



Find out about  
the history under  
your feet!



# ONLINE BACK GARDEN EXCAVATION



The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust





# 1. The Basics

## What is Archaeology?

Archaeology is the study of humans in the past. Archaeologists dig in the ground to find things that have been left long ago. We call what we find artefacts, and we study these to learn about how people used to live. Archaeologists find things like pottery, animal bones, coins and the remains of buildings.

**Fact:** Lots of people think that archaeologists dig up dinosaurs but they don't! Palaeontologists dig up dinosaurs, archaeologists dig up things that humans have left behind.



## What is a test pit?

A test pit is a small trench, usually only 1m square, but can be smaller if you don't have space. As a test pit is so small, it does not take long to dig and does not take up much space. You don't need to dig deeper than about 50cm below the top –most interesting archaeology isn't far down! It is perfect for gardens and small spaces, to learn more about what lies below the ground. In most gardens there is a thick layer of ordinary garden soil, so that is probably what you will find in your garden. But you never know – the soil might change, or you might find a structure like a garden path that has been covered over and forgotten! Archaeologists are very interested in these changes and always make a note of them if they happen, so you will need to too!

Test pits are very simple to do, and you only need everyday garden tools. The technique we will be using is called digging in spits, which is useful for digging in a thick layer of soil that is all the same. Make sure you record your test pit as you go along and send your results to us. If you don't we will never know what you have found!

## Before you start

Before starting your test pit, make sure that you have permission from the landowner. It is really important in all archaeological investigations to have permission before you start any work. The landowner, (or in our case garden owner!) needs to know exactly what you want to do and where.

## What to look out for

Take photos of the pit being dug and after you have finished. When excavating your test pit, keep your eyes peeled for any artefacts. You might find things like pottery, flint, metal, glass or bone. Be very careful when you pick things up out of the ground as they might be sharp, and make sure you wash your hands with warm soapy water at the end. Aside from artefacts, make sure you also look closely at the soil. You might find that it changes colour and texture as you carefully dig down.

## What do you do with the finds?

Once you have finished your excavations, make sure you take photos of everything you have found fill in the recording form send it to us! Don't throw anything away! We will have a look at the photos and try to give you some information about them. If there is anything really interesting, we will help you contact Portable Antiquities Finds Liaison Officer <https://museum.wales/portable-antiquities-scheme-in-wales/>

## What if you don't find anything?

**Don't worry!** Sometimes archaeologists don't find anything during their excavations. Although this can feel disappointing, it is actually really important that you record that you didn't find anything! There are lots of reasons you might not find anything. Perhaps in the past lots of soil has been moved around so the archaeology is very deep, or maybe there is just no archaeology there!

## To dig your test pit

You will need:

- Gloves (gardening gloves are best)
- A hand tape (3m or 5m)
- A trowel (a garden trowel will do just as good as an archaeological one)
- A hand/coal shovel (or a sturdy dust pan to scoop out soil)
- 4 metal nails or plastic tent pegs
- A bucket
- Marker pegs x 20 (These could be seed labels, lolly sticks, tent pegs, cocktail sticks, flags on a stick)
- Seed trays/empty fruit trays/Tupperware storage boxes for your finds
- 4m of string
- A tarpaulin or plastic to put the soil on
- A spade
- A permanent pen or marker
- A garden fork
- Camera (a phone camera is fine)

- Compass and grid reference (both of these can be found using a smart phone)
- Pen/pencil
- Recording Form(found either at the end of this document or online at <http://www.ggat.org.uk/index.html>)
- Kneelers or something soft to kneel on
- A4 Plain paper

Also handy, but not essential would be:

- A large tape (30m upwards is best)
- A garden sieve (1cm mesh)
- Sealable Plastic bags



## 2. Get organised!

### Where?

Where is your test pit going to be? Find a spot with grass or soil cover. The best locations are away from large trees, drains, and buildings/walls. You will also need space to put your spoil.

### Site code

Each archaeological project has its own unique code. The site code for this project is **BGE20**. Make sure that all your recording sheets and labels use this code. It stands for **Back Garden Excavation 2020**. The site code helps us quickly find all the information about that project, and including the year means we know the date the project was running. You will also need to think of your own individual test pit name. This could be your house number and road name, or your school name.

### Test Pit Location

We need to know details of exactly where your test pit is. If your test pit is in a garden, make a note of the address and if it is in the front or back garden. If you are digging a test pit at a school, or community area, make sure you write down the address and a short description of the location on the recording form (e.g. in the playing field). It would be really useful if you could also provide the grid reference for the centre of the test pit. This can be done using an Ordnance Survey Map or a GPS app on a smartphone.

**Need help?** If you're having problems, you can watch our video on how to find your grid reference at (<https://www.youtube.com/user/GGATArchaeology>).

### Lay out your trench

Each of your trench sides should be 1m across, and to ensure they are an exact rectangle, the diagonal measurements should be 1.41m. If you don't have much space, you can make your trench half the size, 50cmx50cm with a diagonal of 70.7cm. Use a nail to mark each corner and measure using a tape measure. Tie string around each nail to create a square. 1m1m1.41m.

**Need help?** If you're having problems, you can watch our video on how to lay out your test pit at (<https://www.youtube.com/user/GGATArchaeology>).

### Record Your Starting Point

Now your trench is ready to go, we need to know exactly where it is. First, use a smartphone to find a grid reference.

Next, sketch a location plan for your trench. This should include the location of the trench in relation to any nearby buildings and property boundaries. If you can, include measurements from the corner of buildings and boundaries to the corner of the test pit. Make sure you include an arrow pointing north. You can find which way is north using a map or a compass on your smart phone.

Next you need to photograph the top level of your test pit. On a piece of A4 plain paper, write in large letters the site code, your own site code and the number level you are about to start working on (Level 1 in this case). It is also very useful to put an arrow pointing north. Put the level label on the edge of your testpit and photograph it using your phone.



**Need help?** You can watch our video on how to photograph your test pit at (<https://www.youtube.com/user/GGATArchaeology>).



**A 1m x 1m test pit measured out. Your first photograph should show the very top of the test pit.**

### 3. Get Digging!

Lay your tarpaulin or plastic sheet at least 2m away from the edge of your test pit. This will become your spoil heap. Using a spade, remove the turf from the top of your test pit in small squares, and carefully lay it to the side of your spoil heap so it can be replaced once you have finished.

**Level 1.** You will be carefully excavating 10cm at a time. As you dig down, scoop out the loose soil and put it in the bucket using your archaeology trowel, garden trowel, fork and spade. Once your bucket is full, pour it out in onto the spoil heap. (If you have a garden sieve, then this is where it comes in. As you pour the soil onto the spoil heap sieve it). Pick out any interesting artefacts. If you aren't sure what it is, make sure you keep it and we can help identify any mystery finds. Make sure you tip your spoil onto your plastic sheets! Any finds should be put in a finds tray labelled with the site code, your own site code, and 'Level 1'. Use your tape measure and measure from the top of the test pit to the flat bottom. Once you have excavated down 10cm and the bottom is level, **stop!** Everything from 0cm down to 10cm is level 1, which is the first spit.

**Need help?** Want to learn how to trowel? You can watch our video on how to excavate your test pit at (<https://www.youtube.com/user/GGATArchaeology>).

Next you need to record the top of level 2. On a piece of A4 plain paper, write in large letters the site code, your own site code and the number level you are about to start



working on. It is also very useful to put an arrow pointing north. You can find which way is north using a map, a compass with a magnetic needle if you have one, or the compass on your smart phone.

Put the level label on the edge of your test pit and photograph it using your phone. Try to take the photograph from an angle so you can see the entire base of the test pit, one side, and the label at the edge of the test pit.

**Level 2** Stick a marker peg half way along each edge of your test pit at the bottom. This will mark the end of level 1, and the top of level 2. Next, start digging again! Using your tape measure, carefully dig down the next 10cm, making sure you sieve the soil as you go if you have a sieve. Any finds from this layer need to be put in a separate tray and labelled again with the site code, your own site code, and 'Level 2'. Look at the soil carefully as you dig. Does it stay more or less the same or is changing? If so, what is the change like? Is the colour lighter or darker or redder or yellower or greyer? Is it stonier or sandier or stickier?

Use the tape measure to measure 10cm down from your marker pegs. You can also measure 20cm from the top of the test pit. Make sure the base of your test pit is nice and level. Once you have completed the digging for level 2, use a new piece of A4 paper and write the same information as before, but label it Level 2. Take a photo of level 2, facing the same direction that you did for level 1.



***Don't forget to keep taking photo of your test pit, recording the top of each level.***

**Level 3 -onwards** Keep going down 10cm at a time. Remember to keep finds from each level separate, record each level with a photograph, and make a note if you can see a real change in the soil. Keep going down until either you think you have reached soil that nobody has ever disturbed (archaeologists call this 'the natural'), or you find a buried structure like a path, or you get down to a depth of 1m.

If you are lucky enough to find a structure you will need to record it. Write down what it's made of. Take a photograph of it.

Remember to take a photo of the bottom of your test pit before you fill it back in! If you noticed changes in the soil as you went down, take a photograph of the side of your test pit that has the markers in too.

### **Backfilling**

Once you have finished excavating your test pit, you need to backfill it. This means putting all the soil you took out back in! Using a spade or shovel, put all the soil back in. Every so often you will need to get in the test pit and stamp on the soil to compact it down. If you took off any turf, make sure you carefully put it back on the top.

Once you've finished don't forget to complete your Recording Form and send it in to us

## **Test Pit –Done!**





# The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd

## Back Garden Excavation 2020

### Recording Form

Filling in this form properly will help show us the archaeology that you've found in your garden.

It will also show your friends, teachers, etc. that you have thought about all the steps that a professional archaeologist needs to take when digging a test pit in spits and have followed them yourself. There are some notes at the bottom to help you fill it in.

<p>I have laid out my test pit. Here is the location plan.</p>	<p>Take a photo of your location plan and insert it here.</p>
<p>You can see my test pit in the picture on the right. When I took the photo I was facing <b>N / S / E / W</b></p>	<p>Insert the photo you took of your test pit before you started digging.</p>



# The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd

This is my picture of the top of level 2. When I was digging level 2:

I could see that the soil was all ordinary garden soil the same as in level 1 OR

The soil changed. Instead of being ordinary garden soil it looked [Fill in how it looked]

Insert the photo you took of the top of level 2.

This is my picture of the top of level 3

When I was digging level 3:

I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 2 OR

The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]

Insert the photo you took of the top of level 3.





The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust Ltd

This is my picture of the top of level 4

When I was digging level 4:

I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 3 OR

The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]

Insert the photo you took of the top of level 4.

This is my picture of the top of level 5

When I was digging level 5:

I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 4 OR

The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]

Insert the photo you took of the top of level 5.



The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust Ltd

<p>This is my picture of the top of level 6</p> <p>When I was digging level 6:</p> <p>I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 5 OR</p> <p>The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]</p>	<p>Insert the photo you took of the top of level 6.</p>
<p>This is my picture of the top of level 7</p> <p>When I was digging level 7:</p> <p>I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 6 OR</p> <p>The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]</p>	<p>Insert the photo you took of the top of level 7.</p>
<p>This is my picture of the top of level 8</p> <p>When I was digging level 8:</p> <p>I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 7 OR</p> <p>The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]</p>	<p>Insert the photo you took of the top of level 8.</p>





The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust Ltd

This is my picture of the top of level 9

When I was digging level 9:

I could see that the soil all looked the same as in level 8 OR

The soil changed. It looked [Fill in how it looked]

Insert the photo you took of the top of level 9.

This is my picture of the bottom of my test pit

Insert the photo you took of the bottom of your test pit



The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust Ltd

This is my picture of the section of  
the test pit

[Insert the photo you took of the section of your test pit](#)

This is my test pit after I finished  
filling it in

[Insert the photo you took after you filled your pit back up  
again](#)





# The Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust Ltd

These are my finds from level **1-9**

Insert a photo of your finds that you found at each level during your test pit excavation

1. Words and letters in **red** are **multiple choice**. You need to select the one that is right for your trench and delete the ones that don't apply. With a photograph, for example, if you were facing N when you took it, you would delete S, E and W. If you were facing SW, you would delete N and E.
2. The bits in **blue** are where you need to add something yourself here. Delete the bit in blue to make room for what you are adding.
3. When you insert the photos, you may find that the width of the column changes. You can put it back to its original size by formatting the picture. When you change the width of the photo to 10cm (using the box at the right-hand side of the formatting toolbar), the column should go back to its proper size. The row will be wider than it was to start with, but that doesn't matter.
4. This form gives you enough room to record a test pit 1m deep (10 levels). **If you didn't dig that many levels don't worry, just delete the rows you don't need.**

Please return this form to the address below, or email it to us at [outreach@ggat.org.uk](mailto:outreach@ggat.org.uk)

## Happy Digging!



The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological Trust

