

TEST PIT EOXP9_CW

North side of Church Way, Iffley, Oxford

Area excavated: 1m x 1m in lawn

Date of Excavation: 11th/12th June 2011

Conditions: Sunny and dry/persistent rain

Excavators: Peter Banks, Julia Brocklesby, Jan Penrose, Bridget Newman, Mike Newman, Natalie Garfinkle, Caroline Morell, Shelia Fairfield and Elizabeth Wells

Report by: The Team and PB

Summary of Excavation

The first test was de-turfed in an area of lawn approximately 0.5m west of the end of the garden path over an area of the lawn which showed a distinct variation in the colour of the grass of the lawn. The division of this distinction ran along an almost true east-west alignment. The test pit was initially located with 0.5m to the north of this distinction and 0.5m to the south of it, so that the test pit was situated exactly over this variation with a view to ascertaining its cause. However during the de-turfing process it became clear that there was a modern stone structure immediately under the turf which would cause difficulty when further excavating the test pit. Upon speaking to the owner of the property PB was advised that this was the remains of a contemporary circular stone decorative garden feature which the owners had constructed, buried some years previously and forgotten about. Due to the time constraints of the test pit weekend the decision was made to move the location of the test pit approximately 1 m to the north west of the original location to avoid the lengthy process of excavating through this feature.

The second test pit was dug to a depth of c 0.6m. The natural geology was not reached due to early conclusion of the test pit on the Sunday afternoon as a result of worsening weather conditions. (Torrential rain.)

The first context below the turf (Context - **101**) was dug to a depth of 0.11m, 0.1m and 0.12m. These measurements and all similar depth measurements were taken along the western edge of the test pit the first in the north western corner, the second exactly halfway along the length of the western edge and the third in the south western corner. This context proved to be a loose organic layer of garden topsoil. It was dark brown in colouration and of a smooth silty consistency. It contained a small quantity of pebbles of various origins (no more than 2-4%), an even smaller quantity of medium sized limestone pieces, no bigger than 0.4mm in diameter (approx 1%), and an even smaller quantity still of small charcoal pieces (less than 1%). There was also some small root contamination from the surrounding garden trees. The finds from this context were quite varied and included: 7 pieces of animal bone, 4 broken stems of clay pipes, 8 medium sized chunks of CBM, 8-10 heavily rust nails of varying sizes (they were mostly square shafted in shape), approximately 20 small pieces of broken glass, 2 large mollusc shells and a large amount of pottery, most of which appeared post medieval although a more expert analysis is probably required. At the depths mention above there was a sudden change to a more compacted layer (Context - **102**)

Context **(102)** seemed to be made of a very similar material to **(101)** in that it was very organic in nature. However it was definitely more compacted than the layer above and the transition between the two contexts was very noticeable once the loose material of **(101)** had been cleared away. **(102)** was friable in nature and a mid greyish brown in colour. As with **(101)** it was smooth silt. There was the same level of contamination from tree roots as context **(101)**. Although the quantity of small and medium sized pebbles was similar to **(101)** there was a marked increase in the amount of charcoal pieces present in this layer (approx 3-5%).

The finds were very similar to **(101)** but generally slightly fewer in quantity, the finds also included 5-6 buttons of varying design and rather interestingly a metal thimble. The thimble was very small in size and would almost certainly not have fitted even the little finger of most adults. EW, a member of the local historical society who happened to be working with the team, suggested that this may have come from the adjacent property to the north which had once been a school for girls.

At 0.2m below ground the first arbitrary spit level was reached and the new spit was allocated context number **(103)**, however it was identical in nature to the context above it **(102)**.

Context **(104)** was reached at 0.28m 0.3m and 0.29m below the layer of the topsoil. Upon cleaning the surface the first day of excavation was concluded. Due to the worsening weather conditions and the smaller team size available on the 12th June the decision was made to excavate a sondage of 0.5m x 1m in the northern half of the trench. The nature of the change between **(103)** and **(104)** was a sudden one. Upon reaching **(104)** the soil became loose and light yellowish brown in colour. The consistency of **(104)** was that of a smooth sand. The inclusion of small and medium pebbles was of similar quantity to the previously excavated layers, however the quantity of charcoal inclusions in **(104)** fell to less than 1% again. The quantity of contamination from the surrounding tree roots grew in this context although the roots were finer in nature. Finds included some post-medieval pottery, some metalwork (Fe) and clay pipe fragments.

Context **(105)** was reached at 0.31m and 0.34m respectively. (There was no reading from the south western corner of the trench at this stage because the sondage did not cover this area) Context **(105)** was made up of a loose gritty sand. It was a light yellowish brown in colour. This context was dry, stony and loose enough to trowel easily. The organic make up of the previous contexts had gone from this layer. The change between layers **(104)** and **(105)** was more gradual than the transition between previous contexts. The root contamination began to thin out at this depth although there were still a few to contend with. The inclusions in this layer also varied from previous layers and included: poorly sorted limestone pebbles the biggest 0.1m x 0.1m in diameter (approx 4-5%) and a large quantity of very angular fragmentary limestone chunks (approx 20%).

The finds included pottery (approx 3-4%) of varying designs (including possible medieval sherds), 7 pieces of CBM, 9 Fe objects, 6 small broken pieces of glass, a few broken clay pipes pieces. There were also 2 non fossilised pieces of oyster shell excavated from this layer.

The limestone fragments and CBM material that was found in this layer lead the team to believe that this layer could represent a layer of building demolition rubble of some kind. Particular as the owners of the property had explained that there once had been

three smaller cottages built upon the plot that now holds the one larger house of 111 Church Way.

Context **(106)** was allocated to the second of the arbitrary spit levels that was reached at 0.4m it was excavated to a depth of 0.45m. at this time it was decided to close the trench due to the poor weather conditions and the day drawing to a close. **(106)** was a loose layer of gritty sand. It was wet when dug although this could have been more down to the weather conditions of the day rather than the ability of this particular context to retain water more efficiently than the previous layers. The colour of this layer was a light yellowish brown. A soil sample was taken from this layer as the quantity of charcoal in this layer had again risen to around 3%. The stone content of the inclusions remained constant from the layer before. The finds were noticeable fewer at this depth with only a few small fragments of pottery, some degraded CBM and 1 piece of animal bone being found in this context.

Although the majority of the pottery recovered from the entire excavation appeared to be post medieval in nature there were one or two pieces which may have been medieval in origin, possibly Brill ware. Unfortunately there were no diagnostic features on any of the CBM and its origins may therefore be difficult to date.

The clay pipe pieces recovered were largely the broken stems of pipes. There were only one or two bowls recovered. This may indicate that the users of these pipes were using and reusing them as the stems broke away they would be discarded and the remaining pipe smoked until the stem became too short for practical use.



