

## **31 Lower Church Lane, Farnham Surrey An Archaeological Report**

### **Introduction**

31 Lower Church Lane, Farnham (SU 8398 4665) is located just off the lower end of Downing Street where this turns sharply eastwards towards Longbridge (see location plan Fig 1). The site lies within the floodplain of the river Wey and was subject to regular flooding until comparatively recent times. St Andrew's Church is built on higher ground about 100m to the west and the core of the medieval town of Farnham lies, again on higher ground, about 200m to the north.

### **The House**

Number 31, together with part of Number 30, forms an 'L' shaped building, with the short leg of the 'L' facing onto Lower Church Lane. Ignoring later brick facings and alterations, the building visible from the lane is a continuous jettied timber framed structure dating to the late 16th or early 17th centuries. The extension to the rear, away from the lane, appears to be slightly earlier in date and may originally have been free standing. The house was recorded by the DBRG (Report No. 1164) in 1975 with a supplementary survey in 1992.

Because of the problems with flooding over the centuries, the building was in a very poor state of structural repair when it was acquired, by the Farnham Building Preservation Trust, with a view to carrying out renovation work. While the progress of this work was monitored by a representative of the DBRG, no provision was made for an archaeological evaluation to be carried out, as it was not originally anticipated that any earthmoving would prove necessary. In the event, however, the framing required underpinning and the floor levels in several of the rooms were lowered by the contractors. It was during this work that archaeological material was noted and the authors were called in to examine the evidence. Under the circumstances, it was impossible to do other than record the exposed features and to carry out a very limited investigation, especially given the restricted space available due to the continuing building works.

### **The Archaeology**

Apart from the padstone under the north east jetty post of the house, which showed signs of tooling and therefore probably of having been re-used from an earlier building, the archaeological finds were restricted to the room known as the kitchen (see Fig 1).

During the course of digging out approximately 60cm of earth from within the room, the builders found two areas of interest. The first of these was in the south east corner, next to the chimney, and consisted of an area of reddened clay and ash within which was a circular mortar lined cavity. The second, a layer of laid stones, was found in a slightly deeper hole dug to underpin the northern, internal, wall of the kitchen. On discovering the features, the builders had carried out their own investigations. In the case of the reddened area this involved the complete removal of all overlying levels and the virtual emptying of the mortar lined cavity. The stone layer was less disturbed and still retained an intact stratigraphy in one area, from which it proved possible to reconstruct a schematic section with a fair degree of confidence (Fig 3). The rest of the floor of the kitchen was not examined, in the main because the upper levels had already been removed and piles of building material greatly restricted the area where the lower levels could be investigated. However, it seemed likely that the stone layer, which was the deeper of the two features, extended outside the area actually recorded and probably remains intact under the recently laid floor.

The reddened area (Figs 2 & 4): As mentioned above this consisted of a flat area of burnt clay and ash approximately 1m x 1.2m in extent, the remainder having been dug away during the building works. The feature underlay, and had been cut by, the walls of the standing house and therefore predates it. Roughly in the centre of the red clay was a circular mortar lined conical cavity. This, while it had largely been

emptied by the builders, still contained two lumps of lead at its base. These had obviously had obviously solidified 'in situ' and the feature must therefore be part of a lead furnace with its associated area of burning. Given the small size of the furnace, this must have been associated with some specialist leadworking activity - lead casting, perhaps of window lights, is one possibility. The layer of reddened clay appeared to thicken again towards the western edge and this may hint that other furnaces once existed in the vicinity but had been destroyed, perhaps by the construction of the chimney itself.

On cutting a section across the furnace, (Section A - B, Fig 4) it was found that the furnace itself had been cut into an earlier post pit, at the centre of which was a 12cm square post hole. No datable material, other than fragments of rooftile, was recovered from either the furnace or the post pit and hole. It is, therefore, only possible to say that the post hole is likely to be later than 12th century in date (because of the presence of rooftile), that the furnace is later than the post hole and that both are earlier than the standing 16th century building.

The area of laid stone (Figs 2 & 4): This lay under and in front of the north wall of the kitchen, at a deeper level than was generally exposed by the building works and approximately 19cm below the level of the lead furnace. The layer consisted of a solidly laid clunch stone floor set on a compact layer of crushed chalk/clunch. This in turn overlay natural alluvial deposits which, from excavations carried out in the 1960s nearby, are known to be at least 2m in depth. Above the floor was a layer of ash, a layer of burnt clay and daub, a further layer of ash and finally a layer of broken pegged rooftile. This was capped by clean clay and a layer of soil on which was set the brick footings of the standing wall.

While, once again, no datable finds were made, the floor is likely to post-date the 12th century, be earlier than the standing 16th century building and, given the greater relative depth, be earlier than the lead furnace. A date somewhere in the 13th century would seem probable, but by no means certain. The floor itself gave the impression of having been within a building, since no soil had accumulated above it. The presence of overlying layers of ash, daub, and rooftile almost certainly indicate that the building burnt down in situ.

### **Conclusions**

Several phases of activity took place on the site, before the construction of the building which now forms 31 Lower Church Lane. The general pattern of occupation, known from elsewhere in the town, is that of a general expansion in the 13th century, followed by a contraction in the later 14th - perhaps as a result of the Black Death and the subsequent recession. The town did not revive until early in the 16th century when building restarted on a large scale and ultimately lead to the town as we see it today.

The finds at No 31, could be seen as fitting into this general picture, with the first occupation of the site coming with the construction of a building with a stone floor, perhaps in the 13th century. The use of a site which was subject to regular flooding, must give some impression of the shortage of building land at the time. In time, the building burnt down and at some stage, following the accumulation of a soil layer, further activity took place on the site in the form of the construction of a structure associated with the post hole. This in turn was followed by the building of the lead furnace, perhaps early in the 16th century and ultimately towards the end of the same century, by the construction of No 31 itself.

### **Acknowledgements**

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David and Audrey Graham

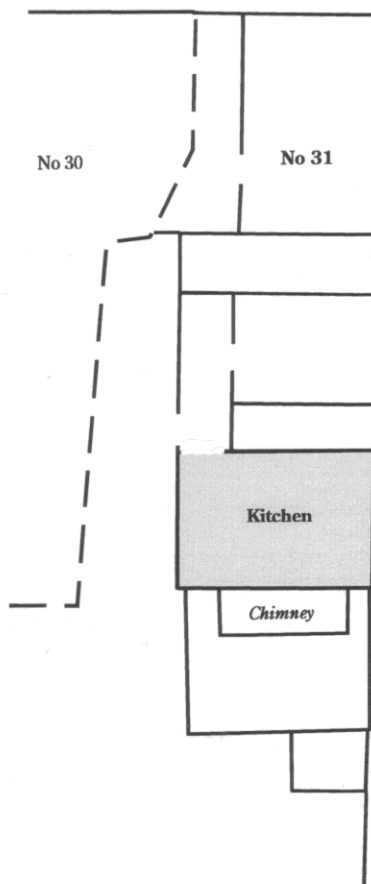
SURREY



31 Lower Church Lane  
Farnham

SU 8398 4665

LOWER CHURCH LANE



0 3m

Fig 1 Building plan showing location of kitchen

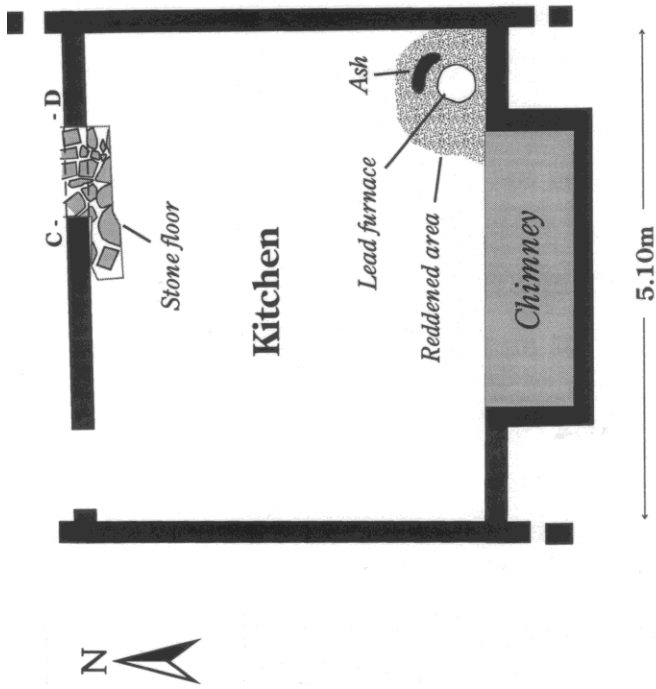


Fig 2

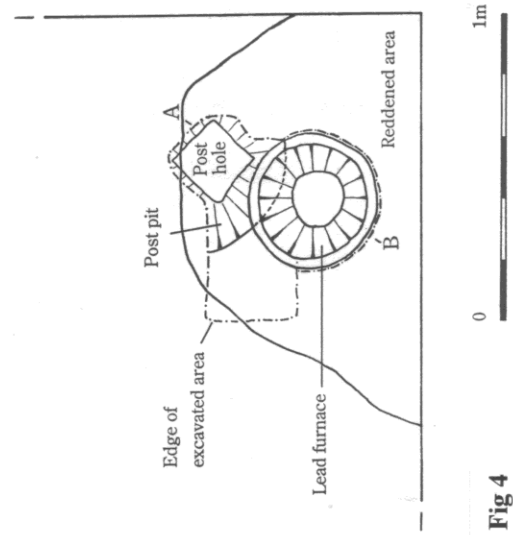


Fig 4

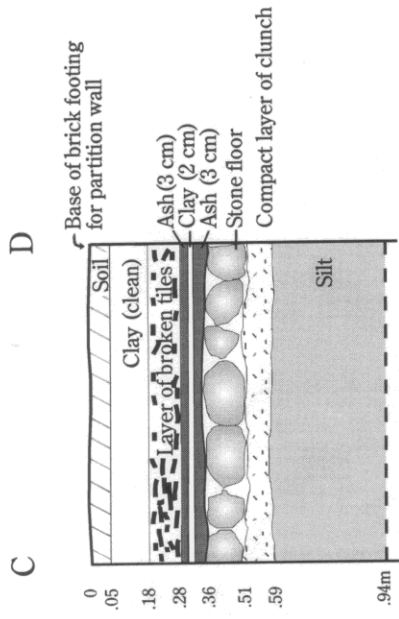


Fig 3 Schematic section C - D

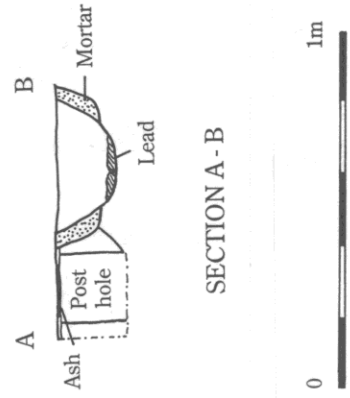


Fig 5