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NOTES FROM THE BERKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

SUE LOBB

I. BRIMPTON—EXCAVATION AND WATCHING BRIEF

SUMMARY

This report describes the salvage recording of features observed during and after topsoil stripping at Brimpton. In 1976, after topsoil stripping, the side ditches of the Roman road were sectioned in places and were found to overlie three curvilinear ditches dated by pottery to the middle to late Iron Age. In 1977, during topsoil stripping, a further stretch of the Roman road as well as more Iron Age features were observed.

INTRODUCTION

The site (SU 567654) is in Brimpton parish and is situated 60 m O.D. on the flood plain of the river Enborne which runs 300 m south of the site. It is within an area currently being worked for gravel. Aerial photographs of the area taken in 1969 and 1970 show the side ditches of part of the Roman road, Margary's 41a (Margary, 1955), which led from Silchester, situated about 6 km south-east of Brimpton, to Speen and then to Gloucester and Cirencester. The only finds previously recorded from the site are two coins of Victorinus and Allectus found in the gravel pit on the line of the Roman road. The aerial photographs show three superimposed rectangular enclosures which have been destroyed by quarrying without archaeological investigation (see Fig. 1). The site was visited in July 1976 and in one area, recently stripped of topsoil prior to gravel extraction, the side ditches of the Roman road were visible as soil marks on the gravel surface. Other soil marks were observed including features which had not been visible on the aerial photographs. Because of the paucity of later prehistoric and Roman sites from the area, it was decided to section some of the features to try and establish the relationship between the road and the other features intersecting the road. The work was carried out over several weekends in November 1976 by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit with the help of local volunteers.

A watching brief was carried out during topsoil stripping in 1977. A further stretch of the Roman road and more Iron Age features were recorded. I should like to thank Bradley's and Co. Ltd. for allowing access to the site, Sir William Mount for permission to excavate on his land, and those who helped with the excavation. I am grateful to the following for help given in the preparation of the report: Mr Leslie Cram (bones), Janet Richardson (report on the Iron Age pottery and pottery drawings) and the Geography department, Reading University (geology). The finds and records have been deposited in Reading Museum.

THE SITE (Fig. 2)

The plan shows the extent of visible features in the available area. In the 1977 strip a further 150 m to the north of the planned features was open and in the south another 50 m. No features were noted to the north. To the south large areas of clay and tufa probably indicate the existence of an old river channel here. To the north and east of the site gravel has been completely extracted, and to the west the site was defined by a ploughed field.

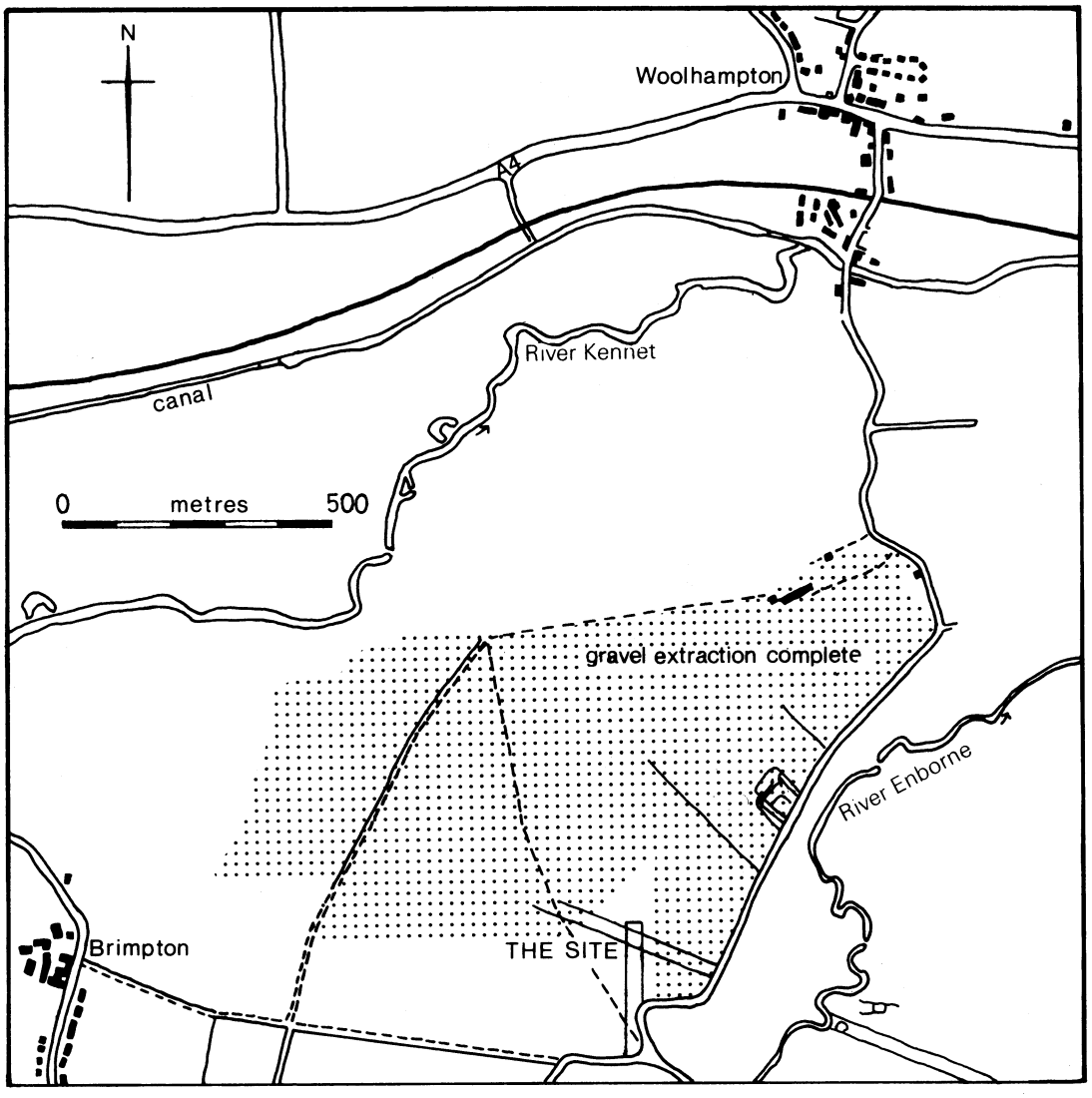

Fig. 1. Brimpton: location.

FEATURES

THE IRON AGE FEATURES

Linear features

Three parallel curvilinear features (Features 10, 11, 13 and 20) could be seen intersecting the Roman road and are dated by pottery to the middle to late Iron Age. They were all fairly shallow and rounded in profile. Features 12 and 14 may represent the remains of cross ditches which hint at the existence of a system of fields or enclosures with the ditches marking the boundaries. Feature 17 may be another ditch in this system. Feature 21 is on the same alignment as the present day hedge and is thought to be the remains of the continuation of this.

Other features

Features 7, 22, 24, 27 and 28 were all large rather irregular-shaped features with very little depth containing Iron Age pottery and animal bones. It seems likely that these represent the remains of an occupation layer, contemporary with the ditches, which has mostly been removed, possibly by ploughing and weathering.

Features 25, 26 and 29, although very shallow, are thought to be traces of post-holes. The lack of other post-holes on the site is perhaps further indication of the damage that the site has suffered.

Features 18 and 19 were both small pits containing much burnt flint, charcoal and fired clay. Feature 18 was a shallow scoop, whereas feature 19 was larger and deeper with a V-shaped profile. The function of these two features remains unclear. Feature 22 was simply a concentration of pottery and burnt flint lying on the surface of a clay and marl deposit.

A rather enigmatic feature (Feature 32—not shown on the plan) was observed about 30 m south of the planned features in the area of clay and tufa. A layer of burnt flint and charcoal was noted overlying the gravel and underlying a deep deposit of clay and tufa which is thought to be part of an old river channel, or possibly flood deposits. It is uncertain what this represents, but it may indicate some land clearance subsequently overlain by flood deposits.

Features 8 and 9 are probably both later marl quarries. Both pits are dug into tufa deposits and are rather haphazardly backfilled.

THE ROMAN ROAD

At Brimpton the Roman road was defined by two V-shaped ditches (Features 1, 3, 31 and 30) about 27 m apart, both of which had apparently silted up naturally. Nothing remained of the agger or the road surface, but an approximate width of carriageway can perhaps be suggested by the presence of two possible inner gullies about 15 m apart (Features 15 and 16) which may have been drainage ditches. These could not be traced in plan and were only seen in the section against the field. The southern road ditch appeared to have been dug in segments; cutting 1 showed the end of one segment, narrowed down to little more than a gully and curving away to one side with a new segment immediately after. This arrangement may have been for drainage purposes. Both ditches had been truncated by later disturbances (Features 2 and 4). Metal objects and pottery (including one medieval rim) were found in the top of Feature 2; but these gave little idea of the purpose of this pit. Feature 4 appears to have been cut into a marl deposit and the pit may have been dug in order to extract this.

DISCUSSION

The plan is inevitably incomplete. It seems clear that the site has suffered severe stratigraphic damage through ploughing and natural weathering. The area has been under arable farming for at least the last two centuries, and a local farmer remembered a rotary cultivator being used on the land shortly after the Second World War. Very little can be said about the nature of the site, but the evidence suggests that there was an Iron Age agricultural settlement with associated fields of

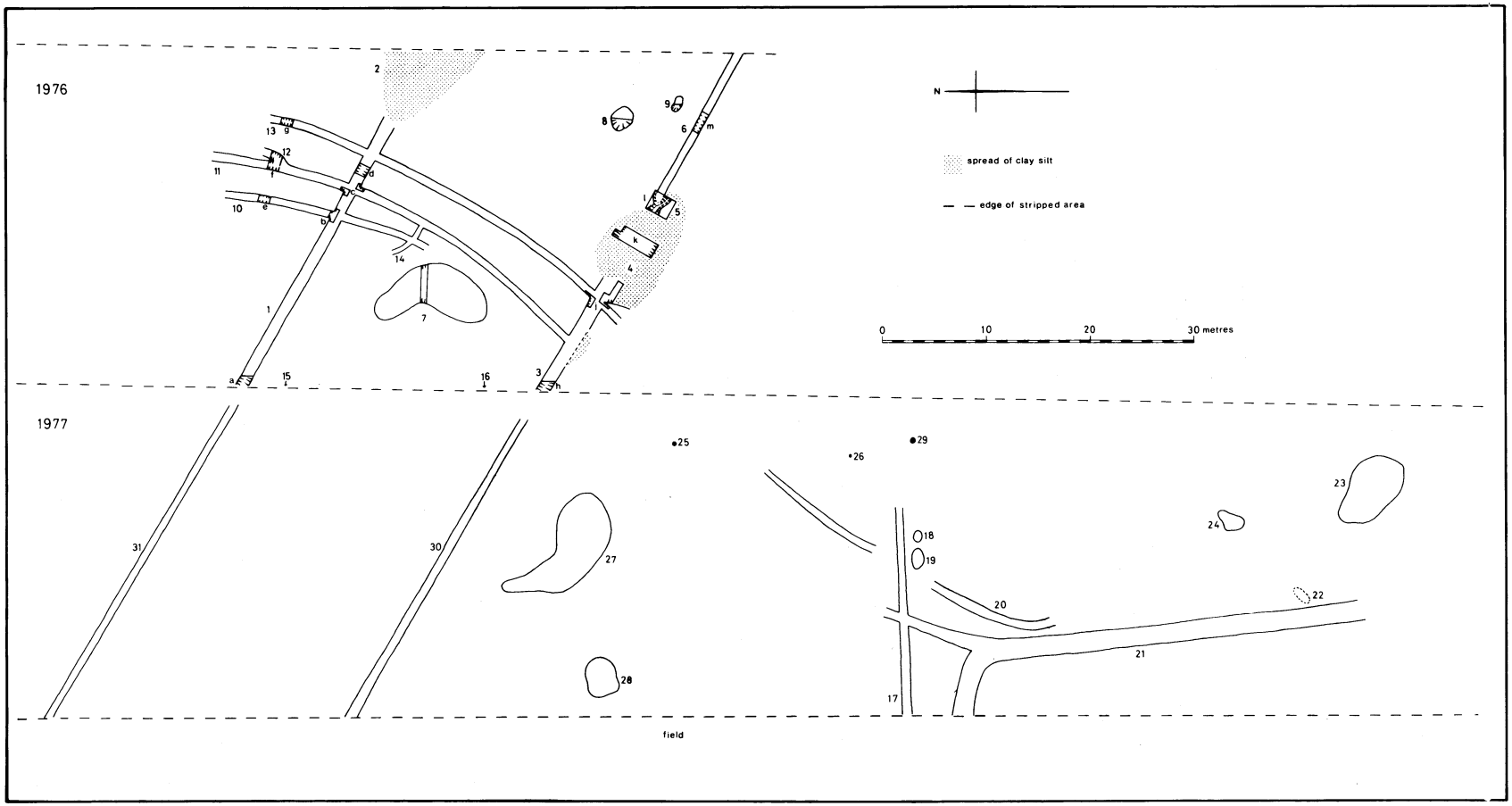

Fig. 2. Brimpton: site plan.

middle to late Iron Age date. The land situated between two rivers, although probably liable to flooding, would have been fertile and suitable for arable farming. The animal bones, although only a small and undoubtedly unrepresentative sample, are perhaps indicative of some stock raising. The evidence from Brimpton clearly indicates that the Iron Age settlement was abandoned well before the road was built.

The Roman road is part of that leading from Silchester to Cirencester and Gloucester. The width of the road compares well with that recorded in a section across the same road at Aldermaston Soke, about a mile from the west gate of Silchester. (Aldermaston Archaeological Society 1962). Nothing remained of the road construction but, since gravel is so readily available, it can be assumed that the road was made of tightly packed gravel such as at Aldermaston Soke. There was no dating evidence for the road.

The evidence from Brimpton fits in with the pattern recently observed in a survey of the plateau gravels in Berkshire (Rose, forthcoming). Fieldwalking during the winter of 1976–77 has produced evidence of activities of Iron Age and Roman date all along the Enborne Valley to the south-east of the site. The Iron Age features at Brimpton are probably only a small part of a widespread pattern of settlement in the area.

THE FINDS

POTTERY

The pottery from Brimpton comprises 160 sherds (1816 g), mostly very abraded small fragments. This is predominantly Iron Age in date with only 100 g of medieval unglazed ware.

Iron Age pottery: by Janet Richardson

The Iron Age pottery falls into two main groups—sandy ware and flint-tempered ware, predominantly the former. Nine fabric types were identified but for reasons of brevity, descriptions have been excluded here.

Illustrated sherds

A Rim sherd from a heavily-walled jar with 'hunched' profile towards the flattened rim. Coarse fabric with abundant flint inclusions. Black/dark-brown outer surface with protruding grits and nail-incised vertical line decoration below the rim. Inner surface buff/brown with visible grits and slight traces of rough burnishing. cf. Harding's Upper Thames Barrel jars from Frilford, Blewburton and Hatford, Oxfordshire (Harding, 1972, pl. 60, B, E and H respectively). The form and decoration suggest a date range of sixth/fifth–third centuries B.C.

B Angular body sherd from a shouldered jar. Red-brown outer surface with visible white grits and nail-impressed decoration around the shoulder. Inner surface brown with light-brown core. cf. Cunliffe's Kimmeridge-Caburn group which he dates to the sixth century B.C. (Cunliffe, 1974, Fig. A3).

F Slightly incurving flat-topped rim from a straight-sided jar in flint-tempered fabric. Outer surface black/buff with small white grits. Fractures and inner surface black with visible grits. Slight burnish on inner surface. This fabric typically associated with later Iron Age forms as at Southcote, Berkshire (Piggott and Seaby, 1937, 48) and Rucstall's Hill, Hampshire (report forthcoming). Mid-fourth–second centuries B.C.

G Rim sherd from thick-walled jar similar to A in profile though with slightly more hunched shoulders. Pink/buff throughout with abundant small white grits on inner surface. Outer surface smoothed, possibly burnished.

H Rim sherd from a bowl in sandy flint-tempered fabric.

I Flat-topped saucepan rim in fine sandy grog-tempered ware. Outer surface brown/dark-grey with visible mica and decorated with a shallow tooled line below the rim. Dark-grey smoothed inner surface.

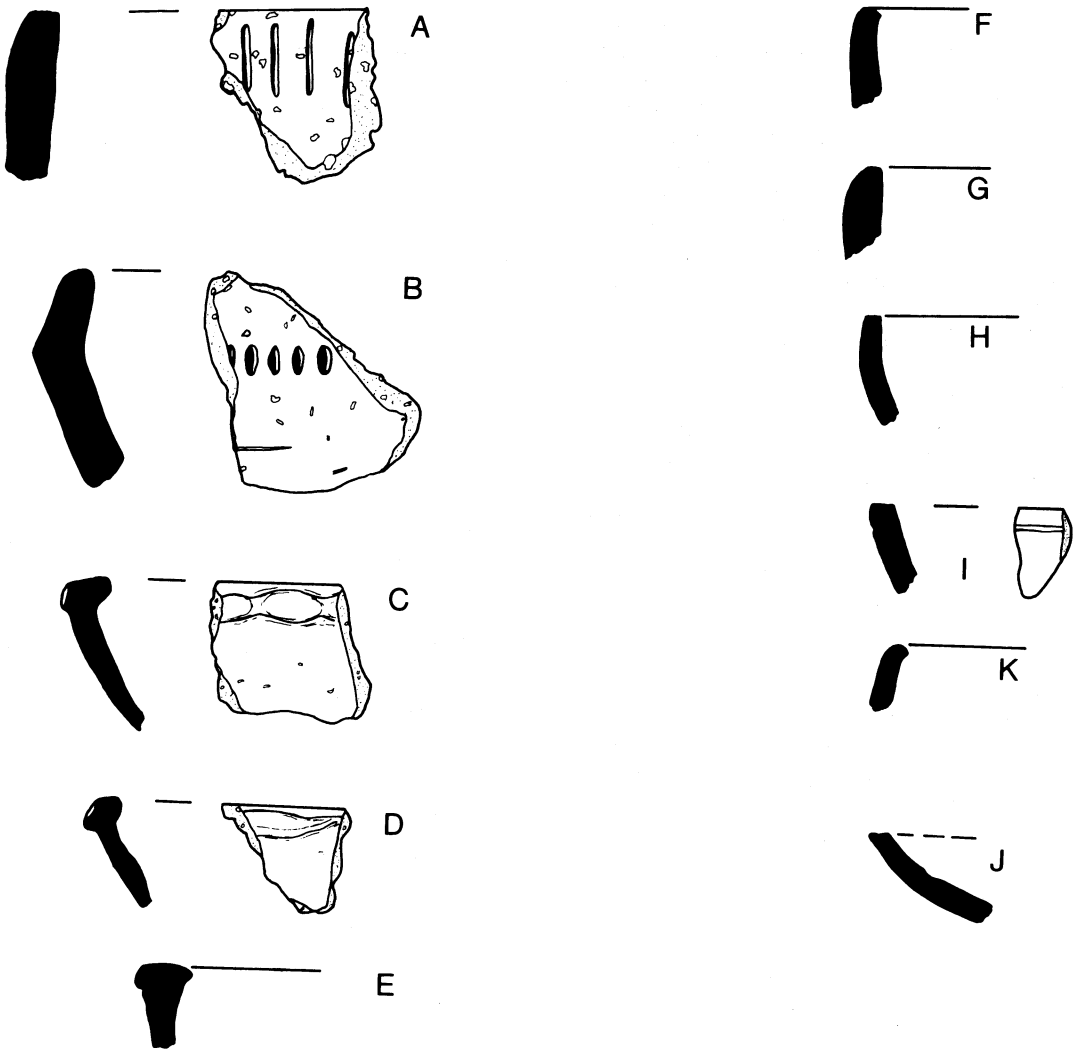

Fig. 3. Brimpton: pottery.

Possibly belonging to a straight-sided dish. The decoration is common to saucepan pots of south-east England in the third–first centuries B.C. cf. Southcote, Berkshire (Piggott and Seaby, 1937, Fig. 4, 9) and Cunliffe (1974, 42–3).

J Haematite-coated body sherd from a bowl. Fractures and inner surface light-brown with few visible grits and mica. Though haematite-coated bowls are generally considered to belong to an early class of Iron Age fine ware, the poor finish on this sherd suggest that it could well belong to the later end of the series.

K Rim sherd from a barrel jar in soft flint-gritted fabric with slight internal overhang producing a rounded profile. Fabric black with visible white grits throughout and uneven inner surfaces. cf. Rucstall's Hill (report forthcoming) and Cassington, Oxfordshire where the jars are seen as typical later Iron Age forms of the later type dating from the mid-third century B.C. though not thought to have continued into the first century B.C. (Harding, 1972, 116).

Summary

The general character of the Brimpton pottery is difficult to ascertain since the identifiable forms are so few in number. However, the predominant forms appear to be the slack-bodied and 'hunched' jars, these being typical of the later Iron Age forms of the Upper Thames basin as grouped by Harding (1972, 99) who also shows that the same types remained in use into the first century B.C. at sites north of the Thames and west of Cherwell (Harding, 1972, 116). Parallels for the bowl form and plastic decoration (Fig. 3, H, J and B) suggest a *terminus ante quem* of mid-fourth century date because, although characteristic of the early Iron Age (sixth–fourth centuries), these features were little known by the second century. However, haematite coating is known to have lasted into the fourth century in a debased form. The *terminus post quem* is provided by the sherd I which, by analogy, belongs to the period third–first centuries B.C. Since jar forms as those in Fig. 3, A, B, F, K and G are considered to be outmoded by the first century (Harding, 1972, 113) the later date of the Iron Age site may belong within the second century.

Medieval pottery

Most of the medieval pottery is of hard, sandy fabric, predominantly flint-tempered, but with some ferruginous and chalk inclusions.

Illustrated sherds

C Flat-topped rim with slightly inverted rim flange. Thumb print on the back of the rim. Red/brick coloured surfaces with darker core. Probably rim of dish-shaped bowl.

D Flat-topped rim with slightly inverted rim flange from dish-shaped bowl. Red/brick-coloured surfaces with darker core. Angular flint grits showing on the surface.

E Rim sherd, thickened and flat-topped, inverted rim flange. Coarse flint-tempered ware, buff coloured on outside, black on inside.

Summary

Owing to the small quantity of medieval pottery found at Brimpton it is difficult to draw any conclusions from it. Furthermore very little is known about the pottery of this date in the area. Jope (1947) suggests that the 'T'-shaped rim form common to all three rim sherds found at Brimpton is a type fairly widespread in the Oxfordshire/Berkshire region and are forms derived from late Saxon prototypes. The fingertip decoration also suggests a late twelth/thirteenth century date.

FIRED CLAY

Small fragments of fired clay were found in several features. In most cases these were single fragments and were very abraded, which made identification very difficult.

BONE

Only a small amount of bone was found on the site, all of it from Features 7, 9 and 10. Due

to the differential survival of bone in the acid soil of the gravels, this is by no means a representative sample. Most of it was very fragmentary and friable. Cow and sheep or goat were the species represented.

METAL

Several pieces of mineralised iron were recovered from both the road ditches, and Features 10 and 12. A chain link and a small hook were identified after preliminary conservation. All pieces were found in the top fills of the features and may therefore be relatively modern.

FLINT

Most features produced burnt flint—presumably relics of occupation debris. The few waste flakes found on the site must be considered residual.

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II. WATCHING BRIEFS

In 1976 and 1977 several watching briefs were carried out by the Unit. Summaries of the positive results are listed below. Detailed records and the finds have been deposited in Reading Museum. Negative watching briefs have not been included. PRN refers to the primary reference number in the Sites and Monuments Record of the county held by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit.

THE OLD RECTORY, BRIGHTWALTON

SU 426794 PRN 2455

A watching brief was carried out at this site when the hole for a swimming pool was excavated. No archaeological features were noted, but an axe with several burnt flints were found in the subsoil. The axe (Fig. 4) is of poor quality flint and has been slightly burnt. It has been broken off at each end then battered or cracked by fire. The profile and form is typical of the Mesolithic Thames picks.

BEEDON HILL, CHIEVELEY

SU 490792 PRN 2800

During the construction of the A34 Beedon by-pass in 1977, ten features were observed on the chalk after the topsoil had been stripped at Beedon Hill. The site consisted of a scatter of six pits, three short lengths of linear features and the remains of an occupation layer. Most of the features were sectioned and found to contain pottery, animal bones and tiles. A single coin and several flint flakes were also found. Of the small pottery sample the diagnostic sherds appear to be largely Medieval with one Romano-British form. The coin, though badly abraded, appears to be Roman, and three of the tiles were identified as *tegulae*. The species represented in the animal bones include cattle, sheep, pig, dog, horse and fowl, in order of abundance. The size range for the cattle suggests a Roman date[1]. Although in a few cases medieval sherds were found, mixed up with Roman material, a Roman date for the site seems more likely, especially in view of the proximity of a Romano-British brick and tile works 250 m to the south-east of the site (PRN 1265). Very little can be said about the type of site as so few features were recorded.

[1]I am grateful to H. H. Carter of Reading Museum for this information.

GREAT SHEFFORD

SU 39057468 PRN 2469

St. Thomas's Church, East Shefford (PRN 1418), originally a twelfth century or earlier church, is now redundant and under the guardianship of the Friends of Friendless

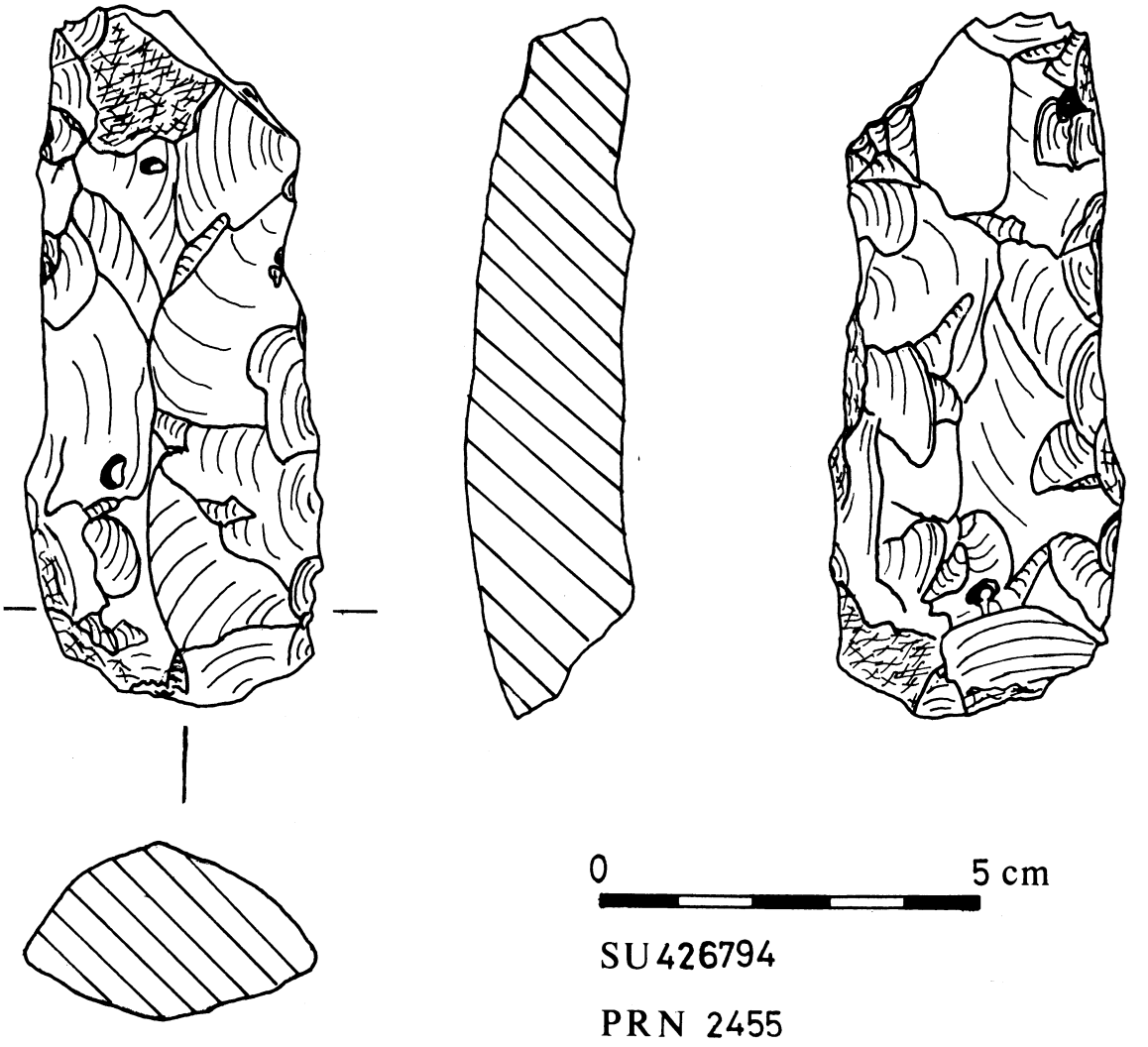

Fig. 4. Brightwalton: flint axe.

Churches. The church stands by the river Lambourn and has suffered greatly from rising damp on the south wall. A channel was dug around the foundations of the church in 1887 in an attempt to try and correct this, and this was deepened in 1975. It was decided, in 1977, to lower the level of the churchyard and to dig a drain to take surplus water away from the south-east corner of the chapel to the south-east corner of the graveyard. Minor excavations in advance of this work were carried out one weekend by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit to try to determine the extent of the damage, and to see if any stratigraphy remained. The ground was found to be very disturbed, and crucial relationships destroyed. Finds included large quantities of building rubble, including tile, glass, chipped flint nodules and waste flakes, presumably discarded when the flint and mortar wall was constructed.

Large quantities of human and animal bone, and coffin nails were also found. A rather shapeless lump of flint and mortar was found next to the south wall of the church, just below the topsoil, jutting out about 0·80 m from the edge of the drainage trench 0·60 m deep. This was directly under the Norman windows in the south wall. It was thought that this may represent the remains of a buttress or, more likely, a part of the wall which had collapsed at some stage, possibly when the windows were put in in the fifteenth century.

When the builders were lowering the ground level in the churchyard a brick barrel-vaulted tomb was discovered underlying the headstone of another grave. The headstone and footstone may have been moved when the size of the churchyard was decreased and fenced.

STANFORD DINGLEY

SU 577713 PRN 2465

When digging the foundation trenches for a garage at the site the builders cut through a flint structure. This consisted of flint nodules of varying size and some ironstone lumps, loosely packed together, about 0·60 m wide and 0·65 m deep and extending about a metre across the site. The exact length is unknown as it extended into the adjacent field. This structure was under the topsoil and in the subsoil, which appeared to have built up around it. Also found on the site were several pieces of Roman roof tile and pottery but there was no stratigraphic relationship between the two.

Too small an area was available to be able to make very much sense of this structure, but it seems likely that it was a wall or perhaps part of the footings of a building. The site is on a slope and, given the many springs in the area, it is possible that it was originally a flint and mortar structure, and that the mortar has since been washed out.

SULHAMSTEAD ABBOTS

SU 642680 PRN 2792

A ground stone axe in mint condition was found in a gravel pit by one of the workmen when excavating a trench for an electric cable through a topsoil dump. The axe (Fig. 5) could have come from anywhere in the pit. There are three shallow grooves on one side of the axe and the other side is slightly flattened. There are no other signs of wear. The axe was submitted for petrological analysis to the Implement Petrology Survey of the South-West and was identified as a greenstone, an altered gabbro, which does not fit into any group but probably originates in Cornwall.

Several other finds of Neolithic date have been found in this area, including a small axe of metamorphic shale of no precise origin.

6 THE BROADWAY, THATCHAM

SU 517674 PRN 2468

The timber-framed building at this site was completely demolished and replaced with a modern building. In the sections of the foundation trenches, below the foundations of the previous building which were not very deep, were noted several layers of trampled clay, cess-stained sand and cess-panning. These represent floor levels. Three sherds of medieval unglazed pottery, (probably twelfth

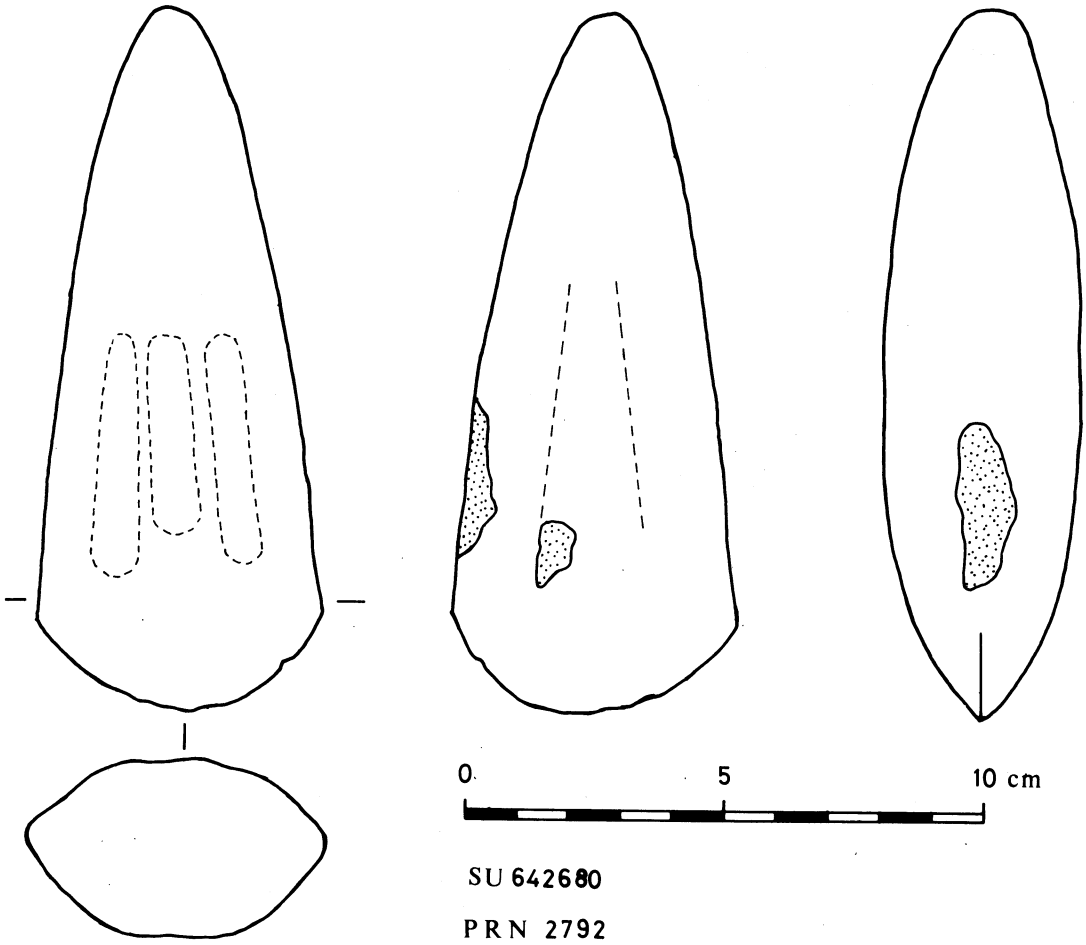

Fig. 5. Sulhamstead Abbots: stone axe.

century) were found in association with these levels. Other finds from the site include two sherds of pottery with partial glazing in yellowy-green glaze, and two sherds of post-medieval pottery.

CHURCH FARM, WALTHAM ST. LAWRENCE

SU 826778 PRN 2456

When ploughing in a field about 500 m from the Weycock Hill Roman temple, the farmer uncovered a deep hole. This appeared to be a well about 0·80 m in diameter and 4·00 m to 5·00 m deep. The walls were lined with large flint nodules. No associated dating evidence was found, but a Roman date seems likely in view of the large number of finds and buildings of that date in this vicinity.

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