

EPSOM & EWELL HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY



THE FIRST 50 YEARS: 1960-2010

Archaeology in the 21st Century



Archaeological investigation during construction of two sets of steps onto the Bourne Hall lawn 2004

Archaeological activity

In the period from 2000 Jon Cotton and Frank Pemberton as qualified archaeologists have led a revival of excavation projects, at Hatch Furlong, St.Mary's Churchyard and tracing the precise route of the Roman road Stane Street through Epsom and Ewell, in partnership with the Surrey Archaeological Society. An archaeological survey of Epsom and Ewell Downs to trace prehistoric and Roman farmsteads has also begun, led by Nikki Cowland.

Excavations and watching building sites have also added to the sites in the 1997 gazetteer, with information on all sites in the Borough available at the Surrey History Centre, Woking and Bourne Hall Museum. The Society's archaeological group, led by Frank Pemberton, has been working through the evidence and finds of prehistoric and Roman settlement in the area, producing research reports. Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age sites and settlement appear to be concentrated around the springs at Bourne Hall and the banks of the Hogsmill River. Sites of these periods have produced flint tools, and a variety of handmade bowls and jars, as well as hollows used for cooking and rubbish pits/hollows. Evidence of Iron Age farmsteads has been studied from the hinterland on the North Downs dip slope above Ewell, with a number of farms continuing to exist into the Roman period.

Hatch Furlong 2006—2009

A four-year archaeological evaluation took place on National Trust land on the south eastern outskirts of the village at Hatch Furlong. Not only did EEHAS financially 'pump-prime' the first season's work at the site, it has played an integral role in sustaining the impetus to an archaeologically satisfying conclusion. Furthermore the project has drawn in a number of influential partners, not least among them being the National Trust, Birkbeck College, University of London and the Surrey County Archaeological Unit, as well as strengthening existing ties with the Bourne Hall Museum and Surrey Archaeological Society. Further collaborative ventures of this type are surely the way forward.

The site appear to be of ritual significance with a series of pits dug into the chalk, containing a wide range of environmental evidence in the form of bones, shell and carbonised seeds. In the last season finds included a complete Roman grey ware pot, several bone hairpins, a glass melon bead and a barbotine letter 'E' from a Rhenish motto-beaker. and some large sherds of late Neolithic Grooved Ware pot dating to 3rd millennium BC.

It has to be said that there has been much less EEHAS involvement in archaeology in recent years than in the early days of the Society. This is owing to a number of factors:

1. There has been a change in the attitude to archaeology nationally, with more acceptance of the fact that excavation is a destructive process and not always the most appropriate way in which to deal with buried remains. Increasingly sophisticated scientific equipment making use of such techniques as the measurement of soil resistivity, magnetometry and ground radar enables more and more information to be obtained without digging. So unless a site is to be lost by development or other reasons, it can be best to leave it alone in the expectation that in a few years time the archaeology will be more fruitful and possibly less destructive.
2. In recent years there has been legislation requiring developers to have archaeology carried out in advance of their work on sites with archaeological potential. This has led to the setting up of professional archaeological units that compete for contracts. Work that would previously have been done by local archaeologists is now undertaken as a commercial activity by such units.
3. Although the Society has a number of members prepared to take part in excavations, for several years towards the end of the 1990s there was a shortage of qualified archaeologists willing to direct digs for the Society. This has improved in recent years with Jon Cotton, Clive Orton and Frank Pemberton directing excavations locally.



St. Mary's Churchyard 2003



The joys of archaeology in the rain at Hatch Furlong

Roman Ewell and Stane Street

Arising from the recent research Roman Ewell now appears to be a rather amorphous settlement spread out about 1km along the main Roman road, Stane Street, with its route from Chichester to London, built in the late 40s AD. Sites in the St.Mary's Churchyard area show that timber buildings with cobbled yards faced onto the road from the 1st up to 5th century AD. The lack of tiles suggests that the buildings were thatched as elsewhere in most Roman countryside settlements.

The analysis of finds from these roadside structures shows a wide range of pottery vessels, including kitchen wares such as Spanish olive oil amphorae, cooking and black burnished storage jars from the potteries at Farham, St.Albans and Dorset, as well as table vessels such as flagons, drinking beakers, bowls and dishes from the potteries at Highgate, north London and St.Albans, fine colour-coated drinking beakers from Cologne and Nene Valley and the superior red Samian ware from Gaul (France) as drinking cups and a bowl decorated with mystical Roman iconography. Such an array of vessels could have been used to serve the travellers on the Roman Road. And, given that Ewell appears to be the last settlement before going onto London, the capital city, refreshment would be important, and Ewell could also have been a stopping point before travelling south towards Chichester across the Downs and Weald. The range and nature of the coins and animal bones found within the Roman settlement suggest a small scale market could have thrived up to the 5th century AD.



Right-recording of a pit feature containing a complete pot and bone at Hatch Furlong 2009



Richard Savage in a flint lined pit at Hatch Furlong



A 12th-13th century sandyware handle with stabbed decoration and a green glaze found at Langley Bottom Farm



Members of EEHAS field walking at Langley Bottom Farm in 2009



A Tudor clothes fastener found during field walking at Langley Bottom Farm