

TEST PIT 1

Magdalen Road Area

Area excavated: 1.5m x 1m

Date of Excavation: 29 October 2010

Conditions: Overcast, mild, dry

Excavators: JI, Roelie Reed, Fay Pendell, Jane Harrison

Report by: The excavation team

GPS location and height over sea level: SP 5290 0518; 61.9m OD

The evidence from this test pit dug in the Magdalen Road area added two interesting aspects to the story of this part of East Oxford. In the period before and especially during the Second World War the garden had been very well manured and dug-over, probably to grow vegetables, and at the same time animals were being kept – chickens and maybe a pig. Secondly, in the time immediately before the present house was built in the 1870s, people were living at or very near the pit's location. But the old maps show no buildings on the site. Perhaps those people were nineteenth century squatters – small holdings were often set up on common land by the poorest in the community. This location near to Oxford would have been attractive to those trying to eke out a living on the margins.

Summary of Excavation

The test pit was dug to a depth of 0.4m, with a further 0.4m+ in a sondage 0.2m x 0.75m with its length against the SE facing section. The natural geology was not reached.

The first 0.2m spit was a highly organic well-manured garden soil; one area at the base of the spit was rich in iron finds including nails with square profiles. The second spit was less organic but contained a good deal of well-preserved charcoal. Both spits contained a considerable number – more than expected perhaps – of domestic finds. As the second spit included redeposited natural it may have been part of the preparations for the building of the house in the 1870s; that spit became sandier and more homogenous towards the base. However the soils from the sondage became more organic again suggesting possible domestic dumping/manuring preceding the building of the house. The nearest properties at that period were probably cottages to the NE (interestingly where a walnut tree grew until very recently suggesting the presence of a farmyard); the pit area may have been a dumping ground.

The large amount of charcoal, some slag and iron finds are interesting. The possibility of more activity in this area than is implied by the available maps – which suggest fairly open farmland – is hinted at by the depth and richness of these domestic deposits. It would be useful to complete excavation to natural at some point.

The owner had collected a large quantity of modern (20th century – possibly late 19th) bottles, pottery, buttons etc. when removing a concrete path to extend a flower bed. Were these used as hard-core or evidence for dumping? The collection could be used as the beginnings of a typology of Oxford domestic evidence.

Results

Spit	Type of deposit	Description	Soil sample	Drawings
1 1.5m x 1m pit	Layer	0.05m of turf and topsoil removed by hand; 0.2m deep. Dark brownish black highly organic sandy silt. Limestone chunks/ fragments max 0.02m ² and quartzite pebbles max 0.02m ² ; charcoal and cinders max 0.01m ² ; fossils – belemnites and gryphea. Diffuse boundaries: gradually becomes more sandy and less finds rich. Finds: Fragments of roofing slate, brick and glass (green brown blue and clear) fragmentary sheep and fish bone, drainage piping fragments, pottery (blue and white), fragmentary brooch and square profile nails. Garden soil: well dug, mixed and manured.		Sections 1-4
2	Layer: below Spit 1	Friable-loose yellowish brown sandy silt with lenses of greyish blue clay 5-10%, lenses sandier deposit, more charcoal than spit 1 but less organic, fewer larger stones. Iron panning on clay lumps Finds: bone, pottery (less blue and white more yellow glazed), small quantity glass sherds, metal work including square-profile nails, clay pipe. Builders' make-up layer?		Sections 1-4
3 Excavated in sondage 0.2m x 0.75m	Layer: below Spit 2	0.45m deep. Friable- loose, mid brown silty sand (coarse), 5% grey clay lenses (larger than Spit 1) at top of sondage only, 5% fragmentary and degraded limestone, charcoal flecks. After 0.8m depth less organic, less charcoal and sandier. Finds: post-med pottery, blue glazed pottery, fragments brick, glass sherds and clay pipe bowl. After 0.8m a concentrated dump of domestic midden with patinated glass, then finds reduce again. Lower/below building disturbance layer – possible domestic dumping.	1	Sections 1-4





