bovid bones have been identified from the pit, although they were fairly common in the kitchen yard. Horse phalanges were an unexpected find. A major difference between the kitchen yard and pit is the abundance of bones and teeth from game animals in the latter, including deer and various (as yet unidentified) small mammals. Many bird bones were present, and a few pieces of turtle shell were recovered. The long bones of the larger mammals had invariably been shattered, presumably to obtain the marrow. There is no indication that any of the bones were sawed or chopped. A few shallow cut marks characteristic of flesh removal were present. The deposit also contained a few pieces of egg shell.

Fish remains - scales, bones and spines - were far more abundant in the pit than in the kitchen yard. Fish bones and scales were conspicuously the largest artifact components in the fine screen samples. Of particular significance is the occurrence of gar scales. These artifacts are very rare in the mansion kitchen yard deposits, but were frequently seen in the pit fill material. The Polish Count Niemcewicz (1805: 101), writing of his visit to Mount Vernon in the late 1790's, remarked that the red flesh of the gar was "little esteemed" and was used "only as food for negroes". It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the relative abundance of gar scales is an indicator that the deposit can be attributed to slaves.

A class of artifact related to the food remains is lead shot. Many pieces of bird shot and a few pieces of buck shot were recovered from the pit deposit. Again, this is consistent with the findings in the Mount Vernon House for Families (Pogue and White 1991). The shot was undoubtedly deposited embedded in scraps of meat. Its presence suggests that at least some of Mason's slaves were permitted the use of firearms for hunting.

* * * *

A particularly intriguing find was uncovered near the center of the large pit. Resting on the cobble "floor," in close association, were a cowrie shell, two pieces of petrified wood and a

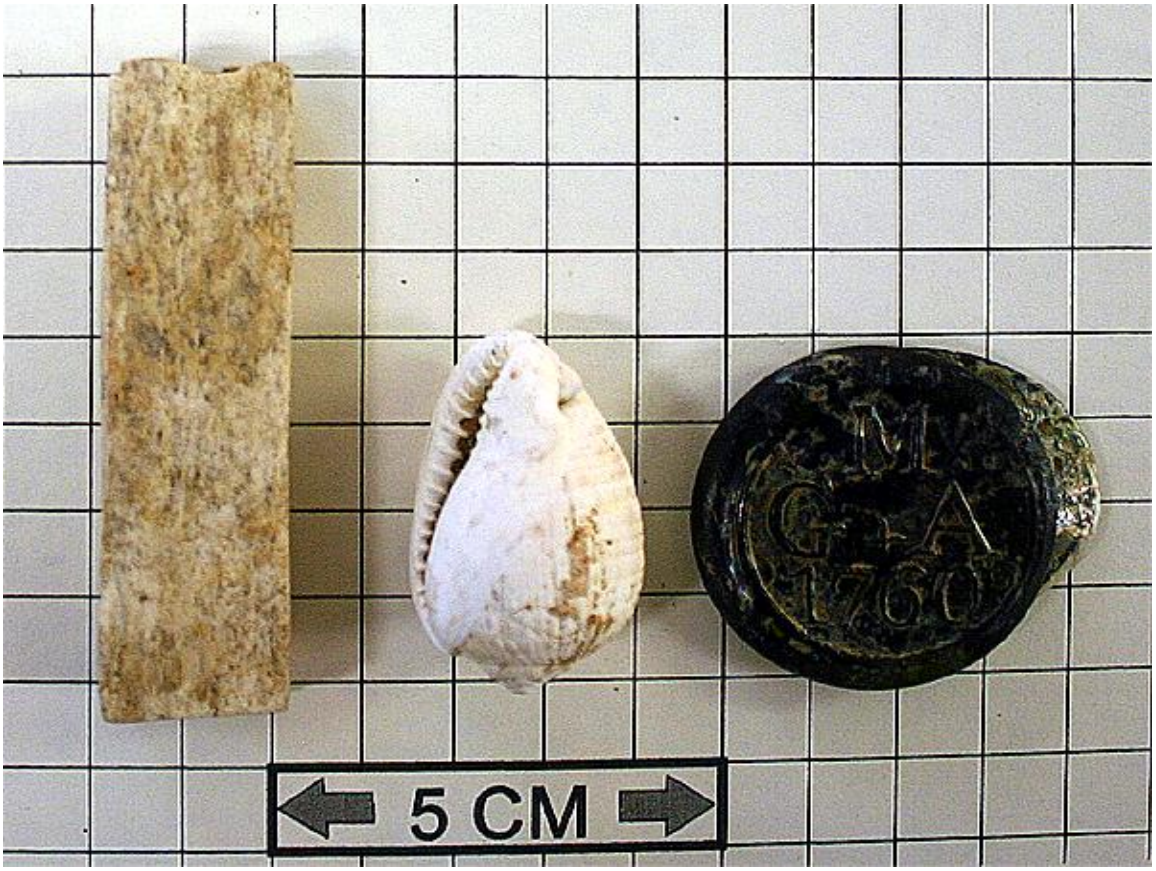

Figure 16. A cowrie shell with a Mason bottle seal and one of the two pieces of petrified wood found near it in the pit feature F3-13.

Mason bottle seal[10]. The cowrie has been identified as a reticulated cowrie helmet, *Cyprecassis testiculis,* a native of Caribbean and tropical West Atlantic waters. It is the only example of this species to have been reported from an archaeological site in Virginia, and one of a total of only four cowries of any species to be reported from Northern Virginia[11] (Heath 2013:12-13).

According to data presented by Heath (2013:13), between 1700 and 1770 64% of ships disembarking slaves in Virginia's York Naval District came directly from Africa. However, during the same period, two-thirds of the ships disembarking slaves in the Potomac Naval

[10] The seal bears the characters **M. G + A 1760**. Many examples of the seal have been found elsewhere on the plantation.

[11] Of the others, one was from Ferry Farm in Stafford County and two were from Mount Vernon.

District (in which Gunston Hall was located) came from the Caribbean (42%) or mainland North

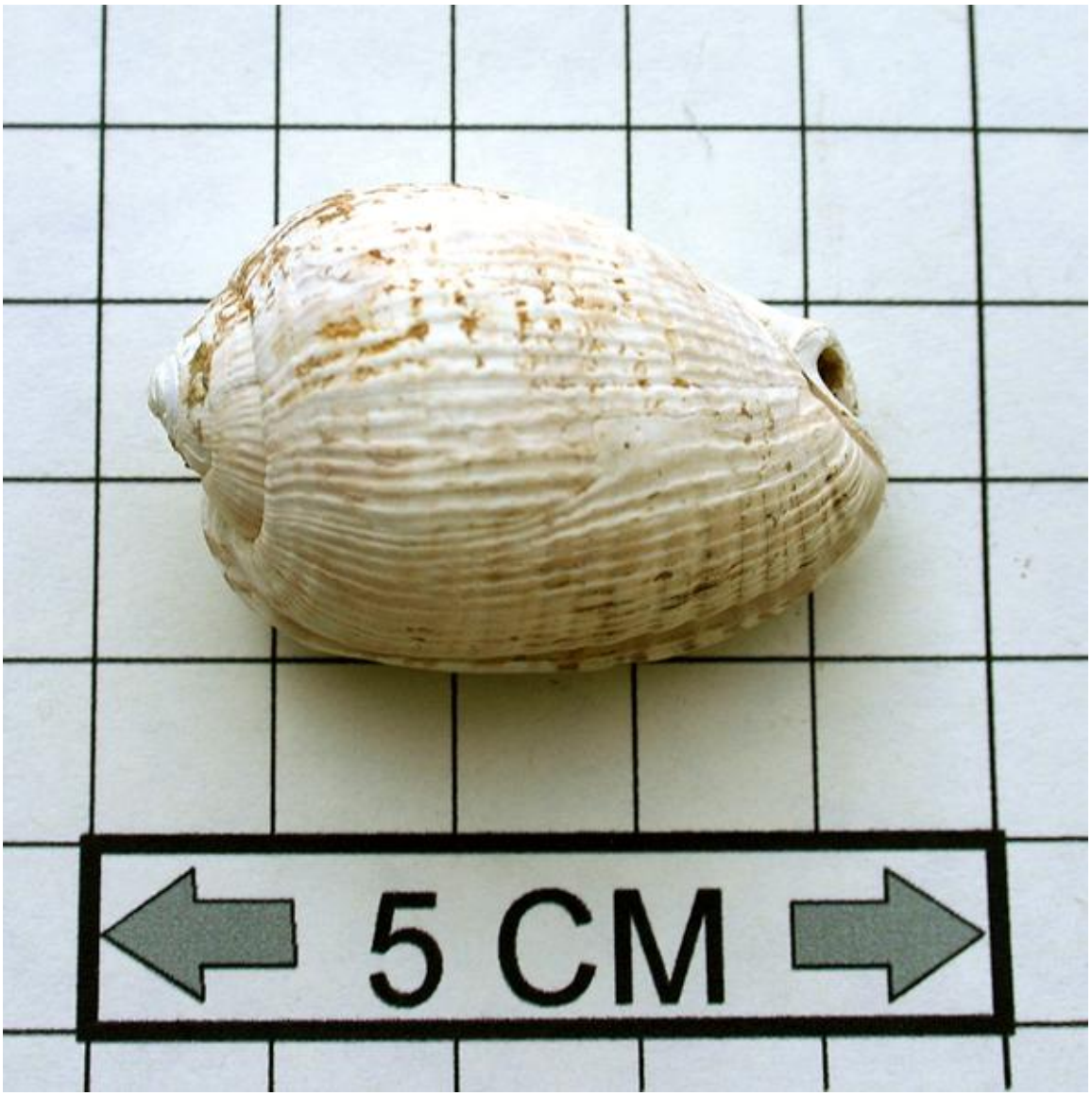

Figure 17. Dorsal view of the Gunston Hall reticulated cowrie helmet. Only small bits of the original pigment remain.

America (25%). This would be consistent with the supposition that the cowrie may have been brought by a slave, or a secession of slaves, from its home in the Caribbean region.

But why would anyone do that? In most, perhaps all, traditional West African cultures cowrie shells had a special spiritual significance and were used for divination (e.g., Asante and Iazama 2008:183–184; Bascomb 1980). Many of the traditions lived on, often in a creolized

form, in the slave quarters of the Western Hemisphere (e.g., Chireau 2003). The paraphernalia associated with the rituals have frequently turned up in the sub-floor pits of slave dwellings (e.g., Samford 2007:149–173). Since cowries are not to be found in most parts of North America, those few that were brought in from elsewhere were probably considered to be objects of some value and may have been handed down through succeeding generations.

Ritual objects found in sub-floor pits are typically arranged directly on the pit floor or on a soil platform that rests on the floor (e.g., Samford 2007:157–166). The Gunston cowrie was lying directly on the cobble floor of the pit feature. There is no assurance that the petrified wood and bottle seal were functionally associated with the cowrie; this could have been simply a chance assemblage. However, one can speculate that it may have been a small cache ritual items – perhaps part of a conjuror's kit.

One of the artifact collection bags was found to contain a small snail shell that appeared to not be from one of the local land or fresh water snails. It was sent to the Smithsonian and there identified as the shell of a checkered nerite (*Nerita tessellate*) (Fig. 18). It is a marine species native to the Caribbean and tropical west Atlantic – virtually the same range as the reticulated cowrie. The shell was recovered from the same 0.20' level in the pit fill as the cowrie and its companions, but its exact spatial relationship to the latter is not known.

The colored integument of the shell is gone, but originally it would have had a rather attractive black and white checkerboard pattern. It had a small perforation which might have been made either by a person or a predator (more likely the latter). In either case, the perforation would have allowed the passage of a thread or string through the shell and its use as a personal ornamentation.

* * * *

The post features might represent either a fence line or structural elements of a post-in-ground (earth fast) structure. If it is a fence line, it is not at all typical of other eighteenth century fence lines found at Gunston Hall. Both the size of the post and the spacing between the posts are about half of what is typical. Further, the other fence lines are either rail or paled fences, which require the posts to be almost exactly aligned; these are not. If the

Figure 18. Checkered nerite shell, showing perforation.

features do represent a fence line, it was constructed with little regard for the "standard" of the plantation. The post molds are also smaller and more closely spaced than one would expect if they were part of a post in ground structure.

There was nothing connecting the post features with the pits, and no artifacts were recovered from the post hole fill. Therefore, there was initially some question as to whether the post features and the pit features were of a comparable age. The question of the antiquity of the features was resolved to some extent by the final post feature of the season to be excavated – F17-13. The feature lay mostly under the gravel feature F5-13. Both the post mold and post hole were clearly visible 0.20' below the base of F5-13. While there no diagnostic artifacts associated with F17-13, there were diagnostics in the overlying gravels. The TAQ artifact type was pearlware, which is usually ascribed an "end" date of sometime during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. So, the gravel feature would most likely hae been deposited sometime between the mid-1780, when pearlware first appeared at Gunston Hall, and the 1820's.

The posts would obviously have to pre-date the gravel feature. Further, the lack of artifacts in the post hole fill suggests the holes were dig before much cultural had accumulated in the ground and are thus of an early date.

A post feature could not be found four feet beyond F16-13 either to the east or to the south (Fig 12). There are a number of possible reasons for this. The next post could have been to the north. There could have been a gap in the line of posts caused, for example, an entry way or a gate. The next post feature may have been obliterated by a soil disturbance. Or, the row of posts could have simply ended here.

* * * *

There is nothing to tie the several features together other that their proximity to each other and the fact that they can individually be interpreted as elements of a slave dwelling. There were no diagnostic artifacts associated with either the small pit (F1-13) or the post features. Post feature F17-13 lay beneath a gravel feature which contained pearlware shards, which suggest the posts most likely appeared in the eighteenth century, but no later than the first part of the nineteenth century.

The large pit (F3-13) had a few shards of the richly cream-colored early creamware, but no pearlware or other later ceramic type. Several Mason bottle seals (Fig.16) were found in the fill of the large pit. Where these have been found (elsewhere on the plantation) in association with identifiable bottle types, they have been bottles which were not manufactured before 1770. Thus, the pit deposit can be dated to the period 1770 to mid-1780's. Judging from the creamware evidence, the date is very likely toward the earlier end of this period. The gravel feature would post-date the pit deposit, but not necessarily a possible structure.

One puzzle associated that must be addressed if the pit features are to be interpreted as sub-floor pits is why the trouble was taken to dig such a large pit in an almost perfect circle. This would not only be somewhat difficult to do, a large pit of this shape would an un-economical use of the floor space in a small dwelling. No similar example could be found in the more readily available literature on the subject.

Michael Johnson, the former chief archaeologist for Fairfax County, after viewing F3-13 remarked that he had seen a pit of similar size and shape being excavated elsewhere in Fairfax County. This turned out to be the Ethyl's Pond site, 44FX3191. The site was excavated by archaeologists employed by the firm Paciulli, Simmons and Associates as part of a mitigation project (Morton et al. 2006; Morton et al. 2007). The site was identified as part of a plantation occupied during the period 1741 – 1830. No evidence of structures was reported, but two pit features were found. The feature of interest was a circular pit averaging 5.5 feet in diameter. This was initially identified as a storage or daub pit (Morton et al. 2006:15) and later as a trash pit (Morton et al. 2007:115). Colono ware, usually regarded as an indicator of an area occupied by slaves, was found near the pit but none was reported from within the pit.

Morton et al. (2007: 115) suggested that the pit fill was" related to a kitchen of slave/ laborer quarters". Purpose-dug trash pits are very uncommon during the eighteenth century in this area, with trash being deposited in pre-existing depressions or simply on the ground surface. Morton et al. (2007) do not suggest that the depression was dug for another purpose and do not address the question of why a rather large, almost perfectly circular pit was dig.

It is highly likely that F-3-13 became a trash and garbage depository only after it became unsuitable or was no longer needed for its original purpose. The cowrie shell and its associated artifacts seem to have been deliberately placed in the center of the floor of the pit. This suggests some ritual significance to the pit and might explain its circular shape.

"Newtown" Burying Ground

George Mason II[12], Grandfather of George Mason of Gunston Hall, acquired by Royal patent and outright purchase most of the parcels of land that eventually made up Gunston Hall Plantation. By at least 1692, he had constructed a house on one of the parcels and established a plantation called "Newtown." (Moxham 1976a:6). In 1976, the Gunston Hall Board of Regents engaged Richard Muzzrole to attempt to find the site of Newtown. After several attempts, Muzzrole (1976) identified a site along the shore of Gunston Cove and about 1,500 feet north of the Gunston Hall mansion. The site included a bowl-shaped depression which, upon excavation, yielded a cellar measuring about 21 x 19 feet (Muzzrole 1976:56). Muzzrole identified this feature as being part of the Newtown plantation house.

The site was registered as 44FX0955 in 1985 by a Fairfax County archaeologist. However, several commenters have questioned this as the actual Newtown location (e.g., Moxham 1976b; Edwards, et al. 1977:12. See also Paul Inashima's accompanying report).

In 1757, while Gunston Hall was still under construction, George and Ann Mason's infant son, William, died. In a note in a margin of the family Bible, Mason wrote that William "… was buried at the Family Burying Place at Newtown." In the early 1890's, Kate Mason Rowland visited Gunston Hall for the purpose of gathering material for several magazine articles and a two-volume biography of Mason. In the latter she wrote, "'New Town'…has passed away utterly; the very name of it is unknown in the neighborhood today. And recent owners of the land have ruthlessly ploughed up the old graveyard, one of the old tombstones having been left leaning against a tree in one of the fields" (Rowland 1892:111). It is not clear whether Rowland actually knew where the Newtown burying ground was located. However, at least since the time of her visit, it had been lost.

While conducting a surface reconnaissance of 44FX0955, an intriguing discovery was made amongst the brambles and other forest undergrowth about 250 feet south of the "Newtown"

[12] The numbers following the names of this line of George Masons were appended by as a convenient way of identifying the individuals.

Figure 19. Ground penetrating radar equipment in operation at the "Newtown" burying ground site. (Photo by Patrick Ladden.)

house site (location 4 in Fig. 1). Here lay two shallow depressions in the earth, side by side and just about the size and shape one would expect of graves.

It was decided to employ ground penetrating radar (GPR) in an effort to determine whether this was, in fact an abandoned burying ground. Small trees and undergrowth were cleared from the relatively level area surrounding the depressions, and a commercial GPR survey firm was engaged[13].

The GPR survey was conducted along a series of parallel, adjacent transects over an area of about 90 x 50 feet (Fig 20). A total of 15 possible grave shafts was detected (Fig. 20). To determine whether the burial area might extend beyond the area cleared, additional clearing

[13] The company contracted was Below the Turf, LLC. The GPR equipment was operated by the owner, Dennis Johnson (Fig 19). Johnson was formerly President of the company that manufactured the device and had helped design it. The specifications are included in Appendix 2.

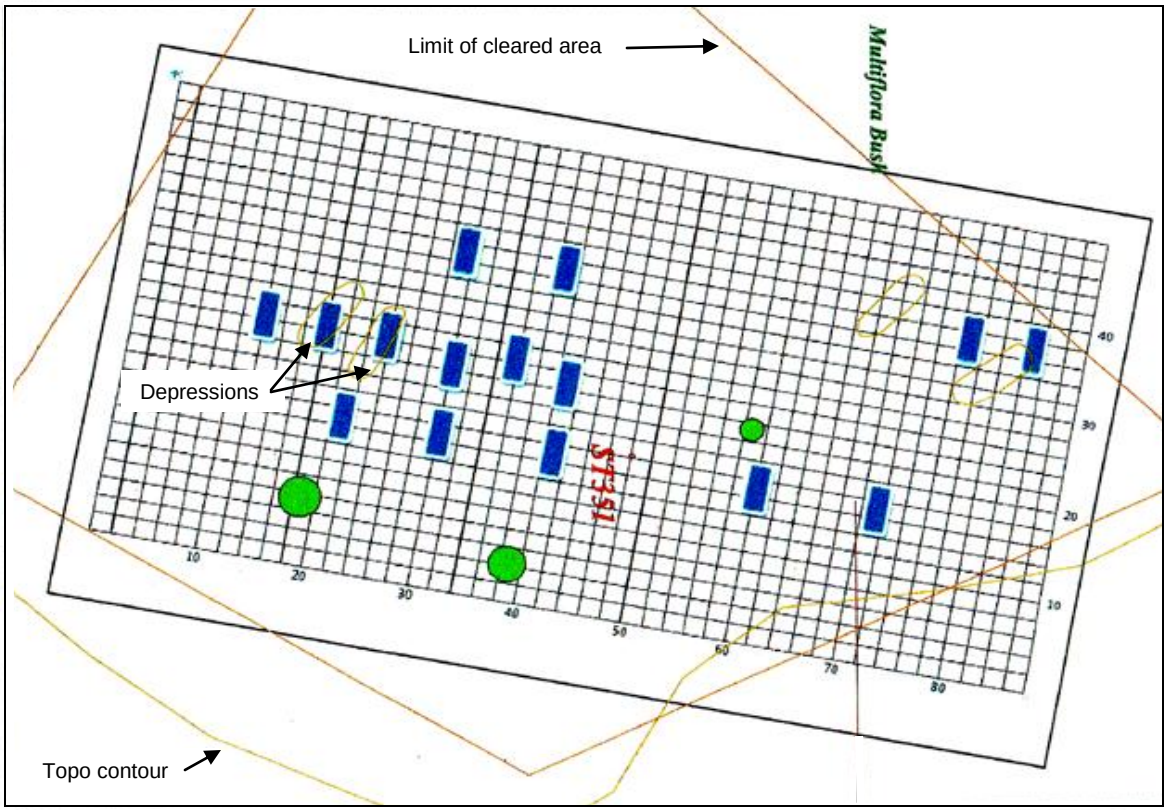

Figure 20. Probable burials identified by the GPR survey. The green circles are large trees. The blue rectangles are probable graves. The rectangles indicate the location, but not necessarily the orientation, of the graves. (Graphic by Paul Inashima from data provided by Dennis Johnson.)

was later done just outside the original plot. A survey over this area did not yield any additional potential burials.

If this is indeed the Newtown burying ground, then names can provisionally be given to nine of the fifteen occupants. The only burial known to be documented is that of the infant William Mason. There is some, rather tenuous, evidence that Mason's father, George III, was buried here after his drowning death in 1735. And, if that is the case, is seems reasonable to surmise that Mason's mother would have been brought here after her death at the Mason family Chopawamsic Plantation in 1762.

Jeremiah Bronaugh leased Newtown from 1731 until his death in 1749. His tombstone currently resides at Pohick Church, but Jeremiah does not. It is likely that this is the tombstone that Rowland saw leaning against the tree during her visit. This would make Bronaugh another candidate for a Newtown burying ground occupant. Bronaugh's wife, Simpha Rosa Ann Field Mason Bronaugh was an aunt of George Mason and was living at Gunston Hall at the time of her death in 1761. It is a reasonable surmise that she was buried with her husband at Newtown.

Finally, Thompson Mason, the brother of George, requested in his will that his sons remove the body of his first wife, Mary, from Gunston Hall and reinter her at his home at Raspberry Plain. Mary died in October 1771, before the present family burying ground was established at Gunston Hall. So, Mary King Barns Mason was probably buried at Newtown. Whether her body was relocated to Raspberry Plain as requested is not known.

If this was not the Newtown cemetery, another possibility would be that it is a slave burying ground. No slave burial area has yet been identified at Gunston Hall. It might be possible to distinguish burials of people of African and European ancestry by examining the surviving contents of the graves. Smithsonian forensic anthropologist Douglas Owsley (personal communication) has stated that it would be possible to determine race based only teeth, if necessary. Dr. Owsley has agreed to undertake the examination of the contents of three of the graves in 2015.

Mason Family Burying Ground

George Mason recorded in his family Bible that on December 4, 1773 twin boys, James and Richard, were born prematurely to Ann. They died the following morning. Mason stated that the twins were "… buried in the new burying ground; being the first of the Family who are buried in that place." In March 1774, the twins were joined by their Mother.

The Mason Family Burying Ground is within sight of the mansion on a point of land overlooking Mason's agricultural lands and the Potomac River. The view is very similar to that seen from the mansion itself. In the 1920's a brick well was constructed around the area containing the graves of George and Ann Mason and six other markers. At that time the upright markers, which had fallen over, were reset – but not in their original locations. There are records of an additional five adults and four infants or children being buried here, but for which there are no markers. Accounts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century visitors mention the presence of many unmarked mounds and that all of the markers were in one corner of the burying ground.

Geophysical surveys were done within the burying ground wall (Hanna and Petrone 2005) and, later, outside the wall (Hanna and Petrone 2006) in an effort to determine the number of burials and the extent of the burying ground. Ground penetrating radar (GPR), electromagnetic induction and magnetic gradiometry techniques were used. A total of twenty-three burials were detected within the walled area (Fig. 21). Twenty-nine probable burials and 57 possible burials were identified exterior to the wall (Fig. 22). The equipment used could not detect the graves of infants or small children.

Some of the burials were arranged along the edge of a wooded area to the west of the burying ground wall. Photographs taken during the 1930's and earlier show that this area was once free of trees. Therefore, a project was undertaken to determine if any additional burials were within this overgrown area. An additional objective was to rescan the area to the west of the wall to determine whether more advanced equipment could detect burials not seen by Hanna and Petrone (2006).

The wooded area was cleared of underbrush, small trees and deadfall to a point about 30 feet west of the existing tree line. The GPR equipment used for the "Newtown" survey was used to scan a series of north-south adjacent transects to the west of the burying ground wall and

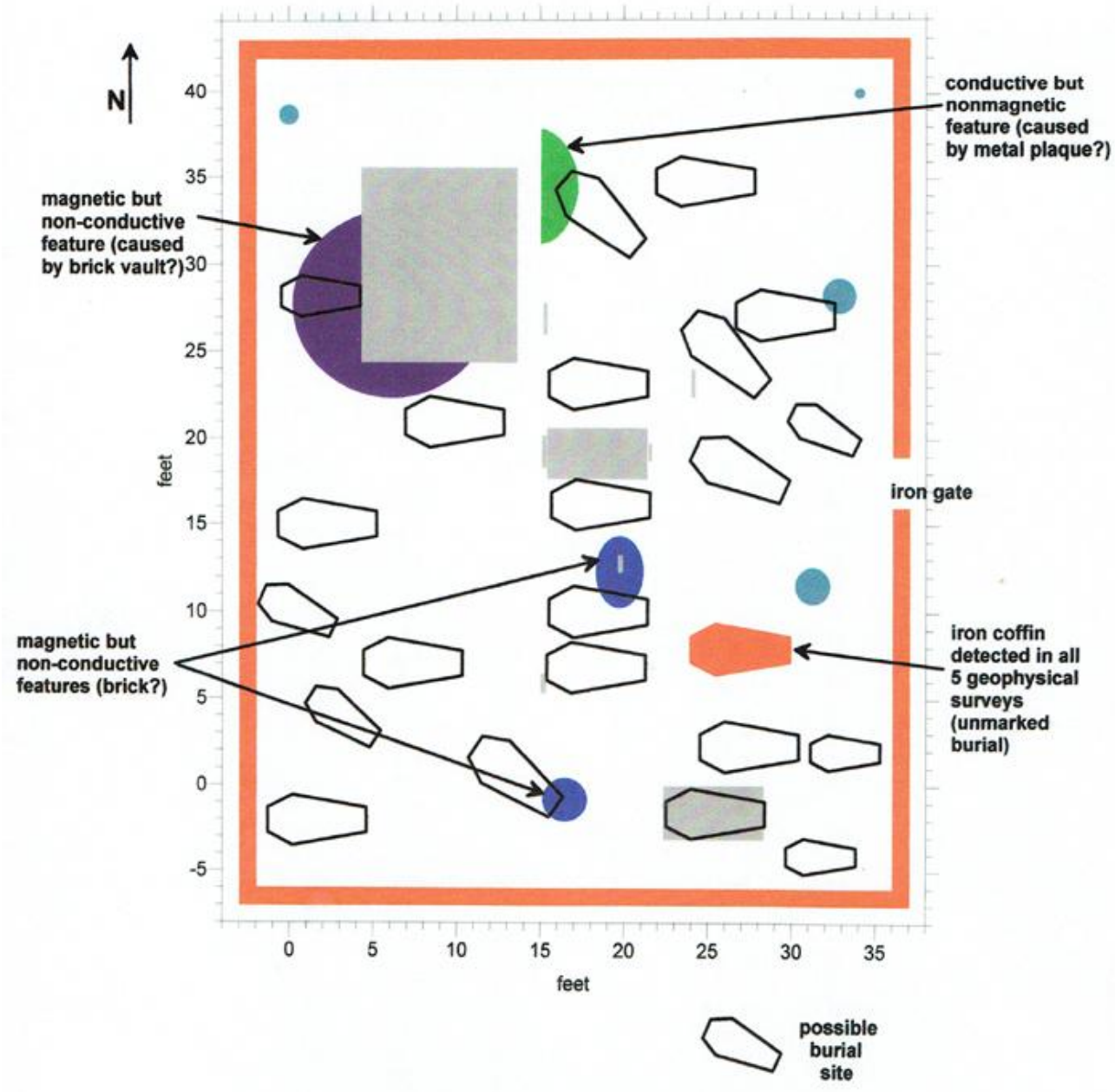

Figure 21. Possible burials within the Mason Family Burying Ground wall. The grey rectangles and lines are existing grave markers; the light blue circles are trees. (From Hanna and Petrone 2005:Fig. 26.)

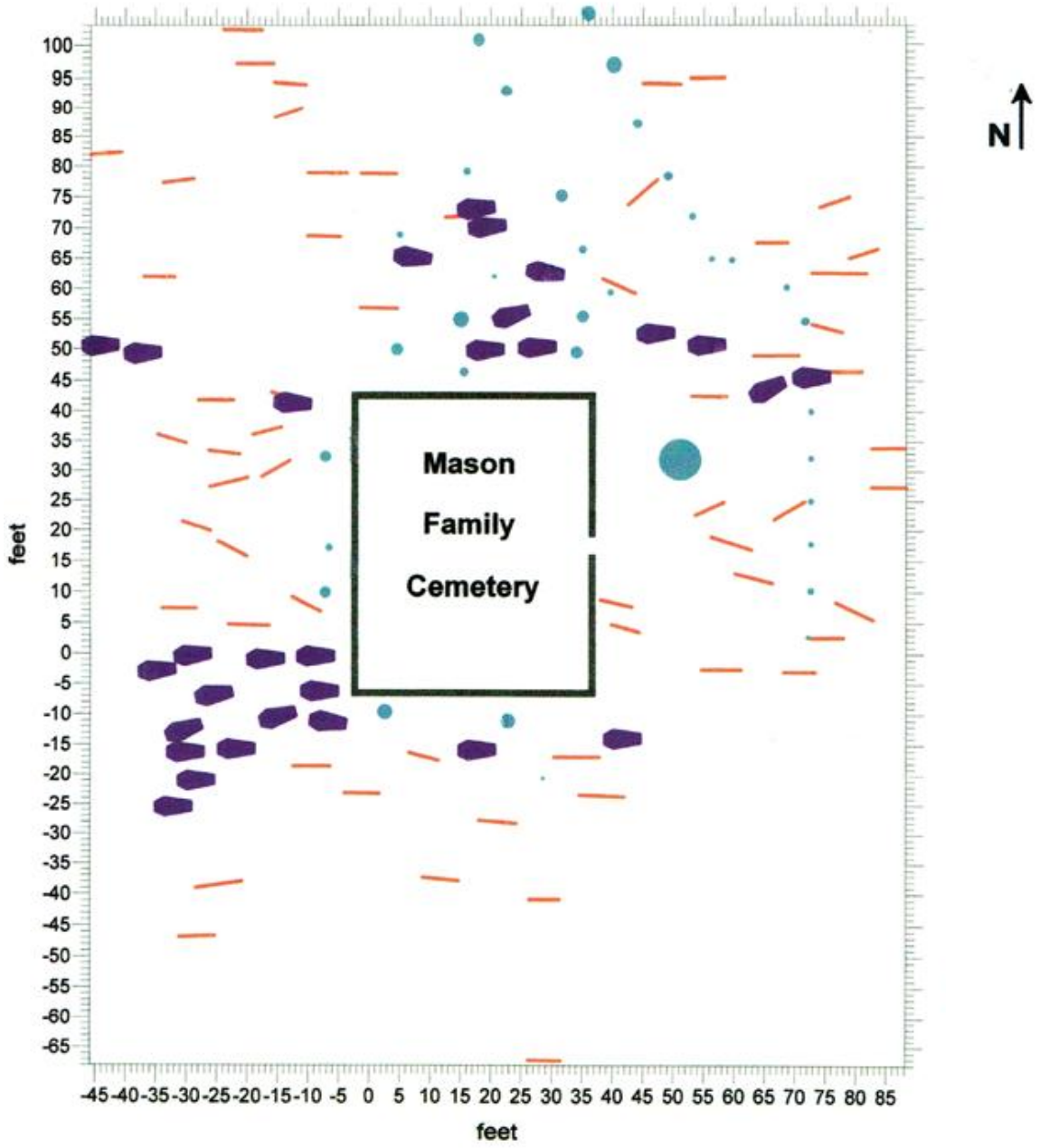

Figure 22. Possible burials detected during the 2006 project outside the burying ground wall. Coffin shapes are probable graves. Lines are possible graves. Circles are trees. (From Hanna and Petrone 2006:Fig. 21.)

cleared area. A total of 30 graves was detected, some of which are the same as the probable and possible graves reported by Hanna and Petrone (Fig. 23). Thirteen probable graves were detected in the cleared area. Over 70 probable burials have now been detected. Additional probable graves would very likely be revealed by re-scanning other parts of the burying ground with the more advanced used on the west side of the wall.

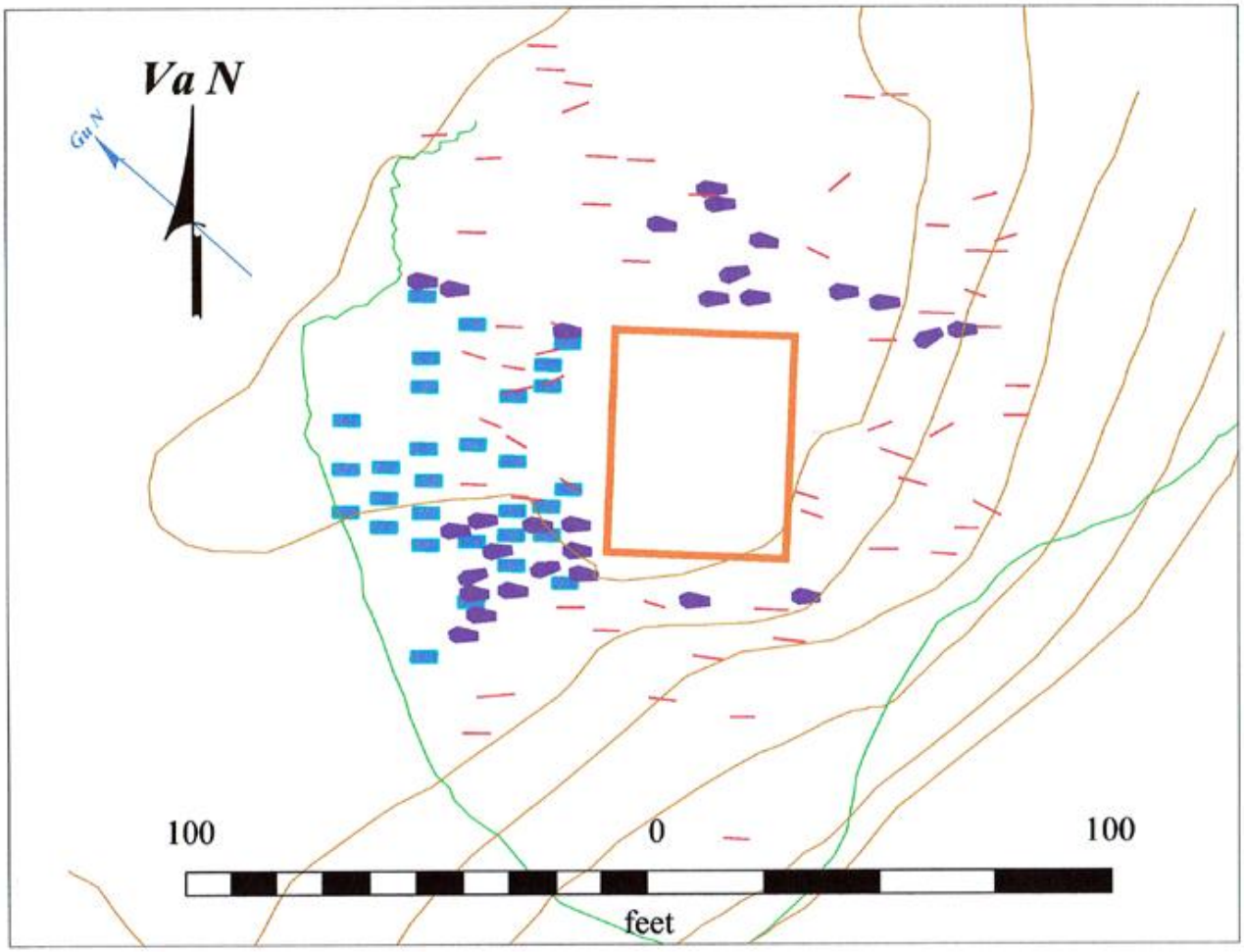

Figure 23. Results of the 2013 Mason Family Burying Ground GPR survey overlain on the 2006 results. The blue rectangles are probable graves identified during the 2013 survey (the locations are accurate, but the orientations may not be). The coffin shapes and red lines are as given in Figure 22. The red rectangle is the burying ground wall. The green line is the tree line after clearing. The brown lines are topographic contour lines. (Graphic by Paul Inashima, with grave locations provided by Dennis Johnson and Hanna and Petrone 2006.)

The large number of unknown individuals buried here invites speculation as to their identity. It seems unlikely that they are all Mason family members and relatives. No post-Mason owners of Gunston Hall or their families are known to have been buried here. It is possible that some burials were slaves. However, while plantation slave burying grounds were often near the family burying grounds, it would be highly unusual for them to be adjacent. One possibility is that slaves or local residents used the burying ground sometime in the period after Mason's death. It may be possible to resolve this by examining the contents of some of the graves. However, there currently no plans to do this.

2014 Field Work Objectives

East yard area (Rectangle 1 on map)

As was described on pages 18 -31, two circular pits were excavated which were suggestive of the sub-floor pits which are commonly associated with slave dwellings. The larger of the two pits was filled with a deposit of artifacts which was very characteristic slave-generated trash. A row of five post holes and molds was unearthed along the north side of the area of the pits. Work in 2014 will attempt to better define this suite of features by further excavations in their vicinity. The line of post features will be followed in an effort to determine whether they part on an earth-fast structure, a fence or, perhaps, something else. The area near the pits will be examined for possible associated features. If this is in fact the site of a slave dwelling, one would expect to find evidence of a hearth and a series of post features enclosing a rectilinear area.

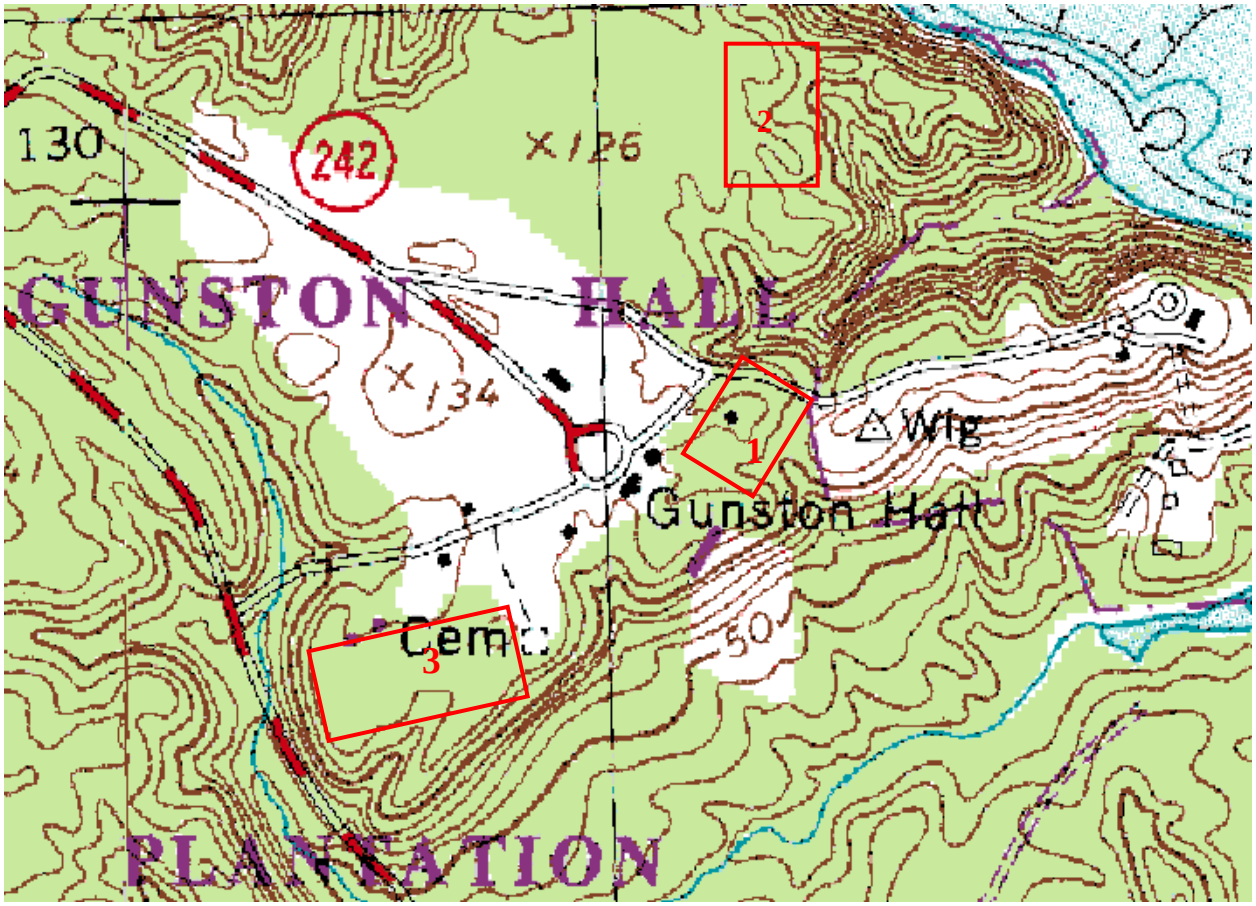

Figure 24. Areas to be investigated during the 2014 field season. (Detail from USGS Fort Belvoir Quad.)

The pit features are within the area encompassed by rectangle '1' on Fig. 24. Very little archaeology has been previously done in this 'East Yard' area. In the 1950's, cross trenching was done near the Director's house (the black square within rectangle '1'). Also, in 2001, as part of a field school exercise, 2' x 2' test units were excavated at 20' intervals in the southwest part of the rectangle. Both projects showed this to be a relatively artifact-rich area. We therefore intend to undertake a systematic test pit survey of the area. The objective will be to attempt locate further evidence of a slave quarter and other out buildings dating to the mid- to late-eighteenth century. Test units 2' x 2' on a side will be placed at ten-foot intervals and excavated stratigraphically to the artifact-sterile subsoil. As time permits, features identified during the survey will be fully excavated using one or more 5' x 5' units.

Newtown site (Rectangle 2 on map)

Newtown is of particular importance because it is thought to be the birthplace of George Mason of Gunston Hall. Also, it is known to be the site of the original Mason family burying ground. Burials include an infant son of George Mason, and probably his father and mother. Questions have been raised as to whether the site identified by Muzzrole (1976) is in fact Newtown (e.g., by Moxham 1976:8-12). Further excavations were undertaken on the site during 2013. An additional earth-fast structure was identified, but the site could not definitively be dated to the late-seventeenth century. During a surface reconnaissance done in connection with this work, two apparent grave depressions were found. A subsequent ground penetrating radar survey of the area identified a cluster of 15 possible burials.

If what Muzzrole designated as the Newtown site is not actually the New Town of George II, then what is this newly found burying ground? A slave burying ground has been suggested. Dr. Douglas Owsley of the Smithsonian Institution's Forensic Anthropology Department has indicated (personal communication) that is should be feasible to distinguish between a possible Euro-American family burying ground and a slave burying ground by excavating no more than three of the graves. Further, Dr. Owsley has agreed to undertake this work early in 2015. In addition, at least two additional locations on the Newtown site, identified during the 2013 season, will be excavated in an effort to help resolve the nature of the site.

Gravel pit area (Rectangle 3 on map)

A relatively level area west of the Mason family burying ground and south of the Gunston Hall archaeology lab and maintenance facility has never been investigated archaeologically. Today, this area is wooded, but photographs taken in the 1930's show it to be open at that time. One obvious feature almost certainly dating to the eighteenth century is a gravel quarry. Gravels virtually identical to those seen in the quarry have been found paving the buried Mason-era walkways found near the mansion. Ground penetrating radar work done during 2013 found that burials associated with the family burying ground extended about 20 feet into the wooded area. Other disturbances of uncertain age can also be seen.

A shovel test pit (STP) survey will be conducted over at least part of the area during the 2014 field season. The transect lines will be established by the use of a total station. The STP's will initially be set at 20-foot intervals, but the intervals may be reduced to 10-feet if the results indicate that to be desirable. It is likely that any phase 3 excavations to investigate the results of the survey will be done during subsequent field seasons.

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Appendix I
Excerpt from the "Gunston Hall Strategic Plan for 2014 – 2018" Pertaining to the Archaeology Program

7. Research, Collections, & Archaeology

George Mason, despite being a prolific writer and a hands-on leader of plantation operations and his household, left very few records providing specific or detailed information about his properties. His son, John Mason, compiled helpful recollections but even this work provides only a limited view.

Accordingly, for us to expand our knowledge of Gunston Hall, its operation as a plantation, and those who lived there, we must support and sustain a culture of curiosity, exploration and discovery. The foundation for this culture and associated activities are our collections, our landscapes, and our buildings. Through the study of these resources, including an emphasis on archaeology, we are able to gain a deeper understanding of the history and material culture of Gunston Hall.

Equally important, it is our duty and obligation based on the Deed of Gift, and we are entrusted by the Commonwealth of Virginia as owners of Gunston Hall and by the public we serve, to ensure the preservation and conservation of these resources in accordance with professional standards, best practices, and ethics as articulated by the American Alliance of Museums. In so doing, we not only increase our knowledge, we expand our ability to engage the public in increasingly interactive and meaningful ways with what makes Gunston Hall a distinctively powerful historic site.

Goal: To facilitate authentic, accessible, research and collections based experiences for our guests which will maximize opportunities associated with the distinctive cultural resources of Gunston Hall.

The following objectives support this goal:

… Objective Four: Support and sustain a vibrant archaeology program.

Strategies

1. Facilitate discussions about the current and future purpose, role, goals, and public value of the archaeology program; research comparable programs and associated opportunities; consider the best niche and the greatest value of the program; articulate and implement recommendations.
2. Evaluate current resources supporting the archaeology program including staff, equipment, and facilities; recommend improvements and enhancements as appropriate; implement approved recommendations.
3. Support an archaeological commitment to an increased knowledge of the slave and African American experience at Gunston Hall.

4. Facilitate increased opportunities for public experiences with the archaeological program, the collections discovered through the work of this program, and the scholarly research based on these discoveries.
5. Research and identify strategies supporting digital archaeological experiences including but not limited to “virtual digs”, on-line scavenger hunts, and “identify that artifact” competitions.
6. Establish enhanced partnerships within the archaeological and museum/historic site community.
7. Support and sustain a culture of exploration and discovery among the organizational team and with the external community through distinctive experiences with archaeology

Appendix II
Specifications of the Equipment Used for the Burying Ground GPR Surveys

Appendix A: TerraSIRch SIR-3000 System Specifications

A.1: System Hardware

Antennas: Compatible with all GSSI Antennas

Number of Channels: 1 (one)

Data Storage:

- Internal memory 1 GB Compact Flash memory card
- Compact Flash port: Accepts industry standard Compact Flash memory or IBM Microdrive up to 2 GB (user provided)

Processor: 32-bit Intel StrongArm RISC processor, 206 MHz

Display: Enhanced 8.4" TFT, 800 × 600 resolution, 64K colors
Linescan and O-scope display modes.

Input/Output:

- Antenna input (control cable)
- DC power
- Ethernet I/O
- RS232 Serial I/O (GPS port)
- Compact Flash memory
- USB master
- USB slave

Mechanical:

- Dimensions: 31.5 cm × 22 cm × 10.5 cm (2.4" × 8.7" × 4.1")
- Weight: 4.1 kg (9 lbs) including battery

Operating:

- Temperature: -10°C to 40°C
- Charging Power Requirements: 15 V DC, 4 amps
- Battery: 10.8 V DC, internal
- Transmit Rate: Up to 100 KHz

Note: The SIR-3000 will not work with the short, orange attenuated control cable that was sold with the SIR-2000. The SIR-3000 will only work with non-attenuated cables (blue or black in color).

A.2: Data Acquisition and Software

Data Format: RADAN (.dzt)

Scan Rate Examples:

- 220 scans/sec at 256 samples/scan
- 120 scans/sec at 512 samples/scan

Sample size: 8-bit or 16-bit, user-selectable

Scan Interval: User-selectable

Number of samples per scan:

256, 512, 1024, 2048, 4096, 8192

Operating Modes:

Free run, survey wheel, point collection

Time Range: 5-8000 nanoseconds full scale, user selectable

Manual or automatic gain, 1-5 points, (-20 to +80 dB)

Filters:

- Vertical: Low-Pass and High-Pass IIR and FIR
- Horizontal: Stacking, Background Removal

System Includes:

- SIR-3000 control unit
- Transit case
- AC adaptor
- User manual
- 2 batteries

Fully FCC Compliant.