



Fig. 1: Manor Farm, Ruislip. Looking north across the ditch to the embankment.

(Photo: Terry Beasley)

Excavations of an Earthwork at Manor Farm, Ruislip

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THE MANOR FARM at Ruislip is a moated site near the parish church, now occupied by a brick and timber building, parts of which are thought to date from the early 16th century. A mound in the southern part of the moated enclosure, and flint foundations which are said to have been turned up from time to time, point to earlier occupation and there are many reasons for thinking that this has been the site of the administrative centre of the Manor of Ruislip from at least the time of the Domesday Survey, when it is

recorded as previously held by Wulward Wight, a Saxon Thane.

On the north the ground drops rapidly to the flood plain of the River Pinn, a small stream. At the bottom of the slope, 80m from the moated site, a large ditch 12m wide and 2m deep with an embankment on its northern side runs east-west for 190m. At its eastern end it is now terminated by houses and gardens but the 1866 O.S. 25in map (see fig. 2) shows it to have continued for a further 200m. Any water

in the ditch runs from east to west and the western end has a considerable amount of water present throughout most seasons. The 1866 map shows a pond at its junction with Bury Street but this is now built upon. Although nothing is known about the structure, it has frequently been assumed to be part of a mill leat: the last record of a water mill at Ruislip is in an Extent of the Manor made in 1324. The line of the earthwork continues halfway round the village in the form of field boundaries.

Its length has been considerably reduced during the last hundred years and several metres in the middle were obliterated in 1967 to make an access road. In 1976 the Borough of Hillingdon kindly gave permission for the Ruislip Northwood and Eastcote Local History Society to dig an exploratory trench across the earthwork under our direction to try to establish the age and function of the ditch and embankment.

Excavation

Initially a trench was dug across the ditch and into the raised embankment. The spoil was searched and sieved and this produced a few sherds of early Tudor ware, coarse grey Roman ware, a few fragments of Roman white ware and a number of worked flints. A skeleton of a piglet was discovered in the water-logged clay at the bottom of the ditch and also one piece of saturated wood (possibly the end of a stake). At the time of the "dig" in April 1976 the water table was close to the surface of the bottom of the ditch and work at that point was greatly hampered by flooding. Digging was continued until a stony layer was struck which was considered to be undisturbed stratum. The wet conditions prevented the strata here being determined with certainty.

Layer by layer, excavating was extended westward along the top of the embankment. Four different strata were clearly visible, the top layer of brownish clay containing white pottery and a few animal teeth. The third layer down contained coarse grey ware and worked flints occurred throughout this layer and extended down for about 0.25m into the lowest strata

Excavation Round-up 1977

Directors, secretaries and other people concerned with excavations carried out during 1977 are asked to send a short report to the co-ordinator, Beth Richardson, I.L.A.U., Imex House, 42 Theobalds Road, London, W.C.1. (01-242 6620) for inclusion in the Spring issue. It would be appreciated if these could be modelled on the ones in Vol. 3 No. 2 and if they could be sent in by 31 January.

of brown streaked yellow clay. Three small (less than 10mm diameter) pieces of indistinguishable rusted iron were also recovered. Bits of fired daub were found sporadically throughout the third layer but a distinct band 0.27m in thickness occurred at a depth of 1.06m from the top of the bank.

Four distinct strata, which were apparent on the south side of the ditch, seem to relate to those in the embankment. Stratified digging here revealed several worked flints in layers 2 and 3 but no pottery.

Results

Flints

Thirty-three pieces of worked flint were recovered. Flints do not occur naturally near the surface in the Ruislip area but do outcrop in the chalk escarpment at Harefield three miles away. A number of pieces were obviously tools but many others appeared to be only waste flakes. The discovery of a core as well was taken to indicate tool manufacture on the site.

Since the flints occurred in the same layers as the Roman grey ware it seems clear that they were accidentally incorporated into the embankment long after being discarded. However their sharp edges and fresh looking condition indicates their infrequent disturbance.

The assemblage of worked flints resemble mesolithic/neolithic types. At least some of the flints show similarities to material excavated 3½ miles due north of Ruislip at Bathend Clump on Moor Park Golf Course during 1958 to 1961¹.

Pottery

The finds were all small fragments. Three distinct types occurred.

1, Grey ware. Unglazed coarse ware of medium to dark grey colour but with some pieces having reddish parts. This has been identified as Roman by both Mr. H. Sheldon and Mr. C. Orton. The rim of a mortarium has been seen by Mrs. K. F. Hartley who considered it to have been made in the Verulamium region c. AD 90-130. She also noticed that it had been burned.

2, White ware. Unglazed coarse ware of whitish colour throughout. This has been identified by the Department of Urban Archaeology as coming from Roman potteries at Brockley Hill, Stanmore.

3, Unglazed Red ware. On the limited amount of material available this is thought to date from the early Tudor period.

Daub

The pieces of daub are fired red throughout resembling brick, but are distinguished by having irregular shapes and some pieces bearing the imprint of wattles. One or two pieces are blackened by what

¹ D. M. Collins and D. W. Phillipson. Reports in the Journal of the Ruislip and District Nat. History Society 1959, 1961-2.

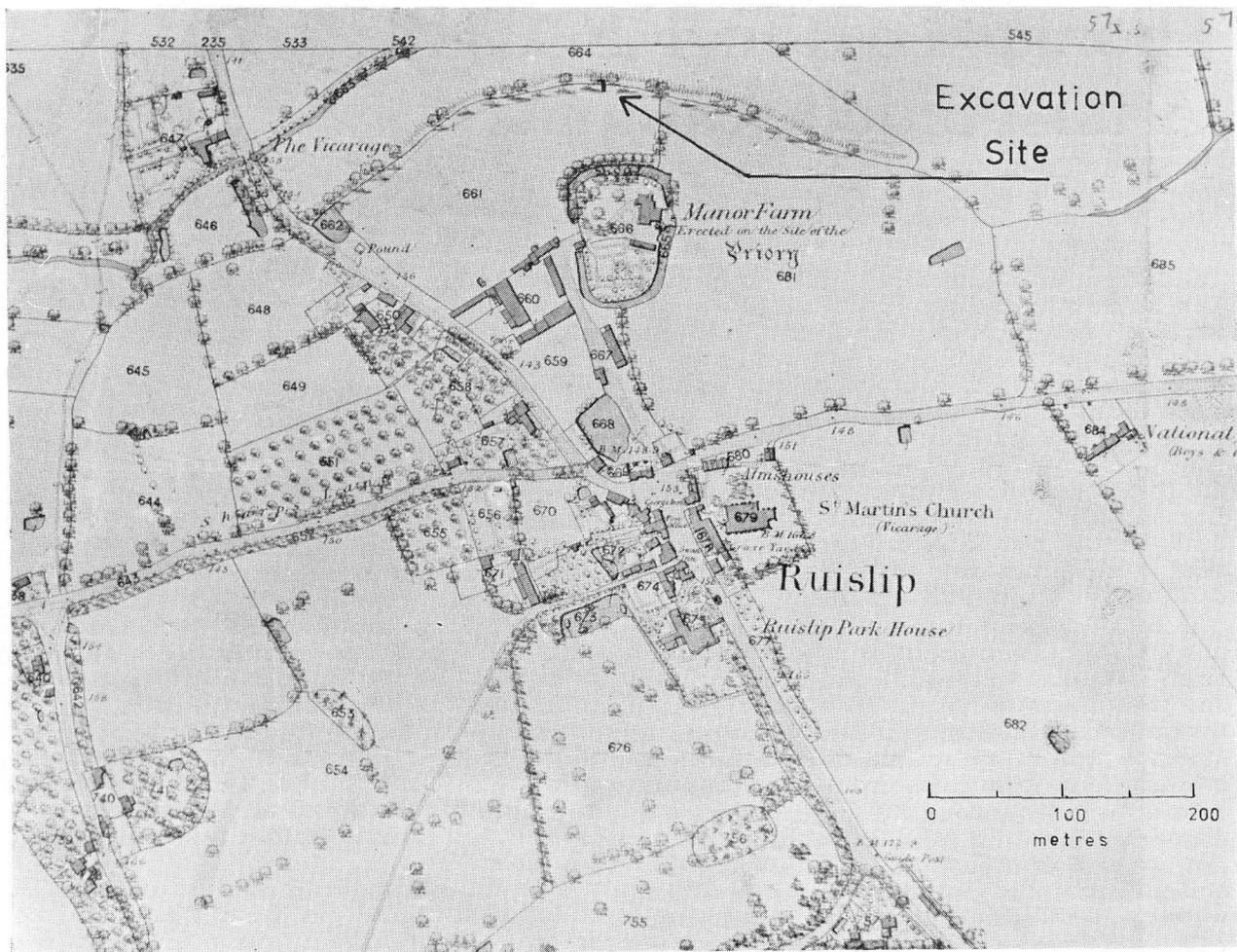


Fig. 2: Ordnance Survey Map of Ruislip showing earthwork and site excavation.

appears to be smoke. Such firing is unlikely to have been produced during the burning down of a wattle and daub structure and is more likely to have formed part of a fireplace.

Conclusions

Apart from a few surface finds which are always open to suspicion the worked flints recovered during this excavation are the first indication that Ruislip was inhabited during the mesolithic/neolithic period. Although they were incorporated into a later structure they are unlikely to have been moved far from their place of origin.

In the *LAMAS Transactions* for 1933 Mr. H. Braun stated that the remains of an apparently Romano-British building had been exposed by building operations at Manor Farm and that fragments of pottery of the period had also been recovered. No

details were published and the whereabouts of the finds are unknown. The Roman pottery excavated from the embankment provides the first corroborative evidence of Roman occupation at Ruislip.

The evidence so far is insufficient to suggest a date for the earthwork but the presence of flints and Roman sherds together in the embankment establishes that part of the structure at least is post 1st century AD. The absence of medieval finds from the ditch was somewhat surprising but might indicate clearance at some later period.

Acknowledgements

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