

EOXP TEST PIT 60

Location of Test pit: Back garden of St Georges House, 31 Cowley Road, Littlemore

Date of Excavation: 15th and 16th June 2013

Area excavated: Maximum 1m by 1m, then reduced to a sondage running West-East from the southern edge of the trench (started at 0.25m and enlarged to 0.55m in width)

Weather conditions:

Day 1, overcast in morning, heavy rain in early afternoon then sunshine.

Day 2, overcast with some light rain during the day.

Excavators: N Ramrekha-Heeramun, P Singh-Heeramun, A Beezadhur, A Tej Yadav Beezadhur, R Reed, P Rowland and others

Report by: Paul Rowland

GPS location and height above sea-level: SP 5384 0298 74m OD

Introduction

Test pit 60 was located here as it would appear that it is one of the oldest building still standing in this area of Littlemore. Test pit 60 was one of two located in the gardens of St Georges House on the Cowley Road in Littlemore. TP 60 was located in the back garden which has a west facing aspect. The garden is a well matured area with one large Yew Tree in the southern end.

There are a couple of significant features in the garden the first being a high roughly hewn mortared stone wall running along the northern edge of the boundary. The wall backs on to Longwall, a side road off of the Cowley Road in Littlemore, it stand approximately 5 metres high and has 6 internal buttresses along its length that were visible from this garden. The second feature is not visible when in the garden: the owners pointed out that under a manhole cover in the lawn area of the garden was a shaft that appears to lead down to a chamber cut into the natural geology. Further investigation might be warranted to understand what this feature is or could have been, there were a number of suggestions whilst some of the test pit team peered down the shaft (there was at the time water in the bottom of this feature). This feature was investigated later and proved to be a rock-cut and concrete roofed small chamber, possibly a small air-raid shelter or safe store, perhaps for ammunition?

Excavation summary

The test pit was dug to an overall depth of c 0.82m within a sondage at the southern end of the test pit (1m W-E by 0.55m S-N), the remainder was dug to a depth of 0.3m. Initially the sondage was dug with a width of 0.25m S-N on Saturday afternoon and extended to 0.55m S-N on Sunday morning. The opinion of the test pit team is that the natural was not reached during this excavation. The natural geology was not reached due to time constraints as we lost approximately 1 hour due to extremely heavy rain on the Saturday until a break in the weather which allowed us to continue the excavation. The majority of the soil was sieved during the excavation, with the exception being soil removed during the opening up of the width of the sondage. The soil removed during this part of the excavation was however sorted through as much as possible.

The first spit of c 0.05m below the surface (100) consisted of the turf and an organic garden soil. This was removed by first cutting the turf and removing it with a spade and then trowelling. This layer was probably brought onto the site to lay the turf on a flat level surface. There were a few finds but nothing of significance and certainly no older material.

After the removal of the turf the second context (101) was dug to a depth of c 0.07m below the surface by trowelling and consisted of the same soil as in (100) and was most likely a continuation of make-up soil used when laying the turf. Finds from this context include various items but again these appeared to be modern and again nothing of real significance. The change in the sound of the trowelling indicated that we had reached a new context (102).

Context (102) was dug to a depth of 0.3m below the surface using a mattock due to its compaction, shovels and trowels, the soil being sieved once it was removed from the trench. There was an increase in the inclusions within this layer with more sub angular limestone being present. There was one potential find that might give an idea for dating of this soil which was a mouth piece of a clay pipe; the remainder again included modern material. There was a clear boundary between (102) and the next context (103) due to a sudden colour change from a dark brown material to a mid-brownish yellow horizon.




It was at this time that the heavy rain came and it was decided that we should stop the excavation so that the garden (mainly the turf) would not suffer. Lunch was taken at this point with the aim to clear up afterwards, however the rain stopped and the sun came out albeit thorough breaks in the clouds.



Context (103) was dug as a sondage in the southern end of the test pit at a width of 0.25m firstly and to a depth eventually of 0.75m below the surface, being extended to a width of 0.55m later. The extension was dug using a shovel with the soil being sorted through to check for any finds. It was in this context that the most significant finds from this test pit came, with one sherd of glazed pottery (possibly medieval) and one sherd of possible 11th/12th century Oxford ware. Both of these sherds did not show much evidence of abrasion and were located in the very bottom of this context. One other item of some significance was found higher up in the context and that was a broken slate pencil.

The final context (104) was dug to a depth of 0.82m below the surface and was the limit of excavation (LOE) given the time constraints. In this context there were no finds and only a few inclusions, however given that one of the inclusion was charcoal it is thought that this might be redeposited natural.



Results

Spit/ context	Type of deposit	Description	Soil sample	Comments
Layer (100)	Turf and topsoil	<p>0.05m of turf with a small amount of top soil removed (dark brown black, friable and moist)</p> <p>Inclusions: Rounded Pebbles < 5%. Angular limestone < 5%.</p> <p>Contamination: roots and worms.</p> <p>Boundary: Apart from turf soil the same as layer 101.</p> <p>Finds: Modern Pottery <1%, glass <1%, CBM <1% not much abrasion to finds.</p> <p>Turf and some topsoil soil, part of landscaping.</p>	None	<p>Sketch plan on back of context sheet shows exact location of test pit in relationship to house.</p> 
Spit (101)	Layer: below (100) continuation of top soil under turf	<p>0.02m of dark brown black, friable and moist (sandy 40% silt 60%)</p> <p>Inclusions: angular limestone, small pebbles, flint and charcoal (<1%)</p> <p>Contamination: Worms and roots</p> <p>Boundary: Same as (100) but clear sudden change to (102) below.</p> <p>Finds: glass, CBM, Pottery, clay pipe fragment (stem).</p> <p>Layer below turf probable make up layer.</p>	None	<p>Sketch plan</p>  <p>Looking north</p>
Context (102)	Layer: below (101)	<p>0.23m of dark black brown, compacted damp sandy silt</p> <p>Inclusions: sub angular small and medium limestone (<5%), small pebbles, flint and charcoal (<1%)</p> <p>Contamination: Worms and roots</p> <p>Boundary: Clear sudden change from (101) above to (102). Clear to (103) below</p> <p>Finds: glass, CBM, modern pottery, stoneware, possible worked flint, Fe nail and clay pipe fragment (mouth piece). Not much abrasion to these finds</p> <p>Probably sub soil brought in to make up ground.</p>	None	<p>Sketch plan</p>  <p>Looking north</p>
Context (103)	Layer: below (102) in sondage	<p>Sondage dug in S of trench (N-S 0.25m x W-E 1.0m, later extended to N-S 0.55m x W-E 1.0m)</p> <p>0.45m of mid brownish yellow sandy (40%) silt (50%) very loose and moist</p> <p>Inclusions: Charcoal and small pebbles <1%, medium sub-angular limestone (>0.1%)</p>	None	<p>Smaller area of sondage dug on Saturday afternoon and extended on Sunday morning (Finds from Sunday not stratified)</p> <p>Sketch plan</p> <p>Looking south</p>

		<p>Contamination: Worms and roots Boundary: Clear to (102) above and (104) below Finds: Glass, CBM, slate pencil (broken) and modern pottery towards top of context. 1 piece of possible glazed medieval pottery and 1 piece of possible 11th/12th century Oxford Ware found at the bottom of the context (clean, sharp un-abraded sherds)</p> <p>Unlikely to be the undisturbed geology but more likely material brought in to make up garden or a lens of silty sand.</p>		
Context (104)	Layer below (103) in sondage	<p>Sondage dug in S of trench (N-S 0.55m x W-E 1.0m) 0.07m of light brownish yellow silty (30%) sand (70%) friable and moist Inclusions: Charcoal and small pebbles <0.1%, medium sub-angular limestone (<0.1%) Contamination: Roots Boundary: Clear to (103) above Finds: None</p> <p>Unlikely to be the natural geology but more likely material brought in to make up garden or a lens of sandy silt. Charcoal inclusions suggest this is redeposited. Also as previously mentioned there appears to be a rock cut structure in this garden at a considerable depth below the bottom of this test pit. LOE (limit of excavation)</p>	None	<p>Sketch plan and section drawing taken.</p>  <p>Looking west</p>

