

Excavations at "The Park," Carshalton: Worked Flints and Post-Medieval Aisled Barn and Threshing Floor

A report, prepared by K. A. PRYER, from the field book and notes of
the late A.S. GILBERT

SUMMARY

Excavation, by the Beddington, Carshalton & Wallington Archaeological Society, in the back gardens of Nos. 7, 9 & 10, The Park, Carshalton (TQ 279641), revealed a thin scatter of worked flints and, on the surface of the underlying Thanet sand, colour traces of the foundations of farm buildings, predominantly those of an aisled barn with a threshing floor. The remains of a cart-track, probably leading into this complex, were also found.

The vestigial nature of the traces was indicative of very thorough demolition of the buildings which these reflected.

The site lies within the boundaries of Carshalton Park, as laid out by the Scawen family and their successors after 1696, i.e. it lay within the wall built by the Scawens. Whether it also lay within the boundaries of the pre-existing Mascalls Manor cannot now be said.

The Scawens' landscaping seems to have started about 1720 and to have petered out about 1770. The demolition of obtrusive, utilitarian, farm buildings could well have taken place between these dates. Hence, as, on architectural grounds, the barn and threshing floor could have been built at any time within the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries and as there was no dateable material in definite association with the foundation traces, the safest working assumption seems to be that the buildings concerned were of sixteenth or seventeenth century origin and destroyed in the eighteenth century, in the interest of landscaping.

INTRODUCTION

The Park is a modern road, the eastern side of which is the western boundary of the London Borough of Sutton's Carshalton Park and the western side of which is residential, the houses having been built at various times between the wars. The original western boundary of Carshalton Park, when a private estate, was considerably west of the ground now occupied by Nos. 7, 9, & 10, The Park.

The finding, by the late J. Thompson, at No. 7, on the surface of a garden

bed, of the exceptionally fine flint projectile described in *Sy. A.S. Bulletin*, No. 48, of December 1968, was reported to the Beddington, Carshalton & Wallington Archaeological Society by a member, Mr. Hedley Gowans, then resident at No. 9.

This find was doubly significant as the Thanet sand, on which a notable mesolithic assemblage was found¹, at Orchard Hill, Carshalton, was known to extend towards The Park.

Permission was obtained from Messrs. Thompson and Gowans to search their gardens for further flints. Simultaneously, observation was kept on an Electricity Board trench then open on the east side of The Park, by the boundary fence of the Borough's park. Under shallow topsoil this trench entered, but did not penetrate, a deep deposit of reddish brown sand. This sand, both in the trench and the spoil heaps, appeared to be devoid of artefacts but the gardens of Nos. 7 and 9 yielded sufficient struck flint to justify excavation. This was commenced, under the direction of the late A.S. Gilbert, in April 1968 and continued until November 1968, when all available ground had been trenched.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Nos. 7, 9, & 10, The Park, lie on the crest of a ridge running NNE to SSW, rising from north to south and falling away, fairly sharply, into Carshalton Park to the east and, very gently, to the west.

The Thanet sand on the crest of this ridge and a number of springs on its eastern slopes, or adjacent thereto, which last have failed only in modern times, made it eminently suitable for settlements. Such settlements, at this southern extremity of the ridge however, would be less favourably situated than was the Orchard Hill settlement at its northern base, with its access to a then probably large expanse of open water, partly still surviving in the Carshalton Ponds, embanked early in the nineteenth century.

The sand subsoil drainage, favourable to the prehistoric people probably also dictated the siting of the barn and associated buildings, particularly as the inclusion of a threshing floor would involve considerable coming and going of heavily laden carts and create mud problems in a less well drained situation.

The dark, loamy topsoil presents an almost level surface in each garden plot on the site, no doubt due to cultivation, but the underlying Thanet sand everywhere reflects the natural north-south slope of the ridge and hence, in a twelve foot trench, may lie at depths below the topsoil surface ranging from 2 ft at the north to 1 ft at the south end.

This ridge-crest Thanet sand, on which finds were made, was of a pale silvery-yellow colour and contrasted very markedly with the dark reddish-brown of the sand in the Electricity Board trench, which appeared to be sterile. Both sands are similar in texture and probably abut on each other

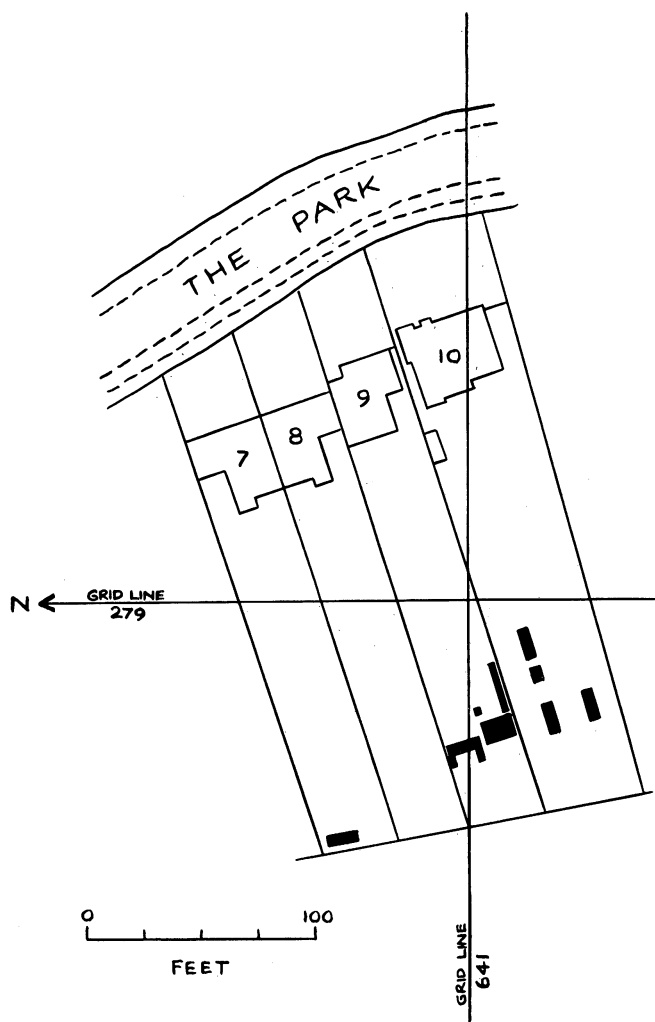


Fig. 1. Location of site, showing position of trenches

under the roadway of The Park. The elevation of the dark sand is only minimally less than that of the Thanet sand. The seeming sterility of the darker sand should, perhaps, be noted, as implying an inferior habitability, for which there is no apparent reason.

THE EXCAVATION

Number 7, The Park

A 12ft × 4ft trench, long axis north to south, was sunk to the surface of the Thanet sand, which followed the original slope of the ridge and was 2ft to 1ft below the surface of the dark, loamy topsoil, which was continuous down to the sand.

A very thin scatter of flints and pottery was found in the topsoil which the house-owner had often dug down to the sand level. Thus all finds on or above the sand surface were much disturbed and unstratifiable. Some inches of undisturbed Thanet sand were examined and found to be barren.

In view of its unproductive nature this trench has not been illustrated.

Number 9, The Park

Trench No. 1

This 12ft (north to south) × 4ft trench was sunk in grass-grown, once cultivated soil, south of a central garden path. The topsoil was similar in depth and composition to that at No. 7.

At an average of about 10 inches below the surface, the trench was crossed, east to west, by a belt of cobbles and rubble, about 1 ft in width. This was found to contain modern material. It lay in a ditch-like depression and could have been a field drain, did the natural drainage of the site not make this unlikely. As its existence was not known to the house-owner it must be assumed it was either a rough path, abandoned and lost before his time, or a shallow trench burial of builders' and garden rubble.

The topsoil in the rest of the trench was free of intrusions and contained a somewhat higher concentration of flints than that at No. 7, together with some pottery.

When the surface of the sand was reached and brushed clean, it revealed, as it dried, a pattern of long, roughly straight, dark stains, of varying widths (see Fig. 2). These were 1 ft 9 ins below topsoil surface and implied the past presence of timber foundations. A roughly square stain, identified as a post-hole, was found in the north-west corner of the trench.

Extension of the trench, south of the cobble and rubble intrusion, revealed two linear markings running east/west and two detached square markings, suggestive of posts. All these were 1 ft 1 in below topsoil surface, i.e. higher than the earlier markings, by reason of the inclination of the Thanet sand.

Removal of the intrusive rubble feature revealed that it had so disturbed the surface of the sand immediately beneath it as to make any markings, which might have linked the foundation traces to north and south of it, quite unintelligible.

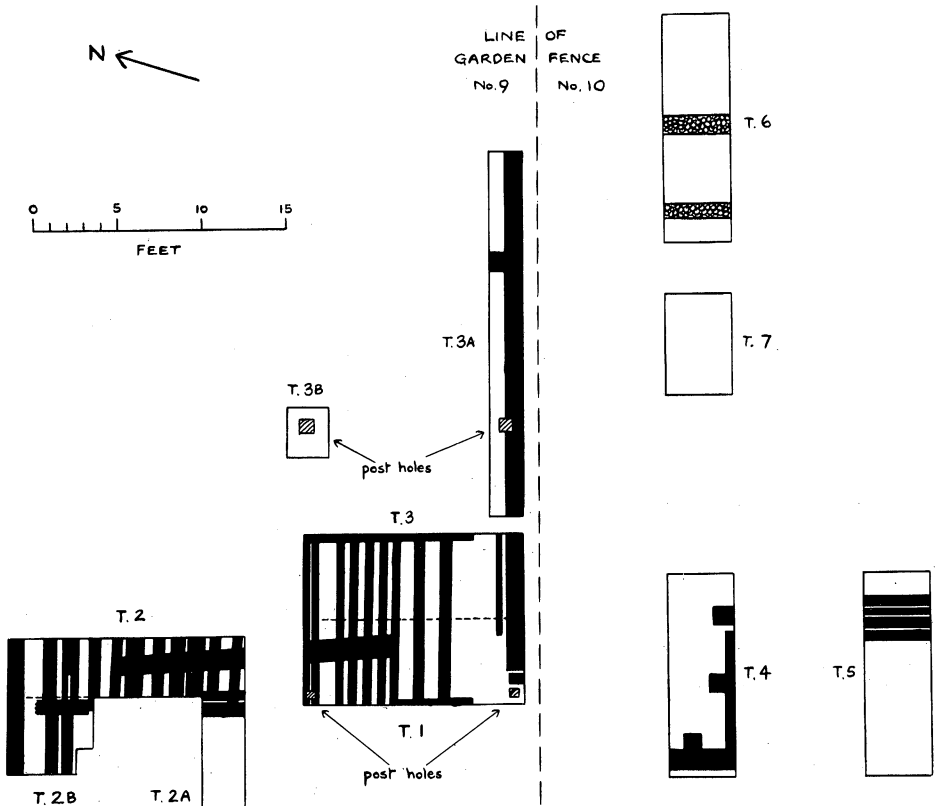


Fig. 2. Plan of trenches, showing the pattern of soil discolouration, indicating timber foundations.

Trenches Nos. 2, 2a, and 2b

Trench No. 2 was opened directly north of No. 1 and similar features appeared therein, confirming continuation of the foundation traces under the garden path. Extensions of this trench, 2a and 2b, revealed other traces (see Fig. 2) some of which extended beyond the coherent remains of the threshing floor and were not interpretable.

Trench No. 3

This trench was sunk immediately east of No. 1 and the baulk between it and No. 1 was removed when it was found that all the west to east markings in No. 1, including the cobble intrusion, continued into No. 3. Removal of the cobbles revealed similar unintelligible disturbance to that which they had produced in Trench 1. South of them however the Trench 1 markings continued across the whole width of Trench 3.

The eastward extension of all the other features continuing from Trench 1 was terminated, just short of the eastern baulk of Trench 3, by a long north to south feature lying partly within that baulk.

Mr. K. W. E. Gravett was consulted and, on the strength of all the traces found in Trenches 1, 2, & 3, suggested the past existence of a threshing floor, within an aisled barn.

Trench No. 3a

This trench showed the continuation, throughout its entire length of 21½ feet, to the east of Trench 3, of the southernmost markings in Trenches 1 and 3.

Two markings suggestive of posts abutting on this long, west to east feature, were indicative of its having been the southern outside wall of the barn containing the threshing floor.

Trench No. 3b

This trench disclosed another square marking, which formed the fourth point of a rectangle with the three found in Trenches 1 and 3a, which confirmed those others as part of a symmetrical pattern. From this all these markings were deemed to represent post-holes, although only one entered the sand to a sufficient depth to be a positive hole.

Number 10, The Park

Trench No. 4

This was opened 15ft south and 4½ ft west of Trench No. 1. It produced foundation traces suggestive of sleeper beams and posts at the south-west corner of a building.

Trench No. 5

This was sunk south of Trench No. 4 and yielded four north to south foundation traces, arranged similarly to the close timbering of the threshing floor. The extent of these traces uncovered was too limited to permit of any assumption as to the type of structure they represented.

Trench No. 6

The owner of No. 10 had reported the finding, during deep digging many years before, of what had appeared to be an old trackway. Trench No. 6 was sunk on a line indicated as being that of this trackway and brought to light the disturbed remains of two north to south beds of cobbles, which suggested a cart track consisting of two metalled strips for wheels with soft padding for draught animals between.

Trench No. 7

This trench found markings on the Thanet sand but so disturbed as to defy interpretation.

CONCLUSIONS

Worked Flint

Coming mostly from the garden of No. 9, The Park, this was of a density sufficient to suggest the existence of a chipping floor in the vicinity but not to imply that anything but the fringe of the scatter therefrom had been broached. As was found with the material from Orchard Hill, there was a high proportion of flakes with near random secondary working. In marked contrast to Orchard Hill, there is a complete absence of cores and a shortage of core fragments and, even more notably, of calcined flint, which was very plentiful at Orchard Hill. The fringe nature of the area is confirmed by the lack of calcined material, the density of which would be proportionate to the proximity of the communal hearths.

All the flint finds had been much disturbed by cultivation and were unstratifiable but there would seem to be no reason to consider them as being other than a homogeneous group. The presence of a microburin and a possible microlith suggest the assemblage was mesolithic, as does the general character of the remainder. No pieces were found that can be ascribed certainly to any other period and it thus seems reasonable to consider the group as mesolithic. The high proportion of secondarily worked pieces can be noted.²

Threshing Floor and Associated Structures

The foundation traces of these structures were an extremely thin discolouration on the surface of the Thanet sand, the visibility of which varied sharply with changes in the humidity of the sand. The general sharpness of the edges of these markings conveyed that the beams causing them had never entered into the sand and, finally, been prised out. The fact that the markings were not encountered when trowelling off the last few inches of topsoil above the sand, implies that no beams were left to decay in situ, as it seems safe to assume that any soil disturbance sufficient to remove all traces of decayed beams must also have blurred, if not destroyed, the faint traces on the sand. Hence the markings may be assumed to be a contamination of the sand, through the weight of a superimposed building having pressed into it some of a layer of topsoil intervening between the foundations and the sand. The very slightly better definition of the threshing floor traces would seem to confirm this, if it be allowed that subjection to the direct concussion of threshing would result in the members of that structure forcing in a higher degree of contamination than would wall beams or ordinary floor timbers.

Mr. Gravett states that threshing floors, such as that suggested by the foundation traces, were employed up to the middle of the nineteenth century, when threshing machines came into use, and remains still exist in many barns in Surrey. They were usually arranged across the barn behind the great doors, with a small door on the opposite side to provide a through draught to blow away the chaff. On either side a waist-high partition of weather boarding kept the grain in place and the sheaves of corn from the

floor. The floor itself had to be of wood, to 'spring' to the blows of the flail, and was made of closely fitted planks, strongly supported to prevent them moving apart and thus letting grain fall between them. Such a floor was an important possession and was treated with care, to stop it cracking or splintering. A barn of this type with a threshing floor could have been built at any time from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

This threshing floor, together with a justifiable assumption of a farm-yard from the very fragmentary traces of other buildings, are the only firm conclusions to be drawn from what were, at best, tenuous and evanescent remains. The complex indicated is not identifiable from those manorial records which it has been possible to consult, although mention of a barn and malthouse was found in documents³ relating to small properties passing, together with Carshalton House itself, between Sir William Scawen and John Fellowes in 1716.

Although names among these properties, e.g. 'Chalkhill' and 'Hoggshott' could suggest a hill in the Carshalton Park area and proximity to the 'Hogpit', which remains in the park and thus be reasonably applicable to the site of the threshing floor barn, other names, viz. 'Spring Close' and 'Roomes' can be shown to relate to properties north of Carshalton High Street. Also, there is slight evidence for a maltster operating in this northern sector a little later in the eighteenth century.

On balance, it seems most likely that all the properties in the 1716 record passed in the course of boundary adjustments between Scawen and Fellowes, in respect of their adjacent holdings on the High Street/Pound Street line and that the barn and malthouse mentioned had no connection with the traces found in The Park.

As the most probable date for its demolition is that of Scawen emparkment, c. 1720, and as only three out of twenty-one dateable pottery fragments, found in its vicinity, are seventeenth century or later, it seems reasonable to assume that it was constructed in the seventeenth century or earlier.

The ancient Mascalls Manor is generally believed to have stood within the boundaries of the present Carshalton Park. Whether it stood on the known site of its successor, Carshalton Park House, alias Carshalton Place, is not known. The barn/threshing floor site would be a not unlikely one for a home farm of Mascalls, if that last was on the site of Carshalton Place. Alternatively, it could have closely adjoined that manor and be an indication that remains thereof await discovery nearby.

FINDS

Worked Flints

These number more than 300 and a large proportion are not definable as standard types of implement. Hence, a complete listing would not be justified. They are here catalogued according to their sources, with the numbers

allocated to each group and some indication of the group's contents. A few are given more detailed treatment, either because they are identifiable implements or because they suggest some pattern of implement need.

Group 1, from No. 7, The Park

Nos. 1 to 9 Irregular fragments with secondary working.

Group 2, from No. 10, The Park

Nos. 10 to 14. Rough fragments with secondary working.

No. 15. A small, serrated, backed blade.

Group 3, from No. 9, The Park

Nos. 16 to 266 Flakes and fragments of widely varying sizes.

No. 17. A microburin.

No. 18. A broken microlith?

Nos. 221 to 230. Irregular fragments, not blade fragments, all with one small notch, deliberately made, ? for smoothing twigs for wickerwork or sinews for cords?

Nos. 231 to 235. Curved, concave edged scrapers

Nos. 236 to 241. Curved, convex edged scrapers.

Nos. 242 to 261. Blade fragments of a coarse, heavy type.

No. 266. Package of 58 small to minute fragments, of indeterminate character.

Pottery

As with the flints, detailed treatment is here applied only to items of some significance.

Group 1, from No. 7, The Park

Nos. 267 to 272.

No. 267. Sherd of poor reduced ware with coarse sand filler. 13th century or earlier.

No. 268. Sherd of hard, fine, grey, reduced ware with grey-brown body. Probably 13th century but possibly Romano-British.

No. 269. Sherd of pale pink, sandy ware, with some grog filler. Applied strip decoration, delicate. Deep impressions ? of fingers, internally. Too small for safe dating but possibly 14th-century.

No. 271. Sherd of brown ware, with fine sandy filler. Lead glazed internally. 14th century or later.

Group 2, from No. 9, The Park

Nos. 273 to 297.

No. 273. Sherd of hand made, crushed flint-tempered ware, Iron Age.

No. 274. Sherd of hand made shell-tempered ware. Shell leached out 12th-13th century.

No. 276. Sherd of reduced ware with coarse sandy filler and 'interrupted' applied strip decoration. 13th or 14th century.

No. 277. Sherd of red/brown surfaced grey ware, with sandy filler. 13th century or earlier.

- No. 283. Sherd of pale grey ware, red internally with thin, poor, lead glaze externally. Possibly 13th century.
- No. 285. Part of rim of sandy grey cooking pot, possibly Limpsfield ware, c. A.D. 1300.
- No. 286. Crude, stabbed handle of ware similar to 285 but coarser tempered. Late 13th century ?
- No. 287. Sherd of pale grey ware, with orange touch to outer surface. Fine sand filler. ? 13th century.
- No. 288. Sherd of green glazed, cream slipped jug, with raised decoration. A.D. 1300-1350.
- No. 289. Fragment of dish or bowl of buff, sandy ware, with green speckled clear glaze externally. 14th-15th century.
- No. 291. Sherd of 'tiger' stoneware, ? 17th century.
- No. 292. Small sherd of imported Chinese porcelain, — ? 18th cent.

Tile

From Nos. 7, 9, and 10, The Park. Fragments Nos. 298-299, 300-318 and 323-325, respectively, of old hand made roof tile.

From Nos. 9 and 10, The Park. Fragments Nos. 320-322 and 326, respectively, of modern mass-produced roof tile.

DISPOSAL OF FINDS AND RECORDS.

The finds remain in the custody of the writer, pending establishment of contact with site owners who have moved since the excavation. In due course, details of disposal will be deposited at Castle Arch, together with the field book and notes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to the late J. Thompson and to Mrs. Thompson of No. 7, The Park, whose report of the finding of the flint projectile prompted these investigations and who willingly permitted trenching to start in their garden. Also to Mr. and Mrs. Hedley Gowans, then of No. 9 who not only permitted but helped in extensive work on their ground and provided, at their own expense, excellent refreshments.

Mr. L. Martin, then of No. 10, has a special claim to gratitude, inasmuch as his property was up for sale and our work thereon could have hindered its disposal.

Mr. K.W.E. Gravett, M.Sc. (Eng.) F.S.A. kindly visited the site at an early stage and his suggestion as to the probability of a threshing floor and barn facilitated purposeful extensions of the excavation which confirmed his theory. I am most grateful for his note on the general nature of such floors.

Other welcome helpers were, Mr. D.J. Turner, B. Sc. F.S.A., who assessed the pottery, Mr. John Belcher, B.A., who prepared the plans for this report and Mr. S.J. Totman, who read extensively in manorial and other records, in the hope of identifying the vanished buildings.

The excavation was directed by the late A. S. Gilbert, C.B.E., LL.M., with his habitual energy and unfailing kindness and consideration for all his helpers. He was prevented from writing this report by an excess of voluntary duties and the onset of ultimately fatal ill-health.

That a report is now possible is due to the efforts of Mrs. Gilbert who, in a time of great stress and sorrow, made it a first consideration to transmit her late husband's archaeological papers and material to safe hands. It is hoped that this and later publications may prove the most acceptable thanks she can be offered.

REFERENCES

1. Turner, D.J. *The London Naturalist*, 45, 100-4.
2. Johnston, D. E. 'A Mesolithic site in West Ewell.' *Sy. A.C.*, 67, 1970, 21-8.
3. SRO 174/1/3