

Archaeological investigations at Anchor Cottages, Eastbourne Road, Blindley Heath

STEVE PRICE

with contributions by
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Archaeological excavations comprising evaluation and a strip, map and sample investigation, were undertaken by Archaeology South-East (ASE) during June 2011 and October–December 2013 at Anchor Cottages, Eastbourne Road, Blindley Heath. The excavations revealed evidence of a Late Iron Age or Late Iron Age/Early Roman field system possibly associated with the Roman road directly to the west of the site (now the A22). Rural medieval activity and some evidence of post-medieval sawpits was also discovered.

For more information on the finds recovered from the site the reader should refer to the grey literature report (ASE 2014), which is available from ASE on request. The report will ultimately be available online through the Archaeology Data Service website and the site archive will be deposited with East Surrey Museum.

Introduction

CIRCUMSTANCES OF FIELDWORK

Archaeology South-East was commissioned by Bugler Developments to undertake a programme of archaeological excavations at Anchor Cottages, Eastbourne Road, Blindley Heath (TQ 36348 45535; fig 1) in advance of the construction of several residential units. The site consisted of two areas of land surrounding two recently demolished houses directly to the east of the A22 (Eastbourne Road), within the village of Blindley Heath. The underlying geology of the site was Weald Clay.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Evidence for activity pre-dating the Iron Age was not found on the site. The line of a probable prehistoric trackway runs approximately north–south *c* 600m to the east (MoLAS 2007). The routeway may have developed with the advent of metalworking in the Weald as part of a growing road network, and may have been a precursor to the nearby Roman road, the London–Brighton Way, that runs north–south directly to the west of the site (Margary 1965). The road was an important route that linked the iron-producing Weald with London to the north, and the grain producing areas of the South Downs (*ibid*, 93). It probably remained in use into the medieval period. There is no particular evidence of activity in this area until the Domesday survey in 1086 recorded Godstone manor as being the most valuable manor within the late Saxon administrative area of the Tandridge hundred (MoLAS 2007). The focus of activity at this time was a settlement 5.5km north of the site.

During the post-medieval period, the area seems to have been occupied by farmhouses and barns, with the site forming part of the open agricultural landscape. The Blue Anchor public house, a listed building located immediately to the south, dates from the 16th century.

Excavation results

GEOLOGY AND OVERBURDEN

Excavations in all parts of the site revealed a typical stratigraphic sequence of 0.20m–0.50m of top- and subsoil overlying Weald Clay (with the exception of the south-west of the site, which had a post-medieval pond and significant truncation) at between *c* 50m OD and

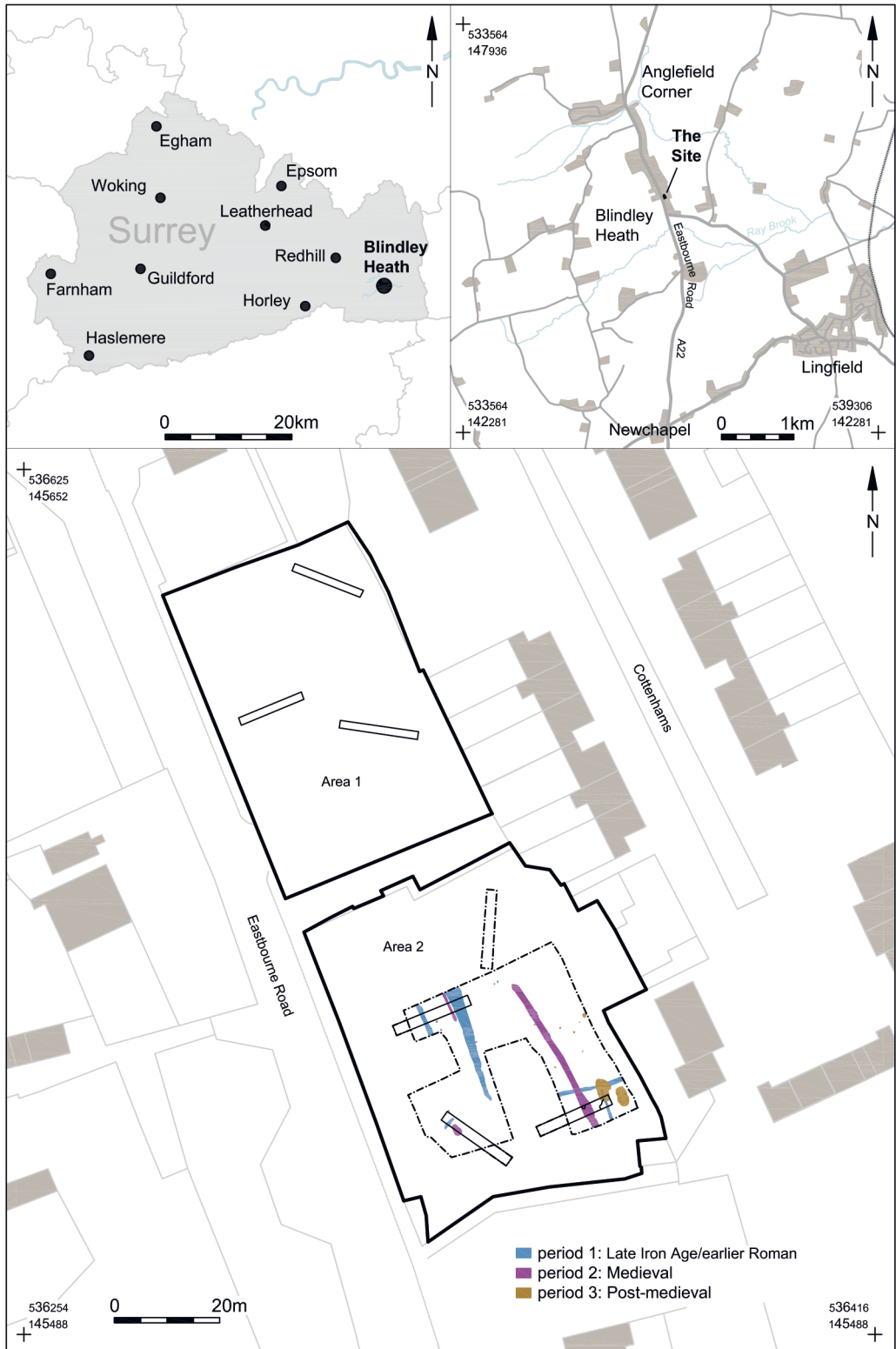


Fig 1 Blindley Heath. Site location and plan.

c 51.4m OD. The Weald Clay at the site was found to be a highly variable deposit ranging from an orangey-brown to a mid-grey colour, and consisting of areas of almost pure clay, to areas of silty clay, both of which contained abundant inclusions of ironstone and manganese.

Period 1: Late Iron Age/earlier Roman

Five linear features and two postholes were dated to this period, based on pottery and stratigraphic evidence. Two ditches, which formed part of possible routeway R1 (G1 and G2), were located in the western part of the site, both running on the same north-north-west/south-south-east alignment as the nearby Roman road. The fill of G1 consisted of yellowish-orange clay with moderate manganese inclusions. It was around 0.45m deep with a U-shaped profile. The fills of ditch G2 generally consisted of pale orange/grey clay, and the ditch exhibited a V-shaped profile. It had a maximum depth of 0.70m becoming progressively shallower to the south, perhaps the result of truncation from previous levelling work for the construction of Anchor Cottages. Therefore, its southern 'terminus' may not have been genuine. It certainly seems possible that ditch G2 may have continued and joined

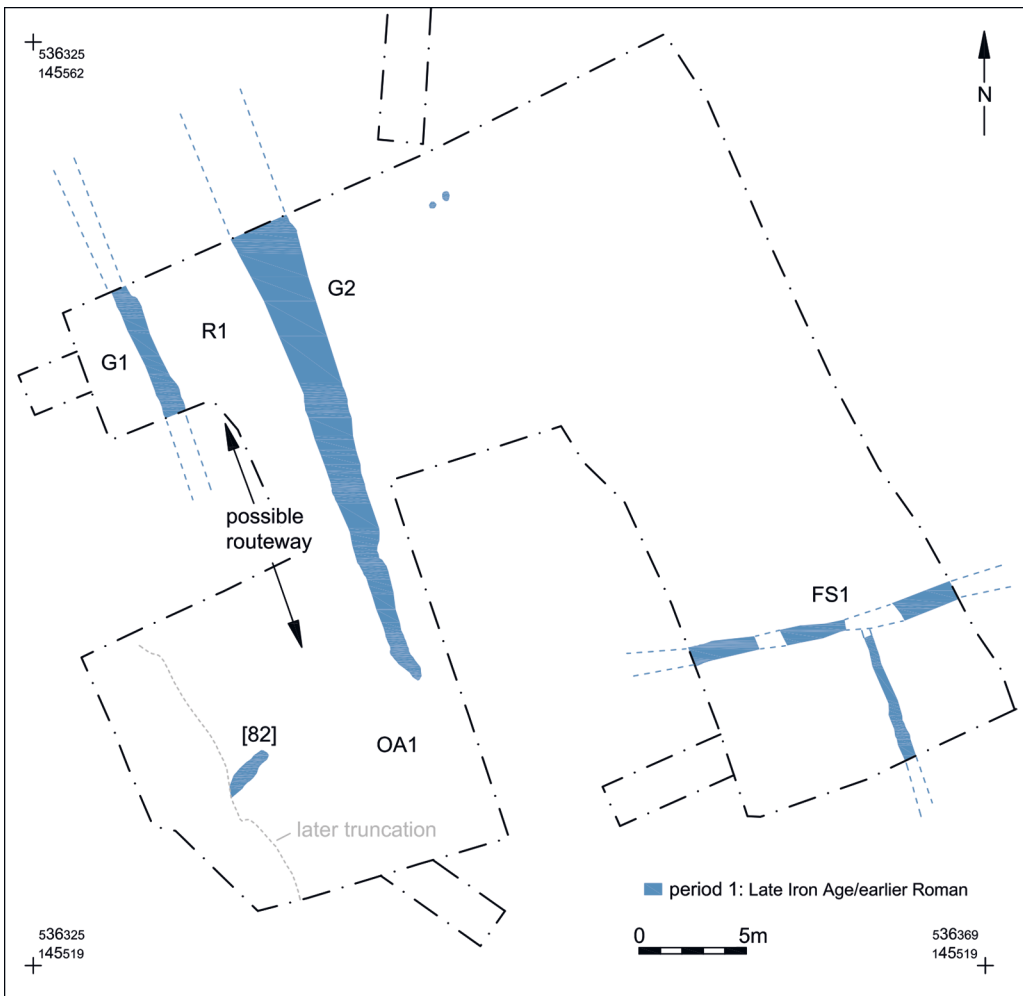


Fig 2 Blindley Heath. Plan of field system (FS1) and possible routeway (R1).

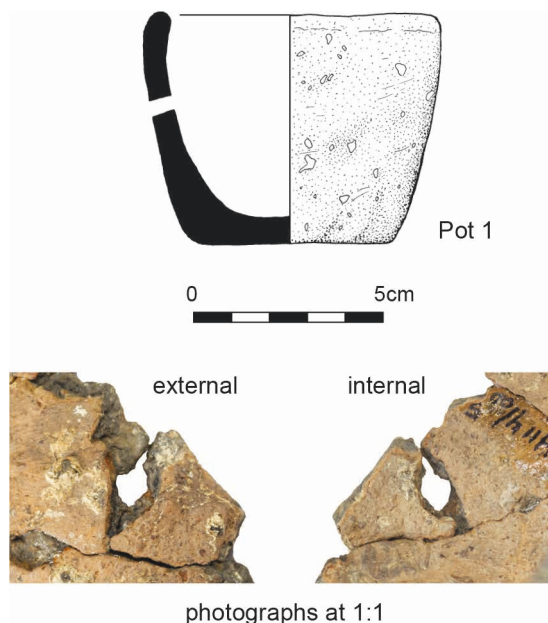


Fig 3 Blindley Heath. Illustration of perforated miniature vessel sherds recovered from ditch G1.

with the ditches in the south-eastern corner of site. It is possible, but not certain, that there might have been a routeway running between ditches G1 and G2 (marked on fig 2).

The datable material recovered from these two ditches consisted of pottery with a 50 BC–AD 50 date range, but probably pre-dating the Roman conquest (see Doherty, below). Notably this included five sherds from a miniature vessel recovered from ditch G1 (fig 3). A possibly deliberate perforation appeared to have been made to the vessel. Such perforations, as well as miniature vessels, have been found associated with placed votive deposits (see *Discussion*, below).

Two ditches located in the south-eastern corner of site formed part of FS1, running perpendicular to each other (fig 2). The relationship between these two ditches was destroyed by later post-medieval sawpit activity, although they were probably contemporary. One of these ditches ran perpendicular to ditch G2 on an east-north-east/west-south-west alignment. A single potsherd dated *c* 50 BC–AD 50 was recovered from it.

Linear [082] was recorded within an open area (OA1) in the south-western corner of the site. This was an area of substantial post-medieval truncation, and the original function of this feature is not clear. It is possible that it may have constituted the remains of a ditch, subsequently truncated by the Roman road underlying the A22. It is possible that ditch G1 may have turned to join [082], although it was noted during excavations that the eastern end of [082] appeared to have been a deliberate terminus (ASE 2014). A single potsherd dated *c* 50 BC–AD 50 was recovered from [082], together with fired clay fragments that may hint at the existence of Late Iron Age structures nearby.

Period 2: Medieval

Dating evidence recovered for this period places activity on the site at around AD 1175–1300. The features attributed to the medieval period (comprising FS2) consisted of two ditches, four postholes and a livestock watering hole.



Fig 4 Blindley Heath. Period 2 plan of excavated features.

The fills of the ditches generally consisted of mid-brownish orange clay, with moderate manganese inclusions. One of the ditches forming part of FS2 ran parallel to the earlier ditch G2 (FS1) on the same alignment. It was visible for around 6m, terminating to the south-south-east, and continuing beyond the north-west limit of excavation. Potsherds dating between AD 1175 and 1300 were recovered from the ditch. It is not clear why this ditch ran parallel with G2, and it may have been coincidental, although the potential for late prehistoric and Roman features to have had an influence on the subsequent medieval landscape of the Low Weald has been discussed elsewhere (Margetts 2018a; 2018b). A substantial ditch also recorded as part of FS2 was oriented north-west/south-east, and was found to cut an earlier ditch of FS1. Pottery was recovered dating to *c* AD 1225–1300. A quantity of ironworking slag was recovered from both medieval ditches.

A large pottery assemblage was recovered from a pit identified as the livestock watering hole [070], which was dated *c* AD 1200–1300; 56 sherds came from the weathered base of an early Limpsfield-type storage jar. The upper fill of the watering hole also contained slag, possibly residual material from the Late Iron Age/early Roman period (see the slag report, below). The lower fill consisted of firmly compacted, pale greyish-orange clay.

Period 3: Post-medieval

The features attributed to this period appeared to exist within an open area (OA2). They consisted of pits identified as sawpits and postholes that may be remnants of associated structures. The two large pits (fig 5) encountered in the south-east corner of the site were of a similar size. The lower fills of these pits consisted of orange/grey clay. The upper fills contained more silt, and were a darker brown colour. Remains of planks of wood were present in the base of OA2 [035]. The wood was identified in post-excavation analysis as oak. It was uncertain whether the planks had originally been part of a floor in the base of the pit, or had been used as part of a trestle table or some other upstanding structure on which wood could be sawn.

A group of postholes and also a pit were located north-east of the two possible sawpits (fig 5). The pit [088] contained ceramic building material fragments (including a fragment of a roof tile) dated to the 18th–19th century. The postholes may originally have been part of a shelter or storage area for wood prior to being worked. Wheelwrights' shops are also known to have been associated with sawpits (Graham & Graham 2008, 347).

Specialist reports

PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN POTTERY, by Anna Doherty

A small assemblage of Late Iron Age pottery was recovered from five contexts during the excavation. The limited range of forms is dominated by hand-made jars. The grog-tempered examples are associated with plain rim forms comparable with Thompson (1982) C3 types, while one quartz-rich fabric is associated with a crudely made jar with a slight neck/shoulder. The presence of quartz-rich and glauconitic wares probably gives a good indication that the assemblage pre-dates the Roman conquest. For example, in large-scale excavations at Horley, these fabric types were rare in groups dating to the 1st century AD, including those likely to be of pre-Conquest date (Doherty in prep).

Of particular note is a miniature version of a C3 jar (just 70mm in diameter and 60mm in height), found within a fill of ditch GP1 (fig 3). The five sherds present represent just under half of the complete vessel. It appears that there may have been a deliberate post-firing perforation to the vessel wall. This is located at the join of two broken, cross-fitting sherds that have damaged surfaces, so it is possible that the hole was made accidentally; however, it appears quite circular in form, suggesting that the perforation may have been drilled.

MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL POTTERY, by Luke Barber

The excavations produced 128 sherds of post-Roman pottery, weighing 2396g, from eleven individually numbered contexts. An estimated 21 different vessels are represented. The medieval activity sits astride the early and high medieval periods and represents one, relatively short-lived, episode of activity between *c* 1175/1200 and 1275/1300. Of these sherds 83 were allocated to the high medieval period, although 56 belonged to the weathered base of an early Limpsfield-type storage jar from fill [071] of the watering hole [070]. This vessel may well have been permanently set in the ground to hold water, a common feature on medieval sites and the wear on the current vessel would be in keeping with this.

The late post-medieval assemblage comprises three large fresh sherds recovered from pit [035]. These were from a single glazed red earthenware jar of mid-18th to mid-19th century date.

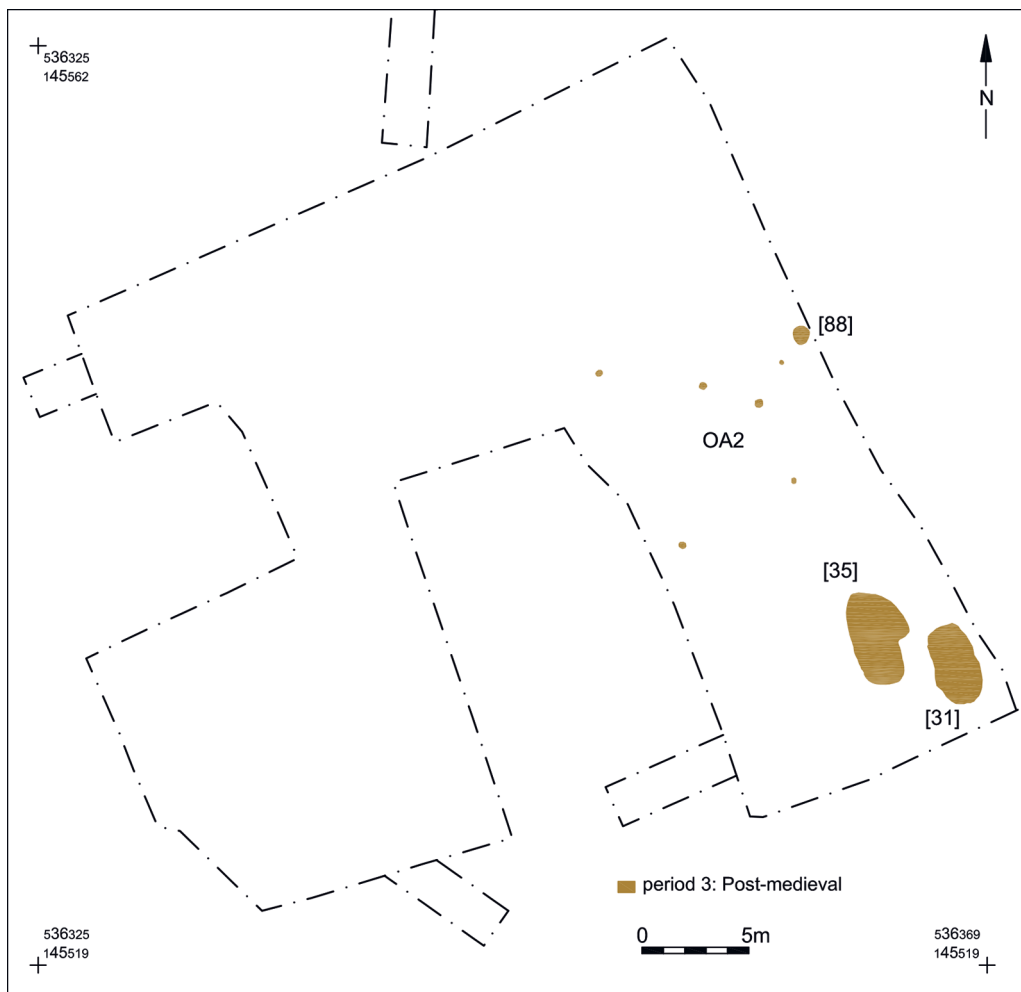


Fig 5 Blindley Heath. Period 3 plan of excavated features.

THE SLAG, by Luke Barber

The excavations recovered 339 pieces of hand-collected slag, weighing 36,330g, from twenty individually numbered contexts. In addition, the environmental residues from seven different samples produced a further 2509g of material initially classified as industrial residues. The assemblage has been fully listed by context and type on metallurgical pro forma sheets, which are housed with the archive. Hand-collected material was quantified by count and weight while, owing to the tiny fragment size, material from the residues was quantified by weight only. The information from the archive sheets was also used to create an Excel spreadsheet as part of the digital archive. The assemblage is summarised in table 1 using the final site phasing.

Period 1: Late Iron Age to early Roman

The material dated to this period is dominated by grey aerated slag, sometimes with solidified molten surfaces, which is not diagnostic of process. However, although iron smithing cannot be ruled out, it is thought the material is more likely to represent iron smelting (bloomery) waste. This suggestion is strengthened by the presence of a little definite smelting slag that is either notably dense (6/1008g) or has distinctive surface flow (tap slag 6/716g). Although most of the material shows some signs of weathering, it is usually not extensive. A study of the distribution of the Period 1 slag shows it to be widespread, appearing in most contexts of this date (the notable exception being the G2 ditch) with no significant concentrations. The high level of burnt stone and clay granules (magnetic fines in table 1) would be in keeping with the presence of a nearby furnace.

Period 2: Medieval

The slag assemblage from this period is more ambiguous to interpret. The majority of the assemblage consists of types very similar, both morphologically and proportionally, to those noted in Period 1 (table 1). However, on the whole this material, particularly the tap slag, is notably weathered/worn in comparison with the Period 1 assemblage suggesting all, or much of, the Period 2 smelting assemblage could be residual. It is equally widespread across the excavated area with no particular concentrations. However, there are a few types in Period 2 not noted before – the lightweight ‘cinder’, a tiny bit of probable smithing slag and a small amount of hammerscale. All these may derive from some low-level iron smithing activity during the medieval period, together with an uncertain proportion of the undiagnostic iron

Table 1 Characterisation of slag assemblage. NB: Chronological divisions are based on associated datable finds

Period	LIA/ERB (1)	Medieval (2)	Post-medieval (3)
No of contexts	8	13	3
Undiagnostic iron	76/5693g	159/14,212g	21/6433g
Cinder	–	31/794g	16g
Iron smelting (tap)	6/716g	6/556g	1/12g
Iron smelting (general)	6/1008g	31/5295g	2/2799g
Iron smithing	–	11g	–
Iron smith hammerscale	–	5g	2g
Magnetic fines	1253g	5g	–
Iron concretion	29g	–	–

slag. The negligible quantities make interpretation difficult – they could derive from some primary smithing immediately after smelting or secondary smithing during the creation of objects. In either event the working area is likely to have been a short distance from the excavated area.

Period 3: Post-medieval

Although features of this period produced a notable quantity of slag (table 1) it is probably all residual from Period 1 and 2 activity. The vast majority is very worn and its presence demonstrates the degree of residual slag across the excavated area, aptly highlighting the potential for residual material in Period 2 deposits.

Discussion

The excavations at Blindley Heath uncovered evidence of Late Iron Age/early Roman, medieval and post-medieval activity. The earliest features on site probably pre-dated the Roman conquest but have a date range of *c.* 50 BC–AD 50 based on the associated pottery. They appear to form part of a field system that may have had an association with the Roman road (now underlying the A22), which ran directly west of the site. A probable prehistoric trackway is known to lie approximately 600m away. The date of this appears to be uncertain, and it is not known whether any earlier trackway existed at Blindley Heath along the route of the London–Brighton Way and later became romanised.

It is possible that ditches G1 and G2 may have formed the eastern and western edges of an earlier routeway, although if this were the case it would probably have led between fields rather than being a long-distance track (fig 2). Margary (1965, 95–6) mentioned that to the south of Blindley Heath and also through Godstone village ‘It is possible that an existing trackway [...] was here followed and Romanised’. Other earlier trackways preceding the Roman road are noted along other parts of the London–Brighton Way (eg Margary 1967, 62), although there does not appear to be any certain dating for these predecessors.

The quantity of slag recovered assigned to Period 1 seems likely to represent waste associated with iron smelting. This suggests the presence of a furnace nearby, although no evidence of this was found on the site. Most of the Period 1 slag was recovered from ditch fills of G1 (ASE 2014), suggesting that the ditch was associated with ironworking activity, and perhaps not part of an agricultural field system at all. Further work in the vicinity would be needed to confirm whether the early evidence represents a series of enclosures directly related to ironworking or an area close to ironworking within a wider settlement and associated agricultural landscape. The waste slag also has the potential to have been utilised as part of a metallised surface whether that be a contemporary local routeway or the nearby Roman road.

Finds recovered from FS1 included a perforated clay vessel from ditch G1, dated to the Late Iron Age/early Roman period. There are various suggestions as to why the deliberate perforation of clay vessels after firing may have occurred. It may indicate evidence of repair to the vessel. The sherds from ditch G1 were all found together, and although not certain, it is possible that they were part of a ritual deposition. The deposition of perforated vessels is known to begin in the Late Iron Age and continues through the Roman period and into the 5th century AD (Fulford & Timby 2001, 294). Examples have been recovered from the excavations at Silchester, deposited in pits and wells, and one vessel found with a cremation (*ibid.*). Unperforated miniature vessels in votive contexts have also been recovered from Frensham Common, Surrey (Graham & Graham 2009) and a temple site at Uley in Gloucestershire (Woodward & Leach 1993). The vessels from the latter site are of a later date, appearing in contexts dated from the beginning of the 2nd century AD.

The possible votive deposition in wells of such vessels at Silchester may suggest that they were deposited at the base of such features, and the pierced holes would prevent them from

floating to the surface while the wells were in use (Fulford & Timby 2001, 293, 295). A further possibility is that the perforated holes were to allow the draining of liquids as a filtering process (*ibid.*, 295), suggesting they would have been used for a purpose prior to their deposition as votive objects. It is not clear whether the sherds of the perforated vessel recovered from the Blindley Heath excavations were from a structured/votive deposit, although this possibility cannot be discounted.

The medieval features recorded appeared to have been in use from *c*AD 1175/1200 to 1275/1300. The finds recovered largely represented domestic waste, suggestive of some small-scale settlement activity close to the site for a short time during the 13th century. The watering hole [070] suggests livestock may have been kept on the site. A small amount of fired clay was recovered from the watering hole, which was most likely representative of structural daub. This suggests that there may have been buildings and occupation activity nearby. The slag recovered from the medieval features showed signs of weathering suggesting the majority of this was residual. A small amount of the slag may have been indicative of low-level smithing, although not within the excavation area itself.

The pottery dating suggests that activity during the medieval period may have been short-lived with a distinct lack of activity after AD 1350, possibly due to the Black Death, when the settlement may have been deserted. The medieval ditches may represent remnants of a field system close to a settlement or perhaps property boundaries relating to a precursor of the 16th century Blue Anchor public house. This evidence comprises the first such activity to be found at Blindley Heath.

The post-medieval remains consisted of features that have been identified as possible sawpits. The wood recovered from pit OA2 [035] may have originally served as a floor surface for the pit, or as part of a trestle table for sawing wood, which had subsequently collapsed when the pit was filled in. It must be stated that the wooden remains recovered from pit OA2 [035] do not conclusively prove that the two large pits functioned as saw pits. It is also possible that they may have been used more as refuse pits in the final phase of use as they were deliberately backfilled. Sawpits are not often found on clay soils, as the ground is often waterlogged for much of the year (Bannister 2003).

An example similar to those pits found at Blindley Heath was excavated at Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex. The dimensions, profile and shape in plan of this pit were similar to the pits within OA2 at Blindley Heath, and it was tentatively dated based on a fragment of a clay tobacco pipe *c* AD 1660–1720 (Margetts 2018a, 220). Another example of a post-medieval sawpit, which may have had its origins in the medieval period, is known from archaeological investigations carried out at Farnham Cricket Club grounds (Graham & Graham 2008). That pit, however, had walls constructed from reused medieval masonry, repaired in places and capped with brick dated towards the end of the 17th or 18th century. The floor was constructed of stone cobbles. It was noted that the construction of this pit was much more impressive than is usually the case with such installations (*ibid.*, 350). It does not, therefore, serve as a particularly useful parallel; the sawpit excavated at Broadbridge Heath forms a better comparison, and it is also closer to the site than the one at Farnham.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ASE would like to thank Buglar Developments Ltd for commissioning the work and for their assistance throughout the project, and Surrey County Council Archaeologist Gary Jackson for his guidance and monitoring. The excavation was directed by Gary Webster with Rachel Cruse providing secondary supervisory cover. The illustrations for this report were completed by Fiona Griffin.

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