

## Romano-British Building at Knowl Hill, Berks (2nd Report).

By W. A. SEABY and J. H. POLLEN (Lt.-Comm. R.N. ret'd.).

SINCE the first report on the excavation published in Vol. 36, No. 1 (1932) of this Journal, the work of uncovering the remains of the Romano-British building at Knowl Hill has been carried out at infrequent intervals by a number of excavation parties working more or less independently of each other. It is for this reason that the results obtained are not so conclusive as might otherwise have been the case. The writers wish to state quite definitely that in this report only the established facts have been dealt with at all fully, conjectural points being left to a summary at the end.

The work since spring of 1932 has consisted mainly in determining the depth of the foundation walls, clearing the area contained by these walls and in the digging of trial holes and trenches in the orchard to the east.

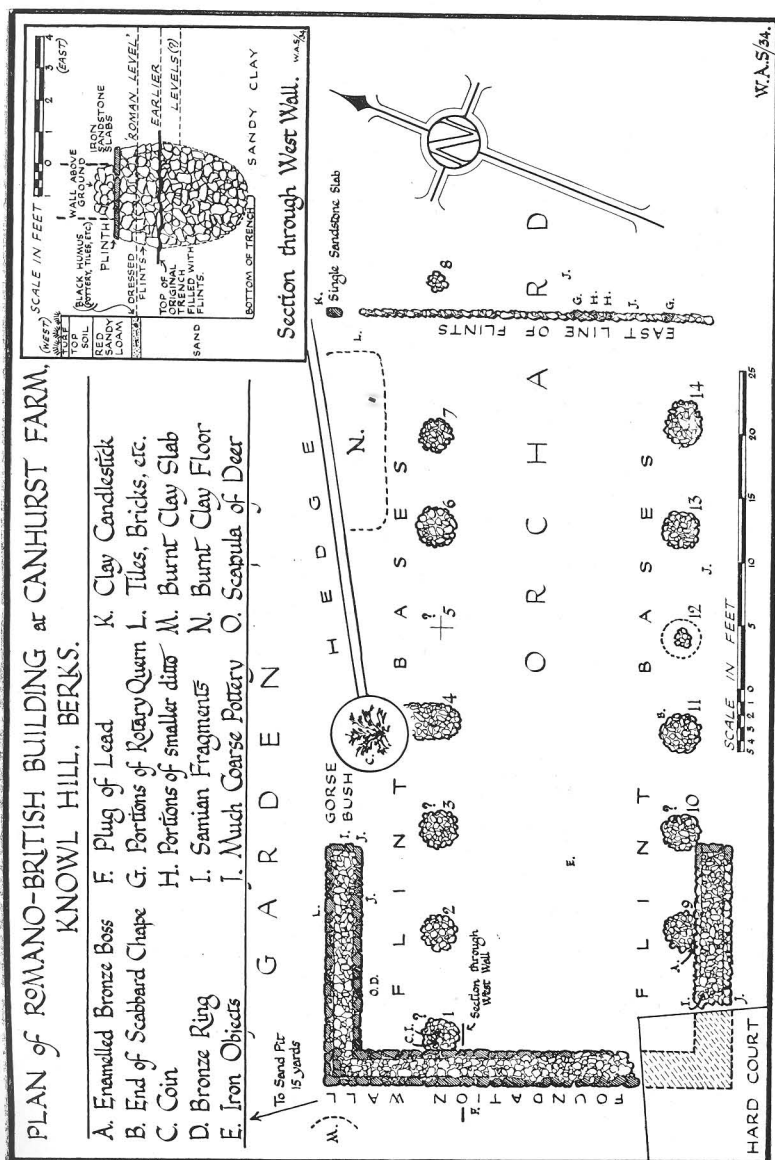
THE WEST WALL. A hole, 3 feet 6 inches square, was dug against the W. wall, 10 feet from the N.W. corner. The excavation proved that the wall was approximately 4 feet in depth below the sandstone bonding course, deeper than was at first thought.<sup>1</sup> The dressing of flints and battering of the wall was found to reach only to about 6 inches below the old surface level. Below this the flints were left untrimmed and the foundation narrowed towards its base. It appears from these data that in the construction of the wall the ground had first been cleared to the depth of 6 inches or so. A trench about 2 feet 6 inches deep had been dug in the sand and flints had been thrown into the trench and rammed down. The unstable nature of the soil necessitated the unusual depth of the foundation. On top of this flint surface was carefully laid a wall 1 foot high and 3 feet 3 inches wide at approximately ground level, having a slight

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<sup>1</sup> *B.A.J.* xxxvi., p. 29.

# ROMANO-BRITISH BUILDING AT KNOWL HILL.

PLATE I.



Plan of the Building with Section through West Wall.

batter on either side. The wall on both faces was roughly dressed. Probably some crude form of cement was used to bind the flints together. Six inches or so above the ground level was placed a layer of flat sandstone slabs, stained deep brown with iron, the width of the wall being 2 feet 10 inches at this height. Set back on top of the sandstone course, approximately 8 inches from either face, the wall proper was built, the bottom of which only remains in places, most notably at the N.W. corner. Thus both inside and outside the walling a small footing or plinth was left, which may still be seen quite distinctly. During the excavation on the W. side of the wall several fragments of pottery turned up. Excavation on the east side of the W. wall, opposite the trial hole described above, was next carried out. A similar square was dug, but work proceeded more slowly owing to the numerous flints met with a foot or so above the "Roman level." It was noticed that a few pottery fragments were here lying below the black humus layer. Further digging in the same place some weeks later revealed pottery fragments at greater depths and faint indication of carbonaceous layers at levels of approximately 1 foot and 2 feet below the so-called Roman level. Digging in four places within the area contained by the walls failed to substantiate the existence of these earlier levels and no trace of soil disturbance by human agency, either outside or inside the walls, was elsewhere discovered below the old ground surface. (Further remarks on this point will be found in the summary).

THE N.W. CORNER. As already mentioned the wall above ground was best preserved at this corner. In clearing away loam from the angle, three bonded quoins of sandstone were discovered in position, revealing 1 foot of the wall proper. (See Pl. II).

FLINT BASES FOR POSTS. The accumulation of flints and flint chippings immediately above and at the "Roman level" everywhere in the vicinity of the walls was such that those digging were forced to proceed slowly, and somewhat painfully. The removal altogether of hundred-weights of flints, all of which were thought to have fallen from the walls, before the "floor" level could be reached prevented the workers from conceiving the

ROMANO-BRITISH BUILDING AT KNOWL HILL.

PLATE II.



*N.W. Corner showing the sandstone bonding.*

possibility of any designed lay-out of flints that might have been apparent in more favourable circumstances. It was found however towards the centre of the area between the walls that the number of flints lessened very considerably, until from 5 to 6 feet from the walls they had become practically non-existent. The black carbonaceous layer became less defined and the pottery fragments also became relatively scarcer. Thus the uncovering of a patch of flints two layers thick, roughly circular and with a diameter of 2 feet 9 inches, aroused considerable new interest. Its centre was 9 feet from the W. wall and 6 feet from the N. (marked 2 upon plan). Part of a tile lay upon the flints. The probability of this circular structure being not only intentionally fashioned but of Roman date led to much speculation as to its purpose. The suggestion that it was a hearth was dismissed on the grounds that there were no signs of heat (i.e. no calcined flints, carbon, etc.). The most reasonable explanation was that it formed the base for a pillar, either of flint or more probably of wood, the nature of the soil making it necessary for the taking of such measures to guard against sinkage.

It was with this idea in mind that excavation was carried out in the orchard to the east of the building in October, 1932. Trial trenches about 2 feet wide were dug parallel and at right angles to the foundation wall. No continuation of the N. and S. walls was discovered but similar bases of flint (4, 6, and 7) were revealed at regular intervals, in alignment with base no. 2, and at right angles to the W. wall. The finding of base no. 13 led to investigating the possibility of a southern line of post bases parallel to that first uncovered. The opening up of bases nos. 11 and 14 quickly removed any doubt upon the matter. Bases 5 and 12 were never actually excavated but in the spot where 12 should be the spade struck flints 2 feet below the surface. The position of base no. 5 is assumed.

In excavating further to the east a row of flints (see plan) was discovered running parallel to the N. wall and finishing in line with the middle points of the N. and S. walls. It was a single layer of flints 28 feet long and was nowhere more than two

flints wide. Near the southern end of this line four fragments of two rotary querns were found laid in such a manner that they might have been intended to form part of this line. Two feet from the N. end of this line a single sandstone slab was discovered. In the position it occupied it would have formed the corner stone of a right angle if the N. foundation wall and the E. line of flints had been continued to this point. The digging in 1929 for a stopcock box in a water pipe a foot or so to the S.E. of the sandstone may have disturbed the continuity of the flints between the stone and the end of the line.

The total distance from the W. wall to the E. line of flints proved to be 59 feet, the space between each flint base averaging just over 8 feet. The distance between the two rows of bases was rather more than 19 feet.

Two feet to the E. of this flint line, in alignment with the N. row of flint bases, there was a patch of a few flints which was smaller and less definite in shape than any of the other bases (marked 8 upon plan). In the corresponding position in the S. row no flints were found. Trenches dug further to the east in the orchard failed to reveal any further formations and all excavations ceased in November of 1932.

#### THE FINDS.

*Mealing Stones.* Of the broken parts of two querns, each in two pieces, found in the east line of flints, one appeared to be the lower or nether stone of a fair-sized rotary quern of hard grey sandstone, much worn; the other a portion of a somewhat smaller quern.

*Signs of Fire.* A considerable area to the W. of the N.E. sandstone corner showed a reddened and blackened layer of clay, approximately 6 inches thick, 2 feet below the surface. Pottery fragments and other remains were conspicuous by their absence over this part and while the state of the soil points to a considerable amount of firing, it seems unlikely that the kitchen quarters were here.

*Bone.* No objects of bone were found, but the scapula of a deer (*Cervus sp.*) was discovered inside the N. wall close to a bronze ring. Another fragment of mammal bone came from just inside the W. wall.

*Iron and Lead.* Iron objects were again mostly too badly oxidised for identification, although a number of nails were recognised. An iron ring found on base 2 crumbled to fragments upon being removed. A piece of lead, 1 inch in diameter flattened on both sides, which had almost certainly been used as a plug for stopping up a hole in some article, was found outside the W. wall. Perforations in vessels were often repaired in this manner and several examples are to be found in the Silchester Collection, Reading Museum.

*Bronze.* Only five pieces of bronze have been found upon the site other than faint traces of green powder which may have indicated small bronze objects long since decomposed. One coin and the enamelled bronze boss have already been reported.<sup>2</sup> Another bronze coin in very poor condition about the size of a worn *as* or *dupondius* of the early Empire was found against the W. wall upon flint base no. 1. A small bronze ring, complete but in two pieces, was found in clearing at the Roman level, on the inner side of the N. wall. It is about the size of a finger ring with an external diameter of 25 mms. It was almost certainly not worn on the hand, being thick and in section circular and not oval.

Perhaps the most interesting object that has turned up since the discovery of the enamelled bronze boss is what appears to be a fragment of the rounded bronze end or chape for a sword scabbard, which was found on base no. 11 (Pl. III fig. II). Such chapes belong to scabbards of late La Tène period<sup>3</sup> and are quite distinct from the knob or ferrule-shaped chape found on scabbards of the short Roman *gladius*. While close dating is impossible, the chape may have belonged to a scabbard made in the first century B.C. or the earlier half of the first century A.D. This approximates to the dating of the boss. W.A.S.

*Glass.* The only finds of glass definitely of the period are two very small pieces of good thin white glass, one of which has a double incised line across it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *B.A.J.*, xxxvi., p. 33.

<sup>3</sup> *British Museum Early Iron Age Guide* (1925), p. 108, pl. ix.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Richborough Report* i., p. 48, nos. 7 and 8, dated mid-first century.

*Pottery.*

*I. Samian Ware.* In addition to the Samian ware noted in the first report,<sup>5</sup> a further small number of fragments have been discovered, only one of which is decorated. This is a side and rim piece of a bowl (form 37 Dragendorff†) of hard light red clay with good slightly darker glaze, showing the *ovolo* pattern decoration, separated from a narrow plain zone by a double groove or raised ridge.<sup>6</sup> Three more fragments of form 31 Drag. were found, one probably being part of the dish with the potter's stamp already noted in the first report, and the other two belonging to a similar dish of smaller diameter. The former of these pieces has a dovetail cut in it for rivetting a break.\* The remaining finds are single pieces of forms 18, 27, 36, (2, one with leaf ornament), and a flat-topped, square-ended rim of triangular section (? form 46). Finally there is a side piece of a cup, (form 33), with inside lip groove and outside girth groove (Pl. IV. fig. 1). This collection seems to embrace the period from mid-first to early second century.

*II. Coarse Ware.* The vessel of white sandy clay found in the sand pit,<sup>7</sup> has now been reconstructed (Pl. III fig. I.). It is an oblique-rimmed wide-mouthed olla of superior workmanship, ornamented with two double girth grooves and is of first century proportions.

It has also been found possible to reconstruct or draw sections of a number of other vessels. There are seven examples of the rough flat dish, illustrated in the first report,<sup>8</sup> of various sizes and at least six deep bowls, two of which are here shown (Pl. IV figs. 14, 15). The former is of hard brownish-grey clay with black surface and is ornamented with an evenly scored lattice pattern,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *B.A.J.*, xxxvi. p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> May, *Silchester*, p. 53 and pl. xix a. dated 70-80 A.D., is very similar to this example.

† Dragendorff, Hans, "Terra Sigillata," *Bonn. Jahrb.* xcvi., pp. 18-155 and xcvi., p. 54-163, Bonn, 1895-96.

\* Many examples in *Silchester Collection*.

<sup>7</sup> *B.A.J.*, xxxvi., p. 30 and note 1. N.B. Some of the finds described in this Report were wrongly sited. Pl. iii. figs. 4 and 7 were found in the building, not in the sand-pit, and fig. 11 was found inside north wall.

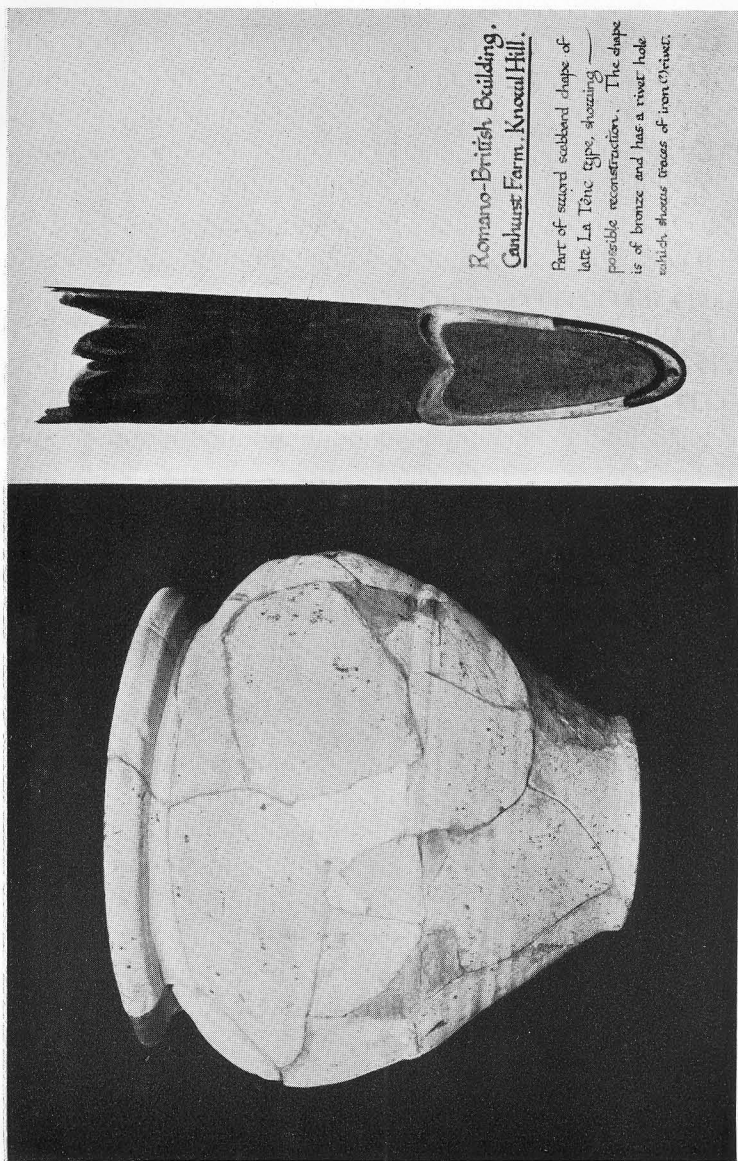
<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.* pl. iii. no. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Richborough* iii., no. 339 dated to 80-120 A.D.



ROMANO-BRITISH BUILDING AT KNOWL HILL.

PLATE III.



Romano-British Building.  
Caulwest Farm, Knowl Hill.

Part of sword scabbard chape of  
late La Tène type, showing —  
possible reconstruction. The chape  
is of bronze and has a rivet hole  
which shows traces of iron rivet.

Fig. I. White Jar from sand pit.

Fig. II. Bronze Chape (reconstructed).

the latter is of fine sandy clay with black surface. Several more of these bowls are decorated with lattice pattern irregularly scored.<sup>10</sup>

The wide dish (Pl. IV fig. 13) is of hard black clay with black burnished surface having a very uneven lattice pattern, an angular rim and bevelled base. This can be dated to about 90-110 A.D.<sup>11</sup> In what was probably a small rubbish pit were found the remains of five rough-cast beakers of white or red clay coated with black or coloured slip. Pl. IV fig. 2 shows one of fine white clay with mottled red and black slip. It has a thin double girth groove below the bulge and can be dated to 80-120 A.D.<sup>12</sup> Fig 5, of considerably earlier period, is of fine hard creamy-white clay with black slip, and is thickly rough-cast with fine particles. It has a smooth band above the rough-cast and a groove at the junction with the lip.<sup>13</sup> There are also remains of several more small beakers (two with "poppy-head" decoration) and of several flagons of soft grey or white clay. One other white clay vessel is illustrated (fig. 6). This is a honey jar probably with a recurved rim, ornamented with a thin double girth groove between the handles. Fig. 4 is a small indented beaker of hard grey clay.

Fragments of some forty or fifty other vessels have also been found, ranging from a small olla of dirty brown clay with everted lip, decorated with a band of counterchanged "arrowheads," to several large store vessels of thick coarse clay. Rims of some of the intermediate types are here shown (figs. 3 and 7 to 12). A large thin-sided olla of light cream sandy clay mixed with black grits, and with a grey outside surface (fig. 3) has two zones of three girth grooves each on the shoulder above the bulge.

Another vessel with a strongly out-curved rim and sharply bent angular shoulder (fig. 7) has a zone of roughly scored

<sup>10</sup> Fragments subsequently unearthed show that the bowl illustrated in the first Report, pl. iii. no. 7, is evenly scored with lattice pattern.

<sup>11</sup> May, *Silchester*, p. 160, type 199, 90-110 A.D.; *Richborough* i., p. 97, no. 46 late 1st or early 2nd century.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Richborough* iii. no. 301, which is practically identical.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. May, *Silchester*, p. 112, no. 46, dated to early Claudian period at latest, and the Canhurst beaker is of even wider proportions.

lattice pattern. It is of hard sandy clay burnt red below the bulge and there is a flint,  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch square, still embedded in its side.

Fig. 10 shows a trumpet-mouthed olla, similarly but more regularly latticed, with a cordon dividing rim from shoulder.

Fig. 12 has three burnished grooves below the lip and is of plain hard grey clay. The recurved lip of fig. 8 closely resembles the type dated to pre-Flavian or Flavian times<sup>14</sup> and the straight sides of fig. 11 suggests that it may have been of the carinated form.

The massive proportions of another olla rim of dark grey gritty clay with burnished black outside surface and a neat zigzag line scored with a blunt point immediately below the lip may be attributed to mid-first century.<sup>15</sup> (Pl. IV fig. 9).

Though it has not yet been possible to classify the pottery found in the exploratory trenches and round the pillar bases in the orchard, a preliminary examination seems to show no great variation from the pottery types found in the building itself, but it must be remembered in this connection that the latter encloses at least four of the bases.

Part of a candlestick of soft red ware was found to the N. of the N.E. sandstone slab (see plan).<sup>16</sup>

J.H.P.

#### SUMMARY.

The extremely permeable nature of the sandy soil accounts very largely for the difficulty the excavators experienced in locating the various horizons. Where unprotected by the walls any deposits of organic matter formed by the accumulation of refuse have, in the process of time, been "washed out" by the percolation of water through the soil.<sup>17</sup> The possibility of levels or "floors" below the black humus or "Roman level" was first pointed out by Mr. E. Plomer, who in excavating inside the W. wall came upon pot sherds at depths considerably below the

<sup>14</sup> *Richborough* iii., no. 252.

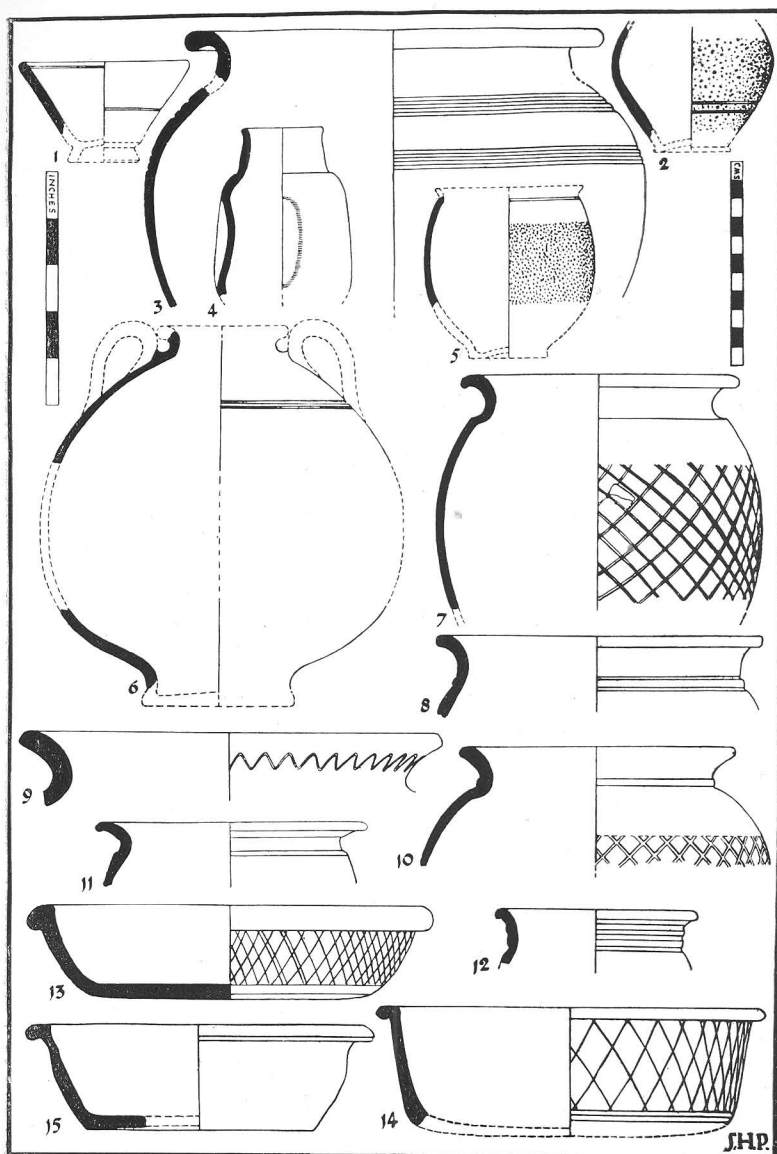
<sup>15</sup> Cf. *Ibid.* i., p. 95, no. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. May, *Silchester*, pl. xlv., no. 7.

<sup>17</sup> It is not without significance that the whole of the area occupied by the building was buried beneath a fine red loam varying in places from 1 to 3 feet, accumulated during the last seventeen hundred years.

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PLATE IV.



*Pottery Sections drawn from fragments.*

horizon. Two of these, one foot and 9 inches apart showed as faint black lines in the sand close against the wall and contained a few fragments of coarse ware. Without in any way disregarding their presence, it must be borne in mind that digging down to such depths elsewhere upon the site the writer failed to detect any disturbance of the soil. The probability of a pillar base (no. 1) occupying that spot had not at the time of the excavation suggested itself to the excavators. Perhaps it is therefore safer to explain the presence of these lower carbonaceous layers or patches by assuming that either a pit was here originally or that they resulted from the digging for the wall foundations.

The exact relationship between the pillar bases and the walls has never been satisfactorily determined, and it is unfortunate that the bases were not discovered first and their formation traced out before any disturbance of those in the proximity of the walls (nos. 1, 3, 9, 10) had taken place. It is noteworthy that the two lines of bases, although set out square with the building are not centrally placed between the N. and S. walls. The east line of flints is again puzzling and seems to be nothing more than a line to indicate the position for a more substantial wall that was never built. At the most it may have supported a fence or partition.

The finding of the chape and enamelled boss, both objects of early date, on bases nos. 9 and 11, and the fact that two bases (nos. 1 and 9) appear to be partly covered by the walls, suggest that the lay-out of the circles of flint took place before the erection of the walls. Indeed, the abrupt termination of the N. and S. walls points to the commencement of a fairly substantial building, which for reasons unknown was never completed.

A barn-like structure with two rows of post colonnades supporting a roof is the simplest form of Romano-British dwelling in this country. It is known as the basilican villa and besides being the poorest, is certainly the earliest. Mr. R. G. Collingwood cites several examples most of which are to be found in Hampshire.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *Archaeology of Roman Britain*, pp. 129-134.

At Stroud, near Petersfield, Hants, a villa was discovered which had originally been built on basilican lines, and was later modified into the corridor type. Two rows of sandstone column bases, fairly regularly spaced, were uncovered, the intervals averaging 11 to 12 feet. These bases were roughly circular and were mortised in their centres to a depth of 2 feet. Examination revealed charred matter in the sockets, proving that the pillars were of wood.<sup>19</sup> Although no such mortise holes were noticed at Canhurst Farm, it is not improbable that they existed.

It appears obvious from the above remarks that the building at Knowl Hill is the remains of a very humble abode or merely a barn belonging to a more spacious house that has not yet been located.<sup>20</sup> It would appear to date from the first century A.D. and may have been occupied throughout the second century. The absence of third and fourth century pottery forms and late imperial bronze coins makes it almost certain that the structure, such as it was, had fallen into disuse before this period.

W.A.S.

The writers would like to express their warmest thanks and acknowledgements to Mr. Victor Martin, who has directed the greater part of the excavations, and without whose invaluable day-to-day diary the writing of this second report would have been considerably hampered. They also wish to thank all who took part in the excavating, especially Sergeant Rolfe, who uncovered most of the flint bases, and Mr. E. Plomer, who is responsible for the photograph of the N.W. corner (Pl. II). Thanks are again due to the authorities of the Reading Museum who facilitated carrying out this work.

The excavations have now been filled in, but those desirous of examining the finds should apply to Mr. Martin at Canhurst Farm, Knowl Hill.

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<sup>19</sup> *Archaeological Journal* lxi., p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> *B.A.J.*, xxxvi., p. 36.