

## Programme of Test Pitting around Ian Avenue, Wirksworth: Test Pit 1

I am most grateful to Mr and Mrs Robinson for permission to put a test pit in their back garden. Although this might be viewed as routine work, every test pit gives different information and helps to build up a wider picture (University of Lincoln, 2020).

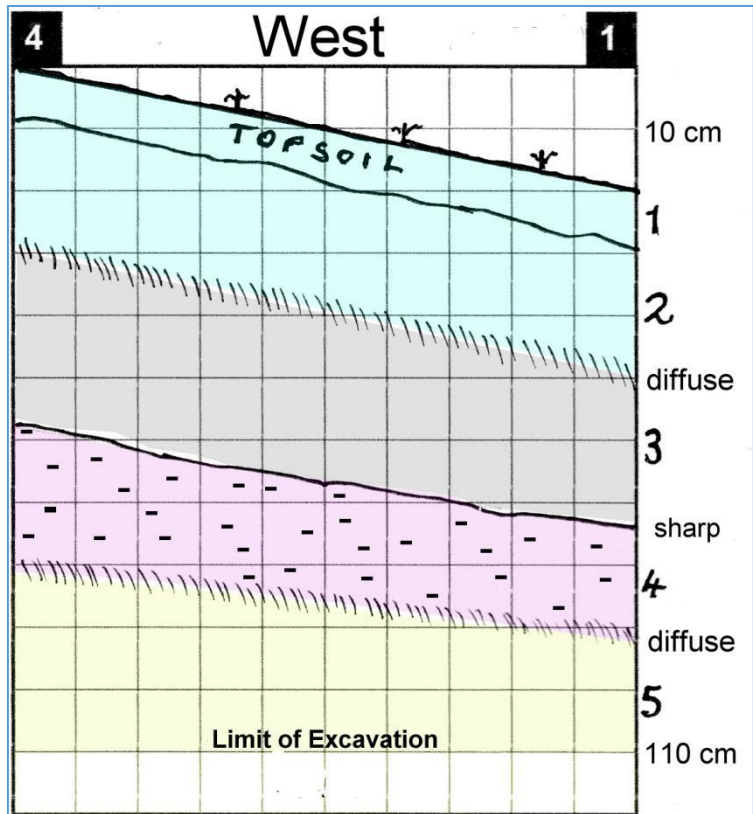
### Summary of the results

The results from this Test Pit go back in time recognisably, judging by the finds, much of which was contained in the upper contexts (think of them as layers) by things deposited by previous householders down the back of their garden perhaps in the process of gardening, tidying junk out of their shed and so on.



Examining the test pit (looking east)

In the lower (older) contexts there were fewer finds (this was a field before the 1960s) but included occasional clay pipe bits as well as a small gilt tombac button which marked a threshold at the bottom of a Victorian cultivated soil layer. Finally there was a further context of the medieval soil of the field with very few but very old finds, with the soil including chert and some very flat small pebbles; this overlay the natural substrate of light brown (fawn coloured) clay.



Section diagram of the contexts of the test pit looking at the west side  
The test pit was on sloping ground, the grid is in 10cm squares

**List of contexts:**

**Context 1:** Topsoil, some modern finds: screws, plastics.

**Context 2:** Modern soil layers and mixed redeposited clay with tipping of garden and household things including artefacts, ash etc. including old bed-springs, 1970s peanut packets, Co-operative Society bottle sherds, and a small selection of various post-medieval pottery: stoneware, whiteware etc. The houses were built in 1964-65, so the context would logically be after that date even though it contains many things made in times before (and during) that period.



Interior surface of a salt glazed stoneware pipe - yellow fireclay fabric

**Context 3:** Victorian field surface of a fine dark brown organic soil with far fewer finds but including the gilt button which was just above the sharp horizon between contexts 3 and 4.



Gilt Tombac Button and sherd of Midlands light bodied slipware from Context 3

Tombac buttons were produced by the late seventeenth century and are common finds, they are generally made of copper alloy and have a single wire loop on the reverse. In this case, the button is gilt and although there appears to be no design on the front, which is somewhat corroded, the reverse says GILT COLO(UR) with further indecipherable lettering. This type of Tombac button started to be made after 1830 and became more common after 1850, with the lettering on the reverse (the back mark) often advertising the maker. Where such back marks are clear, it is then often possible to more closely date the button by identifying the maker and the period of operation of the button making company or firm, helping to more closely date a context.

**Context 4:** Medieval surface of harder lighter coloured (mid brown grey) soil with small amounts of chert (small gravelly stone) and common small flat pebbles (both whole and broken) and containing both Saxo-Norman Stamford ware (Laing, 2014) and grog tempered pottery.



Sherd of Grog tempered ware from Context 4

Roman grog-tempered ware is pottery that has bits of crushed old pottery included in it as a temper. It is fairly typical to find Roman wares in the “medieval” context of a dig and there are local written up

examples, from Derby Little Chester, of grog tempered wares in these contexts (Tate, 2008). Grog tempered wares in this area tend to date from the very late first century to the early second century. We note as an important caveat that there are also later kinds of grog tempered ware.

**Context 5:** This is the natural substrate of light brown clay, a maximum depth of examination was 110cm from the modern ground surface.

## Discussion

This part of Wirksworth was laid out as fields in most early maps of the town, the first to show the specific field where Ian Avenue is now being the 1806 Enclosure Map. The field was mostly owned by John Toplis but a strip plot in the centre, running north-south, probably the remnant of the medieval field pattern, was owned by the Corporation of Etwall Almshouses and Repton School. The field was called “Warmbrook Land” by 1837, but before that date, in 1709, it was referred to as owned (partly) by Phillip Gell and called Short Oat Hill - which is a recorded ancient name: Othyl first occurs in documents in 1395. The field immediately adjacent to the east of Ian Avenue (now a lorry yard and Breasley Foam) was called Hanging Close: Hengyngflatte in about 1500 (Cameron 1959), this latter is therefore potentially where public executions took place in ancient days, though in common with the absence of analysed records (typically for Wirksworth, as many of you will know) this cannot be proven definitively at the moment.

The finds from the test pit reflect some very defined periods of activity. Contexts 1 and 2 are modern and date from after the mid 1960s given when the houses were constructed, with many assorted small items which would occur in garden and household waste of the time, until now. Context 3 contained comparatively few finds but dates from the late Georgian and Victorian ages suggesting that the field was indeed in agricultural use, supported by the known map evidence, until the houses were built. Context 4 is significant and although we have referred to it a being “medieval” this may give a wrong impression, there was limited medieval pottery, but there was a single sherd of Saxo-Norman Stamford Ware (after 900AD to about 1150) and a single sherd of (to be confirmed) Roman grog tempered ware (after 90AD to about 125AD). Finding Roman and Saxo-Norman pottery in “medieval” layers is quite normal, especially where such layers were in rural locations. The gap in finds and time may speak about use or how much activity there was and the very pronounced gap in time between the items in contexts 4 and 3 is obvious. Limited finds from the Georgian and Victorian ages and the medieval times tend to suggest quiet agriculture ( “Oat Hill” ) rather than intensive urban activity.

In general, one should not draw very certain conclusions about the gaps in time or the implications of when a location was in a particular kind of use from such limited finds and a single test pit. For this reason we hope, with the kind agreement of other residents of Ian Avenue, to do some further work.

## References

Anon, 1806, Wirksworth Enclosure Award 1802 and Map 1806, Derbyshire Record Office, D163/20/1 and D2962/5/1

Anon, 1821, Duchy of Lancaster Map of Wirksworth Manor, The National Archive, (Now lost due to incorrect cataloguing at the Archive).

Anon, 1836, Wirksworth Local Board: Map of the Township of Wirksworth, Derbyshire Record Office, D2962/UL

Anon, 1837, Wirksworth Tithe Map, Derbyshire Record Office, D2223A/PI 32

Cameron, K. 1959, The Place-names of Derbyshire, Cambridge, University Press, Part II, pp413-421

Hutchinson, S. 1709, Draft map of the Gell Estate in Wirksworth, Derbyshire Record Office, D258/18/6/1-20

Laing, L, 2014, Pottery in Britain 4000BC to AD1900, Witham, Greenlight Publishing, p78

Ordnance Survey (OS), 1880, OS County Series, 1st edition, scale 1:2500. Sheet XXXIX.2.NW

Tate J, 2008, Archaeological Evaluation at Alfreton Road, Little Chester, Derbyshire Archaeological Journal pp48-49

University of Lincoln, 2020, Digging an archaeological test pit, a step by step guide, Community Archaeology, pp1-8

See also

Munsell Colour Charts:

<https://munsell.com/about-munsell-color/how-color-notation-works/how-to-read-color-chart/>

## Appendix: Pottery Finds from Test Pit WIA23-1

Ref No	Context	Type	No of sherds	Weight grams	Part	Form	Decoration	Date Range	Notes, fabric etc.	Inclusions
WIA23-1 /1/1	1	Stoneware	2	25	Body	Selzer Bottle		1750-1900	Heavy fabric Grey 10YR/7/3	
WIA23-1 /1/2	1	Staffordshire mottled ware	1	10	Body	Jar		1690-1800	Light fabric Dark and mid brown	
WIA23-1 /2/1	2	Stoneware	1	88	End	Sewer Pipe	Interior striations	1845-1960	Heavy fabric Yellow brown 7.5YR/5/8 Salt glazed	
WIA23-1 /2/2	2	Stoneware	1	95	End	Body		1845-1960	Heavy fabric Light brown 7.5YR/5/8 Salt glazed	
WIA23-1 /2/3	2	Modern Whiteware	1	4	Rim	Cup		1930 to now	White	
WIA23-1 /2/4	2	Modern Whiteware	1	2	Body	Mug		1930 to now	White and blue lines	
WIA23-1 /2/5	2	Creamware	1	1	Rim	Plate		1850 to now	White Floral embossing	
WIA23-1 /2/6	2	Stoneware	1	1	Body			1845-1960	Thin fabric Light brown 7.5YR/5/8 Salt glazed	
WIA23-1 /2/7	2	North Notts Slipware	1	1	Body			1650-1750	Thin fabric Brown 5YR/3/1	
WIA23-1 /2/8	2	Modern Whiteware	1	2	Body	Cup		1930 to now	White	
WIA23-1 /3/1	3	Midlands light bodied slipware	1	9	Body			1650-1750	Thin fabric Black 5YR/2.5/1	Occasional sand
WIA23-1 /3/2	3	Tombac Button	Not a sherd	5			Gilt with backmark	1830 to 1900	Copper alloy	
WIA23-1 /4/1	4	Stamford ware	1	4	Body		Exterior rouletting	900-1150	Hard white fabric Clear/green glaze	
WIA23-1 /4/2	4	Local oxidised coarseware	1	1	Body			"medieval"	Soft very thin orange with grey oxidised core	Very fine grit
WIA23-1 /4/3	4	Grog Tempered ware	1	6	Body	Jar?		90-125 AD	Soft soapy fabric Cream 10YR/8/2	Grog and very fine grit

### Notes:

1. All pottery assessment is subject to professional views, the list is our initial assessment.
2. The colour codings (e.g. 5YR/2.5/1) are references for Munsell Colour Charts.

### Commentary

Even though contexts contain pottery sherds earlier than the considered date of the context, this is because pottery and other items hang around. So the modern topsoil (Context 1) contained some Staffordshire Mottled Ware with a making date range of 1690-1800. The item may have been (for example) originally a tobacco jar that was then sat in someone's garage being used for keeping screws or nails and eventually got broken and disposed of.