

Excavations at Great Fosters Hotel, Egham

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Archaeological investigations at Great Fosters Hotel in Egham, revealed evidence of intermittent human exploitation within a changing environment from the early Holocene to the present day. A flint scatter, typologically suggestive of a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date, represented the earliest phase of human activity at the site. The flint scatter may have preceded or been contemporary with a phase of woodland clearance, suggested by the frequency of early tree-throw features and changes in plant macrofossils. A Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age field system then appears to have developed within open woodland or grassland, which may have included a droveway for the management of livestock. An hiatus in activity then ensued, which persisted until the environs of the site were settled in the 5th century. A further break in human activity then occurred between the Saxon period and the medieval period, when evidence of occupation resumed. The site was devoted to arable farming from the 14th century to the late 15th century, prior to construction of the manorial dwelling now known as Great Fosters Hotel. A building recording project, carried out in tandem with the archaeological investigations, indicated that a series of extensions and modifications was made to the 16th century core of the residence throughout the post-medieval period, creating the Grade I listed building evident today.

Introduction

An archaeological investigation and building recording project (site code GFH 01) was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology in 2001, prior to redevelopment at Great Fosters Hotel, Egham. The site lies c 2km south of the river Thames on relatively flat ground (fig 1). Partial development of the Grade II listed formal grounds was accompanied by an archaeological excavation and building recording survey. The project design employed a mixed strategy of mitigation, which included Watching Briefs, test pitting and excavation. Three areas contained remains substantial enough to warrant open area excavation, defined as Areas 1, 2 and 3 (fig 2). The hotel building itself was constructed and repeatedly altered between c AD 1550 and the 20th century (Phillpotts 2006) and is Grade I listed. Redevelopment work on the kitchen wing necessitated a building recording survey (fig 3). This article outlines the results of both projects.

The archaeological sequence, by Jim Leary and Rebecca Lythe

EARLY HOLOCENE ACTIVITY

The underlying drift geology consists of natural flood plain gravels (BGS 1981), which were recorded at a level of 14.7m OD in Area 1 (fig 3), between 14.14m OD and 14.43m OD in Area 2 and between 14.53m OD and 14.84m OD in Area 3. In Areas 1, 2 and much of 3, the gravel was overlain by a deposit of brickearth, which was between 0.2 and 0.3m thick.

A palaeochannel was observed running down the western side of Area 2 (fig 4). The lower fills consisted of mineral-rich, coarse-grained sands and gravels, indicative of a fast-flowing, or 'high-energy', fluvial system. A series of fine-grained silts and clays, indicative of a succession by a 'low-energy', virtually stationary aquatic environment succeeded them, suggesting a subsequent drop in energy. A number of worked flints, typologically characteristic of the Mesolithic, were stratified within the silts and clays suggesting the stream silted up and ceased to flow during this period.

A dispersed lithic scatter was recorded on top of the natural terrace gravel, spreading out across the palaeochannel fill. The flint, retrieved during a field walking exercise, was uniformly spread across the area without any obvious concentrations. The lack of discrete knapping



Fig 1 Great Fosters, Egham. Site location plan. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

spots suggests it was not produced by one or two events, but either accumulated gradually over a long period or as the result of a relatively short but intensive spell of human activity. Typological analysis suggests that the assemblage belongs to a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic tradition, with the exception of one end-scraper, which may belong to an earlier late Glacial or early post-Glacial industry.

Nine irregular cuts truncated the terrace gravel in Area 2 (fig 4). These were interpreted as being early Holocene in date as several were truncated by later prehistoric features. Their irregular nature, coupled with the total absence of finds from within their fills, suggests a natural origin. They were therefore interpreted as tree-throw features.

An assemblage of floral and faunal macro-remains was retrieved from a sampled area of burning in one of the tree-throw hollows. Several grassland and woodland plant species were represented, including common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), moon carrot (*Seseli libanotis*) and bugle (*Ajuga reptans*). Waterlogged twigs were also extracted, along with several species of beetle characteristic of environments with tree cover. The available evidence therefore suggests the excavation area was wooded in the early Holocene.

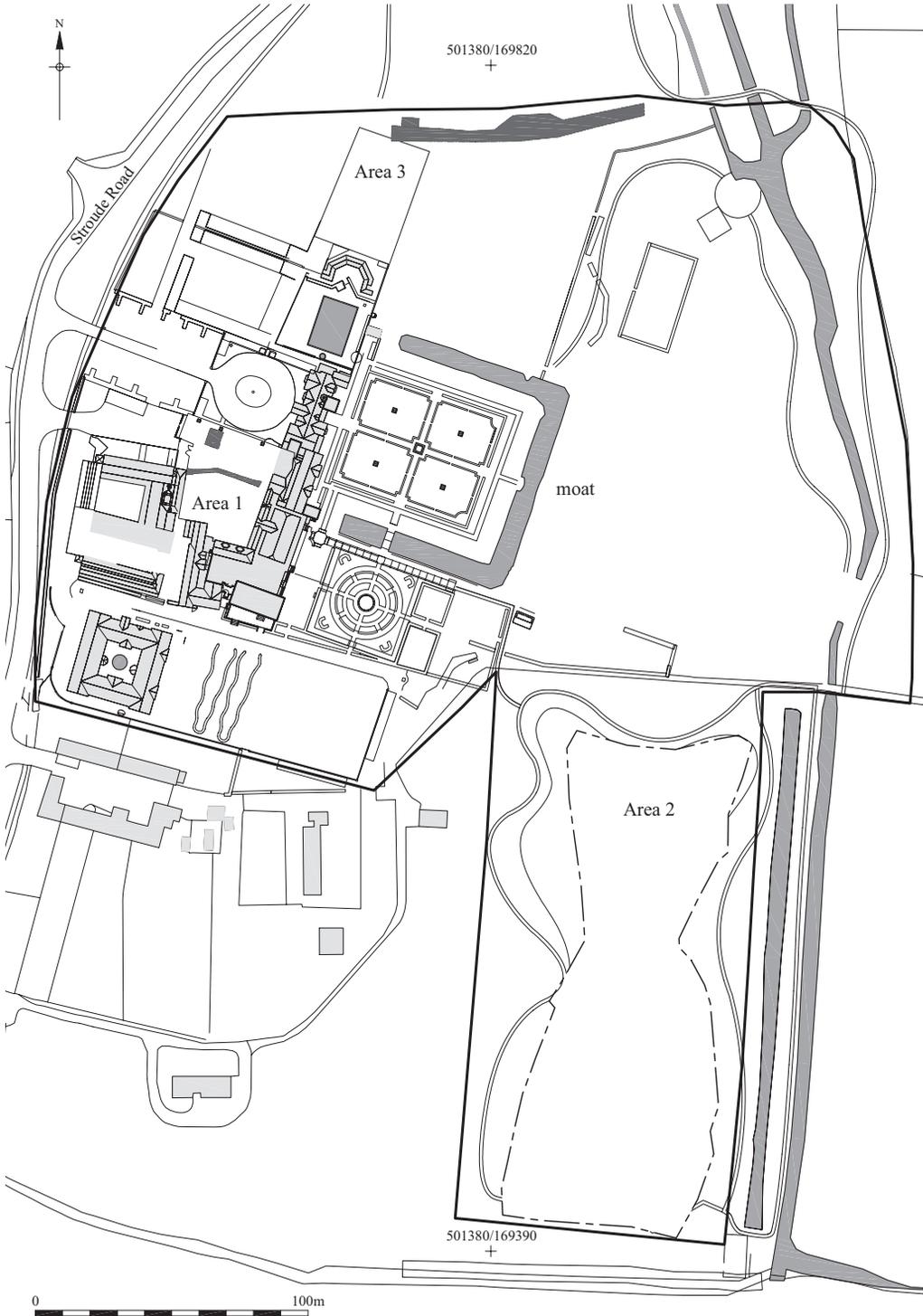


Fig 2 Great Fosters, Egham. Trench and test pit location plan. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

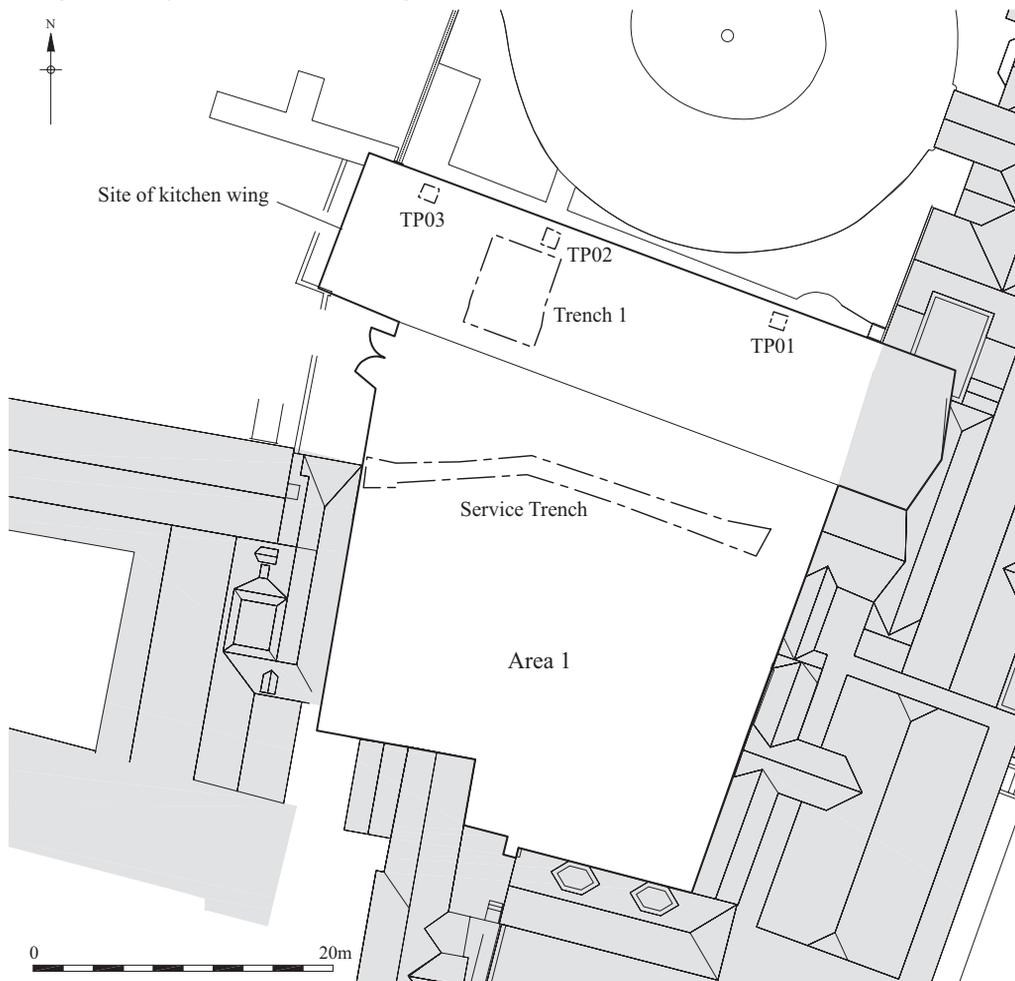


Fig 3 Great Fosters, Egham. Area 1 location detail of trench and test pit locations.

The presence of the tree-throw features indicates that a phase of full or partial deforestation, possibly the result of natural rather than man-made clearance, ensued prior to the next phase of human activity. The mechanics of tree-throw hollows have been the subject of some discussion (Evans *et al* 1999) and it is possible that they provide evidence of primary clearance and settlement. Certainly similar features, recorded at the nearby site of Petters Sports Field, were interpreted as such (O’Connell & Needham 1977). It is impossible to tell from the available evidence whether this was the case at Great Fosters. The tree clearance may have been caused by natural or man-made agents operating over a rapid or more prolonged period of time. A field system had been developed at Great Fosters by the Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age that would have required an area of relatively open land in order to function effectively.

LATE BRONZE AGE TO EARLY IRON AGE ACTIVITY

Evidence for Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age activity within Areas 1 and 3 was virtually absent, being limited to a small quantity of residual struck flint recovered from later features.

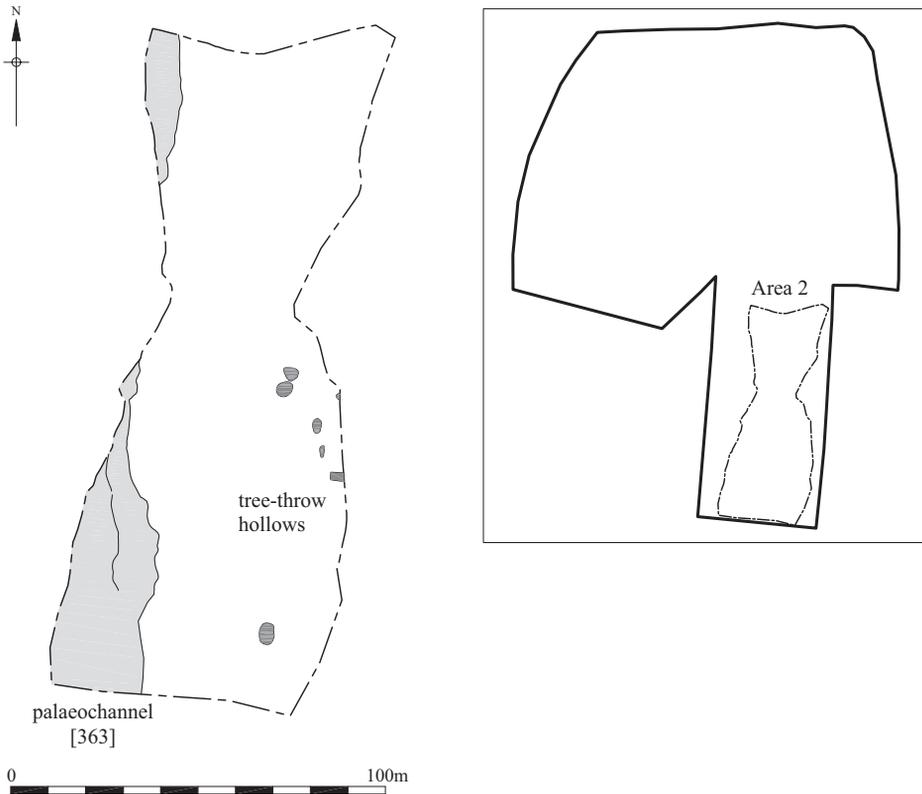


Fig 4 Great Fosters, Egham. Early Holocene phase in Area 2.

This contrasts starkly with the concentration of Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age activity observed in Area 2.

The earliest cut feature of definite man-made origin was east–west gully 316. Although no datable remains were retrieved from its fill, the stratigraphy demonstrated that it had been infilled before being truncated by two ditches, at least one of which had been backfilled between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age (fig 6). It is therefore possible that the ditch represents an earlier prehistoric field boundary or drainage feature.

A further eight linear features were recorded in Area 2 (fig 6). These were interpreted as being broadly contemporary, forming demarcations within a later prehistoric co-axial field system. The boundary features were either parallel with or at right angles to the Mesolithic to early Neolithic palaeochannel. It is therefore possible that the watercourse once delineated a boundary that the later features respected.

Ditch 296 was 1m wide x 0.5m deep with a butt-end to the south. It was the longest of the linear features observed, being 101.3m in length, extending beyond the limit of excavation to the north. A similar ditch (351), roughly equivalent in width and depth, ran parallel with 296 to the immediate west. This left a long, thin upstanding strip of land, approximately 3.5m wide, between them. It is conceivable that this strip functioned as a droveway or pen for the herding of livestock, although it would not have been suitable for the control of larger animals that require a boundary of a substantial nature. No direct evidence for hedgerows or fence lines was associated with the ditches. It is possible that their shallow depths and the lack of postholes or hedgerow evidence was the result of modern horizontal truncation by ploughing, although the survival of relatively peripheral features in close proximity suggests this was not

the case. Hedgerows are known to have a low archaeological visibility only being inferable from the associated ditches (Pryor 1998, 70–2). The droveway was therefore probably constructed for the management of wild stock, probably smaller ungulates, such as sheep or goats.

An interrupted, east–west linear feature (340/342/344/408), seemingly formed the northern boundary of the droveway; its shallow, discontinuous nature is suggestive of a grubbed-out hedgerow. East–west ditch 300/318 was situated to the south. A small gap or opening was present halfway along its length, aligned with the upstanding, central section of the droveway. The opening would have been wide enough to allow the passage of one animal at a time, perhaps acting as a further mechanism for livestock management. Similar field systems of Bronze Age date, both in configuration and size, have been identified at nearby sites to the east at Ashford Prison and Hengrove Farm (Carew *et al* 2006, 31–3, 37–9; Hayman 2005), as well as somewhat further afield at Long Grove Road, Epsom (Stevenson 2005, 161–70) and Prospect Park, Harmondsworth in Hillingdon (Andrews 1996; Farwell *et al* 1999).

A further six incomplete linear features (298, 314, 338, 402, 414 and 440) also formed part of the field system (fig 6). The cuts were all relatively peripheral, being between 0.4 and 0.8 m wide and 0.1 and 0.3 m deep. Analogous features were recorded within a field system at Upminster, which were described as ‘small, narrow, shallow ditches or gullies [...] often only 0.4–0.6 m wide and a few centimetres deep’, resembling ‘a long narrow ditch made up of sections on the same alignment’ (Greenwood 1986, 174). A combination of ditches and hedgerows was often used within field systems during the Bronze Age (Pryor 1998), particularly in lowland Britain (Carew *et al* 2006). It therefore seems probable that such shallow, discontinuous features equate to hedgerows.

New theoretical perspectives on this period focus on the evolution of Bronze Age landscape organisation, particularly with regard to co-axial field systems (Yates 2001). One of the most complex examples of Bronze Age land division has been observed on Dartmoor (Fleming 1988), where the landscape was divided into territories with a series of settlements scattered throughout. Recent work by Yates, along the Thames valley and estuary, suggests that a similar pattern of agricultural intensification occurred in this area, centred on riverine and estuarine environments (Cotton 2004, 27; Field 2004, 46; Yates 2001). Distinct enclaves of Later Bronze Age activity were identified, associated with metal deposition, livestock herding and new forms of settlement (Yates 2001). Great Fosters can therefore be viewed as conforming to the Runnymede–Petters Sports Field pattern of intensification of Late Bronze Age managed land, forming part of the largest block of co-axial field systems identified within the Thames valley area.

None of the field systems studied by Yates yielded evidence suggesting cereal production, indicating considerable reliance on animal husbandry (Yates 2001); this predominance of pasture use had been noted previously by Needham (1987, 134). Great Fosters appears to be no exception; a lack of environmental evidence indicative of cereal cultivation and the apparent presence of elements of a field system with controlled access points and a possible droveway suggests the system was predominantly or entirely focused on animal husbandry. An assemblage of plant macrofossils, retrieved from ditch 296, contained evidence indicating open woodland, grassland or hedgerows, three potential environments equally suitable for the keeping of livestock.

The ditches in the field system did not contain dating evidence, with the exception of north–south ditch 296. This feature contained 38 sherds of pottery, which resembled a transitional Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age assemblage from the nearby site of Petters Sports Field (O’Connell 1986). It therefore seems likely that the field system started to fall out of use between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, when some or all of the ditches silted up or were backfilled. This evidence mirrors patterns observed at similar sites in the area, including those within the Runnymede–Petters Sports Field block. The site therefore supports the hypothesis that a period of abandonment ensued in the Late Bronze

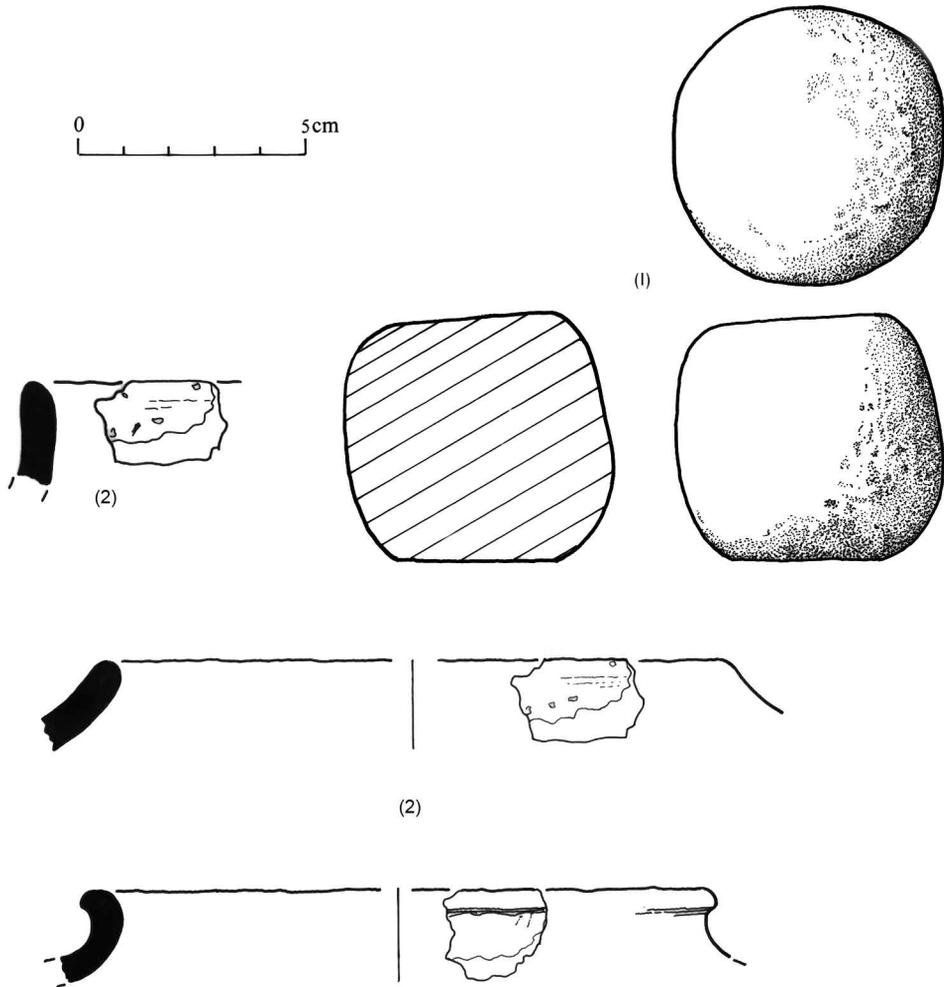


Fig 5 Great Fosters, Egham. Saxon pottery and stone pestle.

Age/Early Iron Age, possibly indicating 'a general crisis' in the Thames Valley area (Yates 2001, 78).

Four small postholes and six shallow pits were also observed in Area 2 (fig 6). These features lacked dating evidence, but the similarity between their fills and the fills of the field system suggest they are contemporaneous. The features were not aligned and did not appear to form part of any obvious structure. Pits 347 and 349, however, both contained burnt material and fire-cracked flint, indicating either an *in-situ* fire or the disposal of burnt waste. As the bases of the pits were not affected by heat, the latter explanation seems more probable.

Two groups of roughly concentric, curvilinear features were recorded in the south-east corner and the east-central section of Area 2 (fig 6). These were between 0.15 and 0.75m deep and between 0.5 and 1.1m wide. Some could be interpreted as the remnants of structures associated with prehistoric settlement, such as drip gullies, windbreaks or possible drying posts or racks. Prehistoric habitation is documented in the area, as exemplified by the nearby site of Petters Sports Field (O'Connell 1986). Their functions remain enigmatic, however, given the nature of the available evidence.

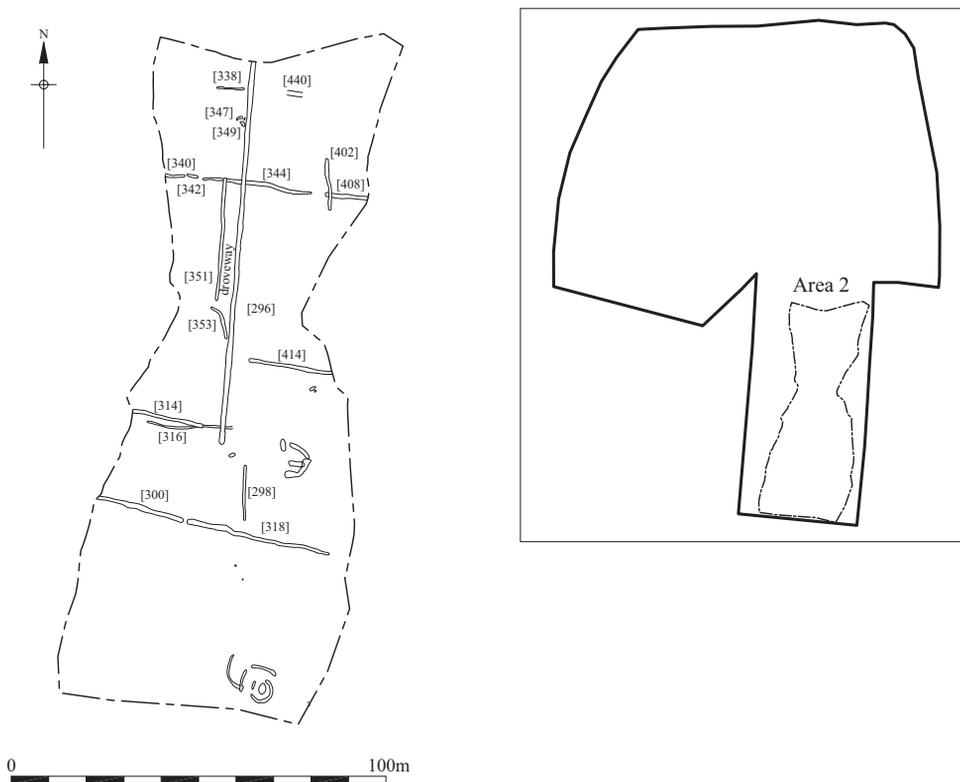


Fig 6 Great Fosters, Egham. Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age field systems in Area 2.

The field walking exercise revealed evidence of a second phase of flint working in the later prehistoric period. Of particular note was a small prehistoric stone pestle, which exhibited wear marks indicative of use (fig 5, no 1). The lithic assemblage was once again distributed evenly across the natural terrace gravel in Area 2, with no obvious patterning.

ROMAN ACTIVITY

An hiatus in activity appears to have occurred between the Early Iron Age and the Saxon period. The only evidence of intermediate occupation consists of three residual fragments of Roman pottery and a fragment of Roman roof tile, recovered from the modern topsoil in Area 2. This suggests that some form of Roman activity may have taken place in the vicinity of the site, beyond the boundaries of the excavation areas.

SAXON ACTIVITY

The presence of a Saxon manor house within the three-sided moat situated to the east of the current main building has been speculated upon (Turner 1926). However, documentary investigations, undertaken as part of this project, found no confirmation in the historical record concerning the existence of any such establishment. In fact, this work suggests that the moat formed part of a 16th century ornamental garden, as was the case at Hamworth House, Middlesex, where excavations re-dated a similar, supposedly ‘Saxon’ moat to the Tudor period (Phillpotts 2006). Despite this, the possibility cannot be completely dismissed since Saxon activity did take place at Great Fosters.

In Area 1, a ditch of 5th to mid-8th century date was observed. The feature was accompanied by a further boundary ditch and a possible fence line, which are likely to date to the Saxon period (fig 7). Saxon ditch 195 was aligned north-west/south-east and was of substantial size. It was over 1m wide and of unknown length but measured at least 1m, continuing beyond the limit of excavation to the north-west. The south-eastern end had been truncated by a later pit, which continued beyond the opposite limit of excavation. The feature was relatively shallow, being 0.37m deep, perhaps because of later horizontal truncation. Its length and width suggest it would have formed a highly visible break in the Saxon landscape, hence its interpretation as a boundary ditch. Typological analysis of the Saxon Chaff and Fine Sand-Tempered Wares (fig 5, no 2) recovered from it suggest it ceased to function between AD 400 and 750, when it was presumably backfilled.

A second boundary ditch (198) was identified to the north of ditch 195. The fill of the feature was sampled and a fragment of burnt bone, two possible emmer grains (*Triticum cf dicoccum*), an unidentified cereal grain and some charcoal fragments were extracted. The inclusions are indicative of kitchen waste dumped during backfilling. The feature is assumed to be roughly contemporary with Saxon ditch 195. This is based upon the similarity between their fills and their identical alignment, as no dating evidence was retrieved from 198. Eight postholes were also recorded to the south of the ditches, organised into one row of six double postholes to the north and a second row of two single postholes to the south. They ran parallel

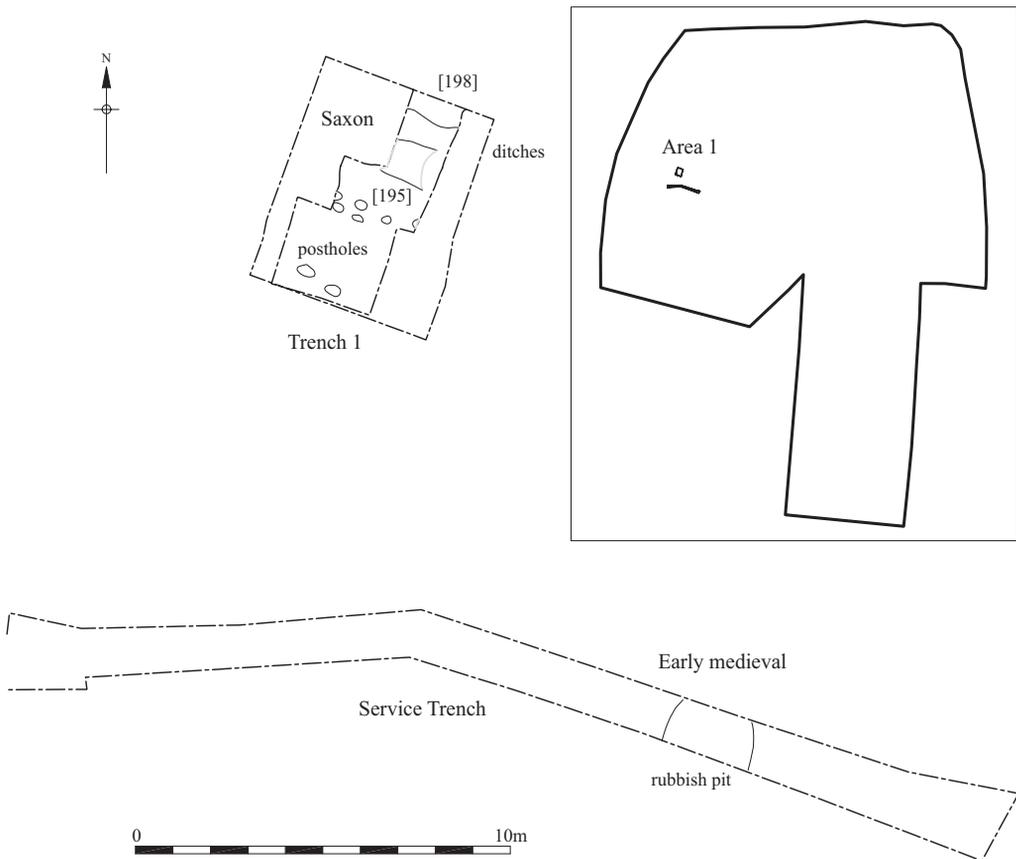


Fig 7 Great Fosters, Egham. Saxon and early medieval activity in Area 1.

with the two ditches and may therefore represent a contemporary fence line running along the southern side of 195. Again, no artefactual evidence was retrieved to support this assertion.

The interpretations presented above concerning the chronology of the ‘Saxon’ features are speculative. Consequently, it is worth considering an alternative hypothesis.

The 17th century gully (141) and 18th century wall (101) both parallel the ‘Saxon’ ditches and postholes. The alignment of these features was practically identical to that of their ‘Saxon’ predecessors, with 18th century wall 101 truncating ‘Saxon’ ditch 198 along its entire length. While chance alone could account for this, it seems unlikely. A more probable explanation may be that the boundary remained active from the Saxon period or earlier, until the late post-medieval period when wall 101 was constructed. It is therefore possible that the parallel ‘Saxon’ features are not contemporary. Ditch 198 and the rows of postholes may represent a series of earlier or later versions of the boundary, succeeded or preceded by Saxon ditch 195.

Saxon activity in Area 3 was represented by a large, solitary pit (fig 8). The fill contained several fragmented, jar-shaped Saxon vessels, including two sherds of 5th century Chaff and Fine Sand-Tempered Ware and Flint-Tempered Ware. A number of fragmented cattle long bones were also recovered, complete with butchery marks and signs of burning, providing evidence of food preparation. The skull of an adult short-horn cow was retrieved, along with pig bones and fragmented small mammal remains, tentatively identified as rabbit. Two grains of spelt (*Triticum cf spelta*), a single grain of emmer (*T. dicoccum*) and fragments of nutshell were extracted from the sampled fill, along with a number of wild plant seeds (downy woundwort or *Stachys cf. germanica*, smooth sow-thistle or *Sonchus oleraceus* and the common nettle or *Urtica dioica*) associated with grassed, wooded and arable environments. Two smithing hearth bottoms were unearthed, providing evidence for metalworking. The presence of edible flora and fauna within the assemblage, coupled with the evidence of butchery and burning, suggests the feature functioned as a midden for the disposal of kitchen waste. Such material was presumably generated by domestic activity, which probably took place nearby. The presence of the hearth bottoms also suggests the occurrence of industrial or craft activity in close proximity. Adjacent 5th century Saxon occupation and activity can therefore be inferred from the contents of the feature.

A single, small posthole was recorded to the east (fig 8). A Saxon date was proffered on account of the similarity between its fill and the fill of the 5th century pit, but a lack of dating evidence prevented a more definite interpretation.

Content and density of the features encountered suggests small-scale Saxon activity at Great Fosters. The population was probably fairly self-sufficient, producing and consuming its own cereals and livestock and manufacturing some of its own tools. The exact nature of the occupation could not be identified on the available evidence. While it could have taken the form of an earlier manorial complex, it could equally equate to a lower status hamlet or farmstead. Former Roman urban centres in the region, such as Staines, underwent a ‘final collapse in the 5th century’ (Crouch 1976, 365). Perhaps this urban collapse led to an expansion of hinterland settlements in more rural locations, Great Fosters being one potential example. Whereas Poulton in 1987 could still decry the severe limitations of the Saxon settlement data for Surrey (1987, 207), it is now clear that the occupation remains at Great Fosters fit the general pattern for rural occupation sites in England of the Early and Middle Saxon periods, which are characterised by dispersed small farmsteads and hamlets, with a very occasional larger village (Cowie & Blackmore 2008, 136–67). The evidence for ironworking represented by the two smithing hearth bottoms compares to a very limited range of evidence from other contemporary rural Saxon sites in the general region (*ibid*, 150–1).

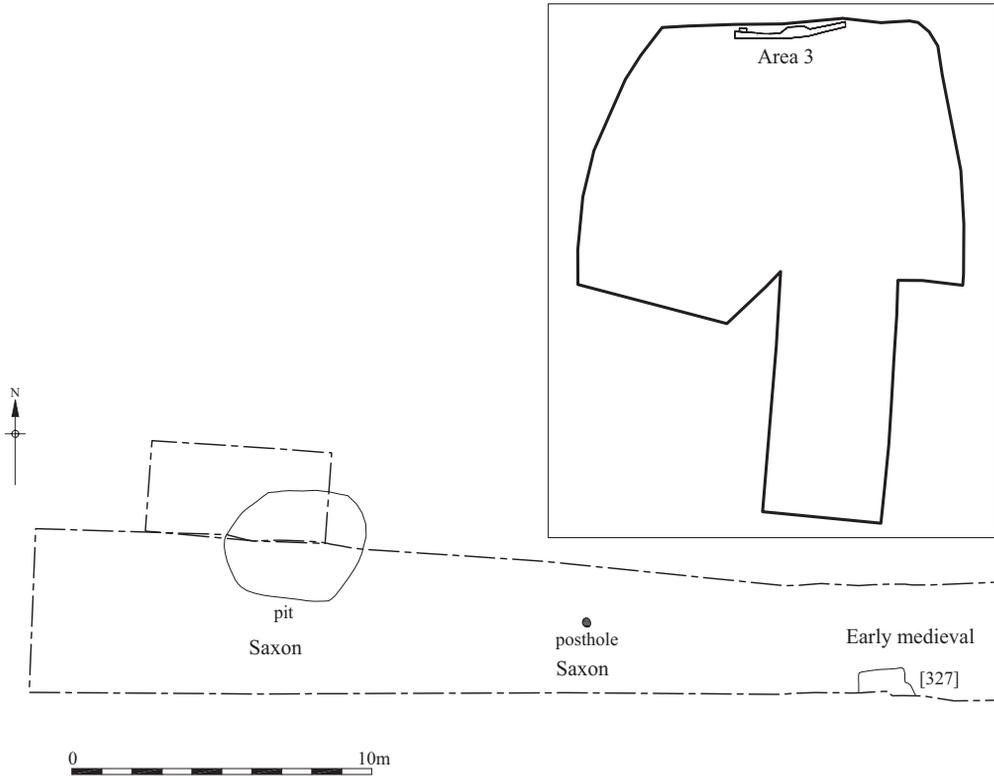


Fig 8 Great Fosters, Egham. Saxon and early medieval activity in Area 3.

11TH–13TH CENTURY MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY

The excavation revealed a lack of activity between the Early Saxon period and the early medieval period; the next phase of occupation apparently took place between the 11th and 13th centuries. In 1369, Great Fosters seems to have formed an undeveloped part of the manor of Imworth, a sub-manor of Egham (Phillpotts 2006).

In Area 1, early medieval activity was demonstrated by a single, large rubbish pit (fig 7). The feature contained several sherds of early medieval Sand and Shell Ware and early medieval Chalky Ware, indicative of a date range of *c* AD 1050–1150. The pottery sherds were accompanied by a faunal assemblage composed of eight cattle bones, a mandible from a sheep or goat, the cranium of a dog and some unidentified small mammal remains. One cow scapula had clearly been chopped, as a result of butchery. A sample of the pit fill yielded one grain of hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and some unidentified cereal grains.

In Area 3, a large, sub-rectangular pit (327) was recorded (fig 8). The fill contained several sherds of medieval Sandy Ware bowls and jars of late 12th–13th century date and an artefactual and faunal assemblage suggestive of kitchen refuse. The mandible of a pig was recovered, along with a number of unidentified large mammal skeletal fragments, a broken sandstone quern and a single grain of hulled barley (*H. vulgare*).

The floral and faunal assemblages, in combination with the evidence of butchery, suggest domestic refuse was dumped in the pits within a rural setting. Consequently, the presence of early medieval habitation in the vicinity of the excavation area is indicated. Given the limited nature of the archaeological record uncovered, coupled with a total lack of documentary evidence regarding the presence of an earlier manor, it is unclear whether this

activity was associated with a high-status complex or some other form of occupation, although the lack of documentary sources suggests marginal occupation.

A second feature, ditch 330, was observed in Area 2. Although it was not excavated, several fragments of pottery were collected from the top of the upper fill, which were dated to the 11th and 12th centuries. It was, therefore, interpreted as an early medieval land boundary, fully backfilled by the 12th century.

LATE MEDIEVAL ACTIVITY

The early medieval features were sealed by a 0.4m-thick deposit of humus-rich material, interpreted as being the result of agricultural activity. The majority of the pottery recovered from it was of Saxon date, having been churned up from underlying features and redeposited during ploughing. One sherd of late medieval Coarse Border Ware was recovered, suggesting the deposit dated to between AD 1340 and 1500.

The site was mapped as 'Fosters' for the first time in 1521, when it was described as 'purpresture', a term used to describe land obtained through encroachment on common land, wasteland or woodland (Phillpotts 2006). The archaeological evidence therefore suggests this 'purpresture' was used as agricultural land at this time.

16TH–17TH CENTURY ACTIVITY

No Tudor activity was uncovered during the excavation. This lack of evidence is surprising as construction of the manorial dwelling now known as Great Fosters Hotel almost certainly began in the 1550s. This construction date is well supported by the results of the building recording survey (see *Building recording survey*, below) and historical research (Phillpotts 2006).

Excavation Area 1 seems to have continued to function as agricultural land or as an ornamental garden during this time, as exemplified by layer 118. This soil horizon seems to have remained in use into the 17th century, as suggested by the presence of pottery dating between 1620 and 1700.

Shortly after this date, the function of the area changed. The layer was cut by a number of 17th century features, including a gully, several pits and a possible beamslot.

Gully 141 was orientated east–west, extending beyond the limits of excavation to the east and west. The feature was 0.65m deep, and might have functioned as a land boundary, replaced or reinforced by a double row of stakeholes cut into its backfill (fig 9). Its alignment respected that of the earlier Saxon ditch, suggesting the boundary persisted in some form throughout the intervening periods.

A contemporary, rectangular pit (146) was also recorded to the north of the ditch. Pottery manufactured between 1630 and 1680 was extracted from its fill. The feature was cut by a later pit (122), which contained similarly dated pottery and a number of 17th century brick fragments. A further pit (143) was also recorded in the west-central portion of the area. It contained a single sherd of 16th century Dutch slipware, presumed to be residual.

A possible remnant of a timber-framed building was recorded to the south, represented by the fragmentary remains of beamslot 124. This feature also contained 17th century dating evidence.

18TH–19TH CENTURY ACTIVITY

The 17th century features were all sealed by a 0.3m-thick layer, presumably deposited in order to raise and level the ground surface in preparation for a new phase of building activity. Pottery recovered suggests this took place in the 18th century.

The deposit was cut by a number of features, including three construction cuts for 18th century walls (figs 10 and 11). Wall 101 was aligned north-west/south-east within construction cut 103 and was of unknown length, extending beyond the limits of excavation to the east

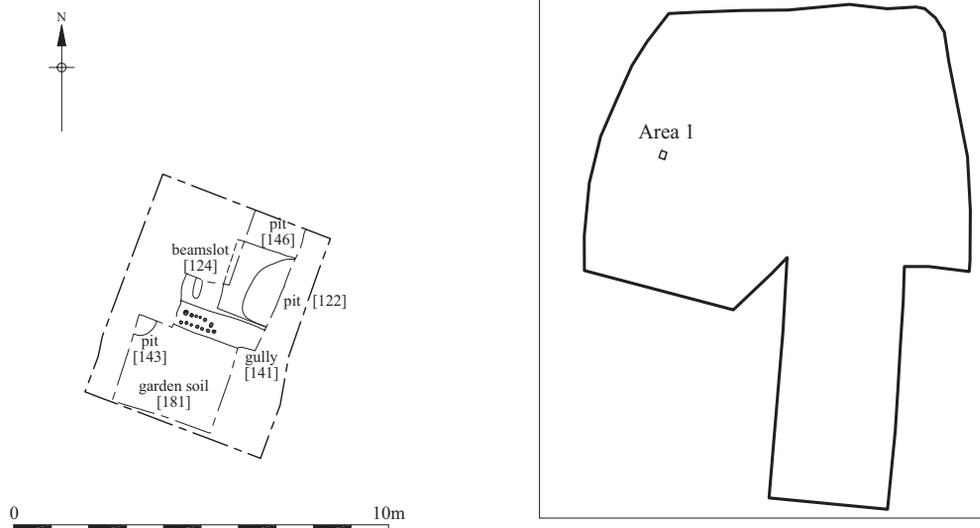


Fig 9 Great Fosters, Egham. 17th century features in Area 1.

and west. The feature may represent a boundary wall, running parallel to the earlier Saxon features and the 17th century gully. Wall 117 was built within construction cut 110. It probably represents the southern wall of an outbuilding, which abuts the existing courtyard wall 120. Earlier 18th century foundation elements of this same boundary wall were also found in test pits 1, 2 and 3 as well as a contemporary drain in test pit 1 (fig 10: TP 01–03). The walls of the outbuilding were all constructed with bricks typical of the 18th century, a date confirmed by the presence of a sherd of Staffordshire white salt-glazed stoneware pottery, from the backfill of the construction cut, dating between AD 1720 and 1780. The floor was composed of red ceramic tiles held in place by mortar layer 114. The building was first recorded in a cartographic context on a 1770–1 farm estate map (fig 11) and is shown on the 1841 tithe map. On the 1881 OS map it is shown surrounded by a yard. It is described in more detail below in the building recording survey.

The structure was eventually demolished, an event recognised archaeologically in a layer of debris containing building material and smashed glass wine bottles. These were manufactured between 1680 and 1800, an unusually wide date range until one considers the possibility that some were re-used as decanters. Their presence within the demolition debris suggests the building may have been used for storing wine prior to its destruction.

Also of note was a copper bell, probably from an 18th century horse harness, recovered as a surface find from Area 2. A stable and coach-house are identified forming part of the manorial complex in an inventory compiled in 1702 (Phillpotts 2006) and the stables still extant were probably constructed in the 17th century (see *Building recording survey*, below).

The building recording survey and survey of conditions, by John Brown

INTRODUCTION

At the time of recording the Great Fosters Hotel was undergoing a rolling programme of redevelopment, one aspect of which was the modernisation of the kitchen wing (fig 3). As the 17th century Mansion House is statutorily listed Grade 1 (Runnymede Borough Council ref 00096 and DoE code no 1346-4-77A), listed building consent was applied for, and granted

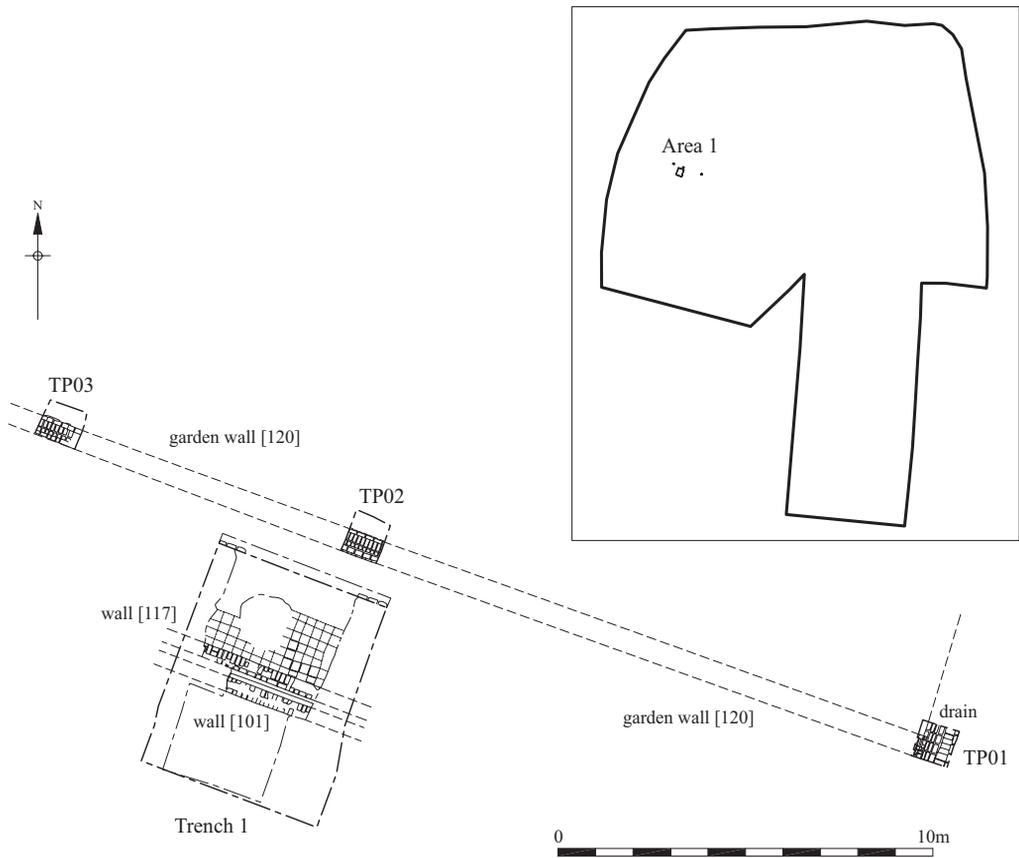


Fig 10 Great Fosters, Egham. 18th century activity in Area 1.

subject to conditions requiring recording and analysis of the standing remains and below-ground archaeology prior to and during the works (ref RU.00/0687 and RU.99/0284; M Higgins, pers comm 17 July 2001). Unfortunately, work involving some destruction of the historic fabric had taken place prior to archaeological recording/assessment. Building recording was initially undertaken on the remaining elements of the kitchen wing, the courtyard and drive, and on the condition of the adjacent early 20th century extension.

METHODOLOGY

The techniques used to record the extant fabric included measured and drawn sketch elevations of both areas of investigation, with additional photographic recording and written description, in accordance with the guidelines of the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments of England (RCHME 1996). The building materials were examined using the London system of classification.

BUILDING HISTORY

The majority of the architectural history presented here is taken from a report by Kym Wilkie Associates and Giles Quarmer and Associates (2000).

16th–17th centuries

The central core of the existing Great Fosters building is thought to have been constructed *c* 1550, and to have been commissioned by Sir William Wareham. The Listed Buildings Register gives a less definite date from *c* 1550–1600. A date on the sundial in the centre of the formal gardens is given as 1558. Given that this is a movable piece of garden furniture this date should be treated with caution. Christopher Hussey analysed the house in the 1920s proposing an Elizabethan origin based on the Garden (east) façade, suggesting a U-shaped symmetrical house. However, Nairn and Pevsner conclude that the symmetry is achieved by 20th century additions (Nairn *et al* 1971, 265). They suggest a late 16th century date for much of the external aspect, with an earlier core around the central hall without the wings or the staircase tower (*ibid*). From 1568 to 1616 various residents are recorded. Over the porch a date is given as 1598, and the northern wing is thought to have been demolished at this time to make way for the stair tower, possibly by Sir George Manners, the Marquis of Wintore (several improvements are attested to by John Aubrey but not further identified). Dates on a decorated ceiling and exterior lead down pipes read 1602 or later, indicating modifications throughout the 17th century. The stables (conference centre), to the south of the main building, formed the southern range of the courtyard opposite the kitchen wing and are dated after 1631 (*ibid*, 266). The owners at this time were Thomas and Mary Bennett. The original construction of the brick cottages that form part of Dower House is thought to date from this period.

18th–19th centuries

The house is first clearly labelled as ‘Great Fosters’ on the Rocque map of 1768. A Dr Irish was operating it as a lunatic asylum by 1767. An 1816 plan by Thomas Denton shows the house set within its grounds, and the now demolished hipped roof outbuilding may have been present at this time, but does not appear to be represented on the 1841 tithe map. More significantly there does not seem to be any indication of the driveway and courtyard that is clearly depicted on the 1881 OS map on which the western wing is depicted running along the boundary wall to the driveway and entrance forecourt. A separate outbuilding is shown, surrounded by a walled yard. The south-eastern range also seems to have been extended away from the core at this period. Some restoration work was undertaken at least internally in 1866 (attested to by a date inserted into the Tapestry Room ceiling), but the most likely period is following the purchase of Great Fosters around 1870 by the Hanoverian Baron Colonel Halkett. During the 1870s, extensive refurbishments were undertaken. The baron died in 1880, and it is possible that this may be a cut-off date for building work in the 19th century. Baroness Halkett sold the house to the Earl of Dudley in 1910.

20th century

Significant restoration work was undertaken during the 20th century. The 1914 OS map shows little change from the 1881 plan, with some re-organisation of the central courtyard south of the kitchen wing. Around 1918–19, ownership of the house passed to the Hon Gerald S Montagu. Extensive renovations were again undertaken in 1918–19 and 1928–31. These included extending the southern range and alterations to the west (kitchen) wing and outbuildings. The surrounding grounds appear to have remained as agricultural or horticultural land and gardens associated with the building. The 1918 extensions were undertaken by the architect Romaine-Walker, who was also commissioned to construct ‘Dower House’, created by combining a range of three brick cottages and building a timber-framed south wing. Romaine-Walker was also responsible for the creation of the Grade II* listed Arts and Crafts gardens, which incorporated the 16th century sundial as a central feature. The architects Dent and Weller undertook the 1928 extensions. In 1929 Sir Harold

Sutcliffe MP bought the house and building work continued, including importing a 17th century tithe barn from Maldon (listed Grade II, RBC ref 00097, DOE code no 1346-4-77b), incorporated into the southern range of the main house in 1930, and presently functioning as a banqueting hall (present on the OS map of 1935). The last major phase of building work prior to 2001 was undertaken during the early 1970s, comprising particularly the creation of the staff block that forms the southern range of the central courtyard, and alteration of the stables to a conference centre.

Observations: kitchen wing

The pitched roof of the ground floor section nearest the main house is probably of mid-late 19th century date at the earliest, being constructed of precision cut timber (2 x 4 inches (50 x 100mm)) with extensive use of machine-stamped galvanised nails. A change in mortar on the external south wall may represent repointing but could also indicate a line of rebuilding. This is mirrored on the north (forecourt) wall where later wall capping has clearly been added. On the forecourt wall the extension of the kitchen wing shows a break in the bond to that of the main house (which is good quality, regular English bond) just after the first floor gable end. This line approximates to an earlier wall now marking an internal division between the main building and the kitchen wing proper. It is therefore likely that the building was re-roofed, possibly at the same time as the 1918–19 extensions of the kitchen by Romaine-Walker.

The south- and north-facing elevations of the forecourt wall respectively show as many as six phases of building. These comprise rebuilds, modifications, repairs, and a variety of brick types, mortars and several brick bonds were used in these elevations (table 1).

Phase 1: main building – 17th century

Foundations uncovered in a contractor's test pit within the western wing close to the gable end of the main house showed purple-red stock moulded brick (fabric 3032), on a perpendicular alignment to the main house that seems to be parallel to the surviving southern wall of the kitchen (rebuilt, although some of the original fabric has either been retained or re-used as facing brick). These foundations appear to represent an extension dating to the 17th century, probably associated with rebuilding by the Percys (and others).

Phase 2: re-alignment of extension – late 17th–18th centuries

Some sections of the remaining kitchen extension forecourt wall represent a second phase of building that can only be given a broad date range of late 17th–early 19th century. However, a late 17th to mid/late 18th century construction date is suggested by the stratigraphic relationships. It seems that during this period the northern wall of the extension was rebuilt to provide a more satisfactory perpendicular alignment with the main house on the forecourt side. This phase also represents the construction of the forecourt wall proper with a pan-tiled hipped roof outbuilding incorporated. Access to the building was on the forecourt side, and later was blocked up. The stepped foundations and mortar type indicate a mid-late 18th century date at the earliest. The building may be the one represented on the 1841 tithe map, although other foundations aligned parallel to it could represent an earlier structure, as the building is not visible on the 1846 tithe map. It does appear on the 1881 OS map, surrounded by a yard.

Phase 3: wall raising – late 19th century

A chamfered capping was added to the forecourt wall, with this being raised further and stepping down from the main house to the hipped roof outbuilding. This seems to have been

Table 1 Main brick types and bond by phase

Phase	Brick fabric	Dimensions (mm)	Bond	Mortar
1 (17th century)	3039 variant,	220–230 x 105–110 x 55–60	English (Regular)	A
2 (Late 17th to 18th century)	3039 variant 3032 near 3033	220–230 x 104–110 x 54–60 230 x 105–110 x 60–65	English (Regular) Header/stretcher (Irregular)	B
3 (Mid/late 18th to mid/late 19th century)	GFH01/1; 3032	220–230 x 105–110 x 55–65; 225 x 95–105 x 55–65	Header/stretcher (Irregular)	C, F, D
4 (19th to 20th century)	3032 GFH01/2	220–230 x 105 x 60–65 210–220 x 107–110 x 55–65	Header/stretcher (Irregular)	E
5 (Early 20th century)	3038 (London Brick Co) 3035 (Kent Stock) GFH01/2	220 x 110 x 66 220 x 110 x 55–60 230 x 105–110 x 55–65	Stretcher Stretcher with occasional headers Stretcher/header (Irregular)	E, G
6 (2001)	‘Breeze’ blocks 3038 (Flettons)	Not examined	Various running repairs during building renovation	

Mortar types:

A = Off-white sandy lime mortar with clear quartz up to 1.0mm.

B = Creamy-white sandy lime mortar with variegated quartz inclusions up to 0.5mm.

C = White sandy lime mortar with clear quartz inclusions up to 0.5mm.

D = White lime mortar with coarse quartz and gravel inclusions up to 2mm, beige/cream lime inclusions up to 4mm.

E = Yellow/brown sandy cement-like (hydraulic) mortar with crushed brick inclusions.

F = Hard, mid-grey (hydraulic?) mortar with lime inclusions.

G = Coarse sandy lime mortar with lime inclusions up to 5mm. Occasional black (iron oxide) inclusions and crushed red brick inclusions.

Local fabric types:

GFH01/1 = Red sandy brick; unfrogged, stock moulded. Silty clay matrix with moderate red sub-angular inclusions <5mm. 220–230 x 105–110 x 55–65mm.

GFH01/2 = Red sandy brick; unfrogged, stock moulded. Soft fabric with red inclusions and moderate voids. 210–220 x 107–110 x 55–65mm.

undertaken before 20th century renovations, and the most likely period for this modification may therefore be the extensive rebuilding undertaken during the 1870s under the occupancy of Colonel Halkett.

Phase 4: wall extension, alteration of outbuilding and kitchen wing – early 20th century

The height of the wall west of the outbuilding was substantially raised, while interior walls built up against earlier builds on the south-facing elevation are thought to represent alterations undertaken some time during the late 19th to 20th centuries, the most likely period being the 1918–19 renovations by Romaine-Walker. It is likely that the pitched roof of the kitchen was rebuilt at this time.

Phase 5: repairs and blocking of outbuilding access – interwar period

Repairs were made to the interior of the kitchens at this time, with blocking up of the window and doorway of the hipped roof outbuilding. Some of the bricks used are stamped ‘LBC’ (London Brick Company) and the most probable period for this work is the late 1920s/1930s when alterations were made just prior to Great Fosters becoming a hotel. The blocking of the outbuilding may represent the definition of visitor access through the forecourt to the main building, and the dividing of the working and staff quarters away from the main house.

Phase 7: 2001 works

One or two elements on the south-facing elevation represent temporary consolidation work undertaken during contemporary renovations.

The condition survey of the 1918–19 extension just to the south of the kitchen wing confirmed the construction date by the use of 20th century machine-pressed brick in the internal walls, although most of the surviving wall was obscured by render. Much of the north and south partition walls had been removed to enlarge access, with roof support provided by reinforced steel joists. Steel girders also supported green oak beams forming the roof. A small trench dug during renovation of the chimney-breast revealed the line of a north–south wall surviving under the ground floor slab. The fabrics were 3032 and 3033, indicating that the wall was no earlier than the late 17th century. The wall survived to about four courses high where visible, but the bond was not discernible.

DISCUSSION

Part of the demolished kitchen wing was originally thought to represent brickwork of Tudor date. However, although the brick fabric types used in earlier phases of the wall bear a resemblance to ‘Tudor’ bricks, the nature of the foundations for the forecourt wall (where visible) and the mortar type used would suggest a much later date of the mid-18th century to perhaps as late as the early 19th century. Skilled restoration work undertaken in the first half of the 20th century has complicated identification of earlier and later fabrics, as has large areas of repointing undertaken on the forecourt wall and the main building.

Discovery of foundations representing previously demolished buildings suggest that there may have been buildings of Jacobean period or later in similar positions to those areas occupied by current structures, and re-use of earlier fabrics is therefore extremely likely, further complicating the understanding of the building phases in this area of the site.

The constructed chronology is of necessity broad, and difficulties in dating brickwork exactly to a phase of building are compounded by the apparent use of local brick fabrics over a long period of time.

Conclusions, by Jim Leary, Rebecca Lythe and John Brown

The archaeological excavations and building recording survey at Great Fosters have produced evidence of intermittent human activity from the early Holocene to the present day, contributing to our understanding of the importance of the site at a local and regional level.

The site fits well within a previously proposed model of mid–late prehistoric landscape development, consisting of a phase of woodland clearance followed by a co-axial field system. Abandonment by the Late Bronze Age–Early Iron Age again conforms to a pattern observed elsewhere in the region, suggesting some form of ‘crisis’ or substantive change within the wider prehistoric community of the Thames Valley area.

Activity then appears to have ceased until the 5th century, when a Saxon hamlet, farmstead or possible predecessor to the existing manorial dwelling was established near the site. The nature of the evidence supports theories concerning an Early Saxon shift away from urban living towards a more dispersed, rural mode of settlement.

Archaeological evidence of early medieval domestic activity supports anecdotal suggestions of an earlier manorial complex at Great Fosters. However, given the lack of supporting historical documentation, any firm conclusion on this point is questionable. It remains possible that the 11th–13th century archaeological features derive from lower-status, smaller-scale occupation, such as an isolated farmstead or hamlet.

Construction of the current residence, known as Great Fosters Hotel, almost certainly began in the mid-16th century. Although limited, some vestiges of this phase may be evident in the form of a sundial, dating to 1558, and the porch, inscribed 1598 in the main body of

the house although both of these may represent later additions. Much of the original fabric was probably concealed or destroyed by various, well-documented, spells of reconstruction, refurbishment and extension coupled with sporadic episodes of neglect, decay and deliberate damage (Phillpotts 2006).

The foundations of the kitchen wing suggest two principal phases of building, with an earlier, possibly Jacobean, antecedent preceding the mid-18th to early 19th century rebuild. Tudor type bricks were re-used in the newer structure, set in later mortar. The architectural histories of Great Fosters Hotel and the kitchen wing itself are imperfectly understood. The high frequency of modifications, coupled with the frequent re-use of older building materials and the long-term use of local fabrics, has created a confused chronology, difficult to untangle except in the broadest sense. In the kitchen wing, attempts at a more detailed understanding have been hampered further by 20th century restoration work. With a few exceptions, the plethora of catalogued owners and occupiers makes it difficult to attribute any of the modifications observed to specific individuals. As demonstrated by historical research, no one family was in residence at Great Fosters for more than two generations throughout its 450-year history (Phillpotts 2006).

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