

# An Anglo-Saxon Site at Audlett Drive, Abingdon, Oxfordshire

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## SUMMARY

*This report describes the assessment and excavation of a small site on the eastern outskirts of Abingdon. Two main phases of activity were identified: a small early Saxon settlement, and a series of late Saxon linear features. The excavated features are described and the finds from them are catalogued. Finally the local and regional significance of the results are discussed.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The town centre of Abingdon occupies a gravel terrace on the north side of the confluence of the River Thames and its tributary, the Ock (Fig. 1). The site dominates a natural fording-point of the Thames, bridged in 1416.<sup>1</sup> The natural attractions of the location have been recognized since the Neolithic period at least, and archaeological sites are densely clustered in and around the town. The high level of proposed

<sup>1</sup> K. Rodwell (ed.), *Historic Towns in Oxfordshire: a Survey of the New County* (1975), 33.

redevelopment in the area from the late 1960s posed an obvious threat to the archaeology, a fact recognised in the seminal CBA publication, *The Erosion of History*.<sup>2</sup>

The Abingdon Excavation Committee was established in 1971 in response to this.<sup>3</sup> In 1973 the Committee became federated with the newly-formed Oxfordshire Archaeological Committee and its Unit.<sup>4</sup> Several major excavations have taken place under the auspices of the successive Committees and the Unit, for instance at Barton Court Farm (Fig. 1),<sup>5</sup> Ashville Trading Estate,<sup>6</sup> Barrow Hills (Fig. 1), Radley,<sup>7</sup> and most recently at the Vineyard (Fig. 1).<sup>8</sup>

In January 1991, the Oxford Archaeological Unit undertook an assessment and excavation of a site on the E. edge of the town centre. The results of this work are described here.

### *The site*

The site lies on the S. side of Audlett Drive, at 52–53 m. above OD on the gravel terrace immediately to the N. of the confluence of the Thames and the Abbey Stream (Figs. 1–3). The disused Abingdon railway branch-line forms the southern boundary of the site and separates it from the floodplain. The abbey precinct is c. 400 m. to the W., while the abbey barton is 150 m. away to the W.N.W., on the N. side of Audlett Drive. Until recently this was a green-field area, but a housing estate has been built on the N. side of Audlett Drive, and a Science/Business Park on the S. side. Saplings have been planted on the site in recent years.

The redevelopment of the Vineyard site in Abingdon by the Vale of White Horse District Council necessitated the relocation of Oxfordshire County Council's Adult Training Centre. A new site was chosen on Audlett Drive, infilling a vacant plot to the W. of the Science Park. The plans involved the construction of an access road, a car park and the training centre itself; some landscaping work was also involved. A clause in the planning consent allowed for an assessment of the site by the Oxford Archaeological Unit, with provision for full excavation if necessary.

### *Methodology*

Eight bore holes, excavated in 1989, showed that the west end and part of the south edge of the site had been quarried out and infilled with rubble in the recent past. The exact extent of these areas was unknown. The assessment (Fig. 2) sampled the car park (Trench 1), the perimeter of the training centre (Trenches 2–3, 6), and the south edge of the site (Trenches 4–5). Topsoil was removed mechanically. Quarries were located in Trench 5 and at the west end of Trench 3. Context numbers were distinguished by using the trench number as a prefix (e.g. 2/1, 3/6).

<sup>2</sup> C.M. Heighway (ed.), *The Erosion of History: Archaeology and Planning in Towns* (1972), 46–8.

<sup>3</sup> D. Miles and M. Parrington, 'Excavations in Abingdon, 1972–4. Introduction: The Abingdon Excavation Committee', *Oxoniensis*, xl (1975), 1–4.

<sup>4</sup> B. Cunliffe, T. Rowley and T. Hassall, 'The Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit', *Antiquity* xlviii (1974), 93–8.

<sup>5</sup> D. Miles (ed.), *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon.* (CBA Research Report 50, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> M. Parrington, *The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement, Bronze Age Ring Ditches and Roman Features at Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon (Oxfordshire) 1974–76* (CBA Research Report 28, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> R. Bradley, R.A. Chambers and C. Halpin, *Barrow Hills, Radley, 1983–4 Excavations: an Interim Report* (1984).

<sup>8</sup> T. Allen, 'Abingdon', *Current Archaeology*, cxxi (1990), 24–7.

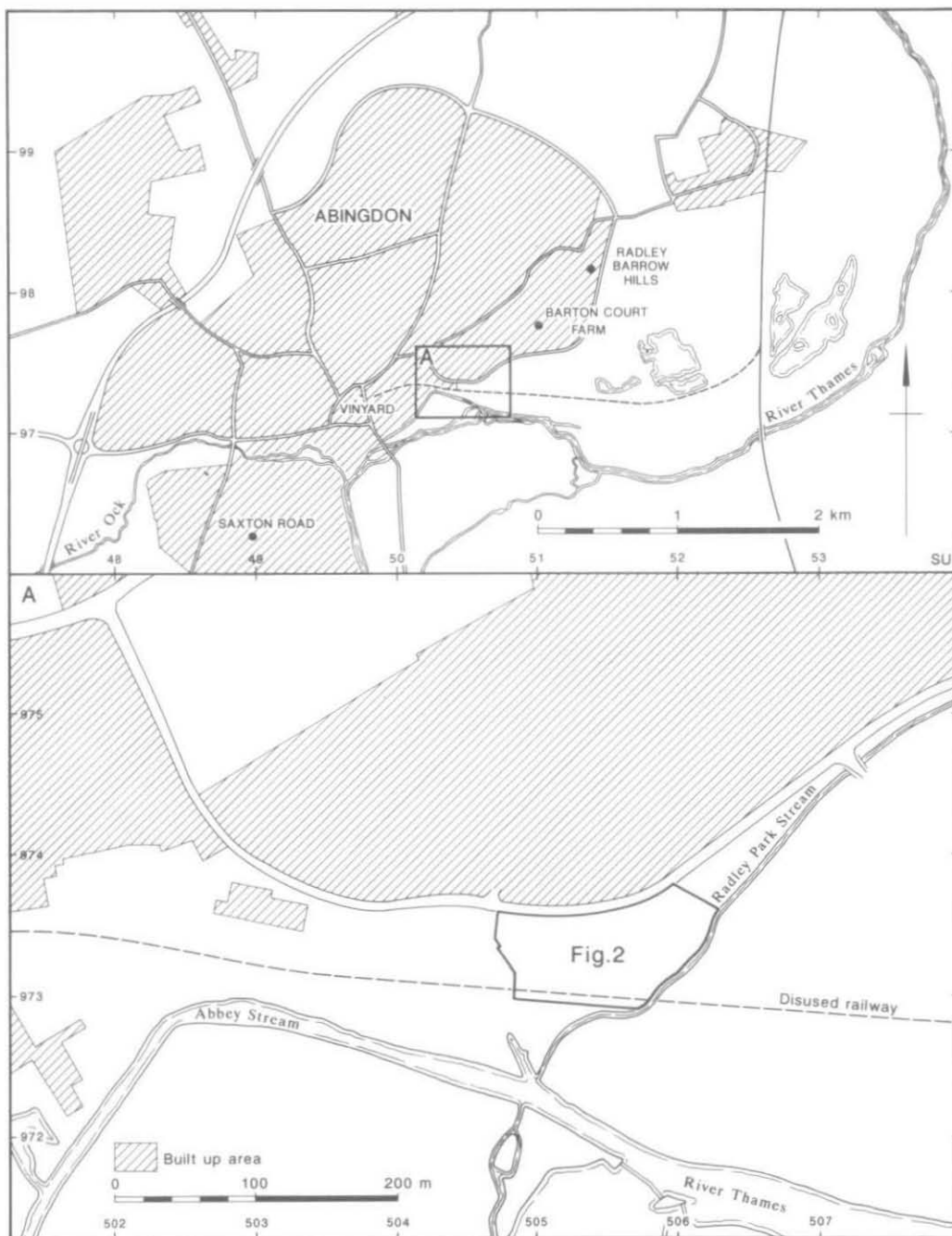


Fig. 1. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Site location.

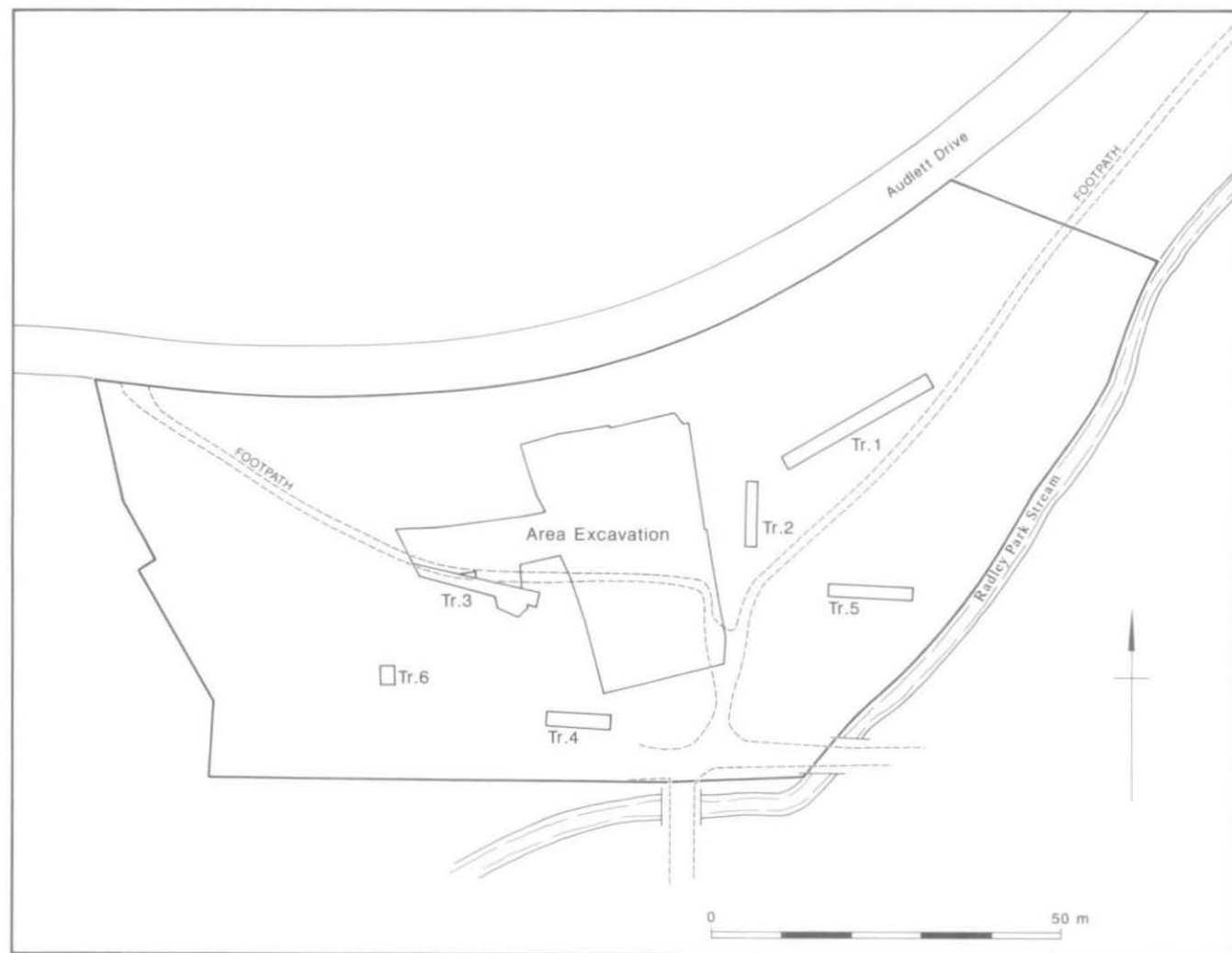


Fig. 2. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Location of excavations.

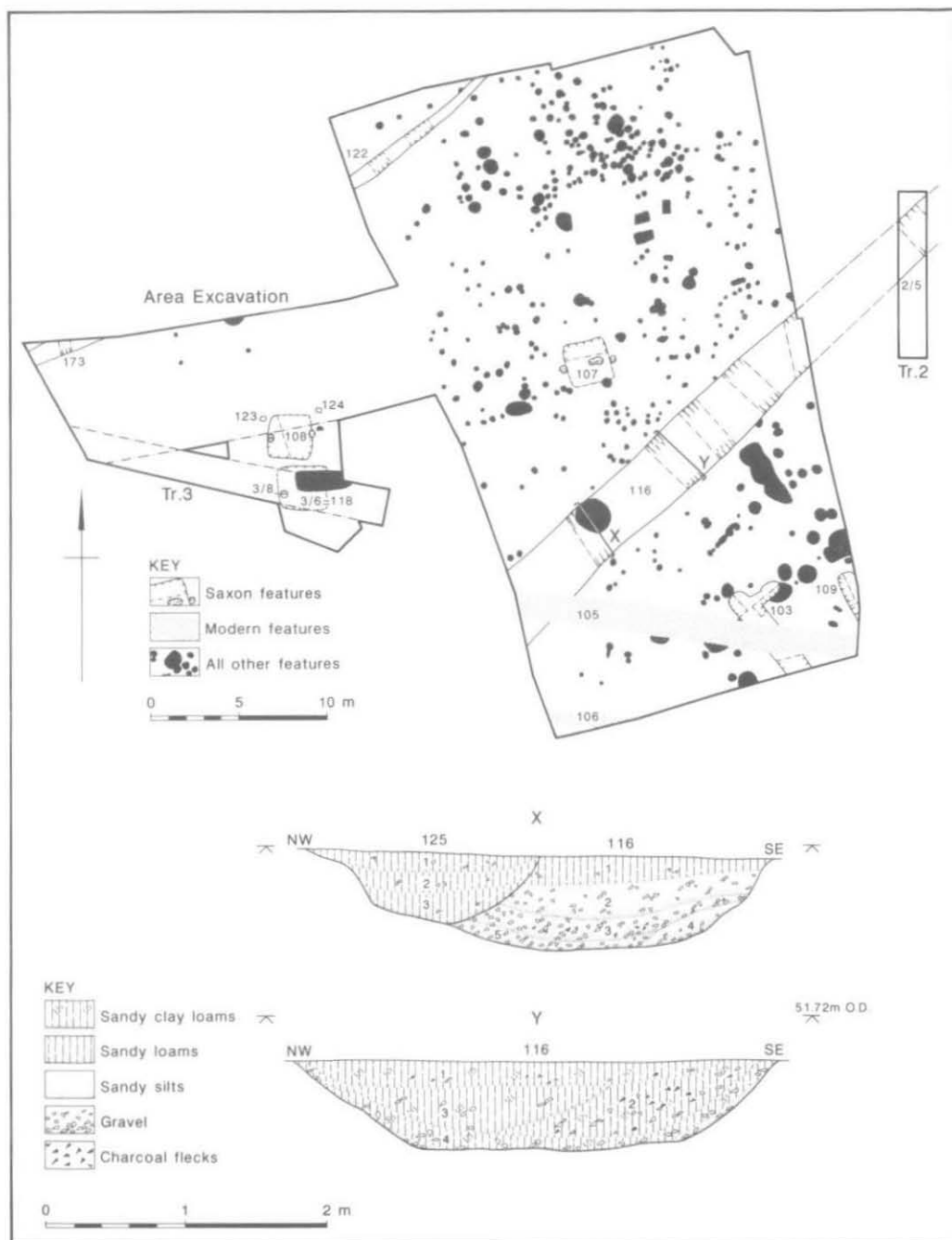


Fig. 3. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Plan of all features, Trenches 2 and 3 and area excavation.

No archaeological features were discovered in Trenches 4 and 5, but Trench 1 contained two features possibly of prehistoric date, while Trenches 2 and 3 produced substantial evidence of Anglo-Saxon settlement. Consequently, it was agreed that the area of the training centre would be fully excavated. No further work was undertaken elsewhere because the building works would not intrude into the archaeological levels. Context numbers started at 100 (topsoil) in order to avoid confusion with numbers assigned during the assessment.

A T-shaped area of c. 900 m. sq. was excavated (Fig. 2). Three sunken-featured buildings, three ditches, a gully, and 175 pits or postholes were excavated. A further 225 pits/postholes were planned but could not be excavated in the time available. Two modern drains crossed the south side of the site, and the west balk was defined by a quarry. A number of natural features were also present.

The sunken-featured buildings, ditches and gully cut a subsoil layer which overlay the natural gravel; this layer was difficult to distinguish from feature fills, the sunken-featured buildings alone being easily visible because of the high density of finds in their filling. The subsoil was removed mechanically so as to reveal the bases of features cutting into gravel. It is accepted that shallow features may have been destroyed as a result of this strategy. Most of the pits/postholes appeared to be sealed by the subsoil, although the method of excavation meant that this could not be determined with certainty.

Horizontal stratigraphy was restricted to relationships with the subsoil layer, and relationships in plan were rare. Phasing the excavated features therefore relies heavily on the finds from the buildings, gully and ditches. Very few of the excavated pits/postholes contained any finds.

Volumes were calculated for all the excavated pits/postholes in an attempt to define associated structural groups. Volumes were calculated from the diameter and depth of each feature without reference to profiles. Volumes ranged from 0.001–0.3 m. cu. No patterning by volume could be discerned. Full details are contained in the archive.

#### PHASE O: UNPHASED/PREHISTORIC FEATURES (Figs. 3 and 7)

Two features were partly revealed in trial trench 1 (not illustrated). Features 1/7 and 1/8 were 0.55 m. and 0.75 m. deep respectively. Each could have been either a pit or a ditch/gully terminal. Two pieces of burnt flint were found in 1/7, and one in 1/8. Both features were sealed by subsoil layer 1/5. This layer contained later prehistoric and Roman pottery and an unretouched flint flake.

There were 391 pits/post-holes in the area excavation (166 excavated) containing no finds or a few pieces of pottery or flint. Some of the features appeared to be aligned in parallel with the late Saxon ditch 116. Three of these features (186, 189 and 204), however, contained Iron-Age pottery; a fourth, 185, contained an unretouched flint flake. Posthole 212 contained a flint knife (cat. no. 9). Pit/posthole 115 contained several small sherds of Beaker pottery and two flint flakes (see Fig. 7 for the location of these features). The pits/postholes appeared to be sealed by the subsoil layer 114 (equivalent to layer 1/5), a medium-dark red-brown silty loam. Possible structures have been identified within the mass of postholes; these are discussed below.

#### PHASE I: EARLY SUNKEN-FEATURED BUILDINGS (Figs. 3 and 4)

Subsoil layer 114 was cut by three sunken-featured buildings (SFBs) characterised by rectangular or square sub-floor pits. One of these was initially uncovered in trial trench 3 (context 3/6 and posthole 3/8), subsequently being recorded as SFB 118. The centre of the structure had been destroyed by a modern feature, 3/5. SFB 108 lay immediately N. of 118. SFB 107 lay 15.8 m. E. of 108. In each case the SFB pit fill consisted of a

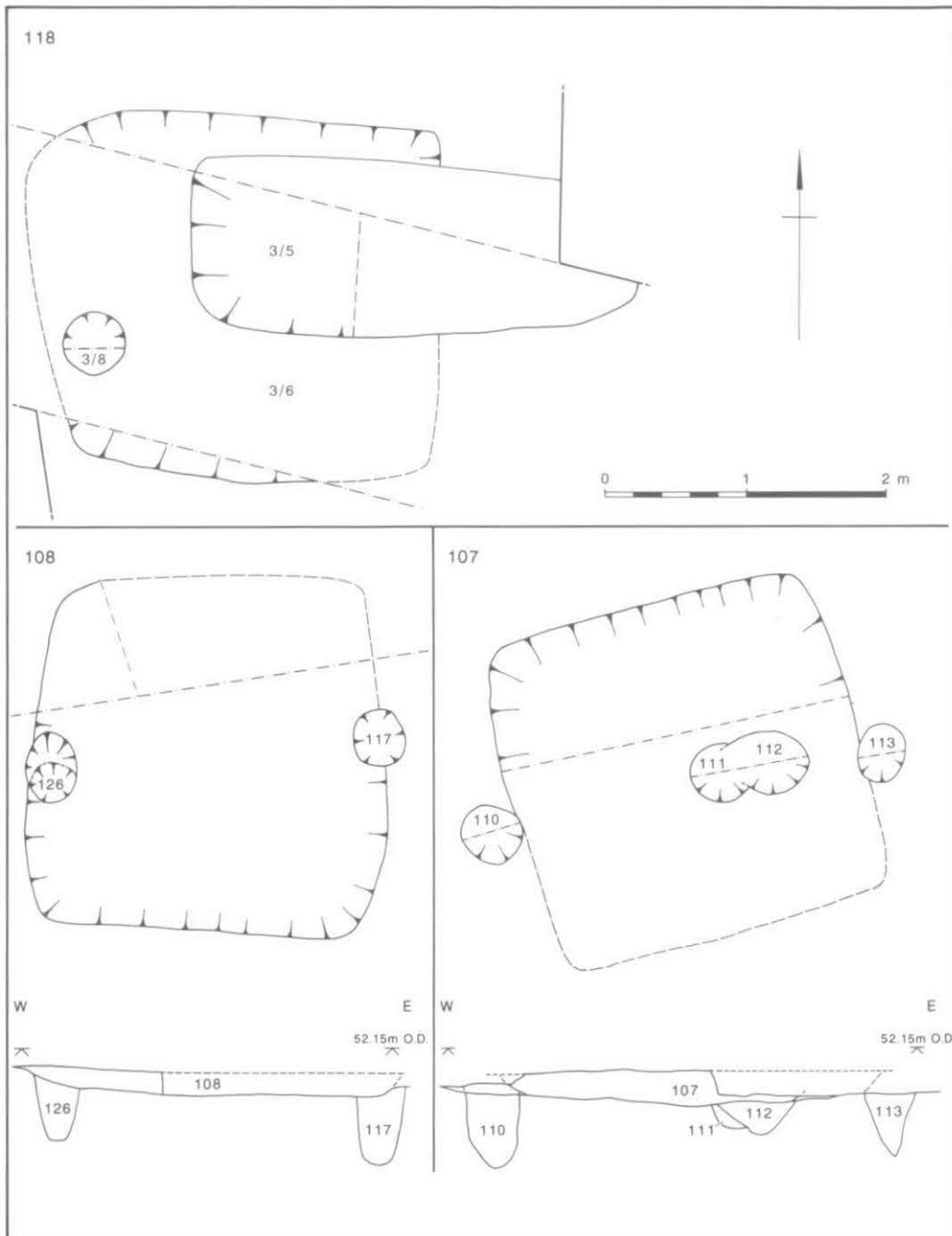


Fig. 4. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Plans and profiles of Sunken-Featured Buildings.

single, homogeneous soil deposit. Two rectangular arrangements of postholes were identified during post-excavation analysis (Fig. 7), and others could be reconstructed from the mass of features. These cannot safely be assigned a Saxon date, but are discussed further below.

Large quantities of pottery and animal bone were recovered from SFBs 107 and 108; that less material was present in SFB 118 is undoubtedly due to the modern disturbance. Small finds were recovered from each structure. A brief note of the finds is included in the description of the SFBs; the site small find number is listed first (SF), followed by the publication catalogue number (C) where relevant.

### *SFB 118*

Despite the modern pitting noted above, the rectangular plan and overall size of SFB 118 could be reconstructed from the surviving parts of the structure. It was c. 2.8 m. long (roughly E.-W.) and 2.5 m. wide, with a maximum pit depth of 0.2 m. The edges of the pit sloped in very steeply to a flat base. No features were found outside the SFB, but posthole 3/8 was located slightly to the S. of the centre line of the building at its W. end. The posthole was 0.45 m. in diameter, with a depth of 0.48 m. No relationship between the SFB pit and the posthole could be determined. The intrusive modern pit had destroyed any evidence for a corresponding feature at the E. end. Small quantities of pottery and animal bone were recovered, but there were only two small finds: an iron nail (SF 49) and an antler spindle whorl (SF 1; C 5).

### *SFB 108*

SFB 108 was parallel to and 0.45 m. N. of SFB 118. It was 2.6 m. square, with a maximum pit depth of 0.18 m. The pit edges sloped at c. 45° into a flat base. Two postholes, 117 and 126, were placed centrally in the E. and W. ends respectively. Posthole 117 was 0.34 m. in diameter with a depth of 0.55 m., while 126 was 0.45 m. in diameter and 0.48 m. deep. Each contained a post pipe (126, 0.12 m. diameter; 117, 0.15 m. in diameter); these were offset towards the outer edge of the posthole. The fill of posthole 126 was sealed by the backfill of the SFB pit; the same relationship seemed to pertain to posthole 117, although not with the same degree of certainty.

Two postholes outside the SFB may have been associated with it (see Fig. 3), although neither contained any dating evidence. Posthole 123, 0.32 m. in diameter and 0.48 m. deep, lay 0.4 m. W. of the N.W. corner of the SFB pit. Posthole 124, of exactly the same size, was 0.6 m. E. of the N.E. corner. Post pipes were not present. Corresponding post settings could not be identified on the S. side of the structure.

Substantial quantities of pottery and animal bone were recovered from the SFB pit. A few bone fragments were found in each of postholes 117, 124 and 126; pottery, however, was absent from these features. The SFB pit also contained several small finds, including loomweight (SF 7, 9) and quernstone (SF 8) fragments, a Roman coin (SF 15), a worked antler offcut (SF 50), a quartz pebble (SF 14; C 8), a riveted iron mount (SF 11; C 2), and a copper alloy penannular brooch (SF 10; C 1).

### *SFB 107*

SFB 107 was 2.4 m. square with a maximum pit depth of 0.26 m. The sides of the pit sloped in at c. 45° to a slightly irregular base. Orientation was E.N.E.-W.S.W., with postholes 110 and 113 at the W. and E. ends respectively. Each was set on the outer edge of the pit. Posthole 110 was 0.46 m. in diameter and 0.48 m. deep, while 113 was 0.36 m. in diameter and 0.26 m. deep. Post pipes were absent, but the infill of 110 was sealed by the backfilling of the SFB pit; no relationship was present between the pit fill and posthole 113.

Two postholes, 111 and 112, were located in the floor of the pit on its central axis. Each contained a few fragments of early Saxon pottery. The postholes can therefore be seen as contemporary with the use of the SFB. Both, however, were sealed by the pit backfill. Posthole 111 was 0.42 m. in diameter and 0.2 m. deep. Its east side was cut away by posthole 112, which was 0.6 m. in diameter and 0.26 m. deep. Post pipes were not present.

The backfill of the SFB pit contained much pottery and animal bone, as well as several small finds. These included a pair of whetstones (SFs 26 and 51), a Roman coin (SF 25), a lead weight (SF 4; C 4), and a triangular single-sided bone comb (SF 20; C 7).



## PHASE II: LATE SAXON FEATURES (Fig. 3)

A number of linear features were cut during the late Saxon period. The most substantial of these was ditch 116 (initially identified in trial trench 2, context 5). This was oriented N.E.-S.W., and was traced over a distance of approximately 34 m. It was typically 3.5 m. wide, narrowing to a minimum of 2.5 m. towards the N.E. end. Six sections were excavated (including the initial exposure in the trial trench), representing a 30% sample of the available length. The ditch had a broad U-shaped profile (see sections in Fig. 3); the sides sloped at  $c. 40^\circ$  into a wide, flat base. The depth of the ditch was fairly constant at  $c. 0.68$  m. Possible recuts were noted in some sections, but these were inconsistent and could not be traced on the surface. A substantial pit, 125, had been cut into the backfilled ditch 6.5 m. N.E. of the W. balk of the excavation area. The pit was 1.8 m. in diameter and 0.6 m. deep. Unfortunately no dating evidence was recovered from it.

Three other less substantial linear features either shared the alignment of 116 or were at right angles to it. Gully 122, parallel to and 23 m. N.W. of 116, had a U-shaped profile typically 0.54 m. wide and 0.17 m. deep. The feature was traced over a length of 31 m., being truncated to the W. by a modern quarry. The W. end of the gully was recorded as context 173.

Ditch 103 was 1.4 m. wide and up to 0.45 m. deep, with a broad U-shaped profile. The sides sloped at between  $50-70^\circ$  to a flat base. The feature ran perpendicular to ditch 116 for 5.7 m. from the S. balk of the excavation, terminating 6 m. S. of 116. A modern storm drain cut 103.

Ditch 109, in the S.E. corner of the excavation, was only exposed for a length of 3 m.; its width was 1.1 m., with a maximum depth of 0.6 m. The sides sloped at  $c. 70^\circ$  to a flat base, producing a broad U-shaped profile. The feature was roughly parallel to and 4 m. E. of ditch 103.

No trace of banks could be found in association with any of the above features. It was apparent during the excavation, however, that some postholes appeared to be in rows aligned on ditch 116. Some of these could have acted as revetting for banks. Unfortunately the lack of dating evidence and ambiguous stratigraphic positions noted above mean that these features cannot be securely associated with the ditch. The apparent alignments are noted on Figure 7; it will be noted that some of the relevant postholes can also be included in other structures.

## PHASE III: MODERN FEATURES (Fig. 3)

The late Saxon features were sealed by a ploughsoil, presumably of medieval date. This was cut by two modern drains, features 105 and 106. The former was not excavated, but a slot was cut into the latter to prove that it was modern; the trench was 0.67 m. wide and was not bottomed.

Boreholing had shown that the W. side of the site contained a large quarry pit. This was found at the W. end of trial trench 3 (context 7). Accordingly the edge of the quarry formed the western limit of the area excavation.

## THE SMALL FINDS (Fig. 5)

*Roman coins*, identification by C. KING

Barbarous, House of Constantine. Gloria Exercitus, single standard. Reversed and illiterate mint mark. Official issue would date to 335-341, but this barbarous example may be as late as 348. SF 15. 108/B/1

Unidentifiable, highly corroded. SF 25. 107/B

Unidentifiable, highly corroded. SF 32. 116/-/1

*Victorian Farthing*

A farthing of 1861 was recovered by metal detector from the spoil-heap during the excavation. SF 28.

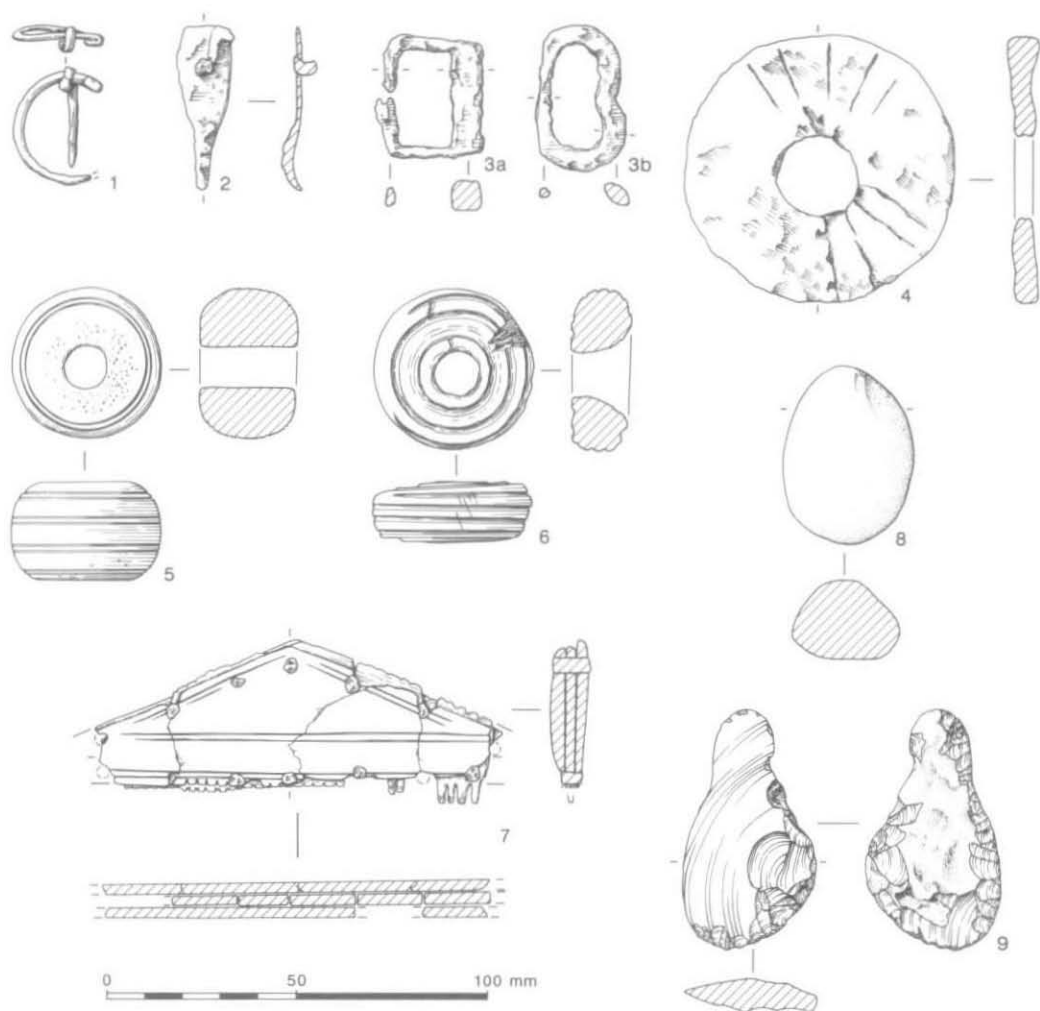


Fig. 5. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Small finds.

*Copper alloy objects*1. *Brooch*

Penannular brooch of Fowler Type D.<sup>9</sup> A common Roman type, occasionally found in Saxon contexts.<sup>10</sup> One terminal missing, pin detached. The intact terminal is folded back. SF 10. 108/A/1.

Brooch: Diam. 30 mm. Th. 3 mm.

Pin: L. 27.5 mm. W. 3 mm. Th. 3 mm

Plain strip fragment bent back on itself. Not Illustrated. SF 34. 107/B.

Two small unidentifiable fragments. Not illustrated. SF 18. 116/A/1.

<sup>9</sup> E. Fowler, 'The Origins and Development of the Penannular Brooch in Europe', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* xxvi (1960), 149-77; E. Fowler, 'Celtic Metalwork of the Fifth and Sixth Centuries A.D.: a Re-appraisal', *Archaeol. Jnl.* cxx (1961), 98-160.

<sup>10</sup> Fowler (1960), *op. cit.* note 9, 167-9, 176; Fowler (1961), *op. cit.* note 9, 114-15.

*Iron Objects*2. *Mount/hook*

Iron plate tapering to a hook. Point chipped but not broken. Iron rivet positioned centrally in plate protrudes 3.5 mm. beyond lower surface. SF 11. 108/A/1.

Plate: L. 43 mm. W. 14 mm. max. Th. 3 mm. (hook)

3. *Buckle and strap guide*

*Buckle* (3b): Made from a single strip of iron overlapping at the rear to form the bar. The frame is asymmetric with rectangular section on the bar and flared section on the rest of the loop. The pin would have rested on the inturn opposite the centre of the bar. Pin missing.

*Strap guide* (3a): the flat sides emanate from the square bar and turn inwards at 90° to form the back, also flat. SF 19. 116/A/1

Buckle: H. 27 mm. max. W. 38 mm. Th. 5 mm.

Guide: L. 25 mm. W. 32 mm. Th. 7 mm.

Two nails, one incomplete. Not illustrated. SF 6. 108/A/1.

Nail, bent and incomplete. Not illustrated. SF 49. 3/6.

Strip. Not illustrated. SF 35. 107/B.

The buckle and strap runner, 3, are unusual in form. Square and D-shaped buckles are common in late Saxon and medieval contexts, but the asymmetric 'B' shape has few parallels. A broadly similar sub-rectangular buckle from Winchester has been dated to the 11th century.<sup>11</sup> An 11th-century example from 16–22 Coppergate, York, also has a slight inturn in the frame and an overlapping bar.<sup>12</sup> The combination of buckle and strap guide suggests that these are spur fittings. They were found together in ditch 116, dated ceramically to the 11th century. No strap-end was found.

*Lead objects*4. *Weight*

Annular weight with central perforation. Radial incised lines on one face extend to the rim in places, causing at least two grooves in the rim. There are also slight traces of wear on the perforation. SF 4. 107/1

Diam: 69 mm. Perforation diam: 22 mm. Th. 6–9 mm. Weight: 220 g.

Musket ball. Not illustrated. SF 30. U/S

Six unidentifiable lumps. Not illustrated. SF 29. U/S

Unidentifiable scrap. Not illustrated. SF 31. 116/1

Unidentifiable scrap. Not illustrated. SF 33. 116/1

The weight, 4, was found 0.05 m. above the base of SFB 107, and may have been a loomweight. The wear marks on the rim and perforation, and the incised lines on one face, all suggest that the object was suspended, probably on a thread. Sixteen lead loomweights were found on the base of SFB 1190 at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon.<sup>13</sup> The latter site is only 1 km. N.E. of the Adult Training Centre.

<sup>11</sup> I.H. Goodall, 'Buckles and Belt Fittings', in M. Biddle, *Object and Economy in Medieval Winchester* (Winchester Studies 7.ii, 1990), ii. 532, catalogue no. 1308.

<sup>12</sup> I am indebted to Patrick Ottaway for this information: P. Ottaway, *Anglo-Scandinavian Ironwork from Coppergate* (AY 17/6, 1992), Fig. 294, no. 3733.

<sup>13</sup> Miles, *op. cit.* note 5, 16–17.

*Ceramic objects*

Two fragments of a loomweight, probably of doughnut type. Not illustrated. Total weight 25 g. SF 9. 108/A/1

Eight fragments of at least one loomweight, type unidentifiable. Two pieces have part of a hole. Not illustrated. Total weight 121 g. SF 7. 108/A/1

*Antler objects*5. *Spindlewhorl*

Circular, cylindrical lathe-turned spindlewhorl with central perforation. Cut from near the base of the antler beam, close to the burr. Decorated with four pairs of concentric incised circles. SF 1. 118

Diam: 37 mm. Th: 25 mm.

6. *Spindlewhorl*

Annular lathe-turned spindlewhorl with central perforation extensively worn on one face. Cut from the base of the antler beam, close to the burr. Decorated with eight deeply incised broadly concentric circles on both faces and the edge. SF 3. U/S

Diam: 42 mm. Th: 15.5 mm.

7. *Comb*

Triangular three-layered single-sided comb in several pieces. The outer layers are single plates, but the inner layer consists of four small separate tooth-plates; at least two more are missing. Incised linear decoration on both outer plates consists of two parallel lines around the edges with a single double line separating them into two panels. The top edge of the central layer is scalloped. Nine rivets survive *in situ*, with holes for at least four more. All of the teeth on the central plate are broken, but they had clearly been cut after the comb had been assembled, as the saw marks are continuous across all three plates. A single incomplete end fragment of one of the outer pieces suggests that they extended downwards over splayed end tooth plates. SF 20. 107/B

L: 107 mm. H: 37.5 mm. Th: 10.5 mm.

Sawn ?Red Deer antler offcut fragment. The dense outer tissue has been sliced off. Two surfaces are smoothed, possibly by wear. Not illustrated. SF 50. 108/B/1

L: 72 mm. W: 14.5 mm. H: 16 mm.

The form and decoration of the spindlewhorls, 5 and 6, is typical of early Saxon examples. Very close parallels occur in the Saxton Road cemetery, Abingdon,<sup>14</sup> and the Barrow Hills settlement, Radley.<sup>15</sup> Both sites are within 2 km. of the Audlett Drive excavation (see Fig. 1). Parallels also occur at sites such as the Spong Hill cemetery<sup>16</sup> and West Stow village<sup>17</sup> in East Anglia. Unfortunately the spindlewhorls are not closely dateable in their own right, with a range from the 5th to 7th centuries.

The triangular single-sided comb, 7, similarly has numerous parallels at Spong Hill,<sup>18</sup> West Stow,<sup>19</sup> and Newark-on-Trent;<sup>20</sup> at the latter two sites they are the most common comb type. The scalloped top of the central plates is less common, but can be seen in graves 1183 and 1663 at Spong Hill,<sup>21</sup> and find H at Newark.<sup>22</sup> At West Stow triangular combs occur in 5th- and 6th-century contexts, but a tendency towards lowering the profile was noted by the late 6th century.<sup>23</sup> While this must be treated with caution a later 6th-century date would be consistent with the ceramic evidence from the SFBs at Audlett Drive.

<sup>14</sup> E.T. Leeds and D.B. Harden, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Abingdon* (1936), 43 and Plate XIII.

<sup>15</sup> I am grateful to Ellen McAdam for this information.

<sup>16</sup> C. Hills, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Spong Hill, North Elmham. Part I* (East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 6, 1977), Figs. 136-7.

<sup>17</sup> S. West, *West Stow: The Anglo-Saxon Village* (East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 24, 1985), vol. 2, Figs 42:7 and 60:24.

<sup>18</sup> Hills, *op. cit.* note 16, 28-9.

<sup>19</sup> West, *op. cit.* note 17, vol. 1, 126-7.

<sup>20</sup> A.G. Kinsley, *The Anglo-Saxon Cemetery at Millgate, Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire* (Notts. Archaeol. Monograph 2, 1989), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Hills, *op. cit.* note 16, 46/Fig. 132 and 65/Fig. 133 respectively.

<sup>22</sup> Kinsley, *op. cit.* note 20, 75 and Fig. 91.

<sup>23</sup> West, *op. cit.* note 17, vol. 1, 126-7.

*Stone objects*8. *Quartz pebble amulet*

Ovoid white quartz pebble with smoothed surface. SF 14. 108/A/1  
 L: 47 mm.                      W: 35 mm.                      Th: 30 mm.

Five fragments of upper rotary quernstone. Conglomerate, probably from a Forest of Dean source. One fragment has a complete section of the edge of the quernstone, maximum thickness 35 mm. Total weight 650 g. Largest piece weight 310 g. Not illustrated. SF 8. 108/A/1

Quartz pebbles are commonly found in early Saxon graves. They may or may not be pierced. White quartz seems to be most commonly used, although this may reflect recovery bias during excavation. Amulets are comparatively rarely found on settlement sites.<sup>24</sup>

*Worked flint*, by P. BRADLEY

Sixteen flint artefacts were recovered during the excavation. The raw material varies considerably, and the cortex rarely survives. Most of the material contains cherty inclusions. Hard and soft hammers were used, so that both prominent and diffuse bulbs of percussion are present. There are few diagnostic pieces; the assemblage consists of one knife, one retouched flake, two scrapers and 12 unretouched flakes or blades. Both scrapers are end-and-side scrapers (SFs 21 and 36), and are not especially diagnostic. The flake (SF 17) has been steeply retouched along part of its right hand side. The flint knife, 9, is the most diagnostic artefact; the shallow invasive retouch suggests a Beaker date.

9. *Knife*

Large irregular flake retouched along one edge. The dorsal face contains a large patch of white/grey cortex. The flint is dark grey-brown with inclusions. The retouch is shallow and invasive with some removals on the ventral face. SF 40. 212/A/1  
 L: 63 mm.                      W: 35 mm.                      Th: 9 mm.

## THE POTTERY (Fig. 6), by C. UNDERWOOD-KEEVILL

*Introduction*

A total of 6.6 kg. of pottery was recovered. Most of the material, 16% and 48% of the total assemblage weight respectively, was from SFBs 107 and 108. The assemblage was divided into fabric types on the basis of the main inclusions or tempering added to the clay based on the Peacock system of analysis.<sup>25</sup> All fabrics were analyzed macroscopically, and microscopically under a  $\times 20$  microscope. Four groups were recognised:

Group 1. Sand gritted, fabric types 1, 10-17 and 100, and also Roman sandy wares 0.1, 0.11 and 0.6

Group 2. Flint gritted, fabric types 2 and 20.

Group 3. Organic tempered, fabric types 3, 30-32.

Group 4. Limestone and shell tempered, fabric types 4, 40-46.

A post-medieval fabric group consisting of red earthenware was also present. All of these fabrics have been described in detail and compared with assemblages from Barrow Hills, Radley,<sup>26</sup> and Barton Court Farm,

<sup>24</sup> A.L. Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets and Curing Stones* (BAR 96, 1981), 88-90.

<sup>25</sup> D.P.S. Peacock, 'Ceramics in Roman and Medieval Archaeology', in D.P.S. Peacock (ed.), *Pottery and Early Commerce* (1977).

<sup>26</sup> S. Raven, 'The Early Saxon Pottery', in R.A. Chambers and E. McAdam, *Barrow Hills* (in preparation); the Fabric Type Series created by Ms. Raven was extensively consulted during the preparation of this report.

Abingdon.<sup>27</sup> The fabric series from Barrow Hills was subjected to thin section analysis,<sup>28</sup> and information from this has been used to establish possible clay source areas for comparable material from Audlett Drive. The assemblage has also been compared to the Oxford and Oxfordshire fabric series in order to provenance the later material. Any comparative fabric codes mentioned in the text that have not been referenced to published material have been compared with unpublished fabric series that have been maintained for each site in question; these are currently held by the Oxford Archaeological Unit.

A brief summary of the fabric types is included here to add to information on the distribution of different fabric types in Oxfordshire. Correspondence between the different fabric groups at the various sites is noted in the fabric descriptions below.

### *Group 1: Sandy Wares*

#### *Fabric 1*

Fabric 1 is the predominant fabric and consists of a red-brown to grey cored, gritty sandy fabric with coarse honey-coloured quartz and dense clear finer quartz grits. Occasional organic voids are apparent especially on the surface. Wide-necked, slack-shouldered jars with simple everted rims are the main form (catalogue nos 9–10). Decoration usually comprises horizontal lined burnishing, although two sherds of fingernail impressed rusticated decoration are also apparent (catalogue no. 12).

This fabric is equivalent to Barrow Hills fabric type 24 and Barton Court farm fabric type 1. It is also dominant at Barrow Hills.

#### *Fabric 10: Coarse sandy ware*

This is a dark grey to black ware with very coarse clear-white, rounded quartz and coarse, sub-angular, abundant clear quartz. Most of the examples have thick walls and a roughened exterior. No vessel types can be confidently reconstructed. A similar coarse sandy fabric appears at Barton Court Farm as a division of the main fabric group, fabric 1A.

#### *Fabric 11: Fine burnished sandy ware*

A fine walled, burnished dark grey-brown to dark grey fabric with very fine to fine clear quartz and very fine sparse white limestone. This is similar to the fine sandy fabric 26 at Barrow Hills.

#### *Fabric 12: Soft sandy ware*

A grey-brown, very soft fabric with extremely fine clear quartz (just visible under a  $\times 20$  microscope). This is equivalent to Barrow Hills fabric 22. The type has been attributed by thin-section analysis to a Reading beds clay similar to that found at Ramsbury and Swindon, Wiltshire.<sup>29</sup> A similar fabric type is present in Oxford (code CR), often finely burnished with stamped and incised decoration.

#### *Fabric 13: Coarse sand and organic tempered*

This is a very thick walled fabric with very coarse red-orange rounded quartz, common organic impressions, sparse coarse limestone and sparse, very coarse, angular flint. It is equivalent to Barrow Hills fabric type 23, which possibly has a north Midland source.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Fabric 14*

This is a fine, clear quartz gritted fabric, with red iron ore flecks which are very prominent on the surface. This fabric is only represented by six non-diagnostic sherds.

#### *Fabric 15*

This is a quartz tempered fabric, differentiated from fabric 1 by the presence of red/brown rounded quartz. The thickness of the sherds is also markedly different, with finer walled vessels being dominant in fabric 15.

<sup>27</sup> Miles, *op. cit.* note 5.

<sup>28</sup> A.G. Vince, 'The Petrography of Saxon and Early Medieval Pottery in the Thames Valley', in J. Henderson (ed.), *Scientific Analysis in Archaeology* (OUCA Monograph 19, 1989), 163–77.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

*Fabric 16*

A finely burnished dark grey-black fabric type with fine to moderate rounded clear quartz and occasional coarse shell and a laminated fracture. The forms are represented by a pedestal ring base and simple upright round topped rims, mainly from SFB 108 (catalogue no. 4).

*Fabric 17: Michelmersh type ware*

This is a distinctive hard fine sandy fabric, with an orange-buff to grey-blue colour range. The inclusions, which are very fine, can only be distinguished under a  $\times 20$  microscope, and consist of clear sub-angular quartz and sparse red iron ore. One decorated sherd with a raised applied clay strip and punched dot decoration is probably associated with a spouted pitcher form (catalogue no. 15). All of the examples are from ditch 109/B/1. This fabric is found at Hamwih and Portchester in 10th- and 11th-century contexts.<sup>31</sup>

*Roman fabrics*

Four Roman fabrics are present: RO.1, a fine orange fabric with red slip; RO.6, a mortaria fabric with dense white quartz grits; RO.11, a dense sandy grey ware; and RO.12, a soft orange fine sandy fabric. The most prevalent fabric type is the red slipped ware, RO.1, an Oxfordshire fabric type. A flagon, a flanged bowl and bowl bases have been illustrated in this fabric to show an unusual flagon rim not present in the Oxfordshire corpus, and the extent of wear and re-use evident on the base and rim sherds (catalogue nos 1-3). All were from SFB contexts.

*Group 2: Flint tempered wares**Fabric 2: Reduced flint gritted ware*

A very harsh, granular textured fabric type with angular moderate to coarse red and grey flint, white sub-angular quartz and moderate amounts of limestone voids. This fabric has a waxy/shiny surface and pimply appearance. The vessel types are limited to everted flat-topped/bevelled rimmed cooking pots (catalogue no. 16).

*Fabric 20: Oxidised flint gritted ware*

An orange-red to grey brown distinctive fabric with very coarse angular grey flint, moderately fine rounded clear to red quartz and medium sized limestone commonly observed on the surface. The body sherds indicate globular bodied cooking pots. This is comparable with Wallingford type 13 and Chalgrove type 003.

*Group 3: Organic tempered wares**Fabric 3: Dense organic tempered ware*

This fabric has a high proportion of organic temper which mainly consists of long thin striated voids and linear voids, and occasional brown quartz and very fine clear mica. It is equivalent to Barrow Hills fabric 50.

*Fabric 30*

Fabric 30 is very similar to fabric type 1 in inclusion type, but the clear rounded quartz is finer and less dense. There is also the addition of regular-sized organic temper. The fabric can be equated with Barrow Hills fabric type 53, a silty fine organic tempered ware, which occurred in later levels.

*Fabric 31: Organic soft sandy ware*

The fabric consists of a fine sandy paste similar to fabric 12, with rounded occasional coarse white quartz and common very fine clear mica, but it also has short triangular voids and elongated fine voids indicating different types of organic temper. The sherds are thicker than fabric 12 sherds, but fine wipe marks are still present. The fabric is similar to fabric 27 in the Barrow Hills series.

*Fabric 32*

Fabric 32 can be distinguished by its light orange to light grey exterior surface and dark grey interior, by the moderate white and honey coloured sub-angular quartz, and also by thin elongated organic and seed-like voids. The fabric has a lightly burnished exterior. The fabric is also represented at Barrow Hills, fabric 52, and Barton Court Farm, fabric 3.

<sup>31</sup> J.G. Hurst, 'The Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in D. Wilson (ed.), *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (1976), 337-8.

*Group 4: Shell and limestone tempered wares*

The fabric types in this group are frequently only represented by one sherd. The fabric types have been retained at present because they are very distinctive visually, but further work in the area may enlarge present knowledge of the extent and date range of calcareous wares.

*Fabric 4: St Neots type ware*

Equivalent to Abingdon fabric type H and Oxford type R. This is dated in Oxford to the 10th–11th century or earlier.<sup>32</sup>

*Fabric 40*

This is a fine limestone tempered fabric; the temper is especially common on the surface. Fine sub-angular quartz is also common. The vessel types are limited to knife-trimmed short everted rim cooking pots. The fabric may be equivalent to Abingdon type K.

*Fabric 41*

A shelly limestone tempered fabric, with common fine to moderate limestone and extremely fine clear mica in a dark grey fabric. Two sherds which represent this fabric: one from SFB 108 with a burnished punched dot decoration, and the other from ditch 116 with stamped rosette decoration and incised lines (catalogue no. 14). A coarser version of this fabric is represented at Barton Court Farm, fabric 2.

*Fabric 42*

A very fine shelly fabric, with fine brown to honey quartz additions. The majority of the sherds in this fabric come from ditch 116.

*Fabric 43*

A dense sand and fine limestone fabric with moderate to coarse limestone voids, common clear sub-angular quartz and occasional red iron ore. The fabric has a finely burnished, almost glossy polish to the exterior. It is equivalent to Barrow Hills fabric 4.

*Fabric 44*

A black to dark grey fabric with abundant fine to moderate white shell and sparse angular white quartz. Decoration is limited to exterior burnishing. The equivalent at Barrow Hills, fabric 2, has burnished dot decoration.

*Fabric 45*

A micaceous fabric with sparse fine to moderate limestone voids and a smooth powdery feel.

*Fabric 46*

A soft pliable paste with coarse soft light brown grog additions. This possibly has an equivalent in a rare fabric type at Barrow Hills, fabric 60.

*Fabric 47*

An orange surfaced, dark grey cored fabric, with moderate to coarse sub-angular clear quartz and sparse moderate to coarse limestone and flint. No vessel forms can be reconstructed. The thickness of the sherds and the firing have some similarities with fabric type 1. The majority of the sherds in this fabric are from ditch contexts 103 and 116.

*Fabric 48*

Fabric 48 is probably a medieval fabric, with a hard grey 'corky' appearance similar to Minety type ware of the 13th to 14th-century.

*Results*

Amounts and percentages of fabric types have been calculated for the whole site for fabric 1, the main fabric type, the organic fabric group 3, and the limestone and shell tempered group 4 (with the exception of the late

<sup>32</sup> R. Haldon with a contribution by M. Mellor, 'Late Saxon and Medieval Pottery', in B. Durham, 'Archaeological Investigations in St. Aldate's, Oxford', *Oxoniensia*, xlii (1977), 111–39.



types such as the St. Neots ware and the medieval fabrics). Fabric 1 is represented by 99 sherds weighing 2.217 kg., 33% of the fabric total by weight; the organic group comprises 51 sherds weighing 720 g., 11% of the total by weight; and the limestone group amounts to 33 sherds weighing 252 g., 4% of the total by weight. Fabric 1 is also the dominant type at Barton Court Farm (76% of the assemblage), Barrow Hills, Radley and Long Wittenham,<sup>33</sup> and is equivalent to the common fabric at Sutton Courtenay.<sup>34</sup> It can be described as a Gault clay and Lower Greensand mix which is available locally, in the area E. of the Thames. Other fabrics, such as 12 and 13, may have clay sources in Wiltshire and the north Midlands.

Vince, in his study of the Barrow Hills assemblage,<sup>35</sup> suggests that production within the parish at Radley is unlikely for much of the pottery, and that the majority may have been obtained from a distance of 10 km. or more. The close affinities in fabric types between the various sites in the Abingdon area does suggest some common source or mechanisms of exchange. The use of non-local material for a basic commodity such as pottery could suggest a surplus of certain goods that were being exchanged for manufactured goods from elsewhere.

The dating of the fabrics and forms is problematic. Quartz inclusions tend to occur on early, middle and late Anglo-Saxon sites in the Thames Valley. The occurrence and relative amounts of organic and calcite gritted pottery may provide a relative chronology.<sup>36</sup> At Shakenoak, it was suggested that organic tempering began in the 6th century and dominated in the later 6th century.<sup>37</sup> It has also been proposed that grass-tempering started in the 5th century at Barnsley, Gloucestershire.<sup>38</sup>

Within the Abingdon area Brown has suggested that organic tempering may begin early in the 6th century.<sup>39</sup> The small proportions of the organic tempered and calcareous wares within the Audlett Drive assemblage make dating difficult. The lack of later material such as lugged vessels, the one instance of an early form (the pedestal ring base in fabric 16 from context 108), and the lack of decorated material would suggest a date range in the 6th/7th centuries, similar to the later phases at Barrow Hills. Unlike Barton Court Farm there is no flint tempered early Saxon pottery.

The late Saxon pottery from ditches 103, 109 and 116 has parallels at Oxford. The highly gritty reduced flint and limestone wares, such as the slightly everted flat topped rim cooking pots, occur in the mid-10th century at St. Aldates.<sup>40</sup> St. Neots rolled rim cooking pots found in ditch 103 date to the 10th–11th century in Oxford. Michelmersh type ware (Oxford type K), of which there were three sherds from ditch 109, is found in 10th-century contexts in Oxford.

The distribution of fabric groups within different context types has also been examined in order to elucidate the dating and infilling mechanisms. The majority of the material as noted above was retrieved from SFBs 107 and 108 with a small amount from SFB 118. The predominant fabric types in these contexts are the sandy wares (Group 1), with a reasonably high proportion of organic tempered sherds (Group 3): 16% and 18% by number in contexts 108 and 107 respectively. The calcareous and Roman fabric types comprise only a small amount: 4% by number and 2% and 11% by weight in both contexts. The average sherd size calculations for both contexts are indicative of large sherds, especially in context 108, where an average sherd size of 25 g. indicates rapid infilling with little or no surface wear. These sherds are unlikely to have been left on the surface or on floors; the lack of wear and large sherd size suggest rapid incorporation into deposits.

The sandy wares, particularly in SFB 108, are dominated by fabric type 1, and reconstruction of vessel types suggests that only two to three vessels may be represented in this deposit. The small amounts of material from postholes contain a high proportion of organic tempered wares and Roman material. The average sherd size of around 6.25 g. for contexts 111, 112 and 113 shows that these sherds may have been lying on surfaces, becoming incorporated in the fills of the postholes due to their small size.

The percentages of fabric types at Barton Court Farm included a high proportion of colour-coated Nene Valley ware in Saxon contexts. It is possible that the more colourful Roman wares were deliberately selected for re-use. The wear marks on some rims and bases may indicate re-use as rubbing tools. Most of the wear appears on the under edge of flanged rims, or on the bottom of ring bases chopped or cut away from the bottom of the vessel. In a larger assemblage it may be possible to link this with the amounts of burnishing visible. Other possible uses include cloth finishing or food preparation. Chemical analysis on a large sample might help to resolve this.

<sup>33</sup> Raven, op. cit. note 26.

<sup>34</sup> F. Berisford, 'The Anglo-Saxon Pottery', in A.C.C. Brodrick, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak III* (1972), 57.

<sup>35</sup> Vince, op. cit. note 28, 168.

<sup>36</sup> Berisford, op. cit. note 34, 58.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Hurst, op. cit. note 31, 294.

<sup>39</sup> M. Avery and D. Brown, 'Saxon Features at Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 66–81.

<sup>40</sup> Haldon, op. cit. note 32.

The ditch contexts 103, 109 and 116 show a high proportion of late Saxon flint and limestone gritted fabric types: 2, 20, 4 and 40. The late Saxon fabrics amount to 70% by number and 56% by weight in ditch 103, and 70% by number and 78% by weight in ditch 109. Ditch 116 is anomalous; it has a relatively high proportion of early Saxon sandy wares (32% by number and 18% by weight) and Saxon calcareous wares (21% by number and 10% by weight), and an even higher proportion of Roman fabrics. The amounts of late Saxon flint and limestone wares are correspondingly lower with only 26% by number and 48% by weight. This suggests either a slow infill of the ditch or the incorporation of residual material from elsewhere. The average sherd sizes for the different fabric groups that are present in ditch 116, with early Saxon sandy and calcareous wares averaging 5 g. and the late Saxon flint and limestone 19 g., suggests that residual material has been incorporated. For all the ditch contexts the average sherd size is approximately 10 g., which could suggest similar depositional mechanisms; it would equally, however, be a reflection of assemblage size in each context.

### *Catalogue (Fig. 6)*

The following abbreviations will be found in this catalogue: FT fabric type; RO Roman; ES early Saxon; and LS late Saxon.

1. Flagon rim. 'Pulley' type rim and cord on with rouletting on neck. This a combination of Young types C14, jug type and C16, narrow necked jar.<sup>41</sup> FT: RO.1. 107/A/1
2. Bodysherd of flanged bowl. Young type C51 or C52.<sup>42</sup> Rim has been removed by chipping/chopping and there is wear on the edge of the flange. FT: RO.1. 108/A/1
3. Base of bowl. Young type C51 or C52, which is often used as a small mortar as evidenced by the wear on the interior surface from use.<sup>43</sup> The base has been roughly trimmed off. FT: RO.1. 108/A/1
4. Pedestal base. Burnished exterior. FT: ES16. 108/A/1
5. Small flat base to rounded jar. FT: ES1. 108/A/1
6. Round topped rim to bowl. Burnished in fine lines on interior and exterior. FT: ES11. 107/B
7. Straight sided jar. FT: ES30. 108/A/1
8. Jar with incurving rim. FT: ES30. 108/B/1
9. Shouldered jar. FT: ES1. 108/A/1
10. Everted rim shouldered jar. FT: ES1. 108/A/1
11. Everted bead rimmed jar. FT: ES3. 108/A/1
12. Finger nail impressed, rusticated type decoration on thick walled bodysherd. FT: ES1. 108/B/1
13. Rosette stamped and incised line decorated sherd. FT: ES41. 116/A/1
14. Punched dot and burnished line decorated bodysherd. FT: ES41. 108/A/1
15. Decorated bodysherd with applied strips and impressed dot square motif. A Michelmersh pitcher type. FT: LS17. 109/B/1
16. Flat topped, slightly everted rimmed cooking pot. FT: LS2. 2/5/1
17. Rolled everted rimmed cooking pot. St. Neots type. FT: LS4. 109/B/1

<sup>41</sup> C.J. Young, *The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region* (BAR 43, 1977), 148-60.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

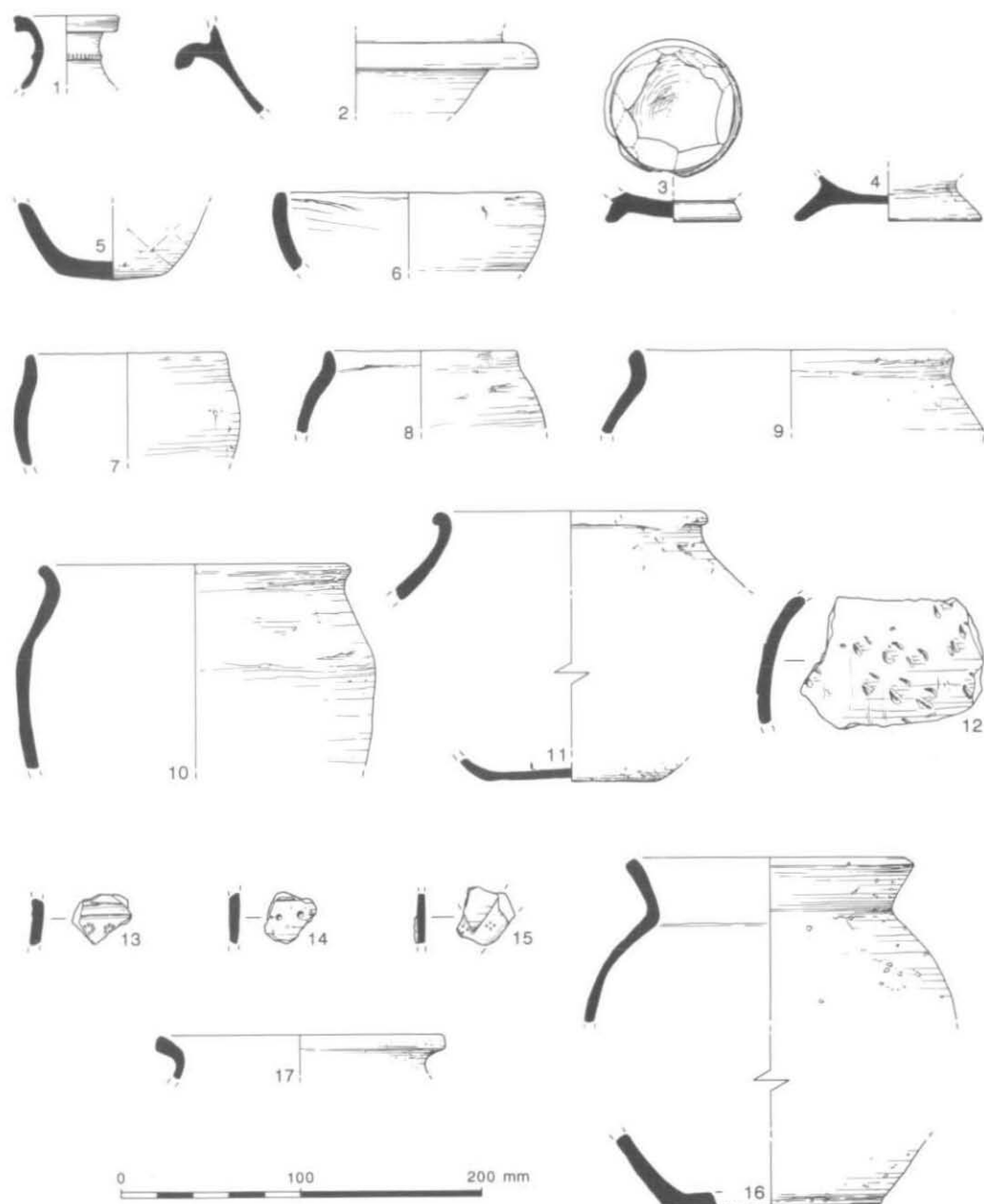


Fig. 6. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Pottery.

## THE DAUB

Coarse fragments of daub were recovered from four features, two of early Saxon and two of late Saxon date. There was no apparent variation in fabric. One piece had an impression of a vertical rod, and another of a horizontal nail; both were from ditch 109. The weights of each assemblage are: 31 g., SFB 107; 8 g., posthole 123 (part of SFB 108); 1.445 kg., ditch 109; and 620g., ditch 116.

## THE ANIMAL BONE, by B. LEVITAN

A small assemblage of 683 bones was recovered during the excavations. Most were from Saxon deposits, as is shown by Table 1. Phase O produced negligible amounts and, while the two Saxon phases produced larger groups, they are still small. Such a small assemblage cannot necessarily be seen as representative of the original site activities.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF VERTEBRATE REMAINS

Phase	Date	No. of bones	No. identified to taxon
I	Early Saxon	545	181 + dog burial
II	Late Saxon	114	39
O	Unphased	24	9
TOTAL		683	229

The bones are generally fragmented and somewhat weathered, but not badly degraded. Gnawing was noted on some bones. A few fragments were burnt or charred. The unphased material is described in archive.

TABLE 2: SUMMARY OF SAXON BONES (&lt; = less than 1%)

Taxon	Early Saxon		Late Saxon		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cattle	91	51	17	49	108	51
Sheep/goat	67	38	11	31	78	37
Pig	15	8	6	17	21	10
Horse	4	2			4	2
Dog		Burial	1	3	1	<
Sub-total	177	32	35	31	212	32
Domestic fowl	2	5	3	75	5	63
Goose	1	25	1	25	2	25
Teal	1	25			1	13
Sub-total	4	1	4	4	8	1
Large mammal	211	58	40	53	251	57
Medium mammal	151	41	35	47	184	42
Bird	2	<			2	<
Sub-total	364	67	75	66	439	67
TOTAL	545	83	114	17	659	100

Although the samples are small, it is interesting to note the similarities between the two phases. The proportion of unidentified bone is within one percentage point, and the relative frequencies of cattle and sheep/goat are very similar, in parallel with those of large and medium mammals. These similarities suggest that there was little variation in the assemblage profiles through the Saxon period. This is interesting because the early Saxon material mostly comes from SFBs, whereas the later material is from ditches and gullies.

The dog burial, from SFB 118, occurred in a virtually central position on the pit floor. 58 bones were recovered, though the hindlimbs are not present. Measurement of the forelimb bones indicates that the dog would have a shoulder height of 366 mm. (coefficient of variation: 1.6%). This is close to the bottom of the range for Saxon dogs,<sup>44</sup> and represents a small breed. The skull is too damaged to provide cranial indices. There is no direct evidence for the significance of the burial, but it may have been intended to mark the foundation or abandonment of the structure.

Anatomical, ageing, metrical and butchery evidence were recorded. Details are not provided here because the sample size is too small for analysis. The relevant information is available in archive.

This small assemblage is typical of a normal, domestic Saxon site. Richer sites often have higher proportions of pig and cattle, and game animals such as deer and rabbit can be present. Poorer sites do not tend to have such material. The available evidence suggests that this assemblage is from a lower status site.

## DISCUSSION

### *Structural interpretation of postholes*

An attempt has been made to extract building plans out of the mass of pits/postholes. The results are shown in Figure 7. Volumetric analysis was of no help in producing these plans. Quantitative analysis has been used elsewhere,<sup>45</sup> but such techniques could not be used within the resources available on this project.

Two types of structure were identified: sub-circular, and rectangular/linear. It must be stressed, however, that the structures are largely notional. Only Structure 1 was recognised during the excavation, and it will be seen that Structures 2, 3 and 6 share several common features. Furthermore the large number of unexcavated features immediately S. of Structure 4 could support numerous different building plans. Indeed a possible rectangular structure can be seen between Structures 4 and 9.

The linear structures, 6 and 7, would be best interpreted as fence lines. It has already been noted that these run parallel to late Saxon ditch 116. It would be tempting to see the fences as revetting for banks associated with the ditch. It must be stressed, however, that four postholes in structure 7 contained either Iron Age pottery or earlier prehistoric flintwork.

The rectangular structures, 5 and 8, measure 5 m.  $\times$  2 m. and 6.7  $\times$  3.7 m. respectively. As such they fall within the lower end of the size range for early-mid Saxon timber buildings.<sup>46</sup> It has been suggested that structures of this size are functionally distinct from halls as such.<sup>47</sup> It must be stressed again, however, that the dating of these postholes is uncertain and none can certainly be assigned to the Saxon period; indeed the balance of probability is that they are of later prehistoric date. These buildings cannot, therefore, be accepted as Saxon.

<sup>44</sup> R. Harcourt, 'The Dog in Prehistoric and Early Historic Britain', *J. Archaeol. Sci.* i (1974), 171.

<sup>45</sup> R. Bradley and C. Small, 'Looking for Circular Structures in Post Hole Distributions: Quantitative Analysis of Two Settlements from Bronze Age England', *J. Archaeol. Sci.* xii (1985), 285-97.

<sup>46</sup> P.J. Huggins, 'Anglo-Saxon Timber Building Measurements: Recent Results', *Medieval Archaeology* xxxv (1991), 6-28; A. Marshall and G. Marshall, 'A Survey and Analysis of the Buildings of Early and Middle Anglo-Saxon England', *Medieval Archaeology* xxxv (1991), 29-43.

<sup>47</sup> D. Powlesland, *The Anglo-Saxon Village at West Heslerton, North Yorkshire* (1990), 8-9.

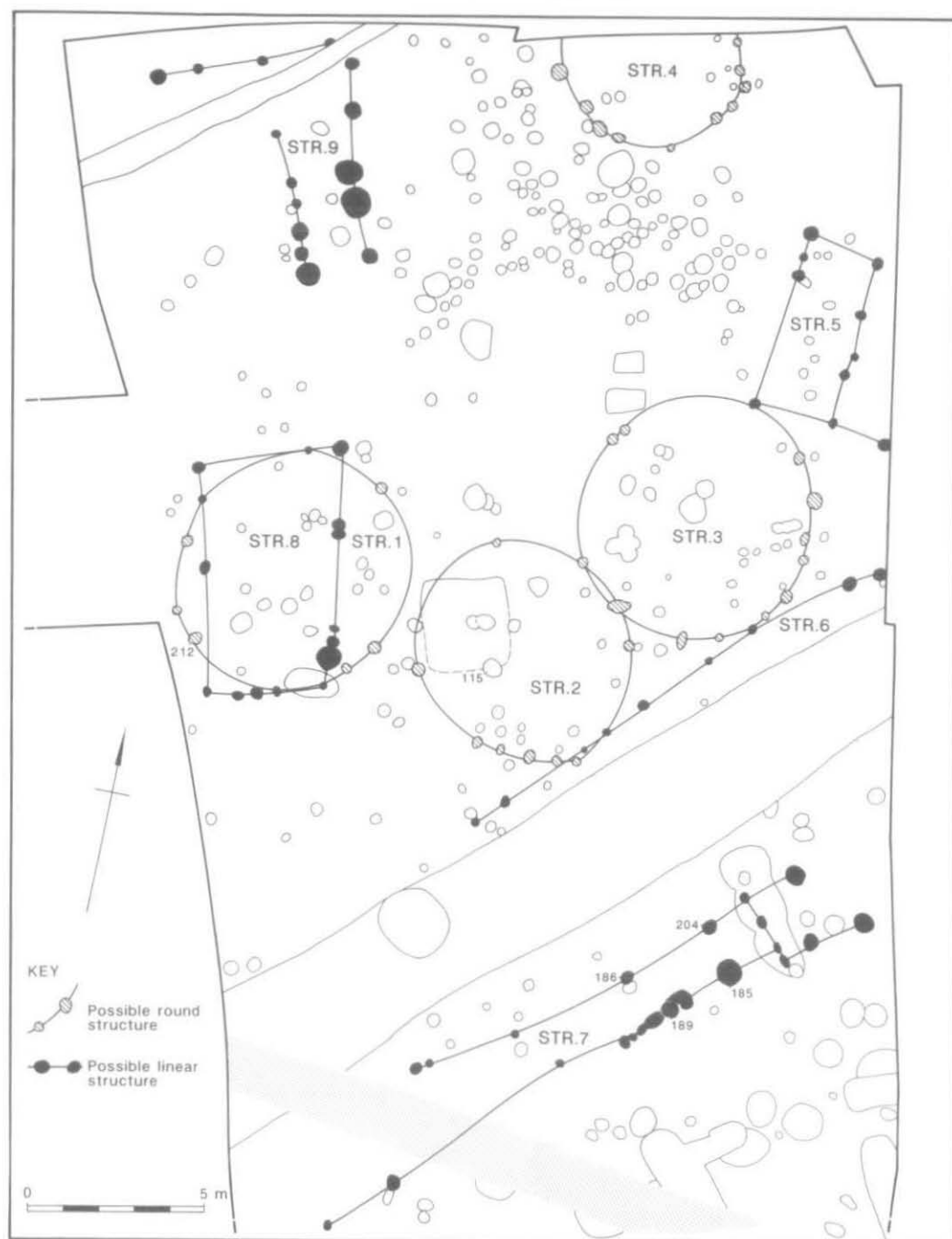


Fig. 7. Audlett Drive, Abingdon: Interpretative plan of postholes showing possible structures.

*The early Saxon settlement*

The importance of the Upper Thames valley for early Saxon studies has long been recognized. The Abingdon/Dorchester-on-Thames area is critical in this respect because settlements and cemeteries were in use from the early-mid 5th century onwards.<sup>48</sup> Re-use of Roman sites has been demonstrated in some instances, most notably at Dorchester itself, but also at the Barton Court Farm villa.<sup>49</sup> It has not been possible, however, convincingly to demonstrate continuity as such. The Audlett Drive site did not produce definite evidence for Roman structures, although pottery and coins were found in the early Saxon features. One of the coins was in fine condition, and several of the potsherds were large and unabraded. It is possible, therefore, that a Roman site exists in the immediate vicinity. Indeed Roman material has been found on the Abbey Barton site, within 100 m. to the N. on the other side of Audlett Drive.<sup>50</sup>

The early Saxon occupation is difficult to date precisely. Most of the small finds are not diagnostic of a tightly defined period. The antler spindlewhorls, for instance, have parallels ranging in date from the 5th to the 7th centuries. The antler comb may be of the later 6th century, but again an earlier date is not implausible. The pottery is clearly crucial, in that it was the predominant finds category. The assemblage does not contain obviously 5th-century material, but seems instead to be characteristic of the 6th-7th centuries.

The dating evidence is mostly from the SFB pits. It was clear that SFBs 107 and 108 had been deliberately backfilled, as at least one posthole in each structure was sealed by the pit infill. Very few finds occurred on the floors; most of the finds came from the backfills. The dating, therefore, relates to the abandonment of the structures rather than their use. The large average sherd size and general lack of abrasion, however, is consistent with the assimilation of the ceramics into the soil matrix very soon after discard. The lack of earlier pottery shows that the use of the SFBs cannot be placed earlier than the 6th century. The evidence suggests that the structures were used during the 6th-7th centuries and were abandoned during the 7th.

While there were no stratigraphic relationships between the buildings, it seems unlikely that SFBs 108 and 118 could have been in use at the same time as they are only 0.5 m. apart. Unfortunately the finds from the two structures are of no assistance in determining the sequence of use.

The three SFBs conform to the typical plan of a simple pit with posts at each end to support a ridge pole; beyond this, however, they are slightly different in plan. SFB 118 appears to be the most simple, although the extent of modern disturbance may well have removed evidence for internal arrangements. SFB 107 contained two postholes cut into the floor of the pit on its central axis between the ridge posts. The posts intercut, so that they cannot be seen as settings for a loom. They might be additional supports for the ridge pole. This would militate against the provision of a suspended floor above the pit.

SFB 108 is perhaps the most interesting structure, as a pair of external postholes N. of the pit and apparently paired with the ridge posts may belong to the structure. No corresponding settings could be found S. of the pit. Had such posts been present the

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Leeds and Harden, *op. cit.* note 14; D. Miles, 'Abingdon and Region: Early Anglo-Saxon Settlement Evidence', in T. Rowley (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Settlement and Landscape* (BAR 6, 1974), 36-41.

<sup>49</sup> Miles, *op. cit.* note 5, 17-19, 51-3.

<sup>50</sup> Pottery and burials found in 1865: *Archaeol. Jnl.* xxii (1865), 82 and 162-3; and a coin of Constantine II found in 1962 (Oxfordshire County Sites and Monuments Record, no. 2902).

structural form could be paralleled in England<sup>51</sup> and on the Continent,<sup>52</sup> but the porch-like arrangement N. of SFB 108 is more unusual.

The function of the SFBs cannot be determined with confidence. Evidence for weaving was found in the form of ceramic and lead loomweights and antler spindlewhorls. The latter and the antler comb might have been made on site, and the antler offcut may be significant in this respect. Such craft industries are commonly attested on early Saxon sites, however, and their presence cannot be taken as proof that either activity was carried out in a particular SFB.

It has been suggested recently that many SFBs were used as storage sheds or granaries.<sup>53</sup> This may be the case for SFB 108, but is unlikely for SFB 107 because of the apparent lack of a suspended floor. All three SFBs are small, and habitation would not seem to be their primary function. It should be noted, however, that the evidence for post-built structures is unconvincing, so that habitable structures are not otherwise present.

Zoning of sites by function or property has been identified on some early Saxon sites.<sup>54</sup> The limited nature of the evidence makes it impossible to undertake such analyses in this case. The character of the settlement, however, is more amenable to interpretation. The SFBs are dispersed within an open landscape and seem to be characteristic of farmstead activity.<sup>55</sup> There is no evidence of the nucleation apparent at West Heslerton,<sup>56</sup> even though a substantial area was excavated. A similar sparsity was noted on the Vineyard excavations.<sup>57</sup> Both of these sites, therefore, must be peripheral to any core settlement of the early Saxon period in Abingdon.

Possible evidence for ritual in domestic life was recovered. The dog burial on the floor of SFB 118 appears to be a deliberate deposit analogous to the 'ritual' deposits so often found on the base of Iron Age grain storage pits.<sup>58</sup> The burial may have been a foundation deposit, although abandonment might seem to be a more appropriate occasion if only on environmental health grounds. The recovery of a quartz pebble amulet from SFB 108, by contrast, seems to represent everyday superstition.<sup>59</sup>

The site was deserted for about three centuries after the abandonment of the SFBs. The total absence of mid-Saxon finds suggests that the land had become waste, without even low-level agricultural use. Then, either in the late 10th or more probably the early 11th century, a major linear boundary was laid out close to the edge of the gravel terrace. Smaller boundaries were established in parallel or at right angles to it, perhaps marking out a series of strip fields. Archaeological evidence for the late Saxon period in and around Abingdon is generally lacking.<sup>60</sup>

Audlett Drive lies outside and to the E. of the precinct of Abingdon Abbey. As such it has lain outside the urban centre at least since mid-Saxon times. It has already been

<sup>51</sup> W. and M.U. Jones, 'The Early Saxon Landscape at Mucking, Essex', in Rowley (ed.), op. cit. note 48, 23-4.

<sup>52</sup> e.g. G. de Boe, 'De Romeinse Vicus op de Steenberg te Grabbendonk', *Archaeologia Belgica*, xcvi (1977), 42.

<sup>53</sup> Powlesland, op. cit. note 47, 10-11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 2-4; Miles, op. cit. note 5, 18; M. Gray, 'The Saxon settlement at New Wintles, Eynsham, Oxon', in Rowley (ed.), op. cit. note 48, 53.

<sup>55</sup> Gray, op. cit. note 54, 54.

<sup>56</sup> Powlesland, op. cit. note 47, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Allen, op. cit. note 8, 26.

<sup>58</sup> G.D. Keevill and P.J. Fasham, *Brighton Hill South Heritage Project: First Interim report 1984-1985* (1985).

<sup>59</sup> Meany, op. cit. note 24.

<sup>60</sup> I am grateful to Tim Allen for discussing this with me.



noted that the medieval abbey barton lies on the other side of the road from the excavation, although Preston asserted that the barton had originally been to the W. of its current site, contiguous with the precinct.<sup>61</sup> The site produced no evidence to throw light on this question. Medieval finds were conspicuously scarce, and the area appears to have returned to waste after the late Saxon occupation until quarrying took place in modern times.

<sup>61</sup> A.E. Preston, *St Nicholas, Abingdon and Other Papers* (1929), 36-40.