Excavations at The Bittoms, Kingston upon Thames
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with contributions by
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Oxford Archaeology carried out an evaluation and subsequent excavation at The Bittoms, Kingston upon Thames, in 2001. The earliest activity took the form of a scatter of pits containing pottery dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. A single pit was dated to the Early to Middle Saxon period. Evidence for medieval settlement took the form of pits, a well and probable tenement boundary ditches. The eastern part of the site was subsequently utilised as a market garden. In the western part of the site, remains of post-medieval properties fronting the Bittoms were uncovered.

Introduction
Between August and December 2001, Oxford Archaeology carried out an archaeological evaluation and subsequent excavation at The Bittoms, Kingston College, Kingston upon Thames (TQ 179 689). The work was undertaken on behalf of Mount Anvil in respect of a planning application to build residential flats and a sports hall. The site, 0.56ha in area, lies just to the south of the historic core of Kingston upon Thames, some 150m to the east of the river. The modern ground surface lies at around 8m OD in the west, sloping down to 7.19m OD in the east towards the Hogsmill river (fig 1). Prior to the development the site was used for car parking and college buildings. The following report represents a summary of the archaeological results, full details of which are available in the archive to be deposited with the Museum of London under the accession code KHR01.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND
The site is located on the eastern edge of the gravel ridge known as Kingston South Lane Island, in an area of marshes and braided channels associated with the Hogsmill (Hawkins et al 2002, 186–8, fig 3). Neolithic activity in the form of occupation debris and a brushwood platform or trackway was revealed during excavations at Eden Walk, c 200–250m to the north-east of the site (OAU 2001a). Late Bronze Age pottery indicative of early occupation of the South Lane Island has been recovered c 30m west of the development site (Hawkins et al 2002, 205), and a Late Bronze Age cooking pit has also been found c 50m to the south-east (Thompson 1991). Flints dating from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age were also recovered from excavations at Woodbines Avenue (Bishop 2002, 243). The Bronze Age activity may have formed part of a single settlement focused around the South Lane Island.

During the Romano-British period the site probably comprised agricultural land with any rural settlement located to the north and north-east (Hawkins 2007). However, arable farming over long periods might have been made difficult by the increasing marshland development of the area during the late Roman and medieval periods (Branch & Green 2004, 15). The small number of Roman finds recovered from previous excavations might have been the result of manuring (Hawkins et al 2002, 206).

The site lay to the east of an area called Moreford (marshy ford) in the early Saxon period (Andrews 2004, 171). Evidence for an Early Saxon post-and-stake-built building, forming part of a farmstead, was revealed during excavations at South Lane c 30m to the west of the site (Hawkins et al 2002). Excavations at Woodbines Avenue (Bishop 2002, 239), c 50m to the south of the site, revealed associated evidence for ancillary post-built structures; activity has also been recorded c 80m to the north-east and c 150m to the north (OAU 2001a).
Excavations by the Museum of London Archaeology Service at The Bittoms immediately to the south-east also revealed features dated to this period, including the possible remains of a sunken feature building (MoLAS 2000). During the 8th or 9th centuries there was a shift in settlement focus to the central Kingston Island, an important royal demesne of the kings of Wessex (Poulton 1987, 211; Hawkins 2008). The site lay in marginal land in the late medieval and post-medieval periods and was not re-colonised until the mid-17th century.
FIELDWORK METHODOLOGY

Following evaluation, nine areas were subject to full excavation, which focused on the western part of the site (OAU 2001b). The overburden was removed by machine to the highest significant archaeological horizon or to natural geology, whichever was encountered first (fig 1). All excavation and recording followed procedures laid down in the OAU Fieldwork Manual (Wilkinson 1992).

Results

PHASE 1: LATE BRONZE AGE TO EARLY IRON AGE (C 1150–500 BC)

Six shallow pits were observed in the central part of the site (307, 1572, 1604, 1822, 1845 and 2093: figs 2 and 3). Four of the pits measured between 0.45 and 0.95m wide and between 0.15 and 0.5m deep. They were filled with orange-brown or grey-brown silty sand and contained a few sherds of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age pottery and flint. They contained few other material remains and their function is unclear, although they might have been dug to obtain small quantities of sand, possibly for use as flooring material. Exceptionally, pit 1604 was 2.1m wide and 0.5m deep, although its fills were similar to those of the smaller pits. A single sherd of Late Bronze/Early Iron Age pottery was recovered from the fill. It is possible that the limited dating evidence recovered from the pits was residual. Flint artefacts, spanning the Mesolithic period to the Bronze Age, and Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery were also found within later features and layers.

Although a small assemblage of Late Iron Age and early Roman pottery was recovered, no stratigraphic evidence was found to indicate occupation or significant activity at that time.

PHASE 2: ANGLO SAXON (5TH–11TH CENTURIES)

A probable sand extraction pit (1506) was revealed in the north-western part of the site (fig 2), measuring 2.4m wide and 0.5m deep. It was filled with dark grey silty sand and contained a sherd of Early–Middle Saxon pottery and a sherd of residual Roman pottery. Residual Saxon pottery was also recovered from soils and fills from across the site.

PHASE 3: MEDIEVAL (11TH–15TH CENTURIES)

Large, irregular sand quarry pits had truncated the north-eastern part of the site. The pits measured between 3 and 6m in width, and were approximately 0.9m deep. They were filled with grey-brown or orange-brown sandy clays. A few sherds of pottery dating from the 11th to 13th centuries were recovered from the central quarries (628, 1729 and 1946: fig 3), and pottery dating from the 13th century was recovered from the westernmost pits (1617 and 1623: fig 2) and easternmost quarries (915: fig 3). Smaller, similarly filled pits measuring up to 3m wide and ranging in depth from 0.5 to 1.2m contained pottery dating from the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries (typified by pits 1745 and 1847: fig 3). Several undated features were revealed in close proximity to these medieval pits and these may be of similar date although it is possible that some may be of prehistoric origin.

A probable well (1589) was revealed in the western part of the site (fig 2), measuring 1.5m wide and over 2m deep. The well was vertically sided and filled with layers of silty sand. Two sherds of pottery dating from the mid-13th century were recovered from the basal fills, and two sherds of late 14th century pottery from the upper fills. A narrow north–south aligned gully (1570), measuring 0.45m wide and 0.25m deep, was revealed to the north of the well (fig 2). It was filled with orange-brown silty sand and contained a sherd of residual prehistoric pottery. A north–south aligned ditch (2072/2082) was observed in the southern part of the site (fig 2). The ditch was over 2m wide and 0.6m deep; it had a similar fill and contained
pottery dating from the 13th century. The gully and ditch may have formed boundaries to the rear of properties fronting The Bittoms, and the gully might have also been used for drainage into the well.

Two east–west aligned gullies (2017 and 2019) were observed to the west of ditch 2072/2082, and an east–west aligned ditch (2033) was revealed to the east (fig 2). Ditch 2033 may have continued into trench 7 to the east (feature 709: fig 3). The gullies were between 0.3m and 0.5m wide and up to 0.3m deep, and the ditch was 1.6m wide and 0.9m deep.
Their sandy fills contained sherds of mid-13th century pottery. These features might also have formed boundaries between properties fronting The Bittoms, or more probably they were field boundaries.

**PHASE 4: POST-MEDIEVAL (15TH–17TH CENTURIES) (fig 2)**

Square or rectangular sand quarry pits were found in the western and central northern part of the site. The square pits (typified by 1763: fig 3) all measured 1m wide x 0.1m deep. The rectangular pits (typified by 1520: fig 2) were c 2m long x 0.7m wide x 0.3m deep. The pits were filled with sandy clay and contained pottery dating from the 16th or 17th centuries. A large quarry pit (1669) was also partially revealed, measuring over 4m wide x 1m deep (fig 3); it contained a single sherd of 16th century pottery, although this might have been intrusive.

Throughout the eastern part of the site east–west and north–south aligned trenches were observed, measuring c 8m long, between 0.5 and 1m in width and up to 0.45m deep. They were filled with brown sandy silt and contained 16th–18th century pottery; the trenches were probably the cultivation beds of a market garden (fig 3).

A deposit of brown clayey silt (2304; not illustrated) overlay the cultivation trenches; it was up to 0.5m thick in the eastern part of site and contained pottery dating from the 15th or 16th centuries. This was probably an imported cultivation soil.

**PHASE 5: MODERN (17TH–19TH CENTURIES) (fig 2)**

The Phase 4 cultivation soil (2304) was truncated by nine north–south aligned trenches (partially shown on fig 3), measuring over 30m long, up to 1m wide and 0.4m deep. They were filled with sandy silt deposits that contained 19th century pottery, and probably had a similar function to the 16th or 17th century cultivation trenches. A similarly filled boundary ditch (1967) was observed to the east (fig 3). Some of the cultivation trenches had postholes at their termini suggesting some form of covering.

In the western part of the site were the remains of four, c 4m-square, basements or sunken rooms (1549, 1609, 2080 and 2326: fig 2). These were constructed from 18th century bricks and owing to modern truncation survived to only a few courses deep. The most southerly (1609) had a 19th century brick floor incorporating a square void lined with ceramic tiles. The void measured 0.25m³ and was capped by a marble tile. The feature might have been used to hide valuables, although the marble tile was far from inconspicuous. The most northerly basement (1549) had no floor evident, but its walls were constructed with a large amount of re-used moulded limestone and green sandstone, possibly deriving from a high-status building nearby. Brick soakaways (1577 and 2054: fig 2) and a brick well (1690: fig 3) to the east of the structures might have been located in the rear plots of these properties. Isolated 19th century rubbish pits and sand extraction slots were also revealed.

**Finds**

The following section comprises summaries of the finds and ecofacts recovered during the excavations. Full individual reports and catalogues of each category of material are contained in the archive.

**POTTERY, by Paul Blinkhorn, Lisa Brown and Daniel Stansbie**

Almost 10kg of pottery was recovered from the evaluation and excavation. The majority was post-medieval in date, but medieval pottery was also noted, indicating continuous activity from the 11th century to the present day. In addition, 23 sherds (118g) of later prehistoric and early Roman pottery were recovered. All sherds in this group are body fragments and no vessel types were identifiable. Precise phasing was not possible as flint temper was used
in pottery manufacture throughout prehistory and into the Roman period. Small quantities of Roman material (consisting of body sherds of sandy greyware, oxidised ware, grog-tempered ware, and a base from an Oxfordshire colour-coated ware vessel) and some Middle Saxon pottery were present. The Middle Saxon sherds were fragmented and most were quite small and undecorated. The assemblage comprised sand- and chaff-tempered material, and the only feature sherd was an extremely small fragment of a simple upright rim.

FLINT, by Kate Cramp

The evaluation and excavation produced 82 worked flints and 156 pieces of burnt unworked flint. Of the worked flints, most were undiagnostic, though blades, cores and scrapers were
present. The assemblage represents limited activity from the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age. Much of it had been redeposited.

OTHER FINDS

Clay tobacco pipes, metalwork, ceramic building material and architectural stone were recovered from the site. Almost all this material was post-medieval in date and associated with the construction and subsequent occupation of the 18th century residential properties. Of note were a 19th century pipe bowl with Masonic decoration and the shaft of a probable copper-alloy dress- or hairpin of uncertain date. Fragments of green sandstone were re-used in the 18th century buildings and probably originated from an earlier, local high-status structure.

ECOFACTUAL SUMMARIES

A total of 415 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the excavations, of which c. 50% was identified as representing cattle, sheep/goat, pig, horse and dog. Cattle predominated in the 11th to 13th centuries, but proportions of sheep and pig were much higher in later periods. The plant remains recovered from the site comprised common cereals and weeds.

Discussion

Although the evidence for prehistoric, Roman and Saxon activity is limited, consideration of the site as part of the wider landscape allows the development of Kingston South Lane Island to be further defined. The Bittoms is known to have been a low-lying marshy area prior to the later medieval period (Hawkins 1998, 272). The site rises from east to west, and both Bronze Age and Saxon activity has been observed on higher ground c. 30m to the west of the site (Hawkins et al 2002; PCA 1998). The prehistoric pitting provides further evidence for the settlement of South Lane Island in the Bronze Age, although it is likely that activity at The Bittoms took place during dry spells, when the land was more accessible. The residual Roman pottery is likely to be a result of manuring, as seen during excavations at East Lane and South Lane, to the west of the site (Hawkins et al 2002, 206). The Saxon pit may represent the eastern limit of activity associated with the early Saxon farmstead seen during the excavations to the west and south (Bishop 2002; Hawkins et al 2002).

There is evidence for medieval activity in the form of pits, a well and boundary ditches. It is probable that properties fronted The Bittoms, to the west, prior to structures shown on an anonymous 17th century map of Kingston (reproduced in McCormack 1989). The large quarry pits may have been excavated to provide sand for use in the construction of the buildings. The east–west aligned gullies and ditch revealed in the southern part of the site may have separated two such properties. The map also shows open land to the east, the probably boggy state of which would have rendered it suitable for pasture during the medieval period, and the north–south aligned ditches (2082 and 1570) may have formed a boundary between the pasture to the east and tenements to the west. There was no evidence for the size of individual tenements though they may have been similar in size to the properties shown on Rocque’s map of 1745 (see below).

The northern part of the site was probably utilised as a market garden from at least the 16th century. Soil was subsequently imported, perhaps in the 16th or 17th centuries, and the level of the site was raised. Evidence for this land reclamation was also seen during earlier excavations (Thompson 1991) and it may be that the site was used for growing crops or keeping animals. However, there was evidence for cultivation trenches dating from the 19th century, suggesting the site reverted to a market garden.

Properties were located in the western and southern part of site. The properties are probably those shown fronting The Bittoms on Rocque’s map of 1745. Of interest was the
amount of re-used high-status architectural stone within one of the structures. This may have been re-used from the demolition of medieval merchants’ houses in the area of the High Street. A stone pillar from such a house stands alongside Kingston library (Wakeford 1990, 27–9).

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