

General view of timbers looking East. (Photo: Lilian Thornhill)

A Double Moated Site at South Norwood

LILIAN THORNHILL

IN THE MIDDLE of the last century, Croydon Board of Health acquired land piecemeal in Woodside, Penge and Elmers End on which to establish a sewage farm (see fig. 3). The land is low lying and two streams flow through it to join tributaries of the Ravensbourne. It has the Forest Ridge to the north, capped by Claygate Beds of gravel, and the Addington Hills to the south, of Blackheath pebble beds. The drift geological map shows areas of gravel at no great distance. The subsoil is however London Clay, and the project was therefore never very suc-

cessful, for the wet sewage stood in the fields for months.

The sewage farm was abandoned some time in the 1960s and the land is to be developed. A double moated site was shown on the Ordnance Survey map for 1861, but records had been lost in the last war and nothing was known about it. Permission to excavate was therefore sought and obtained prior to development.

The Excavation

A machine was employed to make two long

scrapes, one of which cut across the north-east corner of the outer moat, and the other across both moats at almost right angles to them. The area enclosed by the moats was roughly a square.

Trenches of 10 x 1 m were put across the moats and another in the central area (fig. 4). Those in the first scrape, I and III, were abandoned when it was found they would not yield a true profile of the moat, since neither the exact width nor the depth would be recovered. However it was possible to line up the moat in this scrape with that in the second, so that the accurate line of the moat was established. The only object recovered from the two trenches in this scrape, was the bowl of a clay pipe dating from 1680 to 1730, so that it could have been lost in the tree planting referred to below.

The Inner Moat

Trench II, originally 10 x 1 m. across the inner moat proved to be the most important. Under the peaty topsoil associated with the sewage farm, was a layer of London Clay containing occupation debris of the 19th century, clearly brought onto the site to level up the moats in preparation for the sewage farm. A thin layer of this clay was spread over the banks and the area between the moats. Below this was the buried land surface of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and the latest natural fill of the moat—a black silty layer containing much vegetable matter, mainly oak leaves, though no oaks grow near at the present time. The Motley Estate map of 1736 shows the moated area set out as a plantation, and sawn off stumps of oak trees were met in the trenches at this layer. Presumably the trees were removed during the preparation of the land for its recent use. Layer 4, clay with chalk, presumably shows the marling of the soil in which the trees

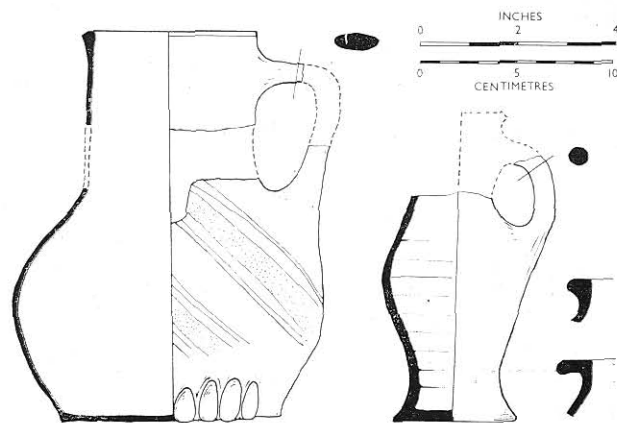


Fig 2 (3)

were to be planted.

Below layer 3 in the moat, was a very thick layer of brown peaty silt still containing the remains of oak, willow and hazel leaves. Many acorns, hazel nuts and pieces of bark were recovered together with fragments of tiles.

A large spill of gravel was found on the inner lip, and contained sherds of grit-tempered ware and tiles. At the time this gravel had fallen into the moat, the walls were of clay with tile so there may have been an earlier collapse of the sides.

The Bridge

Beneath the gravel was a layer of brown friable clay, in which the first substantial pieces of pottery were found. The clay became blue-grey, turning to yellow on exposure, and three beams were found in association in the south-east corner of the trench, at a depth of 2.47 metres. From this point more timbers were exposed. To uncover all the timbers, the trench had to be enlarged in all directions.

A thin black layer of silt indicated the first silting of the moat. Below it was the undisturbed London Clay.

Other Trenches

Trench IV, 10 x 1 m. was dug in the interior, 5 m. south of II, but no old land surface nor occupation layer was revealed. Under the 19th and 20th centuries topsoil was clay with chalk, on top of the natural London Clay.

Trench V, 10 x 1 m. was dug to the north of II, to section the outer moat. This proved to be approximately the same width as the inner and the same succession of upper layers followed. There was however no gravel spill. Two planks were found at a depth of 2.12 metres, in association with medieval sherds, but the excavation was not taken down any deeper except at the southern end, outside the area of the planks, and this showed the undisturbed London Clay to have been reached at this point. Mr. R. W. Savage, the co-director, considers the planks to have been used for timber lacing to support the sides of the moat. This is quite possible in view of the trouble we had with the walls of our trench. The writer thinks they might have been an indication of the close proximity of a bridge across the outer moat, for they were in line with the timbers in the inner moat.

The Finds

The pottery sherds recovered represent about 33 vessels of which 11 were jugs, some glazed. It has been possible to reconstruct one large glazed jug,

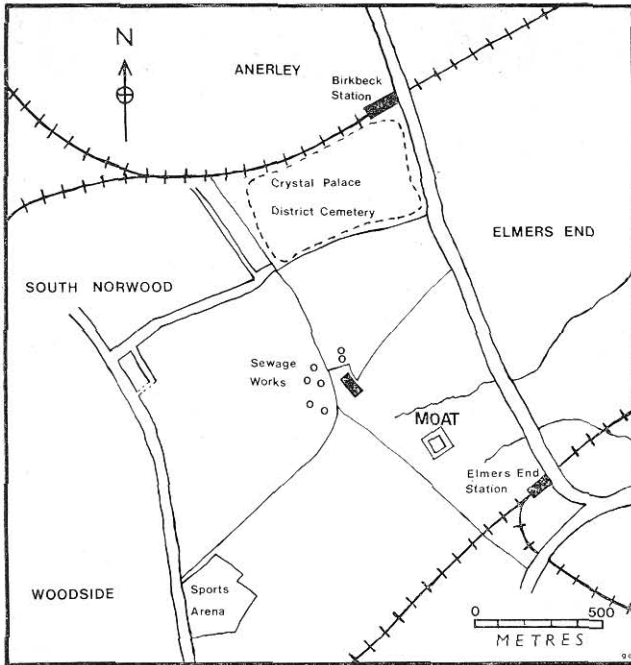


Fig 3. Map showing location of the site.

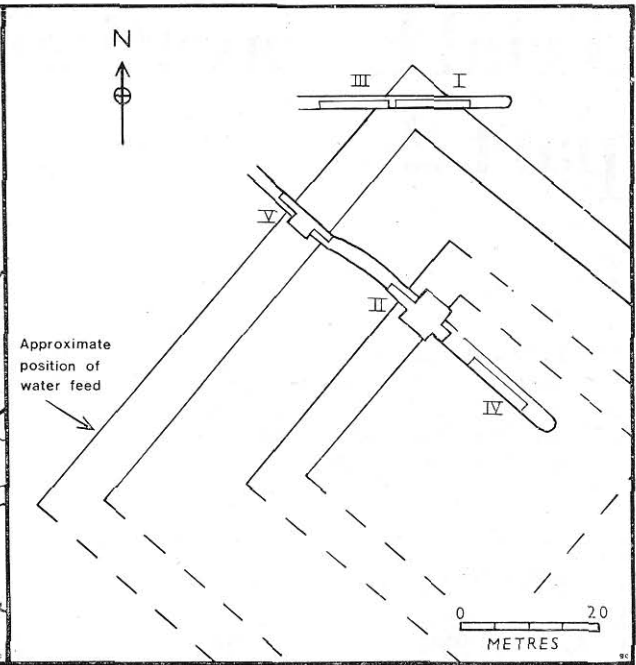


Fig. 4. Detail of Trenches.

and a second is nearly complete. The large jug belongs to a style of 13th century jugs of London make. The edges of the strap handle continue as a cordon round the neck in a characteristic manner. The smaller jug has oblique applied cordons forming panels painted alternatively red unglazed, and green glazed (see fig. 2). This is thought to be late 13th or early 14th century, of London make, inspired by the French imports from the Rouen area. Also of the late 13th century is a baluster jug estimated to be 6in. in height, a parallel to the two found at Friday Street, London in the mid-19th century.¹

The only other vessel of which a considerable proportion was found was a bowl of Surrey ware, 14th-15th century. It was 15in. diameter and had a sagging base, well developed flanged rim and was glazed in the interior on the base and lower walls.

Also recovered from the medieval layers were a fragment of a window catch and a schist hone, broken at the upper end. Surprisingly few bones were found, only three in all, one exuding a blue substance. A few oyster shells came from the inner moat.

Many tiles were found, mainly rectangular and flat with two round or oblique holes, but some curved ridge tiles, and some exhibiting glazing occurred. Also recovered were several blocks of build-

ing stone, some local, probably Reigate or Kentish Rag, and some of millstone grit. Some of the building stone is shaped and tooled. Flints were also found, one large one which appears to have been squared up, has a perforation and could have been a weight.

It would appear that when the land was being levelled for use as a sewage farm, not only were the moats infilled, but knolls were also levelled. From an 18th century map of field names, it seems that the land at that time must have had gently rolling hills and little dells. This, and the proximity of occasional beds of gravel, suggest that the manor house was probably built on an outlier of gravel which would provide a drier footing. The spill of gravel on the inner lip could have come from this. The inner moat was the original one, dug to provide drainage in an otherwise damp area, or as a status symbol or for defence. The outer moat had a simpler profile and must have been later. However it too can certainly be dated to the medieval period.

Mr. G. Tookey who is kindly undertaking research into the site's history has so far established that it was called The Lewmote in 1307. The name had been corrupted to The La Motes by the 18th century, making it sound like an ornamental feature, as indeed it was in that century, witness the Motley Estate map. The excavation was directed by R. W. Savage and Lilian Thornhill.

1. James C. Thorn, "Two Medieval Pots from Friday Street" *London Archaeol* 2 No.3 (1973) 62-3.