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Description of finds from the newly-made footgolf holes

**Janet Pryke
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*Supplement to: High Common, Bath (the Approach Golf Course)
A report on geophysical surveys during 2022
Janet Pryke and John Oswin*

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Summary

In 2023 in High (Great or Upper) Common the southwestern part was redeveloped as a footgolf course. In the previous year a series of geophysics surveys had been completed across the Common. We were given the opportunity to examine the soil dug from the new footgolf holes. High Common's agricultural use had been continued through much of its past, including as part of the common field system of Bath, before its current recreational use. Earlier activity, including from prehistoric times, is known in the region around this work. In this investigation a small but wide ranging collection of finds was obtained from the excavated soil. The finds' datings range across the times of use of the Common. These indications could possibly relate to past settlement in the area as well as to items coming from central Bath.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

In 2023 the southwestern part of High Common, Bath was redeveloped as a footgolf course. BACAS volunteers had carried out a geophysics survey of the whole of High Common while it had been out of use in 2022.¹ In spring 2023 we were given the opportunity to examine the soil that had been dug to create the nine footgolf holes.

Aim

This project was proposed as a preliminary investigation to observe what information might be gained from such sampling of the soil.

The site

The underlying geology is Jurassic mudstone of the Charmouth Mudstone formation (British Geological Survey 2011).² This part of High Common and lies at 50-plus metres height, in the lower part of the slopes up to Lansdown from the River Avon valley.

The results of the geophysics work in High Common completed in 2022 had added to the evidence that this area was used for agriculture during a great part of its history, one likely to have extended from prehistoric times.³ There had been a Roman, probably farm, building in the eastern side of the Common, which was partly excavated in 2004.⁴ In more recent times it was for many years a section of the common lands of Bath, named Great, High or Upper Common. Unlike the common fields to the south, High Common was not included as part of the formal creation of the Royal Victoria Park in 1830. It continued to be used as agricultural land before its current recreational use. Since the 1930s it has been used as an approach golf course.

Additions to the soil have been made over time during the centuries of its use. The soil would have been manured during its periods of cultivation. In addition description includes how the “Scavenger of the common” collected the night soil from the city, when waste was spread across the commons area using the “Town Plough”.⁵ With the golf course creation from the 1930s, material has been brought into the area to create some of the golf green structures, such deposits being observed in the geophysics results.¹



Figure 1 Map of the previous golf course, with acknowledgment to B&NES Council Parks and Leisure departments, showing the holes remade for footgolf marked in orange

Results and comment

The footgolf holes soil assessment

In the creation of the footgolf course, cylindrical footgolf holes were dug in the previously-used golf green areas with dimensions of approx. 55 cm across and 30 cm deep. The holes are lined with plastic liners (Fig. 2) which have elongated triangular drain holes through which it was possible to observe the soil underneath.



Figure 2 A footgolf hole



Figure 3 The work on the two piles of soil (pile 1 two upper images, pile two lower images)

We were supplied with two piles, one dug from the more southerly and easterly holes and the second, soil from the more westerly holes.

The excavated earth (see Fig. 3) is mainly a friable brown loamy soil, on occasion “charcoaly” (as also observed in the 2004 excavations²) containing some nodules of material, including lumps of grey and yellow clay. At the surface under the turves is a top-dressing layer added to the greens. The holes vary from being dug down into a lower layer of clay, to being totally in the upper layers of soil, correlated to their position in the green and how the green was terraced into the slope of the ground.

Finds from the soil

The piles were trowelled through. The finds were separated and a provisional analysis of the finds made. They are listed as follows in the Table and the photographs are shown in Figure 4.

Finds have been retained by the author in anticipation of future reference.

No.	Short description analysis	Photograph	Pile No.
1	Modern pottery 18 pieces, inc. glazed domestic ware ? c. 18-19 century as a result of middening	01	Pile 1
2	3 pieces ?Roman pottery, 1 + rim, poor quality. moratoria fragment and plaster	02	Pile 1
3	Pottery, 2 pieces, large piece with inclusions, black on inside, ?Iron Age	03,04	Pile 1
4	Flint uncut		Pile 1
5	Coal		Pile 1
6	?Kiln lining 1 piece	05-06	Pile 1
7	Bone fragments 2	7	Pile 1
8	Oyster shells and snail shells	8	Pile 1
9	Metal nail and 2 pieces	9	Pile 1
10	Golf course consolidating matter		Pile 1
11	?Roman glass 2 pieces (possibly one plastic fragment)	10	Pile 1
12	Clay pipe fragment (?first half of 18th century)	11	Pile 1
13	? Metal	12	Pile 1
14	Modern pottery as 1 8 pieces	13	Pile 2
15	Modern glass 3 pieces	13	Pile 2
16	£1 coin (2017)	13	Pile 2
17	Blue glass fragment	14	Pile 2
18	Flint uncut and chert		Pile 2
19	Oyster shells + sea shells	15	Pile 2
20	Bone fragments 3	16	Pile 2
21	Belemnite (end)	16	Pile 2
22	Slag	17	Pile 2
23	Clay pipe stem fragment misc.	18	Pile 2
24	Pottery larger piece glazed (?Cistercian 16 th century)	19,20	Pile 2
25	Golf course consolidating matter		Pile 2

The possible timings of this collection of finds cover a wide range that corresponds to the long period of the history of the Common's use, occupation and cultivation.¹ The earliest items could be related to past settlement in this or a nearby area.^{3,4} Most modern littering, and the presence of golf green consolidating matter, is likely to result from its most recent recreational use. Earlier modern finds, including pottery and clay pipe fragments, are consistent with the incorporation of waste coming from the city of Bath e.g. as distributed by the "Scavenger of the common."⁵

There was no precise localising of these finds and only a general interpretation can be made from these results. However the information from this assemblage does add to supplement our previous information about the area. We were pleased to take advantage of this opportunity.

References:

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Figure 4 Finds



Fig 4.1 (Pile 1) 01 ?Modern



Fig 4.2 (Pile 1) 02 ?Roman



Fig.4.3 (Pile 1) 03 ?Iron Age



Fig. 4.4. (Pile 1) 03 ?Iron Age



Fig. 4.5-4.6 (Pile 1) 06 kiln lining?



Fig 4.7 (Pile 1) 07 Bone



Fig 4.8 (Pile 1) 08 oyster+ shells



Fig 4.9 (Pile 1) 09 metal



Fig 4.10 (Pile 1)11 ?Roman glass



Fig 4.11 (Pile 1) 12 clay pipe



Fig 4.12 (Pile 1) 13 ?metal



Fig. 4.13 (Pile 2) 14 15 16 modern

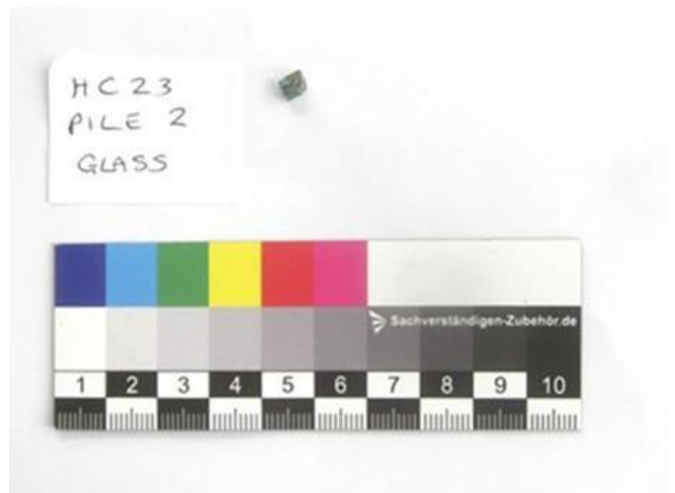


Figure 4.14 (Pile 2) 17 glass



Fig. 4.15 (Pile 2) 19 oyster + small sea shells



Fig. 4.16 (Pile 2) 20 21 bone, belemnite



Fig 4.17 22 (Pile 2) slag



Fig 4.18 (Pile 2) 23 clay pipe fragment misc.



Fig 4.19 (Pile 2) 24 Pottery



Fig 4.20 (Pile 2) 24 Pottery