During May 2001 an archaeological excavation was conducted by the Museum of London Archaeological Service (MoLAS) at 16 Fairfield Road and the rear of 117-133 High Street, Beckenham, in the London Borough of Bromley (Fig 1). The excavation was in advance of the redevelopment of the site and followed on from an archaeological evaluation of the site by Compass Archaeology Ltd. The excavation was commissioned by CgMS Consulting on behalf of G.E.Capital Corporate Estates Limited. An open area of 305m² was excavated and the site (centred on TQ 3729 6938) was recorded under site code FFL01. The archive report for the site can be consulted by prior arrangement at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) at Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED.

**Archaeological and historical background**

Prehistoric and Roman activity in the area is limited; however, the Roman road from Deptford...
to Lewes is suggested to run 400m east of the site. Beckenham is mentioned in a charter of 973, and the manor is listed in Domesday as Becheham when it was held from Bishop Odo of Bayeux, brother of the Conqueror. The medieval manor house was sited on the north side of the River Beck, 300m from the site. It was adjacent to the church of St George, first mentioned in 1294, and it was believed that the focus of Saxon settlement would be located there (Fig. 1). Little evidence for Saxon activity has been recovered from the area, the nearest Saxon findspots listed in the Sites and Monuments Record are over 3.5km away. The discoveries at Fairfield Road were, therefore, unexpected given the current state of knowledge. The medieval settlement is thought to have centred on the church and manor house, before developing into an interrupted ribbon settlement along Beckenham High Street in the later medieval and post-medieval periods.

**Geology and topography**

The site is situated on the Blackheath Beds, the geology of the site itself is formed of fine to coarse pebbly sands. The site is on the crest of a low hill, overlooking a former stream to the north. Modern ground levels on site fall from around 40m OD to approximately 39m to the northwest.

**The site sequence**

**Roman to late Saxon**

An undated, discontinuous, subsoil was cut by four features lying in a north-south line towards the east of the site (Fig 2). They consisted of a sand quarry and three pit-like features interpreted as sunken ‘buildings’ or ‘sheds’.

**Quarry pit**

A sand extraction quarry measured 3.80 by 2.62m and up to 0.60m deep. It was an irregular sub-rectangular cut, with an irregular concave base. It was truncated to the northeast. The fills of the quarry included lenses of rubbish and charcoal, suggesting disposal from a nearby domestic source, prior to deliberate backfilling. Three fired ceramic objects (see below) were recovered from the primary fills.

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**Fig. 2: Saxon and medieval features, with detail of Structure 1**
Structure 1 (S1)
Structure 1 was a sub-square pit measuring 1.85 by 1.84m wide; it survived to a depth of 0.45m and was truncated to the north-west. The pit was well cut with substantial post settings at the north and south (0.4 by 0.32m and 0.38m deep). A total of forty-five stakeholes had been cut into the base of the pit. The perimeter of the base of the pit was lined by 25 stakeholes; the lack of any daub fragments within S1 suggests a plain hurdle lining. Further stakeholes, some up to 0.3m deep, lay within the lined area, probably representing a further structure within the sunken building.
Several smaller stakeholes were dotted randomly across the internal area. The structure was backfilled with a homogenous soil containing some charred rye and weed seeds.

Structure 2 (S2)
Structure 2 was 1m north of S1; it measured 2.07 by 2.0m and was 1.13m deep. It was sub-square in plan, with two substantial post settings, set in the base of the building, on an east-west alignment (0.24 by 0.27m and 0.24m deep, and 0.29 by 0.31m and 0.50m deep). No stakeholes were found within S2. The sides showed signs of erosion, with a deposit in the base suggesting the dismantled structure had been left open for a while, prior to deliberate backfilling.

Structure 3 (S3)
This was a slightly irregular sub-rectangular feature 1.5m north of S2, and 0.2m south of the quarry. It measured 2.06 by 1.85m and was 0.50m deep. The two post settings were aligned northwest-southeast (0.34 by 0.34m and 0.32m deep, and 0.36 by 0.39m and 0.30m deep). Three 50mm deep stakeholes formed a row parallel to the south-western side. The pit had been deliberately backfilled.

Fence-line (Structure 4)
A row of post- and stakeholes aligned northwest-southeast (S4) may be of contemporary date.

Whilst it is possible that the features may represent part of a building or structure, it may merely mark a fence-line relating to open fields.

Medieval
A thick ploughsoil developed across the site in the medieval period, marking the end of the occupation. Ploughing of this field had truncated the top of the earlier features, and destroyed any horizontal occupation deposits.

Post-medieval
Ribbon development along Beckenham High Street eventually led to the establishment of properties to the west of the site. Boundary ditches, garden features and sand extraction features were excavated which date from the 17th century onwards.
The George Inn to the north of the site dates to at least 1662, and long thin properties along the High Street may have been in existence by the late medieval period.

The pottery
Lucy Whittingham and Lyn Blackmore
Aside from post-medieval material, only nine sherds of pottery were found on the site, and the dating of these is problematic. In association with the three loomweights in the quarry is a substantial sherd from a cooking pot or jar with everted rim (Fig. 3.1). This sherd is made from a fine clay which contains abundant fine calcareous inclusions that appear to be a mixture of plant remains, tufa and chalk, with degraded shell. Fine black streaks in the clay body probably result from burnt out rootlets in the clay. The jar can be paralleled by both mid-1st- to mid-2nd-century Roman forms in the north Kent area and by Late Saxon Shelly Ware (LSS) forms imported into London from Oxfordshire during the 10th and early-11th centuries. The vessel is wheel-thrown
or wheel-finished, which is unusual for Late Saxon vessels found so far in Kent.\textsuperscript{9}

Four sherds from a different vessel are associated with Structure 2. The fabric is similar to that of the quarry sherd, but with larger platelets of white calcareous matter. Again, it is difficult to identify shell as such, and some pieces could be plant remains.

Three sherds are associated with Structure 3. These sherds reconstruct into a complete profile from a hand-built, shallow dish with folded rim (Fig. 3.2). The fabric is moderately tempered with crushed fossil shell in a fine clay matrix which is quite micaceous. The calcareous temper near the surfaces of the sherds has leached out and, therefore, all of the sherds are heavily abraded and vesicular. These sherds are associated with a piece of Roman \textit{imbrex}. The dish can be paralleled by Roman flanged dishes in the north Kent area;\textsuperscript{10} however, similar vessels are known in Saxo-Norman London in early medieval Shelly Ware dating from the mid-11th to mid-12th centuries.\textsuperscript{11}

A small body sherd of residual Roman shell-tempered ware (from north Kent) is associated with fence-line S4, at the south side of site. This sherd is also moderately tempered with crushed fossil shell in a fine clay matrix which is quite micaceous. It is heavily abraded and vesicular with a corky texture.

**Discussion**

The provenance and date of these wares is difficult to establish. The majority of the sherds are undiagnostic, vesicular and abraded. The only forms which survive are a jar and a dish, both of which have Roman, Late Saxon and Saxo-Norman parallels. Dating from fabric identification is also problematic as the shell-tempered fabrics from this region can be very similar between these periods.\textsuperscript{12} On present evidence and despite the association of the jar with ‘loomweights’ it is suggested that the jar is possibly a Roman vessel, but that the dish is a Saxo-Norman vessel. Further pottery studies are required in north Kent to establish the differences between Roman and Late Saxon vessels, where there is comparatively little material to consult at present.

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**The fired ceramic objects**

\textit{Jackie Keily}

The three fired ceramic objects are of a flattened circular shape with a central round hole. Each has been burnt and their surfaces are chipped and cracked, although none appears to have been used and there are no signs of wear around the central hole. The fabric is fine-sandy with frequent, fine, well-sorted quartz and all have organic impressions on their outer surfaces (Fig. 4).

**Catalogue**

Diam = diameter of whole object; W = width of ring, as viewed from above; Th = thickness of ring, as viewed from side.

<1> [2]

Near complete; diam 140–153mm, W 56–68mm, Th 33–45mm (thickest point at centre), diam of central hole 21–26mm, wt 1001g. Upper and

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**Fig. 4: the loomweights (scale 1/2)**
lower surfaces uneven and chipped in places; part of one edge is blackened and crumbly through burning. Five or more very small stab marks (as if made with a point) on the upper surface; presumably to aid firing. Similar marks have been noted on Saxon loomweights, for example at Jubilee Hall in London.  

Discussion

The three objects are rather unusual and their exact function is uncertain. It is likely that they were used as some type of weight and the most obvious parallel for them is Saxon loomweights for use with a warp-weighted loom. This type of loom was common in Britain prior to the Roman conquest and continued in use throughout the Roman period, only being superseded by the two-beam vertical loom around the 10th to 11th century. Iron Age and Roman loomweights are of a different form, being triangular or pyramidal. The present examples, however, are much flatter and thinner than standard middle and later Saxon loomweights and their shape is certainly unlike any recovered from Saxon deposits in London. Other possibilities as to their function include other forms of weight (such as thatch weights), vents or tuyères in an industrial process, or some type of stand or support. Their weight would argue against their...
being used as thatch weights (the heaviest is only 1151g) and the lack of vitrification would seem to exclude their use as tuyères. Although all three have signs of blackening through exposure to heat, this is more likely due to accidental burning rather than through use in an industrial process. Another possibility is that they were used as a stand or support, mainly suggested by the flat lower surface, which means that they stand solidly. No direct parallel for this use could be found, however, and in the absence of another more likely function the probability remains that they were made as loomweights.

They do not, however, fit easily into any of the three main recognised forms of Saxon loomweight: annular, intermediate and bun-shaped. The present examples are quite wide and thin, with a very flat, even base, indicative of their having been made on a flat surface. Although unusual, flattened surfaces on loomweights are not unknown. It is possible, however, that the flatness of these bases may have negated their efficacy as loomweights. This may explain why they appear not to have been used; there is no sign of wear around the central hole or on the objects generally.

There is a similarity in their overall shape with a group of loomweights which were found in a heap to the west of a loom at Back Street, St Cross, Winchester. These were well made and either lenticular in section or with one flattened surface and a narrow central hole. They are much smaller than the present examples, however, having an average weight of 222g and an average diameter and thickness of 98mm and 26mm. The Beckenham examples have an average overall diameter of c. 155mm, which, whilst large, is not unknown; examples found at Rochester East Gate averaged about 150mm in diameter. The Beckenham weights average just over 1000g each in weight. This is quite heavy for loomweights but again not unknown. Loomweights from London fall into three broad groups according to weight, the heaviest of which are in excess of 800g: three examples found together at the corner of King William Street and Sherbourne Lane in the City of London weigh between 1044g and 1155g each. These weights measured 64–69mm in thickness, however, as compared to 33–47mm for the Beckenham examples. It is significant that all three are of the same shape and of similar weight. Loomweights found together are often of a similar form and weight, indicating that they were made in sets. Partly-burnt loomweights are often the only evidence for the position of a loom destroyed by fire. Two of the weights from Beckenham are quite heavily charred on one side and the third has some signs of burning on its base, although none showed signs of use.

In the absence of any direct parallels, it seems likely that these ceramic objects were intended for use as loomweights. It is possible that they are a local variant, representing localised craft production for domestic purposes, perhaps made by someone unfamiliar with the more standard types of loomweight or simply made as an experiment.

They are certainly an unusual, if not unique, form, presumably made for use together, although apparently never used, possibly due to their shape, or possibly due to the destruction of the loom with which they were associated.

**Discussion of the site**

The close proximity and the similarities in form of the structures suggest that they are all roughly contemporary; the dating of these three structures and of the adjacent quarry is, however, slightly problematic in that the pottery exhibits characteristics of both the Roman, Late Saxon, and Saxo-Norman periods. Across the site no pottery of unequivocally Roman date was recovered, with only a single, extremely abraded, fragment of *imbrex*. The presence within the quarry of ceramics in the same fabric as in Structure 2 suggests that the quarry is of the same period. The closest parallels for the ceramic objects are Late Saxon loomweights, but their dating to the Romano-British period cannot be discounted. Taken together, therefore, the date of these features is probably best seen as either Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman or Roman; this shows the problems inherent in dating this ambiguous material.

If an interpretation of the pits as sunken-featured buildings is considered then other problems arise. Compared to the standard building types for the Late Saxon period the Beckenham structures are atypical. Comparable examples of sunken
buildings generally date from the Early or Middle Saxon periods. All of the buildings are at the small end of the size range for Saxon sunken-featured buildings in west Kent or Greater London; they are, however, deeply cut when compared to other examples from the region. *Excavated 10th-century examples from Northampton are of a similar depth; however, they are again larger than the Beckenham pits.* Structure 3 perhaps best fits the classic model of a sunken-floored building, with the postholes set into the sides, whilst the depth, and posthole location, of Structure 2 is most unusual. Structure 1 may be a weaving pit, given the care taken in revetting the sides, and the additional stakeholes; it is however small if one actually considers working within the pit. Structure 2 and Structure 3 may perhaps be interpreted as roofed storage features.

The lack of pitting, beyond the quarry, suggests that the settlement was neither intensive nor long-lasting, and that this site may be on its periphery. The recording of fence-line (S4) does suggest that there had been any contemporary postholes from plot divisions or hall-type buildings, they would have probably survived medieval ploughing.

## Conclusions

The excavations at Beckenham have produced ambiguous dating evidence but also structures suggesting the presence of a permanent settlement nearby. The structures are perhaps best interpreted as small sheds or outhouses, probably for storage, with one possibly used as a weaving shed. The structures appear to have been on the periphery of a settlement area, which probably extended to the south and east, occupying the crest of the hill. The limited quantities of domestic waste or rubbish also suggest that the buildings are peripheral, and that the settlement – possibly merely a farmstead – may be satellite to a larger settlement possibly by the site of the later manor house. The fired ceramic objects, are here interpreted as an unusual form of loomweight, probably representing a local variation.

The dating of the site is not certain, partly due to the atypical nature of both the loomweights and the structures, but also due to the ambiguous nature of the ceramics. It is the author’s belief that the features date from the Late Saxon or Saxo-Norman periods. The results of the excavation perhaps underline the paucity of excavated data from the area, and in particular the need for further work on the local ceramic traditions.

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1. The evaluation by Compass Archaeology Ltd in February 2001 had been recorded under the site code FFD01.
2. I. D. Margary *Roman Roads in Britain* vol 2 (1955) 54.
6. SMR reference numbers 020379, 070613, 070618 and 070714.
8. CAT fabric B6; Cotter *pers. comm.*
9. Cotter *pers. comm.*
10. Cotter *pers. comm.*
12. Cotter *pers. comm.*
16. For example, Blackmore 1988, 111–4 (see note 13).
18. John Clark, *pers. comm.*
24. Cowie *pers. comm.*
25. Cowie *pers. comm.*

**Excavations and post-excavation work**

**London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre**, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. Contact Archive Manager, John Shepherd (020 7566 9317).

**Croydon & District**, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collections of pottery fabrics, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

**Borough of Greenwich.** Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites within the Borough. Contact Greenwich Heritage Centre, Building 41, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, SE18 6SP (020 8854 2452).

**Hammersmith & Fulham**, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from the Borough. Tuesdays, 8 p.m. to 10 p.m. At Fulham Palace, Bishops’s Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 85 Rannoch Road, W6 9SX (020 7385 3723).

**Kingston**, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society (KUTAS). Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Thursday (10 a.m.) at the North Kingston Centre, Richmond Road, Kingston upon Thames KT2 5PE. Enquiries 020 8546 5386.

**Surrey**, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Surrey History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 1ND (01483 594 634).

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