

**Channel Tunnel Rail Link  
Union Railways (South) Ltd**

**Project Area 430**

**PARSONAGE FARM  
ARC PFM 98**

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION  
INTERIM REPORT**

**Contract S/400/SP/0008 P483**

**MUSEUM OF LONDON**

**Museum of London Archaeology Service**

**September 1999**

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Prepared by:
Date:
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Date:
Approved by:
Position:
Date:

**Contract S/400/SP/0008 P483**

**Museum of London Archaeology Service  
87 Queen Victoria Street  
London EC4V 4AB**

**September 1999**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited (URS) to undertake detailed archaeological investigations at Parsonage Farm, Westwell, west of Ashford, Kent, in 1998 and 1999. This work formed part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).
- 1.2 The site consisted of a single area of excavation 110m by 130m overall, to the west of Station Road (also called Watery Lane). The approximate centre of this area was at URL grid point 78020 26040, corresponding approximately to Ordnance Survey national grid reference (NGR) TQ 9805 4605. The area excavated totalled 0.9 hectare. The ground sloped down from north to south.
- 1.3 The method of investigation was specified as 'detail excavation'. This method entailed machine stripping of topsoil and other deposits to expose the archaeological horizon, then constructing a plan, followed by full hand excavation and recording of stratigraphic layers and archaeological features. In addition there was sufficient hand excavation and sampling of other features to fulfil the project aims (see 3.2 below). This methodology was set out in a Written Scheme of Investigation, prepared by URL detailing the scope and methods of excavation and agreed with English Heritage and the local authority. This work was undertaken from September to December 1998 with further fieldwork in February and March 1999.

### *Background*

- 1.4 The natural solid geology in the area of the site consists of Folkestone Beds of yellowish sands and silts. These are capped by a loessic silty deposit. The local topography of the site is dominated by two streams that flow from the north-west and the north-east and join just to the south of the site. These streams were originally broader, especially that to the west, and their beds have been partially infilled by hillwash deposits of silty clay and gravel. From this confluence the land rises gently to the north.
- 1.5 A preliminary desk-top assessment (URL 1994, vol 1, 159–61) identified the site as having possible archaeological interest. The vicinity of the site includes ancient woodland, partly coppiced, medieval villages and isolated farmsteads, a 19th-century railway line and Second World War pillboxes. Aerial photography had revealed linear and penannular cropmarks in an area roughly encompassing the subsequent area of excavation (URL 1994, gazetteer 1320, drawing 3081).
- 1.6 A surface artefact collection (or fieldwalking) survey was commissioned by URL and carried out in 1990 (URL 1995). This survey was confined to the north of the area subsequently excavated, and identified a background scatter of struck flint (URL 1994, gazetteer 1352, drawing 3081; 1995, maps 15a & 15b). Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery was also present.
- 1.7 An evaluation of this site was commissioned by URL and undertaken by MoLAS in 1997 (URL 1997). A total of 19 trenches were excavated to further define the archaeological potential of the site. The evaluation revealed the stone foundations of a rectangular building, close to a relict bank of the eastern stream; pottery and roof tiles dated this structure to the medieval period. A large artificial channel, possibly a moat, was identified to the north of the building, the backfill of which included large quantities of medieval roof tiles. Further to the north-east (outside the area later excavated) were pits and ditches containing unabraded medieval pottery. Pottery recovered dated from the 11th century to the mid 14th century. The medieval building (or buildings) indicated by the evaluation, tentatively identified as a moated manor or a mill, were apparently undocumented and previously unknown.

## 2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### 2.1 Periods Represented

- 2.1.1 Provisional dating evidence suggests that the following periods were represented in the archaeological data.

*Late Iron Age/ early Roman (100 BC–AD 100)*  
(Figure 2 Trench 2)

- 2.1.2 This date is applied to timber and brushwood exposed in the western corner of the excavated area, partly by pottery (although this may be redeposited), possibly by the character of tool marks on timber, and very broadly by its stratigraphic position within a deposit of peat in a relict stream, sealed by hillwash deposits of silty clay.

*Late Anglo-Saxon/ early Norman (AD 1050–1150)*  
(Figure 3)

- 2.1.3 A single smashed vessel of this date was found in a ditch running parallel to a stream, interpreted as a leet or race for a watermill. Other pottery of this date has been found in various contexts on the site, in some cases obviously residual. Other cases, where the pottery of this date may be undisturbed and *in situ*, have not yet been identified.

*Medieval (AD 1150–1350)*  
(Figures 4, 5 and 6)

- 2.1.4 Abundant pottery, and a very few coins and objects, dated 1150–1350, were found stratified in the remains of a moated domestic site of medieval type.

*Medieval (general)*  
(Figures 4 and 5)

- 2.1.5 Roof tiles of medieval type, not more closely datable, were found immediately under topsoil scattered over the interior and the inner sides of the moat, and generally in the infill of the moat.

*Medieval or post-medieval and uncertain date*  
(Figures 4 and 5)

- 2.1.6 A brushwood land drain in the western part of the site could have been late medieval or post-medieval in date. Additional ceramic and plastic land drains were found throughout the excavation and the area appears to have been repeatedly subject to attempts at drainage in the 20th century. A few minor isolated cut features inside and outside the moat variously contained medieval roof tiles and later materials. In about 1960, according to the farmer then in occupancy, the area of the moat was levelled up (Mr D Benton pers. comm.).

### 2.2 Feature Types

- 2.2.1 Most features were found cut into the clayey subsoil and the latest were overlain directly by topsoil, the latter being no more than 0.2m to 0.3m deep. On the downslope edges of the moated domestic site (see below) blocks of stone and tiles were mixed with the topsoil, and it was clear that severe erosion or truncation by ploughing had occurred to the south and west. Plough marks trending north to south were common.

*Timber and brushwood platform*

(Figure 2 Trench 2)

- 2.2.2 A platform or thick layer of small lengths of axe-cut round wood and other small cut timbers was found, with brushwood, in a waterlogged deposit of peat in the extreme western corner of the excavated area. This is interpreted as being within an earlier, broader bed of the western stream. It was subsequently sealed by a hillwash deposit of silty clay, overlaid by topsoil. Pottery found with the timbers was of Late Iron Age or early Roman date, but may have been residual material.

*Possible leet or race associated with a watermill*

(Figure 3)

- 2.2.3 A ditch up to 1m wide and surviving to a depth of 0.9m ran south-westwards parallel to, and at a short distance from, the eastern stream. This feature was traced for a length of at least 17m within the area of excavation. It is dated by a single smashed vessel of 1050–1150 in its primary fill, and by the fact that it was sealed by a make-up deposit for the moated domestic site (see below). At this early date it is probably to be interpreted as a channel for water to or from a mill; such a mill was not located and could have been situated either upstream or downstream.

*Stream management*

(Figure 3)

- 2.2.4 A linear gully parallel to the possible mill leat was located it is possible this gully was connected with a revetment of the stream of simply a further ditch.

*Moat*

(Figure 4)

- 2.2.5 The eastern stream was subsequently embanked and incorporated in a moat, the inner edges of which, at least, were revetted or reinforced by timber posts and planks to the south, and by a combination of posts, hurdles and living shrubs, to the north-east. The moat appears to have been roughly square in plan, its interior 'island' measuring up to 46m by 52m, and had utilised the natural topography to some extent.
- 2.2.6 The moat was a minimum of 7m wide, and considerably broader to the north-west and south; its outer edge was not located to the extreme south, north-west nor to the east, and it is possible that in the latter area the moat extended to the eastern edge of the eastern stream, for an estimated minimum width of 15m. The eastern arm of the moat had clearly contained the eastern stream, and the western arm would have been at or below the same level; the northern arms of the moat may have remained dry, or water may have been ponded in them, at least seasonally. Later the inner edge of the moat was retained and reinforced in two places with stone walls (see below). No clear evidence was found for a bridge.

*Moated domestic site*

(Figures 4 and 5)

- 2.2.7 The moat enclosed an area of 0.24 hectare. Evidence for several buildings and other structures in this area, concentrated mainly to the west and south, included:
- buildings constructed with earth-fast timber posts (on the evidence of postholes), entrances reinforced by stone cobbles, and walls possibly of cob or possibly wattle-and-daub;
  - one or more stone-founded rectangular buildings (evidenced by foundations *in situ*), probably with upper floors supported by timber posts (post-pads or postholes being found in appropriate positions), some constructed on a preparatory make-up layer of brickearth;
  - bowl-shaped hearths at ground level;
  - tile-lined drains and deep, rectangular pits, the latter acting possibly as collectors, silt traps or cisterns;
  - stakeholes;

- rubbish pits, generally infilled with a mixture of pottery and tiles;
- roof tiles, although minor buildings may still have been thatched or shingled.

- 2.2.8 The inner moat edge was revetted with stone walls for lengths of at least 14m to the south-west and 8m to the south-east. The latter at least was connected with a stone-founded building that ran up to the moat edge.
- 2.2.9 The buildings of the moated site displayed several phases of construction, or repair and maintenance, but these have yet to be assessed and separated in plan. It appears that to the east, at least, the edge of the moated area was subjected to erosion from the stream; the flow of water was deflected with timbers, and a substantial stone buttress was built with a cutwater base.
- 2.2.10 The water supply to the moated site appears to have been obtained, in the absence of any evidence for a well, from the two streams and from roof run-off. Surplus run-off and waste water appear to have been directed downstream into the moat.
- 2.2.11 The buildings were deliberately dismantled, and stone and timbers removed presumably for re-use elsewhere, perhaps within the period 1300–1350. Roof tiles were used to revet or line the inner edge of the moat (this occurring perhaps before the site ceased to be inhabited).

*Causewayed crossings of the moat*

- 2.2.12 At least two causewayed crossings were built with earth, stone cobbles and kerb stones, situated in the centre of the north-eastern arm of the moat, and towards the east end of the south-eastern arm. These crossings may have been built after (or to assist in) the dismantling of the moated buildings; when the site was uninhabited they would presumably have been for agricultural use by animals and carts.

*Land drainage*

- 2.2.13 Buried land drains in brushwood, ceramic and plastic testify to repeated attempts to drain the ground.

*Tree root disturbance*

- 2.2.14 Areas of tree root disturbance may confirm post-medieval cartographic references to orchards on the site.

*Modern Ploughing*

- 2.2.15 Modern ploughed topsoil sealed the archaeological deposits. The inner edges of the moat and parts of the mound where the medieval buildings were situated had partly been truncated by bulldozing in connection with moat and stream infilling in 1960.

## 2.3 Artefactual Remains

*Late Iron Age/ early Roman pottery*

- 2.3.1 A total of six sherds, from the timber and brushwood feature, are identified as Late Iron Age or early Roman in date. All the sherds are in a reduced, grog-tempered fabric which is relatively soft; the surfaces are very abraded. The group consists solely of body sherds. The poor condition, small size of the group and lack of diagnostic sherds makes close dating problematical, but grog-tempered fabrics are typical of the Late Iron Age across south-eastern England and are well attested from sites in east Kent. Therefore a Late Iron Age date (c late 1st century BC to mid 1st century AD) is suggested provisionally.

*Medieval pottery*

- 2.3.2 Large quantities of medieval pottery were recovered, most of which were probably products of the pottery industry in Ashford, 5km to the south-east, although this can only be confirmed by comparison with known kiln products. The Ashford kiln was operating in the 13th century, and there is clear evidence in this assemblage (and other material elsewhere) for earlier production probably dating to the late 11th century. The range of forms includes cooking pots, jugs and to a lesser extent spouted pitchers and bowls. Some of the cooking pots were embellished with a stabbing decoration around the top of flat top rims. Decoration on jugs included some in a north French style, a white slip coating onto which vertical stripes in red slip were painted, giving a polychrome effect. Other techniques include thumbled strips and green glaze.
- 2.3.3 The presence of Saintonge Ware, imported from Gascony, is taken to be an indicator of status on this site. Examples include a polychrome fragment decorated with birds and sherds from a green glazed jug.

*Registered finds*

- 2.3.4 The small finds include some stratified objects which are medieval in date, and some other types of metalwork (recovered by metal detecting) of uncertain, presumably later date. There are several dress accessories comparable to those published in urban collections from Norwich and London. They include buckles and enamelled copper heraldic mounts and pendants of medieval and late medieval date. In addition there are medieval household objects such as two candleholders, vessel fragments and numerous tripod feet.

**2.4 Palaeo-Environmental and Economic Remains**

- 2.4.1 Sediment, mollusc and botanical samples were taken, of which a representative selection has been processed. These indicated rich assemblages of charred seeds, including wheat, barley, oats and pulses. Faunal remains were scarce, but included fish scales, oyster shells and small mammal bones.
- 2.4.2 Timber samples were taken for species identification, dendrochronology and woodworking analysis. Provisional results of the woodworking analysis indicate that the toolmarks are not post-medieval, but cannot currently be dated more specifically.
- 2.4.3 The general condition of the animal bone was not particularly good but the material should allow some identification of species and carcass part. Identification of age and recognition of bone modification may also be possible. The fragmentary nature of the material, however, means that there is limited potential for bone measurement. In general, this assemblage is of little value for detailed economic and ecological study.

### **3 FIELDWORK EVENT AIMS**

3.1 On the basis of the evaluation the site was deemed to have a high potential for examining the organisation and functioning of a medieval rural settlement and the medieval landscape, and possibly investigating the effect of increased population and land use on the local environment.

3.2 The primary excavations aims (URL 1998) were:

- to determine the function and economic basis of the site;
- to establish the full extent and morphology of structures and other archaeological remains;
- to establish the presence or absence, extent and morphology of any moat or other watercourse;
- to establish a dated sequence of occupation and use;
- to establish a snapshot profile of a domestic assemblage through the recovery of dated pottery assemblages;
- to investigate patterns of natural resource exploitation through the recovery of economic indicators such as faunal and charred plant remains;
- to determine the landscape setting of the site and its interaction with the contemporary local environment, and recover palaeo-economic indicators from a well dated sequence, including ditches, the moat and any palaeochannels.

3.3 The provisional results of the excavation appear generally to fulfil these aims. The extent and survival of the moated domestic site was clearly greater than was calculated in deciding the scope and methods of excavation although, in nature and importance, the remains found seem to have been in line with what the evaluation predicted. The possibly Late Iron Age/ early Roman timber and brushwood feature was not anticipated.



## 4 SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL

4.1 The site lies in the Wealden Greensand ‘landscape zone’. The potential contribution of this site towards answering the research aims of the archaeological component of the CTRL can be considered under the following headings, taken from the *CTRL Archaeological Research Strategy* (URL 1998):

- towns and their rural landscapes (100 BC–AD 1700);
- recent landscape (1700–1945).

4.2 The provisional results of the excavation of this site appear to offer information that can be placed under the broad headings above, but further work may alter these conclusions.

4.3 These potential contributions are sometimes posed here in the form of specific questions, of a kind that post-excavation assessment of the data may be able to answer, or at least confirm are answerable.

### 4.4 Towns and their rural landscapes (100 BC–AD 1700)

4.4.1 Similar moated sites in the region have been gazetteered and studied (Tatton-Brown 1977; Champion & Overy 1989). Most of the 130 and more sites known in Kent, where the type site is comparatively common, are located in the Weald and occupation of many of them began in the 12th to 13th centuries. Few moated sites have been excavated to modern standards and the site at Parsonage Farm is especially notable for having been dismantled in the 14th century, with the consequent benefit that its early history has not been obscured by later development. Is this site unusual in having been, in an economic or cultural sense, a failure?

4.4.2 Documentary evidence should complement the results of excavation, for instance:

- In the period 1050–1150 was there a mill? Who owned it or to which manor was it connected? Was the putative mill established by an Anglo-Saxon lord, or by a Norman incomer? Did this occupation begin possibly as a compact land-holding assarted from surrounding woodland?
- In the period 1150–1350 when, by whom and why was a moated domestic site established here? Why were the occupants apparently so affluent? Was spending on repairs unusually lavish? When, by whom and why were the buildings dismantled and the site apparently abandoned for habitation? Was the site too wet (as the excavation would suggest), or were there further cultural and economic factors involved in its demise?
- Especially after the moated site was dismantled what connection did the site have with neighbouring places to the east, Parsonage Farm proper (formerly known as The Rectory), and to the south, Ripple Court? The buildings there are identified respectively as a 16th-century high-status house with contemporary barn (URL 1994, vol 2, map 3081, vol 3, gazetteer 190) and a timber-framed hall, possibly 15th-century, with a place-name documented in the 13th century (URL 1994, vol 3, gazetteer 191).

4.4.3 This pottery assemblage could prove to be an important typological link for pottery studies in the area.

- What can this pottery tell about pottery production in Ashford prior to the 13th century?
- How does the excavated assemblage compare with material excavated from the 13th-century kiln in Ashford?

- To what extent does the pottery assemblage reflect the status of the complex that it came from? With this in mind it may prove useful to compare the nature of the ceramic group, with other similar sites excavated in the hinterland of London, such as Low Hall Walthamstow, or a slightly lower status site such as Elmwood playing fields in Wallington, Surrey.
- What relations and comparisons can be drawn between the London and Canterbury medieval ceramic sequences?

4.4.4 Since the registered finds include some decorative objects suggestive of affluence as well as more mundane items, they would be worth comparing with assemblages of similar date from excavated moated sites (e.g. Low Hall, Walthamstow, London). If at all possible objects should be investigated in relation to the function of individual buildings.

4.4.5 Macroplant remains were recovered from charred and waterlogged deposits and should provide information on economic activities, such as crop husbandry, and the local environment. Samples were taken from the moat fills and ditches specifically for molluscs, indicative of water conditions.

4.4.6 None of the timbers so far examined have enough tree-rings for dendrochronological analysis.

4.4.7 Agricultural use of the site after habitation ceased may have included pasture, meadow, cultivation and orchard. The moat crossings show that the land was still usable. Were there non-agricultural uses?

#### **4.5 Recent landscapes (1700–1945)**

4.5.1 No evidence was found for any activity except agriculture.

4.6 The potential contributions of the results of the excavation of this site to the research aims above are considered to be of regional or local importance.

## 5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This interim report was prepared by Andrew Westman (who supervised the excavations with Lucy Thompson, Simon Savage and Ian Blair). Thanks are due to Louise Rayner (pre-medieval pottery), Lyn Blackmore (medieval pottery), Richenda Goffin (medieval small finds), Alan Pipe (animal bone), John Giorgi (environmental samples) and Damian Goodburn (timber and woodworking), Jane Sidell (sedimentology) and the archaeological plans were digitised by Andrew Westman, David Bentley and Sarah Jones.

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**APPENDIX 1: ARCHIVE INDEX**

## APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY REPORT

The Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited (URS) to undertake detailed archaeological investigations at Parsonage Farm, Westwell, west of Ashford, Kent, in 1998 and 1999. This work formed part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).

The site consisted of a single area of excavation 110m by 130m overall, to the west of Station Road (also called Watery Lane). The approximate centre of this area was at URL grid point 78020 26040, corresponding approximately to Ordnance Survey national grid reference (NGR) TQ 9805 4605. The area excavated totalled 0.9 hectare. The ground sloped gently down from north to south.

Possibly the first human activity on the site was evidenced by worked timbers and brushwood forming a possible platform in the bed of the stream running from the west, with pottery, which may be residual, dated to the Late Iron Age-early Roman period.

The earliest medieval occupation was represented by 11th–12th-century pottery, associated with a possible mill. A moated farmstead or manor-house was then built. A moat was constructed, partially utilising existing streams to the east and west of the site. Abundant pottery dates this farmstead to *c* 1150–1350. The buildings went through several phases of improvement, modification and repair. These buildings included the stone footings of a hall aligned north to south, with an extension added running eastwards from its northern end and fronting onto the eastern arm of the moat. Ancillary buildings, marked by shallow sill beam slots, earth-fast postholes, and metalled entrances, lay to the west and north-west of the hall. The north-eastern and south-eastern arms of the moat were crossed by narrow causeways, partly metalled with stone, probably for livestock. Buildings were apparently roofed with tiles, contained in extensive destruction deposits. The hall and some other buildings remained standing, however. The hall was then dismantled.

No further occupation was in evidence, and the site was much eroded by ploughing and stream action, especially around the edges of the moated area. According to local knowledge, the moat had survived as a substantial earthwork in places until 1960, when it was filled in.

## APPENDIX 3: KENT SMR RECORD SHEET

<b>Site Name:</b> Parsonage Farm, Area 430, Kent			
<b>Site code:</b> ARC PFM 98			
<b>Summary:</b>			
Excavations at Parsonage Farm, Watery Lane (also called Station Road), Westwell, west of Ashford, Kent, in 1998 and 1999 were commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited, after an evaluation in 1997, and were carried out by the Museum of London Archaeology Service. An area of roughly 0.9 hectare was stripped of topsoil and archaeological features sampled, excavated and recorded.			
<b>District:</b> Ashford		<b>Parish:</b> Westwell CP	
<b>Period(s):</b>			
1. Late Iron Age/ early Roman (?)			
2. medieval			
3. post-medieval			
<b>NGR (centre of area of excavation):</b>		100 km ref: TQ	
<b>NGR Easting</b> 9805		<b>NGR Northing</b> 4605	
<b>Type of Recording:</b>	<del>Evaluation</del>	<del>Watching-Brief</del>	<del>Field Walking</del>
(Delete)	Excavation	Geophysical Survey	Measured Survey
<b>Date of Recording: (From)</b> 1 September 1998		<b>(To)</b> 21 December 1999	
<b>(From)</b> 15 February 1999		<b>(To)</b> 12 March 1999	
<b>Unit Undertaking Recording:</b>			
Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB			
<b>Summary of Field Results:</b>			
PREHISTORIC: A timber and brushwood platform was found in peat deposits within a relict stream bed, associated with pottery dated provisionally as Late Iron Age/ early Roman.			
ANGLO-SAXON/ MEDIEVAL: A possible mill leet or mill race was found, possibly associated with and parallel to a revetted edge of a natural stream. The possible leet or race contained pottery dated 1050–1150.			
MEDIEVAL: A moated manor house was built, at least one arm of the moat being a canalised natural stream, c 1150. Some buildings were in timber, some stone-founded, and there were several phases of construction, enlargement and repair. There was no evidence for a bridge across the moat, which may in part have been dry. The buildings were deliberately dismantled approximately 1300–1350. The site was then apparently not inhabited but used for agriculture, two causewayed crossings of the moat being for animals and carts.			
POST-MEDIEVAL: The site was used for agriculture.			

<b>Location of Archive/Finds:</b> MoLAS Temporarily	
<b>Bibliography:</b> Evaluation Report: URL [Union Railways Limited], 1997 <i>West of Station Road, Parsonage Farm (ARC PFM 97) an Archaeological Evaluation</i> (Museum of London Archaeology Service)  URS, 1999 <i>Parsonage Farm (ARC PFM 98) Archaeological Excavation, Interim Report</i> (Museum of London Archaeology Service)	
<b>Summary Compiler:</b> Andrew Westman	<b>Date:</b> 20 July 1999