

EOXP TEST PIT 58

Location: Grounds of Fairacres Convent, Fairacres Road; in lawn behind main building

Date of Excavation: 23-24th May 2013

Area excavated: 1.0 m x 1.0m

Weather conditions: Overcast with regular and prolonged heavy showers

Excavators: Jeanne Peskett, Catriona Manners, Steve Nicholson, Caroline Morrell, Gary Hsu, Mandy Bellamy, Paul Bradshaw

Report by: J.R

GPS location and height above sea-level: SP 52684 04804, 62.7m OD

Introduction

The test pit was dug in front of Fairacres House which is situated on the top of a spur looking SW over the Cherwell. A number of worked flints were uncovered near to this location in Archeox test pits on Bedford Street and the Bell collection of prehistoric worked flints (held at the Pitt Rivers Museum) was gathered across the immediate vicinity although the records of the locations of these finds are now lost.

Fairacres House is now the central building of Fairacres Convent and is recorded on the 1870's mapping of Oxfordshire before the Northern and Southern extensions were built (the house was built in the early 19th century). The mapping suggests there have been few alterations to the grounds immediately to the rear of the house aside from visible evidence for landscaping supported by the results of this test pit.

This test pit was one of three excavated within the grounds of the convent with limited field walking undertaken in the vegetable patch. One test pit was located downslope of the spur towards the river (EOXP TP57) and one at the top of this spur (EOXP TP56). A number of large pieces of unabraded Roman pottery in a range of fabrics and forms were recovered the pit located on the spur suggesting a small scale rural settlement occupied this attractive location with its sandy soils. 'Field walking' in the vegetable patch also to the W of this test pit produced 11th- 13th and 17th -19th century pottery which suggests that this location may have been an attractive settlement spot from the Roman period through to the present day, with the earliest activity dating from prehistory.

The re-deposited natural encountered in this test pit has been interpreted as relating to the construction of the house, with this material being used to landscape the garden. The buried sub-soil layer underneath the re-deposited natural either represents the original ground level or a layer contemporary with the construction of Fairacres House.

Excavation summary

The natural was not reached, the limit of excavation stopped at a depth of approximately 0.70m. Spit (100), mid-brown sandy silt was below the turf and 0.10m deep. This first spit was initially friable becoming firmer after approximately 0.04m and was clear of any finds.

Spit (101) below was slightly firmer and lighter yellowish sandy silt compared to (100), measuring 0.02-0.05m in depth coming down onto (102) in the S of the pit and (103) in the N. Inclusions consisted of occasional charcoal and rounded river pebbles all concentrated in the SW corner and

associated with (102). A few finds were uncovered and included CBM, pottery, animal bone, shell and flint.

Layer (102) measured roughly 0.5-0.52m N/S and the whole length of the test pit (1m) E/W and 0.05m in depth. It may also be interpreted as a feature as it appears to be a layer of hardcore most likely for a path owing to the lack of structures visible on the earliest available mapping. The layer was only partially uncovered in the S of the trench therefore its actual function is hard to interpret. The hardcore was suspended in a mid-yellowish brown matrix with occasional yellow lenses, slightly less silty than (101) with a small amount of clay. Inclusions consisted of poorly sorted river pebbles and gravel with occasional flint and limestone pieces and occasional degraded charcoal flecks. This layer was the first to produce finds which consisted of animal bone, pottery (mostly modern), glass, CBM, tile, brick, Fe and clay pipe.


Layer (103), friable, mid-yellowish brown sandy silt with similar amounts of clay to (101) lay underneath (101) and (102) and measured between 0.03 and 0.04m in depth. This layer is likely to be buried subsoil relating to the overlying hardcore. Inclusions were very similar to (101); rounded pebbles and frequent charcoal flecks with the addition of occasional shell and fossil shell. Finds included Fe nails, pottery (including medieval Brill Boarstal sherds), slate, brick, glass and clay pipe.



Layer (104) was a compact and dry, light yellowish/greyish brown sand/silt re-deposited natural layer measuring between 0.17 and 0.21m in depth, underneath (103) with relatively clear boundaries between the two. The amount of finds reduced in this layer and consisted of occasional pieces of slate, glass, CBM, Fe Iron, pottery (including some 17th/18th century sherds). Inclusions were infrequent and consisted of occasional charcoal and river pebbles. The next layer below (105) was friable light yellowish/brown, slightly clayey sand which contained very infrequent charcoal and river pebbles and limestone inclusions. Fossil shell was slightly more frequent in this layer. Finds included snail shell, CBM, a few sherds of animal bone, modern blue and white ceramics but also a piece of daub which may well relate to earlier medieval structures on this site, the presence of which would be supported by the dates of the pottery sherds found.

Like (104), (105) also seemed to be re-deposited natural approximately 0.22m in depth but with visible root holes filled with a dark greyish brown soil. This suggests that layer (104) either relates to a more recent landscaping event than (105) or more likely that (104) is the same as (105) but was disturbed when (102) the layer of hardcore was laid hence not being able to see the root holes.

Layer (106), a compact mid-dark brown buried silty clay subsoil lay underneath (105) with very clear boundaries between the two. The bottom of this layer was not reached and at the limit of excavation the layer measured roughly 0.10m in depth. This layer contained very frequent charcoal flecks, occasional rounded pebbles and fossil shell. The finds included Fe, clay pipe, occasional and highly fragmentary CBM, a sherd of old patinated glass, animal bone (one piece with visible butchery marks) and a cattle molar. The pottery contained a few highly fragmented sherds of blue and white as well as some medieval fragments including a piece of Freshen ware.

Results

Spit/ context	Type of deposit	Description	Soil sampl e	Comments
(100)	Spit	<p>Friable, becoming more firm after approximately 40mm. Mid brown sandy (30%) silt (70%). Spit 10cm in depth from the top.</p> <p>Occasional worm and frequent root disturbance.</p>	N/A	Bought in garden soil.
(101)	Spit/ layer	<p>Firmer than (100), Light yellowish brown sandy (30%) Silt (70%) 0.02-0.05m deep.</p> <p>Inclusions: occasional charcoal measuring <10mm and rounded river pebbles also measuring <10mm.</p> <p>Finds: Flint, Fe, pottery, CBM, charcoal and snail shell.</p> <p>Frequent roots and occasional worms. Diffuse boundaries to (100) above and (102) - (103) below.</p>		
(102)	Layer/ feature	<p>Friable mid yellowish brown with yellow lenses. Clayey (10%) sandy (30%) silt (60%). 100mm from the top, approximately 50mm in depth.</p> <p>Inclusions: Poorly sorted river pebbles measuring 10-30mm and gravel like material. Occasional flint and degraded charcoal flecks. Very occasional limestone pieces measuring 20-60mm.</p> <p>Finds: Bone, Pottery, Glass, CBM, Tile, Brick, Fe, Clay pipe.</p> <p>Diffuse boundary to (103) below. Occasional worm and root disturbance.</p>	N/A	<p>Regular pebble and stone spread on the S side of the trench. Possible hardcore for features such as path, shed summer house. Spread measure 0.5-0.52m in width across the trench</p>  <p>(102) in the S and (101) to the N</p>

(103)	Layer	<p>Friable mid yellowish brown sandy (30%) clayey (10%) silt (60%). 30-40mm deep.</p> <p>Inclusions: Frequent poorly sorted rounded pebbles measuring 10-40mm. Occasional charcoal pieces 10-20mm. Occasional shell and fossil shell.</p> <p>Finds: Fe nails, pottery, slate, brick, glass, clay pipe, brill boardstall.</p> <p>Diffuse boundaries to (101) and (102). Clear to (104).</p>	N/A	 <p>Garden soil either earlier or contemporary with (102), hardcore.</p> <p>(103) Facing N</p>
(104)	Layer	<p>Dry and compacted light yellowish/greyish brown. 50% sand 50% silt with occasional worms. 170-180mm deep.</p> <p>Inclusions: Occasional charcoal flecks and occasional river pebbles measuring 10-30mm.</p> <p>Finds: Slate and modern ceramics.</p> <p>Clear boundaries between (104) and (103).</p>	N/A	
(105)	Layer	<p>Friable light yellowish brown clayey (20%) sand (80%). Occasional worms. Approximately 0.22m deep.</p> <p>Inclusions: Occasional charcoal fossilised shell and poorly sorted river pebbles. One chunk of limestone rubble- 40mm.</p> <p>Finds: Pottery, daub, snail shell, CBM and flint.</p> <p>Clear boundaries between (105) and (106).</p>	N/A	<p>Compacted sand layer with occasional orange sand lenses. Re-deposited natural which most likely relates to the construction of the house and the raising/landscaping of the garden immediately in front of the house.</p>


(106)	Layer	<p>Compact mid-dark brown silty (40%) clay (60%). 0.1m deep to LOE.</p> <p>Inclusions: Occasional poorly sorted rounded pebbles measuring 10-25mm. Very frequent charcoal flecks. Occasional fossil shell.</p> <p>Finds: Fe, clay pipe stem, occasional fragments of CBM, Cu, Pottery.</p> <p>Very clear boundaries to (105) above.</p>	<p>Garden soil below re-deposited natural that may well related to the construction of Fairacres House)</p> 
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Image facing E towards Fairacres House. Removing (102) to the S and showing (101) to the N.



Recording



Stratigraphy and final sondage in the SW corner.



Finds from context (101)



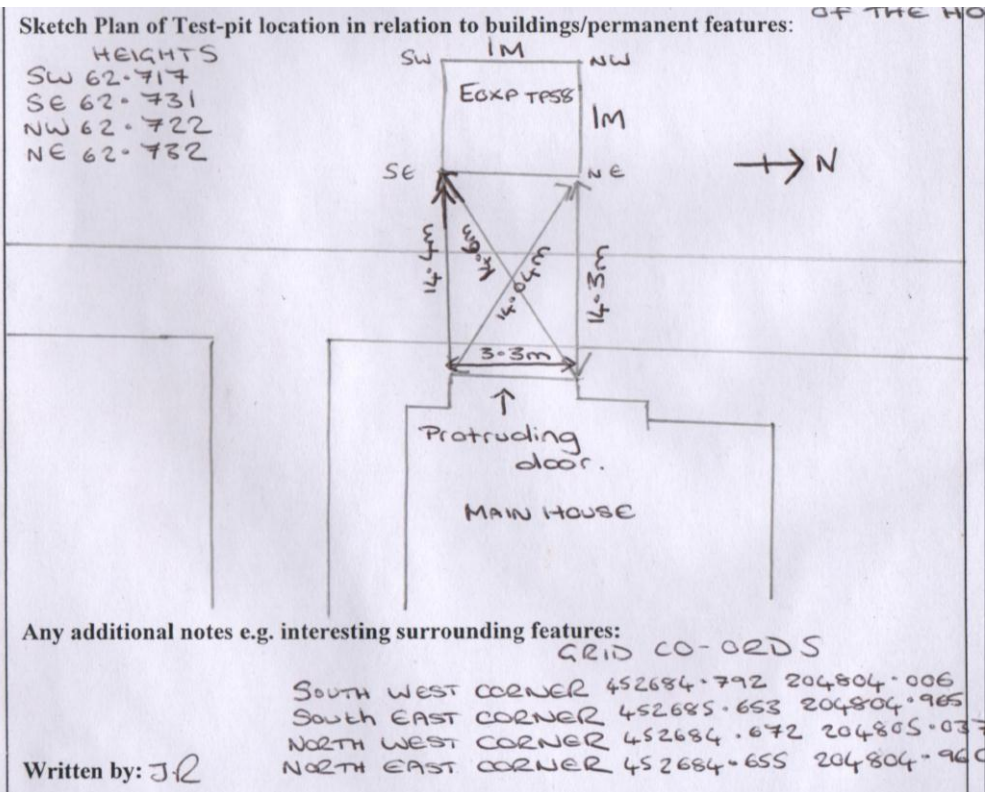
Finds from context (104)



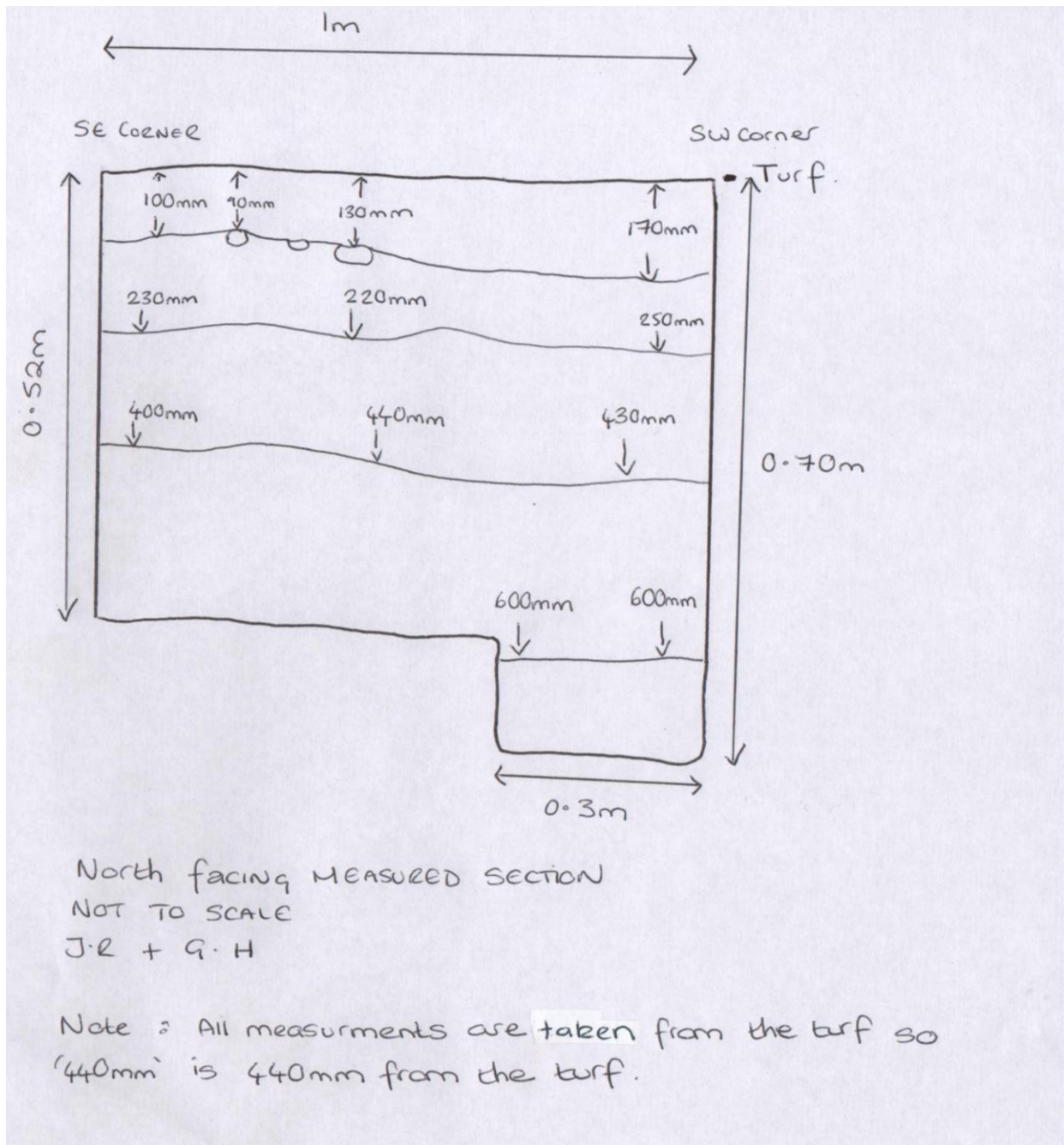
Finds from Context (105)



Finds from context (106)



Location of the test pit in relation to Fairacres House



Measured section drawing of N facing section face.