

# Reports on sites investigated by the Waverley Archaeological Unit in Farnham, Surrey

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*Much of the redevelopment within the conservation areas of small medieval towns such as Farnham is usually small-scale and in consequence any observations, such as those reported here, are bound to be extremely limited. However, a clearer picture is now beginning to emerge of Farnham's medieval and early post-medieval development. Such investigations, combined with the evidence from documentary sources, standing buildings and field survey work, can be used to understand the origins, growth and development of the town in relation to its economic base. Owing to the nature of the investigations, there were few opportunities to record sections of the sites examined.*

*It must be stressed that the objective here is merely to describe and interpret the stratigraphic sequences of a number of sites and in the light of these investigations suggest directions for archaeological research in relation to future redevelopment within the various areas of the town centre. A brief history of Farnham has been presented by O'Connell (1977, 19–23). Sites observed by the Waverley Archaeological Unit and other associated investigations are shown in fig 1. This map is not intended to show all investigations carried out in the town centre. Reports of sites not noted here are published in the Farnham and District Museum Society Newsletter.*

## **75 Castle Street (fig 1, Site no 1)**

In an area measuring 8.0m×8.5m a series of deposits was examined in the sections of the construction trenches for the extension to Lloyds Bank. A complex of medieval backland activity was expected relating to properties that fronted on to The Borough.

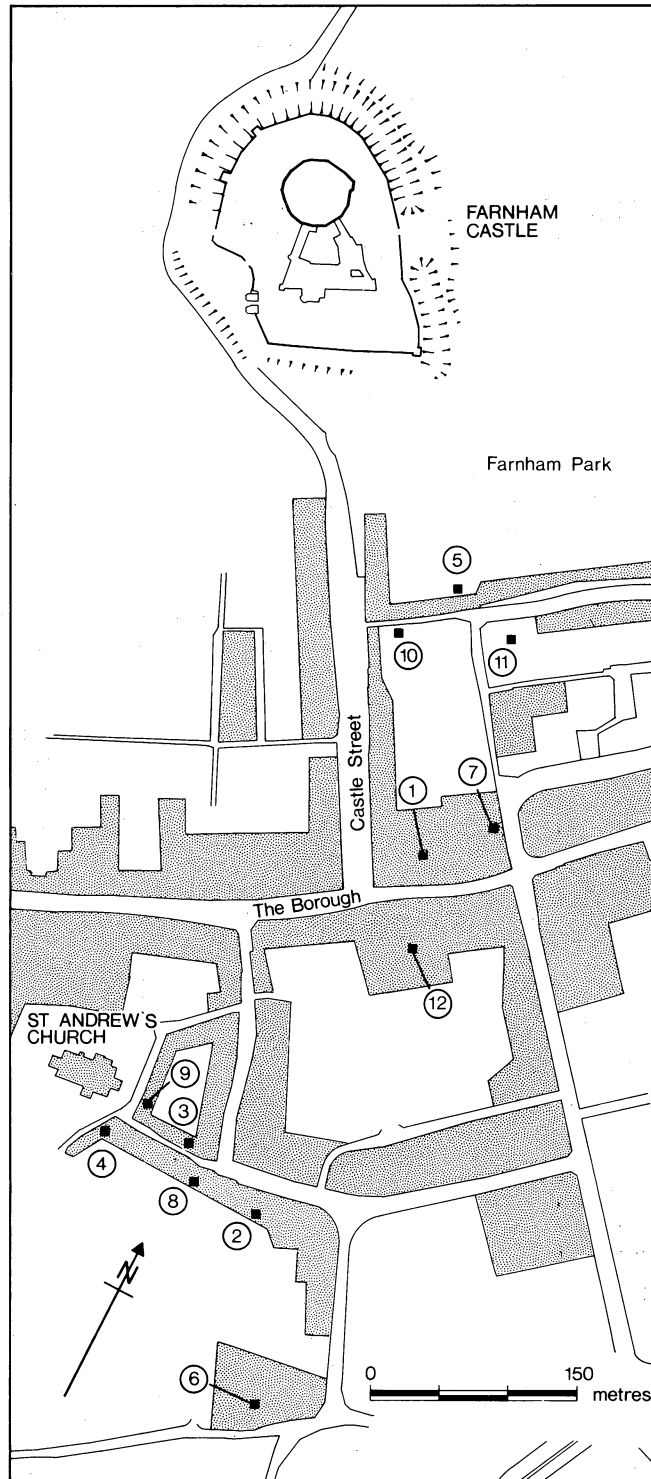
The trenching by the contractors was extensive and averaged 1.50m from the present-day ground level. In the course of trenching operations two pits belonging to the first period of activity on the site (see below) were excavated by the contractors. The pits cut into a layer of coarse sand, overlain by a layer of gravel. Both were natural deposits. The gravel was in turn sealed by a 0.30m thick layer of mid-yellow/brown silty clay loam, containing occasional water-worn and small flint nodules. This layer is interpreted as the natural Gault Clay and appeared in all trenches, except where it was cut by the two pits.

Three major periods of activity on the site were recognised. At a depth of 1.10m from the present ground surface, the Gault Clay was sealed by an extensive and mixed deposit containing pebbles, peg tile fragments and charcoal flecks. This general accumulation was on average 0.60m thick and is interpreted as a horticultural soil. This deposit represents the first period of activity on the site. Dating the beginnings of this activity is difficult because of the lack of pottery. A few sherds of Coarse Border Ware were recovered from this deposit, suggesting a 14th-century or later date for the accumulation. It was difficult, given the mixed nature of the deposit, to tell precisely from where the two pits mentioned above were cut. Both contained a number of mixed deposits, similar in many respects to the deposits through which the pits were dug. One pit also contained the articulated skeleton of a dog. No other finds were recovered, but it is clear on stratigraphic grounds that both pits belong to the initial period of activity on the site.

Deposits relating to period 1 were in turn sealed by 0.40m thick crushed chalk and brick dump, for what appears to be a yard surface – period 2. Pottery from the top of the horticultural soil and within the dump is dated to the 18th century. A series of brick drains also belongs to this phase.

The surface and drains were subsequently overlain by a 0.30m thick loamy deposit (period 3) from the orchard, which occupied the site prior to the present building works.

As the site produced very little evidence of medieval backland activity the excavation programme was abandoned. The reasons for this relatively vacant area in the heart of the medieval town are far from clear. It may be that the main complex of medieval backland activity relating to properties on the northern side of The Borough is further south towards the street frontage. It is



also possible that in the medieval period, the site at 75 Castle Street related more to properties on Castle Street than on The Borough, as indeed it does today. If this hypothesis is correct, then it is not surprising that so little evidence for medieval occupation was found in this area. The area east of the bank extension remains as an orchard and as such provides an opportunity for these hypotheses to be tested.

As the small-scale excavation at the back of 20–21 The Borough (fig 1, Site no 7; Graham 1979b) produced very little in the way of medieval activity it is presumed that this site was outside the town ditch referred to in the Winchester Pipe Rolls (*ibid*). It therefore seems likely that the ditch runs through the area that remains as an orchard. Excavation of this area when an opportunity arises is therefore a high priority.

## 2 Downing Street (fig 1, Site no 2)

Investigation of the backland area was restricted to recording sections of the construction trenches for the extension at the back of the property. One section was examined in detail, located immediately at the back of the building that fronts on to Downing Street. This building is dated c1830 but with a pre-1550 construction behind (O'Connell 1977, 21, fig 10). In section, the 19th-century building had removed all trace of the pre-1550 structure. However, an interesting sequence of deposits representing five distinct periods of activity was observed.

According to the contractors, natural gravels lie approximately 1.60m from the present day ground surface. This could not be confirmed in section as concrete footings had already been inserted.

The earliest deposit to be observed was a gravel layer containing a mid-grey sandy loam, at least 0.20m thick (period 1). This deposit is indicative of an external surface, but whether it represents a courtyard, roadway or path, could not be ascertained. No finds were recovered from this deposit. The surface was sealed by a 0.50m thick layer of mid-brown/grey sandy loam containing pebbles and occasional peg tile fragments (period 2). This layer would appear to be a horticultural soil. Although a number of sherds was recovered, dating is still difficult. Wares range in date from 12th/13th century to the 16th century.

The use of this area changed again in period 3 when an external surface was laid down over the horticultural soil. The surface was composed mainly of mortar with green sandstone, chalk and brick fragments. No pottery was found within this deposit. Sealing the surface was a series of soil deposits with lenses of ash, charcoal, chalk and mortar (period 4). This accumulation averaged 0.40m in thickness and contained 18th to 19th-century fragments of machine-made bricks. This general deposit was then cut by the construction trenches for the 1830 building, which was in turn sealed by make-up for a concrete floor. All these later building works are attributed to period 5.

Every opportunity should be taken to establish the sequence and nature of medieval occupation in this part of the town.

## 6 Lower Church Lane (fig 1, Site no 3)

During renovation of this early to mid-19th-century property, the floor and make-up deposits of the front room were removed to a depth of approximately 0.30m. All deposits appeared to date from the construction of the present cottage. The dividing wall of Nos 6 and 7 was founded on irregular clunch blocks, interspersed with brick fragments and bonded by a yellow sand mortar. As

Fig 1. Archaeological investigations in Farnham: sites mentioned in text. 1: 75 Castle Street; 2: 2 Downing Street; 3: 6 Lower Church Lane; 4: 7 Vicarage Lane; 5: 15 Park Row; 6: The Maltings; 7: 20–21 The Borough; 8: Wagon Yard; 9: 13–16 Middle Church Lane; 10: Almshouses, Park Row; 11: Bowling Green, Bear Lane; 12: Borelli Yard. (Based upon the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown copyright reserved. Drawn by M Cook)

the foundations for all the other walls were brick-built, it would appear that the clunch and brick wall is earlier, dated by these construction materials to between the 16th and 18th centuries. It is not possible without related stratigraphy to give a more exact date for this wall. Excavations in Wagon Yard on the opposite side of Lower Church Lane (fig 1, Site no 8; Dormer 1966) suggest that the initial settlement in this part of the town was post-15th-century.

### **7 Vicarage Lane** (fig 1, Site no 4)

During trenching operations in the back yard extending 4m from the back of this early 19th-century property which faces on to Vicarage Lane, a series of deposits was revealed. A naturally deposited mid-grey/yellow coarse sand existed approximately 1.30m below the present ground surface. This was overlain by an approximately 0.20m thick layer of mid-yellow/brown sandy clay containing occasional flint pebbles: the Gault Clay. At a depth of some 1.10m from the present ground surface, the Gault Clay was sealed by a homogeneous layer of sandy clay loam containing occasional pebbles, peg tile, clunch fragments, oyster shells and flecks of charcoal (period 1). This layer was on average 0.90m thick and was sealed by the concrete yard (period 2). The character and thickness of the deposit suggest that it represents an accumulation of horticultural soils continuously worked until very recent times. Dating this accumulation was not possible as only a few sherds of post-medieval pottery were found in this layer.

The lack of medieval features on this site is comparable to the area excavated to the north in Middle Church Lane (fig 1, Site no 9; Graham 1979a) and Wagon Yard (fig 1, Site no 8; Dormer 1966), where the first buildings date to the 16th century. Graham suggests that the settlement of this area of the town, east of St Andrew's church, first began at this time (1979a, 98). The evidence at 7 Vicarage Lane does not alter this view, although on present evidence it looks likely that the area immediately to the south of Middle Church Lane was not extensively settled until a much later date. Any further redevelopment and renovation work involving groundworks from St Andrew's church to Downing Street should be observed, so that the late medieval and early post-medieval development of this part of the town can be more closely understood.

### **15 Park Row** (fig 1, Site no 5)

Excavation of trenches for an extension at the back of this late 18th-century property presented an opportunity to assess the archaeological potential of this area. Excavations on the opposite side of Park Row (fig 1, Site no 10; Cole 1982) and in Bear Lane (fig 1, Site no 11) revealed a number of pottery kilns dating from the 13th to 14th centuries to the post-medieval period.

At 1.30m from the present ground surface Gault Clay existed (mid-brown/yellow sandy clay). Cutting into this layer was a series of rubbish pits (period 1), one of which contained a mass of broken, mould-produced bricks, dating from the 16th to the mid-18th century. The bricks were all overfired, being highly vitrified and well glazed. As a group they would appear to be kiln wasters. There was no trace of the kiln in section, hence it is not possible to ascertain whether they were produced in the immediate vicinity of the dump. Brick fragments found in some of the other pits suggest that they were of a similar date. No evidence of medieval occupation could be positively identified. The pits were all sealed by a 1.30m layer of garden soil (period 2), in use to the present day.

Every opportunity should be sought to examine this area of the town further, the principal objective being to provide a clearer picture of the ceramic industry and to assess more fully the industry's economic bearing on the town's development. It is important to stress the widespread nature of ceramic production in Farnham in the medieval period, eg the Borelli Yard tile kiln (fig 1, Site no 12; Riall 1986a; 1986b) and Farnham Park (Graham 1982, 121; Reid 1987).

### **The Maltings** (fig 1, Site no 6)

Prior to levelling an area at the back of the existing garden at 3 Red Lion Lane, a small trench was dug to determine the depth and complexity of medieval backland activity in that area.

A core taken during the excavation suggested that natural sands existed some 1.40m below the level of the Maltings car park. Above the natural sand was a series of sandy clay deposits, identified from the core (period 1). Overlying these deposits was a 0.15m thick layer of mortar with plaster facing, peg tile and clunch fragments (period 2). This layer also contained limestone flakes from stone-working. Sealing the building dump was a mid-grey/green mottled loam, containing pebbles, peg tile fragments, charcoal flecks and remains of oyster and cockle shells (period 3). This 0.35m thick layer is interpreted as a horticultural soil, which is dated on the basis of the pottery to the 17th century. Residual material includes pottery of a 14th- to 16th-century date and prehistoric flintwork.

Period 4 is represented by a dump of sand and gravel, averaging 0.20m in thickness, which would appear to be make-up for an external surface above. These deposits are of a 19th-century date, as are the horticultural soil and waterpipe trench above, which were in turn sealed by the ironstone floor of a modern outbuilding.

Again the potential for medieval backland activity is clearly demonstrated by this investigation. Opportunities should be sought to examine the earlier occupation in this area more closely.

*All photographs, measured drawings and finds retained from these investigations have been deposited in Farnham Museum.*

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