

# Our Test Pit Day at Vine Farm Stack Yard

By Phil Docherty

*Following last year's successful trial test pit carried out last year in Pat Smedley's garden it was agreed that a second test pit should be carried out to encourage other members of the society and the village community at large to visit on the day and assess the interest in a community test pit day next year. This report summarises our experience and finds of the day.*

Our first task was to find a suitable site for our second test pit and I approached various people in the village with this in mind. The idea of digging on the village green was discussed but as the Parish Council had started a meadow planting scheme on the green so this was discounted and I contacted John and Jane Wilson at Vine Farm to see if we would be able to dig the test pit on their Stack Yard Paddock on Church Lane adjacent to the church yard. They were very pleased to give their go ahead for this and plans were made for this site.



Prior to the day of the trial test pit we together with some members of the Grantham Archaeology Group carried out a Geophysical Resistivity Survey of the stack yard and adjacent paddock. This type of survey measures the electrical resistivity in the soil so a

stoney dry area would have a high resistivity and a ditch or pit or damp area would have a low resistivity giving us a plot of possible features under the surface. This plot would enable us to assess what features may be apparent before we excavated the test pit and to give us some “targets” to aim for. This survey was carried out on the 21st April which turned out to be a nice sunny day and with everyone’s help and a super lunch provided by Dawn we were completed by early afternoon. The results were produced by the Grantham Archaeology Group team members and sent over to us on email two weeks later. These were impressive with the path in the paddock (A) and the old farm track across the stack yard (B) showing up nicely, there were also some other features (C) showing up as well and it was decided that we should position the test pit on one of these areas.



The picture above shows the Geophysical Survey superimposed on to an aerial view so we could see how the features found related to the present day structures.

On the 2nd July the big day arrived and we all met up at 9.30am in the Vine Farm Stack Yard and set up the gazebos for our CDLHS displays. Meanwhile David, Charley and Nigel discussed the Geophysical Survey results and settled on a position in the area marked C on the plan above for our test pit. This 1m x 1m pit position was duly set out, coned and taped off and its location recorded for future reference and the turf was removed and stacked ready for excavations to start.



No sooner had this been done the weather turned against us and we had very heavy rain with the odd rumble of thunder for good measure. However being made of sterner stuff than most our team quickly erected a spare gazebo over the pit and excavation commenced.

We sieved the soil as we dug and also checking with the metal detector before heaping the spoil on to plastic sheets. Any finds were collected in a finds tray for washing and examination. We also had two metal detectors which speeded the process of checking the spoil and the excavations for any metal finds.

Once we reached 25cm we photographed the excavated surface after levelling and cleaning with a trowel to produce a nice clean surface which would show if we had any features in the excavation. Although no features were found we were clearly excavating in disturbed ground with building materials such as brick and pantile being found. The levels immediately below the turf were full of broken tarmac, slag and hardcore indicating a hardstanding area for the farm.



25cm deep



Visitors start to arrive

As the finds started to appear we cleaned as many as possible to show our visitors what we were finding and to help explain what we were hoping to achieve by excavating the Test Pit. By now the weather had improved and visitors were beginning to come and look at what we were up to. So fortified with sausage rolls and coffee we commenced the excavations down to 50cm.



As we dug down from 25cm to 50cm it was apparent that there were more finds with ferrous nails, oyster shell, pottery some of which was looking like Roman pottery, charcoal, glass and bone being found as we sieved the excavated materials. At 50cm we came across a stone feature of loosely arranged lias/limestone slabs (A) which were bedded on a more sandy/gravelly material and could have been the remains of a wall or floor. At one end there was a particularly flat large stone (B) which was suggested to be a post base. Once the surface had been fully cleaned and photographed it was noticed that there was a lighter sandy infill in one corner of our pit (C) indicating that a pit had been excavated and backfilled adjacent to the stone feature at some time in the past.

At this time we decided that refreshments were needed so everyone went over to No. 8 Church Lane to be fed pizza and cake by Dawn and her kitchen helpers.





On our return from lunch the weather improved and it was now a nice sunny afternoon with the number of visitors swelling to a total of 56 people with a lot of interest in what we were finding and stories of what they had found in their own gardens.

We discussed what we had found at the 50cm level and decided that it would be important to see if the stone feature continued to the west of our test pit so a new 1m x 1m test pit was quickly excavated adjacent to our original pit down to the same 50cm level. During this excavation very similar finds of brick, pantile and ferrous materials were found with the same surface layer of tarmac, slag and hardcore. The stone feature did continue as hoped and the excavation was cleaned and recorded. Whilst this was being done it was noticed that the lighter sandy infill continued across our new pit as well.

We then excavated a further 25cm down to 75cm deep in total and in doing this carefully removed some of the upper courses of stone to try and find the depth of the stone feature. This did extend downwards and across into the extended pit. A piece of Roman pot rim was found insitu amongst this stone structure which gives a date for the structure to that time.

The sandy infill ditch/pit continued down to this level and a strong ferrous signal was picked up by the metal detector. However when this was excavated it was found to be a modern wreath frame probably no more than 50 years old and as this was our deepest find has caused much confusion on what we have found in our test pit.

The sides of the pit were now cleaned up ready for recording and the finds were gathered up ready for further cleaning and examination on another day.



It was now nearly 4pm and a second thunder storm was threatening so the excavations were halted and the test pit records updated and photographed. We then back filled the excavation and carefully replaced the turf back in the same position as it was removed to leave John and Janes field as we found it.

We thankfully had lots of helpers to dismantle the gazebos and displays as it was raining heavily by now and we soon had everything tidied up and packed away. Many thanks to all



the CDLHS members and visitors who helped us with the task at the end of a very busy day and of course thanks to John and Jane for letting us dig the test pit on their land.

The following day I cleaned and photographed all the finds.

The finds consisted of the following items:

Bone	9 no.	Most from one area possibly buried animal
Pottery	19 no.	Six of which were considered Roman Shell Tempered Ware.
Oyster Shell	4 no.	Plus many smaller fragments
Nails	22 no.	Various sizes
Iron	1no.	Possibly plough share fragment
Twisted Wire	6 no.	Unsure of origin
Lead	1 no.	Window Came
Clay Pipe	3 no.	All pipe stem pieces.
Glass	2 no.	Both appear to be modern glass
Clay Floor Tile	2 no.	One with thumb prints
Clay Roof Tile	5 no.	Plus many smaller fragments
Slag, Tarmac etc	3 no.	Three typical pieces making up a yard surface below the turf



This pit has created more questions than answers. Why was a 20th century wreath frame found at the bottom of our pit? Why are we finding pantiles when no buildings are known to be built here? Why are we finding so much Roman pottery? We did not reach the sub soil as we did in Test Pit 1 so perhaps we need to dig again and go a bit deeper next time if the weather lets us.

*Our plan is to organise a community test pit week in 2019 when you can come and pick up some guidance notes and safely dig a pit of your own/in your own garden. We will advise where to position your test pit and monitor your progress through the day and once completed and back filled we can then arrange for your finds to be identified and dated. If we can get 20 or so pits dug this will start to give us some idea of what Collingham's earlier history was.*

*If you are interested please send me your contact details and look out for our notices in The Fleet, at our meetings and/or around the villages. [philip.docherty@live.co.uk](mailto:philip.docherty@live.co.uk)*