

**Archaeological investigation of a probable medieval ironworking
site at Coldharbour Cottage, Lower Mousehill Lane, Milford, Surrey**

SU 93892 42360

By

David Graham

With contributions by Phil Jones and Hugh Turrall-Clarke

December 2014

Summary: *Finds made while gardening and during a subsequent limited archaeological investigation produced evidence of a medieval iron working site in the grounds of Coldharbour Cottage, Milford.*

Introduction: Coldharbour Cottage lies to the west of Milford on Lower Mousehill Lane (SU 93892 42360 (fig 1). The site was first discovered in 2012 by Mr Richard Tracy, the owner, while digging a hole in his garden and was then partially explored by him in a series of small test pits. He reported the finds and the site was brought to the attention of Surrey Archaeological Society. The Society then organised a limited excavation, directed by the author, to try and define the nature and date of the site. Nowadays the A3 defines the eastern boundary of the property and the cutting through which the road passes will have removed any archaeological remains that may once have extended in this direction.

In the event the excavation dated the site, on pottery evidence (Appendix 1), to the 13th century and confirmed that it was likely to have been an ironworks, but failed to locate the bloomery or any other structures apart from a few postholes, several working surfaces and an odd structure consisting of an oval ring of inwardly angled stakeholes. Accordingly this paper can be thought of as an interim note rather than a full report, which must await a larger excavation - should that ever be possible.

Topography and Geology: Coldharbour Cottage is a timber framed house probably dating to the 16th or early 17th century. The house is sited on the north slope of Mousehill Down overlooking lower, and historically wetter, ground to the north. The northern half of the garden forms the lowest part of the slope, which is cut by a number of east west orientated terraces of some antiquity (see profile figs 1 & 2) at least some of which, and maybe all, are associated with the medieval works. The slope is heavily wooded which severely limited the area available for excavation.

The geology of the ridge and slope consists of beds of the Sandgate formation while the lower ground to the north consists of clay, silt, sand and gravel overlying Bargate sandstone.

The Initial exploration: The site was first discovered by the owner while digging a hole halfway down the slope in the northern part of the garden. Under a thick layer of colluvium and relatively recent rubbish, he encountered signs of burning, found a quantity of horizontally grooved greyware sherds and vitrified slag. There were slight signs of structures and the layer also produced hammerscale when tested with a magnet. Further holes were dug in the general vicinity, many of which produced further evidence of ironworking. This was reported to Guildford museum and the site was visited by a professional archaeologist from the Surrey County Archaeological Unit who, in turn, informed Surrey Archaeological Society. In 2013 Mr Tracy and the author excavated a small test pit close to the initial hole which confirmed that the slope had been used to tip domestic rubbish and that this overlay colluvium, in turn overlying a layer that produced medieval pottery which lay on top of the natural sand - at this point the base of one of the terraces that cut the slope. There was also evidence that the slope had been disturbed by recent cuttings for ceramic waste pipes and by garden water features. Mr Tracy kindly agreed to allow a further programme of limited trenching which was undertaken in 2014 and which is the subject of this note.

The 2014 Excavation: The main trench (Tr 3) was sited over Mr Tracy's original hole (Tr 1 not shown in fig 1 was incorporated in Tr 3) but extended further to the north with an eastward projection forming an inverted 'L' shape (figs 1 & 3). The stratigraphy (photo 1) largely conformed to that

exposed by the previous year's test pit. The upper, approximately 30cm, consisted of grey sand which contained domestic rubbish - bottles, window glass, metalwork etc, as well as several sherds of, residual, medieval pottery. This overlay a thin harder compact layer with a scatter of red roof tile and green glazed sherds, which perhaps related to some phase of works to Coldharbour Cottage itself or a predecessor.

Beneath the tile level was another, 25cm thick, band of grey sand, this time containing nothing but medieval pottery (see pottery report below) and, in sections of the trench, resting on several thin bands of clay interspersed with bands of ash. The former must be temporary working surfaces one or more of which were associated with a burnt posthole (photo 2; fig 3, 312) and a second burnt posthole (310). In addition a third burnt posthole (305) lay just over 1m to the north. The trench was not large enough to establish the extent and function the burnt posthole structure, if indeed that is what it was. Subsequently a sub circular ring of 6 stakeholes (photos 3 & 4; fig 3, 310 b-g) was erected surrounding the position of the second burnt posthole (310) with a vertical stakehole (310a) set in the centre the fill of the posthole (310; photo 5). The picture was confused by the presence of numerous root holes which were hard to differentiate from the stakeholes. In any event the ring of certain stakeholes were of varying depths but at least one was deep enough to see that it was cut at an inward angle of about 80 degrees from horizontal (photo 6). If that applied to the other stakes, the structure would have formed a lightly built pyramid with a central supporting vertical stake - the purpose of the structure is unknown. There was a distinct ashy deposit (fig 3, 311, photo 7) immediately to the north, which might be connected in some way to the pyramidal stake structure but more probably with the burning activity associated with the three earlier postholes (305, 310 (part), 311, 312). However, this was difficult to determine stratigraphically, as the earlier hole digging had removed the upper levels at this point. Finally there was a distinct area of reddening (fig 3, 302) in the north-west corner of the trench. The overall section was tested in places to a further depth of about 30cm but appeared to consist of undisturbed natural yellow sand.

The various working surfaces were not continuous across the section (photo 4), being restricted to the north and south ends of the trench. Given that these layers lay directly on the natural sand, this indicates that the terracing, or at least these two, directly relate to the ironworking activities in the 13th century. The 'missing' section of the working floors (in the centre of the section) lay at the lower edge of a terrace and this section of the floors has probably been eroded away. In any event, where they survived, the floors produced medieval pottery, hammerscale and the occasional lump of slag - all indications of ironworking in the immediate vicinity. Not surprisingly there was also a general light scatter of, probably Mesolithic, flintwork at all levels across the site.

The north end of trench 3 was extended eastwards in an unsuccessful attempt to follow the working floors eastwards. However it did, in its north east corner, uncover a compacted, straight edged clay/sand surface containing roof tile (photos 8 & 9; fig 3, 307). Whether this relates to a building or is another working surface is unknown as it was not possible to extend the trench, but again a date in the medieval period is indicated by the pottery finds.

Trench 4, which was rectangular (3.5 x 1.2m), was positioned on the upper terrace level immediately south of trench 3. Mr Tracy had originally cut a smaller hole (Tr2 not shown on fig 1) in this location and had recovered more medieval pottery. This was perhaps residual as little further material was recovered and the ground had been extensively disturbed in recent times, destroying any upper

levels and leaving only slight indications of a trampled surface immediately above the natural yellow sand.

Trench 5 was 1.5 x 1.5m square and located higher up the slope and again consisted in section of a layer of grey sand containing modern rubbish with the lower levels overlying the natural yellow sand being blackened with ash.

Trench 6 was of a similar size to trench 5 and located north-west of trench 3, roughly in the centre of the next lowest terrace. The stratigraphy was again similar to trench 5 except for the presence of a pit containing discarded sandstone (photo 10)

Trench 7 again the same size and the furthest north of the trenches at nearly the lowest point of the slope. Again the lower levels showed signs of ash and burning and contained a heavy scatter of golf ball sized lumps of burnt sandstone (context 702: photo 11) but no other features.

Conclusion: There is little doubt that Coldharbour Cottage was the site of an ironworks in the 13th century. Given the occasional find of slag there was, presumably, a bloomery furnace, or furnaces, somewhere in the vicinity and the presence of hammerscale also hints at smithing as well. Although the trenches failed to locate the centre of either activity it was only possible, because of the tree cover, to look at a limited part of the site and Mr Tracy's other small test holes indicate that the whole slope was originally covered by the industrial activity. Given the evidence of the stratigraphy, the terracing must also date to the 13th century and have been part of setting up the ironworks in the first place, though some may have functioned as trackways as well - see note by Turrall-Clarke (Appendix 2 below). If they are indeed trackways they skirt the wet ground to the north and run westwards towards Elstead and perhaps Waverley Abbey, though whether there is any direct association with the abbey is speculation at present. However, it is worth noting that the 1840 Witley Tithe Apportionment lists Cold Harbour Cottage and other properties as being in the ownership of Lord Middleton who also owned the adjacent Oxenford Farm - a grange of Waverley Abbey. Perhaps the two were linked as far back as the medieval period.

Acknowledgements: I should like to thank Mr Richard Tracy and his wife for permission to carry out the excavation and for Mr Tracy's enthusiastic help throughout the dig. I am also grateful to Phil Jones who generously looked at the pottery in his own time and to Hugh Turrall-Clarke for his note of the possible trackways leading to and from the site (see appendices). Finally, I am indebted to Dave Attryde, David Calow, Judie English, Audrey Graham, Chris Hayward and Anne Lea for their help in carrying out the actual excavation.

David Graham

14 December 2014

Illustrations

Fig 1 Site plan showing location of trenches and profile

Fig 2 Profile

Fig 3 Trench 3 composite plan

Photographs in the report

- 1 Trench 3, longitudinal section, east side
- 2 Trench 3, context 312, from west
- 3 Trench 3, feature 310, stakeholes round south side
- 4 Trench 3, feature 310, stakeholes round north side
- 5 Trench 3, context 310, section of posthole
- 6 Trench 3, section of stakehole f around context 310
- 7 Trench 3, ashy deposit 311
- 8 Trench 3, east end, context 307 (platform)
- 9 Trench 3, east end, context 307 (detail)
- 10 Trench 6, context 603, stone-filled pit
- 11 Trench 7, context 702

Further photographs deposited with Surrey HER

- 12 Trench 3, south section
- 13 Trench 3, north section
- 14 Trench 3, section through context 311 from west
- 15 Trench 5, north section
- 16 Cooking pot sherd

Appendices

- 1 Finds assessment, by Phil Jones
- 2 Note on tracks at Coldharbour Cottage (with photographs), by Hugh Turrall-Clarke

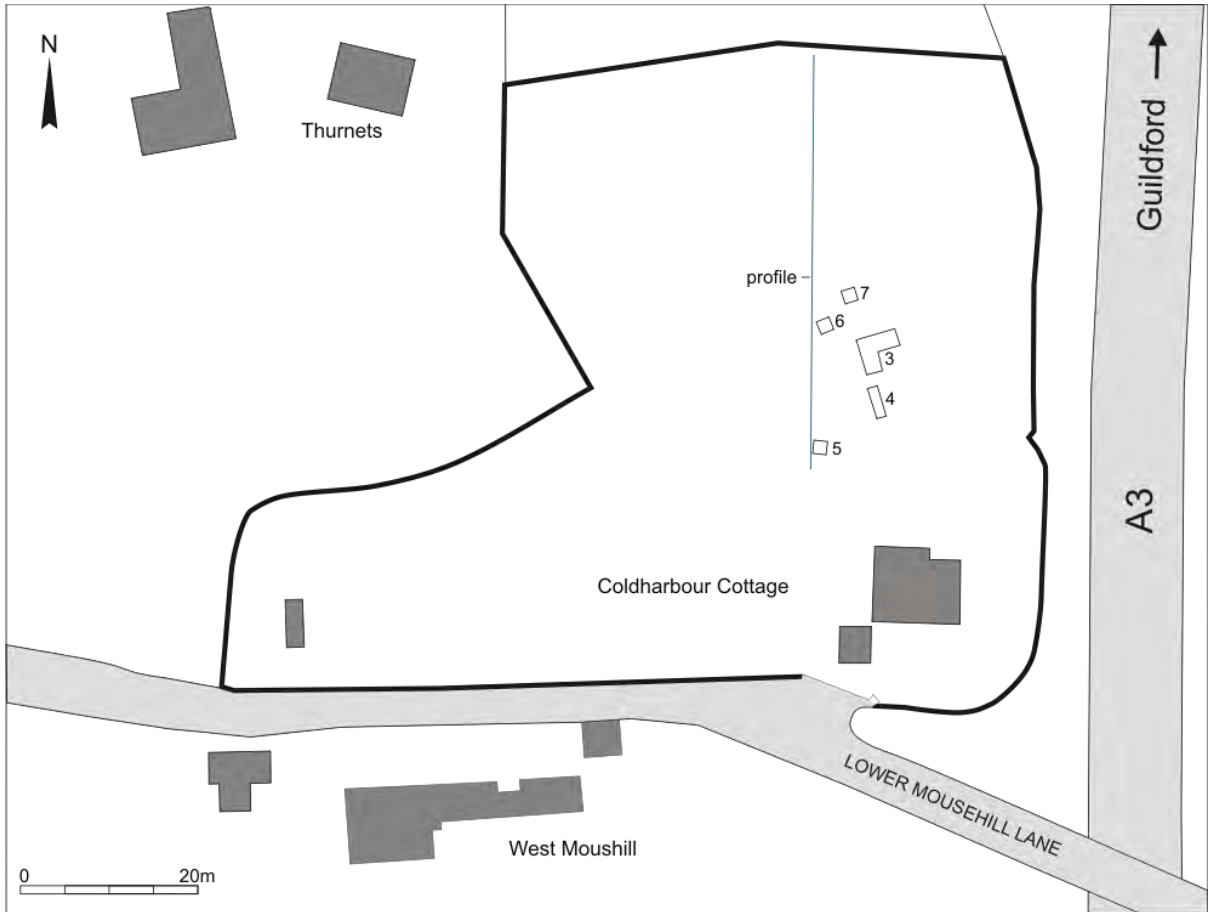


Fig 1 Site plan showing location of trenches and profile

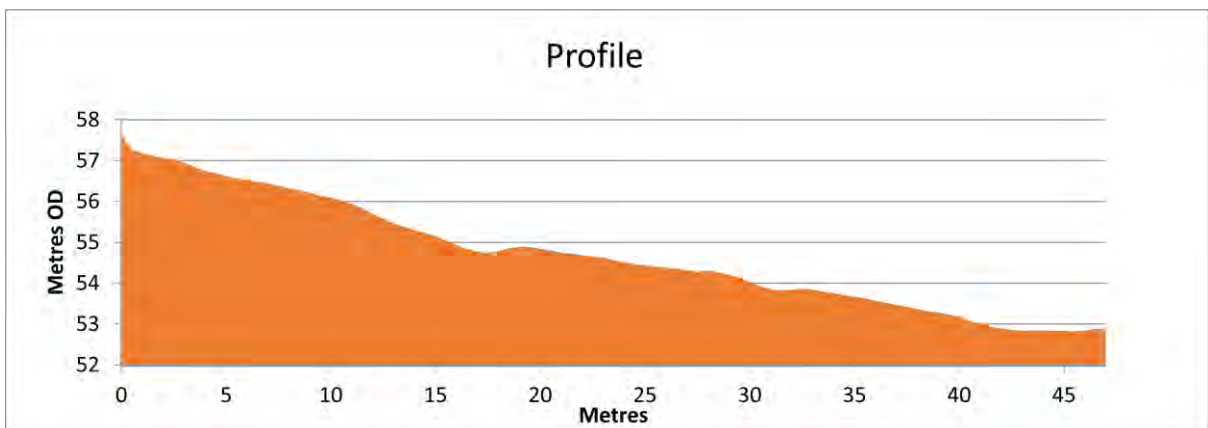


Fig 2 Profile of the slope from south (left) to north (right)

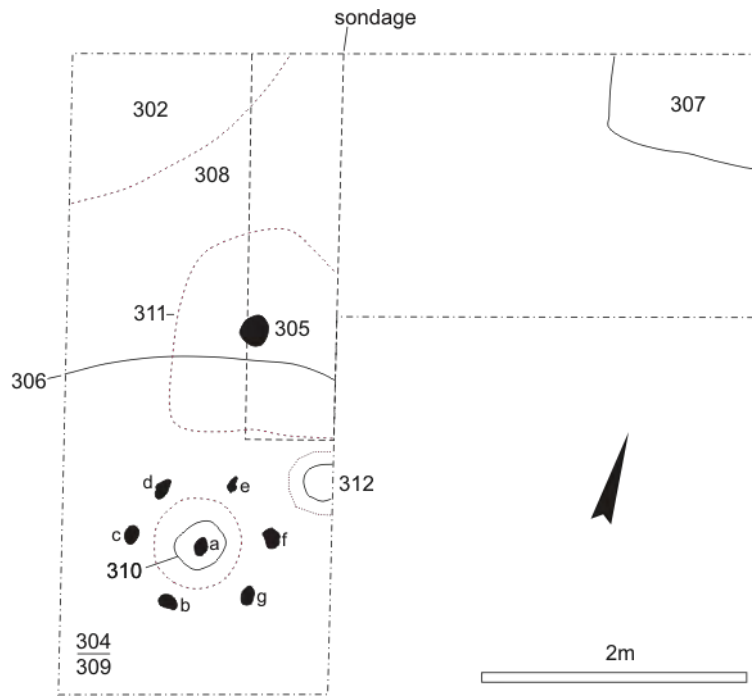


Fig 3 Trench 3 composite plan



Photo 1 Trench 3, longitudinal section, east side

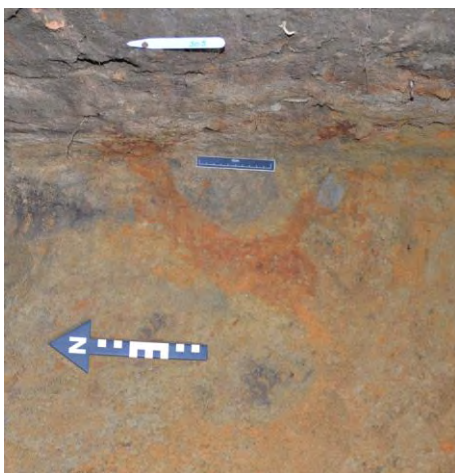


Photo 2 Trench 3, context 312



Photo 3 Trench 3, feature 310, stakeholes round south side



Photo 4 Trench 3, feature 310, stakeholes round north side

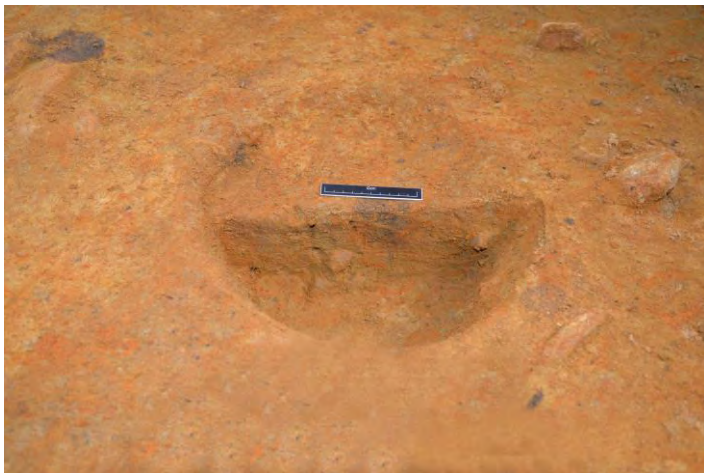


Photo 5 Trench 3, context 310, section of posthole

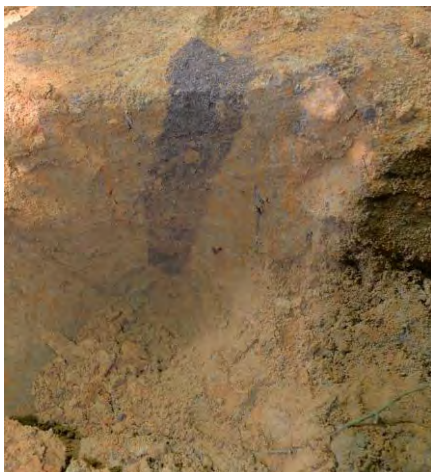


Photo 6 Trench 3, section of stake-hole f around context 310

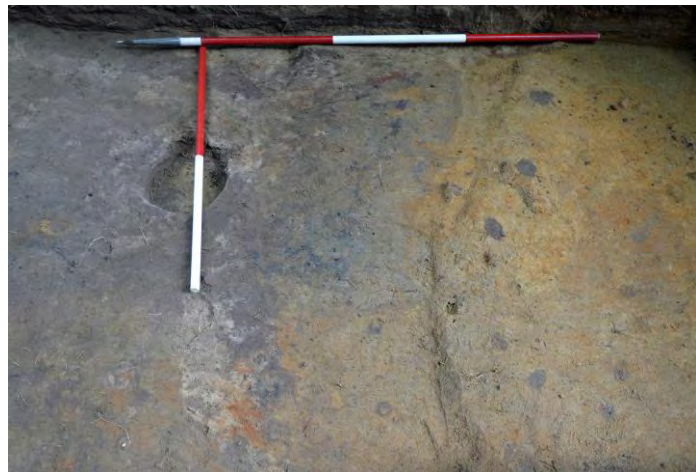


Photo 7 Trench 3, ashy deposit 311



Photo 8 Trench 3, east end, context 307 (platform)



Photo 9 Trench 3, east end, context 307 (detail)



Photo 10 Trench 6, context 603, stone-filled pit



Photo 11 Trench 7, context 702

Appendix 1

COLDHARBOUR COTTAGE, MILFORD (CCM 14)

Finds Assessment by Phil Jones

(Note: the table of finds is not included here but will be deposited with the Surrey HER. All finds have been retained by Mr Tracy)

Pottery

177 sherds (1.8kg), of which two are prehistoric, one of early medieval type, ten more of post-medieval date and the remainder perhaps made and used entirely during the 13th century.

The prehistoric sherds were residual in probable medieval contexts (311 and 502) and both are of calcined flint-gritted ware and most likely of Bronze Age or earlier date.

The single, small sherd of early medieval type is in a calcareous-tempered fabric (perhaps chalk but since dissolved) and is probably of 11th or 12th century date.

Four of the post-medieval sherds are of white Border Ware, including the fragmentary rims of a jar (312) and of a bowl (602), both of which may be of late 16th or 17th century date. Three more of redware fabrics may be slightly later, and includes the rim of a dish with white-slipped decoration on its flange (309) and part of a lid with a glossy dark brown glaze (501). Three more are of RWE (refined white earthenware) of 19th century or later date (301 and 501).

The pottery of High medieval date is mostly of the three graded variants of the Grey/Brown Sandy ware tradition, with 153 sherds (1.5kg), and eleven more (0.1kg) are of two grades of the related Whiteware tradition. The greater majority of the former is of the standard Q2 type, accounting for 68% by count of all grades, but with a significant proportion of the coarsest sandy variant GQ2 at between 22 and 27% by count and weight. In comparison the finest FQ2 type that was usually used for jugs, is represented by only fourteen sherds. Of the few whiteware sherds, seven are of the coarsest WW1A variant, with the other four of the finer WW2 type.

Most of vessels represented amongst the Grey/Brown Sandy ware material are jars with everted rims, and since several sherds retain some sooting it is clear that they had been predominantly used for cooking. The rims of five of these are in GQ2, with another seven in Q2 and two more in FQ2. A significant number of the body sherds of both GQ2 and Q2 examples bear scratch-marking, and this modification also extends over and below the many base angle sherds. The shoulders of some examples of both grades also bear horizontal shallow grooving. No examples of GQ2 and only two sherds of Q2 had been glazed, and the latter includes the beaded rim of a small skillet (302). In contrast, five of the fourteen sherds of FQ2 are glazed, including the rilled upper part of a jug that also bears traces of white slip (305), although a finger-impressed base angle of a baluster jug (309) and a segment of a stabbed rod handle (502) were unglazed.

There is only one sherd that is glazed amongst the seven of WW1A, and both rims are of cooking pot/jars, including one of relatively small size (c 14cm diameter) that may be early within the series (308). The four sherds of WW2 include the rim of a jug with a green glaze splash (308).

The dominance of the grey/brown sandy sherds, absence of earlier types (except for the small possible stray) and the paucity of whiteware suggests that all may belong to the 13th century, with perhaps not much made after c1250. The characteristic scratch-marking of many cooking-pots from the shoulder down is a common trait on similar pottery of the 13th century in Guildford and further west in Surrey confirms the presence of a regional variation of the otherwise ubiquitous Grey/Brown Sandy Ware tradition within the county.

Other ceramic materials

Roof tile

Nineteen pieces (0.9kg) from various contexts (301, 302, 308, 309, 402 and 501) and probably mostly of medieval types, although no attempt at discrimination by fabric was made. The exception from flat examples is a curved piece that may be from a pantile (302).

Floor tile

Three fragments (0.27kg) from plain examples (302).

Brick

An over-fired fragment (26g) from 301.

Baked clay

Two pieces from 309 (5g) and 501 (62g).

Tobacco pipe

A stem fragment from 301.

Stone

Fifty-four pieces (4kg) of various ferruginous sandstone (FeSST) pieces of amorphous shape derived from the Folkestone Beds. None appeared to have been fired. Two other pieces (0.3kg) are of Hythe Beds Lower Greensand (501).

Calcined flints

Three pieces, with two small fragments from 308 and a larger piece (24g) from 402. These may be associated with the prehistoric sherds and/or flints.

Struck flints

Five pieces, including three flakes from 308, and two Mesolithic-type cores. One of the latter has been re-used as a scraper (302) and the other is a multi-platform type.

Iron objects

Two parts of a plate-like object (301) and a possible knife (307)

Iron slag

A piece (0.17kg) from 308 may be associated with iron-working

Charcoal

A small fragment from 308 (1g) and a larger piece from 501 (3g).

Glass

The rim and lower kick from two blown, dark green bottles of 18th century types from 301; a fragment of green-tinged pane glass from 602; and a fused lump of black glass from 602.

Appendix 2

Tracks at Coldharbour Cottage, Lower Moushill Lane, Milford

Coldharbour Cottage lies at the foot of the northern slopes of Moushill Down (also known as 'Heaven's Gate'). The Lane itself is clearly an old cattle/horse track that has been made suitable, and in some parts diverted to make it suitable, for wheeled traffic – see note below.

The property boundaries of Coldharbour Cottage appear to be unchanged since the 1871 Ordnance Survey map (see image 4). The Witley tithe map shows the present property split in two, plots 76 (Viscount Midleton, Occupier Viscount Midleton) and 69b (Viscount Midleton, Occupier Thomas Chalcraft).

There are two tracks in the northern section (plot 69b) running roughly east-west and following the line of a terrace, with lower land to the north and higher land to the south.

The southern track (image 1, looking west, SU (4)93856 BNG (1)42376 to 93899/42399) is a 'compression track', which is normal for a level surface. It runs from one side of the property to the other and therefore dates from before the boundaries were established.

The northern track (image 2, looking west, 93894/42404 to 93866/42400) is shorter and has some cut edges, indicating that it is not as old as the southern track.

It has not been possible to walk the area to the east of the tracks, as there is now a main road (the A3) and it has not been possible to gain access to the grounds of Chimneys because the owners are away. However, in Amberley Lane there are two opposing entrances to the bottom of the present garden of Chimneys and to a field opposite, which could be surviving parts of a former track. This needs further investigation.

To the west the pattern is for the down to fall close to the lane, with the older houses at a slightly lower level to the right (north) and their grounds to fall onto a lower area. This can be seen quite clearly in image 7, which was taken from the north-west of Dairy Farm House, showing the old part of the property on a terrace well above the lower part of the garden. It has not been possible to check that the terracing is continuous with that in the garden of Coldharbour Cottage, but, given the features discussed below, it does seem likely.

Both the Tithe map and the Ordnance Survey show an unusual dog-leg feature in the way the property boundaries run to the west of Dairy Farm House. Such a feature would lead one to suspect that there was a track that followed the main east-west line and went along the terrace in the gardens of Dairy Farm House and Coldharbour Cottage, but was diverted at some time to link up with Lower Moushill Lane. If so, the track would predate Lower Moushill Lane. Extending that track westwards, it takes a line over Royal Common and Guinea Common and along Hookley Lane to Elstead, thus giving a southerly route to the Elstead/Waverley/ Farnham area, as an alternative to the Elstead Road, which appears to have been very boggy at times until the roadway was raised. The other route alternative was much further north, via Ockford and Eashing and Somerset bridges.

It is very difficult to date tracks, but it is possible to establish a possible sequence

1. Track to Elstead following lower terrace
2. Track from Borough Farm/Thursley area following upper terrace (very old, see below), now Lower Moushill Lane
3. Track diverted to join lane west of Dairy Farm House

4. Houses built along the lane (1550 onwards)
5. Property boundaries extended to cover the disused part of the track
6. Lane improved to take wheeled vehicles – 1841 to 1871

One can argue about the sequence, but it is clear that the track to Elstead is Mediaeval. At that time the main draws in that direction were Farnham and Waverley Abbey. There is also a clear track to Hookley Lane from further south and tracks to the Waverley/Farnham area from Thursley. Witley (with Thursley) was a separate entity by the Domesday Book and its inhabitants were not obliged to trade with Godalming, so the track may be one of its trading routes. There is no evidence that it was part of a longer distance route, although one can conceive of its being of use in moving between Waverley its grange at Markwick in very wet weather, when the Elstead Road route would have been boggy.

Lower Moushill Lane

Lower Moushill Lane has several buildings of significance along it – the following appear on the 1871 Ordnance Survey:

- Moushill Manor (OS ref 212), rebuilt in the 19th century (see image 5, 1840s, Brayley))
- Chimneys (OS ref 187), a Tudor building that was extended in the 20th century (see image 6, 1908, Godalming Museum)
- Coldharbour Cottage (OS ref 183)
- West Moushill (OS ref 186), a house from about 1800
- Dairy Farm House (OS ref 182), a timber framed house that was extended in the 20th century (see image 7)
- Kennel Moor (OS refs 210 & 211), a 19th century Gothic Revival style building, which may be on the site of an earlier building
- Burchetts (OS ref 117), the original parts of which appear to have been a substantial neo-classical building (see reconstruction by HTC in image 8), probably built in the late 18th century
-

Coming from the south-west the lane can be described as follows:

- The southern end of the lane aligns with a crossing over the Cosford to Oxenford Stream that emerges by the gate to Borough Farm. The Tithe Map only shows a track from the crossing to Borough Farm. This crossing leads to the northern extension of Thursley Common.
- The Lane then follows the contours, with a substantial dip on its north/western side
- Several large gullies rise from the dip to join the lane on a ridge to the south of Burchetts
- Between the ridge and Burchetts there is a sunken section of the lane
- From Burchetts to Moushill Corner there is a wide terrace that has been metalled over the years
- At Moushill corner there are two tracks forward.
 - Straight on, a track leads to the car park and old maps show this going on to a junction the old Portsmouth Road close to the place where it emerges now. This involves going over a ridge.
 - To the left, the lane loops round to the west. This loop is not shown on the Tithe Map.
 - Between the two are two substantial gullies, which align with a third route shown on both the Tithe Map and the 1871 Ordnance Survey map. This was probably the original line.
- The line from the loop to Dairy Farm House lies at the foot of Moushill Down
- From Dairy Farm House to Chimneys the line follows a terrace on the side of the down

- From Chimneys on, the lane winds through the home area of Moushill Manor to the old Portsmouth Road

From the above it can be seen that the most likely origin of this lane was to move farm goods from the Borough Farm/Thursley Common area to the Godalming area. The lane was later improved to take wheeled vehicles, with necessary diversions at Moushill Corner and south of the ridge south of Burchetts: This would have involved considerable expense and is most likely to be associated with a connection between Borough Farm and Moushill Manor (Both were owned by Viscount Midleton but with different occupiers in 1841. I am trying to contact the owner, J A Herring 01483-421586, on this).

The track from Moushill Corner to the car park and beyond may well have been put in, or put into greater use, when Burchetts was built.

Hugh Turrall-Clarke
27 August 2014



Image 1: south track



Image 2: north track



Image 3: extract from tithe map

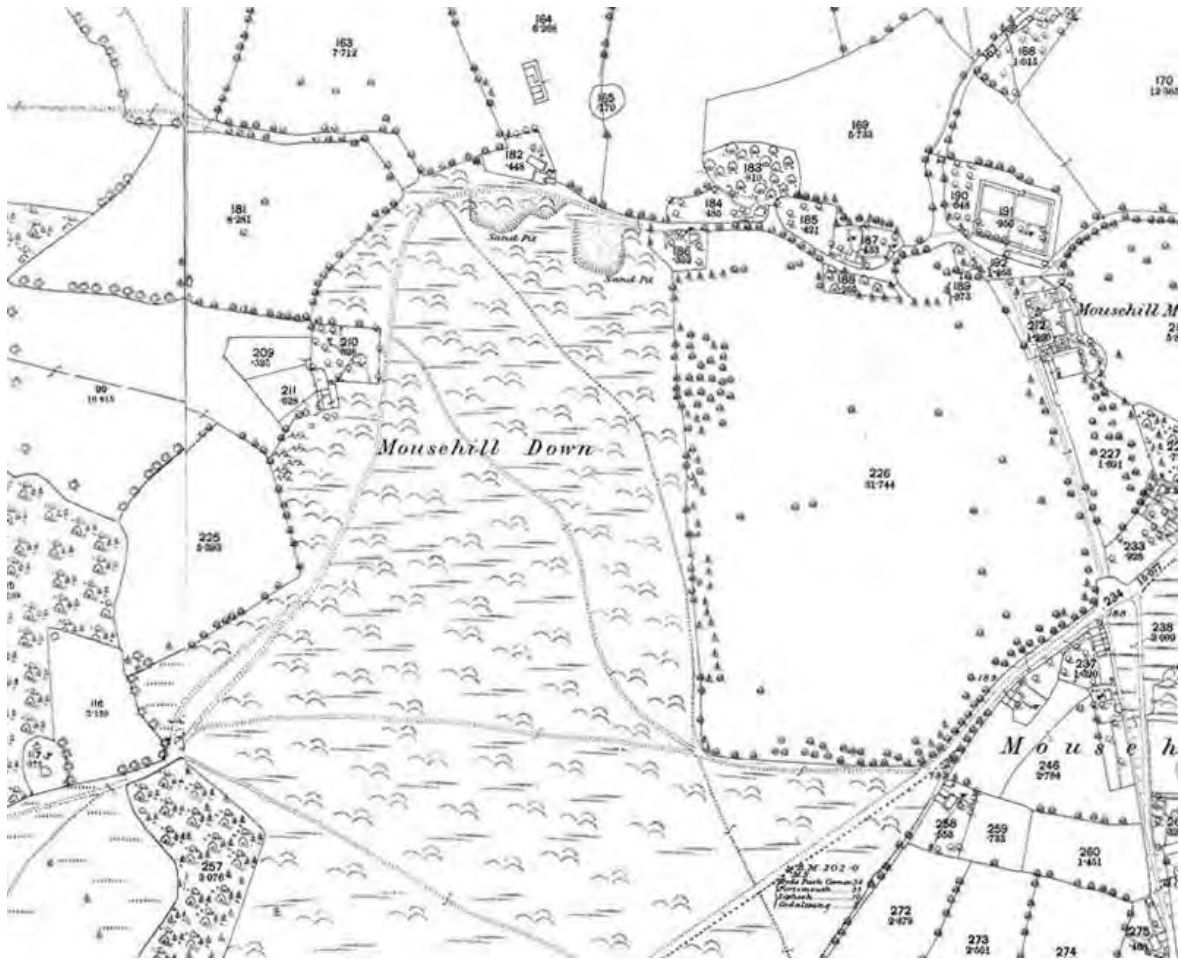


Image 4: extract from 1871 OS map



Image 5: Mousehill Manor, 1845



Image 6: Chimneys, c 1908



Image 7: Dairy Farm House from north-west



Image 8: Burchetts