

Chapter 7 - Wroughton Mead Interpretation

Building 4 - byre, Pit 6 & midden, Enclosure B & entrance
Fire-pit & midden
Oven

The upper layers of Pit 6

The material uncovered in the dirty brown soil and carbon layer immediately above the sarsens at a depth of between 1.07m and 1.3m* in Pit 6, was from the occupation phase at B4 when the hollow was accumulating rubbish. Above that, the 30cm layer of black earth between 76cm and 1.07m in depth, with charcoal, some clay and pockets of cob amongst the black soil, all evident under the base of the oven, is likely to be associated with the fire-pit. The 15cm layer of brown soil with flints and chalk lumps, at a depth of between 61cm and 76cm, could show a brief period of a stabilised ground surface. Over this, the chalk, cob, larger sarsens and flints in dark brown soil with chalk lumps, some 38cm in thickness, represents the utilisation phase and collapse of the oven. During excavation, the topsoil, c.23cm in thickness, down to c.50cm was referred to as a 'midden'. When Pit 6 was a shallow depression, Enclosure A was built to the west. Part of the bank of this enclosure skirted the western edge of Pit 6 so, to prevent the collapse of the bank, the eastern and part of the northern side of the bank were reveted with sarsens.

Dating

The amount of metal objects in the upper 50cm of the pit, that is the 'midden' and oven phase, is of interest. GF591, for example, produced a knife blade dated from between the 10th and 12th century, 'Norman' horseshoe nails (9th-mid 14th century), as well as an MG sherd (later C13th), two 'Transitional' horseshoe nails (later 13th-early 14th century). A 'Norman' horseshoe (C11th-mid 13th; GF547) and an 11th to 14th century armour-piercing arrowhead (GF599; TWA, 10) also came from this black soil, all of which indicate a 13th century date, with a leaning towards the later 1200s, for the midden and oven phases of the pit.

If this material represents a midden, as is clearly suggested, then, being the uppermost fill of the pit, this midden must represent a phase during and after the collapse of the oven. As the oven is later than the occupation phase of B4, the midden cannot, therefore, contain rubbish thrown out by the occupants of B4. This leads to the conclusion that the then shallow Pit 6 was used as the natural place to dump rubbish by the occupants at B1. Thus the oven is not therefore, as once believed, the final chapter in the history of human occupation at Raddon.

This upper 0.4m also produced an abundance of coarseware (CW38 - Newbury B) sherds, but only 3 sherds of West Wiltshire Sandy-Coarseware (CS41; GF591), whereas from 0.75m in depth, the latter became far more evident, especially above and in the clayey pit filling at c.

1.3m in depth; a layer which, it is believed, predates the fire-pit and is probably contemporary with the occupation phase of B4. Also below this upper level, few metal objects were found, though many bones were.

Building 4

The walls of Building 4 (B4) and the features uncovered within it are discussed separately below, with corresponding discussions as to the date and function of each. A concluding section deals with B4 as a whole and places it within the settlement pattern at Wroughton Mead.

Excavation

The excavation of Building 4 (Cutting 6) began in August 1961 and was completed in August 1962. The building measured 11.1m in length and 4.2m in width internally, giving it a floor area of c.46.5m².

Walls & floor

The walls, where uncovered, were built of broken and unbroken sarsen stones. The E wall, to the N of the entrance, was in the best state of preservation, probably because much reconstruction of this area had been undertaken later to insert the oven (see below). In the southern half of the building, however, on both east and west sides, it appeared that many of the stones had been removed, obviously after the occupation of B4. There, the former line of the walls was clearly marked by a slight scarp in the Clay-with-Flints subsoil. This was a characteristic feature of Buildings 1, 2 & 3 and is presumably the result of wear and sweeping within the building.

The N wall of B4 was difficult to locate precisely due to the insertion of the 'oven', although a slight step the length of the floor level in this area, into which the lowest courses of the oven were placed, indicated its position. B4's stone revetment at the W was at most two courses high, and since there was little tumble from it, this may represent its original height. If this were the case, it is likely that the rafters would have been embedded in the bank immediately behind the revetment, rather than on the stones themselves, though no evidence of this was found, nor any evidence of the roofing technique. It is suggested here that the bank into which the W wall of B4 was built was constructed specifically to take that wall (see below). The floor consisted of a red clay with many flints. No evidence of a partition between the N and S ends of B4 was found.

Posthole

In the NW corner of B4, c.1m from the N wall and partially underlying the west wall, a posthole was noted. Being so close and partially under the wall of B4, it is presumably associated with the roof or wall of the occupation phase of B4.

Drain & Sump

Into the Clay-with-Flints floor of B4, a trench 5.4m in length, 1.2m wide at the top and 60cm wide at the bottom and 23cm deep, had been cut down the centre of the S half of the building. It was full of sarsens lying in a brown soil with flints. This trench ended to the south in a small pit, which, being partly beneath the southern wall, had been dug mainly into the disturbed soil of the enclosure bank and lynchet. This pit was 90cm wide at its mouth, with curving sides descending to a bottom 30cm below and was filled with a brown soil with flints, similar to that in the trench beneath the stones, but not noticeably darker or dirtier than the normal flinty soil in the area. From the S side of the pit ran a smaller trench, dug entirely through the enclosure bank, and filled with a fine earthy silt (AWC242 & 253). The pit, central trench and small trench were thus dug prior to the completion of the S wall of the long-house (and after the construction of Enclosure B).

These three features; trench, pit and second trench, were clearly part of the drainage system for the S end of B4 and, as such, were, correspondingly, drain, sump and sump outlet or overflow. This system, starting as it did in the exact centre of the building, is fairly conclusive evidence for the stabling of cattle at the southern end of B4.

The infilling of the drain with small sarsens was deliberate, judging by the fact that the stones continued along the length of the drain and under the southern wall of B4. A stone packing such as this would have acted both as a safeguard against animals stumbling in and as a filter for the urine and excrement. In fact, it would have been essential to contain the solids and not allow them to wash away as they were primary fertilizer. In fact without a filter system, solids would also rapidly fill the sump and block the outlet. Indeed, a drain full of stones would contain the solids far better than a drain with a covering spanning its width and the latter would also allow for the filtration of the liquid through the stones, down the slightly sloping drain and into the sump. Thus solids could be collected from the drain and the liquid from the sump. Any excess was presumably collected outside the south-western side of Enclosure B via the outlet through the bank.

This drainage system bears similarities to many previously excavated long-houses, such as the ones on Dartmoor, especially Houndtor 1, Houses 7 and 3 and Hutholes, House 3 (Beresford, 1979) and one at Treworld (Dudley & Minter, 1966).

Entrance & entrance track

A 3.6m wide entrance was clearly defined in the E wall of B4, north of centre. A large sarsen stone lay on either side of this entrance and a very irregularly surfaced track led up to it, stopping level with the inside face of the wall and forming a slight step down into the interior of B4. There was no entrance in the W through the enclosure bank.

In comparison with the S and W walls of B4, the well-constructed nature of the entrance and the walling directly to its north and south, clearly suggest that this entrance was constructed after the occupation phase of B4. This no doubt necessitated the destruction of the remnant E wall of B4, and, subsequently, the original entrance. An indication of an earlier entrance is given by a pit (Pit 5), uncovered under the remains of the stone wall in the E of B4, 1.2m to

the S of the entrance. This feature contained 13th century sherds (CS41 & CW38; GF729) and appeared to have been deliberately filled as it was sealed by a possible OGS onto which the southern wall stones of the extant entrance had been placed (AWC245). Two deeper holes were apparent within this pit, one just inside, the other outside the E wall; both of which were partially covered by the large sarsens of the later entrance. These holes may have held uprights associated with an earlier entrance structure, with one post inside and the other outside the original, narrower, E wall of B4.

The entrance track was undoubtedly laid at the same time as the entrance. It may not, however, have been very efficient since the rough cobbling consisted of stones of different sizes and shapes, with many lying with edges uppermost and several inches apart. That two glazed sherds of the latter part of the 13th century (GF724) were uncovered under the cobbling, amongst 30 or so CW38 sherds and one 36EG, a construction date for the entrance track, and consequently the entrance, can be assumed.

In summary, the entrance was not contemporary with the occupation of B4, and was therefore associated with either the fire-pit or oven, or both. The track, on the other hand, is likely to have been in use through each phase of activity at B4 as it was the only route to the area (though it did not necessarily follow the exact same line of approach). As such, it would have needed paving and repaving. The entrance was constructed in the latter half of the 13th century or early 14th, which endorses previous discussions as to the dating of the B4 post-occupation features (see C6hii & C6hiii). The entrance was possibly built, considering its width and the position of the track between two low banks, to allow hand, rather than animal-drawn carts to be backed as close up to either the fire-pit or oven.

Lynchet/ Enclosure bank

The bank of Enclosure B consisted of a clayey soil with flints and some chalk lumps. It had been dug into so that the W wall of B4 could be inserted, although only a single line of stones remained *in situ*. The W bank was not found to continue below the floor level of B4, which suggests it was constructed specifically to take the W wall of B4. When the N section of the original wall of the building was removed, the bank was again cut through to take the circular wall of the oven. The N part of the bank had a layer of chalk over it, whereas none was recorded in the S section. The whole length of the bank was covered with *c.* 7.5cm of black soil. The bank was found to be sitting on the edge of the pit filling.

Evidence from the cuttings across the bank show it to have been constructed in the 13th century, and, as it appeared to have been built to take the W wall of B4, it is likely to have been the first, rather than the second, half of that century. The presence of chalk at the N end of the bank may be material dug up during the digging of the fire-pit or the insertion of the oven; the black layer covering the bank is undoubtedly from burning associated with one or both of these.

Hearth

A patch of burnt material over a chalk rock base was uncovered, partially sealed by the oven, up against the inside of the N wall. This slightly sloping feature lay on 2.5cm of dark earth

with charcoal (the occupation layer of B4), demonstrating it cannot be associated with the occupation phase of B4. As such, it is likely it was related to the fire-pit or oven. A 'post-occupation' date for this hearth would explain its position right up against the wall of the building, that is to say it was built against a collapsed wall to serve the immediate needs of those working the fire-pit or oven and not up against the inside of a thatched long-house. Whatever its function, no evidence of a hearth from the occupation phase of B4 was thus uncovered.

B4 - Discussion

Examination of the above material demonstrates B4 was a long-house constructed and in use in the 13th century. Whether this was in the earlier, middle or latter part of that century, or indeed throughout it, is unclear, although B4 was certainly abandoned by the early 14th century (see below). It is possible, however, that B4 was used for a period spanning the middle decades of the 13th century. This, it could be argued, can be demonstrated by the near total absence of early 13th and later 13th century sherds.

The N half is assumed to be the occupation area, although the evidence to support this interpretation is sparse, as, although many sherds were recovered, there was no evidence of an occupation hearth. This is not, however, so unusual considering the amount of later digging and construction activity which took place in this N end. What is certain, however, is that the S end, with its drain and sump, was where animals, presumably cattle, were stalled. The absence of a partition wall between these two ends, as would be expected in a longhouse, remains unexplained.

Sherds from a coarseware cooking-pot found at floor level within B4 and on the platform in the area of Cutting 10, indicate contemporaneity with B4 and Enclosure C in the 13th century, even though the platform in C10 is clearly post-medieval (Xfit 16).

That B4 was kept free of debris is shown by the small quantity of broken pottery and domestic or agricultural equipment on the floor area within the building. Their sheer quantity, correspondingly, along the edges of the wall outside B4, especially in the NE corner by the entrance and in the midden, indicates regular sweepings and clearings out. Although, this concentration in the NE corner may be due to the clearing out of the internal area of B4 to build the fire-pit and/or oven (see below).

B4 went out of permanent use as a longhouse in the mid to latter part of the 13th century. This is evident from the material recovered, such as a 'Norman' horseshoe nail (GF596) from the drain fill below the S wall and finds from the post-occupation phase, for example the sherds from a 13th century jug uncovered with later 13th century material (Xfit 13), and two Norman horseshoe nails from the post-occupation material over the N end (GFs 353 & 474). Although it is extremely difficult to assign which burnt material to which burning process, the enormous amount of burnt stones and charcoal over and around the tumble from B4, as well as the carbonised soils from c. 1m down Pit 6, would suggest B4 burnt down.

Fire-pit

A U-shaped pit, referred to as a 'fire-pit' at the time of excavation (Fowler 1963, 345), was uncovered in the NE corner of B4, dug slightly more than 0.6m below the floor level of the building. This fire-pit was 3.3m long, with a square, almost vertical N end cutting through both Clay-with-Flints and Chalk. The sides had been carefully lined with knapped flint blocks and small sarsen stones which formed vertical faces. Their line at floor level was continued for a short distance to the S before the lip of the fire-pit curved round in a regular U-shape. **At this S end the sides dropped downwards in a relatively long slope so that the area of the pit bottom was much less than the top of the pit at floor level.** The northern end of the fire-pit was only a few centimetres away from the northern end of B4 in its longhouse phase. The fire-pit was built over at its NW corner by part of the 'oven' (see Fig. XXX).

The fire-pit was filled up to floor level with various sorts of burnt soils, charcoal, sarsens and burnt flint, on the whole of a similar nature to the material below the oven wall in Pit 6 at between 76cm to 1.07m in depth. At its lowest level, the filling of the fire-pit was of burnt chalk, burnt cob, burnt flints and charcoal. This was covered by a layer of burnt soil, stones and charcoal, presumably material associated with the oven, and then by cob and chalk rubble, which was the debris from the collapse of the oven. This clearly suggests the fire-pit was in use after the occupation of B4, but was constructed before the 'oven'.

The ceramic evidence does not distinguish the fire-pit from B4 in chronological terms, as both have a predominance of 13th century coarseware sherds. However, it is clearly of a post-occupation date. Not only is this obvious by its fill and the fact that it had been dug through the occupation level. In addition, it also obstructed the entrance, and, if it had been in use at the same time as the building, it would have been perilously close to the walls and roof. However, seeing that its northern edge respected the original northern end of B4, it seems probable that this determined the position of the fire-pit and, consequently, that the northern wall of B4 was a visible, albeit tumbled, length of walling when the fire-pit was inserted through the floor level.

The amount of burnt material to the south-east of the fire-pit over the tumble wall stones of B4, and noticeably not much to the south with hardly any to the south-west, show that raking took place predominantly in a SE direction. Why, though, is unclear. The amount of burnt debris, including pieces of hazel, oak and *prunus* noted at floor level within B4, under the oven and under the wall tumble outside the building, suggests this is the detritus from the activities associated with the fire-pit. The cob in the lowest layer of the fire-pit, which can be compared with examples from the layer below the oven, hint at a cob structure associated with the fire-pit, probably covering it, whose collapsed remains were dumped, or fell, into the fire-pit.

Indeed, the proximity of the fire-pit to Pit 6, and the burnt material apparent in the upper part of the pit, suggest Pit 6 was used firstly as a midden by the occupants of B4 and subsequently as a dump for the burnt material from the fire-pit. If B4 burnt down, then perhaps the debris was cleared from the N end of B4 and dumped into the pit when the fire-pit was dug. This debris layer would, in turn, have been covered by a layer of natural Clay-with-Flints and Chalk from the digging of the lower levels of the fire-pit. This would give a burnt layer, followed by

a Chalk/ Clay-with-Flint layer, followed by another burnt layer, which is, in fact, the case with the levels below the lower courses of the oven structure.

The exact function of the 'fire-pit' is unclear. Judging by its shape, design, filling, possible cob covering, and the large quantity of burnt material surrounding it, and presumably associated with it, it is clear the fire-pit was designed for some sort of small-scale industrial purpose. However, the flints reveteing the sides the fire-pit showed few signs of thermal fracture and the sarsens little burning, indicating that high temperatures were not necessary or that it was only in use for a short period. The charcoal and burnt cob in the bottom of the fire-pit and below the 'oven' layer in Pit 6, indicate that the fire-pit had a covering of wattle and cob.

The near total absence of wasters makes it unlikely to have been a pottery kiln, but it could have stored ash or been used for baking (Beresford 1989, 98). Perhaps the fire-pit was part of an earlier structure, possibly a flue, evidence of which has totally disappeared with the insertion of the 'oven' or perhaps the fire-pit was used to dry crops during the poor weather of the early 1300s. There was a brief mention in the site notes of 'ten stake-holes, which appeared in the Chalk to the S of the fire-pit', which suggests the fire-pit may have had a wind-break on its S side; the direction of the prevailing wind. The interpretation favoured, however, is that localised smithying had taken place here, possibly producing the 'white metal plating' which is unusually high in quantity on the metal goods from Raddon (TWA XXX). A comparable feature to the fire-pit was excavated at Bullock Down, Kiln Combe, E Sussex (Freke 1982 Fig. 78, 153, Contexts 256 & 162, 154) where a flat-bottomed scoop was lined with burnt stone and was partially sealed by a later, circular feature; both of which were considered to be corn-drying ovens (*ibid.*).

Whatever the function, the sequence appears clear: after the abandonment of B4, a return to this area was made and a well-built, flint and sarsen lined pit with a wattle and cob covering was constructed for smithying purposes towards the end of the 13th century. It respected the existing, but collapsed northern wall of B4. No longer necessary, this fire-pit was replaced by the 'oven', which neither respected the fire-pit, northern wall of B4 nor Pit 6. The oven was possibly built using the wall stones of B4, which is why the southern walls of B4, both on the E and W, were not *in situ*, along with a larger entrance and cobbled track. Pit 6, which remained a shallow depression, was used as a dump for material being dug up from the fire-pit and for rubbish from the B1/2/3 area. This later change, coming after the abandonment of B4 and the fire-pit, has to have occurred in the late 13th or early 14th century.

The remains of two French stoneware vessels (GF414) dated to the 17th century, one bearing the arms of Amsterdam, in the topsoil on the bank of Enclosure B and over the W wall of B4, coupled with the remains of a flower pot and other post-medieval and early modern sherds, show the area experienced some activity, albeit probably only picnics, into the Early Modern period.

* All measurements are from the turfline, 60cm N of the peg at the SW corner of Cutting 6K (AWC248).