

A medieval moat at Hope Cottage, High Street, Egham

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with contributions by

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An archaeological evaluation and excavation took place at the site of Hope Cottage on the High Street in Egham, and a moat, 5.6m wide, was excavated. The moat is associated with a manor house that stood nearby in the medieval period. The manor house was not located, although it is thought to have lain to the south of the site. The earliest moat cut dates to the early 14th century or earlier and was recut several times before falling out of use in the late 16th century. A single posthole of medieval date and an undated pit were also recorded. The moat was sealed by post-medieval made-ground and truncated in places by later pits.

Introduction

LOCATION AND GEOLOGY

An archaeological evaluation and excavation was conducted by AOC Archaeology Group at the site of Hope Cottage on the High Street in Egham (TQ 1480 7152; fig 1). The work was undertaken on behalf of Runnymede Homes in advance of the construction of two blocks of new housing. The development site is an irregular-shaped piece of land, bounded by the High Street to the north-west, Albany Place to the north-east, and residential properties to the west, south, and south-east. The site covers an area of *c* 3300m² and was formerly the location of four cottages: Hope Cottage, Gaelic Cottage, The Haven Cottage and Ypsilanti. It lies in an area of Flood Plain Gravel, sealed in places by a thin layer of brickearth. The British Geological Survey 1:50,000 scale map (sheet 269) shows the underlying geology as London Clay. Topographically the site is located about 0.75km to the south-west of the main channel of the river Thames, within its southern flood plain. The land is generally level at an average current height of between 14 and 15m OD.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The name Egham derives from the Saxon words for ‘Ecga’s homestead’; however, there is little excavated evidence of Saxon activity in Egham (AOC 2003, 13). Egham was included in the original endowment of Chertsey Abbey in AD 666 x 75, and confirmation of the grant was made in AD 727 and AD 967 (*VCH*, 3, 419–27). The manor appears in the Domesday Survey, being assessed in 1086 for 15 hides. In the early part of the 12th century three subordinate manors appear to have arisen (Turner 1926, 25). The origin of these holdings is unclear although they are assumed to have arisen by some process of subinfeudation. Turner (*ibid*) identifies these manors as Milton, Imworth and Trotsworth. Turner also identifies a manor house associated with Imworth, which stood ‘at the junction of the London road with the lane leading to Pooley Green and the vicarage’ (*ibid*, 27): this lane is Vicarage Road, so is in the area of the Hope Cottage site. Turner also states that the land attached ‘lay on the south side of the main road as far as the Glanty, with some detached portions in other parts of the parish, including the land on which Great Fosters was built’ (*ibid*, 27). This description suggests a manor house close to the excavation site with land extending to the east in addition to separate detached holdings. The 19th century maps of the area show a property called Manor Farm directly to the south of Vicarage Road, possibly originally associated with the manor. The road leading to this property survives today as Manor Farm Lane.

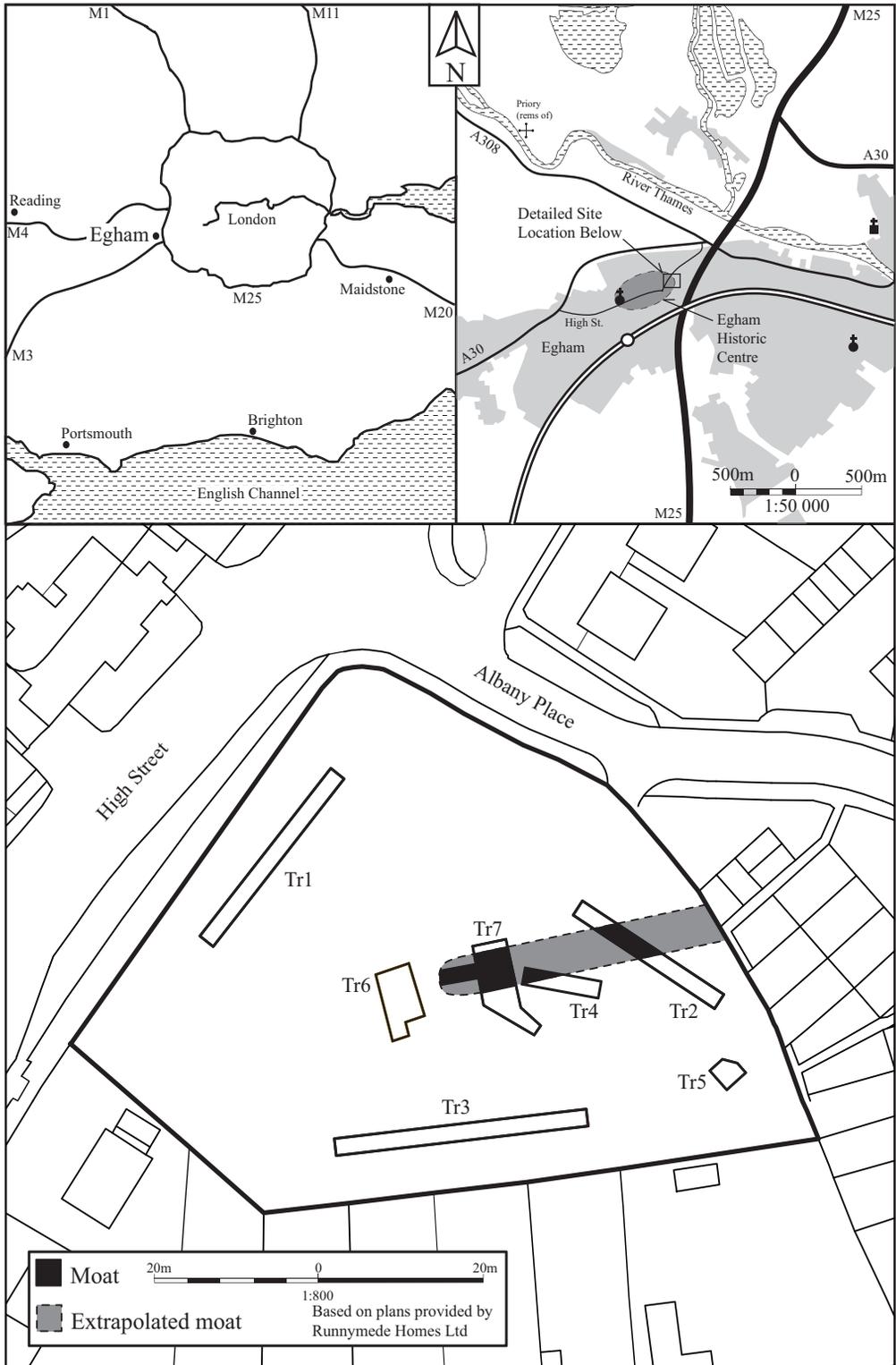


Fig 1 Hope Cottage, Egham. Location plan.

The manor house of Imworth was sold to Sir John Denham in 1604, who demolished it and built a new property known as ‘The Place’. The house underwent various alterations during the 18th century and was used as a school in its final years (Turner 1926, 132, 158). This is probably the substantial property with a grand drive that is visible on Senex’s map of 1729 and Rocque’s map of 1768. It is worth noting that there is a second building to the south of the main house on the later map, which may also appear on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map a century later. ‘The Place’ was demolished in the mid-19th century and replaced by Denham House, which was situated at the junction of the High Street and Vicarage Road. This property was eventually taken over by Surrey County Council and demolished in 1937 when a police station was built on the site.

The manor of Imworth is referred to in a number of sources as ‘*alias* Fosters’ (cf *VCH*, 3, 424). This suggests the lands of Imworth and Fosters were at some point a single holding. The manor of Milton appears to have occupied the site of the present mansion to the south of the site (Turner 1926, 26), directly to the north of Great Fosters, the Elizabethan house that is now a hotel. Its proximity may have led Turner (1977, 93) to associate Great Fosters with an earlier moated manor. The moat at Great Fosters might have been created at a later date, possibly during landscaping (Turner 1987, 234).

In a provisional list of moated sites in Surrey, Turner (1977, 93) identifies Imworth, on or near Hope Cottage, as a possible moated site. He also identifies two other probable moated sites. One is at Old Vicarage, located to the south-east of the site, further down Vicarage Road and the other is at Great Fosters. However, it is possible that the moat at Old Vicarage is also post-medieval, and might have originated in landscaping, as has been suggested for Great Fosters. The late 19th century OS maps show what is identified as the remains of a moat to the south of Old Vicarage. Limited excavations there have identified a possible moat, but no pottery earlier than the 18th century was recovered from the feature (eg Shenton 1973). However, the current Manor Leaze (meaning manor pasture or meadow) appears to be very close to where this moat once stood.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

An initial evaluation of the site consisted of four machine-excavated trenches (trenches 1–4) and a watching brief (trench 5). A large medieval ditch cut was identified in two of the evaluation trenches; this feature was thought to be part of a moat associated with a manor house. Following the findings of the evaluation a phase of excavation was undertaken. This consisted of two further trenches (trenches 6 and 7), and a machine-excavated slot between them, aimed to fully record the form of the moat and the sequence of deposits within it, produce more information on its use, the length of time it was open, and the date it ceased to be a landscape feature. All archaeological works were conducted under the site code HOP 05 and the site archive will be deposited with Egham Museum (AOC 2007). The unpublished reports (‘grey literature’) will be available through the Archaeology Data Service website (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit/index.cfm>).

The archaeological sequence

PHASE 1: NATURAL DEPOSITS

The natural topography showed a west–east drop, from 14.85m OD near to the High Street, to 13.76m OD on the west of the site. A layer of compact mid-yellow/brown brickearth sealed brownish-yellow sandy gravels across much of the site. The brickearth varied in thickness, thinning to the north-east. Two shallow tree holes cut the brickearth; neither contained any finds.

PHASE 2: EARLY MEDIEVAL (1066–1250)

A single pit of unclear function was recorded in the south-east corner of trench 6. The pit extended beyond the limits of the trench but was probably roughly circular in plan and contained three small sherds of early medieval pottery, dated 1080–1200. A small cut in the north-east corner of trench 7 extended beyond the limit of excavation, but its original dimensions and function were unclear. It was filled with soft, mid-brown/grey sandy silt that contained no finds. Although undated, this feature was sealed by the upcast from the medieval moat and therefore pre-dated its excavation.

PHASE 3: LATER MEDIEVAL (1250–1485) (fig 2)

A layer of compact sandy gravel recorded at the northern end of trench 7 was probably upcast material from the excavation of the medieval moat. The earliest cut of the moat (7007) measured 5.60m wide x 1.10m deep in trench 7. No evidence of the moat was recorded in trench 6 directly to the west, indicating that the ditch terminated, possibly to allow entrance to the associated manor house. The slot excavated between trenches 6 and 7 showed the base of the ditch rising sharply and terminating to the west of trench 7.

The primary fill of 7007 was dark bluish-grey clay silt, which represents the gradual silting up of the moat. This contained a number of sherds of medieval pottery and roof tile. The pottery included a number of Kingston-type wares, Surrey grey-brown ware and Coarse Border ware. The assemblage suggests a date range of 1270–1350 for the initial silting up of this feature.

The primary ditch fill was sealed by mid-grey clay silt (7005) that contained a similar pottery assemblage to the primary fill. This consists of Kingston-type wares, some of which are decorated with vertical applied, pinched strips or combed designs, and one sherd has applied curving strips surrounding applied scales in a pendant shape. Small quantities of residual early medieval shelly ware and Surrey grey-brown tradition pottery were also present in the assemblage. Overall this assemblage suggests a date of deposition of 1340–1400. The ceramic building material (CBM) from this deposit included slightly vitrified tile wasters. A large D-shaped iron buckle was also present in 7005; the size of the buckle suggests that it is part of a horse harness (fig 3, <1>). Samples from the primary and secondary fills contained charred grain (free-threshing wheat, hulled barley and occasional oats), possibly as a result of food waste being dumped in the moat. Seeds from wild plants included potential arable crop weeds, such as clover/medick.

The third moat fill was mid-brown clay silt that contained a number of medieval pottery sherds, all but two of which were Kingston-type ware cooking pots or jugs, with some of the latter being highly decorated with incised diamond patterns. The assemblage also contained a sherd of handmade Surrey grey-brown ware and a sherd of a London-type ware jug. Overall the pottery indicates a deposition date of 1230–1400. This fill also contained medieval roof tile, including a hip tile, as well as three fragments of residual Roman CBM.

At the western side of trench 7 this third fill was overlain by dark brown clay silt that contained a single small sherd of Cheam ware dated to 1350–1500. This was sealed by an undated final fill of light brown silty clay that may represent the deliberate levelling of the remains of the moat. The fills of 7007 are dated, by the pottery they contain, to between 1230 and 1400, suggesting the moat was open in the late 13th/14th centuries. The moat appears to have been completely silted up by the end of the 15th century.

During the evaluation the moat was recorded in trench 2, cutting the natural brickearth, and a similar sequence of fills revealed. The primary fill contained animal bone and decomposed vegetation. Large amounts of waterlogged material were present in a sample taken from the primary fill, including waterlogged wood and roots as well as large quantities of waterlogged seeds. The majority of the plants represented appear to have come from those that grow near, or in, water. The nature of this deposit indicates a waterlogged depositional

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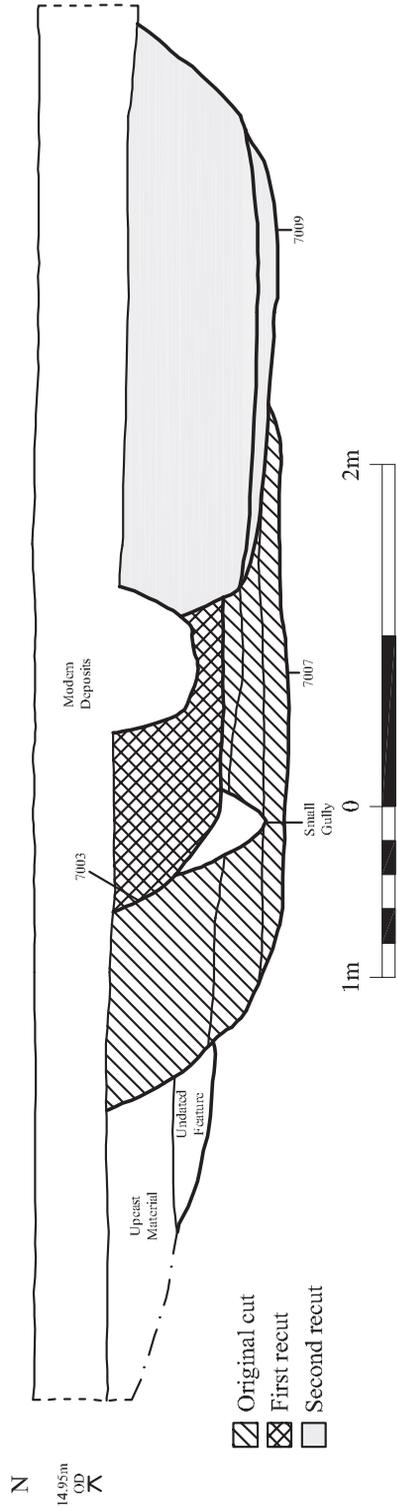


Fig.2 Hope Cottage, Egham. Section through moat.

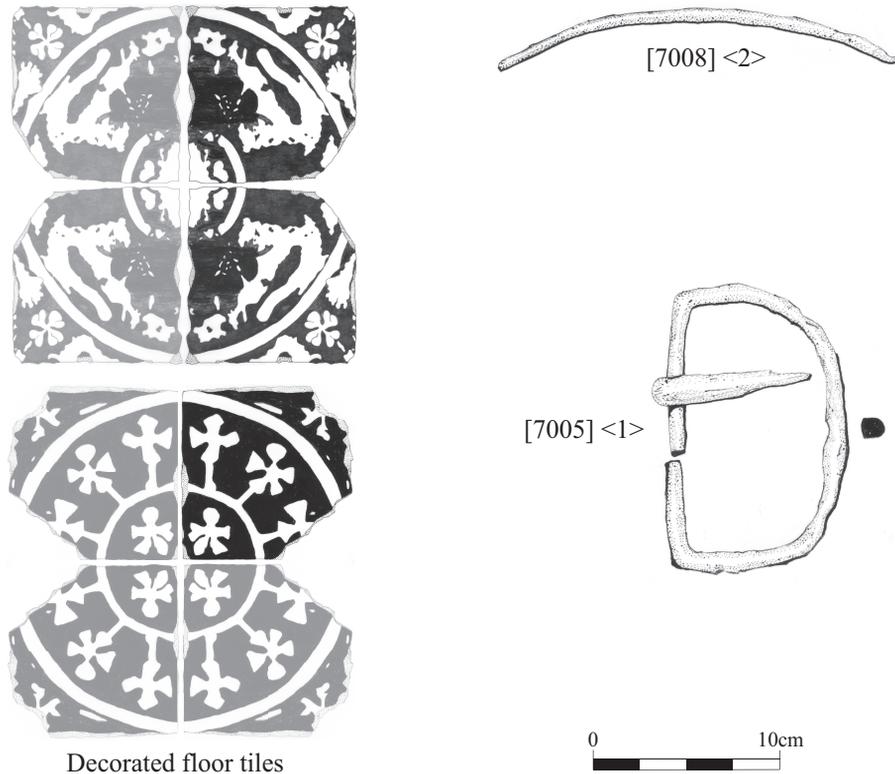


Fig 3 Hope Cottage, Egham. Finds from the site.

environment, showing that the moat once contained water. The secondary moat fills identified in trench 2 contained medieval peg tile and Kingston-type ware and Coarse Border ware dated to 1270–1500.

In trench 4 the moat was again recorded and was filled with a primary fill of dark blue/grey silty clay that contained a small piece of window glass. A secondary fill consisted of dark yellow/brown clay silt fill that contained pottery sherds of Coarse Border ware dated 1270–1500 and Kingston-type ware dated 1250–1400.

At the eastern side of trench 7 an undated small gully was cut into the top of the deposits filling 7007, possibly a drainage ditch, required as the moat silted up. This was truncated by 7003, a recut of the medieval moat, which measured 0.70m deep. This gully was filled with homogenous dark grey/brown sandy silt that contained four sherds of Kingston-type wares, dated 1230–1400 and CBM including tile wasters. The later cut appears, from the pottery dates, to be of a similar date to the original ditch cut (7007). This may suggest that the moat silted up rapidly and had to be recut frequently; alternatively the recut was later but the original fill washed back into it.

A single circular posthole was recorded cutting the natural gravel in trench 6. The function of the posthole is unclear; however, it is dated to the late medieval period by a single piece of abraded CBM.

PHASE 4: EARLY POST-MEDIEVAL (1485–1650) (fig 2)

The probable recut of the moat (7003) was truncated in trench 7 by another large feature (7009). This contained eleven sherds of Cheam redware dated 1480–1550 and four sherds of

imported Raeren stoneware rounded mugs dated to 1475–1500. Overall the pottery suggests a deposition date in the mid-16th century. This fill also contained roof tiles dated to the early post-medieval period, and heavily abraded glazed medieval floor tiles (fig 3). A fragment of arched circular section iron bar recovered from the fill is probably a fragment of a vessel handle, perhaps for a pail or small bucket (fig 3, <2>). Interpretation of this feature is difficult as only a small proportion of it was within the area of excavation, but it may represent the terminus of another later moat recut. These recuts were not present in trenches 2 and 4.

At the western end of trench 3 the natural gravel was sealed by a layer of redeposited brickearth and a series of dump deposits. Most of these deposits contained very few inclusions, while one produced a large quantity of brick fragments, dated to 1450–1650. It seems from this evidence that extensive raising of the ground level of the area occurred during the early post-medieval period.

PHASE 5: LATE POST-MEDIEVAL (1650–1900)

At the south-eastern end of trench 2 a brick soakaway was dated from the bricks to 1400–1600. The soakaway was filled with compact light grey sandy silt that contained many small CBM fragments as well as sherds of London and Frechen stoneware, blue transfer-printed refined whiteware and post-medieval slipped redware dating from the 16th to 19th centuries. A second brick well or soakaway was recorded in trench 3, measuring 0.82m in diameter and 0.52m deep, constructed from unfrogged red bricks. The bricks date the well to the 17th/18th centuries.

A series of pits was dug from the same level as the soakaway in trench 2. The original function of these pits is not clear – their backfill appeared to be largely domestic waste. This area of post-medieval pitting appears to have truncated any evidence of the south-eastern side of the moat cut in this area of the site. The sequence of intercutting pits was sealed by two dump layers, probably intended to level the ground as it slumped into underlying pits and the moat.

A watching brief carried out on the excavation of the base and roots of a willow tree near the south-east corner of the site uncovered the remains of two late post-medieval walls and a brick floor surface. All three structures were constructed from similar red brick of 18th or early 19th century date. Collectively, these features indicate the corner of a building that did not extend into any of the other trenches.

PHASE 6: MODERN (1900–PRESENT)

A series of modern dumps was recorded in trench 3, all of which contained some form of modern material, brick fragments, chalk fragments or modern tile. These were truncated by modern pit cuts and sealed by a large chalk demolition layer. In most of the other trenches deposits of subsoil, modern made-ground, and topsoil were encountered.

Discussion

The earliest moat (7007) had late 13th to early 14th century pottery in its primary fill, suggesting an early 14th century date or earlier for the construction of the manor house. The moat was shallower in trench 7 than further to the east and terminated directly to the west of trench 7. In trench 7 the moat did not contain the abundance of water plant remains found in the moat deposits in trench 2. It appears that the shallower terminus of the moat was dry for a good proportion, if not all of the time, whereas the rest of the moat was filled with water. The terminus of the moat suggests some form of entrance, presumably with a driveway leading onto the London road.

The pottery recovered from the moat shows that Kingston-type ware was the most common. This contrasts with the London pottery market, which was starting to be almost

monopolised by the Coarse Border ware industry in the late 14th century (Blackmore 1999, 46). This suggests that Kingston's pottery industry relied less on London as a market for its products, distributing its wares more locally.

The pottery recovered from the moat fills is primarily domestic, and does not indicate a high-status site. Jugs and jars, typical for this period, dominate the medieval pottery assemblage. The cooking pots and storage jars from the medieval moat would have been associated with the kitchen area; jugs would also have been used in the hall. Pottery is not normally a prestige item in the medieval and early post-medieval periods, except perhaps for very decorative imports. The high table of the hall would have had metal items for eating with and serving which do not readily survive in the archaeological record since metal was normally recycled. Some of the other finds indicate a wealthier residence; glazed floor tiles and window glass suggest a degree of affluence more in keeping with a medieval manor house. The fact one of the roof tiles was hipped indicates that the manor house had a hipped roof, assuming it did not come from another building further away.

The lower fills of the moat contained evidence of cereals and wild plants. Overall the assemblage is typical of medieval occupation in this area; a scarcity of cereal chaff or arable crop weeds suggests cereals probably arrived on the site in a cleaned state. Cereals would have been eaten in a variety of forms, with barley used both for brewing and as an animal food. Heather has the potential for use as fuel, flooring and bedding. The moat appears to have been used to dispose of a range of materials; a lack of cess suggests this was disposed of in a separate, specific area. The presence of weeds such as henbane, dock and stinging nettle indicates waste or disturbed ground nearby; blackberry/raspberry and elder indicate scrubland.

The presence of roof tile wasters in a late medieval context suggests production in the vicinity of the Hope Cottage site. A medieval pottery kiln was identified during excavations at 89–95 High Street, about 200m to the east (Howe *et al* 2008, 366–7). Although no tile production sites have been identified, ceramic production was clearly occurring in Egham in the medieval period. Generally the pottery is typical of medieval sites in this area and reflects the role the Thames and its tributaries played in its distribution.

The later moat recut (7009) may represent the final recutting of the feature. It contained demolition debris including roof tiles and medieval decorated floor tiles. The floor tiles showed similarities to 'Westminster'-type fabrics, but the fabrics appeared to be less silty and sandier than is typical. Two of the tiles were slip-decorated with designs (fig 3) not recognised in the recent corpus by Betts (2002). There is a possibility that the tiles may be part of the Chertsey–Westminster group, exemplified by tiles found at the chapter house of Westminster Abbey (*ibid*, 11). However, the finish of the tiles and dimensions are more in keeping with 'Westminster' fabrics at 132–135mm square and 26–30mm thick. The pottery within this recut is of mid-16th century date, but the backfilling may have occurred at the beginning of the 17th century, and probably relates to John Denham's demolition of the medieval manor house and the infilling of its moat.

The bricks and pottery recovered from the circular brick-lined soakaway in trench 2 indicate that this feature was in use in the 17th century and is probably associated with John Denham's rebuild of the earlier medieval manor. The brick-lined feature in trench 3 was probably of a slightly later date and is associated with a later phase of the same house. A series of 18th century deposits recorded in trench 2 also appears to be contemporary with this phase of occupation and apparently represents deliberate levelling deposits. Similar levelling occurs in trench 3 and may represent the landscaping of the grounds of the new house.

The brick dimensions and mortar type of the two walls and a brick floor surface in trench 5 suggest an 18th to mid-19th century date. The walls form the corner of a building; however, no evidence of a structure is present in this area of the site on any of the OS maps.

A number of modern deposits were recorded, particularly in trench 3. Representing late 19th and 20th century activity on the site, these probably relate to the destruction of Denham

House and the construction of the cottages that occupied the site before the current development. In most of the trenches excavated, deposits of subsoil, modern made-ground and topsoil were encountered across the site.

Conclusion

Moated manor sites are a relatively common monument type in the medieval period. Most moats are simple square or rectangular enclosures of under 0.4ha, which enclosed a house and associated buildings (Turner 1987, 232). The primary function of the moat may well not have been defensive; while they may have acted as ‘psychological barriers’ (*ibid*) they often failed to encompass valuable resources such as granges. Therefore it must be assumed that elements of fashion and status played a key role in the construct of moated settlements. No direct evidence of the manor house itself was found on the site. Given the alignment of the moat, lack of evidence of the manor in trench 1, and the presence of the High Street to the north, it is likely the manor house stood just to the south of the Hope Cottage site.

The construction of a manor house on the site by at least the early 14th century reflects a period of expansion in both the number and geographical range of moated settlements throughout the 13th and early 14th centuries. The 14th and 15th centuries see a decline in the number of new sites, while existing sites are modified and adapted. Finally, most moated sites fall out of use in the 16th century; moats are allowed to silt up and the original manor houses are demolished or adapted in a more ‘modern’ style (Le Patourel 1973). On this site the moat was infilled to allow the construction of Sir John Denham’s new house.

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