

Fig. 1: tin-glazed 'Dutch 'ship' tiles from Site I (126mm square).

(Photo: Museum of London)

Excavations in Uxbridge, 1983-84

JOHN MILLS

FOLLOWING PUBLICATION of plans for the redevelopment of a 2.5 hectare (6.2 acre) site within the town centre of Uxbridge (Middlesex), the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology (DGLA) initiated trial excavations under the direction of the present writer. As no previous archaeological work had been undertaken within the town, the trial trenches were intended primarily to ascertain the nature and preservation of surviving deposits; subsequently, large-scale excavation took place following the demolition of a timber-framed Tudor building.

Location

The site, scheduled for office and commercial use, is designated 'Uxbridge Block III' – the final stage of the Central Area Development programme begun in 1967 with the construction of the shopping centre (Fig. 2). Block III (centred at TQ 055840) lies at the southern end of the town, and is subrectangular in outline, bounded by the High Street and Windsor Street to the north and west, and by Cross Street and Vine Street to the south and east. It is situated on a low ridge of the Flood Plain Terrace (Terrace I) of the Thames Valley gravels¹ overlooking the River Colne, some 600m (650 yds) to the west.

The trenches excavated to date within Block III all lie on or near the High Street frontage: Sites I and II

(the trial trenches) at 2-3 Windsor Street and at the rear of 5-6 High Street respectively, and Site IV (the larger excavation) at 15-17 High Street. Two further small trenches (Site III) were opened outside the confines of Block III, at the north end of the High Street (no. 126), and directed by J. F. Cotton. All trenches were dug by hand.

Historical background

Although study of the documentation relating to specific sites is now under way, little work has yet been undertaken on the widely-scattered sources relating to medieval Uxbridge; unless otherwise stated, therefore, details derive from the relevant volume of the *Victoria County History*².

From the 12th century (and almost certainly earlier) Uxbridge formed part of the Manor of Colham, a knight's fee within the Honour of Wallingford (Oxon.). Colham village probably lay close to the present West Drayton railway station, some 3km (2 miles) south of Uxbridge; it is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086 (Uxbridge is not, but may be covered by the Colham entry) and is last recorded in 1376. Ten years later, the manor house was considered derelict.

Uxbridge – 'a dwelling house at Oxebruge' – features in a charter, dated 1107-c1115, of Brian

1. D. Collins, *Early Man in West Middlesex* (1978) 8-9, Fig. 5.
2. See *V.C.H. Middx.* Vol IV (1971) 55-100, especially 70-73; and *V.C.H. Middx.* Vol. I (1969) p110 n.51 (fitzCount

Charter). A useful summary is given in C. Hearmon's *Uxbridge: A Concise History* (Hillingdon Borough Libraries, 1982) 12-29.

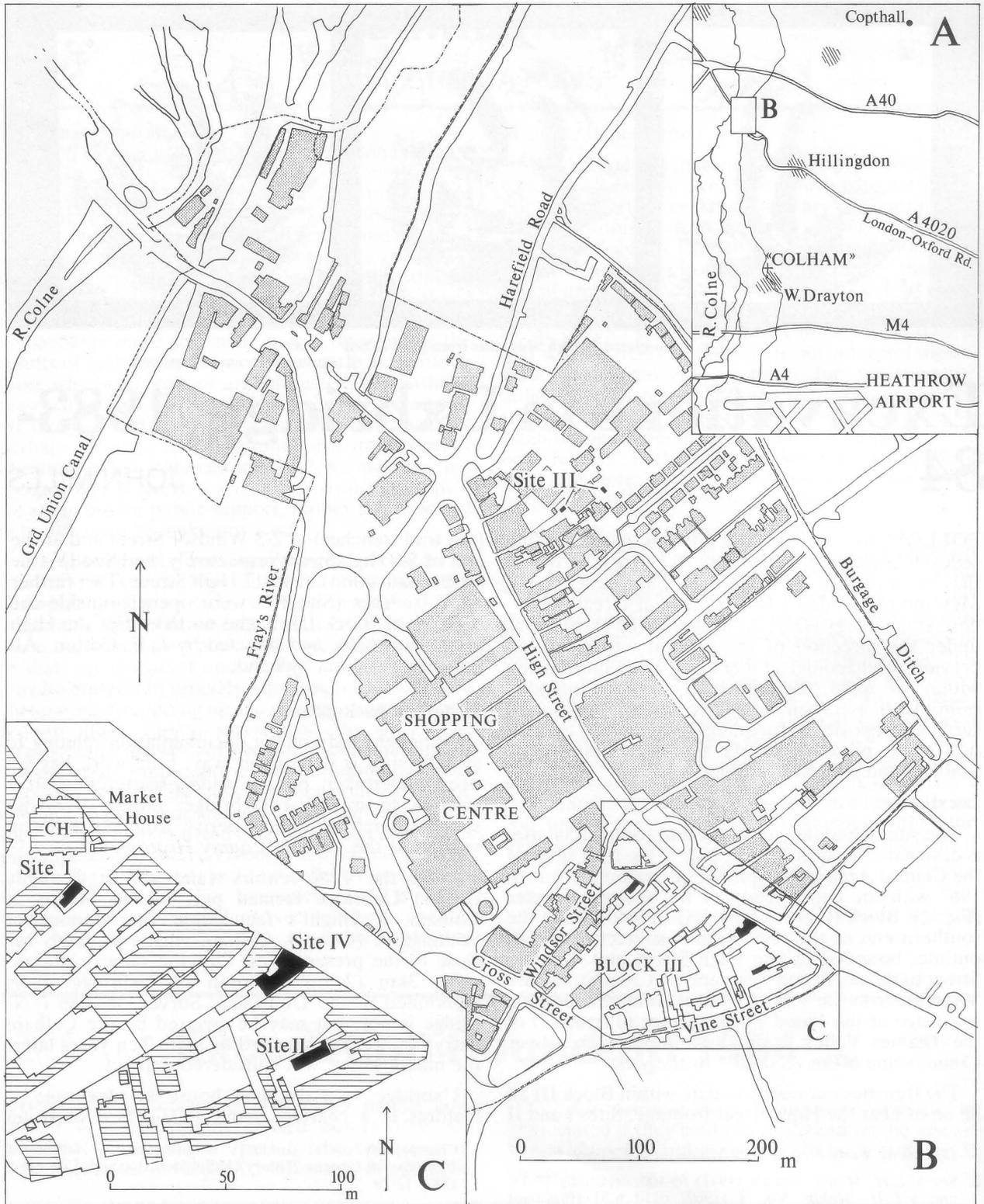


Fig. 2: location map.

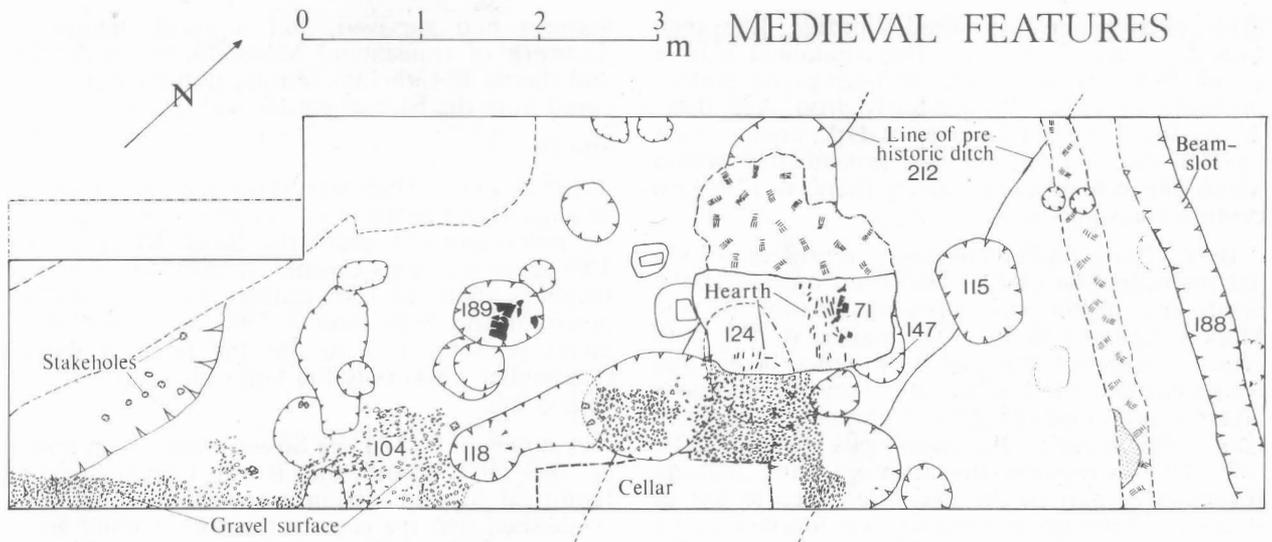


Fig. 3: plan of medieval features, Site I.

fitzCount, Lord of the Honour; after this, it is not attested until 1179-1189, when Gilbert Basset, Lord of Colham, granted it a Thursday market. From this date onward, documentary references to Uxbridge are numerous. A chapel-of-ease (subject to the parish church at Hillingdon) had been built by 1248, presumably within the Old Market Square, on the site of the present late 14th century St. Margaret's church at the junction of the High Street and Windsor Street; Hillingdon, however, long retained the profitable burial rights. By the end of the 13th century the town had been represented at Parliament (1275); been granted two annual fairs and a further (Monday) market (1281, 1294), and had become the seat of the Colham Court Baron.

Undoubtedly this early success owed much to a convenient situation on the main London-Oxford road, within a day's journey (15 miles) of the capital. Thus Gough's map (1360) marks Uxbridge as the first stopping-place after London, and by the 16th century Uxbridge was said to be 'full of inns'³.

At the north end of the town, the River Colne and its tributary leets powered a series of water-mills as early as 1265, and these formed the basis of the principal local trades of corn, flour and brewing in medieval and later times. Consistently, however, a high proportion of the crop from neighbouring villages was channelled through the Uxbridge market to feed London's growing population.

After 1300, a number of inhabitants of Uxbridge considered themselves 'burgesses' of the town⁴, and

3. C. Hearmon, *ibid*, 19.

4. Unpublished information, ex P. C. C. Wills (J. Mills).

by the 16th century officials of the Uxbridge local court of the Honour of Wallingford effectively constituted an autonomous governing body. Although in 1695 the town became a manor in its own right, administered by local merchants, Borough status was achieved only in 1955. Ten years later, this Borough became the nucleus of the present London Borough of Hillingdon.

Historically, the plan of Uxbridge comprised a ribbon development along the High Street (the Oxford road) with a built-up radial street (Windsor Street) running southwards to West Drayton (Fig. 2), and a narrow lane (Harefield Road) running north to Harefield. By 1636 the extent of the market area was defined by a 'burgage ditch', which enclosed 80-90 long, narrow burgage plots fronting the High Street, and a series of shorter, possibly intrusive, tenements on Windsor Street. The longer plots still survive at the north end of the town and (so far) in the Block III area.

The excavations: Site I

Site I fronted the Old Market Square, on a plot occupied until 1976 by a 17th century timber-framed building, first documented (pre-1660) as the White Hart Inn⁵. A narrow trench, 10.6m (35ft) in length established the survival of prehistoric and medieval deposits underlying floor levels of the post-medieval structure (Fig. 3).

The earliest occupation on the site comprises a length of substantial north-south gravel-cut ditch

5. I am grateful to P. McCabe, and R. H. Thompson for supplying information from their notes on the property.

(212), of asymmetrically-silted V-profile, 1.8m (6ft) wide by 0.9m (3ft) deep. This contained a little struck flintwork and some flint-tempered pottery probably of Later Bronze/Early Iron Age date. Above the ditch, a thick layer of dark, organic loam – possibly a cultivated soil – had accumulated, within which were a number of abraded sherds of 12th-13th century coarse pottery.

By c 1200 a timber building – represented by a narrow beam-slot (188) – had been erected at the north end of the site, possibly fronting on the Market Square. Before the middle of the 13th century, however, this had been pulled down, and the beam-slot sealed by the first of several successive layers of gravel metalling for the Square. A series of later 13th and early 14th century pits (115, 118, 124, 147, 189) occupying the frontage may indicate reversion of part of the excavated area to use as backland. Subsequently the site was levelled, and a clay-floored building with pitched-tile hearth (71) and metalled yard (104) was laid out along the tenement, probably by the mid-14th century. This latter building lasted into the 17th century, when it was replaced by the inn demolished in 1976.

The footings of the inn, which were constructed of coursed flint, tile and brick, closely followed the alignment of its medieval precursors. With the exception of a back-to-back fireplace, no original internal fittings had survived, owing to substantial 18th century rebuilding. One late destruction layer, however, produced a number of tin-glazed 'ship' tiles, apparently pulled off an internal wall (Fig. 1). These have been dated to c 1700, and seem to represent Dutch merchant vessels 'dressed up' to resemble men-o-war⁶.

Site II

In contrast to Site I, Site II – a trench measuring 12m (39ft) by 4.5m (15ft) – occupied the back garden of a 19th century High Street shop. Beneath some 1.5m (5ft) of post-medieval garden soil, a series of truncated prehistoric and medieval features were recovered. Of these, a recut north-south gully and a number of pits and scoops contained struck flints and heavily flint-tempered pottery with Later Bronze/Early Iron Age affinities. Medieval occupation of the site was limited to a scatter of shallow 13th-15th century pits, which are probably associated with backland activity.

Site III

Site III comprised two trenches, each 5m (16ft) by 2m (6ft 7in), situated in the yard and back garden of an 18th century schoolhouse. No pre-18th century

features had survived, but a small amount of flintwork of transitional Mesolithic/Neolithic type and sherds of 13th-15th century pottery were recovered from the base of garden soil layers.

Site IV

Site IV (15-17 High Street) formed part of a range of High Street shops (12-17 High Street) scheduled for redevelopment under the Block III proposals. This range of shops comprised two timber-framed buildings, both of 16th century date: 12-14 High Street having been built c 1500, and 15-17 High Street probably c 1550. At the time of writing (September 1984) only the latter building has been demolished.

A survey of 15-17 High Street, undertaken jointly by the DGLA and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments in advance of demolition, established that the core of the 16th century structure had consisted of a jettied two-storey building of three bays (Fig. 4D), spanning the width of one complete burgage plot. To the west, this had been flanked by a narrow alley giving access to the rear of the tenement; while the eastern bay (i.e. 15 High Street) was wedge-shaped in plan, filling in the irregular gap left between the two westerly bays and the earlier building at 12-14 High Street. At a later date in the 16th century, two separate rear wings had been added, and more recently, a range of stables and outhouses.

Following demolition in late 1983 a subrectangular trench, measuring about 17m (56ft) by 11m (36ft) was put down at the front of the burgage plot, on the site of the Tudor building. The objectives of the ensuing excavation, directed by the present writer, were twofold: first, to recover the earliest date and ground plans of medieval buildings within the burgage plot; and second, to complement, by archaeological means, the architectural information relating to the construction of the 16th century building.

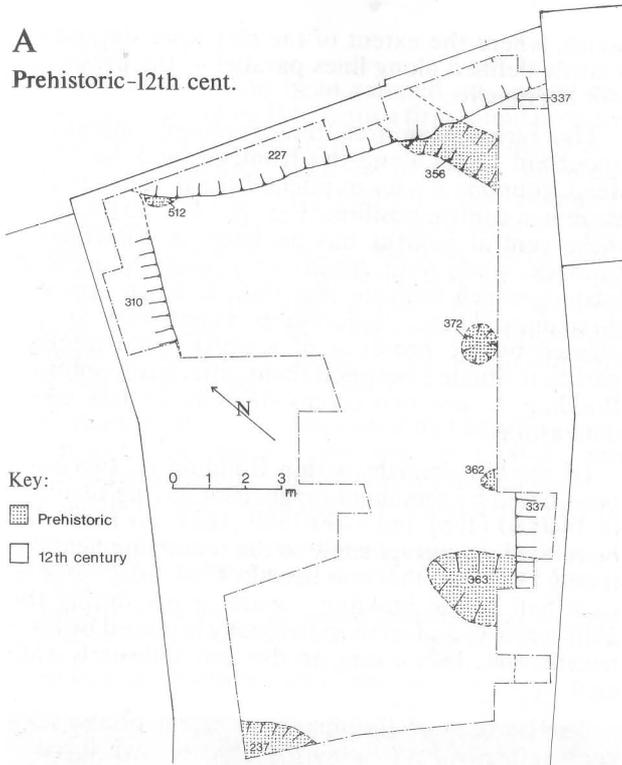
Prehistoric

As on sites I-III, the only evidence of pre-medieval activity on the site was prehistoric in date (Fig. 4A). Two shallow scoops (363, 372) and a V-shaped north-south gully (356), possibly a continuation of the feature noted on Site II, contained waste flint flakes and sherds of flint-tempered pottery similar to that from Sites I and II. A small number of blades and bladelets recovered from later contexts may be of transitional Mesolithic/Neolithic date⁷.

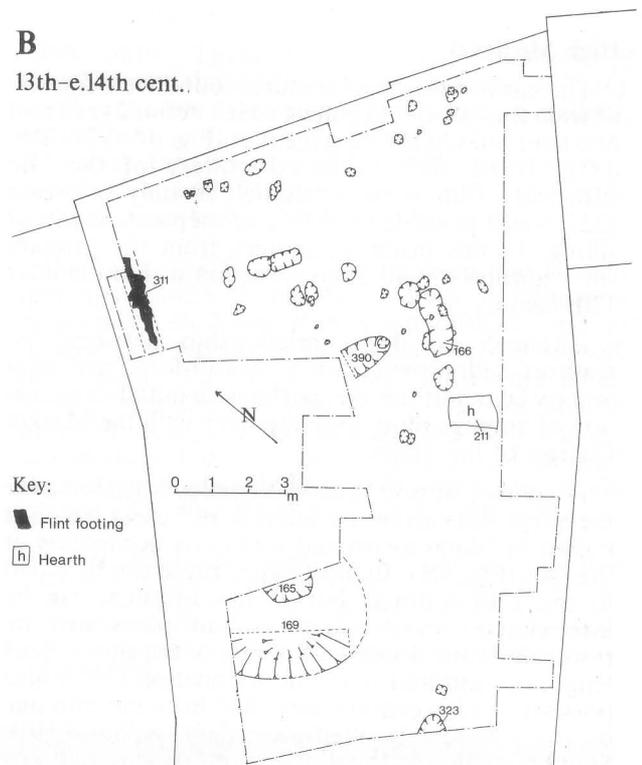
6. Inf. ex Messrs. J. Horne, N. A. Lewis and P. R. V. Marsden.

7. Flintwork from each site was examined by J. F. Cotton, for whose comments I am grateful.

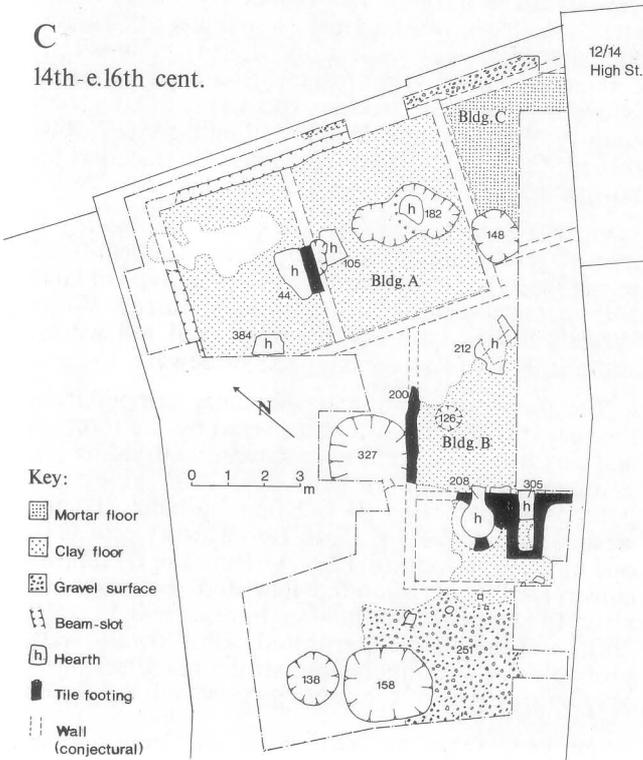
A
Prehistoric-12th cent.



B
13th-e.14th cent.



C
14th-e.16th cent.



D
16th-17th cent.

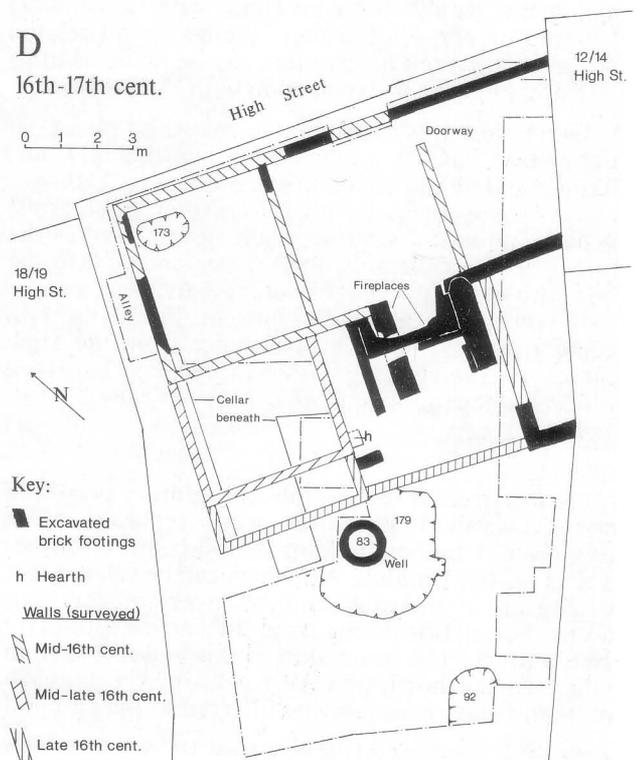


Fig. 4: Site IV: phase plans.

High Medieval

The earliest medieval features found were a series of wide flat-bottomed gullies which defined the front and long sides of the burgage plot (Fig. 4A: 227, 310, 337). These each produced pottery of the late 12th-early 13th century, though in only one case (227) was it possible to distinguish separate layers of silting. In this instance, pottery from the primary silts indicates a date of construction within the later 12th century.

Although no direct relationship between the features had survived, they clearly form part of a unitary layout of the site: perhaps an initial demarcation of burgage plots contemporary with the Market Charter of the 1180s.

A number of post- and stake-holes scattered over the north and east of the site may represent traces of timber buildings associated with early occupation of the plot (Fig. 4B). In most cases, these can be dated to the 13th century, but as few of them can be interrelated, no coherent ground plans can be resolved. In the north-west corner of the site, a short length of mortared flint wall foundation (311), also possibly of 13th century date, had been cut into one of the completely-silted boundary gullies (310). Standing 0.3m (1ft) high by 0.4m (1ft 4in) wide, its alignment would be consistent with a building fronting on the High Street, though as no related walls had survived no estimate can be made as to its size or extent, or its connection with the post-holes.

Other features attributable to this phase of occupation include a pitched-tile hearth (211), terminally dated by remanent magnetism to 1310-40⁸, and a large subcircular pit (169), some 5.0m (16ft) wide by at least 2.4m (8ft) deep. Interpreted as the upper profile of a well, this can be ascribed to the late 13th century through pottery associated with its early silts. Several smaller pits of 13th-early 14th century date, situated at a distance from the High Street, presumably fall within the yard or backland of the burgage plot (e.g. 165, 166, 323, 390).

Late medieval

On the street frontage, the 13th century post-hole and flint-walled structures were replaced by a clay-floored timber building of sill-beam construction (Fig. 4C: Building A), which can be related to a succession of internal dumped layers of clay and occupation debris dating from the earlier 14th-early 16th century. The beam-slots of this building survive intact on the north and west sides of the burgage plot, and may reasonably be inferred to the east and

south, where the extent of the clay floor deposits is sharply defined along lines parallel to the preserved slot alignments.

The rectangular area thus enclosed, measuring about 8m (26ft) along the frontage by 5.2m (17ft) deep, contains a series of pitched-tile hearths, two of them in a central position (Fig. 4C; 44, 105). One of these central hearths has an integral, tile-coursed fireback, while both display very localised areas of burning which indicate that they faced in opposite directions. These observations might best be explained by the presence of a north-south internal partition situated between them, effectively splitting Building A into two rooms of more or less equal dimensions.

Of the four hearths within Building A, two have been dated by remanent magnetism, giving readings of 1440-80 (105) and 1490-1550 (182). As these can be related stratigraphically to the remaining hearths, it may be shown that two hearths (384, 105) – one in each half of the building – were in use during the 15th century, and were individually replaced by later hearths (44, 182) dating to the late 15th-early 16th century.

To the rear of Building A, several of the 13th century pits were overlain by an extensive layer of dark, cultivated soil, which contained pottery of the later 13th-later 14th century. On the south-east of the site, this was sealed by a thick deposit of compacted gravel – interpreted as a yard surface – into which had been trodden fragments of later 14th century Surrey White Ware. Though partially disturbed, this gravel surface (251) may be traced as far northwards as the back wall of Building A.

Further to the west, the dark soil had been left free of gravel, and was cut by deep, rubbish-filled pits (138, 327), which produced large groups of later 14th century ceramics, comprising Surrey White Wares⁹, Surrey-type and possibly local red wares, and a little German (Siegburg?) stoneware.

The gravel surface was subsequently stripped from the rear of Building A and replaced by the footings and clay floor of a rectilinear structure (Building B), a minimum 8m (26ft) by 4.5m (15ft) in extent, perhaps a cross-wing to the first building. To the west, where it overlay a late 14th century pit (327), one of the wall footings (200) to Building B, flimsily constructed in clay-bonded flint and roof-tile, survived to an apparently full height of only 0.35m (1ft 2in), and may be interpreted as a dwarf wall, probably for a timber superstructure. Elsewhere, only impressions of the footings survived, respected

8. In all, six hearths on the site were dated: Dr. A. J. Clark of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission kindly sampled and processed all of these.

9. Inf. ex C. Orton: the White Wares may derive from the Farnborough Hill kilns.

by the clay floor.

The clay floor had been ramped up against the back wall of Building B to form a firm foundation for a keyhole-shaped oven (Fig. 4C: 208; Fig. 5) and rectangular chamber, both defined by a one-piece surround of clay-bonded roof-tile. The chamber, measuring 1.85m (6ft 1in) by 0.5m (1ft 1in), lay open to the north, this end being taken up with a small pitched-tile hearth. A possible function of this chamber-with-hearth arrangement may be illustrated by analogy with 16th century brick-built examples, which are thought to be curing chambers (e.g. for smoking bacon or fish)¹⁰.

Remanent magnetic dates obtained for the chamber-hearth and oven came out to 1400-30 and 1420-50 respectively, while a further hearth (212) at the northern end of Building B gave a reading of

10. E. H. D. Williams, 'The smoky bacon story: curing chambers and corn kilns in Southwest England', *Period Home* 5 no. 2 (1984) 78-82.

In these examples, 'cold' smoke (prepared from specially selected fuels) was channelled from the hearth at one end of the chamber to the enclosed area at the rear, whence it escaped *via* the kitchen's smoke bay.

1390-1450¹¹. These terminal dates, considered together with the stratigraphic relationship of Building B to the late 14th century gravel surface and pits, may indicate a date for the construction of Building B within the period c 1375-1425. Containing a hearth, oven and (?) curing-chamber, the building is likely to have been a kitchen area.

Following the final use of the oven and hearths (perhaps c 1425-50, on the evidence of remanent magnetism) Building B was demolished, and its remains covered over with a thick layer of topsoil. Interestingly, this disuse of Building B corresponds broadly with the first period of use of the hearths within Building A (see above). This may imply a concomitant change of use – conceivably from small High Street shops (Building A?) with a shared rear kitchen (Building B) in the earlier 15th century to

11. A very similar arrangement of keyhole oven and rectangular chamber is recorded on the Copthall (Pynchester) moated site, in association with late medieval Surrey White Wares. (Uxbridge Archaeological Group, 'First (interim) report on the excavations at Pynchester moat site', *Uxbridge Record*, Spring 1969).

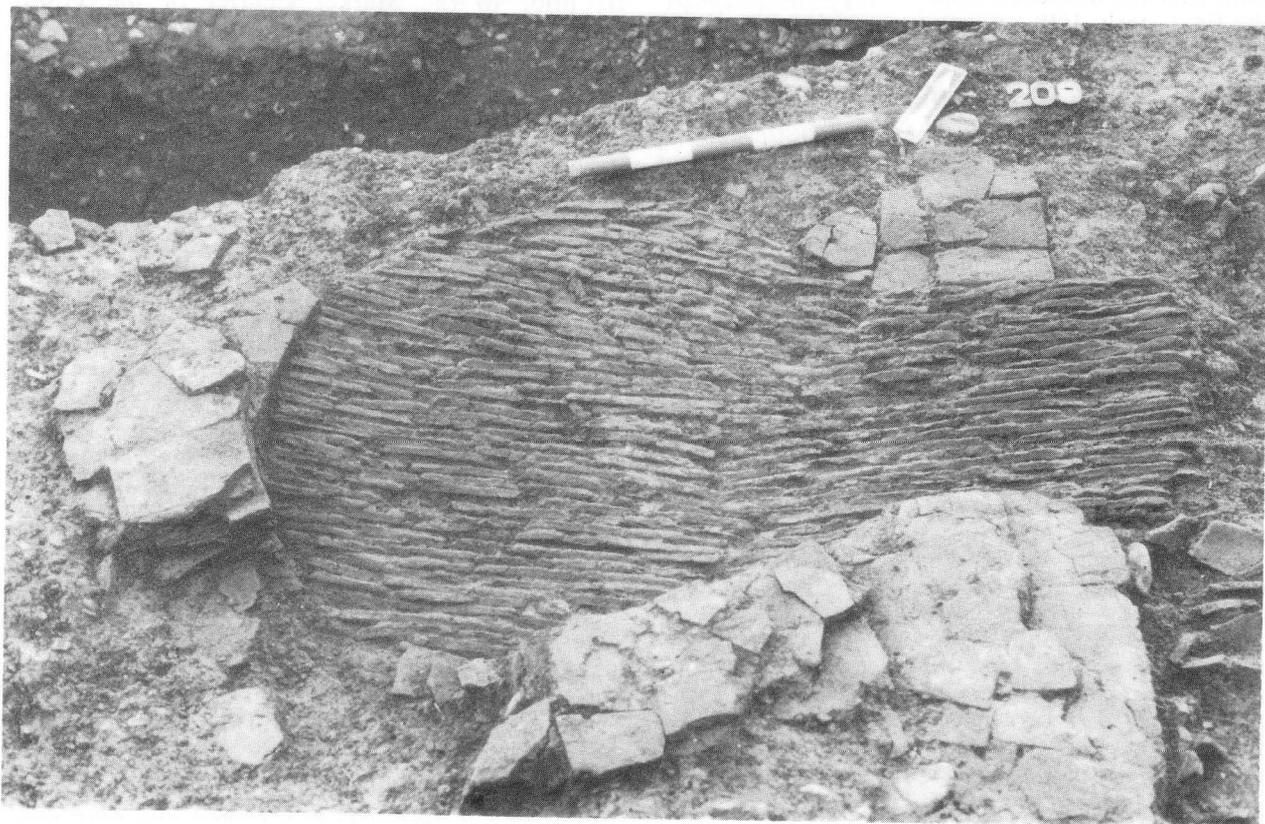


Fig. 5: late medieval keyhole-shaped oven from Site IV.

(Photo: J. F. Cotton)

tenement dwelling-houses (Building A), each with their own hearth(s), in the late 15th-early 16th century.

Following the rebuilding of the neighbouring street frontage to the east (12-14 High Street) in c 1500, extensive alterations were made to the eastern half of Building A – perhaps because the removal of the pre-existing 12-14 High Street building left it unsupported and structurally unstable on that side. Early floor levels in Building A were partially dug away and replaced by a levelling layer of clay, which overlay a hearth (Fig. 4C: 182) terminally dated to 1490-1550. This levelling layer extended over the eastern edge of Building A and across a wedge-shaped area now left between the latter and the newly-erected house next door (Fig. 4C).

The eastern wall of Building A was subsequently re-established on its old alignment (no doubt suitably reinforced), while the wedge-shaped area was re-levelled and supplied with a mortar floor. Although no structural evidence associated with the mortar floor was recovered, it would seem feasible that it belonged to some sort of building (Building C) – perhaps a flimsy annex to Building A. Hence the final, early 16th century form of the pre-Tudor street frontage on Site IV probably comprised a two-bay building (Building A) with a wedge-shaped infill structure to the east ('Building C').

At least two features – both pits – may be attributed to the period between the demolition of the pre-Tudor building and the construction of its 16th century successor. The first (Fig. 4C: 148), containing pottery dated to c 1480-1550, had been cut through the mortar floor, and was in turn overlain by Tudor wall footings. The second (126) contained fragments of lead window came and many small pieces of painted window glass (derived from the demolition?) associated with pottery of c 1500-1550. The dates are in close accord with the architectural dating of the Tudor building, given above as c 1550.

Both the external, clay-bonded brick footings and bay divisions of the Tudor building followed very nearly the ground plan of the pre-existing structures (Fig. 4D). Documentation relating to this building is extensive, and reflects a complex series of internal alterations, room subdivisions and changes in room tenure that cannot be outlined here. Preliminary study, however, shows up close correlations with the archaeological record that should enable a detailed reconstruction of the occupancy and use of most of the rooms on the premises.

Conclusions

The excavations in Uxbridge to date have provided information relating not only to the early medieval occupation of the town – the primary objective of the work done – but also to the earlier, prehistoric settlement of the area.

Both Sites III and IV produced flintwork of transitional Mesolithic/Neolithic type, manufactured from a fine, perhaps non-local, brown-black flint, which may be compared with material recovered from Dewe's Farm, Harefield, further up the Colne Valley¹².

In addition, features of Later Bronze-Early Iron Age date were recovered from all three Block III sites. Although settlement of this date is increasingly evident further south, on the West London Brickearths¹³, it is little known in this stretch of the Colne Valley. Further work may, it is hoped, help to determine its extent and significance.

Turning to the origins of the medieval town, it may be observed that no evidence has yet been recovered that need indicate settlement within Block III prior to the Market Charter of the 1180s. Although small amounts of 12th century pottery have been recovered from all of the sites, in only one case (Site IV) did this come from structural features: and here the features in question were boundary ditches, marking out the tenement. The first clear indication of settlement – in the form of buildings or rubbish-filled pits, for example – appears to date to the early 13th century.

With this in mind, it may be suggested that the area of Block III was peripheral to the village of pre-1180 (the fitzCount Charter *Oxebruge* of 1107-c1115), and was only taken into the settlement following the demarcation of the burgage area concomitant with the Market Charter. As the Market Square and Chapel-of-Ease are located immediately adjacent to Block III, it would not be surprising if these too were secondary features of the town, tacked on to a pre-Market nucleus further up the High Street, near the River Colne.

This makes it all the more unfortunate that this is precisely the area that was redeveloped in the late 1960s without the benefit of archaeological investigation. It is to be hoped that the current level of funding for Greater London archaeology can be sustained, and thus render further occurrences of this nature unlikely.

12. J. F. Cotton, 'The Mesolithic' in *The Archaeology of West Middlesex*, Hillingdon Borough Libraries, forthcoming.

13. J. F. Cotton, 'The Bronze Age', *ibid.*

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the Sun Alliance Insurance Group, London Borough of Hillingdon, and Trustees of the United Reformed Church Charity for providing access to the sites; to the Museum of London, Greater London Council and Department of the Environment for supporting the project; and to Jon Cotton, George Chambers and Margaret Wooldridge of the DGLA, Peter Durnford, Malcolm Reid and the members of the West London and Spelthorne Archaeological Field Groups for their collective efforts. I particularly wish to thank Dr. A. J. Clark of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for visiting the site at very short notice;

Ellen Barnes of the WLAFG, John Bold and Robin Thornes of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, McCurdy & Co., and Frederick Gibberd, Coombes and Partners for their assistance in surveying 15-17 High Street; Clive Orton, Phil Jones and Tony Lewis for commenting on the pottery; and Ken Pearce, Pat McCabe and John Schofield for discussing the site with me. Finally, thanks are due to Jon Cotton for reading and commenting on the text, and Harvey Sheldon for his help and advice in all aspects of the excavation; and especially to Clive Orton for his forbearance during the completion of this article. The drawings are the work of Malcolm Reid and the writer.

Local Society Bookshop

THIS IS THE FIFTH supplement to the list of local publications given in Vol. 3, no. 15, 431-2. Publications are listed alphabetically by their sponsoring Society. Those received for review are indicated by an asterisk, and may be reviewed at a later date. Prices quoted do not include postage, which is shown separately if known.

London Borough of Barnet

Publication available from Public Libraries in Barnet.

'Archaeology in Barnet' (12 page leaflet) free.*

East London History Society

Publication available from 67 Fitzgerald Road, London, E11 2ST.

'East London Record, no. 6' (52pp., many pl. and figs.) 95p.*

Essex Record Office

Publication available from The Bookshop, Essex Record Office, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex, CM1 1LX.

'The Medieval Essex Community: the Lay Subsidy of 1327'. £4.50 plus postage (£1.35 for one copy, 35p for each extra copy).

Gunnerbury Park Museum

Publication available from Gunnersbury Park Museum, Gunnersbury Park Museum, London W3 8LQ.

'Antiquary to Archaeologist' (leaflet) 25p plus 20p postage (20% bulk discount).*

Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee

Publication available from Department of Greater

London Archaeology (Southwark & Lambeth), Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, S.E.1.

'Rescuing the Past in Southwark', by Harvey Sheldon and Laura Schaaf (26pp., many pl. and figs., bibliog.) £1.50 (including postage).*

Surrey Archaeological Society

Publication available from Surrey Archaeological Society, Castle Arch, Guildford.

'Excavations on the site of the Dominican Friary Guildford in 1974 and 1978', by Rob Poulton and Humphrey Woods. *Research Volume of Surrey Archaeological Society* 9 (83pp., 48 figs, 25 pl., bibliog., fiche) £5.00 plus £1.25 postage.

Sutton Libraries and Arts Services

Publications available from Central Library, St. Nicholas Way, Sutton, Surrey, SM1 1EA.

'Courts of the Manor of Bandon and Beddington, 1498-1552', translated by H. M. Gowans, ed. M. Wilks and J. Bray (xxxviii + 92pp., index, map) £7.00.*

'No Small Change - 100 Years of Sutton High Street', by Frank Burgess (76 pp., each with pl.) £2.50 plus £1.00 postage.*

'Croydon Airport Flypast', by Peter Cooksley (20 colour pl.) £4.50.*

Waltham Abbey Historical Society

Publications available from Mr. R. C. Gray, 61A Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey, Essex.

'King Harold's Town', by John Camp and Dinah Dean. 4th edition. 40p (plus 13p postage).

'A Short History of Copped Hall', by Raymond Cassidy. £1.00 (plus 21p postage).