



EXCAVATIONS AT BOYS HALL ROAD, WILLESBOROUGH, ASHFORD

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EXCAVATIONS AT BOYS HALL ROAD, WILLESBOROUGH, ASHFORD

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with contributions by

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Charlotte Thompson

Summary

In August 2001 the Museum of London Archaeological Services (MoLAS), known since October 2008 as Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA), undertook a programme of archaeological work in advance of the construction of a housing development at Boys Hall Road, Willesborough, Ashford, Kent.

The site lay on the southern slope of the valley formed by Old Mill Stream. The archaeological features on the lowest terrace, closest to the stream, were either cut or sealed by various phases of alluvial deposition. These features ranged in date from the Neolithic/early Bronze Age, the pre-Roman Iron Age and the late 12th–early 13th century AD. The prehistoric features included boundary ditches and gullies and a pit. The medieval activity comprised boundary ditches, two phases of a rectangular timber building with an internal hearth, an external hearth (also of two phases) to the southeast of the building, and a series of postholes.

Features higher up the slope cut into colluvium and were sparser than on the alluvial lowest terrace. The processes, probably both natural and caused by human activity, which led to the creation of the colluvium, may have truncated most of the evidence for prehistoric activity. However, a posthole structure of possible late Iron Age date and two medieval ditches defining a trackway leading towards the buildings on the lowest terrace were recorded.

Artefacts recovered from the site ranged in date through all of these periods and some residual worked flints were also found.

Introduction

The site represents about half of a 6.5 acre open grassed field and is located to the east of Ashford in Willesborough (Fig. 1). The approximate centre of the excavation was at Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference (NGR) 601880 141160. The programme of work began with an evaluation of the site. Fourteen trial trenches were excavated to determine whether any significant archaeological remains would

be affected by the development. There was no archaeological evidence in most of these trenches but, on the eastern side of the site, archaeological features were identified within trial trenches 2, 4, 5, and 7. As a result, an archaeological excavation was subsequently undertaken in this area. This article reports, in an integrated format, on the results of the excavation (Elaine Eastbury) and the pottery analysis (Lyn Blackmore).

Other finds and environmental assemblages collected during the excavation were all assessed in the first stages of post-excavation work but most were deemed to be of insufficient value to merit further analysis. An exception was the plant remains and an appended report by Anne Davis is included in the 'Specialist Reports' section at the end of this article. However, this article makes use of the assessment reports made on the animal bone (by Kevin Reilly), the prehistoric pottery (by Louise Rayner and Charlotte Thompson), flint (by Louise Rayner), the accessioned finds (by Jackie Keily) and building material (by Terence Paul Smith). These unpublished reports may be found at the Museum of London's Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC), where the primary records are also located.

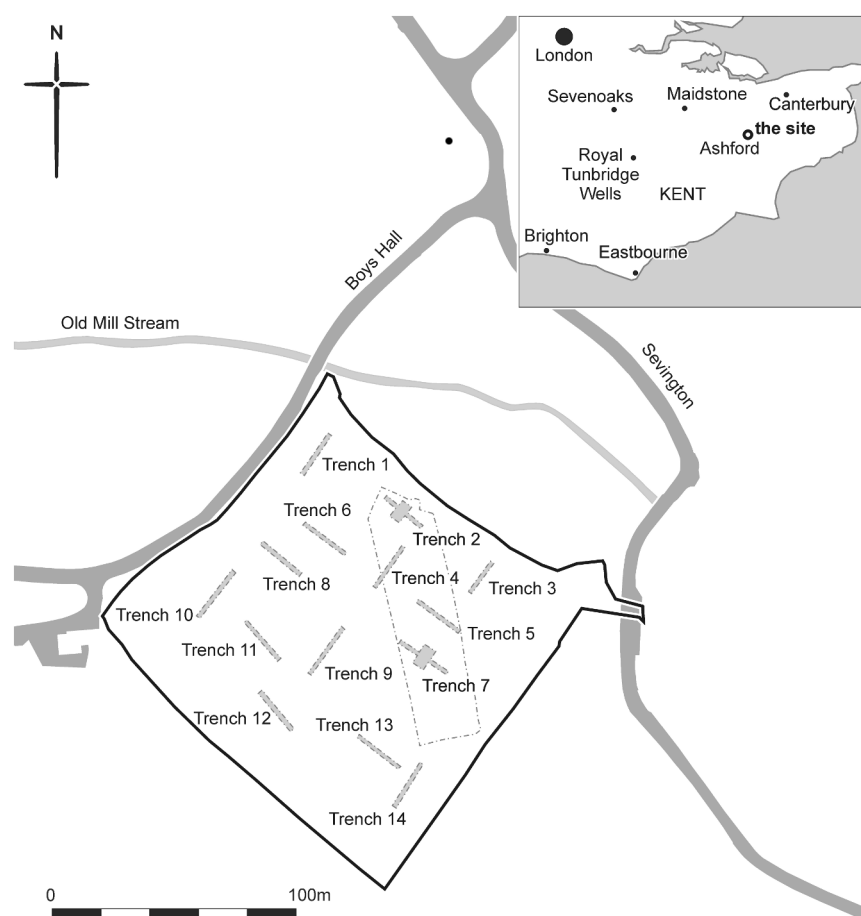


Figure 1. Site location showing the site boundary, trial trenches and area of excavation.

The archaeological sequence was excavated using a single context system. During the analysis of the archaeological work, a hierarchy of larger units was employed to describe the activity on the site. Contexts are arranged into subgroups and groups which are then interpreted in terms of land use and period. Within this report, archaeological context numbers are denoted [1] etc, accessioned finds <1> etc and illustrated pottery sherds <P1> etc. References to group numbers are prefixed by 'G'. A land use is an entity such as a Building (B), Structure (S) or Open Area (OA). Boundary ditches do not fall into any particular land use and are referenced by their group number.

All stratigraphic and specialist data were recorded using standard MoLAS procedures and subsequently entered into an Oracle database. This database, housed in the LAARC, is the medium through which the finds, environmental and field records may be interrogated. The site archive (site code KT-BOY01) remains with MoLAS awaiting deposition with the appropriate local repository.

Geology and topography

The geology of the site is principally formed by Hythe Beds consisting of glauconitic sand and sandy limestone (Kentish rag) with a spur of Atherfield Clay to the west. The overlying drift geology was principally formed in the Holocene period in the late- or post-Glacial environment pertaining between c 14000 and 10000 BP. The site slopes down to the north-east, but two breaks in slope split it into three terraces. On the upper terrace in the south and south-west of the site, a deposit of firm brown clay Head with discrete lenses of grey limestone rubble was found at a height ranging from 45.98m OD to 41.21m OD. Erosion and land slip of these deposits during the Holocene period formed a layer of colluvium on the middle terrace. The lowest terrace is an ancient flood plain consisting of alluvial clay deposits and is cut by the modern Old Mill Stream. The surface of the alluvium slopes from a height of 42.70m OD to 40.92m OD.

Natural deposits encountered during the excavation are treated as period 1.

Archaeological background

There is evidence for both prehistoric and Romano-British settlement and occupation in the vicinity. Within c 900m to the south and southeast of the site, Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age/Belgic and early Roman sites have been identified during archaeological evaluations and excavations (Bennett 1988, CAT 1992, Booth and Everson 1994). Work at the Ashford Orbital Park (Philp 1991) revealed an Iron Age enclosure, which extended into the development site across the railway line, and also evidence of a Romano-British settlement including cremation burials (Willson unpub).

Slightly further afield, excavations at Westhawk Farm, Kingsnorth, c 3.1km to the southwest of the site, uncovered a large Roman settlement sited at an important road junction, where the Roman road from Lympne and Dover met one running from the Weald to Canterbury (Booth 2001; Booth, Bingham and Lawrence 2008). The

settlement evidence included trackways, ditches, domestic and industrial areas and a significant shrine enclosure.

By the reign of Henry III (1216–1272), the manor house and centre of the manor of Sevington can probably be identified with the moated site at Willesborough, which lies c 500m due south of the site. During the 13th century the moated site passed to the Barry family who remained in possession until the later 16th century when it became the residence of the Boys family, after whom it was renamed. Around 1632, Thomas Boys demolished the original buildings and rebuilt the house. A rectangular moat and formal gardens with raised terrace walkways and water features are still evidenced by the surviving earthworks. The site is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Kent SAM 146). Excavations at Boys Hall Road/Sevington Railhead, part of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link project, found a large ditch or pond probably associated with the Boys Hall Moat site (MoLAS 1997).

Archaeological results

Period 2: Neolithic–Early Bronze Age (Fig.2)

Open Area 2

A series of field ditches cut the alluvium on the lower terrace (OA2). There is little firm dating for period 2 contexts themselves. Although a clear sequence of intercut ditches was evident, pottery was present only in small quantities and in a badly abraded state and, as a result, cannot be closely dated (Rayner and Thompson 2002). However, all the period 2 features predate alluvial deposits (OA3 period 3) dated to 1000–600 BC and the successive phases of ditches within period 2 are likely to span the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

Three features, all truncated by later ditches, were the earliest to be identified on the site. The most substantial was a 'V' shaped linear ditch (G2) running on a northwest–southeast alignment. It was traced for 14.30m and was 0.80m wide by 0.39m deep. It had a homogeneous fill, probably deposited in a single flooding event, which contained occasional charcoal flecks but no datable material. Only short lengths of the two other potentially early features (G3, G6) were identified. Irregularly cut gully G3 lay to the east of the G2 ditch and was traced for 5.55m, running on an approximately east–west alignment. The base of the ditch was filled by sandy silt which contained no dating evidence. The irregular base of the ditch indicated that rooting had affected it. Gully G6 lay a little to the south of G3. A 3.0m length on a northeast–southwest alignment was identified. Neither gully was more than 0.32m deep. The alluvial fill of gully G6 contained nine flint burins and 34 flint microliths (Rayner 2001). One flint flake had an area of polishing on its dorsal surface and is probably of Neolithic date, derived from the use or sharpening of a polished core tool, such as an axe. Prehistoric pottery sherds and a cattle molar fragment (Reilly 2001) were also found. The pottery was too abraded and sparse to be reliable for dating purposes (Rayner and Thompson 2002).

A substantial modification to the landscape was represented by an 'L' shaped enclosure ditch (G4) which post-dated the G2 ditch and G3 gully. One arm was

traced for c 20.6m on a northwest–southeast alignment. The southeast ditch terminal was defined but the northwest terminal was not established. However, where the ditch met the western edge of the excavation trench it turned to the northeast and continued for a further 10.4m. The profile of the northwest–southeast aligned part of the ditch was ‘V’ shaped whereas in the northeast return the profile changed to almost vertical on its northwest side. A slightly organic primary fill of the ditch, found on the base and sides of the northwest–southeast aligned arm of the cut but not in the northeast return, probably represented natural silting while the ditch was still open and vivianite found on the base of the ditch at its southeast terminal probably indicates the presence of animal or human excrement within it. The upper, homogeneous fill of the whole ditch may represent a single flooding episode. No dating evidence was recovered from the ditch.

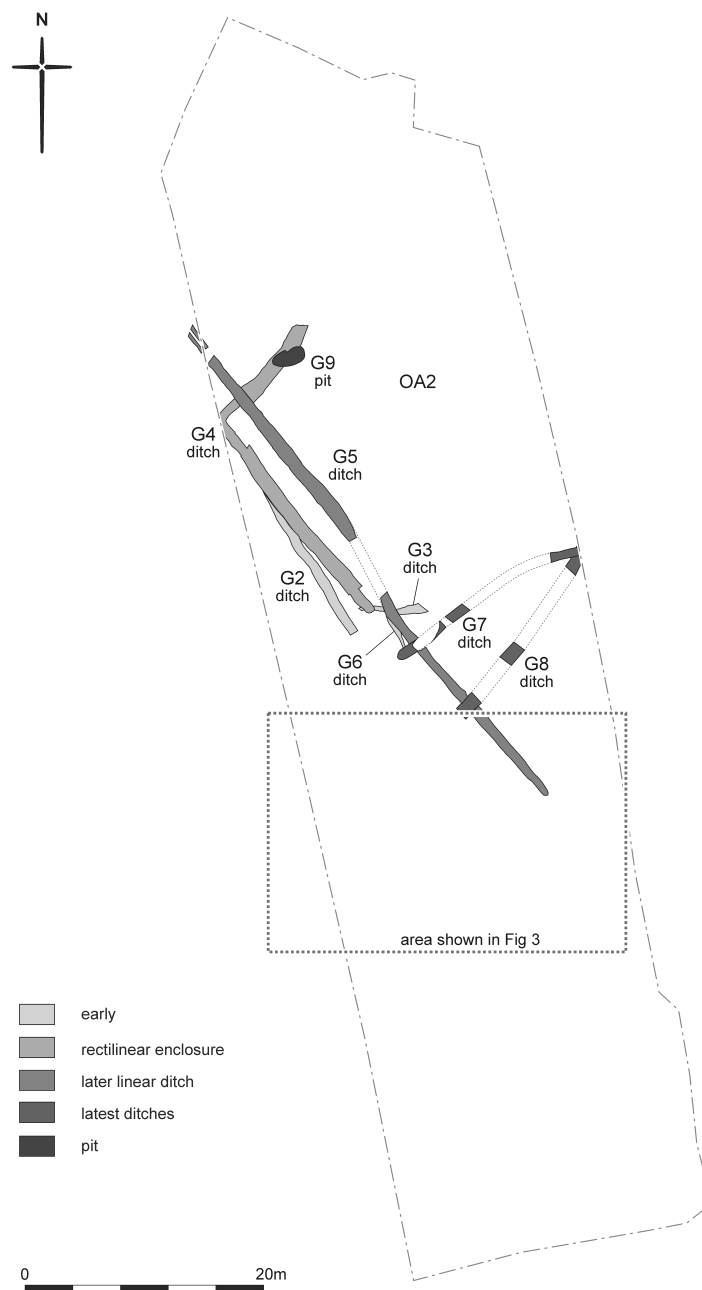


Figure 2. Neolithic and Bronze Age features on the site (period 2)

The enclosure ditch was replaced by another linear ditch (G5), once again aligned northwest–southeast. This feature also post-dated the G6 ditch. It was traced for a length of 34.60m from its southeast terminus. At its northwest end it divided two parallel shallow ditches and continued beyond the area of excavation. Its width varied between 0.70m and 1.20m: it was 0.13m deep at its northwest end and 0.44m deep at its southeast end. The fill of the ditch was homogeneous light-grey sandy clay and again probably represented the rapid silting of the ditch during a single flooding episode. A number of prehistoric flint flakes and fragments were present in the fill and a transverse flint arrowhead provides a possible Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age date for the disuse of the ditch (Rayner 2001, Green 1984, 19).

At its northeast end the G4 enclosure ditch was also post-dated by a roughly oval, 0.62m-deep pit (G9). The primary fill of the pit was organic dark-brown peaty soil suggesting it had naturally silted up. It contained flake and blade core flint debris, and flint-tempered prehistoric pottery which could not be closely dated. Analysis of an environmental sample taken from the pit's fills demonstrates that, whilst the original function of the pit is not clear, it was certainly used for the disposal of burnt hearth residues and possibly other plant-based refuse. The waterlogged seeds recovered from the pit provide evidence for the local environment during period 2. It is clear that the pit lay close to areas of damp, marshy ground, though it remains unclear whether the seeds and insects defining this environment arrived in the pit fill as a result of seasonal flooding or are derived from the remains of deliberately harvested rushes or reeds. There are also indicators of damp grassland and of woods or scrub nearby, though the blackberry and elder seeds present could be the remains of fruits gathered for food.

Other seeds came from species commonly found either as weeds of crops or in waste places and other disturbed environments associated with human settlements. Fragments of wood charcoal and a very small assemblage of charred cereal remains are most likely to be the remains of crop-processing waste, burnt as fuel. The cereal remains demonstrate that emmer wheat and barley were being grown locally. A detailed analysis of this environmental sample (sample 1) will be found in the appended Specialist Report by Anne Davis.

A final phase of ditches was represented by two features (G7, G8) which both cut across the southern part of the G5 ditch. These were aligned on converging southwest–northeast alignments. The earlier ditch G7 was 0.73m wide by 0.35m deep and slightly curved in plan. It ran for 17.43m from its southwest terminal before continuing beyond the eastern edge of the excavation. At its eastern end it was cut by ditch G8 which also extended beyond the eastern limit of excavation. This later ditch was 1.15m wide and at least 17.60m long but its southwest terminal was not identified as it was indistinguishable from the alluvium (G1) into which it was cut. Its northwest side was stepped but its southeast side was concave. The homogeneous alluvial fill of both these ditches was a light-grey, sandy clay which contained no dating evidence.

Period 3: Late Bronze Age and Iron Age (Fig.3)

Open Area 3

A deposit of alluvium was laid down on the lower terrace during this period and sealed the period 2 features to form OA3 (not illustrated). The alluvium was a grey-brown sandy clay containing occasional sub-angular flint gravels and moderate iron manganese flecks which produced a mixed assemblage of Mesolithic, early Neolithic and early Bronze Age flint flakes and tools (Rayner 2001). However, Late Bronze Age pottery (dated 1000–600 BC) was also present (Rayner and Thompson 2002) and it is likely that the alluvium was deposited during the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age transgression which has been noted elsewhere in the region (Devoy, 1979).

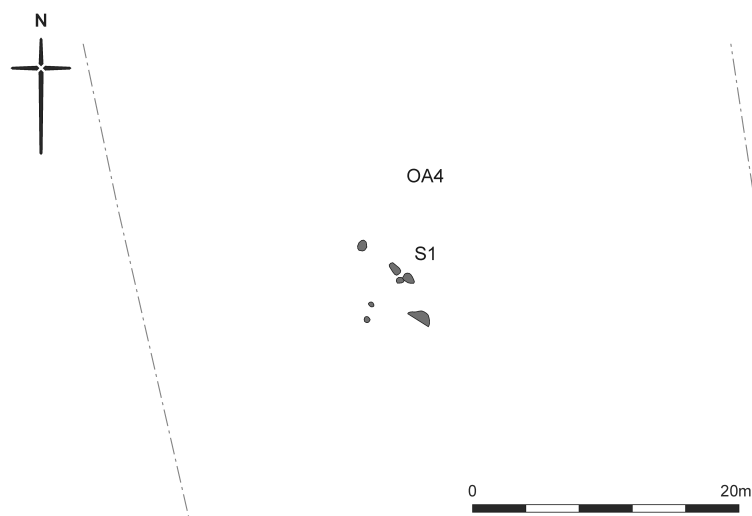


Figure 3. Late Iron Age structure 1 (S1 - period 3)

Open Area 4

The principal period 3 deposit on the middle terrace was a deposit of colluvium (OA4), which merged into the alluvium on the lower terrace. The colluvium contained grog-tempered sherds from a large rilled storage jar. These are likely to date from the 1st century BC to the mid to late 1st century AD and are typical of the transition period in Kent and throughout the southeast (Rayner and Thompson 2002).

In the south centre of the excavated area, the colluvium of OA4 was cut by a group of seven truncated postholes – Structure 1 (S1) – between 0.25m and 0.35m in diameter and 0.08m–0.19m deep. The postholes were filled by a mid-brown, sandy clay, with occasional flint pebbles, which was almost indistinguishable from the underlying colluvium. Three of the postholes contained a single prehistoric pottery sherd and one contained a prehistoric flint blade but all these items are likely to be residual.

Period 4: medieval (Fig.4, Fig.5)

There is no evidence for Roman or Saxon occupation on the site. Resumed activity cannot be defined before the late 12th or early 13th centuries. The analysis of the medieval pottery included in this section was contributed by Lyn Blackmore. The pottery is also discussed in more detail within the appended specialist report.

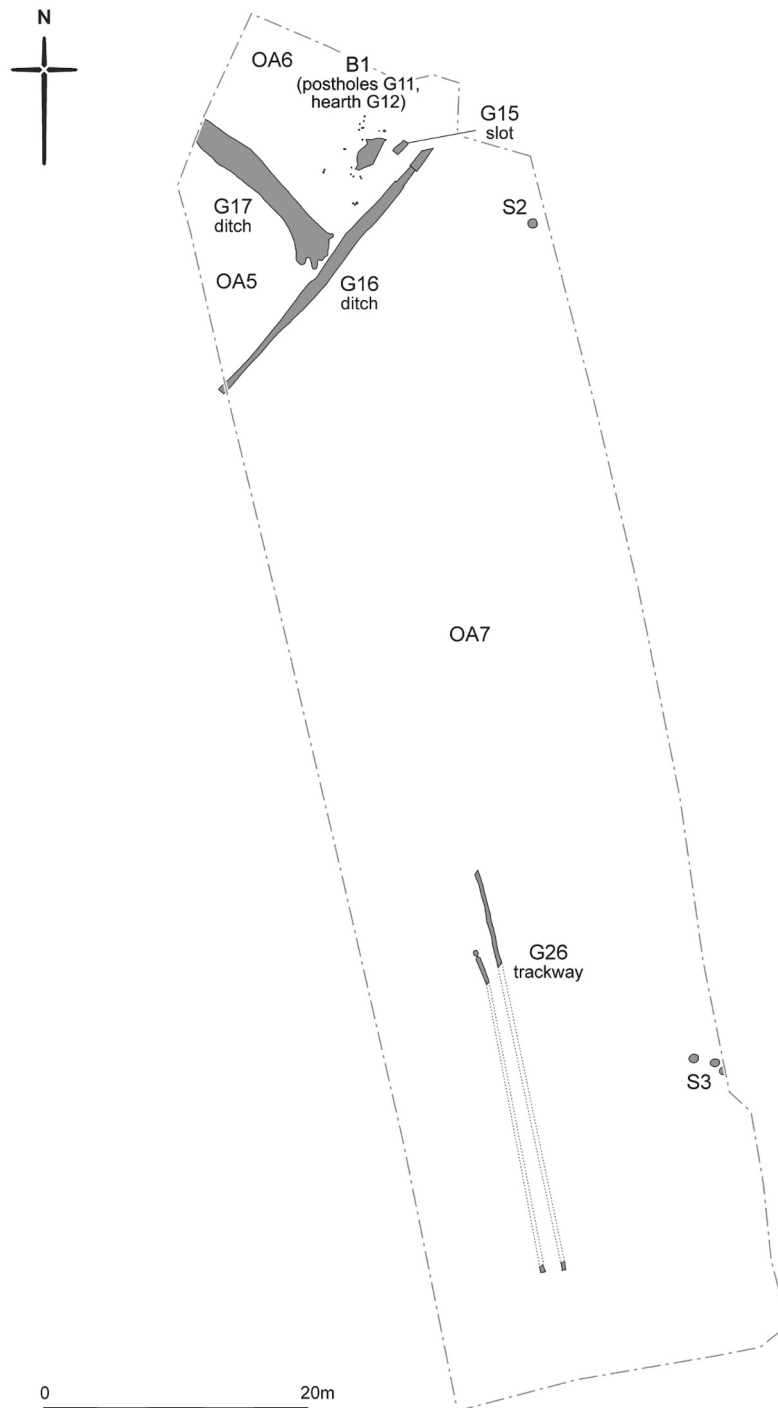


Figure 4. Building 1 and the principal medieval features on the site (period 4)

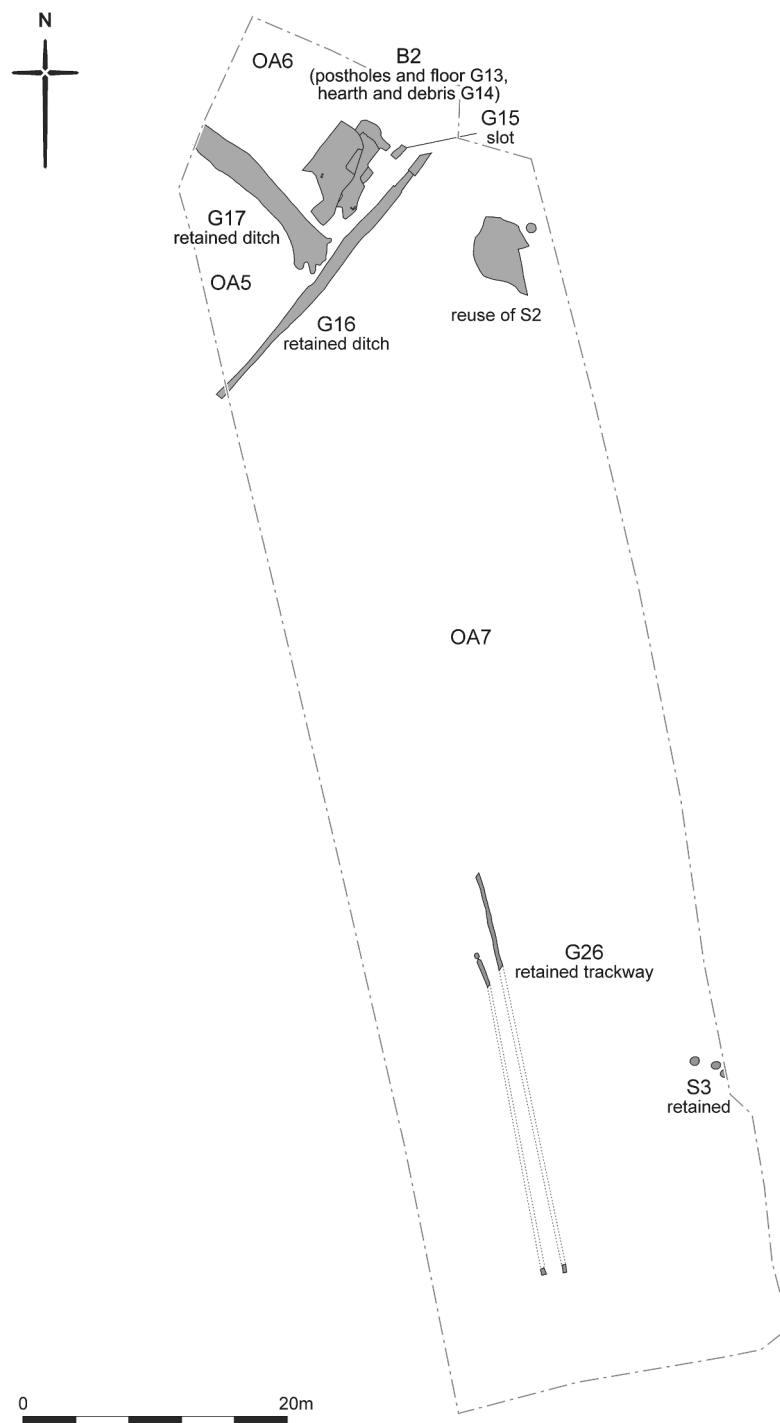


Figure 5. Building 2 and the rebuilt S2 hearth within the retained boundaries at the north of the site (period 4).

Boundary ditches defining Open Areas 5, 6 and 7

In the northern part of the site, on the lower terrace, two ditches (G16, G17) cut into the latest deposit of alluvium G10 and mark the creation of boundaries in the late 12th or early 13th centuries. The G17 ditch divided the northern part of the site into two plots (OA5, OA6), whose southern boundary was formed by the G16 ditch. Open Area 7 lay to the south of the G16 ditch.

Ditch G16 ran for 28.6m on a northeast–southwest alignment. It was 1.04m wide by 0.86m deep. The G17 ditch was broader (2.0m) but shallower (0.22m) and aligned at right angles to the G16 ditch. The south-east end of the G17 ditch lay close to G16 but was indistinguishable from the alluvium (OA3) into which it was cut, suggesting possible erosion. Ditch G17 extended beyond the northern limit of excavation. Both ditches were filled by very similar, light-grey, mottled sandy clay with moderate charcoal. Ditch G16 contained two sherds from a cooking pot in Ashford-type sandy ware with shell inclusions (fabric EM.M5) dated to 1125–1250. Ditch G17 contained a larger pottery assemblage of 31 sherds. Eleven of these are in EM.M5, including rims from three jars, one with thumbing on the shoulder, and a possible curfew (Fig.7, <P6>–<P9>) but the remainder of the pottery (Ashford fabrics M40A and M40B) is slightly later and dates to 1175–1250. The later pottery includes a slashed jug handle (Fig.7, <P10>).

A plain convex head of a small copper-alloy stud <2> and a curved fragment of corroded iron <1>, probably part of a plain rod handle, were found in ditch G17. Finds from the fill of ditch G16 comprised an iron nail <4> and whittle-tang knife <5>, both very corroded, and a small copper-alloy ring <3> (Fig.6). The ring is of interest because, although the ditch fills date to 1125–1250, its form appears unusual for this period. The ring is oval with cast transverse ribs or knurls on its outer surface. It is too small to be any form of armlet but appears slightly large for a finger-ring. No exact parallels have been found for it. It is possible that it is of an earlier date. Knobbed or knurled decoration on copper-alloy armlets is known from the Bronze Age, as at Mountbatton, Plymouth (Pearce, 1983, 549, no. 851 b and c and plate 121), through to the Roman period, such as an example from Colchester (Crummy 1983, 42, fig 44, no. 1676). Were it a prehistoric artefact, a spiral rather than an annular form would be expected (Keily 2001).

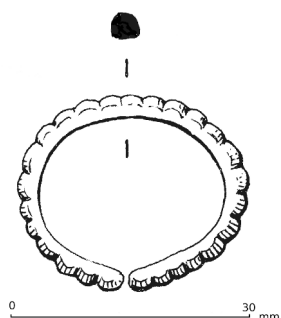


Figure 6. A copper-alloy ring (<3>) from fill [85] of the G16 ditch. The ring is oval, complete, but with one break and has a D-shaped section. Its dating is uncertain and it may be medieval or possibly prehistoric. (Diameter 25-29mm, Th 3mm, Ht 4mm).

Buildings 1 and 2

Two successive buildings – Buildings 1 (B1) and 2 (B2) were constructed within OA6. There is little chronological difference between the pottery dates derived from the two buildings but, whilst B2 can only be dated to 1125–1250, B1, though stratigraphically earlier, contains some later types that post-date 1225. The dating, discussed further in ‘The medieval pottery’ below, would suggest that B1 dates to c 1225, and B2 dates to c 1250.

The construction of B1 was preceded by a slight terracing of the ground surface to form a level surface. The building was represented by a series of 16 postholes which defined three sides of a rectangle: the southeast side had been truncated by modern intrusions. The posts would probably have formed the external framework of a simple timber building which would have covered an area of at least 6m by 3.30m. The fills of the postholes contained some charcoal flecks, burnt clay and fire debris, which probably derive from the disuse or destruction of the building. The spreads of debris extended beyond the area defined by the postholes.

A hearth surrounded by trampled hearth material occupied much of the interior of the building and contained 43 sherds from some eight to ten domestic pots. Most of the pottery from the debris and trample around the hearth (including Fig.7, <P1>) comprises sherds from cooking pots in Ashford-type sandy ware with shell inclusions (fabric EM.M5). Four other sherds, from two jugs, are in London-type ware and Tyler Hill ware and the latter suggests a date of 1225–1250 for the group. Two small sherds from the hearth are of Ashford-type ware with rare shell (fabric M40B, dating to 1175–1400; see pottery report). Charred wheat grains and buttercup seeds and small fragments of cow bone were also present.

The site of B1 was sealed over and made level again by a clay floor and a replacement hearth was constructed. These events seem to demonstrate the replacement of B1 by B2 but the structural evidence for the new building is sparser than for its predecessor. Two clusters of postholes, probably on the south-west wall-line of B2, are the only structural elements to have been defined and may indicate that the new building was either larger than B1 or had been repositioned slightly to the south-west. The fills of the postholes were, once again, fire debris material probably derived from the destruction of B2 by fire.

A total of 38 sherds, all dated to within 1125–1250, were recovered from this building. With one exception, all are in Ashford-type sandy ware with shell inclusions (fabric EM.M5). Seven sherds from three cooking pots were found in the floor while six were embedded in the hearth. The remaining 25 sherds are from the layers of fire debris and include rims from two jars, (Fig.7, <P2>, <P3>), a sherd from a jar with dimpled decoration on the shoulder, part of a possible curfew (fabric EM.M5) and a sherd of Kentish sandy ware with flint and sparse shell (fabric EM29).

Environmental samples taken from the hearth and floor levels of B1 and B2 consisted of wood charcoal, with variable quantities of charred cereal grain and arable weed seeds. The largest assemblage contained nearly 200 cereal grains: free-threshing wheat was most common (54%) with 26% oats, 12% rye, and 8% barley. Some evidence of non-cereal foods was found in the same sample, in the

form of several horse beans and peas and fragmentary pulses, also probably from peas or beans, were present in all these samples. Hazelnut shell and sloe stones occurred infrequently. The high proportion of small weed seeds in these assemblages suggests that they came from crop cleanings or perhaps straw, used as fuel in the hearths. This would have become mixed with small amounts of prime grain and other foodstuffs thrown onto the fire after spillages or other wastage. The inclusion of several different cereals and other food plants suggests that this is domestic waste from people living or at least eating in the building.

Features contemporary with Buildings 1 and 2

Adjacent to the buildings was a shallow, northeast–southwest aligned gully or beam slot (G15). It was 0.75m long and 0.47m wide. Its alignment suggests that it was broadly contemporary with either B1 or B2 and the fill contained charcoal flecks which may be derived from the destruction of either.

Structure 2

On the eastern side of the site an isolated circular hearth, Structure 2 (S2), lay in the north of OA7. It was 0.81m in diameter and 0.13m deep at its centre and set into a small hollow in the surface of the underlying strata. The hearth was surrounded by scorched debris, which indicated that it had been cleaned out. It was subsequently rebuilt using clay and flint to form a secondary fired surface, which was overlain with in situ charcoal spread and fire debris.

The fire debris associated with the first phase of S2 contained 23 sherds. Most, including a possible curfew rim, (Fig.7, <P4>), are of Ashford-type sandy ware with shell inclusions (fabric EM.M5) and date to 1125–1250. In addition to cooking pots/jars, part of a spout, probably from a bowl, and a jug with lattice decoration were found; one or two sherds may be from curfews. However, the latest fabric types are Tyler Hill ware, represented by four sherds from a jug, and one small sherd of Wealden ware (fabrics M1 and M53), which date this first phase of the hearth to after 1225 and 1250 respectively (although it is not impossible that the Wealden sherd is intrusive). The fire debris associated with the second phase of use of S2 contained only three sherds of EM.M5. Although these do not refine the dating of the structure they do include one of the more interesting pieces, a small rim with thumbled edge and stabbing on the body (Fig.7, <P5>). The types of wares from both hearths suggest it was used for domestic cooking rather than industrial purposes. The use of the S2 hearth appears to be broadly contemporary with the buildings to its northwest.

Open Area 7

Located in the southeast of the excavated part of OA7 were a group of three, east–west aligned postholes – Structure 3 (S3). These features had been truncated and only survived to depths of 65–80mm deep. Their fills were almost indistinguishable from the deposits OA4 colluvium into which they were cut. Two of

the postholes contained pottery. The latest sherd recovered was of Ashford-type ware dating to 1175–1250 (fabric EM.M5) but residual Late Iron Age or Romano-British pottery was also present.

A trackway across OA7

Two parallel gullies, 1–1.3m apart ran on a north–south alignment across OA7. They were of similar dimensions and extremely likely to be contemporary. It is most likely that they flanked a narrow path or trackway. A sherd from a jar in the finer Ashford fabric M40B, dated 1175–1250, was found in one of the gullies, although residual material was also present. This dating evidence could indicate that the trackway is broadly contemporary with, and led towards, the buildings to its north, though its alignment is at variance with the more certain medieval activity on the site.

The medieval pottery

The pottery is illustrated on Fig.7.

The medieval pottery was recovered from 13 different contexts, all of broadly similar date. There is little chronological difference in the pottery from B1 and B2, but B1 contains some later types that date to 1175–1250 and to after 1225, whereas B2 can only be dated to 1125–1250. This can be interpreted in different ways. Firstly, the forms in EM.M5 are conservative and in the absence of other wares it is hard to distinguish different periods of activity from the pottery alone. Secondly, the pottery in B2 could be residual, and derived from debris from B1. However, allowing for a realistic period of use, the dating would suggest that B1 dates to c 1225, while B2 dates to c 1250. If, however, the latest pottery in B1 (in [87]) is intrusive from B2, both could be rather earlier. The ditches and other hearth can only be broadly dated; they could predate the buildings or be contemporary with them. Structure 1 also contained pottery dating to after 1225 and 1250, but on the whole there would appear to have been a decrease in activity on the site during the third quarter of the 13th century, and the latest pottery, from period 5, could well date to this period, despite its long date range of 1250–1400.

The bulk of the pottery would appear to have been locally made, probably at the kiln or kilns in the Ashford area (Grove and Warhurst 1952; Streeten 1982a, 87). A small amount of pottery was supplied from Canterbury and possibly from Sussex, while one vessel is from London. This indicates a site of some status, but there are no imports. The bulk of the assemblage comprises jars and cooking pots, and it is of interest that most of these are of considerable size, the smallest having a diameter of 260mm. Two others are under 300mm, but three are c 320–340mm. This might suggest cooking/storage in large quantities, although the depth of the pots is unknown. The two larger rims (<P4>, <P8>) are more likely to be from curfews than jars, and the association of <P4> with the fire debris within S2 supports this. The scarcity of jug sherds presumably reflects the activities taking place within the buildings; they are scattered across the site, with five from period 4 and four from period 5 contexts (the latter are all of local fabrics, whereas four of the former are imports).

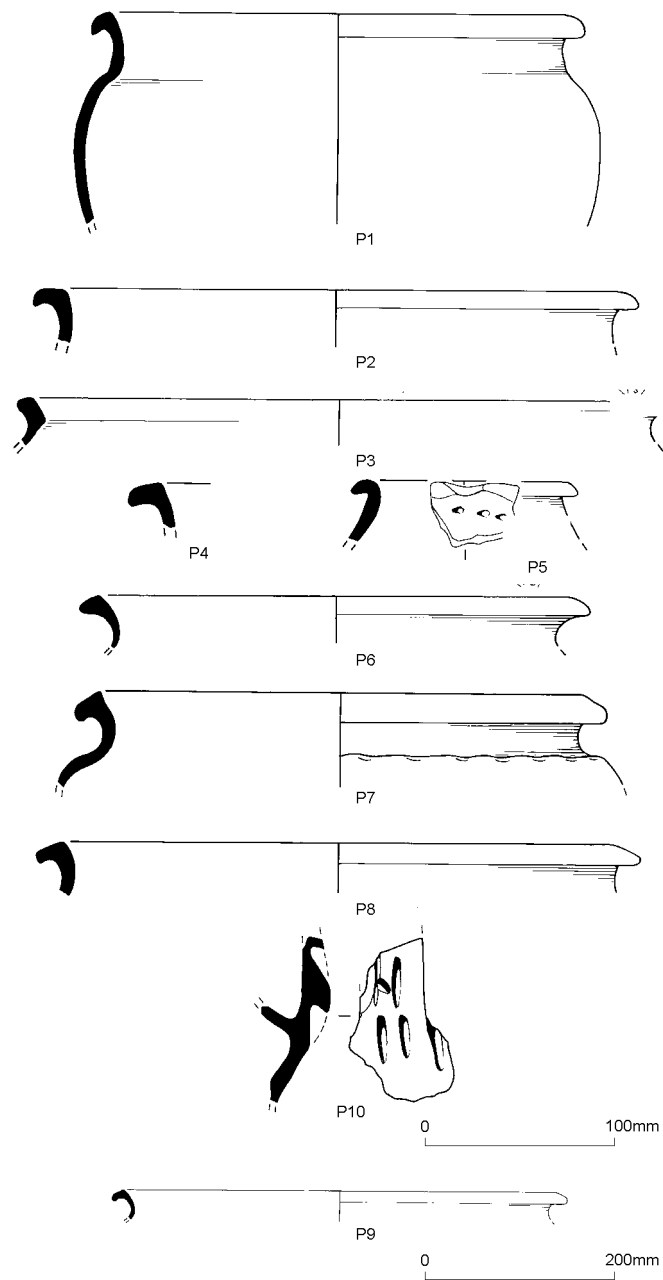


Figure 7. Medieval pottery from the site.

The closest site that can be compared with this assemblage is the consumer site of Parsonage Farm, Westwell (sitecode ARC-PFM98; Blackmore 2000). Medieval pottery has also been found elsewhere in the area of Boys Hall itself (site code BCA93; Brown 1994). At Parsonage Farm a wide range of forms was found, including cauldrons, bowls, dishes (some socketed) and jugs, which date to the 11th–13th centuries. The cooking pots/jars in EM.M5 include both developed flat-topped rims like those found at Potters Corner and more rounded forms, of which some could date to before 1125. These simple forms are similar to those from the Boys Hall site and are also known from Mersham, c 6.5 km to the south of Ashford, the latter tentatively dated to the 11th century (Cotter in prep, a; b). Taken together, this suggests that the present finds could be a little earlier in date than the Potters Corner production, and/or from a different source in the same area.

Table 1. Catalogue of the illustrated pottery

No.	Context	Period	Land use	Fabric	Diam.	Comments
<P1>	87	4	B1	EM.M5	260	
<P2>	34	4	B2	EM.M5	320	
<P3>	34	4	B2	EM.M5	340	
<P4>	79	4	S1	EM.M5	480	Curfew?
<P5>	80	4	S1	EM.M5/M40A	120?	Thumbed and stabbed
<P6>	62	4	Fill of G17 ditch	EM.M5	270	
<P7>	62	4	Fill of G17 ditch	EM.M5	280	Thumbing on shoulder
<P8>	62	4	Fill of G17 ditch	EM.M5	320	
<P9>	62	4	Fill of G17 ditch	EM.M5	440	Curfew?
<P10>	62	4	Fill of G17 ditch	M40B		Handle with slashed decoration

Ashford-type ware EM.M5 has a wide distribution, being found almost as far north as Maidstone (J Cotter pers comm.), and a similar ware was found at Pivington, where one of the jars has finger impressions on the shoulder similar to <P7> (Rigold 1964, 38–40; Fig.4, no 1). Like Ashford/Wealden sandy ware M40B, fabric EM.M5 is also common in the area between Ashford and Dover. A range of cooking pots and bowls was found at the Hospital of SS Stephen and Thomas at New Romney, which spans the period 1190–1320 or later (Rigold 1964, 61; Fig.10), while sherds have been found on sites along the Folkestone Transfer Pipeline (Cotter in prep, b). Jugs in fabrics M40B and M40C have been found at Hythe Manor and at Westwood, Lyminge, just to the north of Hythe (Philp 1996, fig 4; J Cotter pers comm.), while a jug in fabric M40B was found near a probable ford across the Great Stour between Kennington and Wye (Cotter et al 1993, Fig.25). Ashford wares were used to the near exclusion of other types on sites close to Ashford, but in Dover and Folkestone Tyler Hill wares dominate. On rural sites between Dover and Ashford a more equal balance of types has been noted (Cotter in prep, b). However, although

it is clear that there was some overlap between the distribution areas of the two traditions, the marketing mechanisms are not well understood, and, as noted above, it is possible that Ashford-type ware EM.M5 was produced at a number of centres.

This is not the first medieval pottery from the Willesborough area, as finds are known from the site of Boys Hall itself, but these finds are an important addition to the number of find spots from the Ashford area as a whole. Dating is problematic, as the collections noted above suggest that the forms produced in the early fabric EM.M5 were remarkably conservative over some 100 years. The limited distribution of the other ware types, however, suggests that the occupation was mainly of late 12th- and 13th-century date and of a domestic nature. At present pottery use and supply in rural Kent is poorly understood (Streeten 1982a, 87), but it would seem that Ashford-type ware was made at a number of centres from the 10th to the 14th centuries. The finds from this site, although of a limited date range, will add to the understanding of this industry, which can hopefully be developed with the publication of the larger Parsonage Farm assemblage.

Period 5: post-medieval deposits and features (not illustrated)

During the late medieval to post-medieval period a later layer of colluvium was deposited over the middle and lower terraces. It contained a mixed assemblage of worked flint ranging from the Late Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age but also pottery (from jugs in fabric M40C) which dates to after 1250. The majority of the sherds (13) were in fabric M.40B (including a jar rim) which post-dates 1175.

The concentration of material within this colluvium suggests that the soil of the upper slopes of the site, where earlier prehistoric features had been so badly truncated, had been either extensively reworked or been exposed to extensive landslip.

Structure 4

In the southwest of the excavation area, seven postholes on a northwest–southeast alignment defined a modern fence line (Structure 4 G28). Their construction fills were all similar and contained tightly packed fragments of tile, stone and flint. The postholes were circular, between 0.25m to 0.40m in diameter and with a tapered blunt point. Structure 4 was sealed by a layer of plough soil overlain by modern topsoil.

Discussion

The earliest recorded activity (period 2) at the Boys Hall Road site was successive phases of ditch alignment cut into the alluvium on the lowest terrace of the site (OA2). It is, however, possible that even earlier prehistoric activity lay buried beneath the alluvium. Recent work has shown that areas of alluvial accumulation can seal early landscapes (Needham 1991; Taylor 1996; Meddens 1996). Although the dating evidence from the features themselves was generally poor, they all pre-dated deposits dated to 1000–600 BC and are likely to span the Neolithic and Early

Bronze Age. Although period 2 activity is concentrated on the lowest terrace, it is possible that reworking of the soil on the middle terrace during period 3 truncated any period 2 features that may have existed here. Consequently, it is unclear whether the lowest terrace represents a genuine concentration of activity or is merely the only extant portion of a wider landscape.

The environmental sample taken from a pit cutting one of the ditches indicates that the lowest terrace was subject to flooding but was near to human settlement and cultivated land. In this context it is likely that the ditches represent a sequence of drainage and/or boundary features, both subdividing and removing excess water from the flood plain. They may have demarcated small fields or enclosures. These damp, low-lying fields may have been used for grazing but emmer wheat and barley were being grown locally.

Further evidence for the vulnerability of the lowest terrace to flooding was provided in period 3, during which renewed alluvial deposition occurred (OA3), sealing the period 2 features. It is the dating of this alluvium that provides the *terminus ante quem* for period 2. Further upslope, the middle terrace of the site was overlaid by colluvial deposits (OA4), which contained pottery of 1st century BC to the mid to late 1st century AD date. The formation of colluvial deposits in valley bottoms may be caused by changing river regimes but can also be a result of human activity. The clearance of woodland to create agricultural landscapes and ploughing on hill slopes can both cause a significant increase in soil erosion and in surface run-off and increase the amount of sediment brought into rivers (Needham 1991). It can also be caused by natural land slippage. The colluvium usually forms at breaks in slope as at this site.

During period 3, activity within the site is absent from the lowest terrace (OA3). A cluster of postholes (S1) on the middle terrace (OA4) could suggest that activity had shifted southwards up the natural slope from the lower terrace to the middle terrace, perhaps because flooding had become more frequent and had made the lower terrace no longer suitable for exploitation. However, the period 3 activity was so sparse that it remains likely that, by the Late Iron Age/Roman transition, the entire site was now marginal land. This impression is confirmed by the lack of evidence for Roman or Saxon occupation on the site.

It is not until the late 12th or early 13th centuries (period 4) that archaeologically attested occupation of the site resumed. Domestic buildings, hearths and ditches were constructed on the lowest terrace. This suggests that there had been a return to drier conditions and that the river had regressed. It is also possible that during this period the Great River Stour and its tributaries (of which Old Mill Stream is one) were being utilized for milling. Watermills were important during the medieval period for grinding corn, fulling and for power in iron furnaces (Champion and Overy 1989). Mills constructed within the local area may have served to regulate water flow and have reduced the frequency of flooding on the valley plain.

Ditches defined a series of boundaries (separating OA5, OA6 and OA7) and two successive buildings (B1, B2) were constructed in the most north-eastern of the plots within the site boundary (OA6). Building 1 may have been built c 1225 and its successor Building 2 may date to c 1250. Domestic hearths were found within both

buildings and another hearth lay in an isolated position to their south-east. A narrow path or trackway may have approached the buildings from the south.

The ditches can only be dated broadly and could predate the buildings. However, their orthogonal alignment, and the positioning of Buildings 1 and 2 within an enclosure (OA6) defined by the ditches, strongly implies that they were in use at the same time. Similarly, the dating for the isolated hearth (Structure 2) suggests that it was in use c 1225. It is clear that there was marked increase in activity on the site possibly after c 1175 and certainly after c 1225 and that occupation appears to have diminished again during the third quarter of the 13th century. The latest pottery, found in period 4, is dated 1250-1400 and could well have been originally deposited prior to 1275–1300. Given the relative briefness of the period of medieval reoccupation of the site, it is likely that the other features dated by medieval pottery (Structure 3 and the trackway) also fall within it and are contemporary with the use of the buildings.

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Specialist Reports

The post-Roman pottery

Lyn Blackmore

The post-Roman pottery amounts to 162 sherds, of which 159 are stratified; these were recorded on the Museum of London Oracle database. The different fabrics were isolated using a binocular microscope (x20) and recorded using the fabric codes devised by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust (Table 2). The pottery is of average size and condition, neither particularly fresh nor abraded. Most sherds are between 5–10mm across, but some larger and smaller pieces are also present. The pottery is illustrated on Fig.7.

Fabrics and forms

The pottery from this site is quite homogeneous, both in fabric and date range (see Table 2). As a whole the assemblage is dominated by cooking pots (identified by sooting) and jars (unsooted). The former account for 74% of the assemblage by sherd count (62% by ENV), the latter 10% (18% by ENV); the nine jugs amount to c. 14% of the collection by both sherd count and ENV. Two or three possible curfews are represented but no definite bowls or dishes were identified.

Table 2. Expansions for fabric codes used in this report

Fabric	Expansion	Date range
EM.M5	Ashford, Potters Corner sandy ware with fossil shell	1125-1250
EM29	Kent/Sussex fine sandy ware with sparse flint and shell	1125-1225
LM4	Late Surrey/Wealden ware	1450-1550
M1	Tyler Hill ware	1225-1375
M40A	Ashford/Wealden sandy ware with sparse chalk/shell	1175-1400
M40B	Ashford/Wealden sandy ware with little/no shell	1175-1400
M40C	Ashford/Wealden pasty ware (fine with chalk flecks)	1225/50-1350
M5	London-Type ware	1140-1350
M53	Surrey/Wealden ware	1250-1450
PM100	Post-medieval unknown ?English	1550-1700

Ashford-type wares

Documentary and place-name evidence for pottery production in Kent is perhaps more limited than in other counties (Streeten 1982a, 97–8), and Ashford is one of few sites where there is more tangible evidence for production. No kilns have yet been located, but at Potters Corner, just to the northwest of the town, possible wasters dated to the 13th century were found in association with ash and dark soil (Grove and Warhurst 1952, 184; Streeten 1982a, 87; Cotter in prep, b; Blackmore in prep). Ashford is well situated for pottery manufacture, lying close to the interface of the geological deposits of the calcareous Gault and Wealden clays and the Hythe Beds, strata rich in fossil shell, and near to supplies of sand, water and fuel (Grove and Warhurst 1952, 184). These resources were also exploited by several potteries and tileries in the 19th century (Cotter in prep, a). The interim report did not offer much detail on the fabrics, and the presence of shell in some sherds was not noted, if observed (Grove and Warhurst 1952). More recent work by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust on the pottery from Townwall Street, Dover has identified three main Ashford fabric types (see below), which will be fully discussed in that report (Cotter in prep, a). Ashford-type ware has been found on many sites in south and west Kent, notably near Folkestone and on the Romney Marsh (Streeten 1982a, Fig.41B; Cotter in prep, b and c), and it has been suggested that the Potters Corner ‘kiln’ might be only one of several industries in the area (Cotter et al 1993, Cotter in prep, a; b; c). This makes it difficult to identify and classify different variants of the Ashford-type fabrics, which tend to merge into one another, but some distinction can be drawn between micaceous and non-micaceous types, both of which occur in the Ashford area (Streeten 1982b, 274–80; Blackmore in prep). It has also been found that pottery used in the Romney Marsh area, although similar to Ashford ware, contains gastropods and contemporary marine shell, not fossil shell (Cotter 2002, 60).

The earliest of these wares is fabric EM.M5, dated to 1125–1250, which contains relatively abundant fossil shell and is usually oxidised or reddish-brown in colour. As the shell has usually leached out, this ware tends to have a corky appearance, but less shelly wares merge into the more sandy fabric M40A (see below). On this site sherds classed as EM.M5 account for 69% of the assemblage (110 sherds). Several cooking pot/jar rims are present (<P1>–<P3>, <P6>–<P8>); the most complete is

<P1>. Most rims are plain and markedly bevelled; only one true flat rim was found in the earlier features. Of these the rounder forms such as <P1>, which is deeply undercut, and <P2>, <P6> and possibly <P7> may be of earlier/mid 12th-century date, while the more angular forms (<P4>, <P8>) may date to the late 12th or 13th century. The former are most typical of Ashford, while the latter are more in keeping with trends elsewhere in Kent (Blackmore in prep; Cotter in prep, a; b). Two sherds have finger impressions around the shoulder (<P7>). These and the more rounded rims have numerous parallels at the nearby Parsonage Farm site (Glass 2000, 213–4; Blackmore 2000) and are known from other sites in the area (see below).

Other forms are quite rare. One sherd, in a fabric that is finer than most EM.M5 but contains abundant very fine shell, is problematic. It appears to be from the rim of a small jar or spouted pitcher (<P5>), although the thumbing of the rim edge and uneven rows of stabbing on the body are unusual. It is not impossible that this is part of a handle (cf Cotter in prep, a: vessel 1 in M40A), it is rather thin, wide and skewed. A spout-like fragment ([79]) could be from a pitcher, or from a spouted/socketed bowl or dish. Spouted pitchers are not yet known in Ashford-type ware, but socketed bowls/dishes were found at Parsonage Farm (Blackmore 2000). Two rims with large diameters (<P4>, <P9>) and a body sherd ([79]), may be from curfews (cf Grove and Warhurst 1952, Fig.4, no.11).

The slightly later Ashford-types, fabrics M40A and M40B, which date to 1175–1250, are each represented by 18 sherds. Fabric M40A (very sparse shell) comprises only cooking pots/jars. Fabric M40B (a sandy ware that equates with Ashford fabric M39) also includes sherds from four jugs, one a strap handle with deep slashing in the Kentish tradition (<P10>; cf Grove and Warhurst 1952, Fig.5, no.20); the others are from [3] and [6]). Only two jug sherds are of the latest type, M40C, which is broadly dated to 1250–1450; these are from period 5 ([3]).

Other wares

Other wares from Kent/southern England include three flint-tempered sherds (fabric EM29; period 4, B2, period 5, OA6). These may be from Sussex, but it should be noted that a jug found at Dover combines a body in fabric M40A with a flint-tempered handle similar to fabric EM29, suggesting a source between Ashford and the coast for the latter ware (Cotter in prep, a; b). The imported jugs are in three fabrics: Tyler Hill ware, one with incised lattice decoration (fabric M1; Spillett et al 1942; Blackmore 1988, 252–3; 261–3; Fig.91, no 64); a buff ware, possibly of Wealden origin (fabric M53; period 4, S1: [79]); and London-type ware (fabric M5; period 4, B1: [87]). All are probably of late 12th to mid 13th-century date. The unstratified material comprises two sherds dated to 1450–1550 and one of a near stoneware jug or drinking jug with purple wash; this is not a Siegburg or Langerwehe fabric, and is not matched in the London fabric collections.

Table 3. Quantification of the stratified medieval fabric type

Fabric	Sherds	%	ENV	%
EM.M5	110	68.8	52	67.5
EM29	3	1.9	3	67.5
M1	5	3.1	2	2.6
M5	3	1.9	1	2.6
M40A	18	11.3	6	7.8
M40B	18	11.3	10	13
M40C	2	1.3	2	2.6
M53	1	0.6	1	1.3
Totals	160		77	

The Plant Remains

Anne Davis

Acknowledgement: The plant remains assessment was undertaken by Lisa Gray.

This report describes and discusses the plant assemblages from eight environmental samples taken from the site. One of these came from the fill [77] of a circular pit, dated to the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, and seven further samples are from 13th-century hearth and floor deposits within small timber-framed buildings B1 and B2.

Methods

The samples were processed by flotation, and the flots and residues dried, with the exception of the flot from [77], which contained organic material and was stored in industrial methylated spirits. Sample residues were sorted by eye for biological and artefactual remains. The wet flot from the prehistoric sample was scanned, using a low-powered binocular microscope, and plant macrofossils were identified, quantified, and recorded. The dry flots from the remaining samples were fully sorted for charred plant remains. Identifications were made using the botanical reference collection of the Museum of London Specialist Services, and standard identification reference manuals (Beijerinck 1947, Berggren 1981, Anderberg 1994). Charred plant items were counted, and waterlogged remains were roughly quantified according to the following scale: + up to 10, ++ 11–50, +++ 51–approx. 250, ++++ over 250 (many hundreds).

Table 4. Provenance of the bulk samples sorted by group (G).

G	Land use	Context	Sample	Context type	Date
9	OA2	[77]	1	pit	Neolithic/Early Bronze Age
12	B1	[87]	6	hearth	1225-1250
12	B1	[95]	7	hearth	1225-1250
12	B1	[101]	8	hearth	1225-1250
13	B2	[83]	5	floor	1225-1250
13	B2	[82]	4	floor	undated
14	B2	[35]	3	hearth	1225-1250
14	B2	[34]	2	hearth	1225-1250

Sample 1: prehistoric pit

A sample taken from the fill of the pit revealed an abundant assemblage of well-preserved waterlogged seeds, which are all commonly found in damp places. The most abundant seeds were from sedges (*Carex* spp.) buttercups (*Ranunculus acris/bulbosus/repens*) and rushes (*Juncus* spp.). Plants of marshes, reed beds and shallow, slow-flowing water such as spike-rush (*Eleocharis palustris/uniglumis*), branched bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), yellow iris (*Iris pseudocorus*), water mint (*Mentha cf. aquatica*), and fool's watercress (*Apium nodiflorum*) were also present. Species such as water pepper (*Polygonum hydropiper*) and celery-leaved crowfoot (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) are more likely to grow on muddy banks however (Ellenberg 1988). Fragmentary larval cases of caddis flies (*Trichoptera*) and eggs of waterfleas (*Cladocera*), both of which are aquatic invertebrates, were also found. These remains may have arrived in the pit fill as a result of seasonal flooding of the Old Mill Stream, or could perhaps be associated with the remains of deliberately harvested rushes or reeds. Heath grass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), the seeds of which were common in this sample, can be found on damp grassland (Clapham et al 1978), and may have grown on the floodplain close to the site, while unidentifiable fragments of wood, thorns and also seeds of blackberry (*Rubus cf. fruticosus*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*), indicate the presence of woods or scrub. The last two could be the remains of fruits gathered for food, although neither was found in large quantities.

Other waterlogged seeds in this assemblage are commonly found as weeds of crops such as fool's parsley (*Aethusa cynapium*), persicaria (*Polygonum persicaria*), docks (*Rumex* spp.), thistles (*Carduus/Cirsium* spp.) and chickweed (*Stellaria media*), although they are also found in waste places and other disturbed environments associated with human settlements. Other species such as Henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*), fat hen (*Chenopodium album*) and elder would have grown in nutrient-rich soils or on middens.

Fragments of wood charcoal and a small assemblage of charred cereal remains were also present in this sample. The latter consisted of one grain of barley (*Hordeum sativum*), one of probable oats (*Avena* sp.), and one unidentifiable, all in poor condition, as well as several fragments of wheat (*Triticum* sp.) chaff. Two spikelet forks and one glume base were identified as probable emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*). A further glume base was identified as emmer or spelt (*T. dicoccum/spelta*), and two rachis fragments as wheat. Two charred seeds of crop weeds were also found. It is impossible to be sure of the origin of such a small cereal assemblage, but it seems most likely that these remains are from crop-processing waste, burnt as fuel. They demonstrate that emmer wheat and barley were being grown locally.

The original function of the pit is not clear, but it was certainly used for the disposal of burnt hearth residues and possibly other plant based refuse.

Samples 2–8: Buildings 1 and 2

Plant assemblages from hearth and floor levels in the medieval buildings consisted of wood charcoal, with variable quantities of charred cereal grain and arable weed seeds. The largest assemblage was in the sample from the floor deposit and contained nearly 200 cereal grains, most of them (54%) free-threshing wheat (*Triticum cf. aestivum*), with 26% oats (*Avena* spp.), 12% rye (*Secale cereale*), and 8% barley (*Hordeum sativum*). The sample also contained several rachis nodes of wheat, rye and barley, and a large number of small weed seeds, the most abundant of which were from stinking mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*), docks (*Rumex* spp.), and wild grasses including bromes (*Bromus* spp.). Some evidence of non-cereal foods was found in the same sample, in the form of several horse beans (*Vicia faba*) and peas (*Pisum sativum*). Cereal assemblages from hearth deposits in the same building were smaller but broadly similar, with wheat and oats the most common cereals, and weed seeds generally outnumbering them. Stinking mayweed and grass seeds were again the most numerous of these, but seeds of vetches (*Vicia* /*Lathyrus* spp.), ?clover (cf. *Trifolium* sp.), goosefoot/orache (*Chenopodium* /*Atriplex* spp.) and sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) were also common. Fragmentary pulses, probably peas or beans, were present in all these samples, and two deposits included hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) shell and sloe (*Prunus spinosa*) stones. The high proportion of small weed seeds in these assemblages suggests that they came from crop cleanings or perhaps straw, used as fuel in the hearths. This would have become mixed with small amounts of prime grain and other foodstuffs thrown onto the fire after spillages or other wastage.

Throughout the medieval period wheat was the most important cereal consumed in southeast England, and would have been used not only for bread, sometimes mixed with rye, but also in pottage, a thick soup made of vegetables, cereal grains and sometimes meat (Wilson 1976). Oats was reserved mainly for animal feed and brewing, but could also be included in soups and stews. Similarly, peas and beans were used for both human and animal consumption. The charred plant assemblages described here were very mixed, and seem to contain material from several sources. The inclusion of several different cereals and other food plants however suggests that this is domestic waste from people living or at least eating in the building.

NOTE: The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) became, in October 2008, Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA).

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