Excavations at 19 High Street, Reigate

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with contributions by

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An archaeological excavation took place to the rear of 19 High Street, Reigate in advance of development. The excavation revealed evidence of settlement from the medieval and post-medieval periods. The medieval period was characterized by the presence of a possible pond and medieval foundations. The post-medieval period indicated further settlement in the form of floor and levelling surfaces and an 18th century wall. The wall may have related to the brewery located on the site in the 19th century.

Introduction

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd at land to the rear of 19 High Street, Reigate (TQ 25287 50216) for Mr Pallana in advance of the proposed redevelopment of this site for a building extension (fig 1). The excavation took place between 10 and 17 June 2002, following an evaluation which took place between 10 and 14 January 2002 (Wragg 2002, 5). The excavation trench (6m north–south x 3m east–west) was located within the footprint of the development and was situated to avoid the cellar of the brewery buildings previously located on the site. The excavation revealed evidence for a feature which had repeatedly silted during the medieval and post-medieval periods. Medieval foundations, a post-medieval floor and levelling surfaces and an 18th century wall were also revealed. The medieval pottery is referenced to Jones (1998). The site archive will be deposited with Guildford Museum under site code SHSR 02.

Background

The site is located to the south of the High Street and some 11m west of its junction with Bell Street, and lies on the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand. The land slopes downwards considerably from north to south across the site which is located on the northern slope of a valley formed by a tributary of the river Mole. Excavations at the rear of 21 High Street (Trier 1974, 8) and elsewhere in the town have yielded evidence for activity in the late Mesolithic. Indications of medieval occupation have been found at a number of sites, mainly on the south side of the High Street, and there is some evidence to suggest that the north side was not built up until the castle was in decline. Excavations at a number of sites in Bell Street suggest that this street may have formed the core of the earliest town for which a date in the second half of the 12th century seems likely. The tithe map of the 1840s is unclear as to whether there were buildings on the study site, although the tithe awards indicate the presence of brewery outbuildings, stabling, yards and a garden (Sadarangani 2001, 17).

Archaeological deposits

The natural sand was encountered at 77.45m OD in the north of the trench, sloped gradually to 77.25m OD in the south and was overlaid by an alluvial layer of silty organic material that contained no artefacts. This appeared to be the earliest deposit on the site. The environmental samples taken showed that the sedimentary units indicated either a natural fluvial system or artificial feature such as a drainage ditch or large pit (Branch & Swindle 2002, 38). The organic nature of this deposit and its location imply that it represented a natural accumulation of silt and vegetation caused by the gradual silting up of a large water-
filled feature. Above this layer was a deposit of grey silt that contained early medieval pottery. These layers were extremely homogenous in nature and owing to their depth below ground level were partially excavated using a small flat-bladed machine bucket. This secondary silting up phase (fig 2) produced sherds of pottery dating to the late 12th to early 14th centuries.

Two medieval masonry features were constructed on top of this layer (fig 3). The first feature was a wall foundation in the south-west of the trench that consisted of a number of very large roughly hewn pieces of Reigate stone at its base with smaller stones above. There was no evidence of mortar, but roof tile fragments indicated a date for the walls of c 1270 – c 1400 based on a period of overlap between earlier and later tile fabrics and forms (Brown 2002, 34). This wall was aligned north–south and was 0.65m high. It is possible that this feature could have been the wall of a building or it may have formed a medieval property boundary, as it lay at right-angles to the main street. To the east of this foundation was a second L-shaped masonry feature, consisting of eight large roughly hewn pieces of Reigate stone. This masonry feature had not been truncated but did not extend any further to the
Fig 2  19 High Street, Reigate: south facing section.
north or east. It was not possible to establish a relationship between this feature and the foundation to the west. When the stones were removed, fragments of early medieval pottery as well as charcoal were found directly beneath each one. To the north of the masonry features, a layer of small rough stone cobbles was identified (fig 2), which may be contemporary with the medieval foundations further south or may be associated with the construction or demolition of these foundations. This layer produced sherds of pottery in the Surrey grey/brown sandy ware tradition as well as a large body sherd of a jar dating to the 13th or 14th century and a body sherd of a jug with a coarse green glaze. This phase could represent a drier period allowing construction to take place. A tertiary silting up phase (fig 2), very similar in composition to the first, followed the construction of the medieval foundations, and overlay their full extent. The tertiary silting phase produced a wide range of pottery types dating to between c 1150 and 1500.

To the northern end of the trench was a series of eight superimposed external yard surface and make-up layers (fig 2), dating to the 17th century, and overlying the tertiary silt. These layers imply that a 17th century building may have fronted on to the High Street with a yard to the rear, similar to the current layout. In the south-west of the trench was a rectangular pit filled with demolition material. This contained a dish, decorated with a blue geometrical design on white, dated to the late 17th/early 18th century. There were also sherds of a plain blue tin-glazed chamber pot of 18th century date. This was sealed by an 18th/19th century wall (fig 4) running east–west, and which consisted of three courses of Reigate stone with one course of later post-medieval brick beneath. The bricks were of a type commonly used as paving bricks or drain runs, especially in the late 18th to mid-19th century. The base of this wall stepped up two courses towards the western end, which may indicate a possible rebuild. The wall continued to the east outside the limit of excavation. An east–west wall had been noted in the excavation at the rear of 21 High Street (Trier 1974, 8), and this may represent a continuation of that found during the current excavation. It appears that the wall remained

Fig 3 19 High Street, Reigate: medieval masonry structures.
extant until the late 19th/early 20th century and may have been used as part of the brewery, possibly relating to the wall marked on the OS map of 1872. In the 19th century, a period of renewed activity took place in the north of the site, with the creation of sandy levelling layers and deliberately laid yard surfaces. These probably relate to the use of the area as a brewery yard. A 19th century east–west drain cut through some of these surfaces. A large mid-19th century pottery group was recovered from the drain and consisted either of porcelain or industrial finewares.

**The pottery, by Chris Jarrett**

The secondary phase of silting up deposits produced a single sherd of Early Surrey iron-rich ware (Ironstone sandy ware, fabric code IQ), thirteen sherds of Limpsfield reduced ware (fabric code LQ) and sherds of jars or cooking pots in a shelly ware (fabric code QS), dating to the late 12th to early 14th centuries. The shell-tempering is fine and sparse and one large rounded jar was decorated with a vertical applied rib, decorated with pinching and thumbing. Limpsfield-type ware is part of a greyware pottery tradition in the Thames Basin during the late 12th to early 14th centuries and defined as a sandy, reduced, wheel-thrown fabric. Several kiln sites have been found in the Limpsfield area, located close to the Lewes–London Roman Road (Prendergast 1974; Ketteringham 1989; Hayman 1997; Jones 1997). Some of the sherds from the jars are hand made, but the rims appear to be wheel-thrown. Two mid-13th–14th century kilns excavated at Clacket Lane, Titsey, 8 miles to the east of Reigate, produced a wide range of fabric colours and jars or cooking pots with hand-made bodies and wheel-thrown rims (Jones 1997, 35–36, 68). Medieval pottery was most common in the tertiary silting layer and types include: shell-tempered ware (Q2); grey/brown sandy ware (GQ2); Orange sandy ware (OQ) that includes the type of products made at the Earlswood kiln.
(Turner 1974), dated 1200–1400; Surrey whitewares as Kingston-type ware dated 1230–1400, and a Coarse Border ware jug with red slip decoration, dated 1340–1500. There was also a sherd of Raeren stoneware, dated 1480–1610, which indicated that deposition of this layer was in the late 15th/early 16th century. The finewares from the 19th century east–west drain include an example with ‘ROGERS 6’ stamped in incuse and refers to the Roger’s view series that was current between c. 1815 and 1842. Among the tea plates present was an example that had on the underside of the vessel a transfer-print of the name of the design ‘BRIDGE OF LUCANO ITALY’ on a crowned ribbon. Transfer-printed wares with the name of the design marked on them are rare before c. 1830 and therefore this assemblage would appear to date to the second quarter of the 19th century.

The metal-detected finds, by David W Williams

A metal detector was used on the spoil heap that resulted from the machined alluvial material and revealed four metal objects (fig 5). These objects are most likely to have originated from the primary or secondary silting phases noted above. The finds include an oval buckle frame with attached buckle plate and two surviving copper-alloy rivets (fig 5, no 1). This buckle frame is decorated with a series of lines of punched opposed triangles. The openwork buckle plate has additional decoration in the form of short punched lines. A bird, perhaps a swan.

Fig 5 19 High Street, Reigate: medieval metal buckles and casket fitting. (Drawing by David W Williams)
with outstretched wings, appears to be represented here but is unclear. Another oval buckle frame with attached plate was also found (fig 5, no 2). The lobed buckle plate is decorated with a border and arcs of punched triangles. There is a line of rocked tracer decoration behind the cut out for the pin. Two dome-headed rivets survive in the plate. The other two objects found comprise a plain double oval buckle frame, grey in colour and with a high tin content (fig 5, no 3) and with the remains of an iron pin, and a curving spatulate object with a D-shaped section, pierced centrally for a rivet (fig 5, no 4). The frames of the first two buckles are broadly paralleled, although there are no published parallels for their buckle plates. They may be of 13th or 14th century date. The third buckle is probably from a shoe, with London examples dating to c 1350–1450. The spatulate object may belong to a range of casket fittings such as those from Goltho, Lincolnshire (Beresford 1987, figs 154–5), and a 13th century date seems possible.

Discussion
The earliest phase of activity on the site was the period of silting that pre-dates the 13th or 14th century because it was underlying a layer deposited in this period. The thick, homogenous nature of the silting-up phases indicates a deposit accumulated over time and may indicate that a pond or similar water feature existed on the site in the medieval period. The extent of this silted-up area was not identified within the constraints of the excavation and therefore it is difficult to speculate on the precise nature of this feature. The masonry wall overlying the alluvium lay at right-angles to the main street and therefore may constitute an early property boundary or demarcate the presence of an earlier building. The L-shaped feature was difficult to interpret although it appeared to be contemporary with the wall foundation, and its presence within a wet area remains unexplained. The post-medieval period is represented by the tertiary silting phase which suggested that after a period of use for settlement, the site again became a pond or possibly marshy ground. The later yard surface layers, of 17th–19th century date, imply that the area was used as a backyard. It is worth noting the continued use of Reigate stone as a construction material. This stone was mined extensively during the medieval period and into the 19th and 20th centuries, and as a local source of building stone its continued use is not surprising. The presence of a possible pond so close to the main street during the 13th and 14th centuries is difficult to explain, although its location to the rear of the property supports the view that only the street frontages of medieval towns were developed and occupied, leaving the less commercially viable land to the rear relatively undeveloped (Platt 1976, 30). It may be that further work in the area would clarify the size and function of this possible pond. The medieval wall foundation and the later east–west wall indicate a continuity of settlement on the site, with a brief period of disuse.

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