

Iron Age and Roman occupation at St John's School, Garlands Road, Leatherhead

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with contributions by

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An archaeological watching brief was conducted on land at Garlands Road, Leatherhead as a condition of planning approval granted to St John's School for the construction of artificial sports pitches, a car park and a store/toilet building. Features dating from the Early Iron Age through to the Roman period were revealed. The principal Early Iron Age features were a probable well and two pits. Pottery associated with these offers new insights into the Early Iron Age ceramic traditions of the area, while the recovery of struck flint of the same date constitutes some of the best evidence within Surrey for its use extending into the Iron Age.

A large boundary ditch of Middle or Late Iron Age date may have continued in use or was later re-used in the early Roman period. The ditch probably enclosed a domestic occupation site. Early Roman finds from a probable well and 2nd or 3rd century finds from the boundary ditch suggest a prolonged period of occupation. The finds included samian pottery, tile, plaster and rare donkey bones that suggest nearby settlement of some significance.

Introduction (fig 1)

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during November and December 2012 by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit, on land at Garlands Road, Leatherhead (archaeological features centred at TQ 1711 5700). The work was commissioned by St John's School to satisfy a planning condition. The complete site archive is currently held by the Surrey County Archaeological Unit at the Surrey History Centre, Woking, pending identification of a long-term archival store.

The site, which sloped gradually from a high point at its north-east boundary, had a mixed geology of Thanet Sands, Reading clay and sand beds, and a drift deposit of Teale gravel.

The overlying soil horizon was mechanically excavated to a variable depth, dependent upon the gradient of the site. This levelling technique effectively meant that any archaeological horizon in the south-western part, as well as a smaller area in the south-east, of the site was not completely revealed, and the area outlined in red on figure 1 is that within which levels of potential archaeological interest were exposed. Much of the topsoil had been stripped across the whole of the site prior to archaeological observations commencing, while a preserved subsoil deposit was only noted from the central/south-western part of the site, indicating its removal over most of the present area in an earlier episode of site reduction. Despite these issues, a series of archaeological features was discovered in the south-eastern part of the area.

Results (figs 2–5)

The features are described in broadly chronological order, the dates being those assigned on the basis of the finds (see following sections).

Irregular shaped cut 101 measured 1.30m long x 1.20m wide, had near-vertical sides, and was partly excavated to a depth of 0.87m, with the base not revealed. The feature contained two fills: the lowest, context 101B, was devoid of dating evidence and was a dark brown silty sand, while the upper, context 101A, was a mid-brown, silty, sand with flints. The deposit is dated by struck flints of probable Iron Age date, the quantity and good condition of which, together with the absence of finds of other date, make them highly unlikely to be residual.

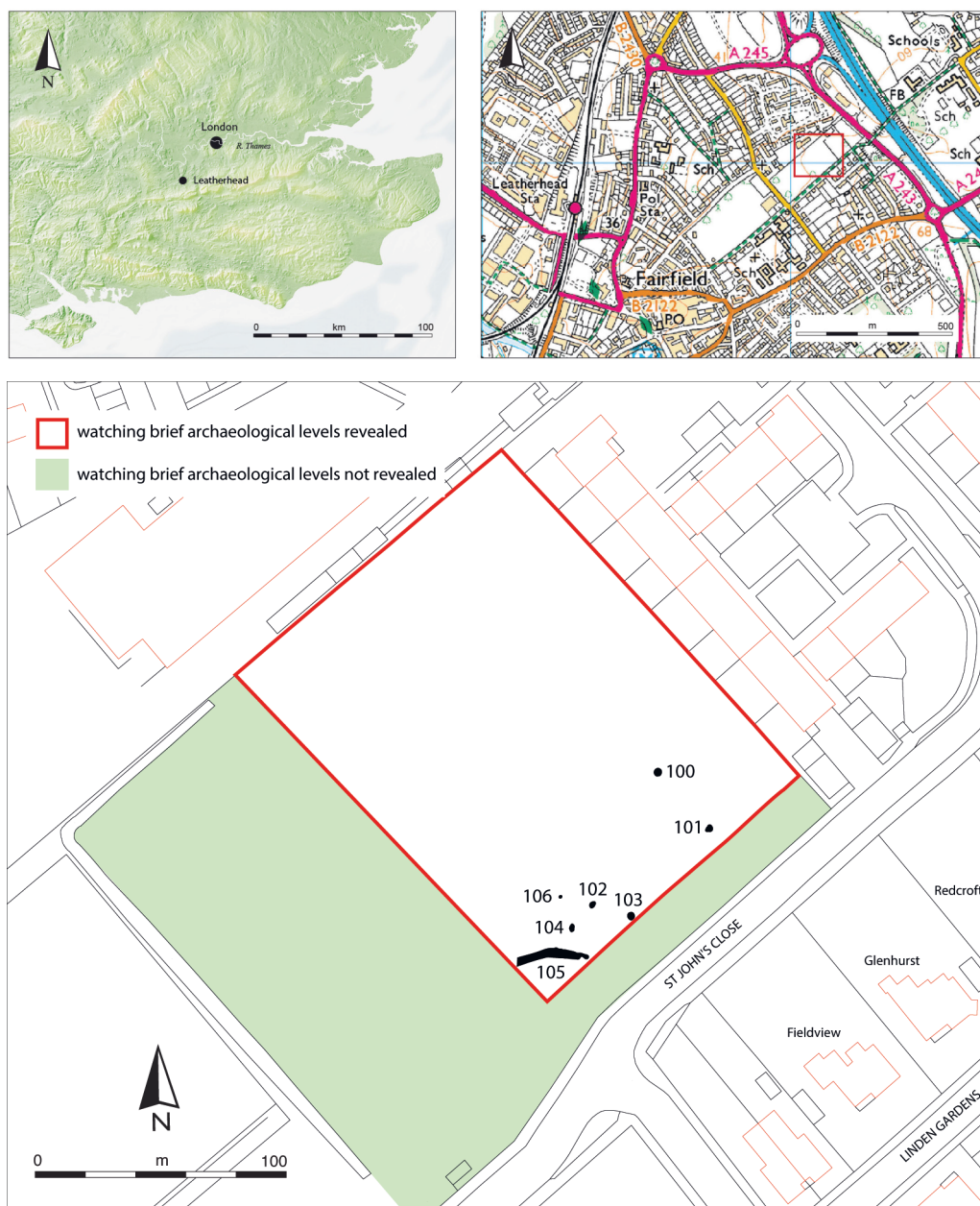


Fig 1 St John's School, Leatherhead. General location map and plan of features. Garlands Road runs c150m away from, and parallel to, the south-west side of the investigation area shown in the lower part of the figure. (© Crown copyright 2017. OS 100014198)

This feature is tentatively interpreted as a well on the basis of its depth and comparatively small circumference (figs 2 and 5), but as it could not be bottomed other interpretations, such as a storage pit, are almost equally plausible.

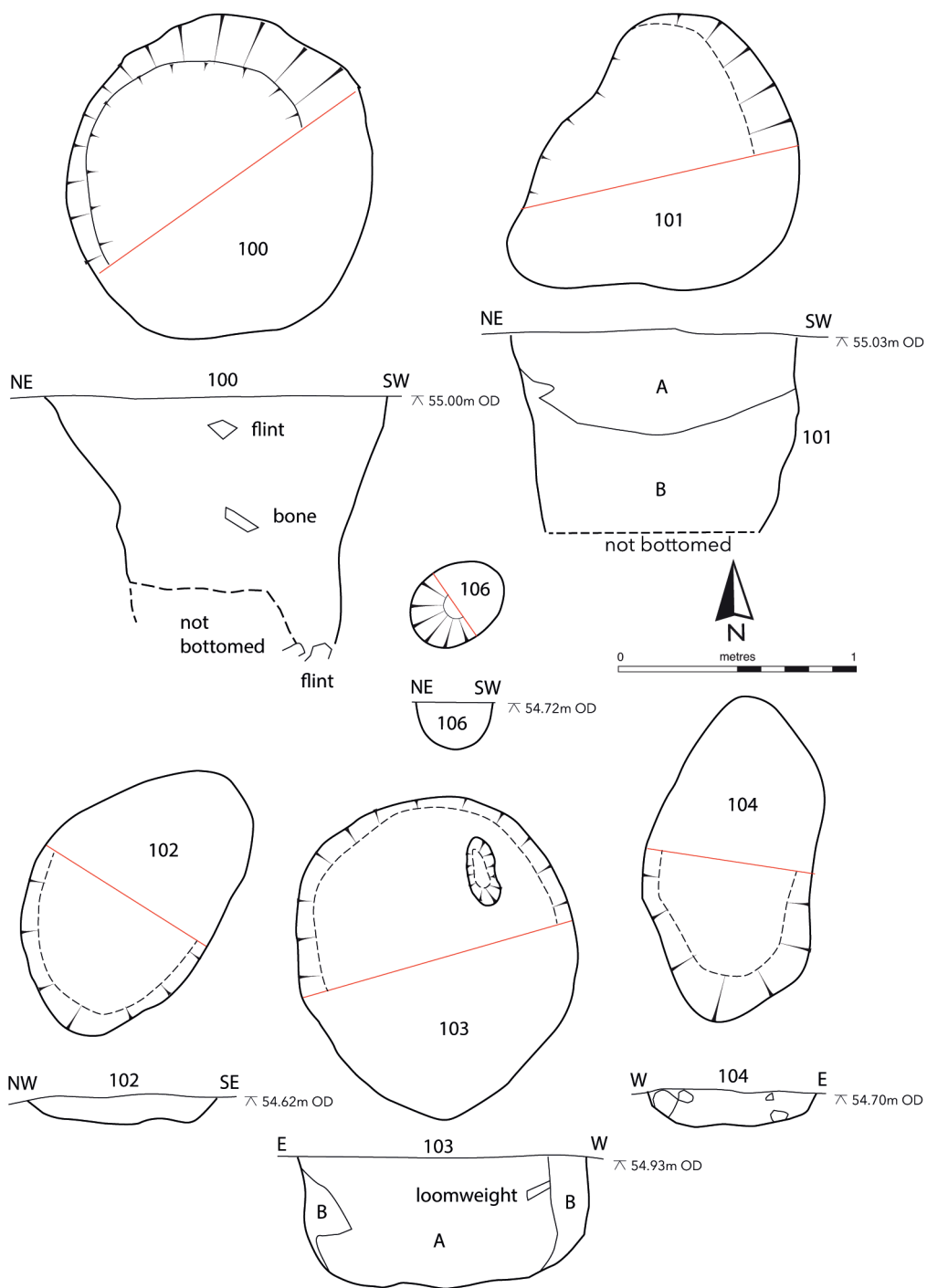


Fig 2 St John's School, Leatherhead. Plans and sections of the wells, pits and posthole.

Shallow ovoid cut 102 measured 1.26m long x 0.79m wide x 0.11m deep, and had a concave side and base profile. The feature consisted of a single fill of dark grey, sandy clay, which included Early Iron Age pottery (fig 2).

The ovoid pit 103 (fig 2) measured 1.32m long x 1.17m wide x 0.53m deep and had vertical sides that rounded sharply into a flat base. It contained two fills, the upper one (103A) being a mid-dark grey silty, sandy clay, the upper levels of which produced a large quantity of calcined flint, a small assemblage of roughly struck flint, and two pieces of baked clay. The lower fill, 103B, comprised mid-grey/beige silty sand, which adhered to the cut edges and graded into the main deposit, suggesting it represents gradual depositional processes associated with feature edge decay, and included Early Iron Age pottery.

Shallow, elongated feature 104 measured 1.38m long x 0.69m wide and survived to a depth of 0.15m. It had a bowl-shaped profile and a single fill of dark grey, silty sand. The feature did not contain any datable finds, but its similarity to feature 102 suggests it may be of similar date (fig 2).

Ditch 105 was oriented east–west and was curvilinear in plan. It was defined at its eastern end by a shallow, rounded terminus, but it continued south-west under soils that were not removed (see the Introduction). The revealed length was c 13.5m, but both the width and depth of the cut varied considerably throughout its length. Four segments were excavated and showed considerable variation in profile and fills (fig 3). Generally the fills were variations of brown, silty sand with abundant inclusions of angular to sub-rounded flints. It seems probable that the profile variations are largely the result of recutting on one or more occasions, but only segment 110 showed this clearly. The lowest layers or levels produced little dating evidence but the upper ones included relatively plentiful material, some of which was clearly dumped. Pottery included material of Middle Iron Age to Early Roman date, with other finds of parts of a triangular loomweight, animal bone, and Roman wall plaster.

The most northerly of the surviving features was pit 100 (figs 2 and 4). This cut was sub-circular in plan, 1.35m in diameter, and had steep, slightly irregular sides that became nearly vertical at a depth of 0.40–0.60m. The pit was excavated to a depth of 1.05m, but its base was not revealed, as it was already considerably deeper than the ground level reduction required for the development. It had a single, homogeneous fill of dark grey, silty sand with occasional fragments of chalk intermixed with flint pebbles, probably natural silting rather than deliberate infill. There was an indication that the edges of the upper part of the feature may have been clay lined. The feature was probably a well in view of the lining, but other explanations, such as a storage pit or even a ritual shaft like the one at Ewell (the clay-lined pit 241; Cowlard 2015), are quite possible. It included 33 sherds of late 2nd or early 3rd century date.

Cut 106 was a small sub-circular posthole, 0.40m in diameter, 0.20m deep with a deep bowl-shaped profile. The single fill comprised a dark grey/brown, silty sand, which was devoid of dating evidence (fig 2).

Finds

Table 1 lists all the finds, including pottery, other than struck flint and animal bone.

THE POTTERY, by †Phil Jones

Seventy sherds (0.92kg) were recovered from across the site, of which 19 (0.2kg) are of wholly Iron Age types, thirteen more (0.25kg) of transitional Late Iron Age to Early Roman date and 38 (0.45kg) of wheel-thrown ‘romanised’ sandy fabrics. Most of these last are from possible well 100, with three more from ditch 105.

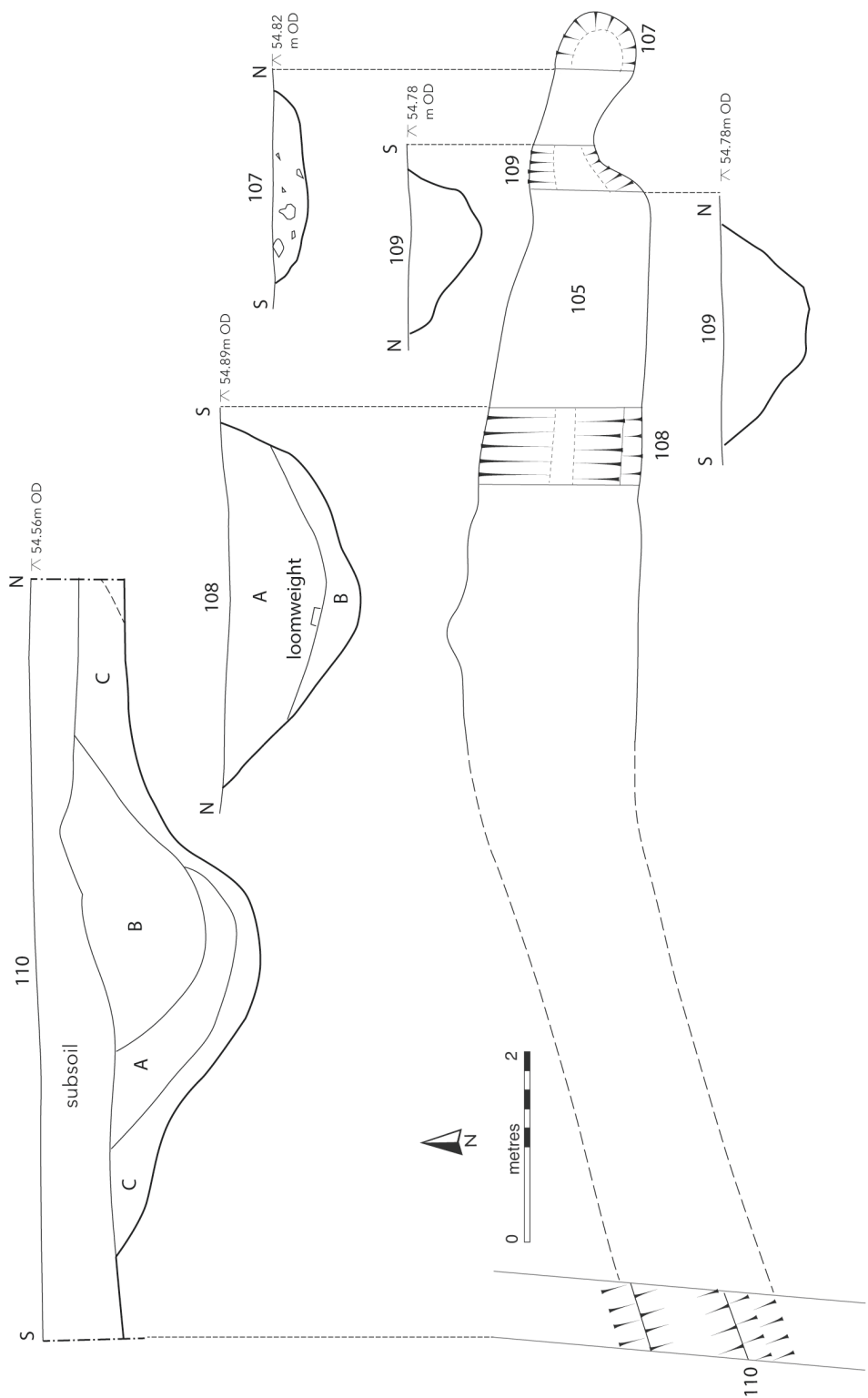


Fig 3 St John's School, Leatherhead. Plan and sections of ditch 105.



Fig 4 St John's School, Leatherhead. Roman well 100, looking south; horizontal scale 0.3m, vertical 0.4m.



Fig 5 St John's School, Leatherhead. Iron Age well 101, looking south; horizontal and vertical scales at 1m.

Early Iron Age

The assemblage of six sherds from scoop 102 is almost certainly of Early Iron Age type, as also may be four from pit 103. The former largely comprises fabrics that are predominantly tempered with crushed chalk, with lesser quantities of calcined flint and quartz sand. This assemblage included the upright rim and slightly angled shoulder of a typical form of the period. This shouldered jar has a slightly bulging rim with a series of notches on its upper surface, and the external surface of the vessel has been coarsely wiped horizontally. One of the sherds from 102 has, instead, a temper of quartz sand and organic inclusions. The only 'feature' sherd of the four from pit 103 is a base angle in a sand and chalk-tempered fabric. Although the other sherds do not contain chalk, they seem more likely to be of Early Iron Age date than any later period on the basis of their temper mixes. They, too, include one with only sand and organic inclusions. Two sherds recovered from the exposed surface of ditch 105 may also be of Early Iron Age date, since they include both chalk and calcined flint inclusions, as is the case with a chalk-tempered base angle from sub-context 110B, but they represent redeposited material.

Middle Iron Age

Four other sherds from ditch 105 are also most probably residual, but of ceramic traditions that began during the Middle Iron Age. They include three sherds with quartz sand and glauconite temper from sub-contexts 108 and 110A, and the upper part of a plain saucepan pot in a sand and organically-tempered fabric from sub-context 110B. This vessel has a rough burnishing of both external and internal surfaces.

Late Iron Age

At least eleven and possibly twelve sherds belong to ceramic traditions of Late Iron Age ancestry, but which continued into the Roman period. Two from well 100 are in poly-tempered calcined flint-gritted fabrics, but are relatively thin and burnished on both surfaces. Although they may be of earlier prehistoric types, it seems reasonable to assume that they are akin to the transitional types that are more common in the west of Surrey than in the Leatherhead area.

All the other eleven sherds are from ditch 105, with nine more certainly of Late Iron Age date and two that might also have been. These two are of a very coarse sandy fabric, one of many comminuted and crumbly fragments (114g) from the surface of the ditch, and the other from sub-context 108 that is large enough (47g) to demonstrate that it is from a handmade vessel, probably a jar. In addition there are six sherds of grog-tempered ware from sub-contexts 108 and 109, in both of which were parts of a large jar decorated on the shoulder with a panel containing at least two rows of opposed, horizontally stamped 'commas'. Similar schemes are found on other storage jars of so-called Patchgrove Ware, a transitional variant of the grog-tempering tradition better known from west Kent and east Surrey.

Lastly, there are three body sherds of coarse shell-tempered ware from sub-contexts 109 and 110B, of a ceramic tradition that was revived in the Thames estuarine district and elsewhere during the Late Iron Age, and which continued into the early decades of the Roman period.

Roman

Despite the dominance of Iron Age sherds, or those of fabrics that began to be produced in the last century of that period, in ditch 105, the presence of four sherds of wheel-thrown 'romanised' greyware indicates that its use continued into the early decades of the Roman

Table 1 Pottery and other finds by context, type, weight and date (excluding flint and animal bone)

Context	Sub-context	Type	Category	Count	Weight (g)	Date	Notes
100	–	Pit	Pot	33	394	L2/E3	1D x3; 3A x23; 8Bx 1; 8C x2; 10A1 x4
100	–	Pit	Pot	2	5	L2/E3	CALC/Q; Q/CALC (residual prehistoric)
100	–	Pit	Pot	2	5	LIA/ER	CALC/Q; Q/CALC
102	–	Scoop	Pot	6	84	EIA	incl shoulder jar
103	–	Pit	Pot	4	25	EIA	CALC/ORG x1; Q/CALC x3
105	110A	Pit	Pot	1	6	M-LIA	Q/glauc
105	surface	Ditch	Pot	4	19	IA	CALC/Q x2; Q/glauc x2
105	surface	Ditch	Pot	1	114	LIA/ER	coarse Q; crumbly
105	surface	Ditch	Pot	1	5	R	3A greyware
105	108	Ditch	Pot	5	80	LIA/ER	GROG; coarse Q
105	108B	Ditch	Pot	2	6	M-LIA	Q/glauc
105	109	Ditch	Pot	3	28	LIA/ER	GROG; SHELL
105	109	Ditch	Pot	1	41	ER	3A CNJ rim/base
105	110B	Ditch	Pot	2	67	M-LIA	incl saucepan rim
105	110B	Ditch	Pot	2	25	LIA/ER	SHELL
105	110B	Ditch	Pot	1	13	ER	3A base
–	–	–	Total	70	917	–	–
100	–	Pit	Roof tile	7	386	–	incl floor tile
102	–	Scoop	Baked clay	3	11	–	–
103	–	Pit	Baked clay	1	81	–	Loomweight? Flat surface
103	–	Pit	Baked clay	1	145	–	Loomweight? Flat surface
105	surface	Ditch	Baked clay	3	36	–	Loomweights?
105	108	Ditch	Baked clay	1	158	–	Loomweight; triangular; diagonal piercing
105	108	Ditch	Baked clay	1	6	–	–
105	109	Ditch	Baked clay	1	3	–	Loomweight? Flat surface
105	110B	Ditch	Baked clay	5	307	–	Loomweights?
100	–	Pit	CALC flint	6	111	–	–
102	–	Scoop	CALC flint	8	266	–	–
103	–	Pit	CALC flint	110	4131	–	–
105	surface	Ditch	CALC flint	4	103	–	–
105	108	Ditch	CALC flint	14	769	–	–
105	108B	Ditch	CALC flint	6	134	–	–
105	109	Ditch	CALC flint	1	54	–	–
105	110B	Ditch	CALC flint	10	420	–	–
106	–	Posthole	CALC flint	8	136	–	–
unst	–	–	Coin	1	–	George III penny	–
100	–	Pit	Fe object	1	8	–	flat-headed rod (nail?)
105	108	Ditch	Piink plaster	frags	4	–	–
105	110B	Ditch	Pink plaster	20	134	–	–
105	110B	Ditch	Pink plaster	1	217	–	round-moulded; lath impression
100	–	Pit	Pink plaster	1	3	–	–
100	–	Pit	Stone	1	16	–	Hythe SST; frag

For prehistoric pottery fabrics and codes see Jones 2012, 117 and for Roman see Jones 2010, 87.

period, although probably not beyond the 1st century AD. They include the rim and the base of a cordon-necked jar, from segment 109, and another base angle from segment 110B.

The remainder of the Roman pottery from the site, amounting to 33 sherds (0.39kg), was retrieved from well 100, but this represents a largely later assemblage that was probably dumped during the late 2nd or early 3rd century. This is suggested by three body sherds with

cross-hatched lattice-work of burnished lines and two rims of Class 3B jars on which such schemes were applied (Lyne & Jefferies 1979). There are also three sherds of orangeware fabrics with external white-slipping from flagons, three sherds of a distinctive wheel-thrown greyware tempered with grog pellets, including a decorated shoulder from a cordon-necked jar, and parts of four Central Gaulish samian vessels. These latter include rims from a Curle 11 dish and a Dr 33 cup, the lower part of a Dr 37 bowl and a decorated body sherd from another such form.

MISCELLANEOUS OBJECTS, by †Phil Jones

Baked clay

Sixteen fragments were recovered (0.7kg), of which some have parts of flat surfaces, and many of the fragments may be from triangular loomweights. Three small pieces (11g) are from the Early Iron Age scoop 102 and two that are larger (81 and 145g), and include flat surfaces, are from pit 103 and of possibly the same period. The remainder are all from segments of ditch 105, and include one certain loomweight fragment that includes part of a diagonal piercing of the triangular form.

Roman tile

Seven fragments (0.38kg) are all from well 100, and include the corner of a fairly thick floor/wall tile.

Roman wall plaster

Fragments of pink wall plaster, that has added inclusions of abundant quartz sand and moderate amounts of, often quite large, pieces of chalk, were recovered from ditch 105 and well 100, but the latter sample is only a single scrap that must be residual (3g). Nearly all are small fragments (138g), one larger 0.2kg piece from ditch 105 (sub-context 110B) is intriguing as it includes an internally convex, but curving, smoothed surface, as well as an internal, rounded impression of a substantial lath.

Iron object

A rod-like object (79mm long and generally 8–10mm diameter) with a flattened head (25mm wide x 7mm thick) was recovered from well 100.

Stone

A small irregular fragment (16g) of Lower Greensand Hythe Beds sandstone was recovered from possible well 100, and may be from a rotary quern of Lodsworth type.

THE FLINT, by Nick Marples

Eighty-three struck flints weighing 1907g were recovered from seven contexts containing flintwork, associated with five features across the whole of the investigated area. Most of the lithic finds were collected by manual excavation, but seventeen items, including fourteen chips, were retrieved from processed residues deriving from a 40-litre bulk sample, BS 1, taken from possible well 101. A complete catalogue of the lithic material in context order, is given in table 2.

Table 2 Struck flint by context, type, quantity and condition

			Cores and Debitage				Tools & Edge Modified					Quantification		Condition & Raw Material					Notes			
Context	Type	Date	Chip	Core	Flake	Flake Fragment	Irregular Waste	Combination Tool	Edge Modified	Miscellaneous Retouch	Notch	Piercer	Scraper	Totals	Weight (g)	Burnt	Patinated	Bullhead flint	Good	Fair	Poor	Notes
100	Well	Roman	—	—	—	—	2	—	1	1	—	—	—	4	138	2	—	—	4	—	—	Retouch may be incidental
101A	Well	Early Iron Age	—	—	2	—	13	—	—	—	—	—	1	16	377	—	2	—	16	—	—	
101A BS 1	Well	Early Iron Age	14	—	—	2	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	17	1	—	—	—	17	—	—	
102	Scoop	Early Iron Age	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	34	—	—	1	1	—	—	Scraper/double notch
103	Pit	Early Iron Age	—	2	2	—	24	1	1	1	1	1	3	36	1058	—	—	5	36	—	—	Several re-fits from same cobble, but some breakage may be excavation induced
108	Ditch	LIA/Roman	—	1	1	—	2	—	—	1	—	—	—	5	272	—	—	—	5	—	—	Retouched core frag
108B	Ditch	LIA/Roman	—	—	1	—	2	—	—	—	1	—	—	4	27	1	—	1	4	—	—	
		Total %	14	3	6	2	44	1	2	3	2	1	5	83	1907	3	2	7	83	0	0	
		% excluding chips	16.9	3.6	7.3	2.4	53	1.2	2.4	3.6	2.4	1.2	6	100	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
			—	4.4	8.7	2.9	63.8	1.4	2.9	4.4	2.9	1.4	7.2	100	—	4.3	2.9	10.1	100	0	0	

Flintwork was present across the full range of excavated features, but the most important single feature assemblage derives from the Early Iron Age pit 103, which contained 36 flints, including nine pieces classified as tools.

Condition and raw material

All the flints are in a fresh, unrolled condition, but the cortex on most pieces, which reflects the varying parent geologies of the raw material, is clearly weathered, indicating its more immediate derivation from within secondary sources, possibly the local head deposits noted in British Geological Survey data (MOLA 2012, 6). Internally, most of the flint is mottled pale to dark grey, with lighter cherty patches and occasional fossil inclusions. Thermal flaws are a recurrent feature of the recovered flintwork, and also of the unworked flints present within the bulk sample which were found to be of identical character and likely provenance. The cortex is of variable thickness and either off-white to buff or grey/greenish-brown, in the latter case frequently accompanied by a honey-coloured sub-cortical band. While the former is likely to derive from a nodular chalk or Clay-with-Flints source, the latter is a clearly recognisable characteristic of Bullhead flint, ultimately deriving from the Reading Beds. This flint was widely exploited for the production of scrapers, serrates, transverse arrowheads and piercers across south-eastern England throughout the Neolithic period, but the raw material used is invariably of much better quality than this flint. Seven artefacts have been produced from Bullhead flint, comprising two core fragments, three pieces of irregular waste, and two possible tools.

A white or pale blue patination present on two pieces clearly pre-dates their subsequent modification. Tiny ferruginous concretions, likely to derive from mineral deposition in their buried environment, are present on many pieces.

Three struck flints are burnt, but up to nineteen burnt flints with irregular fractures, which may have been struck with the intention of manufacturing flint tools, but which cannot unambiguously be identified as the products of a lithic industry, have not been classified as worked.

Technology: cores and debitage

Two of the three cores identified were collected from Early Iron Age pit 103. One is a multi-platform type with very small flake scars, three of which were produced by the removal of blanks with hinged or stepped terminations, one is a minimally flaked multi-platform core with one keeled (joint) platform, a thermally induced working face, and incipient cones of percussion on its principal striking platform, while the other is a fragment with similar thermally induced facets. The largest complete core, another multi-platform type recovered from Roman ditch segment 108, weighs 86g.

Only six flakes and two flake fragments are present, but circular impact scars visible on the remnant striking platforms of two flakes and one retouched flake, and their pronounced bulbs of percussion, indicate that they were detached using a hard hammerstone. Obtuse flaking angles, thick, wide striking platform remnants, and hinged or stepped terminations, characteristic of later Bronze Age and Iron Age flintknapping (Young & Humphrey 1999, 233; Humphrey 2007, 145) are present on four flakes, one retouched flake and one edge-modified flake.

The bulk of the debitage, however, accounting for 61% of the assemblage excluding chips, is made up of irregular fragments with one or more thermally induced facets, most of which could be classed as core shatter, and which can largely be attributed to the very poor quality of the parent raw material. High proportions of irregular waste are a feature of later Bronze Age flintworking, but a high incidence of chunks has also been identified as one of the traits of Iron Age lithic assemblages (Humphrey 2004, 248; 2007, 145). The use of localised raw

material sources, some of very poor quality, has also been highlighted with regard to both later Bronze Age and Iron Age flint (Humphrey 2007, 145).

It is not currently possible to separate the products of later Bronze Age and Iron Age flintworking on technological grounds, as all of the characteristics noted above are typical of both periods. It should be noted, however, that the proportions of irregular waste are even higher than those reported from a number of Middle–Late Bronze Age sites in Surrey, for example 35% overall at Christ’s College, Guildford (Marples 2012, 17) and 33% of lithic finds recovered from all sampled later Bronze Age boundary elements at Hengrove Farm in Staines (Marples forthcoming).

Early Iron Age pit 103 contained several pieces of irregular waste, one flake and one retouched piece that clearly derive from the same cobble-sized nodule, and most of these re-fit, although the full extent of re-fitting has not been determined.

Although the processed bulk sample from well 101 produced fourteen chips, some of these pieces may have been produced incidentally in the course of excavation or flotation, and it is not thought likely that such a small number constitutes reliable evidence of knapping activity.

Technology: tools

Fifteen tools have been identified, but there are inherent difficulties in identifying and classifying the less regular components of later Bronze Age and Iron Age flint industries (Brown 1992, 90), so that their attribution as such must be treated with caution in the absence of any associated microwear analysis (cf Brown *loc cit*; Brown 1996; Brown & Bradley 2006; Herne 1991). Their classification here is based on perceived similarities to illustrated examples in the works cited below and other publications, as well as to comparable material collected from securely dated later Bronze Age flint assemblages in Surrey, many of which await full publication.

Seven ‘non-standard’ tools, which may have been produced accidentally (cf Reynier 2005, 131), include two notches, three variously retouched pieces, and two edge-modified artefacts.

Of the more formal tool types recognised, scrapers are the best represented, with four examples, and there is one possible awl. One tool classified as a combination tool combines an area of concave retouch, possibly used for scraping, with a broad point. Retouch on most of these pieces is quite crude, and generally ragged, precluding their use in scraping hides, although they might have been employed in flax stripping, as suggested by Brown (1992, 92), or for woodworking.

Most of the pieces classified as tools were produced on irregular chunks and thermal flakes. There are only two instances of tool manufacture from regular flakes, providing additional evidence of a lack of controlled, systematic reduction.

The restricted range of identifiable tool types present is entirely commensurate with a later Bronze Age or Iron Age date (cf Young & Humphrey 1999, 233; Humphrey 2007, 145), although due allowance must be made for the very small size of the assemblage.

THE ANIMAL BONE, by Gemma Ayton

Methodology

The assemblage has been recorded on an Excel spreadsheet with reference to the zoning system outlined by Serjeantson (1996). Wherever possible the fragments have been identified to species and the skeletal element represented. Elements that could not be confidently identified to species, such as long-bone and vertebrae fragments, have been recorded according to their size and identified as large, medium or small mammal and the total number of unidentifiable fragments in each context has also been noted. The state of fusion has been recorded and each fragment has then been studied for signs of butchery, burning, gnawing and pathology. Metrical data have been taken in accordance with von den Driesch

(1976), the assemblage does not contain any recordable mandibles (ie mandibles with at least two teeth in a row). One metatarsal has been identified as sheep with reference to Boessneck *et al* (1964).

Results

One hundred and forty-three fragments were recovered, of which 74 were identifiable to species or taxonomic group (eg large or medium-sized mammal). Cattle predominate though caprine, donkey and dog bones have also been identified (table 3).

Table 3 Animal bone count by feature

<i>Taxa</i>	Early Iron Age pit 103	Late Iron Age–early Roman ditch 105					Roman well (?) 100	<i>Total</i>
		108	108A	109	110A	110B		
Cattle	–	15	5	1	1	3	2	27
Sheep/goat	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Sheep	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1
Equus	–	2	–	–	–	–	–	2
Dog	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2
Large mammal	–	21	4	–	7	–	–	32
Medium mammal	–	–	–	–	1	2	6	9
Unidentifiable	5	52	6	–	–	1	5	69
<i>Total</i>	5	90	15	1	9	6	17	143

The assemblage was in a moderate state of preservation with some large fragments remaining though there was ample evidence of surface erosion. Canid and rodent gnawing was noted on specimens from both the well and ditch and implies that the bone was initially discarded on the ground before burial. Very little age-at-death data were available owing to the absence of mandibles and no evidence of pathology or burning was noted. No sieving was undertaken on site.

Just one measurable bone was recovered from ditch 105, section 108 and this was identified as an equus metacarpal. Metrical data can be used to separate horse and donkey, Johnstone's (2004) analysis of equids in the Roman world revealed that there is a small overlap in the withers height of small horses and large donkeys though the slenderness of the bones is sufficiently different to separate the two. The lateral length of the metacarpal from ditch 105 is approximately 200mm, a more accurate measurement was not possible owing to the poor preservation of the proximal end. This provides an estimated withers height of 1280mm (Kiesewalter 1888) or 12.5 hands. The metapodials of horses (*Equus caballus*) and donkeys (*Equus asinus*) can be separated using measurements of the shaft breadth and the greatest length (SD/GL x100). The metacarpal index of the specimen from context 108 has been calculated as 14.5 which falls within the range of Roman donkeys (13–15). It is a commonly accepted view that the Romans introduced donkeys to areas outside their natural climatic range and remains have also been recovered from Late Iron Age contexts on sites with known contacts and trade with the Roman Empire including Danebury (Grant 1984). Donkeys would have been utilised primarily for traction and as pack animals (Johnstone 2008).

Ditch slot 108 contained approximately twenty fragments of large mammal-sized long bones that have been split longitudinally, a process associated with marrow extraction. A large chop mark was also noted on the distal end of a cattle radius from the same context.

Discussion

The earliest features are Early Iron Age in date. Pits 102 and 103 produced baked clay, possibly from loomweights, poorly produced struck flint, and pottery sherds, while possible well 101 produced only struck flint.

The flint assemblage from these features is regionally significant as it is a very rare example of clearly identified Iron Age flintworking. All the flintwork recovered was in very good condition. There are no lithic artefacts demonstrably earlier than the later Bronze Age, and all the material could be attributed to a single period of manufacture on technological and raw material grounds. The similarity between the struck flint from well 101 and the flint assemblage from scoop 102 and pit 103 strongly suggests that these features are of a similar date, despite the absence of contemporary pottery within 101.

Scoop 102 produced a single worked flint (a scraper or double notch, manufactured on a flake), which, when compared with the nineteen flints from feature 101 and 36 flints from feature 103, does appear unusual. However, the paucity of material within 102 may relate to the shallow depth of this feature, rather than to any depositional variations.

The high representation of pieces identified as tools within these features is a strong indicator of domestic or other task activity, while the re-fitting lithics provide a rare glimpse into the mechanics of Iron Age flintworking. Although the subject of Early to Middle Iron Age flint use has received increasing attention, most notably in the work of Humphrey (2004; 2007), the small size of assemblages, such as at St John's School, and the invariable interpretational difficulties presented by multi-period sites with residual artefacts, have usually prevented reliable identification of products.

The contents of pit 103 constitute some of the best evidence within Surrey for flint use extending beyond the later Bronze Age and, as such, they are of some regional significance.

Small quantities of flintwork were also recovered from two features containing later finds and these are regarded as residual elements. The larger body of flint collected from probable well 101, which comprised nineteen pieces, excluding chips, does, in the absence of any other finds, provide a good indication of an Iron Age date.

The ceramic assemblage from the two pits is also remarkable, as it gives us a rare insight into a local Early Iron Age ceramic tradition of chalk tempering, which is unlike the prevalent calcined flint and sand tempering seen in assemblages from the Thames flood plain and terraces further north. The presence of Early Iron Age pottery, worked flint, loomweight fragments, animal bone and calcined flint is a strong indicator of domestic activity at this time.

The creation of ditch 105 is dated to the Late Iron Age, although a Middle Iron Age origin cannot be wholly discounted in view of the recutting that might have removed the earliest evidence. With so few features, continuity of settlement from the Early Iron Age can only be a matter of speculation. Finds evidence suggests that the ditch continued to mark a functional boundary, despite silting up, into the early Roman period, although probably not beyond the late 1st century AD, the date of the latest pottery types. Its curving form and the nature of the finds suggest it may be the remnant of a domestic settlement enclosure.

By far the largest quantity of material recovered is dated to the Roman period. The pottery from ditch 105 included the rim and the base of a cordon-necked jar, and another base angle. Of additional interest is the presence of fragments of plain, pink wall plaster within the same ditch fills. Most of the remaining Roman pottery came from feature 100. The assemblage, amounting to 33 sherds, was dumped during the late 2nd or early 3rd century, and includes sherds from four Central Gaulish samian vessels.

It seems certain that these few features lay on the fringe of a settlement, that either began before or during a very early stage of the Roman occupation of Britain, and survived until at least the late 2nd or early 3rd century. The finds hint at differences between the earlier and later uses of the site. It is notable, for instance, that the only Roman tile debris is from the late well 100, with none from the early ditch 105, despite the fact that the ditch contained fragments of broken plaster. Furthermore, since most of the pottery from the ditch is transitional, with none that need be later than the 1st century AD, such debris indicates the early destruction of the plastered structure, or at the very least a modification of its original design. The plaster is plain and pink, and includes a moulded piece, which is unlike the layered make-up and painted surfaces that are characteristic of finely furnished rooms. It is,

however, much like the similarly pink, plain and sometimes moulded pieces from a dump of plaster that was retrieved from a late Roman well in Staines (Jones 2010, 250). Such material is typical of the linings applied to the surfaces of baths throughout the classical world, and it is now thought possible that the Staines debris is from such a structure, as might also be these pieces from Leatherhead.

The Roman well, 100, also produced a potentially significant group of finds, with seven pieces of tile including a thick example for use in a wall or on a floor, and a relatively high proportion of tableware among the pottery, most especially of samian, with four vessels represented in the small collection of 33 sherds.

The number of features and finds is small and inevitably this makes drawing conclusions as to their wider implications hazardous. Nevertheless, a number of aspects of the finds could be taken as indicating a Late Iron Age and Early Roman site of high status that lies mostly outside the area examined. The point may be usefully clarified by a comparison with a large (around 5ha), completely excavated (over 1000 contexts) low-status farmstead, in use from the latest Iron Age to the 4th century, at Hengrove Farm that lies less than 2km from the Roman town of Staines (Hayman *et al* forthcoming). This work produced not a single piece of plaster and just 76 sherds of samian pottery (about 1% of the assemblage) with only one context, with six pieces, producing more than the four from St John's. Tile was more plentiful, with 52 contexts producing seven or more pieces, and was clearly used for a variety of ancillary functions, as there was no evidence of buildings with tiled roofs at the site. The combination of finds, taken together with the donkey bone for which all other associations are with towns, military sites or major rural centres (Johnstone 2008), strongly suggests that these features are related to a substantial nearby high-status site. The alternative, that they belong to a small and/or low-status occupation site, cannot be ruled out, but it seems improbable that such a modest excavation would discover this combination of characteristics if that were the case.

Overall, the evidence probably relates to continuous, high-status occupation from a little before or after the conquest until the late 2nd or early 3rd century. The recorded features were all located towards the eastern edge of the watching brief area and if ditch 105 formed part of an enclosure ditch, then more intensive settlement activity probably lies to the south and south-east. The nearest known Roman sites are a building, 1.4km to the south-west in Cobham Road, Fetcham (Munnery 2014), a possible villa site, 2.4km to the north-east in the grounds of St Giles church in Ashted (Bird 2004, 104) and the villa and tile kiln site on Ashted Common, 3.4km to the north (*ibid*, 102–4). This is a significant addition to what is a relatively intense concentration of evidence of high-status Roman sites in the Ashted/Leatherhead area.

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