

# Medieval Building in Henley Wood, Chelsham

by L. L. KETTERINGHAM

The earthworks in Henley Wood, Chelsham, are registered as Ancient Monument no Surrey 51 (TQ 375585). They enclose an area of about 10 acres. Excavation took place, with permission from the then owner, Sir Walpole Greenwell, in 1912.<sup>1</sup> Although the banks and ditches were sectioned, the well fully excavated and a 'pit dwelling' (marked D on fig 1) partially examined, the excavators made no attempt to work on, or did not find, the remains of the main building which is the subject of this report.

During the spring and summer of 1974 unauthorised private digging took place which revealed the footings of a substantial building, almost certainly the manor of Chelsham Court (see below, p 000 and fig 3). The diggers had uncovered the north-west, north-east and south-east walls of the hall, walls A, B and C, with its central hearth and part of a continuation of wall C to the east, wall G, which is probably the site of the solar undercroft (see fig 2). Some pottery, which is datable from late 12th to 14th centuries, roof tiles and a large number of 'flint fingers', knapped at one end and probably used as pegs for the tiles, were found. Among the pottery were sherds of a Saintonge jug.

The digging was stopped before the entire building was excavated and this note refers only to what was found on each side of the walls and in some small areas which were cleared to floor level. It was measured and drawn by the writer with the Bourne Society Archaeological Group at the request of the Department of the Environment. (Fig 2.)

## CONSTRUCTION

The footings, lying north-east/south-west, consisted of sandstone blocks, flints, chalk and conglomerate (known as pudding stone) set in clay, 1 m wide standing from 30 to 45 cm high. Their condition generally is fair, as the conglomerate has deteriorated and small pebbles have loosened and fallen to the ground. The flints in the wall faces are not knapped, but the sandstone ashlar are still in good condition. The filling in the walls is chalk lumps, clay, pebbles and broken flints. This was probably a timber-framed building set on very substantial footings as there are insufficient fallen flints to indicate solid walls, unless the building was robbed to provide material for a later building elsewhere. Unfortunately not enough of the interior was cleared to see whether there were traces of pillar bases for aisle posts. There was no trace of mortar on the fallen flints but with footings of this width it seems probable that the walls were constructed of clay or cob.

The site has been back-filled.

# Henley Wood, Chelsham

## The Earthworks

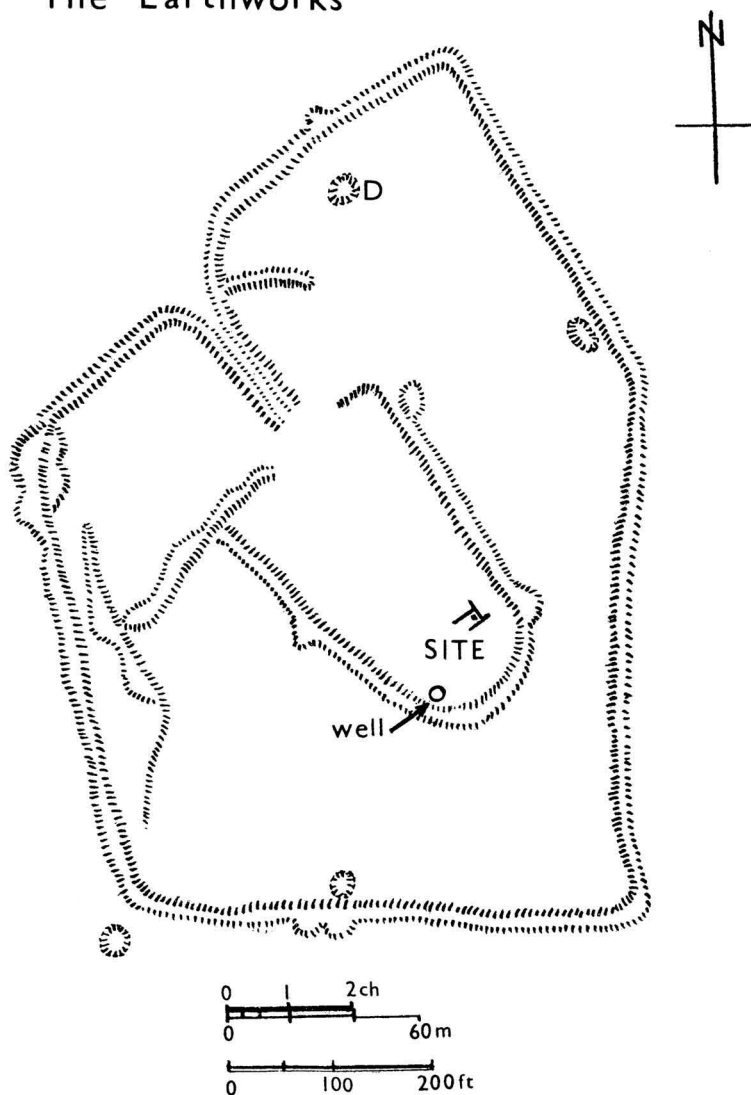


Fig 1 Earthworks in Henley Wood. *Based on a drawing published in the Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society, 1912. With kind permission*

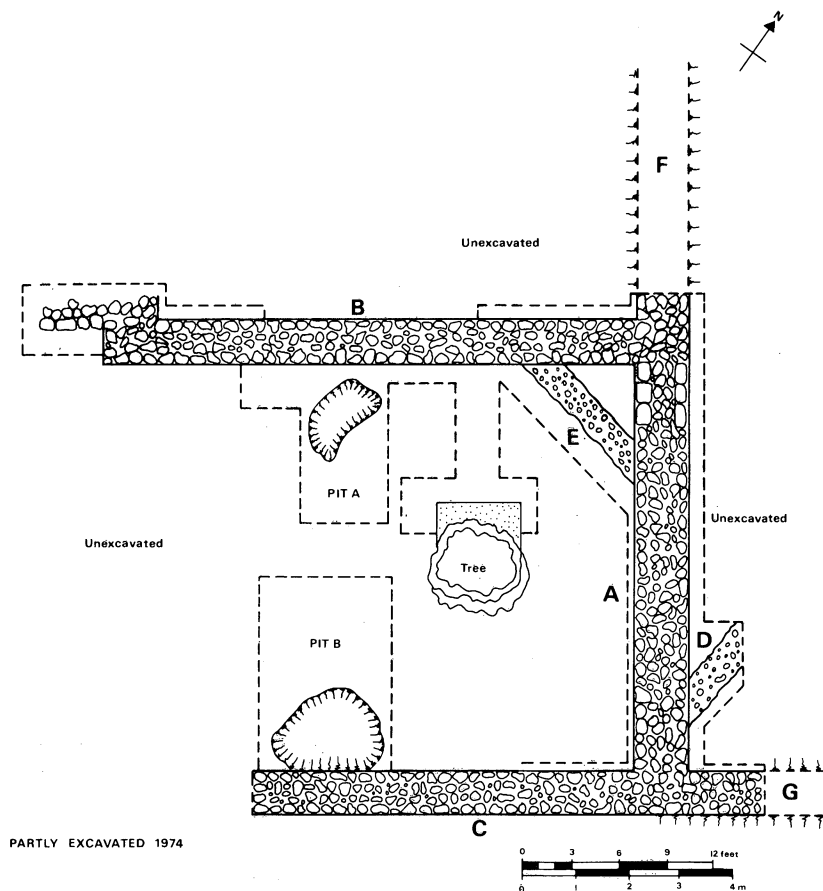


Fig 2 Plan of the site, as excavated in 1974

### The Roof

Along both sides of each wall were layers of roof tiles each measuring about 16×25 cm with two round peg holes. These tiles were rough but not very thick, averaging about 1 cm, most of them showing no grey core.

### The Hall

The Hall was 7.6 m wide internally. Wall B had been uncovered for a length of 10 m and wall C had been uncovered for 7.1 m. At the west end of wall B was a recess lined with well-cut sandstone blocks, possibly part of the main

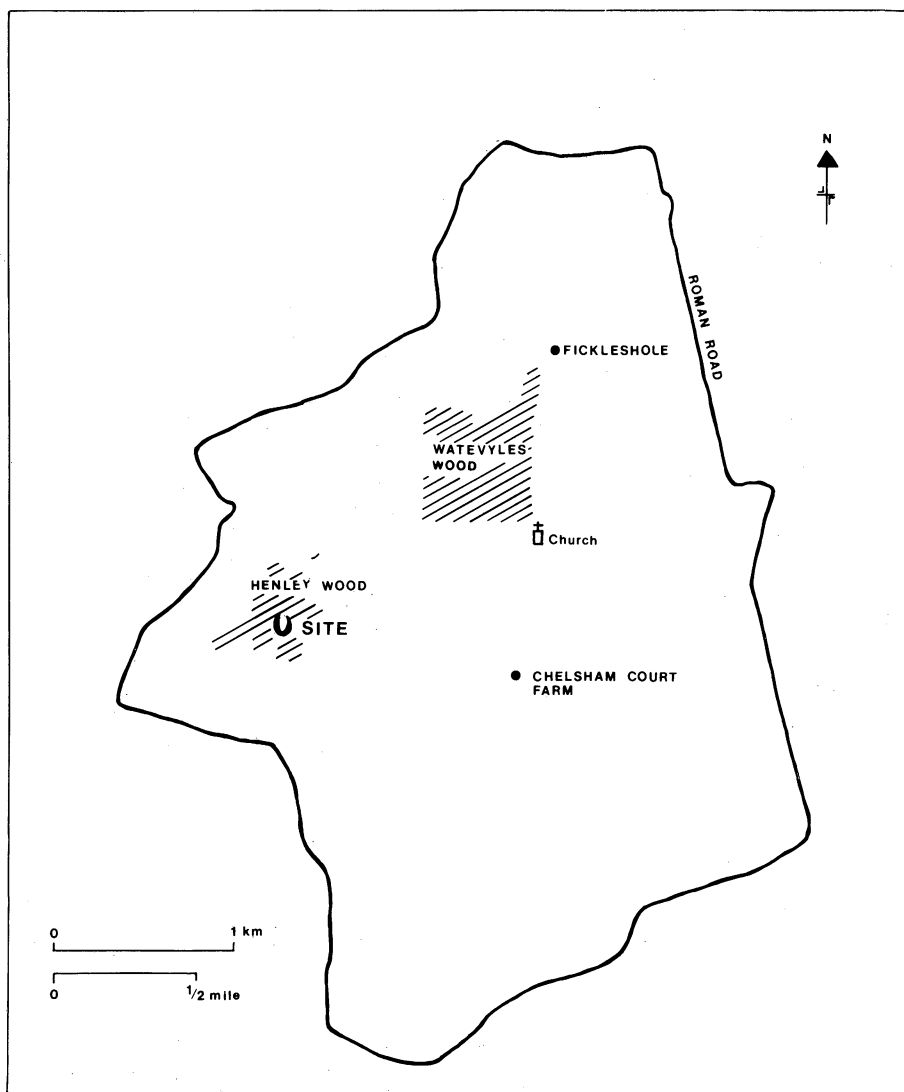


Fig 3 Chelsham parish, showing the relationship between the medieval sites

entrance doorway as it is situated opposite the entrances in the outer earthwork and the inner horseshoe-shaped bank.

### **The Hearth**

Towards the east end of the Hall was a large rectangular sandstone hearth of which most is still covered by a tree which grows over it. So far as it is possible to see it is about 1.5 m wide by about 2.3 m long and is positioned 1.2 m from and parallel to the solar wall, A.

### **The Solar Undercroft**

A continuation of wall C eastward for 1.3 m was uncovered, but this wall, G, continues as a bank, though it is not possible to state its length. A fine construction of ashlar blocks forms wall A for 1.2 m at the north end where it joins wall B. This may be an entrance into the solar undercroft. Wall A continues north-west for at least 4 m as wall F, presumably forming an L-shaped building with a solar block at least 11.5 m long. This part of wall F was not excavated but is visible as a bank.

### **An Earlier Building?**

Across the north-east corner of the Hall there was a low ridge of very hard-packed clay and stones, E, which may be connected with a similar ridge, D, lying diagonally from wall A northwards. If the two ridges meet at a projected point they could form the corner of a possibly rectangular earlier building.

### **The Floors**

Beaten earth, clay and gravel formed two levels inside the Hall, the earlier being about 15 cm lower than the later one.

### **The Pits**

Two pits were discovered within the Hall, but both had been filled in before the writer had seen them. The digger described them as follows:

Pit A. Close to wall B. This contained dark soft earth, part of a deer's jaw, broken animal bones, ashes and roof tile.

Pit B. Close to wall C. This contained black soil, especially near the bottom, with rough, corky pottery. In the higher levels were oyster shells, iron fragments, a piece of shaped sandstone and Lampsfield pottery.

## **SMALL FINDS**

### **Stone**

A piece of stone, weighing 1 kg, roughly 11×8×5 cm, rubbed smooth on one side but marked with short random grooves on the other was found near the centre of the Hall. The Department of the Environment submitted this stone to the laboratory, which reported it as calcareous tufa (a cave deposit found in Derbyshire and Yorkshire). It

appears to have been used as a rubber for either stone or wood in the same way as modern sandpaper is used.

A few small pieces of shaped sandstone, one of which showed very fine chisel marks from 1 mm to 3 mm apart. One piece of tooled stone bearing diagonal chisel marks showing short, light, jerking movements by the stonecutter. One piece of sandstone with a hole, possibly for a bolt.

### **Flint**

About 80 small finger shaped flints with knapped ends were collected from among the roof tiles at the sides of Wall B. It is possible that they were used in lieu of wooden pegs for holding the tiles on the laths.

### **Floor tile**

One small piece of floor tile with slightly bevelled edge, 2.8 cm thick, from the south side of Wall F. There was no trace of glaze.

### **Iron objects**

1 chisel, 18.5 cm long, 1.8×1 cm at the base of the blade, tapering. The shaft was rectangular. This was found stuck into Wall B above the later floor.

1 large nail, domed head, square shaft, 13 cm long, embedded in wood which, if all one piece, is 7.5 cm thick. There may have been two pieces of wood pierced by the nail, the lower piece being 2.5 cm thick and the upper piece about 4 cm thick. The nail head was separated from the wood by an iron disc.

Part of an ox-shoe near the centre of the Hall.

A small knife blade, 8 cm long by 1 cm wide, triangular section, broken tang, from the east side of Wall A.

An assortment of nails, mostly small, from the east side of Wall A. There were some larger nails towards the centre.

### **Bones**

The right lower jawbone of a deer and two leg bones of a goose, from the lower level of Pit A.

### **Oyster shells**

Scattered over the site.

## **POTTERY, by M. Saaler**

The pottery appears to date from the late 12th to 14th centuries and is typical of that found on medieval sites in north-east Surrey. There was one imported vessel; the rest is probably of local origin.

*Shell-filled ware* 20 sherds. Only traces of the shell filling were found in many of the sherds, which were of soft grey fabric with pink-brown surfaces. They were very similar to those found at Watendone, Kenley. (*SyAC* 69 (1973), 214)

*Limpsfield ware* 50 sherds, the colour ranging from pink-buff to brown or grey. Sand and grit temper was used. There was one rim, probably of a dish and two base sherds.

*Cream-slipped jug* 2 pieces; a red fabric with green glaze, similar to sherds found at Earlswood. (*SyAC* 70 (1974), 47-55)

*Off-white Surrey ware* 10 pieces, most of them probably from the same cooking pot. Green glaze inside.

*Imported* 33 sherds of a jug in fine, smooth, white fabric decorated with patchy green glaze. Distinct rilling inside. This vessel has been identified as a product of Saintonge, northern France, by J.G. Hurst.

*Miscellaneous* 1 flat brownish-pink sherd with fine sand temper, burnt on one side but marked on the other with a pattern of vertical and horizontal lines.

Apart from the one Limpsfield rim, all the above were body sherds.

This is not by any means the sum total of the pottery on this site as only a small proportion of the area was excavated to floor level.

## HISTORICAL NOTE

The manor of Chelsham is recorded in Domesday Book, but the entry is confusing. Robert de Wateville held two manors called Chelsham of Richard de Tonbridge, one of which had been held by Toki and the other by Wulfward. They were similar in size, contents and value, but Toki's manor claimed a church and was presumably the chief.

A hedge-count was undertaken over the entire parish of Chelsham by members of the Bourne Society under the direction of Geoffrey Hewlett, the results of which are described in his article in this volume (see p 91). This revealed a series of hedges grouped around Fickleshole Farm (Veckellesholes Water in 1323<sup>2</sup> and Fekellessole in 1351)<sup>3</sup>. The names refer to the deep pond by which the farm stands and may be interpreted as 'the cattle watering hole', a very valuable asset in this dry hill parish. Most of this group of hedges have ten species or more in a thirty yard length indicating a probable pre-Norman origin. There is one similar hedge by the church. It was noted that the London-Lewes Roman Road, the hedge along which is also reckoned to be over 1000 years old, passes close to Fickleshole and is connected to that holding by two more of these ancient hedges.

Adjacent to Fickleshole stood Watevyles Wood, cleared in 1718<sup>4</sup>. At the south-east corner of this wood stands St Leonard's Church, the earliest parts of which are said to date from c1185. Manning & Bray suggest that Fickleshole Farm stands on the site of Chelsham Watevyle house, but although Fickleshole is of very ancient origin it is more likely that, following the usual custom, the Norman manor house would have been built closer to the church. The house of Chelsham Watevyle would not appear to be identical with Fickleshole as both names appear in documents during the 14th century, although the manor lands must have included Fickleshole when the Domesday survey was made. The Watevyle family held Chelsham Watevyle until 1284 when John de Watevyle granted it to Walter de Codestone<sup>5</sup>. Thereafter the descent of the manor is well

documented although it is uncertain whether a house as well as land is being reported. The Codestone family held land and may have resided elsewhere.

The house and manor of Chelsham Court, the second Domesday manor, was held by the de Chelsham family as sub-tenants of the de Watevyles. They are first noted in 1177<sup>6</sup> and continued to hold it until 1314 when Walter de Codestone held both manors<sup>7</sup>. In 1322 his widow, Joan, held a court at Chelsham after which there is a gap in documentation until 1428 when John Uvedale appears as holding it<sup>8</sup>. There is no reason to suppose that the present Chelsham Court Farm is not on or very near the site of the original manor house, the descent of which is also well documented.

This leaves the building in Henley Wood unaccounted for. There can be no doubt of its importance in the 12th–14th centuries. Its construction, large hearth and deep well, besides its green glazed roof tiles found in the well in 1912<sup>9</sup>, point to its likely status as a manor house. The enclosing earthbanks appear to be prehistoric and a possible Neolithic pit containing 'a large handmade pot banded with knobs' together with a quantity of flint flakes were found within them in 1912<sup>10</sup>. However, an examination of the banks and ditches at this time produced only medieval pottery, tiles, etc., but this is perhaps not conclusive. In spite of its strong though mortarless walls it lasted less than 200 years but during that time it was thought important enough to sink a well 140 ft (42 m) deep.

It seems possible that there was never a Norman house of Chelsham Watevyle. Robert de Watevyle held other manors, some larger than Chelsham. The house in Henley Wood is some distance from Chelsham Court, about three quarters of a mile, and its demise appears to be at about the time when there is a gap in the history of Chelsham Court and a change of ownership.

## REFERENCES

- 1 *Proc Croydon Natur Hist Sci Soc* 7 (3) (1912), 80–101
- 2 *VCH* 4, 273
- 3 *M and B* 2, 423
- 4 *Ibid*
- 5 *VCH* 4, 271, 273
- 6 Meekings, C.A.F., ed *The 1235 Surrey Eyre*, 1, 1979, 179 (SyRS, 31)
- 7 *M and B* 2 424
- 8 *VCH* 4, 271–2
- 9 *Proc Croydon Natur Hist Sci Soc* 7 (3) (1912), 8
- 10 *Ibid*, 4

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