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WHITEBEECH, CHIDDINGFOLD

Nikki Cowlard, Emma Corke and Juliet Smith lifting a pot from the upper fill of the Iron Age enclosure ditch

HATCH FURLONG 2009: The Final Season

Jonathan Cotton & Harvey Sheldon

The final season of fieldwork at Hatch Furlong on the south-eastern edge of Ewell was completed with the examination of Trenches 13-17 in April and May 2009. These were positioned to address various questions at the northern and southern limits of the site. So, what did we learn? There are four main conclusions.



HATCH FURLONG overall site plan with 2009 trenches outlined in red (drawing: Giles Pattison).

A new Roman road?

Firstly, we uncovered evidence in Trenches 14 and 15 for a narrow metalled road or track 4-5m in width [3210] aligned SE/NW and bounded on its north by a shallow ditch [3227]/[3431]. This discovery had been widely anticipated from the work carried out during previous seasons, and it supports the idea of an early routeway running off the Downs to the springs at the foot of the chalk dip-slope. The SE/NW alignment of this route appears to have been locally influential, as it was adopted by virtually all of the Roman linear ditches located at Hatch Furlong.

The south-western extension to Trench 14 showed that the metalled surface had been laid down over a scraped-up cambered foundation of chalk and orange clay-loam. The surface, which contained Roman finds pressed into it, was only a pebble thick and appeared to have been virtually un-used. Its date is difficult to pin down although its juxtaposition to what amounts to a 'hollow' now occupied

by the modern Cheam Road immediately to the south, suggests that it represents part of a late (?Roman) replacement of an earlier route or routes.

Moreover, evidence from the south end of Trench 15 suggests that this route swung away south east and onto the alignment of the modern bridle-path that still runs up onto the Downs behind NESCOL. The presence of an early route here may also help to explain the high numbers of Roman coins reported from the southern end of Hatch Furlong during the 1970s (and indeed perhaps the late Roman burials recorded on Priest Hill in the 1940s).



HATCH FURLONG Cambered metalled road or track surface in the extension to Trench 14. The modern Cheam Road lies in a cutting beyond the fence.

Further surfaces and roadside activity

Secondly, a complex sequence of other metalled surfaces lay immediately to the north of the cambered surface in the main body of Trench 14. Whether these formed parts of earlier, more substantial, road surfaces or roadside hard-standings is open to debate, but they appear to have been encroached upon, and bounded, by a range of features including pits, post holes and parallel linear ditches running SE/NW across the site.

Although the post holes presumably held posts supporting timber structures no building plans were discernible, and the two large post holes examined in previous years ([1614] and [3207]) remain unexplained. While it is conceivable that these belonged to a large aisled building fronting onto the SE/NW routeway no further comparable features were located, although the positions of several unexcavated anomalies (such as circular feature [3224]) were suggestive.

Coins, a blue glass bead, and a small triple-disc enamelled plate brooch were amongst the finds recovered from the various metallated surfaces, while pit [3444] in Trench 15 produced an interesting range of possibly deliberately placed finds including a dog skull and a nearly complete greyware beaker of 2nd century date. Moreover, a dump of pottery in ditch [3042] in Trench 13 incorporated a substantial portion of a late 1st to early 2nd century lead-glazed cup.

Chalk quarrying

Thirdly, work further north in Trench 16 concentrated on the large pit [3607] initially examined in 2008. Its depth and profile suggest that it may have been a deep chalk quarry of the type found elsewhere on the site. Virtually half of the fill was excavated and wet-sieved, and this exercise has produced a tremendous amount of environmental information in the form of marine molluscs, animal and bird bones and burnt seeds. Other finds included bone hairpins, small jet and glass beads together with a large blue glass melon bead. The sieving exercise also recovered further sherds of pottery from Rhenish motto-beakers bearing slip-trailed capitals including a well-formed letter 'E'. This can be added to the letters 'O' and 'T' discovered in 2008, and may belong to a motto reading 'AMO TE' ('I love you').

Finally, quarry [3607] was bounded to the north by a series of shallow SE/NW ditches of various widths, of which ditch [3612] in Trench 16 and its continuation [3808] in Trench 17 was the most northerly.



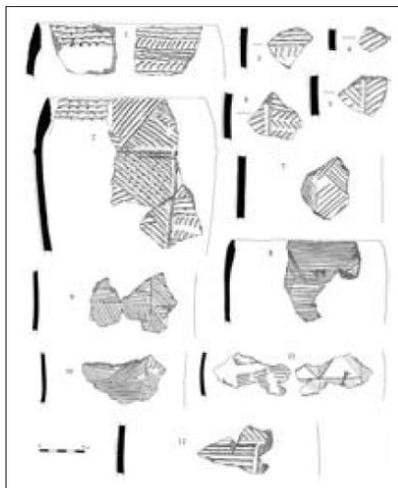
HATCH FURLONG 'Mick's big pit' (3607) with Mick. The best Roman feature assemblage of the site (ed).

The Grooved Ware pit

Lastly, an unexpected but none the less very welcome discovery in Trench 13 was a small scoop [3039] containing large joining sherds of late Neolithic Grooved Ware sandwiched in the metre-wide baulk between two trenches excavated previously – a miracle of survival and discovery. Grooved Ware is often associated with religious sites such as the big Wessex henges, though single pits are the more usual depositional signal in the middle and lower Thames valley. The recovery of this assemblage of fragments from at least 00 vessels at Hatch Furlong is a notable first for Ewell and is quite a turn-up for Surrey as a whole as, apart from a group of sherds from three pits at Betchworth, little of this distinctive pottery has been found elsewhere within the county hitherto.



HATCH FURLONG The Grooved Ware pit under excavation.



HATCH FURLONG The Grooved Ware. Note the internally decorated sherd no 11 (drawing: Phil Jones).

Conclusion

Four seasons of evaluation at Hatch Furlong have addressed many of the questions raised at the outset of the project. These revolved principally around the need to contextualise a series of Roman finds made in the mid 19th century and in the 1970s – finds that included chalk-cut shafts, masonry foundations, coins and pottery. The new work has added considerable corroborative explanatory detail and made clear that in the late Roman period in particular activity was focused on a SE/NW route of considerable antiquity, and on a system of ditched enclosures beyond. Activities taking place within these bounded spaces included the digging and backfilling of further deep shafts and shallower pits or quarries that referenced a range of utilitarian and non-utilitarian behaviour.

Furthermore, the work allows this Roman activity to be placed within a wider chronological and topographic framework encompassing a series of prehistoric and post-Roman interventions on the chalk spur occupied by Hatch Furlong. And it is this multi-period approach, as well as the considerable Roman environmental data recovered during the work, that will help inform the story told in the final report.

Where from here?

The fieldwork may have finished, but work on the post excavation assessment is now under way. Some of the early results from the finds and environmental work in particular were presented at a well-attended public open day at Bourne Hall on Saturday May 1st 2010. (A number of local schools had an opportunity to view these finds the day before.) It is intended that the final report on the site will appear in the Surrey Archaeological Society's *Collections* in due course, and we hope that some of the many finds from the site will eventually be displayed at Bourne Hall.

Acknowledgements

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Thanks are also due to those involved in making the recent open day such a success: Jeremy Harte and David Brooks at Bourne Hall; Abby Guinness, Becky Lambert and Phil Jones (SCAU); Geraldine Missig (Birkbeck Environmental Archaeology Group); Richard Savage, David Hartley and Frank Pemberton (Surrey Roman Studies Group); Norman Bull (Epsom Cine & Video Society); and Bill Meads and John Cole (Metal Detectorists) – to say nothing of welcome guest appearances from Roman soldier Roland Thomas and Roman housewife Sue Quadling.

This is an amended version of an article that first appeared in the Epsom & Ewell History & Archaeological Society's Newsletter in June 2009.