

Excavations at the former St Andrew's School, Grange Road, Ashtead

Introduction

In October 2010, Archaeology South-East (UCL Institute of Archaeology) undertook a targeted archaeological excavation at the former St Andrew's School, Grange Road, Ashtead (centred at TQ 17500 57400; fig 1), following an initial desk-based assessment (Darton 2009) and archaeological evaluation in July 2010 (Margetts 2010). The fieldwork was commissioned by CgMs Consulting on behalf of their client, Barratt Southern Counties Ltd, in order to fulfil a planning condition prior to the proposed redevelopment of the site.

The site is thought to have remained undeveloped throughout the modern periods until the second half of the 19th century when St Andrew's School was constructed. The underlying geology consists of Reading Beds overlying Upper Chalk with Thanet Beds and London Clay nearby (British Geological Survey Sheet 286), and historically the site would have lain on a gradual slope of *c* 61.85m OD in the south-east to *c* 57.25m OD in the north-west. However, the existing topography of the site is artificial consisting of a *c* 60m OD levelled platform constructed in the eastern half of the site and lawned terraces to the west. These relate to the construction of the school and surrounding grounds. Previous archaeological fieldwork in the area, although limited, had produced largely negative results, although this may in part be the result of aggressive modern landscaping practices.

A number of Neolithic finds have been made close to the site including two Neolithic chipped stone axes, and part of a polished stone axe found during the creation of a back garden on the Stag Leys estate, *c* 750m south-east of the site, between 1935 and 1940 (HER ref 152, TQ 1825 5720). A further fifteen potsherds, some at least of Neolithic date, were found during excavation at the former Goblin Works, *c* 1km south-east of the site (HER ref 4288, TQ 182 567).

Iron Age remains were found at a quarry *c* 750m south-east of the site in the mid-1920s and later (Lowther 1933). These included pottery, grain storage pits, pieces of quern stones and loomweights, together with burnt flint (HER ref 137, TQ 1834 5756). Further exploration in 1974 revealed two pits including pottery, burnt flint and a worked flint blade, a quarry pit 2m deep x 3m wide, and the remains of a shaft (HER ref 2973, TQ 1834 5765). An archaeological evaluation in advance of residential redevelopment on land to the rear of 5 Ottway's Lane, *c* 500m east of the site, exposed a number of features and subsequent excavation revealed remains of a Late Iron Age settlement (HER ref 5725/6, TQ 1801 5764; Priestley-Bell 2004). Limited ceramic evidence suggests the settlement may have begun in the Middle Iron Age, although two gullies of possible Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date were also present. The Late Iron Age remains comprised significant elements of a probable double-ditched enclosure, with a possible entranceway. Postholes within the enclosure may have represented the site of a structure.

Roman activity is well attested in the Ashtead area with the Ashtead Common villa, bath-house and tileworks site located less than 3km to the north of the site (Bird 1987; 2014) and another putative villa near to St Giles' church just over 1km to the east. A Roman amphora handle was found *c* 500m south-west of the study site during a watching brief on residential development (HER ref 16065, TQ 1933 5769). The line of Stane Street, the Roman road from London to Chichester, runs to the south-east of the village, over 1.5km east of the site.

A Saxon inhumation cemetery was found at the former Goblin works, *c* 1km south-east of the study site (Hayman 1992; Poulton 1989). Evidence was first revealed in 1927, when a pit containing dismembered and mutilated bones was discovered. In 1974 human bones and a Saxon spearhead were found. These have been classified as early Saxon (HER ref

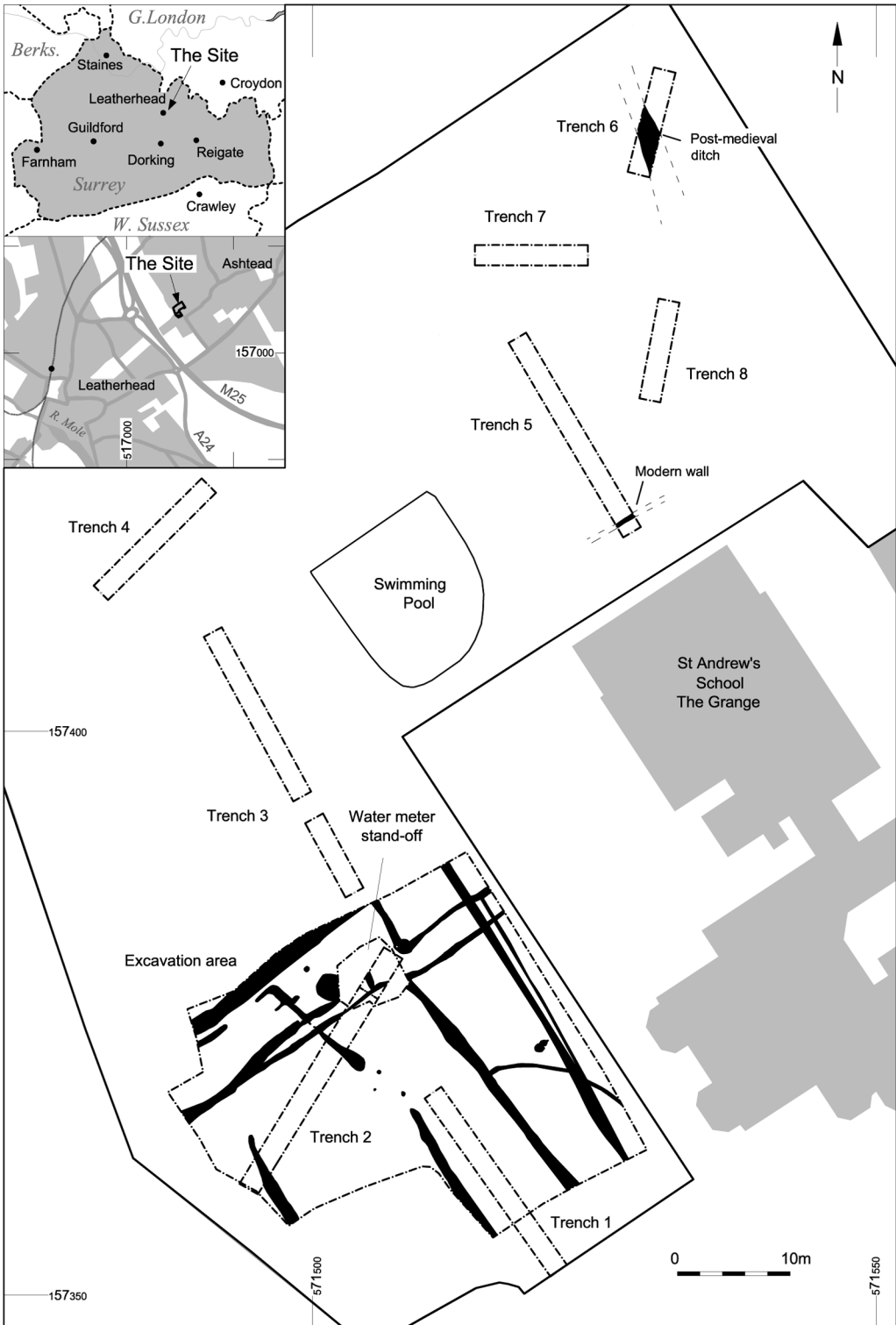


Fig 1 St Andrew's School, Ashtead. Site location. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

2280, TQ 18195 56724). More comprehensive excavation in 1984 and 1985 revealed 35 burials, both standard inhumations and execution burials (HER ref 139, TQ 1821 5670). The execution cemetery is thought to be Late Saxon or early Norman period in date. A settlement at Ashtead was clearly in existence by the late Saxon period as it is recorded in the Domesday Book. A church is not mentioned, and the late 11th century settlement was probably no more than an agricultural estate. A nucleated hamlet or village probably did not form until the 13th century in the Rectory Lane area, to the north of the site. Throughout the Saxon and medieval periods the study site probably lay in open farmland to the south-west of Ashtead.

Results

Archaeological excavation was undertaken in the southern part of the site centred on archaeological evaluation trench 2 in which prehistoric features had been identified (fig 1). An area of *c* 700m² was investigated and revealed further evidence of Iron Age, early Roman, Saxo-Norman and post-medieval date.

A small assemblage of 23 worked flints was recovered. The assemblage consisted almost entirely of pieces of debitage (nineteen pieces including four flakes, eleven flake fragments and four shattered waste pieces). Although no diagnostic pieces were recovered and the finds were not found in association with any contemporary features, the flint assemblage indicates that human activity occurred on the site from the Mesolithic to the Later Bronze Age.

The earliest features consisted of two intercutting pits and a posthole (fig 2). Associated pottery was of quartz-rich and flint-tempered sherds, likely to be of Middle or Late Iron Age date. The environmental sample from the feature produced a small assemblage of wood charcoal including several fragments of oak (*Quercus* sp.) and other taxa, and a moderate quantity of charred crop remains including caryopses of wheat (*Triticum* sp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.) as well as some indeterminate grains (Cerealia). Charred wild/weed seeds included vetch/tare (*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp.), knotgrass/dock (*Polygonum/Rumex* sp.), grasses (Poaceae), and a seed from the cabbage (Brassicaceae) family. The latter was similar to water-cress (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*). Small fragments of unidentifiable burnt bone were also present. The function of these features is unclear although the larger pit possibly represents a hearth or oven; the apparent isolated location may indicate that Middle/Late Iron Age settlement existed close by, perhaps in the area of the school buildings.

The early Roman period is represented by two ditches that intersected at right angles with a circular pit (fig 2). The pit produced a significant quantity of unabraded early Roman pottery, a small amount of unidentified burnt bone, highly fragmented charcoal and charred plant remains. A fragment of fired clay with possible wattle impressions also came from the ditch.

Among the early Roman pottery groups, some of which was found residually, a small proportion is made up by grog- and shell-tempered wares, including two storage jar body sherds in North Kent shelly ware. The majority of fabrics are a fairly homogenous group of sandy wares with dark surfaces and abundant quartz inclusions, probably of local origin. This is associated with two small diagnostic feature sherds, including a bead-rim jar with a sharply carinated shoulder and a handmade simple necked jar. A few sherds, likely to originate from the Alice Holt industry, are also present. The only other rim sherd is from a slightly unusual amphora/flagon like vessel. Overall, the composition of the groups suggests activity in the pre-Flavian or early Flavian period with little evidence of continuity into the late 1st century or beyond. All the pottery forms are typical for this period and none of the sherds is large enough to warrant illustration.

Charred macrobotanical remains included a single grain of wheat (*Triticum* sp.) and two indeterminate cereal caryopses. The ditches and pit represent elements of a larger system, but this cannot have extended far to the north as it was not detected in evaluation trenches

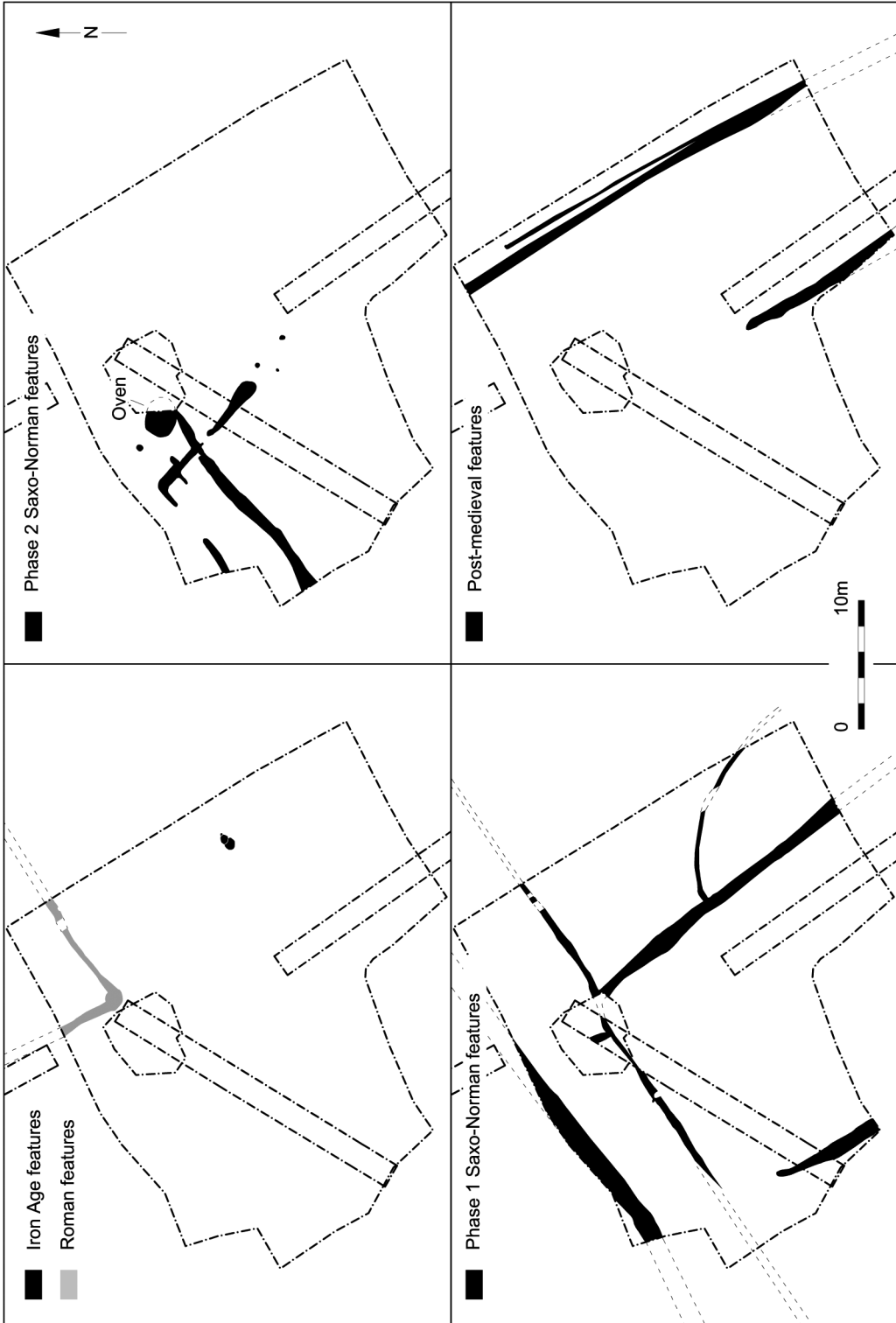


Fig 2 St Andrew's School, Ashitad. Phased plan of excavated features.

and probably extended mostly into the area of the school buildings. The features probably represent continuity of the Iron Age activity.

Two phases of Saxo-Norman activity were defined by the stratigraphy, although the bulk of the small assemblage of the pottery (29 sherds/119g) from both these phases is considered to span the later 11th–12th centuries. Five well-known local fabric types are represented: shelly wares, chalky wares, coarse sandy wares, sand/flint gritty wares and medium/coarse sandy wares. All the pottery is unglazed, undecorated and largely undiagnostic apart from the rims from two 12th century cooking pots. As with the Roman period pottery, none of the sherds warranted illustration.

Phase 1 consists of boundary ditches laid out largely in a coaxial arrangement (fig 2). The ditches appear to define at least three fields, a smaller paddock in the east, and a south-west/north-east-aligned trackway with a possible gateway. The location of the trackway runs *c* 10m to the south of, and parallel to, the boundary between the parishes of Ashted and Leatherhead as shown on the 1729 John Senex, the 1768 John Rocque and the 1871 OS maps. Whether an early medieval route originally defined the parish boundary can only be surmised.

By phase 2, the trackway appears to have been blocked off to the east and replaced by an area including a large oven (fig 2). A north-facing entrance to the trackway was apparently added and a new field defined to the south with a possible entrance from the east.

The fragmentary remains of the base of an oven perhaps deserve greater mention and these comprised a shallow (0.24m deep), irregular oblong cut measuring 0.96 x 1.14m. Adjoining this cut, to the north, was a second small linear cut, probably a flue, measuring 0.6m long x 0.24m wide x 0.15m deep. This was truncated by a modern cut at its northern end. Additionally there was a small (0.20 x 0.11 x 0.08m deep) possible posthole located *c* 0.15m from the south-western edge of the main cut. All these features were cut into the underlying natural silty geology. No actual structure to the feature survived aside from the cut.

The main cut was filled by a deposit of dark greyish-black silty sand with flecks of charcoal and produced a large quantity of fired clay, several pieces of which exhibit wattle impression(s) of between 7.3 and 15.5mm diameter. The fired clay presumably represents remnants of the oven walls and dome built over a wattle framework. One roughly rectangular object, possibly a hearth brick, measuring at least 156mm in length x 101mm in width was also found. This has a large wattle impression in one side of 42mm diameter, with two scooped impressions separated by a raised ridge on the upper surface and a wattle impression at a 45° angle through the centre of one of the scooped areas. The fill produced ten sherds from the same vessel of mid-11th to mid-12th century pottery. Fourteen kilograms of burnt flint nodules were also recovered.

The feature produced a rich assemblage of charred plant remains including grains of wheat (*Triticum* sp.), possible bread wheat (*Triticum* cf. *aestivum*), barley (*Hordeum* sp.), unidentified grains and three indeterminate glume bases. Charred wild/weed seeds were prominent in the flot and included knotgrass/dock (*Polygonum/Rumex* sp.), vetch/tare (*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp.), stinking chamomiles (*Anthemis cotula* sp.), onion (*Allium* sp.), possible sedges (cf *Carex* sp.), white bryony (cf *Bryonia* sp.) as well as oat (*Avena* sp.), unidentified grasses (Poaceae) and seeds from the goosefoot (Chenopodiaceae) family. Well preserved cherry/blackthorn (*Prunus* sp.) charcoal fragments consisting predominantly of roundwood were noted.

No finds were recovered from the fill of the possible flue, which was light greyish-brown silty sand in contrast to the dark greyish-black silty sand fill of the main feature. The possible posthole fill, however, had a similar fill to the main feature and this also contained charcoal and small fragments of burnt flint.

Given the presence of cereal and other food grains and seeds, it seems likely that the feature may have been a small collapsed dome-shaped oven with an associated flue/rake-out channel and associated post of unknown function. The oven would presumably have been close to a domicile of some sort, for which no further evidence was found. A similarly sized and dated feature was recorded on a site at Manston Road near Ramsgate in Kent

(Dawkes in prep). It had sandstone and flint cobbles set into a layer of fired clay that formed the floor of the oven. However, that example was set within the corner of a small sunken-featured building. Other examples of similar features associated with buildings are also known elsewhere in Kent (Allen *et al* 2012; Andrews *et al* 2009) although no similar parallels could be found from Surrey.

In the post-medieval period (fig 2) three ditches and a small gully were recorded along the same alignment as all other periods of activity and indeed that of the modern street plan. Late post-medieval made-ground deposits were found in the south of the site and a buried post-medieval topsoil was recorded to the north. Only three late post-medieval sherds were recovered and these consist of glazed red earthenwares of mid-18th to 19th century date. Fragments of cattle and two complete sheep horn cores were recovered. Of possible intrinsic interest was a neck fragment from a shaft and globe glass bottle, dating to the mid-17th to early 18th century. A second piece consists of the 'bullseye' from a crown glass pane. This pontil mark is usually discarded for recycling, or utilised for cheaper window panes. The fragment dates to the mid-17th to mid-18th century.

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