

Letters

Two felons from Surrey

I READ Tony and Gillian Waldron's report¹ on the two secondary burials from the Galley Hills Barrow with great interest. I have no comment on the report as such, but cannot see why it should be assumed, as the cover reference to *Two Saxon execution victims* does, that these secondary burials were Saxon. I do not think that the Goblin Works burials² were Saxon either. These burials lay not far from the meeting place of Copthorne Hundred, and the Meon Hill excavations³ were on a Hundred site. The primary interment at the Galley Hill Barrow had its upper half completely destroyed by a large post-hole – probably made when a gallows tree was erected on the barrow and gave it its present name.

There is absolutely no reason why all these execution burials should not be medieval (i.e. 11th to 15th century) or later. Indeed, the destruction of the Galley Hills original Saxon burial by the erection of the gallows tree strongly suggests we are dealing with a period later than Saxon. Holding of Hundred Courts in the open air and the erection of permanent gallows near them for the execution of condemned felons are well-authenticated medieval activities. Doubtless the Saxons did execute people by running noose hanging – it is a form of execution for felons and for human sacrifice found widely among both Germanic and Celtic peoples – but we need a lot more evidence before we can confidently assert that any of these known execution burials are Saxon rather than medieval.

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This was an editorial mistake, and in no way reflects on the authors. We apologise to them, to Mr. Nail and to any readers who may have been misled – Editor.

1. Tony Waldron and Gillian Waldron 'Two felons from Surrey' *London Archaeol* 5 no. 16 (1988) 443-5.
2. Rob Poulton 'The former Goblin Works at Leatherhead: Saxons and sinners' *London Archaeol* 5 no. 12 (1987) 311-7.
3. *Op cit* fn 1, 445 and fn. 7.

A Moving Site

Your recent interesting piece in *Mosaic* (Autumn 1988) about the conversion and development at Manor Court, Harmondsworth, unfortunately does not mention that there has occurred yet another example of the neglect of above-ground archaeology. The site is, of course, justly famed for its magnificent 15th century Tithe Barn, which has been meticulously recorded in advance of repair work. The Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology has also excavated the site of a new office block. However, as you mention, the farm complex also includes other historic farm buildings, including a 19th century stable block and a granary. The stable block has been subject to major conversion without any adequate recording, as far as I am aware. It was indeed 19th century and probably contemporary with the existing farm house, but a short examination I was able to make while work was in progress showed that the building incorporated much material from an earlier timber-framed building, perhaps from the earlier Manor House.

The frontage of the stable block is of yellow stock brick, similar to the present farmhouse, but the back is of re-used thin 'Tudor' bricks. Inside, some of the beams supporting the joists of the upper floor contained empty mortices which had clearly supported early-type 'flat' joists. Two of the beams were heavily moulded and

one was a former tie-beam now on its side with its camber laid flat. Many of the existing joists now resting *on top* of the beams, narrow edge down in modern fashion, were the original joists which had formerly lain flat in the beam mortices. Other joists were clearly re-used studs and contained holes and grooves which had supported the staves of former wattle and daub walling. Also the present rafters were re-used ones with early carpenters' marks. With proper investigation it would probably have been possible to reconstruct, on paper, a considerable part of the early house from which the re-used material derived. For instance, from the tie-beam it seems clear that at least some of the upper rooms were open to the roof, and that this was of a queen-post construction.

The post-medieval date for most standing buildings is no excuse for lack of archaeological attention when alterations, repair or demolition takes place. There is much information to be extracted, particularly on the dating of the earliest structures, which if not obtained now will be lost for ever. Would that it had been done a thousand years ago on Saxon buildings. Too often there is the curious situation of a careful, detailed excavation extending over days or weeks (and quite right too) whilst nearby threatened old structures are given no more than a brief inspection at best. It is not simply the architectural record that is required, but a complete archaeological approach to investigate the chronology of the construction and alterations, and the lives of the occupiers as revealed by associated material (e.g. wall paintings, panelling and papers) and the reasons for alterations.

Apart from shedding more light on the last 4-500 years, above-ground archaeology may also produce suggestions for the interpretation of below-ground remains. Is it not time that archaeologists gave serious attention to old standing buildings under threat, and should not strong efforts be made to ensure that planning permission for any work on listed buildings is only granted provided that an appropriate archaeological investigation is agreed?

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Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group

Your readers will be aware of the RCHME project to compile an index of all archaeological excavations in Greater London (*LA* 5 no. 16, 437-42).

The borderline between excavation and observation is not clear-cut and, where an archive survives, the RCHME would like to include the archaeological observation of, for example, roadwork holes or building sites.

The most active amateur body engaged in observation in the London area was the Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group. Although their newsletters are available, it has proved difficult to trace the whereabouts of the notebooks, section drawings, plans and photographs which are mentioned.

Please would anyone who knows of this or similar material contact the RCHME at the address below, who would like to record its existence for the benefit of archaeologists and historians of London.

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