

Excavation of Roman and medieval deposits at the rear of 29–55 High Street, Dorking

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with contributions by

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This report describes an excavation and watching brief to the rear of 29–55 High Street, Dorking. A small number of archaeological features of Roman, medieval and post-medieval date were recorded together with a few Saxon finds. The most notable structural find was a late medieval well.

Introduction

A proposal to redevelop land to the rear of 29–55 High Street, Dorking, prompted an excavation and watching brief undertaken by Thames Valley Archaeological Services between June 1995 and March 1996 (fig 1; TQ 165 494). The site was previously used as a car park, and a garage and disused building were both demolished prior to the excavation. The excavated area lies at a height of 61m OD and the local geology is sand (Folkestone Beds: BGS 1978).

The site lies near the historic core of Dorking, where evidence of Roman, medieval and post-medieval occupation has previously been found as a result of trial trenching and standing building surveys. Trial trenches on the site excavated two decades ago located a Roman ditch containing pottery from the latter half of the 1st century AD (O'Connell 1976). Also uncovered were a small number of medieval features of 11th–14th century date and several post-medieval features. Excavations at the nearby St Martins's Walk revealed three more Roman ditches of 1st–3rd century date (Hayman 1998). In addition, a small cemetery containing fourteen 13th century burials was revealed, together with a ditch which apparently marked the limits of the cemetery. Recent work by the Domestic Buildings Research Group (Surrey), has shown that part of the Wheatsheaf Inn (37–39 High Street) dates to *c* 1500 and part of 41–47 High Street is earlier, at *c* 1470. Caves in the vicinity were not affected by the development proposal.

The excavation followed a scheme of work approved by Surrey County Council Archaeological Section. The site code is DHSS95 and the finds are to be deposited with Guildford Museum (acc no AG24,200).

The excavation (figs 1–6)

The six excavated areas were located in the parts of the site which would be disturbed by the footprints of the new buildings. Areas A, A2, B, D and E were fully excavated and recorded, and Area C was subject to a watching brief (fig 1). The excavated areas were stripped of topsoil and subsoil by a JCB-type machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and these areas were then cleaned by hand. Trenches dug for large service runs, such as drains and soakaways, were also examined.

AREA A (figs 2, 5 and 6)

A small pit (21) in the western part of Area A (fig 2) was fully excavated and its fill contained three fragments of Roman pottery. Approximately 10m to the east of this was a small, truncated posthole (19) which also contained two small sherds of Roman pottery.

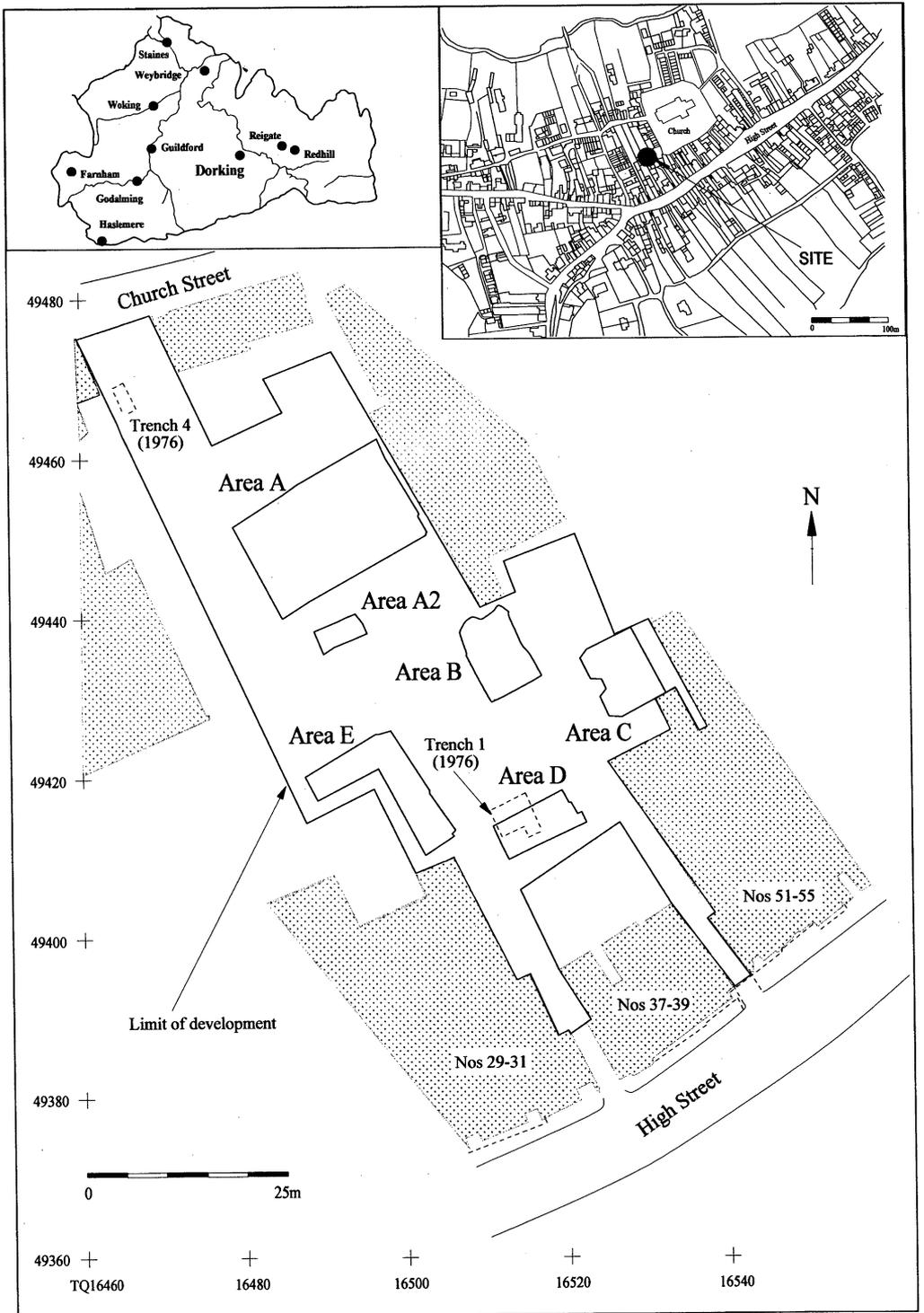


Fig 1 29-55 High Street, Dorking: location of the site within Dorking and Surrey showing excavated areas and earlier trenches. (© Crown Copyright. MC 100014198)

The three medieval features in this area include a small pit (18) which contained one medieval sherd, two mid-11th century sherds (late Saxon/early medieval: fig 6, nos 2 and 3), and one residual piece of Roman date. The slightly larger pit 5 contained fragments of charcoal, burnt flint, and an iron key probably of 14th-15th century date but perhaps as early as the 13th century. Four sherds of medieval pottery were also recovered from the large posthole 22.

Post-medieval features in this area include two parallel gullies (3 and 7), which crossed the north-eastern end of the excavated area. Both gullies were of similar dimensions and contained post-medieval pottery with some residual Roman and medieval sherds. Gully 7 was cut by pit 16 (fig 5), the fill of which contained an almost complete pig skeleton and a single undated potsherd. A second pit (17), of similar dimensions to pit 16, also contained a pig skeleton, together with fragments of brick and tile. In section, the lower fill of pit 17 (72) seemed to be cut by another small feature (141), perhaps a posthole, which contained a single

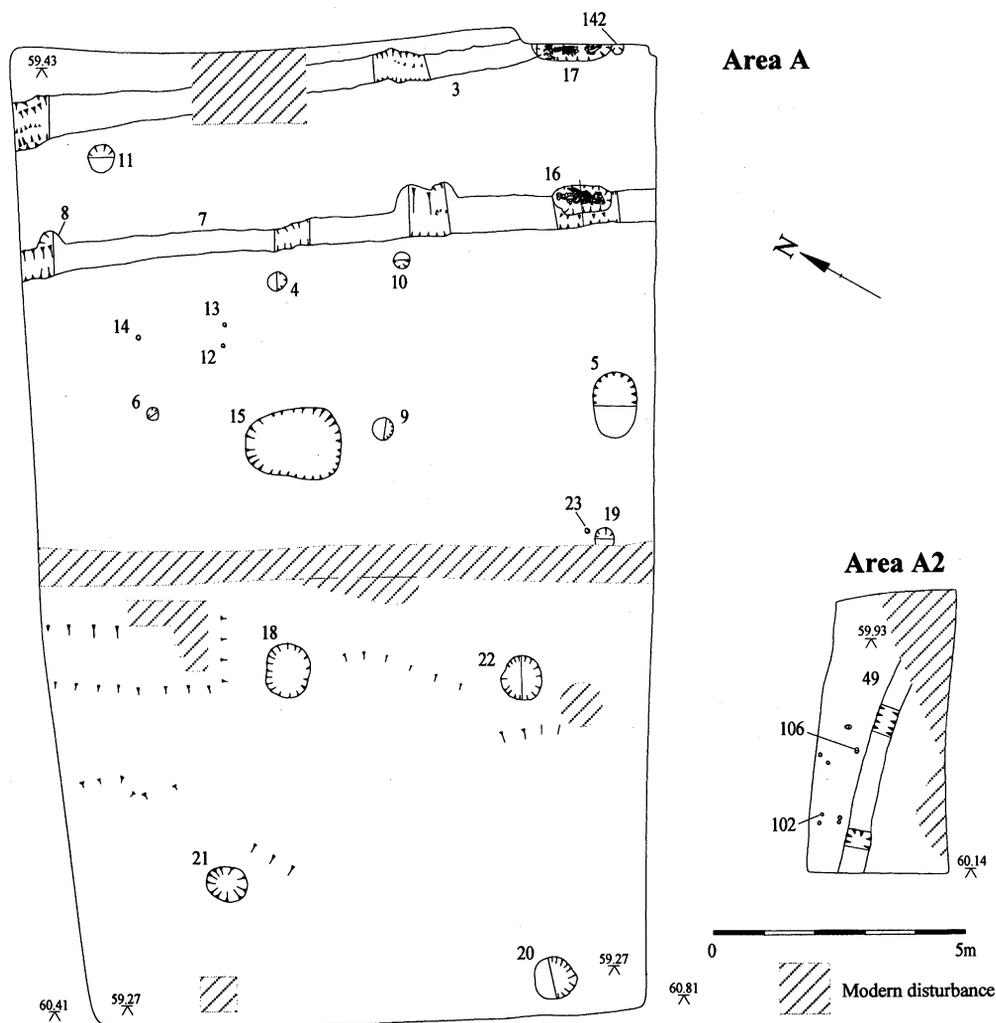


Fig 2 29-55 High Street, Dorking: plan of Areas A and A2.

sherd of medieval pottery within its fill (68). This was itself cut by a further feature, 142 (possibly a recut of 141), which had two fills (69 and 261). All three features physically lay below gully 3 (fill 71) with the latter being stratigraphically the latest feature (fig 5).

A number of small postholes and stakeholes, which do not form a coherent ground plan, were also excavated in this area (4, 6, 8–14 and 23). These contained either small fragments of brick and tile, which may suggest a post-medieval date, or were undated. Lastly, a large pit (15), was fully excavated but produced no dating evidence and pit 20 contained one sherd of 17th–18th century pottery together with residual Roman and late Saxon/early medieval sherds.

AREA A2 (fig 2)

This small area contained a gully (49) and a number of postholes and stakeholes (fig 2). Two sections excavated across the gully showed it to be between 0.45–0.5m wide and 0.21–0.36m deep. It crossed the excavated area from north-east to south-west and contained a single sherd of Roman pottery. The six stakeholes to the north of gully 49 contained no finds and in plan they do not appear to represent a structure (fig 2). The same can be said of two small postholes in this area (102 and 106).

AREA B (figs 3 and 5)

This area contained five features, two of medieval and three of post-medieval date (fig 3). The medieval features include a truncated pit or spread (133), 0.9m wide and 0.1m deep, partly beneath the northern baulk. This feature contained two sherds of medieval pottery. The most substantial feature was a late medieval well with an internal diameter of 1.2m (135). Neither the fill nor the construction cut (138) of this feature were fully excavated, but the upper parts of both were examined. The stonework was left *in situ* and not dismantled. The depth of the well was established by auger as 2.4m. It was constructed with faced, mortared, chalk blocks, of which fifteen courses could be seen. On the eastern face there seems to have been a small hole, 0.2 × 0.2m, possibly a socket for a superstructure. The three upper fills contained pottery ranging from the 13th to 19th centuries. The construction cut of the well (138) was partially excavated and ten fills were recorded (fig 5). Eight sherds of medieval pottery were recovered from fills 196 and 252–255, which indicates a medieval or later date for the construction of the well.

Three features in this area were probably of post-medieval origin: postholes 136 and 137 (the latter contained fragments of tile) and a possible linear feature 134, which ran in a southerly direction from the northern baulk for 1m and contained three sherds of medieval/post-medieval pottery. The latter may be a terminal of one the gullies (3 and 7) seen in Area A.

AREA C

This area was subject to a watching brief during the excavation of the foundation trenches and it proved to be severely disturbed and truncated by modern services. Nothing of archaeological significance was observed. However, during of the examination of the resultant spoil heaps a bone pinbeater of probable Saxon date was found (fig 6, no 1).

AREA D (fig 4)

This area clipped part of trench 1 of the 1976 excavations (O'Connell 1976). The features identified in the earlier excavation included a medieval pit, a soakaway and a number of post-medieval features including pits, a brick floor and a cobbled area. The features discovered in Area D during the current excavation were either of post-medieval date or contained no

Area B

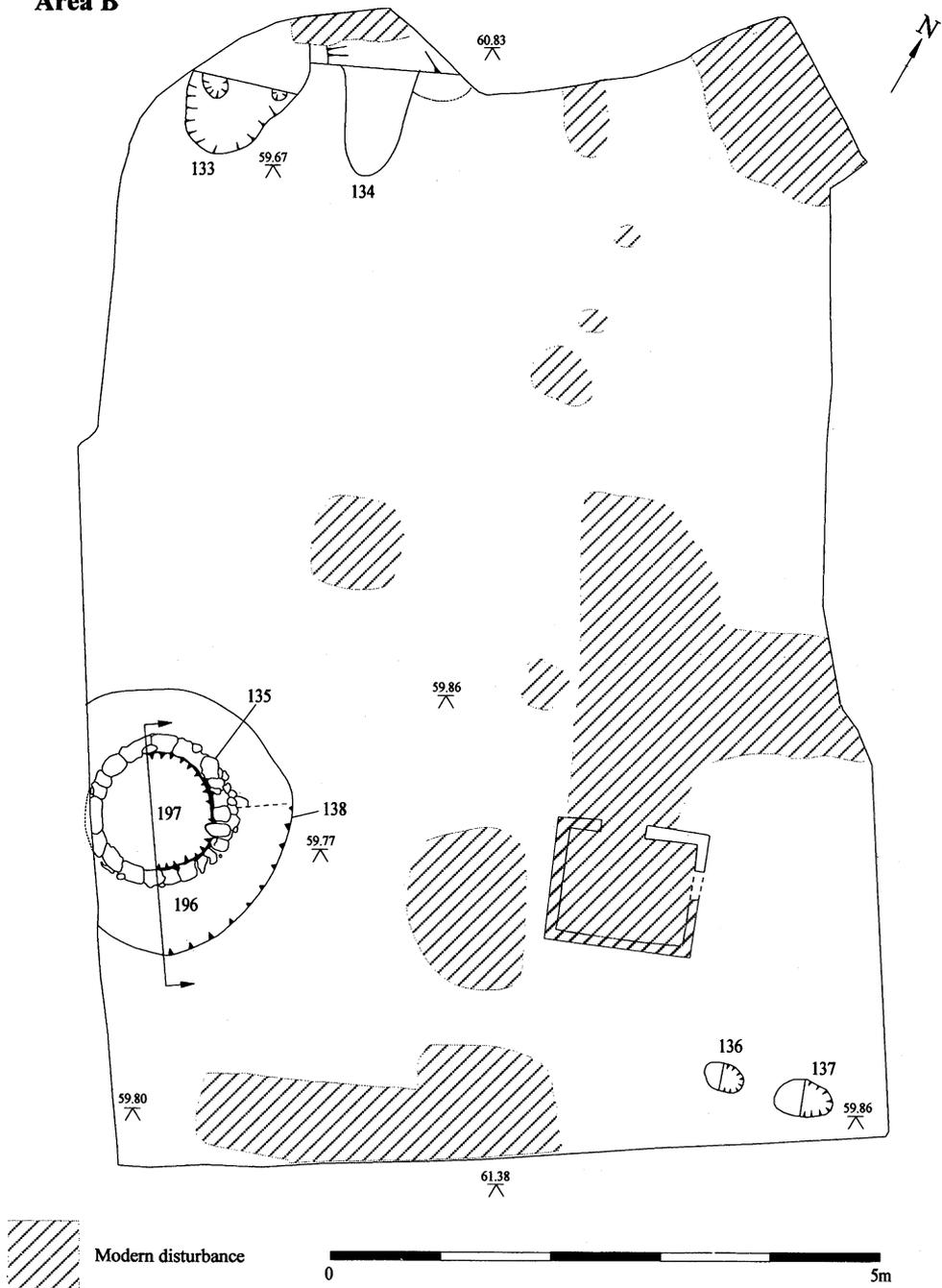


Fig 3 29-55 High Street, Dorking: plan of Area B.

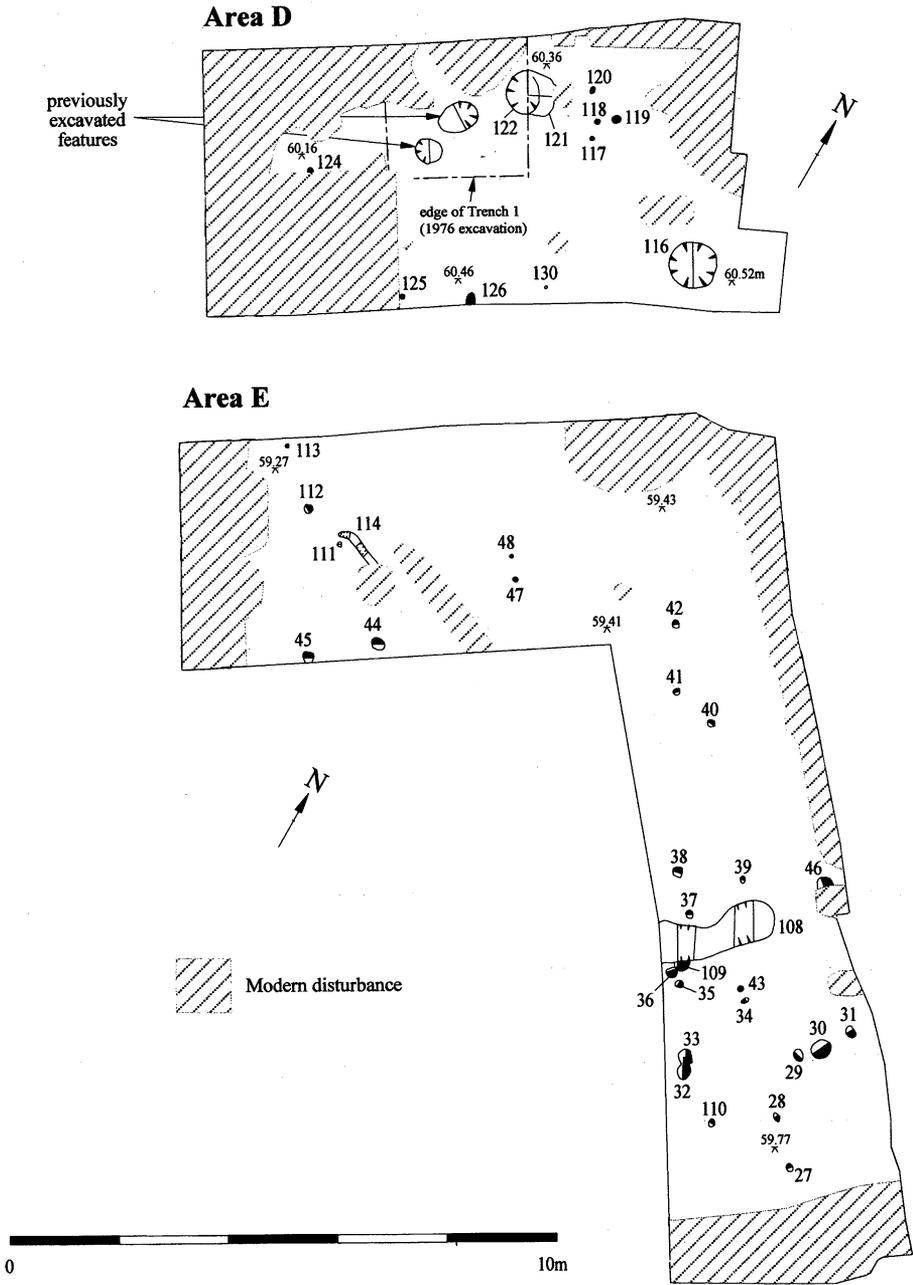


Fig 4 29-55 High Street, Dorking: plans of Areas D and E.

datable finds (fig 4). Seven stakeholes were excavated (117-119, 124-126 and 130) ranging in diameter from 0.06 to 0.13m and from 0.08 to 0.18m deep. Of these, only one (119) contained a small fragment of brick/tile. No pattern was observed in the plan of these stakeholes.

Pit 116 contained two sherds of 17th-18th century pottery (a single sherd of medieval

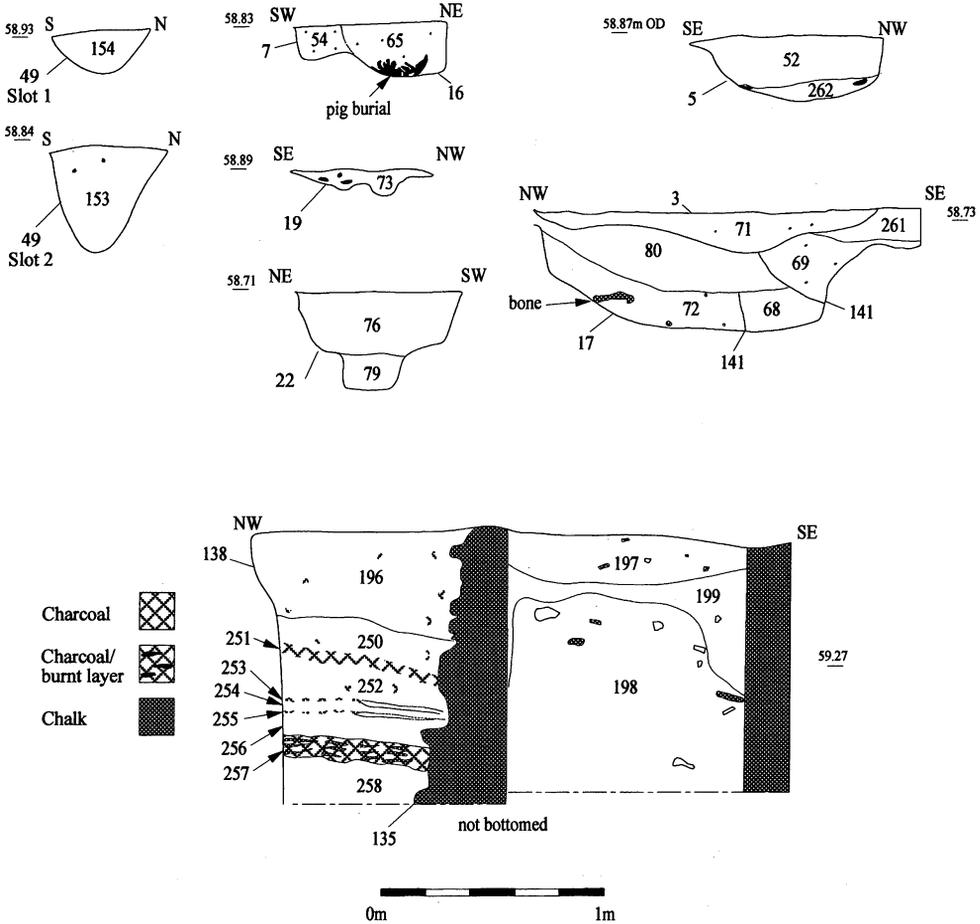


Fig 5 29-55 High Street, Dorking: selected sections.

pottery is presumably residual). Two pits (121 and 122) contained brick and tile fragments and the latter produced seven sherds of 18th-19th century glazed red earthenware. Lastly, posthole 120 remains undated.

AREA E (fig 4)

Ten stakeholes found in this area and ranging in diameter from 0.05 to 0.13m and from 0.04 to 0.17m deep, remain undated as no finds were recovered from their fills (27, 28, 34, 35, 42, 43, 47, 48, 111 and 113). In plan they form a random pattern which does not seem to represent a structure. The same can be said of the seventeen postholes that were excavated in this area (29-33, 36-41, 44-46, 109, 110 and 112). These ranged in diameter from 0.1 to 0.29m and in depth from 0.04 to 0.1m and only 30 and 39 contained finds (small fragments of brick and tile). Also excavated in this area were two possible gullies (108 and 114) which remain undated.

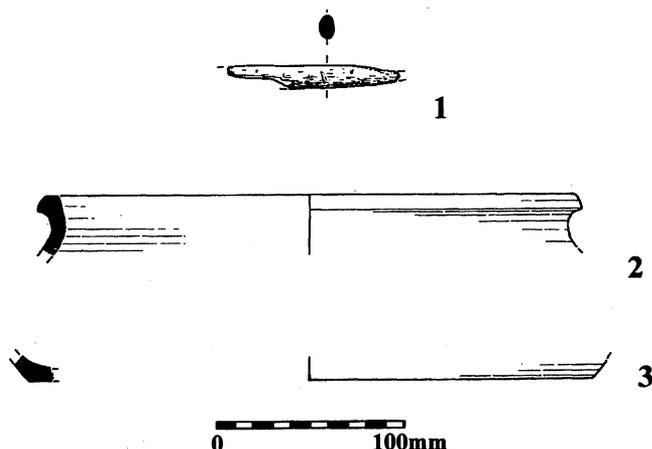


Fig 6 29–55 High Street, Dorking. 1: probable Saxon bone pinbeater (spoil heap Area C); 2: rim of mid-11th century cooking pot (pit 18, 70); 3: base of late 10th to early 11th century vessel (pit 18, 70).

The finds

POTTERY, by Jane Timby

A small group of 67 sherds of pottery and 22 fragments of brick/tile was recorded from twenty features (table 1: see *Endnote*, below). The material was of mixed chronology, most of the sherds being of medieval or post-medieval date. Of particular note are seven unfeatured sherds of Roman date, in most cases particularly small sandy wares occurring as redeposited material. The only features to contain exclusively Roman sherds were posthole 19, pit 21 and gully 49; the latter two produced single sherds, while the two scraps from posthole 19 were so small that some degree of uncertainty must be attached to their identification. One piece of samian was among the unstratified finds. Other residual Roman sherds were noted in gully 7 and pits 18 and 20.

Also of interest are a small number of sherds of late Saxon/early medieval date, notably from pit 18, probably indicating activity dating to the 10th–11th centuries. In particular, these include a rim from an oxidized cooking pot in a shelly handmade ware probably related to the London fabric LSS (Vince 1991, 49) and a basesherd in a dense coarse sandy ware (Vince 1991, 56 ff: London fabric EMS) (fig 6, nos 2 and 3). Other late Saxon/early medieval sherds came from pit 20 and possibly from the construction cut for the well (138) in Area B.

Medieval sherds of slightly later date (12th–14th century), including Surrey whiteware and black sandy cooking wares, were present in pit/spread 133, construction cut 138 and 141 (a possible recut of pit 17). Post-medieval wares include products of the Surrey/Hampshire border industry, for example, Coarse Border wares (Pearce & Vince 1988, 52 ff) and imported German stoneware. Features producing these and contemporary wares include pit 20 and pit 116. More recent finds include flowerpot, glazed red earthenwares, Staffordshire salt-glazed embossed stoneware, other English stonewares, tin-glazed ware, and tile, from features 3, 77, 24, 122 and 135.

FAUNAL REMAINS, by Kevin Rielly

Ten features (nine in Area A and one in Area B) produced 278 animal bones. The small numbers and mixed date range show there is little to gain from detailed analysis of the

majority of features. However, the unusual occurrence of two pig skeletons in pits 16 and 17 is worthy of further comment.

Pit 16 contained 173 pig bones and 77 were retrieved from pit 17. Each pig showed certain positional similarities, ie both were found on their backs and both were aligned north–south with their heads to the south. These skeletons clearly represent the remains of whole carcasses, as shown by the articulated state of the bones and the presence of a large proportion of body parts. In addition, no cut marks were observed, not even skinning marks.

Certain bones were absent, including a few carpals/tarsals and toes, and the bones of the left forelimb from the pit 16 skeleton. The absence of smaller bones could be the result of poor recovery and the absence of a limb may suggest post-depositional disturbance. Indeed, three pig left forelimb bones were found close to this pit in gully 7 (from the section adjacent to pit 16), and these are likely to represent the missing limb from the pit 16 skeleton.

The teeth and epiphysis fusion evidence (using age estimates from Simonds 1854 and Bruni & Zimmerl 1951, respectively) suggests that the animals represented by these skeletons were similar in age, at approximately 1½ years. In addition, the shape of the maxillary/mandibular canines show that they were both female (see Schmidt 1972 for sexual distinctions). There is a slight difference in the size of these animals, the greatest length of the femur (both epiphyses unfused) and the greatest distal breadth of the humerus are as follows: pit 16, 210mm; pit 17, 175mm and 36mm respectively. All measurements are taken from von den Driesch (1976).

A possible infection is indicated by a pathological anomaly displayed by the bones of both the left and right ankle joints of the pit 16 skeleton. The corresponding articular surfaces of two tarsal bones in each ankle (the navicular and cuneiform) show discrete areas of pitting on the articular surfaces. In addition, the left navicular exhibits slight exostosis (bony growth) around the articular margin.

The depositional similarities, such as the position of the skeletons, the type of features in which they were deposited, the close proximity of the features and the head alignments, strongly suggest that these two pigs were buried within a short time of each other; the similarities cannot be viewed as purely coincidental. It can be assumed that the carcasses were quickly buried following deposition, as indicated by the relatively good preservation and state of articulation of the skeletons. Some disturbance did take place to the pit 16 burial, but this probably occurred after the carcass was well rotted.

Regarding the cause of death, it is obvious that strong reasons precluded the use of the carcasses. It would appear that even the skins were not used. The age and sex of these animals would indicate that both could have been useful, either for their meat or for breeding purposes. A possible explanation is that both these animals were diseased. One of the skeletons shows signs of an infection affecting both ankles, and the infection that is seen to be attacking the bones is clearly in an advanced state (Baker & Brothwell 1980, 123). This animal must have been in an extreme state of discomfort and would undoubtedly have been killed. No sign of infection was noticed on the other skeleton but, as mentioned above, this does not necessarily imply that the animal was healthy. It could be supposed that ankle infections were a symptom of a particular contagious disease, which may indicate why there is more than one carcass, always assuming that they were buried within a short time of each other. The pit 17 animal may have been killed at the onset of symptoms in order, perhaps, to halt the spread of the disease.

PINBEATER, by Jo Pine

An incomplete polished bone pinbeater was recovered from a spoil heap in Area C during the watching brief (fig 6, no 1). The pinbeater is 91mm long with a pointed end, gently curved profile and oval section. In complete form this was probably a double-pointed pinbeater, formerly described as stiletos or spindles, which are generally interpreted as tools associated with weaving; they may have been used for beating down individual threads in the weft of

the cloth. They occur in settlements throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, although rarely before the 7th century. Early Anglo-Saxon examples are known from numerous sites, such as Abingdon (West 1985), Walton (Avery & Brown 1972) and West Stow (Leeds 1923), to name but a few.

METALWORK, by David Richards

Eight metal objects were recovered from the excavation: seven iron nails (features 3, 15, 120 and 135) and a key (pit 5, fill 52). The latter has a kidney-shaped handle and the set back bit, with a tapering point extending beyond, indicates a Type VII key (LMMC 1940, pl XXXI). This is perhaps as early as the 13th century but is more likely to be late 14th–15th century in date (length 122mm). For catalogue of iron objects see table 2 (*Endnote*, below).

CARBONIZED BOTANICAL REMAINS, by John Letts

Five soil samples were floated for carbonized remains and just one sample, from pit 21 (75), produced a few unidentifiable cereal fragments (table 3: see *Endnote*, below).

Discussion

This small excavation has revealed a number of archaeological features representing activity at several times. Overall, the pottery evidence points to two main depositional periods: 12th–13th century and 17th–18th century. Some limited Roman activity was also documented along with artefacts of Saxon date.

It is thought that Dorking town centre may have been the location for a Roman posting station (Bird 1987, 171) on the route of the London–Chichester road (Margary 1956, 46); the road had been constructed by AD50 and presumably the station was built around the same time. Recent work, including that by O'Connell (1976) and Hayman (1998), has proved that there was Roman occupation in this area as at St Martin's Walk and to the rear of the Wheatsheaf (37–39 High Street). Whether these features relate to the founding and subsequent occupation of a posting station is debatable but with the modest Roman discoveries described above, this does indicate some form of Roman settlement in the vicinity.

There seems to be little evidence of Saxon occupation in Dorking. The name 'Dorking' itself contains the element *ingas* and probably means 'the people of the Deoric', suggesting an origin in the 7th or 8th century. However, the only archaeological evidence is a Saxon burial west of the town (O'Connell 1976). This excavation does indicate that there was some activity here in the later stages of the Saxon period, although the evidence is scant and consists of only three sherds of probable late Saxon pottery and a bone pinbeater.

It is thought that Dorking was no larger than a village in the Middle Ages. It may have been market based but its layout does not resemble the formal grid pattern of some planned towns (Turner 1987). As yet there have been few field observations to examine this hypothesis in detail, though the excavations at St Martin's Walk (Hayman 1998) which uncovered a small 13th century cemetery are a notable exception. Other evidence of medieval occupation comes from documentary sources: the property at 41–47 High Street is mentioned in a survey of the manor of Dorking undertaken in 1589 and part of it may be earlier (*c* 1470); parts of the present structure of the Wheatsheaf (37–39 High Street) have been dated to 1500 and excavations to the rear of this property revealed three pits indicating 11th–14th century occupation (O'Connell 1976). The excavations to the rear of 29–55 High Street have uncovered three pits, a posthole, a gully and a well, all dating from the 12th/13th to 15th centuries. This evidence suggests relatively light usage of this area, and is presumably related to properties fronting the High Street.

Part of a post-medieval building was excavated in earlier trial trenches (O'Connell 1976) and post-medieval features were found in all of the areas opened during this excavation. The

two parallel gullies in Area A (3 and 7) may indicate shifting property boundaries and the other features reflect the continued use of the rears of the properties fronting the High Street.

Endnote

The tables (table 1: summary of pottery fabric and forms by Area; table 2: catalogue of iron objects; table 3: catalogue of flotation samples) are available via the Archaeology Data Service website (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/surreyac/>). The information can also be accessed via the Society's own website (<http://www.surreyarchaeology.org.uk>) by following the links to *Surrey Archaeological Collections*.

Printed copies of this material will be deposited with: the Society's library at Guildford; Surrey History Centre, Woking, and the Surrey Sites and Monuments Record, Kingston. Photocopies can also be supplied by post – enquiries should be addressed to the Hon Editors, Surrey Archaeological Society, Castle Arch, Guildford GU1 3SX.

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