

# Excavations at Ivy Lane, Westergate, West Sussex

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*The excavations at Ivy Lane, Westergate, included an evaluation of the whole site and a targeted excavation area in the western part. The site lies on the eastern limits of Westergate, some 150m east of the A29. The findings are of two phases of medieval occupation between the 11th and 14th centuries and include the apparent realignment of the building plan in the 13th century. Although the excavated area was small and the evidence fragmentary, this excavation represents one of the few coherent investigations of early post-conquest medieval village backland on the West Sussex coastal plain and therefore provides rare and valuable evidence of activity on the fringes of a medieval village.*

## INTRODUCTION

Archaeology South-East (UCL Institute of Archaeology) conducted archaeological work on land to the rear of 23–27 Ivy Lane, Westergate, West Sussex (NGR 494077 105271; Fig. 1) during November 2006. Targeted excavation of an area of some 20 by 10m in the western part of the site followed on from archaeological evaluation across the whole site (Archaeology South-East 2007). The fieldwork was commissioned by Banner Homes Ltd in order to fulfil a planning condition prior to the commencement of construction work relating to the proposed redevelopment of the site. The site occupies generally level land at between 10.15m–10.50m OD on the West Sussex coastal plain, on locally raised ground between lower ground to the west and east. The geology is brickearth overlying head deposits. The Lidsey Rife runs north to south, about 160m to the east of the site. The South Downs are to the north.

## BACKGROUND

The site lies within the village of Westergate, which forms part of the historical parish and the modern civil parish of Aldingbourne. A scatter of prehistoric and Romano-British material attests to early settlement on the fertile soils of the district. Mesolithic and neolithic worked flints have been found in several places locally, including a possible mesolithic flint-working site at 1 Croft Cottages, Westergate Street. Pottery from the Middle to Late Bronze Age and an abundance of undiagnostic

prehistoric worked flint are also known from the immediate area. To the north of the site, Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery was recovered from overburden deposits in an evaluation at Westergate Community College (AOC Archaeology 2000). A Roman cremation is recorded at Nyton and Roman pottery has been found at several locations in Westergate and Eastergate, prompting the suggestion that a villa may have existed to the south of Eastergate. The evaluation at Westergate Community College (AOC Archaeology 1998) also recorded residual Roman material. St George's Church, Eastergate, has Norman walling and includes Roman brick and tile in its construction.

Historically, the settlement originated as a tithing (a subsidiary settlement) within the larger episcopal manor of Aldingbourne, together with several other tithings, the largest of which was Lidsey to the south (Dallaway 1815). Its tenurial status is complex and unclear; it appears to have had the status of a sub-manor in its own right, Westergate Woodhouse, attached to the prebend (a stipend granted to a member of the cathedral chapter for his support) of Gates in Chichester Cathedral (Salzman 1953), with the prebendary holding the position of lord of the manor. The manorial centre was located in Woodhouse Closes, a location which does not survive on modern maps but which may have been in the vicinity of Woodgate. The manor records survive from the early 17th century, although it may have much earlier origins: the Domesday entry for the manor of Aldingbourne refers to land held by three clerks (Robert, Hugh and Alweard), and it has been suggested that one of these holdings represents

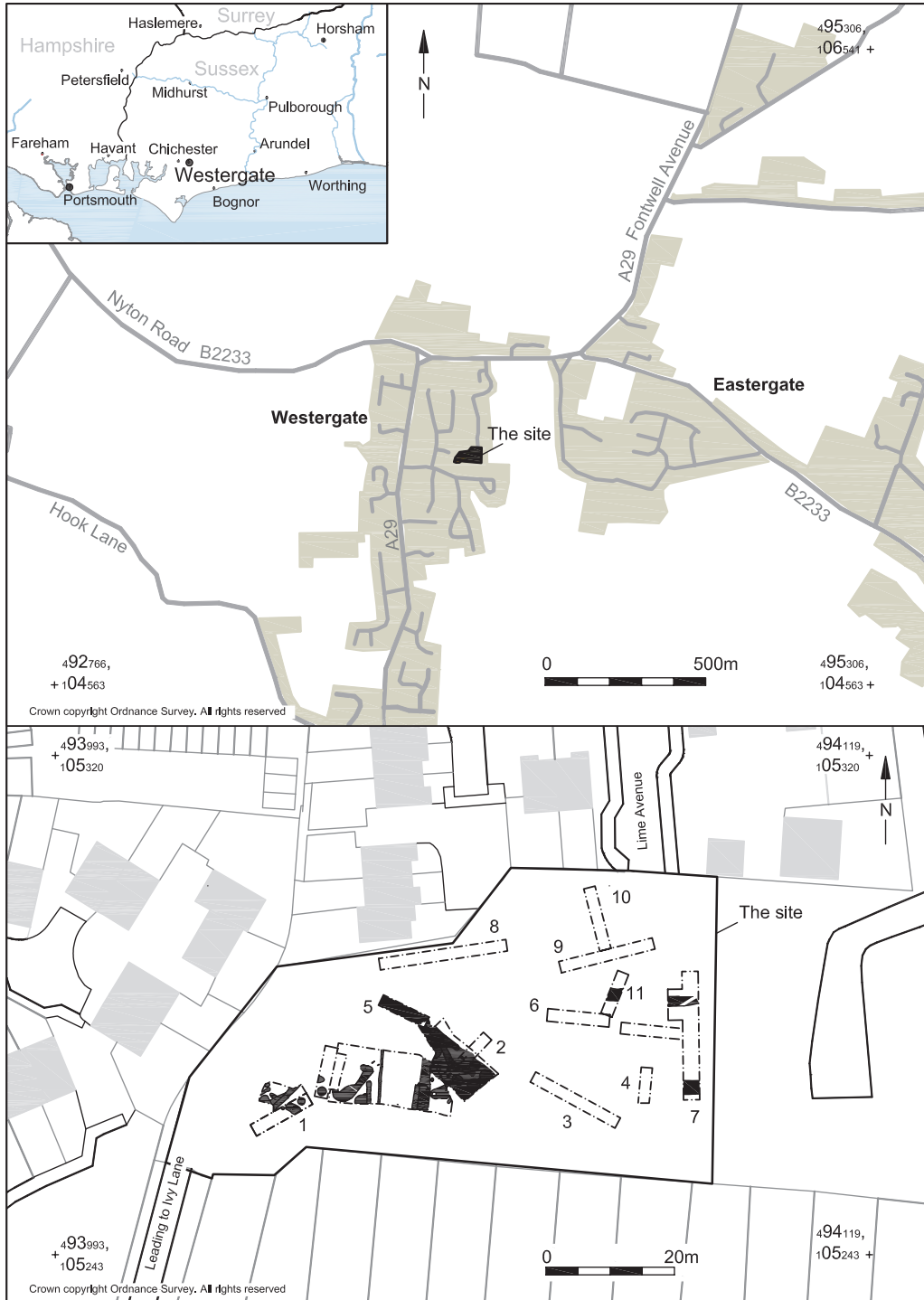


Fig. 1. Site location plan.

Westergate Woodhouse (*ibid.*). Westergate itself has no separate entry in Domesday (Martin and Williams 1992). There are also earlier references to episcopal land-holding; in AD 683, six hides of land at *Geinstedisgate* were granted by Caedwalla to Bishop Wilfrid. Barker interprets this name to mean ‘the gate to the estate’ and locates it at Westergate (Barker 1947, 62).

The place-name itself is puzzling, as it is clearly associated with the neighbouring village of Eastergate. Westergate is described as ‘western gate’ (Mawer and Stenton 1929, 64; Ekwall 1960, 508) and is listed as having been mentioned in Pipe Rolls as ‘*Westgate*’ in 1230 and as ‘*Westregate*’ in 1271 in Assize Rolls. Eastergate is described as ‘eastern gate’ and is listed as having been mentioned in the Feet of Fines as ‘*Estergat*’ in 1263 (Mawer and Stenton 1929, 140*i.*). There is little to link the two settlements which sit on either side of Westergate Common, with Eastergate forming a parish in its own right and formerly part of a larger estate including Barnham and Yapton. They lie within separate hundreds (Westergate in the hundred of Box and Stockbridge, Eastergate in the hundred of Avisford) and, from the 13th century, separate rapes, with the rapal/hundred/parish boundary running partly along a watercourse (rife), forming a physical boundary. Salzman (1953, 64) suggested that the ‘gates’ referred to entranceways, which is consistent with the usual use of the term in Sussex. Given the relative location of the two settlements, straddling a stream valley, the most likely interpretation is that they were named in relation to common meadows situated along both sides of the watercourse (some of which survived to be mapped by Yeakell and Gardner on their Great Survey of 1778).

The medieval landscape of Westergate Woodhouse is not known in any detail, but is likely to have comprised a small nucleated settlement, little more than a hamlet, along the A29 (Westergate Street). Yeakell and Gardner’s 1778 map shows a string of cottages along the road frontage, set within long narrow crofts, a characteristic medieval pattern. The settlement was probably surrounded by two or three open fields, with common pasture on the heathland to the north and further pasture and meadows along the rife forming the eastern boundary of the manor; liminal areas, such as the edge of manors and along boundaries, were often

utilised as common pasture. Occasionally, small private enclosures, held in severalty, were scattered amongst open field landscapes and although none are known for certain at Westergate, the Domesday entry for the parent manor of Aldingbourne records 16 ‘enclosures’ belonging to the manor; however, these may have related to burgages held in Chichester (Darby and Campbell 1962, 464–5). The Parliamentary Survey of 1649 recorded 340 acres of common and a few fields, which may reflect the pre-enclosure landscape (Salzman 1953), although field patterns to the north of the village and along its south-eastern margin suggest earlier piecemeal enclosure of the open arable fields, probably in the 16th and 17th centuries. There are records of the commons at Eastergate, Woodgate and Norton (the latter two in Aldingbourne parish) being enclosed before 1660, and Brandon notes that the newly enclosed fields were farmed from the original roadside settlement rather than from newly established farmsteads out in the fields (Brandon 1963, 229). The commons were formally enclosed by a private Act of Parliament in 1777 (Tate 1949), and Yeakell and Gardner’s map of the following year records this newly enclosed landscape.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESULTS

### PERIOD 1: 11TH–12TH/EARLY 13TH CENTURY (Fig. 2)

Several sub-rectangular or sub-rounded features, three lengths of gully, two ditches, an irregular shaped depression and a single smaller feature mark the earliest physical evidence for the occupation of the site. The gully and the ditch are arranged along a broadly south–west to north–east alignment which is in stark contrast to later activity.

#### Structure 1

The shallow, narrow gully at the western edge of the site may simply mark the end of some delineation which lies beyond the site boundary. However, its vaguely bulbous end and the post-hole to its immediate north suggest that several posts stood here and that these may have formed elements of a small building. The gully may therefore represent the remains of a post-trench or beam-slot for a horizontally-laid timber base plate. Little more can be said of this possible structure, as the remains lay largely beyond the limits of the excavation.

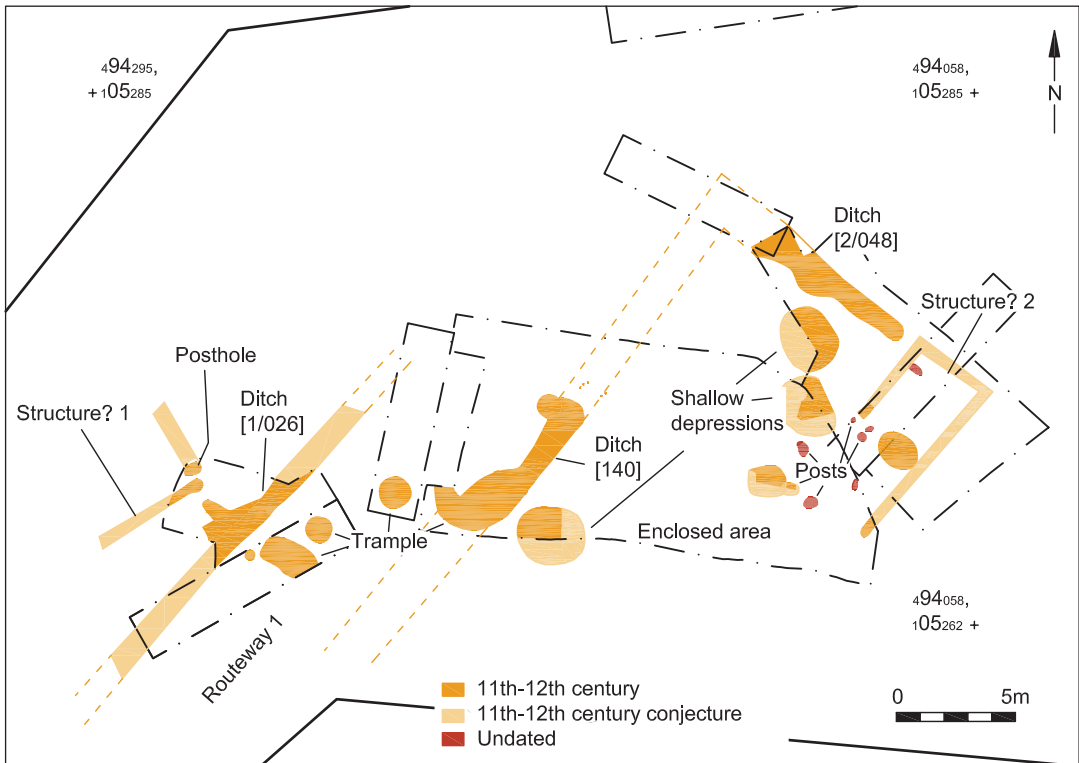


Fig. 2. Plan of excavated features, period 1.

### Routeway 1

The adjacent ditch [1/026] is virtually parallel with structure 1 and was cut with a pronounced V-shaped profile. This feature is almost certainly contemporary with structure 1, given its alignment. The ditch may have served a variety of functions such as drainage or boundary. The feature also appears to mask earlier activity to its north-west, probably an area of trampled ground, where two features of uncertain form or origin were recorded.

Another large irregular feature [140], recorded to the east, may also be the remains of a ditch; its bloated appearance and irregular shape and sides may be the result of animal trample. Its discontinuance to the north and south perhaps mark the occurrence of later truncation. It shares the same alignment as the first ditch and together the two may delineate the course of an early routeway about five metres in width and perhaps a droveway or a track. A large sub-rectangular feature and three rounded depressions that fall within this postulated routeway are all shallow and may mark further areas

of trample, much like potholes, rather than man-made features.

### Enclosed area

Alternatively, or as well as this, the irregular ditch may form the western edge of an enclosed area to the east. It may marry, beyond the northern site boundary, with another ditch [2/048] aligned north-west to south-east and recorded at the north of the excavated area, to which it is perpendicular

### Structure 2

Two short lengths of gully aligned south-west to north-east to the south of ditch [2/048] may also be post-trenches or beam-slots. Together with several post-holes in this area they could mark another possible structure similar in size and form to structure 1. Such a structure may have been about 4m by 8m long. Several other sub-rounded or sub-rectangular depressions and various other post-holes may mark the existence of further structures in the area.

**PERIOD 2: MID-13TH TO MID-14TH CENTURY** (Fig. 3)

This period is marked not only by the occurrence of slightly later dating evidence, but also by a pronounced change in the alignment of features. Land was apparently reapportioned along a system of straight-sided ditches following a new north-south orientation, with various sub-rectangular or sub-rounded features dotted across the area.

**Enclosed area**

A large ditch, aligned north-south [104], probably met a second ditch, aligned east-west, that was recorded in evaluation trenches 7 and 11 and enclosed an area to the south-east. The ditch aligned east-west may also be the continuance of a ditch recorded in an earlier evaluation to the east of the site (trench 8; AOC Archaeology 1998). The ditch aligned north-south was recut along its western edge.

**Structures and curved ditch**

To the east of the ditch [104], three shallow sub-rectangular/sub-rounded hollows were recorded (one within evaluation trench 7). A curved shallow ditch [2/025] and several post-holes may mark the position of another structure. The ditch may have served as a drainage feature around a building.

**Routeway 2**

Some 4.5m to the west of the ditch running north-south [104], a narrow gully ran exactly parallel. It may be that these two ditches delineate the course of a routeway or lane which ran north-south between two properties or areas of activity.

**Gully**

Around a metre to the west of the gully, a second short linear feature [154] was recorded. It is not clear what purpose this had – possibly to provide additional drainage to the routeway, though it could

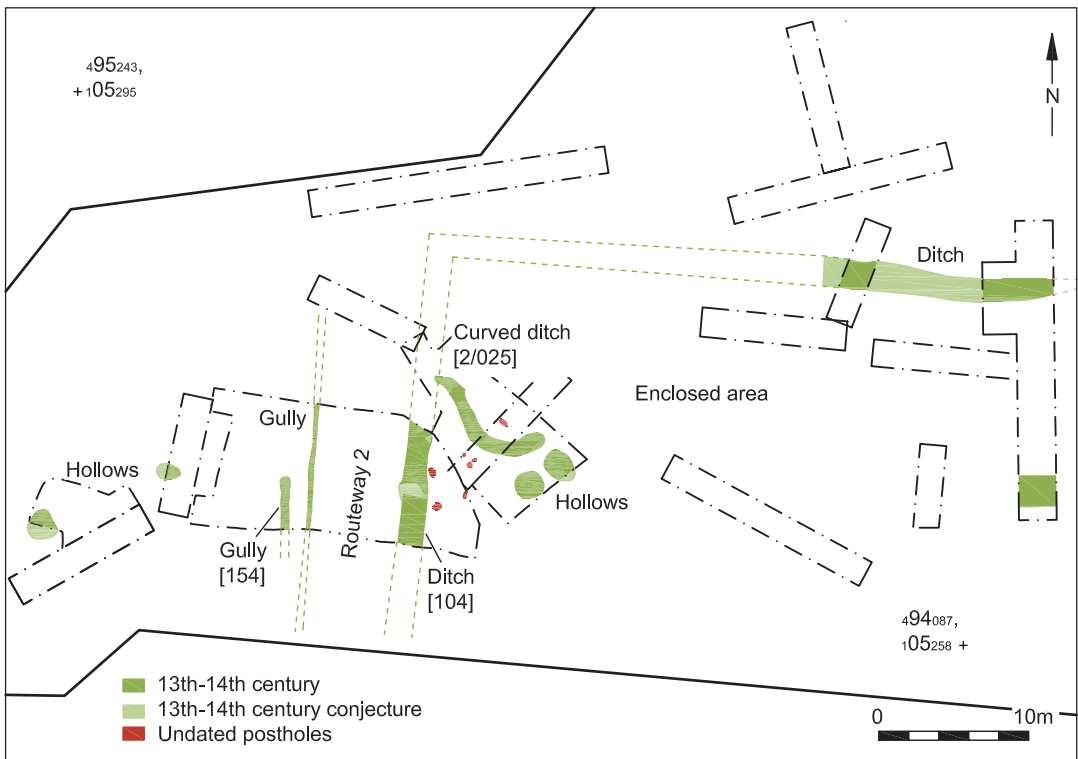


Fig. 3. Plan of excavated features, period 2.

mark the site of another building. To the west of this, two further shallow sub-rectangular/sub-rounded hollows were recorded.

## DISCUSSION

There was clearly a background of prehistoric activity at the site with most medieval features containing residual fire-cracked flint fragments and sixty-six undiagnostic worked flints ranging from mesolithic to Bronze Age date. Many of these were abraded or have edge-damage. One sherd of probable Bronze Age pottery, one Roman sherd and four, heavily abraded mid- to late-Anglo-Saxon sherds were also found residually. The medieval occupation of the site appears to be in two distinct phases, 11th to 12th and 13th to 14th centuries. A single rim sherd of a later 14th- to early 15th-century type was found which is thought to be intrusive. Additionally, some modern disturbance was noted on the site and no features were found in the east-central area as a result of truncation (in evaluation trenches 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10; see Fig. 1).

The varied shape and size of the period 1 and period 2 sub-rounded or sub-rectangular features, particularly their depth and profiles, suggest that they represent remnants of occupation rather than pitting. However, whether they result from sunken-featured buildings or some other type of structure is uncertain. The presence of various possible beam-slots and the general lack of abundant post-holes in association with these structures also make interpretation of their form difficult. These features may have marked the periphery of ephemeral wooden structures with shallow areas of trampled earth within. Occasional fragments of burnt clay, some with a smooth face suggestive of daub, were recovered from the hollows. These may be the only remnants of these putative structures.

Another issue is the question of the use of the site and of these buildings, but unfortunately few finds were found to shed light on this, and a variety of functions may be likely. No evidence of hearths or ovens was recorded at the site which, along with a lack of artefacts (apart from one square-sectioned medieval iron nail), may indicate that the structures were not for habitation. There is also a notable absence of rubbish pits at the site. A layer of debris in the eastern part of the site in the area around, but with no stratigraphic relationship to, the hollows contained a range of 11th- to 14th-century pottery

that may have been used to infill areas of poaching, or trample, in one or both periods. Possibly then, these structures may have been cowsheds or other stock enclosures.

Also to be contemplated are the possible reasons for the change in alignments of the linear features between periods 1 and 2. Whilst the origins of the period 1 alignments running south-west to north-east remain obscure, the period 2 alignments resemble the later historical field alignments, which may in turn be influenced by local topography, the north-south alignments of the rife and Westergate Street, itself aligned along a strip of lower ground running north-south.

Environmental samples were taken, and these contained charred crop and weed seeds including *Hordeum vulgare* (barley), *Triticum sp.* (wheat) and *Avena sp.* (oat) seeds as well as some pulses and several unidentified charred and mineralised weed seeds; shell and fish bones were present in small quantities. However, while these have confirmed the presence of environmental material, the botanical remains are limited and there was strong evidence for modern disturbance within the samples, as most contained uncharred modern root material.

## CONCLUSIONS

The medieval landscape of Westergate comprised a small linear settlement along a lane forming a small sub-manor of Aldingbourne; it had no church of its own, nor even a dependent chapel, possibly because of its proximity to Aldingbourne parish church, which is the church Westergate would have been subject to. It can therefore be assumed that Westergate was a very small place, although the vanished manorial centre at Woodhouse Closes, wherever that was – probably near Woodgate, where the 1st edition OS map shows an isolated barn – may have had some sort of chapel.

It was surrounded by two, probably three, open fields (to the west and south and either the north or a small one to the east) with a heathy common to the north (the former Westergate Common) and marshy wet pasture to the east along the rife. By the 17th century the fields were enclosed; the remaining commons were enclosed by the late 18th century.

Westergate, Eastergate and Woodgate should be seen as small settlements situated around the margins of the common pasture along the rife, accessed by a system of droveways and gates. Within

the settlement itself, the possibility of settlement shift is quite feasible. Alternatively, given the fact that the main street through Westergate is likely to have remained static, the structures on site may relate to outbuildings in the rear of the tenement plots, with the trackways used to access the common.

### Acknowledgements

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