

Excavations and Building Recording at 196 High Street, Guildford

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During April 1983 extensive interior refurbishments at 196 High Street, currently 'Pandora', revealed timber framing and part of a later 15th century crown post roof (figs 2, 3). In addition a scatter of late 13th and early 14th century Surrey White ware vessels and a rubbish pit containing pottery dating from the early 13th century were found approximately eight to nine metres back from the present street frontage. The building was recorded over a number of days by Matthew Alexander, with the help of the Guildford Group and John Baker. Julia Arthur of Guildford Museum and Rob Poulton of the County Archaeological Unit spent one afternoon digging out the pits.

The Building at 196 High Street (fig 1)

Significant parts of two late medieval terraced houses, each one bay wide, survive within the later fabric. Timbers survive to ground level, and clearly demonstrate a first floor jettied over the street frontage (fig 3). It is the crown post roof construction, however, which gives dating evidence. This type of construction is characteristic of the later Middle Ages in Surrey, and consists of a short, vertical post - the crown post - standing on the centre of the tie beam and supporting a central purlin which runs the length of the roof. This purlin in turn supports the collars (like the cross-stroke in a letter A) which connect the pairs of rafters. This structure is largely complete in the western bay, but the purlin and the diagonal brace to it from the crown post are missing to the east. However, the mortice slot is clear evidence of its former position (fig 2). Later work has destroyed the crown posts at both the east and west ends of the roof.

There is soot deposited over the whole of the original roof structure, but it is demonstrably thicker at either end. This is to be expected in an open-hall house of this date with a fire set towards one end of the hall. However, the jettying on the street frontage is clear evidence that there was an upper floor from the first build. We must therefore conclude that the upper floor covered only the front half of the building, the rear section being left open to the roof with a fireplace towards one end. A very similar arrangement can be seen in the row of 15th century Abbey Cottages, Church Street, Tewkesbury, which bears many similarities to the 'Pandora' building (Cornforth 1972).

The partition between the two bays was continued up to the level of the collar and seems to have been left open above. Smoke could therefore percolate from one bay to another. It may be that a smoke outlet or louvre - perhaps of pottery - was situated above the partition in the ridge of the roof and was thus shared by a pair of houses.

There is no positive evidence that these two units were part of a longer terrace as at Tewkesbury, but it is certainly a possibility. Again, taking the Tewkesbury cottages as a parallel, we might expect there also to have been a range of lean-tos against the rear wall (fig 3).

The Rubbish Pit (figs 4-7)

Numerous sherds of pottery were recovered by workmen whilst removing a concrete floor and reducing the floor level. By the time Museum staff arrived at the site, most of the floor reduction had been completed except for a small area in the south-east corner of the trench. Over a rectangular area of 2.5m x 2.35m the workmen had dug up numerous

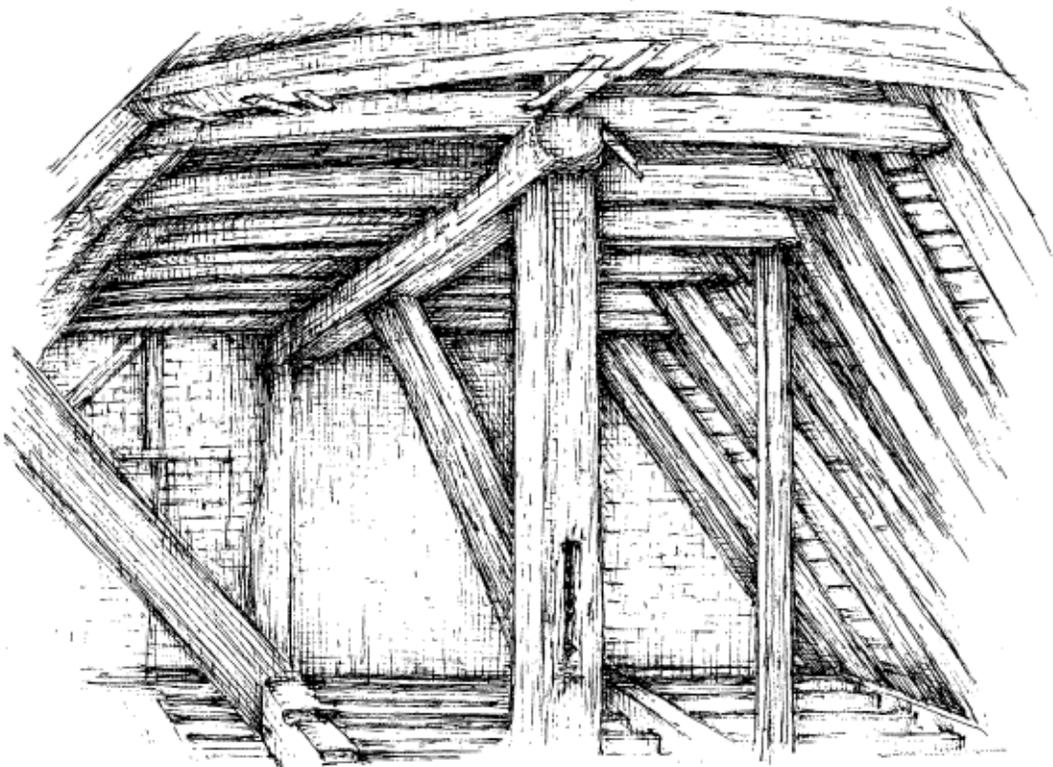


Fig 2. 196 High Street, Guildford. Roof timbers (E M Butts)

medieval sherds, including a nearly complete Surrey White ware barrel-shaped jug (fig 6, no 28) and a 15th century stone mortar of Surrey Malmstone (fig 7, Microfiche 4). The small undisturbed area in the south-east corner showed in the section as a dark brown humic fill packed with pottery (fig 4). Because of restrictions in time and space for working, the pottery and pit fill were burrowed out from the side. Once the limit of the workmen's trench had been reached, the excavation was abandoned even though more sherds were evident in the sides of the section. The sections were cleaned down to reveal a clearer outline of the pit and its relationship to the surrounding features (fig 4). The medieval pit had been truncated by post-medieval disturbance and cut by a post-medieval pit. The gap in the section is where the workmen had created a substantial hole.

The Finds

The finds and the site archive are housed at Guildford Museum.

POTTERY (figs 5, 6)

Introduction

163 sherds of pottery were found: ten Surrey White ware, 149 unglazed sand-tempered ware (West Surrey ware) and four sherds of Saxo-Norman pottery. A minimum of 35 different vessels was identified, including twelve different rims. The catalogue of the pottery is on Microfiche 2-4.

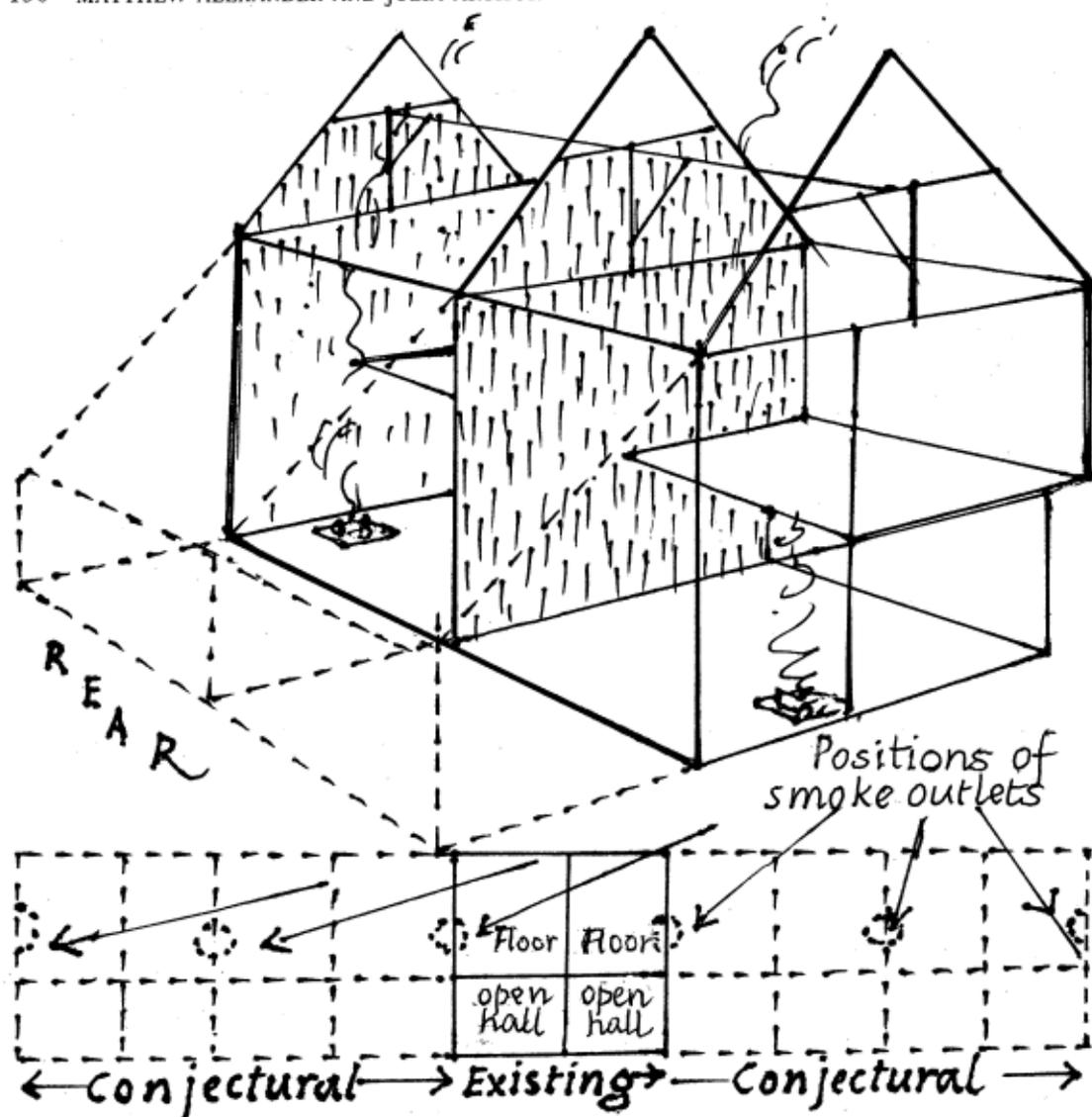


Fig 3. 196 High Street, Guildford. Conjectural arrangement of buildings (E M Butts)

Fabric types

1. From the pit

With the possible exception of the five jug sherds (nos 3, 4, 5 and 26), and one Saxo-Norman chalk-tempered sherd (no 27), all the vessels are of one type of ware characterised by quartz sand tempering with sparse inclusions of iron compound materials. The jug sherds are probably the same ware but with a finer temper mix.

2. Unstratified; found by workmen.

Eleven sherds, representing three different vessels (nos 35-7) are quartz sand-tempered. Three base sherds, representing one vessel, are Saxo-Norman chalk-tempered ware (no 38). All other pottery is Surrey White ware.

Form types

Of the quartz sand-tempered pottery, all but five sherds are from cooking pots. All of the Surrey White ware sherds are from jugs apart from no 34, which is from a cooking pot.

Forming techniques

All sherds apart from the Saxo-Norman ware were made on a fast wheel. The very thin walls of certain sherds (notably no 15) imply a highly plastic clay.

Decoration

The quartz sand-tempered pottery is characterised by grooved rilling on the upper body, applied finger-impressed ribbon decoration and by a coarse scratch-wiping on the lower body. The Surrey White ware vessels are characterised by vertical combed decoration on the neck and body.

Discussion

THE BUILDING

From the early 900s the boundary of the borough of Guildford was defined by a ditch which ran along the line of North Street and Castle Street (fig 1; Alexander 1986, 9). The presence of a later 15th century crown-post roof outside this boundary indicates that by this time pressure on space within the borough had necessitated building along the roads leading from it. The ribbon development is characteristic of later medieval and Tudor towns. At some point before the mid 16th century the boundary was extended to include buildings in the western part of the Upper High Street; when the Grammar School was begun in 1555 it lay just within the boundary. Thus the 'Pandora' houses would have been within the borough from that date at the latest, and possibly from the date of their construction fifty to a hundred years earlier. They lay in Holy Trinity parish and were for a time actually owned by the parish (Haes 1983, 5-6) until sold in the mid 18th century.

The roof ridge of the 'Pandora' houses runs parallel to the street. This feature would normally suggest that there was less pressure on space there than in the town centre where houses were increasingly being built or rebuilt end-on to the street. Thus the surviving

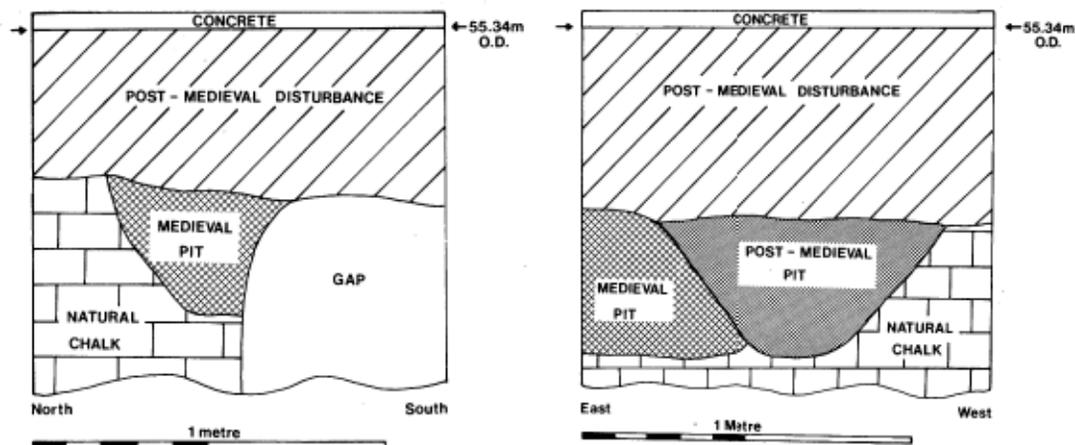


Fig 4. 196 High Street, Guildford. Sections of medieval and post-medieval pits

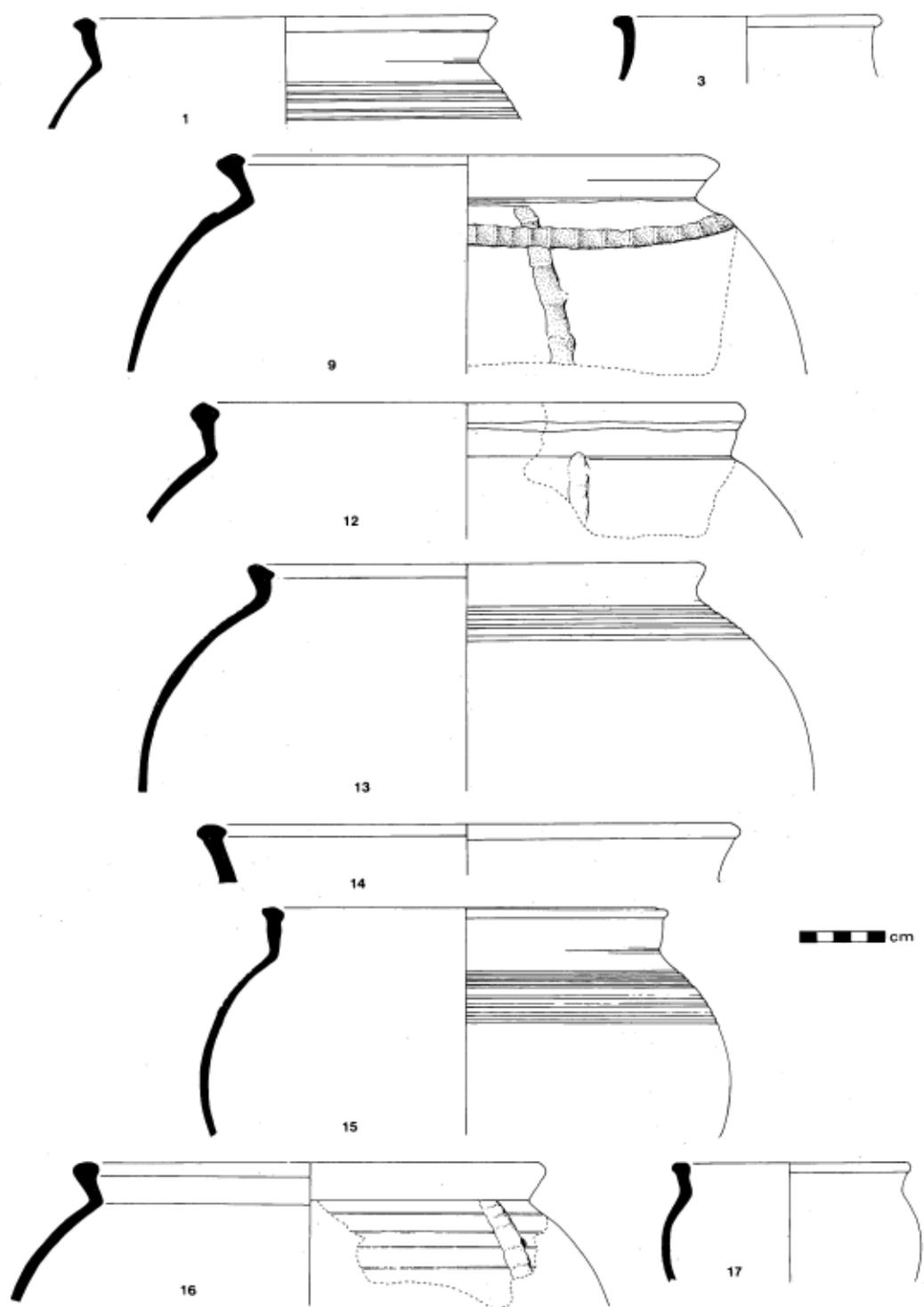


Fig 5. 196 High Street, Guildford. Medieval pottery from the pit (1:4)

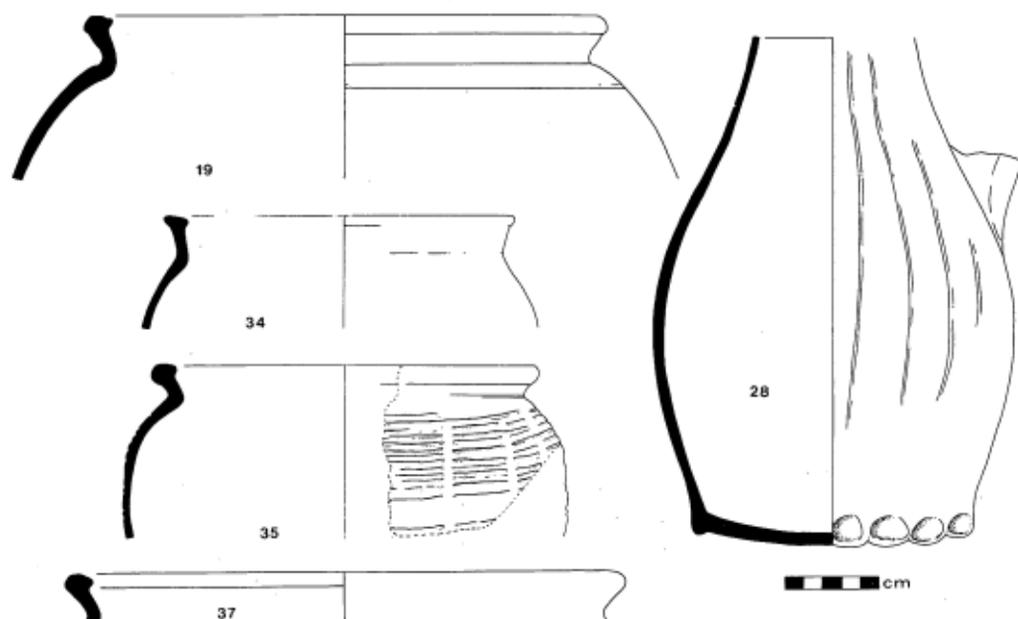


Fig 6. 196 High Street, Guildford. Medieval pottery from the pit (no 19) and unstratified (nos 28-37) (1:4)

late medieval and Tudor buildings on the High Street nearly all present their gables to the street. In this way, two or even three properties could occupy the same frontage as one building which lay parallel to the street. However, if the 'Pandora' houses were indeed merely two units of a larger terrace, then the roof ridge would necessarily run parallel to the street. If we consider the standard tri-partite arrangement of a medieval town house (shop, hall and parlour, with chambers above shop and parlour), then the 'Pandora' houses would, in effect, be end-on to the street. The argument over relative density of development must therefore be inconclusive.

POTTERY PROVENANCED TO THE PIT

The pottery from the pit probably represents a date span of 1175-1250. The rim mouldings and applied ribbon decoration of the quartz sand-tempered pottery are very similar to those found at International Stores, Guildford (Holling 1964) and to the sandy wares found at Pachenesham (Renn 1983), dating to the 13th century. The virtual absence of Saxo-Norman pottery suggests a late 12th or early 13th century date as does the jug form no 4, whilst the total absence of Surrey White wares implies a date before 1250.

UNSTRATIFIED POTTERY

The eleven quartz sand-tempered sherds found by the workmen (nos 35-7) probably came from the pit and are of the same early 13th century date. The Saxo-Norman vessel (no 38), although earlier, may also belong to the pit group. All the other sherds found by the workmen are of late 13th or early 14th century date and may represent the contents of an adjacent but later rubbish pit.

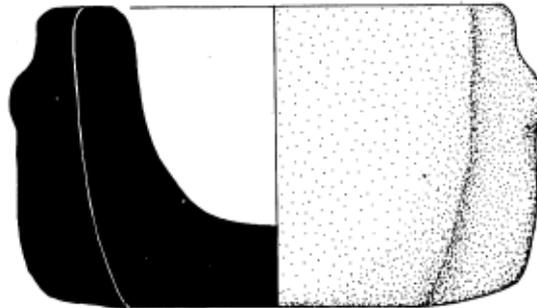


Fig 7. 196 High Street, Guildford. Stone mortar (1:3)

CONCLUSION

The date of the pit group pottery and scattered Surrey White ware sherds is earlier than the existing structure by over 200 years. This pottery may be associated with earlier occupation on the site, though no trace was found; alternatively, the pottery could have been deposited as refuse outside the borough limits.

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