

Springs Farm, Purley South Croydon

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



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Springs Farm, Purley
Archaeological watching brief 1986

W 157

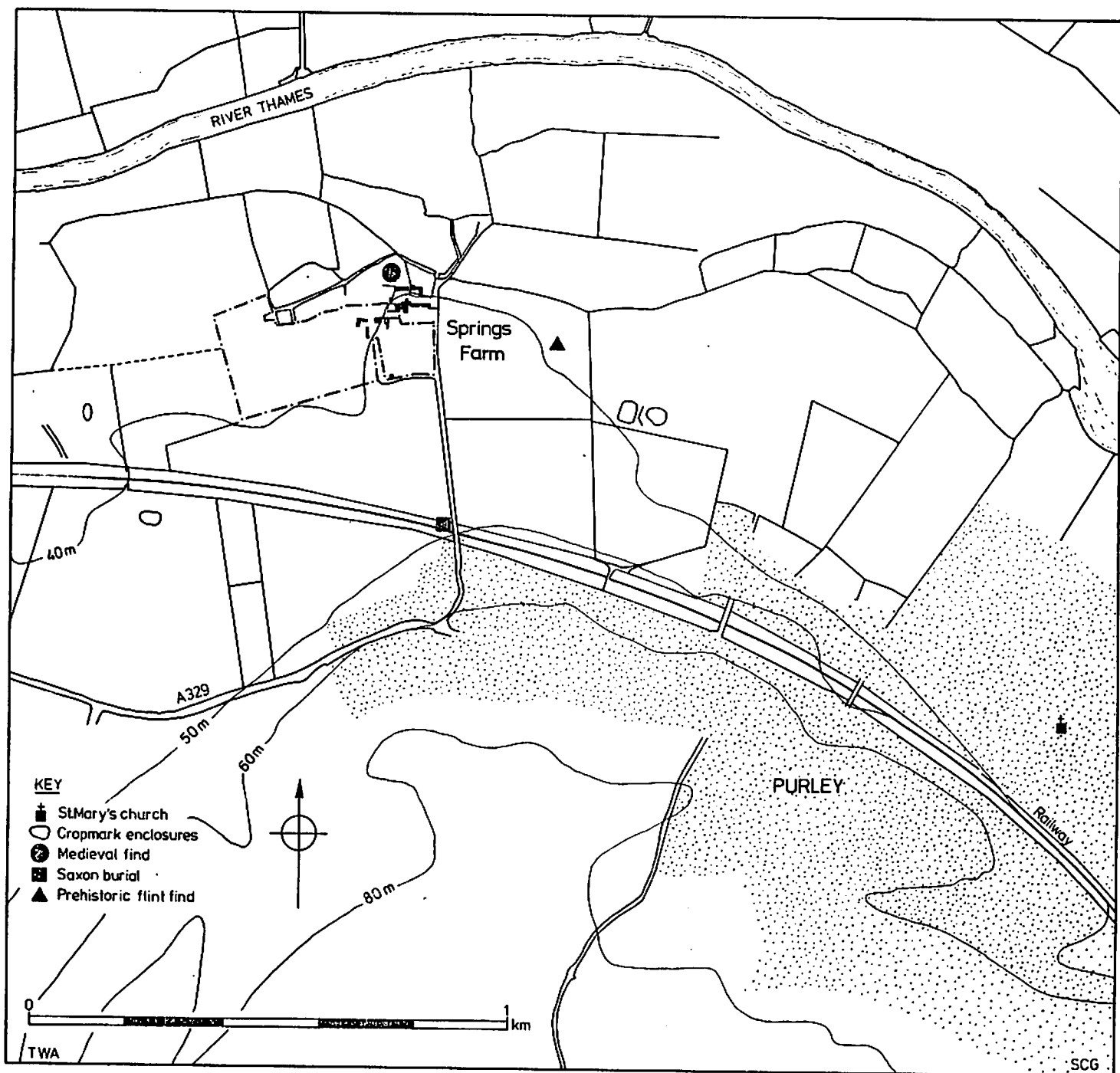
W157: SPRINGS FARM, PURLEY

Introduction

In July 1986 planning permission was granted by Newbury District Council for alterations, extensions and additions to existing buildings at Springs Farm (formerly Scrace's Farm), Purley. Because of the archaeological background of this site the applicant was required to make adequate provision for archaeological observations to be carried out during the development. Accordingly, the landowner agreed to fund the required watching brief work which was carried out intermittently during the period from October to December 1986.

The site

The farm (SU 65407690) is situated about 40m O.D. on the floodplain overlooking the Thames, about 0.4km south of the river, on a slight rise. Its position, on a slightly higher level than the surrounding floodplain, would have made it a suitable site for settlement in prehistoric and later periods. There are two enclosures visible on aerial photographs 0.4km to the south-east of the farm, and Neolithic flints have been found 0.3km to the east. An Anglo-Saxon burial was discovered in 1891 during construction of the railway, 0.4km south of the farm. The farm itself may be on or near the site of the so far unlocated deserted medieval village of Purley Parva. Excavations to the north of the farm buildings in 1971 revealed recent flint and brick floors as well as a pit which contained finds ranging in date from early medieval to the 19th century.



Strategy

Archaeological work at Springs Farm took the form of a watching brief during clearance of the site and the removal of soil for foundation trenches etc. As far as possible, any excavation for foundation trenches was observed, and sample sections recorded and photographed. It was hoped that any archaeological features revealed by excavation could be observed and recorded during this process.

Most clearance and disturbance took place at the east and west ends of the existing house, and footings were also dug at both ends of the barn to the south-west of the house. These footings were dug to a maximum depth of 1.5m, and would have been of sufficient depth to encounter any surviving archaeological features. In addition, a number of soakaway pits, c.2m square and c.2m in depth, were dug in the garden behind the house, and in the area of the old orchard to the south-west of the house. The garden area had been terraced, probably in fairly recent times.

Results

The topsoil varied in depth across the site, from 0.2m to 0.5m, and in most cases overlay an orange-brown sandy clay subsoil, with occasional to moderate gravel. To the west of the house, this in turn overlay a pale chalky silt with occasional large flint nodules and fragments. To the east of the house, the underlying layer was a silty gravelly sand. In some cases, especially in the area immediately to the west of the house, the sequence appeared very mixed, with alternating lenses of the orange-brown sandy clay and pale chalky silt below the

topsoil. The topsoil and, to some extent, the underlying subsoil, showed signs of disturbance, particularly around the house, e.g. for drainage pipes and other modern activity.

Two features were recorded, both the result of modern disturbance. Footing trenches at the east end of the existing house, in the area of the former kitchen garden, at one point cut through a feature containing a quantity of animal bone, most probably sheep (Feature 3), and modern building debris. This feature was about 0.8m deep and at least 1.5m wide at the top. It was cut from quite a high level and was filled with mixed lenses of topsoil (dark brown silty clay loam) and subsoil (orange-brown sandy clay). The animal bone was recovered from the bottom of the feature.

In the area of the old orchard, a soakaway pit c.2m square and c.2m deep cut through a feature in the south-west corner. This was c.0.4m deep and c.0.7m in diameter, and was cut from immediately below the modern turf line. It was filled with mixed grey-brown silt and clay loam, and contained the remains of a wooden post.

Finds

Apart from the animal bone from Feature 3, all the finds recovered from the site derived from topsoil, or were unstratified, i.e. from spoil tips. They included 14 pieces of struck flint, 4 sherds of post-medieval pottery, 4 sherds of medieval pottery, and 3 sherds of uncertain date. The topsoil across the site contained a substantial amount of post-medieval building material and other debris.

Conclusions

Although no archaeological features which could definitely be dated earlier than the post-medieval period were observed during the watching brief at Springs Farm, the small number of finds from the site do indicate some form of activity on or near the site in both the prehistoric and the medieval periods.

Activity on the site in the post-medieval period, especially immediately adjacent to the existing house, has resulted in some disturbance of the subsoil which may have destroyed earlier features. However, it is possible that undisturbed archaeological features do exist on the site, and any further development on the site should be closely observed.

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