



**A Middle-Late Iron Age field system and
post-medieval garden features at
Stedlyn Retreat, Lynsted, Kent**

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A Middle–Late Iron Age field system and post-medieval garden features at Stedlyn Retreat, Lynsted

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Summary

Archaeological fieldwork in advance of development on a site in Lynsted revealed ditches of a Middle–Late Iron Age field system, containing artefactual and ecofactual evidence of a nearby settlement occupied possibly into the late first century BC. Animal bones (mainly cattle and sheep/goat) and charred cereal remains (mainly spelt wheat but also some emmer) provided evidence of the farming regime, with slag and hammerscale indicating metal working.

The base of a post-medieval garden or boundary wall, and an earlier wall, were also recorded. These may relate to the occupation of the site by a mansion, demolished c 1643, belonging to Sir Dru Drury (a member Queen Elizabeth I's royal household), or to a subsequent building on the site.

Introduction

In December 2004, Wessex Archaeology excavated a site at Stedlyn Retreat, Lynsted, in advance of its development for housing. An evaluation had revealed archaeological features: the remains of a post-medieval brick wall in trench 3 and a small Middle–Late Iron Age ditch in trench 6 (Figure 1) (Wessex Archaeology 2004). Two areas of excavation, with a combined area of c. 580 m², were subsequently targeted on these features (Areas 1 and 2 respectively) (Wessex Archaeology 2005a). This report combines the findings of both stages of fieldwork. A watching brief maintained during the extension of a cable trench around the north edge of the site revealed no significant archaeological remains (Wessex Archaeology 2005b).

The site, centred on NGR 594370 106870, lies on the east side of Lynsted, bounded to the west by houses along The Street. Prior to the evaluation it was occupied by a number of buildings and is generally flat except at the south where it slopes towards a brook. It lies at the interface between the Upper Chalk and the London Clays of the Swale (BGS Solid & Drift Edition Sheet 274, 1:50,000).

Middle–Late Iron Age

The Middle–Late Iron Age ditch (605) revealed in evaluation trench 6 was recorded for 3 m and was aligned west–east, appearing to turn northwards at the east. It was 0.9 m wide and up to 0.33 m deep, its upper levels having been truncated. Its primary fill (606), an orange-brown silty clay similar to the subsoil, was overlain by a dark brown clay silt (607) from which Middle–Late Iron Age pottery, animal bone, worked flint, burnt flint and other burnt material was recovered. (Small quantities of later prehistoric pottery were also recovered from trenches 2, 3, 9, 10, 11 and 21.)

The subsequent excavation of Area 2 did not identify ditch 605 in its recorded position, but revealed a ditch (2038) on the same alignment, c. 3 m south. Unlike ditch 605, this did not turn to the north, but ran for 25 m from beyond the western edge of Area 2 to a point where it abutted a north–south aligned ditch (2039). Although ditch 2038 was interpreted in the field as the same feature as ditch 605, it is possible that these were separate features, perhaps defining part of a trackway. As a result of truncation, ditch 2038 also varied in profile and dimensions along its length, from 0.7–1 m wide and 0.2–0.5 m deep, with one or two fills. Ditch 2039 was 0.65 m wide and 0.3 m deep, with a roughly V-shaped profile and a single fill.

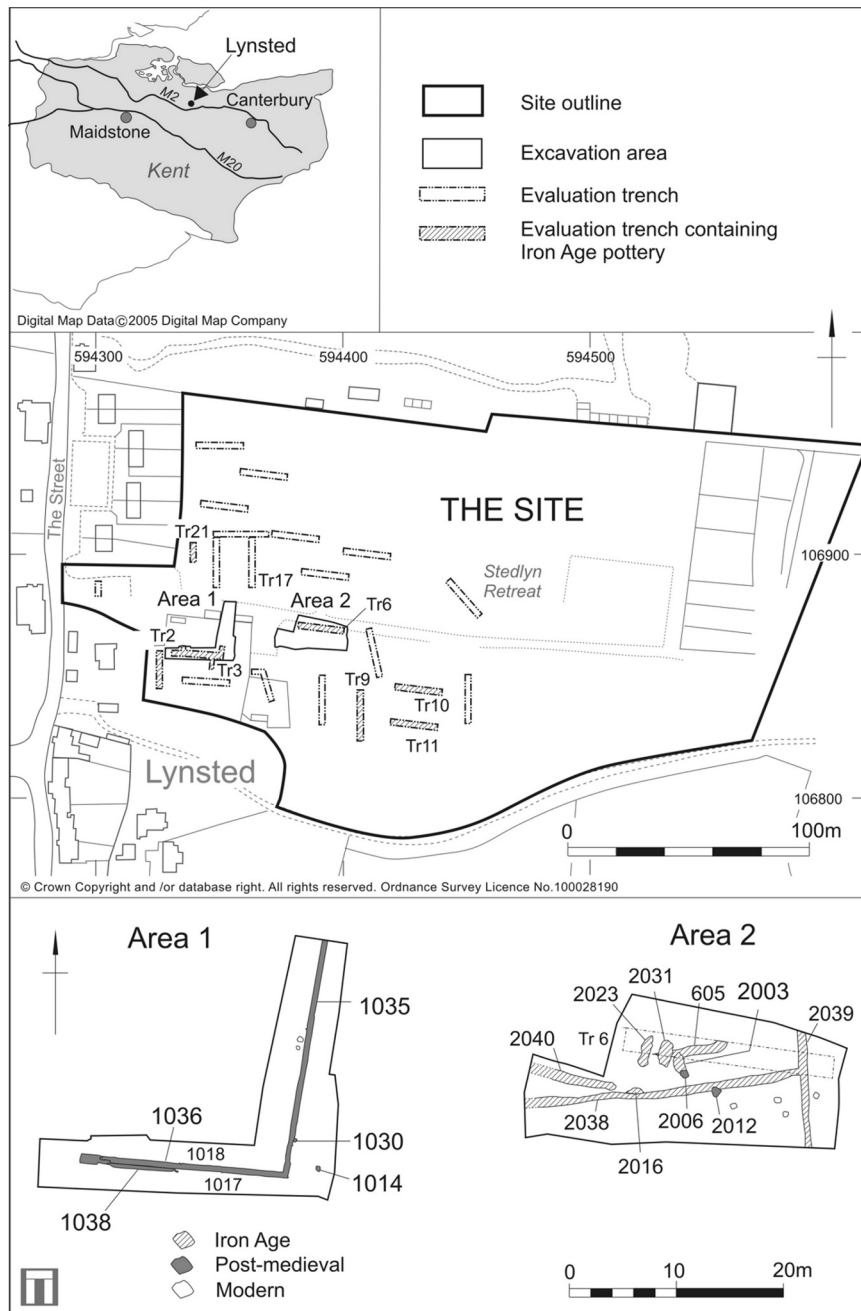


Figure 1: Site and trench locations and plans of all features

Both ditches produced late prehistoric pottery, in some cases specifically Middle–Late Iron Age in date, as well as charcoal-rich waste material. A further length of ditch (2040) converged with ditch 2038 from the north-west. Several other features contained Middle–Late Iron Age pottery, including a possible pit (2003) and three tree-throw holes (2016, 2023 and 2031).

Most of the prehistoric pottery assemblage (605 sherds weighing 8246 g, Table 1) comprised straight- and convex-sided vessels (some cordoned) with beaded or everted rims, in flint-tempered, grog-tempered and glauconitic sandy fabrics with external surfaces frequently textured by combing, brushing or scoring. There were no signs of any decoration. The range of fabrics and forms suggests a Middle–Late Iron Age date range. Tree-throw hole 2016 produced a rim sherd from a Dressel 1A amphora, a type dated to the later 2nd to mid 1st century BC; this is a rare find in Kent, with most known findspots being confined to central southern England (Fitzpatrick 2003, fig. 2). Two sherds from the upper fill (607) of ditch 605 appear to extend the date range to at least the later 1st century BC – one of ‘Belgic’-type grog-tempered ware, the other a fragment of a Dressel 2–4 amphora handle. In addition, three Romano-British sherds, in greyware and oxidised wares, were recovered (from evaluation trenches 2 and 3).

Small amounts of slag were recovered from environmental samples taken from the ditches and hammerscale was present in sufficient quantities to suggest waste from iron working. Two small sherds of organic-tempered briquetage (salt-working equipment) were also identified.

Table 1: Finds totals by material type

Material type	Number	Weight (g)
Pottery		
<i>Prehistoric</i>	605	8246
<i>Romano-British</i>	3	18
<i>Medieval/post-medieval</i>	19	269
Metalwork		
<i>Copper alloy</i>	2	2
<i>Iron</i>	18	181
<i>Lead</i>	1	11
Animal bone (fragments)	698	7753
Worked bone (antler)	1	8
Ceramic building material (CBM)	51	9858
Fired clay	12	57
Worked flint	22	530
Burnt flint	7	851
Shell	2	18

The charred plant remains from context 607 included a large number of spikelet and glume bases from hulled wheats, most of them identified as emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) although some were more characteristic of spelt (*Triticum spelta*). While spelt often dominates Iron Age assemblages in many parts of Britain, emmer is more common in areas of south-east Britain, perhaps reflecting a continental influence. Few fragments of cereal grains were recovered, and weed seeds were also sparse with only the occasional seed of larger-seeded grass species, e.g. brome grass (*Bromus sp.*), and oats (*Avena sp.*), as well as a single seed of vetch/wild pea (*Vicia/Lathyrus sp.*). Some wood charcoal, including several larger fragments, was recovered but none could be identified as round or twig wood. Such material is characteristic of hearth debris and/or midden material deriving from general domestic activities such as the processing of cereals for consumption.

The animal bone was recovered mainly from the ditch fills, although some was found in the tree-throw holes. Thirty-four percent was identified to species, the majority being of cattle with smaller numbers of sheep/goat and pig (Table 2); dog and deer bones were rare, and included a worked antler tine (recovered from the topsoil) with a perforation running diagonally from the base through one side. Twenty-four bones could be aged, and most were skeletally mature or young adults at prime meat weight although one very old sheep was indicated by a mandible with heavy tooth wear and several pathologies were noted on cattle limb bones that may indicate old age or heavy use. A smaller number could be measured, consisting predominantly of the small slender animals typical of Iron Age Britain (Maltby 1996). Remains from a female pig and possibly castrated sheep were recovered.

Context	Cattle	Sheep/goat	Pig	Dog	Deer	Unidentified	Total
No. of identified specimens	67	30	11	1	2	210	320
Per cent	21	9	3	0.3	0.7	66	100

Table 2: Numbers and species proportions of later prehistoric animal bones

Butchery marks were frequent, and on cattle included cut marks from decapitation, skinning and disarticulation and chop marks from portioning meat-bearing bones and removal of the horn core. Sheep and pig bones displayed similar marks, although cut marks were relatively more common and some helical fractures from breakage of fresh bone were recorded, presumably for marrow extraction. A very small percentage of shaft fragments had been burnt and two had been partially calcined, indicating high temperatures.

Many of the snail species recovered from upper ditch fill 607 are indicative of shaded, hedged or woodland environments. Primary species identified included *Cochlicopa sp.*, *Aegopinella sp.*, *Pomatias elegans*, *Carychium sp.*, *Helicigona lapicida* and *Discus rotundatus*. In addition, several of more open grassland

species were recovered, such as *Helicella itala* and *Vallonia spp.* While the assemblage may relate to a former hedgerow or strip of relict woodland, it could also relate to a more localised build-up of scrub within the ditch following its abandonment.

Discussion

Although the Iron Age features were only recorded in Area 2, the arrangement of ditches suggest that a settlement, as indicated by the artefactual and ecofactual material in the ditches and by finds more widely distributed across the site, was situated nearby within a more extensive field system. The range of evidence suggests a small farmstead, cultivating wheat and raising cattle, sheep and pig. The recovery of slag and hammerscale suggests smithing within the settlement.



Plate 1: Post-medieval wall viewed from the east

Post-medieval

The base of a red brick wall (numbered 1036 during the excavation phase) was recorded running east–west for over 17 m in evaluation trench 3. An extension to the trench at its east end showed that the wall turned to the north (although not at a precise right angle) (Plate 1). During the subsequent excavation of Area 1 the northern arm was shown to extend for over 22 m (1035), while traces of mortar and a probable construction cut at the west end of wall 1036 showed that it had also continued further west.

The foundations of an earlier, undated wall (1038) were recorded below the west end of 1036, and truncated by 1036's construction cut. This earlier wall had a facing of flint nodules within a pale grey mortar and a core of rubble and broken peg tile. After its demolition, it was sealed by a compact levelling/landscaping deposit of flint nodules and cobbles within a silt/clay/loam matrix (1017/1018). This layer was identified across Area 1 (a similar deposit had also been recorded in evaluation trench 17 to the north), and was in places cut by the foundation trenches for walls 1035 and 1036. Elsewhere these walls, which were two brick-lengths wide and survived in places up to four courses high, lay directly on top of the layer. Layer 1017/1018 contained fragments of post-medieval CBM (as well as a residual sherd of medieval pottery dated to 1225–1375). The foundations of wall 1035 and 1036 and areas of upstanding wall show evidence for the reuse of materials with whole and broken post-medieval bricks and peg tiles in evidence.

Other features included a post-hole (1030) of uncertain function lying against the eastern face of wall 1035, and another (1014) 2.5 m east of the wall. Both contained post-medieval CBM. Another post-medieval posthole (2012) was recorded in Area 2. A number of modern post-holes were also identified.

The later pottery from the site comprises a few sherds in sandy fabrics, mainly medieval finewares of Tyler Hill (Canterbury) type, with a small group of post-medieval redwares (Table 1).

A well-preserved, articulated goat burial (2006) was recorded in Area 2. The animal, aged 2.5–3 years old, was c. 63 cm at the shoulder, and the bones were slender, typical of a female animal. The long bones were very thin-walled, possibly indicating nutritional stress. Stratigraphically, the burial is post-medieval or later, and it may be the remains of a relatively modern farm casualty. There were few animal bones from this period other than a cattle pelvis, two proximal metatarsals from two sheep and a pig incisor with groove across the crown that may indicate a period of illness or vitamin deficiency in the animal's life.

Discussion

The site is believed to have been occupied in the 16th century by a mansion belonging to Sir Dru Drury, Member of Parliament, Lieutenant of the Tower of London and a Gentleman Usher at the coronation of Queen Elizabeth I (Igglesden 1928). His son (or possibly grandson – both were also called Sir Dru) is credited

with having demolished the mansion c. 1643, reusing the material to expand another timber-framed house in the village called Beaugill, which passed out of the Drury family some time before 1648.

It is uncertain whether the later wall revealed by the excavation, which was probably a property boundary or garden wall extending westwards towards The Street, relates to the original mansion or to a later building constructed on the site. However, the suggestion of at least two demolition phases, one indicated by the reuse of brick and tile in the earlier wall, and the other by that wall's demolition and replacement, may relate to recorded episodes in the history of the site.

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