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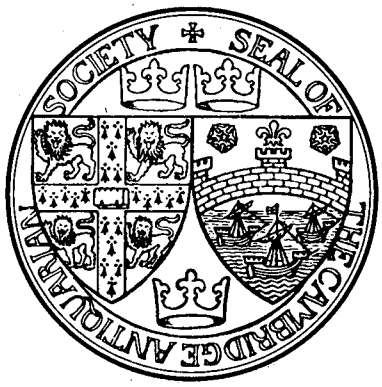
Roman Cambridge

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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5. The Third and Early Fourth Centuries

Summary

Ridgeons Garden lay open at this time and was used for a series of ritual shafts containing infant burials, dogs and other deposits. Evidence of dereliction came from Mount Pleasant where quarrying for gravel took place among the houses. The amount of rubbish in some of the large pits, however, suggests that the settlement was flourishing elsewhere and that a system of rubbish disposal was in operation. Most of the small houses and yards seem to have been out of use, for rubbish pits and quarries were dug through them. New houses and yards which sealed these pits were built in the early 4th century.

Introduction

No land surface or feature survived later destruction in CP, CR, HC or AR. Three pits in MP may belong here. In GT the ground surface survived in trenches Aa, Bd and Be on a 30cm thick loam which had accumulated during the 1st and 2nd centuries. Oyster and mussel shells, iron nails and pottery came from it. There was no building debris. The *mansio* in CH Area A appears to have been still in use. One house was found in SH 83, and pits and ditches of this period were found in all sites excavated. It was during this century that Akeman Street was relaid. Observation of the Shire Hall foundations in the 1930s showed building levels which might have belonged here but no details were preserved (RCHM I 1959).

Excavations in HM and PH revealed only a few features belonging to the 3rd century. At HM the area lay open and was used for quarrying. In the early 4th century, MP house 14 and yard 15 as well as RG(N) yard 1 and probably house 1 all remained in use. In SP the early part of the 4th century was marked by increased gravel digging, a ditch and at least ten pits. The quantities of domestic rubbish tipped into them suggest occupation nearby.

Description (Fig. 5.1)

Streets

Via Devana. This continued in use, and its surface was studied where it met Akeman Street to the west of the junction. It was also located where, in the early 4th century, the butt end of the town wall was found.

Akeman Street. In SH and CH the 2nd century road surface had been covered by sandy gravels, up to 20cm thick, and cobbles were laid on top. In the Shire Hall excavations, this remake of Akeman Street was narrower and not so well surfaced as the 1st century road, but in CH 86 Trench B it was wider, well made and sealed the earlier western roadside ditch.

The side streets continued in use, several new features being found beside them. Street 4 in CH, the only one found north of Via Devana, was in use at this time.

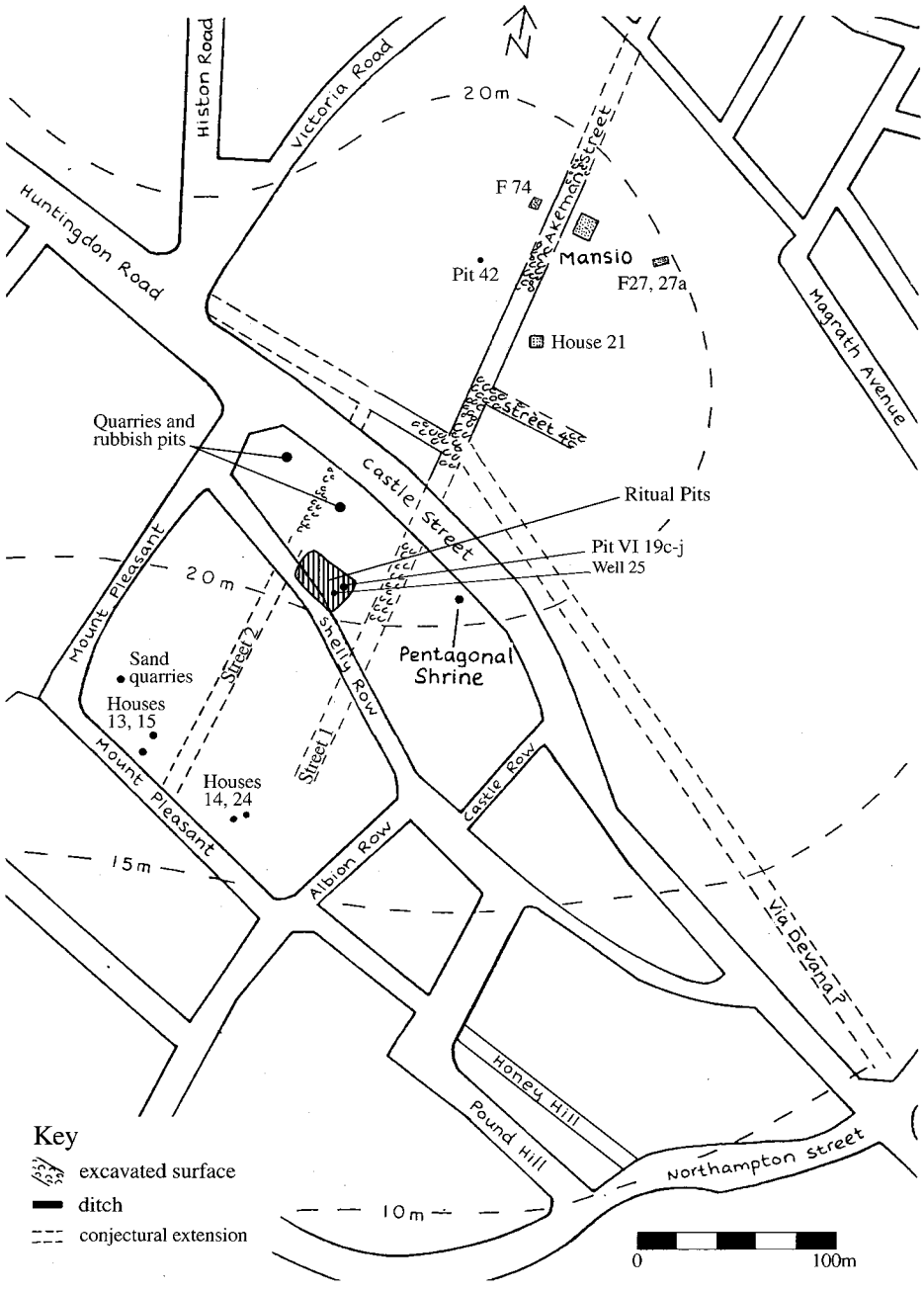
Houses and yards

SH II F74. West of Akeman Street was a two-phase timber framed building. The remains of a well-made floor, up to 20cm thick consisting of hard-packed silt, gravel, sand and, predominantly, marl was traced up to the edge of the sandy deposit (144) which separated it from the road some 2.5m to the east. Parallel to the road was a steep-sided flat-bottomed linear feature, 55cm wide and 26cm deep, cut through both the early surface of Akeman Street and the silt layer which overlay it, probably a beamslot for a substantial timber-framed building. Pottery in the fill is no earlier than the mid 2nd century. In the fills of F74 were postholes one of which contained sherds and two red glass beads. Part of the beamslot was overlain by the white floor. Three other pairs of postholes, spaced at approximately 3.5m intervals, run at right angles to beamslot F74 and a fourth possible pair of postholes on the same alignment, occurred as shallow indentations in the bottom of a later, Saxo-Norman, ditch.

CH 86 Area B. Building and Yard. A large posthole and two wall-foundation trenches, vertical-sided and 50cms deep, were sealed by a 4th century spread. Sherds in the fill and the associated ground level suggested a date not later than mid 3rd century.

SP

House 13. No break in occupation of house 13.



5.1 Plan of 3rd century features

House 15 (Fig. 5.2). Built over Pit F.25 soon after it was filled in, during the later part of the 2nd century. It must have been more than 3m x 2.1m, for no walls were found in the area cleared. Substantial cement floor, laid down before the pit-fill had consolidated. The floor had not been disturbed by pit-digging in the Roman period, although contemporary pits were found all around, and the house may have survived until a large building was erected on the same site in the 4th century.

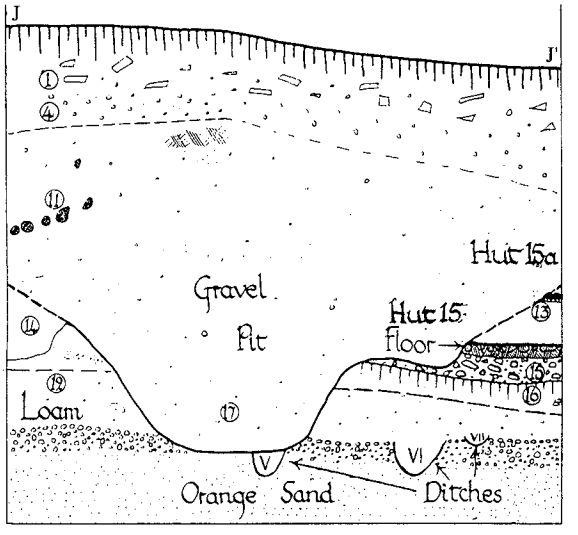
MP
House 14. No break in occupation. It appeared to remain in use throughout this period since the succession of floors and hearths continued into the 4th century.

Yard 15 and its latrine also continued in use.

House 24 consisted of a hard marl floor, parts of which showed signs of burning. No wall footings were recognised on the edges exposed.

Yard 22. A yard with sherds of this period.

SH 83. Yard and House 21. Well-made surface of compact laid marl up to 18cm thick, laid upon 14cm of clean orange sand which extended beyond the marl floor. Neither yielded any dating evidence, but immediately overlying the marl was a compact deposit of



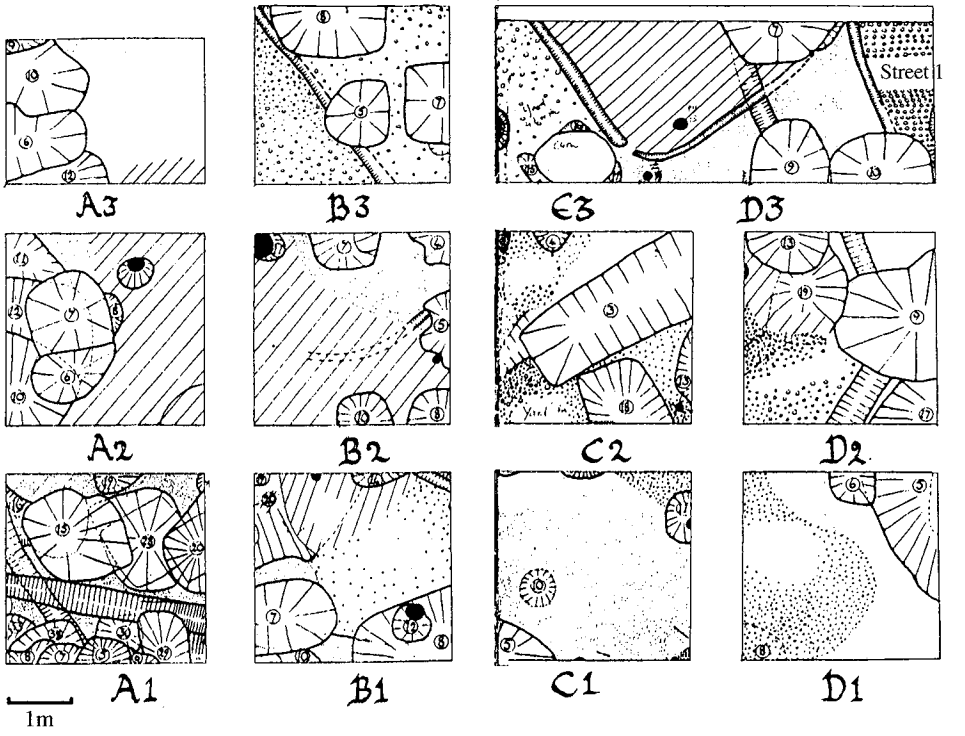
5.2 Floor of Hut 15, Mount Pleasant, cut by post-medieval gravel pit

gravel and pebbles (21) which contained a concentration of Roman sherds dating to not later than the 3rd century. The plough-disturbed upper part of this deposit (20) contained similar pottery. Four postholes might form part of a contemporary building.

Pits (Fig. 5.3)
CH: F30, F39, pit or hearth F43, and F27 (CXXI: 851–860).
GT: pit Ab
PG J2.10 and N19,
PH: pit S4.
RG(N): pits A1.30, A1.33, C2.3, C2.18, C3.15, C3.16 and D1.8.
SH: pits F4 and F5. ?Latrine F6, F11, F21, F22, F28, F29, ?Pit F45, F47, F62 (Plate CXIX; 841) and F105
SP: pits (10), (18a), F.20, F.21, F.22, F.23, D.3, D.4, Nl.5, C.3b, D.9, D.10, VI (13x–y) (18x–y) and VII (9).

RGS 26 was 1.35m wide, more than 1.8m long and cut 90cm into bedrock. Its fill of light sandy loam contained several thousand late 2nd–3rd century and a few 4th century sherds, many of them fine wares similar to those in the shrine (above) (eg Plate XXXVIII: D26), glass, many oyster shells and some animal bones. It was thought to be associated with clearance works of the shrine.

RGS VI (19c–j) Fig 5.5). Near-rectangular, vertical-sided, flat-bottomed, 1.9m x 1.2m x 3.35m deep. A layer of wattling or brushwood lay on a thin layer (10cm) of hard packed chalk at the bottom. On this was a horse, one leg bone and the skull in an advanced state of decay being all that remained; the rest of the animal was traced by the staining. A layer of grey wood ash surrounded the horse and three colour coated beakers (Plate CXXIV: 885–887) lay in this fill. Above this was an ashy greenish-grey deposit, and a layer of sandy loam. Decayed planks lay part way along the south side and another along the west side of this level, with a circular wooden object – perhaps a small wheel – and an iron hilt-shaped object (Plate XXVII: 201, 202). A layer of clay then covered part of the shaft which was afterwards filled up with brown loam sealed by gravel. Sherds suggest a date of late 2nd to early 3rd century (Plates CXXIII–CXXV: 873–892). Animal bones included cattle, sheep, pig, pheasant and



5.3 RGN. Late 3rd – early 4th century huts, pits and yards

partridge, rat and frog. Topmost fills cut by a late 3rd to early 4th century furnace.

SH 83 IV. Pit F1. Large oval pit 1.9 x 1m x 90cm deep. Fills all contained 3rd century pottery. (24) lower fill contained many oyster and mussel shells, two bronze pin fragments and one bronze fragment. (22) Ashy clay fill with charcoal and daub, many oyster and mussel shells, two 2nd century samian sherds with stamps. (14) loam with plaster and daub fragments, 22 iron nails, 42 shoe studs, many oyster and mussel shells, bone fragment. (10) upper fill of silt containing charcoal and marl lumps, many oyster and mussel shells, plaster fragments, 52 iron nails, perforated bronze disc, neck of glass vessel, an early 2nd century samian sherd with stamp, bone needle, iron bridle and antler cheek bits (Plate XIX: 166, 167), a bronze pin, fragments of iron with wood adhering (Plate XX: 169) and shoe-studs. Flotation of a soil sample from the lowest fill (24) contained a few cereal and weed seeds. A variation in profile suggests the feature was recut.

Quarries

Features interpreted as quarries included:

SP Pits A.1, A.4, H.19, J.12 and J.16. The northern end of the site was a complex of gravel pits at this time, and these continued to be dug in the early 4th century. Most were very large. They suggest that this area lay open during this period. The quantities of pottery from their fills must have come from occupation to the south and west.

SH 83 Quarry 15–9. The working face of a large shallow sandpit probably of this period cut *c.* 1.5m into the clean sand (33) and stopped just above waterlogged gravel. Its horizontal floor was traced for 5m and although then destroyed by later pits, it probably extended for at least 8m, and possibly 11m, further to the east. Its width may have been more than 9m. In excess of 67m^3 of sand had been removed. The sand must have been carted out from the western end of the quarry. In the 3rd or early 4th centuries the floor of the quarry became covered or was deliberately filled with sandy loam. On its level surface a stratum of stones, tile fragments and pottery lying horizontally, was found. This appeared to be a land surface and could be traced, although cut through by later features, for over 6m^2. No part of the land surface or other features of this period survived, but large numbers of sherds from later features suggest activity nearby.

HM A Pit 36.60. East of the quarry another pit was *c.* 1.5m in diameter and had been sunk into the gravel to a depth of 1.8m (2.6m from the modern surface), probably for gravel extraction. It had then been filled with rubbish, including a collection of some twenty 2nd century samian, and six glass, vessels.

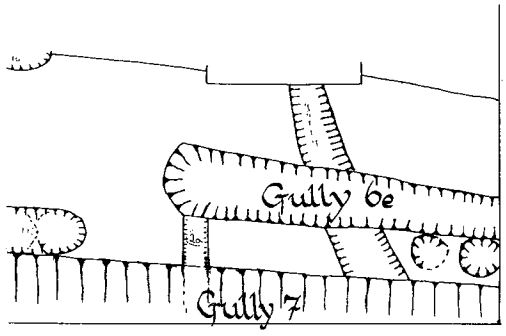
Ditches and gullies of uncertain use

CH

F34. Ditch and recut may be the same as F20. Original ditch had fill of brown loamy clay, but the recut contained fine light-brown chalky clay. A few greyware sherds.

F35a–36. U-shaped ditch 36 joins F35a at right angles. Fill of light-brown clay silt contained early-mid 3rd century sherds.

PH. Gullies 6e and 7 (Fig. 5.4) under the 4th century rampart bank (and on the same alignment). Gully (6e) was 32cm wide and 35cm deep. Shallower towards the northwest where there were large stones. Articulated backbone of a horse on base of gully, which was filled with compacted spoil of rampart bank. Gully(7) was 40cm deep and also shallower at northwest. Fill of blackish clayey loam and charcoal fragments contained sherds of Oxford type and coarse colour coated wares, suggesting a date late in the 3rd century.



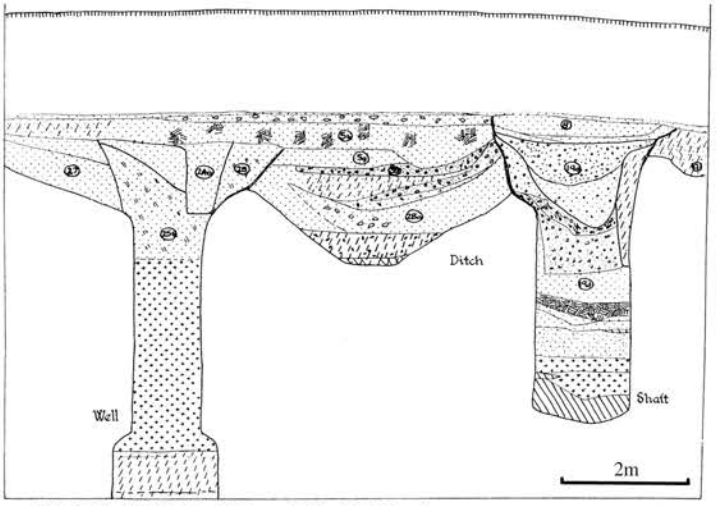
5.4 3rd century gullies beneath rampart bank

SH 83 II. Ditch F9. 2nd century ditch F29/38 was cut at right angles by smaller ditch F9. Flat bottomed, about 1m wide and 35cm deep, pottery of late 3rd to 4th century. Primary fill of light brown silt with marl, then brown sandy silt with gravel, and finally dark brown sandy silt containing a concentration of equine bones including a skull.

Wells

RGS. Well VI (25). (Fig. 5.5, 5.6) Circular, 95cm in diameter. Excavated to water level at 5m. The upper part, where the well cut through an Iron Age ditch, was lined with timber which rotted *in situ*. Below it two opposed rows of foot/hand holes had been cut into chalk marl. Lowest fill was weathered chalk silt. An articulated skeleton of a horse aged 4–5 years was in this fill, together with three almost complete vessels (Plate CXXVII: 896–898). Above were ash and chalk marl lumps, fragments of iron, thin strips of wood, and much daub with timber laths attached. Uppermost fill of loam containing chalk marl lump contained a few bones, one human femur among them.

SH 84. F32. Circular well, 1.1m diameter, cut into



5.5 RGS. Well VI (25) and Pit VI (19c-j)

5.6 Well 25, which contained an articulated horse skeleton. Foot-holes were cut on either side.

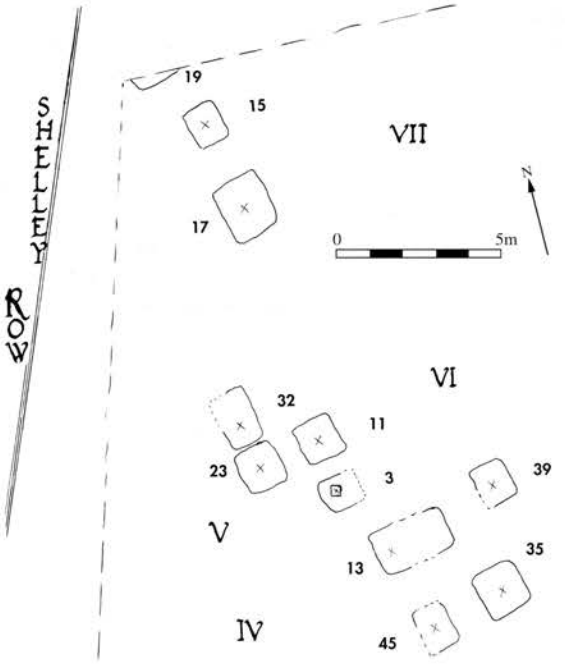
natural marl to 95cm with a flat base. Appeared to be cut from a 3rd century horizon. Fill of black wet loam/clay mix contained animal bones and sherds with two nearly complete vessels – a samian bowl and a shell-tempered cooking pot of early 3rd century date (Plate CXVI: 807–808).

SH 83. Well F41. Augering demonstrated that a shaft continued down more than 1.6m. Upper fill, dark-brown silty loam, contained nothing later than 3rd century.

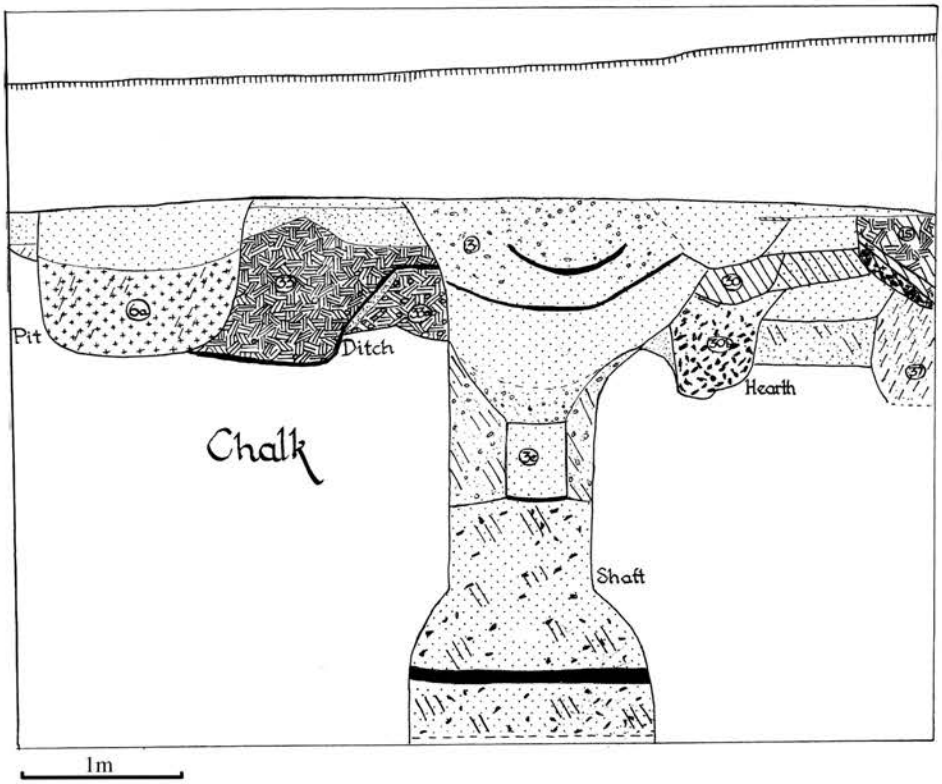
SH 83. Well F56. Oval, 1.75 x 1.4m and 3.05m deep. Top sloped steeply then dropped vertically, forming a shaft, almost circular with diameter of 50–60cm. Cut into stable marl with no evidence of timber lining, but upper portion was lined with 20cm of orange/brown fine clayey silt with some gravel (Plate CXXXI: 921–922).

Ritual shafts (Fig. 5.7–5.14)
RGS/CP
A group of at least 13 shafts of 3rd and early 4th century. Each one fully excavated was a deep pit containing a mature dog aged 5–7 years of fox terrier size in the south corner, and a rush mat and a wicker basket containing the stain of an infant burial laid on large sherds. Only a few small pieces of infant bones remained, mainly fragments of mandibles. In most shafts two burials occurred one above the other, and in five shafts there was a pair of small shoes, of which only the studs remained, but which would have fitted an older, 5 to 6 year old, child. These shafts were filled up immediately after the infant burial(s). Large sherds of earlier phases were used to line the area on which a rush mat(s) was laid for the infant burial(s). The most significant vessels however are those placed next to the infants, for these showed that at least some burials dated to the 4th century. A few red polished sherds were normally found in the topmost layer, with the exception of (35).

Shaft (3) (Fig. 5.8). Far the deepest shaft, it may have utilised a partially filled-in well; it was excavated to 3.5m without bottom being reached. The chalk around the top had weathered, and pieces fallen down before use as a grave. The lowest level excavated was a mixture of loam and chalk lumps with a thick black layer of charcoal covered by sand. On this was a wooden coffin 45cm x 25cm of which stains and the nails remained. A fragment of infant mandible came from inside the box where the stain of an infant burial could be seen. Above the box a layer of very soft friable, nearly black, soil was sealed by brown gritty loam. There had been considerable settlement in the well which had disturbed the skeleton of a mature dog. In the upper fills were burnt limestone and sandstone fragments, floor and roof-tile fragments, daub and sherds of 3rd to 4th century (Plate CXXXIII: 929–947). Two very small rim fragments of 4th century red polished ware were found in the lower fills.



5.7 RGS. Ritual shafts



5.8 Ritual Shaft 3

Cattle bones and coins (App. III: 68, 73, 85) were found in the uppermost fill.

Shaft (6) (18c -3) (22) Nearly square, 1.1m x 1.2m x 2.2m deep. Timber lining on the southwest side and a rounded base with six postholes, 28cm wide and 40cm deep on the west, on the south side 28cm wide and 53cm deep and on the northwest corner 24cm wide and 90cm deep. Fills of black ashy loam were tipped in from southwest. At the bottom was the articulated skeleton of a falcon, one horse skull, bones of sheep and cattle, two fragments of infants' bones, and shoe studs giving the outline of a sole 27cm long. Near the top of the shaft were 28 cattle skulls, other bones of cattle, sheep, pig, and chicken/pheasant, and a human jaw. The fill of the shaft contained more bones of cattle and sheep, and fragments of dog and chicken. Part of a figured samian vessel, 100–120 AD (Plate XXXVIII: D25), was found in the bottom, but stratigraphically this pit belongs here (Plate CXV: 795–800).

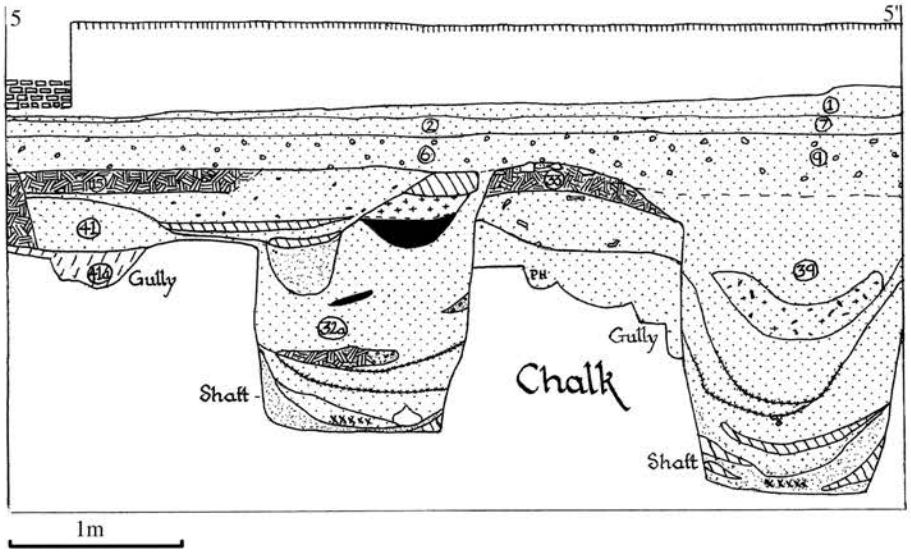
Shaft (11) Rectangular, 1.3m x 1.2m vertical-sided shaft, 1.89m deep and flat-bottomed. The lowest part was covered with sand and loam containing chalk marl lumps and patches of clay. A pair of shoes – the studs only remaining – lay on this. They might have fitted a half-grown child. A mature dog skeleton lay in the southern corner. A wicker basket lay above this with the stain of an infant burial in it. The layer was sealed by a greenish-brown gritty layer in which another pair of shoes was represented by 35 studs – again fitting a child – and a number of other studs. Above this the shaft was filled with fine brown loam containing fragments of roof-tile, burnt daub, burnt squared limestone fragments, bone pins, bronze fragments, sherds (Plate CXXXIII: 948–953), a coin (App. III: 46) and cattle (c 20 kg), sheep and bird bones.

?Shaft (15). Vertically-sided rectangular shaft 1.3 x 1.1m. Limited excavation. Sherds dated to the 3rd to 4th century.

Shaft (17) (Fig. 5.9). Rectangular vertical-sided shaft 2 x 1.6m, partially excavated. Disturbed in the upper layers by a later pit. An articulated mature dog skeleton in the south corner. Sherds of the late 3rd to early 4th century AD including one inscribedPX (P157), 50 iron nails, several iron objects and fragments of tile and daub were found. The shaft cut the corner of grave 17b (p32).

?Shaft (19) (Fig. 5.5). Possibly another shaft of which only a small portion was excavated. Vertical sides.

5.9 Dog in Ritual Shaft 17



5.10 RGS Burial Shafts 32 and 39.

Shaft (23). 1.5 x 1.4m and 1.45m deep, rectangular with vertical sides and a flat bottom. The lower part was covered with sand on which were placed large sherds and above them a wicker basket with the stain of an infant burial; two limb bones remained. A mature dog lay in the southeastern corner and nearby 25 studs of a pair of child's shoes remained. The shaft was filled up with brown loam containing a few bones, mainly cattle and sheep, sherds and one crushed vessel.

Shaft (32) (Fig. 5.10). Rectangular shaft 1.1m deep and 1.52m square, vertical sided and flat-bottomed. The bottom and lower sides were covered with orange/yellow sand on which were large pieces of two stamped samian, 150–200 AD, coarse ware vessels (Plate CXXXIII: 954–958) and tile. An articulated mature dog in the south corner. Signs of rush matting and the stain of an infant burial were found and above this was a wicker basket, again with the stain of an infant burial; rib bones and two limb bones remained. The shaft was filled with gritty light brown soil containing oyster shells, animal bones, iron fragments, sherds and 4 pieces of limestone. The uppermost fill had been slightly cut by later features.

Shaft (35) (Fig. 5.11, 5.12). Rectangular pit 1.5m x 1.68m, truncated by later feature to 1.18m. Vertical sided, flat-bottomed, surviving below disturbance to 95cm. The lower sides and bottom had been covered with sand on which were large pieces of sherd with the sharp edges in the sand. A mature dog's articulated skeleton lay in the south corner and next to it a complete 4th century jug (Plate CXXXII: 926). On the sherd fragments a rush mat had been laid, the pattern of which was visible, and on this was the stain of an infant burial with head to the northwest. A small piece of linen cloth that had been wrapped around the infant was found, and a undatable coin was close to its head. Above this infant a wicker basket, maximum measurement 1m x 55cm was placed and in it was a second infant with its head to the southeast. Again, only the stain of the body remained and a few small fragments of lower mandible were found and a piece of coarse cloth. Another 4th century spouted colour coated jug was found in this layer, also many studs from a pair of shoes. The shaft was filled with a clay and chalk marl mix in which were a few animal bones and sherds of 3rd to 4th century. Animal bones included fragments of dog and piglet, single femurs of cat, pheasant and pigeon, and the skulls of two mature sheep. The shaft was truncated by a structure 4.7m x 2.8m, cut to a depth of 1.18m. It was plank-lined, had double postholes at the corners and postholes down the central axis. It contained nails, hinges and brackets, sherds (mostly 4th century) and coins of the 3rd and 5th centuries (which can no longer be traced). Three ox horns, placed vertically, and one ox skull were added to the surviving top. A timber cover was placed on top and 5–8cm of chalk marl sealed the shaft.

Shaft (39) (Fig. 5.10). Rectangular flat-bottomed shaft, 1.5 x 1m and 2.45m deep. Bottom and lower sides also covered with sand and fragments of chalk marl. On this were placed sherds and rush matting above which was the stain of an infant burial. Over this burial was a wicker basket containing a second burial. In the south corner an articulated mature dog skeleton was found. The shaft was filled up with a clay/loam mixture containing many stones, a few sherds and

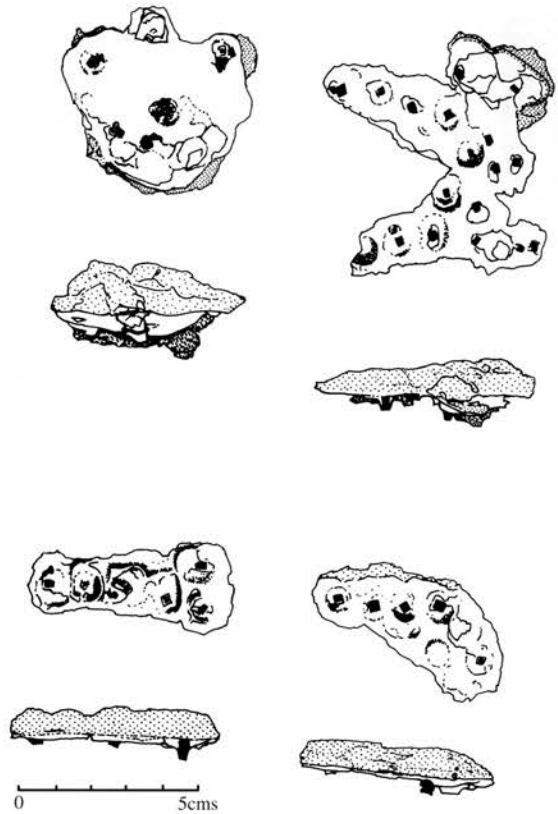
5.11 Burial 35. Part of a wicker basket under the infant burial

5.12 *Shaft 35. Dog and vessels beneath wicker basket.*

bones including two mature skulls of cattle and one of immature pig.

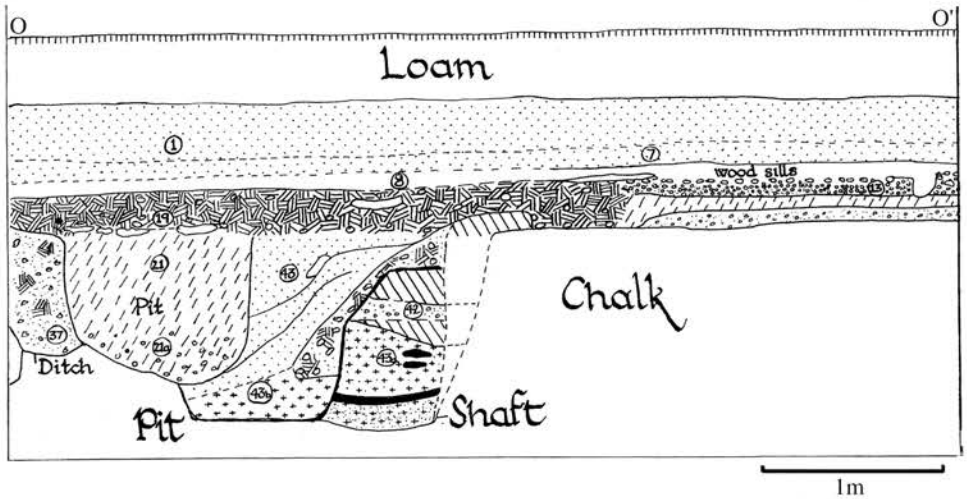
Shaft (43) (Fig. 5. 13) and V(17). Shaft 1.2 x 1.04m, vertical-sided and flat-bottomed. The bottom and lower sides covered with yellow sand above which was a lining of large sherds (Plate CXXXII: 928) and rush matting. A little higher there were traces of a wicker basket. Top filled with brown loam, with pebbles and stones around the edge. Several large fragments of limestone, the corner of a squared marble block, 35 nails, some with wood attached and over 70 shoe studs were found in the lower part of this fill, along with a few sheep and pig bones and a quantity of cattle bones. As much of this shaft was cut away by a later pit there was no evidence for a dog in the south corner.

Shaft (45). Smaller rectangular shaft, 70cm x 1.1m, base covered with sand on which lay a single layer of large sherds including an amphora handle (App. IV: 84, Plate CXL: 19) and oyster shells. Traces of a wicker basket lay on these. The remainder was filled with



5.14 *Parts of shoes from Shaft 45*

brown loamy clay with pebbles, containing a few sheep and cattle bones, two mature sheep skulls, three pigeon bones, tile fragments and scattered shoe studs, some with leather attached (Fig. 5.14).



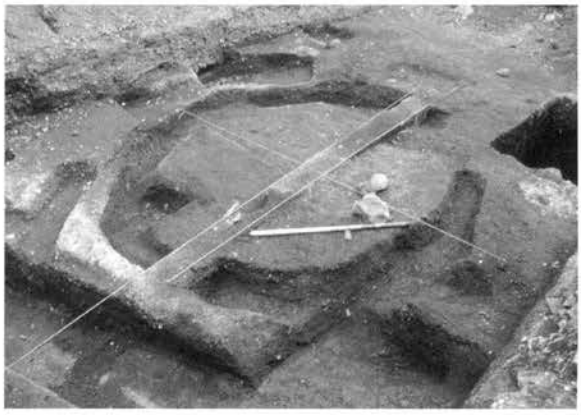
5.13 *Shaft 43, cut by later pit*

5.15 RGN Infant burial

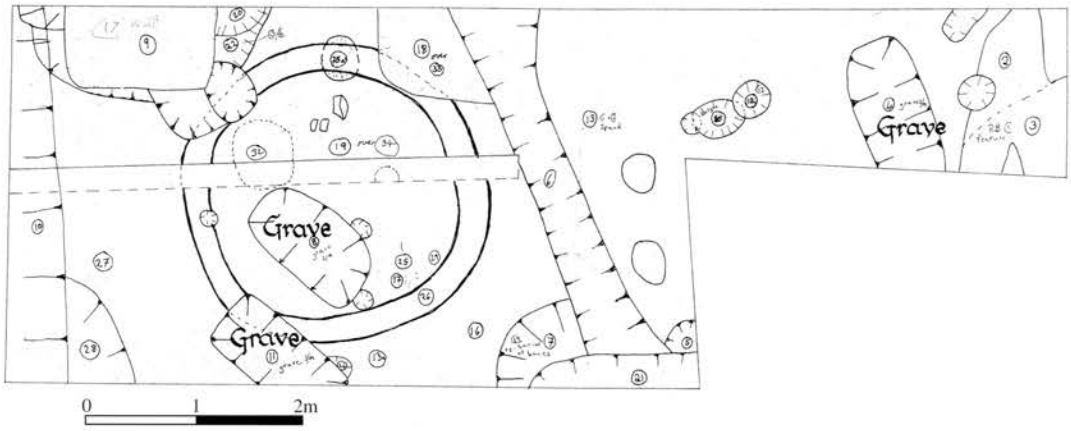
RG(N). The crouched body of a year-old child was found just inside the western boundary ditch, gully 10, in an oval pit 60cm deep (Fig. 5.15). No finds came from the grave, but in the light of the other child burials it could belong here.

Pentagonal Shrine? (Fig. 5.16, 5.17, 5.18)

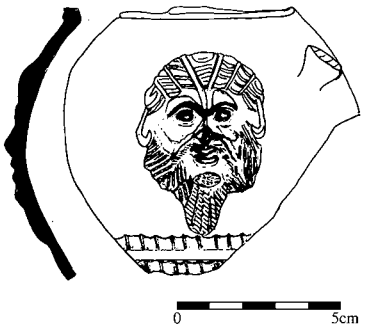
CS. Following a general levelling early in the 3rd century, a small timber framed pentagonal structure was erected. It was 3m in diameter (external measurement). The vertically sided, flat bottomed foundation trench appeared to be almost circular, however the clay that filled it did not follow its exact edges, but formed a polygonal shape. It is suggested that this was because the building was a timber framed construction which rested on a series of timber beams serving as wallplates. These would have been between 1.2m and 1.4m long and were approximately 18cm wide; they rested on the clay foundation. This would have resulted in a pentagonal building with a possible entrance on the south side (simply because this was a slightly longer side than the others). There was no sign of a floor within the building, or a path leading up to it. The building appeared to have been a modest one, patches of ash within and around it may indicate a possible hearth within it and three small irregularly shaped stones may be the remains of this. There was a mixture of sandy loam and ash within the building which may represent debris from demolition and deliberate levelling of the site. To the south of the building small cobbles and gravel patches may indicate the remains of a yard or path but they did not seem extensive enough to merit such a description. Little evidence for actual building materials was found on the site, with the exception of three nails and small patches of what may have been wall plaster. However, an ash and marl filled ditch on the northwest side of the building, which included fragments of burnt plaster and daub may provide a clue to the construction and later fate of this building. It suggests that the building had been carefully demolished and the site cleared down to foundation level following abandonment. A sherd from Lezoux, decorated with a pan mask (Fig 5.18) (App. VIII, p157) normally associated with religious sites was found nearby, though unfortunately it was unstratified. The ditch (22) was V-shaped in profile and extended only 40cm into the trench. Partly cut away by a 17th century well, it was only 30–35cm wide and survived to a depth of 25cm. Two other ditches, to the northwest and southeast may also be associated with the building. A build-up of sandy silt loam, following the demolition of the building, suggests that the area remained an open space until the site was used as part of All Saints by the Castle churchyard in the late Saxon period.



5.17 Possible pentagonal shrine on Castle Street, below graveyard of All Saints by the Castle



5.16 Possible pentagonal shrine on Castle Street, below graveyard of All Saints by the Castle



5.18 Sherd with face mask, found near pentagonal shrine

Early 4th century features

Houses
MP. House 14. The final 3cm of the floor belongs here, for the town rampart was built immediately on top of it, and the house was still in use, with a fire on its hearth, when work on the town-wall caused its abandonment.

MP. Yard 15. This yard, 10m further south, also appeared to be in use until the rampart was built over it. One gatepost was only removed at the last moment so that the rampart material filled the upper part of the posthole.

RG. House 1 and Yard 1. Also in use from the 2nd century and still being repaired towards the end of the 4th century.

Pits
SP. H.14, H.16, H.18, H.21, H.22, H.23, J.22, K.15 and K.16. The pits appeared to have been levelled to a horizontal surface 1.8m below the present one and, since the intervallum road was laid out on this surface, the levelling was probably contemporary with the building of the town bank and ditch. On it accumulated a sandy loam containing artefacts of later 4th century date.

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