

## 1. Background

### 1.1 Site location and topography

The plot of land known as St Mary's No. 5 Churchyard ('the site') is situated in Ewell, Surrey, centred roughly on NGR TQ 2218 6293 (see fig. 1). In extent it is about 100 m SW–NE by 70 m NW–SE, and is bounded by St Mary's No. 4 Churchyard (NW), the gardens of houses on Church Street (SW) and on Ewell By-pass (NE), and by Ewell Vicarage and its gardens (SE). Its underlying geology appears to vary from Reading Beds (sand/clay) in the north to Thanet Beds (sand) in the south. The land rises very gently from west to east; the River Hogsmill flows north from a spring which lies about 250 m WSW of the site. The present condition of the site is of rough grassland. Evidence from No. 4 Churchyard (Pemberton 1973, 5) suggests that the depth of topsoil is likely to be about 0.5 m, but archaeological deposits are not thought likely to have been damaged by recent ploughing or building work. They are very unlikely to have been waterlogged.

### 1.2 Previous work in the area

#### 1.2.1 Ewell in general

##### *Prehistoric periods*

Finds of many periods have been made in Ewell, for example:

palaeolithic flints (Wymer 1987, 26),

mesolithic flints (Wymer 1977, 273–4),

late neolithic/early bronze age beaker and flint arrowhead (Orton 1997a, 94 and 107),

bronze age pottery (Needham 1987, 109),

late bronze age pottery (e.g. Orton 1997a, 94),

iron age: iron-working site (Lowther 1949a), possible burial (Orton 1997a, 95), other pottery (Lowther 1949b).

Little is known of the nature of settlement or other activity in any of these periods in Ewell. The area is well situated for prehistoric settlement, being located around a spring and with easy access to a range of topographical and geological zones. Further evidence for activity in any of these periods could be expected anywhere in the area.

##### *Roman period*

There have been several summaries of our knowledge of Roman Ewell; the most recent is by Orton (1997b). The current view of Roman Ewell is of a rather amorphous settlement spread out for about 1 km along the line of the main Roman road (Stane Street), although the exact route of Stane Street through the centre of the area is not yet well defined. Despite much archaeological effort over the past 150 years, the function of the settlement is unclear; a small-scale market centre seems most likely to be the main function, although there may also be a religious element (Orton 1997a, 120; Bird 2002).

##### *Saxon and medieval periods*

The evidence for activity in Ewell in the Saxon period consists only of burials (Lowther 1935; 1963). No trace of an associated settlement has yet been found, although the existence of one is very likely.

The Domesday Book entry suggests the presence of a small village, but the distribution of the recorded population is not known. Any nucleated settlement seems likely to have been focused around the High Street/West Street – Church Street cross-roads.

#### 1.2.2 The site and its immediate vicinity

There have been several discoveries of Roman remains in and around the site (Abdy and Berton 1997). The focus of investigation has been Stane Street, which has been located near the western corner of the site (TQ 2215 6294; Abdy and Berton 1997, no. 69; Pemberton 1987), as well as in No. 4 Churchyard to the north (TQ 2220 6300; Abdy and Berton 1997, nos 71 and 72; Pemberton 1973; 1987), and in Church Street to the west (TQ 2214 6290; Abdy and Berton no. 68). All these locations are also shown

on the site location plan (fig. 1), together with that of an excavation by Temple in 1978 (Pemberton *pers.comm.* 2000). Work was also undertaken by Ewell Technical College in the 1970s, but its exact location is not known.

The route of Stane Street to the south-west of the observation in Church Street is unknown. Traces of buildings were found next to the road in both No. 4 and No. 5 Churchyards, as well as at Holman Court (TQ 2214 6281, Abdy and Bierton no. 60) to the south of the western corner of the site. Further Roman artefacts have been found at various locations in Church Street (TQ 2211 6288, 2213 6283, 2213 6286, 2213 6288; Abdy and Bierton nos 66, 61, 63 and 67), and at Woodgate to the north of No. 4 Churchyard (TQ 2215 6305; Abdy and Bierton no. 73).

The evidence appears to support the idea of 'ribbon development' along Stane Street, but since the main research aim of work in this area has been to identify the route of Stane Street, it is not surprising that the structures located lie near its supposed route. In particular, the area to the south-east of the known route and its supposed continuation has not been investigated beyond a narrow strip adjacent to the road.

A resistivity survey of the entire site was undertaken by Dyer in 1996. It showed the known route of Stane Street through the north-west part of the site, but no other obvious anomalies.

### **1.3 Reasons for the work and aims of the excavation**

The site has at present no formal use, but is designated as a possible future extension to the No. 4 Churchyard; it is owned by the Church of England but is not as yet consecrated. Decisions must be made about its future use, the main one being whether or not to consecrate and use for burial. Such a decision must be made in the next few years, before No. 4 Churchyard becomes full. One input into these decisions should be reliable information about the nature, extent and condition of any archaeological remains that may be present in the site. The aims of the project were as set out in the Project Design (Orton 2000), and are repeated below.

#### *Research aims*

There seemed little point in further investigating Stane Street, which had already been studied on several occasions. The interest in the site lay in the opportunity to examine the intensity of Roman activity along the roadside, particularly the rate at which the intensity and nature of such activity changed away from the road. This information would help to clarify the nature of the Roman settlement (see above), and might also shed light on the exploitation of London's rural hinterland in the Roman period.

As the site appeared to lie on the northern edge of the settlement (the northernmost recorded building is at TQ 2220 6303, see Pemberton 1973), the possibility of Roman period burials could not be ruled out.

The possibility of locating remains of other periods should not be ignored. Although the main emphasis of archaeological research in Ewell has been the Roman period, it is clear that there has been significant activity here since at least the mesolithic period.

The potential of the site for further research into the archaeology of any period would be assessed after the completion of the project.

#### *Management aims*

The management aims of the work were:

1. to inform any decisions that may be made about the future use of the site.
2. to contribute to broader studies of Roman Ewell as a whole.
3. to contribute to any plans for the management of archaeological remains in Ewell.

#### *Other aims*

The work was intended to provide fieldwork experience for students of UCL Institute of Archaeology, who had to complete 70 days' fieldwork in order to be awarded their degree. In particular, it was aimed

at students living in south London or Surrey who wished to live at home while undertaking their fieldwork, e.g. for family reasons.

It was also intended to make the experience of archaeological fieldwork available to local residents, and in particular to members of the Nonsuch Antiquarian Society. Such experience would be under the supervision of staff and/or students of UCL IoA, and would require a definite time commitment.

#### **1.4 Account of the excavation and post-excavation work**

Following an invitation from the Rev. W.R. Hanford, Vicar of Ewell, to UCL Institute of Archaeology, the Project Design was submitted for his approval and that of the Parochial Church Council of St Mary's, Ewell, and of the Diocese of Guildford through the Faculty procedure.

The Project Design proposed investigation of the site by means of trial trenches, dug by hand. The principal trench would be laid out at right angles to Stane Street, from the point where it crosses the north-west edge of the site, and extending to the south-east edge of the site (a distance of some 75 m); it was to have a width of 2 m. It should be noted that the present north-west edge of the site is not that shown on the current (2000) Ordnance Survey Superplan (1:1250) of the area, as the boundary between Churchyards No. 4 and No. 5 was moved about 10 m to the south-south-east in the 1980s.

If time and resources permitted, test pits (2 m by 2 m) would be dug in a regular grid on either side of the principal trench. The technique would be to remove the topsoil (recording any finds to within 1 m squares), and delimit and record any archaeological features revealed. It was not intended to excavate into any such features, except as was necessary to clarify their nature and extent.

All artefacts observed were to be recorded and retained, but no special retrieval methods (e.g. sieving) were to be employed. Initial post-excavation work would be undertaken on site, and subsequently by students of UCL IoA, as part of their fieldwork requirement. Synthesis and reporting were the responsibility of the project director.

Excavations lasted for three weeks from 19 June 2000, following removal of the turf by machine in the previous week. The site was given the code ECY00 (i.e. Ewell Church Yard 2000). The following amendments to the Project Design were made:

1. width of principal trench was reduced from 2 m to 1 m (on advice from the Surrey County Archaeologist about likely work rates).
2. the principal trench was moved slightly to the south to avoid a very large rubbish heap; this and large bushes along the south-east edge of the site had the effect of reducing the available length to 67.7 m.
3. initially, the first 25 m (from the west) of the principal trench were excavated. This was later extended to 30 m, and further sections were excavated at 40–45 m and 60–65 m from the western end of the trench.

The locations of the areas excavated are shown on fig. 1. An artificial site grid was defined in which the trench ran east-west. All measurements were taken from the south-west corner of the trench, which was defined as being 200 m east and 100 m north of an arbitrary false datum point. Successive metre squares along the trench were thus numbered 200/100, 201/100, etc. The purposes of this device were (a) to make it possible to excavate south of the trench without requiring negative grid references, and (b) to make it impossible to mis-record by transposing the elements of a square's reference number. Contexts were numbered sequentially starting from 100; the number 99 was used as a reference for objects located on the spoil-heap (see below).

Levels were measured by reference to a site datum which was arbitrarily set at 100 m; this was found to be at 38.91 m above OD by reference to the bench-mark on the north-west corner of St Mary's Church.

Interim reports have been published in the Parish Magazine of St Mary's, Ewell, the *Nonsuch Antiquarian Society Newsletter* and the *Bulletin of Surrey Archaeological Society*.

## **1.5 Documentation**

The documentation made on site comprised (a) the site notebook, including details of levels taken, (b) the stratigraphic file, which contained context description sheets and plans (at a scale of 1:10) of all features, and (c) the list of individual ('small') finds.

Post-excavation documentation included catalogues of various categories of find, in both paper and digital form (using Excel for pottery, glass and flint, and Access for the small finds and animal bone).

## **1.6 Location of archive and finds**

All archaeological material excavated from the site is legally the property of the Church of England, as represented by the Vicar of Ewell. It is hoped that they will be deposited at Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell. The site archive will be deposited at the Bourne Hall Museum, with a copy at Guildford Museum (Surrey Archaeological Society).

## **1.7 Acknowledgements**

Permission to excavate was granted by the Rev. W.R. Hanford, the (then) Vicar of Ewell, and the Parochial Church Council. Accommodation for storage and processing was kindly provided by Rob and Jane Pedlar, and members of the Nonsuch Antiquarian Society (now the Epsom & Ewell History & Archaeology Society), especially Charles Abdy and Peggy Bedwell, gave valuable support and background information. The site was excavated by students of UCL Institute of Archaeology and of Birkbeck College, together with members of the NAS and other local residents. Don Cooper acted as my assistant, managed the equipment, and undertook much of the post-excavation cataloguing. Valuable advice was given by Dr David Bird (then Principal Archaeologist of Surrey County Council) and members of his staff. Specialist reports were provided by Ernest Black (flue tiles), Diana Briscoe (stamped Saxon sherd), Kris Lockyear (coins) and Richard Macphail (soil samples). Post-excavation work was assisted by Deborah Trein and Elizabeth.