

# A prehistoric enclosure and post-medieval park features at Carshalton

Nicola Powell and Simon Carlyle

## Introduction

In December 2011 and February 2012, Cotswold Archaeology undertook a programme of archaeological investigation (evaluation, excavation and watching brief as required) at 2–4A Rotherfield Road, Carshalton, London Borough of Sutton located at NGR 2826 6451 (Fig 1).

The archaeological works were carried out on behalf of Martin Grant Homes, in accordance with a

requirement for archaeological mitigation for planning consent, associated with residential development, requested by the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS). All archaeological work on the site was carried out under site code ROT11. The archive can be consulted on request at the Museum of London Archaeological Archive. The flints are currently retained by Martin Grant Homes.

## Topography and geology

Carshalton lies in the valley of the river Wandle, one source of which is at Carshalton Ponds, these being man-made water features created from a spring in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The site of the excavation was a roughly trapezoidal plot of land, bounded to the north by garages belonging to the properties fronting Carshalton High Street, to the east by Rotherfield Road, to the south by All Saints Carshalton Church of England Primary School, and to the west by the remains of a canal that once formed part of a landscaped park. It covered approximately 0.28ha and had been occupied previously by four houses. Ground level was flat at around 39m OD, although locally there is a general fall to the north, towards the Wandle.

The underlying geology of the area is Cretaceous chalk, of the Upper Chalk Formation, overlain by deposits of glacial Head.<sup>1</sup> On site this was further overlain by alluvial deposits of mid-grey silty clay, and on part of the site it was covered by a naturally formed, loose layer of flint cobbles. Much of the site, in the centre and west, was also covered by a thick layer of garden soil.

## Archaeological background

Within 1km of the site the Greater London Historic Environment Record notes several sites of prehistoric date including finds of worked flints, Late Bronze Age features and the remains of a possible Iron Age settlement, as well as finds of Roman pottery. The density of discoveries may be partly due to Carshalton's location on the North Downs springline, with these early sites located around the headwaters of the Wandle.

The site lies just over 2km north of a circular Late Bronze Age enclosure at the former Queen Mary's Hospital (Scheduled Monument no. 400733) and

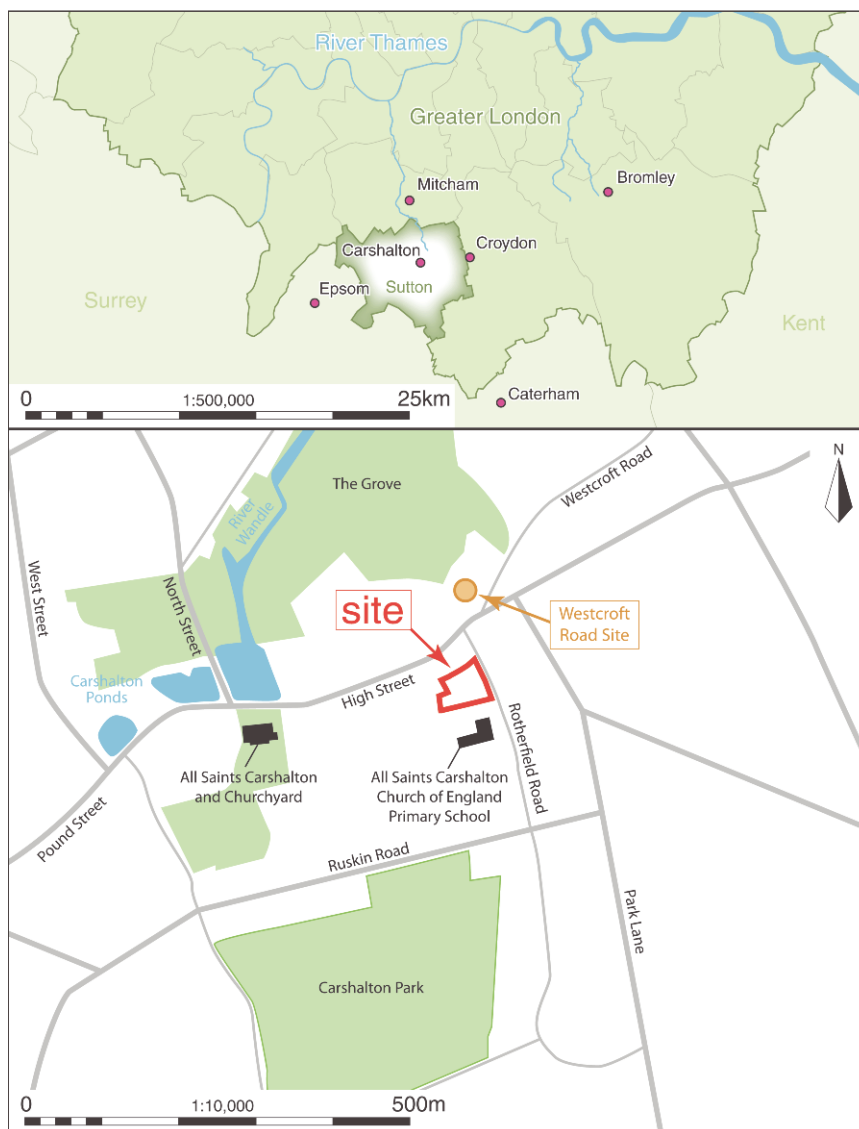
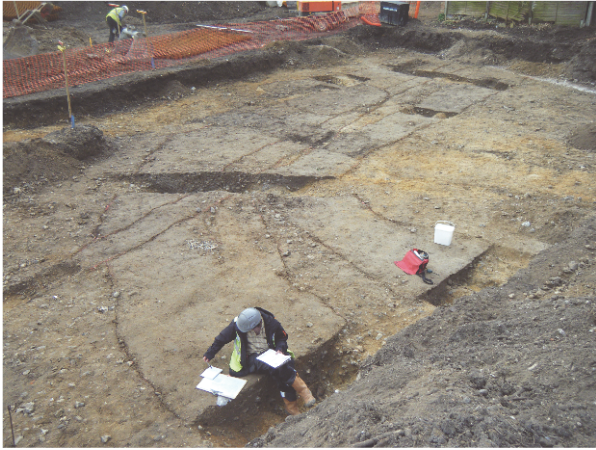


Fig 1: site location plan



**Fig 2: recording the prehistoric ditches in Area 1, looking south-east**

150m south of Westcroft Road, where ditches, pits and finds representing Late Bronze Age structured deposition were found.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 1km to the west lies St Philomena's School (formerly Carshalton House), where a major Bronze Age settlement site was found, including a midden deposit, ditches and a possible burial cairn.<sup>3</sup> A number of Late Bronze Age metal hoards also have been found locally, including near Carshalton Beeches to the south, and to the north at Beddington Corner.<sup>4</sup>

Saxon and later medieval finds are known from the vicinity of the nearby parish church of All Saints, which dates from the early 12th century. The place-name Carshalton, or 'Cressalton', is thought to refer to the existence of watercress beds in the Wandle, attesting to the quality of the water. The river allowed Carshalton to develop as an industrially important place in the later medieval period. Several mills, including fulling mills, were known along its course, with one in 1086 associated with a manor mentioned in the Domesday Book.<sup>5</sup> The Victoria County History records fishing rights along the river changing hands in the medieval period, as the town became famous for trout.<sup>6</sup>

Maps of the 19th century show that the site was within the grounds of Carshalton Park (Fig 4), an 18th-century landscaped park that featured an ornamental canal and associated grotto, remains of which can still be seen in the park (Fig 5). The canal ran past the site immediately to the west and north. Throughout most of the 18th century, the park was owned by the Scawen family<sup>7</sup> and it was Thomas Scawen who

planned and began the construction of a mansion, Carshalton Park House, engaging the Venetian architect Giacomo Leoni to oversee its building and the landscaping of the park, but the family fortunes collapsed before the plans could be completed. Pressure from residential building in the 20th century much reduced the park in size, and the site became separated from the surviving area of parkland by the construction of Talbot Road and Ruskin Road (Fig 4C).

### Excavation Results

Two areas, 25m by 12m (Area 1) and 10m square (Area 2), were investigated in response to the evidence from two earlier evaluation trenches (Trenches 1 and 2). During evaluation, Trench 1 had revealed three parallel, closely-spaced ditches aligned north-east/south-west and containing worked flint, and Trench 2 had featured what was thought to be a post-medieval boundary ditch (Fig 3).

#### *Prehistoric*

Excavation of Area 1 showed that two of the three ditches from evaluation Trench 1 turned northwards in the eastern part of the area (Fig 3). Both ditches had been recut at least once and contained quantities of worked flint, mostly flakes from secondary deposition. The southern ditch [1001] was well-defined, being around 2m wide overall and 0.9m deep. The northern ditch [1009/1011] was less substantial with an overall width of 1.5m and a depth of 0.35m. The fills generally comprised loose, grey silty sand, with frequent small flint cobbles and occasional chalk pebbles or flecks, and occasional orange mottling. No evidence for any associated banks was found. Bulk samples from sections through both ditches yielded worked flint but no material suitable for environmental analysis or radiocarbon dating.

Two intercutting ditches, [2019] and [2025], were revealed in Area 2 (Fig 3). Both ran approximately north-south, turning north-eastwards at

their northern ends towards the ditches in Area 1, although both seemed to terminate at this point. Ditch [2019] was the larger of the two, being c. 2.4m wide and 0.45m deep. It contained a relatively large amount of worked flint, again mostly flakes. The smaller ditch [2025] was approximately half as wide and 0.32m deep. Small pit [2028], adjacent to ditch [2025], also contained worked flint. All features had suffered from truncation.

A stony layer comprising flint cobbles was also observed in Area 1, which may have represented a deliberately-laid surface. There was evidence for the careful burial of flint nodules in pits at Westcroft Road<sup>8</sup>, but this was not clear from the stony layer at Rotherfield Road.

#### *Medieval*

Ditch [1001] in Area 1 was cut along its main length by a north-east/south-west aligned ditch [1007]. It was approximately 0.65m wide, with a depth of 0.18m and terminated roughly 3m to the east of the corner of the prehistoric ditches, where it was cut by a later pit [1084]. It was well defined and also contained worked flint. Its similar trajectory to ditch [1001] suggests that it was still a visible landscape feature when ditch [1007] was created.

In Area 2, ditch [2001] cut across earlier ditches [2019] and [2025] on an alignment that was broadly perpendicular to ditch [1007]. Residual worked flint also was recovered from this larger feature, as was a single sherd of late medieval pottery from a layer of silt [1041].

#### *Post-medieval*

A scatter of later pits was recorded across Area 1. A small amount of 18th-century pottery was recovered from two of the pits, with 19th-century pottery, bottle and window glass fragments and rusted metal objects recovered from others, suggesting these were tree-throws from the 19th-century landscaped park.

A large ditch recorded on the western side of Area 1 and the north-east tip of Area 2 appears to have been the same feature encountered at the northern ends of evaluation Trenches 3 and 4. Projected across the site, this



Fig 3: phase plan of the site as excavated

appears to have been the remains of a large L-shaped feature visible on the 1848 Tithe Map (Fig 4A). This feature may have been related to the construction of the canal or a water feature (see below).

The foot of a substantial embankment was encountered at the western side of Area 2, comprising dumps of soil containing 19th- and 20th-century pottery and glass. This was part of the embankment that once carried the adjacent canal past the western and then northern sides of the site at a raised level.

The remains of four post-medieval ditches were recorded to the south and east of the site during the watching brief, most of which aligned with modern site boundaries, however ditch [716] was on a different alignment and was earlier than at least two of the other ditches (Fig 3); map evidence suggests that this was probably the remains of an 18th-century boundary.

**The worked flint assemblage**

*By E.R. McSloy*

A total of 244 pieces (1,408g) was recovered, including 83 pieces (118g)

from soil samples taken from various ditches. Recording included quantification (count and weight according to broad class), raw material, level of edge damage/cortication and cortex coverage.

The majority of the assemblage (204 pieces; 84%) was derived from features, with the remainder from layer deposits, including topsoil/subsoil horizons. Most comprised dark grey or grey-brown flint, typically of moderate or good quality. Where cortex survived this was most often abraded/thinned and suggestive of derivation from river



Fig 4: map extracts, from left: Carshalton Tithe map (1848); Ordnance Survey 1:10560 County series map (1871); Ordnance Survey 1:10560 County series map (1914)

gravels. Only a small proportion (19 pieces) exhibited patination/cortication, resulting in light surface mottling. Edge damage and breakage was common throughout the assemblage and noted among the potentially stratified groups as well as later features and topsoil/subsoil deposits.

No pottery or other datable material was recorded from features of probable prehistoric origin, with only 47 pieces of flint recovered from these features. Dating based on the lithics was limited by the virtual absence of definable tool types. The single tool present, an end scraper from a ditch [1009/1011], is not assignable to a particular period. Ten blades/blade fragments, including an example from a ditch [2019] which is 65mm in length, were suggestive of Mesolithic activity. The largest element comprised flake-proportioned removals, including 'chips' (less than 10mm long) without secondary working. Characteristics among this group, including the squat proportions and the absence of evidence for platform preparation, were most suggestive of dating across the later Neolithic or Bronze Age.

In summary, the potentially stratified

groups were small, with the assemblage overall dominated by waste flakes/chips with very limited incidence for secondary working/utilisation. The scarcity of tools may be an indication that the assemblage related more to procurement/primary reduction of raw material than to habitation, though the sample is too small for such a conclusion to be drawn with confidence.

**Discussion**

The excavations at 2–4A Rotherfield Road provided evidence for prehistoric activity as well as remains of features from to the post-medieval landscaped park, part of which still survives.

*Prehistoric*

The prehistoric ditches appear to have been part of an enclosure, suggesting the former presence of a substantial prehistoric feature in an area already known to have a number of such sites. The relationship between the prehistoric ditches in Areas 1 and 2 was unclear as they were on different (though similar) alignments, and the Area 2 ditches appeared to terminate at the northern limit of excavation. It is

possible that there was an entranceway at this point, and that the pit [2028] may have been related to this. It is also unclear, if this is the remains of a prehistoric enclosure, which side of the ditches was the enclosure's interior.

The ditches had been recut at least once, suggesting some reuse or maintenance over time. The ditches continued beyond the site to the north and it is possible that they were related to the Late Bronze Age features recorded at the nearby Westcroft Road site.<sup>9</sup> No obvious domestic or agricultural function could be assigned to contents of the Late Bronze Age 'ritual' pits recorded at that site, and neither was any evidence for domestic settlement structures identified, but the wealth of material recovered from those pits indicates a level of prehistoric activity that stands in sharp contrast to that attested at Rotherfield Road.

Work in and around the Late Bronze Age enclosure at Queen Mary's Hospital<sup>10</sup> and St Philomena's School also revealed a significant number of finds, including evidence for the environment and agricultural economy<sup>11</sup> and for domestic and agricultural activity.<sup>12</sup> The number of

worked flints recovered from Rotherfield Road, their condition, type and date range, is similar to that recovered from the Late Bronze Age enclosure and appear to be indicative of a plough-zone assemblage. Again, the absence of diagnostic pieces prohibits close dating, with the assemblage relating more to procurement and primary reduction of raw material.

The site at Rotherfield Road adds to the corpus of prehistoric material recognised from archaeological interventions that have taken place in the area, but the relative paucity of material culture recovered suggests that the site was largely peripheral to the Late Bronze Age domestic, agricultural and ritual *foci* of the area.

#### *Medieval and post-medieval*

The two ditches that postdated the prehistoric ditches, but did not yield any post-medieval dating evidence, may have been medieval land divisions, of which little more can be said. In contrast, the site contained evidence of post-medieval activity that could be directly related to features on 19th-century maps relating to the development of Carshalton Park, and its house and gardens (Fig 4).

The first of these was a ditch [716], relating to a boundary feature of probable 18th-century origin, between the house gardens to the north and the formal park gardens to the south. The second was the embankment recorded at the western edge of the site, built to carry the park's ornamental canal above ground level at this point.

The third was an L-shaped feature, recorded in both areas as well as in evaluation Trenches 3 and 4, which may well have been another water feature, or was perhaps just a borrow pit for the construction of the canal embankment. The feature was recorded



**Fig 5: the remains of the grotto at the southern end of the ornamental canal in Carshalton Park**

on the 1848 Tithe Map (Fig 4A). The other pond feature, recorded on the Tithe Map (now dry and a substantial natural amphitheatre) called the 'Hog Pit' sits near the north gates of the park, is first mentioned in records of 1444 as the *Hoggpytte*.<sup>13</sup>

By the time of the 1871 Ordnance Survey map (Fig 4B), the sinuous feature had disappeared and trees had been planted. The other pits encountered on the site are probably the tree-throws from these trees, as very few finds were recovered from them. The plans drawn up by Giacomo Leoni for the Scawen family for their landscaped park were clearly ambitious. This was the heyday of the British landscaped garden, with a move from the ornate, formal, 'civilised' gardens of the 17th century, in which France and Italy excelled, to a more 'natural' concept championed by Capability Brown.

Apart from the canal and grotto (Fig 5), little of Leoni's grand scheme was ever built, but a bridge of white Portland stone bearing the Scawen arms and retaining the architect's name survives, crossing the Wandle where it leaves Carshalton Ponds. What remains

of Scawen's grand scheme is now a public park.

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*Nicola Powell was formerly a Post-Excavation Manager at Cotswold Archaeology. Simon Carlyle is a Senior Project Manager at Cotswold Archaeology.*

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