

NOTES

A multi-period site at 15 High Street, Stanwell

Introduction

Archaeological investigations were undertaken in 2002 by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd in advance of the construction of a basemented extension at the rear of an existing building at 15 High Street, Stanwell, Borough of Spelthorne (TQ 0561 7428). Two areas, measuring approximately 11.5 x 11.5m and 8 x 1.5m, were excavated within the footprint of the basement. The site recorded activity dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods, including Late Bronze Age pits, medieval agricultural activity, and 18th and 19th century domestic activity.

Background

The Geological Survey Map of Great Britain (sheet 269) indicates that the proposed development site lies on Taplow gravel. The site is flat and lies approximately 2km east of the river Colne, located to the west of the village of Stanwell, immediately north of High Street and Park Road (fig 1). Aerial photographs of fields north of Park Road (becoming High Street) and immediately west of the site identified a number of crop marks (Poulton 1978), which led to a series of excavations between 1979 and 1985 prior to the extraction of gravel in the area (O’Connell 1990). The excavations produced a number of sites of national significance and revealed a plethora of prehistoric features, including a Neolithic cursus monument, a Late Bronze Age field system, two possible Late Bronze Age circular huts and a number of pits. A few Saxon features were also recorded during these investigations, which included a shallow gully, a ditch (possibly associated with an oval enclosure) and two rubbish pits, providing limited evidence for a small, rural Late Saxon settlement (O’Connell 1990, 54–5). Medieval activity from the site was represented by two parallel lines of gullies, interpreted as part of either a trackway or field boundary, as well as a pit dating to the late 11th or 12th centuries (O’Connell 1990, 59–60). Excavations to the west of Long Lane recorded boundary ditches of post-medieval date, although one may have been prehistoric, while excavations at Lord Kynvett’s School revealed no features (Howe *et al* 2000, 195–6). Little other archaeological work has occurred in Stanwell.

The earliest record of Stanwell occurs in the Domesday Book, while St Mary’s church, to the south-east of the site, probably dates to the 13th century (Reynolds 1962). A manor house existed in Stanwell from at least the 14th century, which by the 17th century had been replaced by Stanwell Place, located to the west of the village, where it remained until 1933 (Reynolds 1962). Rocque’s map (1741–6) shows that by the mid-18th century Stanwell comprised a small, nucleated settlement surrounded by arable land.

The archaeological sequence

The first clear evidence for activity from the site dates to the Late Bronze Age, with the digging of three pits, possibly for the disposal of rubbish (fig 2). Incorporated within the fill of one of these pits was an unabraded pottery sherd from a large Late Bronze Age vessel, some struck and burnt flint and a number of charred grains of emmer/bread wheat (*Triticum dicoccum/aestivum*). The evidence of charred grains, as well as charcoal fragments and the burnt remains of organic waste such as straw, hay and wood, indicates that this deposit represents hearth debris, disposed within the rubbish pit (Vaughan-Williams & Branch 2003). The presence of wheat grains suggests that wheat was a component of the diet and was consumed

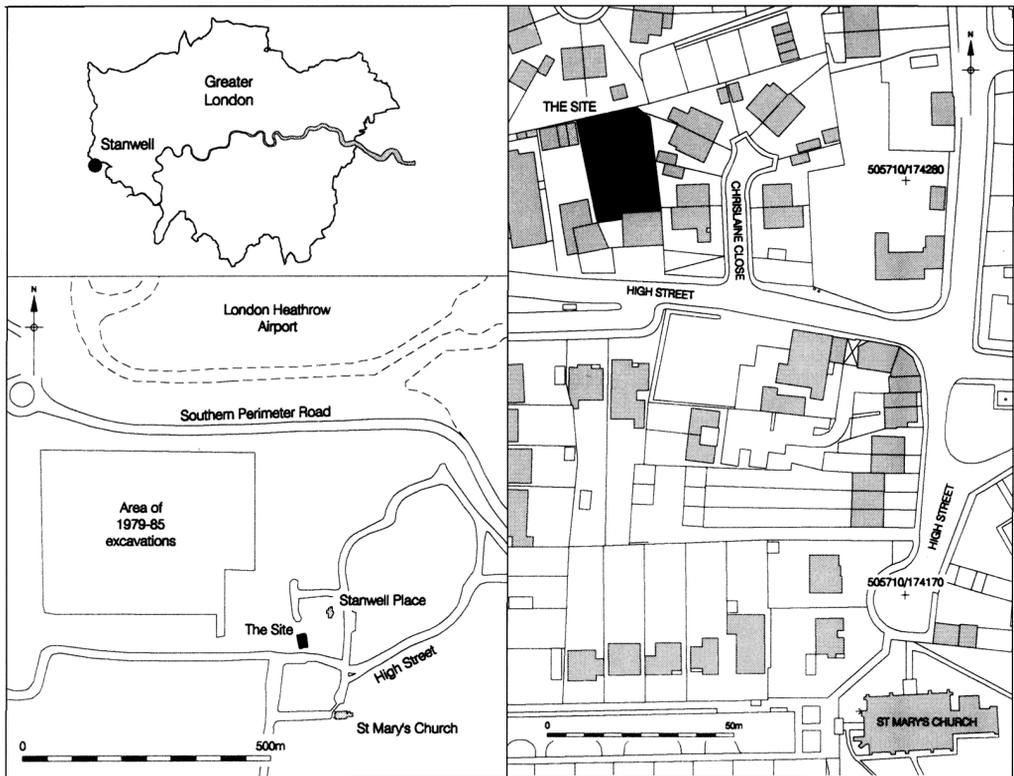


Fig 1 High Street, Stanwell. Site location with inset area location. (© Crown Copyright. NC/2004/33611)

on or near the site. Probably contemporary, although lacking any firm dating evidence, were two further pits with similarly composed fills, one of which contained a Bronze Age flint piercer.

No further activity was evident from the site until the early medieval period, when two gullies running at right-angles to the High Street were dug (fig 2). A sherd from a 13th century cooking pot, incorporated into the fill of one of the gullies, provides a date for the infilling of this feature. The gullies may have been used to facilitate drainage, suggesting that the land had been turned over to agriculture, and the presence from a contemporary pit of wheat grains (*Triticum* sp.) as well as charred goosefoot weed seeds (*Chenopodiaceae*), indicative of arable land, supports this. The gullies were orientated at right-angles to the modern road suggesting that a medieval road may have existed along the same alignment. A further pit contained a sherd of Pingsdorf-type ware, possibly a German import, dating from between the 10th and 13th centuries, and providing evidence for domestic activity in the vicinity of the site.

The site probably remained agricultural in nature throughout the rest of the medieval period, and the next phase of activity comprises two parallel, east–west aligned ditches, dated by pottery sherds from a cooking pot to between 1250 and 1350, and a pit (fig 2). The ditches, possibly representing field boundaries, were aligned parallel to the road, further confirming that an earlier road preceded the High Street. The above features were overlain by a layer of ploughsoil, incorporating pottery sherds, probably having been introduced during manuring, dating from the 12th century to the late medieval/early post-medieval period.

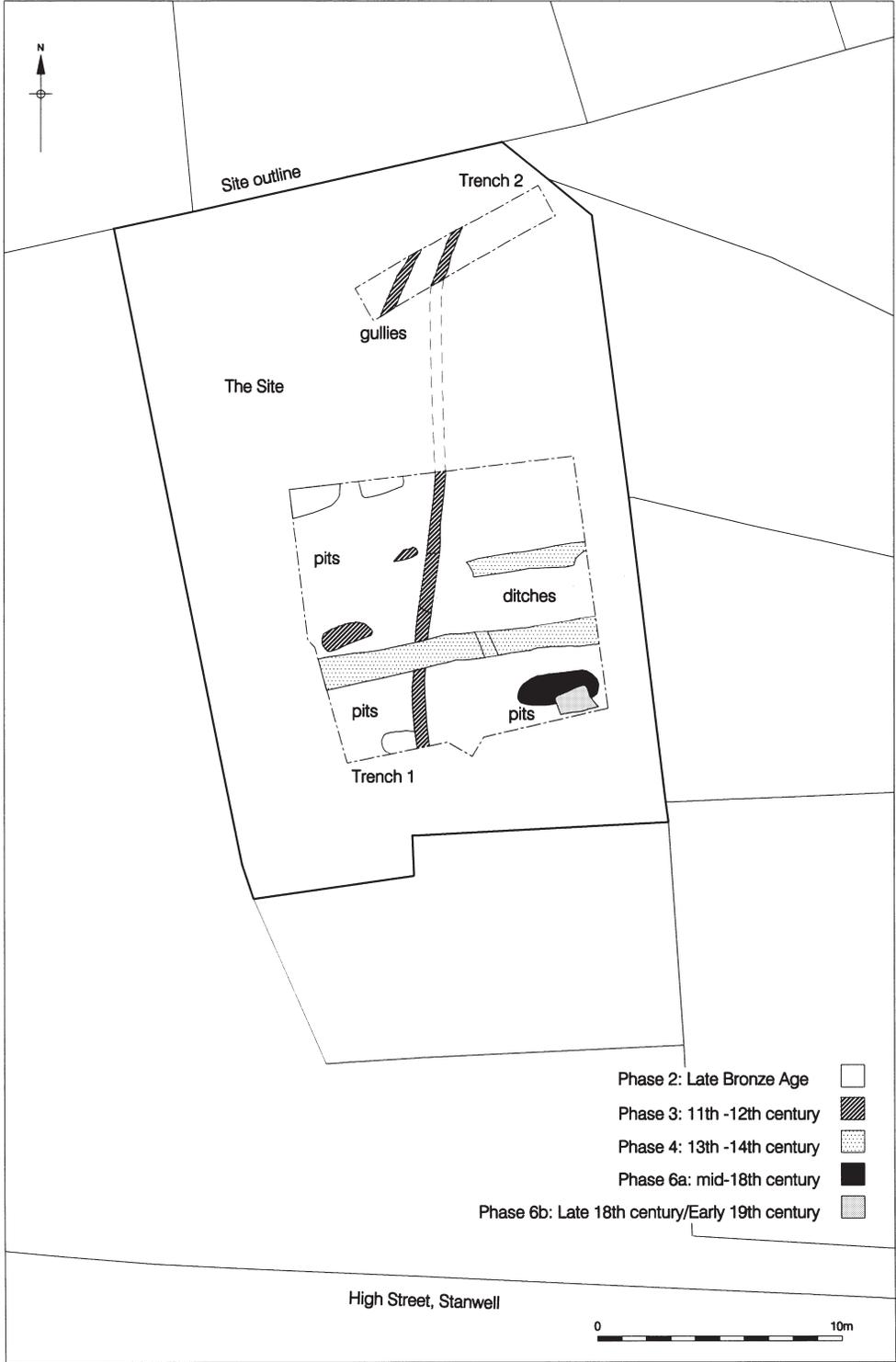


Fig 2 High Street, Stanwell. Multi-phase plan of the site.

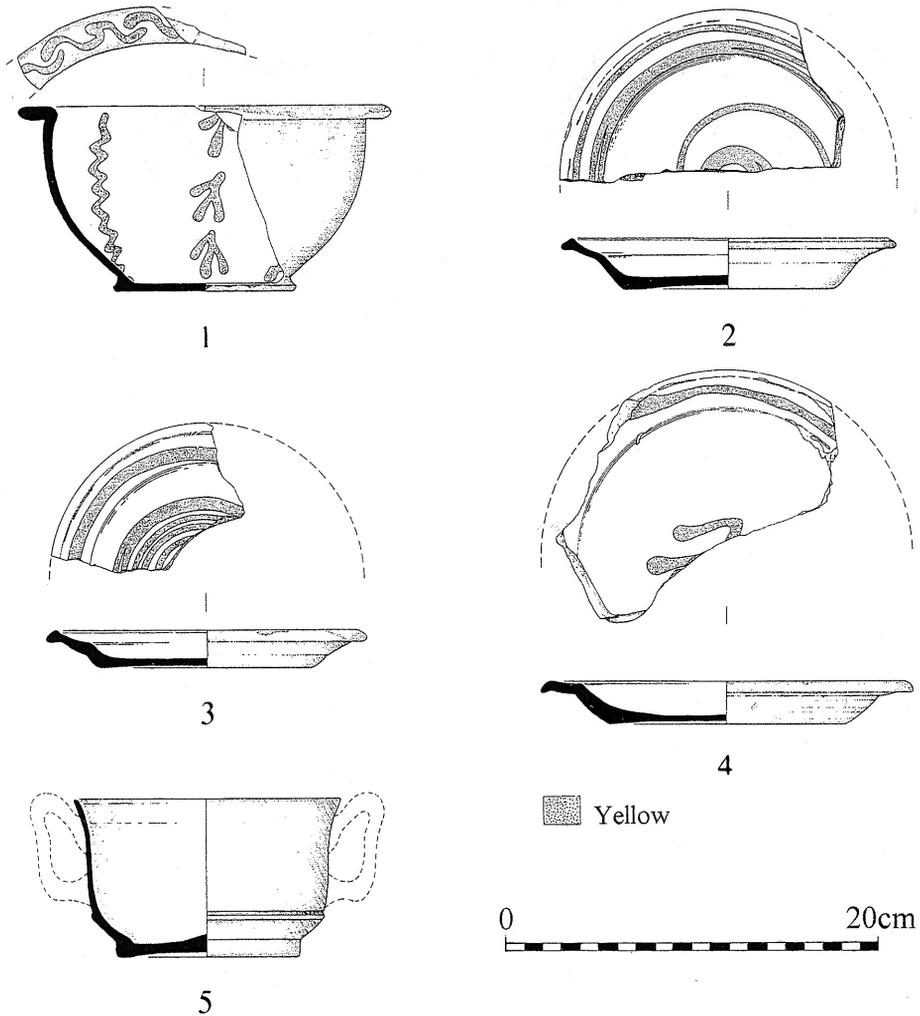


Fig 3 High Street, Stanwell. Pottery: (1) Donyatt slipware rounded bowl decorated with a running S-shaped border on the rim, with the interior divided into quarters and a curvilinear line and three arrow-shaped motifs in each wall panel; (2–3) Donyatt slipware dishes decorated simply with trailed slip on the rim and with central spiral designs; (4) Donyatt slipware dish decorated with a trailed white-slip line on the rim and V-shaped motifs in the centre; (5) Brown-glazed Red Border ware carinated bowl that would originally have had two vertical loop handles.

A mid-18th century rubbish pit cut the medieval ploughsoil and provides the first clear evidence for domestic activity in the area, probably from a building fronting the High Street (fig 2). The pit produced typical pottery for the period; however, of particular note was a small number of Donyatt white slip-decorated wares from Somerset. These included a rounded bowl decorated with a running S-shaped border on the rim (fig 3, no 1), with the interior divided into quarters and a curvilinear line and three arrow-shaped motifs in each wall panel, and two dishes decorated simply with trailed slip on the rim and with central spiral designs (fig 3, nos 2 and 3). A Donyatt slipware dish also occurred in another rubbish pit, this time dated to the late 18th to early 19th centuries, and was simply decorated with a trailed white-slip line on the rim and V-shaped motifs in the centre (fig 3, no 4). The pit also included

a brown-glazed Red Border ware carinated bowl that would originally have had two vertical loop handles (fig 3, no 5). The Donyatt pottery industry was long lived over a period of 800 years until its demise in the Second World War. While the occurrence of Donyatt slipware in London is extremely scarce, recent findspots at Uxbridge and now Stanwell indicate a greater concentration in the west London outer suburbs during the late 18th century (Coleman-Smith 1999, 275; Pearce 2000, 159, 161).

Conclusions

There has been much Late Bronze Age activity recorded from the vicinity of the site, suggesting that the area was intensively occupied and utilized, and the Bronze Age features recorded from this site add to this corpus of information. The site also produced an interesting sequence of later features in an area that so far has yielded little archaeological information, tracing the development of Stanwell from its early origins in the medieval period, through later medieval agricultural practices and 18th and 19th century domestic activity. The presence of Donyatt slipware from the site indicates that the distribution of this Somerset ware extended as far as the margins of west London during the mid to late 18th century.

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