

Green Lane, Wanborough 1979 (SU 920 495)

by MARTIN O'CONNELL

Preface

This is an account of the archaeological investigation of the site of a Roman building at Green Lane, Wanborough that was undertaken in 1979–80 on behalf of the Conservation and Archaeology Section, Planning Department, Surrey County Council and funded by the Department of the Environment. Excavation of a trial trench in June–July 1979 was directed by Martin O'Connell and was followed in 1980 by two geophysical surveys of the surrounding area. The first was carried out in January by Ian Roberts while the second conducted in November was by Rob Poulton with the assistance of Graham Hayman and Martin O'Connell. The results of the second geophysical survey were processed by the Ancient Monuments Laboratory (DoE) and a short report prepared by Alister Bartlett. The land on which excavation took place is owned by Surrey County Council and permission to excavate was arranged through Dennis Steer of the County Engineer's Department.

Discovery of the Site

A relatively large quantity of Romano-British occupation material (1st–4th century) was found in the 1960s by Mr C J Sage in a ploughed field to the south of Green Lane (fig 1) (Holling 1969). Subsequent investigation in April 1970 by Felix Holling led to the discovery of further Roman material and the remains of a possible building in Green Lane, approximately 40m to the west of the 1979 excavation trench. These finds are now held by Guildford Museum (RB2218) together with a plain silver ring (RB2811), possibly of Roman date, which was found in 1976 in the same general area. In May 1979 structural evidence was located at the present site by Martin O'Connell and Rob Poulton and trial excavation was undertaken to assess the nature of the remains.

Setting

The site lies on London Clay to the north of the chalk ridge of the Hog's Back (fig 1). Green Lane is a drove road of some antiquity (Holling 1969) which, at this point, forms part of the parish boundary between Wanborough and Ash. This section of the lane is classified as a 'road used as a public path' (OS 1:50,000) but although it occupies a relatively wide area is no more than an uneven, often boggy, track which narrows considerably in places due to the density of the undergrowth.

It is uncertain when the Hog's Back was first utilised as a through road although Turner has discussed the possibility of an Iron Age origin (1980, 1–13). Certainly the existence of a number of Roman settlements on either side of the ridge is circumstantial evidence for its use as a communication route during the Romano-British period. The area to the south in particular has produced an abundance of material on the basis of which it has been argued that the appearance of villa estates south of the Hog's Back, such as Compton, was the result of the enclosure or growth of small scattered Romano-British farming settlements (Clarke & Nichols 1960, 42–71). There are insufficient grounds as yet for postulating a parallel development to the north and the discovery of the present site is a significant addition to the available evidence. The latter includes the villa excavated at Broadstreet Common (Sibthorpe 1831, 398–403) and the possible villa site at Tongham (VCH 4, 369). At Wanborough itself in 1793 the remains of a Roman building were allegedly found in 'Major Tredcroft's garden' (Lasham 1893, 248). The garden referred to formed

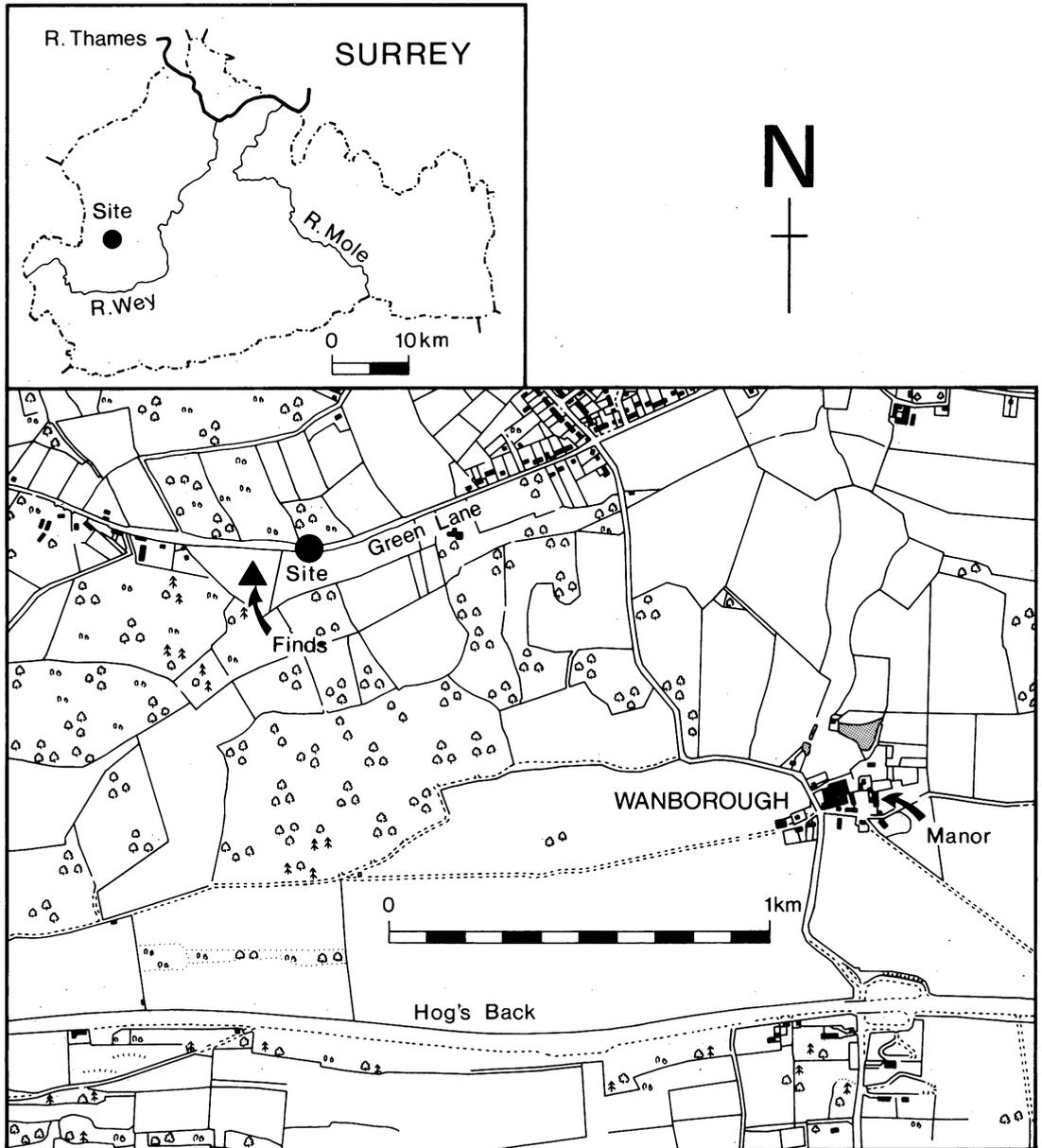


Fig 1. Wanborough: Site Location

part of the grounds attached to Wanborough Manor (Holling, pers comm), which is situated (fig 1) near to the spring line where the Chalk changes to Reading Beds before the beginning of the wide band of London Clay. In the absence of tangible evidence this discovery cannot be verified but if some form of Romano-British settlement did exist in the vicinity of the Manor it would be interesting to establish its relationship to the proven one at Green Lane which is less than 2 kilometres distant.

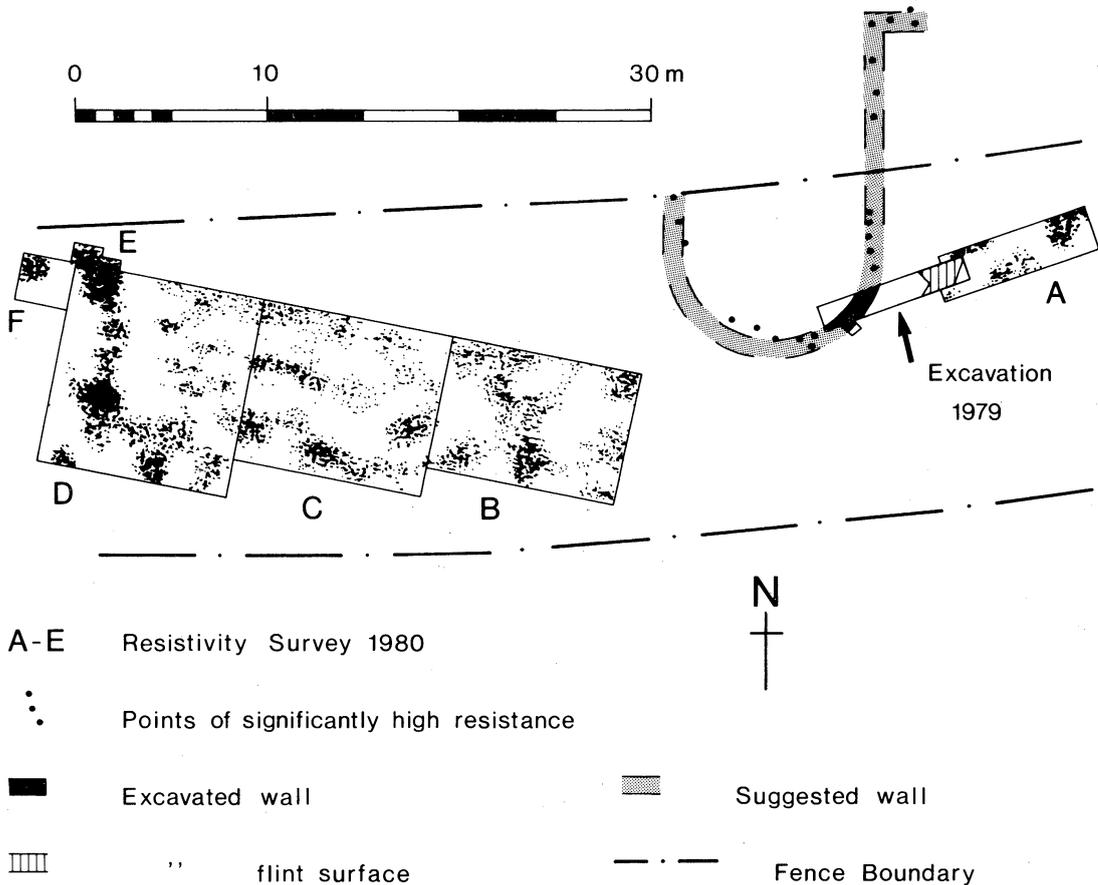


Fig 2. Wanborough: The Site

The Excavation

The trial trench (fig 2) — approximately $8.0 \times 1.30\text{m}$ — was opened where a concentration of flint, gravel and tile had been noted on the surface of Green Lane (see Section C–D, fig 4). The stratigraphic relationship between the contexts identified in the trench is summarised in a Harris Matrix (fig 3) and the details of these contexts and their associated finds are presented in tabular form.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS (figs 4 and 5)

The construction trench, flat bottomed with sloping sides, had been infilled with flint, gravel and clay (25 and 24) before the wall itself (5) had been tied into the edge of the feature. The wall was composed of flint blocks with a core of flint, gravel and clay (23). Only traces of original mortar had survived. An eavesdrip trench (20) ran parallel with the wall. The northern edge of this feature (20) had been produced by the deposition of a clay layer (18) above the exposed foundation material (24). The narrow strip (21) left between the wall and eavesdrip trench had then been infilled with grey clay and gravel (17). The wall (5) followed a gentle curving line, suggesting that it was either part of an apsidal ended or circular structure. Only a minute section of the interior was exposed in the north-western corner of the trench and this had been almost entirely obscured by two later features (10 and 11). To the east of the wall a layer of large flints

Table 1: Context Descriptions and Finds

The numbers that appear under metalwork relate to small finds.

Context	Description	Interpretations	Clay		Metalwork		Organic	
			Pottery	Tile	Nail	Coin/ Other	Bone	Oyster shell
1	Dark brown clayey soil	Trampled topsoil	/	/	7-13		/	/
2	Dark brown soil + pebbles/gravel + charcoal	Demolition layer	/	/	1-5		/	
3	Brown clay and flints and gravel	Demolition layer	/	/		31 ? coin		
4	Dark grey/black clayey soil + chalk flecks + charcoal	Demolition layer	/	/	16-26	25 bronze sheet?		
5	Flint wall	Wall						
6/19	Brown clay	Natural clay subsoil						
7	Brown clayey soil	Topsoil	/	/	14, 15			
8	Dark brown clayey soil	Fill of 11	/	/				
9	Dark brown/black soil + chalk, flint, burnt sandstone and charcoal	Fill of 10	/	/	29, 32		/	
10	Irregular, shallow pit		Pit associated with					
11	Irregular shaped, narrow gully	demolition Purpose unknown — post demolition						
12	Soil mixed with crushed stone and gravel	Levelling layer?	/		27		/	
13	Brown clay + flints	Demolition layer	/	/		28 Bronze object		
14	Large flints with clay and gravel	Foundation of yard or path?	/					
15	Clay, gravel + gravel	Fill of 27						
16	Dark grey clay + gravel	Ultimate fill of 20	/	/	30		/	
17	Grey clay + gravel	Fill of 21	/	/			/	
18	Clay with a little flint	Redeposited natural clay subsoil						
20	Shallow gully	Eavesdrip trench						
21	Narrow gully	Result of deposition of 18						
22	Dirty clay + gravel	Primary fill of 20	/	/			/	
23	Brown clayey soil	Building material						

Context	Description	Interpretations	Clay		Metalwork		Organic	
			Pottery	Tile	Nail	Coin/ Other	Bone	Oyster shell
	+ small gravel + traces of under-composed mortar	for 5						
24	Light brown sandy soil + clay and gravel	Fill of 28						
25	Dirty clay + flint and gravel	Fill of 28						
26	Brown/grey clayey soil + chalk flecks	Demolition layer						
27	Shallow scoop	Construction trench for 14						
28	Deep cut with flattened base	Foundation trench for 5						

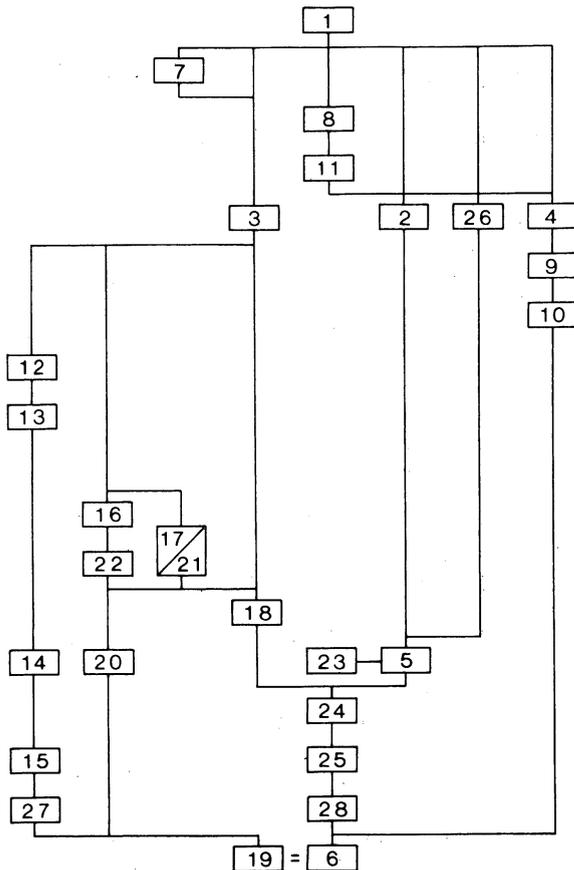


Fig 3. Wanborough: Harris Matrix

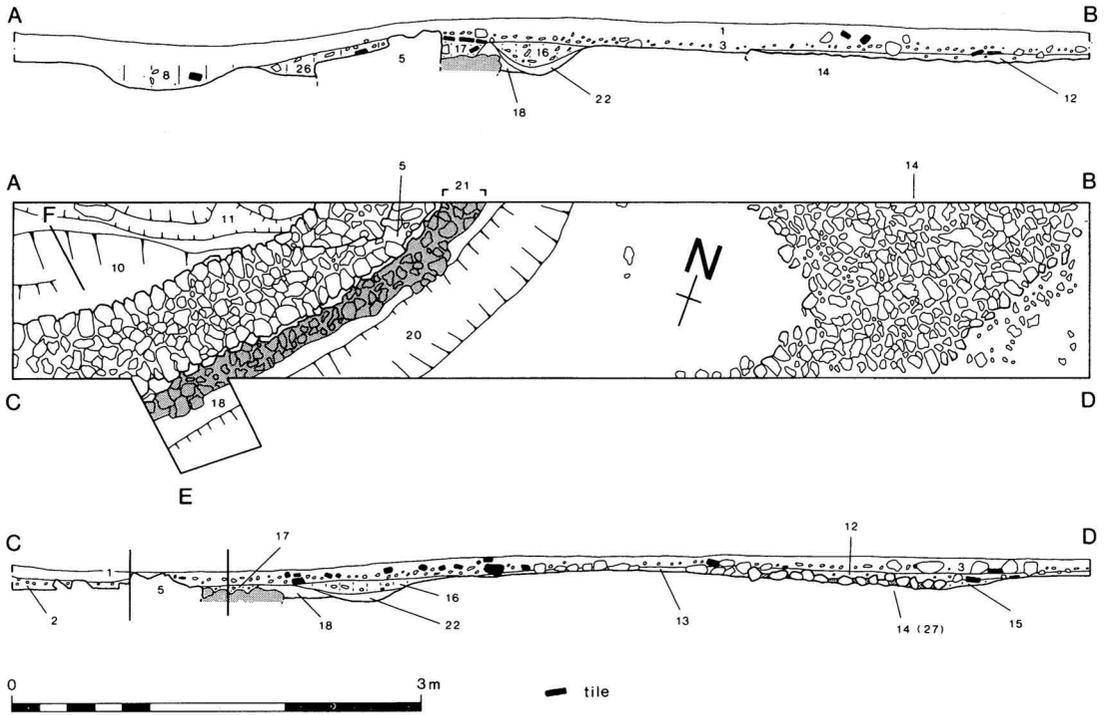


Fig 4. Wanborough: The Excavation. Shading has been used to indicate the top of the foundation material

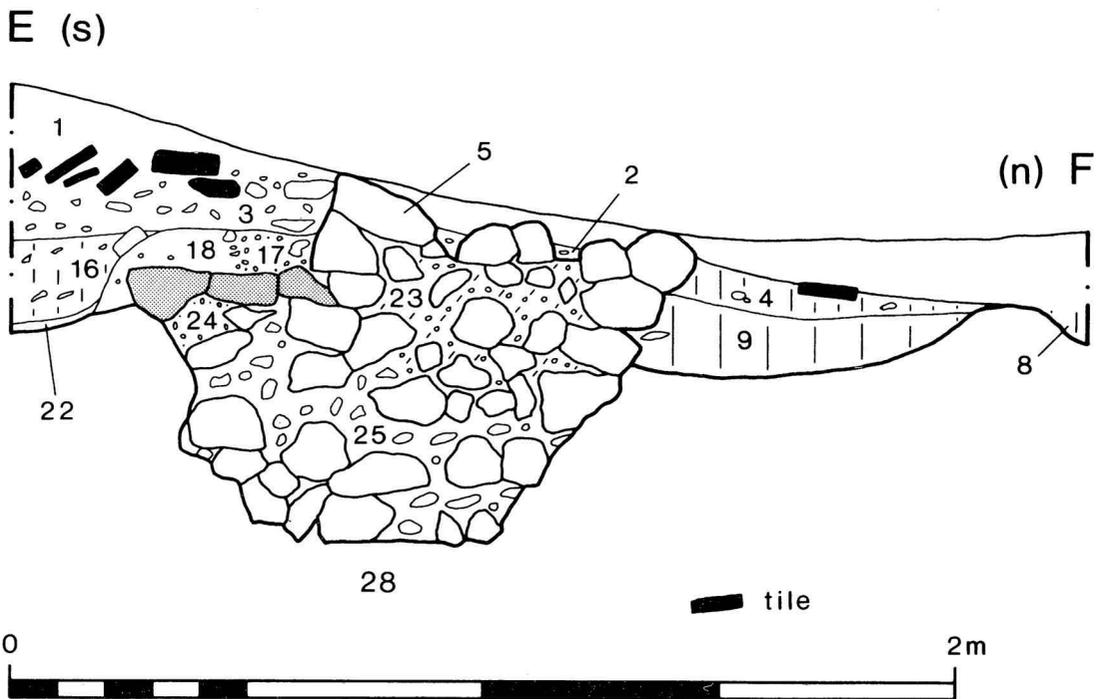


Fig 5. Wanborough: Section E-F. Shading has been used to indicate the top of the foundation material

intermixed with gravel (14) had been laid into a shallow construction trench (15). This surface may have served as some form of yard or path related to the structural evidence.

The building appears to have been deliberately dismantled and the site then levelled. The process of demolition is represented by a shallow feature (10), the excavation of which would have been largely responsible for the collapse or slumping of the flint wall (5), since it had been dug immediately against the interior face of that wall and then backfilled with loose material (9). The ultimate fill (4) of this feature (10), contained quantities of building debris and closely resembled (26) which sealed part of the wall. (4) and (26) may have formed part of the same layer but unfortunately a later feature (11) had destroyed their original relationship. A levelling layer (12) was found above (14) and the remains of another (2) partially sealing (5). A layer of building debris (3) covered almost the entire area of the site. The function of the later intrusive feature (11) remains uncertain.

THE ROMAN POTTERY (fig 6) by Joanna Bird

The Roman pottery from Wanborough described in the catalogue (Microfiche 2-10) comprises 137 diagnostic sherds. Fine wares are few: eight sherds of Central Gaulish samian, all of Hadrianic-Antonine date, a near-complete 'hunt cup' from the Rhineland, a rough cast beaker from Colchester and an Oxfordshire mortarium. The rest of the pottery consists of grey or orange-brown coarsewares, and apart from four sherds of Dorset black burnished ware (BB1) these are all apparently of local origin. It is likely that they all come from the Alice Holt/Farnham kilns, despite the considerable range of colour and quality.

The pottery ranges in date from the later 1st to the 4th century, though none of the earlier vessels is closely dateable and all could come from forms which lasted into the first half of the 2nd century. The complete absence of South Gaulish samian would be unusual even in such a small assemblage if there had been much activity on the site within the 1st century. The overall picture from the pottery suggests that the main period of activity lay within the 2nd century and 3rd century, perhaps lasting into the 4th century on a diminished scale.

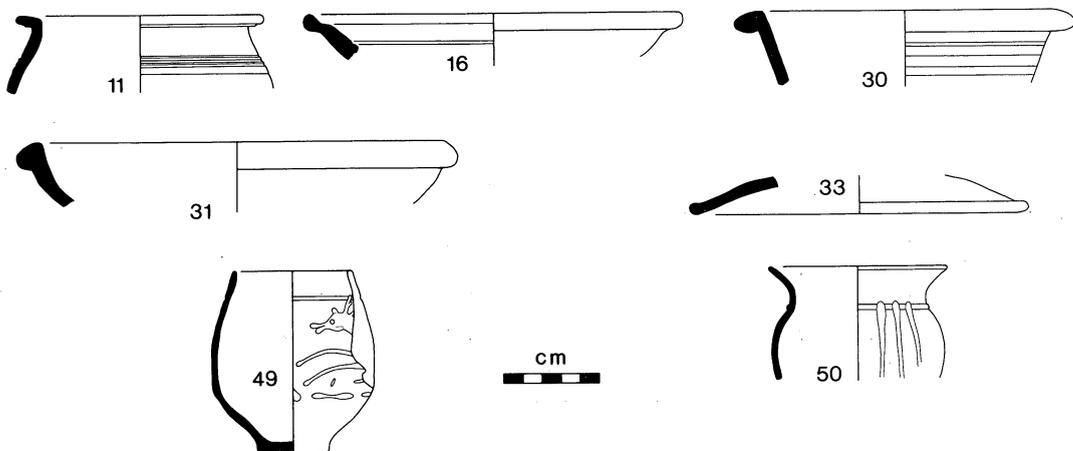


Fig 6. Wanborough: The Roman pottery

THE ANIMAL BONE by Geraldene Done

Twenty-six fragments of animal bone were recovered from Trench 1, from which ox, sheep and roe deer were identified (see Microfiche 0-0 for catalogue). A distal tibia (22) though large for the sheep of the period was considered on morphology to be sheep rather than fallow deer. The distal width (Bd) falls within this range for Romano-British sheep at Exeter, (Maltby 1979). Burnt bone was found in (4), (5) and (17).

SMALL FINDS

Apart from a number of corroded and fragmentary iron nails, three objects of copper alloy were noted. These were:-

- 1 Remains of a thin sheet (max length 76mm and width 46mm) but with numerous cracks and pitted. Plain. Context 4.
- 2 Remains of a thin, flattened strip (max length 36mm, width 3mm and thickness 1.5mm). Plain. Context 13.
- 3 Thin, roughly circular object (max diameter 15mm). The suggestion of a design on one side might have indicated that the object was a coin, but it was too badly corroded to be certain. Context 3.

Geophysical Survey by Rob Poulton

During 1980 two attempts were made to extend the results from excavation by the use of geophysical survey techniques. Unfortunately the area available for survey was limited to Green Lane, since permission for work in the adjoining fields was refused. The first survey attempt in January 1980 utilised a fluxgate gradiometer, and covered an area similar to that of the later resistivity survey. No real pattern could be deduced from the results, due to the frequent occurrence of surface- or near-surface iron.

The second attempt in November 1980 was made with the 2-probe resistivity technique (Clark 1975) and produced rather more interesting results (fig 2). The initial work concentrated on trying to extend the line of the excavated wall. Because of the dense scrub and undergrowth in this area it proved impossible to do this by conventional grid survey, and a technique was adopted, analogous to the 'walkabout' system used with gradiometer surveys, in which traverses were made at right angles to the projected line of the wall, and points of significantly high resistance marked with a peg. The ability to do this represents a marked advantage of the 2-probe over other resistivity systems. The results suggest that the excavated wall formed part of an apse which was *c* 10m wide across its chord. A possible wall at right angles to the apse was encountered just over 17m from its furthest projection. Because of the difficulties in survey this finding does not preclude the possibility of a wall at right angles at a lesser distance.

In the more open areas of Green Lane it proved practical to survey on a grid system with readings taken at 0.5m intervals. The readings were plotted in a number of ways, but the dot-density plots used in fig 2 (high density of dotting indicates relatively high resistance) proved marginally the clearest for interpretation. Grid A shows an area of high resistance extending the area of the excavated flint surface, and this suggests the possibility that such may be the explanation of other areas of high resistance scattered in the other grids. The most significant feature, though, is that which runs north-south through grids D and E; at its southern end there is an indication of another high resistance feature joining it at right angles and possibly running through grids C and B. These features are most simply interpreted as the remains of walls, and it is surely relevant to their understanding that they have closely similar alignments to the other excavated or postulated walls.

Conclusions

The results of the archaeological investigation that has so far been undertaken clearly indicate the existence of one building and the probability of other related structures. The only identifiable plan recovered is that of part of an apsidal building. Without more information it is not possible to be certain of the nature of the settlement and it would be fruitless at this stage to develop hypotheses or discuss comparative material from other rural Romano-British sites.

Dating is entirely dependent upon the pottery. Unfortunately no artifactual evidence was found in association with the building construction, there was a complete lack of occupational deposits while the largest proportion of the finds related to the infilling of the eavesdrip trench

(20) and the processes of demolition and levelling. Despite the inadequacy of the finds Joanna Bird has been able to draw some general conclusions and postulate that the principal phase of occupation occurred during the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD with a possible prolongation of activity into the 4th century before the building was demolished.

The obvious need for further work on the site is unlikely to be met in the immediate future due to the refusal of the landowner to allow access to land bordering Green Lane while the absence of any development threat to the Lane itself means that any further investigation of this area would necessarily be part of a research project.

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