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HATCH FURLONG, EWELL What we find in wet-sieving
(see p.16)

HATCH FURLONG, EWELL

The training excavation undertaken earlier this year was a huge success, and I hope an interim account will appear in the Bulletin before too long (strong hint). Meanwhile, here are a few photos of one of our open days.



Abby Guinness showing visitors the site



Harvey Sheldon showing the local MP a special piece of pot



Becky Lambert instructing her team

Bald bloke showing off some Roman pottery



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HATCH FARM, EWELL. Site Supervisor Richard Savage in a flint-lined hole. Is it a ritual shaft?

ARCHAEOLOGY AT HATCH FURLONG, EWELL, 2006

INTERIM REPORT

Jonathan Cotton and Harvey Sheldon

Introduction

The long-planned initial archaeological evaluation at Hatch Furlong, Ewell, was carried out between the 22nd April and the 15th May, by students from Birkbeck, Faculty of Continuing Education, University of London, and by members of the Epsom and Ewell History and Archaeology Society (EEHAS) and the Surrey Archaeological Society (SyAS). The student training element of the project was led by staff from Birkbeck and the Surrey County Archaeological Unit (SCAU). This brief report summarises some of the results.

Hatch Furlong is a plot of land bisected by the Ewell by-pass and has been in the ownership of the National Trust since the late 1920s. The site is on an elevated spur of North Downs chalk that juts down into the centre of the village. As members of EEHAS and SAS will be well aware, Ewell was a Roman settlement on Stane Street, the main road that linked London with Chichester. Stane Street was probably constructed in the early years following the conquest and the Ewell settlement was sited close to the road and to the springs that lie at the foot of the Downs.

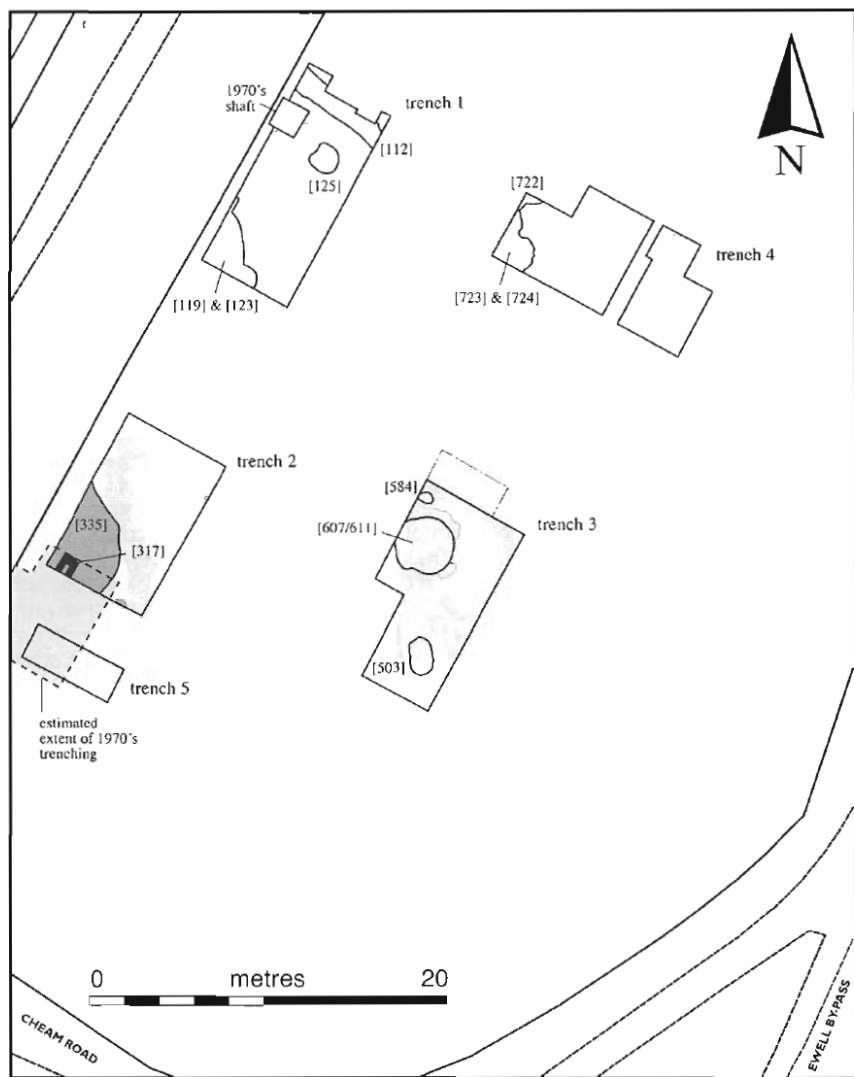
The county Sites and Monuments Record contains references to a series of mainly Roman finds in the immediate area of Hatch Furlong. These include a number of 1st and early-2nd century AD shafts or wells discovered during nineteenth century chalk quarrying on the south side of the Cheam Road (the site now occupied by Homebase). Further finds made within Hatch Furlong itself in the 1970s included a late 2nd century chalk-cut shaft, 12 feet (3.65m) in depth containing the remains of a number of young dogs, and what appeared at the time to be a short length of stone wall. Taken together, these various discoveries hinted at the existence of considerable activity on the higher ground overlooking Stane Street and the Ewell settlement. It was this activity that the present evaluation set out to explore.

Interim results

Five trenches were opened by machine at the south end of Hatch Furlong (see plan): three were sited to re-locate the features discovered in the 1970s, and two upslope to the east sought to examine others identified in the 1970s and during a geophysical survey conducted by Birkbeck in November 2004. All trenches produced geological features trending north-south and archaeological features of Roman date at no great depth, together with traces of later agricultural and horticultural activity. The present summary concentrates on the Roman features; dating is based on a provisional spot-dating of the pottery.

Trench 1 was sited to locate the 12 foot deep shaft emptied in the 1970s, which was visible as a shallow depression in the modern field surface. The evaluation confirmed this and located a second probable shaft (context [125]) two metres to the south-east of the first. The upper fills of this second feature dated to the late 3rd-4th century, though excavation did not proceed any deeper than 1.20m. Both features were bounded to the north by a shallow linear ditch aligned SE-NW (context [112]). The western portion of the ditch contained 2nd century pottery and its eastern portion contained late 3rd-4th century pottery. The ditch fills also contained a number of fragments of dog crania (Geraldine Missig, pers comm). A sequence of inter-cutting 2nd century pits or shallow quarries lay to the south (contexts [119] & [123]).

Trench 2 was sited south of Trench 1 to re-locate the 'stone wall' found in the 1970s. Though quickly achieved, the 'wall' appeared to form part of a narrow rectangular flue belonging to a small oven or drier (context [317]). The flue was constructed of un-mortared tile, flint nodules, and chalk and sandstone blocks, one of which had the date '1979' scratched into it. The oven sat within the upper fills of a large shallow 2nd



HATCH FARM, EWELL. Plan of the excavations

century quarry (context [335]), which occupied the south western corner of the trench. The quarry backfill had been cut into by several other features including the butt end of a linear ditch (context [327]) dated to the 4th century and aligned SE-NW (i.e. parallel to ditch [112] some 30m to the north in Trench 1). Charcoal was present in some quantity in the vicinity of the oven and may represent material connected with its use; samples are undergoing study.

Trench 5 lay immediately to the south of Trench 2 and was sited to locate an area intensively trenched in the 1970s. To judge from the evidence of the machine-cut

sections it clipped the SE corner of the backfilled trench, and may help to shed light on the contexts from which a large quantity of Roman pottery (including much late 2nd century riveted samian) was reportedly recovered.

Trench 3 lay upslope and to the east of Trench 2, and was sited to locate a large anomaly noted in the 2004 geophysical survey. Although the anomaly proved to be of geological origin a number of Roman features lay within the trench. The most substantial of these proved to be the mouth of another probable shaft or well (contexts [607]/[611]), lined with un-mortared flint rubble (see photograph). The evaluation did not proceed below 1.20m in depth, though probing suggested that the feature continued down for at least a further two metres. Pottery recovered from the backfill of the construction trench suggests that it was dug some time in the 2nd century, though finds from the uppermost fills of the shaft appear to indicate that the latter remained open into the 4th century. An inverted 2nd century jar was buried in a small pit (context [584]) adjacent to the mouth of the feature. Tool marks visible in the side of a late 2nd-3rd century shallow sub-rectangular pit (context [503]) at the south end of Trench 3 suggested the use of a narrow pointed tool (akin to a modern pickaxe) to excavate the soft chalk.

Trench 4 lay north of Trench 3 and east of Trench 1 and was sited to try and locate a 'chalk platform' reported in the 1970s. No platform was found, although it is possible that it lay beyond the trench footprint to the east. The principal point of interest lay at the western end of the trench in the form of a series of shallow inter-cutting pits or quarries (contexts [722], [723] & [724]). These contained a range of finds of late 2nd or early 3rd century date. Notable amongst them were quantities of broken roof and floor tile, together with a number of iron objects including an ox-goad – one of several recorded from the site. No fewer than five fossil sea urchins were recovered from this trench, one from quarry fill [726] and the others from soil layers overlying; a sixth example was found in Trench 2.

Conclusion

Archaeologically, the site proved to have been honeycombed with shallow inter-cutting Roman pits or quarries (Trenches 1, 2 and 4); that in Trench 2 contained a small oven or drier with a rectangular flue. In addition, there were at least three substantial chalk-cut features (Trenches 1 and 3), the mouth of one of which was lined with substantial quantities of un-mortared flint rubble. Furthermore, it is possible that the two deep features in Trench 1 were screened off by a linear ditch. The digging and backfilling of these various features probably encompassed a range of utilitarian and non-utilitarian activities; the presence of fossil sea urchins on several of the county's Roman temple sites might be noted in this context too.

The quantity of ceramic building material recovered from several of the features in Trenches 3 and 4 hints at the existence of a building somewhere in the vicinity, though no certain traces were identified during the current work. Detailed analysis of the finds (pottery, building material, ironwork, animal bone and charcoal etc) has yet to be completed, but early indications suggest that there were at least two main phases of Roman activity dating to the 2nd-3rd centuries and late 3rd-4th centuries. This appears to be somewhat later than the 1st and early 2nd century activity discovered in the course of the nineteenth century chalk quarrying further south.

If the archaeology proved extensive and rewarding, the hoped-for student and community involvement was just as impressive. Training in archaeological techniques was given to 35 Birkbeck students over two hectic weeks; work over three (equally hectic) weekends was carried out by up to 30 local volunteers; two open days attracted over 400 visitors, and 6 school parties were conducted around the site. Further tours were given to members of EEHAS and SAS; to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and 12 Councillors from Epsom & Ewell Borough Council; and also to the local

MP, Chris Grayling, Shadow Transport Spokesman. Articles appeared in local newspapers and a 'live' interview was recorded with Three Counties Radio. Furthermore, members of the Epsom Cine & Video Society were ever-present on site and we look forward to a screening of their footage in the not too distant future.

Acknowledgements

It remains to thank the very many institutions and individuals who made the work possible. It was a genuine team effort. The evaluation derived great support from: The National Trust; Birkbeck, Faculty of Continuing Education; Surrey County Archaeological Unit; Epsom & Ewell History & Archaeology Society; Surrey Archaeological Society; Council for British Archaeology (South East); Bourne Hall Museum; The Museum of London; Surrey County Council; James Simister (Chessington Adult Education Service); and Martin and Alan Wright (PGSD Ltd).

The site was co-directed by the writers; the training excavation trenches were supervised by Mick Miles (Birkbeck) and Becky Lambert (SCAU); the weekend trenches were supervised by Alan Hall, Richard Savage and Phil Stanley (SAS Roman Studies Group); finds supervision was provided by Phil Jones (SCAU), assisted by Frank Pemberton (EEHAS); on-site wet-sieving was coordinated by Geraldine Missig (Birkbeck Environmental Archaeology Group); metal detecting duties were in the capable hands of Bill Meads and John Coles; site tours and handling sessions for schools and members of the public were provided by David Brooks (Bourne Hall Museum) and Abby Guinness (SCAU); and the site plan (see above) was prepared by Giles Pattison (SCAU). Finally, special thanks are due to Caroline Thackray and David Kennington (National Trust) for their unflappable assistance regarding permissions and access; to Robin Densem and Natalie Ping (Birkbeck) for their smooth handling of the site logistics and to Peggy Bedwell and Margaret Nobbs, assisted by other EEHAS members, for services 'above and beyond the call of duty'.