

EOXP TEST PIT 43

Location of Test pit: Fairview Allotments, Town Furze, Headington.

Date of Excavation: 22 & 23.05.2012

Area excavated: 1 x 1m

Weather conditions: Clear, sunny, dry.

Excavators: Jennifer Quested, Sarah Lacey, David James, J.E. Griffin, Natalie Garfunkel, Alan Davis.

Report by: J.E. Griffin, Sarah Lacey, Jennifer Quested, Alan Davis.

GPS location and height above sea-level: SP 5485 0532; 85m OD.

Introduction

The test pit was located in Fairview Allotments, Town Furze, on the Headington/Cowley borders. It is bordered to the NW and NE by an inter-war housing estate and to the SE and SW by Southfield Golf Course. Boundary Brook runs roughly north to south about 300m to the west of the site. For some decades this site has been used as allotments. The land is let to the Allotment Association by Southfield Golf Club. A local resident (Cumberland Road, Cowley) grew up nearby and recalls that this use may have been a response to the WW11 "Dig for Victory" campaign. This anecdotal evidence would benefit from additional oral testimony or documentary evidence. Before that it seems likely to have been farmland. Judging by the present allotments, it seems a difficult site to cultivate and this suggests it is more likely to have been used as pasture than arable. Historic maps, e.g. OS One Inch 'Old Series', 1830-1833, show the area and its surroundings as farmland. Historically, of the three farms nearby (Bullingdon, Wood and Southfield Farms) the site's location and its association today with Southfield Golf Course make it seem likely that in the past it would have been part of Southfield Farm.

Excavation summary

The pit was dug in 0.2m spits to a maximum depth of 0.46m. No sondage was dug. Although not certain, it seemed likely that the base of the pit had reached the natural. The indications for this were: the more stony appearance of the final surface particularly of the eastern half of the base of the pit; the corallian rubble within it and the overlying context (4303); the presence of an apparently more consolidated area of rocky material in the NE corner; and a general resistance across the whole surface to probing below it with the point of a trowel. Further investigation of this was not possible in the time available. After the removal of turf and topsoil by spade some material was removed by spade but most by trowel. Excavated material was sieved from the outset to reduce the risk of missing some of the smaller and less obvious inclusions and finds. Results seem to have vindicated this approach. Although excavated soil, which was damp but loose, initially contained more silt than sand, this gave way to predominant sand. Some stones, including river-rounded pebbles, were present, but in the lower layers unsorted lumps of Corallian rubble became a frequent and predominant inclusion.

The first spit (context no. 4301) was dug to a depth of 0.2m with spade and trowel. The soil was loose and slightly damp and its dark blackish brown colour suggested humic content, as might be expected from allotment cultivation in recent decades. Its basic make-up was sandy silt. It is likely to have been frequently disturbed by digging for cultivation.

The second spit (context no. 4302) was dug from its top level of 0.2m to a depth of 0.4m. Soil was still loose and slightly damp but the colour changed from that above it to an orangey brown and the content to silty sand. Cultivation disturbance is still likely at this depth, at least nearer the top of the spit, and the nature of the few finds seems to support this.

The next spit (context no. 4303), starting at 0.4m, was excavated to a final pit depth of 0.46m. and initially was only the western half of the pit. The soil was loose to friable but now only very slightly damp. The content continued to be silty sand as with the spit above but with more frequent inclusions of unsorted Corallian stone lumps. There were also some small patches of

clay with one larger yellowy green lens in the NW corner.

When the other half of context 4303 was investigated it became evident that its content was changing more markedly than the area to the west so it was allocated a new context number (4304). There was still silty sand but more frequent Corallian lumps, some still showing their fossiliferous make-up much more distinctly than the more worn ones from other contexts. There were also small lenses of yellowy green clay as with 4303. The overall character and content of this context suggested much more clearly than 4303 had that the pit was now very likely meeting the more broken surface of bedrock, an impression reinforced by an area of much more concentrated and consolidated rocky material in the NE corner. The absence of finds and paucity of inclusions other than Corallian rubble and some shell seem likely to indicate relatively little disturbance from human activity. This, if correct, might support the possibility of pasture being the most likely historical use before the present one as allotments.

Results

Spit/ context	Type of deposit	Description	Soil Sample	Comments
4301	layer	The spit was 1m x1m square dug to a depth of 0.2m. The blackish/brown soil was slightly damp and generally quite loose, consisting of approximately 60% silt to 40% sand. The infrequent inclusions (1% or less) were small bits (1cm x1cm and less) of Corallian stone, very infrequent small shell fragments, small (less than 1cm x1cm) bits of charcoal and a few very small (1cm x1cm maximum) pieces of slag-like material. The only finds were a small piece of glass and a small piece of bone. The stone inclusions seemed to become more frequent towards the base of the spit but there was no really significant change at the boundary with underlying spit 4302. Contamination included worms in the upper part of the spit and plentiful roots throughout. The spit was overlain by the topsoil and it overlay spit 4302. Its upper part was dug by spade but the lower was trowelled and sieved.	none	Given the long history of use as allotments it is to be expected that the soil had a well-cultivated character. The absence of any sizeable stone inclusions could be natural at this depth but it seems likely that the lack of others of less durable make-up, of any significant size, could equally be the result of disintegration resulting from the working of the soil for cultivation.
4302	layer	The spit was 1m x1m square dug from a surface depth of 0.2m to a bottom depth of 0.4m. The soil was loose, slightly damp and orangey/brown. It was composed of approximately 20% silt to 80% sand. Inclusions were: river-rounded pebbles (less than 10%) and others (less than 1%), sub-angular and sub-rounded in shape, all on average about 1cm x1cm; very small charcoal pieces (less than 1%) and a few snail shells (less than 1%). Finds included small pottery fragments (less than 1%), a few bits of glass, some small lumps (less than 1%) of apparent slag and a 10cm x 8 cm piece of flat stone. At its boundary with 4303 unsorted Corallian lumps were becoming more frequent. There was contamination throughout by worms and roots. The spit was overlain by 4301 and it overlay 4303. It was	None	Overall, this layer seemed quite rich in organic content. Its stonier character at the boundary with 4303 suggested that the soil depth on this site was quite shallow and that it might be approaching the surface of the natural. Otherwise, its character would seem to be explained in much the same way as for 4301. The greater quantity of inclusions could be partly natural, but this, and the greater frequency of finds might suggest that at this depth the soil was less finely worked and cleared for cultivation. The piece of flat stone among the finds

		excavated mainly by trowel, with a little use of spade, and was sieved.		could possibly be a fragment of a Stonesfield slate. There was no other indication of possible structural material.
4303	layer	<p>The spit was the 1m x 0.5m western half of TP43, dug from a surface depth of 0.4m to a bottom of 0.46m. It was loose to friable with some dampness. Its colour was yellowy/ brown with some patches of yellowy/green clay. Otherwise it was composed of silty sand. It produced larger numbers of unsorted lumps of Corallian stone than the context above (4302). These ranged from approximately 1cm x 1cm to the largest at 13cm x 8cm x 2 cm. and comprised about 5% of the spit's content. There were very few small charcoal fragments, diminishing nearer the base of the spit. The only finds were two pieces of possible pot in poor, abraded condition and one small piece of snail shell. At its base a greater amount of Corallian material was evident and there were patches of yellowy/green clay with a particularly concentrated spread in the north west corner. The spit was contaminated with roots and worms. The spit was overlain by 4302, abutted 4304 (to its east) and possibly overlay the natural.</p>	None	The nature of the intrusions and the virtual absence of finds seem to support the conclusion that at this depth excavation starts to meet the natural. Although terminating the spit at 0.46 m, i.e. only 0.06cm below its upper surface, was partly dictated by time constraints, rough probing with the trowel met some resistance and suggested that the material below was stonier and consolidated, consistent with its appearance at the boundary with 4303.
4304	layer	<p>The spit was the 1 x 0.5 m eastern half of TP43 and from its upper surface at 0.4 m was dug to 0.46 m. In compaction it was similar to 4303, i.e. friable to loose with some dampness, and it was composed of silty sand mixed with Corallian rubble, with some patches of less friable yellowy/green clay. Although rough probes with the point of a trowel did seem to encounter sandy/silty material penetrating further in places, generally they met more apparently stony resistance. The only inclusions were less than 1% snail shell fragments. There was one very distinct, perfect half of a cockle-like bivalve fossil. The only finds were three possible small mammalian tooth fragments. As with 4303 the boundary at its base showed more evidence of stony Corallian material with patches of clay. The north eastern corner of the spit contained a particularly consolidated concentration of stony material. The spit was contaminated with worms and roots as with 4303.</p>		The nature of this spit reinforces the conclusion drawn from 4303 that, at the base, excavation was encountering the natural. The excavation overall yielded nothing to contradict suggestions that this is a site of generally shallow soils overlying the natural, and that, although in recent decades used as allotments, its geology and location on sloping and uneven ground does not particularly favour cultivation rather than use as pasture earlier in its history. The presence of tooth fragments is possibly the result of small rodents burrowing.



Looking North



Looking North



Looking East

