

## NOTES

### A Late Saxon timber structure from the Broad Ditch, Wisley

During the summer of 1987 the Byfleet Foul Sewer Relief Scheme was under construction from Wisley Sewage Works to Parvis Road (A245) and was being monitored by Ann Watson. When construction of the trench reached a point (TQ 057 602) just south of the Broad Ditch to the north-west of Wisley village, several timbers were dislodged and brought up by a mechanical excavator. These came from a notably wet area beneath a layer of clay and were deposited on the adjacent spoil heaps where they were seen and some retrieved. Further south from this point (*c* TQ 058 599) were noted two features described as oval scoops containing much charcoal and heat-reddened clay, which were thought to have been connected with iron-working. Only the timber fragments form the subject of this note.

The group of recovered timbers comprise a number of pointed stakes of circular section and a flat board-like object, but is dominated by a substantial beam pierced at either end by pairs of sub-rectangular holes. This timber was submitted for dendrochronological dating to the Museum of London Archaeology Service but was found to contain an insufficiently large number of rings for this dating method to be possible. However, it was noted that all the pieces of worked timber were made of oak (Ian Tyers, pers comm). A sample from the beam was then supplied to the Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit at Oxford University and provided a date in the Late Saxon period (OxA-3166: 1180 ± 95BP, which calibrates to *c* AD670–1010 at 95% confidence level).

#### Catalogue of illustrated timbers (figs 1–3)

- 1 Timber beam measuring *c* 1.78m long, by *c* 0.21m across its central portion and with a depth of *c* 0.12m. Part of one end has been broken during its recovery by machine, but its form clearly mirrored the surviving end. Both ends have been rounded off so that the timber forms a bow-like shape. In addition, the rounded terminal on the surviving intact end continues on to form a slight projection. Both ends of the timber are pierced by a pair of roughly-cut apertures spaced *c* 0.1m apart, between the pairs, leaving a space of *c* 0.9m between the two pairs of holes.
- 2 Pointed stake, surviving length *c* 1.47m.
- 3 Pointed stake, surviving length *c* 1.02m.
- 4 Pointed stake, surviving length *c* 0.46m.
- 5 Board-like object, measuring *c* 0.23 x *c* 0.32m.

#### Discussion

In the absence of any record of these timbers *in situ* it is impossible to say much about their relationship to each other, either chronological or spatial, or to any structures which may still survive in the ground.

Fortunately, a structure has been excavated at Anslow's Cottages, Burghfield, Berkshire, which incorporated a timber that very closely parallels the pierced beam from Wisley and which also dates to the late Saxon period (Butterworth & Lobb 1992, esp fig 36 and pl 13). The beam from Burghfield (fig 4, B) is incomplete but was clearly of similar form to that from Wisley (fig 4, A) with a pair of roughly rectangular holes placed at either end. Assuming its symmetry this beam would have measured *c* 1.8m, which is approximately the same length as the Wisley beam.

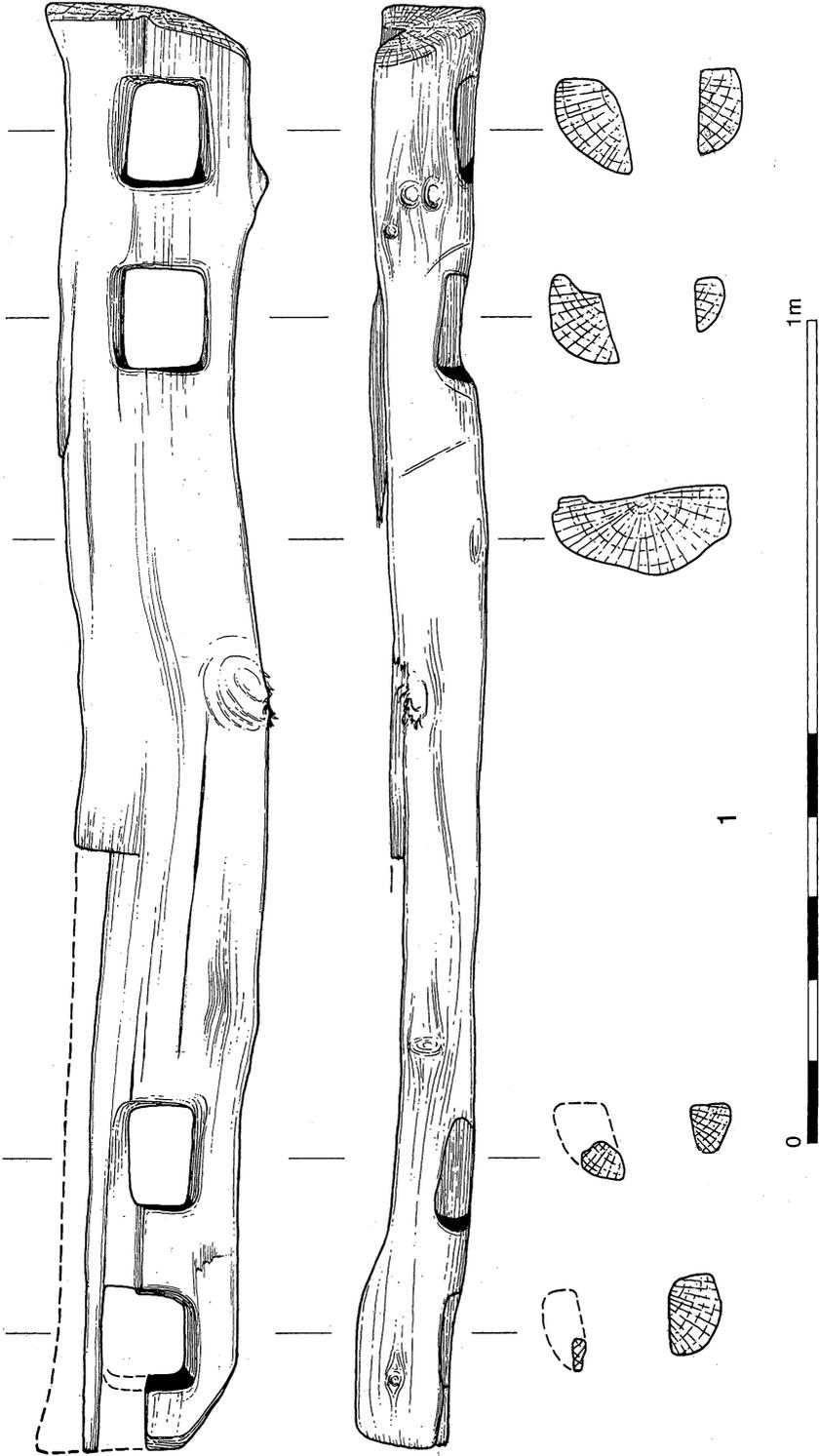


Fig 1 Late Saxon pierced wooden beam from the Broad Ditch, Wisley

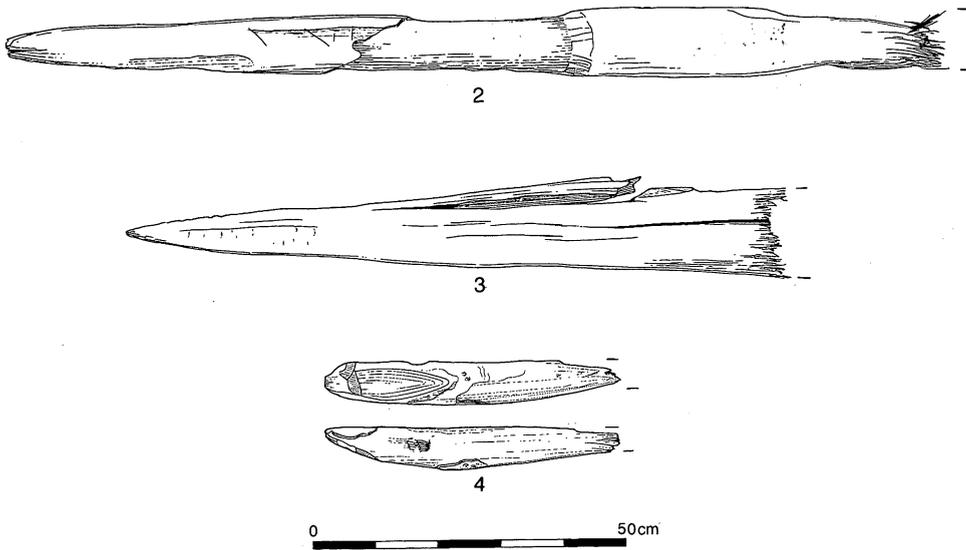


Fig 2 Pointed stakes from the Broad Ditch, Wisley

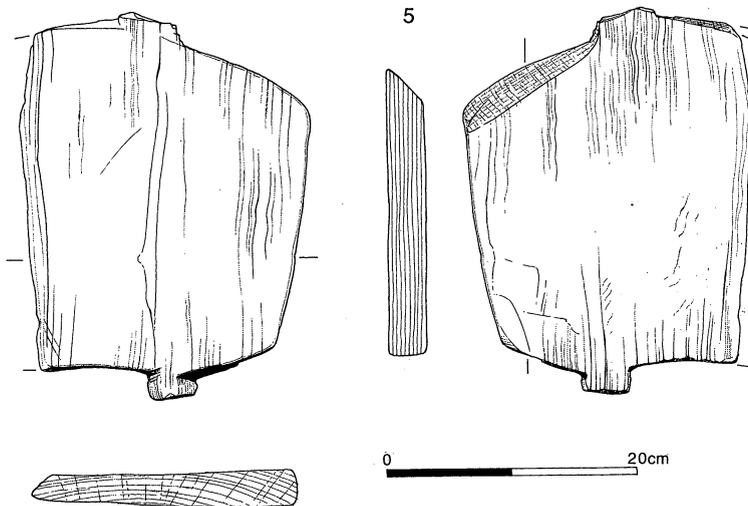


Fig 3 Board-like object from the Broad Ditch, Wisley

The Burghfield beam was found *in situ* across the line of a channel with a group of vertical planks and stakes that appeared to reinforce a low gravel bank. The beam itself was firmly anchored to the bed of the channel by two stakes in its surviving complete end. The excavators felt that the completed structure had been located at the narrowest part of the channel, and that it had been intended to resist a considerable force of water. The Burghfield structure was cautiously interpreted as the lower part of a barrage, perhaps a vertical sluice gate, to control the flow of water possibly as part of a system of water meadows. The evidence from the wider excavation suggested that below this barrage the flowing stream widened out to form a broader channel or pool.

The Broad Ditch at Wisley appears to have been a former channel of the Wey which, it has been suggested (O'Connell 1982), may have been diverted on to its present course in

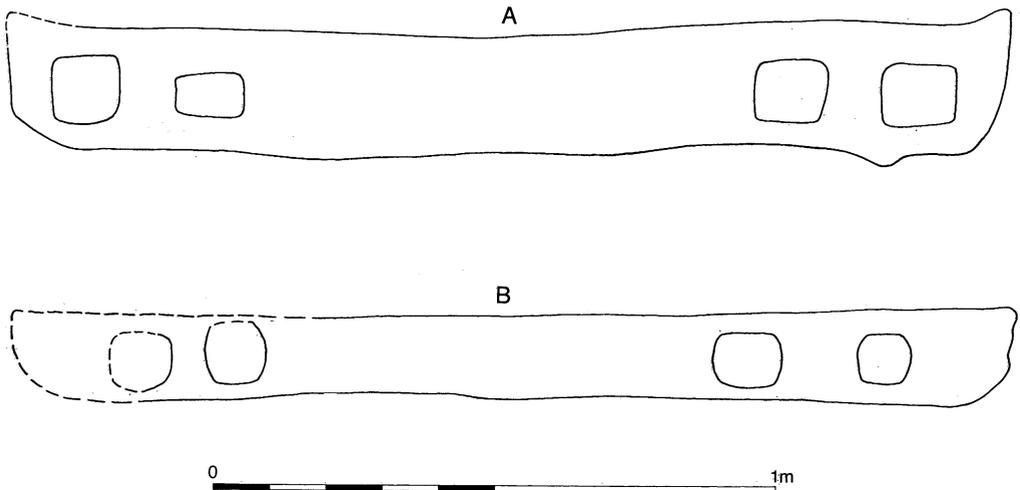


Fig 4 Comparisons of pierced beams from Wisley (A) and Burghfield, Berkshire (B)

the medieval period to facilitate the operation of a mill. The parish boundary largely follows the course of the Broad Ditch. The limited evidence suggests that the Wisley beam, and perhaps the other timbers also, may have formed part of a late Saxon water management device similar to that recorded from Burghfield, perhaps for water meadows rather than for the river itself.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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 O'Connell, M, 1982 Wisley: excavation in 1978, *SyAC*, 73, 93-6

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