

Excavation at 12 Bridge Square, Farnham A Brief Summary of Results

During October 1971, a limited excavation was carried out beneath the floor of one of the rooms of this old timber frame house in an effort to establish the date of its construction. In this some success was met with, but an added bonus was the discovery of the kitchen area of an earlier, more substantial medieval house.

The natural subsoil here was found to be soft yellow sand with a little flint. Built on this was the east wall of a room which ran beneath the west wall of the present house and under the yard beyond. The builders of this earlier house overcame the problem of building on sand by digging a wide foundation trench and filling it with clay and rubble before constructing the wall, which would appear to have been of timber. No artefacts were associated with its construction other than a few tile fragments.

Later a massive projecting masonry fireplace was built onto the west face of this wall. Most of it lay beneath the room next door, but it was possible to excavate some of the northern portion. Part of the sandstone slab hearth and a corner of the ash pit were located and the northern retaining wall examined in detail. The wall was built of fine squared sandstone blocks of varying proportions, set in clay and standing two courses high.

Probably at the same time as the addition of this fireplace, a wall was constructed parallel to the retaining wall and of similar construction and length, forming a recess to the north. This second wall was notable at having, at its west end, a massive bevelled sandstone block.

The recess was thoroughly examined and proved to have had quite a complex history. In its earliest phase it was floored with a rammed mixture of dirty clay, broken tile, decomposed sandstone and earth, whereas the floor of the rest of the room at this time was simply the dirty smoke blackened surface of the natural sand. Set into the floor of the recess was a curious long narrow slot about 40cm wide and 30cm deep, thickly lined with a sticky mixture of clay and chalk which was clearly designed to make it watertight, although to what purpose it is at present unknown.

The next phase saw the accretion of a thick layer of soot and occupation debris in the recess to the extent of it piling up against the side of the fireplace. The mysterious slot was filled up with the same material as well as a large amount of builder's debris including tile and rubble.

Following on this a large square pit was dug across the entrance of the recess for its full width. The pit was fairly shallow and filled with great slabs of sandstone, plastered over with clay to form a hearth for cooking. On analogy with the oven complexes which succeeded it there should have been an oven behind it in the rear of the recess, but this was never constructed. In fact the hearth itself was never used in this form. Instead, the southern half of the recess was blocked up against the fireplace, with a clay and rubble platform. An apsidal stone lined oven was let into the northern part behind the half of the original sandstone hearth left in use.

This remaining portion of the original hearth showed intense burning and was overlaid by ash. The oven behind contained thick soot deposits, but its clay base was unburnt.

During the life of this oven and associated hearth, thick deposits of soot and charcoal accumulated on the floor of the room. These deposits yielded a little pottery and a perforated lead diamond. The oven produced another one, this time with a nail pushed through the perforation. I would think from a preliminary examination of the pottery from this phase that the oven was a 14th century construction used into the 15th century.

Eventually there was another phase of oven construction. This was associated with the laying down of a trampled clay floor over the whole of the room sealing in the earlier soot deposits below. The raised rubble and clay platform over the southern half of the recess was extended across the full width leaving a small horseshoe-shaped oven in the front. This was made of small rectangular sandstone blocks with a stone slab base. The hearth associated with this oven flanked its entrance on the north, being set in the floor of the room against the west edge of the platform. It was rectangular and of tile fragments set vertically in clay.

Associated with this was another spread of soot over the floor of the room. This was followed by the laying down of another clay floor which necessitated raising the surface of the hearth by means of a clay resurfacing. The base of the horseshoe oven was also raised by laying clay mixed, oddly enough, with broken snail shells and overlaid by flat tile fragments. This latest oven was badly mutilated and its form not clear. Yet another spread of soot and ash was associated with it.

Later on the ash pit of the main fireplace was plugged with brown clay. Above this was a thick deposit of yellow sand overlaid by ash which spread out into the room.

The ash and soot deposits encountered, all seemed to contain varying amounts of sand culminating in this thick spread in the main fireplace. A clue to its purpose may be a couple of fragments of the sagging base of a cooking pot found in the earliest oven with burnt sand grains adhering. These sagging base vessels were not designed to stand upright and to achieve this they may well have been stood in sand in the ovens with embers piled round for cooking. The thick spread of sand in the main fireplace with the ash above would be from the last cooking session left *in situ* prior to the demolition of the house and shows that the fireplace hearth was also used for this purpose.

Following on the final spread of sand and ash in the main fireplace, came the demolition of the house and levelling of the area. There were no deposits indicating a time lag between this and the building of the present house and it may be assumed that it was constructed immediately afterwards.

It had been observed that the west wall of the present house was merely a 19th century brick façade built up against the outer face of an earlier timber-frame wall. It was reasoned that the foundation of this earlier wall might be located on the inside of the present one and a trench was put down. A clay filled foundation trench with postholes was located cut from the top of the latest soot and ash deposits of the earlier house.

The first floor of the present house was of dirty trampled clay which contained pieces of pottery of 16th century date. Only a few sherds were found but they included some fragments of a thin walled cup of white fabric with deep green glaze on both inside and outside.

Set into this floor over the site of the recess in the earlier house was a hearth, part built of vertical tile fragments set in clay and part of sandstone blocks, with an oven of ironstone blocks adjoining on the west.

Much work has still to be done on the pottery, tile and other materials from the excavation, which may lead to modification of some of the observations made above as regards dating, but the sequence of events as recorded above should require little alteration.

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12 BRIDGE SQUARE

23. OCT. 71

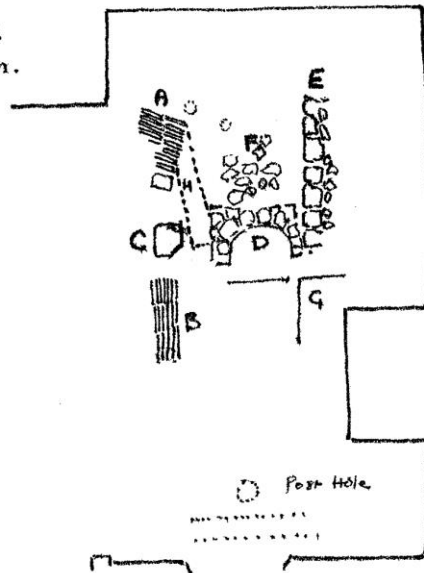
Appear to be at least three major phases.

1. Early masonry wall (E), perhaps of same period as rubble floor F

2. Oven (?) D

3. Hearths A and B

How the masonry C fits in not yet known.



A. Hearth (?) of Tiles set vertically

B. Hearth - more positively - of Tiles, set at angle $\approx 45^\circ$

C. Ashlar masonry, bevelled, tooled with the point.

D. Oven (?) of Rubble.

E. Wall, of squared masonry with rubble backing. Did not find the other face of this wall.

F. Rubble floor of greensand lumps

G. Slab.

H. FOUNDATION TRENCH

BRICK FLOOR

