

Wirksworth Archaeological Society

Progress Report April 2026

Work has restarted at the dig site at Ian Avenue this month after a very long wet and cold winter. Forthcoming work will take in Trial Trench 4, which is initially composed of Test Pit 9 but intended to be developed into a three metre trial trench. At the moment we're just working on the test pit to identify what materials and contexts are in it, with the objective of attempting to determine whether the archaeology we found in Trial Trench 2 comes to the modern garden surface at an expected gradient of 1 in 4.



Test Pit 9 looking west at the beginning of work

Finds in the topsoil context are much what we would expect from a "modern" garden surface: plastic, glass, china, bits of clay pipe stem and a very degraded One Penny coin of George V, dated 1921. In addition there is what appears to be

a modern pistol bullet (i.e. 20th century) and the now inevitable collection of handmade nails, some of them very fragile, which are a common feature of this site.

In order to achieve matching between the contexts in Trail Trench 2 and the current test pit, its necessary to look at the materials found. Consequently we have contexts 1 and 2 in Test Pit 9 which are the modern garden topsoil and subsoil, context 3 is apparently missing (due to different materials bulldozed across the garden when the house was built in 1963) and context 4 is present, which is light brown (fawn) clay with some soil and modern broken brick, with its lower horizon containing a little gritty ash. In context 4 were the following sherds:



Pottery 1: Unknown hard and rough greyware

2. Roman Rossington Bridge Black Burnished Ware (Antonine: AD138-192)

3. Midland Yellow Ware (1550-1650, later Staffordshire variant)

For clarity, these sherds do not represent a dating confirmation of context 4, this is because we already know its a result of the builder's work: yes, these things were probably in the field before the bulldozer arrived, but they are not in what we

would regard as a secure historic archaeological context, that is one where the pottery or finds represent the actual dating of the context.

Then the materials appear to jump almost directly to context 9, which is a redeposited grey sticky clay with soil lenses, charcoal and bits of stone and pebble.

At present it appears that context 9, the conceptual Roman context, which rises through the garden, may come up at steeper angle into Test Pit 9 than expected. This means that in order to be certain of the gradient, it would be necessary to find the upper leading edge (the upper horizon). This being the case, the Test Pit will probably have to be extended northwards at forthcoming digs. The Person in Charge of the work today was Tom Hough, the Site Archaeologist.



Test Pit 9 in progress showing slightly ashy horizon between context 4 and 9.

References

Laing, L, 2014, Pottery in Britain 4000BC to AD1900, Witham, Greenlight Publishing, pp110-11

Rossington Bridge Black Burnished Ware <https://potsherd.net/atlas/Ware/RBBB1> accessed at 25th April 2026