

The Surrey Excavations Index

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Introduction

The Excavations Index for England

Since 1978 the National Archaeological Record (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England) has been compiling an index of archaeological excavations carried out in England. The Index has four main objectives:

- 1 To compile a list of all sites that have been excavated.
- 2 To locate the finds from excavations.
- 3 To locate the original documentary and visual archive from excavations.
- 4 To show which excavations have been published.

To date (July 1989) the Index comprises some 24,000 records covering the 47 counties of England. The last county index to be completed was that for London.

Compilation of the Index

The Excavations Index has been compiled on a county by county basis, aiming to provide over an eleven year period a rapid and comprehensive survey of all excavations carried out in England.

The most effective means of compiling the Index has proved to be the preparation of a basic list of known excavations from the record cards and linear files of the former Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division (now incorporated in the National Archaeological Record) and the county Sites and Monuments Records. The basic list will normally contain approximately 60 to 70% of the excavations eventually incorporated into the Index. This list is then supplemented by noting additional excavations described in published sources and from information supplied by individuals and institutions involved in the archaeology of the area. Such supplementary work is crucial in obtaining details of unpublished excavations or those excavations which have only been published in a very brief form.

Once this basic list is complete the most important work of the Index can take place: to locate wherever possible the original excavation archive and the finds for every act of excavation that has taken place in the county. A search is made of museums, libraries, county archaeological units etc for this material. Individual excavators are also contacted to provide further details of archive and find locations.

The importance of this work lies in the fact that no organisation has systematically recorded this information before for any county; in addition, the Index records details of excavation finds and archives held by any individual or institution either inside or outside the county. In this way the Excavations Index combines information from many disparate sources to provide a unique record of archaeological excavations throughout England.

Checking and Revision of the Index

Once compilation of an Index for a county has been completed the information is computerised in London and a number of primary checking procedures are carried out. This involves the checking of the computerised record against the original data entry sheets, then a number of checks to ensure internal consistency in coding and format. Final checking

then takes place to assess academic content and then to add any information received since compilation was completed.

The Excavations Index was begun in 1978 and for the majority of counties no updating has taken place since compilation was completed. The Index in some areas therefore needs substantial updating to include excavations which have taken place, reports which have since been published, and finds or archive transferred to museums. Some counties will therefore require additional compilation work to bring them up to a par with counties completed more recently in the south of England. Once this is done plans for the future maintenance of the Index can be put into effect. The information required to maintain the Index is essentially of two types:

- a) Basic information on site location, site type, bibliographic references, etc.
- b) The location of archive and finds.

Four major sources will be utilised to provide this information:

- a) Local, county and national journals, and other archaeological literature derived from the NAR.
- b) Regular contact with archaeological units, societies and Sites and Monuments Records.
- c) Museums.
- d) Individual excavators.

The Surrey Excavations Index

The Surrey Excavations Index was compiled by one of the authors (ES) between January and June 1987. During this time she was based in the Conservation and Archaeology Section (now Countryside and Heritage Division) of the Planning Department, Surrey County Council; the post was funded by the National Archaeological Record of RCHME.

The Index was compiled initially from the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) of the Planning Department. This SMR incorporates the old Ordnance Survey record cards. It also has its own computerised index which provided a basic list of excavations. This work was then supplemented by research in museums, especially Guildford; by bibliographic searches, particularly of the Surrey Archaeological Collections and Surrey Archaeological Society Bulletins; by correspondence with excavators; and by consulting the antiquities records of the former Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division. In June 1987 the number of excavations listed in the Surrey Index stood at just over 500.

The brief discussion which follows is based on statistics compiled by the NAR, and as future research will no doubt lead to correction and enhancement of the Index, the figures cited should be regarded only as approximations. This article is not concerned so much with details as the description and discussion of broader trends.

An Example

The following example from the Surrey Index illustrates the contents of a typical Index entry. Various fields of the entry employ abbreviations, and lists of abbreviations used are printed with every copy of the Index. In this example, the abbreviations used are:

COR	Correspondence
GUIFM	Guildford Museum
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
MAN	Manuscript (eg Reports and Drafts)
MPBW	Ministry of Public Buildings and Works
NEG	Negatives
NMR	National Monuments Record (RCHME)
NOT	Notes, Context Sheets etc

OS	Ordnance Survey
PHO	Photographs
PLN	Plans and Drawings
PRN	Primary Record Number
REP	Report
RO	Roman
SAM	Scheduled Ancient Monument
SLI	Slides
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record
SURAC	Surrey Archaeological Collections
WAVMSF	Farnham Museum (of the Waverley Museums Service)

Asterisks indicate that further information about a field which should be noted is to be found in the longer field called Remarks.

LOCATION INFORMATION

Quarter Sheet	SU 84 NE	SAM No:	120
Grid Ref:	SU 8517- 4783-	SMR No:	1715
Site Name:	SIX BELLS, FARNHAM PARK	County:	SURREY
PRN:	17465	District:	WAVERLEY
OS No:	5.00	Parish:	FARNHAM

EXCAVATION DETAILS

Excavated By:	RANKINE, W.F/ LOWTHER, A.W.G.		
Classification:	POTTERY KILNS, BATHS, VILLA		
Duration:	1946 - 1947	Auspices:	MPBW
Funding:	MPBW	Periods:	RO
Finds Location:	GUIFM WAVMSF		

ARCHIVE DETAIL

Location:	GUIFM*	NOT(Y)	PLN(Y)	PHO(Y)	NEG(Y)	SLI(Y)	COR(Y)	MAN()
	WAVMSF	()	()	(Y)	()	()	()	()
	NMR	()	()	(Y)	()	()	()	()

BIBLIOGRAPHY

JRS/37/1946-7/175	Type:NOT
SURAC/50/1949/22-3	NOT
SURAC/54/1953-4/47-57	REP

REMARKS: * AND TYPED REPORTS.HERE

The Distribution of Excavations

The main areas of Surrey where large numbers of excavations have taken place fall into four main categories (which are not mutually exclusive). These are: the historic urban centres of the county; the gravel quarries; sites of exceptional importance; and areas where usually a single excavator has been active. In discussing the first category it should be borne in mind that in Surrey urban centres are fewer and smaller than in most counties. Nevertheless it is an important category and comprises centres where continued urban development has necessitated a large amount of recent salvage work, particularly in Guildford, Staines, Reigate and Ewell (fig 1). This archaeological response to development has been due largely to the presence in Surrey of a number of archaeological institutions, both amateur and professional, especially the Surrey Archaeological Society, the Bourne Society, Guildford Museum and the archaeologists of the Countryside and Heritage Division

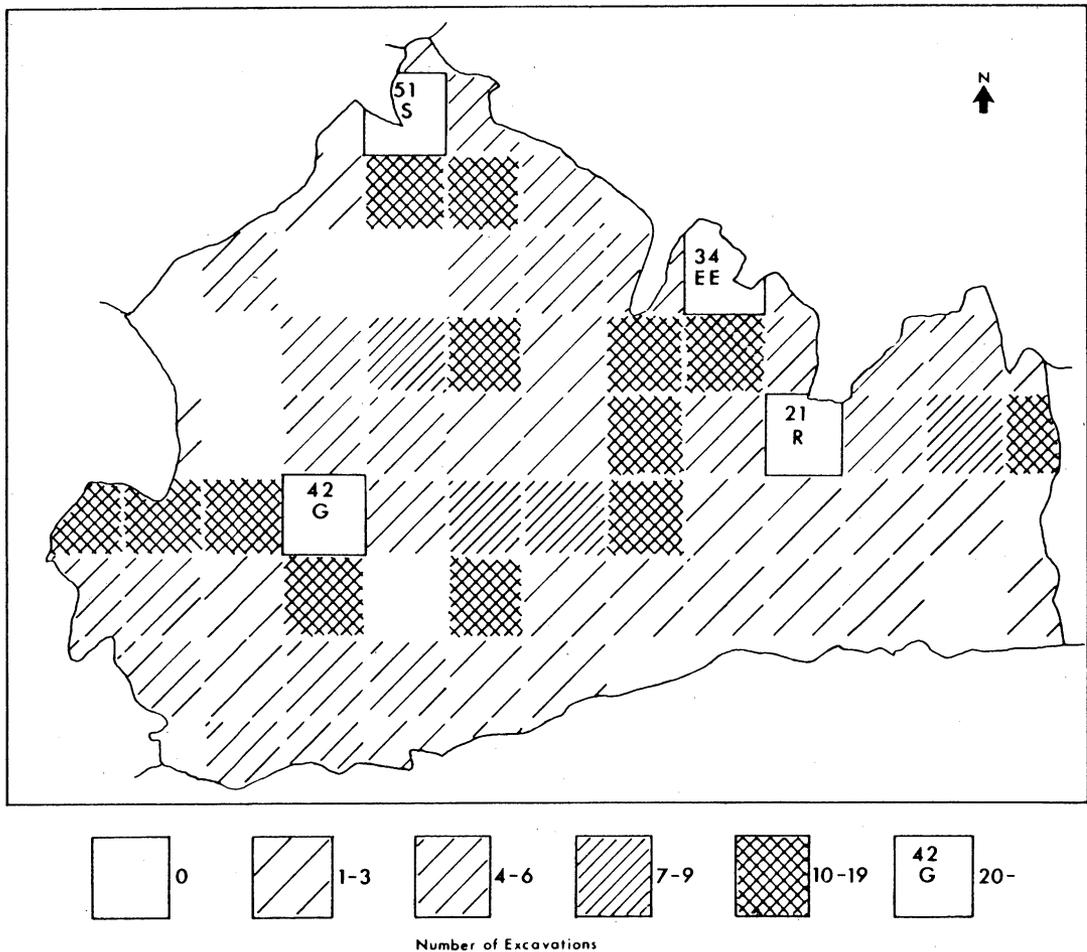


Fig 1. The distribution of excavations in Surrey. Each square is 25 sq km. Codes used for squares with 20 or more excavations are, from west to east: G-Guildford, S-Staines and Egham, EE-Epsom and Ewell, R-Reigate

of the Planning Department of Surrey County Council (fig 2). The latter organisation has already carried out at least five more salvage excavations in Staines since June 1987, which will be added to the Index in due course. The second category, the gravels, is concentrated in the parishes of Chertsey, Egham, Shepperton, Staines, Stanwell and Thorpe. In the past a very large number of chance finds have been collected from these areas (see, for example, the card index system at Weybridge Museum), but in more recent years Surrey County Council has carried out both small-scale excavation of the areas around find spots, as at the Abbey Meads gravel pit in 1985, and some large-scale excavations, for example, at Stanwell. The third category includes Chertsey Abbey and its tile kiln, excavated by Pocock and Grumbridge (1855), Shurlock and Angel (1861), Dr E Gardner (1922, 1928), Nevill (1934), Group Captain Knocker (1954) and Poulton (1984-85). The fourth category includes the large numbers of excavations in the parishes of Farnham and Frensham by W F Rankine, A W G Lowther and A G Wade.

Excavation Dates

The earliest recorded excavation in Surrey took place in 1790, when the Reverend J Douglas investigated a mound which contained an Early Bronze Age Beaker burial in the parish of Chiddingfold. There were 31 excavations in the 19th century. Important excavations include those at the sites of the ruined abbeys of Waverley and Chertsey; it is believed that the excavations at Chertsey Abbey (1855-1861) are the first in this country for which a photographic record exists (Poulton 1988). It is interesting that, in keeping with the rest of southern England at this time; a significant proportion of these 19th century

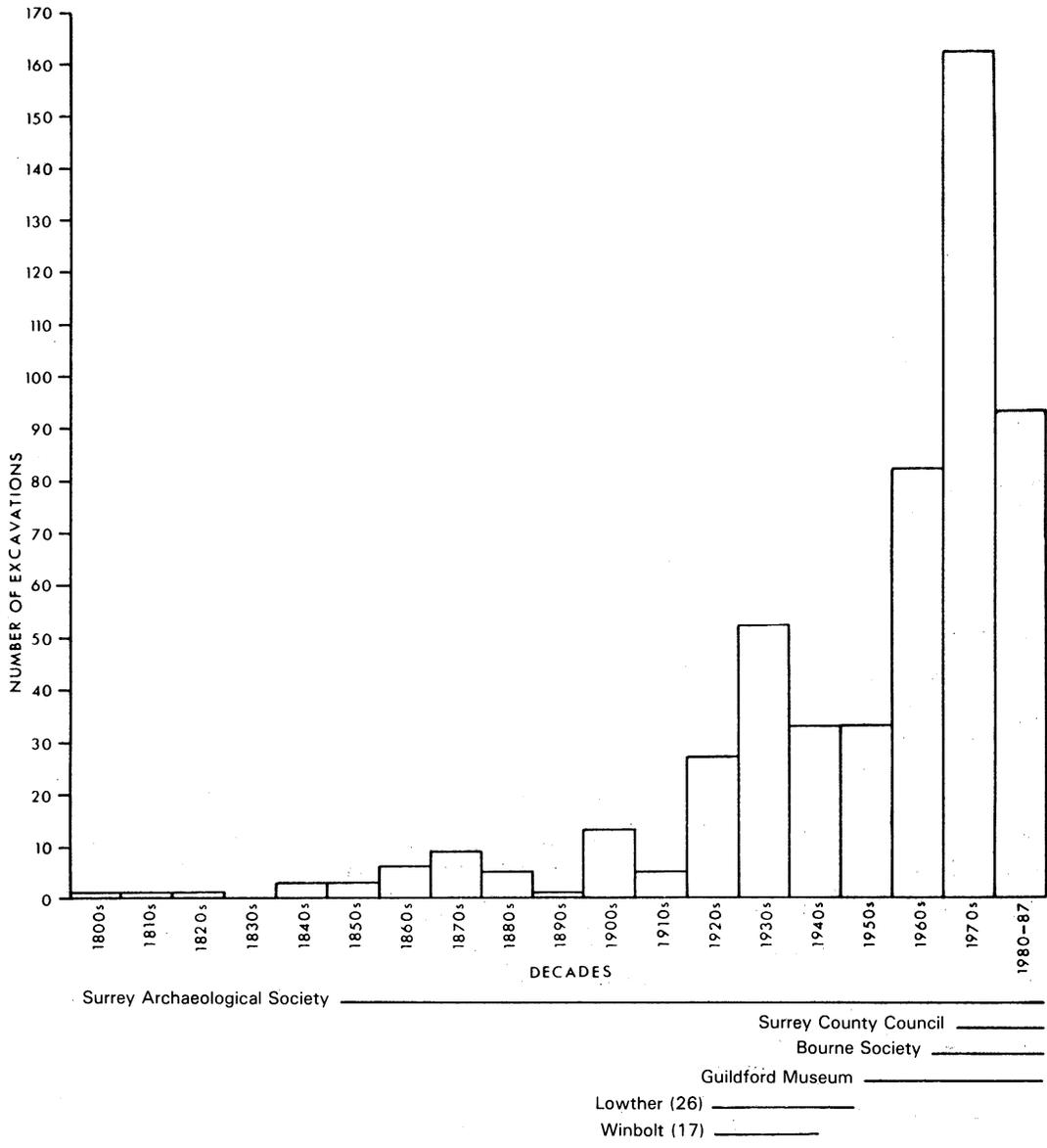


Fig 2. The number of excavations in Surrey by decade since 1800, and the principal institutions and excavators (with number of excavations)

investigations were of Roman villas: the Earl of Onslow excavated at Broadstreet Common in 1829; W W Pocock at Walton Heath in 1856; G W Leveson-Gower at Titsey between 1864–65; T H Farrar at Abinger in 1877; E Freshfield at Walton Heath in 1882; and the Reverend T S Cooper at Chiddingfold between 1888–89. Pitt-Rivers was also active in Surrey in the 19th century, opening barrows at Merrow Downs and on Whitmoor Common in the 1870s. The 1920s saw the beginning of the prolific work of Lowther, Rankine, Wade and Winbolt, which contributed so much to our understanding of the archaeology of Surrey, prehistory in particular. One of the most famous visiting excavators must be Professor Louis Leakey, who excavated a Mesolithic site at Abinger Manor in 1950. Brian Hope-Taylor carried out one of the first scientific excavations of a motte in England at Abinger Manor in 1949. It is noteworthy that Hope-Taylor's excavation technique, technically very advanced for the 1940s, allowed him to discover evidence of timber structures on the top of the monument. In the following decade Hope-Taylor conducted important pioneering excavations elsewhere in Surrey, at Preston Hawe and Limpsfield, which are not yet published. Another well-known archaeologist to work in Surrey was S S Frere. He was involved in at least nine excavations in the 1950s and 1960s. In more recent years, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, the main impetus for excavation has switched from research to rescue considerations, and the number of excavations undertaken in Surrey has increased dramatically.

Finds and Archive Locations

The location of the finds and the archives from excavations are two of the main objectives of the Excavations Index. Where these are still in the possession of the excavators, it is hoped that they will, in due course, be deposited with an appropriate institution (eg Guildford Museum). The National Archaeological Record also provides a microfilming service for archives held by institutions and individuals (see Microfilming below).

The main institution as far as Surrey excavation archives and finds are concerned is the Surrey Archaeological Society, whose finds are mainly lodged at Guildford Museum, where there are finds from 153 excavations, and archive material from 98 excavations. The finds and archive from a great many excavations, however, remain in the possession of the excavator.

Potential Uses of the Index for Surrey Researchers

It was observed in 1987 that 'It is to be hoped that in the near future someone will find the time and energy to prepare a full report on the Roman occupation of Ewell' (Poulton & O'Connell 1987, 123). While the Excavations Index itself does not attempt such a task, it can act as a useful springboard for those who wish to undertake this or similar research. The Index lists all the excavations of Roman levels in Ewell, along with bibliography, SMR number, location of finds and archive etc. The Index should prove to be valuable in saving researchers both time and energy, if people know of it and use it.

Microfilming

In addition to the information held on the Excavations Index the NAR provides a microfilming service for archaeological archives and houses a large and rapidly expanding collection of microfilm records. The purpose of microfilming is twofold. It provides a permanent security copy of the archive, a safeguard against damage or loss; and it further provides a secondary – and sometimes more convenient – means of consulting the archive, thereby reducing wear and tear on what are frequently fragile originals. Microfilming is particularly important for unpublished records or for excavation archives where the excavation report has followed the Frere or Cunliffe guidelines on publication. English

Heritage in fact stipulates that when it grants funds for rescue excavations, the excavation archive must be microfilmed and a copy of it deposited with the NAR.

The NAR provides a free microfilming service of archaeological archives to private individuals or public bodies and if requested provides one free copy for the owner of the archive. Further information on the conditions and methods of microfilming is available from the NAR at the address listed at the end of this article.

How and Where to Consult the Index

The Excavations Index is computerised and information can be retrieved from any combination of the 72 fields in the record (fields = period, site type, excavator, date of excavation, archive location, parish etc). On-line searching of the Index is possible via a computer terminal in the public library of the NAR in Fortress House in London, where NAR staff can guide you through the enquiry screens. This service is free except for the cost of copying if this is required. Printouts of the Index for Surrey are also available in the NAR library and these contain a catalogue ordered by Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 Quarter Sheet and National Archaeological Record number as well as indices for date of excavation and periods represented on excavated sites. Printouts of the Index for Surrey have been deposited for consultation at Guildford Museum and with the Sites and Monuments Record of Surrey County Council. Some enquiries will require printouts which are selected or ordered by other specified criteria, eg site type, or will relate to excavations outside Surrey. Such information may be obtained from the NAR. Enquiries may be made by telephone, letter or personal visit. A wide range of catalogue and index options for printouts are available for which a nominal charge is made to cover the cost of printout.

Errata and Omissions

A survey of excavations in a county can never be complete and it is inevitable that some errors will have occurred or some information will have been omitted. Notification of any errors or additional information on excavations from users of the Index can be sent to the NAR at the address below.

National Archaeological Record,
The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England,
Fortress House,
23, Savile Row,
LONDON W1X 2JQ.
Telephone 071 973 3500

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