

# Excavation of a Romano-British occupation site at Wokingpark Farm, Old Woking (TQ 025 565)

by NANCY HAWKINS

## Summary

Excavation near Wokingpark Farm, Old Woking, revealed the post holes of a timber building measuring 15m × 5m which appeared to have been destroyed by fire, an adjacent ditch, an enclosure ditch, and a possible trackway to a ford across the river Wey on the southern boundary of the site.

The site produced pottery ranging from the 1st to the 4th century, a higher proportion of early pottery being found in the area of the timber building and in the lower levels of the nearby ditch.

## Introduction

On a map in a series covering the Honour of Windsor in 1608 (BL Harley MS3749) the site is shown as lying within the Little Park of the Royal Manor of Woking, which is recorded in Domesday as held by Edward the Confessor. The Old Woking and Pyrford portion of the Manor, which includes the site, is owned by the Burhill Estates Co Ltd.

Field names of the site are not indicative of early occupation (Tithe Map 1843; John Remnant's Plan of the Royal Manor of Woking, 1719). Furzes is the name given to the uncultivated area by Burhill Estates' personnel, although some local people call it the Hovels, and believe that there were cottages here for the servants at Woking Palace. During the excavation no evidence was found for any such cottages.

## Discovery of the Site

In 1969 two sherds of Romano-British coarseware were found in dredgings from the original un-canalised course of the Wey near Wokingpark Farm. Permission was kindly given by the Burhill Estates Co Ltd for an investigation to be made opposite the find spot on the northern bank, where a scrubby, uncultivated raised area, standing out in strong contrast to the surrounding flat meadowland of the flood plain, suggested a possible occupation site.

Initial trial trenching was carried out on the highest part of the uncultivated area (the Furzes), as being above flood level and therefore the most likely place for habitation. Flint cores and waste flakes were found (see below) but no evidence of later occupation. The finding of a sherd of Romano-British pottery on the surface beside a newly erected fence post led to excavation on the lower part of the Furzes close to the flat cultivated field (the Field) lying to the east. Large quantities of Romano-British pottery were found, and excavation was therefore extended from this point.

## The Site (figs 1–3)

The site is situated on the northern bank of the original un-canalised course of the river Wey about 0.8km (½ mile) downstream from the parish church of St Peter's, Old Woking (of Norman and later date) and 0.8km (½ mile) upstream from Old Hall, or Woking Palace ruins of the 14th–17th centuries and moated site. A wide bend of the river forms the southern boundary, and the flat pastures and cultivated fields of the alluvial flood plain surround the rest of the site. Approximately 1.2km (¾ mile) to the north the land rises to the 45m (150ft) high ridge of

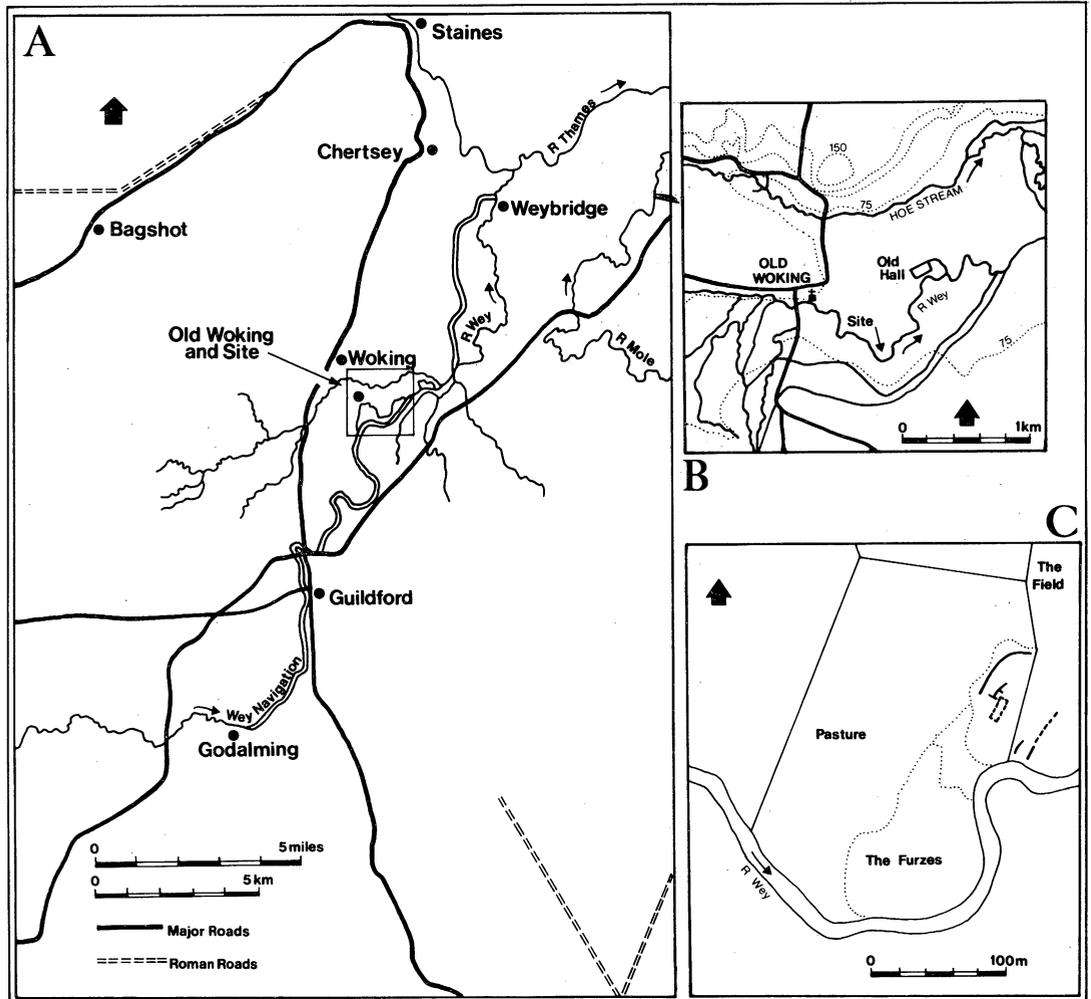


Fig 1. Wokingpark Farm: Location Maps A-C

Maybury and Pyrford on the Bagshot Beds, and to the south the flat lands extend to Send. Beyond Send and 8km (5 miles) due south, the land rises to 168m (550ft) at St Martha's Hill on the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand.

The site is composed of two areas with distinctly varying characteristics.

#### *The Furzes* (fig 1c)

This formed the eastern part of a rough uncultivated area of 1.356ha (3.35 acres) covered with bracken, bramble, gorse and thorn, which is raised above the flood level of the surrounding flat lands on a sandy eminence of the lower terraces of the river gravels. It was on the eastern lower level of this area that the evidence for a timber building was found.

Approximately 50cm of disturbed, acid topsoil overlies the natural sand and gravel, and the water table is reached at approximately 75cm below the surface. Leaching occurs all over the area, but is much more pronounced in some places with extensive multi-coloured staining and iron pan formation.

*The Field* (fig 1c)

This area covered part of a flat, cultivated field of 6.216ha (15.36 acres) adjoining the eastern boundary of the Furzes, where approximately 50cm of heavier alluvial soil overlies the natural sand and gravel. Leaching and the formation of iron pan occur as on the Furzes. This low lying area is very subject to flooding, and although pottery, a gully and a possible trackway were located, the high water table immediately below the 50cm of topsoil prevented full investigation.

Romano-British pottery is scattered on the surface of the southern portion of the Field and on the eastern part of the Furzes, and medieval and post-medieval pottery can be found on the northern part of the Field nearer to the Palace. Worked flints can be picked up over the whole area. Roman tiles are built into the 13th century lower part of the tower of St Peter's Church, Old Woking.

**Previous Finds**

Apart from the flints and pottery mentioned in this report, no finds have been recorded before from the site. For previous finds in the locality see Hampton & Hawkins 1983.

**Extent and Method of Investigation**

Prior to excavation aerial photographs were studied and resistivity and field surveys were carried out, the last named proving the most effective in indicating the areas with features. A slight linear hollow beneath bramble bushes on the northern perimeter of the Furzes indicated the line of the enclosure ditch, and similarly the site of the timber building was identified by the roughly rectangular thicket of blackthorn under which it lay. Blackthorn did not grow anywhere else on the site.

**The Excavation**

From the surface pottery scatter, and indications that the hollow of the enclosure ditch continues around much of the northern perimeter of the Furzes, it is estimated that the site could cover about 1.560ha (3.855 acres) of which 0.085ha (0.21 acres) was excavated over

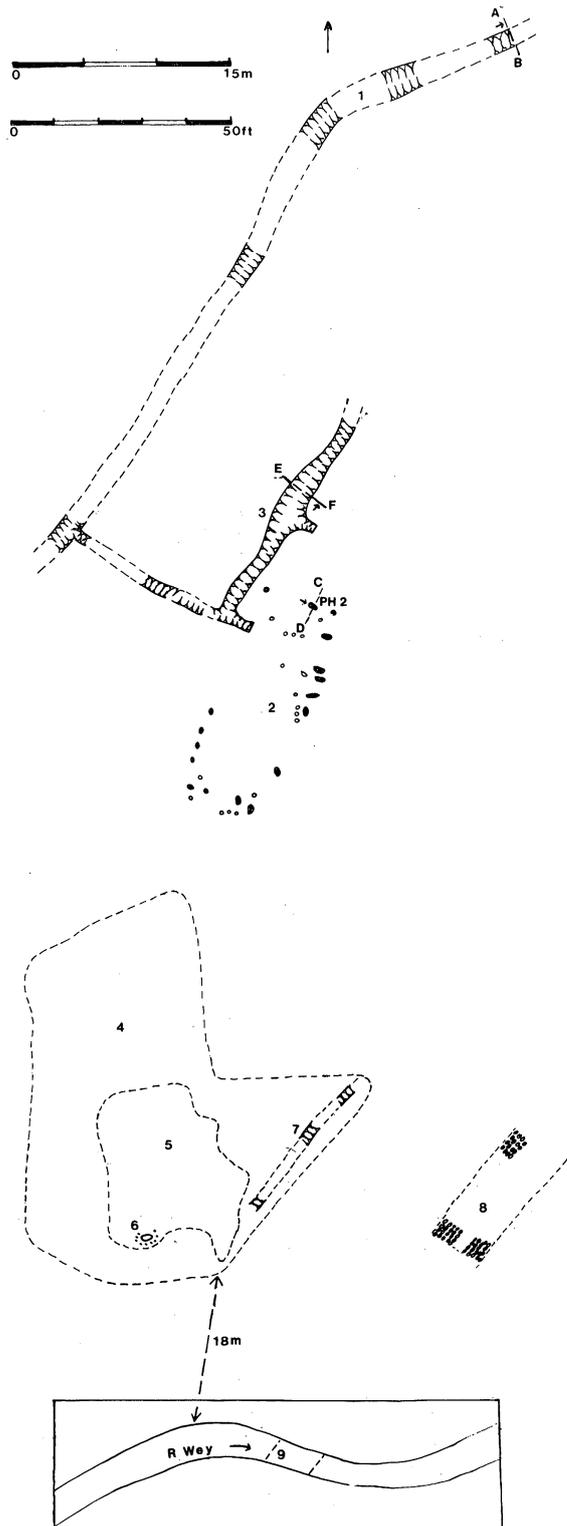


Fig 2. Wokingpark Farm: Plan of Site

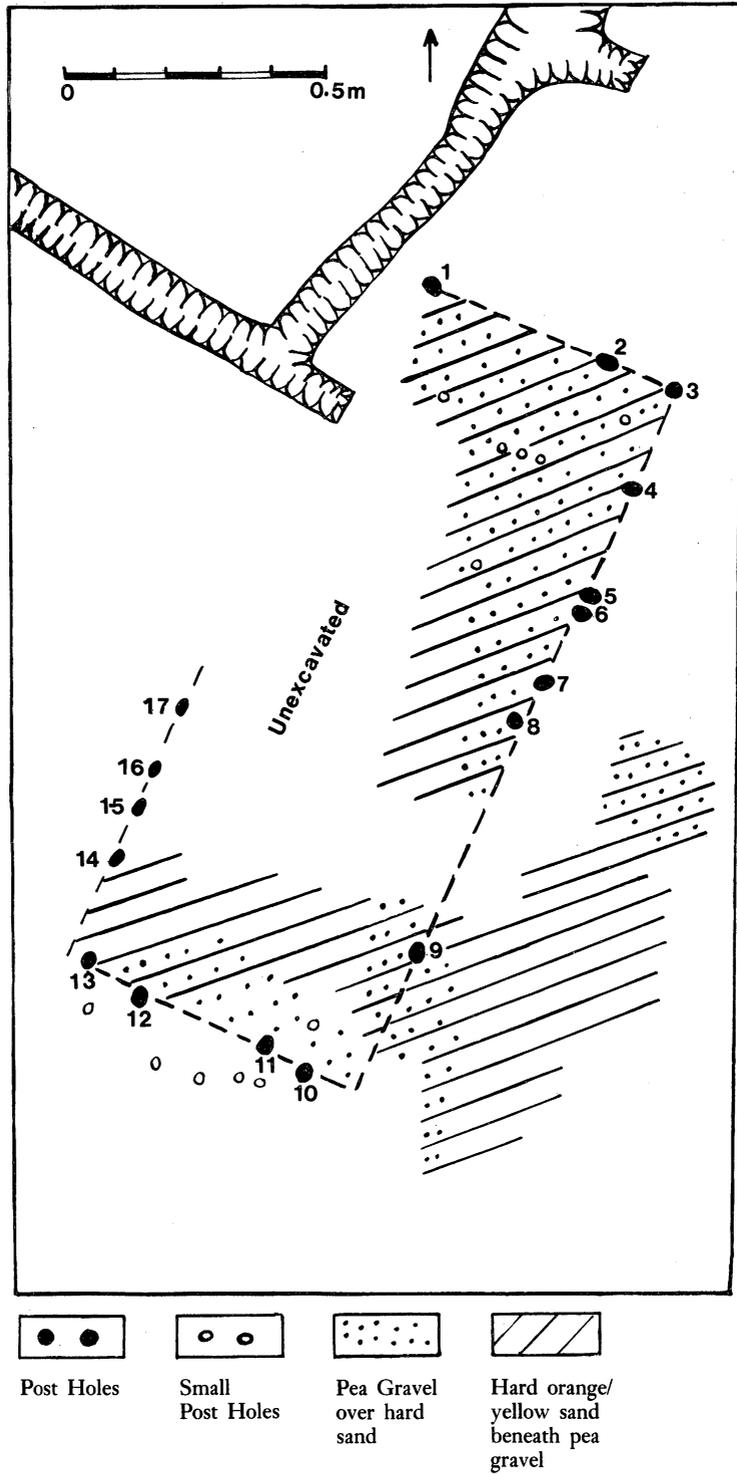


Fig 3. Wokingpark Farm: Plan of Timber building

4½ years, mainly for half days at week-ends. The method of excavation was by 3m square trenches laid out on a grid system over selected areas. A larger area was opened when the timber building and its associated ditch were found. The enclosure ditch area was tested in six places, and the ditch proved for a distance of 47m.

In 1975 it was decided to cease excavation. Due to various factors much of the site had to be left unexcavated, but further investigation may be needed if Burhill Estates Co Ltd carry out their original long-term project of clearing and levelling the Furzes.

## Detailed Description

### *Enclosure ditch (fig 2)*

47m of a well-defined ditch were traced by excavation across part of a slight linear depression running along the surface of the northern perimeter of the Furzes from the north-east corner to a point 70m away to the south-west where the depression is lost as the ground rises towards the slope above the river (fig 4, Section A–B).

The ditch was 140cm wide and 35cm deep, with a U-shaped section at the north-eastern end, gradually broadening and deepening to 160cm wide and 40cm deep at the south-western end of the excavation. The fill consisted of approximately 25cm of dark brown soil resting on 15cm of grey sand and, beneath this, hard orange iron pan had formed at the bottom of the ditch.

Level with the top of the ditch, the sand on the northern and outer lip was hard and mixed with orange iron pan, whereas the pale yellow sand on the southern inner lip was very soft and loose. It is possible that the hard orange sand on the outer lip had formed under the compression of an overlay of soil, but there was no other indication of a raised bank on either side of the ditch, nor evidence for any re-cutting.

### *Timber building (figs 2, 3)*

Post hole and other evidence was found pointing to the existence of a timber building. 2.5cm of fine, loose, sandy gravel (layer 3) overlay hard orange/yellow compressed sand (layer 4) which probably formed the floor of the building described below.

## Post Holes

Seventeen post holes were found forming a rectangular building 15m × 5m on a north-east/south-west axis. Iron pan had formed around the post holes on the northern and eastern sides of the building. They were on average 40–50cm deep with hard orange iron pan at the base. They were U-shaped, and tapered from 30–35cm at the top to 15cm at the bottom. In all except post hole 3 layers 3 and 4 terminated abruptly at the inner edge of the post holes (fig 2, Section C–D).

The remaining post holes on the southern and western sides could not be investigated thoroughly, but their formation appeared to be identical to those on the north and east. Layer 4 extended up to their inner edges, but layer 3 only occurred in a few places. Slighter signs of similarly constructed post holes possibly indicated internal partitions.

Discolouration of the soil, blackened and burnt stones, brick and daub found around and filling post holes 2 and 5–9 indicated that the building had been destroyed by fire. No definite entrance was located, but halfway along, and outside the eastern side of the building, layers 3 and 4 formed a 2m wide area which extended eastwards for approximately 3.5m beyond the line of post holes. This could possibly have been a trodden area outside an entrance.

### *Associated (inner) ditch system (figs 2, 3)*

A ditch was found near to the building. From a point 12m north-east of the building, where the ditch had a steep U section and was 75cm wide × 40cm deep (fig 2, Section E–F), it ran in a south-westerly direction parallel to the line of the building. After 2.5m it curved slightly and widened out to 2m × 50cm deep. From this broad area, a branch turned at right angles

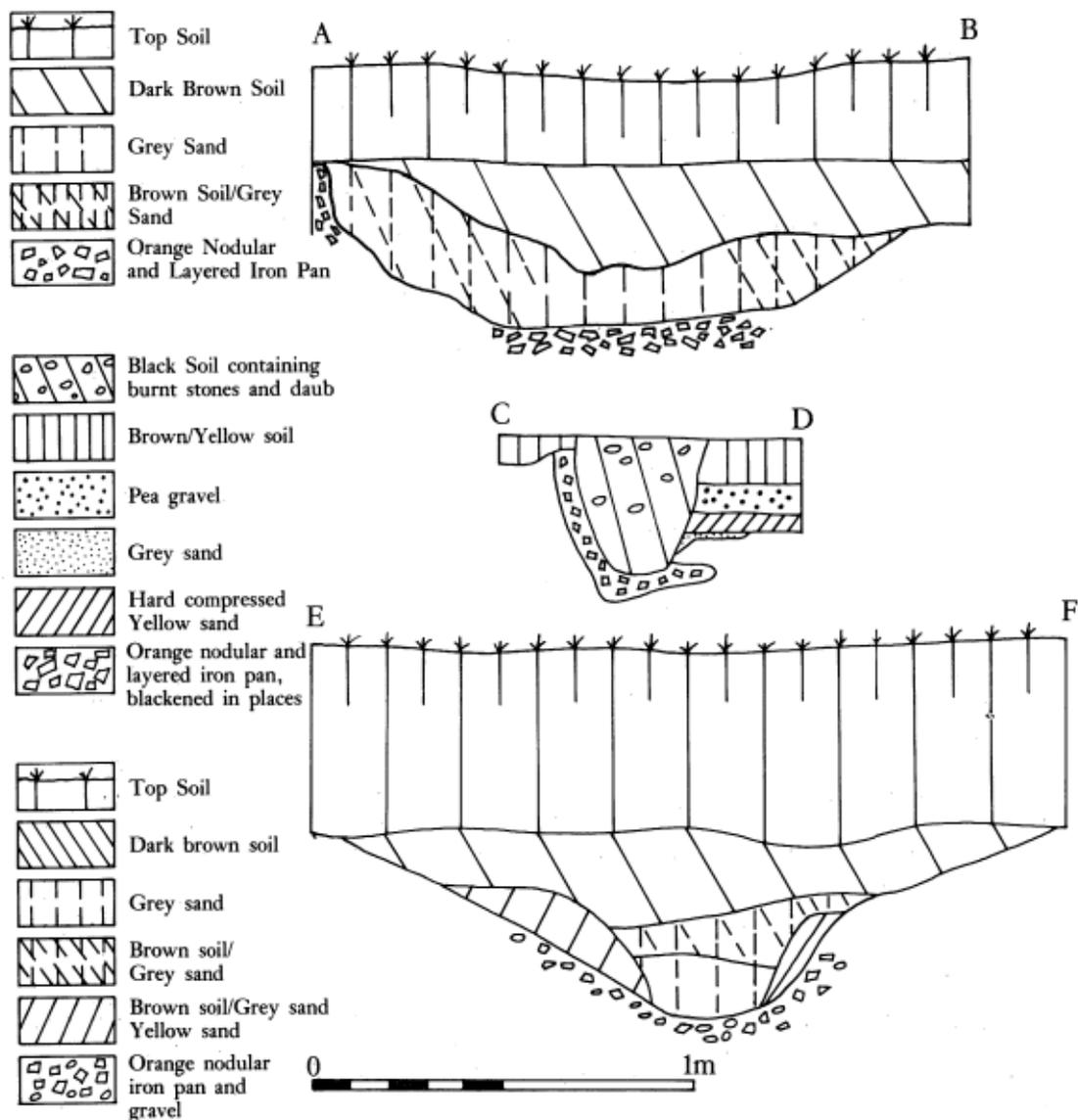


Fig 4. Wokingpark Farm: Sections

eastwards, terminating abruptly after 1m. The main ditch then narrowed again to 72cm wide  $\times$  30cm deep, with a steep U section, until, after 7m from the first branch, it again branched at right angles eastwards for 75cm where it stopped abruptly at the line of post holes on the western side of the building. Possibly this branch could have been a drain from the building.

Opposite this branch, the main channel of the ditch turned at right angles in a westerly direction for 13.5m until it joined the enclosure ditch. The ditch was filled with dark brown soil which, in the sections nearest to the building, contained pottery and also disintegrated brick and daub. The full extent of the ditch north-east of the building was not investigated.

*Other features on the site***Possible dispersed remains of a midden (fig 2)**

South of the building, in an area which was not fully excavated down to the natural sand, pottery and other finds, including a key and several quern fragments, were scattered haphazardly on a slightly sticky dark brown layer at approximately 60cms below the surface. The finds were more concentrated in F5.

**Small fire pit with possible stake holes (fig 2)**

A roughly circular area 16cm in diameter (F6) was cut into the natural sand and was filled with greyish/brown soil containing a large number of crackled flints. It was surrounded by vertical bands which varied between 4 to 7cm in width by 44cm deep. These bands consisted of very hard black iron pan containing small pieces of crackled flint, and could possibly have been where stakes placed around the fire had burnt, with the natural process of leaching eventually producing burnt, crackled-flint filled iron pan deposits within the stake holes.

**Gully (fig 2)**

A gully of rectangular section 40cm wide × 16cm deep (F7) was traced for 9m. A few pieces of pottery were found in the fill of pale grey sand. Several large stones lay along its western edge only, and it was interpreted as possibly the drip trench of a thatched building. An attempt was made to locate a parallel gully further out in the field, but this was not possible as the water table was too high. Iron pan had formed above the gully.

**Trackway and Ford (fig 2)**

13m to the east of the gully, and roughly parallel to it and to the line of the timber building, a 3.5m wide band of hard black iron pan nodules (F8) was traced for 9m by excavation, and for another 35m in a north-east direction by resistivity surveying and probing. This possible trackway is in line with a hard shallow band across the river bed at approximately 50cm below normal water level; the depth of the river on either side of the band is about 1.5m. The band appears to drop to the river bed in two stages; the narrowest part, ie the top step, is about 9m across (F9). Local inhabitants and fishermen remember this as a ford which could easily be crossed.

**Discussion**

It would appear from the pottery and other finds that the enclosure ditch, the timber building and the associated drainage ditch, were all constructed at about the same time in the 1st/early 2nd century AD. Occupation could have continued until the 3rd/4th century, although this is a long time for a timber building to survive without reconstruction. However, whether still occupied or in ruins, the building was destroyed by fire sometime in the 4th century and its drainage ditch was backfilled with multi-period debris. The concentration in the midden of mainly 3rd/4th century pottery, together with a few sherds of possible 5th century ware, indicates the probable presence of buildings of these later periods somewhere nearby in the unexcavated parts of the site.

The trackway and ford, which are in line with the projection of the Rowhook/Farley Heath Roman road northwards to St Martha's Hill, and the river Wey itself, would have provided easy lines of communication to all points. Probably the inhabitants of this Romano-British site farmed the land, using the lush riverside meadows and the rich alluvial soil for cattle grazing and cereal crops. In time of flooding, the inhabitants and their livestock would have a safe refuge on the extensive raised island of the Furzes between the river and the enclosure ditch.

Many points remain unresolved, but this limited excavation has served to fill in some early gaps in the story of this short stretch of the riverside between Old Woking and the moated site of the Royal Manor of Woking.

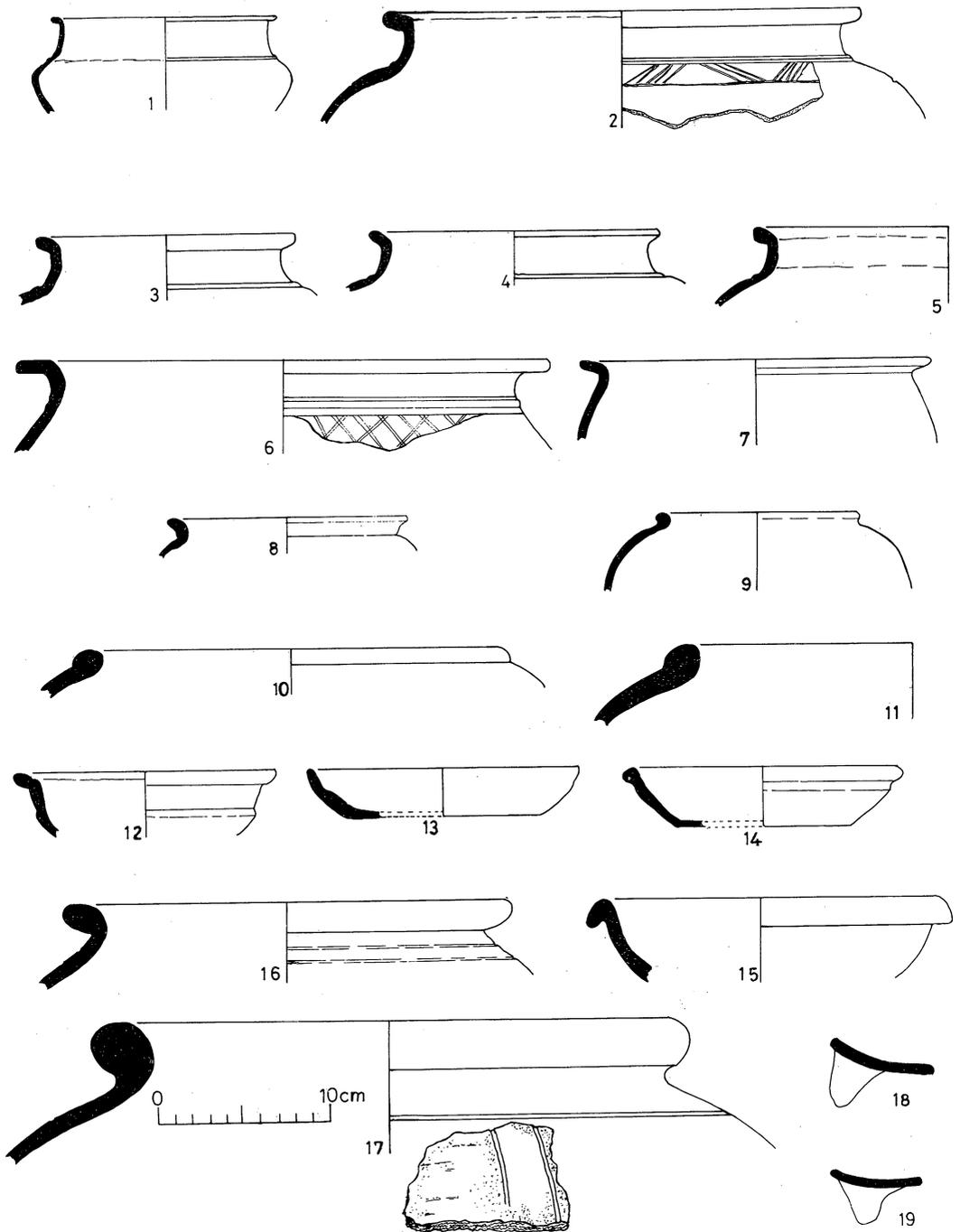


Fig 5. Wokingpark Farm: Roman pottery, early Alice Holt wares (1/4)

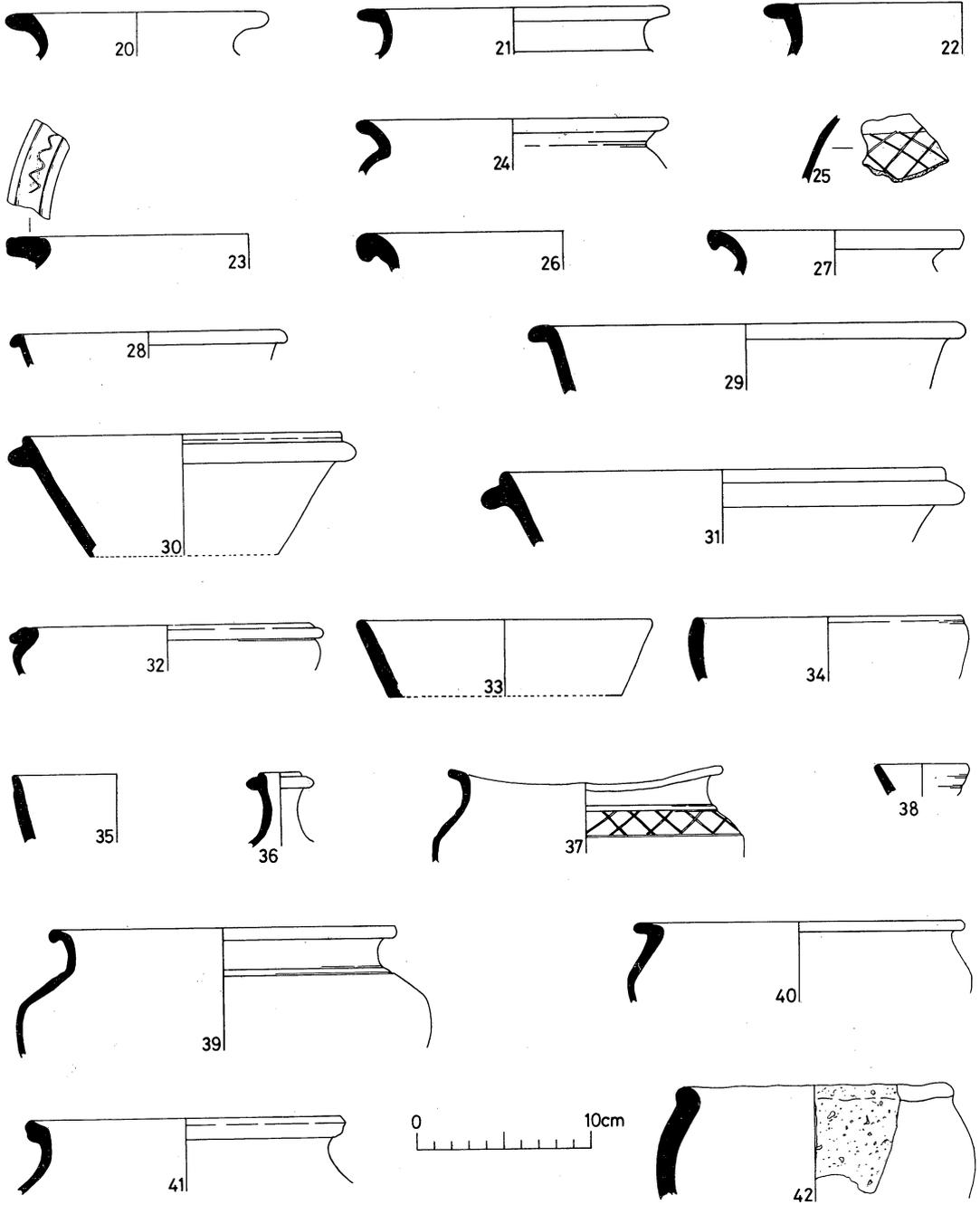


Fig 6. Wokingpark Farm: Roman pottery, coarse wares (1/4)

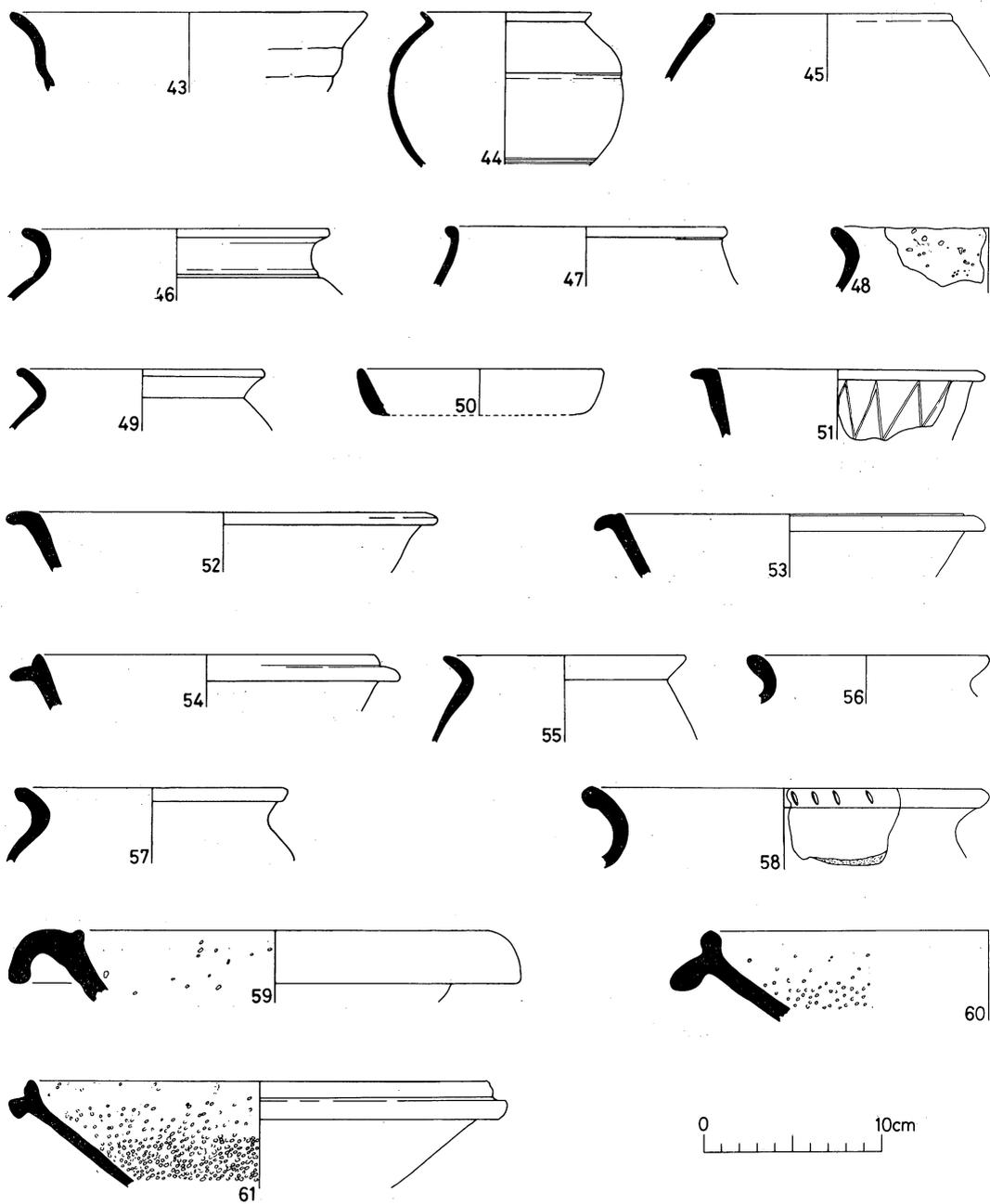


Fig 7. Wokingpark Farm: Roman pottery, coarse wares (1/4).

## The Finds

With the exception of the key which has been retained for examination by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory, all the finds have been deposited at Castle Arch, Guildford, together with the site records.

### THE SAMIAN WARE by Joanna Bird

For the full catalogue, see Microfiche 2-3.

The samian ware was all badly weathered or abraded, and none has been illustrated. There was one illegible stamp, of 1st century date, and two decorated bowls of the Hadrianic-Antonine period. Apart from a 1st century cup, the remaining samian was all of Hadrianic-Antonine date, with one dish that could date as late as the early 3rd century.

### THE OTHER ROMAN POTTERY by M A B Lyne (figs 5-7)

For a detailed catalogue, see Microfiche 3-9.

The 314 rims from the site range in date from the mid-1st century to the 4th, and possibly into the early 5th. There are three main assemblages, associated with the inner ditch (F3), the timber building (F2) and the midden (F4 and F5).

The inner ditch had an early Alice Holt bead-rim jar, tempered with crushed burnt flint, in its primary silting (fig 5:11). Crushed burnt flint tempering is a feature of the latest Iron Age and earliest Roman pottery industries in Alice Holt and had been totally superseded by the use of quartz sand by *c* AD 60.

The lower levels of the ditch produced the highest percentage (66%) of 1st/2nd century pottery on the site, decreasing to 53% in the upper levels, but the indications, from the mixture of late and early pottery at all levels, are that a general backfilling of the ditch took place during the 4th century using general occupation debris.

In the area of the timber building there was no vertical stratification of pottery, just a mixed scatter of early and late material. Only 42% of the pottery here was 1st/2nd century in date, and although the general relationship of the building to the ditch system suggests an earlier rather than later date for its construction, it may have continued in use into the 3rd/4th centuries. The midden clearly belongs to the 3rd/4th centuries, as only 6% of the material there is early.

The most important pottery source from the Roman conquest to the end of the 2nd century, a period represented by 147 pot rims, was the Alice Holt/Farnham complex, accounting for 62.5% of the whole. A local source, judging by the presence of a waster or poor second (fig 6:39), supplied small quantities of soft-fired greyish-white grog-tempered cordoned jars and bowls, similar to forms manufactured in Alice Holt during the late 1st and early 2nd centuries. This source was responsible for 9% (13 rims) of the analysed material. A couple of soapy, vesicular, hand-made, everted-rim vessels almost certainly had their source in the Thames valley near Staines, where large quantities of crude hand-made bead-rimmed jars and other forms in similar fabric are found in 1st century deposits.

Of the remaining 1st-2nd century vessels the bulk (24.5%) comes from one or more centres producing fine and coarse sandy grey wares, probably local judging by the waster (fig 6:37). A few Dorset black burnished bowls (2.75% of the whole) appeared on the site during the later 2nd century (fig 7:51-52).

From *c* AD 200 onwards the Alice Holt/Farnham industry was responsible for as much as 84.5% (141 rims) of the 3rd/4th century material, represented by the rims of 167 vessels. The rest of the pottery came from a variety of sources and included three Oxfordshire mortaria of 3rd/4th century date and a red colour-coated bowl from the same source. Dorset black burnished ware was represented by an incipient beaded and flanged bowl, a developed one and a straight sided dish.

The late material presents us with an interesting situation. The vast majority (130 rims) of the later Alice Holt material dates to the period between AD 200 and 270, with only 11 rims which could be regarded as later. This by itself might be interpreted as abandonment of the site by the end of the 3rd century. The presence of 6 rims of Surrey Buff ware vessels, which are generally regarded as dating after AD 330 and lasting into the 5th century, does indicate, with the Oxfordshire material, that there was some kind of 4th century occupation. One vessel in a sandy buff fabric has a flaring rim decorated with diagonal stabbing (fig 7:58) reminiscent of a Frisian form, and could be early 5th century in date.

#### BRONZE OBJECTS by Joanna Bird

1. Bronze brooch of a 'Colchester derivative' type which has two central holes at the head to hold the axis bar and the chord of the spring. Only the head of the bow, part of each wing, the stubs of the upper hole and the plate with the lower hole now survive. There is a raised 'dolphin' rib down the front of the bow. Hawkes & Hull 1947, pl 91:41, is closely similar. Second half of the 1st century AD. (Not illustrated; found near Enclosure Ditch layer 2).
2. Part of a bronze strip 5mm wide; both ends are missing. There are small holes at the edges, one at least of which is probably original, suggesting that the strip was once attached by stitching or small studs, eg to a leather strap. (Not illustrated; Midden layer 1).

#### THE IRON KEY by A J Clark

An iron pan nodule was found at the same level as the occupation layer containing scattered Romano-British pottery at a depth below the surface of 75cm. Here podsolised subsoil gave way to yellow sand, producing conditions conducive to the formation of pan.

After excavation, the nodule broke to reveal that it contained a cavity in the form of the handle end of an iron key. In the ground, the yellow sand immediately beneath the nodule had been leached to a grey colour, and it seemed that the key had formed a nucleus for the accretion of pan, before its own substance became incorporated into the pan.

The key was comparable with a group of L-shaped iron slide keys from London (*London Museum* 1930, pl 30A). It is hoped to produce a closer study of the key, including X-rays and a casting from the cavity in the nodule. (Not illustrated).

#### IRON NAILS

32 possible nails and 10 possible hob nails were found. Due to the acidity of the soil all were heavily encrusted with iron pan, making it difficult for them to be recognised and cleaned. One large nail found in the midden broke whilst being cleaned, and the following approximate measurements were taken: round head, 2.3cm diam; length, 12.6cm; square shaft, 1cm sq at the head, tapering to 0.5cm at the tip. The average measurement of the hob nails were: round domed head, 1cm diam × 0.8cm deep; length, 1cm from base of head to tip.

4 of the hob nails were found near the timber building and in its adjacent ditch; the others were found in the midden. (Not illustrated).

#### SPINDLE WHORL

The 4cm diam broken base of a soft grey coarseware vessel had been pierced through with a 1cm diam central hole for probable re-use as a spindle whorl. (Not illustrated; found in the midden).

#### FLINT FOSSIL SPONGES

Five were found, including one lying beside two pieces of mortaria (fig 7:61). This latter sponge was 4cm diam with a 1cm tapering centre hole and could perhaps have served as a pestle.



Fig 8. Wokingpark Farm: Flints (1/2)

#### FLINTS by R L Ellaby (fig 8)

- 1 A small core in pale grey flint with some cortex remaining. The flake beds are notably broad which could suggest a Neolithic date.
- 2 A small blade core in grey variegated flint with some cortex remaining. Possibly Mesolithic.
- 3 A pick-like core tool in grey variegated flint with some cortex remaining. The tip or cutting edge has been formed by the removal of a transverse flake (tranchet method). Much battering on the butt end suggests that the tool was also used as a hammerstone. The tranchet sharpening method appears not to be exclusive to the Mesolithic as this feature was found, for example, on a small adze-like core tool in a closed Late Neolithic context on Arreton Down, Isle of Wight, (Alexander *et al* 1960, 293; F39). The crudity and general appearance of the Furzes implement would suggest a similar date.
- 4 A small thumbnail scraper in dark grey translucent flint retouched with fine pressure flaking typical of the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.
- 5 A flake in grey-brown variegated flint with adjacent wide shallow notches forming a crest or ridge where they meet. Flakes with wide notches are a constant feature on surface spreads of flint in Surrey. They appear to be most common in Neolithic contexts: cf those from Arreton Down (Alexander *et al* 1960, 292; F22, F23). They are rare in closed Mesolithic contexts except, perhaps, at Abinger (Leakey 1951) which, because of its unusual assemblage, may be argued to belong to a Mesolithic/Neolithic transitional stage of which little or nothing is known.

#### THE QUERNSTONES by D J Tomalin

The fragments of rotary querns from the site may be attributed to the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand. They may be assigned to two of the provisional petrological sub-groups which have been proposed for Surrey quernstones (Hanworth & Tomalin 1977).

##### *Stone 1* (OWF 75. L2. 501. 75.).

A rim fragment of a lower stone 48cm in diameter with concave grinding surface. The rim shows a simple bead edge. The undersurface bears deep crude peck-marks betraying the use of an adze with a cutting edge some 2cm wide. A fresh section through the stone reveals milky and pale yellow quartz grains with some 5% brown limonitised glauconite crystals. These characteristics approximate to provisional sub-group IV.

##### *Stone 2* (OWF. 75. B15. Layer 2).

A rim fragment of an upper stone 32.5cm in diameter with a convex grinding surface. The lithology shows glossy fresh transparent sutured quartz grains irregularly compacted in a white ground mass with some secondary quartz growth. Clusters of brown limonitised glauconite crystals occur. These features are generally compatible with provisional sub-group II.

#### *Comments*

The provisional petrological sub-groups II and IV present at this site are commonly found in

Surrey querns (Hanworth & Tomalin 1977): Sub-group II, represented by stone 2, is found in a number of Iron Age querns at Holmbury and it is also present in the lower component stone of a flat-topped convex profiled quern found at Burpham (*ibid* fig 50).

Stone 1, representing sub-group IV, may be compared with the complete lower stone of the same sub-group from St George's Hill, Weybridge (Guildford Museum 5.397; Hanworth & Tomalin 1977 fig 50). The convex grinding surface of stone 2 appears to accord with Curwen's proposal for the survival of the Iron Age grinding profile whilst the weight and thickness of the stones were reduced during the early Romano-British period (Curwen 1937).

#### *Tabular Sandstone.*

OWF. 1975 1D4 Feature.

The two worn tabular pebbles of highly indurated sandstone have probably been obtained from local flood plain deposits. The larger example shows faint but positive signs of polishing and abrasion along its narrow flattened edge. The smaller example shows no clear signs of use.

#### BUILDING MATERIALS (not illustrated)

##### *1 Burnt daub*

Various sized lumps of burnt daub, including two pieces with distinct wattle grooves, were found in the midden. More pieces, including one with a wattle groove, were found in the timber building and its adjacent ditch. In addition, several of the larger sherds of pottery found in the timber building and its adjacent ditch contained a mixture of disintegrated burnt daub and sandy soil.

##### *2 Brick and tile*

Small quantities of various periods were scattered over the site and in some of the occupation levels, but there was no significant concentration in any particular area. Small pieces of burnt brick were found around the outside of post holes 2 and 19, and two small pieces of brick showing traces of possible plaster were found in layer 1 within the timber building.

##### *3 Flue tiles*

A few very small pieces of pinkish-red flue tile were found. Two of these, found in the timber building and in the unstratified top soil over the adjacent ditch, had parallel combing on one face. Another extremely worn piece found in the midden appeared to have criss-cross combing and a possible wattle impression.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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