

Excavations in Old Town, Croydon

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FOLLOWING THE large scale re-development of the Victorian commuter suburb of East Croydon, the Old Town area of Croydon is now coming under the same pressure for ruthless development. Over the last three years, therefore, various sites in the original centre of Croydon have become available for archaeological investigation. The Archaeological Section of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society, under the Chairmanship of Mrs. Muriel Shaw and the Secretaryship of Mrs. Lilian Thornhill, has taken this opportunity for research and has been excavating various sites as they became available. Muriel Shaw has been making detailed studies of past archaeological finds from Croydon while Lilian Thornhill and the author have been conducting excavations and organizing watching briefs. The combination of all this work is revealing an almost

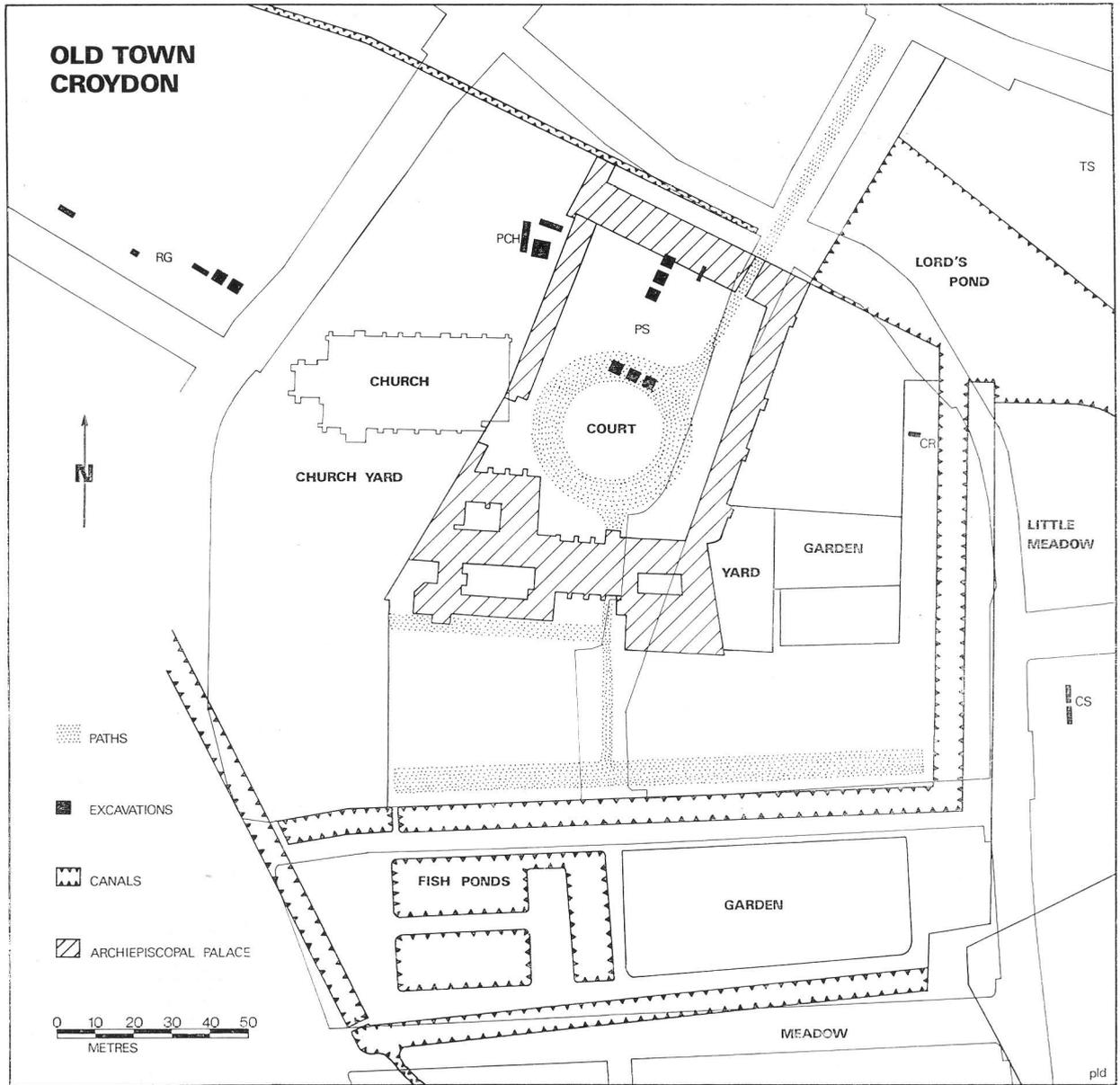
continuous sequence of 2,000 years of occupation in Croydon.

Croydon is situated on the Taplow terrace gravels north of an important gap in the North Downs near the junction of several dry valleys. The name *Crogedene*, as it appeared in a document of A.D. 871 probably means the crooked valley. The valley appears to have attracted small bands of prehistoric peoples from the Upper Palaeolithic to the Pre-Roman Iron Age. Upper Palaeolithic and Mesolithic worked flints were found scattered over the top of the natural gravel in all the trenches excavated in Old Town. Bronze and Iron Age occupation material has been found some 120 metres south-west of the Parish Church in Aldwich Road. The prehistoric material from Old Town is, however, very scattered and probably only indicates the presence of wandering bands.

By the Romano-British period several permanent

Old Town Croydon, in the late 18th Century, showing the 14th Century church tower and houses clustering around the church. (Print published c. 1800-1820 from the collection of A. Francombe).





Excavations in Old Town, Croydon, in relation to the Tudor layout of the Archbishop's Palace—Based on research by A. Hawkes. (Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office, Crown copyright reserved).

farmsteads were established within the area of what is now the London Borough of Croydon. The road from Stane Street near Clapham to the iron fields of Sussex ran through Croydon. Although the actual line remains uncertain numerous Roman coins and two very large hoards have been found along its probable route. One of the farmsteads near the line of the road was situated in the Old Town area of Croydon. Excavations in Rectory Grove (RG), on the site of the Parish Church Hall (PCH) and the

southern end of the Primary School site (PS) altogether revealed over 100 Roman tile fragments, including decorated flue-tiles, roof and floor tiles. Associated with these was a scatter of coarse ware and Samian sherds, a few glass fragments and a very worn coin. This evidence points to a fairly substantial structure in the area. The most likely site, at present, appears to be under the parish church.

The earliest archaeological and documentary evidence for a permanent settlement in Old Town,

Croydon, dates from the late Saxon period. The gap between the end of the Roman occupation and the establishment of the late Saxon village is partly bridged in the archaeological record by the Pagan Saxon cemetery found along Edridge Road overlooking Old Town. This cemetery was discovered in 1893 and the material has since been scattered throughout southern Britain. Unfortunately much of it has now been lost. Muriel Shaw has, however, over the past three years, shown that this cemetery was far larger and more important than at first suspected. A detailed study of this material is in preparation. No evidence has, however, been found for a contemporary settlement.

The earliest documentary reference to Croydon is dated about A.D. 871 and records Archbishop Aethelred exchanging some land in *Crogedene* for land owned by King Aelfred at Chartham in Kent. Although this record implies a settlement by 871 the first certain documentary evidence for a settlement is found in the *Codex Diplomaticus* and records the will of Beorhtric and Aelfswyth which was witnessed by Elfsies, the Priest of Croydon. Such a record would imply a Church and therefore a settlement. The first detailed record of Croydon is, however, that which appears in the Domesday Book. This records that

“Archbishop Lanfranc holds in demesne Croindene. In the time of King Edward it was assessed for eighty hides and now for sixteen hides and one virgate. The land is sufficient for twenty ploughs. In demesne there are four ploughs, and forty-eight villans and twenty-five bordars with thirty-four ploughs. Here is a church; and one mill of five shillings and eight acres of meadow. Wood for two hundred swine. Of the land of this manor Restold holds seven hides of the Archbishop. Ralph one hide; and from thence they have seven pounds and eight shillings for gable. In the time of King Edward, and afterwards, the whole was worth twelve pounds. Now, twenty-seven pounds to the Archbishop; and of his men ten pounds and ten shillings.”

The archaeological evidence for occupation during the late Saxon period is in no way conclusive. The stratigraphically earliest pottery from Croydon is coarse shell-tempered ware. It is not yet clear how early this type of pottery appears in the East Surrey/West Kent area. It has been suggested that at Merton shell-tempered ware continues to c.1250 while at Eynsford it appears to run to as late as c.1300. Evidence from Croydon tends to show that shell-tempered ware may have been in use in this area by 960 if not earlier. Shell-tempered ware has been found at the south-eastern end of Rectory Grove (RG), on the site of the Parish Church Hall (PCH) and at the southern end of the Primary School site (PS). One sherd was also found in Church

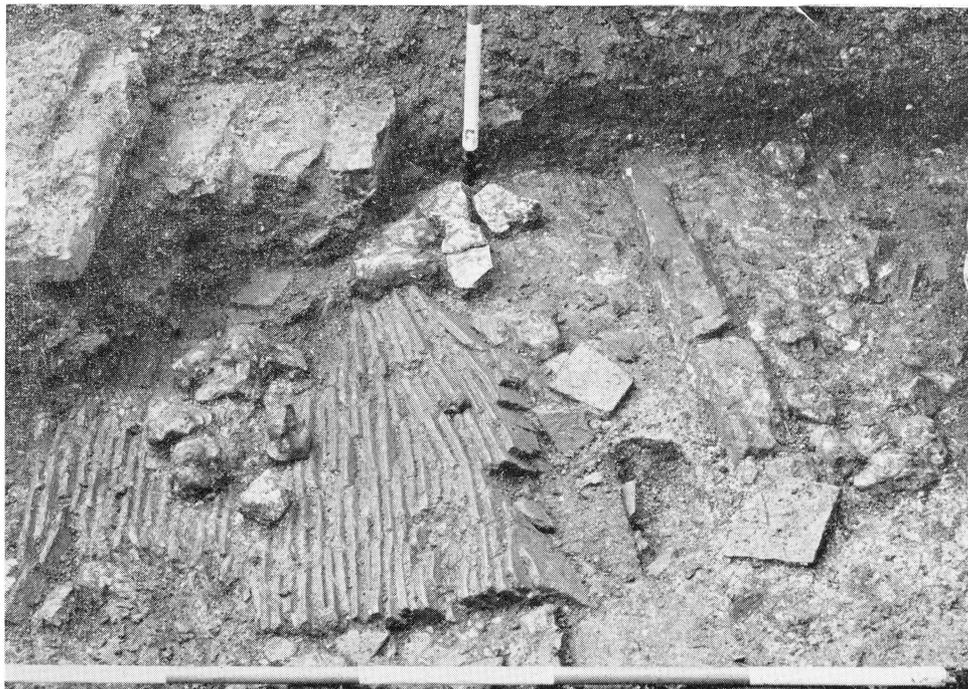
Road (CR), but this appears to be a stray sherd. No shell-tempered ware was found in Charles Street (CS) or on the Tesco site (TS). Associated with the shell-tempered ware was calcined flint tempered ware and, at the Primary School site, with two loom-weights. No structures could, however, be directly associated with this early pottery. All the shell-tempered ware was associated with dark, humic, gravelly soil directly above the natural gravel. This soil may be interpreted as plough soil and the fragmentary sherds in it may have been introduced with manure. The amount of early pottery seems to increase towards the church so it appears that the late Saxon settlement was clustered around a church on the site of the present church. The settlement would therefore be naturally protected in a small triangle of land between two streams. By the late medieval period these were canalized as part of the Archiepiscopal Palace complex, but now, due to a lowering of the water table they no longer exist.

Most of the medieval references to Croydon deal specifically with the Archbishop's Palace and its Royal guests; from the 11th to 18th centuries the development, early prosperity and later decline of Old Town, is closely tied up with the fortunes of the Palace as an ecclesiastical residence. The early commercial development of Croydon was certainly encouraged by the presence of the Archbishops. By 1276 Croydon had developed into a small market town; in that year Archbishop Kilwardby was given a Royal Charter to hold a weekly market each Wednesday as well as a nine day fair starting on the feast of St. Botolph. A second charter was granted to Archbishop Reynolds for a Thursday market in Croydon.

During the 12th and 13th centuries the area postulated as arable fields during the late Saxon period appears to have become too wet to work without considerable artificial drainage. Drainage gullies containing 12th-13th century pottery were found cut through the late Saxon plough soil in Rectory Grove (RG) and on the Primary School site (PS). The dampness of Old Town remained a problem throughout the Middle Ages and indeed right up to the 18th century. The convenient position of Croydon, however, outweighed all inconveniences. For example when Archbishop Grindal was urged to resign the Archbishopric in 1577 he petitioned that he might retain the Palace in Croydon. “Croydon house,” he said, “was no wholesome house, and that, both his predecessor and he found by experience; notwithstanding, because of the nearness of London, whither he must often repair, or send to have some help of physic, he knew no house so convenient for him, or that might better be spared of his successor, for the short time of his life.” He died there on 6th July, 1583.

By the late 14th or early 15th century the Archiepiscopal Palace complex appears to have occupied

Rectory Grove, 1970.
Trench V showing late
Medieval wall footing
(right), 17th Century
tiled hearth (centre)
and late 18th Century
wall overlying late
17th Century wall
(top left-hand corner).
Scales in feet.
(Photo: Peter Drewett).



the area shown on the map. This map is based on plans drawn up for the sale of the Palace in 1780. Excavations at the north-east end of the Primary School site (PS) revealed a chalk block foundation beneath the Tudor red brick stable-block foundations. The earlier foundation is possibly of 14th century date and appears to be on approximately the same line as the Tudor stable block. Two flint footings at the southern end of the site are apparently contemporary structures but these were swept away when the Tudor stable block, servants quarters and the Great Gate-house were built. At the same time the area within the Great Courtyard was levelled and laid out with gardens and gravel paths.

By 1437 the area around the Archiepiscopal Palace was referred to as Old Town so it is probable that the spread of the settlement eastwards up Church Street had begun by the late 14th century if not earlier. Archaeological evidence from the Tesco site (TS) in Church Street illustrates this movement. Excavations by J. K. Horne in Surrey Street in 1967 revealed evidence of 15th century occupation although all the late medieval layers were badly disturbed by 18th-19th century foundations. This evidence is consistent with the documentary evidence that the new town established itself on the higher slopes of the Taplow terrace along what is now Surrey Street. It is not improbable, therefore, that the plan of 15th century Croydon was similar to that mapped by Jean Baptiste Say in 1785. This map

shows two main occupation clusters, one around the Parish Church and one along Surrey Street. These two are linked by occupation along Church Street. The map, however, also shows 18th century expansion along the London-Brighton Road which had been improved by Act of Parliament in 1769.

Excavations at the south-eastern end of Rectory Grove show what is probably a fairly typical sequence of domestic occupation from the 15th century right through to the 19th century. The structures on this site were rebuilt or substantially altered at least seven times. Likewise the Tudor stable-block was modified some four times and the internal floorings were often relaid.

By the 18th century, however, the Old Town area and particularly the Palace had declined considerably. So bad was the Palace that in 1780 a Private Act of Parliament was passed which "Set forth that the house was in so low and unwholesome a situation and in many respects so incommodious and unfit for an Archbishop's house that few archbishops had of late been able to reside there, and vested it with two closes of land containing six acres in the Lord High Chancellor and two other trustees for sale or to be pulled down." On 10th October, 1780, it was sold to Abraham Pritches of Streatham and by 1818 it was used as a linen printing factory. This decline of the Palace was clear in the archaeological record for the area of the courtyard became a rubbish dump with animal bones, pot-sherds, glass

bottles and building debris scattered over paths and gardens. During the 18th century some attempt was made to bury rubbish in the courtyard. A pit, for example, was found against the stable block wall, but this was soon given up. The documentary and archaeological record clearly shows that by the 18th century Old Town was in a sorry state. Croydon's proximity to London and the coming of the railway, however, encouraged Croydon's 19th century population explosion and commercial prosperity.

The excavations in Croydon have, therefore, largely confirmed the sketchy historical record. It

is hoped, however, that much detailed information will become available when the large amount of late Saxon to 19th century pottery, small finds and animal bones are analysed together with the structural details obtained. The Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society hopes to continue its examination on building sites as they become available and so a more detailed picture of the development of Croydon will be revealed.

The full report on the excavations in Old Town Croydon will be published in the *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, Vol. LXVIII, 1972.

London's Archaeological Societies — 7

BOROUGH OF TWICKENHAM LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY

THE BOROUGH of Twickenham was founded in 1927 after considerable opposition from its associated villages, Teddington, Hampton, Hampton Wick and Whitton. Each still, in spite of "progress," forgetfulness and mid-century migrations maintains its peculiarities and stubborn exaggeration of separate identity. Medieval law, however, had bound the villages to "Istleworth" and the Lords of Syon gave protection in return for dues.

Recent legislation has joined this amalgam to Richmond as the "Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames." This is a curious shaped affair with the Thames dividing the two. Local interests still make themselves felt and our Society persists with its original title.

The locality has a particularly rich past. Six stately homes or palaces are within easy reach of each other; Hampton Court, Ham, Osterley, Syon, Strawberry Hill and Marble Hill. A wealth of notable residents have found the riverside a pleasant place to live in; Pope, Walpole, Kneller, Turner, Dickens, Garrick and Blackmore.

The Local History Society was formed in 1962 by a group of "patriots." Since then it has met each month, from October to May, for lectures and discussions and has fostered interest in the by-gones of the area and wider related subjects. With a membership of over 300, attendance never falls below 100 enthusiasts; which fact somewhat astonishes visiting lecturers.

The publication of research on local topics is a particular feature of the Society's work and about 20 booklets have already appeared. Our Borough Council is appreciative and generous in this matter. The Publication Committee aims to offer about three new titles per year, modestly priced (2/6 to 5s) and modestly produced; of some issues there are no remainders. We now have to reprint some numbers. The local diarist, taxation, fire brigade, turnpikes, suffragettes, excavation and so on, provide topics for a variety of tastes. Novices in research are encouraged to start work on projects and students from training colleges seek advice from the Society.

The river which flows through our district has often yielded an historic treasure or two, as labels at the British and London Museums will testify; Twickenham Parish Church has a Norman Tower; the name Twickenham has

Saxon derivations and "Tuicanhamme" is mentioned in a Royal Saxon Charter dated A.D. 790. But it was not until 1966 that its prehistoric past was investigated. A prime mover in the founding of the Society, an enthusiastic "patriot," who thought that his home town had everything but a "dig," urged that a bombed site near the Parish Church should be excavated.

To the enthusiasm of the Society was added considerable practical help and material aid by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. This blind project proved most rewarding; ample material of the occupation of historic Twickenham from Norman times onward turned up at this extremely small site and the unexpected Prehistoric material will soon be on view at Kingston Museum, where it is on loan. All who run may read an account of the excavation in the Society's Paper Number 12, (Price 3s), with a special note on the pottery by Dr. Isobel Smith. In future, on early Neolithic maps, a new dot should mark Twickenham, next to Kingston, next to Staines.

The success of the Twickenham Excavation encouraged another in Hampton the following summer. This was an extensive rescue dig on a demolition site, prior to the erection of a new Parish Hall; the object was to search for the foundations of a medieval tythe barn and an ancient Grammar School. A very large number of people were engaged on this, but never had platter been licked cleaner. Two small fragments of Iron Age pottery; one boar's tooth; one very delightful flint tool; one bronze Roman brooch pin were practically all the reward we had, apart from some interesting Victoriana, the inevitable clay pipes the skeleton of a dog and of course, the happy companionship one gathers on the best of "digs," in one's worst of clothes.

So, though primarily, a "Local History Society," we have delved into Prehistory to some good purpose. Our publication "business" absorbs much of our interests. Our lecture list is wide and varied—the local soap manufacturer precedes Paleolithic Man. We like it all.

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