

HARLOW TEMPLE: THE BARTLETT ARCHIVE PROJECT

An Assessment

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1 Introduction

The assessment of the Bartlett Archive covers the work on a key excavation archive relating to the nationally important Late Iron Age and Roman religious complex at Stanegrove Hill, Harlow. The excavations by Richard Bartlett, then curator at Harlow Museum, in the 1980s, provided a vital context to earlier work on the site, which had been focused on the Roman temple. The 1980's investigations established the presence of Bronze Age funerary activity and Iron Age and Saxon religious activity, as well as producing a rich array of artefacts. Sadly Richard Bartlett died before the completion of the archive and the excavation was never published fully.

2 Aims of the Bartlett Archive project

The Bartlett Archive project aims to consolidate, digitise and make publically accessible this very important excavation archive, building on over 15 years of work by Harlow Museum volunteers. In addition an assessment has been made of the finds in order to establish their current state and location and to assess what further work will be required in order to progress the site to publication. By lodging the scanned archive with the Archaeological Data Service (York University) the future survival and accessibility of this archive to researchers in Essex and further afield will be safeguarded. The site's important archaeology can be situated within its regional, national and international context and set alongside that of other major long-term religious complexes such as those at Great Chesterford, Essex and Marcham, Oxfordshire.

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3 Harlow Temple site

3.1 Location

Harlow temple (TL467123) is sited on the highest point of Stanegrove Hill (45m OD), immediately to the south of the River Stort.

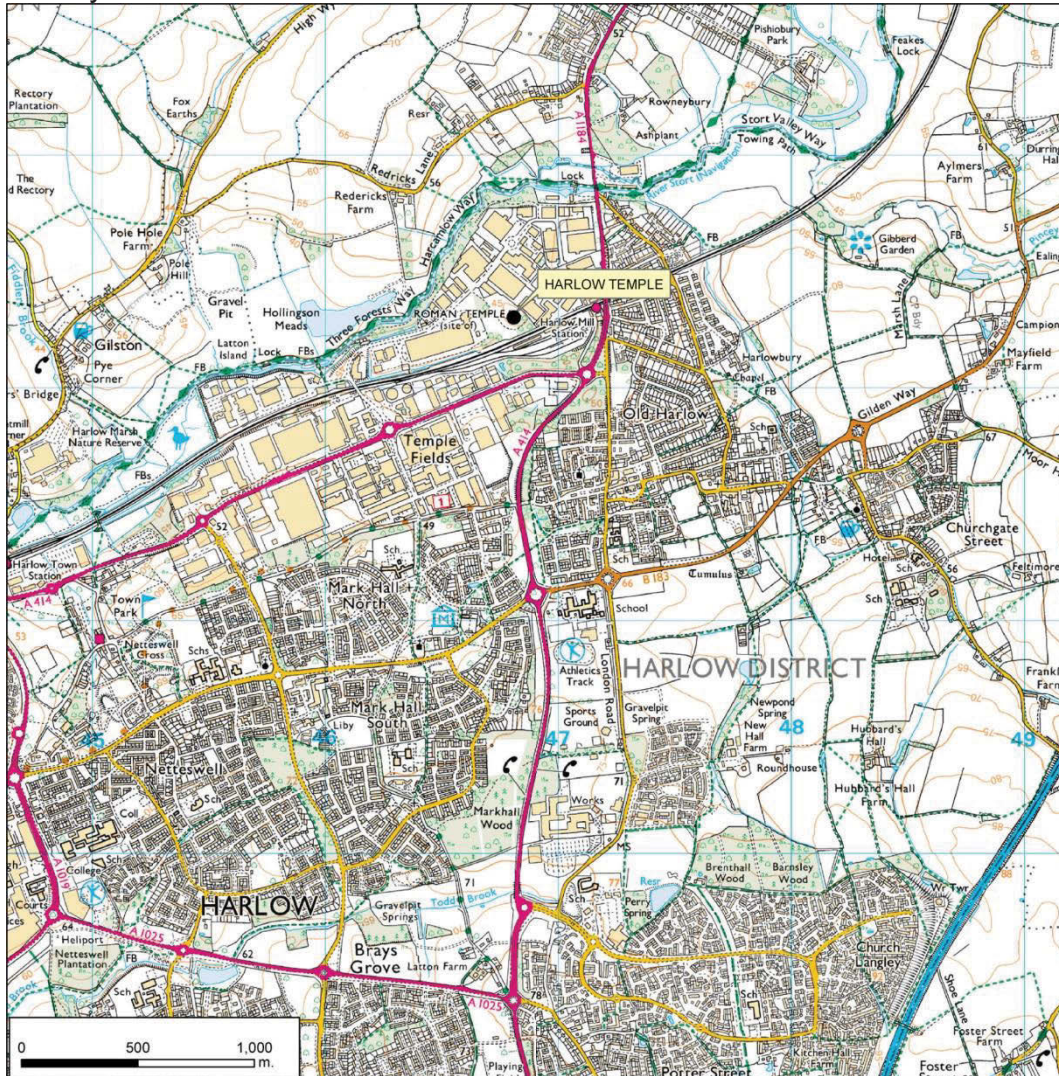


Fig. 1 Location plan

The solid geology of the area consists of Upper Chalk, which outcrops on the Sawbridgeworth ridge to the north of Harlow. The chalk is overlain by London Clay, outcrops of which occur on Harlow Common and Potter Street. The London Clay in turn is overlain by glacial drift deposits, consisting of two boulder clay levels, separated and occasionally underlain by glacial sands and gravels. Quaternary 'Head' deposits also occur and there are alluvial deposits from the flood-plain of the Stort. To the west of the temple on the hill-top was an area of marsh, which persisted until the post-medieval period.

3.2 Summary of the prehistoric, Roman and Saxon archaeology of the Harlow area

It had been known since 1764 that there were masonry remains beneath the surface of the hill beside the Stort. These were first identified as being the remains of a Romano-British Temple by Miller Christy in 1927, and formed the basis of Mortimer Wheeler's seminal work on this monument type (Wheeler, 1928). The site was subsequently re-investigated in 1962-71 (France and Gobel, 1985) and in 1985-88 by Richard Bartlett. Rescue excavations took place within the area of the Roman town; at Holbrooks in 1970 (Conlon, 1973) and again in 1978 (Chapman, 1979) and in 1980/81 (Bartlett, 1982); and at Staffords (Sewter, 1973; Chapman, 1979; Bartlett, 1981). Excavations have also taken place in and around Harlowbury Chapel (Bartlett, 1985) and on the mill site at Harlowbury (Andrews, 1991a). There has also been an excavation in Old Harlow at The Chequers site (Andrews, 1991b). Large-scale fieldwork has taken place at Church Langley, New Hall, London Road and Gilden Way, which form the rural hinterland to the south and east of the Roman temple and settlement.

The Harlow area has been occupied since the Late Palaeolithic period (c. 12,000 – 10,000 BC). However, the evidence from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic (10,000 – 3,500 BC) and Neolithic (3,500 – 2,000 BC) periods consists only of scattered flint flakes and tools. The Bronze Age (2,000 – 600 BC) is better represented, by a line of burial sites along the southern bank of the River Stort, including a group of eight burial urns at the temple site. Two ring-ditches, one containing a Beaker burial, have been recently excavated on the New Hall site about 1.5km to the south-east of the temple (Dyson 2015). Fieldwalking in the Harlowbury area has established the widespread presence of Neolithic and Bronze Age flint-work on the ridge to the south of the Stort (Bartlett 1991). In the Iron Age (600 BC – AD 43), Harlow lay on the tribal boundary between the Catuvellauni in Hertfordshire and the Trinovantes in Essex. At the temple site there were two roundhouses of mid to late Iron Age date and numerous Iron Age coins, small finds and animal bones. The quantity and pattern of distribution of the coins, coupled with what appears to have been deliberate damage to the small finds suggests that the site had a religious rather than domestic function. The discovery of coins of a late Iron Age date in the Holbrooks area to the east of the temple suggests that the Roman settlement there occupied a pre-existing Late Iron Age site (Conlon 1973; Chapman 1979; Bartlett 1982).

Roman Harlow, in addition to the temple on the hill-top, comprised an extensive settlement on the slightly lower ground to the east and south-east, to the south of the river crossing (Medlycott 1999). This has widely interpreted as a small town, possibly a 'specialised site' that developed to support a religious complex (Burnham and Wachter, 1995, 183-88). It appears to have covered c.40 ha, making it far larger than larger local centres/roadside settlements such as Wixoe (18 ha), Bishop's Stortford (16 ha), Braintree (12 ha) and Kelvedon (10 ha). However the piecemeal nature of the excavation of the Roman settlement means that it is not possible to establish how dense or urban the settlement was in nature. It is possible that like Billericay (Medlycott *et al* 2010), which spread over an area of 22 ha. but has a relatively low density of occupation and many rural characteristics alongside a limited range of urban characteristics. Occupation extended from the 1st through to the 4th century and included extensive iron working, along with bronze working and possibly bone working and leather working. 37 lead weights from Holbrook's suggest

commercial activity. There is evidence for several substantial buildings including a complete tessellated pavement found in 1935-6 at Gould's Timber Yard, roof and flue tile from River Way, and the enigmatic stone building with a tessellated floor and ash-filled flue at Holbrook's. At Holbrook's (Conlon 1973; Chapman 1979; Bartlett 1982) the buildings appear to have been densely packed alongside gravelled streets in an urban fashion, whereas at Stafford House (Sewter 1973) on the southern fringes of the settlement they appear to have been more widely spaced within their own paddocks. The artefacts from the Holbrooks site include clear evidence for both manufacturing and votive objects, and it is curious that no comparable votive objects were found at the temple site.

The evidence for the Saxon period is lighter, although there is sufficient to demonstrate settlement within the area. There is a Saxon structure at Harlow Temple, Saxon pottery was recovered at Gould's Timberyard and sunken-featured buildings have been recently excavated at New Hall some 2km to the south (Dyson 2015).

3.3 The Temple complex

The temple site on Stanegrove Hill, has seen a long history of antiquarian discoveries, and four campaigns of excavation. Of these the 1927 and 1962-71 excavations have been published (Wheeler 1928; France and Gobel 1985) whilst the 1935-6 and 1985-8 have not. This project is concerned with the archive of the 1985-88 excavations by Richard Bartlett.

3.3.1 Earlier prehistory

The evidence for earlier prehistoric activity on the site is in the form of flint tools and flakes, which are largely residual in later contexts. The finds include a Palaeolithic hand-axe from the cobbled layer in the Roman temple precinct, a Mesolithic tranchet axe from context 588 (a destruction layer) and a Neolithic axe from the area of the Iron Age hut (context 379). It is possible that the axes were brought to the temple site in the late Iron Age or Roman period as an example of a 'thunder-bolt', as has been postulated for the collection of hand-axes from the Ivy Chimneys temple site at Witham, Essex (Turner and Wymer, 1987). There are however further flint flakes, tools and waste of probable Palaeolithic and Mesolithic date, that are unlikely to have been deliberately selected for deposition in later periods, and are probably representative of activity on the hill-top in early prehistory.

There are a number of pottery sherds, from an early Neolithic Mildenhall style assemblage.

3.3.2 Bronze Age

A large portion of an Early Bronze Age Collared Urn was recovered from pit 698.

Several Bronze Age cremations were recorded grouped around an oval depression (671) just below the brow of the hill. The depression itself was interpreted as a pond-barrow, with a small area of intense burning within it. Late Bronze Age pottery

was mainly recovered from the pond barrow and from a posthole (488), as well as residual material in later features. There are numerous flint flakes and tools of Bronze Age date, both from the two fills of the pond barrow (contexts 672 and 692) and residual in Iron Age and Roman contexts.

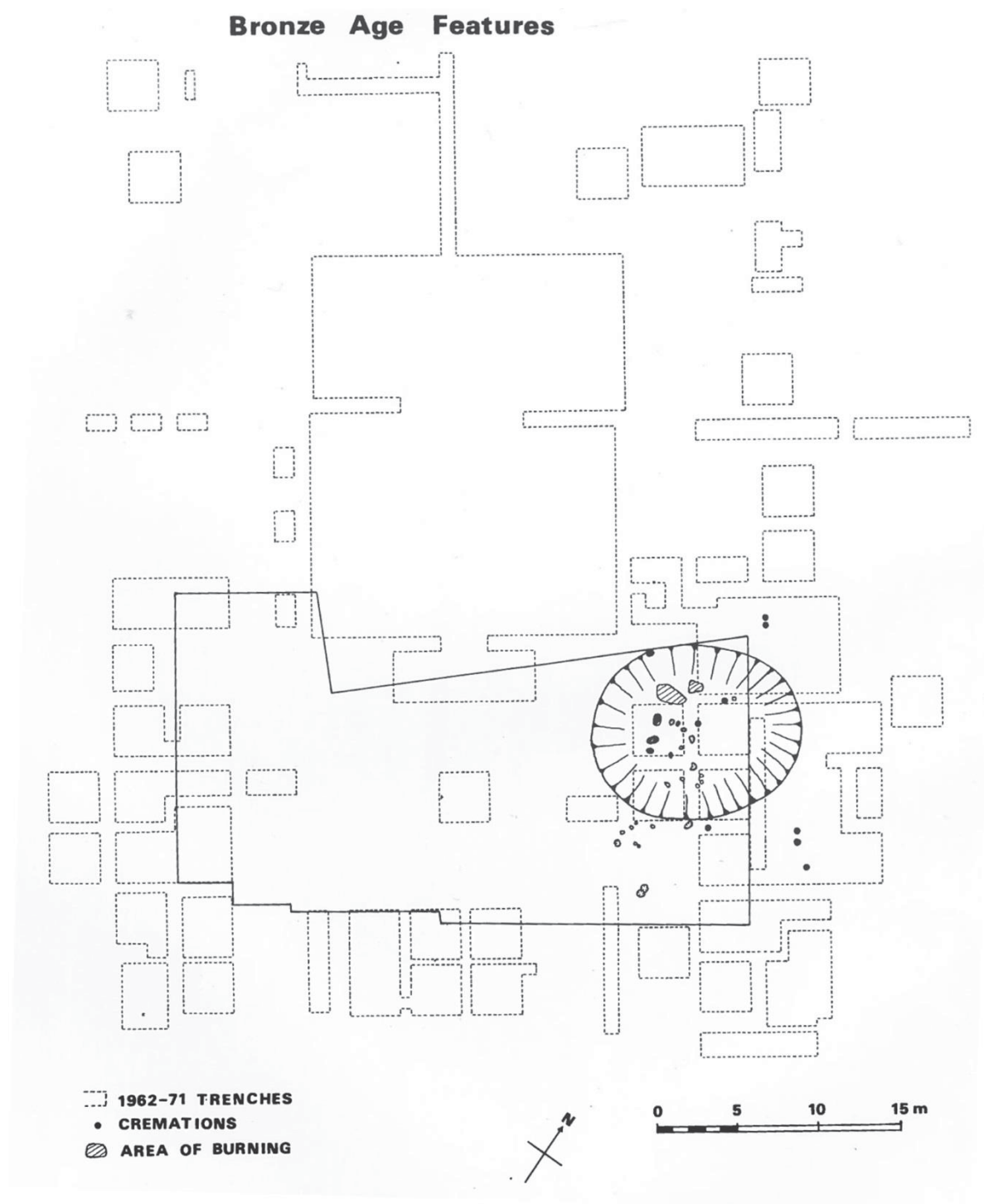


Fig. 2 Bronze Age features

3.3.3 Iron Age

In the 1st century BC the hill-top was reoccupied. A roundhouse (13m diameter) with south facing doorway was excavated. From the terminals of the ditch came a large amount of animal bone, the substantial remains of several Late Iron Age pots and a bronze edging of a dagger scabbard. Large number of postholes were excavated in the area of the roundhouse, some of these form possible rectangular structures or fence-lines. Some 600 Iron Age coins ranging in date from 50BC-43AD came from the area of the roundhouse. They largely derived from a layer of loam thought to represent the later Iron Age ground surface, this layer was high in organic materials (the excavator suggested it may have had its origins as leaf mould), this layer sealed the roundhouse. The coins are largely associated with rulers whose heartland appears to have lain in the east of modern Hertfordshire (notably Tasciovanus).

PRE-ROMAN IRON AGE

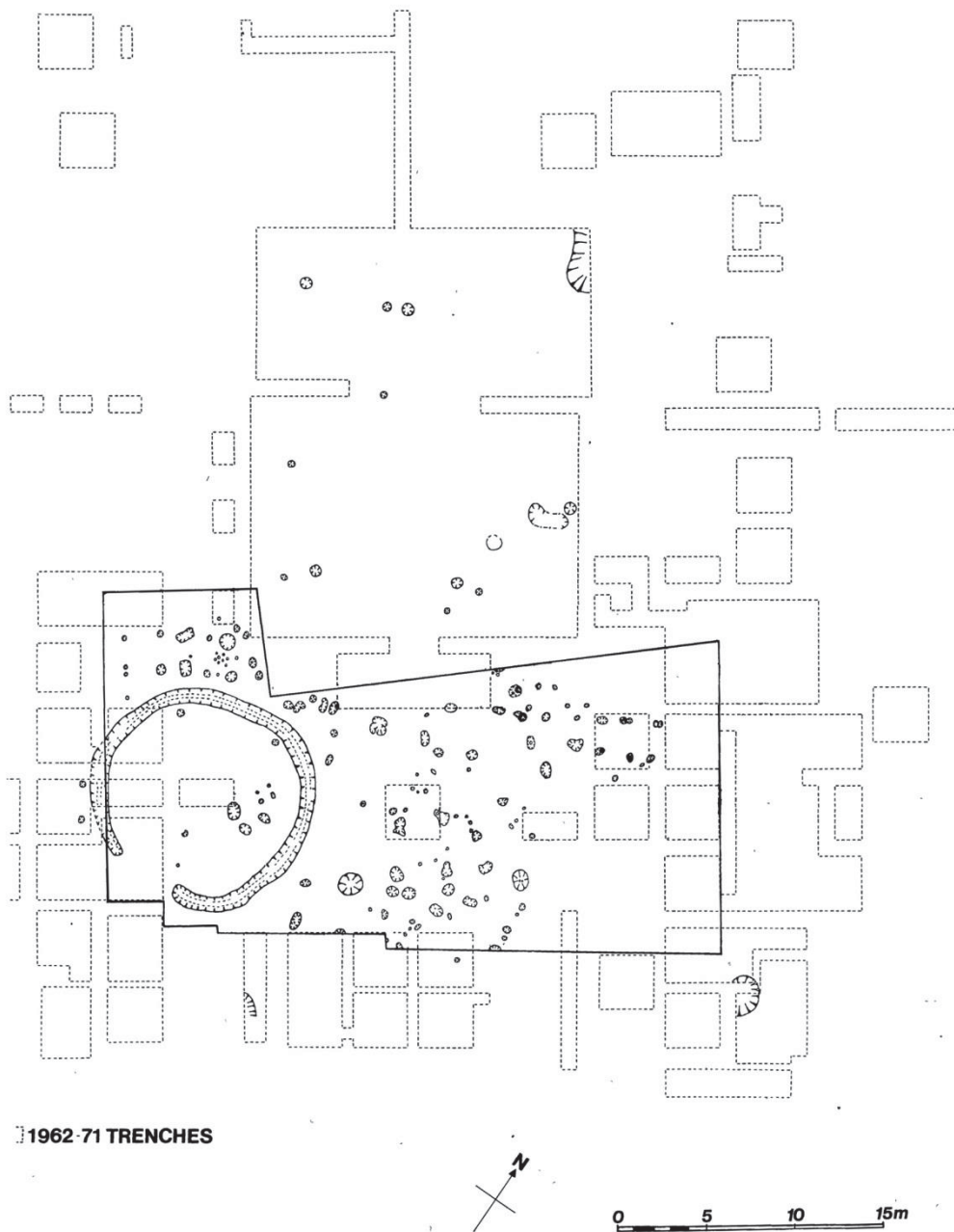


Fig. 3 Pre-Roman Iron Age

3.3.4 Roman period

The earliest excavated structural evidence for a masonry temple dates to c.AD80. Before the temple was built offerings continued to be left on the site. These included coins, brooches, miniature swords and pieces of military equipment. The late 1st century temple comprised a simple stone-built square cella and surrounding ambulatory (probably with a tessellated pavement). In the early 2nd century, about AD 120, was enclosed by a timber palisade in order to create a temenos, with timber colonnaded structures to the east and west of the public courtyard, some additions to the front of the temple and a fence enclosing an area to the north.

Around c.AD 200 the courtyard buildings were rebuilt in stone as was the large entrance gateway. Up to six possible treasuries for votives were added onto the temple, the porch was enlarged and an inscribed altar for public sacrifices erected at the foot of its steps. Either now or later the rooms in the buttressed east range received stone or tessellated floors and at least one of its wall painted. The west range was less elaborate in decoration. The temple was decorated with carved stone and painted plaster. Finds included pieces of the priest's regalia in the form of an elaborate bronze chain, a stone bust of Minerva and a large bronze candelabra.

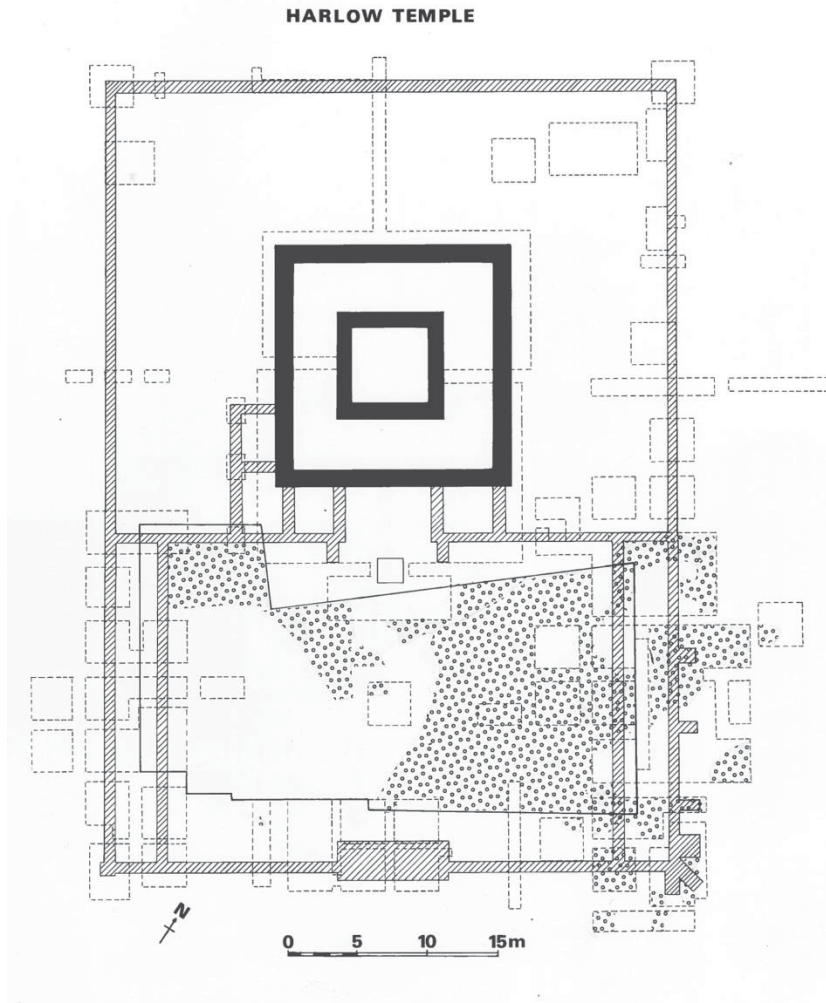


Fig. 4 The 2nd century rebuilding in masonry

The site appears to have fallen into decay in the mid 4th century. It is suggested that the influence of Christianity may have led to its closure c. 350 AD. However the deposition of coins on the site continued until around 400AD. In addition to the coins, a belt plate decorated with the Christian symbols of a peacock and tree of life, dating to c. 370 was recovered from the later levels.

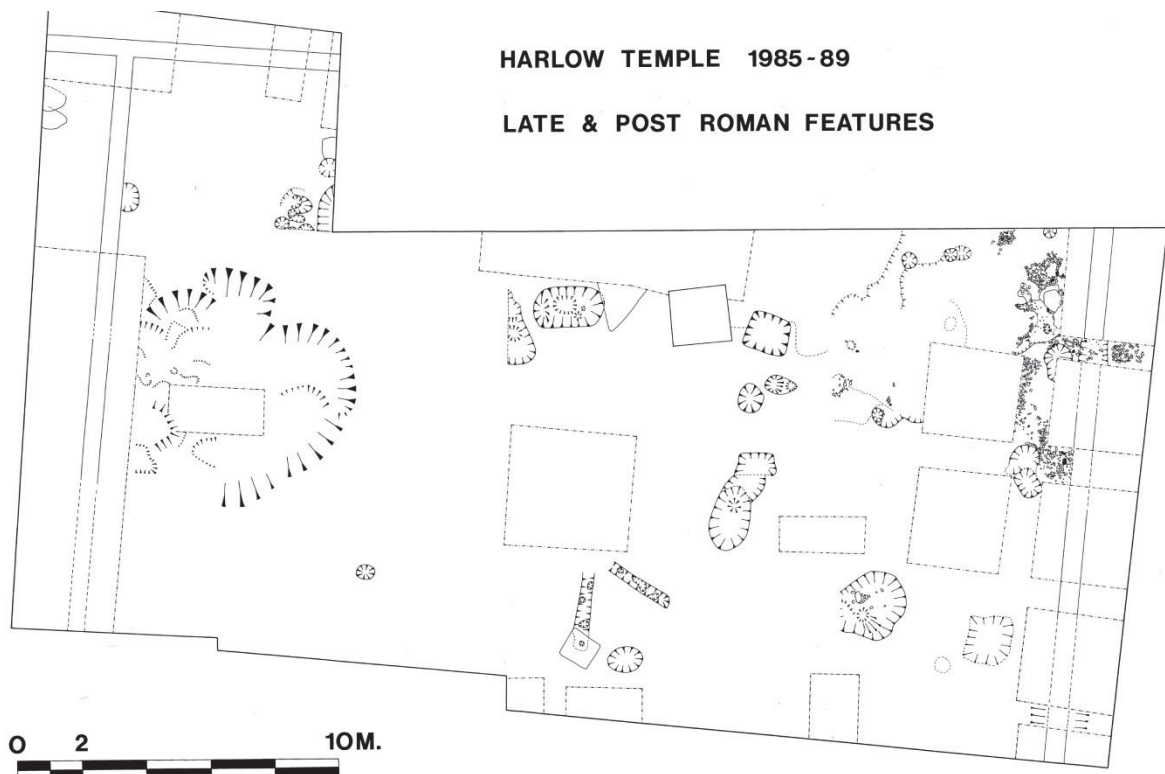


Fig. 5 Late and post-Roman features

3.3.5 Post-Roman period

The end of the 1989 season revealed several postholes packed with rubble deriving from the ruined temple, marking the location of a substantial timber-building in the northern corner of the courtyard.

3.3.6 Bibliography

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