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ARCHAEOLOGY AT HATCH FURLONG: Third Interim Report 2008

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Introduction

A third season of exploratory archaeological work has been completed on the National Trust land at Hatch Furlong, Ewell. The site lies on the Upper Chalk of the North Downs and overlooks the springs around which the Roman and later settlement of Ewell developed.

Although bad weather hampered the programme throughout, five trenches were evaluated between 18th April and 8th May 2008 by students from Birkbeck Faculty of Lifelong Learning, community archaeology volunteers working with Surrey County Archaeology Unit (SCAU), and weekend volunteers drawn from Epsom and Ewell History and Archaeology Society (EEHAS) and Surrey Archaeological Society (SyAS).

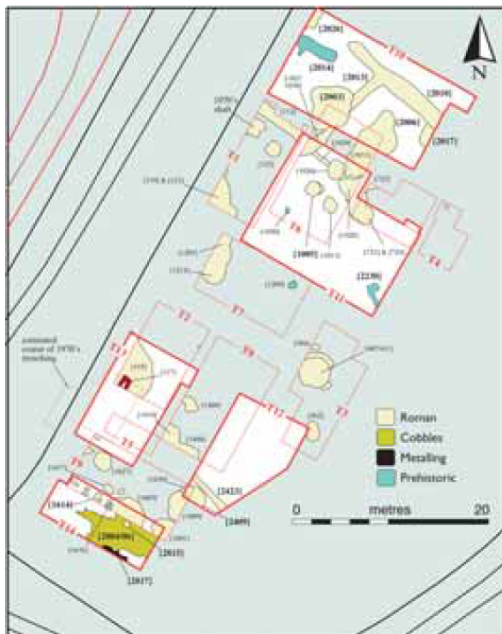
Pupils from a number of local schools were conducted around the site, in addition to over three hundred visitors on a busy Bank Holiday Monday. As has become customary, this year's investigations were filmed by members of the Epsom Cine and Video Society.

The aim of the third season was to investigate areas adjacent to those previously examined at the southern end of the site. Furthermore the intention was to define more clearly the areas dug in the 1970s and glimpsed in Trenches 2 and 5 in 2006; to explore the post holes revealed in Trench 9 in 2007; and to complete the examination of the deeper of the two chalk-cut shafts (context [1005]) in Trench 6. Accordingly five new trenches, numbered 10-14, were opened by machine.

Trench 10

This was the most northerly of the trenches, and was positioned to explore the potential continuation of features previously revealed in Trenches 1, 4 and 6. These included ditch [112/1023/1030], and the shallow scoops/quarries [1033] and [1013].

Aside from a possible prehistoric linear feature [2014] at the western end of the trench, all features proved to be of later Roman date. The earliest comprised a large pit [2017] running into the eastern section. Its dark loamy fill was extremely rich in finds datable to the mid to late third century, including ironwork, ceramic building materials, a wide range of animal bones and a medley of marine shells comprising oyster, cockle, mussel, whelk and winkle; many of the animal bones, which included sheep/



HATCH FURLONG: Plan of all trenches.

goat, cattle, pig, horse, deer, bird, fish and dog, show signs of having been butchered, gnawed and charred. The accompanying pottery is, according to Phil Jones, 'the single-most important assemblage' from the site, and incorporates a range of storage, mixing and serving vessels. Many are of high quality, including Rhenish motto beakers and a marbled flange-rimmed bowl of *ceramique à l'éponge*.



Shaft 1005.

Pit [2017] was cut by a wide shallow ditch [2010] which ran SE-NW along the northern edge of the trench. This appears to have been contemporary with the narrower, more shallow, ditch [2013]; from its alignment this latter feature presumably represents a northward continuation of ditch [1023/1030]. It was clearly cut by one of two large shallow scoops/quarries [2003], which can be equated with quarry [1013] in Trench 6. The upper backfill of [2003] contained part of the iron sheath belonging to a wooden spade.

The second quarry [2006] appears to represent a continuation of [1033] and had two phases of exploitation separated by a lense of compacted chalk backfill [2005]. The latter sealed a placed deposit comprising a complete cattle skull (minus horncores) which had been propped up on a platform of fist-sized flint nodules. A further possible quarry [2026] was identified in the NW corner of the trench.



'Cairn' at base of Shaft 1005.

Trench 11

This trench was positioned to re-expose the two pits/shafts [1005] and [1011] discovered in the southern half of Trench 6 in 2007. The intention was to: complete the examination of shaft [1005]; see if the alignment of pits/shafts continued to the east; and to define the extent of the quarries [1028]/[723]/[724].

It quickly became clear that there were no further deep shafts to the east. Indeed, the only features in the eastern part of the trench appeared to be an amorphous shallow

scoop [2230] containing struck flint and several scraps of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery which had been cut by another undated, but presumably later prehistoric, linear feature. It would seem from this that the line of four pits/shafts (including the 1970s shaft and [125] in Trench 1) is perhaps better regarded as two separate pairs.

The examination of shaft [1005], begun in 2007, was completed with the removal of just under a metre of basal fills. Overall, therefore, the shaft had been cut some 2m deep into the chalk. Traces of possible tool (spade/pick) marks were noted on its lower walls and slightly dished floor. The primary fill comprised a small cairn of flint, chalk and hard conglomerate rubble [2238] which had been placed directly in the centre of the floor. The fills above comprised a sequence of soft friable soils [2208], [2234] and [2213] containing small bones and a few scraps of pottery, none of which need be later than mid-second century. Fill [2204] above contained a localised deposit of puppy and piglet bones. By comparison the fills against the walls of the shaft, [2228] and [2225], were noticeably more compact, but contained fewer finds. All contexts were 100% wet sieved, and the residues are currently (November/December 2008) being sorted. Early indications are that they contain molluscs and the bones of birds, small mammals, amphibians and fish, as well as a number of fruit pips and stones.

Trench 12

This trench was sited to tie together the results from Trenches 3, 8 and 9 examined in previous years, and to expand into areas not previously explored. In the event, the size of the trench was limited by the presence of a live water main to the south east.

Two Roman features were revealed at the southern end of the trench. The first of these comprised a shallow circular pit [2409] part of which had been found in the NW corner of Trench 9 and there designated [1636]. This contained a number of marine shells, part of a rotary quern and third to fourth century pottery. Chalky upcast from the digging of this pit sealed the fill of a shallow ditch [2423] that ran NW-SE across the width of the trench immediately to the north. Pottery from the ditch fill suggested a second century date, and included a possible placed deposit in the form of the greater part of a necked shouldered greyware jar.

Trench 13

This trench was investigated by community archaeology volunteers and focussed on the area thought to have been explored in the 1970s. The intention was to define the extent of this digging; to recover a cache of pottery reportedly reburied at its cessation; and to explore and record the southern portion of the stone-lined flue located in Trench 2 in 2006.

Excavation refined the extent of the areas dug in the 1970s, and it is now possible to correlate this with the surviving sketch plan. The cache of pottery was relocated, and found to comprise large sherds of one or more Dressel 20 amphorae together with fragments of a substantial storage jar of later Roman Alice Holt/Farnham type. A further length of the stone-lined flue was also found, together with large amounts of mostly *ex situ* pink sandy daub containing large chalk inclusions. Many pieces showed smoothed surfaces and interwoven wattle impressions. The original function of this daub is unclear, although it may have formed part of the superstructure belonging to the stone-flued oven or drier.

Trench 14

This trench was positioned to expand Trench 9, excavated in 2007, with the specific aim of examining the area south of several substantial rubble-packed post holes.

Machining revealed a spread of patchy, ill-compacted flint cobbled surface [2804/2806] across much of the eastern section of the trench. There was

considerable variation in clast size within the cobbling, which ranged from 0.02–0.20m, and fragments of pottery, animal bone and tiles lay both on and within it. Other finds included a copper alloy stud and a large iron latch-lifter, the latter over 440mm in length.

In the time available it was only possible to explore limited areas, but this exercise quickly demonstrated that a number of features await further examination. Those uncovered this year included a pair of post holes, [1614] and [2815], spaced some 4m apart, representing the remains of substantial posts set in large sub-square pits backfilled with chalk rubble. Both post holes had been noted in 2007, but not fully understood. Whether these formed part of a building or possibly a substantial gate structure requires further work; but either way they appear to have been set back some 3m from a compacted and apparently cambered metalled surface [2817] that ran along the whole of the southern edge of the trench. This was composed of large flint nodules rammed into a chalk foundation and was bounded to the north by various shallow ditches.

Conclusion

Three seasons of work on the site have resolved a number of questions, even as they have raised others. The 2008 work in particular has allowed us to make more sense of the Roman site in terms of its overall plan. It would seem from this that various activities were accommodated within areas defined by shallow ditches laid out across the chalk spur on a NW-SE orientation. Moreover, it is possible that these ditched areas were accessed from a cambered metalled surface that seemingly ran parallel to the line of the medieval and modern Cheam Road. Topographically this alignment is the most direct route off the Downs to the springs that give rise to the Hogsmill stream, and is likely to have been of considerable antiquity.

The four chalk-cut shafts, three of whose fills can be dated to the second century, are now perhaps best seen as two separate pairs. While each would have produced



HATCH FURLONG: Work in the Community Trench.

quantities of chalk rubble suitable for building or other purposes, the process of backfilling seems to have involved repetitive acts entailing the manipulation of whole and incomplete carcasses of various animals such as young dogs, piglets, deer, horse and cattle. The excavation of the basal fills of shaft [1005] in particular has recovered a wealth of environmental data that is going to take time to sort. However, it is already clear that the remains of many small animals were present in the lower parts of the shaft, together with fruit pips and stones. Similar material also appears to have been recovered from the fill of at least one of the shafts excavated in the mid-nineteenth century: for Hugh Diamond's original 1847 account in *Archaeologia* (vol 32, 451) records the presence of 'a fine rich mould ... [that] contained ... apple-pips and cherry-stones ... the bones of a cock, and of a rabbit or hare'.

The activities carried out on the site in the later Roman period appear to have encompassed low-level exploitation of the North Downs chalk through the digging of a number of shallow scoops or quarries. The purposes to which the resulting soft crumbly chalk was put remain unclear, however. For the most part the quarries seem to have been backfilled with domestic refuse and without undue ceremony. However, the careful placement of a cattle skull on a heap of flint nodules at the base of [2206] was clearly a deliberate act, and harks back perhaps to the deposits contained within the earlier shafts.

A further season of exploratory work is contemplated in 2009. This is likely to focus on the northern and southern extremities of the site. Firstly, to confirm whether or not the ditch located in Trench 10 does indeed represent the original northern boundary of the site. Secondly, to resolve the function of the large post holes in trench 14 and thirdly, to confirm the existence of a metalled road or track along the site's modern southern boundary.

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