

Excavations at 32 Burleigh Avenue, Wallington, 1921 and 1976

by CLIVE ORTON

LOCATION AND HISTORY OF SITE

The site (TQ 2852 6501) lies on the south-eastern crest of a small outcrop of Thanet Sand overlooking a valley in which a branch of the River Wandle may have run before it was diverted c1700 (see fig 1). In 1921 the remains of Wallington Chapel, demolished in 1797 (*VCH* 4, 169), were excavated by Mrs J.E. Birch on land that now mainly forms the back garden of 32 Burleigh Avenue (Major 1925, 114). This enigmatic building has been much discussed (eg by Lysons (1792, 66), Manning and Bray (1804, 267), Birch (1925), Molesworth-Roberts (1937, 14-8) and Jones (1970, 30)) but its origin and purpose remain obscure. The discovery in 1976 of part of a human skull in the front garden led to a further excavation, directed by the author on behalf of the Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society.

THE 1921 EXCAVATION

This section is based on a plan made at the time, copies of which are in the possession of the BCWAS and the Sutton Libraries and Arts Services. It shows a rectangular 'chapel' and a roughly circular 'hut', in the locations shown on fig 1. The chapel is shown as a stone building, 29 ft 6 in by 18 ft 6 in (9 m by 5.6 m) externally and 24 ft by 13 ft (7.3 m by 4.0 m) internally, with chalk and flint footings in lime mortar, and a floor of apparently similar material. The 'hut' is pear-shaped, and measures 7 ft by 6 ft (2.1 m by 1.8 m), with a 'floor of flints rammed into clay' and a 'threshold of Godstone Stone'. The interpretation of this feature as a hut seems improbable.

THE 1976 EXCAVATION

A description of all contexts and a summary catalogue of the finds can be found in the archival report (see below, p 81). Only the main features, together with evidence for their dating and function, will be described here.

The subsoil is a yellow sandy clay, with a varying proportion of sand to clay, presumably derived from the Thanet Sand. Although not all features were stratigraphically related, their chronological order appears to be:

(a) *the 'oven'*

This was a circular feature, dug to a depth of 9 in (0.23 m) into the subsoil, and through at least 2 in (50 mm) of topsoil. There was no evidence for an above-



Fig 1 32 Burleigh Avenue, Wallington: location map.

ground structure. The bottom was saucer-shaped and 3 ft 3 in (1.0 m) in diameter, and the sides were slightly undercut. The walls and floor consisted of reddened sandy clay, 1 to 1½ in (25 to 40 mm) thick: beneath the floor was about the same thickness of yellow sandy clay with patches of reddening and pieces of charcoal, while below this was a layer of charcoal, varying in thickness from 1¼ in in the west to 3 in in the east (30 to 75 mm). In the charcoal was one burnt sherd, in a soft hand-made fabric with abundant fine shell temper, of unknown date. Samples of the floor were taken for palaeomagnetic dating, but the results were inconclusive because the material was magnetically unstable and half the samples had to be rejected. The most likely dates from the Iron Age onwards are AD 120–340, c630–760 and 1170–1540, but the only dates that are statistically improbable are 1650–1870, and the 5th and 10th centuries.

An apparently primary fill in the north-west part of the feature, consisting of a dark brown clayey soil with much charcoal, contained one Iron Age and one Roman sherd, and, lying on the oven floor, a large fragment of black flint-tempered pottery. It had horizontal wiping on the interior and vertical wiping on the exterior, cf Weybridge no 205 (Hanworth and Tomalin, 1977), published as Iron Age but possibly Saxon. This fragment is thought to be Saxon (R. Hanworth, pers comm), although similar Iron Age fabrics are found in Hertfordshire and elsewhere (C.M. Green, pers comm). The rest of the fill consisted of yellow sandy clay similar to the subsoil. It contained no finds and appeared to be a deliberate fill.

The angle between the floor and the western part of the wall was packed with flint blocks and a broken piece of fired clay, with a 'cigar-shaped' end; a similar fragment was found in the primary fill and five other, but less complete, pieces outside the oven. Such fragments have been identified as fire-bars (Woods 1974, 27). Opposite this packing was a 15 in (0.38 m) wide gap in the wall, although

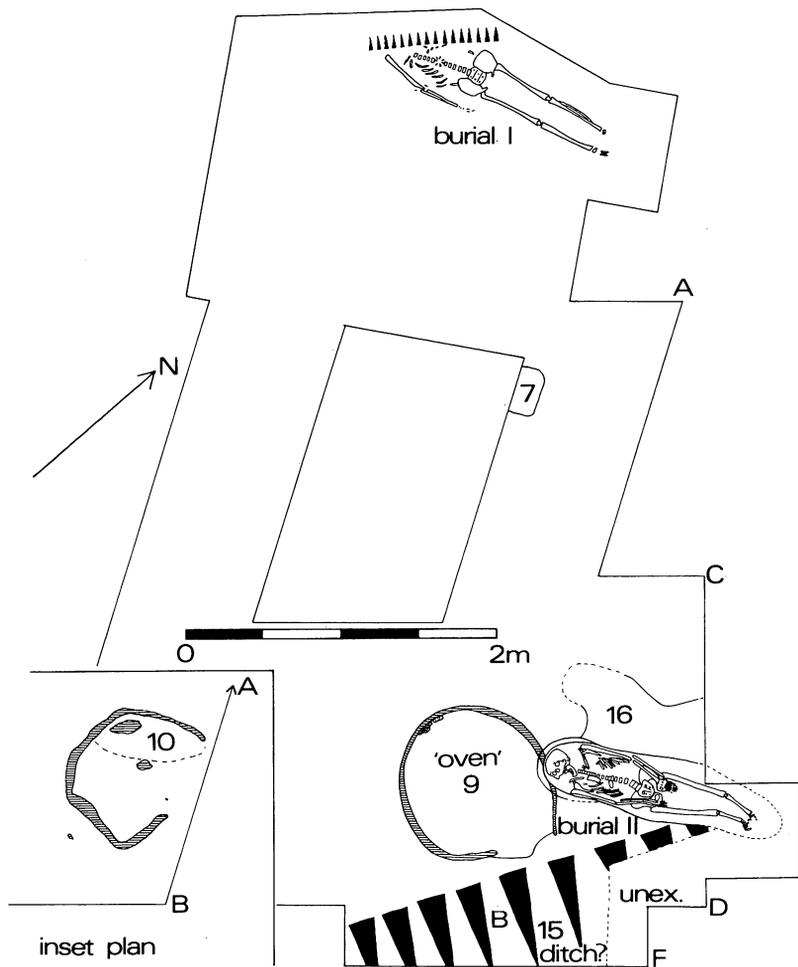


Fig 2 32 Burleigh Avenue, Wallington: plan of medieval and earlier features. Inset: plan at top of oven. (The numbers and letters refer to the archival report.)

the floor continued across slightly beyond the line of the wall. South of this gap the wall leant in sharply (see plan and inset, fig 2). Although this side of the oven had been damaged by a cut feature, this gap does seem to be an entrance to the oven, possibly leading from a destroyed flue.

Features of this type have been recorded as kilns, either Belgic/early Roman (Woods 1974) or Saxon (Arthur and Jope 1963). A similar but smaller feature, found below a Roman road in Ewell, was described as an oven (Lowther 1947, 18). This too had a layer of charcoal below the floor.

In the absence of wasters, it is safest to interpret this feature as a hearth or oven. The date is most likely to be Saxon, but an Iron Age date cannot be ruled out.

(b) the northern edge of a cut feature, possibly a ditch, and running NNE-SSW, was found just to the south-east of the oven (see fig 2), than which it is stratigraphically later. It cut into the subsoil to a depth of at least 15 in (0.38 m), and was filled with a mixture of topsoil and lumps of subsoil, suggesting deliberate back-filling. The finds included two small sherds, one probably of early medieval date.

(c) *the burials*

Two inhumations were found, both extended and aligned at 20° north of east (Burial 1) and 33° north of east (Burial 2) (see fig 2). Both were in shallow cuts with no trace of a coffin: that for Burial 1 penetrating 6 in (0.15 m) into the subsoil and that for Burial 2 10 in (0.25 m). Burial 2 cut the oven and overlay the 'ditch' fill (into which the feet bones had partly collapsed), and was sealed by a layer of chalk blocks dated to the 17th century (see below). Burial 1 had no stratigraphic relationships to other features, but is assumed to be roughly contemporary with Burial 2, which had one medieval sherd (not later than 12th or 13th century) in the grave fill.

Burial 1 was of an adult male, healthy, probably between 30 and 40 years of age, and 5 ft 10 in (1.77 m) in stature. Despite damage due to gardening, possible evidence survived of a healed wound on the top of the head, and clean cuts as from a sword on the right hand and the right side of the face and skull. There were no abnormalities or pathology.

Burial 2 was of a man of considerable age, perhaps 65, and 5 ft 6½ in (1.69 m) in stature. Thirteen teeth had been lost long before death and the one remaining molar was worn completely flat. Both bones of the right forearm, the right clavicle and a left rib showed healed fractures. There was one extra vertebra, osteoarthritis of the spine, and both shins were affected by Paget's disease.

The burials appear to date from between the 12/13th and 17th centuries. If, as seems likely, they can be associated with the Wallington Chapel, a pre-Dissolution date is probable.

(d) a shallow cut feature, itself cut by Burial 2 (see fig 2) contained no datable finds.

(e) *the 'floor'*

This is a chalk spread, covering the eastern part of the site and sealing all the features already described except for Burial 1. It consisted for the most part of two layers of well laid chalk blocks, each 1½–2 in (40–50 mm) thick and up to 6 in (0.15 m) long (not shown on fig 2), but thinned out towards the west. In places the upper layer consisted of flint or greensand blocks, standing proud of the surrounding chalk to a height of 1½–2 in (25–50 mm). Over the ditch the chalk had sunk, and had been levelled up with a deposit of flint, tile and brick. Sherds of post-medieval red ware and Hampshire/Surrey ware (Holling 1971),

together with one clay pipe bowl of mid 17th century date, suggest a mid-to-late 17th century date.

This feature is seen as the foundation for an area of hard-standing, probably with a flint and greensand surface, laid to the north of the Chapel while it was in use as a barn (it was described as such in Bishop Willis' visitation of 1725). The surface may have been robbed when the Chapel was demolished.

(f) an area of dumping across the centre of the site, consisting mainly of roof tiles and nails, but with small fragments of greensand and mortar. It partly overlies the chalk 'floor'. The dumping is thought to derive from the demolition of the Chapel.

Summary of other finds

Other finds included flint-working debris, fragments of Mayen lava and Millstone Grit, scatters of Iron Age, Roman, Saxon, early medieval and post-medieval pottery, but very little late medieval or Tudor pottery.

DISCUSSION

The scatter of Roman pottery probably represents agricultural activity in the immediate area. The Beddington villa, 1½ km to the north-west (VCH iv, 358) is a possible source.

If the 'most likely' palaeomagnetic date of c AD 630-760 is accepted, it suggests a location for the settlement of the 'Welsh' that gave Wallington its name (Ekwall 1960, gives the derivation of Wallington as *Weala-tun*, ie, the *tun* of the Welsh). The local topography (see fig 1) makes this area a suitable one for settlement in this period. Further opportunity to excavate in this area should be sought.

The decrease in pottery scatter after the 12th or 13th century suggests a change in land use, presumably from settlement or agriculture to grave-yard.

Finally, we have archaeological support for the documented use of the Wallington Chapel as a barn or outbuilding in the 17th century and its demolition in the 18th.

RECORDS AND FINDS

Copies of the archival ('level 3') report have been deposited with: Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society (also site notebook, finds notes, correspondence, etc); South-West London Archaeological Unit; Surrey Archaeological Society (Castle Arch, Guildford); Sutton Libraries and Arts Services (also the finds).

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