The M25 Motorway from Godstone to the Kent Boundary

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Rescue excavation and site watching carried out by the Bourne Society Archaeological Group, along the route of the M25 from TQ 352 529 to TQ 427 547 in 1975 and 1977, revealed sites and finds of Late Iron Age, Romano-British, Saxo-Norman, medieval and post-medieval date.

This paper describes work carried out on the potential route of the M25 motorway from Godstone to the Kent boundary (figs 1, 2). A magnetic scan carried out in 1976 produced only one area of positive responses (site 11). After stripping by the contractors, Messrs Bovis Civil Engineering, in 1977, the Bourne Society walked the route. As part of the contractors' operation, a drainage ditch had been cut along the north side of the route; it measured 82cm deep × 60cm wide at the top and it revealed clearly both the profile of the soil and all the features which it crossed. The London-Portslade Roman road (site 1) and the London-Lewes Roman road (site 9) were encountered; the remains of two medieval buildings were found (sites 3, 5) and also, extending for almost the whole distance, a thin scatter of pottery sherds, some of them datable to the late Iron Age or Romano-British period (sites 1, 2, 4, 5, 9) while others were medieval (sites 3–8, 10).

Environment and soil

The route runs along the belt of Gault Clay at the foot of the North Downs, south of the spring line on undulating ground, almost all of which is under grass. Several small streams crossed the line from north to south and there were deep pockets of bog in the gullies (in which were small deposits of what was pronounced to be poor-quality Fullers' Earth[1]). This section of the route, which begins at the London-Portslade Roman road to the west (the present A22) and ends a quarter of a mile east of the London-Lewes Roman road, passes south of the Titsey Roman villa and temple, and medieval village. Above, and parallel to it, runs the alleged North Downs trackway, marked on the OS maps, while to the south lie the Saxon villages of Godstone (*Walcnested*), Oxted (*Acsted*) and Limpsfield (*Lymnesfeld*). Surprisingly, no specifically Saxon sherds were found.

A fairly consistent profile throughout the route was *c*12cm of topsoil above a layer of white chalky gravel, about 38cm deep; the latter was the result of hillwash from the chalk, flints, and Blackheath Beds of the North Downs. It overlay orange pebbly clay, which rests on the surface of the grey-blue Gault. The land is therefore well watered and well drained, though the topsoil is only suitable for shallow ploughing or pasture – particularly for sheep.

Sites and Finds

SITE 1, TQ 3514 5308 (fig 2a) **Roman road**

The London-Portslade Roman road (Margary 1967, route 154) showed as a line of sandstone lumps in a cutting for the new roundabout at Godstone Corner, as reported in Ketteringham 1974, 13–17.

SITE 2, TQ 3522 5295 (fig 2a) **Romano-British pottery** in Godstone by-pass slip road.

Some sherds of Roman pottery were found at the edge of a shaw in a cutting for the roundabout (not illustrated).

SITE 3, TQ 3575 5285 (figs 2a; 3–6; 8) **Medieval Building 1,** General's Grove.

In the north side of the drainage trench, 612m from Godstone roundabout, were the remains of a pot which had been standing upright embedded in a hard-packed pebble layer, 23cm beneath the surface (fig 4 and discussion below). The soil profile was disturbed in this area over a length of 11m. Many Saxo-Norman, medieval and Romano-British sherds were present in the spoil heaps from the ditch, which also contained lumps of red burnt clay and large rough flints.

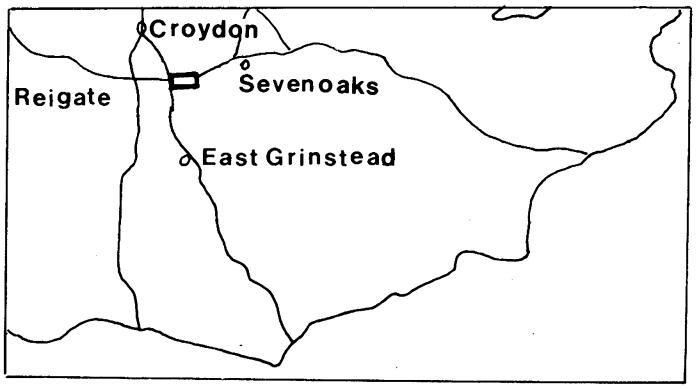
A strip, 4m wide × 12m long, was consequently opened along the route on the south side of the ditch to examine more of the disturbed area. Almost immediately some medieval and RB sherds were recovered to a depth of about 14cm. Below this there were no RB sherds, but medieval pottery became more frequent, probably due to medieval disturbance of the topsoil when Medieval Building 1 was erected (Bird *et al* 1980, 240, fig 5).

Room 1 (figs 3, 4)

At a depth of 50cm, a packed pebble layer appeared (fig 4, layer 4) and was recognised as a floor lying between two wall footings, A and C (fig 3). These footings consisted of sandstone lumps and flints set in clay, one or two courses deep and 1.2m wide, and were joined by a cross-wall, B. Thus room 1 measured 3.8m wide internally, but a total length was not obtainable as it continued northwards into the field outside the motorway area. The packed pebble floor (fig 4, layer 4) was clean, except for a small area of blackened soil and charcoal near the corner of wall-footings A and B, which could have resulted from a burnt wooden object. The footings of cross-wall B were 1.5m wide. Wall C was not so well defined, but it contained two settings of stones around shallow depressions, presumably post-bases as they were hardly deep enough to be termed postholes. Room 1 produced a very considerable amount of pottery (fig 8). No hearth was found, but the red burnt clay which had been noticed in the spoil heaps of the drainage ditch nearby may have come from one that had been destroyed.

The pottery in Room 1 falls roughly into three types. Six representative pieces were submitted to M J G Russell for microscopic examination and his report with petrological analysis is on Microfiche 5–7. The main types are: a) vesiculated ware which comprised about one third of the assemblage; b) a grey gritty ware; and c) a grey ware with a black surface. Over 80 different pots could be identified.

In the north side of the drainage trench (fig 3), within the area of the extension of the building northwards into the field, were the remains of a large pot (figs 4, 5), 28cm tall, standing upright at a depth of 60cm. This pot stood in a small pit which had been cut through the hard-packed pebble layer, the presumed floor of the building, into a hard stony brownish clay and gravel (fig 4, layer 5). The upper 23cm of the pot protruded above layer 4, while its base may have rested on a small sandstone block, although when found there was a gap of 5cm between the base sherds and the stone; its base appears to be flat, which is unusual. The pot may have been placed within the small pit to prevent it overturning; part way up its sides it was coated with soot, but inside it was clean. Seven cm above its top there was a layer of charcoal and blackened soil (layer 2), which could have resulted from the burning of the thatched roof of the building. Although layer 2 was 28cm above the pebble floor (layer 4), it may be that the building was abandoned for some time before the thatch was burnt and that soil (layer 3) had accumulated over the floor, particularly if the floor was slightly lower than the surface of the field around it, having been levelled by its builders – hence the reversed strata. The fabric of the pot is Vesiculated Ware Fabric 2, described on Microfiche 5–6.



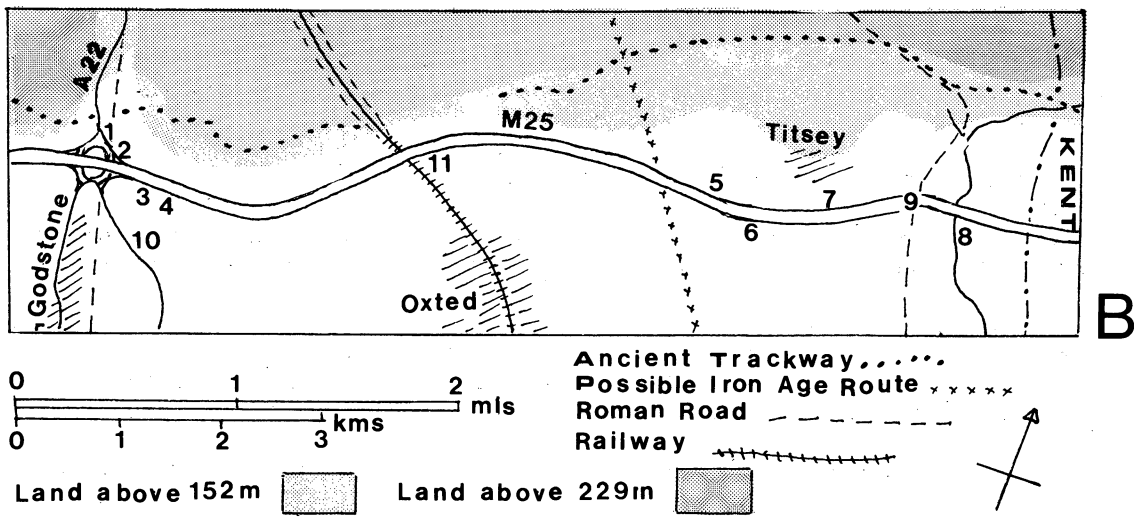


Fig 1. M25 motorway. Location maps

Room 2 (fig 3)

The contractors allowed only three weekends for work on this site, so in view of the shortness of time it was decided to follow wall A southwards as far as possible in order to obtain some idea of the length of the building, while leaving its northern end, which projected beneath the ditch and into the field, for possible future excavation.

Wall A continued south for a further 7.3m when it was joined at right-angles by the footings of wall D, of which 1m was uncovered. Wall C presumably extended south, parallel to wall A, but it was not uncovered owing to lack of time. If so, the internal measurements of Room 2, provided it was rectangular, would have been 4.5m × 3.8m. There was only time to clear a small strip of the floor in room 2, alongside wall A. It was also of packed gravel, but very dirty and muddy compared with that in room 1. By contrast, there was very little pottery in room 2.

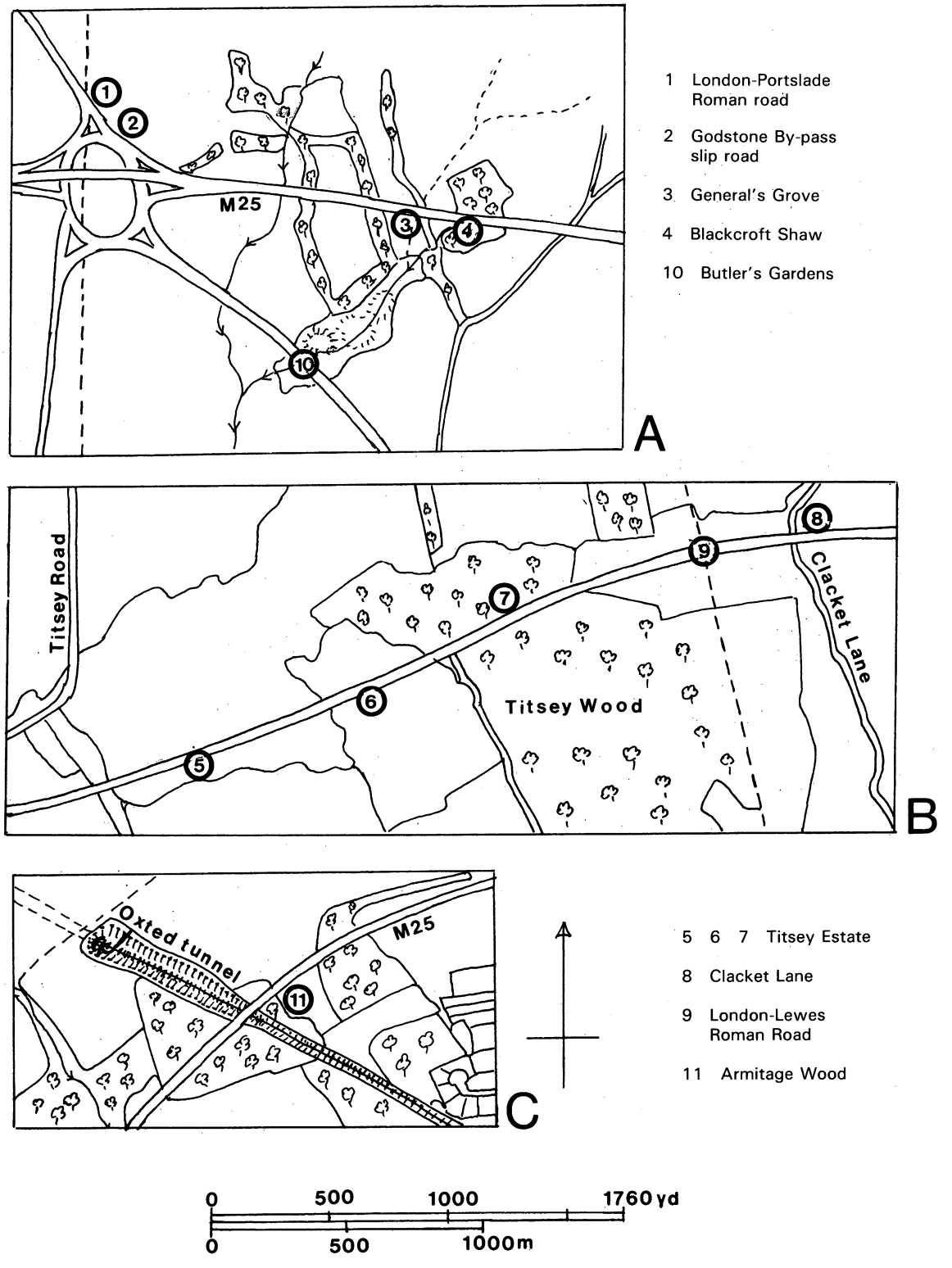


Fig 2. M25 motorway. Distribution maps of sites

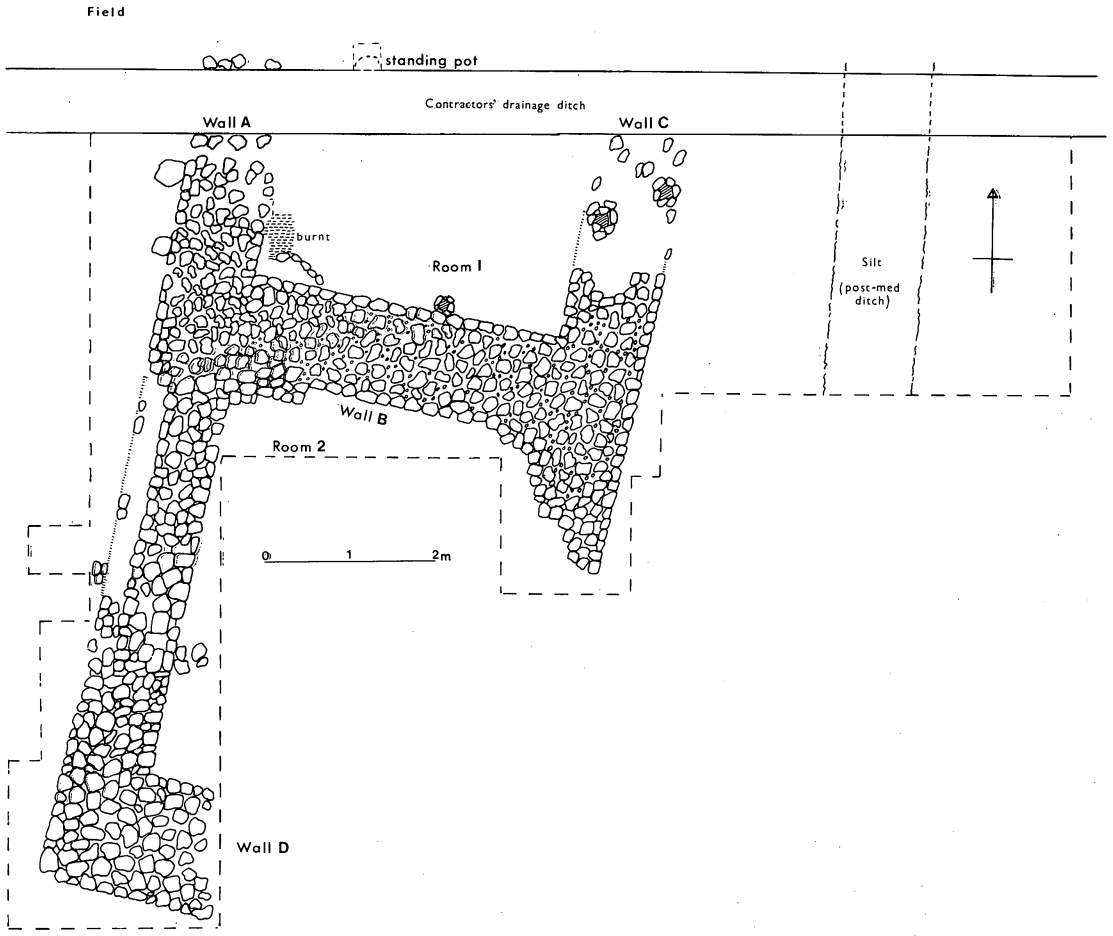


Fig 3. M25 motorway. Site 3, Medieval Building 1: site plan

The wide shallow footings of the building suggest that the walls above them were probably constructed of turf, cob or clay lump and, as no roof tile sherds were found, the roof was probably of thatch, turf, or shingles. The building was either a long, narrow house, of which the south end was divided from the rest by a thick cob or turf wall and possibly used for housing animals or stores (as suggested in the reconstruction drawing, fig 6), or it was part of a larger building mostly lying outside the motorway area. No evidence for drainage was found in room 2, but if the room was used for stalling animals, which was inferred from the condition of the floor, there could have been some – since the land slopes to the south – in the unexcavated part of Wall D.

There seems no reason to suppose that a narrow house, with cob walls as thick as these must have been, should not stand for a considerable time; 200–300 years would be possible, provided the roof was well kept. Wood (1963, 275) describes a thatched cob wall still standing in Brightwell churchyard, Oxfordshire, which may date back to the 12th century. However, the pottery evidence here suggests that the occupation of Building 1 probably lasted from the early to mid 13th century.

Later use (fig 3)

Evidence of later land-use was provided by a V-shaped ditch, crossing the site 2m to the east of wall C, in which were found sherds of 18th/19th century pottery and a clay pipe

stem. The bottom of the ditch was 10cm above the level of the floor in room 1 (fig 4, layer 4), and smelt strongly of cow dung. At this point the excavation had to be abandoned.

SITE 4, TQ 3585 5280 (figs 2a; 8) **Medieval pottery at Blackcroft Shaw**

This entire strip of woodland, a length of 200m, had been grubbed out by the contractors. The land was broken and boggy in parts but surface finds included 13th/14th century pottery with Limpsfield and Surrey White wares (fig 8). There were small sherds of RB pottery, but no rims.

SITE 5, TQ 4126 5410 (figs 2b; 8–9) **Medieval Building 2**

64m east of Titsey Road, where the land rises beyond the deep valley through which the road and the river Eden run, was another medieval site, but largely destroyed by the contractors' machines because it was much closer to the surface. It was only possible to uncover what was virtually just a spread of flints and a few sandstone blocks, with 12th/13th century pottery. Among the flints was a piece of Patchgrove ware (fig 9), of the late Iron Age/Romano-British transition. It may have been residual in the clay with which the flints were bonded (see pottery report below).

Throughout the length of the route between Titsey Road and Clacket Lane, surface finds included many Romano-British sherds. This was probably due to the proximity of the Titsey Roman villa and temple, and presumed associated settlement.

SITE 6, TQ 4156 5428 (fig 2b) **Medieval pottery**

A spread of 13th/14th century pottery on the south side of the road.

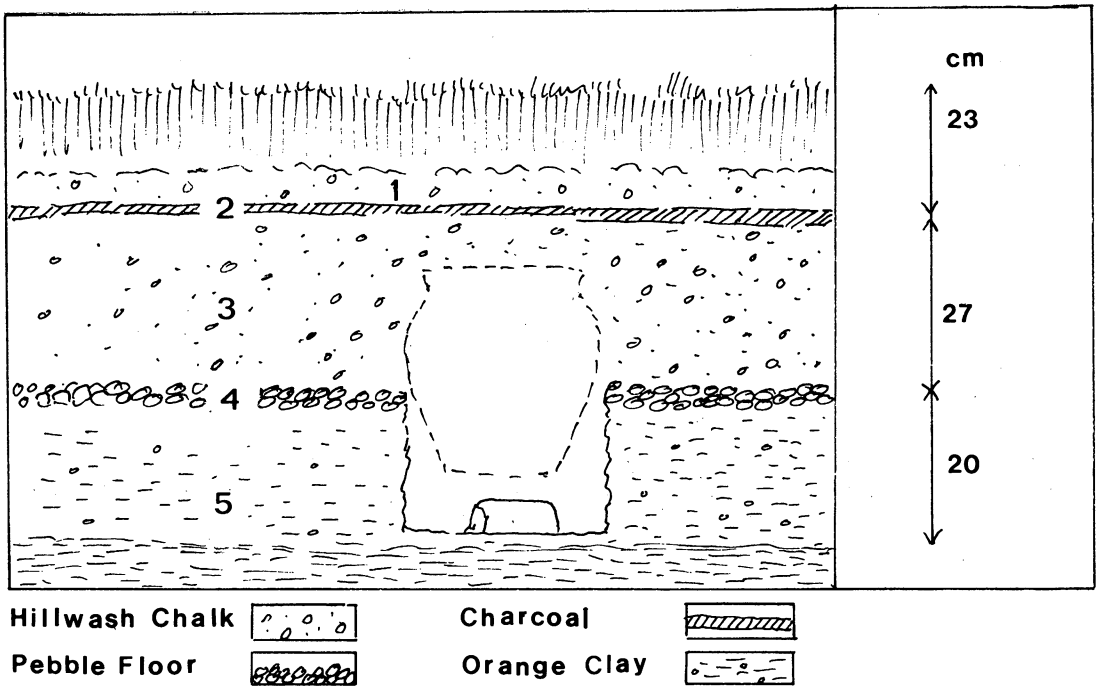


Fig 4. M25 motorway. Site 3, Medieval Building 1: schematic section through Room 1

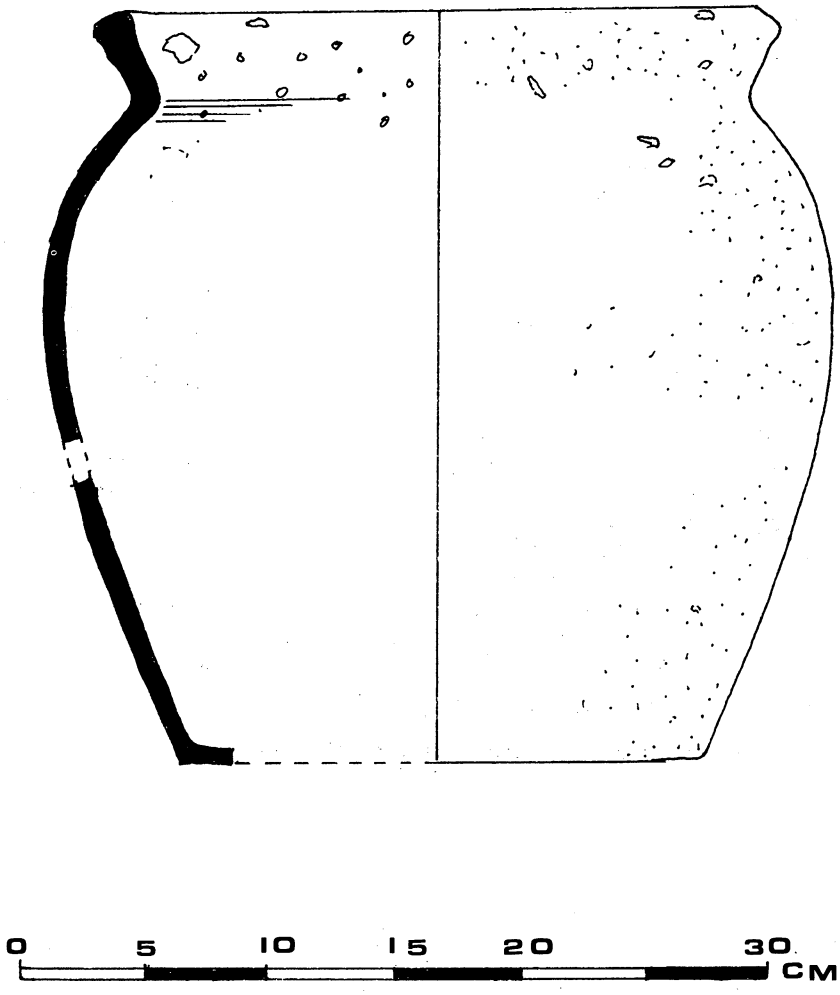


Fig 5. M25 motorway. Site 3, Medieval Building 1: jar set in floor of Room 1

SITE 7, TQ 4179 5442 (fig 2b) **Medieval pottery**

A spread of 13th/14th century pottery on the north side of the road.

SITE 8, TQ 4247 5462 (fig 2b) **Medieval pottery**

A spread of 13th/14th century pottery on the east side of Clacket Lane. The last three sites (6–8) were excavated by the contractors' machines before it was possible to attend to them. Neither superficial examination nor the magnetic scan had revealed any trace of buildings.

SITE 9, TQ 4224 5459 (fig 2b) **The London-Lewes Roman road** (Margary 1967, route 14)

This was sectioned and measured in 1975, as reported in *SyAS Bull,* **117,** dated May/June 1975.

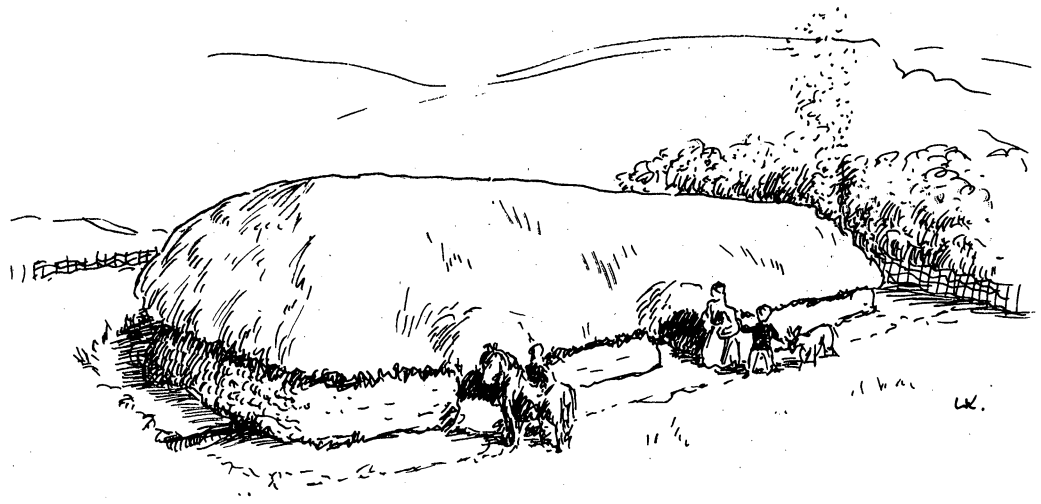


Fig 6. M25 motorway. Site 3, Medieval Building 1: possible reconstruction

SITE 10, TQ 3556 5255 (fig 2a) **Butler's Gardens moated site**

Part of the M25 construction was completed in 1972, when a by-pass was made from Godstone Corner roundabout to the A25, passing within 15m of the moated site known as Butler's Gardens (Scheduled AM 138). It is likely that the moat surrounded a house owned by the le Botiler family by whose name, as Butler, the area is still known. Blackcroft Shaw (see Site 4 above) was known until the mid 20th century as Butler's Lower Blackcroft, and pottery of the 14th century was found at both sites. A short report appeared in *SyAS Bull,* **91,** dated October 1972.

The le Boteler, or Botiler, family appears in Godstone documents from 1248 to 1328 (Lambert 1929, 174), and Medieval Building 1 (Site 3 above), although earlier, lies within the estate. (It is hoped that a short survey of the medieval buildings, both standing and excavated, of this area will form the subject of a forthcoming paper.)

SITE 11, TQ 3805 5395 (figs 2c; 7) **19th century shed, Armitage Wood,** by A J Clark

This site was discovered in the course of the magnetic scan just north-east of where the motorway route was to cross the railway. A subsequent detailed magnetic survey produced a rectangular pattern of anomalies that seemed worth investigating (fig 7), and a small excavation was undertaken.

Below the topsoil, the whole area was covered to a depth of 75cm with small broken flints and dirty clay, mixed in some parts with scatters of ferruginous sandstone, reddened presumably by fire and resembling roasted ore. These were quite strongly magnetic and probably the cause of most of the magnetometer response, although there were no iron residues of any sort that might have resulted from smelting or forging. The deposit also contained sherds of 19th century date and a few clay pipe stems. There was considerable blackening of the soil and flecks of charcoal in one area, but no foundations of any sort. Other separate anomalies close to the site proved to be caused by two very large iron nails, each weighing over 230gm, and a broken iron coupling plate used to fasten railway lines together. There were several small scatters of 1–1½ inch nails. The evidence leaves no doubt that this corner of the field had been used during the construction of the railway. Although not apparent in the excavation, the rectilinear plan of the magnetic anomalies strongly suggests that the bulk of the magnetic materials had once been contained within

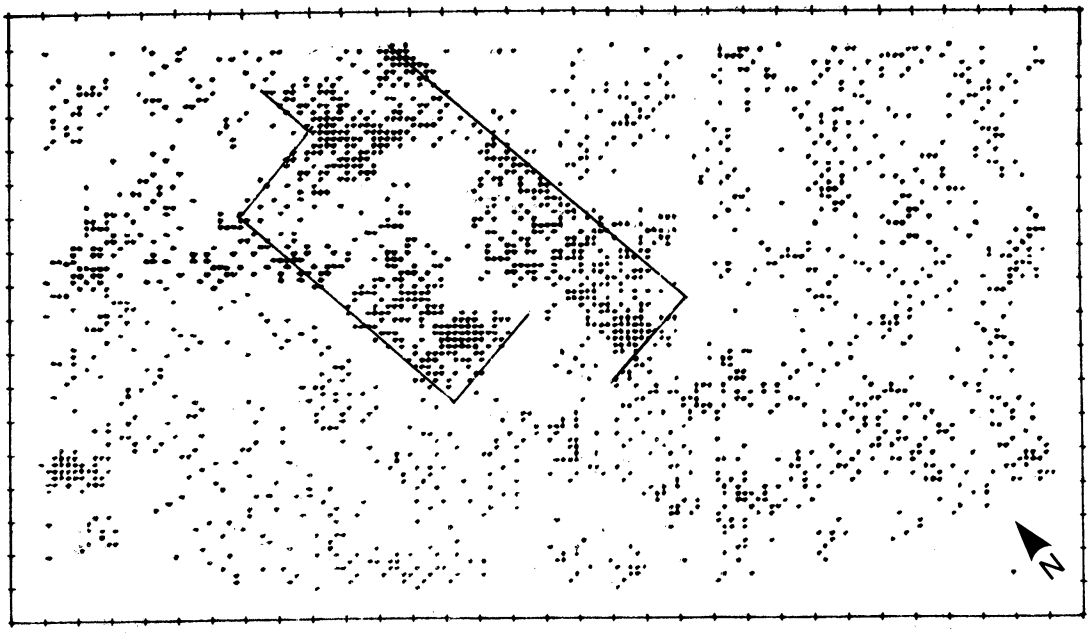


Fig 7. M25 motorway. Site 11, 19th century shed, Armitage Wood. Computer dot density plot of the fluxgate gradiometer survey. The survey area is 30m × 16m, with marginal ticks at 1m intervals. The rectilinear area of high readings is outlined

the walls of a building, very likely a wooden shed or bunker that was removed after the railway work had been completed, leaving no direct evidence of its existence. The broken flints seem to have been laid as hardstanding, probably for access from Chalk Pit Lane to the railway line during its construction.

Conclusion

The stretch of country through which this section of the M25 motorway runs was used and probably cultivated by the Late Iron Age and Romano-British people. It carried small farmsteads possibly from pre-Norman times and has been farmed ever since. The apparent lack of evidence for activity between the end of the Roman occupation and the early medieval period is striking, but seems unlikely to be conclusive. The absence of worked flints illustrates the preference of the earlier prehistoric peoples for the hills, where scatters of flint tools are common.

The pottery (figs 8–9)

There was a scatter of pottery ranging from Iron Age to Victorian along almost the whole of the route under observation. The most important assemblage came from site 3 (Medieval Building 1) and appears to be similar to some of the pottery found at Cherchefelle/Reigate Old Vicarage (Jones 1986). The petrological analysis by M J G Russell, and catalogue of the illustrated pottery are on Microfiche 2–7.

Site 1, the London-Portslade Roman road

Small two-handled Roman flagon in sandy buff ware (Ketteringham 1974, fig 3); eleven sherds of very coarse black ware with abundant crushed flint temper.

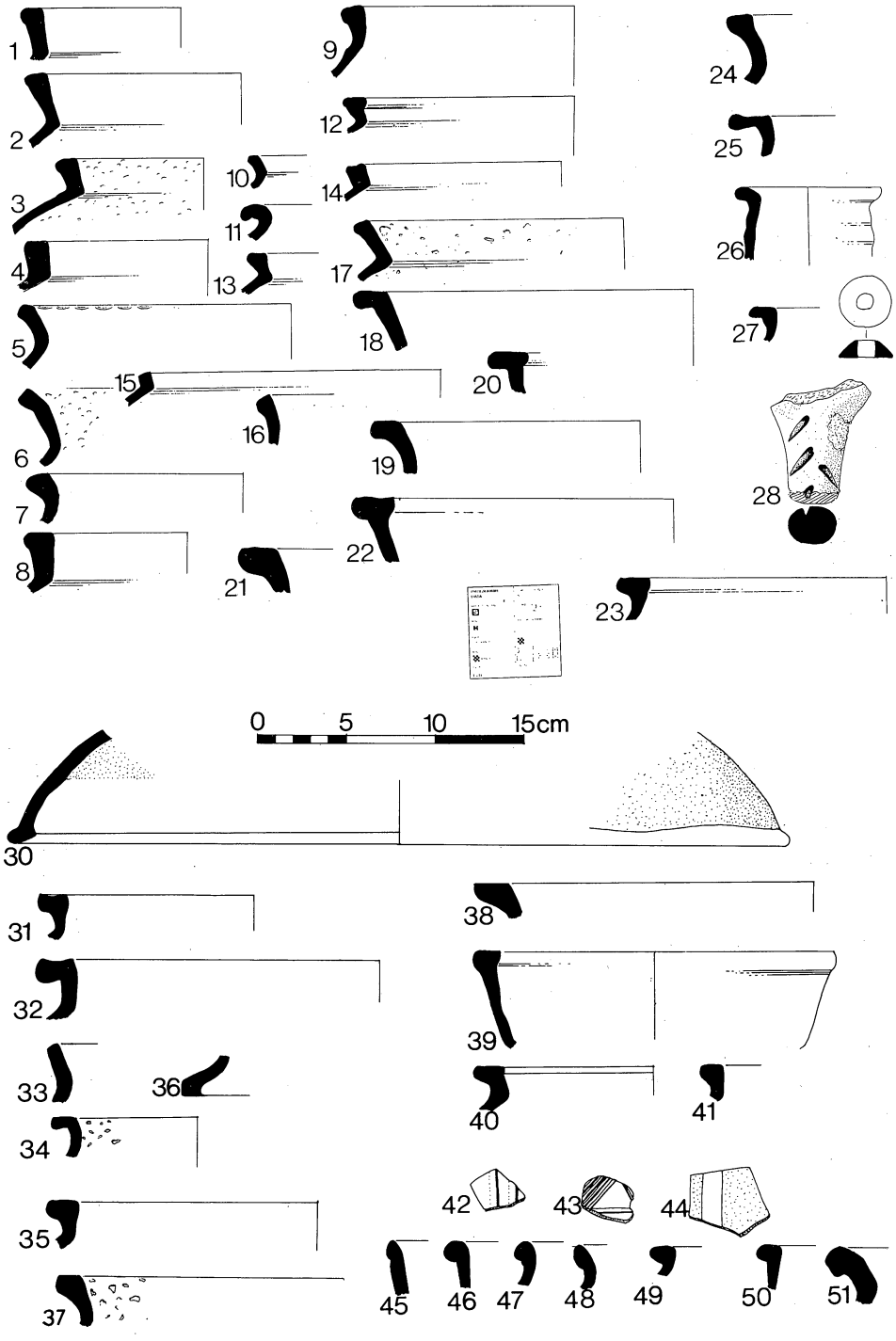


Fig 8. M25 motorway. Pottery: nos 1–41, from Site 3; nos 42–44, from Site 4; nos 45–51, from Sites 5–9. Scale 1:4

Site 3, Medieval Building 1 (fig 8, nos 1–41)

In the short time available, 287 sherds (weight 10lb 12oz) were found (fig 8, nos 1–41) and preliminary examination by magnification × 10 classified them roughly into two categories, vesiculated and sandy; there were no significant chalk or flint inclusions. Of these two categories, further subdivision provided percentages as follows:

Vesiculated (shelly/quartz), Fabrics 1 and 2 (see Microfiche 5–6)	9.4%
sandy fine	0.7
sandy fine/medium, smooth and rough (gritty)	31.0
sandy/medium coarse and coarse (gritty)	48.8
sandy/soapy surfaced	10.1

No decoration of any kind was found except for one green-glazed oxidised sherd which was probably intrusive. Although the appearance of the sandy vessels shows considerable differences in colour, and the density of the fabric varies from soft and friable to moderately hard, the constituents of the fabric are fairly uniform and differ only in the proportion of fine sand to coarser sand. The majority of the sherds had grey, grey/brown and black surfaces but some, particularly those of the vesiculated ware, had a bright orange 'skin'.

There was no stratification, as all the sherds were found on, beside or above the floor of the building, but all were well below the present surface of the field. Almost all the sherds from this site came from cooking pots or jars, were unglazed, mostly rough to the touch, and heavily abraded. A few (fig 8, no 30), were better made, harder, and seem to be of a different ware, similar to that found on Site 4. The building can probably be placed in the Saxo-Norman period, 12th to early 13th century.

Site 4, Blackcroft Shaw (fig 8, nos 42–44)

The pottery from this area was a scatter of sherds (weight 2lb 11oz), apparently of a slightly later period than Site 3; no evidence of a building was found. Some of the sherds were in the late Saxo-Norman tradition, but there were also 18 green-glazed decorated sherds and a rod handle, all from jugs, possibly not later than mid to end 13th century. The percentages of wares were as follows:

sandy fine/medium	27.5%
sandy fine/medium harder, black surfaced; Fabric 4 (see Microfiche 6)	48.7
decorated green-glazed	22.5
single Roman sherd	1.3

Site 5, Medieval Building 2 (fig 9)

Among the scattered sandstone traces of a building on this site was a sherd from the neck and shoulder of a Patchgrove jar, of the late Iron Age/Romano-British transition, not

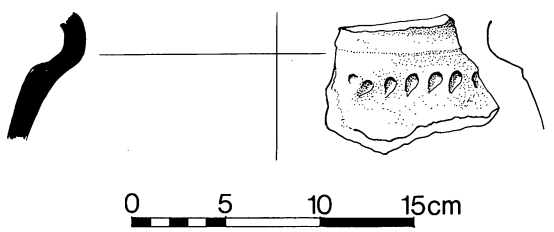


Fig 9. M25 motorway. Sherd of Patchgrove ware from Site 5

thought to have been contemporary with the building, which was probably similar to Medieval Building 1. The pot may have been residual in the clay with which the walls were bonded.

Sites 6, 7, 8, 9

Scatters of mostly 13th–14th century pottery and some Romano-British sherds were recovered, which may have been the result of waste thrown on to the fields. There were both Roman and medieval sites in the vicinity.

Fig 8, nos 45–51, are examples of Romano-British pottery scattered across the fields from Sites 5–9.

Site 10, Butlers Gardens

This small excavation was published in *SyAS Bull,* **91** (1972). It produced 36 sherds of well-made jugs, cooking pots etc, of 13th–14th century date, and four sherds of the sandy fine/medium type of an earlier period (not illustrated).

The finds are now deposited in the East Surrey Museum, Caterham.

NOTE

1 Information from the late E Stevens, former employee of Fullers Earth Union Ltd, Nutfield, Surrey

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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