

II: Town Farm Quarry, Norley, Cheshire

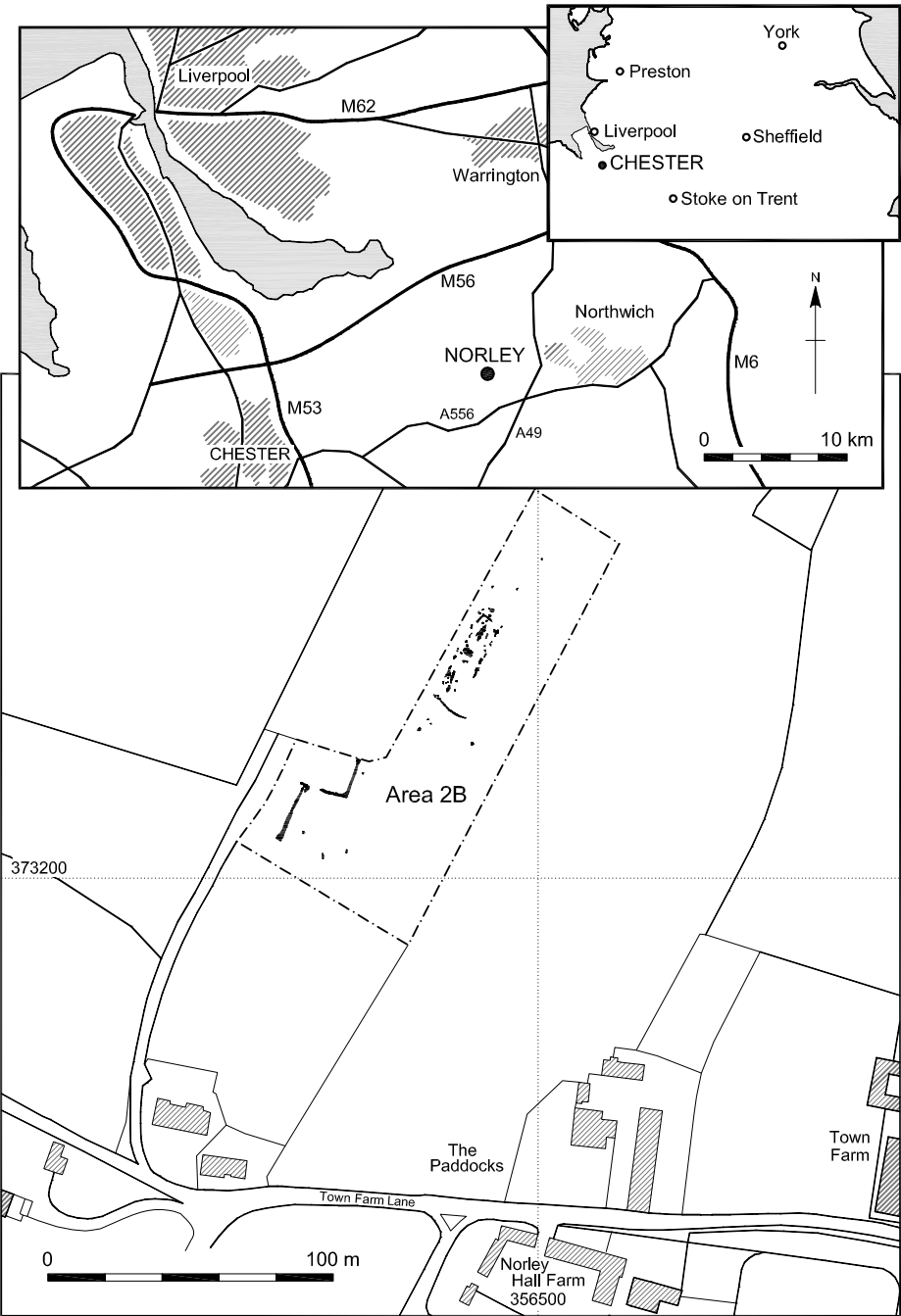
by **Oliver Cooper and Greg Speed**
with contributions by **R.S. Leary and Margaret Ward**

Archaeological monitoring was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd in 2003 during topsoil stripping of an extension to Town Farm Quarry, Norley, Cheshire. The work identified two areas of heavily plough-truncated archaeological features. Investigation of these features showed them to consist of slots, ditches and lines of pits delineating a series of enclosures. A number of pits were concentrated within one of the enclosures, but also scattered more generally across the excavated area. Structural remains in this enclosure were restricted to a group of postholes possible representing a small rectangular building, and a line of larger postholes possible forming one side of a larger structure the remainder of which had already been lost to quarrying. A small assemblage of pottery indicated a Romano-British date for these features. The second group of enclosure features did not produce any finds, but the similarity of alignment suggested that they were broadly contemporary. The relatively aggressive acidic soil conditions on the site meant that little animal bone survived, and little palaeoenvironmental evidence was recovered from soil samples.

The pottery assemblage recovered from the site, although small, was of some significance due to the limited dataset available for rural Romano-British sites in Cheshire. The material, which had a relatively restricted date range of the mid to late 2nd century, was unusual in that it included a relatively high proportion of imported material consisting of Spanish amphora and Gaulish samian, and also a mortarium from Mansetter-Hartshill and coarsewares from Dorset and the Severn Valley. The presence of this material suggests either relatively high status for the site or a preference for Roman eating habits.

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken in May and June 2003 during topsoil and subsoil stripping in two areas, designated Areas 2B and 3, in advance of sand and gravel extraction at Town Farm Quarry, Norley, 5km west of Northwich in Cheshire (Ill.II.1). The work was undertaken by Northern Archaeological Associates Ltd on behalf of Hanson Aggregates Plc. Work in Area 2B involved the stripping of an area of approximately 0.8ha for mineral extraction along the south-eastern boundary of the permitted development area (centred at SJ 5648 7327). Area 3 consisted of the construction of 360m of access road (10m wide) to the north of the



III.II.1: Town Farm Quarry, Norley: site location

existing quarry (SJ 5637 7354). Archaeological features within this second area were limited to a small number of undated pits, and they are not described further within this report.

An archaeological assessment of the then proposed extension and haul road had been undertaken as part of the planning application submission (NAA 2001). This concluded that there was a slight potential for unrecorded early prehistoric sites to survive within the project area. An archaeological condition was subsequently attached to the planning permission for the scheme requiring an archaeological watching brief during topsoil stripping of the extension area and the haul road.

Location, topography and geology

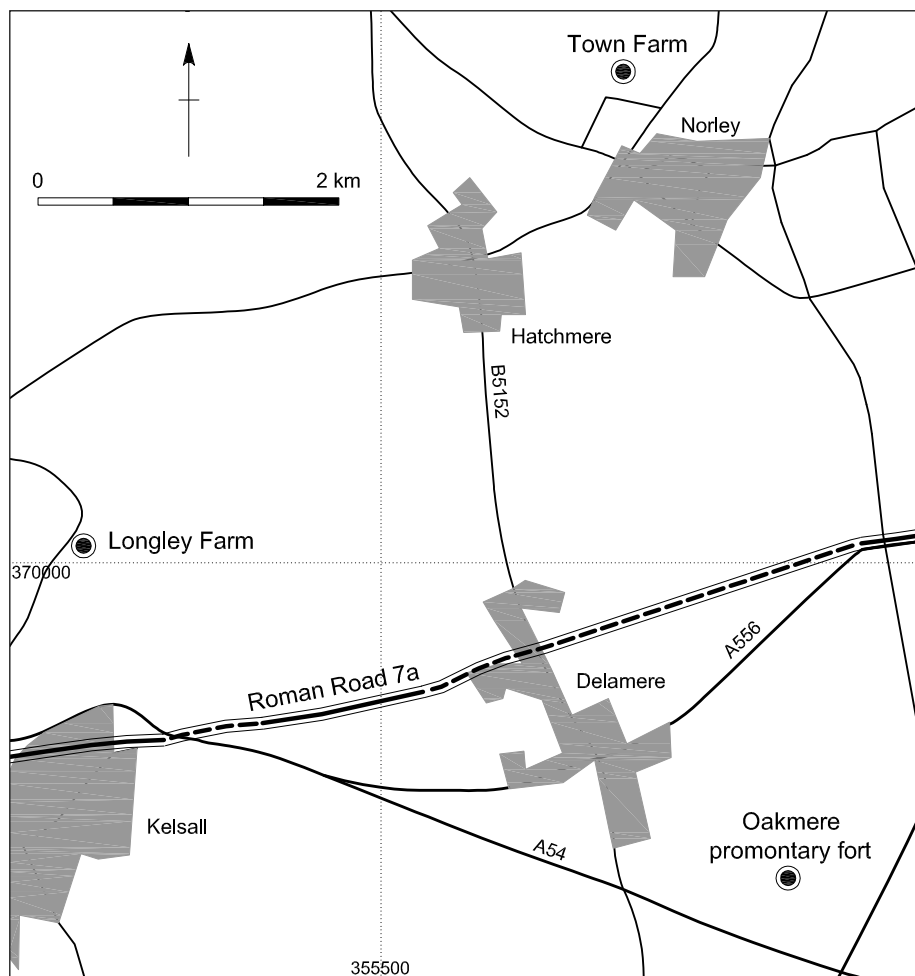
The quarry is situated north of Norley Hall and Town Farm Lane, which are located about 1km north-west of Norley village centre (III.II.1). The site lies to the east of the Mid-Cheshire Ridge, on the northern edge of the sheet of Delamere Sand, which overlies the lower mudstones of the Mercia Mudstone Group (GSGB 1965 and 1986). The soils are of the Newport 1 Association, predominantly sandy loams which are characteristically acidic and free-draining but of poor natural fertility (Jarvis *et al* 1984, 249–53; SSEW 1983). This steep northern edge of Delamere Sand is capped by rising glacial till, which forms the surface of the low ground between Kingsley and Weaverham. The general topography of the quarry area is undulating hummocky relief characterised by a series of glacial sand and gravel ridges and plateaux separated in places by steep-sided gullies. The archaeological features were identified at the top of a steep east-facing slope down into one of these gullies.

Archaeological background

The archaeological assessment (NAA 2001) found no direct evidence to suggest that Iron Age or Romano-British occupation was likely to be present within the area of the quarry. Within this part of Cheshire the distribution of sites during these periods is poorly understood and it was difficult to draw any meaningful conclusions from the little evidence that existed. The area was not particularly sensitive to aerial photographic survey, the steeper topography of the Mid-Cheshire Ridge meaning that large areas lie either under permanent pasture or woodland, notably Delamere Forest. There was very little artefactual or palynological evidence for this period, particularly around Delamere and Norley.

Excavations at Eddisbury hillfort (SJ 553 694) and Beeston Castle hillfort (SJ 538 592) suggested that these two sites, at least, must have dominated the area around the Mid-Cheshire Ridge during the early Iron Age period (Leah *et al* 1997), but at the time of the assessment there appeared to be little evidence for occupation or activity beyond these prestige sites and none to suggest it was occurring as far north as Norley.

The evidence for the distribution of sites for the later Iron Age and Romano-British period within the area was equally obscure and again did not suggest occupation during this period around the Norley area. The nearest recorded sites to the quarry were the probable Iron Age or Romano-British field system near Longley Farm, Kelsall, nearly 6km to the south-west of the quarry, and the late prehistoric promontory fort at Oakmere on the east side of the mere nearly 6km to the south-east (III.II.2).



III.II.2: Nearby archaeological sites

Except for the network of Roman roads around Delamere and Oakmere to the south and the road from Chester towards Northwich and Manchester (Margary 1973, 300–1, 7a), which passes some 3.5km to the south of the Town Farm site, the Roman conquest appeared to have had very little impact on the area in general. There was no recorded evidence for either Roman military or civilian activity within the vicinity of the site and no evidence to suggest that such remains were likely.

Watching brief and excavation results

Following the discovery of a small amount of Roman pottery during initial topsoil stripping of the northern half of Area 2B, preliminary examination revealed archaeological features concealed by a subsoil deposit. Mechanical removal of this lower subsoil deposit was then completed under archaeological direction in order to define the extent of the archaeological features. Mechanical excavation ceased when archaeological features were encountered to permit excavation and recording.

Area 2B was an irregular area of approximately 6800m² on the top and eastern slope of a ridge aligned north-east to south-west to the south-east of the existing quarry (SJ 564 733). Within this area the natural subsoil consisted of mixed deposits of orange and yellow sandy clays. Interspersed with these deposits were spreads of yellow sand and gravel. The natural subsoil was sealed by a 0.2m thick layer (context 02) of friable, reddish brown, slightly silty sand containing some pebbles and larger stones. The topsoil (01) was 0.2m thick and consisted of friable, dark reddish brown loamy sand. Layer (02) produced a fragment of oxidised Roman pottery, possibly a mid-2nd century Severn Valley fabric. Three sherds of Central Gaulish samian ware, dating to the latter part of the 2nd century AD, were unstratified (context 40), but probably also originated from this deposit.

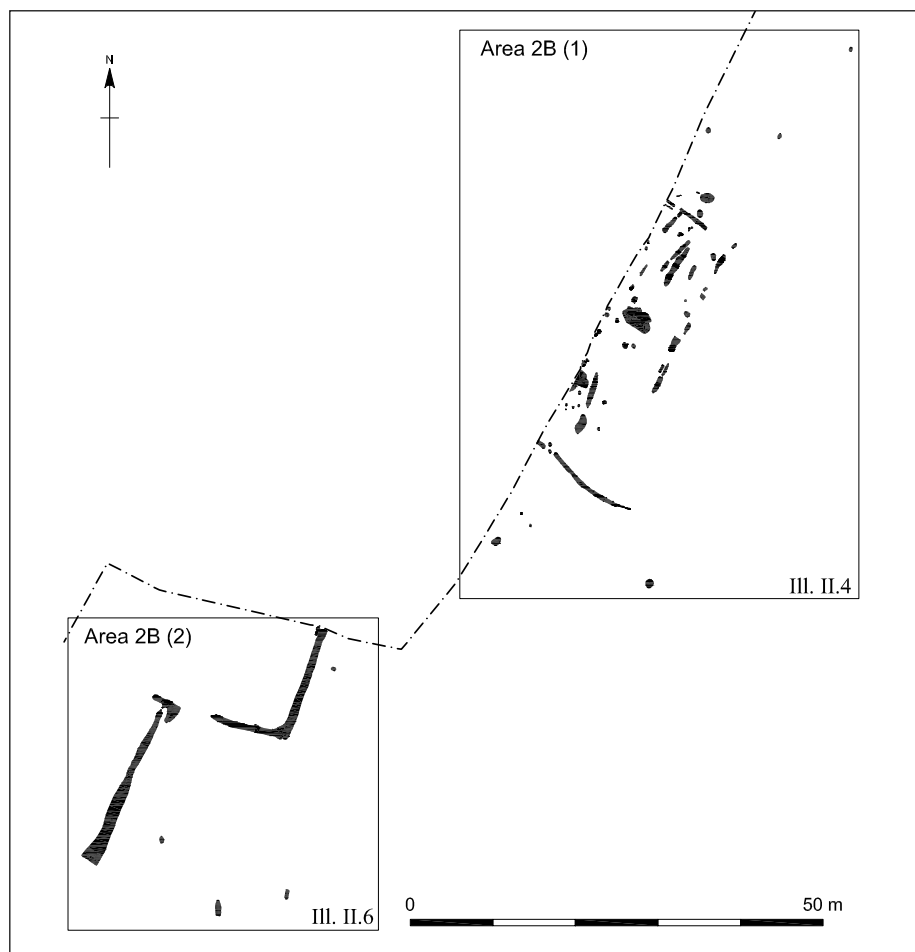
All recorded archaeological features were cut into the natural deposits and sealed by subsoil (02). All had been badly truncated by ploughing and only their lower portions survived (in many cases less than 0.1m). Truncation was most severe towards the eastern slope of the ridge.

The features were located in two main groups: Area 2B (1) and Area 2B (2) (III.II.3). Area 2B (1) was an area of fairly concentrated settlement activity extending along the eastern edge of the glacial ridge (III.II.4). Area 2B (2) comprised a system of linear ditches lying approximately 50m to the south-west of Area 2B (1). In addition, a small number of pits were found randomly spread across Area 2B in areas external to both groups.

Area 2B(1)

This area of concentrated activity spread across an area of some 500m², measuring approximately 34m north to south and 14m west to east (III.II.4). The northern side was defined by two gullies on a north-west to south-east alignment (23, 26). Gully 26 was 4.05m long, up to 0.42m wide and 0.18m deep with a uniform rounded profile and terminals. The alignment of gully (26) was continued to the west by gully (23) which was traced for 1.24m, and was 0.32m wide and 0.06m deep with a rounded profile and rounded eastern terminal. It was paralleled on its southern side by a similar but slightly narrower feature (24). The westward extension of both features had been truncated by earlier mineral extraction. The southern side of the area of settlement activity was also defined by two linear features on a north-west to south-east alignment (43, 44). Gully (44) was traced for 11.6m and curved towards the north at its eastern end. It was up to 0.63m wide and 0.18m deep with a semi-regular rounded profile and rounded western terminal. The alignment of gully (44) was continued west by gully (43), which was traced for 0.57m and was of similar dimensions and profile to gully (44). These gullies were separated by a gap of 1.7m, which had possibly formed an entrance to the main area of settlement activity.

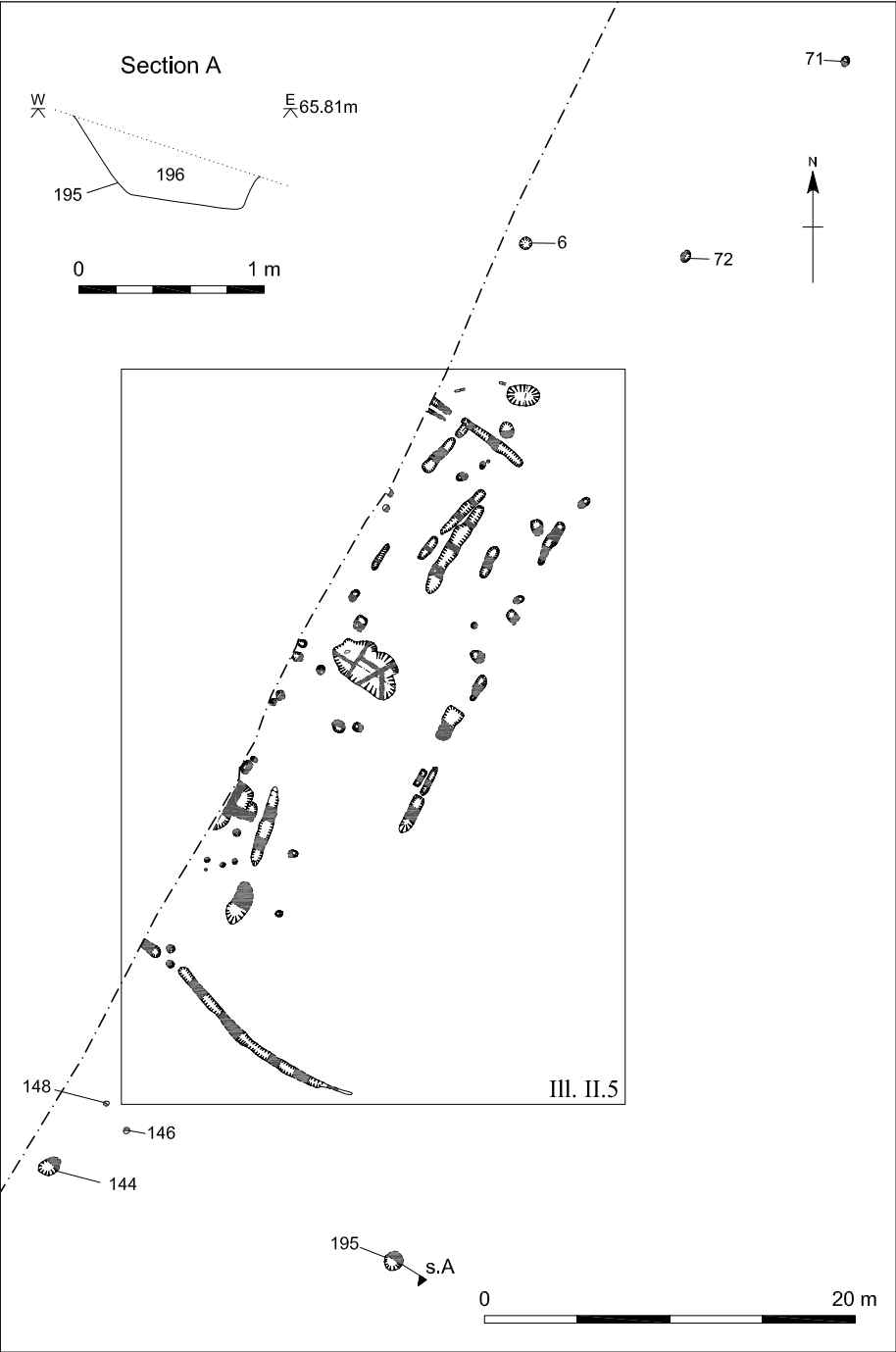
The south-eastern extent of this area was defined by a north-east to south-west alignment of six elongated pits or gullies (77, 90, 93, 94, 96, 98) interspersed with the remnants of four smaller sub-circular pits (78, 85, 87, 88). Combined, these features extended for 20m. Ploughing and/or soil erosion meant that they were only between 0.03m and 0.09m deep and it is possible that other features may have been lost. No finds or palaeoenvironmental material were recovered from any of these features.



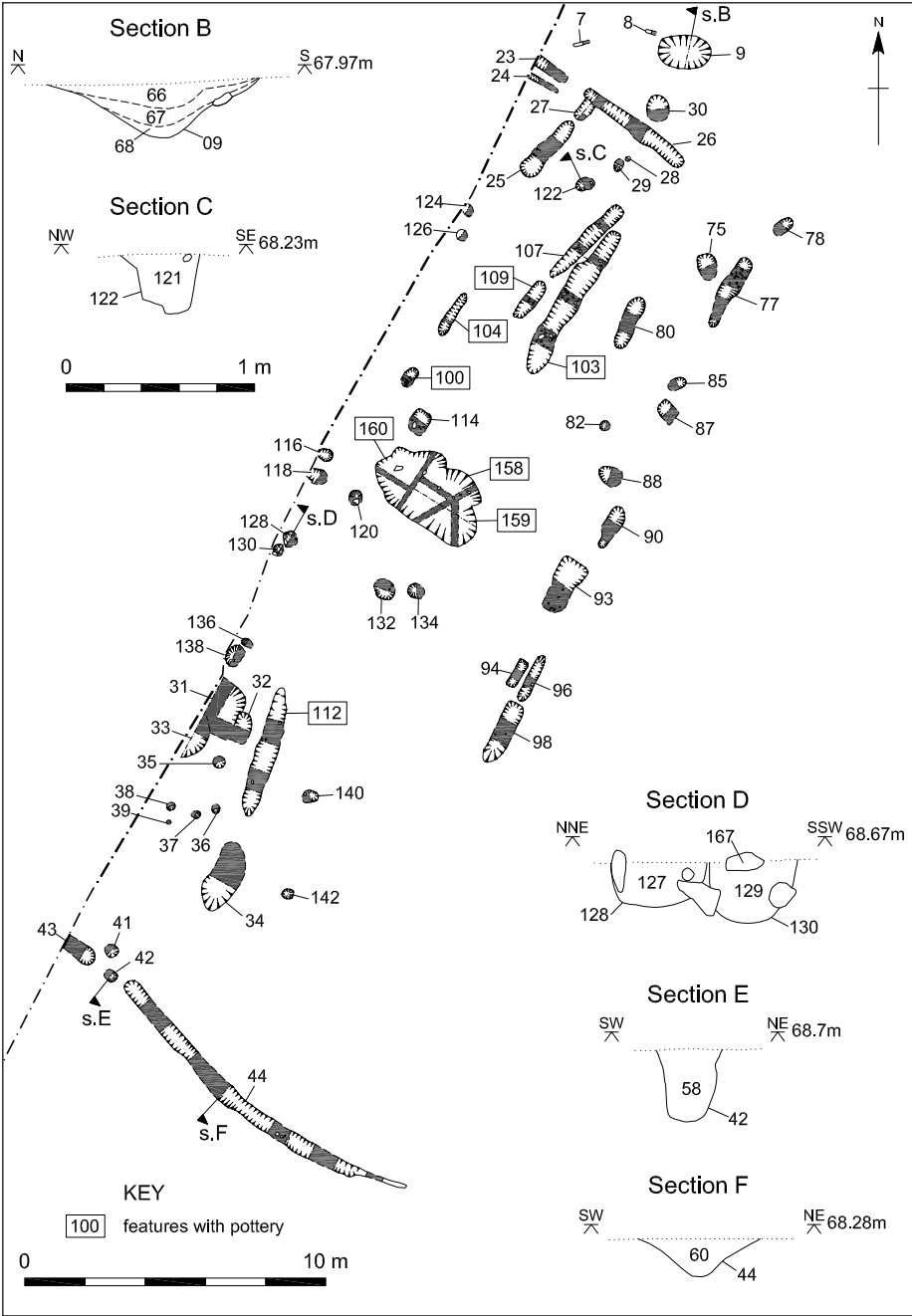
III.II.3: Overall plan of the archaeological features in Areas 2B(1) and 2B(2)

Within the 'enclosure' defined by these features (III.II.5) were a number of severely truncated cut features. The north-eastern part of the area contained a group of short linear gullies aligned from north-east to south-west. Within the central area were three large pits or groups of inter-cutting pits and 25 small pits or post holes. These included several paired pits and a cluster of five apparently related post-pits. Many of these features were very shallow, measuring less than 0.1m deep. Most of the linear features and three of the larger pits contained Roman pottery of mid to late 2nd century date.

The linear gullies within the northern part of the area were between 1.5m and 5.4m long and between 0.32m and 0.8m wide. Despite total excavation, it was not possible to determine their function. The largest gully of this group, gully (103), was filled by mid-brown, fine sand (102) which produced thirteen sherds of Roman pottery and fragments of fired clay and charcoal. Soil samples produced a few charred plant remains including unidentifiable cereal grain. Fill (106) of adjacent feature (107) produced a possible quernstone



III.II.4: Area 2B(1), excavated features.



III.II.5: The Area 2B(1) 'enclosure'

fragment and fill (108) of feature (109) produced two sherds of Roman pottery. Linear feature (104) located slightly to the west of these produced eighteen sooted sherds of a BB1 jar (fill 105). One of the sherds of Black-Burnished ware joined with one from fill (161) of pit (158). Fill (105) also produced a charred cereal grain and a fragment of calcined bone.

Within the central part of the 'enclosure' was a complex of large inter-cutting pits (158), (159) and (160). Overall, the pit group measured 4m long from east to west with a maximum width of 2.18m. The features had respective widths of 2.4m, 1.25m and 1.95m, but none was more than 0.16m deep. Despite almost total excavation, the inter-relationships and function of these features remained unclear. All three features produced sherds of Roman pottery, with pit (158) being the most productive.

A second group of inter-cutting large pits (31, 32 and 33) was located towards the south-west edge of the area, but again their function and inter-relationships were unclear. The pits varied in size between $c.1\text{m} \times 0.54\text{m}$ (32) and $1.75\text{m} \times 1.43\text{m}$ (31), and were 0.12–0.17m deep. A nearby short linear gully (112) produced a sherd of Roman pottery. A large pit (34) just to the south of this, measuring 2.38m by 1.03m and 0.14m deep, did not produce finds.

Two possible structural groups of features were identified. To the west of gully (112) lay a group of five small circular post-pits (35–9). These measured between 0.15m and 0.38m in diameter and between 0.13m and 0.21m deep. While none contained packing stones, three had certainly contained small posts or stakes between 0.06m and 0.16m diameter, which had been driven between 0.08–0.17m past the base of their respective pits. These features may have formed part of a small rectangular structure aligned from north to south, 1.8m wide and measuring at least 1.8m long.

Several possible pairs of post-pits could be identified within the occupation area: these included (136) and (138); (128) and (130); (116) and (118) and (124) and (126). These post-pits ranged in diameter from between 0.38m and 0.76m. Pits (138) to (124) formed a line approximately 6m long on a north-east to south-west alignment. It was possible that these pairs of post-pits represent the heavily truncated remains of a post-built feature. Pits (128) and (130) had a layer of packing stones within their base. No finds or palaeoenvironmental material were recovered.

A number of other truncated post-holes and pits were located within the northern part of the 'enclosure'. Apart from pit (100), which contained three sherds of Roman pottery, none produced finds. A number of other pits were scattered to the north-east and south-west of the 'enclosure', and others to the east are likely to have been lost due to truncation. None of these features produced any dating evidence.

Area 2B (2)

A second group of archaeological features designated group 2B(2) was recorded some 50m south-west of the enclosure 2B(1). These features included the south-eastern corner of a ditched enclosure, another linear ditch running south-west from the enclosure, and

several pits (III.II.6). The ditches lay on a similar alignment to the features in area 2B(1) and were considered to be broadly contemporary; although, no dating evidence was recovered from this second group of features.

The south-eastern side of the enclosure was demarcated by ditch (175). This was traced over a length of some 14m, lost due to previous quarrying to the north-east. It was up to 1.05m wide and 0.40m deep with a rather irregular profile (III.II.7). The fill produced some unidentifiable unburnt fragments of animal bone. At its south-western end, the ditch returned to the north-west for 10m, recorded as ditch (173). This was up to 0.78m wide and 0.36m deep, and produced fragments of unburnt cattle bone. For part of its length, the northern side of the ditch cut a parallel, gully-like feature (185). This had a 'V'-shaped profile, was 0.16m deep and was at least 0.3m wide.

To the north-west, the line of ditch (173) was continued after a gap of at least 4m by another short length of ditch (176). This had a surviving length of 2.2m, was 0.6m wide and up to 0.22m deep. Its eastern end had been cut away a small post-hole (177) and then by a large, irregularly-shaped pit (170). This was 2.5m long, 1.6m wide and 0.6m deep, and produced some unburnt fragments of cattle tooth and bone.

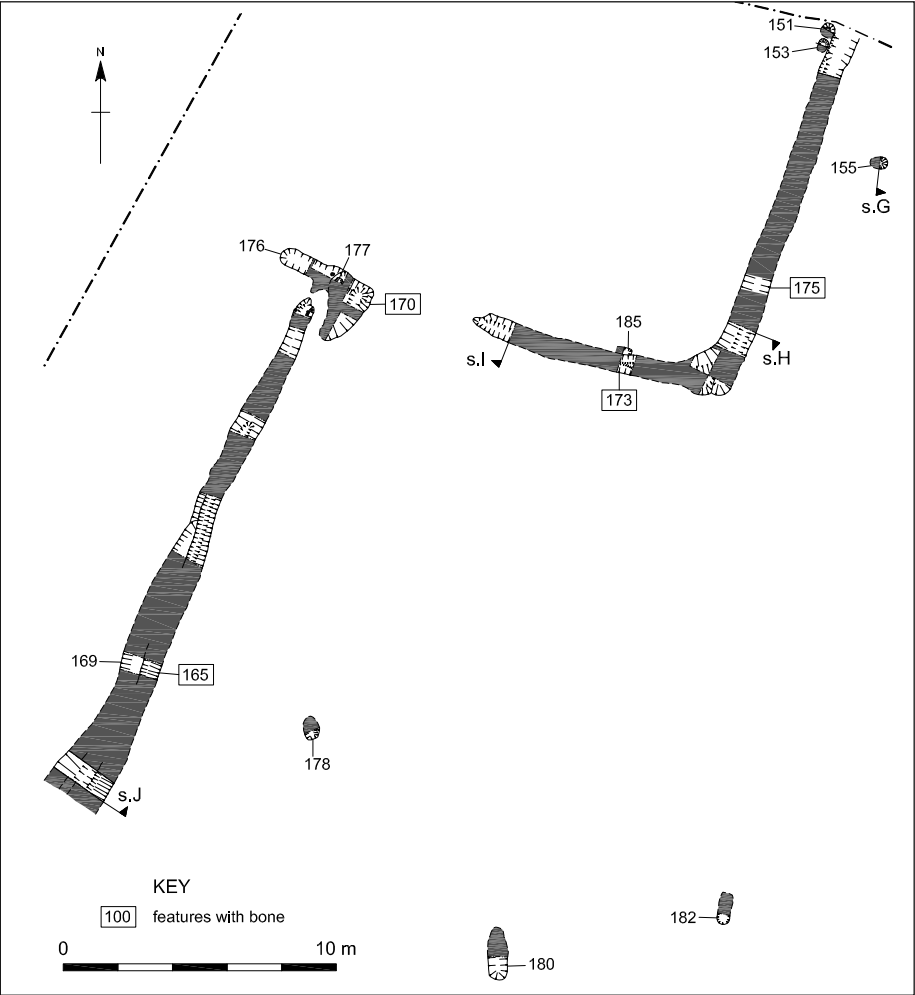
Another linear ditch (165) ran to the south-west at right angles from ditch (176). The two ditches did not quite meet, and the similarity of the deposits and the proximity of ditches (176), (165) and pit (170) resulted in the sequence of the relationships between them being indeterminate.

Ditch (165) was recorded over a distance of 20.5m, continuing to the south-west. It gradually widened to the south-west, up to 1.77m wide and 0.62m deep at the limit of excavation, with a round-based 'V'-shaped profile. The fill (164) produced fragments of unburnt cattle long bones.

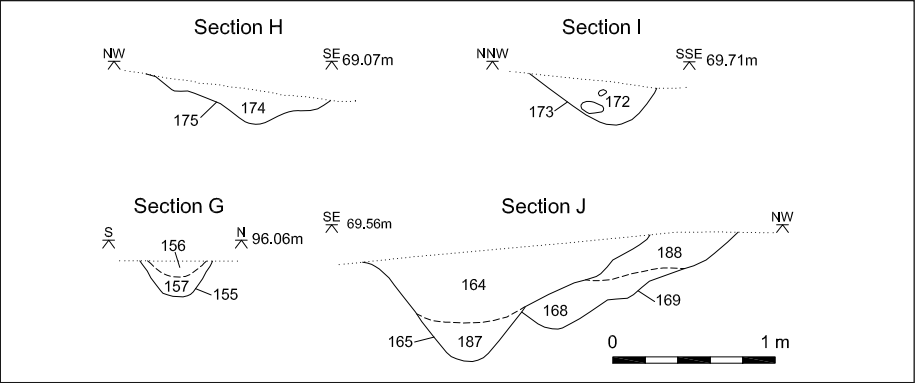
Excavation showed that ditch (165) was a recut of an earlier ditch (169) diverging slightly westwards to the south-west. This was identified as a separate cut over a distance of some 12m. It had been more than 1.11m wide, was up to 0.53m deep and had a shallow 'v'-shaped profile.

A number of pits and possible post holes were recorded in this area. Two small pits (151 and 153) were located at the north-western (inner) edge of ditch (175) at the northern limit of excavation. They were 0.36–0.53m in diameter. Pit (151) had a 0.18m diameter possible post-socket cutting its base, giving the feature a total depth of 0.52m. The pit appeared to have been cut by ditch (175). Pit (153) was only 0.06m deep. A third similarly sized pit (155) was located external to the enclosure, a few metres to the south.

Two pits were recorded to the south-east of the enclosure features. Pits (178) and (180) were oval and respectively 0.83m and 1.79m long, 0.26m and 0.29m deep, and had steep-sloping sides. A third pit (182) was considered by the excavator to be of likely modern origin.



III.II.6: Area 2B(2), excavated features



III.II.7: Area 2B(2), enclosure sections

A number of bulk soil samples were collected from features in both areas and submitted for assessment to the Environmental Archaeology Consultancy. The samples generally produced poor carbonised plant assemblages with little potential for interpreting the site, and no further analysis was undertaken. The density of occupation debris was low in all samples, but included a little pottery, fired earth, charred cereal grain and charcoal with an indication, from the presence of hammerscale, that some iron-smithing was taking place somewhere on site but not near the sampled features. The animal bone from the site was in poor condition and it was evident that a considerable proportion of such material may have degraded and been lost from the deposits.

The Romano-British pottery

R.S. Leary

Sixty-three sherds of Romano-British pottery (603g) were identified from the site and these included nine samian sherds (see Ward below). Only one rim sherd was found and this was incomplete. It came from a BB1 jar of mid to late 2nd century form (Gillam 1976, no. 3). Although a small group, it falls above the threshold considered reliable for analysis using count and weight measures (Evans 1991, 70; Hodder 1974).

An archive catalogue was compiled for all the pottery according to the standard laid down by the Study Group for Romano-British Pottery (Darling 2004). None of the pottery merited illustration and the assemblage is summarised below. The fabric series was cross-referenced with National Fabric Collection codes (Tomber and Dore 1998) where possible.

Fabric and vessel types

Fabric descriptions after Peacock 1977 and Orton 1980.

- Dressel 20: Dressel 20 amphora. Spanish olive oil amphora. (Tomber and Dore 1998)
BAT AM 1
- BB1: Black-burnished ware category 1 from Dorset. (Tomber and Dore 1998)
DOR BB1
- GRB: grey ware, Cheshire Plain. Light brown/grey with darker extant surfaces, but possibly no original surface left and this is the margins revealed. Hard with irregular fracture. Sparse, well-sorted, coarse, sub-angular quartz and rare, ill-sorted, irregular and rounded shaped black/brown inclusions which appear to be ferric in nature. Most like Middlewich GRB8 (Leary 2008).
- OAA: medium orange with buff core. Possibly Severn Valley. Soft, smooth with finely irregular fracture. Rare, well-sorted, medium, sub-rounded quartz, sparse, ill-sorted, medium-fine, rounded red/brown inclusions (clay pellets) and moderate, fine sub-rounded quartz. Sparse, fine, mica visible on surface. This fabric is similar Warwickshire fabric series O23, a Severn Valley fabric and OAB4 at Middlewich (Leary 2008). The buff core is also typical of some Severn Valley fabrics and less common amongst the Cheshire Plains wares.
- OAB: orange, hard with sandy feel and hackly fracture. Cheshire Plain Moderate, well-sorted, medium, sub-rounded quartz, sparse, medium, rounded red/brown inclusions. Sandier than most Cheshire Plain ware. Similar to Middlewich OAB2 (Leary 2008).

- SV2 : Severn Valley ware with black inclusions, ?charcoal. Reddish orange, soft, but fairly smooth. Irregular fracture. Sparse, ill-sorted elongated voids and black inclusions, fine to coarse. Sparse medium quartz and fine mica.
- FLB: orange with wide grey core and cream slip inside handle. Possibly Cheshire Plain. Very hard, rather conchoidal fracture and smooth feel. Rare, medium, sub-angular quartz,
- MH: Mancetter-Hartshill. Fine-textured, cream fabric, fairly soft. Rare, medium-fine, angular red/brown inclusions, probably grog. One reddish brown trituration grit, probably re-fired pottery. The trituration grit after AD130–140 consisted of hard red-brown and/or hard blackish material (probably re-fired pottery fragments), with only very rare quartz fragments. Earlier mortaria usually have a mixed trituration grit in which quartz and sandstone are normal components.
- CG: Central Gaulish samian
- EG: East Gaulish samian

The majority of the coarse ware sherds were from jars where the vessel type could be determined. These were predominantly in BB1 ware, but one probably grey ware jar base was present in context (161). The forms of the oxidised sherds, which were excessively abraded, were uncertain but these were probably jars also. A Dressel 20 oil amphora was represented by two sherds from (161). One scrap of mortarium came from context (101). It retained one trituration grit and was tentatively identified as a sherd from a Mancetter-Hartshill mortarium, probably dating after AD140/50. One ribbed flagon handle was present. Bowls and dishes were present in the samian assemblage.

Site chronology

Only ten contexts contained Romano-British pottery and all the sherds are consistent with a date in the mid to late 2nd century (Table II.1). Many of the sherds were abraded and relatively small with an average sherd weight of 10g overall. Some of the sherds are very abraded, including the samian, amphora, mortarium, grey and oxidised wares whereas the BB1 wares, from the same contexts, are less abraded. The oxidised wares and samian often lose their surfaces on Cheshire Plains sites due to soil conditions, but the degree of abrasion of amphora, mortarium and grey wares sherds compared with the BB1 wares cannot be explained in this way and imply some of the pottery sherds have been subjected to more thorough weathering and/or trampling than others, perhaps in a midden, before deposition in earth dug features.

A number of contexts contained BB1 sherds from Dorset (101, 102, 105, 108, 161, 162 and 163). Since BB1 ware began its northern circulation *c.* AD120, these fills belong to that date or later. BB1 bodysherds from context (102) bore acute lattice burnish lines and these help to narrow the dating to the second century while an incomplete BB1 rim sherd from context 161 is of a type dated to the mid to late second century. The neck of this vessel may have burnished curvilinear decoration, a motif which declined after the mid second century (Gillam 1976, 63), but this was uncertain. Another BB1 sherd in context (161) may have derived from the shoulder of a second jar, probably from a bead-rim vessel dating to the mid to late 2nd century (Gillam 1976 no 31). This context also contained two

| <i>Context</i> | <i>Feature</i> | <i>Date</i> | <i>Nos</i> | <i>Weight (g)</i> | <i>Rim %</i> | <i>Av sherd weight (g)</i> |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 02 | subsoil | Roman, optimum mid-2nd century | 1 | 12 | | 12 |
| 101 | 100 pit | | 3 | 16 | | 5 |
| 102 | 103 gully | AD150–180/200 | 13 | 47 | | 4 |
| 105 | 104 gully | Mid to late 2nd century | 18 | 61 | 5 | 3 |
| 108 | 109 gully | AD120+ | 2 | 18 | | 9 |
| 111 | 112 gully | Roman | 1 | 2 | | 2 |
| 161 | 158 pit | Mid to late 2nd century, AD150–80 | 18 | 424 | | 24 |
| 162 | 159 pit | AD120+, probably 2nd century | 1 | 3 | | 3 |
| 163 | 160 pit | AD120+, probably 2nd century | 3 | 12 | | 4 |
| 40 | Unstratified | AD150–80 | 3 | 8 | | 3 |
| Total | | | 63 | 603 | 5 | 10 |

Table II.1: Quantification and date range of pottery by context

Dressel 20 bodysherds and samian of AD150–80 and AD140–70. Context (101) also contained sherds from an FLB flagon handle and a MH mortarium. The flagon is of uncertain date, but a date within the second century or earlier third century is likely. The MH mortarium sherd has a re-fired pottery trituration grit and is, therefore, likely to date after the mid second century (Tomber and Dore 1998, 188). Oxidised sherds from context (02), subsoil, and context (111) are of uncertain date. The samian supported a mid to late second century date range for site activity. The Severn Valley ware from context (102) is consistent with the date range suggested by the samian from this context, AD150–200, since Severn Valley wares were more common in the Cheshire Plain in and after the mid/late 2nd century (Webster 1974, 94; Webster 1992, 42) although examples are known from Flavian contexts at Chester (Carrington 1977; Tyers 1996, 197).

Pottery supply

The site was supplied with small amounts of traded items, namely samian from Gaul, Spanish amphora, a mortarium from Mancetter-Hartshill, near Coventry and coarse wares from Dorset and the Severn Valley (Table II.2). The globular-shaped Dressel 20 amphora is the most commonly found amphora form imported into Roman Britain (Williams and Peacock 1983). They were made specifically to transport by sea the large surplus of olive oil produced by the many estates situated in the valley of the River Guadalquivir and its tributaries between Seville and Cordoba in the southern Spanish Roman province of Baetica, and some 150 kiln sites are presently known (Ponsich 1974; 1979; 1991; Remesal 1986; Peacock and Williams 1986, Class 25). The globular Dressel 20 form was made over a long period, from the reign of Claudius until shortly after the middle of the third century AD.

The samian vessels were from kilns in Central and East Gaul and were all bowls and dishes — fine tableware. A single mortarium was identified and this was of Mancetter-Hartshill type, major potteries near Coventry which supplied much of the mortaria in the military north. Local mortaria were made in the Cheshire Plain during the second century, but Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria were more common after the mid second century as local

| <i>Fabric</i> | <i>No sherds</i> | <i>Weight sherds (g)</i> | <i>Rim %</i> | <i>Av weight</i> | <i>Rel % Nos</i> | <i>Rel % Weight</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| BB1 | 31 | 141 | 5 | 5 | 49.2 | 23.3 |
| CG | 6 | 62 | 0 | 10 | 9.5 | 10.3 |
| DR20 | 2 | 198 | | 99 | 3.2 | 32.7 |
| EG | 3 | 62 | 0 | 21 | 4.8 | 10.3 |
| FLB | 1 | 12 | | 12 | 1.6 | 1.9 |
| GRB | 5 | 68 | | 14 | 7.9 | 11.2 |
| MH | 1 | 2 | | 2 | 1.6 | 0.3 |
| OAA | 2 | 26 | | 13 | 3.2 | 4.3 |
| OAB | 5 | 18 | | 4 | 7.9 | 3.0 |
| SV2 | 7 | 16 | | 2 | 11.1 | 2.6 |
| Total | 63 | 603 | 5 | 10 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| Total excl amphora | 57 | 406 | | 7 | | |

Table II.2: Quantification of fabrics

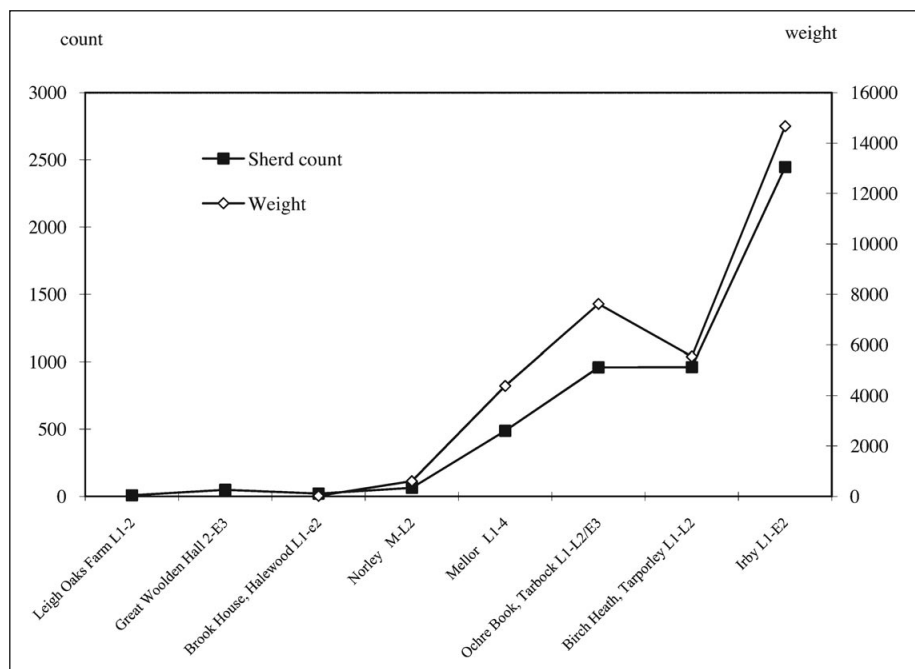
manufacture declined so their absence at Norley is consistent with the suggested date range of the site.

The presence of BB1 and Severn Valley ware reflects trends detected at Manchester in the mid to late second century (Leary 2007) when BB1 peaks and Severn Valley wares increase in number; although, this latter ware was never present in large numbers. The presence of these traded wares bears testament to the degree to which the site was integrated with the military trade network. Of note, however, is the absence of most of the fine wares found at the military sites and also the non-local wares which occur in small numbers such as two types of jars from the south Midlands (shell- and grog-tempered wares) found at Middlewich and Manchester, Derbyshire ware at Middlewich and at Nantwich and Cumbrian mortaria at Manchester (Leary 2007; 2008). These small scale exchanges, probably made possible by troop movements or small scale trade, perhaps of comestibles, were not available to the rural settlement.

The grey and oxidised wares are likely to be of local origin. In detail the wares compared better with samples of fabrics found at Middlewich than at Manchester or Wilderspool. The mortaria from Manchester and Middlewich suggested that small-scale local kilns were operating in the Cheshire Plain during the second century (Hartley and Leary 2007; Hartley and Leary 2008) and these, no doubt, supplied the roadside centres and surrounding rural settlement with coarse wares.

Site function and status

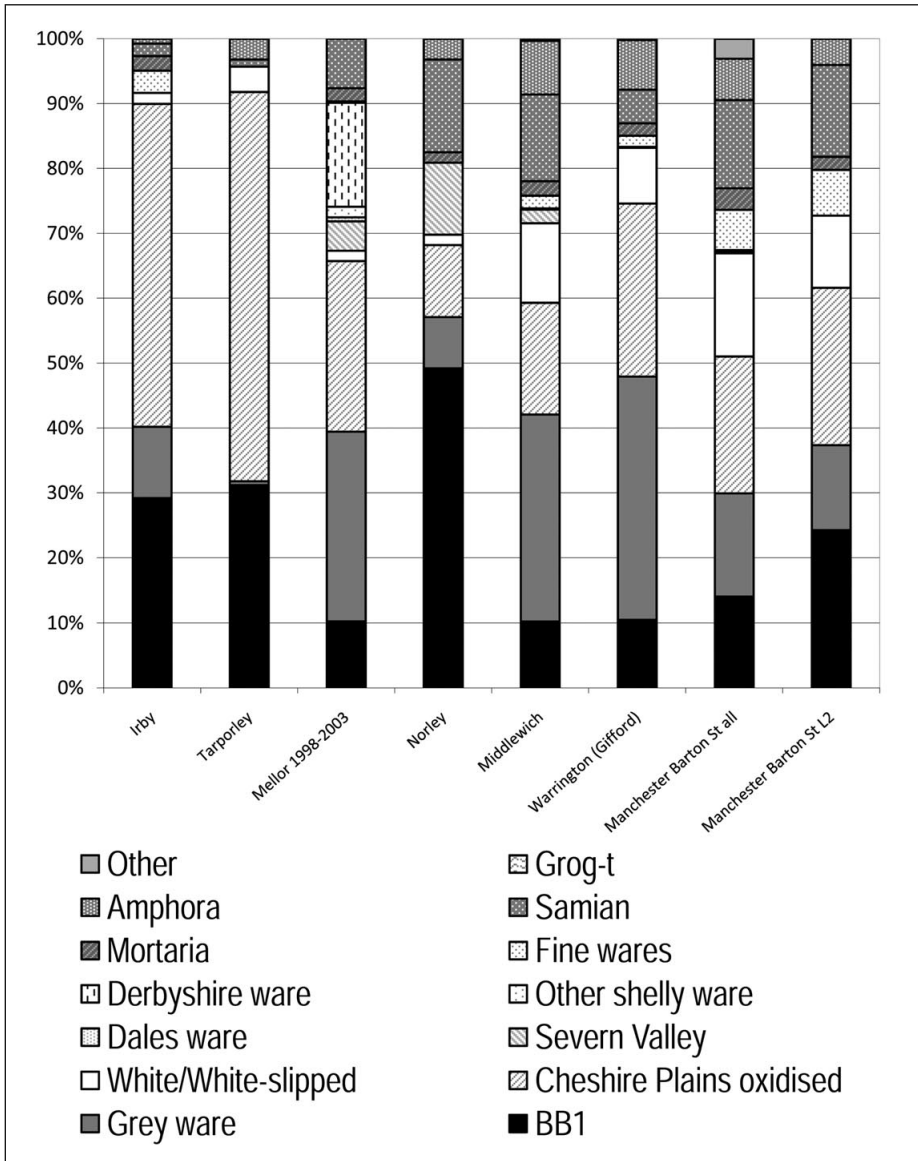
BB1 jar sherds from contexts (102), (105) and (108) were sooted and those from (101), (105) and (163) showed signs of surface deterioration caused by heat, presumably cooking. The mortarium scrap was worn inside. No sherds were repaired and no graffiti was identified.



III.II.8: Quantities of pottery from rural sites in Cheshire and Lancashire

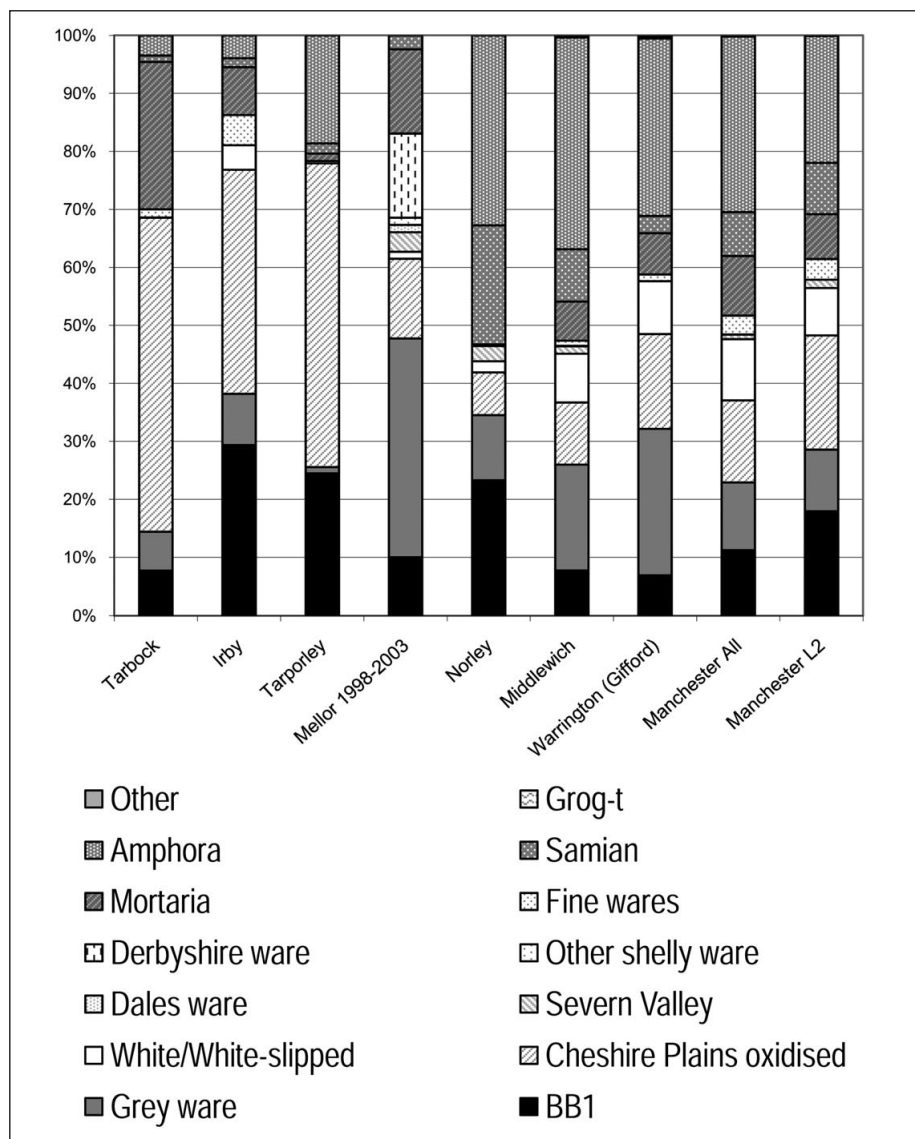
Any interpretations of this small group are, of necessity, limited due to its small size. Nevertheless, this group adds to a growing data set for the ceramics used on rural Cheshire settlements and has some distinctive characteristics that may prove significant as more data is collected. Differences in the wares and vessels types being used on sites can disclose patterns that relate to the status and character of the site (Evans 1993 and 2001). The group from Norley, albeit small (III.II.8), includes evidence for some degree of articulation with the military-led trade from the Continent. The site is unusual amongst the rural sites in that both Spanish amphora and Central and East Gaulish samian are well represented even though the assemblage is small (III.II.9). The presence of imported wares may indicate relative high social status or an acceptance of, and preference for, Roman eating habits. As at Mellor other key tablewares, in this case flagons and beakers, are not present or rare. The BB1 cooking jars and mortaria demonstrate use of Roman vessels for food preparation and cooking, although the mortarium is not considered necessarily distinctively Roman (Evans 1993, 103–4).

The proportion of BB1 is unusually high and this is also true if weights are used (III.II.10), although again the small size of the assemblage advises caution in interpretation. It may be that there was an increase in the use of BB1 in the mid to late 2nd century and that this ware was particularly favoured on rural settlements. A similar rise in BB1 in the 2nd century was noted at Mellor (Leary 2005, 45). The lower relative numbers on military sites such as Manchester Barton St (III.II.9) is partially the result of the wider range of wares present reducing the relative quantity of BB1. During the mid to late 2nd century over half the bowls, dishes and jars at Barton St were BB1 products.



III.II.9: Relative quantities of wares (by sherd count) at Tarbock (Jones 2000), Irby (Philpott and Adams 1999), Tarporley (Fairbairn 2002), Mellor (Leary 2005), Middlewich (Leary 2008), Warrington (Lucas 2007) and Manchester Barton St (Leary 2007)

The numbers at Norley may imply a preference for BB1 cooking pots. At Mellor the BB1 jars are less numerous overall and their place is taken by Derbyshire ware jars, perhaps reflecting ethnic or tribal differences as well as regional variations (III.II.9 and II.10 and Leary 2005). BB1 or BB1 type bowls and dishes, by contrast, are not represented at Norley suggesting they may not have been so appealing. The opposite situation was noted on a rural settlement in the Arrow Valley, Warwickshire where BB1 jars were absent and BB1



III.II.10: Relative quantities of wares (by sherd weight) at Tarbock (Jones 2000), Irby (Philpott and Adams 1999), Tarporley (Fairbairn 2002), Mellor (Leary 2005), Middlewich (Leary 2008), Warrington (Lucas 2007) and Manchester Barton St (Leary 2007)

bowls and dishes present. Evans suggested that perhaps local sources of jars were satisfactory here, but bowls and dishes could not be readily obtained (1999, 103).

This relatively small group adds to the growing evidence for the selective manner in which rural settlement related to the imposed Roman presence in the region and its accompanying trade and exchange network. Although a small group, it is useful in its apparently short life and the nature of the ceramics compares well with evidence from elsewhere.

The samian ware

Margaret Ward

Contexts (40) and (161)

1. Central Gaulish moulded bowl, form 30. One sherd in context (40) displays the battered remains of an ovolo, probably Rogers type B106 as used by the potters Albucius and Paternus v (Ill.II.11). Below it lies a now unrecognisable horizontal border and the head of a horse (Oswald type 1910). Two other battered chips lacking decoration are presumed to represent the same bowl. In context (161), two adjoining wallsherds show more of the freestyle animal scene, including a panther (Oswald type 1511) to the left of a stag (Oswald 1720) below a large hind (Oswald 1805). On the far right, a figure-type that is now almost unrecognisable represents a large bear hunched over its food (Oswald 1608). All the animals appeared, as here, over partially impressed plant-motifs on a bowl of form 37, stamped by Albucius (Stanfield and Simpson 1958, 123.42). Albucius was a prolific potter who worked at Lezoux in the period *c.*AD150–180; this bowl is fairly typical of his firm. Weight 58g.

Context (161)

2. East Gaulish dish form 18/31 or, more likely, 31. Two very eroded, adjoining pieces of the footring and lower wall of a dish with a fairly high basal ‘kick.’ The foot shows possible signs of wear from use, but it has suffered badly in the soil. This dish was produced in a workshop in the Argonne region in the earlier-Antonine period, most probably in the range *c.*AD140–160/170. Weight 59g.

3. A third fragment found in the same context appears also to have been a product of an Argonne workshop in the earlier-Antonine period. It may well represent the same vessel as No 2 above, but its extremely eroded condition, lacking all surfaces, has rendered it of indeterminate form. Weight 3g.

Context (102)

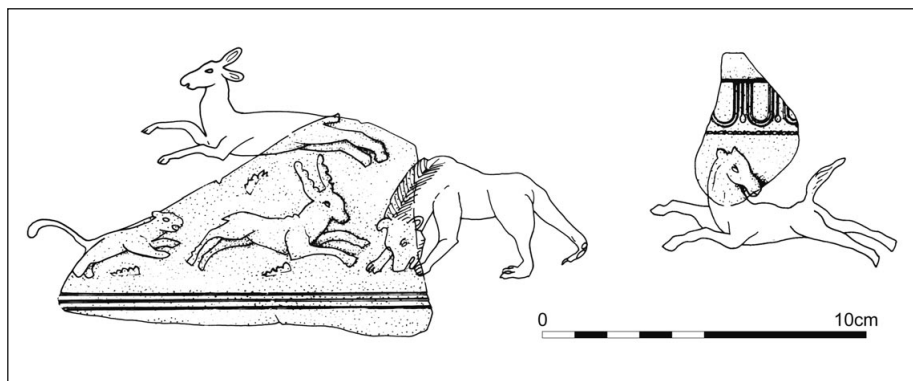
4. One battered and eroded fragment represents a vessel of indeterminate form that was produced at Lezoux in Central Gaul. It was possibly, but not certainly, from the same vessel as No 1 above. It can be dated only broadly in the range *c.*AD150–180/200 therefore. Weight 4g.

| <i>Form</i> | <i>South Gaulish</i> | <i>Central Gaulish</i> | <i>East Gaulish</i> | <i>Total</i> |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| 30 | | 1 | | 1 |
| 18/31 or 31 | | | 1 | 1 |
| Indeterminate | | 1 | 1 | 2 |

Table II.3: Summary of the samian vessels by form and fabric (maximum nos)

Summary

The nine sherds recovered from Town Farm 2003 represented a minimum of two and a maximum of four vessels, as catalogued in Table II.3. Two sherds were of indeterminate form, but may have belonged to the two firmly identifiable vessels. Environmental conditions



III.II.22: The decorated samian pottery

had affected the East Gaulish material in particular. However, the vessels appear to have been contemporary products of workshops in East and Central Gaul dated *c.* AD140–170 and *c.* 150–180 respectively; the former being a plain dish and the latter a moulded bowl from Lezoux in the style of Albucius. The East Gaulish dish was manufactured in a workshop in the Argonne region; such products are recorded elsewhere in the North-West, at sites including Chester fortress and civil settlement, Lancaster, Ribchester and Carlisle.

Any statistical analysis of such an extremely small sample is not only unwise, but impossible. However, it should be stressed that such groups in rural locations in the heart of Cheshire are highly significant and require full publication (cf. Ward 2000a, 14–15). For comparable groups in Cheshire and Merseyside, see for example Fairburn (2002, 77) and Ward (2000b). Records of such groups, however small, add much to our knowledge of the pottery supply to rural sites in the north of Roman Britain.

Discussion

Excavation identified an area of concentrated Roman activity, probably settlement, in Area 2B(1). The grouping of the features suggested that they represented the south-eastern part of a small rectilinear enclosure. However, the linear features delimiting the north-eastern and south-western edges of this ‘enclosure’ were extremely slight. There was no evidence for them having held timbers forming a fence or palisade, and they conceivably represent either bedding trenches for hedges or small drainage gullies alongside some form of boundaries for which no other evidence survived. The line of features forming the south-eastern side of the enclosure is more problematic, since their size and layout did not really provide any sort of ‘boundary’ at all, whilst still clearly delimiting the main area of activity.

The function of the majority of the features excavated within the ‘enclosure’ was not apparent, perhaps as a result of the extent to which later agriculture and erosion had truncated the remains. One group of five post holes seemed to represent a small and rather insubstantial structure. A line of larger paired post-pits possibly represented one side of a larger timber building. Linear gullies and grouped, inter-cutting pits were restricted to the interior of the ‘enclosure’. Other single pits, although slightly more densely concentrated within the ‘enclosure’ were also scattered beyond it to the north and south.

Within the area of apparent settlement activity in Area 2B(1), ten contexts (including the subsoil and ‘unstratified’) contained Romano-British pottery, all of which is consistent with a date in the mid to late 2nd century. Despite a lack of structural evidence, the assemblage indicates the proximity of a domestic building probably of relatively high status, with imported, fine quality samian tableware and amphorae (storage and transport vessels for wine, oil or garum fish sauce) in addition to the more humble Black-Burnished storage and cooking vessels. While there was the possibility that some of the post holes represented a large building within the ‘enclosure’, the absence of roof tiles or other building materials indicates that it is unlikely to have been the principal dwelling, but rather a subsidiary structure (such as a barn or storage building). It was noted that, with the exception of the Black Burnished wares, much of the pottery assemblage was heavily abraded. The abraded material could represent secondary deposition of material from a habitation area elsewhere on the site.

The distribution of the pottery seemed further limited by the type of feature. Pottery was only recovered from four of the short linear features, a tight group of three inter-cutting large pits, and a single smaller pit. No pottery was recovered from any of the ‘boundary’ features. Similarly, none was recovered from any of the features directly associated with the two possible structures. With the one exception noted above, no pottery was present within the wider scatter of smaller pits, either within or outside the area of the ‘enclosure’. It hence seems quite likely that the recorded features represent more than a single phase of activity, only one of which was associated with deposition of ceramics. The dispersed scatter of small pits in particular may represent a separate phase of activity either pre- or post-dating the enclosed phase, while still focussing upon the same point in the landscape.

The small complex of enclosure boundaries located to the south-west in Area 2B(2) lay on a similar alignment to the features in Area 2B(1) and presumably represented a contemporary field system associated with the Romano-British settlement. Here there was some stratigraphic evidence to demonstrate more than a single phase of activity, with two of the ditches replacing earlier boundaries. Unfortunately there were no finds at all from this area, and the activity could only be dated through its presumed association with the features in Area 2B(1). Several small pits or post holes could be directly associated with the enclosure ditches, but several other scattered pits could have been of any date.

Whilst the identified archaeological remains were somewhat fragmentary, their importance is heightened due to the fact that evidence of rural Romano-British settlement in Cheshire is sparse. The watching brief has revealed the remains of 2nd century rural Roman activity including a probable settlement located on a glacial ridge north-west of the village of Norley. The Roman pottery adds to the growing evidence for the selective manner in which rural settlement related to the imposed Roman presence in the region and its accompanying trade and exchange network. Although a small assemblage, it is useful in its apparently short life and the nature of the ceramics compares well with evidence from elsewhere in the county.

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