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TR35 SE 343

Report upon Observations by

Dover Archaeological Group

on the

Hull Place Sholden Foul Sewerage Scheme

By Keith Parfitt , B.A.; M.I.F.A.

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Sholden Foul Sewerage Scheme

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1) Introduction

In the spring of 1991, under the auspices of Dover District Council, work started on the construction of a new foul-water sewer through the grounds of Hull Place on the north-western side of the village of Sholden, near Deal (Fig. 1). The present mansion of Hull Place (formerly Long Farm) is of post-medieval date and its associated estate has, in recent years, been sold off to create a series of plots for new, large detached dwellings. The construction of these new properties has, in turn, led to the need for the laying of a new sewer through the estate. This has involved the excavation of a 0.90m. wide machine-cut trench dug to depth of between 2 and 3 metres, together with the digging of two deeper pits for the insertion of a pumping-station immediately adjacent. In archaeological terms the area is of a fairly high potential and the maintenance of a watching brief during the course of the work seemed essential, especially in view of the existence of a probable Roman villa within 100 metres of part of the trench line (see below). A total of some 350 metres of trench was excavated in all and it was possible for members of the Dover Archaeological Group to observe these excavations on a daily basis, with some useful results.

Following the course of the private estate road, the pipe-trench was cut in three distinct sections. Starting at the existing sewer at the junction of The Street and Sholden New Road, opposite the village hall (TR 3584 5271), Section 1 ran for some 185 metres in a north-westerly direction (with a significant re-alignment about half way along its length); the trench then made a right angled bend to the south-west and ran in this

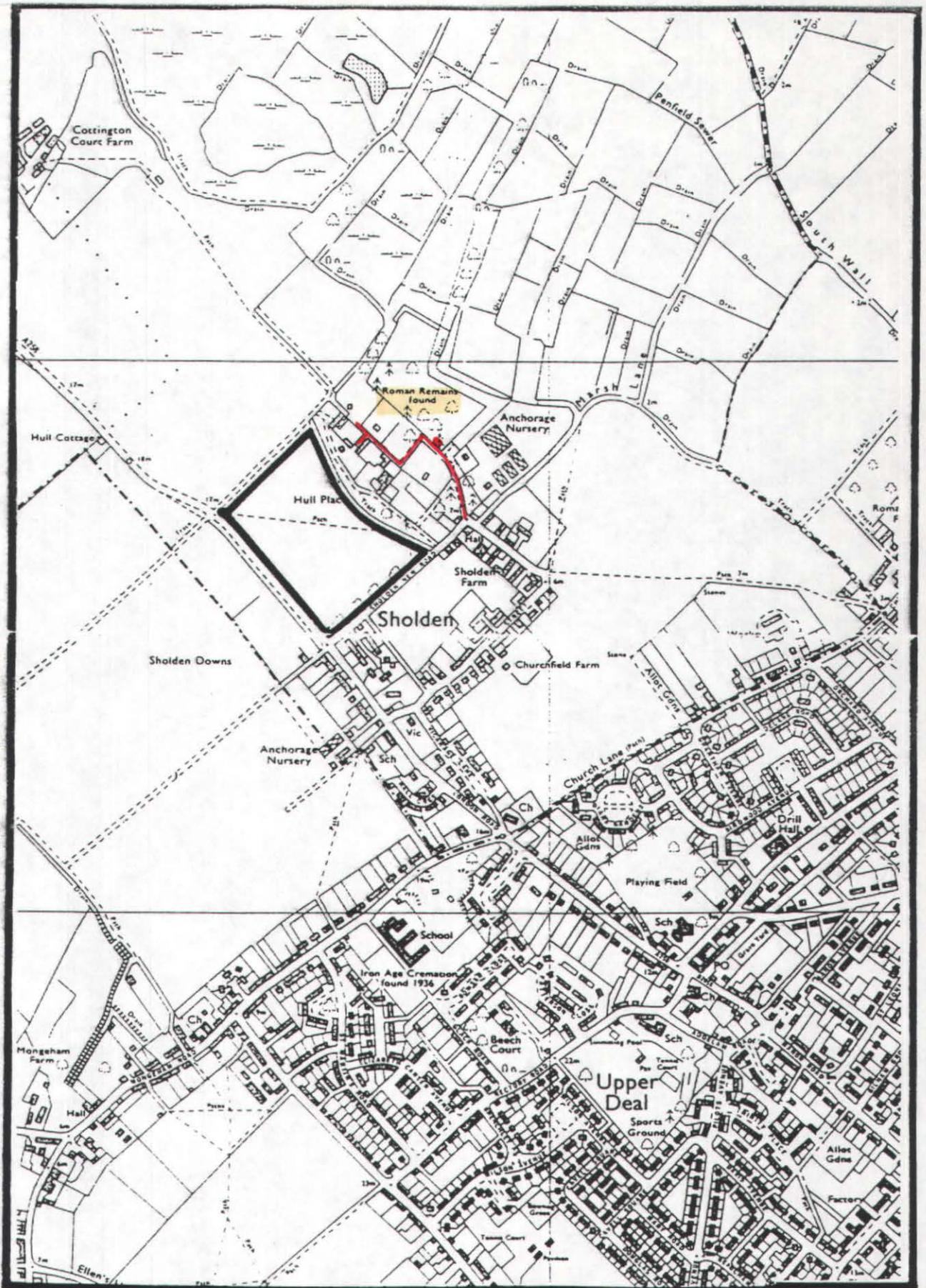


Fig.1: Plan of land referred to in Application:- STD/90/868
 STD/90/869

Scale 1/10,000

Grid reference of site TR356527

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Line of 1991 sewer trench shown in red —

direction for some 65 metres (Section 2). It then turned through another right angle and resumed a north-westerly course for a further 100 metres (Section 3, finishing at TR 3565 5288), with a 15 metre spur leading off to the south-west near the north-west end. Near the junction of Sections 1 and 2, the pumping-station was constructed. All of the archaeological features recorded were located in Sections 1 and 2 of the pipe-trench; the bulk were concentrated in the north-western half of Section 1 adjacent to the pumping-station excavations (Fig. 2).

The Hull Place estate is situated on rising ground just above the southern end of the Deal marshes. The sub-soil here is fine brown brickearth, resting over weathered chalk. During the present excavations the underlying chalk deposit was revealed only in the deep pits dug for the pumping-station and within the main trench, outside the gates of Hull Place mansion itself. The excavations located the top of the chalk at a depth of about 4 metres below present ground level on the pumping-station site and at 3.50m. outside the mansion. Ground level, itself, stands at between 6 and 7 metres above Ordnance Datum in this area.

2) Acknowledgements

Thanks are due firstly to the Dover District Council officials, principally Mr R. Shaw, who provided a large scale plan of the intended works and readily allowed access the site. On site, the construction team, led by Mr Ted Revell took a keen interest in the work and gave every assistance. Of the Group members who undertook the work, Mr Geoff Halliwell (Deal Area Field Officer) maintained a daily watch on the trenching operations and co-ordinated any archaeological work required. To all these people the writer extends his sincere thanks.

3) Previous Discoveries in the Area

The extensive tract of brickearth in the immediate area of Deal has long been recognised as an area rich in archaeological remains, although there have been few formal excavations here under modern conditions. In the immediate area of Hull Place four earlier discoveries, including the site of a probable Roman villa (see below) are of interest and suggest something of the archaeological potential of this general area; indeed the close proximity of a substantial Roman masonry villa building suggests that this was an important locality. In more general terms, it is becoming increasingly clear that in many areas the rising ground just above the north-east Kent marshlands was particularly attractive to ancient settlers.

i) TR 3609 5260. In 1962 the excavation of a sewer-trench some 100 metres to the east of Sholden Street and some 300 metres to the south-east of the start of the present trench revealed a Belgic cremation burial, consisting of two pottery vessels and two brooches. The burial group has been dated to the period c. 10 B.C.-10 A.D. (Ogilvie and Dunning, 1967). It is now on display in Deal Library.

ii) c. TR 356 527. In 1914 whilst laying out the gardens to Hull Place mansion Roman tile fragments, including part of a box-flue tile, were discovered (Phillips, 1964).

iii) TR 3568 5277. In 1915 during extensions to Hull Place mansion a 6th-7th century bone comb (Dunning 1966b, Plate VI) and Roman pot sherds were found (Phillips, 1964). The comb is now on display in Deal Library.

iv) TR 357 529 In 1922 W.P.D. Stebbing excavated part of a Roman masonry building with traces of painted wall-plaster in the park facing the mansion (see Stebbing, 1937). This was fairly certainly a villa (Phillips, 1964; Parfitt, 1980; Parfitt, 1986). The parch marks in the grass that

initially indicated its position measured some '30 yards wide by 50 yards long' (Chapman, 1921).

4) Observations Along the 1991 Pipe Trench (Fig. 2)

Twelve separate archaeological features were cut by the pipe-trench, together with two overlying general soil deposits containing archaeological material. The features were all cut into the natural underlying brickearth and are briefly described below with the available dating evidence. Features 1-5 and 11 were clustered in the area immediately to the south-west of the new pumping-station and it seems clear that if this area could have been opened up into an area excavation a very complex series of intercutting features would have been revealed. Within the narrow confines of the present pipe trench it was, understandably, not possible to fully interpret the exposed features, although it is clear that a complex of pits and ditches was represented.

The brickearth deposits in the Deal area have yielded a considerable quantity of flint artefacts over the years (Dunning, 1966a) and the possibility of a significant stone age site being revealed during the present work was evident from the start. In the event, the brickearth here was found to be largely devoid of lithic material, although three fresh struck flints were recovered (site code: HPS-91-11); one of these, a broken blade, shows some evidence of working. It seems probable that a small number of struck and burnt flints recovered from the later features are also derived from this underlying brickearth.

In the pumping-station area, the trenches revealed a fairly thick deposit of dark brown clay with carbon and daub specks overlying the natural subsoil. This deposit (HPS-91-1) sealed several features (Fs 1-5

and 11; see section 1) and covered an area measuring at least 15 metres by 15 metres. It was sealed by the top-soil and road metalling. The deposit reached a maximum thickness of 0.90m. and produced 10 fragments of Roman tile (including several large pieces of tegula), two burnt flints, one struck flint, two small pieces of burnt daub and 7 pot sherds. The potsherds consist of three pieces in sandy Roman fabrics, three Belgic grog-tempered pieces and a small flint-tempered Iron Age rim. The precise interpretation of this substantial deposit remains unclear.

A similar, though thinner deposit (HPS-91-9, see Section 7), was revealed in the main trench 20 metres further to the south-east. This sealed Features 8 and 9 and produced a single sherd of grog-tempered pottery and a fragment of Roman tile.

FEATURE 1 (Pipe Section 1; 160 metres N.W. of Sholden New Road junction)

This was a 'U' shaped ditch running south-west by north-east. It was between 0.65m. and 1.10m. in width and 0.36m.- 0.50m. deep and cut an earlier feature (Feature 3). The filling was a dark grey clay with carbon specks which produced a fragmentary bronze wire bracelet, a chip of Roman tile and 8 small Roman pot sherds probably all of 2nd century or early 3rd century date (see Section 1; HPS-91-3).

FEATURE 2 (Pipe Section 1; immediately N.W. of Feature 1).

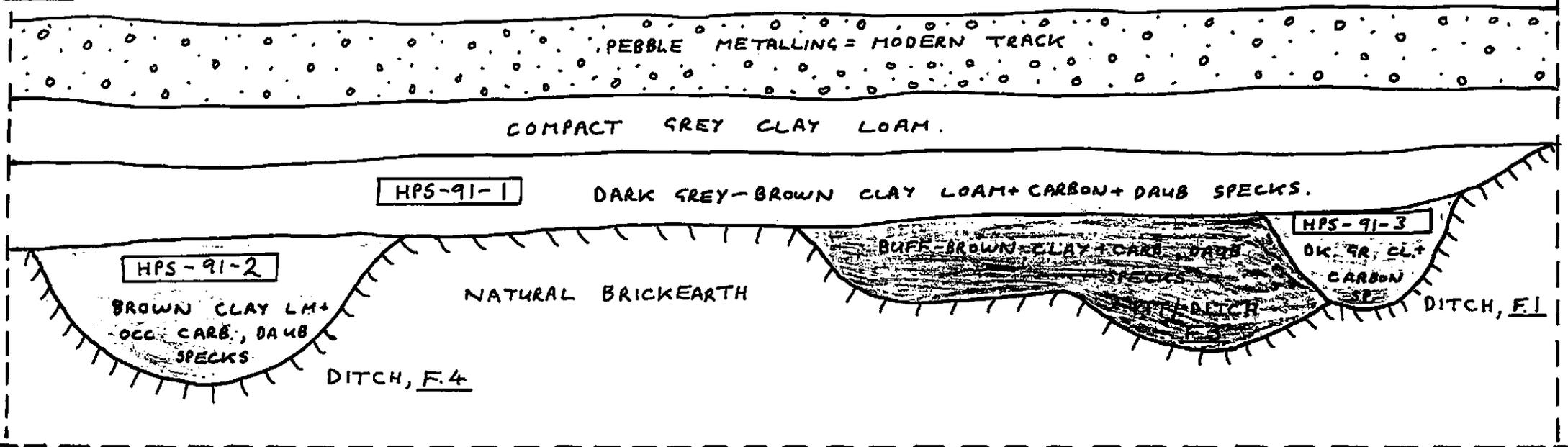
This appeared to be a pit or ditch terminal. It was confined to the south-west side of the trench and may have cut Feature 3. As seen in section it was some 1.25m. across and 0.40m. deep. It was filled with a dark grey-brown clay with carbon specks which produced a single small Roman tile fragment (HPS-91-4).

FEATURE 3 (Pipe section 1; immediately N.W. of Feature 1).

This was rapidly recorded as a single pit or ditch terminal but it may

N.W.

S.E.



SHOLDEN 1991,
 HULL PLACE SEWERS,
 SECTION ACROSS FEATURES 1, 3+4,
 SCALE = 1:20 (APPROX.),
 SECTION No. = 1.

K.P.
6.11.91

(S.1)

in reality have been two separate intercutting features. It was confined to the north-east side of the trench and was cut by Feature 1. It may have been cut by Feature 2. As seen in section it was at least 2.00m. across and 0.28m.- 0.45m. deep. It was filled with a buff-brown clay with carbon and daub specks which produced no finds (see Section 1).

FEATURE 4 (Pipe Section 1; 1.20m. N.W. of Feature 3).

This was a 'U' shaped ditch running south-west by north-east. It was between 1.25m. and 1.40m. in width and 0.60m. deep. The filling was a brown clay loam with occasional carbon and daub specks which produced a single grog-tempered pot sherd of late Iron Age or Roman date, together with 3 burnt and one struck flint (see Section 1; HPS-91-2).

FEATURE 5 (spur off Pipe Section 1; 1.70m. north of Feature 4).

This was a large 'U' shaped ditch running south-east by north-west. It was some 1.50m. in width and at least 0.60m. deep (its base lay below the bed of the pipe-trench). It was filled with a dark brown clay with occasional carbon specks which produced a small piece of animal bone and a small fragment of Roman tile (HPS-91-5).

FEATURE 6 (Pipe Section 1; 17 metres N.W. of Feature 8).

This appeared to be a pit and was confined to the south-west side of the trench. As seen in section it was some 0.71m. across and 0.36m. deep. It was filled with a very dark grey-black clay loam with carbon and daub specks which produced single small pieces of animal bone, daub and Roman tile (HPS-91-6).

FEATURE 7 (Pipe Section 1; 9.70 metres N.W. of Feature 8).

This was a flint packed post-hole recorded during the cutting of the pipe-trench. It was circular in shape with a diameter of some 0.30m. The post-hole was 0.35m. deep and was filled with a grey-brown clay loam with

carbon and daub specks. Flint packing stones occurred around the outside of the feature. Three pieces of burnt daub, a struck flint and a small fragment of Roman tile were recovered from its filling (HPS-91-7).

FEATURE 8 (Pipe Section 1; 130 metres N.W. of Sholden New Road junction)

This was a pit and was confined to the north-east side of the trench. As seen in section it was some 2.55m. across and 0.90m. deep with steep-vertical sides and an almost flat base. It was largely filled with brown clay with carbon specks, with a thin black ash and carbon deposit on the base. The basal ash layer produced a few very small sherds of burnt daub and Roman pottery (see Section 7; HPS-91-8).

FEATURE 9 (Pipe section 1; 6 metres N.W. of Feature 8).

This was a large pit or ditch running north-west by south-east. As seen in section it was some 3.22m. across and 0.90m. deep with sloping sides and a flat base. It was filled with a series of grey and brown clay deposits, most with carbon specks. The lower filling produced three small pieces of Roman pottery of somewhat indeterminate date (HPS-91-10).

FEATURE 10 (Pipe Section 2; 43 metres N.E. of main gates to mansion).

This was a flat bottomed ditch running south-east by north-west. It was some 1.30m. in width and 0.56m. deep. The filling consisted of a series of grey and brown clays and clay loams with carbon specks and small daub lumps. The middle filling produced an iron nail or bolt, a piece of burnt daub and three small pieces of Roman pottery, including a fragment of an Oxfordshire Ware mortarium (HPS-91-15).

FEATURE 11 (spur off Pipe Section 1; 1.70m. north of Feature 5).

This appeared to be a large pit or ditch running north-west by south-east. As seen in section it was at least 1.75m. across and 0.52m. deep with a sloping side and a flat base. It was filled with dark brown clay with

N.W.

S.E.

PEBBLE METALLINGS = MODERN TRACK

COMPACT GREY CLAY LOAM.

HPS-91-9

DARK BROWN CLAY + OCC. CARBON SPECKS.

BROWN CLAY + CARBON SPECKS.

NATURAL
BRICEARTH

ORANGE-BROWN CLAY + OCC. CARBON SPECKS

= PIT, FEATURE 8.

HPS-91-8 BLACK ASH + CARBON + OMB SPECKS.

SECTION No. = 7

NATURAL BRICEARTH

S.7

SHOLDEN 1991 - HULL PLACE SEWERS - SECTION ACROSS PIT, FEATURE 8 (1:10)

K.P. +
T.P.

carbon specks which produced three large, conjoining fragments of a Roman roof tile (tegula) (HPS-91-16).

FEATURE 12 (Pipe Section 2; 36 metres N.E. of main gates to mansion).

This was a flat bottomed gully running east-west. It was 0.70m. in width and 0.60m. deep with sloping sides. The filling was a dark grey clay loam with occasional carbon specks, which produced a large animal jaw bone and 15 other smaller pieces of animal bone, together with two pieces of sandstone and a single rim sherd from a late Roman bowl of Oxfordshire Ware (HPS-91-17).

5) Conclusions

Although the amount of dateable material is limited it seems clear that most if not all of the dozen archaeological features recorded during the trenching operations were of Roman date. The most readily dateable finds are the two Oxfordshire Ware pottery sherds recovered from Features 10 and 12. These ought to be of either late 3rd or 4th century A.D. date. All of the remaining pot sherds may be broadly dated to the 2nd to 4th century A.D. The Roman tile would also readily fall within this broad date bracket. The single flint-tempered Iron Age rim sherd hints at pre-Roman activity in the area, whilst the three struck flints found in the underlying brickearth, together with the residual lithic material from the later features provide some evidence for even earlier settlement in this locality.

From the surviving records concerning the structure excavated by Stebbing there can be little doubt that this was a Roman villa of substantial proportions. The evidence for further Roman buildings in the area is limited to the small collection of Roman tiles recovered during

1914 and from the 1991 pipe trench. Some substantial pieces of roofing tiles (tegulae) came from the trench, whilst the single box-flue tile fragment of 1914 is suggestive. None of the 1991 tile fragments bear any mortar traces and no other recognisable building debris was observed or recovered from the trenches cut. All of this combines to suggest that, either the building excavated by Stebbing about 100 metres to the north of the pumping-station was the only building on the site, or that any other structures in the area were built of timber (the post-hole located, Feature 7, should not be forgotten in this context). Indeed, Roman timber structures are known to have sometimes possessed tiled roofs.

At least 5 ditches or gullies were revealed by the pipe trench and it seems probable that these represent Roman field boundaries, although nothing of their phasing or layout could be deduced. More than one phase of ditches could perhaps be implied by the clustering in the pumping-station area. The various sizes of pits recorded may have been for either rubbish or storage.

In the light of recent excavations on Roman villa sites elsewhere, a whole complex of ancillary out-buildings, pits, ditched fields and enclosures and working areas may be reasonably expected around most Roman villa buildings. The discoveries at Sholden seem to be entirely consistent with this external evidence and it is unlikely to be coincidence that the densest concentration of features located within the pipe trench lay at the closest point to the excavated villa remains. Only large scale excavations can reveal the full details but the present exercise has served to suggest that the Sholden site has a scatter of outlying features. Nor need a Roman villa complex be the only significant settlement here. Many villa sites can now be seen to have pre-Roman origins and the pre-Conquest

cremation burial found in 1962 only a short distance to the south-east could hint at such an occurrence at Sholden.

Roman villa sites that continued to be occupied into the post-Roman period are generally less common, but the pagan Saxon bone comb found at Hull Place in 1915 could suggest that the Sholden villa estate, like that at nearby Wingham, was just such a site.

From the above discussion it is readily apparent that the Hull Place area is of some considerable archaeological potential and it is perhaps timely that this report is being compiled shortly before the holding of a public enquiry to consider an application to build on a substantial area of land on the higher ground immediately to the south-west, between Hull Place and the main A 258 (see Fig. 1). The archaeological potential of this entire area will be evident from the present report and some sort of archaeological input will certainly be required if construction work on the site is allowed to go ahead.

6) References

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