



**Test Pits and an Apple Tree ...and then a damson**

HANNEY HISTORY GROUP

# Why chose this site?

- ▶ A chance to test the method for digging a test pit
- ▶ To learn some of the skills of test pitting and general archaeological best practice
- ▶ Begin a possible review of the central area of West Hanney for perhaps the first time
- ▶ There was a need to prepare a similar sized area of ground to successfully plant two trees! Perhaps an incentive for others?
- ▶ We had permission from the key stakeholder for *West Hanney Test Pit 1* – the garden owner

# What Are Test Pits?

- ▶ Test-pits are used to assess the archaeological potential of a site. They offer a rapid and minimally intrusive evaluation.
- ▶ They are designed to recover a sample of artefacts from topsoil and subsoil deposits, with the bonus of providing a 'snapshot' of any buried archaeological remains.
- ▶ They combine the principles of fieldwalking and trial trenching.
- ▶ They are a methodological approach in which enthusiastic amateurs are often involved
- ▶ They can be used in a targeted or more random manner [ as in this case ]
- ▶ If resources and topography allow , a more densely patterned approach can be followed.



# Some local results



- ▶ **Stanford in the Vale - a reappraisal of Roman, Saxon and Medieval layouts**
- ▶ **Led by David Ashby – Winchester University Archaeologist**
- ▶ **57 test pits 2013 -2020**
- ▶ **Charney Bassett project – 2 shown here**
- ▶ **9 test pits – 2017/19**
- ▶ **Reports on Charney Village Website**



# Key Features of the process- Simplified

1. Choose site, ideally based on some research, and measure 1 metre square.
2. Location and pit data recorded in Test Pit Booklet
3. Gather necessary equipment for excavation
4. Remove turf and store – break up soil if needed
5. Remove 10 cm layers with trowel – keep level
6. Sieve soil removed and store finds in trays
7. Record soil levels/types and key finds
8. Stop when you hit 1 metre, 'natural' [undisturbed ground], a significant feature, cable or a body!
9. Fill the hole and do the washing up
10. Record it all.

# Our test pit sites on the 1881 O.S. Map





# Getting Started



Probable back garden of pre-existing cottages demolished circa 1933

# Some Useful Kit for Your Test Pit

- ▶ Tape measures – large and small
- ▶ Compass / GPS
- ▶ 4 tent pegs, String and Large groundsheet
- ▶ Spade, Mattock, Small shovel, Trowels,
- ▶ 1 cm sieve
- ▶ Seed trays for finds
- ▶ Sealable plastic bags
- ▶ A camera
- ▶ Clipboard, markers, pencils and Test Pit Booklet
- ▶ Buckets, bowl and washing kit
- ▶ First aid box
- ▶ **SOMEONE WHO KNOWS HOW TO USE IT ALL**



# Kit we prepared earlier and pits on Stanford Church Green 2016





# Men at Work



February 7<sup>th</sup> 2020  
Enjoyable archaeology  
weather – why wait until  
spring?  
DIGGERS: PAUL SAYERS AND BILL ORSON



# Some of the Finds after Washing [1]



Pieces of clay pipe  
bowls [2] and stems[5]



## Some of the Finds after Washing [2]



## Some of the Finds after Washing [3]



Mostly bones and teeth

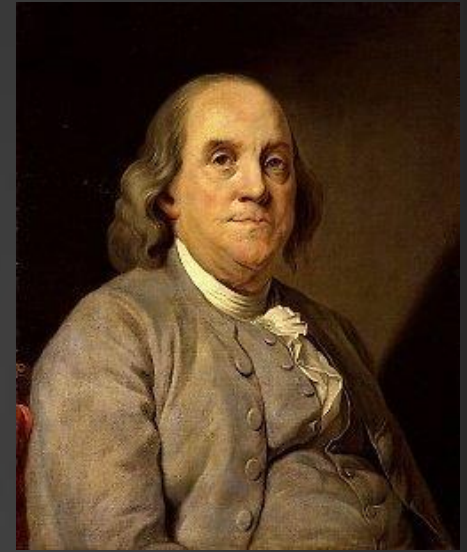
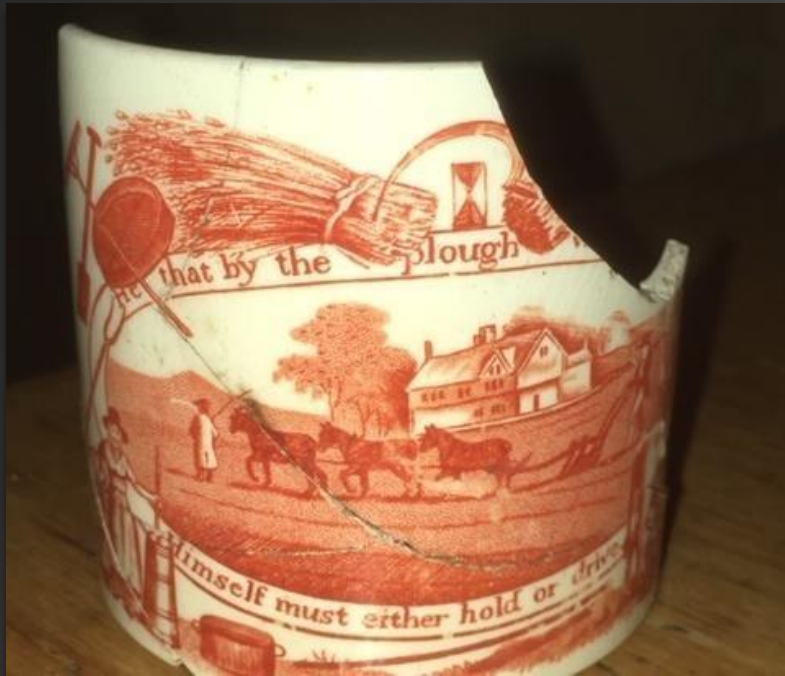


## Some of the Finds after Washing [4]



Pottery –some mediaeval





## Our Main Recovered and Glued Artefact

Teacup  
Victorian  
1850?

'He that by the plough would thrive,  
himself must either hold or drive'

The Way to Wealth 1758

Benjamin Franklin [1706-1790]

# Some Conclusions on finds

- ▶ Spit 1 provided many clay pipes – shortened by use
- ▶ Spit 2 was largely 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century but some was possibly mediaeval
- ▶ Spit 3 offered most of the bones
- ▶ Cup @ Spit 2 level in edge of pit
- ▶ The process worked but we[2] used most of 5 hours
- ▶ Sieving harder in winter soil
- ▶ Washing and sorting takes almost the same time
- ▶ 3-4 people would work
- ▶ Finds Specialist would help greatly
- ▶ Gets your eye in – later Spring 2020 finds





# Fruitful Site Restoration





# Where next?



Approximate site of December 2020 pit 2 here – Damson tree!

# Test Pit 2 Location & Overview

- ▶ Test pit 2 was sited nearer to the properties demolished in the 1930's and the soil profile varied little, perhaps showing the amount of garden digging. It was excavated to around 60 cm.
- ▶ Nails [30+] , bricks and tiles were found early on, mostly at about 10-20 cm.
- ▶ A corroded blade tip and sardine can removal key + were recovered at about 15 cm.
- ▶ Ceramic ware was mostly 20<sup>th</sup> century but 1-3 probable mediaeval fragments were found
- ▶ Some clay pipe fragments at about 40 cm.
- ▶ A range of 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> century glass at mixed depths
- ▶ A number of possibly shaped flints found at around 30-40 cm

# A selection from the metal find group



Clockwise from top

- ▶ Blade tip?
- ▶ 5 iron nails
- ▶ Copper nail
- ▶ Guttering support?
- ▶ 2 more nails
- ▶ Sardine can key





# A selection from the glass finds



- ▶ A selection of typical glass fragments from pit 2 – none identified
- ▶ Around 30 fragments recovered overall

# Photo of flint group



- ▶ Assorted flint fragments
- ▶ The two nodular flints on the left are especially dense and may have been used for hammering?



# Photo of pottery/tile/brick find group [a small selection]

- ▶ Most brick and tile fragments in upper 30 cm - numerous
- ▶ Mediaeval fragment at about 40 cm ★



# Summary Points Test Pit 2

- ▶ No significant ground variation due to earlier gardening and building work
- ▶ Close to earlier properties [2 cottages]
- ▶ Finds very diminished by 50- 60 cm depth and ground becoming a more clay / small gravel mix which is typical of this garden
- ▶ No particular pattern to finds apart from small group of flint fragments in 50 cm circle
- ▶ Pit restored, damson tree planted and doing well

# Some Useful References

- ▶ Archaeology of East Oxford – Digging a Test Pit

<http://www.archeox.net/digging-test-pit.html>

- ▶ Suffolk County Council Test Pit Guide

<https://www.hoxnehistory.org.uk/Hoxne%20Test%20Pit%20Guidebook.pdf>

- ▶ Jigsaw Guides offer a range of self - help guides, including test pits and finds guidance

<https://jigsawcambs.org/resources/guides/step-by-step-guides>

- ▶ Search for Test Pits on U-Tube, but be wary of the range of ideas. Many are less than 5 minutes!