

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUMES LVI & LVII

JANUARY 1962 TO DECEMBER 1963

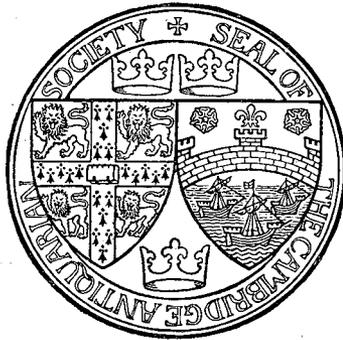
CAMBRIDGE
DEIGHTON BELL

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EXCAVATIONS AT THE WAR DITCHES, CHERRY HINTON, 1949-51

D. A. WHITE

INTRODUCTION

THIS paper describes a concentration of Romano-British structures comprising a post-hole complex, a large pit, a well and a series of drainage ditches, all of which belong to a farmstead dating from the second to the fourth century A.D. It lies slightly to the west of the entrance of the Iron Age hill-fort of War Ditch, at 150 ft. above sea-level (Grid Ref. 484556).

The site was discovered by Mr T. C. Lethbridge in the summer of 1949, after the topsoil had been cleared from the area to make way for chalk quarrying. Something

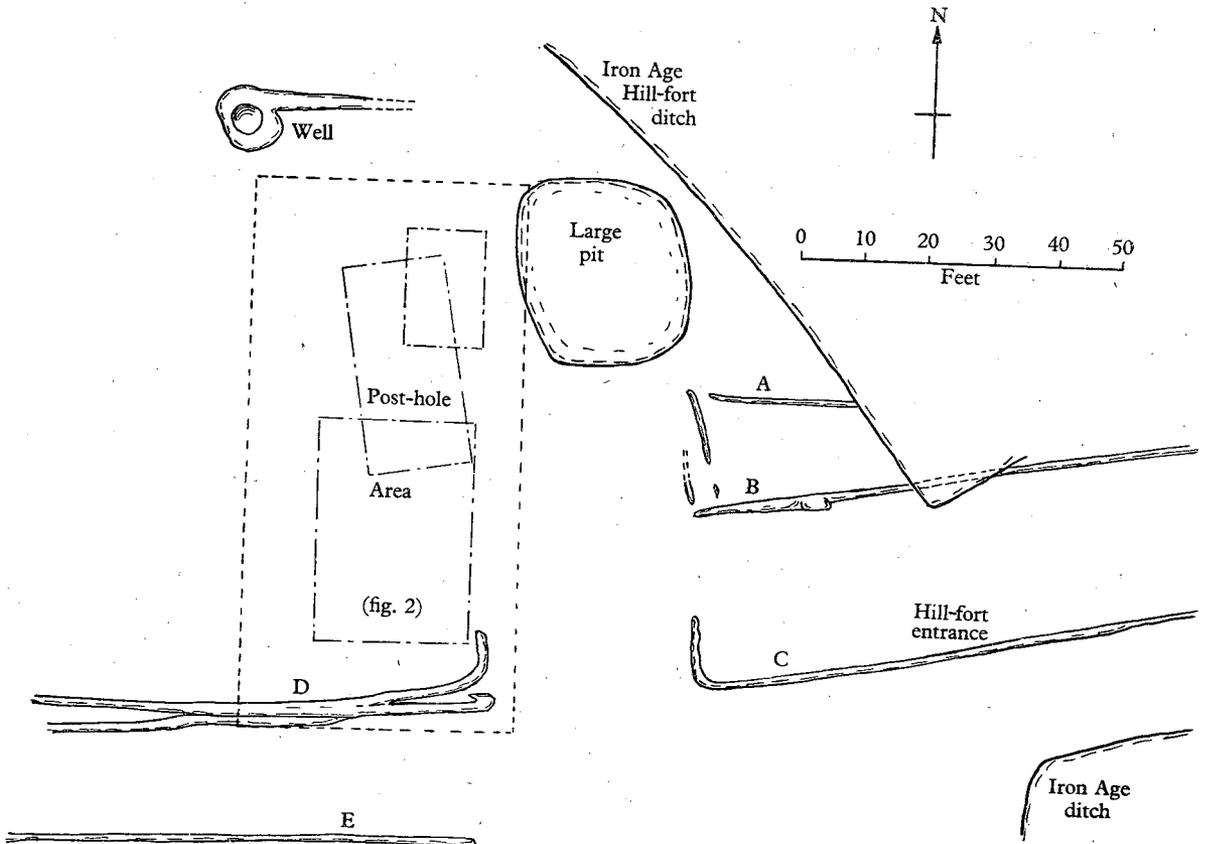


Fig. 1. General plan of site.

was done on the area by Mr Lethbridge, but extensive work was not begun until later in the same summer under Mr K. D. M. Dauncy of Birmingham University, who directed excavation of the post-hole complex and some of the ditches. The examination of the area was continued by Mr C. H. Houlder, then a member of the Cambridge Archaeological Field Club, who cleared out the large pit (no. 85) and the well; work on the site finished in 1951. In the autumn of 1962, the author began working on the material from this site in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, and is publishing the findings under the auspices of the Cambridge Archaeological Field Club.

Figure 1 is a general plan, illustrating an area 200 by 150 ft. The only substantial features on the site are the well, the large pit and the Iron Age hill-fort ditch, in the north-eastern and eastern parts of the area. The remaining features are shallow and had suffered a good deal of damage when the bulldozer removed the topsoil. Especially noticeable is the complete removal of the eastern half of the run-off to the well. The damage caused in the area of the post-holes must have been immense, apparently removing all traces of floors. The post-holes have been badly truncated, only the bottom few inches being left. Some are extremely shallow features and it is highly likely that all traces of several post-holes were completely removed by bulldozing. In Fig. 2 the position of hypothetical post-holes is shown in dotted outline.

THE POST-HOLE COMPLEX

Figure 2 shows the details of the post-holes and the structural skeletons to which they would appear to conform. They are numbered A, B, C, D or E according to the alignments they follow. The post-holes belong to at least two structural periods, whose dates may be estimated from the material found in them. B 5, B 11, B 17 and C 13 produced body sherds of a possible second-century A.D. date. They are characterized by the darkness of fabric, which oxidizes to a chocolate colour; two of the sherds had a dark polished slip. More conclusive evidence comes from other post-holes, most outstanding being the discovery of a base of a jar with incised rings and dark polished slip¹ in B 2; B 5 and B 8 produced shoulder sherds of narrow-mouthed jars of the late first or early second century; these too have soapy, polished fabrics. The Antonine date of the complex is further substantiated by a worn shoulder sherd of a jar with horizontal rilling² from B 9. From C 6 came a body sherd with a soft calcite-gritted fabric, almost reminiscent of Iron Age A pottery; similar fabrics have been found on the site in a second-century context from the well (see Fig. 6, nos. 1, 3, 4). In E 1 and E 3 were fragments with light grey fabric, characteristic of sherds from third- and fourth-century contexts on the site; these had no slip applied to them. D 12 produced a small fragment of colour-coated ware and E 2 a fragment of a flanged bowl rim.

The conclusions would appear to give an earlier date to post-holes of the B and C series; the fact that the B and C are contemporary is further confirmed by the alignments B 18 to B 23 and C 5 to C 8, which are almost identical. One would be inclined

¹ *Proc. C.A.S.* LIII (1959), p. 25, no. 14.

² *Ibid.* nos. 2, 3.

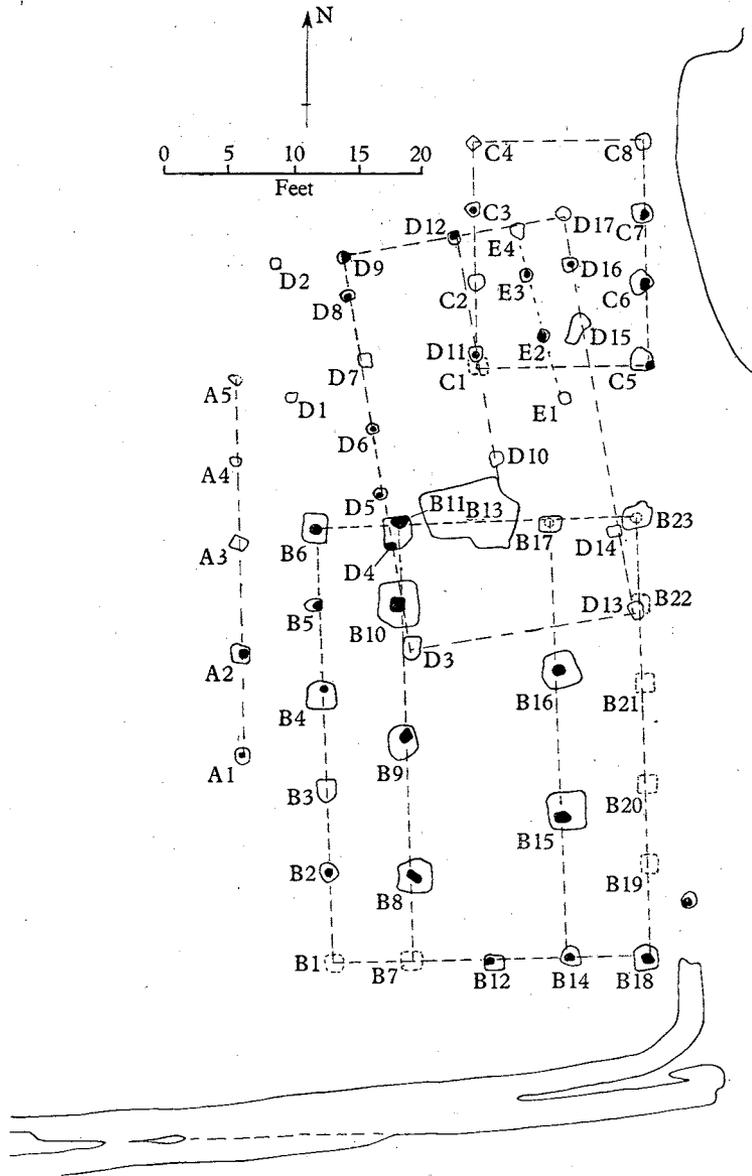


Fig. 2. Detail of post-hole complex.

to assign a similar date to row A because of its orientation. Post-holes of the D and E series are later in date; their alignments have been turned slightly anti-clockwise.

Figure 3 gives a conjectural view, from the south-east, of the post-holes of the 'B' series. The plan on Fig. 2 gives only the details of the main structural members; the dark spots in the post-holes are the plan view of what was left of the actual wood used in the building; the shapes of these spots indicate that tree-trunks rather than shaped timbers were used for the wooden uprights (see cross-section, Fig. 4).

The building was a large one, measuring 25 by 35 ft.; to support its roof a special design would have been necessary. It was important to construct a rigid, strong timber framework to hold it up. The framework was probably based on the rectangle with B7, B11, B14 and B17 as corners. Timbers about 13 ft. in length are required to cross the gaps, B17 to B16, B11 to B17 and so forth. Timbers of this length are about the longest that can be obtained naturally as a reasonably straight piece of

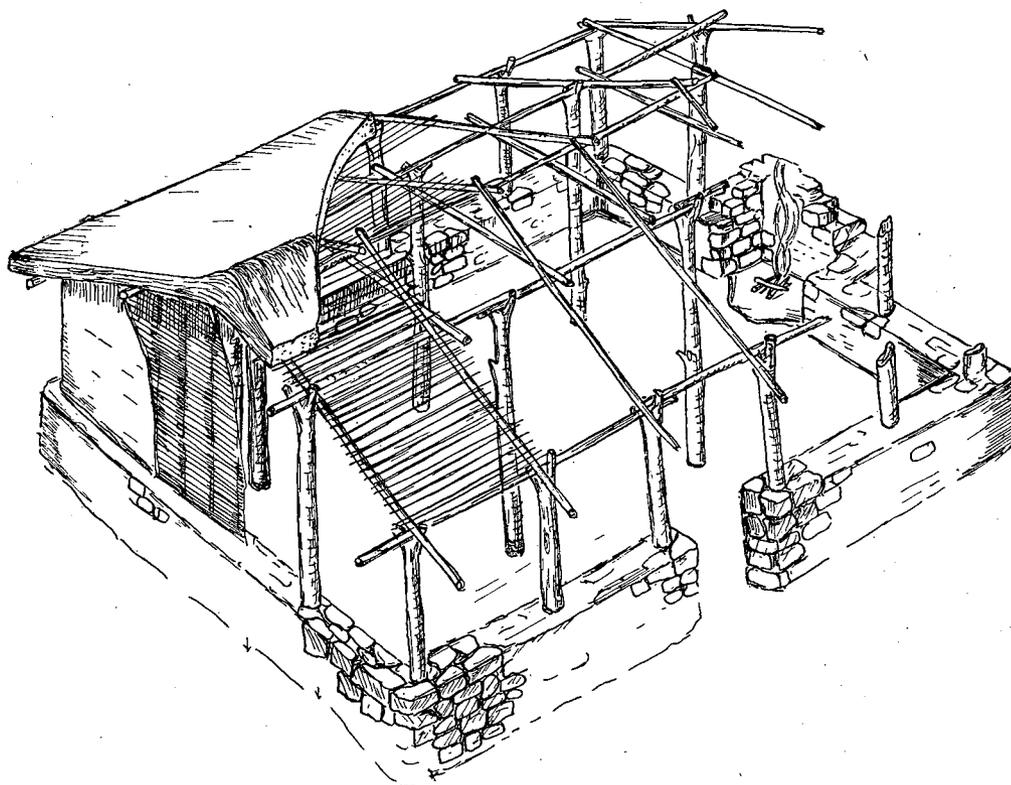


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of building B.

wood. This puts a design limit not only on maximum possible spans, but also on the maximum possible height of an upright. Assuming that it was necessary to dig the posts in 3 ft. down for stability, the large uprights B8, 9, 10, 15, and 16, could only have supported a roof 10 ft. off the ground along the lines B7 to B11 and B14 to B17. Assuming the roof over the walls B1 to B5, B18 to B23 was 6 ft. off the ground, the ridge of the roof must have been at least 14 ft. high. To support the ridge directly a 17-ft. length of timber is required; since this would be almost impossible to get, the designers had to rely on a rigid framework, supported by posts also on the lines B7 to B11 and B14 to B17, to hold most of the weight of the roof.

The posts along the sides B1 to B6, B18 to B23 therefore had a smaller weight to carry. Their main function was to stabilize the walls. One very interesting aspect of the wall construction concerns the nearby large pit or quarry (Fig. 1).

It seems highly probable that the pit was a source of building stone for the walls, as shown on Fig. 3. Dr N. Davey of the D.S.I.R. Building Research Station states that the use of chalk blocks for walling is an extremely old practice, and not at all impossible in our climate, providing that adequate precautions are taken to keep the

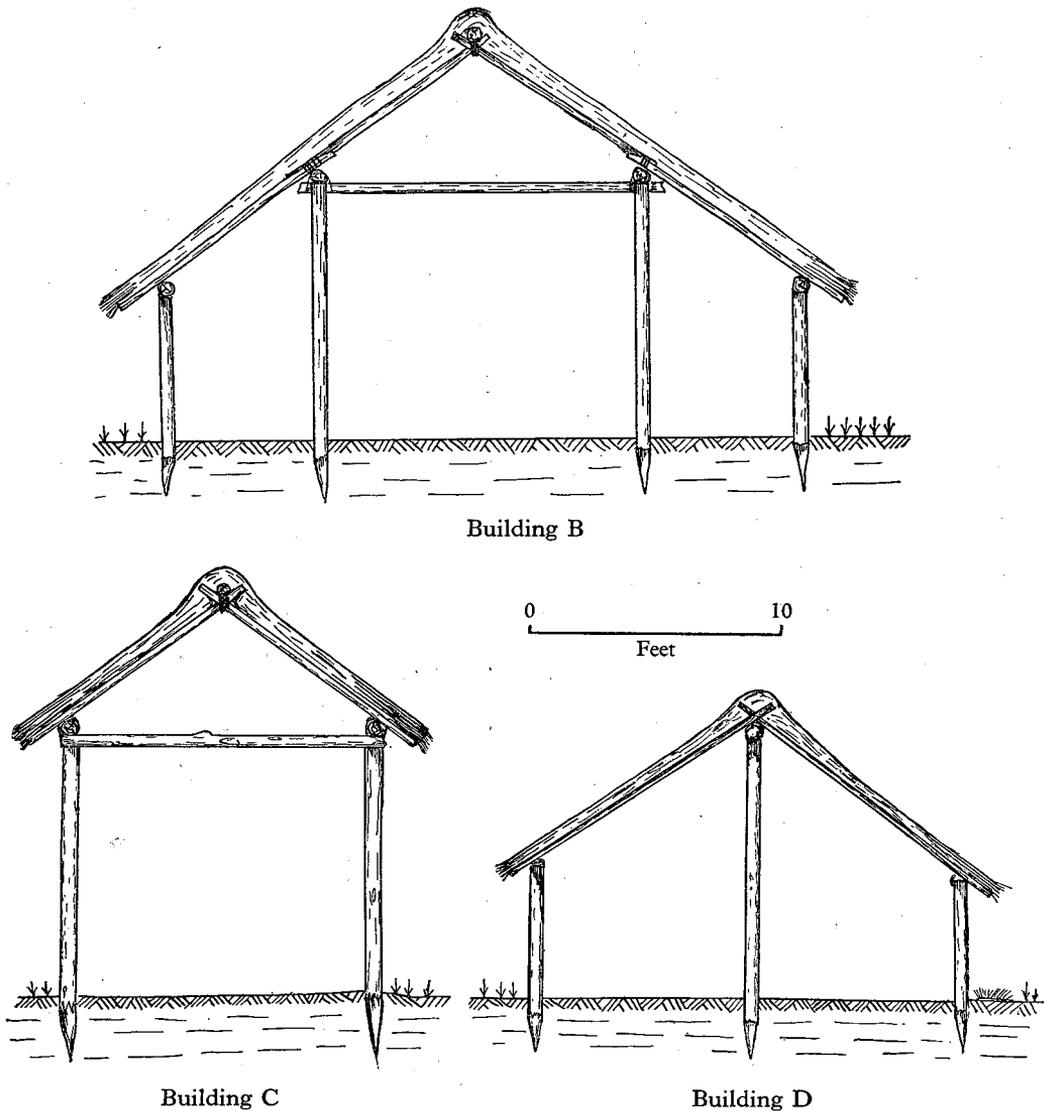


Fig. 4. Reconstructed cross-section of huts.

walling dry; otherwise the chalk would suffer damage by frost and erosion. The sketch on Fig. 3 shows the higher portions of the wall continued by wattle and daub, but it should be noted that the excavators make no mention of the presence of wattle and daub in destruction deposits of this period and do not comment on its absence. No tiles are reported from any part of the site; thus the building probably had a

thatched roof; the absence of a solid supported ridge must have given the roof a pronounced bow in the centre.

Figure 2, B 13, is a shallow hollow, partly outside the hut. When excavated it was found to contain a great amount of burned earth and thus may possibly represent the hearth of the house, in which case a chimney as shown in Fig. 3 is possible. The position of the door is not certain, but from the general layout of the site the position as shown in Fig. 3 between B 20 and B 21 is most probable. There may well have been internal walls in the hut but no traces of any were found. The presence of a large amount of burnt debris, from deposits of the Antonine period, suggest that this building was burned down in the middle of the second century A.D.

Just to the north of building B lie the series C post-holes, representing the foundations of a rectangular building 18 by 13 ft. The width is about the maximum possible using only the outside walls as a roof support, as a 13 ft. timber is required to span the gap from C 4 to C 8 and so on. C 1 to C 4, C 5 to C 8 could thus have been 10 ft. high and its general shape would, of all the buildings, most resemble a barn. It is probably contemporary with building B, and its conjectural cross-section is shown in Fig. 4.

The foundations of the building represented by the series D post-holes are the most incomplete, but would seem to show the outline of a building 32 ft. long and 18 ft. broad. The main axis had been turned slightly anti-clockwise from those of buildings B and C. It is obviously not contemporary with these. Its width of 18 ft. necessitates the use of a central roof ridge, supported by the uprights D 10, D 11 and D 12 (see Fig. 4). Timbers 18 ft. in length to span the whole width of the building would be virtually impossible to obtain. Thus the ridge of the roof could be no higher than 10 ft. and the side walls D 3 to D 9, D 13 to D 12 would probably be only 5 ft. high, giving the building the appearance of a dwelling rather than a barn.

The post-holes of series E are difficult to explain, but may have been added to support some of the timber members of hut D.

THE WELL

Mr Houlder describes the well in the north-west corner (Fig. 1) thus:

Three feet in diameter and excavated to a depth of forty-two feet. The fill was entirely of rubble, apparently thrown in deliberately. Nothing resembling a primary deposit was found. The well was perfectly circular and vertical-sided and had steps cut in two opposing vertical rows: these were holes six inches square and one and a half feet apart centre to centre, arranged alternately so that a descent could be made straddle wise. At the mouth the sides expanded sharply at a depth of two feet to a diameter of about seven feet at the surface of the chalk. Around the mouth were a few small stake holes as of a hurdle fence. A shallow runnel one foot three inches wide ran to the east but faded out after twelve feet.

From near the bottom of the excavated portion of the well came a large deposit of early Antonine Samian, forms 31, 31 R and 33. Many of these sherds show signs of intense burning, a feature shared by much of the coarse ware from the well. Especially noticeable was the burnt handle of a flagon which had a few fragments of

clinker adhering to it. There seems little reason to doubt that the well fell out of use during this period and was purposely filled in then. This view is further strengthened by the discovery of fragments of an Antonine Samian vessel, form 31, from the top 2 ft. of the well deposit. The sherds from the well filling can thus reasonably be dated to the years A.D. 140-70.

The gutter leading east from the well (Fig. 1) runs on an axis roughly parallel to the northern and southern walls of buildings B and C. The uniformity of alignments suggests that the well and the buildings are contemporary.

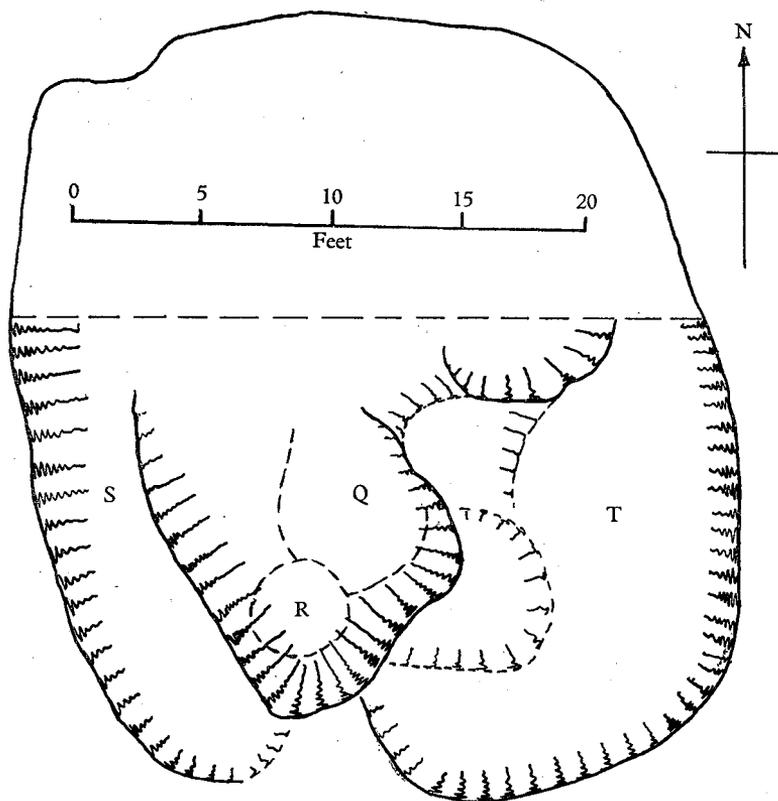


Fig. 5. Plan of large quarry pit.

THE LARGE PIT

A plan of this pit is given in Fig. 5. It is a large oval feature which had a very irregular floor. At Q its depth is about $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. whilst at T there is a slight shelf cut only a foot or so into the chalk. Fig. 5(S) is a ramp which leads from the bottom of the pit to the surface.

A possible reason for cutting the pit may have been to obtain chalk blocks for building or burning for lime. Its width and the absence of internal post-holes seem to rule out the hypothesis that this was dug to make a pit dwelling, and its use as a quarry is further substantiated by the presence of buildings nearby.

Debris from the Antonine period was thrown into the bottom level of the pit. Much of this debris is burnt, as already observed in connection with pottery from the well. This suggests that the pit was dug to provide material for the large building B and outhouse C, which would appear to date from the Antonine period.

Later two rubbish pits Q and R were dug into the primary rubble; third- and fourth-century pottery were thrown into these holes but, since they were dug into an earlier layer, the later pits are contaminated with Antonine pottery, and detailed descriptions of the finds are omitted. Instead, some of the best pieces are illustrated in Appendix II, since they give some indication of the dates of the later phase. A section of the whole pit is also omitted, since a great deal of the upper layers were removed before serious excavation started.

Finally, a word about the ditches shown in Fig. 1. No significant finds of pottery from these features have been preserved and it seems impossible to date them more accurately. However, features on Fig. 1, B, C, seem to follow the alignments of the later building phase, E and A those of the first phase, whilst D contains two ditches on both alignments. Whether this constitutes dating evidence for these features is still open to doubt, especially since many Roman native sites on the Fenland seem to have been constructed without any master plan or semblance to a rectangular order.

CONCLUSIONS

Rectangular buildings, of the type found at Cherry Hinton, replace the traditional round Iron Age dwelling,¹ as at Maiden Castle,² in the early decades of the Roman period. In the more out-of-the-way districts, the transition takes place at a later date than in the developed urban areas. Rectangular structures occur at Park Street and Lockleys in the last quarter of the first century,³ whereas in Somerset round dwellings exist up to the second century.⁴ This latter state of affairs may hold true in Cambridgeshire for two reasons; first, the relative backwardness of the indigenous Icenian natives, and, secondly, the halt of natural development caused by the suppression of the Boudiccan revolt. There seems little reason to doubt that the area of the War Ditch was continuously inhabited from the Flavian Period onwards; however, the construction of the farm in the Antonine period *c.* A.D. 130—if this represents the first Romanization on this site—comes at a very late date indeed. But the pottery sequence from this area shows conclusively that the farm was first occupied in this period.

Applying Collingwood's definition to this site,⁵ it must be concluded that the remains belong to a 'Villa'. But, as Rivet has pointed out,⁶ the discovery that the isolated farm is more common in Roman times than was once thought tends to

¹ For a local site see Tebbutt, *Proc. C.A.S. L* (1957), p. 76.

² Wheeler, 'Excavations at Maiden Castle', *Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries*, no. XII, p. 125, pl. xx.

³ Rivet, *Town and Country in Roman Britain*, p. 103.

⁴ O'Neill, *Studies in Building History*, ch. 2.

⁵ Collingwood, *Archaeology of Roman Britain*, p. 113.

⁶ Rivet, *op. cit.* p. 104.

invalidate the definition, and one is forced to refer to the present site as a farmstead. The largest building in this complex, building B, measuring almost 25 by 40 ft., is almost the size of Park Street or Lockleys, showing that the dividing line between farmsteads and 'Villas' is a very difficult one to define on the basis of size of construction.

Richmond¹ has discussed problems concerning the construction of Roman timber buildings and raises points relevant to the farmstead at Cherry Hinton. The hypothesis that the maximum easily obtainable length of timber is 13 ft. is borne out by the width of portals of timber gateways in Roman forts. These portals would be spanned by continuous widths of timber. The relevant lengths are 12 ft. at Inch-tuthil, 10 ft. at Hod Hill and 13 ft. at Fendoch.

The problem of wall foundation-trenches is also mentioned by Richmond.² These are an important feature of a timber building, their function being to stabilize the walls. They are absent at Cherry Hinton. Whether this absence is at all significant is difficult to judge. They may have existed, but could easily have been removed by the bulldozer. The walls were further strengthened by uprights, which, according to Richmond, are placed at intervals of 5 ft. This observation is further substantiated by the uprights of the walls of building B, and by the eastern and western walls of both buildings C and D; these uprights too are 5 ft. apart. The actual method of wall construction of the buildings at Cherry Hinton cannot be stated with any certainty. In this connection, the use of chalk blocks as building stones has already been mentioned. Although this material would not seem very satisfactory when exposed to the rigours of our climate, even less hardy materials have been used by Romano-British builders. Richmond³ reports the use of 'heat-dried', possibly sun-baked, clay bricks in the walls of buildings at Castell Collen and Colchester.

Cherry Hinton stands on the border of two provinces of Roman Britain: to the south lies Essex and a countryside studded with villas, very different from the Fenland to the north, characterized by small farms and villages.⁴ By their nature the structures at the War Ditch seem to belong to the Fenland settlements, for, although the site is raised over 100 ft. above the low fens, the farmstead at Cherry Hinton should be interpreted as typical of the large number of farms that must have existed in the Roman Fenland.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr C. H. Houlder and Mr K. Dauncy for making their material available. Mr B. Cunliffe and Miss M. D. Cra'ster have advised and helped me prepare this report. Mr B. R. Hartley examined the Samian Ware and gave me the notes from which Appendix I has been written. Mr A. L. Prentice helped with the pottery drawing.

¹ *Studies in Building History*, ed. E. M. Jope (Odhams, 1961), ch. 1.

² *Op. cit.* p. 20.

³ *Op. cit.* p. 24.

⁴ C. W. Phillips in Grimes (ed.), *Aspects of Archaeology* (Edwards, 1951).

APPENDIX I

SAMIAN WARE

A large proportion of this group of fifty Samian sherds is burnt, and with only two exceptions an early Antonine date, A.D. 140-70, seems certain. Most of the sherds are fragments of forms 31, 31R, 33 and 37 although there is one Curle 15 from the large pit and an 18/31 of Hadrianic date. There are five fragments of the same form 37—two from the well and three from the large quarry pit; this has a large winding scroll-pattern and wavy-line border paralleled in the work of Attianus of Central Gaul.¹ This is in his late style.

Stamps

From the bottom of the well there are three examples.

(1) MACRINVS (on form 33). A stamp of the Central Gaulish potter Macrinus also occurs on form 33 at the Wroxeter Gutter² and on an early example of form 29 from Cirencester.

(2) AETERNIM (retrograde stamp) on a form 31; this stamp has a possible blind A. Aeternus is an Antonine potter of Central Gaul; retrograde stamps probably of this die come from the Wroxeter Gutter and Aquinam.³

(3) CIM-[Stamp of Cintugenus of Central Gaul probably from a die reading CIITVGENI as at Newstead, where its Antonine date is not in doubt.

(4)]MINIF on a form 31; a stamp of one of the Geminidae of Central Gaul. This stamp comes from the bottom of the large pit.

APPENDIX II

COARSE POTTERY

In sheer weight a great deal of Romano-British coarse pottery was found at the War Ditch; in two respects, however, it was a somewhat disappointing assemblage. First, the features found had already been badly damaged before excavation began and so a large proportion of stratified material was lost. The second reason is more fundamental; the main period of occupation on the site was Antonine and there was certainly a much smaller fourth-century occupation. But the fourth-century deposits were found in pits that had been dug into Antonine debris; these pits contained a large proportion of material derived from an earlier context—so much, in fact, that there appeared to be more Antonine than fourth-century sherds in the finds from the two pits dug into the large rectangular quarry pit. Accordingly, most of the material from a later context has been neglected in this paper, but for the sake of the record a few fragments are shown to illustrate the fourth-century occupation on the site.

The extent of pottery contamination at the War Ditch shows what can happen on any site where there is a considerable depth of stratigraphy. On such sites many so-called 'survivals of earlier types' must surely be derived from an earlier context. Where there is a large depth of debris of a number of periods of occupation, it is possible to work out the skeleton of a pottery sequence. However, the bare bones of such a sequence must be filled with the flesh which is obtained from the examination of small isolated features, graves, kilns and storage pits,⁴ wherever there is any evidence that these features were filled within a short period of time. Then the

¹ Stenfield and Simpson, *Central Gaulish Potters*, pl. 87, nos. 21, 25 and 26.

² Atkinson, *Excavations at Wroxeter* (Oxford, 1923-7).

³ Jahász, *Archaeologiai Eresito* (1936), p. 33.

⁴ For instance the local Arbury Road Groups, *Proc. C.A.S.* XLVIII (1954).

survivals of earlier types found on larger sites may be cross-checked, for, if they are not present in small groups of the same date, one may strongly suspect that they are not contemporary with the filling of the deposit but derived from an earlier context.

For reasons given above, the filling of the well and of the bottom of the large quarry pit, in the present site, should be considered contemporaneous and Antonine in date. The sherds in these deposits are thus typical of the mid-second century in the Cambridge area, and so are worthy of publication.

Antonine coarse pottery from the War Ditch (Fig. 6, nos. 1-7)

First a couple of negative points. In the deposits from the well and pit there was not one sherd of colour-coated ware, this being yet another illustration that such wares were not used in the

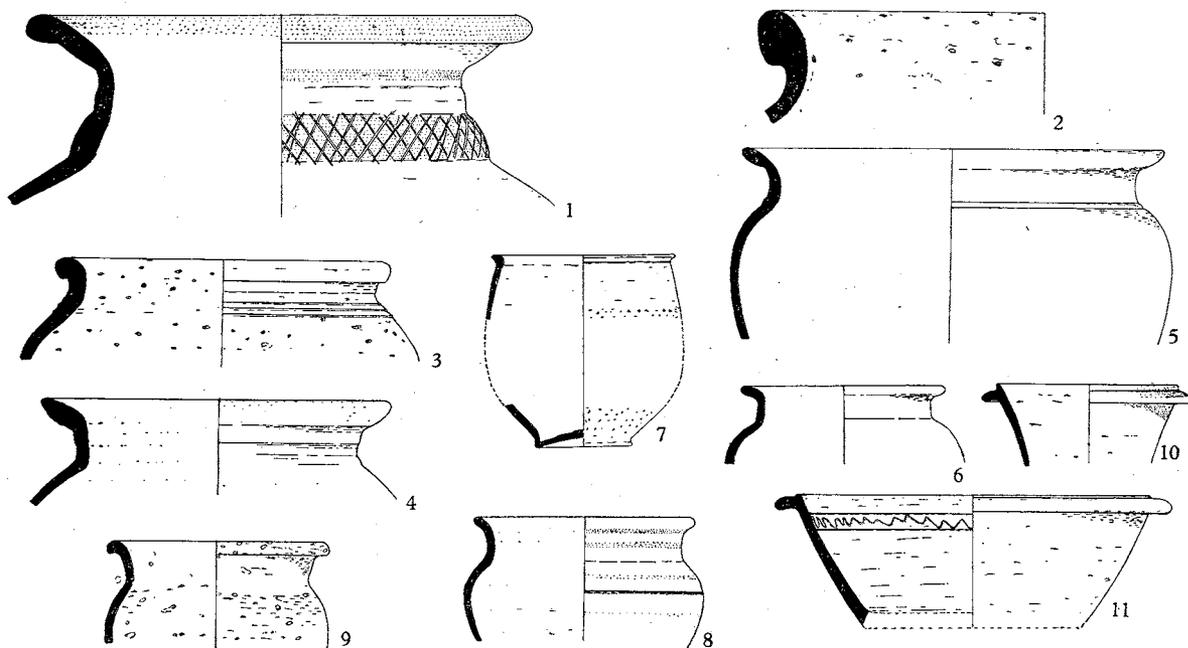


Fig. 6. Coarse pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

Cambridge area until the late second century at the earliest. There are also no *mortarium* fragments from these deposits. The absence of such vessels is interesting and may indicate some irregularity in the diet of the Roman farmers at Cherry Hinton. Of this group, nos. 1, 2 and 3 come from the well, and the others from the large quarry pit.

No. 1. Large jar from the well in a slightly smoked grey fabric burnished on rim and neck, and decorated on the shoulder band with incised lines (the incisions being made after firing). Similar types have been found in second-century deposits locally at Godmanchester,¹ and at Arbury Road.²

No. 2. Rim of a large storage jar in a shell-gritted ware. The fabric has a grey core and is oxidized to a reddish-pink on the outside. The sherd shows traces of burning. Similar jars

¹ Green, 'Roman Godmanchester', *Proc. C.A.S.* LIII (1959), p. 17, no. 14.

² Hartley, 'Arbury Road', *Proc. C.A.S.* XLVIII (1954), p. 32, no. 17.

come from second-century layers at Jewry Wall¹ and Hadrian's Wall,² though the most exact parallel was found locally at Orton Longueville.³

No. 3. Jar, possibly a cooking-pot, in gritted fabric similar to no. 2; however, the sherd is baked a uniform pink; again there are traces of burning on the outside. This is a localized form, the only apparent parallel being from Godmanchester.⁴

No. 4. Pot similar in fabric to no. 3, but with a brown core. No parallels. These gritted fabrics are typical of the second-century deposits and represent an attested survival of first-century wares,⁵ themselves very reminiscent of Iron Age A fabrics.

No. 5. Medium-mouthed jar in light pinkish fabric with a dark polished slip; the shoulder is cordoned. A 'classic' Belgic survival into the second century, this type has been found in the upper filling of the hillfort ditch⁶ in a first-century context, and also from the kiln at the War Ditch.⁷ It is known from a second-century deposit at Verulamium.⁸

No. 6. Small jar in pink hard fabric, burned slightly on the outside, paralleled—in shape only—at Orton Longueville.⁹

No. 7. Rough-cast beaker in whitish-grey fabric with a dark grey slip. This example is in an unusual fabric for this well-attested second-century type; most examples are in colour-coated ware. Locally this type is known from Godmanchester,¹⁰ and has also been found on Hadrian's Wall,¹¹ Verulamium¹² and Jewry Wall.¹³

Material from later deposits (Fig. 6, nos. 8-11)

Colour-coated ware was plentiful but fragmentary. The sherds included pieces of bulbous beakers, most examples having rouletting, similar to those from the Nene Valley¹⁴ and Hadrian's Wall.¹⁵ Another type found at the War Ditch was the Castor-ware lid.¹⁶ The occurrence of these fragments attests a fourth-century date for much of the material from the deposits.

No. 8. Small jar with grey core slightly oxidized on the outside, a patchy thin grey slip, and bands of burnishing. This fragment is undoubtedly derived from an earlier source by its rim shape¹⁷ and fabric, which would not be out of place in a first-century deposit. This example is included as typical of the contamination in the later deposits at Cherry Hinton.

No. 9. Jar in soft pink gritted fabric, paralleled in shape by a vessel from Godmanchester.¹⁸ However, its presence in these deposits is not necessarily indicative of a fourth-century date.

No. 10. Flanged bowl in light grey fabric with a dark slip. A fourth-century type found also at Arbury Road.¹⁹

No. 11. Flanged bowl in pinkish fabric with grey slip. The decoration of zig-zags was made before firing and similar decoration is known from Hadrian's Wall.²⁰

¹ Kenyon, 'Excavations at Jewry Wall', *Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries*, xv, p. 176, no. 1.

² Gillam, 'Types of Romano-British pottery in North Britain', *Archaeologia Aeliana*, xxxv (1957), p. 231, no. 106.

³ Dakin, 'Roman Site at Orton Longueville', *Proc. C.A.S.* LIV (1960), p. 59, no. 25.

⁴ Green, *op. cit.* p. 19, no. 34.

⁵ See my previous paper on the War Ditch, *Proc. C.A.S.* present volume, Fig. 5, nos. 10, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.* Fig. 5, no. 7.

⁷ Hartley, *Proc. C.A.S.* LIII (1959), p. 25, no. 9.

⁸ Wheeler, 'Verulamium', *Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries*, no. XI, p. 184, no. 17.

⁹ Dakin, *op. cit.* p. 59, no. 1.

¹⁰ Green, *op. cit.* p. 17, no. 21.

¹¹ Gillam, *op. cit.* p. 228, no. 72.

¹² Wheeler, *op. cit.* p. 183, no. 9.

¹³ Kenyon, *op. cit.* p. 164, no. 41.

¹⁴ Hartley, *op. cit.* p. 25, no. 16.

¹⁵ Gillam, *op. cit.* p. 243, no. 230.

¹⁶ Hartley, *op. cit.* p. 25, no. 18.

¹⁷ *Proc. C.A.S.* present volume, Fig. 5, nos. 5-7.

¹⁸ Green, *op. cit.* p. 60, no. 66.

¹⁹ Hartley, *op. cit.* p. 34, no. 54.

²⁰ Gillam, *op. cit.* p. 243, nos. 231, 232.

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