

◆ An archaeological excavation at Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex

by Christopher Greatorex *Seventeen medieval features were recorded during an excavation undertaken at Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex.*

These discoveries included part of a tenement boundary, pits and three possible post-holes dating to the twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth century. A single shallow scoop of mid-thirteenth- to mid-fourteenth-century origin was also investigated. The range of recovered artefacts/ecofacts (pottery, burnt clay, metalwork, animal bone and marine shell) is indicative of general waste derived from a relatively low-status family group or smallholding utilizing mainly local resources.

This project has contributed to the detailed understanding of Steyning's early development and confirmed the archaeological potential of the immediate area.

INTRODUCTION

This summary report presents the results of an archaeological excavation undertaken at Steyning Museum, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex during the summer of 2005 (NGR TQ 17825 11315). Steyning Museum Trust had received planning approval for an extension to the existing museum (Fig. 1). However, as the proposed development lay within the medieval core of historic Steyning, it was judged that groundworks associated with the scheme could impact upon archaeologically significant features and deposits.

In August 2004 the investigation of a trial trench demonstrated that the footprint of the proposed extension did indeed encompass a low-density spread of archaeological features (Greatorex 2004). The full archaeological excavation described below followed accordingly.

The fieldwork was carried out by C. G. Archaeology and members of Worthing Archaeological Society. All aspects of the project were commissioned by Steyning Museum Trust, to whom thanks are extended.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The broad archaeological and historical evidence for medieval Steyning has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Gardiner & Greatorex 1997; Hudson 1980; Hudson 1987; *V.C.H. Sussex* 6, pt 1, 220–25) and

need not be reconsidered here. Even so, three fieldwork projects undertaken in the immediate vicinity of the current Area of Interest are worthy of attention (Fig. 5).

The first of these was conducted by Worthing Museum during 1962, on a site then known as Cuthman's Field (Barton 1986). The recorded features located within 'Area 2' included a sunken-floored building, plus a series of pits and two wells of late-tenth- to mid-fifteenth-century origin. An early-fifteenth-century lime-slaking pit, a sunken trackway assigned to the years between 1450 and 1600 and a large timber-framed house seemingly occupied from the mid-fifteenth to the early eighteenth century were also discovered.

In 1989 a rescue excavation was undertaken during groundworks associated with the construction of Steyning Museum (Reynolds 1992). This work revealed an intercutting ditch and pit, both dated at the time to the late eleventh or early twelfth century and a second pit of late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century origin.

The proposed museum extension also lies approximately 30 m south of a 1995 excavation carried out in advance of the Steyning Library development (Gardiner & Greatorex 1997). The easternmost end of this site overlapped much of Barton's aforementioned 'Area 2' trench of 1962. It is noticeable that the later work failed to locate any conclusive evidence for the sunken-floored

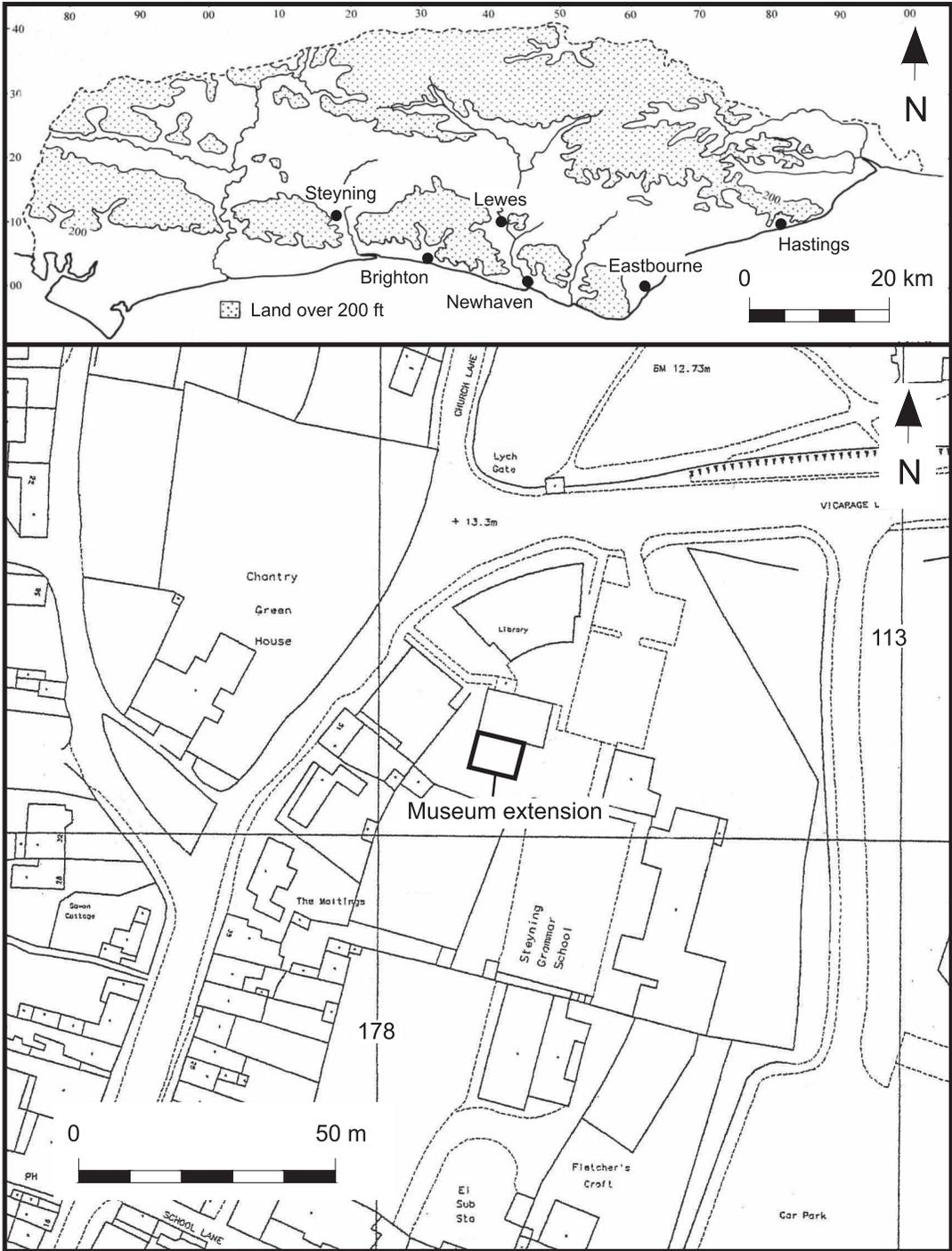


Fig. 1. Location of museum extension.

building, trackway or lime-slaking pit recorded 33 years before. Nevertheless, three phases of activity were identified. Initially, the footprint of the new library encompassed a number of pits dating to c. 950–1250. The majority of pits predating 1250 lay on the east side of the excavation. However, during the second phase of occupation (1200–1450) all of the cut features bar one were found within the westernmost half of the trench. The third settlement phase (1400–1700) was represented by the remnants of two walls (presumably part of the timber-framed building described by Barton) a ditch, two pits, two possible post-holes and a stone-lined oven.

EXCAVATION RESULTS

A compact layer of homogeneous dark grey-brown silty clay overburden (1) with a maximum thickness of c. 0.85 m was first stripped from the trench shown on Figures 2 and 3. This procedure revealed an underlying deposit of natural Upper Greensand (2) cut by five delimited modern intrusions (cuts 8, 10, 12, 48, 53), one additional area of unexcavated twentieth-century disturbance (no context number) and 17 features of medieval origin (cuts 3, 5, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 40, 42, 44, 46, 50).

The medieval features are here defined as six pits, six shallow scoops of rather more uncertain function, three possible post-holes, a single linear ditch/gully and one cut too disturbed for typological interpretation (Table 1).

Analysis of the pottery recovered from the 17 tabulated features has confirmed that the site was utilized between the twelfth and mid-fourteenth century. Furthermore, one can subdivide this period of perhaps more or less continuous activity into three distinct though clearly overlapping phases (Fig. 3). Unless stated otherwise, each of the cuts described below contained a single surviving fill of homogeneous grey-brown silty clay.

TWELFTH CENTURY

Pit (Cut 40)

Cut 40 yielded pottery, four small fragments of burnt clay, animal bone and marine shell (Fill 41). No discernible evidence for the precise physical relationship of interlinked cuts 40, 42 and 44 was recorded in section. However, ceramic assemblages of twelfth- to early thirteenth-century date were recovered from both of the latter features (fills 43, 45).

Table 1. Classification of medieval features based on an appraisal of cut size, shape and profile.

Class of feature	Cut no.	Fill nos	Max. diam.	Max. depth	Notes
Pits					
	22	23	1.15 m	0.22 m	
	30	31, 52	1.15 m+	0.38 m	
	32	33	1.30 m	0.34 m	
	40	41	2.0 m	0.33 m	
	44	45	3.15 m	0.70 m	
	46	47	1.85 m	0.24 m	
Shallow scoops					
	18	19	0.48 m	40 mm	Ill-defined profile
	20	21	0.36 m	80 mm	Concave sides
	26	27	0.60 m	0.10 m	Concave sides
	28	29	0.46 m	0.12 m	Concave sides
	34	35	0.60 m+	90 mm	Concave sides
	36	37	0.25 m	45 mm	Ill-defined profile
Possible post-holes					
	3	4	0.38 m	0.20 m	Steep sides
	24	25	0.35 m+	0.20 m	Vertical sides
	50	51	0.43 m	0.25 m	Vertical sides
Ditch/gully					
	5	6, 7	0.75 m (max. width)	0.29 m	
Uncertain character					
	42	43	?	0.10 m	Most of cut not discernible

Shallow scoop (Cut 36)

Cut 36 produced pottery and one piece of flat-sided burnt clay (Fill 37). The interpretation of all six shallow scoops recorded during the project is discussed at a later juncture.

TWELFTH-EARLY/MID-THIRTEENTH CENTURY Pits (Cuts 22, 30, 32, 44, 46)

Five pits dating to the twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth century were located across the site. Cut 22 contained pottery, five burnt clay fragments, two iron nails, animal bone and marine shell (Fill 23). Within Cut 30 an uppermost surviving fill of dark grey silty clay (Fill 31) was found above a primary deposit of dark grey-brown silty clay and orange-brown silty clay flecks (not apparent in section) (Fill 52). Sherds of pottery, five pieces of burnt clay, at least one iron nail, part of a copper-

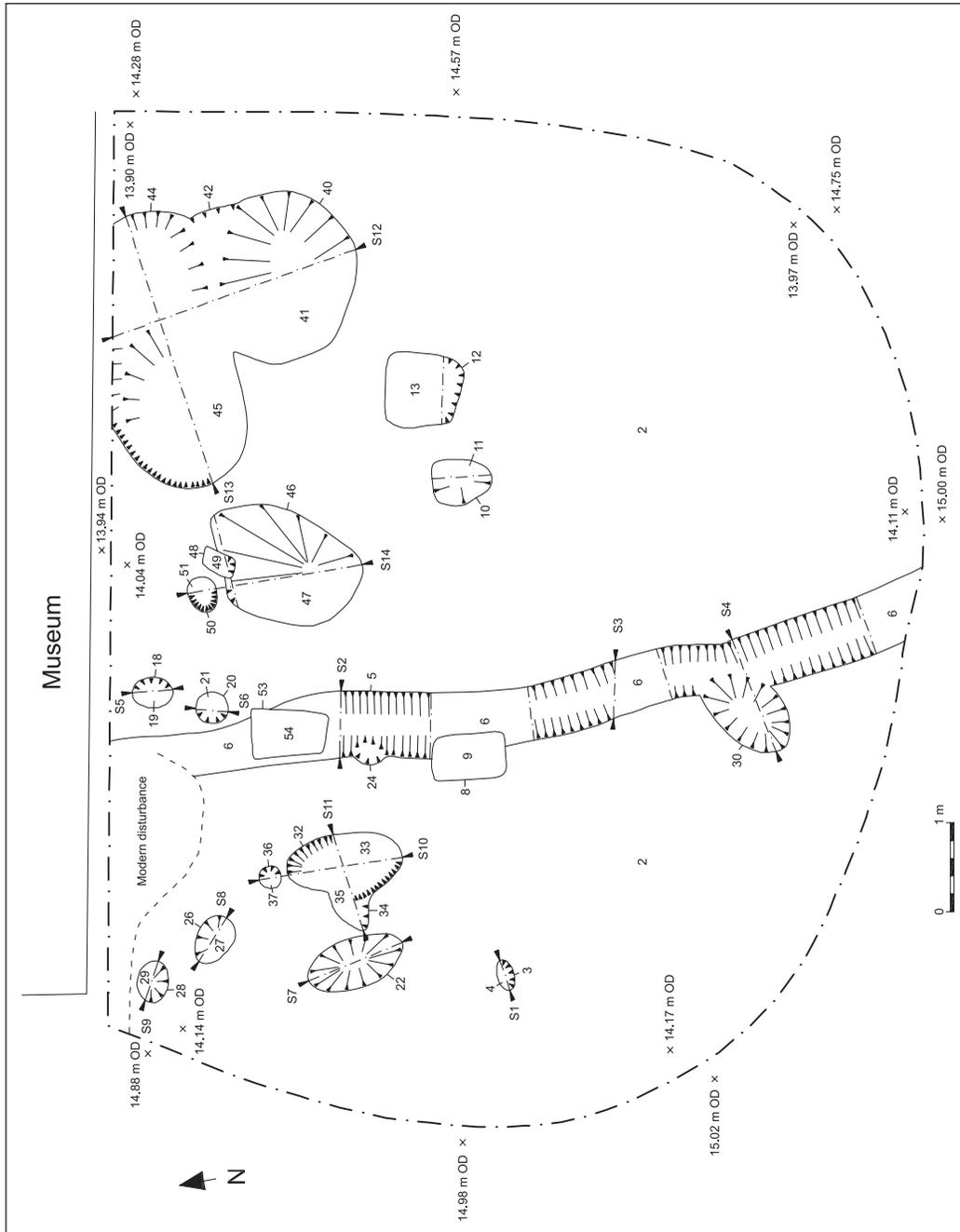


Fig. 2. Excavation plan.

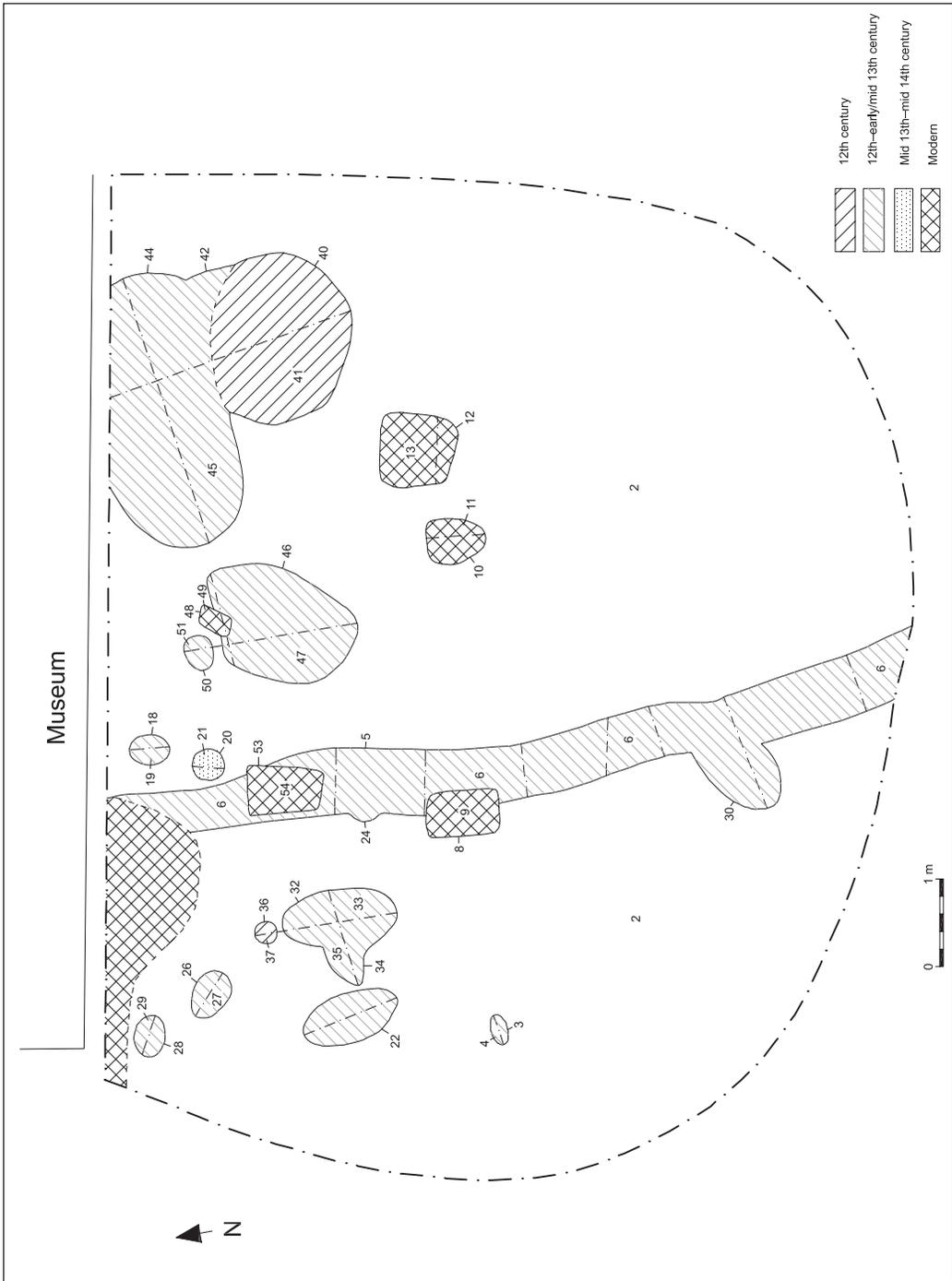


Fig. 3. Phased excavation plan.

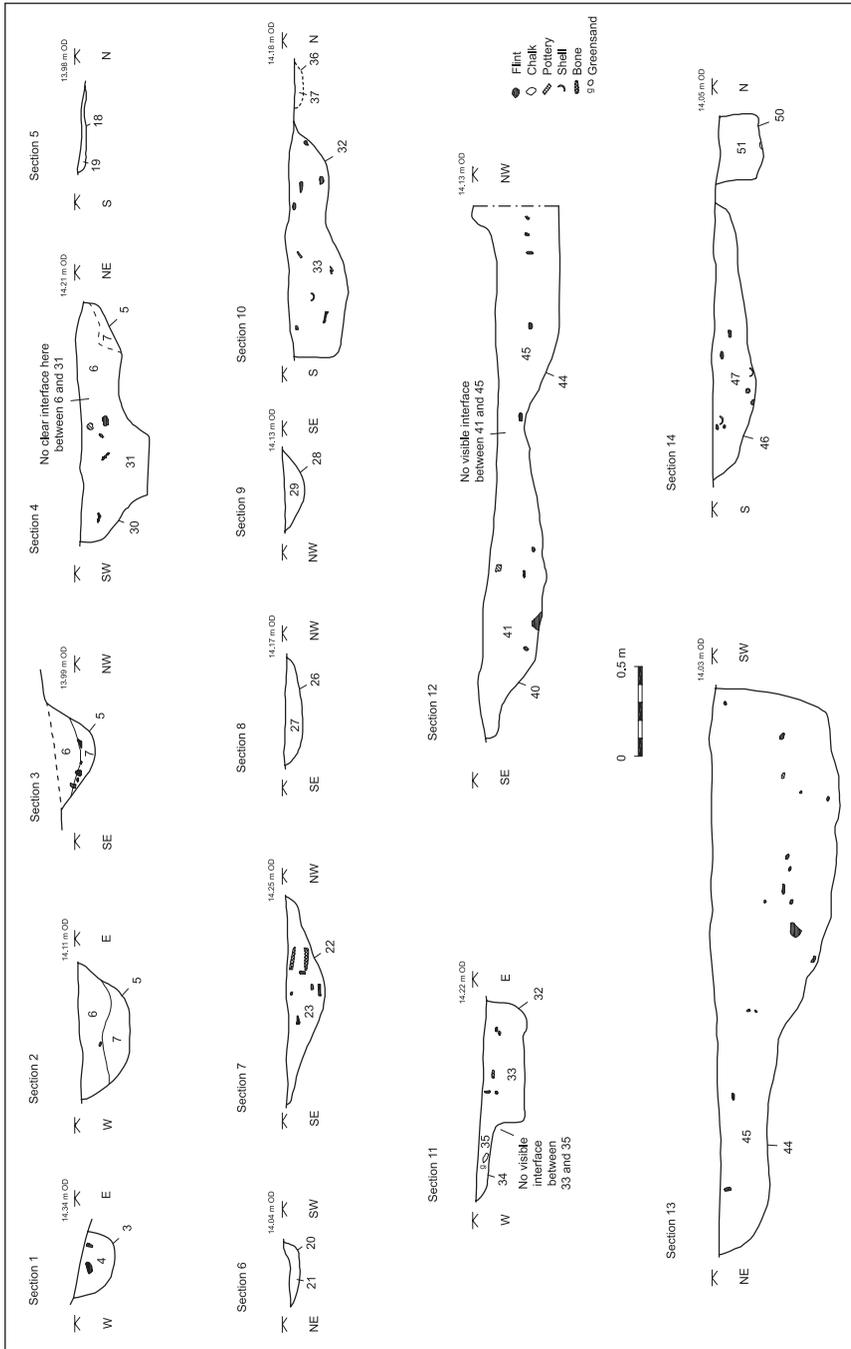


Fig. 4. Section drawings.

alloy buckle, animal bone and marine shell were recovered from this feature, which cut a broadly contemporaneous linear ditch/gully (Cut 5). The investigation of Cut 32 yielded pottery, 14 burnt clay fragments, one piece of possible slag (3.9 g) animal bone and marine shell (Fill 33). Unfortunately, the precise physical relationship of Pit 32 and interlinked and similarly-dated Shallow Scoop 34 was not ascertained. Potsherds, six fragments of burnt clay, five iron nails, animal bone and marine shell were gleaned from Cut 44 (Fill 45). As already observed, no conclusive evidence for the exact physical relationship of cuts 40, 42 and 44 was recorded in section. Nevertheless, the results of the ceramic analysis do suggest that the broadly contemporaneous infilling of both features 42 and 44 was completed at a slightly later date than that of Pit 40. Cut 46 had been disturbed by modern intrusion 48, but still contained twelfth- to early thirteenth-century pottery, three pieces of possible iron slag (29.7 g), animal bone and marine shell (Fill 47).

Shallow scoops (Cuts 18, 26, 28, 34)

Four shallow scoops dating from the twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth century were recorded across the northwesternmost corner of the site. Cut 18 yielded pottery and marine shell (Fill 19) while the excavation of Cut 26 produced pottery and animal bone (Fill 27). Pottery, animal bone and marine shell was also recovered from Cut 28 (Fill 29). Cut 34 contained pottery and one piece of smooth-sided burnt clay (Fill 35).

Possible post-holes (Cuts 3, 24, 50)

The northwesternmost 'quarter' of the site also encompassed three possible post-holes dating from the twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth century. Cut 3 produced pottery, four fragments of burnt clay and marine shell (Fill 4). Pottery, animal bone and marine shell were gleaned from Cut 24 (Fill 25) (no measured section drawing). However, the precise physical relationship of this feature and interlinked early/mid-twelfth- to thirteenth-century Ditch/Gully 5 proved impossible to elucidate. Cut 50 contained pottery, animal bone and marine shell (Fill 51). The excavation did not establish if the three cuts highlighted here once formed part of the

same (though still obscure) structure or fence line. Even so, their similar size, broad contemporaneity and near alignment are of note.

Ditch/Gully (Cut 5)

A single linear feature (Cut 5) was found to run across the site in an approximate north-south direction. This ditch/gully possessed a rounded section profile and contained two distinct deposits (Fills 6, 7). The uppermost surviving horizon of mid grey-brown silty clay (Fill 6) yielded thirteenth-century pottery, four fragments of burnt clay, at least three iron nails, animal bone and marine shell. The primary fill of light grey-brown silty clay (Fill 7) produced early/mid-twelfth- to early-thirteenth-century pottery, two burnt clay fragments, animal bone and marine shell. Cut 5 clearly represents a continuation of the ditch/gully first exposed during the 1989 construction of Steyning Museum (Reynolds 1992) (Fig. 5). The feature is here interpreted as a tenement or property boundary of slightly later date (early/mid-twelfth to thirteenth century) than that proposed within the 1992 publication report (late eleventh to early twelfth century) (Reynolds 1992). Nevertheless, the aforementioned disturbance of Cut 5 by twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth-century Pit 30 does support Reynolds's contention that this demarcation was only utilized/respected for a relatively short period of time.

Feature of uncertain character (Cut 42)

Cut 42 was simply too disturbed for objective interpretation. Furthermore, its single surviving fill (Fill 43) proved to be indistinguishable from those of interlinked twelfth-century Pit 40 (Fill 41) and broadly contemporaneous Pit 44 (Fill 45). The investigation of what remained of this feature did however garner twelfth- to early-thirteenth-century pottery, one piece of ferruginous sandstone (0.20 kg), animal bone and marine shell.

MID-THIRTEENTH-MID-FOURTEENTH CENTURY Shallow scoop (Cut 20)

Only one feature of clear mid-thirteenth- to mid-fourteenth-century origin was revealed during the fieldwork. Cut 20 comprised a shallow scoop and yielded five sherds of pottery (Fill 21).

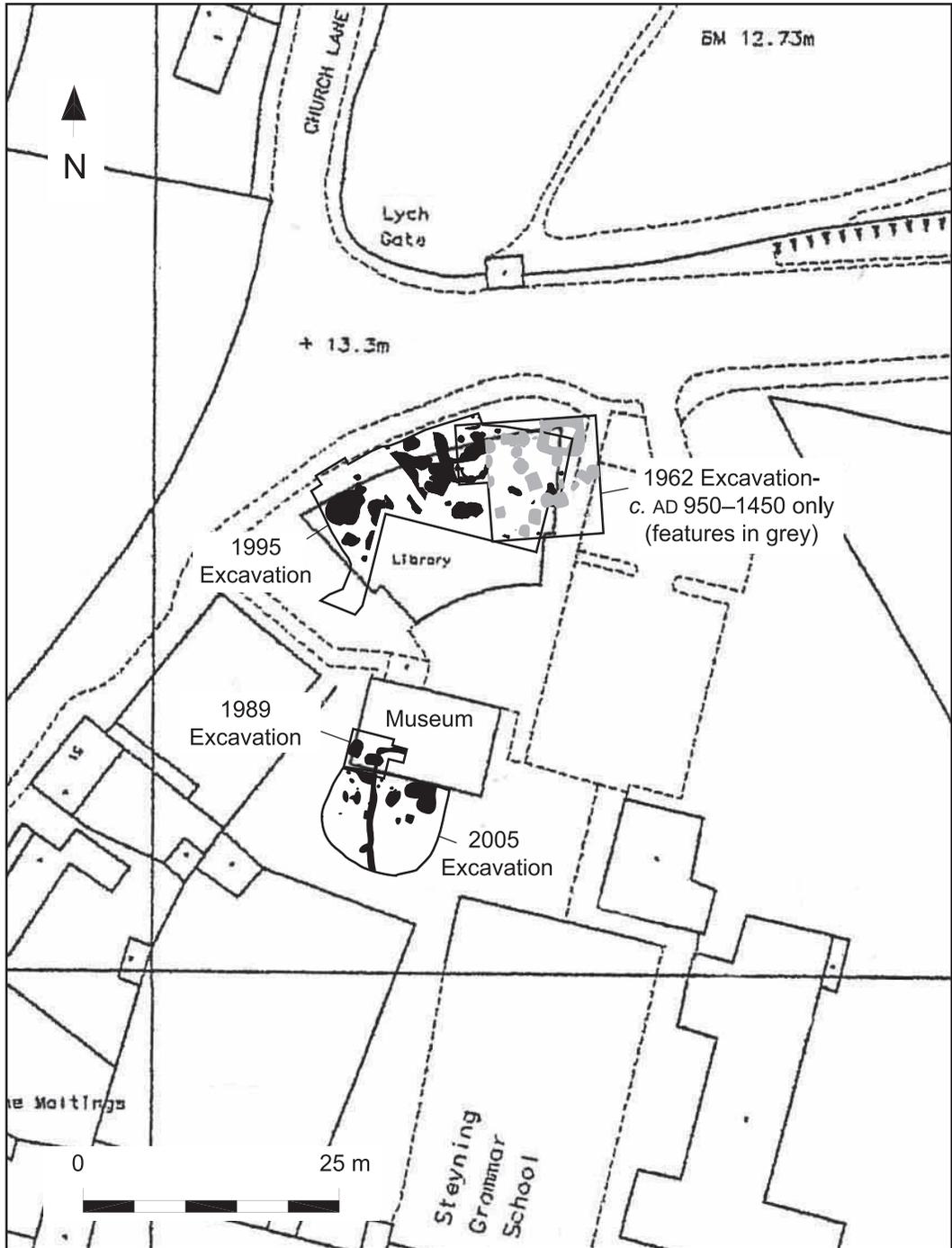


Fig. 5. Excavations undertaken in the vicinity of the museum.

THE FINDS

POTTERY by Luke Barber

Introduction

The excavation produced 714 sherds of pottery weighing 4.122 kg from 24 contexts. With the exception of six residual Romano-British sherds and one intrusive post-medieval sherd, the assemblage is all of the medieval period. Although the medieval assemblage spans the tenth/eleventh to fourteenth centuries, the majority is of twelfth- to early-thirteenth-century date.

The condition of the assemblage is poor. Most sherds are small (average sherd size for the whole collection is 5.8 g) and show signs of abrasion suggestive of reworking. More than a few contexts demonstrate a moderate degree of residuality, while in others there are definite intrusive pieces. Very few feature sherds are present and context groups tend to be small: the largest is from Fill 45 (Cut 44) which contained 167 sherds weighing 0.988 kg (including residual Roman and intrusive seventeenth-century material).

A number of other excavations undertaken within the town and its environs (e.g. Gardiner 1990; 1993; Gardiner & Greatorex 1997) have yielded far better assemblages of pottery. Indeed, the current collection does not contain the secure context and diagnostic sherds needed to advance this study beyond the current report. However, the opportunity has been provided to integrate a number of new fabrics into the West Sussex Medieval Fabric Reference Collection.

The assemblage

The Late Saxon/Saxo-Norman assemblage is by far the largest (672 sherds weighing 3.709 kg). The earliest material consists of a few residual sherds of coarse flint- and shell-tempered cooking pots of probable late-tenth- to early-eleventh-century date. No feature sherds are present and all this material is residual in later Saxo-Norman contexts. However, these sherds do at least indicate some Late Saxon activity in the vicinity.

The majority of the assemblage can be placed between the later eleventh and early thirteenth century, though most is probably of twelfth-century date. Cooking-pots with sharply everted flaring rims dominate and a number show 'pie-crust' decoration on the rim and occasionally stamped or incised decoration on the shoulder. These vessels appear in a range of generally oxidized fabrics utilizing chalk (earlier in the period) and more commonly, alluvial grits containing flint, chalk / shell and sand. The alluvial grit tempering appears to become finer and sparser towards the later twelfth to early thirteenth century. At this point in time it is likely that the first true sand-tempered wares, such as those produced in Steyning itself (Gardiner 1997) began to replace the earlier tempering agents. By the middle of the thirteenth century it is probable that the last of the alluvial gritted wares were supplanted by 'High Medieval' sand-tempered wares. However, sand-tempered wares with occasional flint / chalk / shell inclusions appear to have been made at some production sites in the area into the fourteenth century (Barber forthcoming). These are usually distinguished by the sparse nature of the inclusions and harder-fired nature of the matrix.

The assemblage contains only 35 sherds (0.37 kg) which can confidently be placed in an early/mid-thirteenth- to mid-fourteenth-century date bracket, though none need postdate the thirteenth century. Of these, 17% by weight come from the topsoil and a good deal more have intruded

into Late Saxo-Norman deposits. This small assemblage is dominated by sand-tempered wares (probably made in the town) coinciding with the appearance of glazed jugs from a number of local/regional sources. Only one imported sherd was recovered: a French jug from Fill 6/31 (Cut 5/30). The low quantity of 'High Medieval' pottery strongly suggests that little refuse disposal was occurring from the early/mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth centuries. Although a number of the pits do contain material of this date, it is found in very small quantities and often in association with larger numbers of Late Saxo-Norman sherds. The only sherd postdating the mid-fourteenth century consists of a single seventeenth-century earthenware fragment.

BURNT CLAY by Christopher Greatorex

Forty-six pieces of hard burnt clay with a total weight of 154.3 g were recovered. All of the fragments can be described as light orange-beige in colour, although a few examples did also have light-grey or mid-orange/red 'patches'. Most of the collection consisted of small, irregularly-shaped fragments yielding little useful information. Nevertheless, a single 12.8 g piece gleaned from Ditch/Gully 5 (Fill 6) was characterized by the impression of a wattle rod (c. 12 mm estimated diameter). A further three fragments retrieved from Pit 30 (Fill 31) and shallow scoops 34 (Fill 35) and 36 (Fill 37) each possessed one smooth, virtually flat surface. No concrete evidence for any *in situ* buildings was recorded across the site. However, the four pieces of burnt clay highlighted here are perhaps best (though still somewhat cautiously) interpreted as fragments of structural daub.

METALWORK by Luke Barber

Fifteen pieces of metalwork were discovered. The assemblage retrieved from twelfth- to thirteenth-century cuts 5 (Fill 6), 5/24 (Fill 6/25), 5/30 (Fill 6/31), 22 (Fill 23), 30 (Fill 31) and 44 (Fill 45) consists almost entirely of corroded iron nail fragments. Most of these are of a general-purpose variety, although two headless examples were garnered from Fill 6 and a total of three dome-headed horseshoe nails were recovered from Fills 31 and 45. The one outstanding medieval artefact comprises part of a copper-alloy buckle with heavy iron corrosion products almost certainly derived from a buckle pin (Fill 31). An iron grip thought to have once formed part of a set of post-medieval tongs was also identified (Unstratified).

Of additional note are four small pieces of possible iron slag retrieved from cuts 32 (Fill 33) and 46 (Fill 47).

FAUNAL REMAINS by Patricia Stevens

Six hundred and four bones from 16 contexts were presented for examination. Nine species were identified: *Equus* sp. (horse), *Bos* sp. (cattle), *Ovicaprid* (sheep/goat), *Sus* sp. (pig), *Canis* sp. (dog), *Felis* sp. (cat), *Gallus* sp. (domestic fowl) salmon/trout species and probable cod.

Gnawing by dogs is fairly common, although evidence for it occurred mainly on fragments recovered from contexts 6, 7, 25, 45 and 52. A number of examples show some erosion, which together with the gnawing, is perhaps an indication that the remains had been discarded on the ground prior to burial. Butchery evidence is very slight, with only five pieces displaying signs of chopping. A sheep horn core has cut marks around the base, suggesting that it was still in place when the skin of the animal was removed. There is no obvious evidence for pathology on any of the fragments.

It would seem that the major species present were fully adult, though probably not more than five years old. Precise estimates of age or size could not be made for the assemblage. The fish bones clearly represent local fishing, but again numbers are too small to provide any detailed information.

MARINE SHELL by David Dunkin

Marine shell from 17 medieval contexts was presented for identification. The 1.902 kg assemblage comprises *Ostrea edulis* (Common oyster) *Mytilus edulis* (Common mussel) *Cerastoderma edule* (Common cockle) *Venerupis decussata* (Carpet shell) and *Littorina littorae* (Periwinkle). Oyster remains were present in all shell-bearing contexts and account for c. 97% of the collection's total weight.

Only a small number of marine molluscs were recovered from each of the contexts. Pit 44 (Fill 45) contained both the greatest quantity of shells (including 15 complete oyster valves) and the largest number of represented species.

Nine of the fills yielded oyster shells displaying signs of polychaete worm infestation (e.g. *Polydora ciliata*/*P. Hoptura*). Evidence of distortion and at least one example of burrowing sponge infestation (*Cliona celata*) was also recorded. Such a high level of 'invasive' activity suggests that the oyster had been harvested from unhealthy wild colonies. Still, the majority of complete oyster shells are of edible size (most falling within a four- to ten-year age range). The small number of mussel, cockle, carpet-shell and periwinkle shells must represent an insignificant food resource.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Perhaps the most striking of the exposed medieval features was the single ditch/gully (Cut 5) interpreted as part of a short-lived early/mid-twelfth- to thirteenth-century tenement boundary.

The one twelfth-century (Cut 40) and five twelfth- to early/mid-thirteenth-century pits (cuts 22, 30, 32, 44, 46) contained a range of artefacts/ecofacts (pottery, burnt clay, metalwork, animal bone and marine shell) indicative of general waste derived from a relatively humble family group or smallholding exploiting mainly local resources. No deposits of palaeoenvironmental significance were identified. More unfortunately, the functional interpretation of a further six extremely shallow scoops of twelfth-century (Cut 36), twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth-century (Cuts 18, 26, 28, 34) and mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth-century date (Cut 20) is fraught with difficulty.

The limited depth of all 17 medieval cuts and the fairly sharp context boundary found between the removed overburden (1) and underlying Upper Greensand (2) may indicate that a degree of truncation has occurred across the area of investigation. Indeed, the shallow scoops are noticeably clustered towards the northwestern corner of the trench and a patch of modern disturbance surely linked to the 1989 construction of Steyning Museum and perhaps the accompanying rescue excavation (Reynolds 1992). Yet even if one takes a postulated reduction in site formation/stratigraphy into account, cuts 18, 20, 26, 28, 34 and 36 were still not of a size usually associated with pits once employed for medieval rubbish disposal. Furthermore, none of the scoops possessed the vertical or steeply-sloping sides typical of post-holes, or yielded any evidence for post-stains or -packing. It can therefore be seen

that the precise nature of these rather ephemeral features remains a matter of conjecture.

Medieval rubbish pits are of course characteristically found in close proximity to contemporaneous properties. Sadly, only three possible post-holes were revealed during the project (Cuts 3, 24, 50). The similar date (twelfth-early/mid-thirteenth century) size and near alignment of contexts 3, 24 and 50 has been recognized. However, the excavation did not establish if these features once comprised components of the same building or fence line. Conclusive *in situ* evidence for the dwelling that was presumably once set within the identified tenement enclosure (Cut 5) thus still awaits discovery.

Although the fieldwork did garner six Romano-British potsherds and a few examples of residual late tenth- to early-eleventh-century pottery, all but one of the recorded medieval cuts have been assigned to the twelfth or twelfth to early/mid-thirteenth century. It is generally accepted that the Saxo-Norman settlement of Steyning lay to the south and west of St Andrew's Church, with tenth-century buildings being 'superseded in the eleventh century by a greater number of structures evidently of lower status' (Gardiner & Greatorex 1997, 170). During the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, the town centre seemingly moved to a new location on the current High Street. Nevertheless, the archaeological excavations of 1962, 1989, 1995 and 2005 demonstrate that the land now encompassing the present-day museum and library was still at this time a focus of intrusive (though relatively modest) activity. During the mid-thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century the footprint of the new museum extension was clearly no longer the scene of significant occupation or even of general rubbish disposal. Furthermore, the archaeological evidence would suggest that from the mid-fourteenth

century onwards, the site reverted to open land and remained so until the modern era.

Archive and acknowledgements

The full paper, photographic and digital records arising from this project have been deposited with the retained artefact

assemblage and remaining soil samples at Steyning Museum. C. G. Archaeology would like to thank Chris Tod, the Hon. Curator of Steyning Museum, John Mills at West Sussex County Council, Worthing Archaeological Society, Luke Barber, David Dunkin, Patricia Stevens, Emma Olivari and Mike Seager Thomas for their assistance and expertise.

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