

51

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LII

JANUARY 1958 TO DECEMBER 1958

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DEIGHTON BELL

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*Published for the Cambridge Antiquarian Society (incorporating the Cambs and Hunts
Archaeological Society) by Deighton Bell, 13 Trinity Street, Cambridge*

*Printed in Great Britain at the University Press, Cambridge
(Brooke Crutchley, University Printer)*

CONTENTS

<i>Officers and Council of the Society 1958-9</i>	<i>page vi</i>
<i>Report of the Council for the Year 1957</i>	vii
<i>Summary of Accounts for the Year 1957</i>	viii
A Beaker from Ely <i>By D. H. TRUMP</i>	I
Excavations at Whiteley Hill, Barley, Herts <i>By J. C. WILKERSON and M. D. CRA'STER</i>	2
A New Hoard of Romano-British Pewter from Icklingham <i>By JOAN LIVERSIDGE, M.LITT., F.S.A.</i>	6
A Roman Well at Exning, Suffolk <i>By DAVID E. JOHNSTON</i>	II
A Group of Romano-British Pottery with an Owner's Mark <i>By B. R. HARTLEY and E. STANDEN</i>	21
A Romano-British Farm at St Ives <i>By H. J. M. GREEN</i>	23
William Allington of Horseheath, Speaker in the Parliament of 1429-30. Paper I <i>By J. S. ROSKELL</i>	30
William Allington of Bottisham, Speaker in the Parliaments of 1472-5 and 1478. Paper II <i>By J. S. ROSKELL</i>	43
A Medieval Leather Box from Ellington, Hunts <i>By G. H. S. BUSHNELL</i>	56
Excavations on the Wandlebury Figures <i>By T. C. LETHBRIDGE and C. F. TEBBUTT</i>	58
Further Finds on the Arbury Road Estate <i>By W. H. C. FRENCH</i>	69
<i>Index</i>	73

A ROMANO-BRITISH FARM AT ST IVES

H. J. M. GREEN

INTRODUCTION

THE site lies on the west bank of the Great Ouse, 1 mile south-east of St Ives and in a gravel pit immediately south of the St Ives-Cambridge railway line. The subsoil is gravel and the site is 17 ft. above sea-level (O.S. datum)—map reference, O.S. 2½ in. to 1 mile 52/323700 (Nat. Grid ref.).

Gravel digging during the war removed half the site before any rescue excavation could take place. Before the remainder of the site was completely destroyed in 1955, a series of trial trenches were dug to ascertain the character and duration of the Romano-British occupation, and to uncover one of the dwellings. A preliminary account of the excavations has already been published in the *Archaeological News Letter*, vol. v, no. 2, p. 29. The finds from the site have been deposited in the Norris Museum at St Ives.

THE SITE

Period I. The structural remains of this period were confined to only a small part of the total site (Fig. 1). At the southern end of the area a large ditch (D 4) empties into the river, and on either side of it were deposits of the period. It is possible that this ditch was a cleaned and remodelled stream near which the original settlement established itself. The only other structural remains found of this period were three shallow gullies. Apart from these, the area of occupation was covered by a layer of dark sandy loam (layer (5)), which varied from 4 in. to 1 ft. in thickness.

Gully 1 contains the earliest forms of pottery on the site, but both this and gullies 2 and 3 also contain Roman standard grey wares, indicating probably a date during the last half of the first, or first half of the second century for the period I deposits. The unstratified pottery which could be attributed to this period agrees with such a dating. Apart from the Belgic pottery made in the native tradition and Romano-British versions of it, shell-gritted fabrics and imported wares were scarce. The paucity of Samian is striking, but is paralleled on other domestic sites in the region, notably Runcton Holme.¹ Here the lack of Samian ware was attributed to late Romanization due to the Boudiccan rising and its aftermath. The same may also be true of this site.

Period II. The break in the pottery sequence indicates that at some period, probably during the second century, the site may have been deserted and not re-occupied again until the late third or early fourth century. This period of desertion

¹ *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* vol. XII (1933), p. 241.

is represented by layer (4) varying from 3 in. to 2 ft. in thickness and covering the whole site. The layer was of sandy loam and sterile.

Period III. Sealing layer (4) was a deposit of dark sandy loam (layer (3)), varying from 1 ft. to 2 ft. 6 in. in thickness. Three shallow gullies (6, 7 and 8) had been dug into layer (4), one of which was of V section (gully 6). A pit, or perhaps a well (pit 5), also cut through layers (4) and (5). Its filling consisted of layers of dark humus and loamy sand, and contained fragments of wood. Water at 6 ft. 9 in. prevented further excavation. Neither this pit nor any of the gullies produced datable pottery, but an

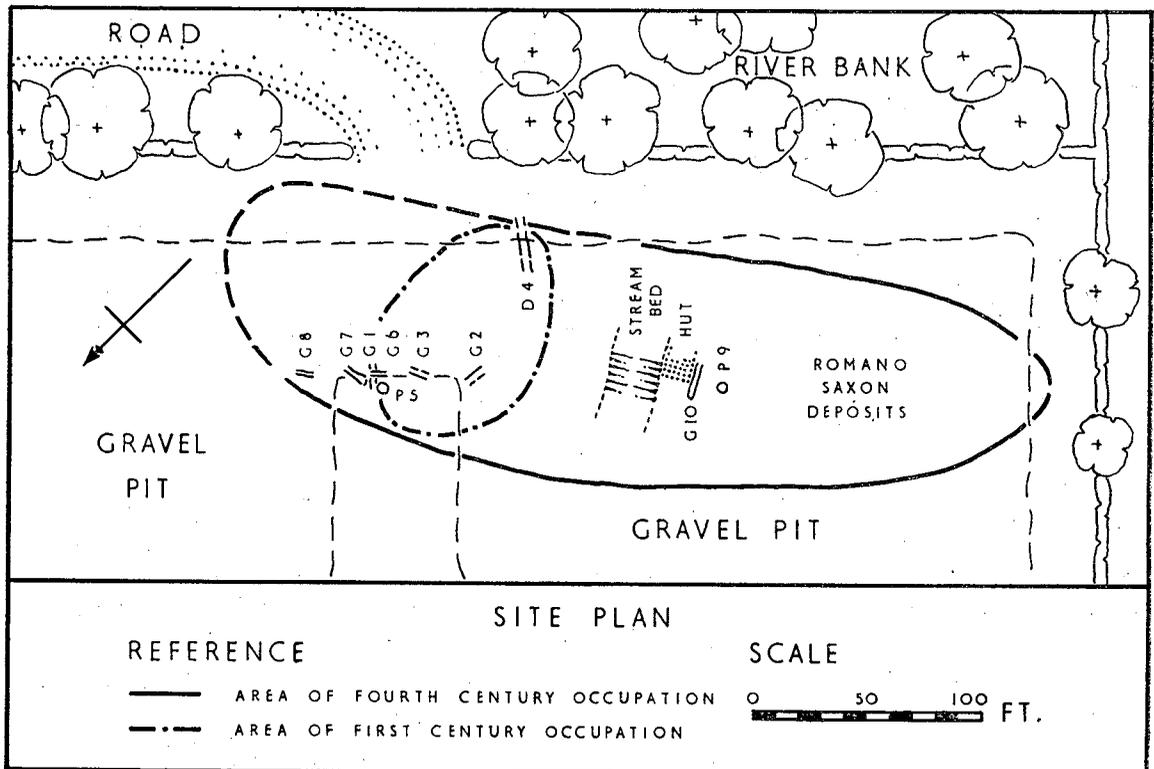


Fig. 1. Site plan.

early fourth century jar was found lying on the top of layer (4). This jar and the pottery from the hut and stream bed suggest that the site was probably reoccupied either during the late third or early fourth century. Some of the unstratified pottery from the site dates to this time or later in the fourth century, some of it being very late. The unstratified coin series is both small and late (Appendix I)—the latest is a coin of Arcadius (395-408) (Appendix I, no. 5) which probably indicates occupation into at least the first quarter of the fifth century.

Period IV. Extending over the whole site to a depth of about 1 ft. is a layer of compact silty clay loam (layer (2)). The layer is sterile and is clearly a deposit derived from regular, probably winter, flooding over a long period of time. Its lower levels merge into the top of layer (3), and soil tests suggest that there was little chemical

weathering of this layer before the silty clay loam deposits were laid down. It is, therefore, probable that the end of the occupation and cultivation of the site coincided with the beginning of the regular seasonal flooding which laid down layer (2).

THE HUT AND STREAM BED

The hut. Near the centre of the site a rectangular hut of period III had been constructed on the banks of a shallow stream, which flowed into the river (Fig. 2).

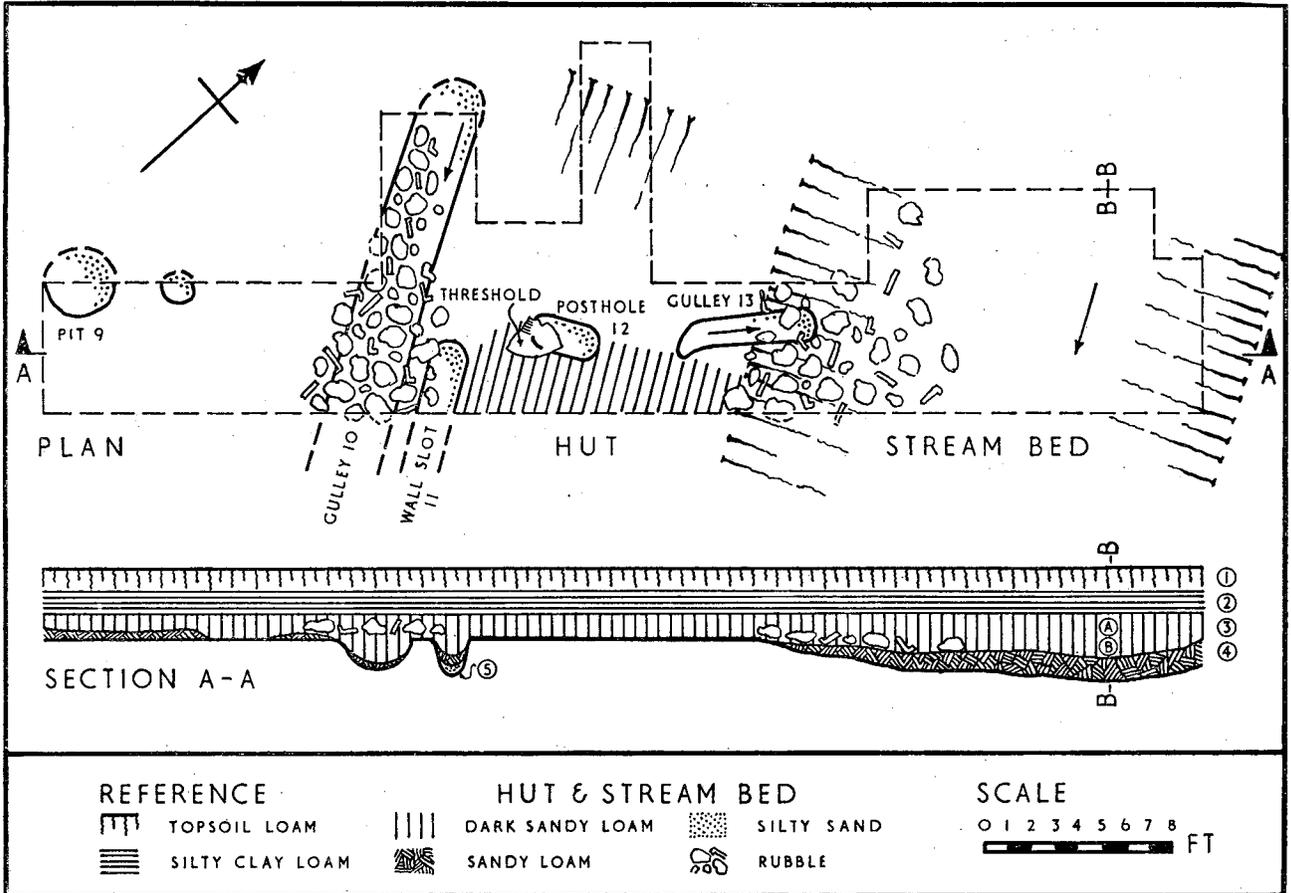


Fig. 2. The hut and stream bed.

Unfortunately gravel digging had removed all but the north-east end of the hut, but sufficient was found to gain some idea of its construction. A wall slot (11) indicates wattle and daub walls (no plaster was found), set in wooden sleeper beams. A near central post-hole (12), 1 ft. 3 in. deep, at the north-west end, probably held a post which supported the ridge-pole. The elongated shape of the post-hole may indicate that the post was renewed during the life of the hut.

The roof covering was probably of roofing tiles, tegulae and half-flue tiles,¹ but

¹ J. Ward, *Romano-British Buildings and Earthworks*, fig. 85.

no imbrices. The position of the debris from the roof would suggest that the gable overhung the north-west end of the hut by three or more feet. The stream and a gully (10) carried off the rain-water from either side of the roof. Unlike the stream bed, very little pottery was found in the gully. The floor of the hut was of beaten earth and full of domestic rubbish. This included much broken pottery (some of it heavily burnt), a child's bracelet, a loom weight, a broken palette, a stone rubber and some glass (Appendix III). The two dozen iron nails found in and around the hut probably secured the roof timbers. Partly covering post-hole 12 was a broken quern reused as a stone threshold, but whether it was in its original position is uncertain.

After a period, long enough for gully 10 to silt up with rubbish and for the threshold to become worn, the hut may have been dismantled. The stones and broken tiles from the roof were found in heaps on either side of the hut and the posts and sleeper beams had been removed.

The stream bed. Immediately north-east of the hut was a stream whose deposits were 20 ft. wide and between 2 and 3 ft. thick at its centre. Soil tests show that the stream was flowing fairly fast for a period before the hut was built and occupied. The variation in the sizes of silt particles suggests that this rapid flow was probably seasonal—perhaps at the time of the winter rains. The stream collected about a foot of sediment before the hut was built, and the period of occupation is represented by debris and pottery from the bottom of layer (3)—together with some traces of charcoal. In this occupation layer and near the centre of the stream was found a complete skull of *Bos longifrons*. It appears that at this period the stream began to fill up with humus and animal matter, its apparent rate of flow decreased, and before the end of the site's occupation it was probably dry. Certainly the amount of humus from layer (3) at A suggests that the stream bed may have been under cultivation for a time before the end.

Scattered in and around the hut and on the stream bed was found an important series of late third to mid-fourth century pottery. Much Samian and colour-coated pottery was found with the coarse pottery; but unless residual, it is difficult to understand the significance of the former in such a late context.

THE ROMANO-SAXON DEPOSIT

In view of the late fourth-century coin and pottery series from the site, the potsherds nos. 1-4 (Fig. 3) are of especial interest. They were found together in a heap thrown up by the mechanical excavators, but which must have come from somewhere near the south-west end of the site (Fig. 1). The series included a few fragments of earlier pottery, such as Samian ware together with colour-coated ware, grey fabrics and a piece of red colour-coated pottery. The Romano-Saxon or Sub-Roman series itself, however, reflects at least three ceramic traditions. No. 4 is clearly derived from standard forms current at the end of the fourth century. The detailing is rather coarse, but the fabric of this shard, the colour-coated pottery, and the grey wares are normal Romano-British. The Romano-Saxon fragment (no. 1) is likewise probably of

Romano-British manufacture. This type of pottery is a recently recognized hybrid combining Romano-British mass production methods with decoration of a Saxon kind. Hitherto nearly all the examples known came from the Saxon Shore or its immediate hinterland. Nos. 2 and 3 are uncommon. Neither truly Romano-British nor Saxon in either fabric or form, they represent a tradition which can truly be called Sub-Roman.

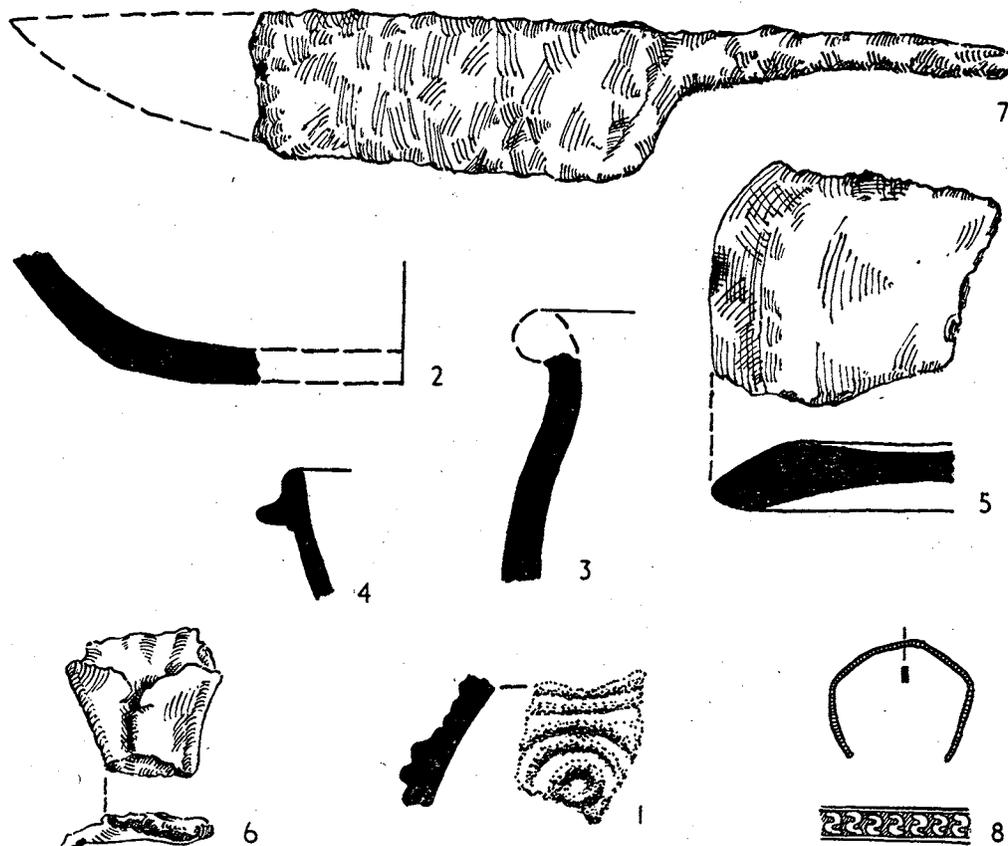


Fig. 3. Small finds, and Romano-Saxon pottery (scale: nos. 1-8 one-half natural size, and detail of no. 8 full size).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

From the first century onwards occupation on the site seems to have been established near streams which flowed into the river in this vicinity. At its maximum extent during period III, occupation covered a little under an acre, and during period I appears to have been nearer a quarter of an acre.

By analogy with neighbouring sites the farmstead was probably surrounded by an irregular network of small fields which spread in a narrow belt along the riverside. Neither corn-drying ovens nor storage pits were noticed within the area of occupation; nor have they often been found on other local farm sites. Animal remains, on the other hand, were plentiful and probably indicate widespread use of the river

pastures.¹ Those from the hut and associated stream bed give an idea of the livestock during the early fourth century. There were apparently two types of cattle, the small Celtic ox and a larger breed which may have been imported to improve the native strain. The bones of both types were found in almost equal proportions. The other principal animal remains were those of sheep, which were almost as common as those of cattle. The varied ages of both sheep and cattle indicate that there could not have been any regular winter killing. The bones of horse and pig were less common on the site.

This site was evidently one of those small native farms, probably of mainly pastoral character,² which were scattered along the river edge almost continuously as far north as Somersham. Similar sites at St Ives and Earith, both fortunately with much of the field system surviving, will be described in future papers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the late Mrs H. Anderson of Westwood Farm for permission to excavate, and to the St Ives Sand and Gravel Company when the land later passed into their possession. I am grateful to Mr J. N. L. Myres for examining the Romano-Saxon pottery, to Dr J. P. C. Kent for identifying the coins and to Dr I. W. Cornwall for examining and checking the reports of the soil tests and animal remains. I also wish to thank Mr M. A. Hyde for help in making the soil tests and Mr J. Perry for examining the stone objects. Finally I am grateful to Mr C. M. Coote and Mr E. Standen for help and for putting material at my disposal.

NOTE

A report of the pottery from the site, other than the Romano-Saxon material, will be incorporated in a future paper in these *Proceedings*. This paper will describe the development of Romano-British pottery in the Great Ouse Valley, and will include a survey of the material from the recent excavations at Godmanchester and at Earith.

APPENDIX I

THE COINS

No.	Denomination	Emperor	Reference	Preservation	A.D. issue date	Find spot
1	As	Uncertain		Worn	First or second century	Layer 4 near hut
2	Æ 3	Constantine I	Cohen 123	Fair	321-3	Layer 3 near hut
3	Æ 4	Barbarous copy of Constantine II as Augustus	Cohen 45	Fair	337+	Unstratified
4	Æ 3	Valens	Cohen 11	Good	364-78	Unstratified
5	Æ 4	Arcadius	Goodacre 45	Fair	395-408	Unstratified

¹ *A.N.L.* vol. v, p. 30.

² C. F. Tebbutt, *History of Bluntisham cum Earith*, p. 16.

APPENDIX II

ROMANO-SAXON POTTERY

(1) Decorated fragment of Romano-Saxon ware (Fig. 3, no. 1). In grey fabric with a cream-orange wash. The fabric is similar to certain types of first-century Belgic pottery, and may be an example of the revival of Belgic techniques at the end of the Roman period.¹ Mr Myres comments '... it does look very like an attempt in decadent R.B. ware to imitate the grooved and bossed ornament of early A.S. pottery... I suppose it comes from a sloping shoulder of quite a small vessel, with horizontal grooving or corrugation above and a line of small solid shoulder bosses each surrounded by circular grooves and surmounted by a dimple. If this is correct it would be quite in order as an A.S. decorative scheme, but neither the fabric nor the execution is normal A.S.' The decoration is comparable to that of another Romano-Saxon vessel found at Walton Castle.²

(2) Hand-made jar in black calcitic fabric with a rough black surface (Fig. 3, no. 2). Mr Myres says 'I do not think that I can make much of the base angle except that there is nothing remotely reminiscent of R.B. conventional wares about it. The closest parallels to it and to no. 3 that I can think of are the pots from Wingham, Kent.'³ The slightly sagging base of this example is paralleled by Wingham no. 7, and both Wingham nos. 1 and 3 have a similar base shape and fabric to our example.

(3) Hand-made jar in black calcitic fabric with a burnished-black surface (Fig. 3, no. 3). Mr Myres comments 'I take it that no. 3, which all but reaches up to the rim is also sub-R.B., both in fabric and form'. The general neck curve is similar to Wingham nos. 2 and 4, and the reconstructed lip is based on those examples. The fabric is unusual on this site, but a few other pieces have been found in unstratified contexts. The normal Romano-British gritted wares are here mixed with pounded shell, the introduction of calcite may be a feature of the sub-Roman period.

(4) Flanged bowl in shell-gritted brown fabric with black surface (Fig. 3, no. 4). Mr Myres says 'the degenerate R.B. bowl is also interesting' and agrees that it represents a stage in the devolution of the fourth-century flanged bowl.

APPENDIX III

SMALL FINDS

(1) Broken palette of argillaceous limestone. The palette is very worn and subsequent to breakage had been reground to shape for further use. Hut floor, layer (3) (Fig. 3, no. 5).

(2) Lead loom weight of irregular shape and folded to hold threads. Hut floor, layer (3) (Fig. 3, no. 6).

(3) Iron knife with broken tip. Cf. with example from London.⁴ Unstratified (Fig. 3, no. 7).

(4) Child's bracelet of bronze with dark green patina. Exterior engraved with S pattern. Hut floor, layer (3) (Fig. 3, no. 8).

¹ *A.N.L.* vol. VI, p. 146.

² D. B. Harden, *Dark Age Britain*, fig. 3, no. 8.

³ *Ant.* vol. XVII (1944), pp. 52-3.

⁴ *London Museum Catalogue*, no. 3 (1946), pl. xxvi, no. 5.

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CONTENTS

<i>Officers and Council of the Society 1958-1959</i>	page vi
<i>Report of the Council for the Year 1957</i>	vii
<i>Summary of Accounts for the Year 1957</i>	viii
A Beaker from Ely By D. H. TRUMP	I
Excavations at Whiteley Hill, Barley, Herts By J. C. WILKERSON and M. D. CRA'STER	2
A New Hoard of Romano-British Pewter from Icklingham By JOAN LIVERSIDGE, M.LITT., F.S.A.	6
A Roman Well at Exning, Suffolk By DAVID E. JOHNSTON	11
A Group of Romano-British Pottery with an Owner's Mark By B. R. HARTLEY and E. STANDEN	21
A Romano-British Farm at St Ives By H. J. M. GREEN	23
William Allington of Horseheath, Speaker in the Parliament of 1429-30. Paper I By J. S. ROSKELL	30
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