

Excavation of late Saxon/early medieval deposits at Mitcham Vicarage, 21 Church Road, Mitcham

STEVE FORD

with contributions by

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This report describes the archaeological excavation carried out in the rear gardens of Mitcham Vicarage. Two areas were opened, located on the basis of the results of an earlier evaluation. The main area (A) located several recut boundary ditches aligned east–west approximately parallel to Church Road, along with a small number of postholes, pits and a gully. The majority of the features were of late Saxon/early medieval and medieval date (11th–14th centuries), with some late post-medieval (18th century) and modern disturbance. The smaller area (B) was located to recover the remains of a horse burial found during the evaluation. Although this burial contained medieval pottery, the presence of other items, such as coal, and the form of the horseshoes, shows that it is late post-medieval in date. A small number of sherds of Roman pottery and a tegula fragment, and a single sherd of middle Saxon pottery, point to some activity of these periods in the vicinity, although not necessarily anything more than manuring of farmland.

Introduction (fig 1)

The site is located on the south side of Church Road, Mitcham, in the former gardens of Mitcham Vicarage (figs 1 and 2; TQ 2707 6860). The fieldwork described below followed an earlier evaluation (Weaver 1996) which was carried out as part of a proposal to redevelop the vicarage gardens for housing, a new vicarage and a parish centre. The excavation took place prior to groundworks for the new development according to a scheme agreed by Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service. The site code is VGS96 and the finds and archive will be deposited in the Museum of London.

The site lies on more or less level ground at a height of 19m OD. The underlying geology is a sandy gravel which forms part of a large tract of a gravel terrace of the river Wandle, flowing 1km to the south-west. At the time of the excavation the site was a rear garden of the vicarage, which was built *c* 1825.

Archaeological background

Several sites and finds are recorded in the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record in the general vicinity of the site. Arguably the most important entry is that detailing a 5th–6th century Saxon inhumation cemetery located 450m to the south, which revealed at least 238 burials. However, of more immediate relevance are other sites and finds closer to the site that are of broadly similar date to the excavated deposits. The parish church of Mitcham St Peter, which lies 90m to the north, was rebuilt in 1822 but with some of the original medieval fabric remaining. The church was not recorded in Domesday Book but is thought to have been present at that time (Montague 1995, 10). At 80–82 Church Road just to the north-east, an evaluation and follow-up excavation located three pits containing pottery of 12th–13th century date, together with two late post-medieval pits (AOC 1996). Further to the east, along Church Road at Hall Place, medieval deposits of 11th–12th century date were excavated close to the rear of the original medieval hall (Montague 1995, 8) and it is thought that a chapel was possibly sited in the vicinity. Just to the west of the vicarage site is the findspot of an early Saxon, decorated bronze bowl but the circumstances of its discovery and associations are unclear (Montague 1995, 3). To the west an excavation comprising two

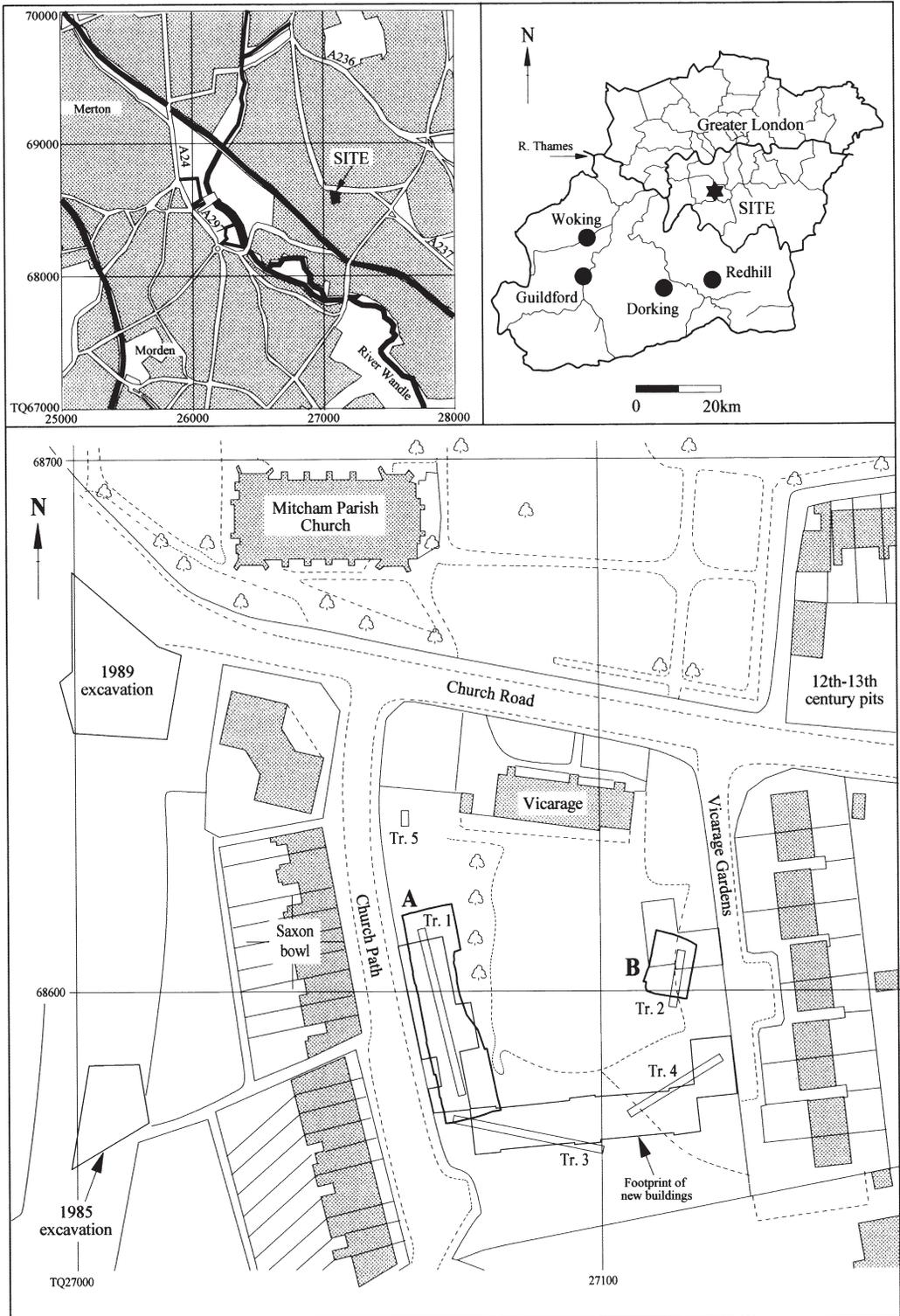


Fig 1 Mitcham Vicarage. Location of the site and other sites mentioned in the text. (© Crown Copyright. NC/2004/33611).

trenches took place in 1989 as a part of a road widening scheme. A series of Roman, late Saxon/early medieval, and medieval ditches was found (Hailley 1989). One of the Saxon ditches contained a butchered horse burial. The locations of these finds and deposits are presented on figure 1.

The excavations (figs 2–4)

Two areas were excavated (A and B) on the basis of the evaluation results. Area A (360m²) was on the western side of the gardens and located to examine a series of ditches, a gully and a pit revealed in evaluation trench 1. Area B (90m²) was on the eastern side of the gardens and located to examine a horse burial found in evaluation trench 2.

AREA A (fig 2)

A deep cover of topsoil (0.9m) overlay the archaeological features, which cut the natural sandy gravel in this area. It is not known how such a depth of topsoil came to be present, but it presumably represents dumping from elsewhere, perhaps spoil from construction works of the nearby terraced houses. Archaeological features were not dense in this area. Few finds were recovered overall and this places a degree of uncertainty on the detailed chronology of the deposits. Some intrusive material (coal and coke) was noted in the samples taken for the recovery of charred plant remains but these fragments were very small and could have been introduced by worm or root action. This is unlikely to be a serious issue for the chronology of the deposits but may be more relevant for the interpretation of the charred plant remains.

Linear features

Seven linear features were recorded; six (200–203, 205 and 206) were on the same west-south-west to east-north-east alignment and intercut one another in two areas (fig 4). The features were typically 0.6–1.4m wide and 0.2–0.8m deep, with gentle profiles. Gully 201 cut 200 and both contained only late Saxon/early medieval pottery (11th–12th century) (gully 200 – eleven sherds; gully 201 – seven sherds, including one middle Saxon). Both features were also cut by pit 113, which contained four sherds of similar date.

Gully 203 was cut by gully 206; 206 was cut by 205, and 205 was cut by late post-medieval pit 116. Gully 205 also cut gully 202. Gullies 205 and 202 were both late post-medieval (17th–18th century). Gully 203 contained three sherds and was medieval (12th–13th century) in date; gully 206 presumably belongs to the same period.

Gully 204 was different in character to the above as it was sinuous and aligned approximately north-west to south-east. It produced three sherds of early medieval pottery (11th–12th century).

Pits

Eight pits and a scoop (104) were recorded. The larger pits (110, 112–13, 116 and 123) were oval or circular in plan, with bowl-shaped profiles, 1.4–2.6m across and 0.4–0.9m deep. Pit 116 was clearly late post-medieval, containing fragments of clay tobacco pipe and bottle glass in addition to pottery, tile and tar. Pit 113, although infilled at the uppermost levels with possibly post-medieval tile, contained four sherds of late Saxon/early medieval pottery (11th–12th century). Pit 110 contained a single sherd of late Saxon/early medieval pottery (11th–12th century) and a fragment of daub. Pits 112 and 123 contained two sherds each of undated, post-Roman pottery, with 123 also containing fragments of oyster shell.

The smaller pits (100, 102 and 103) were 0.5–0.9m across but less than 0.2m deep. Scoop 104 was 1.4m across but only 0.1m deep. Pit 100 contained a single sherd of early medieval date (11th–12th century); pit 102 a single sherd of late Saxon pottery (9th–10th century); pit 103 is undated; and scoop 104 contained four sherds of late Saxon/early medieval pot (11th–12th century) and a residual Roman sherd.

Area A

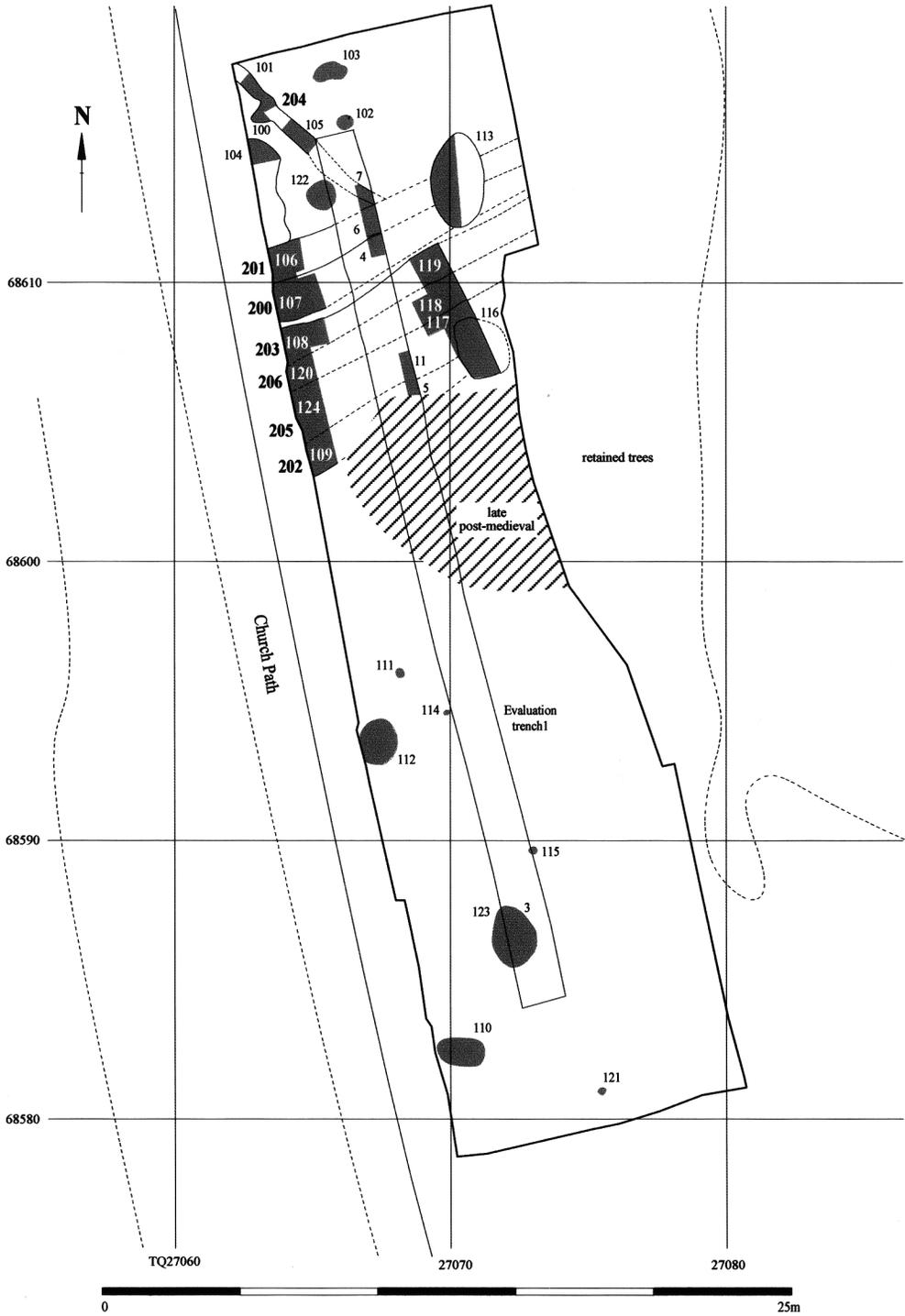


Fig 2 Mitcham Vicarage. Area A: excavated features/sections tinted.

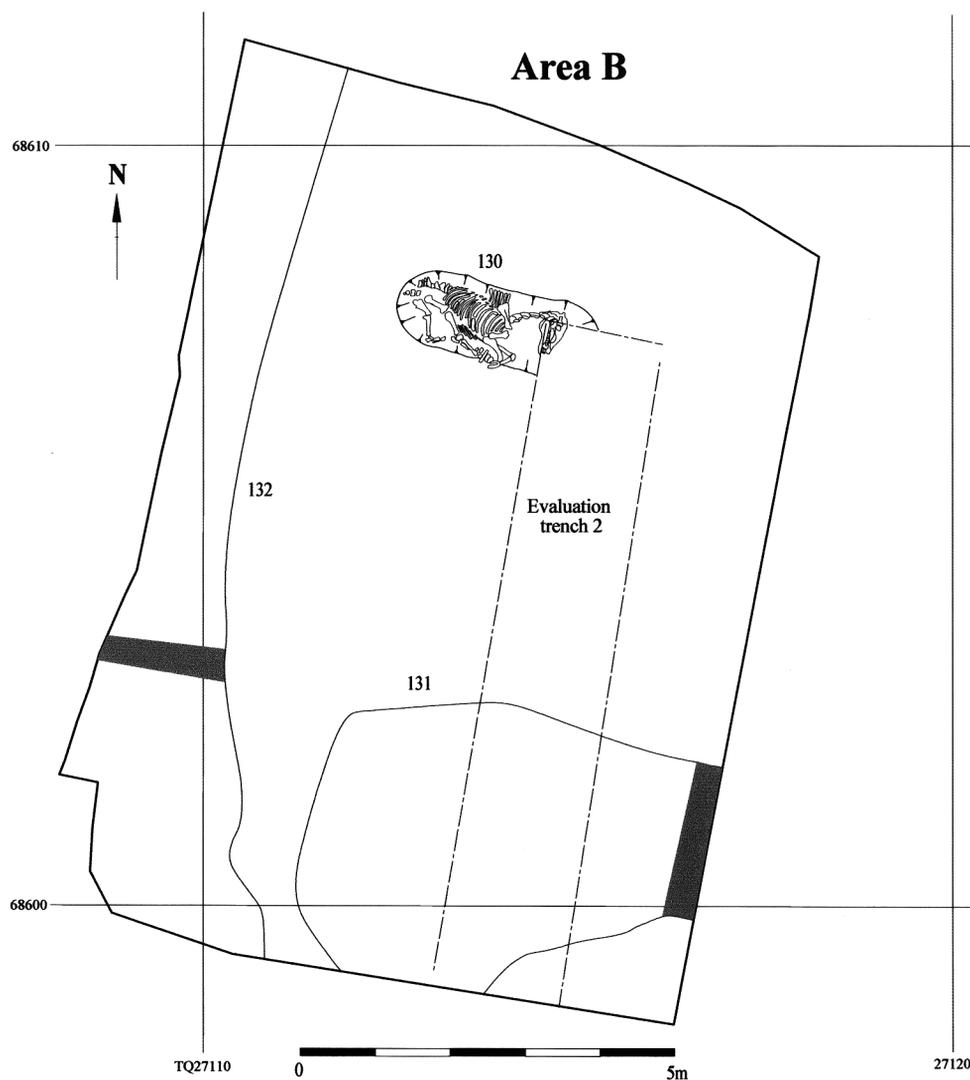


Fig 3 Mitcham Vicarage. Area B.

Postholes

Five small features are interpreted as postholes but only one (122) is of sufficient size and profile to be unambiguously an archaeological feature. This contained three late Saxon/early medieval sherds (11th–12th centuries). The remainder (111, 114–15 and 121) were all shallow (< 0.1m) and are undated. None of the postholes appeared to represent structural remains.

AREA B (fig 3)

This area also had a considerable thickness of topsoil (0.76m) overlying sandy gravel. Three subsoil features were observed. Feature 130 was an oval pit 2.6 x 1m, cutting the subsoil to a depth of 0.35m. It contained the complete skeleton of a horse, about 20 years old, lying on its left side with its head to the east and legs folded. Finds from within the fill of the burial comprised brick/tile fragments, coal and four sherds of medieval pottery (12th–13th

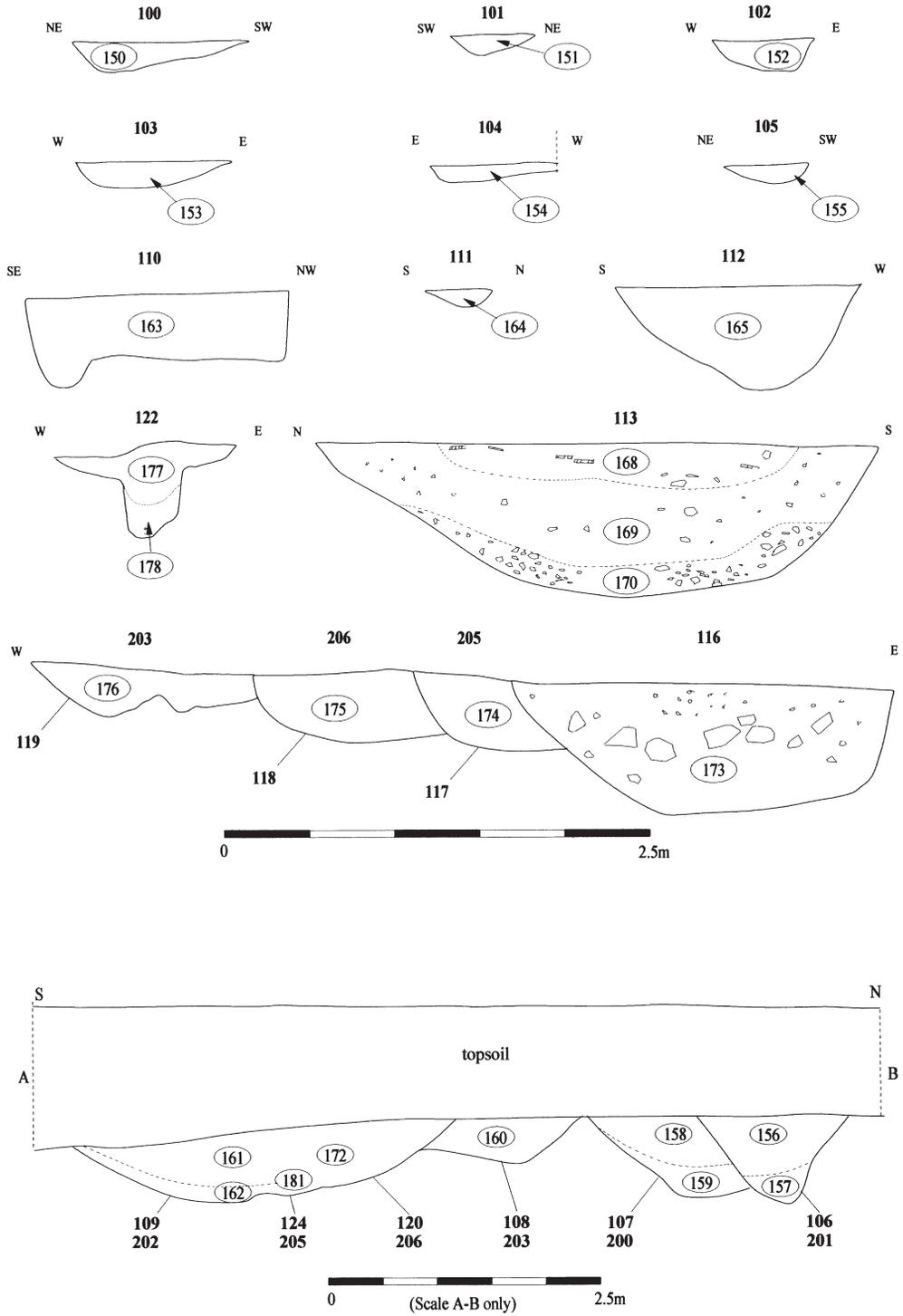


Fig 4 Mitcham Vicarage. Selected sections.

centuries). The horse was buried with its iron horseshoes in place and these are of a type typical in the 18th–19th centuries.

The two other features within the area were a large, late post-medieval pit (131) and a large hollow or infilled furrow (132) of similar date.

Finds

THE POTTERY, by Alan Vince with a contribution by Barbara Precious

Introduction

The pottery can mainly be dated to three periods: Roman, late Saxon/early medieval and early modern. The Roman pottery consists mainly of abraded sherds not necessarily indicating settlement in the immediate area. It does include a sherd of Roman glazed ware, however. The late Saxon/early medieval assemblage probably represents a long-lived period of activity, although it mainly consists of 10th–11th century wares. The earlier wares, in the main, are of types found in the City of London, although the relative proportions of these wares differ. The later wares include some types not found in the City, perhaps indicating a reorganization of supply from north/north-east to the south. The early modern material probably spans a much shorter period of activity. With the exception of a single unstratified transfer-printed sherd the wares are of 18th century date and were probably deposited on site in the mid–late 18th century.

Roman pottery, by Barbara Precious

Thirteen sherds of Roman pottery were found. All were either abraded or very abraded. Where they can be dated, the sherds belong to types dating to the 1st or 2nd centuries. The earliest datable sherd is a barbotine-decorated vessel of Staines glazed ware, an uncommon type. The latest datable sherd is a scrap of white-slipped redware flagon, dating to the mid–late 2nd century.

Early to mid-Saxon pottery

Despite the proximity of this site to the early Anglo-Saxon Mitcham cemetery, there is no pottery from the site which dates to the early Anglo-Saxon period, but one sherd from a thick-walled jar with a rolled-out rim with a flat top may be mid-Saxon in date. It comes from ditch 201 (6) where it is associated with late Saxon and Saxo-Norman sherds. The form and manufacture of the vessel are very similar to Ipswich ware but the fabric is tempered with abundant, iron-coated quartz grains up to 1mm across and ferruginous sandstone fragments. The groundmass appears to have a low iron content and a moderate muscovite content. These features suggest a local origin (ie south-west Surrey or north-east Hampshire). Wares with similar characteristics have been noted on sites in mid-Saxon Lundenwic and are absent from sizeable collections of ?late 9th to early 11th century date from the City of London. The vessel is therefore either the only sherd of mid-Saxon pottery from the site or a sherd of a late Saxon ware that has a narrow distribution which does not include sites along the Thames.

Late Saxon and medieval pottery

Fifty sherds of late Saxon and Saxo-Norman wares were found on the site. All are of types known from the City of London, where they occur in stratified deposits in a datable sequence (table 1).

Where the ware concerned was produced closer to Mitcham than the City of London then it is possible that the date range for the ware determined in the City may not hold for Mitcham, since the ware could have been produced on a smaller scale before being traded

TABLE 1 Late Saxon and Saxo-Norman wares found at Mitcham

Code	Sherds	Name	Date in the City of London	Comments
LSS	24	Late Saxon Shelly ware	CP1–CP2 (850–1030)	
EMFL	4	Early medieval Flinty ware	CP2–CP3 (1000–1030)	More common at Mitcham than the City
EMSH	7	Early medieval Shelly ware	CP3–CP5 (1000–1150)	Vince and Jenner suggest a source in north-east Surrey or north-west Kent
EMGR	1	Early medieval Grog-tempered ware	CP4 (1030–1080)	
ESUR	14	Early Surrey ware	CP4–CP5 (1030–1150)	Mitcham is closer to the source and could therefore have earlier examples than the City

to London. Nevertheless, the presence of so many sherds of LSS ware at Mitcham suggests that the ware was the main source of pottery for the settlement at some point. The main difference between the Mitcham and City assemblages is the absence of EMCH, EMS and EMSS (Early medieval Chalky, Sandy and Sand-and-Shell wares respectively). The first of these was probably produced somewhere in the Chilterns, so its absence from Mitcham is unsurprising. The EMS/EMSS industry has not been closely provenanced. It was clearly close to the City and has only been found in small quantities in 11th–12th century assemblages from Barking Abbey, for example.

The presence of LSS sherds at Mitcham in quantity is worthy of note. In 1985, when a study of this ware was published (Vince 1985), the ware appeared to have two distinct distributions, one in the Upper Thames Valley, centred on Oxford, and the other in the Lower Thames Valley, from Wraysbury to Silvertown. Mitcham only slightly widens this distribution area and leaves the dual nature of the pattern intact. This discontinuous distribution has led some researchers to question the petrological reasoning which was used to attribute the lower Thames finds to a source in the upper Thames. For this reason, each of the Mitcham sherds was examined under a binocular microscope to establish the nature of the shell inclusions and to note any other inclusions which might indicate a different source. The results show that the Mitcham sherds have exactly the same characteristics as those from the Thames Valley sites, on either side of the Chilterns.

The other shell-tempered ware present at Mitcham, EMSH, contains a quite different type of bivalve shell. In EMSH this comes from thick, undecorated shells in which the calcite occurs as laminae parallel to the shell surfaces whereas the LSS shell fragments are nacreous (ie like mother-of-pearl) and the calcite was laid down as lenticular bands. These shell fragments were often heavily infested with fungal borings.

Most of the sherds from Mitcham come from jars, many of which have sooted exteriors and were used for cooking. The exceptions are two LSS dishes, both from fills of ditch 200. The absence of other forms is not significant in such a small assemblage.

Medieval pottery

Four sherds of high medieval date were found. Two of these are wheelthrown greywares of Hertfordshire/Limpsfield type. These were examined under the binocular microscope and all the quartz grains noted were polished and, in many cases, had a thin coating of haematite. This, together with the absence of flint fragments, suggests a source in south Surrey, in the Limpsfield industry. A sherd of Coarse London ware, the base of an early standard jug, was also examined under the binocular microscope and its identity confirmed by the presence of sparse freshwater molluscan fragments together with a mixed quartzose sand. The fourth sherd was a white-slipped, green-glazed jug. The fabric of this sherd was seen to contain abundant iron-coated rounded quartz grains. These characteristics are present in the products of the Earlswood kiln at Bushfield Shaw (Turner 1974) but no in-depth study of glazed red

earthenwares in Surrey has been undertaken by the author and there may be other potential sources.

The Coarse London ware vessel is definitely of 12th century date and may, in fact, overlap in date with some of the Saxo-Norman wares described above. The Limpsfield industry probably spans the 12th–14th centuries whilst the Earlsfield kiln products are thought to date to the later 13th or 14th centuries. However, on comparison with the medieval London-type ware industry a slightly earlier date for the industry is also possible. Given the proximity to the Surrey whiteware production sites at Kingston and Cheam, the absence of Kingston-type ware and other Surrey whitewares suggests that there was little deposition on the site from the middle of the 13th century onwards.

Post-medieval and early modern pottery

Thirty-nine sherds of post-medieval and early modern pottery were found. They came from four features (5, 9, 116 and 131) and a small unstratified assemblage.

The pottery spans a limited period. There is no definite 17th century material for example and, while some of the wares were current in the early 18th century, most would have still been in use in the mid-18th century. Two possible sherds of Red Border ware were noted but there were no examples of the White Border wares. This would also suggest that there is no early 18th century pottery deposition on the site. The latest wares present, excluding the unstratified collection, are of mid–late 18th century date (a hand-painted Pearlware vessel and several Creamware vessels). The range of wares present includes both non-local finewares and imported porcelain and would therefore be classed as moderate in status. The range of forms present indicates drinking and serving of food and some food preparation.

FAUNAL REMAINS, by Sheila Hamilton-Dyer

Methodology

Species identifications were made using the author's modern comparative collections. All fragments were identified to species and element with the following exceptions. Ribs and vertebrae of the ungulates (other than axis, atlas, and sacrum) were identified only to the level of cattle/horse-sized and sheep/pig-sized. This restriction does not apply to burials and other associated bones where ribs and vertebrae were assigned to species. Unidentified shaft and other fragments were similarly divided. Any fragments that could not be assigned even to this level have been recorded as mammalian only. Sheep and goat were separated using the methods of Boessneck (1969) and Payne (1985). Recently broken bones were joined where possible and have been counted as single fragments. The small number of bones from sieved samples is included. Withers height calculations are based on factors recommended by von den Driesch & Boessneck (1974). Archive material includes metrical and other data not presented in the text.

Area A

A total of 180 individual bones was recovered from a variety of features. The bones are mainly well preserved with little erosion, but some had been broken on excavation. Several bones had been accessible to dogs before final disposal and a few had been burnt. Most of the identified material is of cattle and sheep/goat; a few bones of pig, horse, cat, and amphibians are also present (table 2).

Over 50% of the total (92 fragments) comprises small fragments of mammalian bone that could not be identified. A further 18% is of cattle- and sheep-sized fragments of ribs, vertebrae and long-bone shaft. Only the remaining 30.5% (55 fragments) could be fully identified. More than 56% (31 bones) of these are sheep/goat bones. Two could be positively identified as sheep, the remainder are indeterminate. Most areas of the body are represented, with the

TABLE 2 Faunal remains summary

Date		horse	cattle	sheep/ goat	pig	cattle -size	sheep -size	mammal	cat	amphibian	Total
Saxon and medieval (9th–12th century)	Total	0	7	10	4	4	11	24	0	0	60
	% of total	0	11.7	16.7	6.7	6.7	18.3	40	0	0	
	% cattle, sheep, pig		33.3	47.6	19						21
Post-medieval 17th–18th century	Total	0	1	4	0	5	1	0	1	0	12
	% of total	0	8.3	33.3	0	41.7	8.3	0	8.3	0	
	% cattle, sheep, pig		20	80	0						5
Undated	Total	1	6	17	1	5	7	68	0	3	108
	% of total	0.9	5.6	15.7	0.9	4.6	6.5	63	0	2.8	
	% cattle, sheep, pig		25	70.8	4.2						24
Total	Total	1	14	31	5	14	19	92	1	3	180
	% of total	0.6	7.8	17.2	2.8	7.8	10.6	51.1	0.6	1.7	
	% cattle, sheep, pig		28	62	10						50

expected bias against small and/or fragile elements. Loose teeth and portions of tibia are the most frequent elements. Cattle bones number fourteen and include five jaw fragments. The five pig bones include part of the jaw from a half-grown animal. The single horse bone is a complete metatarsus from ditch 206 (118, 175), which offers an estimated withers height of 1.359m.

These few bones are typical of many small groups of medieval and post-medieval bones from a variety of sources.

Area B: horse burial 130

Most of the complete skeleton of a horse was recovered. In addition to the bones the horseshoes were also present. Although several bones were broken on excavation and some bones were not retrieved it is clear that this pit originally contained the whole animal, buried with the shoes still on, and not dismembered. A detailed report on this animal is in the archive. In summary the bones represent the burial of a substantial horse of about 15½ hands and around 20 years old. This horse was lame and had a number of pathologies of the spine and feet, although none is likely to have been the cause of death. The large iron shoes are of a type used mainly on plough horses in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It seems likely that this horse died or was culled and was buried in the field, soon to become the vicarage garden in 1825.

CHARRED PLANT REMAINS, by Mark Robinson

Samples from twelve contexts of late Saxon to medieval date were floated onto a 0.3mm mesh to recover charred plant remains. The flots were sorted rapidly under a binocular microscope and the charred remains identified. The results are given in table 3. All the samples also contained fragments of coal and coke indicating the possibility of some intrusive contamination.

The samples contained different concentrations of remains but otherwise the character of the charred assemblages was similar. Free-threshing grains of *Triticum* sp. (bread or rivet wheat) predominated amongst the identified cereal remains. There was a slight presence of grains of *Secale cereale* (rye), *Hordeum* sp. (hulled barley) and *Avena* sp. (oats) along with a very few weed seeds including *Vicia* or *Lathyrus* sp. (vetch or tare). Some charcoal of *Quercus* sp. (oak) was identified from some of the samples.

TABLE 3 Charred plant remains

	Context	152	153	155	156	158	160	163	165	170	175	177	179
	Feature	102	103	105	106	107	108	110	112	113	118	122	123
	Group number	-	-	204	201	200	203						
	Sample volume (litres)	11	12	15	15	29	12	17	15	15	15	16	15
CEREAL GRAIN													
<i>Triticum</i> sp. – free threshing	Bread or rivet wheat	23	27	14	43	3	–	–	–	2	–	18	–
<i>Secale cereale</i>	Rye	–	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. – hulled	Hulled barley	–	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	1	–	2	–
<i>Avena</i> sp.	Oats	1	2	–	–	1	–	–	1	–	–	1	–
cereal indet.		27	41	35	58	8	2	1	1	5	1	17	1
WEED SEEDS													
<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> sp.	Vetch or tare	3	1	1	–	1	–	2	–	–	–	1	–
<i>Bromus</i> cf. <i>secalinus</i>	Brome grass	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	–
CHARCOAL													
<i>Quercus</i> sp.	Oak	–	+	–	–	–	–	+	+	+	–	–	–

+ = present

The material probably represented the accidental burning of cleaned grain of bread-type wheat which then became dispersed on the site and incorporated into various archaeological features. Bread wheat has been a major crop from the Saxon period onwards.

BRICK AND TILE, by Nicola Powell

A moderate quantity of brick and tile was recovered, mostly from late post-medieval contexts. However, ditch 201 produced two fragments of tile, one of which was a residual fragment of a Roman *tegula* (162g). The upper fill of pit 113 had been infilled largely with post-medieval tile with a sample in excess of 2kg being retained. The lower fills contained five fragments (15g) of tile. Ditch 203 (119, 176) produced a single sherd of probable floor tile (146g).

STONE, by David F Williams

Pit 123 produced several small fragments (<10g) of weathered, dark grey vesicular lava, almost certainly from a Mayen lava quernstone.

OTHER FINDS, by Nicola Powell

A small quantity of glass, clay tobacco pipe, oyster and mussel shell, iron objects, burnt clay and burnt flint was recovered, mostly from post-medieval contexts. These are detailed in the site archive. Undated pit 123 contained a fragment of oyster shell (10g) and pit 110 (163) produced a fragment of daub (64g).

Discussion

Of the periods represented by the findings of the excavation, early Roman and middle Saxon finds consist only of residual pottery and tile. Similarly, late Saxon activity might be represented by a single pit (102), but the one sherd from this pit need not date it closely.

The fieldwork has added a small, but useful, contribution to an understanding of the development of Mitcham in the subsequent late Saxon/early medieval period. The

excavation has revealed a number of successive boundary features of 11th–12th and 12th–13th century date, along with a number of pits and postholes of similar date. The boundary may have endured and been redefined in post-medieval times. Subsequent use of the site, in the form of large pits, did not take place until the late post-medieval period (18th century).

Apart from a single posthole, and several doubtful examples, no structural evidence was revealed. The density of early medieval finds and deposits suggests a settlement, but the site was probably peripheral to a more densely occupied area. The findings here can be added to those from the earlier excavations to the north-west of the site (Hailley 1989), which also revealed ditched features of similar date. Together, these may indicate that a significant component of the late Saxon/early medieval settlement of Mitcham was located close to the church. Excavations at Hall Place, to the east, produced further evidence of this period, with the suggestion that the manor was located nearby (Montague 1995, 8).

Montague has used his assessment of cartographic sources, backed up by archaeological evidence, to elucidate early patterns within the landscape. He has suggested that an area including the vicarage garden was open fields until the 12th–13th centuries (1995, fig 6). Previous excavation evidence indicated that a late Saxon enclosure lay to the west of the vicarage garden (Hailley 1989). The findings presented here are not extensive enough to test this assertion, but they do suggest, at least, the likely western boundary to such fields.

The horse burial in area B, which comprised the whole animal including its horseshoes, took place in late post-medieval times. It has provided useful comparative anatomical material as the remains of such animals are rarely found complete.

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