

The Manor of Huscarls and the Beddington Roman Villa

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The historic parish of Beddington lay on the dip slope of the North Downs to the west of Croydon. In the middle ages it included the hamlet of Wallington and had a rather fragmented manorial structure which is only partly understood. One of the manors – or sub-manors – was called *Huscarls* from the family who owned it in the 13th and early 14th centuries. Several fortunate circumstances allow us to define its boundaries. In the later Middle Ages the tithes of Beddington were split between the rector and a sinecurist called the *Portioner*. The origin of the Portion is unknown although it can be traced back to at least the 13th century. In 1473 an inquiry found that the holder was entitled to the tithes of 200 acres of land called Huscarls which lay north of the church. The Portion passed into the hands of the Carew family, who came to Beddington in the mid-14th century, and soon became the owners of much of the parish. The last Portioner was probably appointed in the mid-16th century.¹ After this the Carews seem to have treated the tithes of the Portion as their personal property. This state of affairs continued until the late 18th century when the Rector of Beddington, John Bromfield Ferrers, claimed all the tithes were his and sued William Pellatt who was then the trustee of the Carew estates. The rector won and the Portion ceased to exist. However, the papers relating to the case name the fields from which the Portioner drew the tithes.² These are fairly easily reconciled with the field names in the Carew estate sale catalogue of 1859 which allows the boundary of the Portion and the Manor of Huscarls to be identified with certainty.³ It was a compact block of land on the west side of Beddington Lane to the north of the river Wandle (Fig. 1). It had a total area of about two hundred acres and lay north of the church, thus fitting well with the findings of the 15th-century enquiry. The western boundary lay along a Freron Lane – which is now lost – while the north side abutted on Mitcham Common until 1535 when the southern edge of the common was enclosed.

The site of the Beddington Roman villa was located towards the south-east corner of the manor close to the river Wandle. The villa's bath house was discovered when Croydon sewage farm was being constructed in the 1870s. The site was extensively excavated in the 1980s under the direction of Lesley and Roy Adkins and has recently been published by the Museum of London Archaeological Service.⁴ The site had been severely damaged by the sewage farm. The northern side of the foundations of the villa building had been destroyed by the excavation of a series of sludge ponds while over most of the rest of the site there were only truncated pits and ditches.

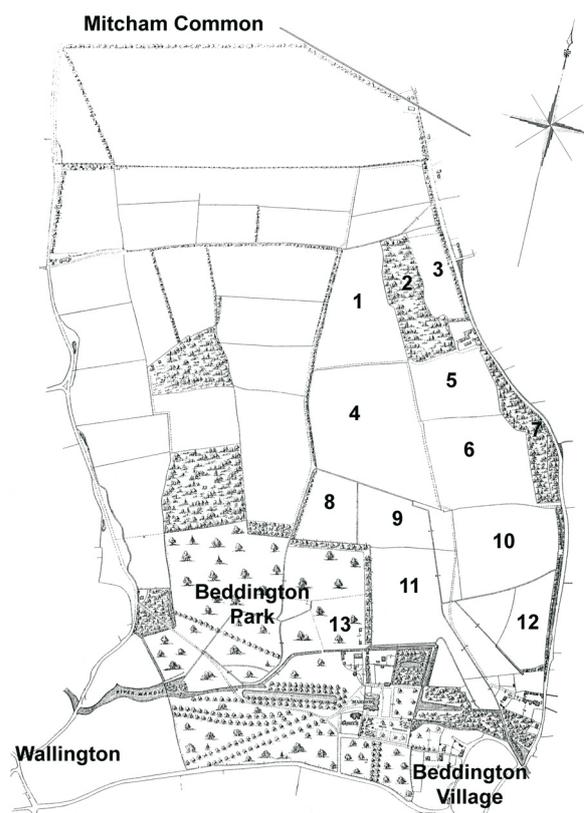


Fig. 1: map of Beddington Park and Huscarls (based on a map from the Carew Estate sale, 1859)

Settlement on the site started in the late Bronze Age and continued into the Roman period. There were early Roman finds on the site but no trace of the associated buildings. A villa was erected about 180 AD and subsequently modified. There was a separate bath house a short distance to the west and a large barn to the north which was rebuilt several times. There was another outbuilding of which little survived apart from the ceiling plaster decorated with a geometric design in red and yellow. The disturbance of the site meant that a high proportion of the finds were residual, so it was difficult to be certain whether occupation was continuous or intermittent. However, the villa survived until about 400 AD and the site was then abandoned.

The next development was the creation of a pagan Saxon cemetery about 400m south of the villa. This was also found when the sewage farm was being constructed in the 1870s and was very badly recorded. The surviving evidence was drawn together by Jacqueline

Perry and published in 1980. There were at least twenty-five burials and cremations scattered across an area which seems to have extended from Park Farm by Beddington Lane to the vicinity of the Carew Manor boundary walls a distance of about 250m east to west. There was a mixture of burials and cremations dating from the 5th, 6th and perhaps the early 7th century. Some of the burials were accompanied by knives, spears, shields and at least one sword.⁵

The cemetery must have been started within about fifty years of the abandonment of the villa although the gap could be narrower given the uncertainties of the dating. The cemetery was presumably associated with a settlement. We do not have any evidence for the location of this although it may be significant that it lay immediately west of Park Farm which is the most likely site for the medieval manor house of Huscarls. The construction of the sewage farm and the subsequent urbanisation make it hard to appreciate the finer details of the topography. However the villa was 'considerably higher than the surrounding farm'⁶ while the Saxon cemetery 'was raised slightly above the adjoining meadow'.⁷

It is therefore possible that the site was more-or-less continuously occupied from the late prehistoric period to the Middle Ages and that, at the end of the Roman period, the settlement moved a short distance south from one ridge to another. This raises the possibility that the associated land unit
(*continued on p. 139*)

Land from which the Portioner took the tithes NA E 178/6974	Name and area of field in 1859 Carew Sale catalogue	No. on map
Twelve Acres – adjoining on the south east corner to the other twelve acres (12a) Seven Acres (7a) Six Acres (6a) Several shaws and parcels of wood ground adjoining to the said several parcels of land (12a)	Nineteen Acres (19a) Twelve Acre wood (12a) Barn Field (7a)	1, 2, 3
Thirty Acres (32a)	Thirty Acre Field (33a)	4
Twelve Acres – adjoining a shaw which abuts the road from Beddington to Mitcham (12a)	Twelve Acres (12a)	5
Ten Acres (10a) and Ten Acres adjoining the road leading from Beddington by the snuff mill towards Mitcham Common (10a)	Twenty Acres (21a)	6
A piece of meadow land adjoining on the west side of the said mead (8a)	Lower Parson's Mead (9a)	8
Parson Meadow or Rushy Mead (11a)	Upper Parson's Mead (12a)	9
Hillier's Mead (20a)	Roadside Twenty Acres (21a)	10
Great Meadow (30a)	Great Meadow (31a)	11
Meadow land occupied by Arthur Blake (7a)	Admirals Mead (8a)	12
Two parcels of meadow land near the dog kennel in Beddington Park adjoining the deer park towards the south and west (20a)	Included in the deer park in 1859 (about 20a)	13

The prehistoric and, to a large extent, the Romano-British occupation of the upper Wandle valley is straightforward, even predictable. But what happened in the 5th century remains the vital, largely unanswered, question: if 'continuity' from Romano-British times into the Migration Period is going to be demonstrable anywhere, the upper Wandle valley is just the kind of place where it must be looked for. The report under review tells us that the villa building was extensively and systematically robbed of its usable building materials, probably before the end of the Roman period, but a Saxon date for the robbing is not completely ruled out. No features dating to the Saxon period were found on site, but an S-shaped late-5th to mid-6th century brooch was found, while the well-known 5th- to 6th-century cemetery is 350m to the south. Other evidence for Saxon occupation in the immediate vicinity is scant, but Beddington is an *-ington* place-name. There was a scatter of medieval pottery and other objects over the excavated site.

The report understandably stated that the land formed part of the manor of Beddington, but John Phillips and Derek Bradford of the (then) BCWAS demonstrated at a recent meeting of the Surrey

Archaeological Society's Village Studies Group that the villa site lay surrounded by a separate medieval estate known as Huscarles Manor, which also incorporated the pagan Saxon cemetery. It is tempting, but as yet completely unprovable, to see Huscarles as representing the successor estate to that of the villa.

The whole territory from Waddon in the east to the other side of Carshalton in the west, and from the dip slope of the Downs to the south to the other side of Mitcham northwards, represents an area that should be treated like a suburban Whittlewood. The area was clearly one of the key points in the 5th century, but its rich interest stretches both backwards and forwards from the problems of the Migration Period. The archaeology has been heavily ravaged by housing, gravel extraction and industry, but there are some areas of landscape surviving – such as Beddington Park which seems to be crawling with crop marks. The parishes involved have the benefit of better than average documentation, and there is a major interdisciplinary project crying out to be done. The Beddington villa site should be just the beginning.

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was also stable and that the manor of Huscarls occupied the same area as the Roman villa estate. John Blair suggested that large early estates were often composed of older and smaller land units which were stable over a long period and went on to form the basis of the post-conquest manors.⁸ Huscarls could be an example of such a unit. It certainly seems an exception to the local pattern of the medieval landscape as it was located on the gravel outwash at the mouth of the Croydon valley and does not seem to have had any land in

the open strip fields on the Down slope to the south.

Huscarls probably ceased to be farmed as a distinct agricultural unit in the 14th century when the Carews incorporated it into Beddington Park although the land worked by Park Farm in 1859 included the greater part of it.

Acknowledgments

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1. K. Pryer *The Beddington Portion...* Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society Occasional Paper 2 (1974).
2. The National Archives E178/6974.
3. Particulars with plans of the Beddington Park Estate for sale by auction ... Wednesday the 22nd, Thursday the 23rd and Friday 24th June 1859.
4. I. Howell *Prehistoric landscape to Roman villa*. Museum of London Archaeology Service (2005).
5. J. Perry 'The Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Beddington' in

C. Orton (ed.) *The past our future*. Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society Paper no 4 (1980) 23–28.

6. J. Addy 'Account of the Roman villa lately discovered at Beddington, Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 6 (1874) 118–121 esp 119.
7. J.W. Flower 'Notices of an Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Beddington, Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 6 (1874) 125–126.
8. J. Blair *Early Medieval Surrey* (1991) 24–30.