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ODXII
Chapter 6 (Draft 1)

MES with revision by RJ

Chapter 6 (first draft)

Excavation: a Late Romano-British Settlement on Overton Down (ODXII)

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Introduction

Excavation revealed four buildings (1, 2, 3 4A), cut into the lynchets, and the possible remains of a fifth (4B/C). On pottery and coin evidence, occupation can be dated to the second half of the fourth century, and at least in Building 4A, probably continued into the fifth. At an unknown date, the buildings were robbed for stone; this can be paralleled at the farmstead at Bradley Hill, Somerset where robbing occurred after abandonment of buildings of a similar date (Leech, 1981, 185, 187, 192).

There is evidence of two phases in Buildings 1 and 2, two or possibly three phases in Building 3, and certainly three phases in Building 4A. Construction took place in both timber and stone, but only in 4A is there clear evidence of an entire building constructed in timber; the small numbers of post holes found beneath the stone phases of the other buildings may represent earlier fences or boundary markers. Only one or two courses of stone work survived. These walls, composed of unmortared, irregularly-shaped sarsens with some smaller flints, could not have stood to any great height, but must have been dwarf walls to take a timber superstructure. In several places these walls rest in a trench or step cut into the chalk.

The most striking feature of this group was the very regular layout, which respected the position of an earlier boundary, and in the case of most buildings, also respected its alignment.

This boundary, running NE/SW, had originally been marked by a ditch; although this was filled in by at least the 330s AD and certainly before the buildings were constructed, the south-eastern sides of two largest buildings (2, 4A) still respected its line, their long axes at right angles to it, the north-western walls of both at a distance of c40ft (12m) from the boundary. Building 1 also lay close to the boundary, but was tucked into the corner of a lynchet, and aligned approximately north/south.

To the south-west of Building 2 lay Building 3, and in a comparable position to the south-west of Building 4A lay the possible building 4B/C. Though the remains of both of these western buildings are complex and fragmentary, each appears to have one phase or component with its long axis parallel to or at right angles to the former boundary ditch. Buildings 4A and 4B/C were separated by a fence, running parallel to the boundary.

Clear evidence of planning in the layout of an individual building comes from the regular spacing of post holes in the two timber phases of 4A. In each

phase most of the post holes are roughly equidistant, apart from wider gaps for entrances.

The function of the buildings is suggested by their morphology. Building 2 was divided into one large and one small room, the former with a hearth. Parallels are found mainly in the south-west at Catsgore (Leech 1982), Bradley Hill (Leech 1981) and Gatcombe (Branigan 1977), and also at Hibaldstow, Lincolnshire (Britannia 8, 389), where two- and three-roomed buildings of this type have been identified as houses.

The history of Building 4A is more complex. The surviving remains, containing no trace of internal divisions or hearths, might be best interpreted as a barn or other agricultural building.

Building 1 was much smaller than the other buildings and square, rather than rectangular or sub-rectangular. The lack of occupation material apart from the quern found in situ appears to identify this as a workshed devoted to milling. Another quernstone and many other quern fragments were re-used in other buildings.

Building 3 seems also to have been intended for working rather than occupation. The heavily-robbed nature of the remains makes it impossible to define the structural sequence with absolute certainty, but the interpretation offered here is of two stone-built phases, each involving some heating process. Belonging to the first phase is a rectangular, stone-lined hearth; fragments of the walls also survive. The hearth was overlain by the walls of the second phase, a building possibly with an apsidal end and with a stone floor; an oven with a clay superstructure probably belongs to this phase. Almost all of the finds from Building 3 were found in or beside the wall stones, indicating that the floor had been regularly swept.

Area 4B/C seems also to have been a working area. There was another oven with a clay superstructure, adjacent to a floor of rammed chalk. There was a suggestion that this may have been bordered on three sides by sarsens, running roughly east/west, but in the absence of clear evidence of a building, it may be best to regard this as an open-air working area. However, there is firmer evidence of a building beside it, where lengths of sarsen walls were found, each resting in a construction trench. These lengths appear to form a U-shaped structure, its long axis parallel to that of Building 4A. This may be another building with an apsidal end, similar to those found in other agricultural settings at Catsgore, (Buildings 2.10 and 3.13, Leech 1982, 17-21) and Hibaldstow (Frere 1977, 389).

The group thus appears to be a single unit, comprising house, barn, workshed for milling and working areas also related to grain processing, such as baking, and possibly threshing and corn drying or parching. The group as a whole can be paralleled at Gatcombe, where the south-western part of the site was interpreted as a complex for the storage and processing of grain (Branigan 1977, fig 33). Around an open area were two large aisled buildings for storage and possibly also milling, and two rectangular buildings

containing ovens, interpreted as bakeries with living accommodation. A large number of querns were found in the area.

[RJ: The dating, phasing and landscape setting of the buildings will be discussed in greater detail below.]

[MES: If ODXII is in fact a specialised unit within a larger complex rather than a small settlement in its own right, this seems like further evidence of your theory of something much larger than a small settlement though - perhaps fronting onto the fields which were producing the grain?] If the buildings are not contemporary then poss. a different explanation should be sought? - rj.

Area 1 (See Fowler 1967)

Features pre-dating the stone building

Pit

A large oval pit, 1ft deep, was found in the southern corner of the area. The latest datable find from the fill was SFNo 135, a coin of Allectus (293-6). Other finds included coins dating from the 2nd-century AD, emphasising that this feature represents some of the earliest activity on the site, possibly contemporary with the lynchet. One interpretation may be that the pit was a votive deposit located in the corner of the field, marked out by the lynchets and the NE-SW ditch. Pottery from the pit fill included sherds of late 3rd to 4th-century date.

Post holes

Of the 10 post holes (4 certain, 6 possible) in this area, 2 can be shown to pre-date the stone construction phase, since they are cut by the trench in which the north-eastern part of the wall rests. The others cannot be linked with either phase. Pottery from the post holes included some late 4th-century sherds (pp\$).

The post holes do not form any recognisable structure. Unlike the line of the post holes in Area 2 (see below), which might have formed a boundary marker, the post holes in Area 1 are not on the line of the boundary ditch. Their function may therefore be directly associated with that of the building or represent earlier occupation contemporary with the pit deposit.

Building 1

Two separate trenches, underlying the eastern and southern corners of the building are probably best interpreted as cuts for the insertion of the wall stones. The trenches were a maximum of 1ft in depth.

Building 1 was aligned due north/south rather than aligned with respect to the former boundary ditch. Its external measurement was 15ft 6ins square, internal c11ft square. There were no internal divisions or hearths. The building had been robbed, the western half more extensively than the eastern.

As the sarsens were nowhere more than two courses high and there was no tumble on either it was felt that the stonework should be described as wall footings to take a timber superstructure. The northern wall was an almost continuous line of sarsens with some flints, but there was a gap at the southern end of the east wall. This seems unlikely to represent an entrance, as access would be difficult down the slope of the lynchet. The scatter of flints and fragments of Old Red Sandstone tiles across is probably the remnants of the bedding layer on which the sarsens originally rested.

The southern wall was represented by a short length of wall footings resting in a trench; two courses of stone were present. The rest of the wall survived as a scatter of flints and sarsen fragments.

A similar scatter made up the west wall, although two possible post footings indicated a central entrance. These post footings consisted of circular arrangements of flints, each enclosing a circular void 6ins in diameter.

A complete lower stone of a rotary quern made of sarsen (SFNo 123) was found adjacent to the northern part of the east wall. Possibly the two large sarsens to the south of it may be the remains of a bench against the wall (and published plan also shows a stone to the north-west). A parallel may be the quern bench of semi-circular shape found in Building 12 at Gatcombe (Branigan 1977, 21, fig 4, plate 2C), in a complex of buildings possibly devoted to grain processing and baking. A rectangular quern bench was found at the fort of Vindolanda, in a barrack constructed c275 to c300 (Bidwell 1985, fig 29, plate XIII, and see discussion there).

The finds distribution plot shows that the floor of this building had been kept clean. A few finds of glass, jet, iron and a copper alloy pin (SFNos 103, 11, 113, 114) pre-dated the walls or came from the construction trenches, but the majority of occupation material had obviously been swept outside. The only other feature within the building was an arrangement of sarsens, forming 3 sides of a square, to the west of the quern; these may have been a post footing.

Dating

Small finds 65, a whetstone, and 12, a coin of Valentinian (367-75) came from layer 2 over the occupation material. There is no other coin evidence for the date of use of the building or for its abandonment. Pottery sherds from the prewall deposits and the stone construction were all at least 4th-century with the exception of a few sherds in the prewall deposits which dated to between AD240 and 400.

Area 2 (see Fowler 1967)

Phases pre-dating the stone building

Of the post holes in Area 2, the majority can be shown to pre-date Building 2, but four may have been associated with the building itself. These include one certain and three possible post holes within the limits of the building.

The former comprise a line of six post holes (two certain, four possible) between the south-east wall of the building and the former boundary ditch. No further post holes were found, although the site was excavated down to natural, and with no evidence of a timber structure.

Possibly the line of post holes may have been a fence or boundary marker after the ditch had been filled, or was associated with the laying out of the stone building

Also a trench ran north-east/south-west under the northern part of the south-east wall. The trench had a maximum depth of 1ft 3ins; and an irregular profile with an uneven base. It may have pre-dated the stone wall or could have been an eaves-drip gully formed during occupation.

However, a gully located outside the southern part of this wall clearly pre-dated the building and the boundary ditch, which cut it (transcript of second tape, p3).

Building 2

The building was rectangular, its long axis at right angles to the former boundary ditch. The north-western wall was 40ft from the centre of this ditch (cf Building 4A). Externally the building measured 34ft by 30ft, internally 26ft by 20ft. It was divided into two rooms; the larger, to the south-west, was c. 20ft by 18ft; the smaller was c. 20ft by 6ft.

Two- and three-roomed houses of fourth-century date are known at Catsgore (Leech 1982, 30-1), and other sites mainly in the south-west, as mentioned in the introduction. At Catsgore, the largest room was heated, and it was suggested to have been the living and eating area. The small rooms were usually unheated and often carefully paved; they were interpreted as bedrooms, or in one case as a cold-store or dairy (Ellis 1984, 8-9). The best evidence that these were houses is given by infant burials. In Building 1 at Bradley Hill, Somerset (Leech 1981, 183, fig 5), one of the small rooms contained an infant burial; three were found in the smallest room in Building 2 (*ibid.*, 187, fig 7). The room interpreted as the dairy or cold-store at Catsgore contained five infant burials, four of them placed in the corners (*op cit*). At least two infant burials were found in the small room of Building 5 at Gatcombe (Branigan 1977, fig 6).

Some of these buildings may have had other functions in addition to living accommodation. At Catsgore some of the larger examples could have been used partly for the storage of farm equipment, and in buildings fronting the road, may possibly have served as a shop. At Gatcombe, Buildings 12 and 16 were thought to have served as bakeries as well as houses, and Building 5 contained evidence of smithing (*ibid.*, 182-3).

Building 2 at Overton Down, in common with the other buildings on the site, had been robbed, more heavily on the west side than the east.

Down the centre of the filled-in ditch, and co-terminal with the wall of the building, was a line of large sarsens; as described below, this may be interpreted as a boundary marker, or possibly the remains of an earlier phase of the building.

Stone walls

The ground had been levelled for the construction of the building, a cut into the natural chalk being apparent in the north-eastern corner. On all sides the walls had rested on a layer of flints, 4-6ins thick. The eastern corner was the only place where two courses of sarsens survived, and in places the sarsens were missing altogether.

In the centre of the south-east wall was a possible votive deposit. This was an oval scoop cut into natural chalk, c8ins deep, filled with dark soil containing two coins (Valens, 364-7), fragments of glass and some animal bones; it was covered by a layer of sarsen chips. However, since it was not sealed by the sarsen walls footings it is not possible to tell if this represents a foundation offering or whether it was deposited during the occupation of the building.

Ritual deposition can be paralleled in houses at other rural sites. In Building 1 at Bradley Hill, Somerset (Leech 1981, 183, fig 5), the small room with the infant burial mentioned above also contained a foundation deposit of a pot containing coins. A pit in the corner of Building 19 at Gatcombe contained thirteen coins, and had been covered by an octagonal slab of pennant stone (Branigan 55, fig 11, plate 14A). A votive deposit was found at Catsgore, but in a small fenced enclosure outside one of the long walls of the house; in this enclosure was a pit filled with sand and covered by a stone slab (Leech 1982, 24-5).

The sarsens of the south-western wall became larger towards the southern corner, culminating in a long triangular sarsen which had fallen over westwards.

The north-western wall contained some large stones, amongst which was an inverted lower stone of a worn rotary quern (SFNo 110), also of sarsen. From parallels with Buildings 1 and 4A, it might be expected that the entrance would lie in this wall. This might be represented by the gap towards the northern end of the wall' or the missing south-eastern corner. However, the latter might have been the result of robbing (see below).

For the most part the north-eastern wall consisted of a scatter of small stones on the slope of the lynchet.

The partition wall had a central opening, and was less well preserved at its north-eastern end.

Hearth

The hearth, situated in a corner of the larger room, consisted of a roughly oval pit a maximum of 1ft in depth.

Floor

The floor level consisted of 'a scatter of broken stone and baked clay roofing tiles and of large coarse potsherds laid horizontally, perhaps in imitation of a real floor' (Fowler 1967, 29).

Occupation material in house

The latest occupation layer was marked by a layer of flints which dipped towards the centre of the structure. On the flints not only tile fragments but a number of animal bones, mainly long bones. Many of the bones were concentrated around the hearth (see published plan in Fowler 1967), but it was clear they were 'part of a mostly undisturbed occupation layer which covered the greater part of the interior. This was only an inch or so thick but was marked by a much deeper soil coloration' (Fowler 1967, 29).

The finds distribution plot shows a striking concentration of finds in the larger room and within or beside the walls. Apparently the floor of the smaller room was kept swept. However, it should be noted that the large concentration of finds in the other room does not all relate to occupation; most of the finds come from layer 2 overlying the occupation, or from the base of the topsoil, and presumably relate to robbing or dumping of rubbish after the building had gone out of use.

Finds from occupation material in the larger room included pottery, glass, lead, an iron hook and a number of coins, dating between AD 321-354 (SFNos 5, 39, 61, 63, 58, 59, 72, 90, 96). Four finds lay in the northern corner of the house, beside the gap in the wall, possibly further evidence that the entrance was located there; two were found near the hearth. The pottery from the occupation layers was had a higher proportion of coarse wares than elsewhere on the site.

Finds from layer 2 flinty material over the occupation material in the larger room included copper alloy objects, a small amount of glass and two coins, AD341-6 and 364-7 (SFNos 69, 71, 73, 75, 76, 77, 79, 81, 83, 84, 85). Most of these lie around the hearth, where the greatest concentration of animal bone and tile was found, and therefore these probably represent finds disturbed from the latest occupation layer.

Line of sarsens to east

The line of the ditch was marked by a line of large sarsens; many of these appeared to have been set upright originally, to have fallen backwards or forwards. There were no stones at all in the ditch to the north-east and some stones found overlying the ditch to the south-west were small and flat.

The ditch had been deliberately filled with clay in the 330s (given by Constantian coins in the fill). Above this fill was a layer of red soil (possibly washed down from the lynchet), on top of which was a layer 2 or 3ins thick of

flints. The large sarsens were set into this flint layer. Below the flints was a coin of Valentinian II (367-75) (SFNo 94).

Interpretation

- i. boundary marker used in laying out building, cf suggestion above that line of post holes may have had similar function, or
- ii. the building was originally larger, its eastern wall overlying the ditch fill, thus causing subsidence, and therefore the eastern wall was rebuilt. This is possible, because some subsidence can be seen on ditch sections.

Dating evidence

A tpq for the building is given by a SFNo 121, a coin of Magnentius found beneath the walls. The coin of Valens (364-7) (SFNo found as a possible votive deposit under the pile of sarsen chips may date either the foundation or the occupation of the building. A coin of Valentinian II (375-8) (SFNo 109) was found in layer 2 amongst the stones of the wall at the northern corner. Generally, the coins from the occupation layer were pre AD 350 and it seems reasonable to suggest occupation occurred at around the middle of the 4th-century. Diagnostic pottery sherds were rare although a few recovered from the post holes were later than AD350.

Building 3

The remains of this building occupy a space 35ft by at least 24ft, but the exact size, shape and sequence of the phases is difficult to determine because of the extent of robbing. It was noted at the time of excavation that there were possibly two stone phases in addition to underlying post holes (site notes, p52, 60, 62), also it was observed that the north-eastern end of the building appeared to be curved (p62).

The post holes do not conform to any structure, and could have pre-dated the first stone phase or have been contemporary with it. A possible interpretation of the stone remains is of a rectangular building with a hearth aligned along its western wall, superseded by a smaller building, possibly with an apsidal end. The second phase had a stone floor and an oven at the northern end. The two phases were probably on slightly different alignments.

Post holes

There are eight certain and three possible post holes. Although several are on the line of the eastern wall of both phases, only two are certainly sealed. One certain and one possible post hole underlie the stone floor of the second phase.

The following post holes are roughly in an arc, from north to south, along the east side: 9, 10, 11, 12, 1, 2, 3: there is also one possible post hole, 11A. Numbers 9 and 11 are overlain by the wall of the second phase.

In the southern corner of the building beneath the sarsen floor of the second phase is an isolated post hole, number 8. Under a patch of the same floor to

the north is a possible post hole, number 4; the base of this was very uneven, and the feature might have been a solution hollow in the chalk. Beyond the western edge of the building was another possible post hole, number 7A.

Stone phase 1

The surviving walls of this phase consisted mainly of a bedding layer of flints, overlain by some sarsens. The north-eastern wall was represented by one group of flints and sarsens at the eastern corner, more flints and sarsens at the centre of the wall, and flints alone at the northern corner. These flints continued to form the northern part of the south-eastern wall; the southern end of this wall was represented by a line of four sarsens. Flints found overlying the fill of the hearth probably represent a survival of the robbed wall.

The south-eastern wall was represented only by a patch of flints and two sarsens at the southern end. There appeared to be no surviving traces of the south-western wall. The dimensions of the first phase building are therefore approximately 32ft by 22ft.

Hearth

The maximum width of this feature was 3ft and the total length 11ft. This length included a stone-lined rectangular pit, c5ft by 3ft, in the southern half, and a shallower, unlined stokehole or flue in the north.

The depth of the lined portion was 2ft. Evidence that it had been a fire-pit was seen in the effect of heat on the upright sarsens of the lining, and the heavy deposits of carbon. The lowest fill was a sticky black layer 3ins deep containing iron objects; charcoal and soot was found amongst the stones of the lining. Several sarsens had tumbled into the fill.

The much shallower northern end had a different fill, which contained pottery. The section shows a brown clay layer at the base, overlain by a grey soil with small flints, and an upper layer of brown soil with large flints. The fills were overlain by a layer of large flints, which appeared to have tumbled in from the west, presumably derived from the robbing of the wall.

There is insufficient evidence to locate the entrance of either phase. A door latch (SFNo 328) was found outside the western corner, and a window grille (SFNo 324) outside the centre of the south-east wall. Both derived from layer 2.

Stone wall phase 2

The second stone phase, aligned with its long axis parallel to the former boundary ditch, measured roughly 32ft by 18ft. North-eastern end may possibly be apsidal (for parallels of buildings of this type in farming settlements, see discussion of Area 4B/C).

The phase 2 walls, though more substantial than those of phase 1, were still fragmentary. There was an almost continuous line of sarsens along the south-western wall, which was roughly 18ft long and a maximum of 4ft wide, and a further length of 7ft of sarsens at the southern end of the south-east

wall. These were the only lengths which were set on a layer of flints. There was a gap of 6ft at the centre of the south-east wall before a further scatter of three smallish sarsens, and the north-eastern end of the building consisted of an arc of sarsens. In the central portion of the south-western side there was a single line of smallish sarsens 12ft in length; the southernmost of these appeared to overlies the eastern edge of the phase 1 hearth and were abutted by the western edge of the sarsen floor (see below).

Floor

The floor was composed of large sarsens laid horizontally with small stones, including quern fragments, in the interstices; two separate spreads survived. The larger, an L-shaped area, comprised a strip roughly 4ft wide adjacent to the south-western wall and a sparser distribution of sarsens running northwards for a further 6ft. The smaller spread was a rectangular area, 5ft 6ins by 2ft 9ins, beside the oven.

The gap between the edge of the floor and the south-western wall is probably a robber trench, and many of the finds from this area presumably derive from the robbing. However, pottery from the trench was dated to the late 3rd or 4th-centuries and may indicate that earlier occupation debris was incorporated into the ditch fill.

Oven

This consisted of two roughly circular pits joined by a central channel, the total length being 5ft. The larger, north-eastern pit appears to have had a clay superstructure, while the smaller, south-western pit appears to have been the fire-pit, and was joined by a shallow feature described as an auxiliary flue, but which could have been a channel forming by raking out debris from the fire-pit.

The larger pit was steep-sided, U-shaped, and had a depth of 1ft 3ins. The fill consisted of loose, fine, brown soil with some charcoal near the top; a large sarsen had tumbled into it. Some sarsens showed signs of burning and the area of floor adjacent to it was scattered with fragments of charcoal, coal and burnt clay, probably derived from the collapsed superstructure.

The central channel was 9ins in depth, as was the fire-pit. The latter had a shallow U-shaped profile and a fill of dark soil containing much charcoal and coal. The auxiliary flue or raking-out channel was irregularly-shaped, running into the fire-pit from the north-east; it was an average of 6ins deep, gradually becoming shallower towards the end. Charcoal was found in the fill until near the end.

Occupation material

There were very few finds under the sarsen floor or from the occupation material over it, as shown on the finds distribution plot. The concentration of finds beside and amongst the wall stones suggests that the stone floor had been regularly swept. The finds included two iron shears, an iron buckle, a door latch, a copper alloy bracelet, and three unidentified coins (GFNos 259, 263, 264, 272, 274, 278, 281, 282, 286, 309).

Layers overlying occupation material

Many finds, including the majority of the coins came from layers overlying the building, rather than in occupation material. These may either be the result of robbing or the dumping of rubbish over building after it had gone out of use.

Interpretation

In this account, the term oven has been used for those features with a clay superstructure, ie this phase 2 feature, and the feature E in Area 4B/C. The phase 1 stone-lined feature with no apparent superstructure has been called a hearth.

In the absence of any record of metalworking debris or the signs of any other industrial process, it might be assumed that the oven and hearth in used for some process involving grain. It may be significant that three ox skulls were found in the building, possible parallels for the votive deposit of a horse skull in a corn drier at Catsgore (Leech 1982, 144, Fig 55). It is not possible to say which phase of the building the three ox skulls belonged to. Pottery from the side showed a high proportion of samian sherds in comparison to elsewhere on the site.

Dating

Unfortunately the coins from this building are missing and there are no positive identifications for most. Provisional identification of some coins was however made at the time of excavation. In layer 2 within the building there was a coin (SFNo provisionally assigned to Valens (364-78) and from the layer overlying the robbed wall a coin (SFNo 317) thought to be of Arcadius. Pottery from phase 2 of the stone building was identified as New Forest and Oxfordshire colour coated ware of the late 4th-century. In contrast sherds from the lynchet were 1st to 2nd-century in date.

Building 4A and Fence

This building is on the same alignment as Building 2, and in a comparable position (from the centre of the boundary ditch to the west wall is 42ft, cf 40ft for Building 2). It is roughly the same length as Building 2, but narrower. There were three phases, one in stone and two in timber. The only part of the sequence which it is possible to define with certainty is that the smaller of the two timber building pre-dates the stone phase. There are no direct stratigraphical relationships to tie in the larger timber building. In this account it is placed at the beginning of the sequence mainly for convenience, although there is some circumstantial evidence for suggesting it might be the earliest phase.

The regular spacing of post holes along the north-eastern walls of both phases is clear. The post holes of the larger timber building are roughly 7ft apart, those of the smaller building 5ft apart (modern feet). The two buildings shared the same north-western and south-western walls; both plans and sections suggest that some of the post holes were re-used. Although

appearing initially confusing, post holes do occur in positions consistent with the same spacings being carried through these walls with only minor irregularities, for which explanations can be offered. The south-eastern walls of both phases are less regular, but again it is possible to distinguish the same pattern, allowing for some additional post holes in the wall of the smaller building, and one gap in the larger.

Large timber building

The dimensions of the building were 37ft (11.28m) by 22ft (6.7m), narrowing gradually to 21ft (6.4m) at the eastern end.

The main structural post holes are as follows (those also used in the smaller building are marked S: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8(S), 9(S), 16A, 17(S), 18, 19, 21, 21B. Additional post holes possibly for strengthening corners on downward part of slope are numbers 15 and 21A. If this scheme is correct, it would indicate a carefully laid out building. The only deviations from a rectangular form occur along the north-eastern and south-eastern walls, which appear to be following the lines of the lynchets, rather than being positioned parallel with, or at right angles to, the former boundary ditch. This may be the reason why the position of post hole number 1 does not conform with the spacing of roughly 7ft; alternatively the post hole may be out of position because of some practical difficulty of digging on the lynchet slope or in the region of the in-filled ditch. The spacing of 14ft between post holes 21B and 21 implies a missing post hole. This was searched for during excavation, but no trace was found. It is possible that this timber may have been supported on a post pad rather than being in a post hole, or possibly features in this area had been destroyed by the rabbit disturbance which was found throughout the site. The only remaining inconsistency is the spacing of 9ft between post holes 21 and 19. The gap is sufficient to represent an entrance for wagons the position in the corner of the lynchet would be difficult for access. A simpler explanation could be that the north-west wall was the baseline for setting out the building, and that an error in the spacing had developed by the time the boundary was reached. Otherwise there is no clear indication of where an entrance might have been. However, it will be argued below that the entrance to the smaller timber building was in the centre of the north-west wall, and this may have been its position in the other phases.

In neither timber phase were there any traces of internal divisions or post holes for timbers to support the roof. It is possible that the latter might have rested on stone post pads. Some of these could have been removed when the site was levelled for the construction of the stone building; however, it is perhaps doubtful whether the construction cut for the stone walls as shown in the section drawings was sufficient to have removed internal features. A lack of internal supports would imply a high degree of constructional skill in the roof, particularly in the larger timber building, where the span was 21ft.

The only internal feature, which could have belonged to either the larger or smaller timber building, is a post hole (number 11) in the south-eastern quadrant.

Small timber building

The building was 30ft (9.14m) by 17ft (5.18m), narrowing, possibly to 15ft (4.57m) at the east. The outline of this phase is more irregular than that of the larger timber building; in particular the north-east wall narrows sharply at its mid-point, and the south-west wall may also do so. Also the post holes along the north-eastern and south-eastern walls are much smaller than those used in the rest of the building and in the other timber phase. This could mean simply that smaller timbers were used, but alternatively they could have been truncated by the cut for the walls of the stone phase.

Along the north-eastern wall there is a regular spacing of approximately 5ft between the post holes, which are numbered 7, 35, 34, 20, 30 and 31. From number 31 down the south-eastern wall there is the same spacing to numbers 33, 33A and a possible stakehole found at the southern corner of the building. There were apparently extra timbers at each end of this wall, represented by post holes 32, 33B and a possible stakehole. The wall itself takes an irregular line.

The suggested scheme for the north-east wall is that post holes 7 and 14 formed the corners, and that post holes 8 and 9, used in the larger building, also formed part of this phase. This would conform to the spacing of the north-east wall, but allow an extra wide gap for a central entrance. The iron latch lifter (SFNo 229) found beside post hole 8, but in the flinty layer overlying occupation material, may confirm the position on an entrance here.

The scheme only holds good for the south-eastern wall if it assumed that the wall bowed outward, then inward at its mid-point, and that there are two missing post holes. Some possible explanations for these inconsistencies will be offered below, but the proposed layout is as follows. The wall line bends outward from post hole to 15A at a distance of 4ft, then there is a gap of 5ft 6ins to post hole 16 is 5ft 6ins, and 5ft to number 17. Post hole 17A may be an addition to bring the wall back into line with the southern corner of the building. There are no other post holes between 17A and the corner, but a square arrangement of sarsen stones 5ft from 17A may represent a post pad. This still leaves a gap of 10ft to be explained. The difficulty of access to a wide entrance way in this position has been stated with reference to the larger timber phase. An additional objection is that the small stakehole at the corner of the building would provide insufficient support for the timbers of such an entrance. The only remaining explanation is that traces of other post pads have been destroyed.

A possible explanation for this irregular shape is given below (see phasing).

Evidence that this pre-dates the stone phase is that three of the post holes of the north wall (20, 34 and 35) are overlain by sarsens of the wall footings.

Parallels

A poorly-preserved post hole building of fourth-century date was found in complex 5 at Catsgore (Leech 1982, 25, fig 17); its original phase was 29.5m long and possibly 19.7m wide, roughly the same size as the larger timber

phase at Overton Down. It was interpreted as a farm building, although it was noted that much larger timber halls are known in Dark Age contexts.

Stone phase

The ground was terraced for the construction of the stone building. The cut into the lynchet extends further along the north-west side than the wall of the timber building. The cut is 36ft in length, curving around the northern corner and extending a short distance down north-west side; it also continues down the south-east side, not for full length of the wall, but for a distance of 16ft. The cut for the north-western wall is not straight, but follows the irregular line of the post holes of the smaller timber building.

The section drawing along line FE shows the cut on the east side as a shallow U-shaped scoop, 6ins deep and roughly 2ft 6ins wide, with a fill of flints. Section FN shows the cut 9ins deep.

The wall was found to have been heavily robbed, only the footings remained. These were mainly flints, but there were a few large sarsens. This material extended almost the full length of the south-eastern wall, but only for a length of 7ft 6ins along the north-eastern.

Also there is a possible stone feature represented by a right-angled arrangement of sarsens, measuring 5ft by 4ft 6ins, within the building, adjacent to the south wall, half way along, extending north and east from post hole 17A.

The evidence for suggesting this represent a feature is only circumstantial. There is no suggestion from the site notes that these stones were regarded as significant at the time of excavation, and they are marked 'R' on the plan, indicating they were removed, so presumably they had been in an upper layer and not bedded in.

However, they appear to be of the right size and position to be part of some sort of entrance arrangement. Alternatively they could be the remains of a feature such as a bench or storage bin, paralleled in other agricultural buildings of the period.

Phasing

Two reasons can be given for suggesting that the sequence of construction was, first the large timber building, then the smaller timber phase, and finally the stone building. They are:

- 1) The two timber phases are likely to have been consecutive; if the stone phase had intervened, it is difficult to imagine that some of the same post holes were re-used.
- 2) If the largest building had been the last phase, the interior would have contained not only the awkward step caused by the cut for the stone building but also a clutter of sarsen stones and flints.

This sequence allows for an explanation of the irregular shape of the small timber building. If the original building had partially decayed, timber from it could have been salvaged for a smaller version. The narrowing of the new

building at its mid-point could be the result of fitting the walls to the available lengths of roof timbers; the increased number of small post holes of the south-eastern wall may indicate that only small timbers were available, thus requiring the additional posts on that side. The possible use of post pads at the end of the south-western wall may simply indicate that there were no timbers long enough to be sunk into post holes.

Occupation material

Presumably the finds from 4A mainly reflect the latest phase of occupation, most material from earlier phases having been cleared away. Following the above sequence, then finds would then mainly reflect the stone-built phase.

The finds distribution plot shows most finds concentrated in the western half of the building, but this should be interpreted with caution.

From layer 3 occupation material there are 11 small finds, including glass beads, a hook, a pennisular brooch and four coins, dating between AD 364-75 (SFNos 248, 249, 251, 255, 265, 256, 263, 266, 267, 257). There may be some significance in the fact that these all come from the walls or the interior of the western part, which parallels the situation in Building 2. Of the 6 finds from the western interior, five are personal ornaments; the concentration is mainly around the presumed position of the entrance.

Of the finds from layer 2 occupation material, eight come from within the limits of the stone building, including four coins dating between AD 353 and 375 (SFNos 181, 189, 195, 199, 201, 203, 278). Most of these are associated with the walls, but they include one certain and one probable coin of the House of Theodosius (AD 395-402); one from the western part of the interior was slightly worn, one from the east was corroded.

Other finds from layer 2 occupation (SFNos 137, 140, 144, 145, 182) lie within the limit of the larger timber building, but if it is the case that it had already gone out of use, then these probably represent midden material or scatters of material on the lynchet. Three of the finds were coins: Tetricus I (270-3), Gratian (379-83) and Constantine I (337).

Robbing or collapse

At an early stage in excavation it was noted that there was a scatter of sarsens in the western half of the interior (shown on plan). One of the interpretations recorded at the time was that they 'represent part of a wall, heavily robbed' (site notebook, p12) .

Finds from this phase

There are also finds from layer 2 contexts described as a flinty layer and probably overlying occupation material. Early, middle and late 4th-century coins were all present along with objects of iron, glass, jet and copper alloy (SFNos 157, 158, 187, 209, 210, 212, 216, 217, 219, 220, 221, 223, 225a and b, 229). These are all in the western part of the building, and may be associated with robbing or collapse of the wall on this side of the building.

Alternatively they could derive from deposition of rubbish through the entrance of the building after it had gone out of use.

Whichever is the case, the finds suggest that the building was not abandoned until the early fifth century, since they include three worn or very worn coins of the House of Theodosius.

Possible middens to north, east and south of Building 4A See finds distribution plot for large spreads of finds in these areas, which could represent middens formed during use of building, or material from clearance of the site after one phase has ended and before construction of the next phase, or dumping in the area after the building had gone out of use. There was also a scatter of finds in the north-west of Area 4.

Large sarsens to SE

The right angle of very large sarsens outside the southern corner of the building may represent clearance at some stage, but could be late Roman or post-Roman.

Large sarsen to west, beside fence

This very large stone lies roughly on the line of the south-western wall of 4A, 11 ft west of post hole number 10, and close to the line of the fence. It rested on a smaller upright sarsen, set into post hole 37. It was suggested at the time of excavation that this arrangement might have some ritual significance (site notebook, p44). The only possible support for this is that the unusual copper alloy votive axe (SFNo 179) was found 4ft to the west of the large sarsen, on the other side of the fence line. Another explanation for this arrangement of stones is that it was used as a marker in the laying out of the building.

Fence

This is represented by post holes 22-28. As well as the votive axe mentioned above, finds on the line of the fence included two coins (Valens 367-75, and Constantine II 330) and a number of iron and copper alloy objects (SFNos 152, 208, 214, 269, 279 and 382).

A parallel for a fence within a settlement of this kind comes from Catsgore, where a boundary ditch and bank between two farming complexes was replaced by a fence (Leech 1982, 22-4). In another complex on the same site, two ditch and bank boundaries were replaced by walls, apparently to save space (ibid., 18). The latter may be of relevance to the line of stones, possibly acting as a boundary marker, over the line of the filled-in ditch beside Building 2 at Overton Down.

Dating

The pottery from building 4A is more biased towards a late 4th century date than elsewhere on the site. In particular sherds from layer 3 were 4th-century while layer 2 had a date stretching into the 5th-century (see above). However, pottery from some of the post holes was identified to the 2nd or 3rd-century although which post holes is not clear. Coin evidence from the occupation

layers is generally late 4th-century in contrast to Building 2 where an earlier 4th-century date was more likely.

Features in Area 4B/C - Possible Buildings

Oven and floor

That this was a working area comparable to Area 3 is clear from the oven or hearth E. This consisted of a roughly circular pit, 2ft in diameter, with a straight flue leading into it from the south-east. The flue had been covered while in use, as the sarsens overlying it were heavily burnt on their undersides. There was also a packing of baked clay between and over these sarsens. The upper edges of the pit were surrounded with burnt clay, suggesting there had been a clay superstructure.

Adjacent to the oven was a floor composed of chalk, slabs, sarsen chips and broken tile, at least 6ins in depth and sunk into the layer 2 flinty soil. It was an irregular oval, aligned roughly east/west. No firm evidence of walls was found during excavation, and it was concluded that this was an open air working area. However the field plan suggests that the area was at least bordered on the west by a line of sarsens running roughly east/west and the section drawing shows that at least one large sarsen to the east of the floor appears to be set into layer 2. This would create a sub-rectangular working area, roughly 18ft by 10ft, with a slightly round north-eastern end, the chalk floor taking up an area of 14ft by 10ft in the north-eastern part, with the oven to the north-west.

It is possible this may have been used as a threshing floor.

Possible votive deposit

One of the finds made in the vicinity of the oven was '... the crushed skull of a large (horse-sized?) animal ..' (site notebook, p36). This is paralleled by the ox-skulls found in Building 3, and votive offerings beside corn dryers, cf a horse skull placed with a corn drier in Building 3.5 of a similar agricultural settlement at Catsgore, Somerset (Leech 1982, 144, Fig 55).

Other finds

Also on the chalk floor around E was a coin of the House of Theodosius (SFNo 200) and a few other finds: three coins (Helena 337-40, Gratian 378-83, and Constantine II 330-31), three iron objects, a quern fragment used in the floor, and a piece of jet (SFNos 204, 234, 242, 271, 275, 276, 284, 285).

Hearths A, B, C and D

There was a charred area on the floor immediately to the east of the flue of oven E, approximately 2ft by 1ft 6ins, containing charcoal and burnt clay, and in addition to the south and south-east of E was a row of four features (A-D) in a line parallel to the fence. These were initially regarded as simple hearths, although in the site notebook (p43), it was suggested that they might simply be debris from E. The details are as follows:

Hearth A

Consisted of a scatter (c.1sq.yd.) of large and a few small pieces of tile. No charcoal, few signs of exposure to heat and ' little claim to be a hearth' (site notes).

Hearth B

Possibly a hearth. An area of red baked clay on top of probable chalk upcrop, with trampled down red sherds or tiles and evidence of burning, and extensive charcoal.

Hearth C

Probable debris of broken tile and baked clay.

Hearth D

Probable debris of yellowish baked clay.

Possible building with apsidal end

This building is inferred from features found in the southern extension and in the eastern annexe to Area 4.

When the South Extension was cleaned down to layer 2 (clay with flints), two parallel rows of sarsens were seen. Each row was tested by three small box trenches. In the northerly row the sarsens rested in a trench, 4ft wide and 1ft deep; the southerly row were bedded into a slight hollow. Box 4c, at the end of the northern row contained two unusual finds, an iron cauldron base (SFNo 294) and an almost complete pot (SFNo 289), in addition to a coin, possibly of Valens (SFNo 306). But equally notable was the concentration of finds along the southerly row; these consisted of three unidentified coins, a piece of glass and an Iron object (SFNos 312, 314, 318, 319, 334).

In the east annexe was an arc of sarsens, the ends of which were aligned roughly with the two lines of sarsens in the South Extension. This arc was investigated by two box trenches, one of which showed a sarsen lying in a shallow trench c.1ft 6ins wide and 6ins deep. However, the distribution of finds in this trench was also significant; as in the South Extension, these were aligned roughly along the arc of stones. Four unidentified coins were present as well as a copper alloy object (SFNos 337, 341, 346, 350, 351).

The whole suggests a building with external dimensions of 21ft (6.60m) by 12ft (3.66m), parallel with Building 4A, apsidal at the south-eastern end and possibly open ended at the north-west. Apsidal buildings are known in similar rural settlements, but other examples are larger. At Hibaldstow in Lincolnshire, Building D, 21m by 9m, had an apsidal rear wall and in its earliest phase had an open front facing onto a road (Frere 1977, 389).

Building 3.13 at Catsgore measured 15m by c8m (Leech 1982, 18-21). In its first phase, after c315 to c360, there were no internal features. In a second phase, dated on coin evidence to after an internal division, hearths and a drain were added, and it was interpreted as a house. Later an extension with a corn drier was added; the upper fill of this contained a coin of 388+. The

combination of apsidal building and corn drier may thus parallel the possible building and adjacent oven at Overton Down.

The other fragment of apsidal wall at Catsgore (ibid., 17-18) could be part of a large barn, measuring 35m by 10m.

Isolated post hole

Post hole 4S/1 was found in the corner of the South extension, beyond the sarsen walls. It contained a copper alloy pin, SFNo 327.

Dating

Coins from the floor area span the middle and late 4th-century and it is unfortunate that those from the building are unavailable to be identified. Pottery sherds from Area 4B/C is 4th-century with aspects of 3rd. Consequently it is difficult to associate the building and floor area with any specific buildings on the rest of the site.

Discussion [this is only a tentative conclusion courtesy of rj]

Any interpretation of the site must take account of the chronology of the buildings as identified by the pottery and coin evidence. The earliest features on the site certainly predate the stone structures. These features include the lynchets, the pit in area 1, a number of the post holes in areas 1 and 2, and possibly the boundary ditch which was filled in after AD 330. To this list may be added the large timber building in Area 4 where pottery from the post holes indicates a 2nd or 3rd century date for its construction.

The earliest occupied stone building appears to be in Area 2, the coins from which date to prior AD 350. It may be that the construction of this building and the initial filling of the ditch occurred at one and the same time. If this is so then the coin preserved under the sarsen line to the east (dating to 367-75) may indicate either a later attempt to extend the structure or a renewed need to mark the boundary. It is difficult to directly associate any other structures to this phase. It may be that phase 1 of Building 3 is a likely candidate but the coin evidence is sadly lacking and the pottery only represents later occupation of the building. The smaller timber building in Area 4A may have been built at around this time, just prior to the construction of the stone phase and contemporary with the fence and the first use of Area 4B/C.

Later stone buildings on the site include phase 2 of Building 3 and the stone structure at 4A. With the exception of phase 1 Building 3 it is not clear to what extent occupation across the site was contemporary. It is for that reason that Building 1 and Area 4B/C remain outside any clear chronology. Certainly the pottery from the apsidal building in 4 does seem earlier than the floor and oven but the difference is only slight and it seems likely that the whole of Area 4 was occupied at different times, while the specific functions for structures may have varied.

The outlying position of Building 1 and its late date in comparison to its nearest neighbour, Building 2, suggests it may stand alone or be part of a larger, as yet unexcavated, context. Such an interpretation helps to sharpen our picture of the rest of the site. It may be that the building can be divided into distinct units, for example, Buildings 2 and 3 (phase 1), and Buildings 4A, 3 (phase 2) and structure 4B/C. The overall layout of the site does suggest distinct, regularly planned units; delineated by the boundary to the NE and the trackway to the NW. A similarly structured landscape at OD south has yielded 1st and 2nd-century pottery and may well be the site of an earlier but related settlement, possibly associated with the cultivation which resulted in the lynchets.

Such an interpretation is necessarily tentative considering the lack of a clear sequence across the site. The reason for this may simply be that land and structures were continually being reused, whether as middens, storehouses, or as sources of stone. The settlement has been placed in an existing field system and has expanded, contracted, and changed function. All common features of settlements in the area right through until the modern period.

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