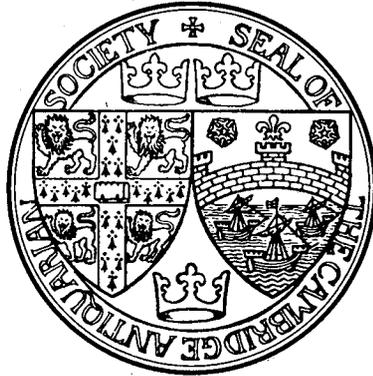

**Proceedings of the
Cambridge Antiquarian Society**
(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume LXXXVIII
for 1999

Roman Cambridge

Excavations on Castle Hill 1956–1988

John Alexander and Joyce Pullinger



This volume is dedicated to more than 400 volunteers who worked in their free time on the excavations and post excavation work, and to those contributors to the final work who did not live to see the results: Don Allen, Bernard Denston, Ray Farrar, Chris Godfrey, Rex Hull, Joan Liversidge and John Scott.

Roman Cambridge: Excavations on Castle Hill 1956–1988

John Alexander and Joyce Pullinger

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2. The Iron Age Settlement

Summary

An extensive Iron Age settlement was sited to command the river crossing and trackways to Godmanchester and the Fens. The phases of settlement recognised stratigraphically suggest there was occupation for several generations. The earliest phase probably consisted of ditched enclosures. Six round, vertically-sided pits may have been contemporary with these enclosures. Pottery showed the villagers to be using wares of Belgic types and it is likely that the settlement was founded late in the 1st century BC. There were then built, without change in the rest of the cultural evidence, a succession of rounded features and a large number of pits, which differed in shape from the storage pits and which may have been for quarrying marl. A possible third phase was represented by one much larger ditch which was either set among, or in place of, some of the smaller ditches. It seemed to have been still in use at the Roman conquest. Parts of five ditched features were excavated. These are thought to have been enclosures containing dwellings, for gateways, hearths and walls were found within them.

Introduction

Excavations show some of the limits of the settlement on the hill. Only a few sherds were found at SR and CR, and none at CEF, SP, HM, HC or MP. Ditches of this phase were found in GT, RG, RGS, CP, CH and, perhaps, beneath the Shire Hall.

Description (Fig. 2.1)

Phase I

Ditches

RG

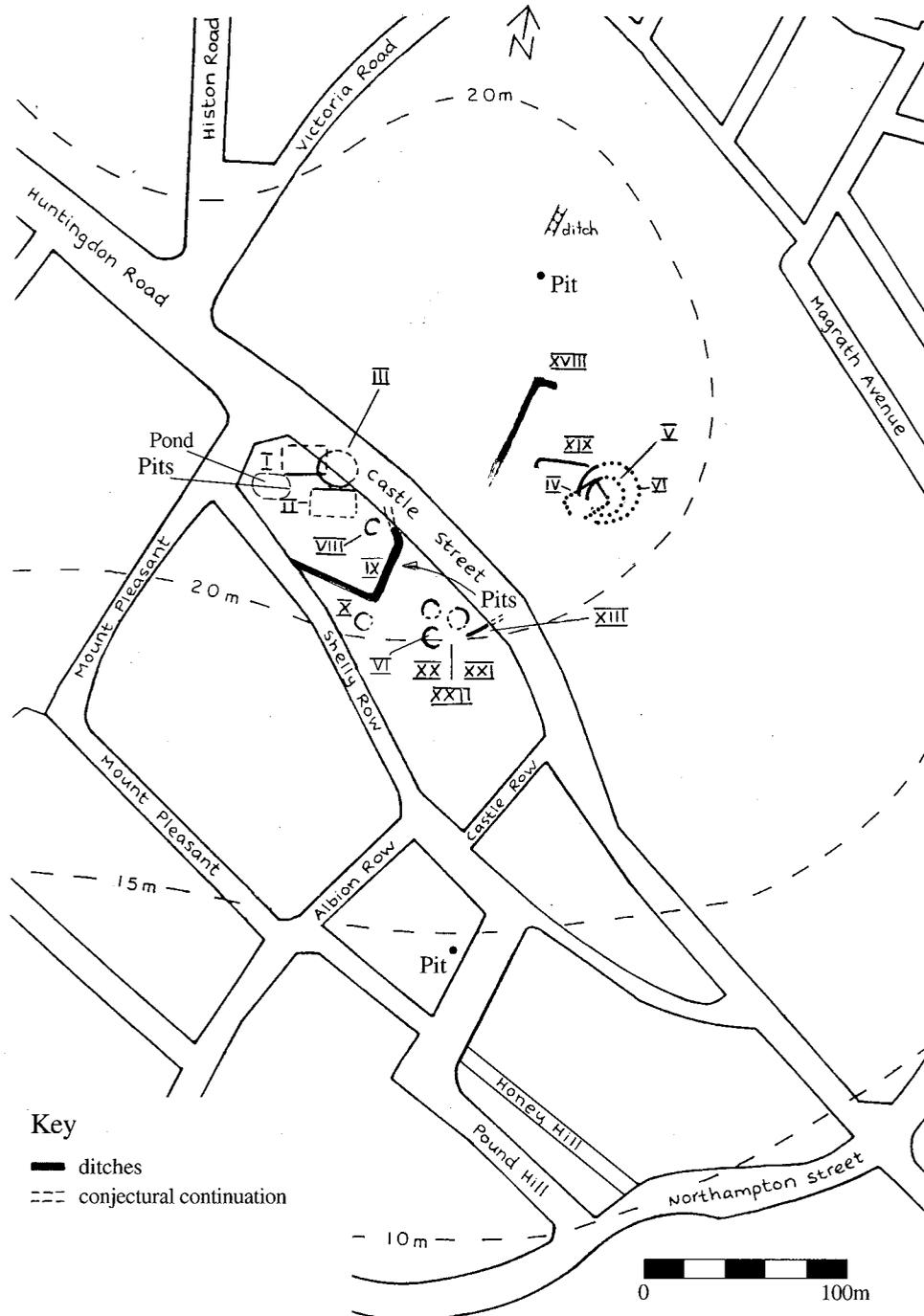
Ditch I (Fig. 2.2): This was a V-profiled ditch, dug 1.2m into the chalk. It had smooth well-cut sides and was traced for 10.6m in a straight line. It was probably part of a rectangular enclosure and, although its northern edge had been destroyed, the whole of the southern side was intact. Along this side the loam and sand which naturally overlay the chalk had been removed, leaving the surface of the chalk bare and artificially level. This surface had been puddled and reinforced

with many small broken flint nodules. The original land-surface further west had been completely destroyed by later pre-Roman pitting and no trace of any features remained. Along the edge of the ditch three postholes had been dug. The ditch had apparently remained open for a long time, slowly silting up to within 30cm of its top, but several changes occurred in the silting during this time. The stiff white primary silt was covered by a grey clay on the surface of which flints collected. On this there was a thick layer of yellow clay. The top filling was chalky and covered by a layer of flints. Iron Age sherds were found in all the siltings. A second ditch was dug through it after Ditch I had silted up. This had a U-profile, was 1.2m wide, 60cm deep and flat bottomed. The layer from which it was dug was the surface associated with Ditch I. It was filled with buff clay and a smaller U-shaped gully within it might have been a timber slot. Its fill suggested that the timbers had probably been removed later. No finds came from it. Stratigraphically contemporary with it was Pit V, a shallow depression more than 3m wide and 45cm deep. It had silted up slowly and no finds came from it.

Ditch II: Palisade trench, similar to the U-shaped gully (above) and probably contemporary with it. Here the bottom 38cm of a 90cm wide, steep-sided, gently-rounded to flat-bottomed ditch survived. It was traced for 11m in a straight west to east line roughly parallel to Ditch I. It had a thin primary silt of gravel and sediment, then stony red-brown sterile loam and finally, a dark almost stoneless loam which contained Iron Age sherds. No silting lines were seen in the fill.

GT (Plate XL: 118)

Ditch IV (GT Ditch 1 and 1a): Further east more of the settlement was found, the earliest features being similar to those described above. Here two ditches at right angles were the earliest feature (Fig. 2.3) probably a rectangular, palisaded, enclosure. The northern palisade was set into a well-made U-profiled ditch (Ditch GT. 1) 75cm wide and cut 75cm into the chalk. It could be traced in a straight line for 4.5m although it had

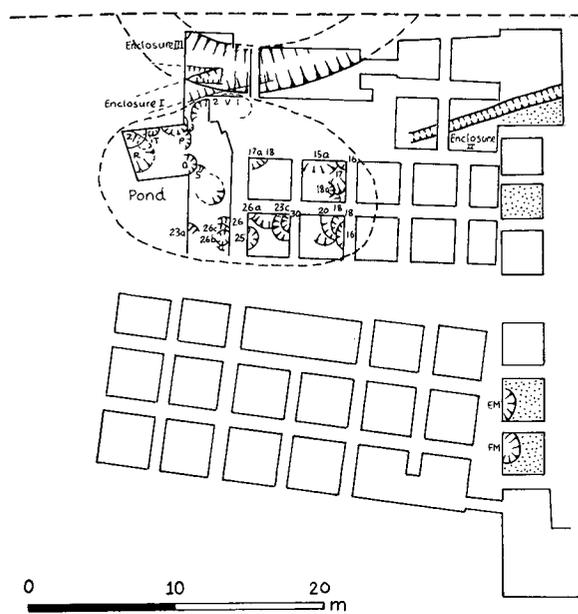


2.1 Simplified sketch of main Iron Age features

been cut through and partially destroyed by the later pre-Roman Phase II ditch and pits. Its fill was an orange sandy silt, with some charcoal, which was quite unlike any of the later ditch silts here. No finds, other than a fragment of bone, came from it. The eastern ditch (Ditch GT 1a) was similar in shape and silting. No finds came from it. It was at right angles to Ditch GT 1, straight, and traced for 2.4m, but the junction had been destroyed by later pits. This feature seems to have been very similar to Ditches I and II.

CH 86, Area B

A U-profiled ditch traced for 5m. It was 3.1m wide and 1.2m deep running on a northeast-southwest alignment. At the bottom of the ditch, in the fill of light brown sticky clay, was the articulated backbone of an ox. The ditch had been recut once to a width of 2.6m and a depth of 80cm. The ditch was capped with marl after it went out of use and was then cut by later features. These included an early Roman boundary or palisade trench and posthole, a 2nd century hearth and a late Roman grave (Fig. 6.30, 6.31).



2.2 Ridgeons Garden Iron Age ditches I, II, III and VIII, and pits.

Pits

GT

Pits Aa.3, Aa.4, Aa.5, Bd.1, Dd.2, Eb.105, 30, and 267, belong to this phase. Where sufficiently well preserved for dimensions to be measured, they were oval and flat bottomed, with maximum widths of between 1 and 2 metres. Most showed signs of deliberate infilling. Preservation of the tool marks suggests that one had not remained open for long, although another appeared to have silted over a long period.

Phase II

Ditches

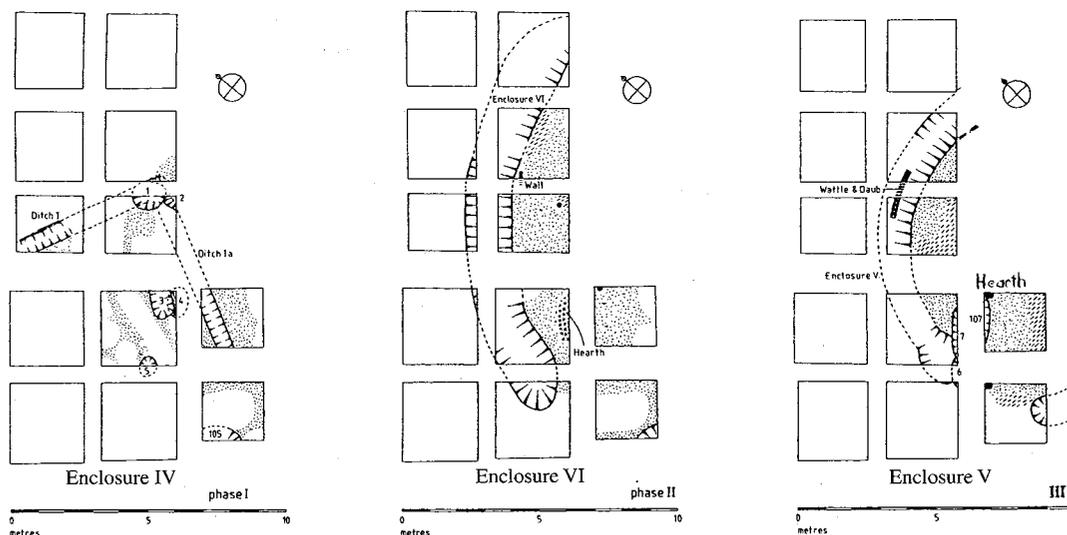
RG Trenches H and I, Ditch III

Like the earlier Phase I ditch it had a well-cut V-profiled ditch which was 2.6m wide and 1.4m deep. It

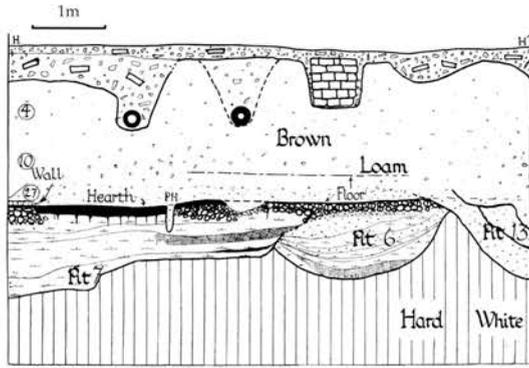
was traced for 12.2m (Fig 2.2). Its curve showed it to have been an oval or round feature of perhaps 18–21m diameter stretching out under Castle Street and it overlay a short stretch of the old ditch I. Some 6m² of the interior were exposed. Here, as in Ditch I, the loam and weathered sand overlying the chalk, had been removed and a level surface of chalk reinforced with flints, 20cm lower than that outside the ditch had been carefully prepared. On this a 5–8cm layer of grey clayey mud had accumulated while it was in use. There were no postholes or other features on the lip of the ditch. The ditch had silted up slowly; a fine white bottom silt was covered by a thin layer of loam and then by a yellow clay. These filled the ditch until only a shallow depression remained. Iron Age pottery came from the siltings.

GT Ditch V (Fig. 2.3) (Plate XL: 111–117).

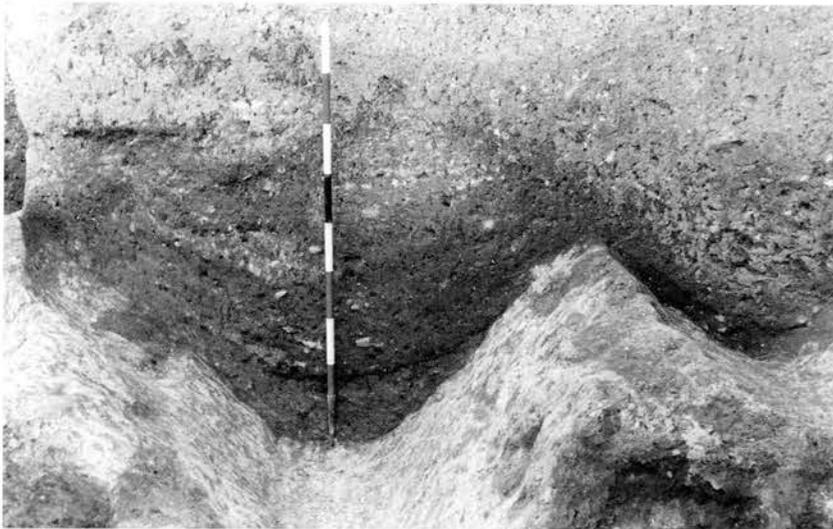
The rectangular ditch was replaced by a sub-circular one which enclosed an area about 11m in diameter, laid out over the old ditch IV and the nearby pits. A causeway provided access to the gateway and evidence of an internal structure came from the remains of wattle and daub walls, a clay fireplace and a chalk-marl floor. The building had apparently burnt down and the debris had been thrown into the surrounding ditch. Some 15m of the ditch was excavated. It was 1.5m wide and 1.7m deep. In the bottom 60cm was a homogeneous grey clay, a primary silt representing the passage of a considerable period of time. Above it, along the whole 15m length excavated, a 2–3cm thick layer of charcoal and black loam was found from a fire inside the enclosure. In trenches Be and Bd, on top of the charcoal, over an area of 3m² was a 2cm thick layer of stiff green-blue clay in which was a pattern of straight, reddened depressions 23cm apart and 15–38cm long. This looked very like the imprint of burnt wattling on clay daub and may have been part of a former wall. The ditch also contained a concentration of large sherds lying horizontally, some on top of each other; animal bones and slabs of burnt clay



2.3 Gloucester Terrace Iron Age ditched enclosures IV, V and VI



2.4 Section through Iron Age hut within ditch VI



2.5 Iron Age ditch VI cut by a 2nd century ditch

from a hearth which lay with them. In trench Aa the butt-end of the ditch was found. It ended in a steep-sided oval slightly wider than the rest of the ditch. Stones trodden or rammed into the entrance causeway may belong here. A posthole 50cm across and 30cm deep had probably held the gatepost of this period for it was sealed under the floor of the succeeding ditch (VI). Inside the ditch little of the original surface had survived in later pits. The hard level of the chalk marl had apparently been cleared, the early pits filled in and levelled and, the surface reinforced with broken flint nodules. No foundations of this period could be identified. The silting of the ditch above the burnt level suggests that it had remained open for a considerable period, but not long enough for a soil to develop. The upper marly silt closely resembled the primary silt. Above it loam (in Aa) and gravel (in Bd) seemed to mark deliberate levelling up. From these strata came more Iron Age sherds (Plate XXIX: 109). Further evidence of a period of abandonment was a rubbish pit which had been dug through the causeway entrance between the abandonment of ditch V and the building of ditch VI. It was a shallow oval unlike the earlier pits. The primary silt was only 7cm thick and it had then apparently been filled in with a layer of marl and loam and sealed with a layer of gravel.

GT Ditch VI (Fig. 2.3, 2.4, 2.5)

Over the abandoned but still visible ditch V a new ditch VI was laid out, reusing the old entrance causeway. Pottery from this feature was of the same type as that from the earlier one. A hearth, postholes and a wall suggested that it had also been used as for habitation. From the evidence of the ditch-silting it had been in use for a much longer period than V. There were no signs of any sudden destruction. Its ditch was horseshoe-shaped, with a diameter of 19.8m. Like the previous one it was an extremely neatly cut V-shape, 1.8m wide and cut 90cm into the chalk. It was traced for 24.5m and had an initial 13.7cm of chalky silt and

then over 90cm of tough grey clayey silt similar to that of ditch I. From it came large sherds, many animal bones and stones (mostly water-worn pebbles), a piece of iron slag and unbaked clay tile fragments. The entrance causeway and a butt-end of the ditch were located. The northern butt was rounded at the top but on exactly the same alignment as the earlier ditch V butt. Inside the enclosure the surface had been carefully levelled up over the old ditch and pits, using the spoil from the new ditch. This had made a fine level white chalky floor, the surface of which had been trampled or puddled. Over 12m² of this floor were exposed.

Only three certain postholes were found; they were small (15cm) and no plan could be recognised. A fragment of a low wall of water-worn pebbles was seen in Trench Be. It was only 35cm long x 15cm wide by 22cm high so that its purpose was uncertain. It was set only 15cm from the inner lip of the ditch. In the floor in Trench Aa was a shallow steep-sided depression more than 1.5m wide and 7cm deep. Only a small part of it could be excavated but its fill of charcoal suggested that it was part of a hearth, although there was no discoloration from burning. A 7cm stake had been driven 22cm into it. No further evidence of internal structures was recovered.

CP Ditch VIII (hut)

Circular enclosure with its entrance facing east. 5m in diameter with a well-cut V-profiled ditch.

RGS/CP Ditch IX (Plate XLVIII 166–7)

The first phase of this large ditch (see phase III) belonged to this period.

CP Ditch X (Hut). (Fig. 2.7) (Plate L 191–2)

The butt end of a small circular enclosure. It was V-shaped, 50cm wide and 40cm deep. Iron Age pottery was found in the brown silty fill with charcoal flecks, with three pieces of daub, one with a well-smoothed surface.



2.6 Iron Age pot with perforated base from Ditch IX

RGS/CP Ditch XII (Fig. 2.7)

Defined by a V-profile ditch. 1.24m wide and over 60cm deep. No silting and it had been quickly back-filled with gravel. A few pieces of Iron Age pottery near the bottom of the ditch.

CH 84, Ditch XIX.

To the northwest of ditch V was part of another ditch. It was V-profiled and was traced for 4.3m. It curved into a butt end. The fill of the ditch, which was 2.5m wide and 1.6m deep, was dark brown loam with small stones. Iron Age sherds came from the fill. The ditch

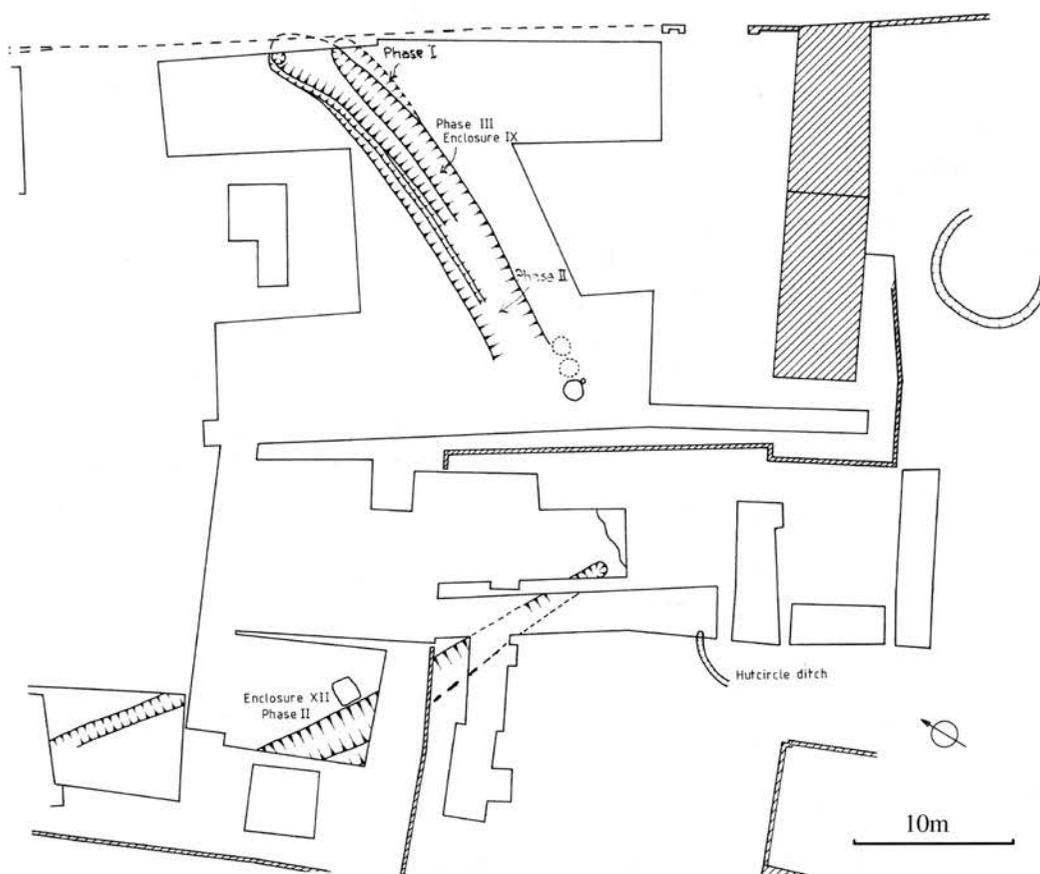
was sealed by a cobbled layer, 25cm thick, which in turn was sealed by a grey silty clay.

CS Ditch XX (hut) (Plate LI 194–7)

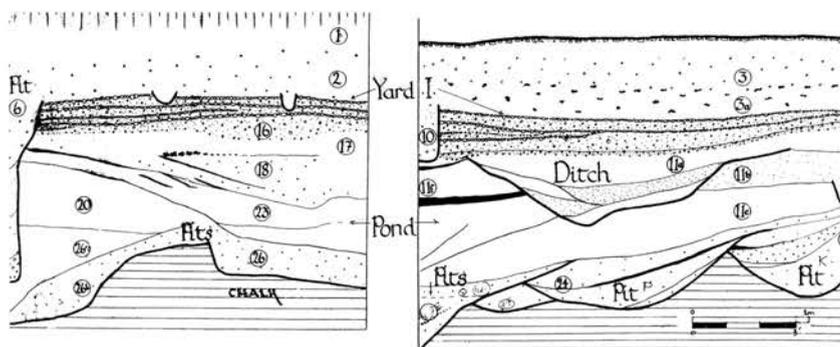
Partly cut away by later features. The earliest phase survived as a steep-sided unevenly cut feature with an irregular base. It was filled with lumps of marl, clay and pebbles. It is suggested that this ditch was originally excavated as a foundation trench for fence posts and that the marl base represented an initial packing. However, no trace of any post setting survived in the marl – although the unevenness of the base may indicate where posts were set along the trench. It is assumed that this indicates that the posts were removed whilst still strong enough to be pulled out without breaking and thus disturbing the pattern of any post sockets that would otherwise have been preserved in the marl. Sherds in this fill were of Belgic types (Plate LI: 194–7). The ditch survived to a depth of 30cm and was approximately 50cm wide. The upper levels appeared to consist of deliberate infilling of silty loam from the adjacent ground surfaces (34), truncated by the new ditch next to it.

CS Ditch XXI (37) (hut)

Shallower profile than XX, with a much smoother, almost flat bottomed base, which sloped gradually to the northwest. Originally the ditch must have been at least 1m wide, although its maximum surviving width varied between 60cm and 80cm. The maximum



2.7 Iron Age huts and ditches beneath Roman fort.



2.9 Iron Age pits merging to form pond, beneath 2nd century Yard 1.

also belong to this period, but is later than ditch XX, which it cuts.

Pits (Fig. 2.9)

A large number of pits were dug during this phase, many of them apparently for quarrying chalk marl. In RG the digging of pits through ditch I continued throughout Phase I. Eventually more than 35 pits, all round-mouthed and steep-sided, merged and formed a single big



2.8 RGS Iron Age ditch IX, with re-cut

depth was 45cm at the northwest end and its silty clay deposits suggested that this had served as an open ditch prior to silting up. Sherds in the fill were of the late Iron Age.

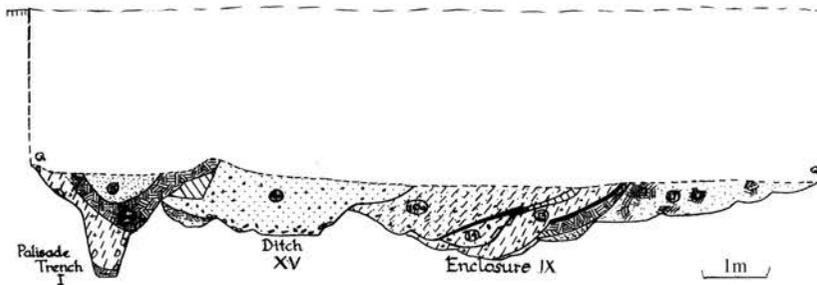
CS Ditch XXII (hut)

This was a shallow aceramic ditch with a gently rounded profile which survived to a depth of 40cm and a width of 60cm. A 2m length of this ditch was excavated and the aceramic sandy silt suggested that it had silted up quickly after being dug. The upper levels were removed by later Roman activity and by 19th century cesspits. Two postholes, set into marl-filled post pits (42 & 43) may have indicated the presence of some form of gate. From their similarity and the fact that one overlapped the other, it is suggested that the later posthole (42), with its 20cm diameter post, replaced the earlier one (43) with its 30cm diameter post once this had decayed. Another possible post setting or pit (48) may also belong to this phase. A fragment of a small gully (45), 15cm wide and 18cm deep may

depression 1.6m x 4.5m and 1.5m deep, before the end of this period. Where their lips had survived it could be seen that they had been dug from the same ground level as ditch III. The stratigraphically later pits were generally larger than the earlier ones and no finds came from them. Some of the older ones, of which only the bottom survived, might have been contemporary with Pit W and ditch I. Most of them seem to have remained open for some time. The clay silt which was eventually deposited over the whole depression suggests that it became a pond which slowly filled up. This pond was still in existence when the Roman occupation took place and the latest sherds from the pond were of later 1st century AD types.

Pits belonging to this phase include:

RG: Aa.7, Ea.107, G1.26, G1.26b, G1.23a, H1.26a (Plate LV, 225-6), K, Q, R, S, T, Z, W1, X, Y.
RGS VI 26 (Plate XLV 154-5)
CP IV 29 (Plates LIV, LV 217-24).



2.10 RGS Iron Age ditch IX, cut by Claudian ditch XV and palisade I.

Pits which should stratigraphically belong here, although no finds came from them were H1.30, J1.18, H1.25, H1.23c, H2.18, J1.20, J1.16, J2.17, J2.18.

Sealing the pits was a 30–60cm thick layer (RG J.11c, G1.20, H2.16, J2.13) of stiff water-deposited clay.

Southwest of the pond more pits were dug at about the time of the Roman conquest and should be contemporary with ditch III. These were more certainly chalk marl pits. Presumably they were dug because standing water in the old quarry made it unusable.

Phase III

Ditches

RGS/CP Ditch IX (Fig. 2.8, 2.10) (Plates XLIII–XLV: 130–150, LII: 198–203)

The artefactual evidence was the same as in Phase II and it remained in use until the Roman occupation. It may therefore have been either a large enclosure with houses both inside and outside during Phase II and III or a reduced in size defended settlement which succeeded Phase II. It was represented by a ditch which curved into a butt end. Traced for some 20m, it lay some 10m back from the top of the hill slope with an entrance close to the present Castle Street. Its ditch was 2m wide. A detailed examination could be made only of its final form because of recutting, each recut being slightly east of, and destroying most of, its predecessor. Each recutting had taken place after its predecessor had silted almost to ground level, the shape

and width of the ditch remaining the same. The final ditch had filled up slowly with stiff clayey silt in which were sherds and animal bones. Roman pottery came only from the uppermost infilling of this final recut. From the surviving 20cm of the earlier ditches came only pottery similar to Phases I and II. The original ditch and all except the final recutting terminated in a butt at the north

end where a large posthole, presumably a gate post, was 40cm in diameter and over 70cm deep. The final recutting continued in a straighter line under Castle Street and was rising to a probable butt end. The uppermost infilling of this final recut contained Roman provincial wares. This layer was partly sealed by a deposit of brown gravelly clay, variable in thickness. Iron Age pottery and bone was found in the fills of the earlier recuts. Sheep bones predominated, many from immature animals.

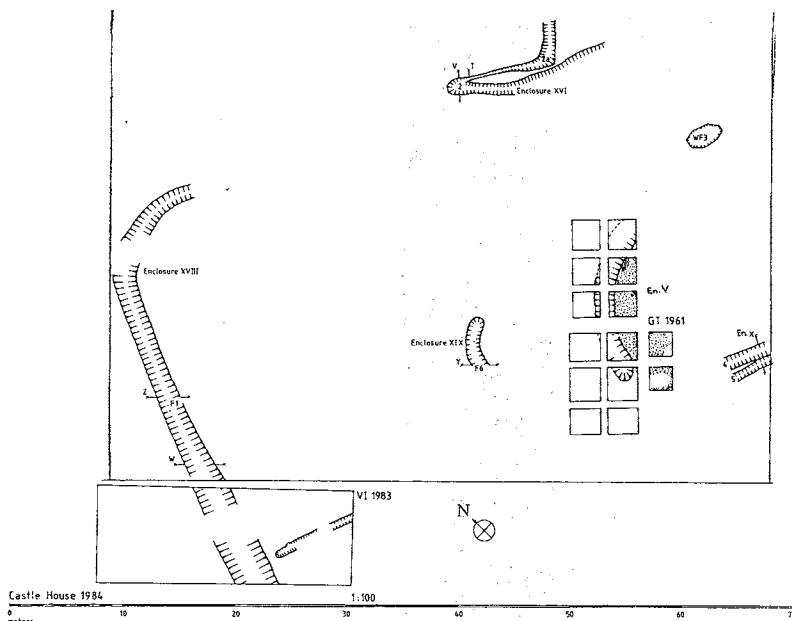
The ditch had always been recut on its southeastern lip, but later levelling of the area had removed all traces of a bank and evidence of any incorporated structures. An entrance bounded by the first ditch and the two earliest recuttings opened to the southwest, for ditch butt-ends were found. Close to the butt end on the surface of the natural marl were three Iron Age coins (App. IV, SF 100, 103, 104). Four large postholes on the outside of the entrance were 90cm, 1m, 1.2m, and 20cm in diameter. The remains of three large postholes were found in CP about 4m south of postholes 1–4. These may have formed part of an entrance structure to ditch IX, or they may have been a timber fence to block off this entrance. Close by were two parallel gullies for a timber construction associated with these post holes. A silver coin (App. III, SF 306) lay in the bottom of one. A second entrance, to the north, is described above. The whole might be tentatively explained as a long-used and well-maintained enclosure ditch, perhaps with an internal bank. It had a southeast facing entrance which may have had a timber gateway. In the latest phase of use a new alignment was followed and a new entrance made. The final silting of the ditch seems to have been contemporary with the first Roman occupation.



2.11 Shire Hall ditch XVIII

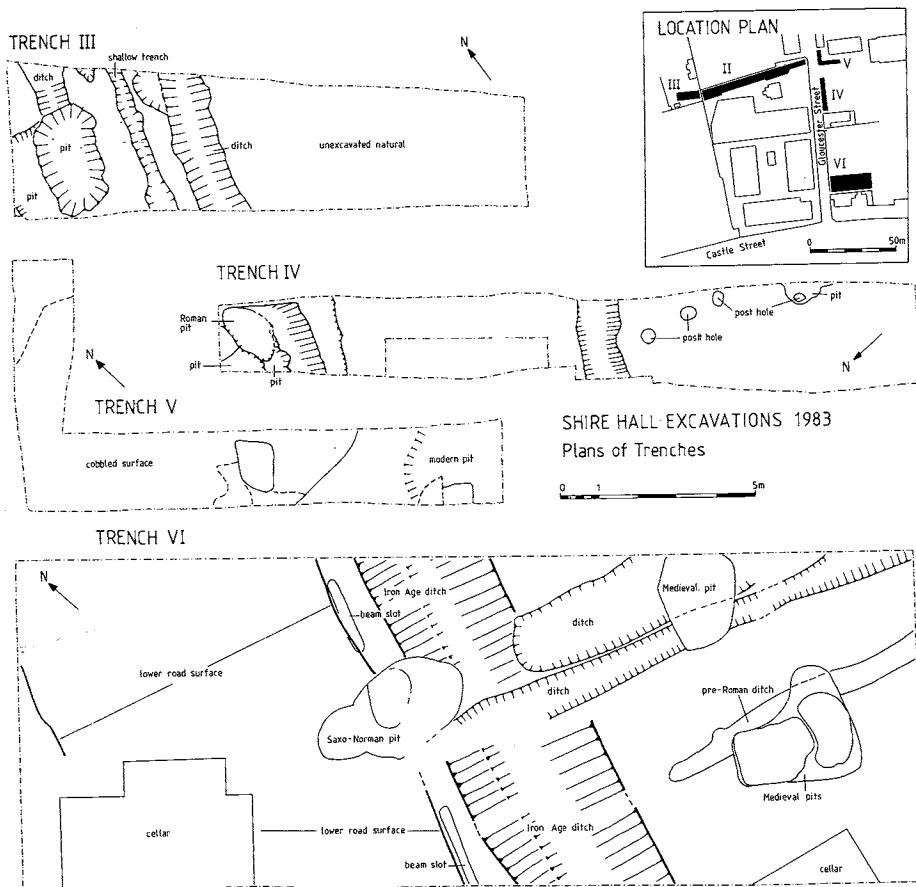
SH/CH Ditch XVIII (Fig. 2.11, 12) (Plate LIV: 213–5)

Cut by a complex of recut ditches aligned north-south. Further recuts were subsequently made in the Roman period. The necessarily destructive nature of such recutting rendered it impossible to determine the width, but it is clear that the ditch was at least 1.5m in depth, and it was at least 3m wide. In total, this complex of ditches was excavated over a



2.12 Castle Court Area C; Iron Age ditches

length of about 5m in SH and exhibited variability in its fills and recuts. In CH a further 18m of this ditch was traced in a straight line, running in a northerly direction. It then turned in an easterly direction where it was traced for 8m, becoming wider and shallower as it did so. The ditch, sectioned in SH showed that the ditch here was 2.25m wide and 1.5m deep from the top of bedrock. It varied in profile along its length from U to V-shape. The fill of grey chalky clay which had loam mixed with it in places contained sherds of late Iron Age date. The final Iron Age V-shaped recut, 1.5m deep, contained late Iron Age pottery, and single sherds of samian and amphora. Four postholes sunk at right angles into the side of the ditch may have supported some sort of bridge structure. It was cut by the Roman roadside ditch running on nearly the same northerly alignment.



2.13 Ditch XVIII in excavations at Shire Hall

CS Ditch XIII (Plate LI: 194-197)

A shallow aceramic ditch with a gently rounded profile which survived to a depth of 0.4m, and a width of 0.6m. The upper levels were removed during the excavation of the adjacent 19th century cess pit and by the later Roman levels. In the centre of the trench were two phases of Late Iron Age ditches, the later, (37) cutting through the upper levels of (38) to the west. The original course of (38) is lost at its northern end, however it appeared to be running approximately north-south, whereas the later ditch swung sharply to the west at its northern end. The earliest phase of these ditches survived as a steep sided unevenly cut feature with an irregular base, filled with lumps of marl, clay, and pebbles. The upper levels appeared consisted of silty loam similar to the adjacent ground surfaces, suggesting that the ditch had either been



2.14 Iron Age phase III pits in Ridgeons Garden, cut by the later Fort ditch.

deliberately filled in prior to the construction of the new ditch to the east, or had rapidly silted up with material washed in from either side. It is suggested that this ditch was originally excavated as a foundation trench for a post fence, and that the marl base represented an initial packing. However, no trace of any post setting survived in the marl – although the unevenness of the base may indicate where posts were set along the trench. At the east end of the site were a number of aceramic features associated with this phase, including a single oval pit (30) 0.6 x 0.4m with a 0.2m post setting at its west end. Beyond this, exposed at the very end of trench was a small steeply sided V shaped gully, (2), which was approximately 0.4m wide and survived to a depth of 0.35m. This contained sandy silts and appeared to have silted up naturally. It was cut by a similar feature which ran approximately north-south, with identical fills, (3). A number of possible stake holes were also found here. What appeared to be the edge of a substantial pit or ditch terminal (44) survived at the north end of the site, cut through by the 17th century well. What little was left contained a sandy silt loam suggesting that the feature had silted up naturally. The depth of the feature was unclear as so little survived, however the shallow sloping sides suggested that the feature was not likely to have been much deeper – unless it dropped steeply away to the north. Stratigraphically the feature belongs to this phase of the site.

Other features

Several pits (Fig 2.14), often with little or no pottery and probably associated with quarrying for marl or gravel are associated with this phase.

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