

RUISLIP MANOR FARM: RESULTS OF AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AND GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY ON THE SITE OF A MOTTE AND BAILEY CASTLE AND A MEDIEVAL MANORIAL COMPLEX

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With contributions by the late Geoff Egan and Paul Williamson

SUMMARY

A series of archaeological watching briefs were carried out at Ruislip Manor Farm, in the London Borough of Hillingdon during 1997–2008, when the historic buildings were being converted into an interpretation centre. The existing farmhouse was built in 1505–6 on a site previously briefly occupied by an 11th-century motte and bailey castle, which was superseded by a manorial complex set within the moated enclosure. From c.1087 until 1404 Ruislip manor was the property of the Abbey of Bec (Normandy, France). Some of the test pits identified parts of the foundations of the medieval buildings, which had been reused as footings for the early 16th-century farmhouse. A geophysical survey was also undertaken and this identified buried anomalies that probably indicate the positions of ditches and buildings relating to the castle and manor. Other test pits identified the foundations of the 18th- to 19th-century barns that would have been ranged around the farmyard. Other post-medieval features recorded include a garden feature and a circular brick-lined structure. An unusual piece of medieval carved bone inlay was found below the floor of the southernmost ground storey room of the farmhouse.

INTRODUCTION

This article reports on a series of archaeological watching briefs carried out at Ruislip Manor Farm, in the London Borough of Hillingdon, during 1997–2008 and on the results from a geophysical survey carried out by Stratascan Ltd during 2005. The approximate centre of the site is at NGR 509053 187809 (Fig 1). The historical background of the site has previously been extensively covered elsewhere (Franklin 2009; MOLA 2004). This article concentrates on defining how the recent archaeological work relates to our previous understanding of the site. It is intended as a summary of the recent fieldwork, full details of which are available in the site archive at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC).¹

Part of the site, containing earthworks of a Norman motte and bailey castle, is a Scheduled Monument and the former manor house (now known as Manor Farm House), which dates to the early 16th century, is listed Grade II. Ranged around the farmyard are a series of agricultural buildings, including the 14th-century

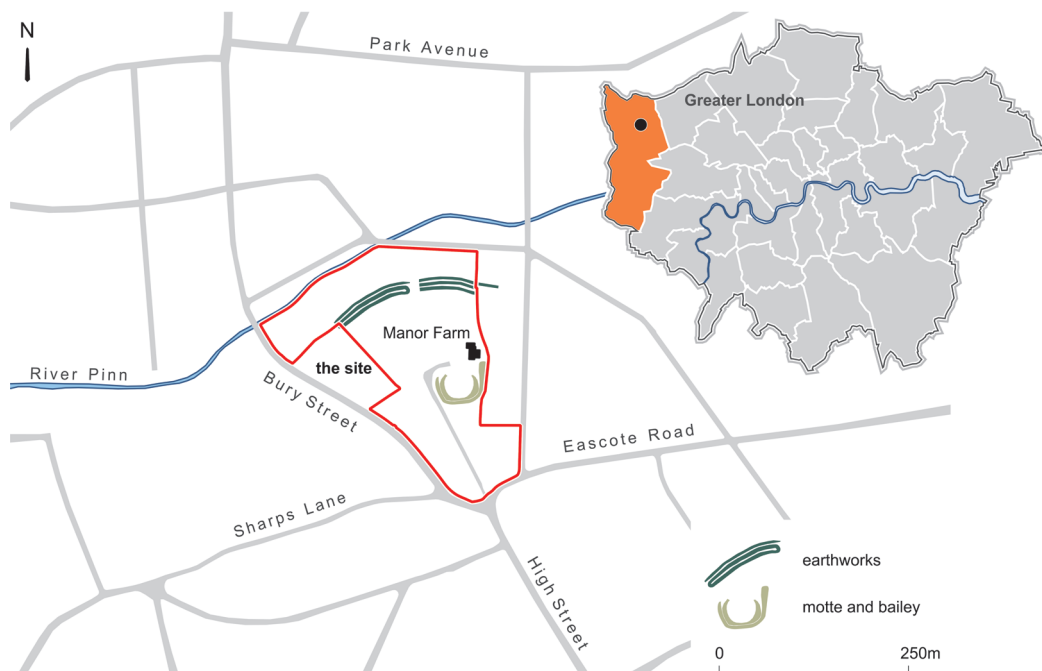


Fig 1. Site location (scale 1:10,000)

timber-framed Great Barn (Grade II*), one of the oldest surviving tithe barns in England and the Little Barn (Grade II), built *c.*1600, that is now Manor Farm Library. The 2005–7 scheme of work was designed to both assess the condition of the buildings and to record archaeology affected by the works necessary for the conversion of Manor Farm House into an interpretation centre. Three phases of archaeological watching brief and evaluation were undertaken: test pits (TP) 1–4 were excavated in 1997, TP 5–19 in 2005 and TP 20–34 in 2007 (reported in MOLA 1997, Steele 1998, MOLA 2005 and 2007 respectively) (Figs 2–4). Trench 24 (not illustrated) was not excavated due to the presence of modern services. Much of the archaeological work consisted of monitoring the excavation of test pits (ranging in size from one to four square metres). Internal renovations within the house were also monitored, and aspects of this architectural recording work have been published already by Franklin (2009, 260–8). A final site visit was made in early 2008 to record a brick structure exposed during groundworks.

Cumulatively, the test pits were ranged across the entire site and were intended to assess the archaeology of all periods, but in particular the motte and bailey earthworks, the medieval priory and the development of the farmyard and associated buildings. The results are presented here with these research aims in mind.

A geophysical survey was undertaken in 2005 to assess the castle earthworks, other earthworks to the north of the Manor Farm complex and the survival or otherwise of buried structural remains (Stratascan 2005). This involved a resistance survey on 0.5ha of grassed areas and a ground penetrating radar survey on 0.1ha of road.

HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

Ruislip Manor Farm is located in the valley of the River Pinn (Fig 1). The river runs along the northern edge of the site and flows a further *c.*4km westwards before joining the Colne. Consequently, the site slopes down from south to north as far as the earthwork

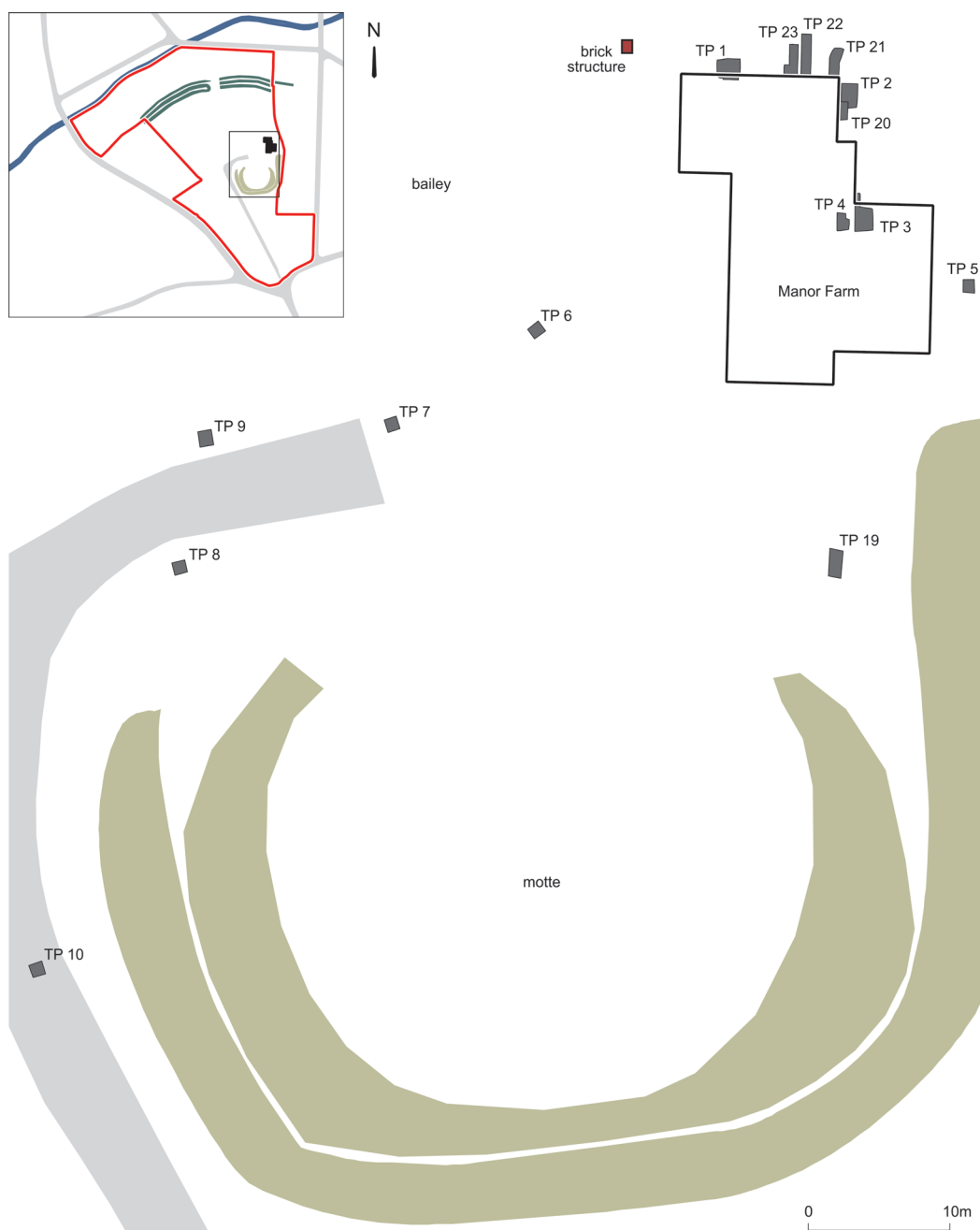


Fig 2. Areas of excavation in the north of the site (scale 1:500)

on the north side of Manor Farm House, beyond which the river flood plain is fairly flat. The earliest known features on the site are the linear earthworks near the River Pinn,

which might be part of the western extension of a late Roman or Saxon earthwork known as Grim's Dyke (Bowl 2008, 109) (Fig 1). However, the earliest securely interpreted



Fig 3. Areas of excavation in the west of the site (scale 1:800)

earthworks on site are the remains of a late 11th-century motte and bailey castle. This undocumented castle was apparently short-lived and in *c.*1087 the manor of Ruislip was given to the Benedictine Abbey of Bec in Normandy, France (discussed below). In 1211 King John sequestered the English properties of Bec Abbey including Ruislip for the first time. The English properties of alien monastic houses were frequently sequestered by the Crown during times of war, and this happened repeatedly to Ruislip. The sequestration of 1404 proved to be permanent and in 1441 the manor was granted to King's College, Cambridge (Franklin 2009, 253–4). A new manor house, the building now called Manor Farm House, was built in 1505–6, and the 'sowth barne' was either repaired or rebuilt during 1506–7 (*ibid.*, 255–7). Today the farm buildings are arranged around the two courtyards.

During the early 20th century the Ruislip area was transformed from farmland to

suburban housing. As a consequence the manorial function of Manor Farm became untenable. The last manor court was held here in 1925, and all farming ceased in 1933. In 1931 Manor Farm and its buildings were included as a gift in the sale of Park Wood to Ruislip-Northwood Council and Middlesex County Council (Franklin 2009, 255). In 1937 the Little Barn was converted into a public library (Cherry & Pevsner 1991, 347–8).

A similar complex of redundant post-medieval agrarian buildings exists nearby at Manor Farm, Harmondsworth. This complex formerly included a granary (demolished 1990–1), stable block (now offices), open cart-shed (demolished 1990–1), barn/cattle shed and a 19th-century farmhouse, plus a magnificent 15th-century timber-framed Great Barn, constructed when the property was owned by Winchester College (Bowl 2013; Cherry & Pevsner 1991, 325).

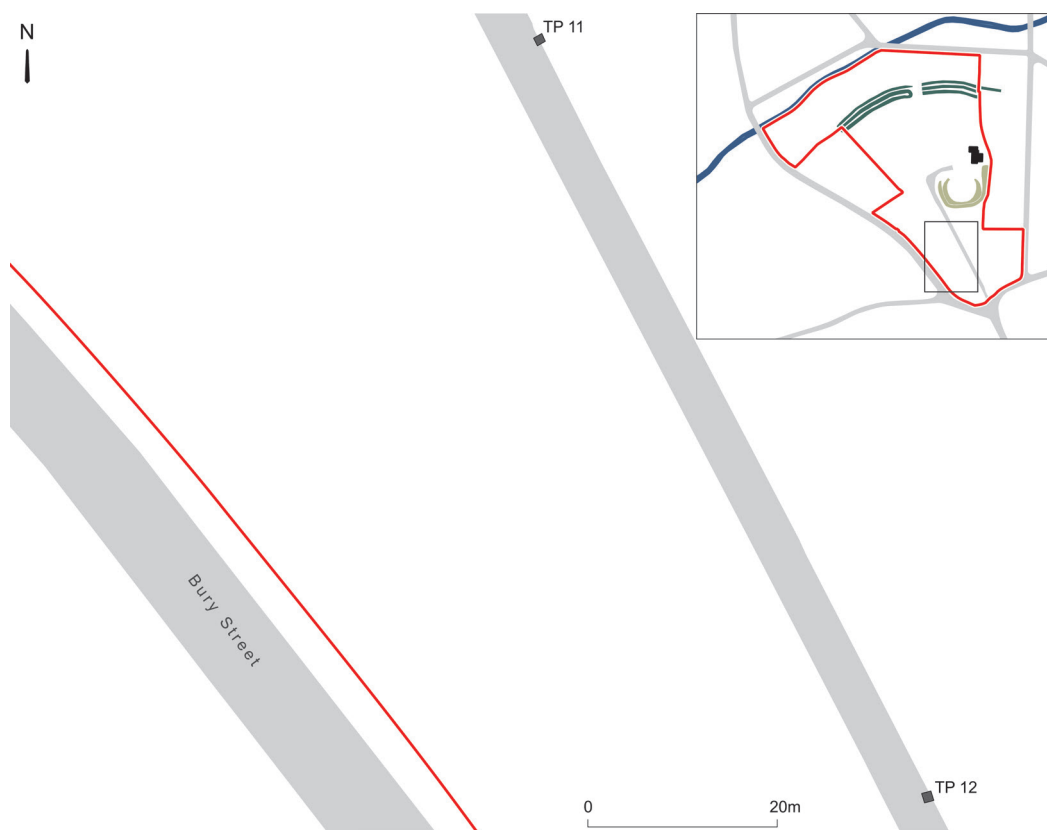


Fig 4. Areas of excavation in the south of the site (scale 1:800)

NATURAL GEOLOGY

The site lies on the southern flank of the valley of the River Pinn. The southern edge of the Pinn flood plain, which is broadly level at $c.41\text{m}$ above Ordnance Datum (OD), is marked by the linear earthworks, which bisect the northern part of the site. South of this the ground rises towards Manor Farm, where modern ground level is at $45\text{--}46\text{m}$ OD, before levelling off again. The remainder of the site is broadly level at $46\text{--}47\text{m}$ OD. The geology of the higher ground consists of the mottled clay with sand and pebbles of the Eocene Reading Beds giving way to Eocene London Clay towards the southern boundary of the site. The drift geology of the Pinn flood plain is alluvium (British Geological Survey 2005). A capping of orange brown, clayey brickearth was observed in some of the test pits including numbers 12–14, 19, 30 and 31.

MOTTE AND BAILEY EARTHWORKS

Today, the visible signs of the motte and bailey castle are limited to a grass-covered mound or motte 45m in diameter and 3m high, surrounded by traces of a horseshoe-shaped ditch, situated to the south of the farmhouse (Fig 2). These earthworks were first interpreted as a Norman castle by Braun (1933, 117, fig 5). It is believed that this castle was never completed and certainly the motte may never have been finished. Instead it appears that during the 12th century this redundant or incomplete castle was converted into an oval-shaped moated enclosure. In 1888 the ditch around the northern half of the site was infilled when tennis courts were constructed (Braun 1933, 117–20, fig 6).

The earliest recorded archaeological work in this area of the site took place

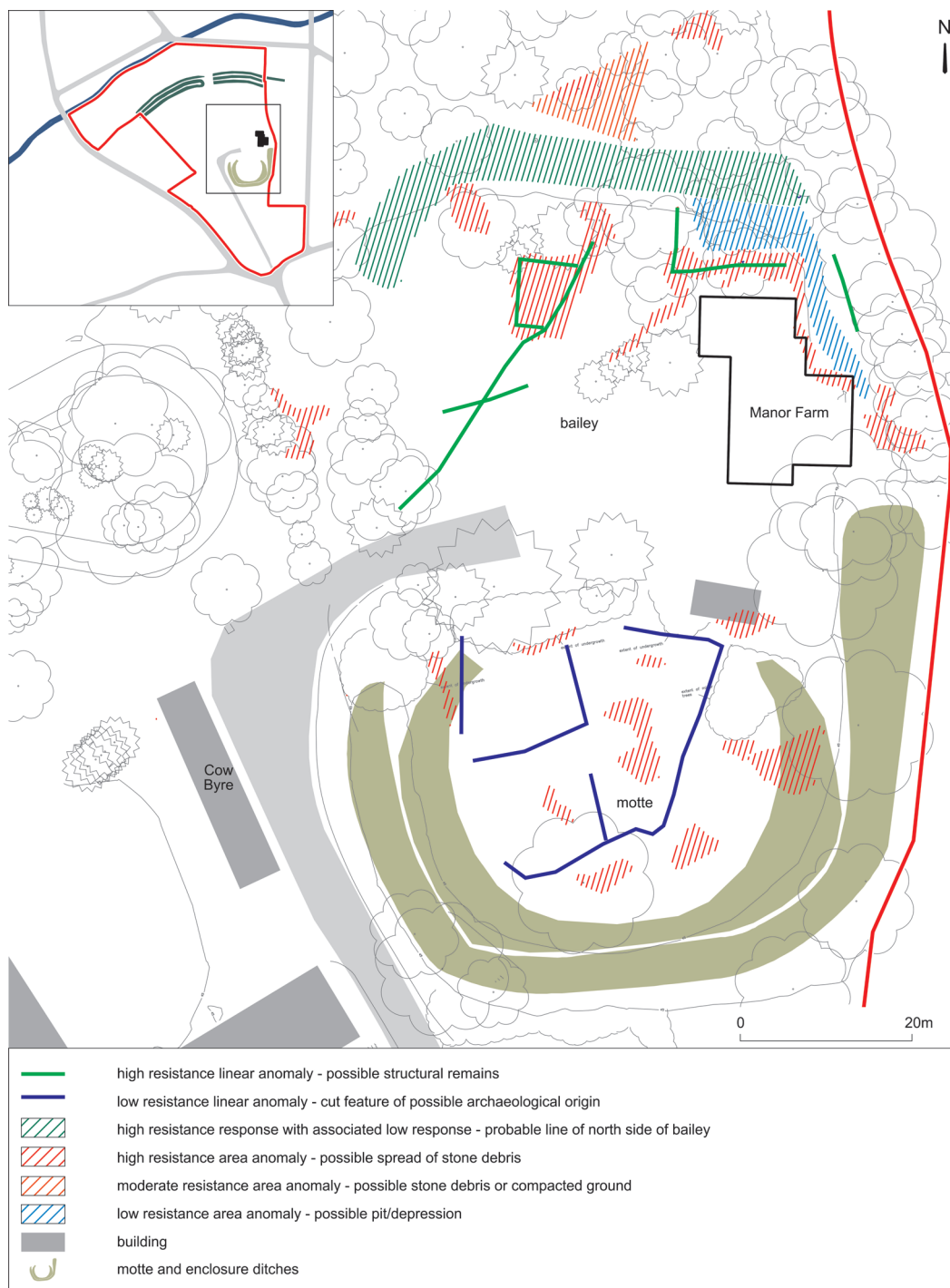


Fig 5. Interpretative plan of resistivity survey anomalies (after Stratascan 2005, fig 5) (scale 1:800)

during the 1920s when the tenant of the farm uncovered ‘some fifteen feet of the medieval boundary wall ... on the summit of the northern rampart of the one-time castle bailey’ (Braun 1933, 119). In 1978 two trial trenches (each measuring 4m square) were excavated to the north of Manor Farm House. While on the line of the infilled moat a linear trench (8m long & 1m wide) was excavated to try and obtain a cross section of the ditch. However, the high water table restricted excavation to the top *c.*0.7m of the infilled moat. Significant finds from the uppermost fills of the moat included a 1919 farthing, plus sherds of medieval and post-medieval pottery. It is likely that these deposits represent part of the rampart that was used to infill this stretch of the moat in 1888 (Bedford & Bowlt 1978).

Some 80m north of Manor Farm, on the edge of the flood plain of the River Pinn, there is a prominent east–west aligned ditch and bank linear earthwork (Fig 1). Although included in the Scheduled Ancient Monument entry, these earthworks are not part of the bailey. Instead, it is possible that they represent a western extension of Grim’s Dyke. A trial excavation of this stretch of bank in 1976 produced Roman pottery confirming that it must have been constructed during the 2nd century AD or later (Bowlt 2008, 109–11).

To the south of these earthworks, between them and the farmhouse, the resistivity survey plots demonstrated a linear zone (shown in green on Fig 5) of high resistance with a parallel and associated low resistance anomaly on its north side. This is very likely to be the actual line of the north side of the bailey, with the high response representing the compacted, built-up ground of an embankment and the low response the looser fills of an external ditch (Stratascan 2005, 10). In test pits 1 and 2 (Fig 2), located on the north and east sides of the farmhouse, the build-up of ground level was 1.1m above natural deposits. Of this, the primary 0.5m of overburden may incorporate material cast up from the original Norman ditch and could constitute the original bank of the bailey, which extended northwards from its present visible limits.

MEDIEVAL MANOR AND CELL OF THE ABBEY OF BEC

It appears that the earthworks of the redundant castle were subsequently transformed into a moated manorial enclosure after *c.*1087, when the manor of Ruislip was given to the Abbey of Bec in Normandy. A small monastic cell or administrative centre for Bec’s English estates was established here. By 1176, the most senior monk resident at Ruislip was referred to as prior *ex officio* (hence Ruislip’s description as a non-conventual cell of the abbey). It was never a priory complete with all the usual conventual buildings). By 1294 two monks were living at the manor house, presumably the prior *ex officio* and his assistant or *socius*. Attached to the manor house was a private chapel for the use of the monks (Franklin 2009, 253–6). A 1435 inventory of Ruislip manor indicates that there were an extensive number of buildings within the moated enclosure including a hall, counting house, prior’s chamber, lord’s chamber, forester’s chamber and chapel, plus a scullery and bakehouse (Flower 1954, 203). The Great Barn and other farm buildings were situated to the west of the enclosure (Fig 3). Braun (1933, 119) reported that under the lawn to the west of the farmhouse ‘the foundations of thick flint walls’ had been discovered. In *c.*1505 some of the medieval priory buildings within the moated enclosure including the chapel were demolished to create space to build the present Manor Farm House; others were retained. In 1613 the medieval hall of the priory was demolished (Franklin 2009, 258, 265).

MEDIEVAL MANOR FOUNDATIONS

During the 1997 watching brief, work in test pits 1 and 2 (Figs 2 & 6) revealed a mortared flint foundation, [23], reused within the foundations of Manor Farm House (Steele 1998, 9). The foundations continued to the north, west and east of test pit 1 and to the north and south of test pit 2. In test pit 1 the foundations had been robbed and a later foundation constructed over the robber cut. A series of medieval deposits (not visible in Fig 6) banked up against the earlier foundation. Test pit 20 (Fig 2), dug

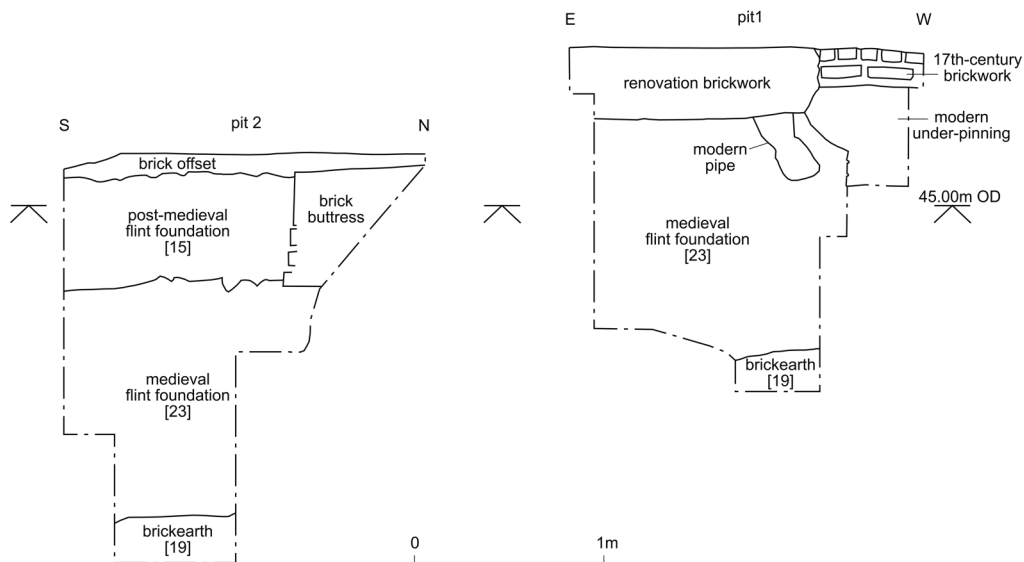


Fig 6. The north-facing section of test pit 1 (right) and the east-facing section of test pit 2 (left), showing the medieval flint foundation, [23], below later rebuilds. The location of these two sections is shown on Fig 7 (scale 1:40)

during the 2007 phase of work, overlapped with test pit 2, and the earliest flint footings were again observed in its east-facing section. As before, the 1.1m-deep footings consisted of irregular courses of large flint nodules bonded by a loose, orange mortar and founded on natural brickearth [19]. It is most likely that these foundations belong to part of the priory buildings. They may have been part of an eastern range backing on to the moat.

The resistivity survey conducted on the motte mound revealed several linear anomalies that may represent the buried remains of buildings (shown as purple lines on Fig 5), but the low resistance values suggest that these had been robbed out or were of timber (Stratascan 2005, 4, 14). These results confirmed those of an earlier geophysical survey carried out in 2000 (MOLA 2004, 19; Stratascan 2005, 15). The date of these possible buildings remains unclear, though they are more likely to form part of the medieval manor than the castle.

THE POST-MEDIEVAL NORTH WALL OF MANOR FARM HOUSE

A later phase of foundation, incorporating greensand blocks, tiles, bricks, chalk blocks and flint nodules, which post-dated the flint foundations of the medieval manor, was seen in test pits 1, 2 and 20–22 (Figs 2, 6 & 7). The mixed character of these foundations probably represents the reuse of available materials (perhaps derived from the demolition of the medieval manorial buildings) for the construction of the farmhouse itself, in 1505–6. Franklin (2009, 258) argued that the high price of wages and building materials in the early 16th century would have encouraged such reuse.

In test pit 1, the later work was within a construction cut which contained a counterfeit silver penny of the reign of Stephen (1135–53), considered to be residual in this context (though possibly indicative of the date of the medieval footing) (Steele 1998, 16).²

In test pit 1, the offset of this foundation was sealed by a demolition deposit, [25] (not visible in Fig 6), which contained pottery

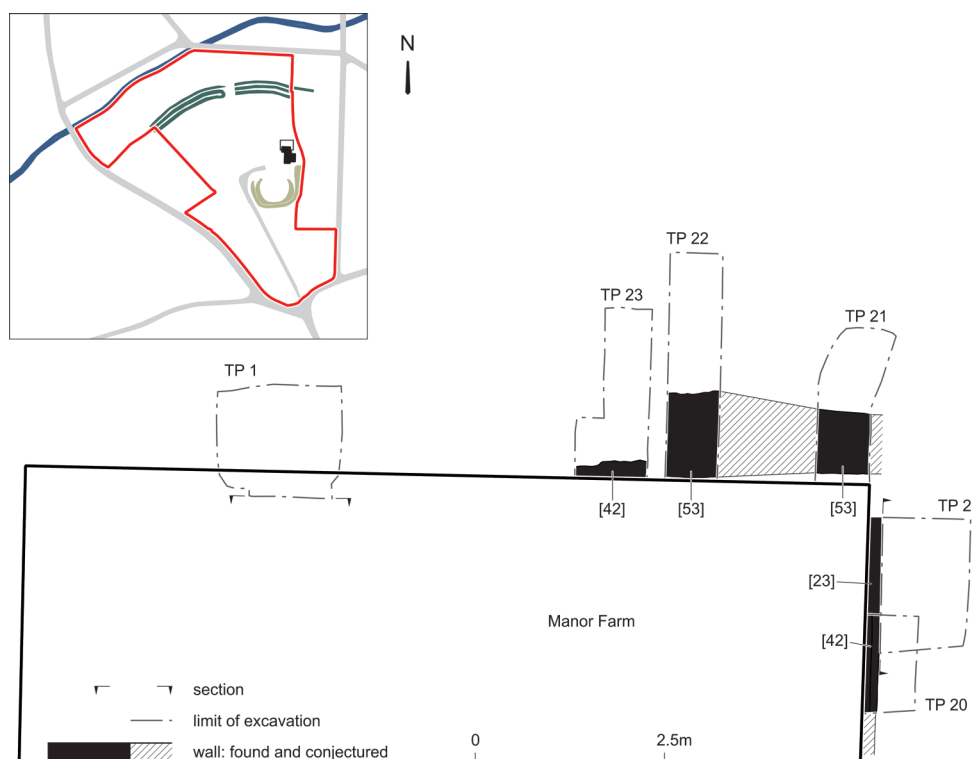


Fig 7. Plan of test pits 20, 21, 22 and 23, showing the location of flint foundations to the north of Manor Farm House (scale 1:100)

dated to *c.*1480–1600. In test pit 2, this phase of foundation, [15] (Fig 6), formed an offset to the walls of the farmhouse (Steele 1998, fig 4).

Several of the test pits dug in 2007 (nos 20–23) were also immediately outside the walls of the existing manor farmhouse (Fig 7). The later footings, [42], seen in test pits 20 and 23, consisted of irregular courses of small flint nodules and reused fragments of post-medieval building material set in a paler mortar and survived to 0.6m thick; they are again likely to be associated with the construction of Manor Farm House in 1505–6. The construction of the farmhouse also involved a make-up dump of redeposited yellow clayey brickearth, also seen in test pit 20.

Test pits 21 and 22 were both too shallow to reach the earlier, priory phase of foundation. In test pit 21, a flint foundation, [53], again associated with a redeposited

yellow clay similar to that seen in test pit 20 and therefore likely to be contemporary, extended in plan *c.*0.9m north of the current standing building, far further than expected (Fig 7). Overlying the clay layer was a loose light brownish yellow sandy silt, possibly construction debris from this period. In test pit 22, the flint footing, [53], extended 1.3m north of Manor Farm and lay directly under the topsoil.

The area available for investigation was not extensive but the results do suggest a complicated structural history for this part of the farmhouse, with some form of extension adjoining the north side of the building. This may relate to the underground anomalies observed to the north of Manor Farm House during the resistivity survey (Fig 5). It remains possible, however, that these walls and anomalies belong to a late phase of modification to the priory buildings.

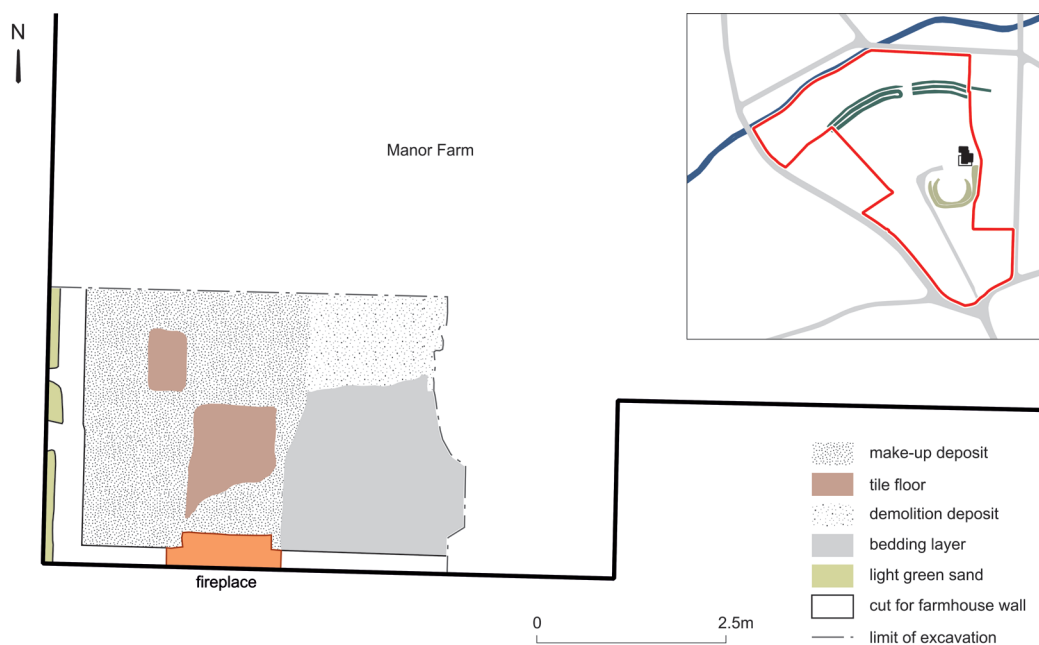


Fig 8. Plan of internal features in the Manor Farm House kitchen, showing earlier floors and structural cut for the original house (scale 1:100)

INTERNAL EXCAVATIONS WITHIN THE FARMHOUSE

Internal renovations of the farmhouse involved work in its southernmost room, possibly the kitchen (Fig 8).³ The edge of the construction cut for the south farmhouse wall was identified, [61]/[62]. The foundation had been trench-built and a fill of mixed sand and (presumably reused) pink mortar thrown in against the wall to level up the trench.

In the south-west corner of the room, the modern floor was lifted and a sequence of earlier surfaces identified. These consisted of layers of mixed and compacted clay and sandy silts acting as a make-up for a mortar spread or bedding layer. There was one extant tile associated with this bedding. A similar mortar layer and a mixed layer of mortar and small fragments of building material lay in the south-east corner of the room.

The most significant find from the site, a piece of medieval carved bone (see Appendix), was found in a modern sand and

rubble bedding immediately below the concrete floor in the north-west of this room, just inside the doorway. In the north-east corner of the room was a fragmentary north-south aligned wall foundation, 1.25m long, 0.49m wide and including some brick, interpreted as a later internal rebuild or alteration (not illustrated). It was sealed by a layer of rubble, probably derived from the demolition of this feature.

THE MOAT

Deposits of gravel [38] and demolition rubble [31] encountered in test pit 5 (Fig 2), to the east of Manor Farm House, represent part of the infilling of the moat which took place in 1888 (Braun 1933, 120).

THE WESTERN COURTYARD

A series of test pits were also located within the western court or farmyard and the outbuildings around it (Fig 3). In some locations modern disturbance had removed all archaeological deposits or, as in test pits

13 and 14 for example, were excavated through a modern concrete floor that was founded directly on to natural clayey brickearth. The fullest sequence of farmyard surfaces was found in test pit 17. The earliest to be defined, a rough gravel tinged greenish from organic content, may pre-date the 19th-century developments of the farmyard and outbuildings. A second, replacement gravel surface was more securely dated as it had occasional fragments of pottery embedded into it and may be contemporary with the (re) construction of the farm outbuildings at the beginning of the 19th century (Wrightson & Brocklebank 2001, 19). A cobbled yard surface set on a cindery base completed the sequence in this test pit; this surface was also seen in test pits 14 and 16, though it had been disturbed by the installation of the later concrete surface.

BUILDINGS IN THE WESTERN COURTYARD

During 2007 pits 25–29 (Fig 3) were excavated within the range of open-sided cart-sheds, now known as the ‘northern barn’ of the western courtyard, in order to examine the foundations. This barn, late 18th or early 19th century in date, was originally a range of open-sided cart-sheds that were completely enclosed when reclad during the 20th century (Wrightson & Brocklebank 2001, fig 7). Their foundations were revealed to consist of between ten and 12 courses of stepped, offset brick footings, seen in all the test pits. The base of the footings was consistently at 41.4–41.5m OD. No construction cut was visible but some redeposited clays in test pit 27 could be fill or dumping contemporary with their erection.

Test pits 30–34 (Fig 3) examined the foundations of outbuildings adjoining the 14th-century Great Barn. In test pits 30 and 31, within a 20th-century pigsty, the foundations consisted of three courses of brick, generally laid directly over the natural brickearth. In test pits 32–34, within other buildings that were also formerly open-sided cart-sheds and again reclad during the 20th century, brick foundations were also found, but here they overlay two irregular courses of flint. The flint was reused, as shown by traces of a different, orange mortar remaining on them.

During works within the Great Barn to remove a modern structure in the south-east of the barn, a large timber pad was located underneath one of the vertical posts of the barn (not illustrated). This comprised a large tree trunk roughly shaped and placed horizontally on a plinth of red bricks. The plinth probably represents 20th-century restoration work, but the timber is likely to have been reused.

EXTERNAL GARDEN FEATURES AND ROAD SURFACE

Several test pits dug in 2005 were located in the area to the south-west of the Manor Farm House. A solid brick surface, two courses of brickwork laid on edge in a creamy white mortar, found in test pit 6 is interpreted as a path or garden feature. It was overlain by a rubble dump. Traces of what is likely to have been a gravel path, edged by rounded flint cobbles, was found below the topsoil in test pits 8 and 9 (Fig 2). A north–south aligned brick wall running across the western side of test pit 8 had an insubstantial, shallow foundation and is likely to be a garden subdivision rather than a building. This area is shown on the 1868 Ordnance Survey map (MOLA 2004, fig 9) as a formal garden criss-crossed by footpaths.

Further to the south and south-west, test pits 10 (Fig 3), 11 and 12 (Fig 4) were excavated through a modern tarmac road leading to Manor Farm House from the north end of the High Street. Watching brief work in 2004 had revealed earlier cobbled surfaces, thought to be medieval in date, though it is unclear whether this route was the original access to Manor Farm (MOLA 2004, 11).

Test pit 10 contained a compact layer of crushed building material and pebbles, filling in a rut in an earlier surface which was a compacted gravel and clay road surface. This was 0.28m thick and was bedded directly on a mottled yellowish brown clayey deposit, which probably was either disturbed or redeposited natural brickearth. Earlier road surfaces were also found in test pit 11. The upper gravel surface, [11], had a greenish tinge indicating a high phosphate content, probably derived from the frequent use of this route by livestock (Fig 9). Below this

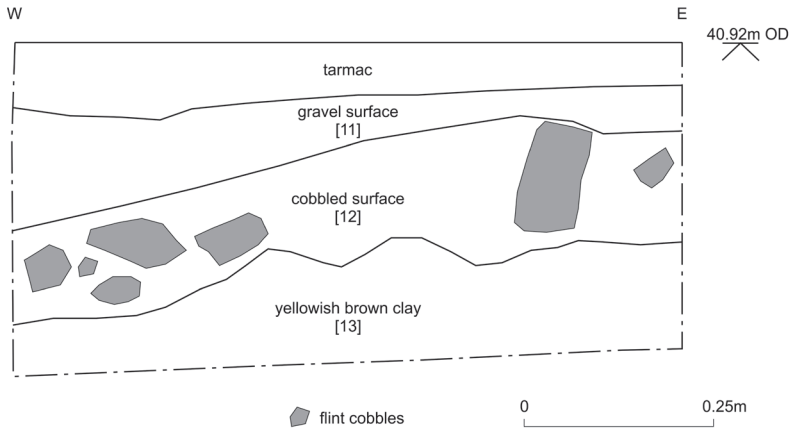


Fig 9. The south-facing section of test pit 11, showing successive phases of road surface (scale 1:10)

was a much more substantial road surface formed by roughly knapped angular flint cobbles in a sticky clay matrix, [12]. Both these surfaces sloped down towards the west, suggesting either uneven wear or that the surface had a camber to aid drainage. Below the cobbled surface was a mottled yellowish brown clayey deposit, [13], which probably was either disturbed or redeposited natural brickearth.

Two successive surfaces were also recorded in test pit 12. The upper surface was gravel with tile fragments embedded within it, while the lower surface was gravel and clay with a greenish tinge, again indicating the presence of phosphates. The lower surface was constructed directly on the natural clayey brickearth.

The sequence of surfaces demonstrates continued post-medieval use and maintenance of the route, though absolute dating for its inception was not recovered.

CIRCULAR BRICK STRUCTURE

During the 2008 watching brief, a circular subterranean brick-lined structure was partially uncovered close to the north-west corner of Manor Farm (Fig 2). This feature remains *in situ*. It possessed a dome-shaped upper portion with an external diameter of 2.80m, which incorporated a central circular access hole (0.68m diameter). Subsequently

this access hole had been modified when a brick-built manhole fed by two ceramic pipes was added to it. Only the top metre of the backfill within the interior of the structure was removed. However, this was sufficient to reveal that its interior was rendered and the lining walls below the dome were probably vertical. The dome was constructed of tiers of header bond red, pinkish red and purple bricks with a width of 100mm and a thickness of 70mm, implying an 18th- or early 19th-century date on stylistic grounds. The brickwork was bonded by a hard pale brown sand/lime mortar, which obscured parts of the external fabric.

The interpretation of this structure remains uncertain as it was only partly examined. However, there are three possibilities. Firstly, it could have been a well from which water was extracted via a pipe and a handpump. If it was a well then it was unusually large as almost all contemporary examples possessed an internal diameter of less than 2m and were not internally rendered as this would have impeded water collection. Secondly, it might have been a small ice house accessible only from the top. However, if it was an ice house then it was an unusual design as contemporary examples were normally entered via a side passage (of which there was no sign), but they often possessed a top vent similar to the access hole (Ellis 1982, 44–77). Thirdly, the presence of internal

render suggests that this structure may have functioned as a storage tank perhaps for roof water, hence its location close to Manor Farm. Water could have been extracted from the tank via the access hole by means of a pipe connected to a handpump. Of all these interpretations the third seems the most plausible. On early 20th-century plans a 'rain water well' is shown in approximately the same position as the circular brick structure.

CONCLUSIONS

The various archaeological investigations carried out during 1997–2008 at Ruislip Manor Farm have added to our knowledge of the development of the site, in particular the reuse of medieval flint foundations for the early 16th-century farmhouse and the sequence of floors discovered within the kitchen area. Whilst little dating evidence was recovered some conclusions can be drawn.

- For the motte and bailey castle, the resistivity survey (Stratascan 2005) has demonstrated the most likely line of the northern bailey rampart and ditch, confirming what is already indicated by the topography of this area.
- Fragmentary remains of a Benedictine priory cell building of unknown plan or function were recorded. It was possible to see that the Manor Farm House building had reused some of the medieval foundations. The footings extending north of the house remain to be fully understood, but may correspond with the north-eastern extent of the original range of medieval buildings, the extent of which was constrained by the moated enclosure ditch.
- The reuse of foundations suggests that there were already standing buildings on the spot where Manor Farm House was built in 1505–6, within the former castle bailey, and that its location was determined by these factors.
- The resistivity survey indicated that there may be other areas of buried masonry surviving which may date from the medieval period, although they were not exposed during the watching brief.
- The exposure of the foundations of barns ranged around the western courtyard has shown their construction methods and the materials used. These are later in date than the Great Barn and the Manor Farm House but remain an important part of the site and contribute significantly to its historic value. The circular brick-lined structure probably dates to the same period of late 18th- and early 19th-century development at the farm.
- It has been confirmed that elements of the post-medieval gardens and farmyard surfaces survive.
- The discovery of a fragment of medieval carved bone inlay is certainly a find of regional significance as such material is not commonly encountered in archaeological investigations (see below).

APPENDIX: FRAGMENT OF MEDIEVAL CARVED BONE INLAY

Geoff Egan† and Paul Williamson (Keeper of Sculpture, Metalwork, Ceramics and Glass, Victoria & Albert Museum, London)

The object is an incomplete fragment of carved bone 78mm long (RMO05 <1>), which is now on display in the Manor Farm House at Ruislip (Fig 10). It was produced from an ox metapodial (identified by Alan Pipe, MOLA), which was split in half and then carved in bas-relief on the semicircular surface with an angel on the right supporting an oval shield having a pointed base (the hands, probably of a second angel, at the break are on the left side of the shield); the surviving angel, with wings outstretched, looks out to the right, away from the shield (which hides the lower limbs) and appears to be supported on a stylised foliate scroll with jagged-edged leaves. There are tiny traces of gold on the scroll and angel, and possibly of red pigment at the base of the shield.

The object is likely to be an inlay from a late medieval casket (c.1420), following the style of north Italian marriage versions from the Embriachi family workshop, dated from c.1380 into the 15th century. Many of these have putti or similar supporting a heart-shaped shield uniting the arms of the two partners, all against a foliate background (Longhurst 1929, pl LIX; Randall 1993, cat nos 232, 233, 235).



Fig 10. The fragment of medieval carved bone inlay (length 78mm)

This fragment, with its angel supporter (facing outwards in contrast to the putti, who look towards the arms they hold), different form of shield and stylistically distinct foliate background, is probably a north European (eg French) adaptation of the Italian caskets, possibly for a specifically religious milieu. No obvious close parallel has been traced. This highly accomplished carving may have been produced at, or for, the Abbey of Bec in Normandy, which owned the manor of Ruislip from c.1087 until 1404 (discussed above). The arms that may be presumed to have been painted on the shield were perhaps those of the abbey. The condition is not that of a buried object but suggests that it may have been found or rediscovered, possibly during the renovations of the farmhouse in the 19th century, and then discarded for unknown reasons.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Lindy Casson, Andy Daykin, Heather Knight, Alison Steele and Jez Taylor. Stratascan Ltd undertook the geophysical investigation. The illustrations for this article were produced by Judit Peresztegi and Fig 10 was produced by Andy Chopping. Julian Hill edited this text and saw the project through to publication.

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NOTES

- ¹ The 1997 fieldwork has the site code RMH97, and 2005–7 work the code RMO05.
- ² The coin is now on display in the farmhouse. It was found in the base of the construction trench of wall foundation [4] (RMH97).
- ³ Room 10 on fig 3 in Franklin (2009).

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