

EXCAVATIONS NEAR MOUNT WOOD, CHENIES

ROSALIND DUNNET

In 1970 fieldwalking on the south side of the River Chess near Mount Wood revealed a concentration of Romano-British tile, pottery (including samian) and animal bone. Excavations in 1972 showed that the finds were associated with a layer of broken flint, three small pits and a corn-drying oven of probable third-century AD date. A small pit 2.5 m south-east of the oven, filled with brown loam, contained an infant burial.

Introduction

In 1945 Romano-British pottery and a coin of Hadrian were found along the edge of Hollywell Lane (Cooper 1945). Roman-British pottery was also found in an area of water-logged ground at the corner of a field adjacent to Hollywell Lane and Mount Wood (Branigan 1967). In 1970 the Mount Wood site was discovered during fieldwalking by members of the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society (CVAHS) who found a concentration of Romano-British pottery, including samian, with tile and bone in an area approximately 30 x 22 m.

The subsequent excavation took place in March 1972 and was designed to establish the nature and if possible, the extent of occupation in field 286, adjacent to Mount Wood, Chenies (NGR SU027988, Fig. 1). The excavation was organised by the CVAHS with the help of students from West Herts schools led by Miss Ann Trotman of the Chorleywood Field Centre.

The site

The site lay approximately half way down a steep slope on the south bank of the river Chess, almost opposite the known villa at Valley Farm on the north bank of the river, (see Fig. 1). Erosion of the hillside must have removed a great deal of archaeological evidence. The ploughsoil was 20 to 30 cm deep and in places the natural chalk was exposed.

A datum line 30 m in length was laid out across the area and eight trenches (A to K) were totally or partially examined (Fig. 2). Trenches A and K were almost barren and thus provided a limit to the occupied area on the north-west and south-east. It is not known how far the occupation may have spread to the north-east and south-west. In trenches H, J, and K the bases of plough furrows were clearly defined, cut into the flinty hillwash that formed the natural subsoil of the site. Although no plough furrows were observed in the subsoil of trench A, the ploughsoil was only 25 cm deep and any archaeological features had little chance of survival.

Results

In the centre of the excavated area (trenches D, E, F and G, see Fig. 2) a thin layer of broken flint (layer 2) was found which covered an area approximately 8 x 10 m. This lay directly on the subsoil and was very patchy. It was mixed with a high proportion of humus and appeared to have resulted from a continual trampling of the soil rather than deliberate placement. It contained a small amount of animal bone and coarse pottery (Figs. 4 & 5, numbers 2, 3, 4, 20, 33, and 36) dating from the later first to second centuries AD, although two sherds may be of later date.

Three small pits had been dug into the broken flint, the smallest of which may have been a post hole. All three features were filled

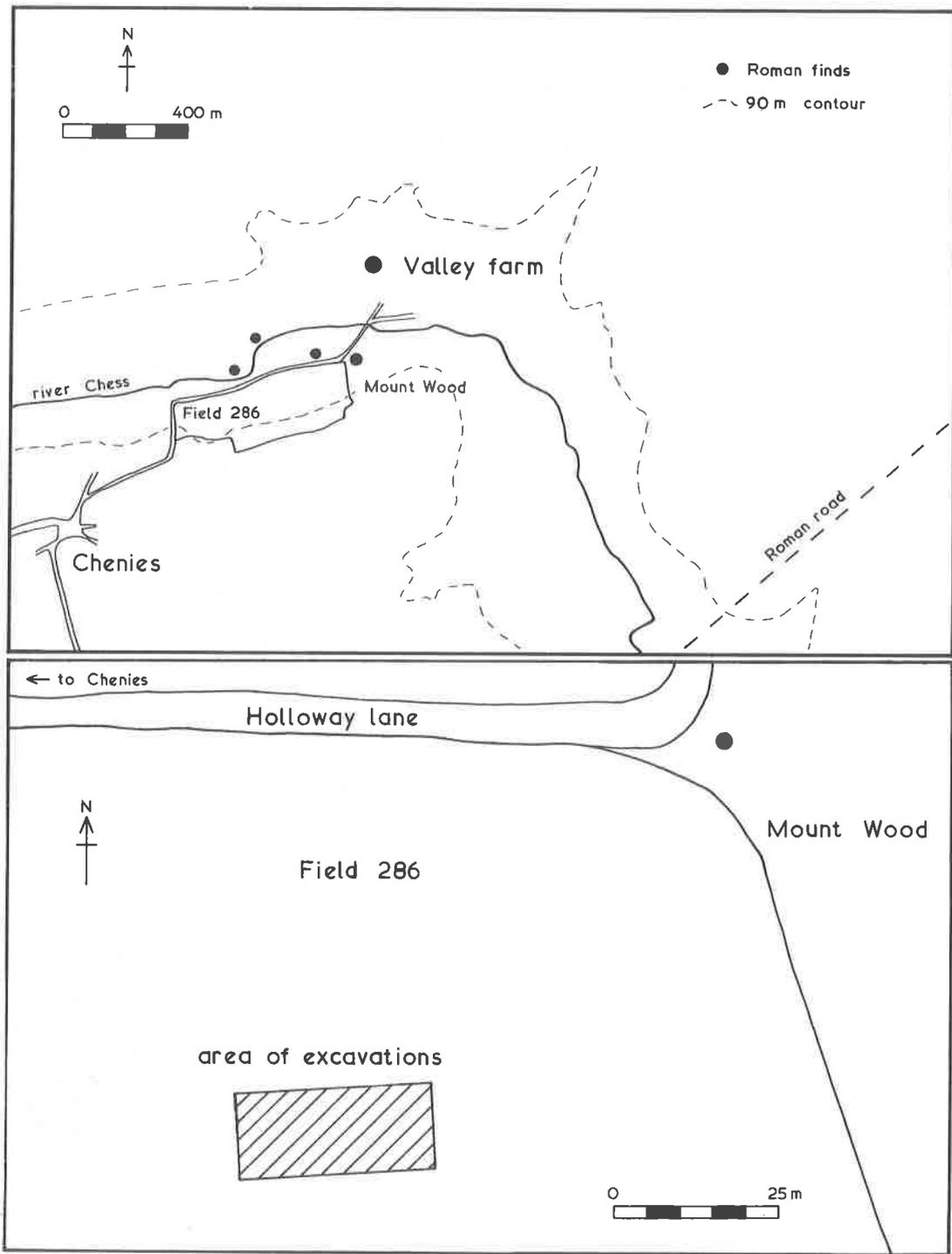


Fig. 1. Site location.

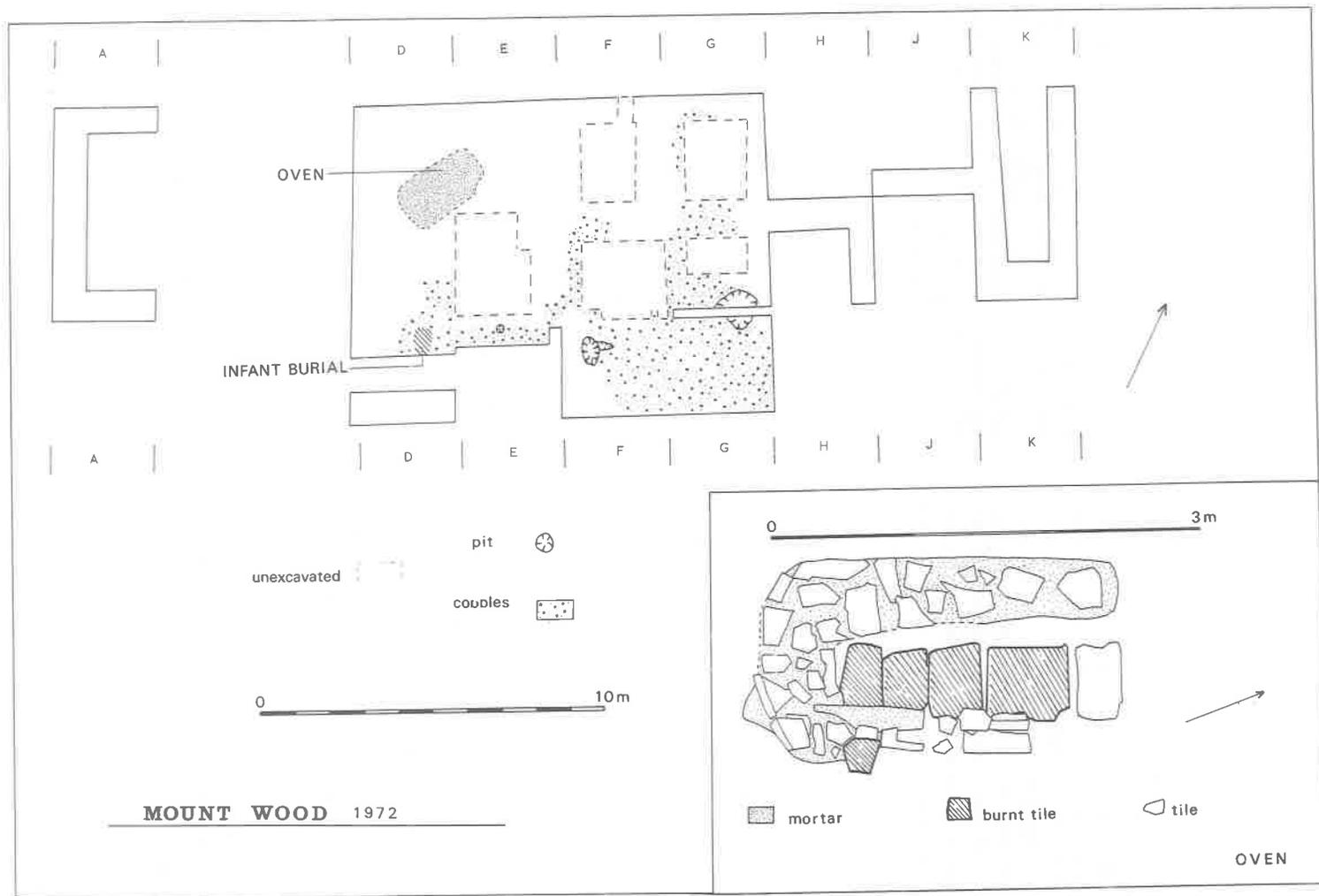


Fig. 2. Excavated features.

with a soft, brown loam that contained small flints and flecks of charcoal. North-west of the pits, in trenches D and E were the remains of a simple corn drying oven. This had been built of roofing tiles, set in mortar and resting directly on the subsoil. The tiles in the oven walls were broken fragments; only in the floor of the flue were complete tiles used. These were covered by a film of soot. The oven was much damaged, all that remained intact was the flue (1.9 m long) and the lowest course of the oven wall. Numerous fragments of tile were strewn over the site and almost certainly came from the upper part of the oven, since there was no evidence that a building stood on the site. 2.5 m south-east of the oven a small pit had been dug through the flint layer and filled with brown loam. In the base of this was an infant burial.

The Pottery

From 1969, when field walking started, to 1972 when excavations were conducted, a substantial quantity of pottery had been collected in field 286. It can be dated between the mid first to fourth centuries AD but much of the pottery consists of small abraded fragments.

Very few sherds found during the 1972 excavations were truly stratified and the pottery has been considered as a whole.

The Samian Ware by Anthony C. King

Relatively few sherds of samian were recovered from the site at Mount Wood. They consist mainly of sherds from bowls and dishes attributable to early or mid-second century Central Gaulish workshops. One piece, number 25, may be much earlier, and 29 is possibly an east Gaulish piece.

As a whole the assemblage presents no unusual characteristics and its chief value lies in the overall confirmation that it gives to the conclusions reached by Branigan (1967) concerning the date and use of the site.

Catalogue

Dr. signifies the form as defined by Dragendorff (1895) and Oswald and Price (1920). Central Gaulish is abbreviated as CG

and South Gaulish as SG. Sherds 1 to 5 in this catalogue are illustrated in Fig. 3.

1. Dr 37 wall sherd. Hippocamp; Oswald attributes this form to Cinnamus. CG. A sherd from Chesters, Northumberland (Stanfield and Simpson, 1958) has the same tendril binding, double semicircle and vertical line. The small circle is in a similar position on both sherds and it is therefore probable that the general design of the Mount Wood fragment follows that of the Chesters example. Mid to late second century.
2. Dr 39 wall sherd (two pieces). CG. There is not enough decoration to attribute the sherd to a potter, but the St Andrew's cross motif suggests an early to mid second century manufacture. The two rosettes, one with six and the other with seven points are not parallelled in Rogers (1974), but the seven pointed example may be Rogers (1974, c150, Butrio).
3. Dr 37 wall sherd (three pieces). Ovolo; Rogers (B52, 1974), Divixtus or Cririco. CG. Mid to late second century.
4. Dr 37 rim. Ovolo damaged at base of 'egg' and not found in Rogers (1974). Rivet hole.
5. Dr 37 wall sherd. Ovolo; Rogers (B100, 1974), Primanus or Eppillus. CG. Second century.
6. Dr 37 rim. CG. Second century.
7. Dr 37 rim. CG. Rivet hole between upper part of ovolo and rim band. Possibly early second century.
8. Dr 18/31 base. CG.
9. Dr 18/31 rim. CG. Early second century.
10. Dr 18/31 or 31 rim. CG.
11. Dr 18/31 wall sherd. CG.
12. Dr 18/31 or 31 rim. CG.
13. Dr 18/31 wall sherd. CG. Very white fabric.
14. Dr 18/31 wall sherd. CG.
15. Dr 18/31 floor sherd. CG. Finger mark in slip.
16. Dr 18/31 floor sherd. CG.
17. Dr 18/31 wall sherd. CG?
18. Dr 18 or 18/31 wall sherd near rim. Possibly early CG. Micaceous fabric.
19. DR 18 or 18/31 floor sherd. SG.
20. Dr 35 rim. CG. Thin slip.
21. Dr 35 wall sherd near rim. CG.
22. Dr 35 wall sherd. CG.
23. Dr 35/36 wall sherd near rim. CG.
24. Dr 35? wall sherd. SG/CG.
25. Dr. 15/15 wall/floor carination. SG. This form usually dated to the early or mid first century, but some examples are later.
26. Dr 27, or equivalent base. Probable SG. Mid to late first century.
27. Dr 33 rim. CG. Early to mid second century.
28. Dr 38 flange. CG. Mid to late second century.
29. Dr 32 wall sherd. Possibly East Gaulish. Mid second to early third century.

There are twelve other wall sherds, none of which present enough features to allow certainty about their form, although most of them could easily be attributed to the 18, 18/31 or 31 categories.

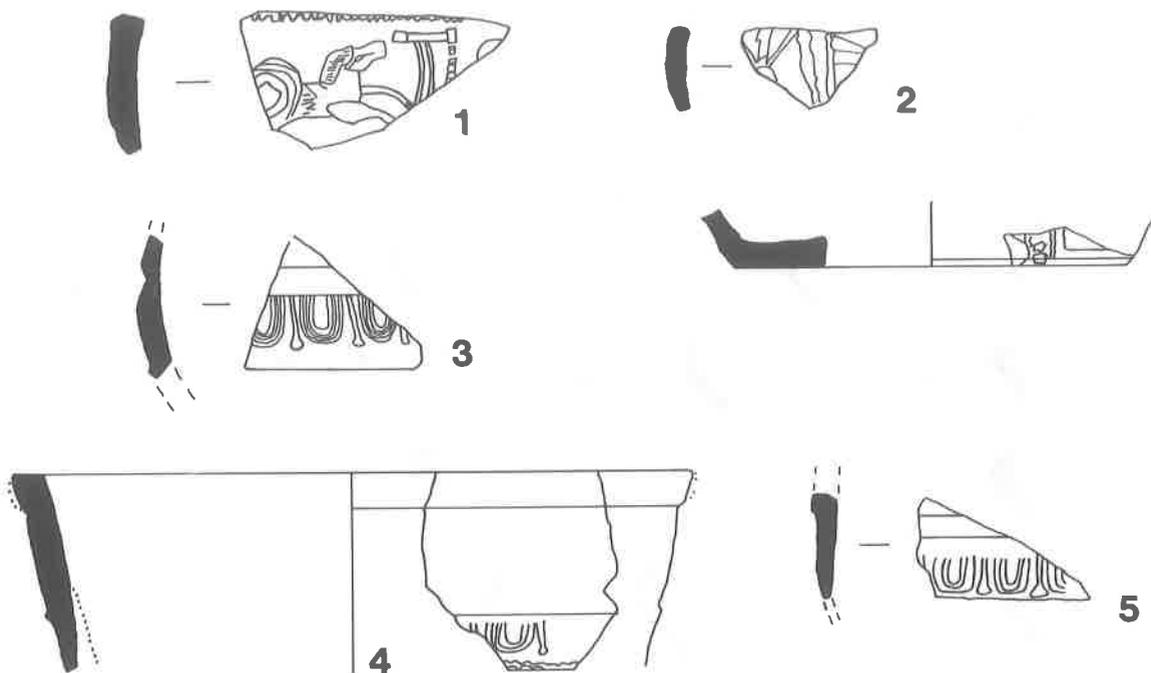


Fig. 3. The samian ware (1:2).

Coarse Pottery (Figs. 4 & 5)

The most common fabric, which may be of local manufacture, is a brown/buff gritty ware with a high proportion of sand temper that produces a granular texture on fracture. A dark brown to black fabric, with heavy calcite temper is also represented.

Unless indicated otherwise the sherds were recovered from the ploughsoil. Tr = trench.

Cooking pots and jars

1. Local sandy fabric.
2. Double rim, similar fabric to 1. Tr. F.
3. Double rim in dark grey, sandy fabric. Interior pink/buff, exterior fumed. Tr. D.

Cooking pots with double rims of the mid second century were found at Verulamium (Frere 1972) and later second-century examples at Gadebridge Park (Neal 1975). Similar types of late third to early fourth century occurred at Latimer (Branigan 1971).

4. Brown/buff, sandy fabric. Much weathered. Possibly mid first century (cf Frere 1973, 169). Tr. D.

5. Red, sandy fabric. Tr. E.
6. Dark grey, sandy fabric with pink/buff surfaces and fumed rim.
7. Slightly undercut rim in fine, dense, pale orange fabric.
8. Flask or small jar in dark grey, sandy fabric. Two similar rims have also been found.
9. Grey fabric with minute sand inclusions. Red/brown core.
10. Red, sandy fabric with grey/brown surfaces. Similar to 9.
11. Dark grey, sandy fabric. Smoothed exterior.
12. Very hard, dense, grey fabric with white grit inclusions. Surfaces grey and carefully smoothed on the exterior.
13. Dark grey fabric with minute black sand and grain inclusions. Grey surfaces, carefully smoothed on the exterior.

Jars with shoulder cordons and small, neat, everted rims such as 12 and 13 are not common at Latimer, and it is likely that they were most popular locally in the century before the main occupation at the Latimer villa in the later second century. Jars similar to 12 and 13 also occur at Verulamium in the late first century (Frere 1972, 171).

A small group of pots were made in a distinctive pale grey fabric with small black and grey grit inclusions.

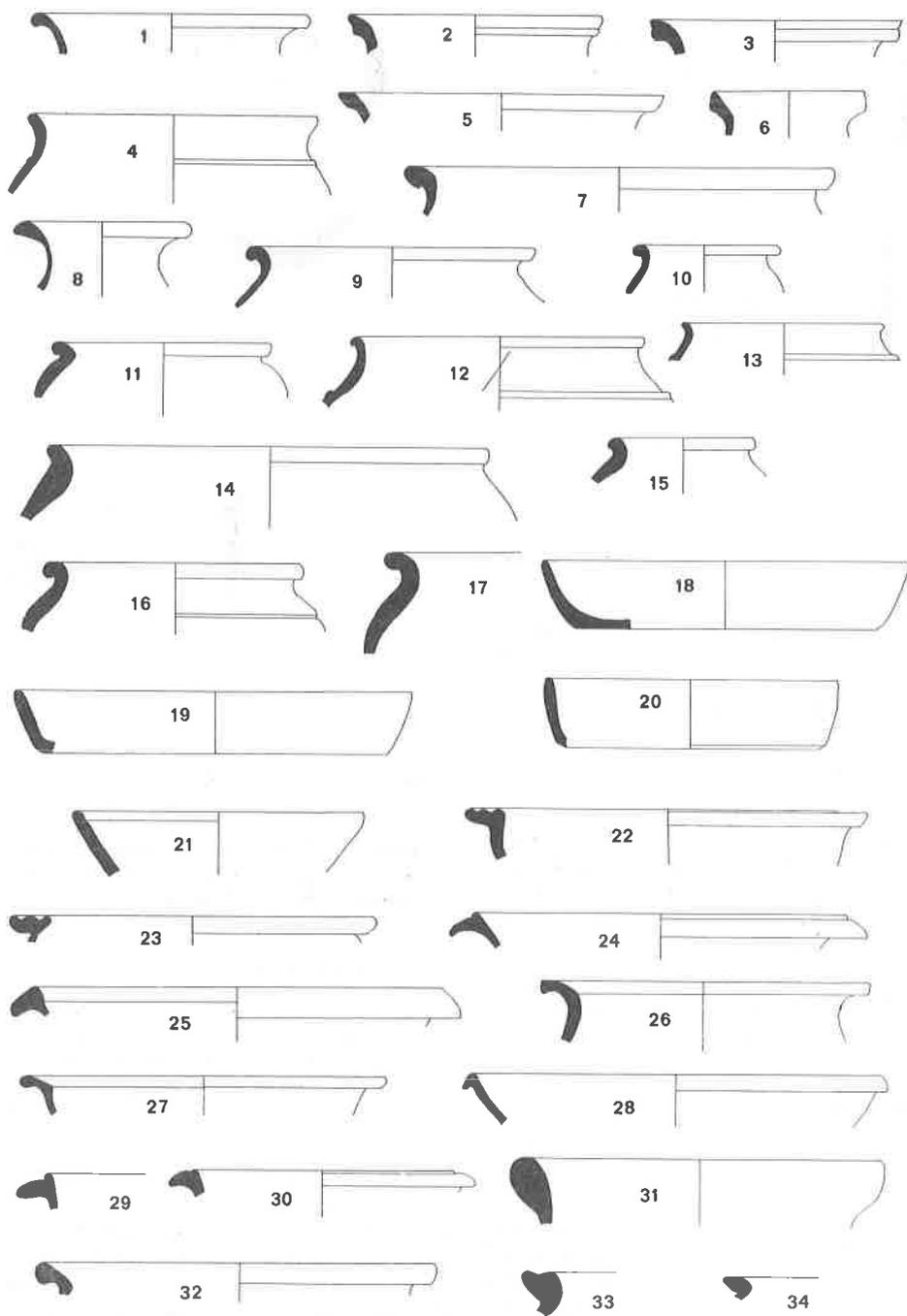


Fig. 4. The coarse pottery (1:4).

The surfaces are black and carefully smoothed with a 'soapy' texture.

14. Neckless jar with everted rim. At Verulamium this form occurs from the mid to late first century and, as residual material, until the mid second century (Frere 1972, 301-302).
15. Similar to 14, but smaller. Another example has been found.
16. Jar, similar to 14 and 15, with a more carefully modelled rim and smaller shoulder groove. The texture slightly sandier than others in this group. (cf. Frere 1972, 294).
17. Pot with simple everted rim. Three more sherds have been found.

This group of vessels, of closely similar fabric, are of first or very early second century date and probably represent a pre-Roman ceramic tradition.

Some two dozen other cooking pot rims have been recovered from the site, but are either too weathered or fragmentary to be informative. Many of the types illustrated are not datable but sherds 4 and 10-17 tend to be current in the early Roman period at Verulamium and Gadebridge Park. Sherds 2 and 3 are probably of Antonine or later date.

Dishes

18. Pale grey fabric with occasional grey and white grit inclusions. Hard and dense with traces of an unusual slip on the exterior. Similar forms occur in the first century at Verulamium (Frere 1972, 219-221), and continue into the late fourth century (Frere 1972, 1269-1271).
19. Dark grey, sandy fabric with smoothed surfaces. Three similar examples have been found.
20. Grey/brown fabric with dark grey surfaces. Burnished on the exterior with chamfered base. Tr. E.
21. Coarse, granular black fabric with carefully smoothed surfaces (cf Frere 1972, 222).

Reeded-rim bowls

These are a common type on the site, and seven examples have been identified. All are very fragmentary.

22. Brick red fabric, very hard and sandy. Surfaces buff on interior and fumed on the exterior.
23. Similar to 22.
24. Similar to 22, but the rim is rather down-turned and the grooves are not so well defined.

There are four other examples which are similar to 22 and 23.

At Verulamium, reeded-rim bowls first appear in the later first century (Frere 1972, 327-39) and large, heavy rims like those from

the present site are particularly common at Verulamium in the mid second century (Frere 1972, 933-4). Rims of similar date also occur at Latimer in villa phase 1 (Branigan 1971, fig. 2.7).

Wide-rim bowls and dishes

25. Pale grey, sandy fabric which is darker towards the surfaces. Probably early first century (cf Frere 1972, 495).
26. Dense, rather soft, pale buff fabric. Smooth surface brown/orange on exterior.
27. Hard, black, sandy fabric. Similar forms of late first to early second century are known (Frere 1972, 236 and Neal 1972, Fig. 104, 235).
28. Buff, sandy fabric with grey, fumed exterior. This form occurs at Verulamium by the middle of the second century and continues in use until the end of the third (Frere 1972, 724).
29. Very dark grey, sandy fabric with occasional black grit inclusions, smooth black surfaces. Tr. E. A flanged bowl of similar type occurs at Verulamium in mid second-century levels (Frere 1972, 965), but the type does not become very common until the late third to early fourth centuries.
30. Flanged bowl in buff/grey, sandy fabric.

There is a small group of five vessels made in calcite gritted fabric. The ware is grey, relatively hard and very heavily tempered with small white grits. Other inclusions are rare. The surfaces are smooth, rather soapy in texture and all are dark grey with the exception of 30 which is pink. Calcite gritted fabrics were not found at Latimer, but a calcite gritted ware is known to have been manufactured in south Essex (Drury 1973, 79) and it may thus date from the first century in the present site. The forms of vessels made in this fabric are not, however, particularly diagnostic.

Jars

31. Rim of jar.
32. Heavy triangular rim with flattened top.
33. Rim of a jar with false cordon at top of neck. Tr. E.
34. Similar to 33. Tr. E.

Storage jars

36. Hard, blue/grey fabric with smooth orange/buff surfaces. Tr. F.
37. Similar fabric to 36.

Colour-coated wares

38. Pink/orange fabric with black colour-coat on exterior and brown/red interior. Tr. F.
39. Fabric and colour-coat as 38. Tr. E. A similar, smaller example exists with a red colour-coat.

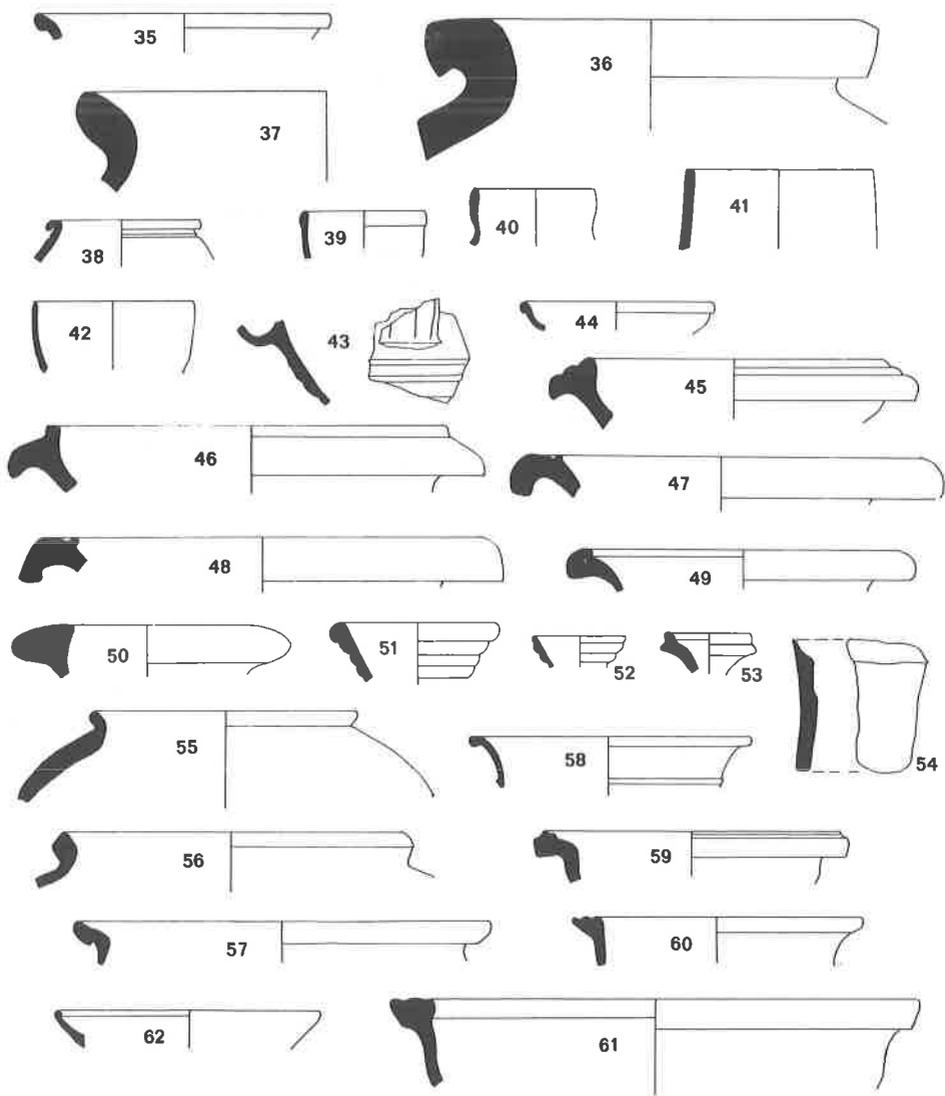


Fig. 5. The coarse pottery (1:4).

40. Fabric as 39, but with black colour-coat on exterior and chocolate interior. Tr. E.
A similar example exists.
41. Coarse, sandy fabric. Pale orange near surface and grey at core. Black colour-coat. Surfaces much weathered.
42. Soft, pale orange fabric. Black colour-coat, very highly burnished on exterior.
A body sherd in cream fabric with a black colour-coat has been found. It is burnished on exterior with a small piece of white, barbotine decoration. It is probably a Nene Valley ware of late second to early third century.

A body sherd in pale buff fabric with a red colour-coat and rouletted decoration has also been found.

Wares of the type described above first appear in the early second century at Verulamium and are common there by the second half of the century.

Other fine wares

43. Body sherd in hard, dense blue/grey fabric with a white slip on exterior.
44. Soft, dense grey fabric.

45. Dense, hard pale grey fabric with pale orange surfaces. A similar third century form occurs at Colchester (cf Hull 1958, form 599). A type of late third to early fourth century date is described by Neal (1975, 380).
46. Pale yellow/buff fabric. Sparse grey and red grits reaching up to the bead. Frere (1972) dates a similar form to mid second century.
47. Pale buff fabric with large grey and brown grits reaching up to the bead.
48. Similar fabric to 47.

Amphorae

49. Hard, pale cream fabric. Tr. F.
50. Fabric similar to 49. Very weathered.

Flagons

51. Hard, sandy, pale orange fabric. Five well defined rings.
52. Fabric similar to 51, but slightly paler.
Ring necked flagons occur commonly at Verulamium from the mid first century (Frere 1972, 102-111) and persist into the second century (Frere 1972, 404-409). An example is also known from Latimer (Branigan 1971, Fig. 27, 51).
53. Orange/cream fabric (cf Frere 1972, 73 and 235).

Tripod bowl

54. Leg from a bowl in pale grey, sandy fabric with smooth surfaces. A similar fragment of mid first-century date is described by Frere (1972, 231). Hawkes describes a similar fragment in a different fabric with a mica coating (1947, form 45).

In the County Museum at Aylesbury there is a collection of pottery that was made by W. Filby in Mount Wood, immediately adjacent to field 286 and the 1972 excavations. Its general character is similar to that from field 286, i.e. coarse pottery covering the early to mid Roman period. The fragments are small and rather weathered. A small proportion of finer wares, a few Romano-British roof tiles, fire-cracked pebbles and waste flakes also occur.

Because of their proximity and relevance to the above described material, a number of diagnostic sherds are illustrated in Fig. 5.

55. Neckless jar in pale grey fabric. Similar to 14 and 15, and of late first to mid second century.
56. Jar in hard, dense pink/buff fabric. No visible inclusions. Remains of brown slip on exterior.
Two similar rims in pink/red, sandy fabric are in this collection.
57. Necked jar in soft, pale grey fabric. No visible inclusions. (cf Neal 1975, 89).
59. Rim of a rather heavy vessel in a very dense, dark grey fabric. No visible inclusions. Smooth surfaces.
60. Reeded-rim bowl in hard, pale grey fabric with

minute black sand grain inclusions. cf 22 and 23, second century.

61. Heavy reeded-rim bowl in rather coarse, grey/buff fabric with a pinkish tinge on the interior. cf 22 and 23, second century.
62. Part of a fine bowl in a dense, pale grey fabric with carefully smoothed, dark surfaces. cf 21, first century.

The Metalwork (Figs. 6 & 7)

A few iron objects, including pieces of two dozen nails, and a single bronze object were recovered from the excavation. All of the finds were typical of Romano-British occupation but not datable.

All the finds, with the exception of the nails, are illustrated.

1. Iron knife blade. Tr. D.
2. Small iron chisel, or wedge.
3. Iron punch. Tr. G.
4. Iron stylus? Head missing.
5. Unidentified semicircular iron object.
6. Iron clamp or joiners dog. Tr. E.
7. Possible base of iron lamp. Tr. D.
8. Furniture or bucket fitting of iron with the remains of two bronze studs *in situ*. Locating hole of third present. Tr. E.
9. Furniture or bucket fitting of iron. Tr. G.
10. Furniture fitting of iron. Tr. E.
11. Furniture fitting of iron. Tr. G.
12. Furniture fitting of iron.
13. Bronze penannular ring. Possible earring. Tr. F.

The Bone

by Betty Westley

The material is well preserved and this has allowed identification of some 150 fragments. One complete bone, a cattle metatarsal, is present. The fauna represented include:-

Rodentia: Hare, 1 fragment of tibia/fibula

Perissodactyla: Horse, 1 cheek tooth

Artiodactyla: Cattle, 59 fragments, including 1 metatarsal

Artiodactyla: Pig, 9 fragments

Artiodactyla: Sheep, 42 fragments

Bone samples from the *Artiodactyla* are well broken or chopped up. Many bear saw or knife marks indicating that they are the remains of food. Cattle bone predominates as is usual on early British sites and the overall length of the surviving metatarsal (219 mm) falls well within the range for the early 'Celtic' cattle type.

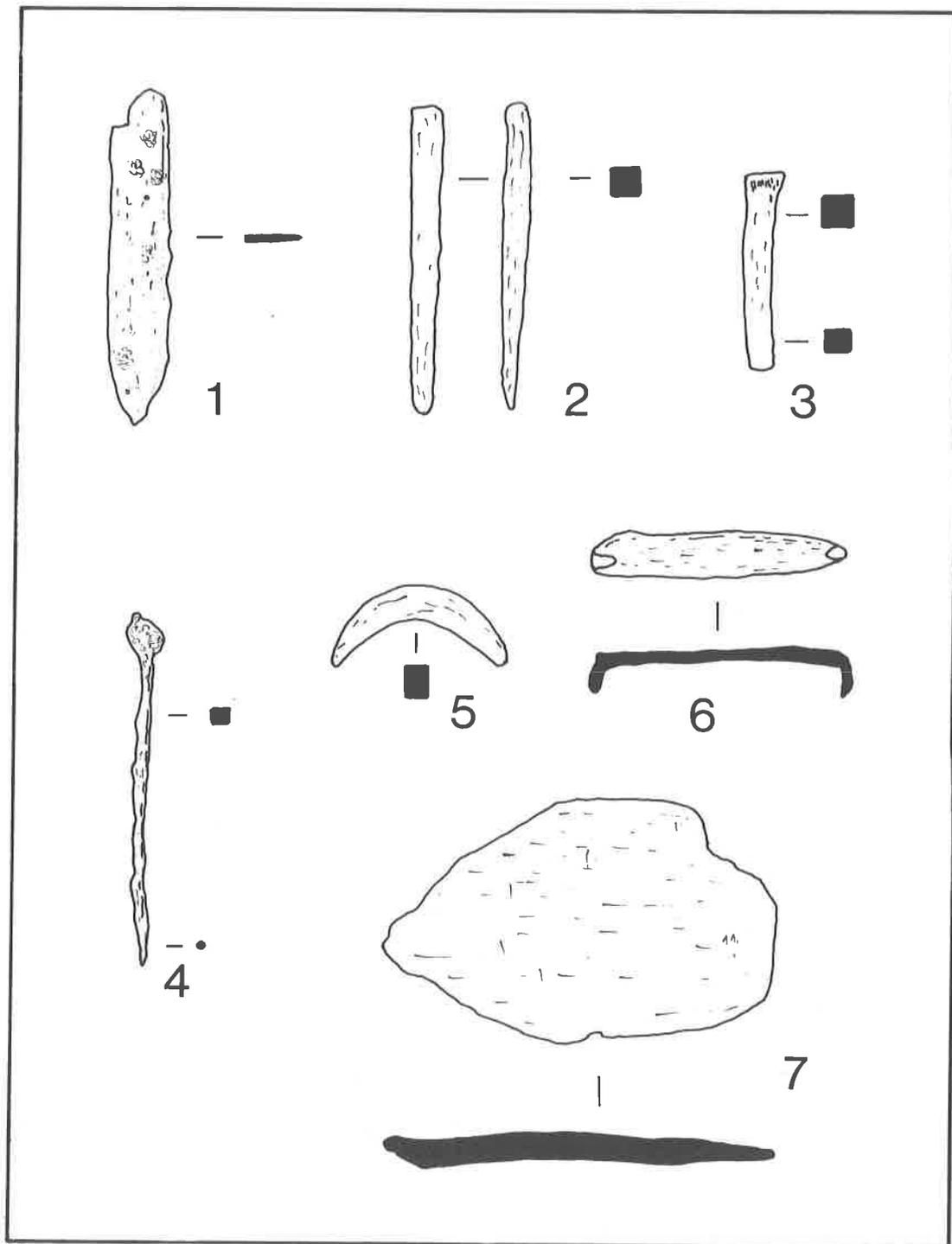


Fig. 6. The metalwork (1:2).

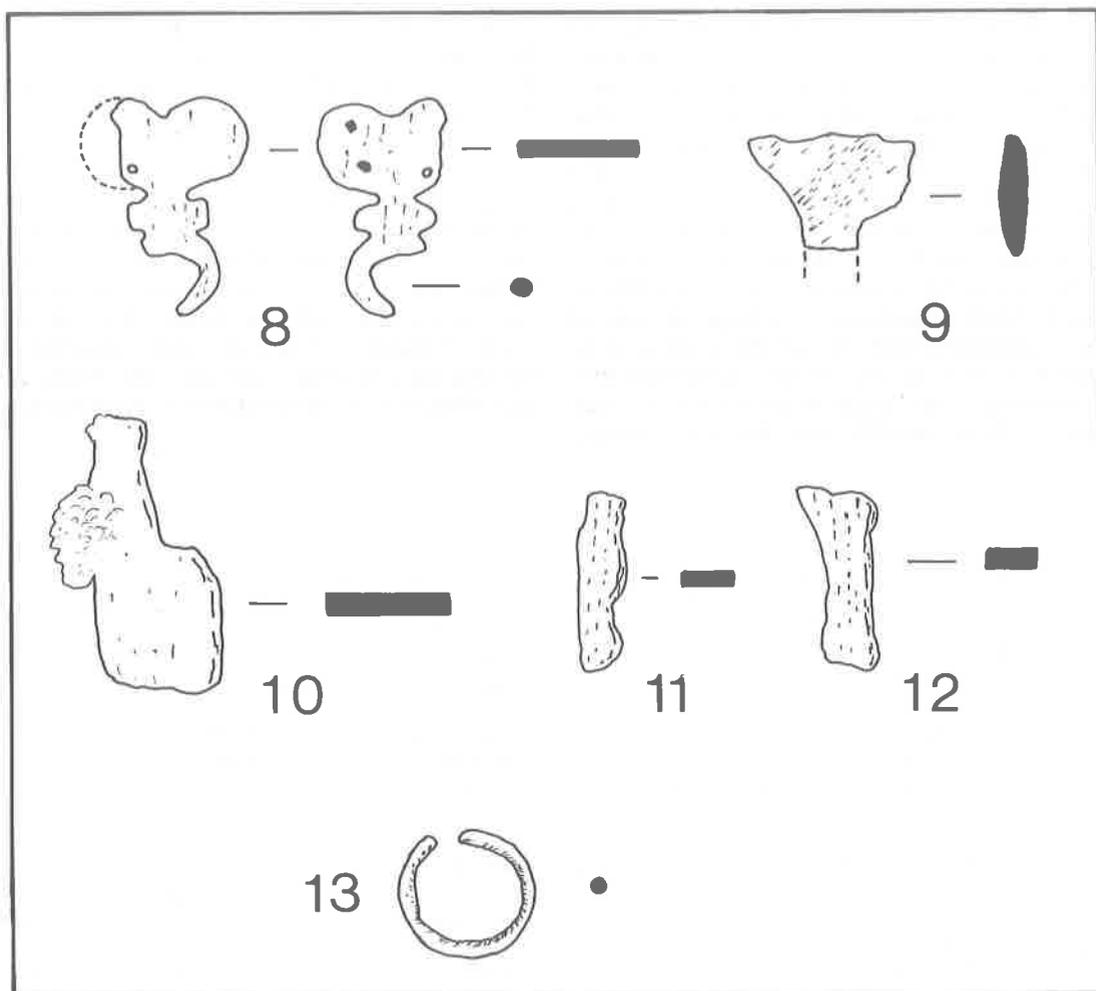


Fig. 7. The metalwork (1:2, no. 13 1:1).

Sheep fragments are characteristically of the slender kind. Dental remains suggest that the animals were slaughtered in their second year.

There is no evidence of deer, birds, fish or of any wild predators such as fox. Nor, surprisingly, is there any evidence of dog.

Infant Burial

Most of the bones of an infant are present, except for the pelvis, scapulae, parts of the long bones and the facial region of the skull. The size of the bones, together with the thinness of the skull suggests a foetus or newborn

child. Several non-erupted teeth which are present have loosened and separated post mortem. No sex can be assigned to the remains.

Conclusions

Apart from a single post hole, no trace of a structure was found and it is probable that the site was an open working area, doubtless associated with the villa at Valley Farm. The broken flint layer and the corn drying oven could not be proved to be associated with one another and so they need not be contemporary.

It was not easy to establish the date of the site

in the absence of stratified material and the lack of many diagnostic pieces of pottery. The most important pottery fragments for dating purposes are the coarse, double rim sherds 2 and 3, both from the broken flint layer and likely to date from the second century, as at Gadebridge Park (Neal 1975) and Verulamium (Frere 1972). Latimer villa, however, produced similar rims in a late third- to fourth-century context (Branigan 1971). If a later date for the Mount Wood sherds is accepted, the large amount of earlier pottery found on the site is difficult to explain. It may be that earlier occupation sites or working areas await discovery in the near vicinity. It is possible that the early pottery

found its way to the site as domestic refuse from the villa, perhaps brought across the river from farmyard middens, to be spread on the fields as a fertilizer.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Mr Peter Simpson for permission to excavate and for his interest in the project. The site was first noted by Mr Walter Filby. The CVAHS assisted in the excavation, and the preparation of this report. Figures 1, 3, 6 and 7 were supplied by Pauline and Stanley Cauvain. The finds are deposited at the County Museum, Aylesbury.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Branigan, K. 1967. 'The distribution and development of Romano-British occupation in the Chess Valley', *Recs. Bucks* 18, 136-49.
- Branigan, K. 1971. *Latimer*, Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society.
- Cooper, G. 1945. 'Roman vestigia near Chenies', *Recs. Bucks* 14, 240.
- Dragendorff, H. 1895. 'Terra sigillata. Ein Betrag zur Geschichte der griechischen und römischen Keramik', *Bonner Jahrbuch* 96, 18-55.
- Drury, P. J. and Rodwell, W. J. 1973. 'Excavations at Gun Hill, West Tilbury, Essex—Archaeology and History', *Trans. Essex Archaeol. Soc.* 5, 48-112.
- Frere, S. S. 1972. *Verulamium Excavations I*, Soc. Antiq. Res. Rep. 28.
- Hawkes, C. F. C. and Hull, M. R. 1947. *Camulodunum*, Soc. Antiq. Res. Rep. 14.
- Hull, M. R. 1958. *Roman Colchester*, Soc. Antiq. Res. Rep. 20.
- Oswald, F. 1936-7. *Index of Figure-Types on Terra Sigillata, "Samian ware"*, Liverpool, reprinted Gregg Press, 1965.
- Oswald, F. and Pryce, T. D. 1920. *An Introduction to the Study of Terra Sigillata*, London, reprinted Gregg Press, 1965.
- Neal, D. 1975. *The excavation of the Roman villa at Gadebridge Park, Hemel Hempstead*, Soc. Antiq. Res. Rep. 31.
- Rogers, G. B. 1974. 'Poteries sigillées de la Gaule Centrale. 1. Les motifs non figurés', *Gallia*, Supp. 28.
- Stanfield, F. and Simpson, G. 1958. *Central Gaulish Pottery*, London.