

OLD BUXTED PLACE

By C. F. Tebbutt, F.S.A.

Buxted Place and Park have now been bought by His Highness Sheikh Zayed, President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, as his official residence in this country. Among other changes that he wished to make was to enlarge the rather small lake to the SE. of the house (at TQ. 487226) and during the early part of 1973 this was done by mechanical diggers on the NW. side of the lake. This affected an area at the end of the well known lime avenue where the old mansion was supposed to have stood, facing down the avenue.

Macdermot¹ records the succession of the Manor of Buxted from medieval times, but the first mention of "Buxted Place" is at the time of its inclusion in a sale of the Manor to Richard and Edward Amhurst in 1620. Before that the Manor had been the property of the Waller family for ninety-eight years. The house is again mentioned in a lease of 1684. In 1711 Humphrey Fowle of Rotherfield purchased the property and sold it, in 1722, to Thomas Medley of Coneyborough who, Macdermot says "marked his ownership by pulling down the old mansion which stood on low ground at the end of the lime avenue, and by building the present house . . . near the church." This apparently was completed in 1725. Elsewhere Macdermot says that the old mansion was pulled down in 1722. No records appear to exist to prove the original building or appearance of the old mansion.

A close watch was kept as the 1973 excavation proceeded and it was soon apparent that it covered the site of former buildings, as stone and brick foundation walls began to appear as well as small sections of brick floors and square stone lined soakaway drains and ditches. At a place towards the south end what appeared to be the brick foundation of a square bay window, measuring 10 feet 9 inches by 5 feet 9 inches on the outside, could be seen. From the method of excavation it was quite impossible to recover any sort of plan, or even determine if this was the site of a house, or only of stables or outbuildings. An estate worker explained that more foundations existed just to the north. It was therefore only from the finds of building materials and pottery etc. that any evidence of the old mansion could be obtained.

All the stone revealed seemed to come from foundations or drains, and this was also the case with the bricks, although some were laid flat for floors. Most of the bricks were $8\frac{3}{4}/9$ x $4\frac{1}{4}/4\frac{1}{2}$ x $2\frac{1}{8}/2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in size and were over fired, producing a semi-glazed surface, probably second quality goods. The main roofing material was almost certainly red plain tiles, $9\frac{1}{2}$ x $5\frac{1}{2}$ x $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in size, with tapered square nail holes. A few examples of Horsham type slates were found and a number of broken west country slates. When stone walls are taken down in this district, many blocks break up, and if there had been stone walls here, there would have been some signs of this. Again no bricks of good quality were found, although many of second quality were left *in situ* in floors. I therefore formed the definite opinion that the building had been timber framed. The only sign of an ornamental garden was a stone ball, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, once attached to a stone gate post cap, or a terrace wall.

¹ K. H. MacDermot, *Buxted the Beautiful* (1929).

THE FINDS

Finds threw more conclusive light on the date of the building. Many clay tobacco pipe bowls were found, mainly in the soakaway drains, and a large number of pottery sherds. Some of these I was able to recover while still stratified in the main building site, others at the ends of soakaway drains and ditches. Of all the datable finds none is earlier than the 17th century, or later than the early 18th, i.e. consistent with the destruction of the house about 1722. The main finds are described below:—

Ceramics. These are a very interesting collection and it is hoped they may form the subject of a future study. They include Bellarmine, Bristol, Lambeth, Southwark, and Wrotham wares, as well as many examples from local kilns, some of unusual and unidentified types.

Clay tobacco pipes. I am indebted to Mr. D. R. Atkinson for the following report: "All but one are of the late seventeenth century London type, and can be dated quite closely. This type is common in London and examples are known dated 1683. Those with the initials I H are particularly interesting as this type is very rare with moulded initials. These are the same as examples found at or near Lewes, and can be safely attributed to the maker John Holcom (of Lewes), who died in 1699. The odd one has a more upright bowl and the initials T H. These were made at Lewes also, the maker being Thomas Hannan (born 1697, died 1781). The pipe dates to c. 1720 . . . You can date your deposit to about 1690-1720. The small one is much earlier; about 1640 by its size."

Roofing slate. I am indebted to Mr. E. W. Holden for the following report on the slate found:—

"About twelve fragments of grey slate were recovered from and near the site of the demolished mansion. Most pieces are too small to have any distinctive features, but one has part of a hole, has the reduced "shoulders" at the head and is the right width of 4½ in. for a slate that would originally have been c.9 in. long (a very common size). They resemble, in colour and texture, slate found elsewhere in Sussex which probably was quarried somewhere along the south coast of Devon or Cornwall.¹ Such roofing slate was traded along the south coast from the SW. peninsula to the Channel ports during the medieval and early post-medieval periods, but without other evidence cannot be closely dated. The pieces found may not even belong to the building demolished in 1722 (though they may), as they could be debris remaining from an earlier building, or could have been brought in from some nearby demolished structure just for the purpose of being utilised as packing and levelling pieces in masonry footings or walls.

"Nevertheless, it is of interest to note Buxted as one of the few Wealden sites in Sussex where slate has been found, as most sites are close to the ports, or where there was good river access. It has to be borne in mind that a branch of the R. Ouse runs close by the Buxted site and it may be that slate was brought up as far as was possible at the time by water."

Window glass. There were many fragments of window glass, of domestic glass, the globular stem of a 17th century wine glass, and parts of many 17th century wine bottles were found.

Professor R. G. Newton, O.B.E., D.Sc., F.S.A., kindly examined samples of the window glass and I am greatly indebted to him for the following report:

"The analytical results of the glass, obtained by the courtesy of the British Glass Industry Research Association, are as under:—

Silica (SiO ₂)	= 55.5%
Potash (K ₂ O)	= 8.2%
Soda (Na ₂ O)	= 2.1%
Lime (CaO)	= 23.2%
Magnesia (MgO)	= 5.6%
Alumina (Al ₂ O ₃)	= 2.7%
Iron Oxide (Fe ₂ O ₃)	= 1.1%
	98.4%

¹ E. W. Holden, "Slate roofing in medieval Sussex," *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (hereafter *S.A.C.*), vol. 103 (1965), 67-78; J. W. Murray, "The origin of some medieval roofing slates from Sussex," *ibid.*, 79-82.

"This glass is relatively high in potash, low in soda, and high in lime and magnesia. In this it differs markedly from nineteenth and twentieth century window glass, where the lime is less than 15%. There is also less magnesia, and the alkali is almost entirely soda. This is one of those glasses which mark the transition from the 'Forest' type, where the ashes from the wood-burning furnaces were used as the source of alkali for melting the glass,¹ and the later glasses where the alkali was imported as barilla. It would be of interest to know the date when the glass was installed in the building so that the date of manufacture might be assessed. The use of wood ash was still being advocated by Christopher Merret in 1662² but the import of barilla had become established by the end of the sixteenth century. Thus the transition period is diffuse and still ill-determined³; any study like this one will help us to explore the gap."

Wood. Coming from waterlogged conditions under the floor levels, in what might have been a filled in cellar, were a number of lengths of hardwood timber. Among them was a wooden trough, ten feet long, hollowed from a single length of hardwood and with solid ends.

Careful search was made for pottery or other signs of medieval or post-medieval occupation of the site, before the seventeenth century, but none was found. The conclusion must therefore be reached that the building found had been built in the early seventeenth century and pulled down about 1722. If any earlier Manor House ever existed it must have been elsewhere, perhaps nearer the medieval village.⁴

Prehistoric occupation

During the course of the excavation about 130 flint artifacts were picked up, some, and probably all, of Mesolithic date.

All the finds will be presented to the Barbican House Museum, Lewes.

In gathering the above information and recording it I am especially grateful for the help and cooperation of Mr. A. A. Schmid, agent to the estate, and to Mr. P. Harman, who assisted in many ways. Mr. and Mrs. F. G. Sheard and Mrs. D. M. Meades also gave valuable help.

¹ W. E. S. Turner, "Studies in ancient glasses and glassmaking processes," Part V, Raw materials and melting processes, *Journal Society of Glass Technology* 40 (1956), T.277-300.

² C. Merret, *The art of glass* (1662) (Translation in English of Neri's *L'Arte Vetriaria*).

³ E. S. Godfrey, "The development of English glassmaking, 1560-1640" (1957), unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Chicago.

⁴ C. F. Tebbutt, "Two newly-discovered medieval sites," *S.A.C.* vol. 110 (1972), 31-4.