

REPORTS

A Roman Settlement at Bicester Park, Bicester, Oxfordshire

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SUMMARY

Excavation by Northamptonshire Archaeology for Gifford in advance of a new industrial estate at Bicester Park, on the outskirts of Bicester, examined part of a Roman rural settlement lying just over 3 km north-east of the small Roman town of Alchester. The settlement may have been established with respect to a linear land boundary of late Iron Age/early Roman origin and was in use from the later first century AD to the late third to early fourth centuries AD. It was defined by a rectilinear ditch system that was heavily truncated but had probably formed a series of rectangular enclosures and sub-enclosures, with the northern area separated from a domestic area to the south by a trackway. The trackway and the boundary ditches were slightly realigned in the third century. Activity in the domestic area included pit groups, soil-filled hollows, and two wells, one of which was stone-lined. These probably lay at the margin of a more extensive domestic focus lying largely beyond the excavated area. The pottery assemblage has a very low average sherd weight and includes a limited range of material, with few higher status finewares, and the animal bone assemblage is similarly poor. Other finds were also sparse, with only three coins recovered, while a small amount of iron slag is suggestive of small-scale secondary smithing. In contrast to the bulk of the material evidence, which indicates that this was a rural settlement of relatively low status, part of a wooden writing tablet came from a well.

Northamptonshire Archaeology was commissioned by Gifford on behalf of Kier Property Developments Limited to conduct an archaeological evaluation, followed by open-area excavation, on land at Bicester Park Industrial Estate, Bicester, Oxfordshire, in advance of proposed development comprising industrial buildings and associated infrastructure (Figs 1 and 2: NGR SP 6002 2239).

A geophysical survey had been undertaken early in 2004,¹ and this recorded faint traces of potential features of archaeological interest. As a condition of the planning consent, the impact of the development on these archaeological remains was mitigated through a programme of archaeological works, which was outlined in a Design Brief for Archaeological Field Evaluation, issued by Oxfordshire County Council.² A Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) was subsequently prepared by Gifford.³

¹ 'Bicester, Oxfordshire, Geophysical report, J1878' (Stratascan, TS report, 2004).

² 'Bicester Park, Bicester: a design brief for archaeological field evaluation' (Oxfordshire County Council, TS report, 2004).

³ S. Steadman, 'Written scheme of investigation for archaeological evaluation, Bicester Park Phase 4' (Gifford and Partners Ltd, TS report 11026/096/RO3, 2004).



Fig. 1. Location of excavation and other local Roman and Saxon sites

Ten trial trenches were excavated in July 2004, but as the archaeological programme proceeded straight to open area excavation, no evaluation report was issued. The open area excavation was completed during October 2004, and an assessment report and updated project design was prepared in January 2005.⁴ The client report, upon which this published report is based, was issued in 2007.⁵

LOCATION, TOPOGRAPHY, AND GEOLOGY

Bicester lies within the confluence of the Gagle brook and the river Ray, the latter lying to the east of Bicester and flowing south to join the river Cherwell north of Oxford. The development site, which covers an area of 2.3 hectares, lies approximately 1.4 km to the east of the present town centre of Bicester (Fig. 1). It is bounded by existing industrial units to the west and north, by Charbridge Lane to the east, and by the London to Birmingham railway line to the south (Fig. 2).

The site is generally flat, at about 70 m above OD. A small stream runs north-east to south-west to the immediate west of the development site. The underlying geology has been recorded by the British Geological Survey as Oxford clay and lies in the cornbrash geological area.⁶

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

There are a number of prehistoric, Roman, and early/middle Saxon sites and monuments in the immediate vicinity, as listed in the local Historic Environment Record (HER) – formerly the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) – and the National Monuments Record (NMR) (Fig. 1). The earliest remains, identified from cropmarks, probably date to the Bronze Age. These include two ring ditches on the south-western outskirts of Bicester (NM-338911) and four possible Bronze Age ring ditches, at least three of which have now been destroyed, to the north and north-west of the current site. A middle Bronze Age cremation has been found adjacent to Gagle brook, off Chesterton Lane (HER 16213), near to Alchester Roman town.

There is evidence for middle Iron Age settlement in the area, notably from excavations near to the Chesterton Lane/A421 junction to the west of Bicester and from cropmarks near one corner of the Roman walled town of Alchester. Excavation at Bicester Fields Farm, about 0.7 km to the south-west of the development site,⁷ located a settlement of probable middle to late Iron Age date (HER 16120, Bicester Fields Farm). In addition, a possible Iron Age pit was identified in an evaluation on land north of Gavray Drive, about 0.5 km to the west of the current site.⁸

There is a significant number of known and investigated settlement sites dating to the late Iron Age and Roman periods in the vicinity. Within the immediate area a Romano-British settlement (HER 16071) was discovered during an archaeological field evaluation less than 100 m to the south of the current site.⁹ This comprised a ditched enclosure of probable second-century date, with evidence for Anglo-Saxon activity. The archaeological features continued to the north, towards the railway line, suggesting that it may be a continuation of the Bicester Park settlement being

⁴ Ailsa Westgarth, 'Archaeological excavation at Bicester Park, Bicester, Oxfordshire, July-October 2004: assessment report and updated project design' (Northamptonshire Archaeology TS report, 05/009, 2005).

⁵ Ailsa Westgarth and Simon Carlyle, 'A Roman settlement at Bicester Park, Bicester, Oxfordshire' (Northamptonshire Archaeology TS Report, 06/141, 2007).

⁶ www.bgs.ac.uk/geoindex/index.htm (accessed 13 July 2003).

⁷ Anne Marie Cromarty, Stuart Foreman, and Paul Murray, 'The excavation of a late Iron Age enclosed settlement at Bicester Fields Farm, Bicester, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, 64 (1999), pp. 153–233.

⁸ 'Archaeological Evaluation North of Gavray Drive, Bicester, Oxfordshire' (Cotswold Archaeology TS report, 05102, 2005).

⁹ 'Bicester Park, land south of London-Banbury railway line, Bicester: archaeological evaluation report' (OAU TS report 1997).

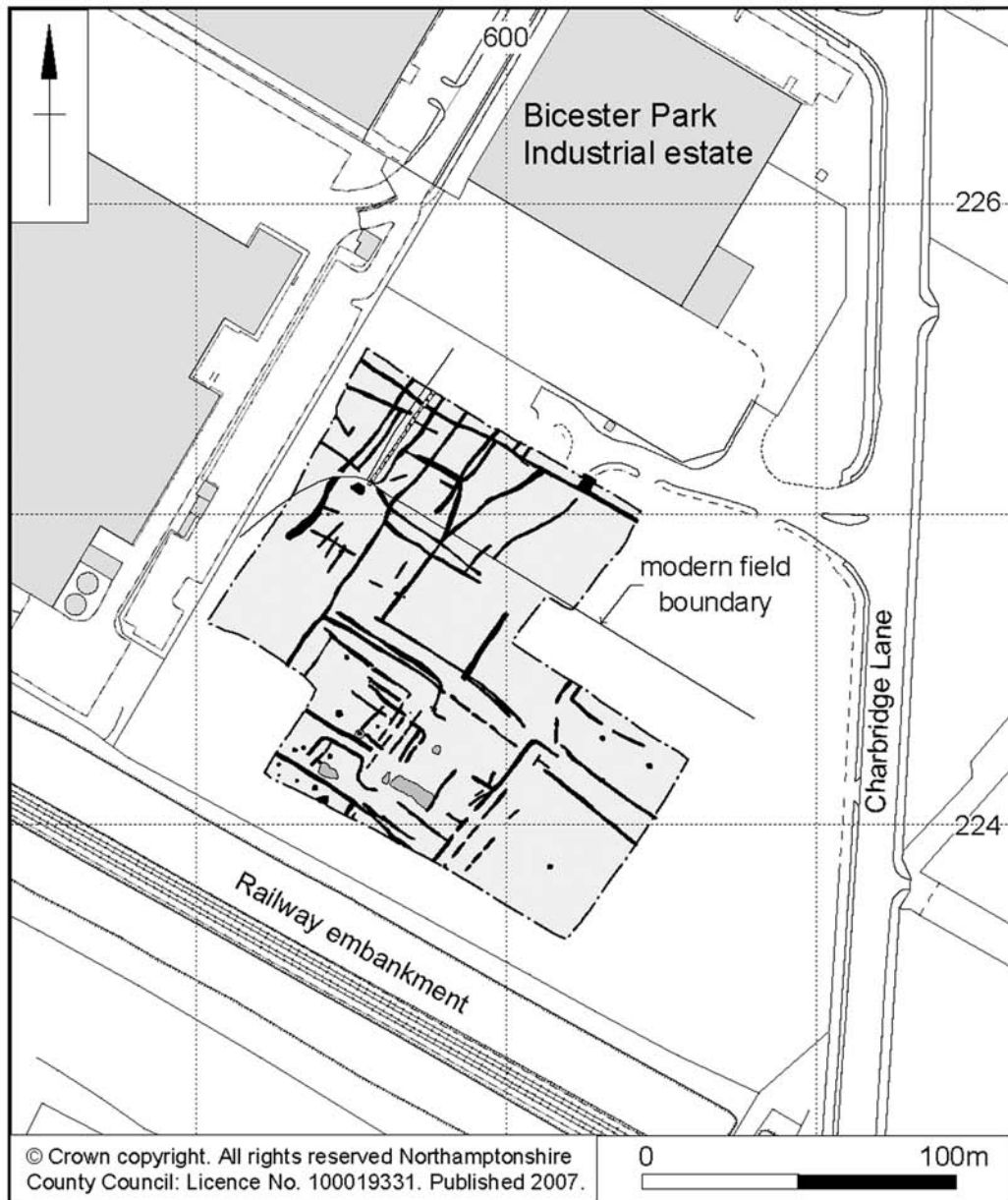


Fig. 2. General site plan

reported here. The site of a possible Romano-British settlement has also been reported following fieldwalking near Launton, about 0.5 km to the east (NMR-341121, precise location unknown).

Investigations on Oxford Road, Bicester (HER 15867), identified a small rural farmstead dated to the first century AD,¹⁰ and an excavation prior to the construction of the community hospital revealed a period of intensive settlement in the first and second centuries AD, comprising a trackway and associated enclosures both similar to, and contemporary with, the settlement at Bicester Park, and with similarly low-status finds.¹¹

Further settlements in the area dating to the Roman period have been found on the western side of Bicester (HER 11204, 16541, 1587, and 16294), and the remains of a possible villa or similar substantial building (NMR-655903) have been identified close to the ring road, on the north side of the town. Near Bicester town centre a coin hoard, dated to the fourth century, was discovered during construction work (NMR-338914).

The small Roman town of Alchester (HER 1583) is the principal Roman settlement in the area, lying just over 3 km to the south-west of Bicester Park (Fig. 1). The town was established in the late first or early second century AD on the site of a probable Claudio-Neronian vexillation fortress. Excavation within the extramural settlement¹² has produced a substantial assemblage of pottery that can be compared and contrasted with the material from the Bicester Park settlement. Alchester lay on the north-south route between Towcester (*Lactodurum*) and Dorchester-upon-Thames, just to the south of its junction with Akeman Street, the primary east-west route between St Albans (*Verulamium*) and Cirencester (*Corinium*) (Fig. 3). The plan of the Alchester region (Fig. 3) shows the principal Roman roads and towns, but only a selection of the known and excavated rural villas.

A substantial Saxon settlement dating from the fifth century onwards has been found on land to the rear of the Kings Arms, Market Square, Bicester (Fig. 1, NMR-1385542). It included three *Grubenhaus*, five timber halls, and other post-built structures.¹³ Slight evidence for early/middle Saxon activity was also found during the excavation (HER 16071) immediately to the south of the current site.

In the medieval period the Bicester Park area lay within the medieval field system. The field boundary alignment seen in the excavation was broadly respected by the post-medieval to modern field boundaries. The latter were still visible as surface features before the site was stripped, and coincided with boundaries shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1885.

THE BICESTER PARK SETTLEMENT

A few pits contained a little prehistoric pottery and may suggest a pre-Iron Age presence in the area. Small quantities of flint-tempered and shelly ware, some of which came from a linear ditch at the northern edge of the settlement, are difficult to date but may be later Iron Age or early Roman. It is suggested that this linear ditch was a pre-existing boundary of late Iron Age or early Roman date that determined the alignment of the settlement boundaries when they were established in the later first century AD. In subsequent reorganization, ditches cut across this line, indicating that the linear boundary had fallen out of use, perhaps as settlement extended further northward. The pottery assemblage indicates that the settlement fell out of use between the end of the third and the early fourth century AD.

¹⁰ C. Mould, 'An archaeological investigation at Oxford Road, Bicester, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, 61 (1997) pp. 65–108.

¹¹ D. Score and A. Mayes, 'Proposed community hospital, Bicester, Oxfordshire' (OAU TS report, 2002).

¹² P. M. Booth, J. Evans, and J. Hiller, *Excavations in the Extramural Settlement of Roman Alchester, Oxfordshire, 1991*, OA Monograph, 1 (Oxford, 2002).

¹³ P. A. Harding and Phil Andrews, 'Anglo-Saxon and medieval settlement at Chapel Street, Bicester, excavation 1999–2000', *Oxoniensia*, 67 (2002), pp. 141–79.

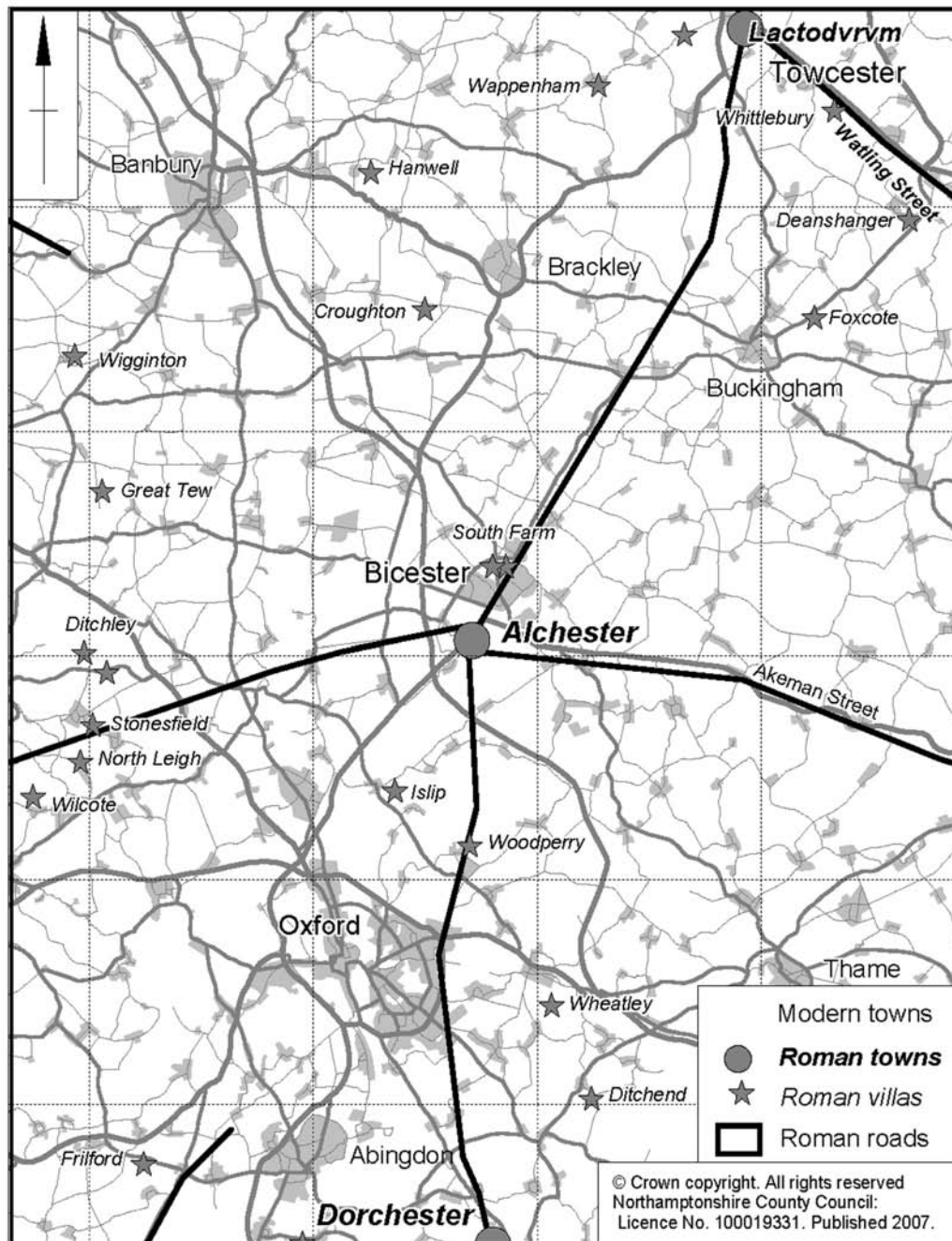


Fig. 3. Roman towns and roads, and some villas, near Alchester

The site had been heavily truncated and the fragmentary nature of the archaeological remains, with some ditched boundaries probably only partially represented in the record, has made it impossible to reconstruct the arrangement of the settlement fully at any specific period. In addition, the shallowness of the surviving features and the homogeneity of the clay fills made even establishing ditch-cut sequences problematic.

The broad interpretation is that the excavated part of the settlement comprised separate northern and southern areas, divided by a linear trackway that ran east-west, parallel with the northern boundary ditch. There were numerous linear ditches in the northern area, which probably formed a succession of smaller sub-enclosures. The paucity of domestic finds in this area suggests that these were stock enclosures, and there may have been a gathering pen set at the western end of the trackway, which was perhaps utilized as a droveway for stock (Fig. 5).

The increased density of features and finds in the southern area, including quantities of ceramic roof tile, limited evidence of secondary smithing, and the presence of two wells indicates that the core of the domestic settlement lay to the south of the trackway. It probably also continued beneath the railway embankment to the south of the excavated area. It is likely that the contemporary Romano-British remains identified in evaluation to the south of the railway line formed the southern margins of the same settlement.¹⁴

There was no certain structural evidence for domestic timber buildings, but buildings of this period were often timber-framed and raised either on sill beams or dwarf walls, leaving little or no ground evidence, especially on a site as heavily truncated as this one. It has been tentatively suggested that a rectangular sunken area, 14 m long by 5.5 m wide, which contained a quantity of domestic debris, may have been the eroded interior within a timber range.

The economy of the site was probably based on mixed farming. Enclosed areas in the northern and eastern part of the site perhaps served as paddocks and pens for corralling livestock, with access to and from the east-west trackway that separated them from the southern area. The animal bone, combined with the location of the site on low-lying ground, with access to pasture and meadow, suggests that cattle rearing probably formed a significant component of the economy. A number of horses had been kept, with horse bone accounting for nearly 30 per cent (by number) of the animal-bone assemblage identified to species, as opposed to cattle (50 per cent) and sheep/goat (17.6 per cent). However, the overall quantities are so small that no valid generalizations are possible. Wheat and barley grains and a small quantity of chaff recovered from a number of second-century features indicates cereal production, with possible processing on the site, but again the overall quantities recovered are very small.

The site at Bicester Park conforms generally to the English Heritage type-B classification for Roman farmsteads, in comprising rectilinear enclosures with rectangular houses, which formed 'the dwelling places and small scale production and processing centres of individual families or small kinship groups involved in mixed farming, often at a subsistence level'.¹⁵ Such settlements are interpreted as being of relatively low status, with little evidence of individual wealth. This view is supported by the limited range of pottery from the Bicester Park site, which contains a low percentage of finewares such as imported samian. Dorset black burnished ware is similarly scarce, and there is only one sherd of Nene valley colour-coated ware. Additionally, there are no amphorae.

The writing tablet recovered from a well is of a rare type, with only around twenty examples known from Roman settlements throughout Britain. Its presence does not necessarily indicate the literacy and status of the occupants of the settlement, as it is possible that the tablet had been a legal or commercial document written by a visitor to the site on business.

¹⁴ 'Bicester Park, land south of London-Banbury railway line, Bicester: archaeological evaluation report' (OAU TS report, 1997).

¹⁵ English Heritage, *Monuments Protection Programme, Single Monument Class Description, Farmsteads (Romano-British)* (London, 1989).



Fig. 4. General view of site, looking west

The wider archaeological context of the site is not considered here, but the settlement at Bicester Park fits into a greater organized landscape, probably controlled from the town of Alchester, which, like many other Roman small towns across Britain, experienced growth during the second century. The majority of sites within the area fit into one of two categories: late Iron Age settlements declining in the second century, or more Romanized settlements founded in the second century and falling into decline during the fourth century,¹⁶ and Bicester Park best fits the latter of these two options. Rural settlements like the one at Bicester Park may have been independent farmsteads, or they may have functioned as part of a rural estate or peripheral holding, dependent on a nearby town or a villa. In this case, Bicester Park lies near the small town of Alchester, while there are possible nearby villas on the northern outskirts of Bicester (Fig. 1: NMR-655903).

The excavations at Bicester Park have added some further detail to the pattern of local settlement and land use in the Roman period, even though in themselves they offer only the very unprepossessing remnants of a minor rural settlement much truncated by later land use and producing poor-quality finds and environmental assemblages.

THE EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

Methodology

In July 2004 ten trial trenches were excavated, several of which contained shallow ditches and pits, while others contained no archaeological features. The second phase of works comprised an open area excavation undertaken between August and October 2004. The overburden was removed using a 360° tracked excavator. A total area of 1.55 ha was opened, with areas to the south-west and north-east excluded, as the evaluation had indicated that there were few archaeological features in these areas (Figs 2 and 4).

The clay substrate (see below) meant that the site had a tendency to flood and to retain surface water, making it difficult to establish the extent of some ditch systems, especially as the surface was heavily truncated and shallower

¹⁶ Martin Henig and Paul Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 2000).

features had been partially lost. The sampling strategy included the investigation and recording of the relationships, wherever possible, between all features and deposits, and all discrete features were sectioned.

Soil samples, of between 10 and 40 litres, were taken for flotation from datable contexts with a potential for the recovery of charcoal and carbonized plant remains, but the clay fills were not conducive to the preservation of environmental remains, and bone preservation was also poor, while much of the pottery had heavily abraded surfaces.

General Stratigraphy

The natural geology across the site comprised a horizon of orange Oxford clays. At the base of the two wells there was underlying blue-grey and brown-grey Oxford clay. All of the archaeological features cut the natural geology and were sealed by light orange-brown silty loam subsoil, approximately 0.40 m thick, which was sealed by dark-brown loam topsoil, up to 0.25 m thick.

The feature fills were generally similar in composition, comprising mid-orange-brown silty clays and mid-grey-brown silty clays, with very few inclusions, all indicative of rapid silting rather than deliberate backfill. Where marked differences in the composition of the fills occurred they have been detailed separately.

Early Activity

Three struck flints, recovered as residual finds from Roman ditches, provide the only evidence for Neolithic to early Bronze Age activity in the area.

Pit group 1. Three similarly sized pits lay in the south-eastern part of the site (Fig. 5, PG1). They measured less than 1.0 m in diameter, were less than 0.5 m deep, and had rounded profiles. One of these pits produced a few sherds of flint-tempered pottery. This cannot be precisely dated, but these pits were probably the earliest features on the site, perhaps pre-dating the Iron Age.

The Origin of the Boundary System (First Century BC to First Century AD)

At the northern end of the site a linear ditch ran north-west to south-east across the full width of the excavated area, a distance of 103 m, and had continued in both directions beyond this (Fig. 5, DG1). To the west the ditch was heavily truncated, and was only 0.4 m wide by 0.1 m deep, but to the east it was more substantial, up to 1.35 m wide. Eight sherds of shelly ware from this ditch suggest a late Iron Age/early Roman origin, perhaps the early first century AD, and it may have been a primary landscape boundary, perhaps related to a nearby settlement. A recut of the ditch to the east contained later pottery, indicating that it was modified on at least one occasion and was at least partially retained into the Roman period.

Some of the ditches of the later boundary system also produced sparse pottery dated to the late Iron Age/early Roman period, but it is unclear whether more elements of the ditch system had an early origin or whether this material is residual.

Development of the Roman Settlement (Late First Century and Second Century AD)

By the late first or early second century AD a system of ditched enclosures and a trackway had been established, and they appear to have been aligned with respect to the boundary ditch at the northern end of the site (Fig. 5). To the south of the trackway a small rectilinear enclosure, wells, pit groups, and soil layers formed part of a domestic focus that evidently continued further to the south.

The trackway. The most prominent feature was the trackway, which ran north-west to south-east. It was defined by flanking ditches, measuring around 1.0 m wide and 0.5 m deep. The trackway was about 8 m wide and to the south-east opposed broad openings, 10–12 m wide, in the flanking ditches, allowing access to both the north and south. To the north-west the trackway opened into the southern end of a broad rectangular enclosure or pen, 16–19 m wide. Originally the pen may have been up to 70 m long, perhaps running to the northern boundary ditch (DG1), but later ditches cut across it, shortening its length. It may have served as a stock pen for gathering animals to be driven along the track or droveway.

The northern ditch groups (DG2). Apart from the possible pen, a series of rectilinear ditches in the northern area of the site may have formed several small enclosed areas, some of which cut across the northern part of the pen.

It is notable that the easternmost of these ditches terminated at the northern boundary (DG1), while those to the west continued across this ditch, suggesting that the western end of the northern boundary had fallen out of use relatively early. This may have occurred at the establishment of a linear boundary to the west (Fig. 5, western boundary). This ditch extended the full length of the site, a distance of 100 m, forming the western side of the pen and closing the western end of the trackway, and continued southwards to flank the western side of the domestic area to the south.

To the west of the pen there were two probably unrelated pits (PG2), and close to the northern edge of the site

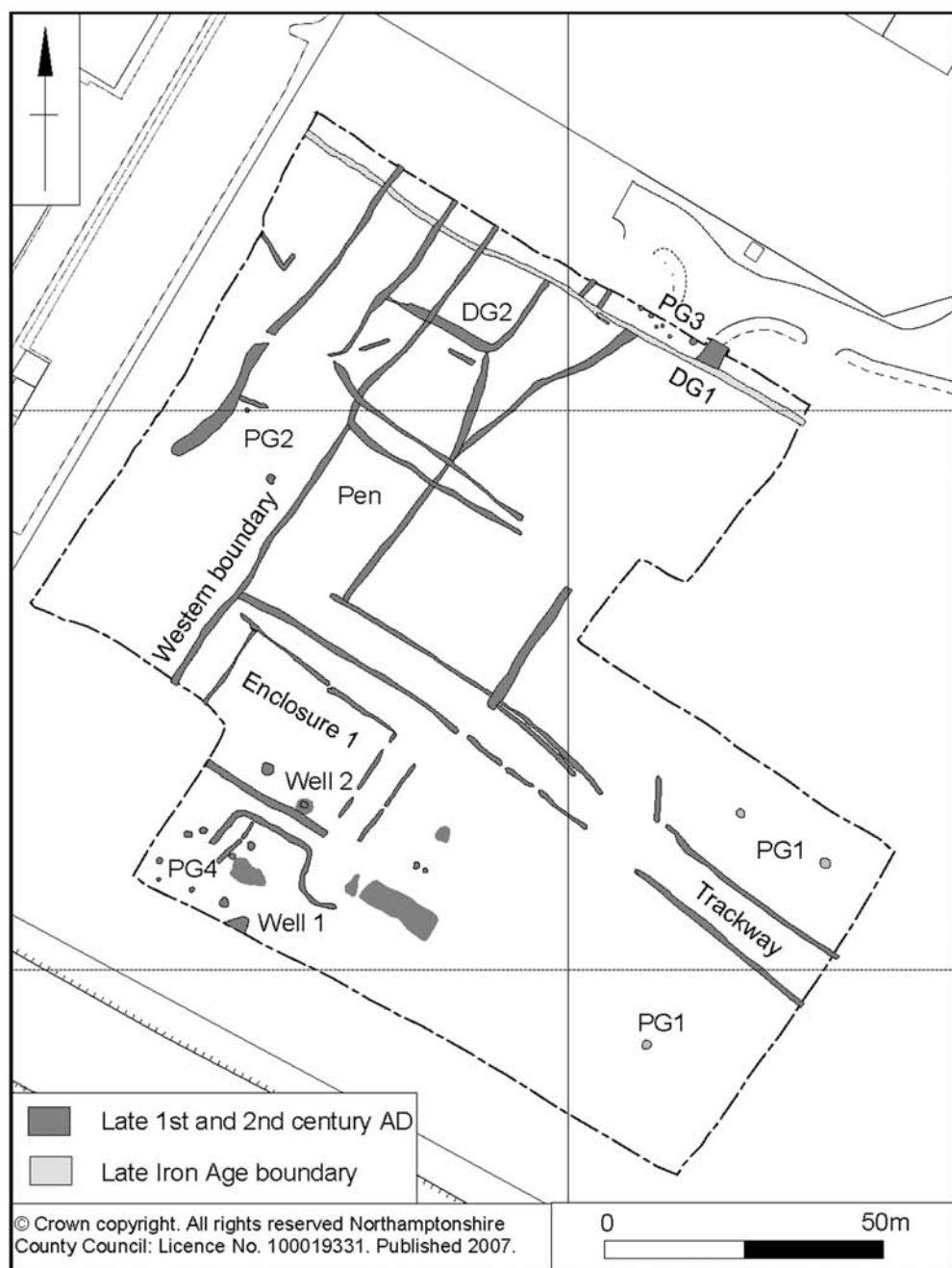


Fig. 5. The late Iron Age to Roman settlement (first and second centuries AD)

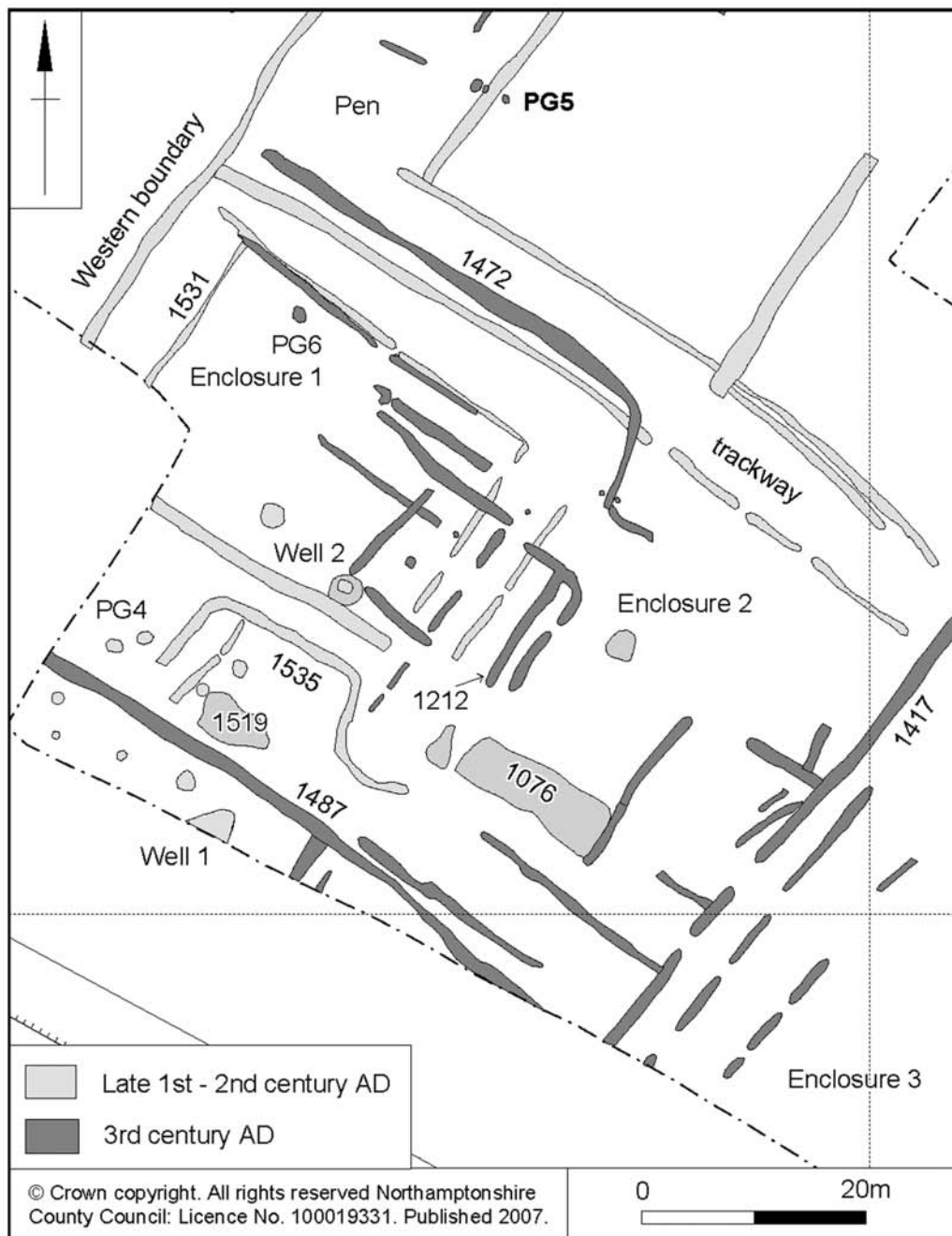


Fig. 6. The domestic focus in the southern area, all phases

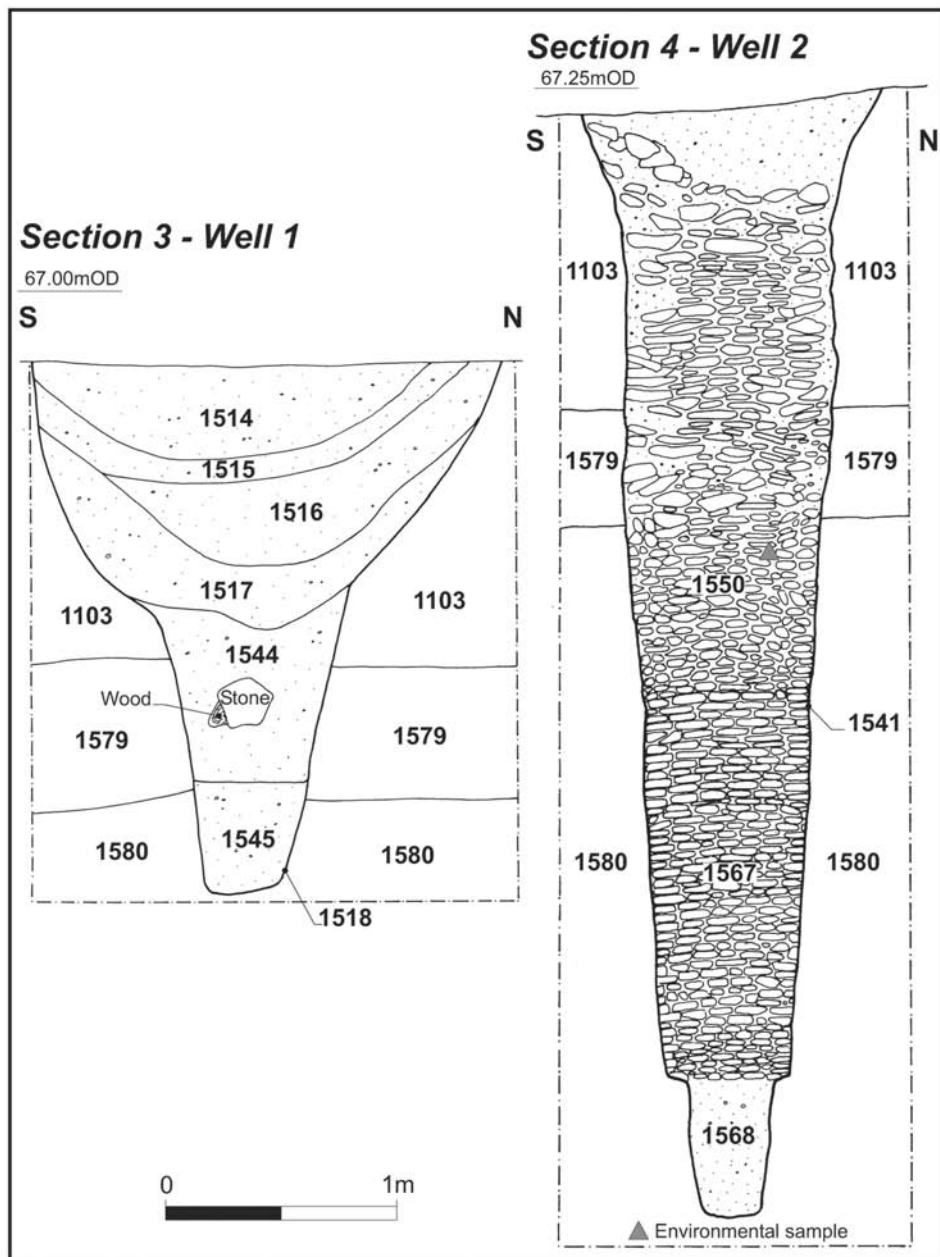


Fig. 7. Section of Well 1 and section of Well 2, showing the exposed stone lining



Fig. 8. Well 2 exposed in machine-cut pit, showing the stone lining in elevation

there was a cluster of smaller pits or postholes (PG3). The latter might be the remains of a post-built structure, but this could not be confirmed, as the group extended beyond the limits of the excavation.

Enclosure 1. To the south a small rectangular enclosure was set in the angle of the trackway and the western boundary ditch (Figs 5 and 6, Enclosure 1). The enclosed area measured 31 m by 23 m, and the northern and western ditches were quite narrow and shallow, at 0.5–0.6 m wide and up 0.3 m deep, with rounded U-shaped profiles. The eastern side of the enclosure was formed by a pair of similarly narrow ditches, set 5.3 m apart. The southern arm of the enclosure was formed by a broader ditch, and abutting its northern edge there was a stone-lined well (Figs 5 and 6, Well 2, see below).

To the south of Enclosure 1 there was a complex of various features, including a second well (Well 1), perhaps timber-lined, a scatter of pits (PG4), and soil layers preserved in shallow hollows. These all suggest activity on the margins of a domestic focus. The principal ditch in this southern area (Fig. 6, 1535) was rectilinear to the west, but had a curving arm to the east. It is difficult to ascribe a function to this ditch system, given its curious plan form, but it appeared to relate to the two areas of intact soil layers (1519 and 1076) (see below).

The wells. The two wells were investigated by machine-cutting box sections across them (Figs 7–8). Well 1 lay at the southern limit of excavation (Fig. 6). The inverted bell-shaped cut was 2.0 m in diameter at ground level and curved in to meet the narrower central shaft 1.0 m below ground level (Fig. 7). The shaft was 0.80 m in diameter, tapering to 0.35 m diameter at the base, which lay 2.30 m below ground level. There was no trace of any former timber lining, unless it had been dismantled and removed prior to the backfilling of the well pit.

The lower fills comprised light blue-grey clay (1545, 1544), and the fill of the upper shaft was of mixed orange-brown sandy clays (1517–1514). Part of a wooden writing tablet (see Figs 11 and 12) was recovered from the primary fill (1545), along with part of a small oak plank, while a length of willow root and some pottery, dated to the second century AD, came from the fill above this (1544).

Well 2 had a stone-lined shaft, 1.00 m in diameter at the top, below the eroded upper edges, and gradually narrowing to 0.50 m diameter at a depth of 4.20 m (Figs 7 and 8, both showing the exposed lining in elevation). There was a basal sump, 0.35 m in diameter by 0.60 m deep. The stone lining was in fairly regular courses of rough-hewn limestone blocks and slabs. The lower fill (1567) within the stone-lined part of the well comprised loose stone

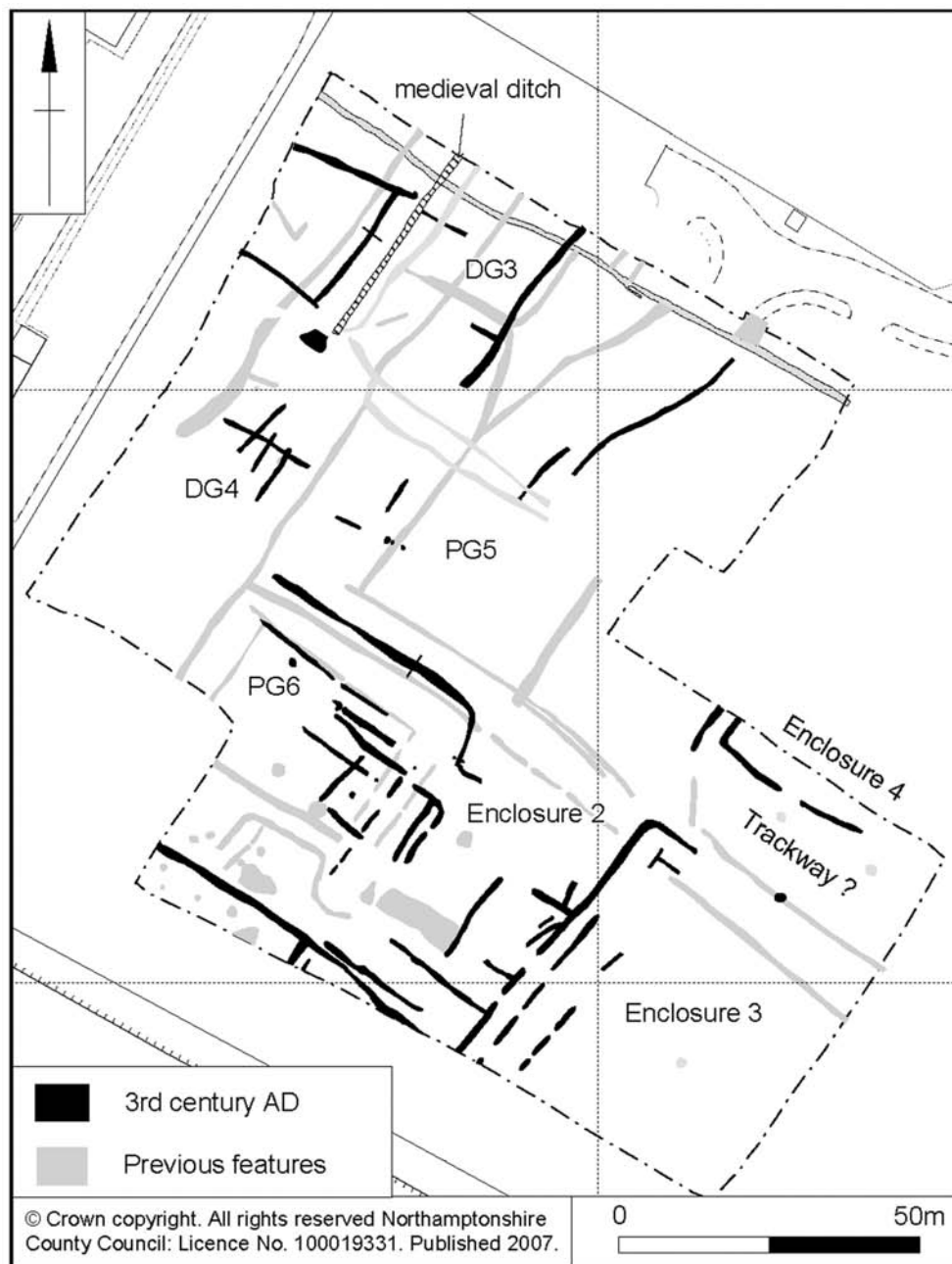


Fig. 9. The reorganized settlement (third century AD)

rubble. This contained locally produced pottery, dated to the second century AD, ceramic roof tile, animal bone, and several small pieces of waterlogged wood, which included pieces of alder and a length of hawthorn (or similar species) with tool marks. Butchery marks and canid gnawing were evident on a single bone from this context. The upper fills of the well comprised silty clays.

Pit group 4. There were several small pits in the southern area (Fig. 6, PG4). Each measured between 0.9 m and 1.1 m wide, and they were approximately 0.14 m deep. Each contained a homogeneous fill, suggesting rapid silting, but they are all likely to have been heavily truncated. One of the pits contained a cluster of medium-sized stones in the upper fills, many of which had been burnt.

Soil layers. There were three areas of dark-brown, silty organic soil-filling shallow hollows, each less than 0.10 m deep (Fig. 6, 1076 and 1519), which contained quantities of pottery, animal bone, and charcoal. The most extensive soil layer was up to 14 m long by 5.5 m wide (1076), with a detached smaller deposit at the western end. The semi-regular rectangular plan suggests more than just a random eroded hollow, but it is unclear whether this was an external hollow or perhaps even the eroded interior of a building for which all other traces had been lost.

Reorganization of the Settlement (Third Century AD)

In the third century AD there was a reorganization of the settlement boundaries, although use of the southern area probably stayed much the same, with the high feature density indicating that it still formed part of the domestic focus (Fig. 9). The ditches flanking the trackway both fell out of use, with a new boundary (Fig. 6, 1472) impinging on to the former course of the trackway. However, the new boundaries still respected the same general alignment, and it is possible that the trackway was retained, but relocated slightly further to the north, but without fully ditched boundaries. To the east it could have run between Enclosures 3 and 4, which were up to 15 m apart.

The northern area. To the north only a few ditch systems can be specifically dated to the third century (Fig. 9). These typically measured less than 1.1 m wide and 0.4 m deep and had wide U-shaped profiles. It is probable that these were additions to and new sub-divisions within the broader existing ditch systems, as otherwise they would have been isolated lengths of ditch with no apparent purpose. The end result was perhaps the creation of a series of adjoining plots, around 25–30 m wide but of unknown length. The new ditches show no respect for the former northern boundary, indicating that this had been totally abandoned. Unfortunately the low level of both feature sampling and finds deposition make it impossible to provide a more refined phasing of the minor ditch systems in this northern area.

The southern half of the northern area was largely open. To the west there was a cluster of short lengths of gully that may have been associated with some small ancillary structures (DG4). Further east there were a couple of short lengths of gully and a few small pits (PG5).

The southern area, Enclosure 2. The northern boundary (1472) of the southern area lay 3 m to the north of its predecessor (Figs 6 and 9). The new boundary ditch, which was 1.4 m wide by 0.65 m deep, was more substantial than most of the other ditches and was broad and flat-bottomed in section. To the east this ditch turned southward, perhaps to form a structured entrance to the domestic area. A southern boundary was provided by a new north-west to south-east ditch system (1487), which lay just within the southern limit of the excavated area.

Within the centre of this area there was a complex of short lengths of ditch and gully that have no obvious specific functions. The finds from this area include what little higher status imported pottery, including samian, black burnished ware, and mortaria sherds, there is from the site, while ceramic roof-tile fragments may have come from buildings within this area that have left no other traces. There was a sparse scatter of small pits in this area, each measuring around 0.8 m diameter by less than 0.5 m deep (Fig. 9, PG6). One of these contained a little ironworking slag, suggesting that secondary smithing had been carried out nearby.

Enclosure 3. To the east a linear ditch, less than 1.0 m wide and no more than 0.5 m deep, with a partial return at the northern end (Fig. 6, 1417), may have defined a large enclosure devoid of smaller internal features. Two narrow openings in the western arm, measuring less than 2.0 m wide, oppose similar openings through two parallel ditch systems, perhaps suggesting the presence of formal entrances. To the west of these openings a system of gullies may have formed a small rectangular enclosure or pen, 20 m long by 10 m wide.

Enclosure 4. Ditches to the north of Enclosure 3, which perhaps flanked the northern side of the new trackway, may also have formed the southern arm of a further ditched enclosure, with a 3 m wide central entrance opening on to the trackway (Fig. 9).

Abandonment of the Roman Settlement and Thereafter (Fourth Century AD to Present Day)

Small quantities of pottery indicate that occupation continued into the early fourth century AD. Thereafter it appears that the site was abandoned. Four sherds of early/middle Saxon pottery came from the subsoil, and a small

assemblage of early/middle Saxon pottery was recovered from the evaluation to the south of the railway line.¹⁷ These may derive from a nearby, as yet unlocated settlement.

A length of field-boundary ditch in the northern part of the site (Fig. 9, medieval ditch) produced three sherds of medieval pottery, dated to the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. This length of ditch lay directly east of, and parallel to, the modern field boundary, and to the south it stopped at the line of a modern field boundary, which was still visible as a surface feature before the site was stripped. It would therefore appear that the post-medieval and later field-boundary system had at least partly respected the medieval field system.

THE PREHISTORIC POTTERY by JANE TIMBY

The earliest material is six flint-tempered sherds from Pit Group 1 (PG1). These may pre-date the Iron Age, but they cannot be precisely dated.

A residual sherd of fine flint-tempered ware came from a third-century boundary ditch to the north. Very vesicular fragmented shelly ware from the Roman ditches is, in the absence of any associated material, difficult to date, and it may be later prehistoric or early Roman.

A further five sherds are also likely to be later prehistoric, and all were residual in later deposits. These comprise two grog-tempered, two grog and shell-tempered, and one hand-built sandy ware.

Fabric description

Flint. Handmade flint-tempered ware. Hard with a rough feel. Dark grey with red-brown margins and a dark grey-black core. The paste contains coarse fragments of calcined flint up to 3–4 mm on exterior surface, finer on interior. Wall thickness 7 mm.

THE ROMAN POTTERY by JANE TIMBY

Introduction

The work resulted in the recovery of some 2,081 sherds of Roman pottery, weighing 19.19 kg. The assemblage is in very poor condition, reflected in the overall average sherd weight of 9.3 g. Sherds were generally very soft and abraded and in many instances very fragmented, although it is clear there are in some cases multiple sherds from single vessels. In nearly all cases surface treatments were no longer evident – for example, slips, glazes, or colour-coats were largely absent, making ware recognition difficult.

Methodology

The Romano-British assemblage was sorted into broad fabric groups based on inclusions present, the frequency and grade of the inclusions, and the firing colour. Known regional or traded wares were coded following the system advocated for the national Roman reference collection.¹⁸ The sorted assemblage was quantified by sherd count, weight, and estimated vessel (rim) equivalence (EVE) for each recorded context.

Roman Pottery

The range of material is extremely limited, the main traded wares encountered being limited to Central Gaulish samian, Dorset black burnished ware, and one sherd of Nene Valley colour-coated ware (Table 1). There are no amphorae or other imported continental finewares present. In terms of date, the material appears to range mainly from the later first or early second century through to the later third or early fourth centuries, with most of the material appearing to date to the mid- to later second and third centuries.

Continental Imports

Some thirty-three sherds of samian were recorded, most of which were heavily abraded and had no surviving surface finish. Vessels present are dominated by plain forms, largely dishes Dr 31, but also with examples of decorated forms 30, 37, and 35/6. The complete profile of a dish was recovered from a third-century enclosure (E2a).

¹⁷ 'Bicester Park' (OAU report, 1997).

¹⁸ R. Tomber and John Dore, *A National Roman Fabric Reference Collection: a Handbook*, Museum of London Archaeology Service, Medieval Monasteries series, 2 (London, 1998).

TABLE 1. QUANTIFICATION OF POTTERY BY FABRIC TYPE

Fabric	Description	Sherd No	Sherd No (%)	Weight (g)	Weight (%)	EVE	% EVE
CG SAM	Central Gaulish samian	33	1.6	366	1.9	44	2.1
DOR BB1	Dorset black burnished ware	15	0.7	155	0.8	18	0.8
LVN CC	Lower Nene Valley colour-coat	1	0.0	2	0.0	0	0.0
BW	black sandy ware	28	1.3	155	0.8	17	0.8
BWF	fine black ware	5	0.2	45	0.2	0	0.0
GRSJ	hm grog-tempered storage jar	46	2.2	1667	8.7	38	1.8
O10	fine oxidized sandy ware	311	14.9	2112	11.0	255	12.0
O15	medium-fine sandy ware	7	0.3	22	0.1	0	0.0
O20	medium sandy ware	70	3.4	534	2.8	103	4.8
OXGROG	oxidized grog-tempered	238	11.4	3599	18.8	290	13.6
OXF OXM	oxid Oxon mortaria (?whiteslip)	19	0.9	281	1.5	12	0.6
OXF RS	Oxon colour-coated ware	97	4.7	541	2.8	67	3.1
OXF WH	Oxon whiteware	69	3.3	310	1.6	150	7.0
OXF WHM	Oxon whiteware mortaria	21	1.0	519	2.7	28	1.3
OXLI	fine oxidized limestone-tempered	6	0.3	42	0.2	0	0.0
R10/OXF FR	fine grey ware	867	41.7	6643	34.6	919	43.1
R15	medium-fine grey sandy ware	6	0.3	115	0.6	17	0.8
R20	grey sandy wares	107	5.1	1765	9.2	146	6.8
R30	coarse sandy ware	2	0.1	19	0.1	0	0.0
SHELL	shelly wares	131	6.3	288	1.5	29	1.4
MISC	miscellaneous	2	0.1	5	0.0	0	0.0
Totals		2081	100.0	19185	100.0	2133	100.0

Regional Imports

*Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1).*¹⁹ A small group of fifteen sherds, which includes flat-rimmed bowls and jars typical of the second century, and a conical flanged bowl, dating from the later third or fourth century, from Enclosure 4.

*Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware (LNV CC).*²⁰ A single, very small sherd was recovered from the ditch systems.

Local Wares

*Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (OXF RS).*²¹ At least ninety-seven sherds could be positively identified, but it is likely that a significant proportion of the plain fine oxidized wares (fabric O10) may also belong to this category. Forms include beakers, cups, and dishes (C45 and C47).²²

*Oxfordshire oxidized (white-slipped) mortaria (OXF WS).*²³ A total of nineteen sherds of orange sandy mortaria was recovered, which was probably originally white-slipped (WC 4).²⁴

*Oxfordshire white ware (OXF WH).*²⁵ The white wares, including mortaria, amount to some ninety sherds. Forms include flasks (W15, W18), jars (W33), bowls (W54), and mortaria (M17, M22).

Sandy wares. The assemblage is dominated by local oxidized and reduced wares, either in fine sandy fabrics (O10/R10) (= OXF FR) or slightly sandier fabrics (O15/R15), medium sandy fabrics with macroscopically visible quartz sand (O20/R20) or coarse sandy wares (R30).²⁶ The oxidized wares account for 18.6 per cent by sherd count and the reduced wares for 47.2 per cent. Forms include reeded rim (Fig. 10, 11), flat-rim and simple undifferentiated rim dishes/bowls, flanged bowls (Fig. 10, 6), everted rim jars with rounded or triangular rims (Fig. 10, 5 and 7), a handled jug (Fig. 10, 3), flagons and flasks (Fig. 10, 4 and 8), lids, beakers with flared necks (Fig. 10, 9), short everted or cornice rims, and at least one tankard with burnished lattice decoration. A fine grey-black ware necked bowl (Fig. 10, 1) with a metallic sheen was recovered from a second-century well (Well 1). In addition, a black sandy ware (BW) and a fine black sandy ware (BWF) have been distinguished. The former feature as jars and flat-rim bowls.

Grog-tempered wares. A significant proportion of the assemblage, 13.6 per cent, comprises a hand-built, grog-tempered storage jar (GRSJ) (Fig. 10, 2) and wheelmade and hand-built oxidized grog-tempered ware (OXGROG) (Fig. 10, 10).

Calcareous wares. Two fabrics are grouped here, a fine oxidized sandy ware, containing sparse inclusions of limestone (OXLI), and shelly wares (SHELL). The former comprised just six bodysherds of wheel-made ware. Shelly wares account for 6 per cent by count of the assemblage and are probably mostly early Roman. The sherds include both hand-built and wheel-made vessels. Some sherds may be later prehistoric in origin, but most are associated with Roman material.

Forms

A summary of forms present based on percentage Estimated Vessel Equivalence (EVE) comprises a total EVE of 2133 (Table 1). As might be expected from a rural site, jars dominate the repertoire, at 52.3 per cent, followed by fineware bowls/dishes at 4.2 per cent, coarseware bowls/dishes at 15 per cent, and beakers at 12.5 per cent. The remaining 16 per cent comprises flasks, jugs, mortaria, and lids.

Site Discussion

Late Iron Age–early Roman. A small collection of thirty-nine sherds (164 g), most of which (92.5 per cent) are shelly wares, came from ditches producing no later wares. The sherds are wheel-made and include a necked expanded rim jar. In many instances individual ditches produced single Roman sherds, which cannot be closely dated. They suggest that the establishment of the ditch system in the first century AD has been largely swamped by the presence of later material.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 127.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

²¹ Ibid., p. 179.

²² Christopher J. Young, *The Roman Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region*, BAR 43 (1977).

²³ Tomber and Dore, *National Roman Fabric Reference*, p. 176.

²⁴ Young, *Roman Pottery Industry*, n. 4.

²⁵ Tomber and Dore, *National Roman Fabric Reference*, p. 174.

²⁶ Ibid.

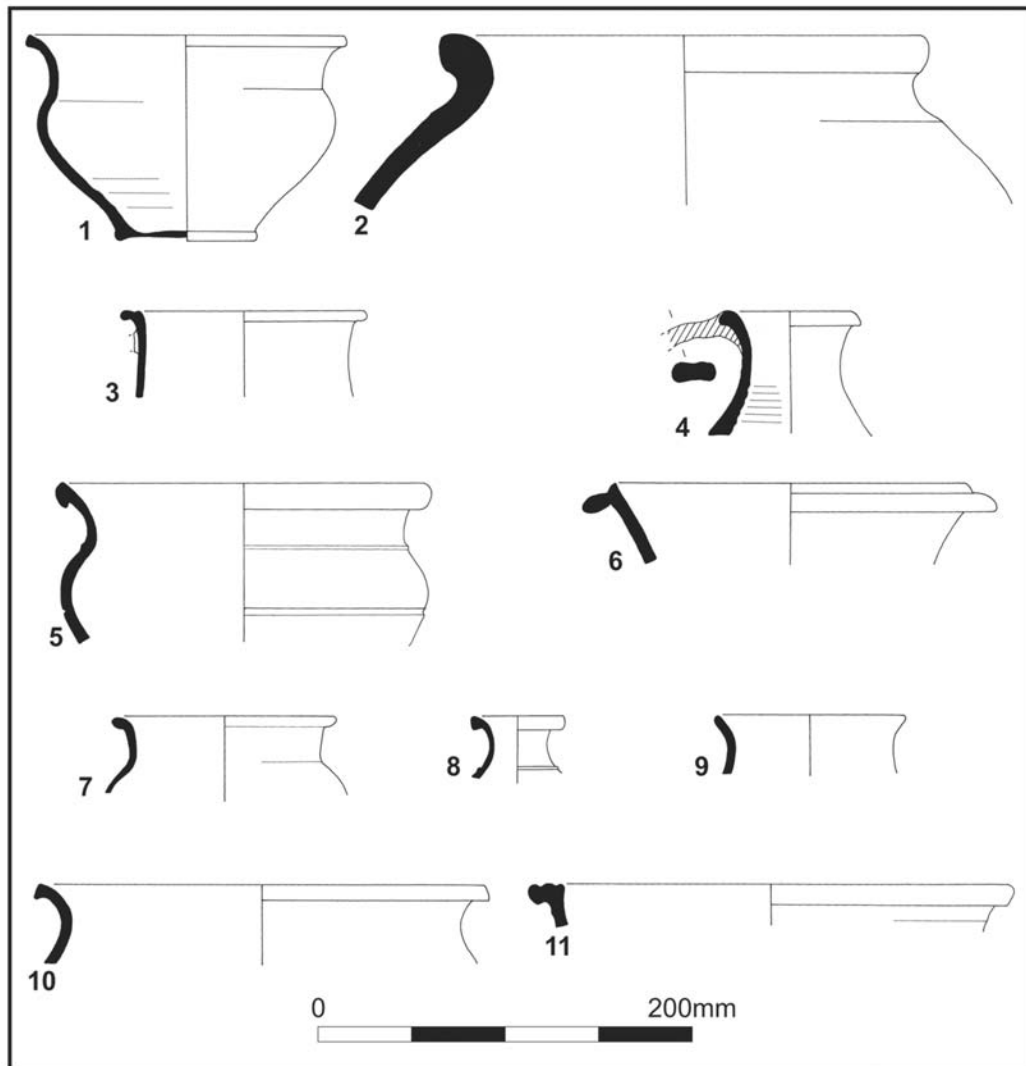


Fig. 10. The Roman pottery, 1–11

Second century AD. Features allocated to the second-century ditch systems produced considerably more material, some 736 sherds (7 kg), suggesting an increased level of activity during the second century. Oxidized and reduced Oxfordshire sandy wares, accounting for 16.8 per cent and 60 per cent respectively by sherd count, dominate the assemblage. Amongst the other Oxfordshire wares is a white ware bowl, Young type W54,²⁷ from Well 1 and a number of sherds of large grog-tempered storage jar. Traded imports are present in the form of eight sherds of samian and two pieces of Dorset black burnished ware.

Individually the assemblages are quite small, with the largest group from Well 1 with eighty-four sherds. The stone-lined well (Well 2) produced twenty-three sherds, including a flagon (Fig. 10, 4), an everted rim jar, and a handled jug (Fig. 10, 3). Further small assemblages came from the northern ditches and a pit north of the trackway, with thirty-nine sherds (Fig. 10, 1 and 2). In all cases, the sherds are local, comprising oxidized or reduced sandy wares and grog-tempered oxidized ware.

Third century AD. Some 953 sherds, about 8 kg, come from the third-century features, with a further 38 sherds (117 g) from features which could date to either the second or third centuries. Many of the same fabrics continue, and in the absence of featured sherds clear dating is subjective and to a certain extent based on feature layout. A few sherds are present which clearly indicate later third- or fourth-century occupation, most notably Oxfordshire whitewares, colour-coated wares (OXF RS), and typologically later greyware forms, such as the conical flanged bowls. Among the white wares are at least two mortaria, Young types M17 and M22, from the ditches in the north, with production dates of AD 240–300 and 240–400 and flasks (Young W15 and W18) from a southern enclosure (Enclosure 2a). Some ninety-seven sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware are present, although sixty-eight of these came from a single bowl, Young C45, from this enclosure (Enclosure 2a). Other sherds came from other enclosure ditches. There is little or nothing datable to the later fourth century, suggesting abandonment earlier during that century.

Catalogue of Illustrated Sherds (Fig. 10)

1. Almost complete but fragmented necked bowl, with a grey-black metallic sheen. Fabric R10. Second century. Primary fill (1545) of Well 1 (1518).
2. Large, hand-made storage jar. Grog-tempered oxidized ware, fabric OXGR. Second century. Lower secondary fill (1544) of Well 1 (1518).
3. Handled wide-necked jug. Orange sandy ware, fabric O20. Second century. Fill (1549) of Well 2 (1541).
4. Handled flagon in fine grey sandy ware, fabric R10. Second century. Fill (1567) of Well 2 (1541).
5. Necked, cordoned bowl, with a hooked rim. Fine oxidized powdery ware, fabric OXIDE. Second century. Ditch (1531) of Enclosure 1.
6. Flanged rim conical bowl, medium-fine grey sandy ware, fabric R15. Third century. Northern area, Ditch Group 2 (DG2).
7. Necked jar, orange sandy ware, fabric O20. Third century. Ditch 1212 of Enclosure 2.
8. Narrow necked flask. Fine grey sandy ware, fabric R10. Third century. Ditch 1212 of Enclosure 2.
9. Flared rim jar/ beaker. Fine grey sandy ware, fabric R10. Third century. Ditch 1212 of Enclosure 2.
10. Flared rim jar. Wheel-made orange oxidized ware (OXGR). Third century. Northern Area, Ditch Group 2 (DG2).
11. Reeded rim bowl. Orange sandy ware, fabric O20. Residual in subsoil (1102).

Discussion

The archaeological work has produced a moderately substantial assemblage of mainly Romano-British pottery, spanning the first to later third or early fourth centuries, with a particular focus of activity in the second and third centuries. The assemblage is of some interest in terms of its geographical location in relation to previous work in the immediate area at Bicester Fields Farm, which has suggested predominantly Iron Age occupation.²⁸ Other investigations in the locality have identified middle to late Iron Age occupation at Slade Farm, some 2 km to the north-west,²⁹ and late Iron Age to early Roman occupation at Oxford Road, Bicester.³⁰ The latter appears to fade out by the early second century. A substantial rural settlement of unknown character has been observed at Kings End Farm and South Farm, to the west of Bicester.³¹

The Roman walled town of Alchester lies some 3 km to the south-west of Bicester Park, and excavations in

²⁷ Young, *Roman Pottery Industry*, n. 5.

²⁸ Cromarty, Foreman, and Murray, 'Bicester Fields Farm', pp. 153–233.

²⁹ Peter Ellis, Gwilym Hughes, and Laurence Jones, 'An Iron Age boundary and settlement features at Slade Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire: a report on excavations, 1996', *Oxoniensia*, 65 (2000), pp. 211–65.

³⁰ Mould, 'Oxford Road, Bicester', pp. 65–108.

³¹ Cromarty, Foreman, and Murray, 'Bicester Fields Farm'.

the extramural area have yielded a large assemblage of Roman pottery, spanning the first to late fourth centuries.³² Although the same range of forms and fabrics as those at Bicester Park can be found here, the range from Alchester is considerably greater, with a wider range of imported finewares and amphorae. Samian wares at Bicester Park account for 1.5 per cent by sherd count, compared with 2.4 per cent of the overall site assemblage at Alchester, which although greater, is still more typical of a rural site. It has been argued by Evans³³ that in the earlier Roman period the pottery profile at Alchester is more typical of a rural rather than an urban centre, changing from the later second to early third centuries to become more consistent with that to be expected from an urban site. This is also reflected in a dominance of jar forms at Alchester accounting for between 50 and 60 per cent in the earlier Roman period, falling to around 35 per cent in the later Roman period. The earlier figure compares well with Bicester at 52.3 per cent. It is clear that Bicester Park shows no such rise in status in the later Roman period, remaining essentially rural in character, but following a pattern of development quite common in the Upper Thames Valley.

OTHER ROMAN FINDS

THE METAL AND GLASS FINDS by TORA HYLTON

There are twenty-three individually recorded finds in four material types: seven copper alloy, fourteen iron, one lead, and one of glass. Sixteen were recovered from stratified deposits, while the remaining seven came from topsoil and subsoil deposits by using a metal detector. All the datable Roman artefacts came from topsoil and subsoil deposits.

Copper alloy. The copper alloy objects are in a stable condition. Objects worthy of note include three coins and one brooch; the remainder are undiagnostic fragments from stratified deposits.

The brooch is a Colchester derivative type. It is incomplete (the terminal of the bow-foot/catch plate, pin, and spring mechanism are missing) and damaged by corrosion, and this has obscured much of the ornament on the wings and bow. The wings are decorated with transverse mouldings, and the bow is decorated with a double ridge, ornamented with fine notches. Brooches of this type generally date from the mid- to late first century AD.

The coins have been identified by Steve Critchley, and date from the mid-second to fourth centuries.

Ae. Sestertius. Legend and reverse illegible. Portrait suggestive of Marcus Aurelius as Caesar, AD 139–61.

Ae. as. Vestige of female portrait, facing right. Possibly Faustina I, who died in AD 140. Faustina coins were issued for some time after her death.

Ae. module. BEATA TRANQUILLITAS altar – VOTIS XX. Inscribed. Type issued by Constantine I, Crispus, Constantine II, and Licinius II, about AD 319–24.

Iron. The ironwork is in a reasonable condition, although some of it is encrusted in corrosion products. There are fourteen individual iron objects, but the majority are unidentifiable fragments. An ox goad was recovered from Well 1, which is dated to the second century, and consists of a spiral-former cylinder with a short spike (now missing), which would have fitted on to the end of a pole and have been used to guide oxen.³⁴

Two of the three nails can be classified according to Mannings Type series³⁵ as a type 3, with a 'T'-shaped head, and a type 1B, with a flat sub-circular head; the remaining nail has lost its head.

Lead. One small amorphous fragment of lead, possibly a molten dribble, was recovered from Enclosure 2, dated to the third century.

Glass. A base sherd from a square prismatic bottle in blue glass came from a soil spread of second-century date within the southern part of the site. The underside of the base is furnished with a design in relief, in the form of two concentric circles. Bottles of this type generally date from about AD 43 to the end of the second century; they were particularly common from the last quarter of the first century onwards.³⁶

³² J. Evans, 'Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery', in Booth, Evans, and Hillier, *Roman Alchester*, pp. 263–383.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

³⁴ A. Isaac, 'Iron objects', in A. S. Anderson, J. S. Wachter, and Andrew P. Fitzpatrick, *The Romano-British Small Town at Wanborough, Wiltshire: Excavations 1966–1976*, Britannia Monograph series, 19 (London, 2001), pp. 121–47.

³⁵ W. H. Manning, *Catalogue of Romano-British Iron Tools, Fittings and Weapons in the British Museum* (London, 1985), pp. 134–7 and Fig. 32.

³⁶ J. Price and Sally Cottam, *Romano-British Glass: a Handbook*, CBA Practical Handbook in Archaeology, 14 (York, 1998), p. 194.

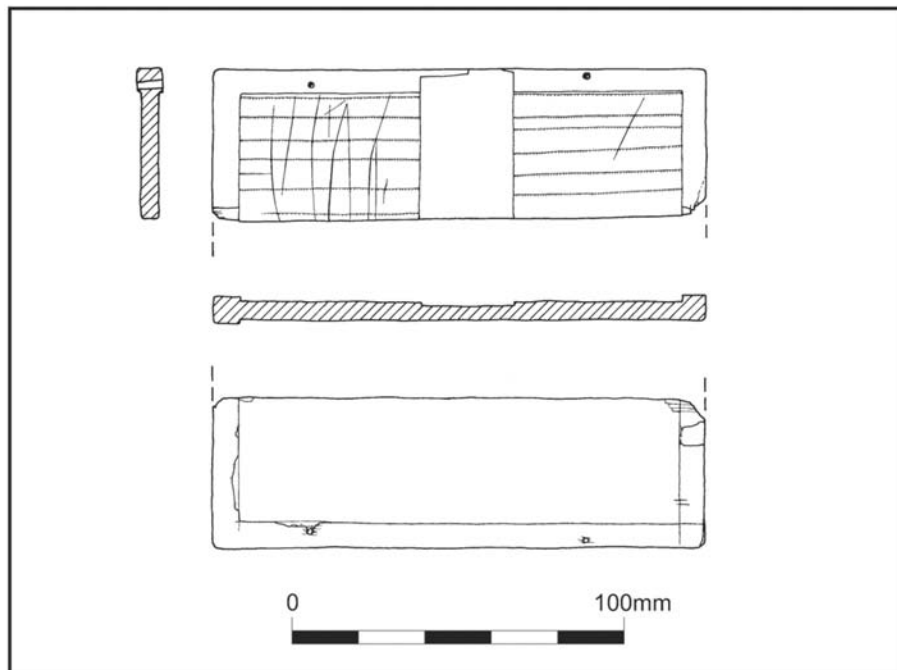


Fig. 11. The wooden writing tablet

THE WRITING TABLET by ROGER TOMLIN

Part of a Roman stylus writing tablet was recovered from the primary fill of Well 1, which is dated to the second century (Figs 11 and 12). The tablet, in either cedar or fir (see Gale below), measures 148 mm by 47 mm wide and 7 mm thick. Both faces have been recessed about 1 mm, leaving a raised margin about 7 mm wide. A vertical rebate, 28 mm wide, has been cut into the middle of one face. Two holes have been bored into the long margin for hinging cords, and midway between them is the trace left by the binding cord in the fore edge.

This fragment is between a third and a half of the original tablet, which was probably the second in the block of three tablets intended for a legal document (such as a lease or a deed of sale). The text would have been written in duplicate, with the inner text written on the inside of the first tablet and the plain, recessed face of the middle tablet. The two tablets would then be sealed by a cord running down the rebate, where it was secured by the seals of seven witnesses, whose names were written on both sides of the middle tablet. The outer text was written on the rest of the second face of the middle tablet and on the third tablet, and could be checked by unsealing the inner text.

There is now no trace of the black waxed surface in which the text was written, or of any scratches left by the stylus in the wood underneath, except perhaps for a series of tiny diagonal marks in one corner of the plain, recessed face, and there is no sign of any secondary ink on the fore edge for annotation. In one panel of the rebated face there is a series of more-or-less vertical incised lines. They seem to resemble the elongated letters used in addresses, so perhaps the name of the person or place was written here. Taking the raised margin to be the bottom edge, with the panel to the right of the rebate, it would be possible to read '... VIA', the first letter being indeterminate.

WOOD IDENTIFICATION by ROWENA GALE

The wood of the writing tablet is either cedar (*Cedrus* sp.) or fir (*Abies* sp.), but, with degraded archaeological material such as this, it is difficult to separate these species reliably. A number of Roman writing tablets of similar form and identified as cedar/fir and larch (*Larix*) were amongst Roman artefacts excavated at the London waterfront and St Magnus House, London.³⁷

³⁷ Gustav Milne, *The Port of Roman London* (London, 1985).

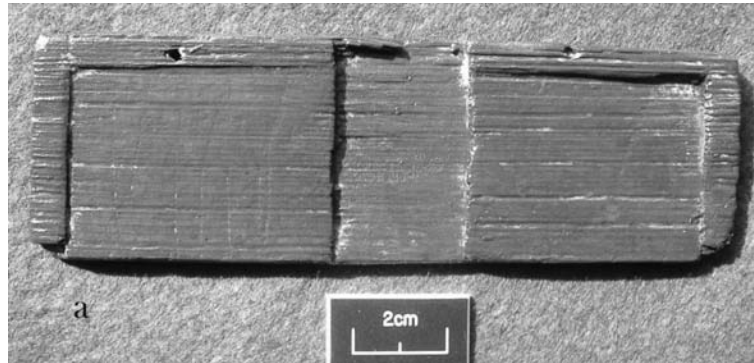
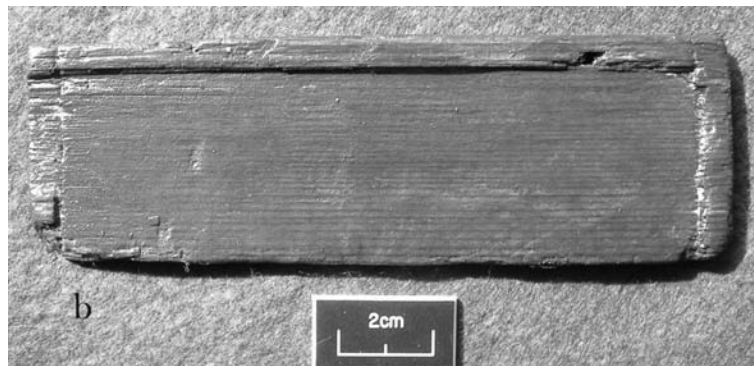


Fig. 12. The two sides of the incomplete wooden writing tablet (scale 20 mm)



THE QUERNS AND MILLSTONES by ANDY CHAPMAN

Eight contexts from the domestic features within the second- and third-century settlement produced fragments from rotary querns or millstones. They were generally single fragments, although five pieces from the subsoil are probably from a single quern. In six instances they are of millstone grit, between 22 mm and 44 mm thick. Most of these have lost the grinding surfaces, but in two instances enough of the outer circumference survives to estimate stone diameters at 600–700 mm and 700–800 mm. These dimensions suggest that at least some of the millstone grit has come from millstones rather than querns. A single piece is in fine-grained sandstone conglomerate, containing occasional large pieces of quartz, and the possible late Iron Age/early Roman ditch in the northern area contained 30 g of small, eroded fragments of lava, which may have come from a lava quern.

THE METALWORKING DEBRIS by ANDY CHAPMAN

A total of 3 kg of metalworking debris was recovered from seven contexts within the third-century domestic enclosure and associated pit group. A ditch within Enclosure 2 produced 1.23 kg, and a nearby pit produced 0.71 kg, while the other contexts produced single pieces or two or three pieces, weighing between 100 and 300 g. All of the material consistently comprises undiagnostic irregular lumps of miscellaneous ironworking slag. There is also a little fuel-ash slag, occurring either as small separate pieces or adhering to larger lumps of miscellaneous slag. Some pieces of slag retain impressions of the charcoal fuel. The small group of material probably indicates that some secondary smithing was carried out on the site.

THE CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL by PAT CHAPMAN

This assemblage comprises 142 sherds of tile, weighing 11,036 g. It is quite fragmentary, with no large pieces, no complete dimensions, and just a few diagnostic fragments. Twenty sherds are identifiable as *tegulae* and six as

imbrices, but there are no obvious remains of box-flue tiles. The tile is mainly in small groups from various contexts, although one third of the assemblage comes from the subsoil, including six of the *tegulae* sherds. The tiles are typically 16 mm thick, including the *imbrices*, with a few of the *tegulae* sherds 26 mm thick by the flange.

Two fabric types make up two-thirds of the assemblage. The main fabric, half the assemblage, has a fine silty matrix, with scarce small grit and scarce-to-medium small grog. It is orange in colour and occasionally has a reddish core. The other main fabric contains no inclusions and has an orange surface, with a medium to dark-grey reduced core, and comprises a fifth of the assemblage. Some of the remaining sherds are in a sandy fabric, brown in colour, with cracked surfaces that are perhaps a result of weathering; a few are in a hard red fabric, with a very smooth surface. The remaining sherds range in colour from brown to red, with variations in a reduced core and a more sandy fabric. Two sherds in a hard reduced fabric and another with a reduced core and a pink surface, which had been covered with a dark maroon wash, were recovered from Well 2.

THE SAXON AND MEDIEVAL POTTERY by JANE TIMBY

Four sherds indicate some early/middle Anglo-Saxon activity in the locality. These came from the subsoil and comprise one large sherd of organic-tempered ware and three hand-made sandy wares. Early/middle Saxon pottery dating from the seventh century is well documented from Bicester,³⁸ and small amounts, provisionally dated to the later fifth to eighth centuries, have been documented from Alchester.³⁹

A single large rim of probable St Neots ware, from a medieval field boundary ditch, is of tenth-century date.

A total of sixteen sherds of medieval date was recovered, six from subsoil, four from topsoil, and four sherds from a medieval ditch. These include jug sherds of Brill-Boarstall type, suggesting a date within the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries.

ANIMAL BONE by KAREN DEIGHTON

A total of 5.69 kg of animal bone was recovered by hand. This was scanned to determine the species present and the state of preservation. Identifiable bones and those to which an age could be assigned or which could be measured were noted.⁴⁰

Of the thirty-four identifiable animal bones, seventeen were cattle bones. The stone-lined well, Well 2, contained the majority of identifiable sheep/goat and horse bones and, with Well 1, about half of the identifiable cattle bone. The ditches of Enclosure 2 also produced a small amount of cattle bone. The ditch groups DG1 and DG3 produced indeterminate bone fragments only. No bone was recovered from the sieved samples.

The surface condition of the bone was poor, with a high frequency of abrasion and exfoliation. Material from the stone-lined well, Well 2, exhibited dark staining, which is consistent with waterlogging. Fragmentation was also fairly high and appeared to be largely the result of old breaks. Four instances of canid gnawing were noted, and a single example of possible butchery (knife marks consistent with filleting) was observed on a cow long bone from Well 1, also dated to the second century. No burned or calcined bone was noted.

The three species identified are cattle (50 per cent by number), sheep/goat (17.6 per cent), and horse (30 per cent). The only evidence for the presence of juvenile animals is a sheep/goat skull, with unfused cranial sutures and underdeveloped horncores ('buds') from Well 2. The bone recovered from within the well was possibly the result of refuse dumping after the well fell into disuse or was incorporated during deliberate infilling.

The lack of material prohibits any discussion concerning the economy of the site, the nature of the animal husbandry practised there, or the origin of the assemblage. This paucity of material would appear to be the result of poor bone preservation conditions at the site.

THE WATERLOGGED WOOD by ROWENA GALE

Samples of soft and degraded waterlogged wood recovered from the two wells were submitted for identification. The samples were prepared using standard methods.⁴¹ Anatomical structures were examined using transmitted light on a Nikon Labophot-2 compound microscope at magnifications up to x400 and matched to prepared reference

³⁸ Harding and Andrews, 'Chapel Street, Bicester', pp. 141–79.

³⁹ Evans, 'Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery', in Booth, Evans, and Hiller, *Roman Alchester*, p. 383.

⁴⁰ Angela von den Driesch, *A Guide to the Measurement of Animal Bones from Archaeological Sites*, Peabody Museum of Natural History Bulletin, 1 (Cambridge, MA., 1976).

⁴¹ Rowena Gale and D. Cutler, *Plants in Archaeology: Identification Manual of Artefacts of Plant Origin from Europe and the Mediterranean* (Otley, 2000).

slides of modern wood. When possible the maturity of the wood was assessed (i.e., heartwood/sapwood) and stem diameters recorded.

The seven pieces of wood matched reference material as follows:

Well 1. The lower fills within this well produced a small fragment of plank and a writing tablet (see above) and root fragment from the secondary fill. The plank was identified as oak (*Quercus* sp.) heartwood. Although now fragmented, it was described as measuring 290 mm in length by 90 mm in width and 13 mm thick. The worked edges have not survived. The root was either willow (*Salix* sp.) or poplar (*Populus* sp.). These taxa are anatomically similar.

Well 2. Worked wood was retrieved from the primary fill of the stone-lined well. This included a piece of roundwood, 115 mm in length by about 20 mm in diameter, with about eight growth rings; tool-marks were probably present on one end. A few fragments of bark remained *in situ*. The wood was identified as a member of the Pomoideae group, which includes anatomically similar species such as hawthorn (*Crateagus* sp.), apple (*Malus* sp.), pear (*Pyrus* sp.), and *Sorbus* sp. (rowan/whitebeam and service). Two thin strips of alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) wood were recovered from the primary fill. These almost certainly originated from a single piece and together measured roughly 70 mm in length by 40 mm by 6 mm thick.

THE CHARRED AND WATERLOGGED PLANT REMAINS by KAREN DEIGHTON

Sixteen samples were hand-collected from the excavation. Assessment was undertaken to establish the nature, preservation, and presence of ecofacts and their contribution to the understanding of the function and economy of the site. Nine samples were processed using a siraf tank fitted with a 500-micron mesh-and-flot sieve. The resulting flots were dried and analysed using a microscope (10x magnification). The remaining seven samples, being waterlogged, were sub-sampled and stack sieved through sieves 3.4 mm-500 microns. The retents were also examined under a microscope.

Two kinds of preservation were encountered at the site, charring and waterlogging. Charcoal was fragmentary. Charred seeds were largely abraded and fragmentary. The preservation of waterlogged plants and animal remains was reasonable.

Cereal grains indicated the presence of wheat/barley (*Triticum/Hordeum*). Both hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare* var. *nudum*) grains were observed in a sample from the northern enclosures (DG2). Possible spelt (*Triticum spelta*) grains were noted in a sample from a cluster of pits and postholes in the northern area (PG3). Chaff fragments, which are more readily identified to species than grains, confirmed the presence of spelt wheat. The small quantities of chaff present and the lack of charred wild/weed seed could suggest a late stage in crop processing. However, this statement must be regarded as tentative, due to the small size of the charred assemblages and the poor preservation encountered. Both spelt wheat and barley were commonly grown crops for the Roman period.

Waterlogged weeds were nettle (*Urtica dioica*) and dock (*Rumex* sp.). Nettle is a common colonizer of waste ground. The dock taxa present could not be identified to species, and no comment can therefore be made regarding habitat tolerances.

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