

The Wheatsheaf, Dorking: excavations in 1976

by MARTIN O'CONNELL

INTRODUCTION

During the spring of 1976 excavations were carried out in advance of development at the rear of the Wheatsheaf (37-39 High Street) and adjoining buildings (41-47 High Street) (centred TQ 16504943). Permission to excavate was kindly granted by the Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Group, the site developers, and Bovis Ltd, the site contractors. Work started on 1 March, soon after the existing outbuildings of the Wheatsheaf had been demolished, and continued until 4 May. It was carried out by the County Archaeological Unit, under the direction of the writer. The presence of underground caverns which extended into the site and the access space required by the contractors restricted the area available. With a limited work force it was decided to open four large, widely spaced trenches in order to investigate the maximum possible area and to see if there was any evidence for Romano-British or medieval occupation in this part of Dorking.

SUMMARY OF MAIN RESULTS

The earliest feature excavated was a small Roman ditch or gully. The finds suggested a date in the latter half of the 1st century AD. The upper part of the ditch and the layer above had been badly disturbed by later activity. It contained 1st to early 3rd century pottery as well as some medieval pottery. A medieval pit was found to the north of the ditch and produced late 13th/early 14th century pottery, together with part of an 11th/12th century cooking pot. Two possible medieval features were also discovered. One appeared to have been used as a rubbish pit and contained late 13th/early 14th century pottery. The second, which was only partially excavated, was lined with chalk blocks and may have been used as a soakaway. The finds were also late 13th/early 14th century. The upper layers of both had been disturbed and contained post-medieval pottery. Part of a mid to late 17th century building, which appeared to have been demolished towards the end of the 18th century, was uncovered. A number of 18th century pits were revealed beneath the floor of one of the recently demolished outbuildings. Several 19th century features were also excavated.

THE SITE

Dorking lies to the south-west of the gap in the chalk of the North Downs carved out by the River Mole, whose tributary, the Pippbrook, runs to the north

of the town. The town itself is on the Folkestone beds of the Lower Greensand and on the site these slope gently towards the north (Trench 2: natural subsoil at 60.72+OD; Trench 1: natural subsoil at 60.47+OD; Trench 3: natural subsoil at 59.19+OD; Trench 4: natural subsoil at 58.08+OD). There is also gravel and alluvium associated with the river while a narrow band of Gault Clay lies to the north of the Pippbrook.

The surrounding area has furnished finds from the Mesolithic period to the Bronze Age but no Iron Age material has yet been found. Evidence of Romano-British occupation has come from the town itself and nearby (see fig 1), while Stane Street may have passed through Dorking (Margary 1967, 66). The possible existence of a mansio, or posting station, in the Dorking area has been discussed elsewhere (O'Connell 1977, 15). Late Romano-British pottery and building material has recently been discovered to the north of the town at Pixham (Ettlinger 1976). There was a strong possibility, therefore, that further evidence of Romano-British settlement would be forthcoming from the area excavated.

Certainly evidence for medieval occupation and backland utilisation during the medieval and post-medieval period might have been expected from the site. Recent examination by the Domestic Buildings Research Group, Surrey, has shown that part of the present structure of the Wheatsheaf is to be dated to c1500, while part of the structure of 41–47 High Street is even earlier, c1470. The earliest known record of 41–47 High Street is in a survey of the manor of Dorking, 1589 (Arundel Castle MS.MD 1203) where the buildings were known as the George Inn. In a survey of the manor of Dorking in 1622 (SyAS Research Material 2/6), the same premises, together with a number of outbuildings, were referred to as 'sometimes an Inn called by the name of the George'. The earliest known reference to the Wheatsheaf Inn (37–39 High Street), is as late as 1828 (SRO 52/18) when a brewhouse, outbuildings and yard were also mentioned. The Tithe map of Dorking (1842) provides the first accurate and detailed plan of the Wheatsheaf and 41–47 High Street. The outbuilding associated with the brick floor (F 10) excavated in T 1 appears on the map as well as a property wall partly uncovered in T 2 (F 14). A plan of the Wheatsheaf c1862 (SRO: Acc 353) shows only the west end of the outbuilding but indicates that the building in T 1 formed part of a stable block in the 19th century. The recently destroyed outbuilding encountered in T 2 (F 3 and F 15) was first shown on the 1st edition OS 1:2500 map of Dorking (c1870). A deed of 1869 (SRO 52/19) refers to a proposal to demolish a number of the outbuildings of the Wheatsheaf and to a rebuilding scheme. The building in question may have formed part of that scheme. An alley is shown on the Tithe map and on the 1st edition OS 1:2500 map where T 3 was opened. There had, until quite recently, been an orchard of pear trees in the area where T 4 was sited and there is no record of any structures having been built there. T 3 and T 4 were sealed by a layer of tarmac on a rubble foundation.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Four trenches were excavated on the site and these were numbered with Arabic figures in the order in which they were started (see fig 2). The layer and feature

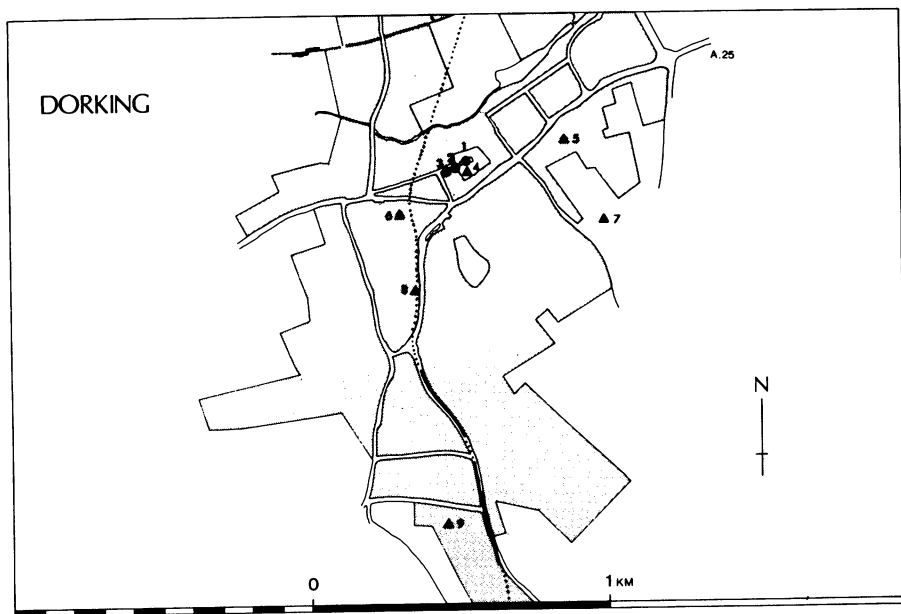


Fig 1 Map of Dorking showing locations where Roman material has been found

KEY:

- Excavations which have produced Romano-British finds
- ▲ Chance Romano-British finds
- Stane Street. Route certain (cf Margary 1971, 197 and 1963, 67)
- ... Stane Street. Route inferred

- 1 TQ 1653 4951 St Martin's Church. 2nd and 3rd century Romano-British pottery, 1974
- 2 TQ 1649 4947 30, Church Street. 3rd and 4th century Romano-British pottery, 1975.
- 3 TQ 1646 4947 The Wheatsheaf. 1st century Romano-British ditch and later Romano-British pottery, 1976.
- 4 TQ 1653 4951 Romano-British coins found in churchyard, according to Camden. 1974
- 5 TQ 1687 4957 1st century cinerary urn and fragments of others. Found c1900.
- 6 TQ 163 493 Coin of Claudius Gothicus, found 1838.
- 7 TQ 170 493 2 sherds Romano-British pottery. No date.
- 8 TQ 1636 4907 Romano-British pitcher. Found 19th century.
- 9 TQ 1647 4825 Coin of Commodus. Found 1935.



Fig 2 Location of trenches

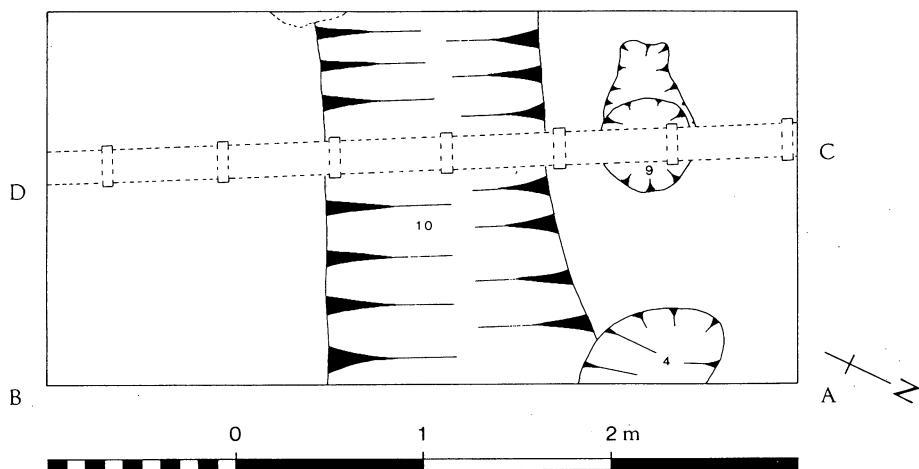


Fig 3 Plan of Trench 4

numbers start at 1 in each trench and the figures in brackets refer to feature numbers. The various features excavated can be divided as follows:

Period I (Roman)

T 4 — ditch (10)

Period II (Medieval)

T 1 — rubbish pit (24); soakaway (37)

T 4 — pit (9)

Period III (Post-medieval)

T 1 — various pits (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35); brick floor and cobbled area (10).

T 2 — mid to late 17th century wall (13) and floor (11); brick wall (15) and floor (3) of outbuilding; brick wall (unexcavated) and disturbed brick floor (16).

T 3 — pits (2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11)

T 4 — scoop (4)

The following is a description of the various features in chronological order:

Period I (Roman)

In T 4 a small Roman ditch (10) was found cut into the natural subsoil (see figs 3 and 4). Its greatest depth was 72 cm and width 1.44 m. Section A-B (fig 4) showed a V-shaped profile but in section C-D the V-shape was less pronounced and the bottom of the ditch was slightly more rounded. Above the primary silt (L8) the fill consisted of dark brown sandy loam and charcoal (L7), and dark brown sandy loam with flecks of charcoal and some stone (L5). A lens of mortar (L6) also constituted part of the fill. The pottery found suggested a date in the latter half of the 1st century AD. No other features contemporary with the

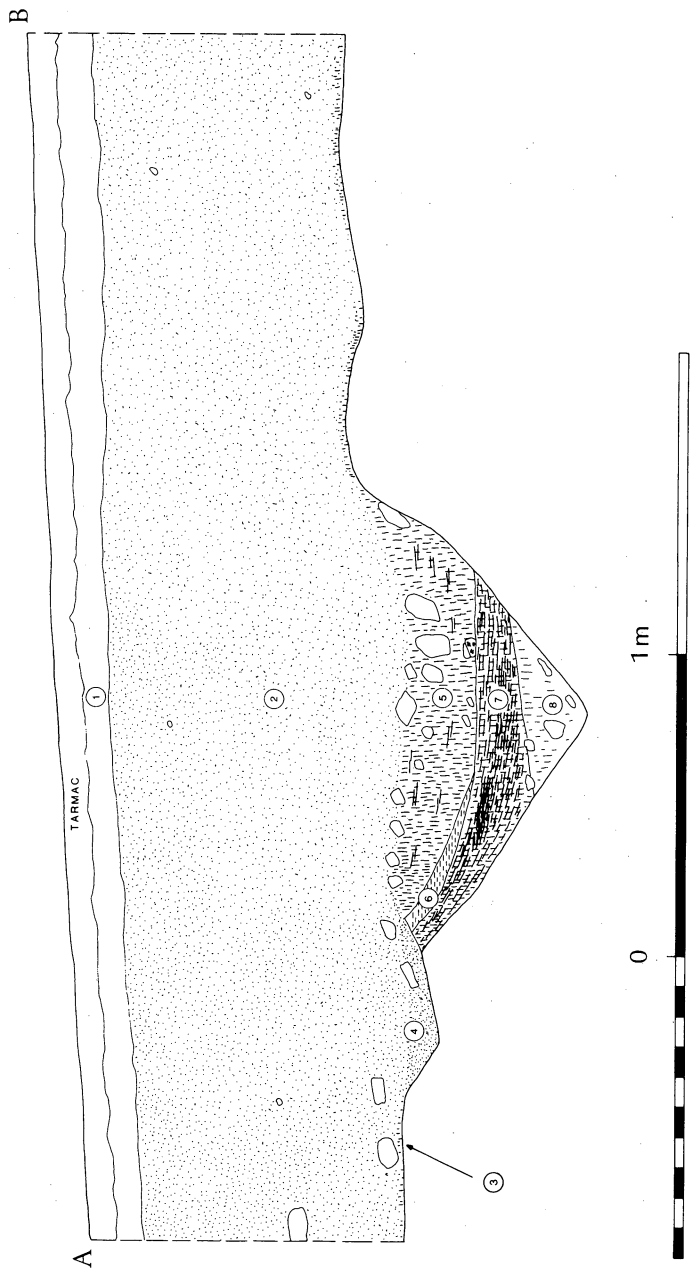


Fig 4 Trench 4, Section A — B

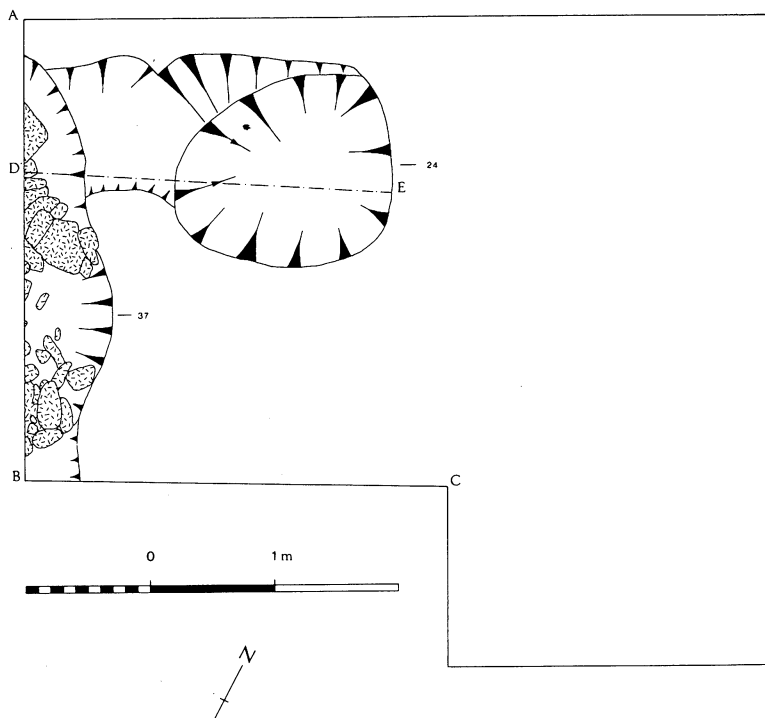


Fig 5 Plan of Trench 1, medieval period

ditch were found. Above the ditch was a layer of brown sandy soil (L3). The finds in this included Roman pottery and building material, ranging from the 1st to 3rd century AD, together with some later 13th/early 14th century pottery and a fine bronze buckle which has been dated to the third quarter of the 13th century. This layer sealed a medieval feature (9) (see below), and the Roman pottery had probably been redeposited. The redeposition of the pottery may have been the result of later agricultural activity, which might also explain the reduced profile of the ditch in section C-D and the absence of L5 in the same section. A shallow post-medieval feature (4) cut the upper levels of the ditch (10) and also cut through L3. Above L3 was a layer of rich brown soil (L2). Again the finds were mixed and included 1st to 2nd century pottery and medieval and post-medieval pottery. Several sherds of the Roman pottery found had been badly worn and had probably been redeposited. L2 had been badly disturbed by root action and more recently by the laying of a modern drain.

Period II (Medieval)

A pit (9) was discovered in T 4 (figs 3 and 4) to the north of the Roman ditch, cut into the natural subsoil and sealed by L3. Its greatest depth was 35 cm and width 78 cm. Root action had enlarged the west side of the pit. One grey-ware

sherd, possibly Romano-British rubbish survival, was found, together with late 13th/early 14th century pottery and part of an 11th/12th century cooking pot. A large pit (24) was found in T 1 (see fig 5), cut into the natural subsoil and partly sealed by the bedding layer (L11) for a post-medieval brick floor (10) and by a heavily disturbed layer (L9) of dark brown sandy loam and building debris. The greatest depth of 24 was 90 cm and width 2.50 m. The fill consisted of dark brown sandy loam with fragments of chalk and a large block of Reigate stone. There was no trace of silting, which indicates that the pit had been backfilled not long after it had first been dug; since the fill contained late 13th/early 14th century pottery it is suggested that the backfilling had taken place early in the 14th century. However, post-medieval pottery and building debris were found in the upper part of the fill indicating that it had been disturbed subsequently. The large size and condition of the medieval pottery sherds argued against their redeposition with the later pottery. A second possible medieval pit (37) was discovered in T 1 but it was not possible to extend the trench in order to excavate it fully. This pit, sealed by layers 9, 10 and 11 had been cut partly into the natural subsoil and also into 24. It had been lined at its north and south end with large chalk blocks and a filling of fine sand. A layer of grey silty loam (L34) had accumulated at the bottom of the pit but produced no finds. At some stage the chalk blocks had partially collapsed and were then covered by L33 and L31. L33 consisted of brown sandy loam and contained late 13th century pottery. L31, brown sandy loam with some clay, chalk and building debris, contained late 13th/early 14th century pottery together with several sherds of 18th century pottery as a result of post-medieval activity on the site. Some robbing of the chalk had taken place and several chalk blocks were found in L36, brown sandy loam, which produced no dating evidence. Because only a small section of the pit was examined it is impossible to be certain about its nature or purpose. The lining of chalk blocks and the amount of silty loam (L34) which had accumulated at the bottom of the pit (40 cm deep) suggest that it may have served as a soakaway.

Period III (Post-medieval)

Part of a post-medieval building was excavated in T 2 (see fig 6). Overlying the natural subsoil was a layer of dark grey chalky loam with some building debris (L12) which served as a bedding for a compacted chalk floor (11). L12 produced mid to late 17th century pottery and clay pipes which could date both layers. A wall (13) of mortared brick and chalk with some blocks of ironstone had been cut into the chalk floor (11). Five courses of the wall (13) had survived. Its maximum width was 36 cm and its load-bearing capacity must have been limited. It had no foundation but simply rested on top of the natural subsoil. The west end of the wall appeared to have been rebuilt entirely in brick. A cut (10) was associated with this end of the wall but provided no dating evidence. Above the chalk floor (11) were a series of dumps containing building debris: grey chalky loam (L9), brown clayey loam (L8) and dark brown sandy loam (L6). The last, containing 18th and 19th century pottery, had been cut in order to rob part of the wall (13) and was itself sealed by a layer of very dark brown sandy loam and building debris (L5). Dumps (L9) and (L8) contained 17th and 18th century pottery and represent the demolition material from the building

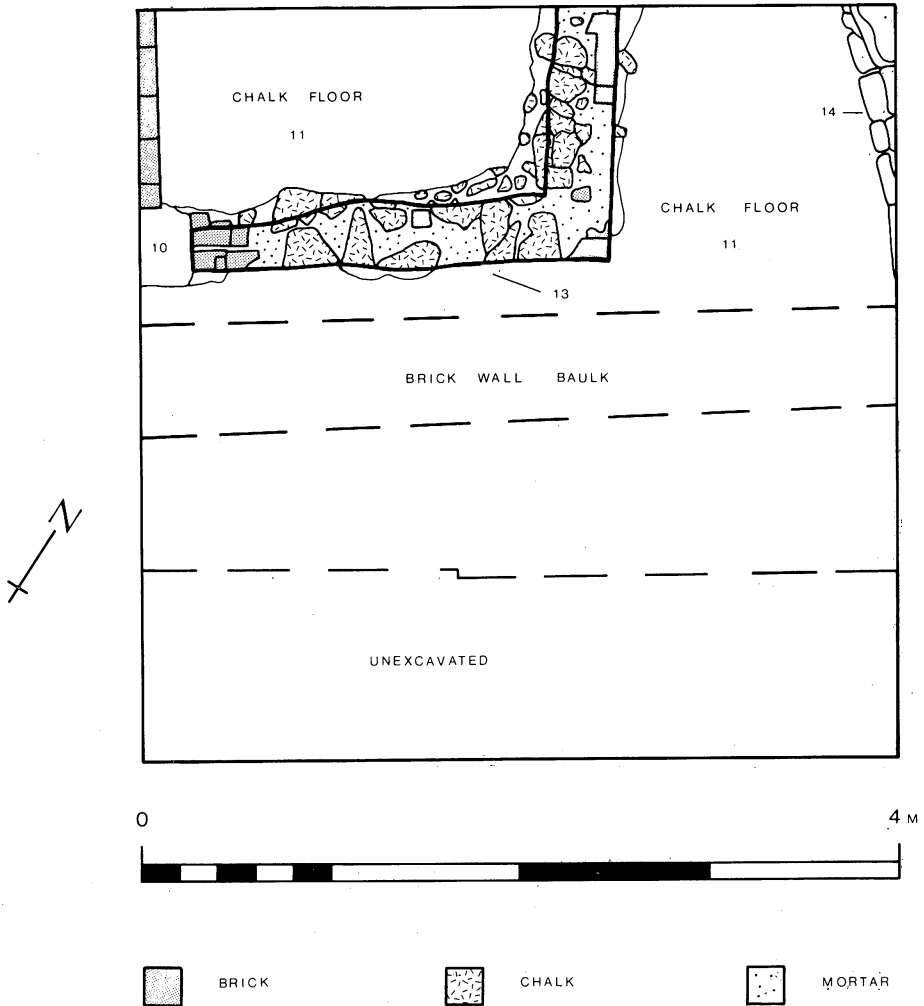


Fig 6 Plan of Trench 2

associated with the wall (13). A slate and chalk wall with fragments of brick (14) cut through L8 and had been laid into L9. It has been identified as a property wall shown on the Tithe map.

L5 produced 18th and 19th century pottery. Over it were laid the brick wall (15) and floor (3) which belonged to one of the recently demolished out-buildings of the Wheatsheaf. The building is first shown on the 1st edition OS 1:2500

map of Dorking (see above, p 50). A layer of heavily disturbed, dark brown sandy loam and building debris (L1) containing 18th and 19th century pottery lay under a second brick wall and floor (16) which was not excavated.

A number of post-medieval pits were excavated. Details of these have been deposited, with other archival material in the Society's Library.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the excavations at the Wheatsheaf, together with the results of previous excavations at 30 Church Street (O'Connell 1975) and St Martins Church (Ettliger 1974), add support to the case for some form of Romano-British occupation either in or close to Dorking. The finds suggest that the period of occupation could have lasted from the 1st to 4th century AD.

Trenches 1-3 highlighted the difficulty of excavating a relatively large site where the stratified deposits were not deep and had consequently been badly disturbed by post-medieval and more recent development. Trenches 1 and 2 gave an indication of the degree of backland utilisation in this part of Dorking during the 18th and 19th centuries.

THE FINDS

Although a large number of finds were made only a relatively small proportion of the material was well stratified and consequently the bulk of the finds have only been summarised in this report. Special attention has however been paid to the pottery and animal bones from the Roman ditch because a large part of that material came from an effectively sealed deposit and because this ditch is the first stratified Roman feature to be excavated within Dorking. A detailed report on the clay pipes was thought necessary because the pipes were sealed below a floor surface and provided valuable dating evidence for the post-medieval building excavated in T 2.

Also included is a summarised version of a detailed specialist report on the material from the medieval features (T 1, 24 and 37; T 4, 9), which has been deposited in the Society's Library, Guildford. Although all three features had been disturbed by later activity they are important in providing the first excavated evidence of medieval occupation behind the street frontage in Dorking.

Roman pottery, by Joanna Bird (fig 7)

Trench 4, L8

- 1 Small jar with curved neck and bead rim. Micaceous sandy dark grey fabric with lighter surfaces; burnished on neck.

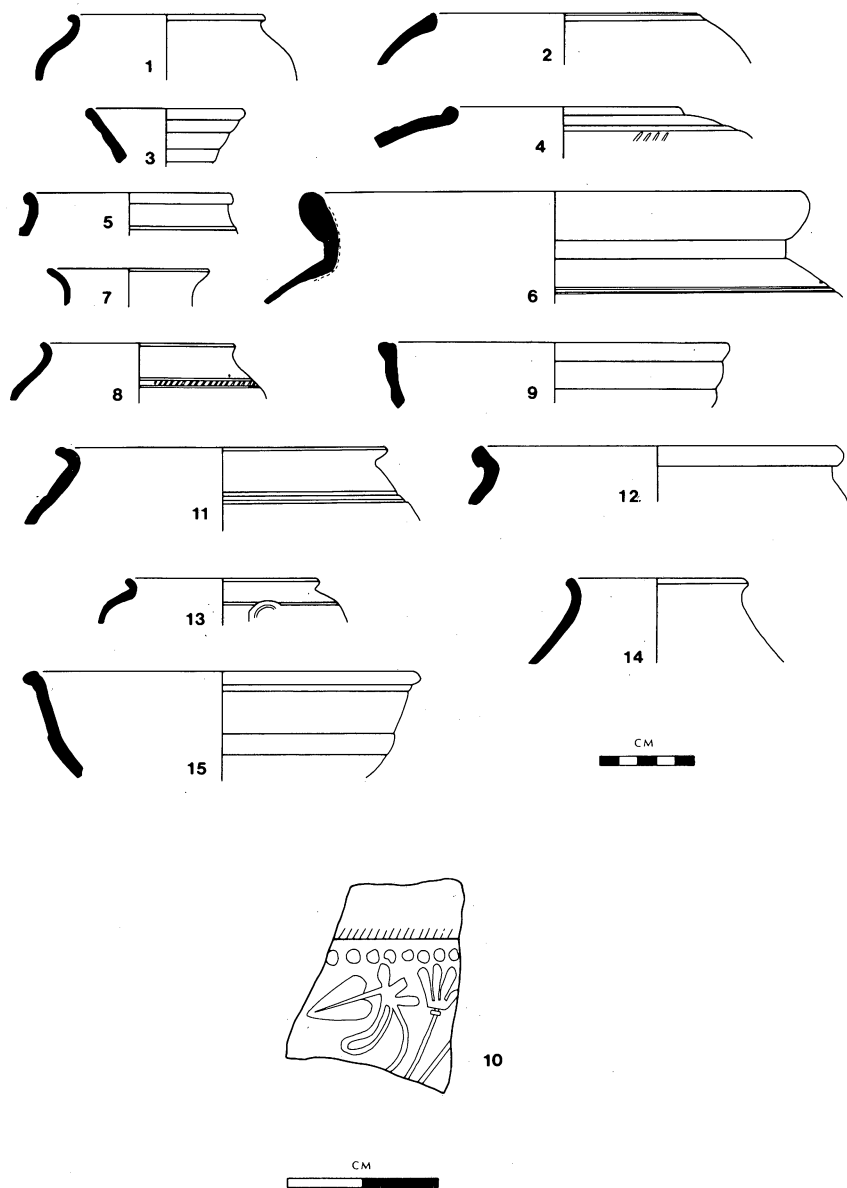


Fig 7 The Roman pottery. Scale 1:4, with the exception of no 10, which is 1:1

- 2 Jar; the rim is beaded on the interior. Sandy brown fabric, dark grey surfaces; burnished on shoulder.
 Also: sherd from everted-rim beaker (as 13), in fine cream fabric with darker exterior surface and circle of barbotine dots; base of jar in sandy dark-grey fabric with lighter core and surfaces; sherd in sandy brown fabric with dark grey surfaces.
Date: Early Flavian probably.

Trench 4, L7

- Samian: Dr 18 R, South Gaul, pre- or early Flavian.
 Dr 15/17 or 18, South Gaul, 1st century; burnt.
 Dr 18, South Gaul, 1st century; burnt.
 At least 2×Dr 27, South Gaul, Flavian.
- 3 Ring-necked flagon. Micaceous hard sandy orange fabric, grey core; traces of red slip.
 4 Bead-rim jar with cordon on shoulder, above incised decoration. Sandy grey fabric, brownish-grey surfaces, burnished on shoulder.
 5 Necked jar with cordon at base of neck. Sandy light-brown fabric, pale grey core, grey surfaces. Burnished.
 6 Large storage jar with everted bead rim and groove on shoulder. Light grey fabric with tempering of large quartz grits; blackish exterior surface, burnished above the cordon.
 7 Everted rim of beaker. Fine micaceous sandy dark-grey fabric, brown core. Burnished.
 8 Beaker with band of incised diagonal lines on the shoulder. Hard fine micaceous brown fabric with dark grey core and surfaces; burnished exterior.
 9 Bowl with grooved rim, and grooves below the rim and above the carination. Micaceous sandy grey fabric, darker surfaces; burnished exterior.
 Also: sherds from at least two cream-ware beakers (as 13), with darker slip and barbotine dots in (a) circles, and (b) panels, and barbotine circles; sherd from beaker in grey ware with barbotine dots in panels; sherd from jar in coarse grey ware with burnished lattice decoration; sherds from several grey ware jars; four buff-ware sherds, probably from flagons or beakers.
Date: Flavian (possibly Flavian-Trajanic)

Trench 4, L5

- 10 Samian: Dr 29 in the style of Murranus of La Graufesenque. He regularly used the palm-leaf — it occurs with the same spurred bud on a bowl from London (R. Knorr, *Terra-sigillata-gefäße des Ersten Jahrhunderts mit Töpfernamen*, 1952, taf 44, B) cAD 45–60.
 11 Jar with everted grooved rim and grooves on the shoulder. Coarse micaceous dark grey fabric with grey grog temper, dark grey surfaces; burnished exterior.
 12 Necked jar with everted rim. Sandy micaceous drab fabric, grey exterior.
 13 Beaker with everted rim and barbotine circle on shoulder. Fine cream fabric with sparse quartz grits; cream surfaces.
 14 Beaker with bead rim. Sandy grey fabric, burnished exterior.
 15 Bowl, as 9; coarse sandy light-grey fabric, burnished exterior.
 Also: sherds from several grey-ware jars and beakers; sherd from storage jar in orange fabric with flint tempering and dark interior surface.
Date: Pre- or early Flavian.

General comment: Most of the material dates within the 1st century. The grey wares (jars, bowls), could all be early products of the Alice Holt Forest industry.

Roman animal bones, by Geraldine Done

<i>Trench 4, L5</i>	9 fragments
OX	Rib fragment probably ox
SHEEP	Right mandible aged c6-8 years Distal humerus shaft First phalanx Skull fragment
PIG	Distal humerus shaft
	Three unidentifiable
<i>Trench 4, L7</i>	19 fragments
OX	Part of left mandible with M ₃ . Though the two posterior cusps are not yet bearing, the anterior cusp is heavily worn. One almost complete rib (recovered in 3 pieces) with 2 circular holes c4 mm diameter on outer face, 20 mm apart and located approximately at junction of upper and middle thirds of the rib shaft. They do not pierce the bone, being directed obliquely in to it. Two other rib fragments, probably ox.
SHEEP	Right mandible aged 4-6 years One M ₃ aged c2-3 years Part of left mandible Two shafts of humerus, left and right One shaft of radius with chop mark Pelvic fragment consisting of acetabulum with part of ilium and ischium Tibial shaft with gnawing marks
PIG	Two rib fragments probably sheep One incisor
GOOSE	Jaw fragment with M ₂ and M ₃ Young adult Fragment of clavicle

Medieval and post-medieval pottery, by Felix Holling

This is a summary of the material from the three medieval features excavated (Trench 1, 24 and 37; Trench 4, 9)

The pottery includes two sherds which are possibly Roman but is otherwise medieval or the result of post-medieval disturbance. The earliest medieval pottery is part of an 11th/12th century round-based cooking pot in a smooth-surfaced dark fabric, and two sherds of shell-gritted ware not likely to be later than the mid-13th century. The rest is sand-gritted, although varying considerably in coarseness of texture and in colouring. The types represented are jugs and cooking pots or bowls; any recognisable forms are consistent with a 13th/14th century date. None of it is in any way remarkable, and perhaps the most significant feature is the absence of Surrey ware, suggesting that the Dorking market was adequately served by local potters or others further to the east of Surrey: part of a decorated jug with white slip under green glaze on a red fabric is very similar to products of the Earlswood kiln (Turner 1974). Apart from a single modern sherd, the post-medieval pottery is all lead-glazed on red, buff, or grey fabrics — mainly red — the only recognisable form being a rim sherd from a platter with Metropolitan style white slip decoration under brown glaze, which could be late 17th or early 18th century. While much of the red

ware is virtually undatable between the 18th and early 20th centuries, the absence of other wares or forms which can be assigned to the 17th century, or to the late 18th century onwards, implies that as a group this material belongs to the early 18th century and implies that the main disturbance of the upper levels of the two pits in Trench 1 (24 and 37) took place at the beginning of that century.

Clay pipes

Six clay pipe bowls were found in the bedding layer (L12) for the chalk floor (11) in T 2. The pipes are all of the same type having bulbous bowls with rouletting and short, stubby spurs. This type has been discussed by Oswald and is dated by him to c1640–1670 (Oswald 1975, fig 49:17).

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