

Excavations at Tolworth Court Farm

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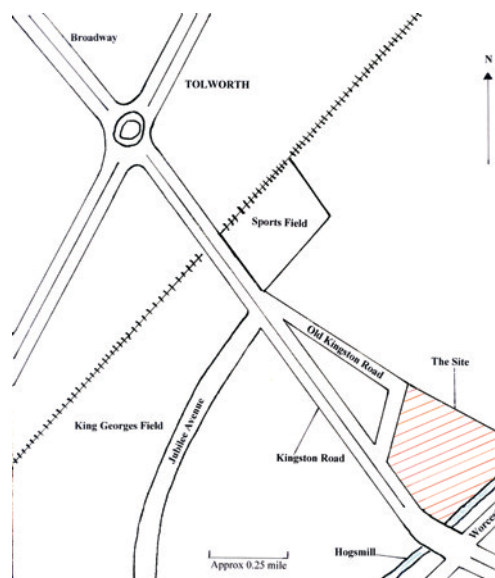


Fig. 1: site location (drawing by Chris Hayward)

In 2000 and 2002, excavations were carried out by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KuTAS) and UniSearch (now disbanded), directed by Steve Dyer, on land at Tolworth Court Farm, Old Kingston Road, Tolworth, Surrey (Fig. 1). Earthwork features recorded in 1994–1995 and documentary sources suggested that this might be the site of the medieval moated manor of Taleorde, and a possible associated medieval village. The 2000 excavations provided some evidence for the moated manor, but suggested that the supposed medieval village contained Iron Age and Romano-British features. The 2002 excavations were designed to provide clarification and to assist English Heritage in determining the suitability of the site for scheduling.

Archaeological background

Nearby sites, including Old Malden Vicarage,¹ Percy Gardens,² the Vicarage site,³ Alpine Avenue⁴ and Manor Farm⁵ produced significant material from several periods, especially the Bronze and Iron Ages.

History

Domesday Book mentions two manors in 'Talworth'.⁶ Tolworth Court is almost certainly the manor held by the Picot

family, with tenure probably into the 12th and 13th centuries. Merton Priory also held interests in the manor from at least 1150. In 1167 Peter de Talworth witnessed a deed in the Merton records.⁷ The manor passed from the Picot/de Talwarth clan as part of the dowry for female members of the family in the later 13th century. It passed successively into the hands of courtiers of Edward II, most notably, in 1320, to Hugh le Despenser the Younger.⁸ Tolworth was conveniently situated between London and the Royal Palace at Sheen. Despenser entertained the King at Tolworth at Christmas 1320, and on several occasions thereafter.⁹

After Despenser was executed, an *inquisition post mortem* gave the first detailed description of the manor:¹⁰ "...at Tolworth there is a chief house, the site of which is enclosed by ditches. The site contains two halls, with a chapel and six chambers, a kitchen with a chamber, a bakehouse and a

brewhouse. It has a gate and a drawbridge. Outside the ditches there are two weirs, two cowsheds, a building for turning carts and other buildings for cows, a stable and a piggery. There is a garden and a water-mill. There is no advowson of churches nor a dovecot. In demesne there are 180 acres, not enclosed. There are ten acres of movable meadow, not enclosed; the meadow is very poor...."

In 1398/9, the manor was in the possession of Alice, Countess of Kent. Her papers do not mention the house, but record a dovecote, stables, a new granary, and a water mill.¹¹

The Earl of Westmoreland's family held the manor in the 15th century.

In 1564 it passed to George Evelyn (grandfather of the diarist) whose family held it until 1692. Some stonework from the buildings was taken for Nonsuch Palace, and in 1605 the estate lost part of its land to enlarge Nonsuch Park. By the early 17th century, it seems



Fig. 2: trench layout (amended drawing by Chris Hayward)

to have been just a farm.

Kingston Borough purchased the site in the late 19th or early 20th centuries. It was used as a dairy farm until the early 1960s, when it was abandoned. It is now part of the Hogsmill Valley Nature Conservation Area and designated as Metropolitan Open Land.

The excavations

Fifteen trenches were excavated across the site (Fig. 2).

Trench A lies on the moated island. A moat up-cast deposit was excavated; the ground beneath it produced mid- to late 13th-century pottery and some charcoal, probably representing activity at the time the moat was created. Beneath this level were alluvial silts and sands typical of the area, helping to confirm that dating. No signs of contemporaneous buildings were found. (The Site Director has since speculated that this was an open yard, with the manor house on an adjacent moated island, now mostly covered by the A240). A few residual pottery sherds around the moated island and the moat indicated Roman and early medieval activity. The medieval pottery comprised 68 sherds of Surrey white ware, with many more of post-medieval date. The material from the moat up-cast also suggested that the moat was cleaned in the 16th century.

Trench K revealed walls of 17th- to 19th-century bricks, probably including part of a 19th-century farm building recorded on contemporary maps. Its chalk foundations might be demolition material from earlier building. Documents record the use of such material in the medieval complex.

Excavation of a leat in Trench E revealed that it silted up during the 18th century, and was then backfilled with debris. In the north-west corner, a spread of chalk rubble and 16th-century brick proved to be material dumped on the edge of a watercourse to form a track-way in the 19th or early 20th centuries (Trench L).

Three leats linking a pond and the northern arm of the moat (Trench P), which were visible as parallel linear earthworks, proved to be shallow ditches maintained from at least the late medieval period for water management. They appear to have been located within

a former channel of the Hogsmill River.

Trench F produced a line of nine postholes parallel to a watercourse, and four at right-angles (Fig. 3). These features contained pottery dating from the Late Iron Age and Romano-British periods (1st to late 2nd/early 3rd centuries AD), a melon bead fragment, and many butchered animal bones, mainly cattle. Similar discoveries were made in Trench G. It is likely that these areas contained fields or compounds during this period, and that animal husbandry was important over many centuries (other nearby sites such as Percy Gardens and Alpine Avenue have also produced evidence of settlement and farming of the same period). The small amounts of Late Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery found appeared to have been disturbed and redeposited by medieval and post-medieval activity.

In Trench R there were slight earthworks suggestive of a deserted medieval village. The excavations, however, revealed two segments of a curvilinear enclosing ditch.

The excavated fill contained

significant quantities of fragmentary butchered animal bone and a small amount of Anglo-Saxon pottery, which suggest that a settlement of Saxon date may have existed in the immediate vicinity. Early medieval occupation was also indicated by 214 sherds of pottery. Most groups were dated to the period about 1080–1150/1200. Several wares could be earlier than this, or could have been deposited by about AD 1100.

Summary report on the pottery

(Lyn Blackmore and Amy Thorp)¹²

The sherds are generally small (mostly under 10 g) and in poor to average condition, with few rims and no profiles. Dating some fabrics, especially the shell-tempered wares, is difficult when only small body sherds are present, as similar wares were used in the prehistoric, Roman and medieval periods. Furthermore, the date ranges for pottery fabrics found in central London might not apply in Surrey, where more locally-made wares were common and where shell- and flint-tempered wares may have continued in use rather later than in the City.



Fig. 3: postholes, Trench F (photo: Caroline Jones)

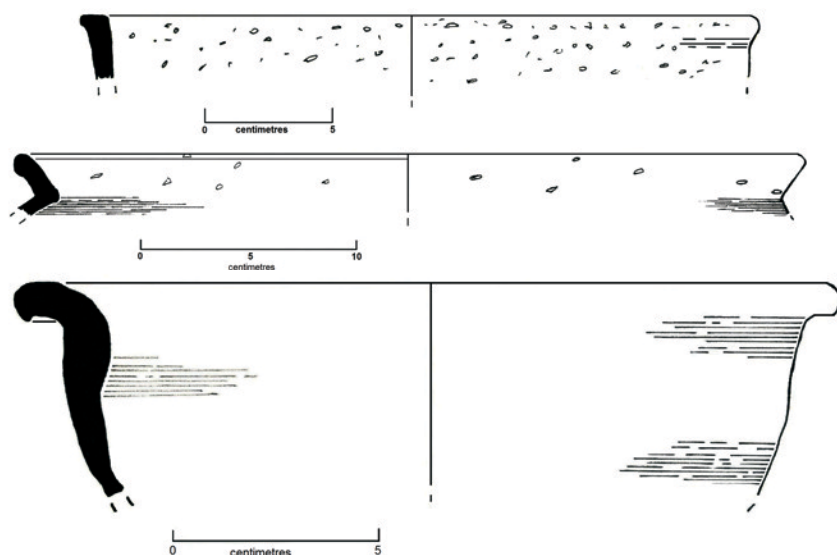


Fig. 4: (top) shell-tempered Saxon jar, 10/11th century; (middle) chalk-tempered Saxon cooking pot, 10/11th century; (bottom) possible Late Saxon or Early Surrey ware cooking pot

Prehistoric (LB)

Strong evidence of prehistoric activity was found in earlier archaeological investigations to the south-east of Tolworth Court Farm, in the vicinity of the parochial school and the vicarage in Church Road, Old Malden.¹³ Taken together, these finds suggest an Early to Middle Iron Age settlement on the high ground to the south and east of the church. At Tolworth Court Farm, however, only one small, abraded sherd, residual in a ditch fill in Trench R, was definitely of prehistoric date. It has a very fine silty matrix containing iron and very fine carbonaceous matter, tempered with abundant crushed flint (mainly white) between 1 and 3 mm across. Dating probably lies in the later Bronze Age (1000 BC to 600 BC). An abraded sherd from Trench P is probably of Late Iron Age date, while two from Trench F might also be of the same period, though they are problematic because several Roman sherds were found in the same area.

Roman (AT)

Examination of 101 sherds of Roman pottery, from 37 contexts, showed that only four sherds were potentially stratified. The main concentrations were in Trenches R, G and F. The majority were very small, some abraded, and with few identifiable forms. Two sherds of Verulamium region white ware, including the rim of a *mortarium*, date from c. AD 50–160. However, most of the material is unsourced and has a

general date range of AD 50–400; mostly sherds of sand-tempered wares, but there are also five grog-tempered. Two sherds of black-burnished ware dated to c. AD 120–250/400. There was a small quantity of late Roman pottery, mainly sherds of Alice Holt/Farnham ware, but also five sherds of Oxfordshire red colour-coated ware, two of Nene Valley colour-coated ware, and two of Portchester type D ware. A late Roman rim sherd from a black-burnished-type flanged bowl is the best preserved form.

Saxon (LB)

No Anglo-Saxon pottery has previously been published from the area of Old Malden or Tolworth, and the exact date of the present finds remains doubtful, as some of the 11 sherds examined are possibly Iron Age. Except for one sherd from Trench F, all are from Trench R. Two sherds contain moderate fine organic inclusions in a micaceous fine sandy matrix, with occasional larger rounded grains of quartz. In central London this fabric type occurs in both Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon contexts. Two sherds from the shoulders of thick-walled jars/cooking pots contained large rolled, patinated flint inclusions in an iron-rich micaceous sand-free matrix with occasional rounded quartz grains. Both have a reduced body with red-brown outer surface. This fabric type has not been encountered on other Anglo-Saxon sites in the London area studied by the writer. Five sherds

contain quartz sand and Greensand quartz, with or without black ironstone/glaucanite and organic inclusions. In central London this general fabric type occurs in both Early and Middle Saxon contexts (Fig. 4).

Medieval and later (LB)

Medieval material from Tolworth Court Farm, Manor Farm, the Vicarage, and that excavated by Carpenter,¹⁴ includes fabric types that are broadly similar to those found in central London. As on the Vicarage site, calcareous and shell-tempered wares are the dominant category, followed by sand-tempered and early Surrey wares. Most of the pottery dates from between c. 1050 and 1200, the bulk of it probably to between c. 1080–1150. For the mid-later 13th century onwards, Kingston-type ware is rare, but coarse Surrey-Hampshire border ware and related wares that are probably from Earlswood are quite well represented. The dating of the pottery indicates a possible hiatus in activity between the mid-12th and the late 13th or 14th centuries but the main area of occupation may not have been discovered.

Post-medieval

The post-medieval wares spanned the 16th to 19th centuries and include redwares similar to those found on the Vicarage site.

Discussion

Given the evidence for prehistoric activity on the higher ground at Old Malden, it was expected that some of the pottery from the Tolworth Court Farm site would date from the Bronze and Iron Ages. While evidence was sparse for both prehistoric and Roman periods, Mesolithic and Neolithic activities in the area were, however, indicated by 14 patinated struck flints, including scrapers, awls, a multipolar core, and 49 pieces of knapping waste from Trenches A, E, F and G.

The Anglo-Saxon finds are important, as there has hitherto been no evidence in the area for activity between the Roman and the Saxo-Norman periods.

The origin of the early medieval fabric types is of interest, especially when the possibility of pottery



Fig. 5: one of the medieval floor tiles
(photo: Chris Hayward, scale in cm.)



Fig. 7: the red stem is marked "L Fiolet, St Omer, déposé"

production in the area is considered. For the calcareous wares, a source close to Ewell is possible, although clays containing tufa and freshwater shell may have been available in many river valleys, possibly even that of the Hogsmill. The micaceous early Surrey wares from Tolworth Court Farm are distinctive, as are the coarser Greensand-tempered wares from the Manor Farm site,¹⁵ which are particularly iron-rich and in some cases also contain sandstone. The closest Greensand formations are some way to the south, along the south side of the North Downs, but the Reading Beds outcrop at Ewell. A fairly local source has already been suggested for the early

Surrey-type wares from Manor Farm and the Vicarage excavation¹⁶ and the same may apply to Tolworth Court Farm.

Other finds of interest

Two complete medieval floor tiles were also recovered (Fig. 5). A small (16 mm) copper-alloy trading token was issued by Elizabeth Wood in 1656. Such tokens were issued by trades people from 1649 to 1672 in response to the lack of small change. As a female issuer, Elizabeth was unusual, but was probably a widow carrying on her husband's trade as a goldsmith. The obverse bears the inscription *Elizabeth Wood* with the arms of the Goldsmith's Guild, the reverse *In Beach Lane 1656 (E W)*. Beech Lane (the standardised late-18th-century spelling) lies to the north of Aldersgate in London. Four of Elizabeth's tokens could be changed at her premises for a silver penny. They may also have been used as coins in their own right (Fig. 6).¹⁷ Among the collection of clay pipe fragments was a red-fabric pipe from France and another with maker's mark P S (Fig. 7).

Conclusion

While it was disappointing not to have found any structural remains of the mediaeval manor, there is considerable evidence to show that the site was in continuous occupation from late

prehistory, with associated farming activities. The discovery for the first time in the area of Early to Middle Anglo-Saxon pottery in the ditch and the possibility of a nearby settlement more than compensates.

Acknowledgements

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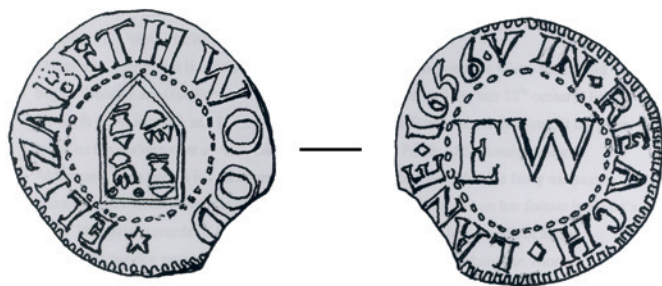


Fig. 6: the 17th-century token (diameter 16 mm; drawing by Tim Everson)

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