

- ◆ EXCAVATED SITE
- ◇ OLD VICARAGE SITE

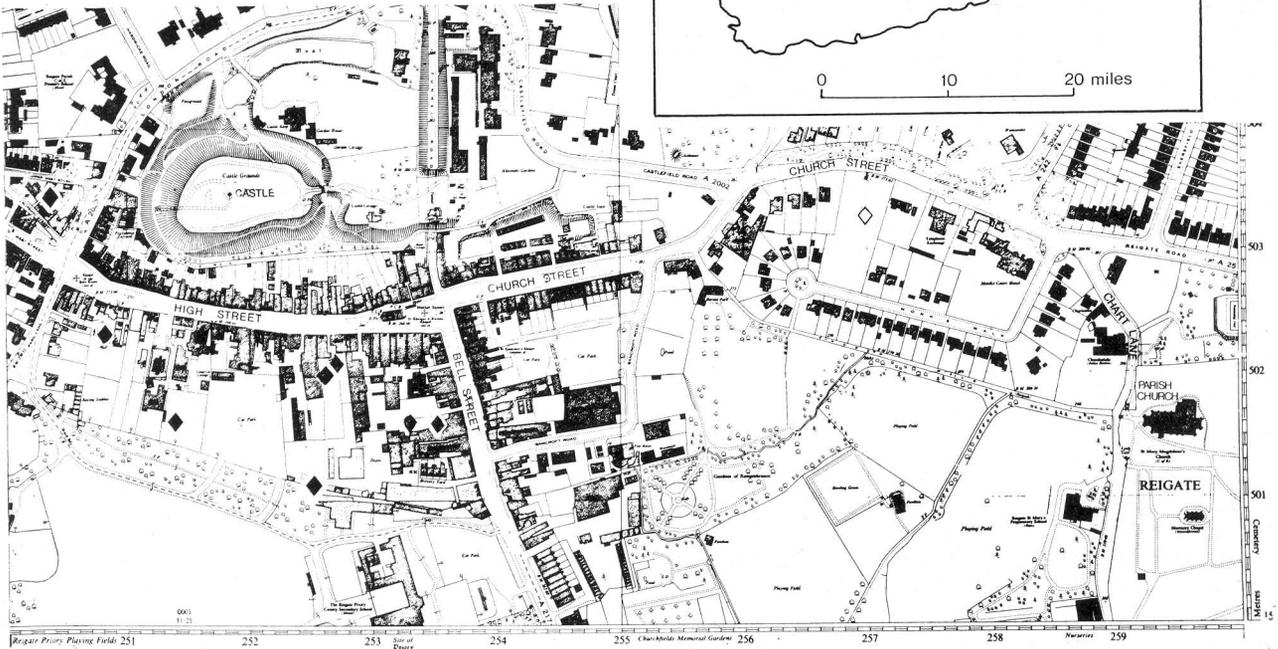
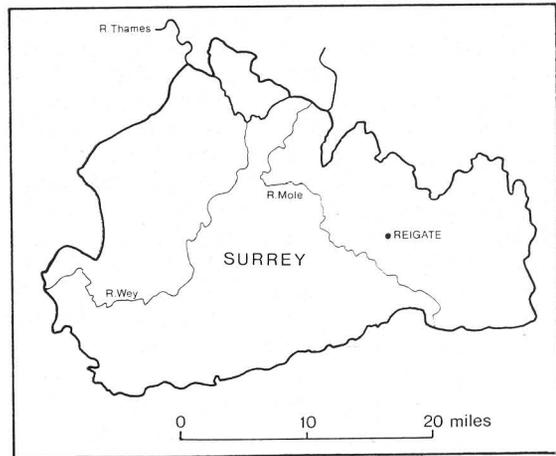


Fig. 1: Location of the Old Vicarage Site, Reigate.

Cherchefelle and the origins of Reigate

ROBERT POULTON

In CHERCHFELLE Hundred CHERCHFELLE, in Lordship, Queen Edith held it. Then it answered for 37½ hides, now for 34 hides, for the King's Work. Land for . . . In Lordship 3 ploughs; 67 villagers and 11 smallholders with 26 ploughs. 2 mills at 12s, less 2d; meadow 12 acres; woodland, 140 pigs from pasturage; from grazing, 43 pigs.

Now it is assessed at £40 and pays so much¹.

1 Translation from Morris, J. (Ed.) *Domesday Book: Surrey*. Phillimore, (1975), 1.7 (30b). Cherchefelle is, however, there translated by Reigate, without explana-

tion. THE ABOVE DESCRIPTION of Cherchefelle in Domesday Book should be compared to those for the other historic towns of Surrey². Of these only Guildford and, possibly, Farnham have a higher population, while only Farnham has a higher assessed value. Such comparisons are notoriously imprecise, but nevertheless suggest that Cherchefelle is one of the largest and most prosperous communities in Surrey at this period.

tion.

2 As listed in O'Connell, M. "Historic Towns in Surrey", *Surrey Arch. Soc. Res. Vol 5* (1977).

The place name³, meaning "Open space by the hill or barrow"⁴, drops out of use in the late 12th century, as soon as the name Reigate appears⁵. This strongly suggests that the two were in close proximity and that Reigate, centred around the Norman castle (Fig. 1), absorbed the population of Cherchefelle⁶. Since the two are not superimposed (on the evidence of excavation in Reigate⁷) the most likely place for Cherchefelle is the area around the Parish Church about 0.5 km (550 yds) distant from Reigate Town Centre (Fig. 1). Although none of the fabric of the present church is pre-conquest, a fragment of Saxon sculpture has been discovered there⁸.

The site of the Old Vicarage, Church Street, was one of the few open areas remaining where this idea could be tested by excavation. Hence when in 1976 it became clear that the site would be developed local archaeologists made arrangements to examine it. Their investigations over the past two years have revealed the plan of a fine medieval building⁹. Furthermore, whenever features cutting through the floor of this building were excavated layers containing early (Saxo-Norman) pottery were revealed. Since time was limited it was decided that these layers would be most suitably examined in a full time professional excavation. The results of this work are described below.

The Excavation

The earliest feature on the site was a shallow ditch (688, Fig. 2) whose fill was leached almost to the colour of the 'natural' sand. It was cut by several rubbish pits, but contained no dateable material. Perhaps it served as a field boundary.

The major group of features is, however, all of one period. These features divide into a number of distinct types. The most numerous type is the pits, which come in a variety of sizes and shapes (Fig. 2). In contrast their fills were of dark grey sand uniform in colour and almost so in texture, an effect pro-

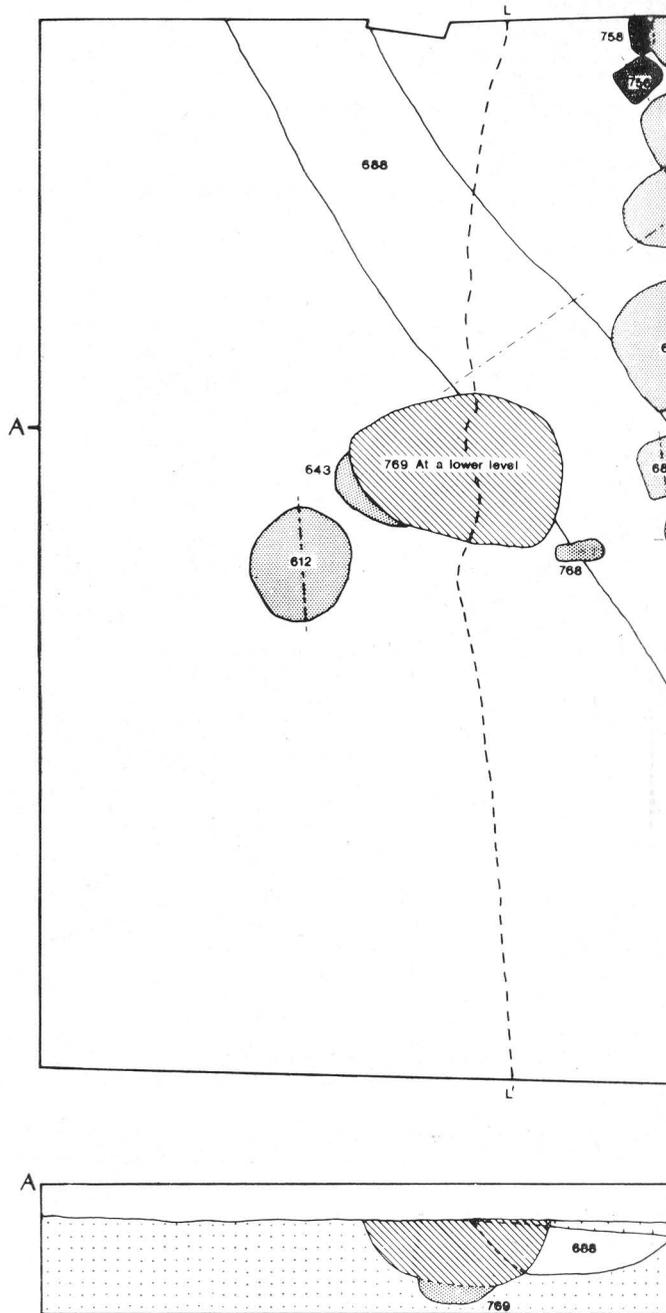


Fig. 2

3 The name is more accurately recorded elsewhere as Crichefeld (etc.) See Gover, J.E.B., et al. *The Place-names of Surrey* (1934, English Place-names Society, 11), 281-2.

4 Cf. Gelling, M. *Signposts to the Past*, (1978), 138-40.

5 *Op cit*, fn 3, 304-5.

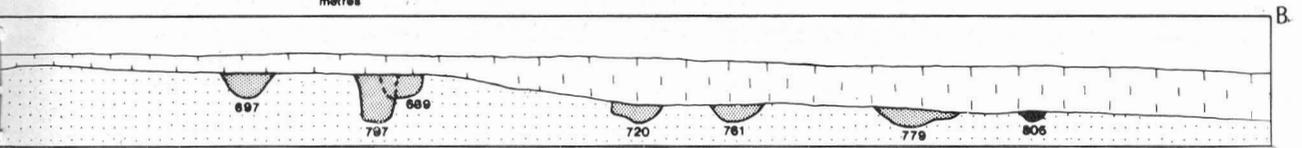
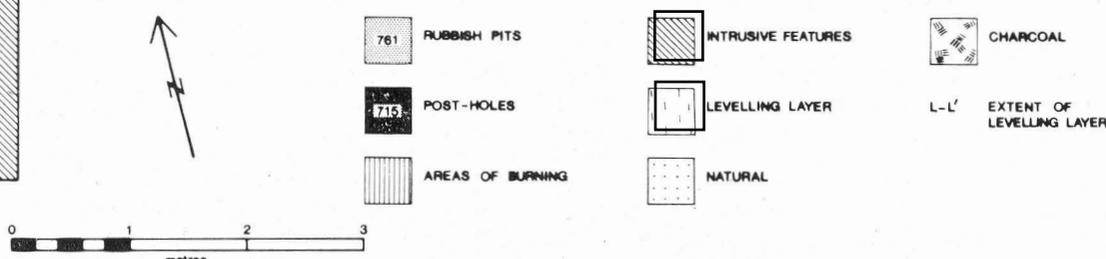
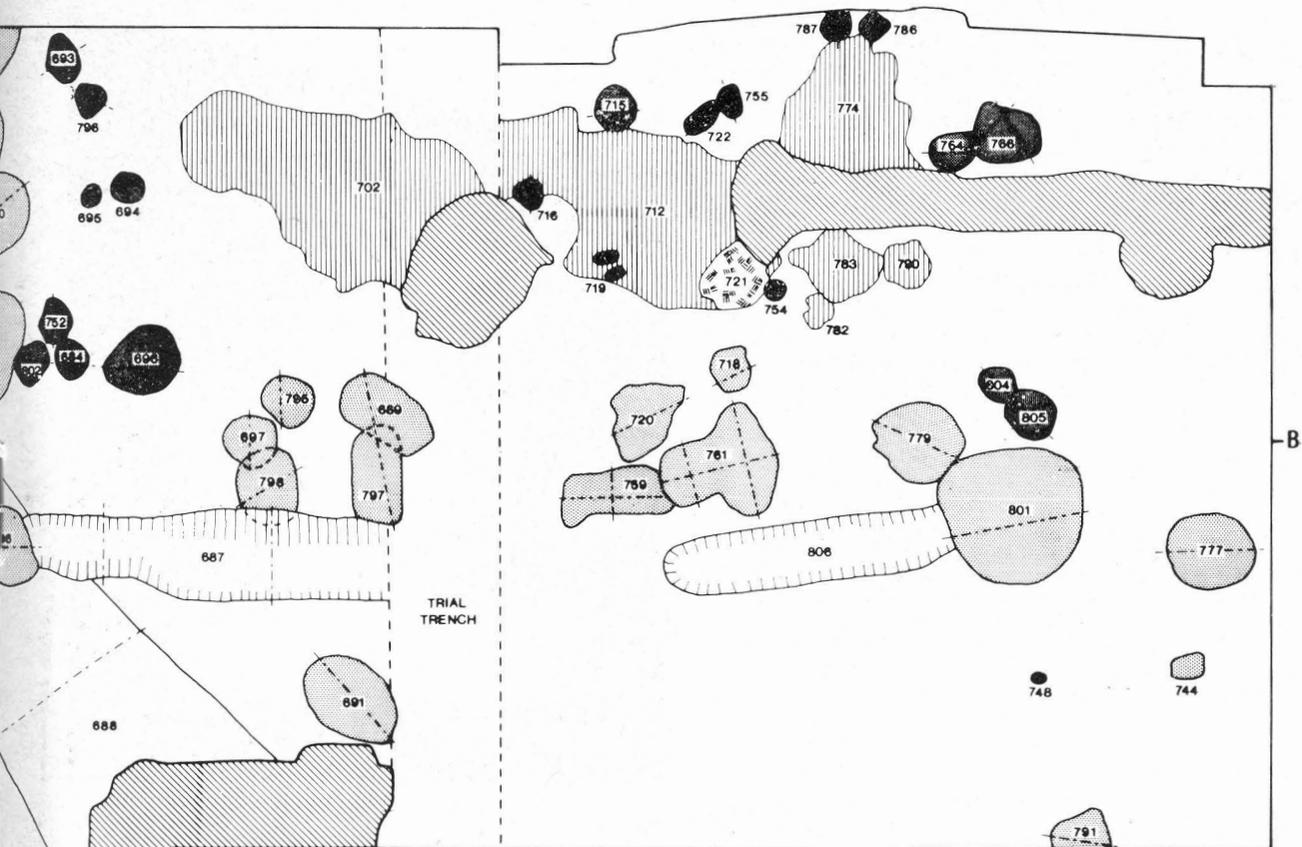
6 The suggestion (O'Connell, *Op cit*, 45, following Hooper, W. *Reigate: its story through the ages* (1945), 22) that Cherchefelle consisted of a number of scattered hamlets has no evidence in its favour, and the recent excavations render it unlikely.

7 Woods, H. "Excavations in Reigate, 1974" *Surrey Arch. Colls*, 70, (1974), 79-95.

8 Hooper, *Op cit*, 50.

9 This building and associated and succeeding levels were excavated by David Williams for the Holmesdale Group. See Williams, D., "Reigate, Old Vicarage Site". *Surrey Arch. Soc. Bulletin*, 164, (1980).

duced by the strong leaching in the podzolised soils which have developed on these Folkestone beds of the Lower Greensand. Where two such features met along one edge it was impossible to determine their relative chronology either in plan or sectional view.



Plan and Section of the excavation at the Old Vicarage Site, Reigate.

The great variety in character and quality of finds from different pits makes it clear, however, that their infilling occurred at discrete times. Similarly the finds make it apparent that these were rubbish pits, into which waste material was jettisoned. In this acid soil

most such material — in particular vegetable refuse, leather and wood — had decomposed. Pottery, as usual, survived best followed by bone and iron work.

A number of features, lacking diagnostic rubbish

material in their fill, are very small for pits and have been interpreted as post holes. Since no pattern can be seen amongst them the interpretation must be open to doubt. Two main areas where the natural sand was heavily burnt were also discovered. (702 and 712 on Fig. 2). One of these had a rough paving of small ironstone blocks overlying it and this in turn was covered by a spread of decayed mortar. The other area was similar but lacked the ironstone paving. The burning is possibly connected with lime-burning. Though individually the above features are difficult to interpret taken as a whole they are clearly the remnants of minor industrial working. That idea is strengthened by the discovery of small pieces of iron and lead casting debris on the site.

In the main, however, the small finds are not very exciting. The majority are of iron and consist of indeterminate lumps, nails, and fragments of knife blades. Of greater interest are the point of a prick spur, a possible decorative pendant (Fig. 3) and two small horseshoes. Other finds include several whetstones, spindle whorls and part of a quern.

One find, however, forms an exception to these run-of-the-mill products. This is the bone skate discussed in the note below.

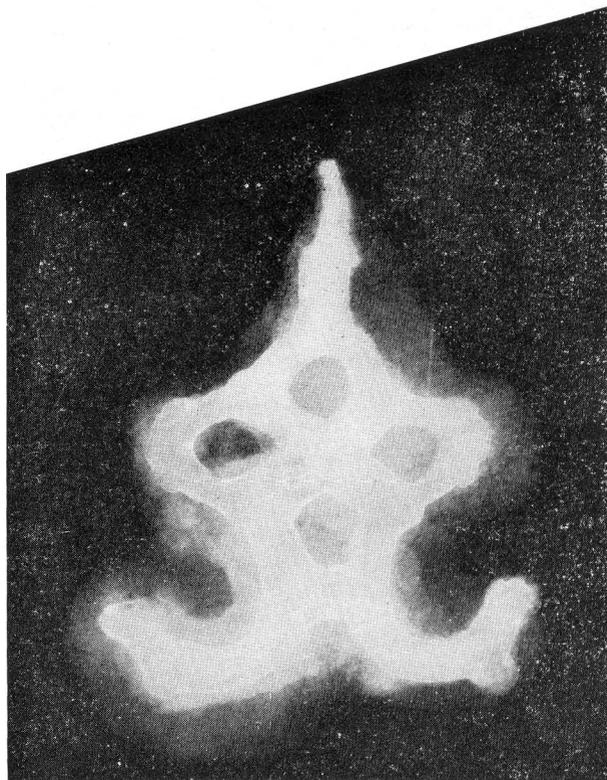


Fig. 3: X-radiograph of an iron decorative pendant.

A Bone Skate (Fig. 4)

The example has been assembled from fragments. These were found closely scattered within the leveling layer, (Fig. 1) and were presumably broken up in making that layer. After piecing them together they clearly formed most of a metatarsal bone, length greater than 260mm (10½in), probably of red deer. Both distal articular condyles were pierced by a hole 7mm (¼in) in diameter which would have accommodated the thong attaching this end of the skate to the skater's foot. The proximal end of the bone is missing and hence what arrangements, if any, were made for attachment there are unknown. The medial edge of the posterior surfaces has been whittled along most of the existing length. Slight whittling of the anterior surface is also evident. The lateral edge is missing except immediately above the distal extremity. The shaft ends proximally with a transverse chop.

10 MacGregor, A. J. "Bone skates: a review of the evidence". *Archaeol. J.* **133** (1976) 57-74.

11 MacGregor, A. J., "Problems in the interpretation of microscopic wear patterns: the evidence from bone

GERALDINE DONE

The working of the medial edge was presumably directed towards providing a more comfortable support for the skater's foot. The anterior surface would normally be in contact with the ice¹⁰ and although examination by dissecting microscope (X20) shows small areas of burnishing, there is no sign of the wear patterns recorded by MacGregor¹¹. It is unlikely that this skate had been used. The chopped proximal end is also of some interest in that it suggests an already butchered bone was being converted. This would have had the advantage of obviating the laborious task of detaching the distal tarsal row. Alternatively, as the complete bone would have been *circa* 300mm (12in) long, the chop may represent cutting down to a size appropriate to the user's foot. No instance of this has been found in the literature: opportunist use of discards from a carcass seems a more likely interpretation.

skates". *J. Arch. Sci.* **2**, 385ff (1975).

12 Clason, A., "Animals and Man in Holland". *Palaeohistoria*, **13**, (1967).

13 Jewell, P. "Cattle from British Archaeological Sites".

The majority of examples of bone ice-skates are made from cattle or horse bones. This example, being made from a red deer metatarsal, is unusual. Ox metapodials of Saxo-Norman date are generally small, rarely in excess of 210mm (8¼in) long^{12,13,14,15}. Soles from King's Lynn¹⁶ suggest men's feet lengths ranging from 230-310mm (9-12in), so ox metapodials were almost certainly unsuitable as skates for adults and indeed provide only 23 per cent of the examples cited by MacGregor¹⁷. The horse seems to have supplied the preferred alternative (62 per cent of MacGregor's list) with bone lengths up to 271mm

(10½in).

With regard to length it is perhaps surprising that the long metapodials of the red deer do not occur more often as skates. Possibly the slenderness of the bones made them less comfortable than relatively broad horse bones with their flat posterior surfaces.

Finally, it may be added that a find spot in Central Surrey is well outside the normal area of distribution in the Saxo-Norman period. The use of bone-skates at that time should perhaps be seen as a result of Viking influence, even if, as probably here, this is not at first hand.

Occ. Papers Roy Anthropol. Inst., 18, 80ff (1963).
 14 Maltby, M., "The Animal Bones from Exeter" *Exeter Arch. Reports*, 2, (1979).

16 Clarke, H. and Carter, A., "Excavations in King's Lynn 1963-1970", *Soc. for Med. Arch. Monograph Series*, 7, (1977).

15 Noddle, B., "Mammal Bone", in *Op cit*, fn 16, 378-99.

17 *Op cit*, fn 9.

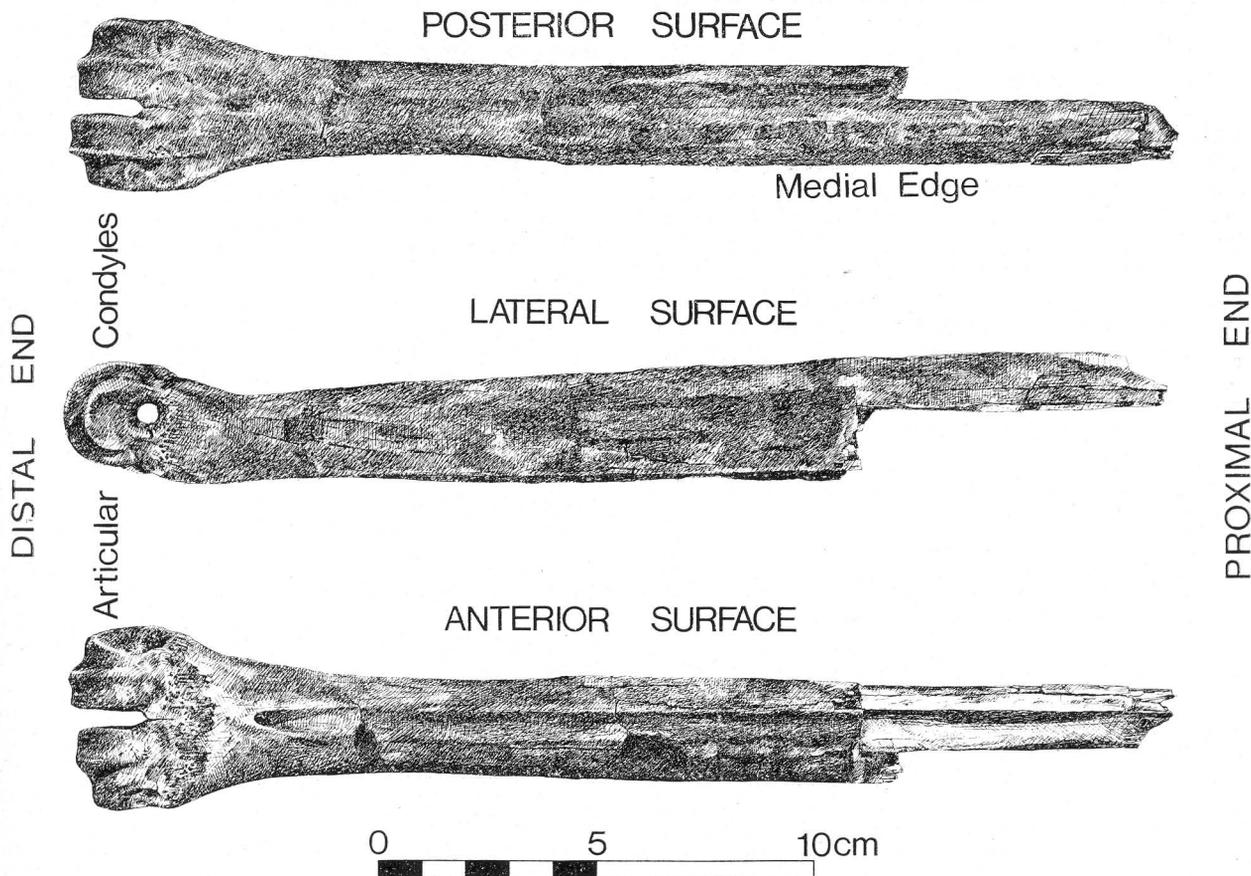


Fig. 4: A bone skate made from a red deer metatarsal.

Dating

So far we have simply assumed a Saxo-Norman date for the site. None of the material discovered is in itself closely dateable. Two elements, however, provide pointers to the date of the site. The first

is the heavily burnt area (Fig. 5) which was sampled for archaeomagnetic dating by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory (see Front Cover). This gave a date in the period 950 to 1150 (at single standard

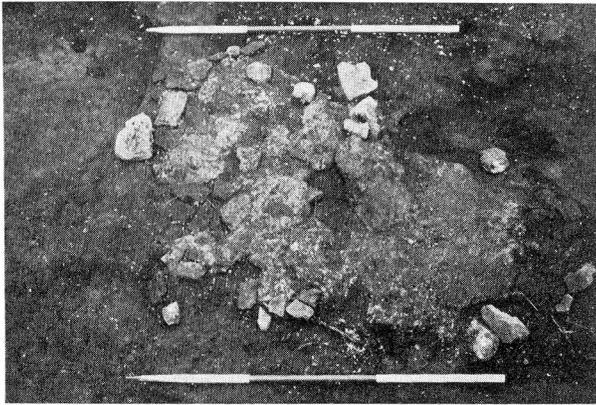


Fig. 5: The heavily burnt feature (702 on Fig. 2) which was sampled for Archaeomagnetic dating.

error).

The second pointer lies in the pottery discovered on the site. Analysis of this is at a comparatively early stage, but some general points may nevertheless be made. Broadly speaking two fabric groups may be distinguished, shell-tempered and sand-tempered — these are currently being sub-divided by microscopic examination, which already indicates that in the shelly ware one type, used for relatively thin sectioned pots, contains as much quartz as shell, while another type, used for relatively thick sectioned pots, contains no quartz but plentiful large shell fragments. So far, however, no imported fabrics have been noted, so that dating has not been aided by that source. Without detailed analysis the forms offer little help except to confirm a general 11th and 12th century date.

Conclusions

We have, then, clear evidence of rubbish pits and of minor industrial working. The excavated site is therefore a backlands area. Furthermore the evidence of five pits in a line (679, 757, 680, 683, 685 — Fig. 2) strongly suggest that they are respecting a boundary line, for which no evidence survived; at a right angle to this is another boundary line represented by the gullies 687 and 806, beyond which features are very scarce; and a further boundary may be represented by a line drawn just west of 801, 805 and 766. This last is less certain, though it does effectively delimit the concentration of features, but taken together these must represent plot boundaries. The plot, probably 10m (33ft) wide and c. 35m (115ft) long, should have fronted onto Church Street (Fig. 1). This hypothesis will be tested in the near future.

18 See fn 9.

19 *Loc cit*, fn 3 and fn 5.

20 *Op cit* fn 2, Fig. 22.

If correct it will indicate that Cherchefelle had 2 main streets, Church Street and Chart Lane.

The characteristics discussed above surely mark Cherchefelle as an urban or at least proto-urban settlement. Some support for this suggestion is provided by the status of its successor Reigate as a town. The mechanism of that changeover now needs to be discussed. Firstly, on the excavated site it is clear that a sharp break occurred. The site was levelled up for a new building¹⁸ (see section on Fig. 2) which ignored the property boundaries noted above. A late 12th century date for the establishment of Reigate is indicated by the place-name evidence, and there is only a limited period when both names are in use¹⁹. This seems to indicate the replacement of Cherchefelle by Reigate as a single act of policy. Two points perhaps modify that interpretation. Firstly this event apparently takes place almost a century after the Castle was founded and it is possible that in the interval settlement had begun to develop around it. Secondly the town plan of Reigate does not exhibit a high degree of formal planning²⁰.

If the end of Cherchefelle is now reasonably well known its beginning is almost equally obscure. The only hints are provided by the place name itself. In Berkshire the element *Feld* has been shown possibly to be indicative of new settlements established after the earliest phase of Saxon colonisation²¹ and there are a number of examples of the name type in South-East Surrey, including 5 parishes²². And, finally, it is perhaps no coincidence that the first elements of two of those parishes (Cherchefelle and Limpsfield²³) are of Celtic derivation.

Acknowledgements

The excavation was financed by DoE, Reigate Borough Council and by a number of private donations, and organised by the Archaeology Unit of Surrey County Council in conjunction with the Reigate and Banstead Archaeological Co-ordination Committee.

Thanks are due to all those who helped in the financing, organising and execution of the work, and in particular David Bird, David Williams and Richard Woodhouse (organisation and advice); Kip Kelland and John Price (Site Supervision); Geoff Murray (drawing of bone skate); Tony Clark and the Ancient Monuments Laboratory (Archaeomagnetic Dating); Dr M Gelling (advice on place-names); and especially Ian Roberts for much post-excavation work and preparing the illustrations.

21 M. Gelling. *The Place-names of Berkshire*, III, 835f.

22 Cherchefelle, Tatsfield, Limpsfield, Lingfield, Nutfield.
No other parish in Surrey has this element.

23 *Op cit*, fn 3, 323.