A medieval timber building at London Road, Wallington, Sutton

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with contributions by
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Excavations at the former Elmwood Playing Fields site at London Road, Wallington, revealed evidence of a 13th century hall, an important addition to knowledge of the Wallington area in the medieval period. The pottery assemblage from the site contributes to the understanding of pottery supply sources in north Surrey in the later 13th century.

Introduction

The former Elmwood Playing Fields, London Road, Wallington, in the London Borough of Sutton (fig 1), was the site of an archaeological investigation by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) in early 1995, prior to development by Laing Homes. The site lies on the western side of London Road directly to the north of the river Wandle (TQ 2870 6584). Evaluation work identified two areas for detailed excavation, and the eastern of these areas produced evidence of medieval occupation the interpretation of which forms the bulk of this paper (fig 2).

The site is located on the gravel flood plain of the Wandle directly to the north of the river. The bedrock lithologies include London Clay to the north and Thanet Sands and Woolwich Beds to the south. Upper Chalk underlies the high ground to the south. The flint gravel is highly variable across its outcrop and ranges from a bleached gravel to a red, heavily stained gravel with linear bands of fine to coarse sand.

Mesolithic and Neolithic flint implements were recovered to the south-east of the site at Bunker’s Field, now part of the site of the Wallington High School for Boys (Laws & Wooldridge 1980, 18). At Queen Mary’s Hospital, Carshalton, c 3km to the south-west, a Late Bronze Age circular enclosure was recorded (Adkins & Needham 1985, 11–50). Roman finds in the vicinity include a 1st century cremation burial and pottery sherds from Bandon Hill (Adkins 1980, 11) c 1.5km to the south-east of the site. Excavations at 32 Burleigh Avenue, Wallington, in 1921 and 1976 (site code BA76) produced scatters of Roman pottery (Orton 1980a, 77–82) c 300m to the south of Elmwood Playing Fields. A 3rd century Roman villa has been excavated at the Beddington sewage works (site code BSF87) c 1km to the north-east of the site (Keulemans 1963, 37–49; Howell forthcoming). An Anglo-Saxon cemetery has also been found at the Beddington site (Morris 1959). There is relatively little medieval evidence from the vicinity. Wallington Chapel lay only a short distance to the south, and a site at The Lodge, West Street Lane, Carshalton, has produced evidence of timber buildings (Orton 1989, 10). By 1353 Beddington Park, just to the east of the Elmwood site, was in the control of the Carew family (Michell 1980, 29). Successive maps show the site as open meadow land until 1956, when it became the Elmwood Playing Fields.

The archaeological sequence presented here is described in terms of periods, each made up of land uses: Buildings, Structures and Open Areas. Not all the periods are illustrated, and some land uses are neither illustrated nor described here. Individual contexts recorded on the site have been formed into subgroups, and subgroups into groups, and this numbering hierarchy is used to identify selected features within the land use illustrations (ie beamslot 4.01 is part of Building 1 in period 3, as shown on fig 3). All the finds and site records from the excavations (site code ELM95), including more detailed specialist reports upon which this
paper is based, are stored in the Museum of London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) and can be consulted by prior arrangement.

**Site sequence**

**NATURAL**

The surface of natural sand and gravel was recorded across the site, at levels varying between 26.94m OD in the north-west and 27.63m OD in the south-east. Broad, shallow watercourses, running east–west across the site and filled with grey silty clay, were probably braided channels associated with the early course of the Wandle.

**PERIOD 1: EARLY ACTIVITY**

*Open Area 1* (not illustrated)

No features pre-dating the Late Saxon period were found, indicating that the site probably remained open, undeveloped land until the 10th or 11th century. It is notable that several prehistoric, Roman and early Saxon residual finds were recovered from the medieval and later plough-soil, suggesting that there was earlier occupation in the area. Redeposited sherds of Late Bronze Age pottery and flint flakes were found in some of the western evaluation trenches. A badly corroded early Roman coin and some fragments of early Roman tile were found in the plough-soil, along with a rare Late Roman/Early Saxon belt buckle with buckle...
plate. The buckle may have been unearthed during medieval grave robbing, and there is some evidence of a trade in antiquarian objects at that time. The Roman villa and Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Beddington is a possible source (Morris 1959; Poulton 1987; Howell forthcoming).

PERIOD 2: LATE SAXON ACTIVITY

Structures 1 and 2 (not illustrated)

The earliest dated feature from the site was a flint-packed posthole pre-dating Building 1 in excavation area 1. The posthole fill contained two sherds of 10th–11th century Late Saxon shelly ware (LSS). Two undated postholes lay nearby, and together they may have been part

Fig 2  London Road, Wallington. The site showing evaluation trenches 1–23 and excavation areas 1 and 2.
of a fence line or wall aligned north-east/south-west (Structure 1), perhaps a precursor to the medieval hall. Two other postholes lay just to the west and may have been part of a contemporary fence or wall line (Structure 2).

**PERIOD 3: 12TH–13TH CENTURY OCCUPATION**

*Building 1, phase 1*

The first phase of Building 1 measured at least 14 x 6m, its long axis aligned north-east/south-west (fig 3). The northern end of the building was truncated by later activity and was not located. The eastern and southern walls were probably built on large sill-beams. The east wall survived as two beamslots (4.12 and 4.01) and the south wall was represented by eight postholes and a beamslot (4.02). A gap of 1.6m between the beamslots in the south-east corner of the building may indicate the location of an entrance. In contrast, the wall line to the west was formed from substantial timber uprights set in postholes and postpits about 3m apart (4.22, 4.14 and 4.16). This wall may have been part of an internal arcade supporting the apex of the roof along the centre line of the building, or dividing a main room or hall to the east from a narrower aisle to the west. A large postpit (4.13) at the southern end of this wall contained four postholes and may have formed a substantial support for either the south-west corner of the building or the southern end of an arcade.

A stone hearth within the building was constructed from fragments of Reigate stone (4.19). The hearth measured 1.5 x 1.1m, having been enlarged or patched with flint and chalk nodules. Part of an associated floor surface consisted of compacted soil.

No direct dating evidence was recovered for the construction and use of the building, which was probably of 13th century date. Reigate stone was exploited on a large scale by the early 12th century.

*Open Area 2: open land around Building 1*

The area surrounding Building 1 had been disturbed by cultivation in antiquity and partially truncated during creation of the playing fields in 1956. Fragments of Reigate stone and large flint cobbles were noted in the overburden during clearance, suggesting that other postpits once existed in this area.
Partial demolition of Building 1, phase 1

The excavated evidence suggests that the medieval building was partially demolished, and the posts and sill-beams robbed. Pottery recovered from the backfills of beamslot 4.01 has been dated to 1230–1300 and consisted of small groups of non-diagnostic body sherds of Earlswood, Limpsfield and Kingston wares, with Kingston sherds in the majority. A stone hone was also recovered. Pottery from the backfills of beamslot 4.02 and the fills of postpit 4.13 dates to 1150–1300. This suggests that the south and east walls were demolished but that the west or central wall and interior, along with the hearth, were retained in a reconstruction and expansion of the building in the late 13th or early 14th century.

Building 1, phase 2: the timber hall extended

Building 1 was partially rebuilt and extended to the south, and possibly to the east, perhaps to incorporate aisles on both its eastern and western sides (fig 4). In the rebuilding work the eastern wall sill-beams were replaced by at least two upright posts. Post 5.02 truncated the robbed phase 1 beamslot backfill. Posthole 4.05 was located just inside the old wall line, and it appears that the eastern wall was rebuilt in a similar fashion to the retained western wall. Two undated postholes formed a parallel line to the new eastern wall just over 1m further east, and one of the postholes may have been associated with an ex-situ Reigate stone post-pad found nearby. Later disturbance had removed any trace of floor surfaces in this area, but it is possible that this rearrangement of structural features represents an extension of the building eastwards, possibly through the construction of an eastern aisle.

The new southern wall sill-beam (5.01) was set approximately 1m south of the phase 1 south wall. The eastern extent of the southern wall, and south-east corner of Building 1 phase 2, lay beyond the limit of excavation. It is not clear whether the possible entrance at the south-east corner of Building 1 phase 1 was retained and widened, or disappeared. A new post (5.03) formed part of the support for the new southern wall, replacing phase 1 postpit 4.13. Posthole 5.04 lay slightly to the south of the line of the southern wall but was also interpreted as a support for the building.

Phase 2 of the building measured at least 15.5m along its long axis and, if it did now have twin aisles (in no way a certainty), would have been about 10m wide. The hearth 4.19 was apparently retained in use from phase 1. As with the earlier phase of the building floor surfaces were compacted earth.
Demolition of Building 1, phase 2

Building 1 went out of use some time in the 13th century. Examination of the fills of the southern beamslot and postholes suggested that they may have decayed in situ but it seems likely that most of the structure of the building was dismantled. The backfill of posthole 5.03 contained pottery dated to 1230–1300. A large deposit of roof tiles was recorded to the south and west of the building and may have derived from the collapse of the roof of the building.

PERIOD 4: LATE 13TH–14TH CENTURY LAND USE

Open Area 3: open land with drainage ditches

Following the demise of Building 1 the area reverted to open ground and a system of drainage ditches was dug across the site of the building (fig 5). In the north-east corner of the area an east–west aligned ditch (3.01) was 1.2m wide and 0.4m deep, with an irregular base and a slot along its centre. Nearly 2.5kg of pottery was recovered from ditch 3.01, exclusively made up of Limpsfield and Earlswood wares, apart from a solitary sherd of Kingston ware and a residual abraded sherd of Late Saxon shelly ware cooking pot. The cooking pot sherds display fewer signs of abrasion and more pronounced signs of external sooting. Decorative techniques on the cooking pots and bowls (fig 6, nos 1–3) included thumbed applied strips, incised wavy lines and stabbing around the rim. The jug fragments were confined to Earlswood ware, which included a white-slipped and green-glazed stabbed strap handle, a slipped and glazed rod handle and roller-stamped sherds.

An east–west aligned ditch recorded in the western part of the area ran westwards and turned south-west (3.03), probably draining towards the Wandle. It was 1.3m wide and up to 0.28m deep, and was probably part of the same ditch as 3.01. Silt accumulations in the ditch contained over 5.6kg of pottery, almost entirely made up of Limpsfield ware, apart from a few sherds of an Earlswood green-glazed jug, Kingston ware, and a sherd of London ware from a small drinking jug. Among the vessels there is a fragment of a Limpsfield curfew, with thumbed strip over the top (fig 6, no 4). Limpsfield ware cooking pot was the dominant form with the rim diameters ranging from 180 to 300mm and the bulk falling between 200 to 280mm. There are sherds from two Limpsfield jugs represented by fragments of stabbed (fig 6, nos 5–8) and slashed handles (fig 7, nos 9–10). Environmental samples produced 91 seeds, the majority of which were from cereals, with one seed of rye-grass. A large amount of animal bone was also recovered, including the partial skeleton of a dog.

A north–south ditch (3.02) lay to the north of the east–west ditch and extended beyond the northern limit of excavation. It was 0.9m wide and 0.4m deep, and drained downwards.

Fig 5  London Road, Wallington. Excavation area 1: period 4, Open Area 3 drainage ditches.
to the south, into the east–west ditch. Pottery recovered from the silt fill has been dated to the late 13th century and included fragments of a cooking pot with an applied strip. The large amount of animal bone recovered from the fills was derived from domestic activity and the rearing and slaughtering of cattle, pigs and sheep.

The species and frequency of molluscs from the primary ditch fills suggests that they were seasonally or periodically filled with water. A grey clay/silt deposit which contained aquatic molluscs with a preference for larger volumes of water was probably associated with a flood episode. Perhaps significantly, no further pottery was dumped into the ditches after this event, and a very high proportion of molluscs from the higher fills were terrestrial species at a time when deposition was through erosion of the ditch sides or dumping, rather than by fluvial action. The large quantities of later 13th century rubbish in the ditches suggests that occupation continued nearby after the final disuse of Building 1.

**PERIOD 5: 14TH–15TH CENTURY LAND USE**

*Open Area 4 (not illustrated)*

Further evidence of continued occupation in the vicinity can be found in the 14th century construction of a cobbled surface over much of the area formerly occupied by Building 1 and subsequent drains, and the disposal of large amounts of rubbish. The surface was composed of large flint cobbles with occasional chalk and greensand fragments, the latter perhaps serving as post-pads for some sort of structure. A medieval jetton or token dating to 1302–27 was recovered from the surface. Associated contexts contained pottery which included a Limpsfield ware cooking pot and jug, Kingston ware bowl and a coarse Border ware cooking pot rim (fig 7, nos 11–14) dated to the late 13th or early 14th century onwards. A small quantity of early medieval shelly ware was initially thought to be residual but is likely to be contemporary with 13th century deposits in north Surrey (P Jones, pers comm).

In the north-east of the area, agricultural soils contained 5.1kg of medieval pottery (fig 7, nos 15–16; fig 8, nos 17–21). The group is dominated by mundane cooking pots, mostly produced at the Limpsfield group of kilns. The diameters of the cooking pot rims fall into a range of 160–320mm, the majority of which were 240–280mm. A late London ware pipkin (fig 8, no 22), normally dated to after 1400, was probably intrusive. Two 14th century strap-ends (accession nos <6> and <7>) and two medieval horseshoes (accession nos <11> and <16>) were also recovered from the soil.

**PERIOD 6: POST-MEDIEVAL LAND USE**

*Open Area 5 (not illustrated)*

A linear feature recorded in evaluation trenches 6, 9 and 10, near the northern edge of the site, was part of an 18th century field boundary. The feature was approximately 1m wide and up to 0.5m deep, and lay on a similar alignment to the medieval building to the south-east. Evidence of other post-medieval activity was limited to agricultural deposits.

**The pottery, by Roy Stephenson**

The bulk of the pottery from the site is from the Limpsfield group of kilns, assumed to have ceased production at the end of the 13th century. The next most commonly occurring type is Earlswood ware, which continued in production until the end of the 14th century. Small quantities of Kingston ware were also present, and are not usually thought to have been in common circulation before 1230.

The presence of abraded Late Saxon pottery hints at occupation in the vicinity, but there was an absence of common 10th and 11th century pottery types such as an early Surrey ware.
Fig 6  London Road, Wallington. The pottery assemblage: pots 1–8.
Fig 7  London Road, Wallington. The pottery assemblage: pots 9–16.
Small quantities of early medieval shelly ware was present, but this ware continues in circulation well into the 13th century (Vince & Jenner 1991). The coarsewares are brown/grey Surrey wares, a dominant type throughout Surrey and almost certainly manufactured at the Limpsfield group of kilns (Prendergast 1974). The products of the kilns are now clearly significantly different from the South Hertfordshire greyware (SHER) types found in the City, which allows this fabric to be categorized separately, specifically on sites in south London/north Surrey, as LIMP.

The lack of Kingston-type ware (KING) (Pearce & Vince 1988), and the fact that the majority of the wares are from Limpsfield, is significant as the site lies closer to Kingston than Limpsfield. This may indicate that pottery at Kingston was being produced for immediate

Fig 8  London Road, Wallington. The pottery assemblage: pots 17–22.
consumption and for export to London, leaving Limpsfield ware to fill the vacuum in Kingston’s immediate rural hinterland. Alternatively, the absence of Kingston-type ware may be a reflection of status; superficially, the white-firing, green-glazed body of Kingston-type ware might be regarded as superior to the coarse unglazed grey/brown Limpsfield products, the desire for glazed decorated jugs being fulfilled by products of the Earlswood kiln (EARL) (Turner 1974). The question of status is partially answered by comparison with pottery from Merton Priory, which could be regarded as part of the Kingston rural hinterland and produced a plethora of Kingston ware, as well as ample quantities of Limpsfield-type ware. Merton Priory is closer to Kingston, but as a monastic house its status was clearly greater than that of the Elmwood Playing Fields site.

The majority of the forms present were cooking pots, indicating that food preparation tended to use pots over an open fire. The lack of large jugs may reflect relatively good availability of fresh water, removing the necessity to transport and store it in large quantities. Very large diameter bowls may have been associated with dairying, where large open vessels are used for cream separation or dough making. The lack of drinking jugs suggests that most drinking vessels were wooden.

The pottery assemblage from the Elmwood Playing Fields site is a valuable addition to the north Surrey typology, with characteristics that can be applied to dating other pottery groups from the area. These characteristics, deviating from the City norm for 13th century pottery groups, include: (1) handmade early medieval shell tempered ware in 13th century deposits; (2) large quantities of Limpsfield ware, characterized by a large range of colours from dark grey, through brown to near orange, also reflected in the kiln material (Prendergast 1974); (3) Earlswood ware present in small but significant quantities; (4) Kingston and London-type wares present in quantities smaller than would be expected in City deposits, and (5) an absence or near absence of imported wares. The findings are partially borne out by the assemblages from Merton Priory, High Street, Croydon and 3 Throwley Way, Sutton.

The late Roman/early Saxon belt buckle with buckle plate, by Angela Wardle

A rare Late Roman/Early Saxon belt buckle with buckle plate (fig 9), Type 1A (Hawkes & Dunning 1962, 41), was found in the plough soil of Open Area 1. The D-shaped buckle frame has a straight hinge-bar and the curved side is formed by the flattened bodies of two confronted dolphins with a pellet between their open jaws. The buckle plate is a narrow strip of copper alloy, which was doubled over the hinge-bar and riveted into place, with an engraved geometric decoration.

The late Roman/early Saxon belt buckle with buckle plate.
The charred plant remains, by John Giorgi

Eighteen bulk soil samples were collected from a range of medieval features in excavation area 1, particularly from the fills of ditches and postholes, and thirteen produced small assemblages of charred plant remains. Cereal grains accounted for almost 96% of the total. Wheat (Triticum spp.) was the best represented cereal and included a large number of short squat grains, identified as free-threshing bread wheat (T. aestivum). Barley (Hordeum sativum) was the second best represented grain while several grains of rye (Secale cereale) were also identified. Over 50% of the cereal grains could not be identified. A very small number of weed seeds such as Polygonum sp. and Lolium sp., which may grow in a range of habitats, and small legume seeds, also probably weeds, were recovered from six samples.

The cereal grains from the Elmwood Playing Fields site may have been accidentally burnt while being dried before storage or hardened for milling into flour. All the samples contained a mix of the different cereals in similar quantities, and the predominance of grains suggests that they were fully processed. The presence of charcoal and other debris in the samples suggests they were deposited with other domestic refuse as floor sweepings, or were blown into open features. It is not possible to establish whether the grains were cultivated nearby or imported onto the site from further afield, although the latter would have been costly.

The animal bone, by Kevin Rielly

The majority of the site assemblage was recovered from medieval contexts, particularly from Building 1 and the later ditch fills. In general, the medieval bones were well preserved, although dog-gnawed and eroded bones were found throughout the group. Comparative analysis between the animal bone in the building and ditch deposits found no spatial variation in species representation or use.

The bone assemblage was consistent with a domestic refuse disposal, derived from Building 1 and any other nearby buildings. Butchery cuts show a meat use for cattle, sheep/goat and pig, and butchery probably took place nearby. Cattle probably met the greatest part of meat demand, although butchered chicken and horse was also present. The presence of immature pigs indicates that they were bred and killed for their meat. Some of the cattle and sheep/goat were better represented in adult age groups, indicating use for ante-mortem products such as wool, milk or work, although the older sheep/goat may have been kept for their mutton. Horses and dogs were used as working animals and chickens supplied eggs, explaining the incidence of older age groups.

The assemblage was too small for detailed comparison with other medieval sites. The species, ages and size ranges of cattle, sheep/goat, pig and horse present are similar to those found at other medieval London sites.

Discussion

The archaeological findings from the Elmwood Playing Fields site are significant for providing the first evidence of a medieval rural building in the Wallington area, although the former Carew manor house may have incorporated medieval walls (Michell 1980, 29). A detailed interpretation of Building 1 is hampered by a lack of occupation deposits and undefined northern and western walls. Enough evidence survived to conclude that it dated from the 12th to 13th centuries and was abandoned at the end of the 13th century or early in the 14th century. The presence of a hearth suggests the building was used domestically rather than as a shelter for animals. It was of timber construction with a combination of posts and sill-beams forming the eastern and southern walls. The different construction of a wall to the west, formed from large postholes and postpits, suggests that it may have been an arcade along the centre-line of the building, or a division between a hall and an aisle, although no evidence survived further to the west to verify either possibility. The building was partially
A MEDIEVAL TIMBER BUILDING AT LONDON ROAD, WALLINGTON

The Elmwood building may be an example of a type found throughout England, and the fact that other timber buildings were adapted with the introduction of aisles raises the possibility of a similar sequence here.

A similar but earlier timber building, abandoned during the 12th century, was excavated at Raunds in Northamptonshire (Cadman 1983, 116). The building featured shallow linear trenches with associated postholes, a central row of postpits and a hearth located towards the centre of the building. A well-preserved 13th century timber building at Weoley Castle, Birmingham (Oswald 1962–3, 109), had been converted into an aisled hall with similar dimensions to the Elmwood building.

The period 4 drainage ditches which post-dated Building 1 may have been related to a nearby building which was not found during the excavation. The large quantity of animal bone in the ditch fills suggests that animal husbandry took place in the area. The subsequent use of the area as a cobbled yard implies that it was very near to a site of continued occupation. The status of Building 1 and possible successor buildings on the site is unclear. It may be that it was an early manorial site of the Carews, but that the location was abandoned in the mid-14th century for a higher, drier site in Beddington Park.

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