

SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT DANSTEED WAY, MILTON KEYNES

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SUMMARY

Salvage excavations at a late Iron Age rural site are described. The principal find was a group of pottery of regional type.

THE SITE

The site was discovered in 1972 by D. C. Mynard and D. N. Hall who found a surface scatter of Iron Age pottery in a field west of Common Lane, Old Bradwell, Buckinghamshire, at National Grid Reference SP8425 3957. The site lies on boulder clay.

On the 17th October 1977 that part of the site which lay on the line of the new city road H4 (Dansteed Way) had been stripped of topsoil by box scraper and was being used as an access road by the road construction plant. The road construction work continued and by the 21st October the box scrapers had completely destroyed all the archaeological features as they scraped out a cutting for the new road.

Consequently, archaeological work on the site was limited to salvage operations between these two dates. Several features were observed and planned, a small section was cut through two of them (see Fig. 1) and surface finds were collected. The site was allocated no. 294 in the Milton Keynes sites and monuments record (no. 3294 in the Buckinghamshire sites and monuments record). The site records and finds are now stored in Bradwell Abbey Field Centre (Acc. Nos. 1974/76 and 1977/192), although the surface finds found in 1972 cannot now be located.

THE FEATURES

The area was much disturbed and compacted by the contractor's plant, which caused a blurring of the soil marks. The soil marks appeared as on plan B (Fig. 1), with features 1 and 2 seeming to be separate gulleys. However the section cut across these gulleys failed to distinguish them as separate features. It may well be that the section was fortuitously placed at the point where these gulleys merged, and if this is so, features 5 and 6 may well be further indications of these gulleys.

Features 3 and 9 also appeared to be gulleys, and feature 8 may well be the last vestiges of a fifth gully. Feature 7 had the appearance of a substantial ditch and probably functioned as a drainage and/or boundary ditch. Feature 4 appeared as an ill-defined spread of black soil and was probably a pit. All the features appeared as black soil marks with much charcoal and many burnt stones of all sizes. Feature 1 and 2 also appeared black on the surface, but in section their fills appeared to be dark brown clay, though still with charcoal and some burnt stones.

Milton Keynes-MK294

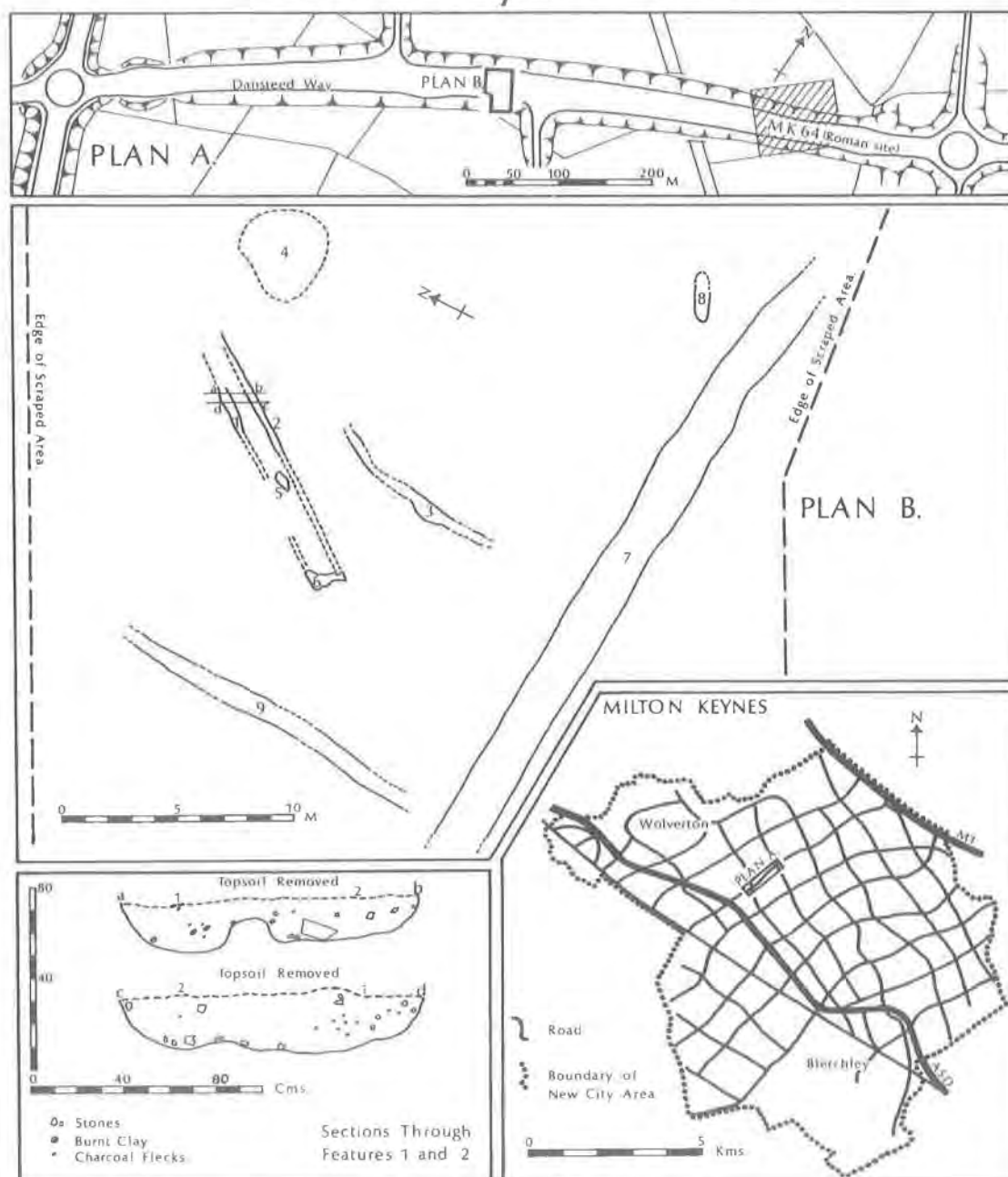


Fig. 1. Danstead Way. Location Map, Plans and Sections. Plan A based on the Ordnance Survey Map by kind permission of the Director General, Ordnance Survey. Crown copyright reserved.

THE FINDS

These consisted of pottery, animal bones and teeth, tile and 3 'pot boilers'.

The Animal Bones:

Of the fragmentary bones from the site, a few were recognised as representing horse, and sheep or goat. Most of the bone fragments were too small to be identified. No evidence of butchering was observed.

The 'Pot Boilers':

Two of these were found in the fill of the feature 2, while the third was a surface find. They showed evidence of repeated exposure to extremes of temperature, and were identified as being respectively of quartzite, siltstone, and dolerite (alteration of the surface layers due to heat has made identification of the latter difficult). All these types of rock are commonly found as erratic pebbles in the boulder clay, and it therefore seems likely that they were used because they were to hand, without preferential regard to particular types of rock. It is worth noting that in an area where stubble-burning is a common practice, many such stones are ignored by fieldworkers as being of recent origin.

The Pottery:

Most of the pottery from the site was found as a surface scatter over the area stripped for road construction. The pottery falls into three broad groupings according to fabric, with both hand-made and wheel-thrown pots being represented in all the groups, although in each group wheel-thrown pots are predominant.

The groupings are:

i) Shell gritted ware, unevenly fired (ranging from reduced to oxidised) with most sherds partly reduced. The sherds could be recognised as remains of medium-sized jars, large storage jars and other indeterminate vessels. The illustrated sherds:

1. Slack-shouldered jar. Outer face patchy black/orange-brown: inner face orange-brown: section light grey: shell gritted: 2 incised lines along uppermost part of rim. Paralleled at Twywell, Northants. (Harding, 1975, 80-81, No. 20) (where pot does not have incised lines on rim)
2. ? Jar. Hand made. Outer face black, with groove below rim: inner face light brown: section light grey: shell gritted: fingernail decoration on outer rim and incised line along uppermost part of rim. Paralleled at Moulton Park, Northants. (Williams, 1974, 29, 30 No. 107)
3. Jar. ?Hand made. Both faces black: section medium grey: groove below rim on outer face: shell gritted: fingernail decoration on outer rim, and incised line on upper face of rim. Paralleled at Moulton Park, Northants. (Williams, 1974, 34, 35, No. 162)
4. ?Bowl. ?Handmade. Outer face patchy black/medium brown: inner face dark red-brown: section black: shell gritted.
5. Storage Jar with thickened, everted rim. Outer face patchy black/brown-grey: inner face orange-brown: section light grey: shell gritted. Groove along top of rim. Paralleled at Stoke Goldington, Bucks. (Mynard, 1966, 33, 37, No. 1)
6. Channel-rimmed jar. Outer face brown-black: inner face orange-brown: section

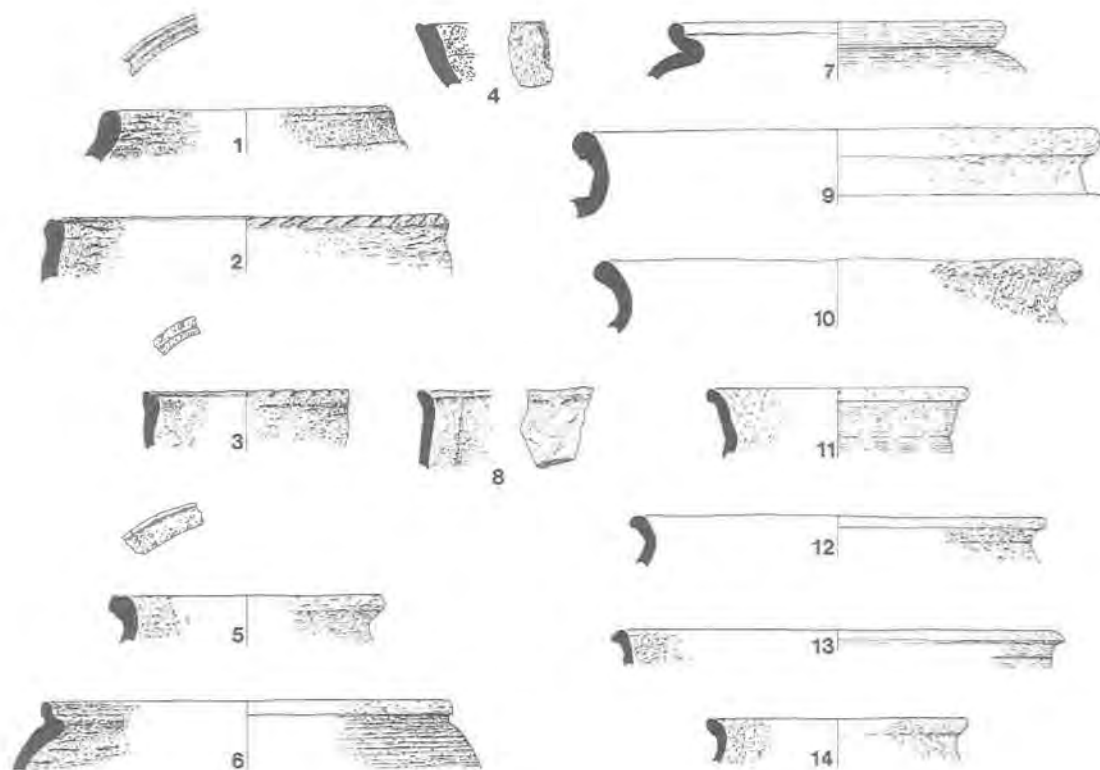


Fig. 2. Danstead Way. The Pottery, scale $\frac{1}{4}$

light grey: shell gritted. Paralleled at Stanton Low, Bucks. (Jones, 1958, 208, 209, No. 14)

ii) Sand tempered ware, some well fired, some evenly fired (ranging from reduced to partly oxidised) with most sherds reduced. The sherds could be recognised as the remains of small and medium-sized jars and other indeterminate vessels.

The illustrated sherds:

7. Channel-rimmed Jar. Outer face black: inner face black: section dark brown to black: sand gritted. Form paralleled (in shell-gritted ware) at Stoke Goldington, Bucks. (Mynard, 1966, 33, 37, No. 5)
8. ? Bowl. Handmade. Both faces black: section dark grey to black: sand gritted. Paralleled at Saffron Gardens, Bletchley, Bucks. (Waugh, 1974, 379, 392, No. 8)

iii) Coarse, slightly 'lumpy' ware, with much grog filler and some shell and sand grits. Unevenly fired (ranging from reduced to oxidised) with most sherds partly oxidised. The sherds could be recognised as the remains of large storage jars, small and medium sized jars and other indeterminate vessels.

The illustrated sherds:

9. Storage jar, with thickened, everted rim. Both faces patchy orange-brown/dark brown: section black, tempered with small pieces of grog and a few small shell and sand grits. Paralleled at Saffron Gardens, Bletchley, Bucks. (Waugh, 1974, 384, 398, No. 77)
10. Storage jar with thickened, everted rim. Outer face dark orange-brown: inner face patchy dark orange-brown/orange grey: section medium grey: tempered with large pieces of grog and a few small shell and sand grits. Paralleled at Saffron Gardens, Bletchley, Bucks. (Waugh, 1974, 384, 396, No. 69)
11. Jar with everted rim. Outer face very dark red-brown: inner face orange-brown: section medium grey: tempered with small pieces of grog and a few sand grits. Paralleled at Moulton Park, Northants. (Williams, 1974, 32, 33, No. 139)
12. Jar with everted rim. Both faces dark orange-brown: section medium grey: tempered with small pieces of grog.
13. ?Jar with bead rim. Both faces dark orange-brown: section medium grey: tempered with small pieces of grog.
14. ?Jar with everted thickened rim. Outer face light orange-brown: inner face patchy light orange-brown/light grey: section medium grey: tempered with small pieces of grog and a few sand grits.

CONCLUSIONS

Although no structures could be recognised, the site probably represents a small rural settlement of late Iron Age date. It may well be a predecessor of the Roman settlement at Wood Corner (MK64 – shown on plan A, Fig. 1.)

The pottery is broadly paralleled at Moulton Park, Northants and Saffron Gardens. At both these sites wheel-thrown and hand-made pottery were found together. In the absence of any comparable closely-dated groups the pottery from Saffron Gardens is attributed to the first half of the first century AD for the wheel-thrown pottery and from the late third to the mid-first century BC for the hand-made wares (Waugh, 1974,

pages 374–5), while at Moulton Park the whole group (Group 2) is attributed to the first half of the first century AD (Williams, 1974, page 25). This suggests a date-range in the first half of the first century for the majority of pottery from MK294. It is not possible to determine whether the hand-made pottery also falls in this date range or is evidence of earlier occupation of the site.

As Williams points out (Williams, 1974, p.25) the lack of Roman imports need not invalidate a first century AD date, since MK294 is just as likely to be a modest settlement 'in a relative backwater of the country' as Moulton Park. The importance of the site lies in demonstrating pre-Roman settlement of the boulder clay in this area of North Buckinghamshire, suggested by the settlement pattern illustrated by Mynard, (Mynard, 1969, 23) and Waugh (Waugh *et al.* 1974, 376–377) and adds to the number of such sites recently discovered on boulder clay (Jackson, 1975, 31) in the south midlands.

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