

Combined interim reports for 2001 and 2002

The Excavation of a Roman Villa, Horton

16th – 20th July 2001

A magnetometer and Resistivity Survey by Stratascan for the farmer of Springfield Farm, Horton (Mr John Mastrangelo) located a series of linear features. These were presumed to be the walls of a building (or at least their foundation trenches). With the help of local volunteers, South Gloucestershire Council excavated a small portion of this site in order to obtain information to augment the Sites and Monuments Record.



Magnetometer Plot at Horton

Project Aims:

- To define the construction form of the building and, if possible, the materials used
- To establish the surviving condition of deposits
- To define the date of the structure
- To recover any archaeological artefacts associated with deposits
- To compare excavation plans with geophysical survey results

Initially, a 5m grid square was marked out, intending to examine some of the interior of the villa, part of any surviving wall structure, and a portion of the exterior. It was felt that this would be most suitable to answer the research aims listed above whilst at the same time causing least disturbance to the site itself, should it prove to be important.



The Excavation Trench, Horton 2001

Wet conditions and the underlying sticky clay made excavation of this area difficult. It was thus decided to subdivide the area and to leave in areas of baulks with the square.

Features Revealed:

Cobbled area

The work initially revealed a cobbled area, presumably a track or yard which was located to the west of the trench, an area assumed to lie outside the possible villa structure. This cobbling was not present across the full extend of the square. Adjacent to this layer was one composed of collapsed building materials, including Roman roof tiles and several iron nails.



The Cobbled Area

The Villa

The main feature of the excavation lay to the east of the yard – a finely constructed wall. Surviving up to 5 courses in depth, the wall was built from squared blocks of stone with and orange mortar and rubble stone filling. The initial process for construction involved the digging of a foundation trench. In this, flat, thin slabs of stone were laid and mortar added, followed by the stone courses of the foundations and further mortar to fix them in place. There were three courses of stone lying on the foundation slabs, this was then followed by the wall proper. The Foundation trench appears to have been filled with smaller stone rubble following wall construction.



Wall Elevation with Foundation Stones and Mortar

To the east of the wall, lying within the area of the building were several clearly defined layers with obvious archaeological horizons. Beneath a layer of rubble was a layer of flat Roman roof slabs. This was initially considered to be a possible floor but closer examination revealed that a number lay on end as opposed to flat, and one retained its iron nail. The layer probably therefore represented the collapse of the roof of the building. The tile layer sealed deposits containing Roman pottery and a coin of the Emperor Claudius II (c.268-270) which gives us a *terminus post quem* for the building's demise.



Complete Roman Roof Slab

A further coin from the interior of the building appears to be one from the reign of the emperor Constantine I, c310-316, with the Sun God, Sol, depicted on the Reverse. This coin was minted in the Roman city of Trier in Germany. The information from the coins thus indicates that the building collapsed at some point after c.270, and probably after c316 AD



Coin of Claudius II



Coin of Constantine I

In addition to the finds of coins, roof slabs, pottery and animal bones, one lump of metalworking clinker was recovered. Though too small a quantity to enable any dogmatic statements as to possible industrial practices within the building, this is nevertheless an interesting possibility. The magnetometer plot picked up large magnetic readings in another part of the building which perhaps

related to an oven or hearth. This could only be determined by further excavation.

Further Features

A small, poorly constructed, wall of loose stone blocks in soil was constructed at a later phase to the east of the building and perhaps represents some type of field wall. There is no reason that this feature need not be Roman in date as well.

Conclusions

The feature that showed up on the magnetometer plot is indeed a Roman villa; stratigraphically sealed pottery and coins all help to show this. The walls are very well built from squared stone blocks (? white lias – not Cotswold Stone) and mortared into place with an orange mortar. Their foundations lay in a cut pit which was filled with rubble following the walls' construction.

From the find of the coin, the structure appears to have collapsed at some point after the late third or early fourth centuries AD. Pottery from the site can be dated from the mid Second Century onwards (finds of Samian, Amphora Storage vessels, Black burnished Dorset & Oxfordshire Wares being present), and other occupation debris in the form of butchered animal bone remains, was also present.

The fact that samian, amphora and two fragments of window glass have been found seems to confer an element of status to this building – it was far from being a simple structure. Given that badger sets in a distant part of the field are revealing pottery, and that the magnetometer plot has also revealed other structures, it may be that the site is part of a large farmstead, though it mustn't be assumed that all features are contemporaneous.

Site Potential

The small-scale operations of the South Gloucestershire Council excavation revealed much information. The villa building at Horton has survived remarkably well and bears testament to sympathetic farming practices over the years. The site has yielded answers to all of the Research Objective Questions listed at the start of this document, although the scale of excavation was such that

comparisons between site and magnetometer plans will be of limited value. The Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) has been updated and a gap in our understanding of the region in the Roman period has, partially, been filled. It is interesting to note that the distribution map of Roman Sites in Aston and Iles book on the Archaeology of Avon merely displays a void for South Gloucestershire! It would not be unfair to say, therefore, that the villa at Horton is probably the best surviving known Roman wall in the region

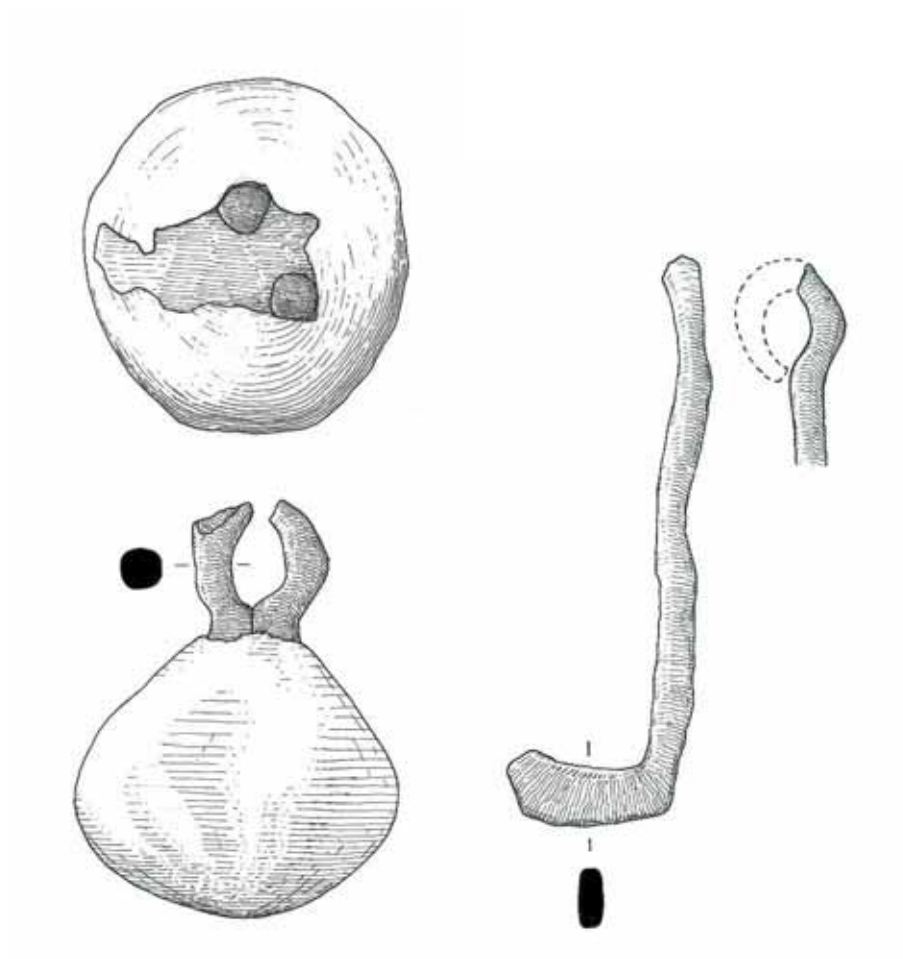
There remains huge potential for the rest of the building and its environs, with only a very small amount of the structure having been excavated. This is beyond the remit of South Gloucestershire Council and we would encourage preservation *in situ* for the rest of the site. Given the careful management of the land by Mr Mastrangelo and his family, this would not appear to be a problem at all.

South Gloucestershire Council would like to thank Mr Mastrangelo and all volunteers for their help with the project.



The Sun God on reverse of the 4th Century Coin

The Excavation of a Roman Villa



Horton 2002

The excavations of a Roman Villa at Springfield Farm, Horton 2002

A second season of excavations was undertaken at the Roman villa site at Horton in June 2002. The site lies on land that is carefully managed under a Countryside Stewardship Scheme and DEFRA gave permission for small scale excavation work to take place, with one of their officers even undertaking some digging work! Excavation was contained within Squires Leaze and Mistress Leaze, taking care to avoid disturbing the badger sets in the south west corner of Squires Leaze, and into Chesters Leaze.

Project Aims 2002

Two small trenches were excavated to answer specific questions:

- **Trench 2** was cut to establish the survival conditions of the site on the other (eastern) side of the hedge to the excavations of 2001. It was also hoped that this would determine the relationship between the south-east corner of the building and a linear feature that can clearly be seen to be running at a perpendicular to the main structure off to the south east.
- **Trench 3** was cut to reveal whether there were any obvious functions for the rooms of the building, and whether they displayed any spatial variance. The character for internal and external walls would be revealed and might also yield evidence for different phases for the building.

Local volunteers and Professional archaeologists from South Gloucestershire Council uncovered further walls of the structure that hailed from the 3rd-4th Centuries AD. As with discoveries of last summer, the walls of the villa were in remarkable condition using well squared, mortared, blocks of lias sat on foundations of rubble. These walls had been laid in a specially constructed foundation trench which was then back-filled with stone rubble when the walls had been laid.

Part of the interior face of the external wall was built with stones set diagonally; a classic Roman construction technique for drainage.

Traces of Roman occupation lay everywhere with a large piece of amphora (a vessel used to transport goods in the Roman period) from Southern Spain found in one of the villa rooms. This would have brought olive oil to the people that lived there. Other finds were coins of the third and fourth centuries, a Roman brooch and pieces of domestic pottery (including Mortaria), a steelyard weight,

and oyster shell. The coinage recovered was from the later Third Century AD.

With the information from this summers' excavation, and those of 2001 it is perhaps possible to postulate that this building represents servants quarters. The building was certainly well constructed from squared stone blocks and with window glass. It was also of quite sizeable and contained domestic finds of some quality. No *in situ* traces of hypocausts, painted plaster, tesserae or similar trappings of affluence have been recovered though these have been seen in the material brought out by the badgers from their set some c50m south of the site. The possibility remains that this is where the most important part of the complex of buildings lies (a field called "Chesters Leaze"; a clear Roman placename).

Other parts of the site revealed a cobble trackway (Trench 2) which yielded the iron hobnail from a Roman boot, lost by a resident some 1600 years ago as they walked around the villa, and a lead weight from a Roman balance or scales - this weighed almost exactly a Roman pound.

It seems as though the building went out of use soon after the 4th Century and eventually collapsed with large quantities of pennant stone roof slab fragments being found across the site from the. Some complete slabs were recovered, some with the Roman iron retaining nail still in position, and their weight only reinforced the belief that such a structure would have required some hefty timber uprights to support the roof.

Once the building went out of use, a quantity of stone from the walls was robbed out or re-use elsewhere – a fact born out by the large quantity of 'missing' stone in the segments of excavated walls. It is possible that evidence of hearths found on site may relate to this period of stone removal by later societies.

Trench 2

On excavation it was found that the features in Trench 2 (Mistress) survived far less well than the deposits in Squires (Trench 1 2001 and Trench 3 2003). The former is far lower down and was perhaps subject to a more rigorous ploughing regime over 50 years ago.

Features:

Feature 4 Trench 2 (linear cobbling)

An area of cobbling (lias and other stones) to the SE of the villa. One edge was truncated by the pipe-trench yellow clay (layer 20) and this gave appearance of it being a linear feature at first. Other edge under baulk. The layer was c20cm deep and contained Roman pottery, tile and a Roman hobnail. Possibly a trackway.



Feature 4

Feature 5 Trench 2 (Remains of villa wall)

An area of jumbled building stone with a clear edge of worn white lias stone blocks. This Feature ran roughly NNE-SSW and represents the E side of the villa. Clearly preservation in this field is far poorer than on the other side of the hedge and the villa has been largely ploughed away, leaving little information about its construction.



Feature 5

Feature 6 Trench 2 (Robber Trench)

A small trench associated with the walls of the Villa and, in some places, continuing below it. Representing either the remains of a robber trench cut to retrieve stone or a wall foundation trench.



Feature 6: to bottom photo with F5 above

Layer 20 Trench 2 (Linear Feature adjoining corner of villa)

A linear feature running roughly WNW-ESE from the SE corner of the villa (given layer number of 20). One of the intentions of inserting the Trench in this location was to discover the relationship between these two elements. Layer 20 turned out to be a shallow (c10cm deep) linear trench which had been filled with a yellowish clay. Very regular in shape and straight. Some sherds of [residual] Roman material including roof tile fragments and pottery were recovered. The yellow clay was initially interpreted as being redeposited natural clay – it seems more likely that this linear is in fact the fill of an old pipe trench (no pipe now being present) and it is this clear anomaly that shows so well on the magnetometer plot.

Layers 36 and 44 (burnt material and charcoal – hearth?)

Elements perhaps relating to a hearth were uncovered to the N of Trench 2. This comprised some burnt stone (pink in colour) and also a lens of charcoal. This might be contemporary with the collapse and subsequent robbing of the villa though there is no datable material to corroborate this.

Trench 3

Features:

Feature 7 Trench 3 (Exterior Wall of villa)

Well-built exterior wall of Roman villa, continuing the excavated length of 2001 and, thus, of the same construction. Squared white lias blocks, up to 5 courses in depth, mortared together with a gritty orange mortar. Unlike last year, there were no clear traces of the foundation trench or packing though it is assumed that they were used. To the south of the exposed length, one of the lower courses was laid in a diagonal alignment. This was to facilitate drainage for the building (see Adam, J-P, 2001, 125). The excavated length of wall was c2.8m and as 60cm in width and up to 65cm deep.

Feature 8 Trench 3 (Internal wall of villa)

Well-built interior wall of Roman villa, built in the same fashion as the exterior wall described above. The wall demarcated two separate rooms and was constructed at the same time as the exterior wall as some of the lower courses were integrated (thus far, only one phase of building has been established at Horton). The interior wall was of similar proportion to the exterior. Part of this wall was removed on its southern edge when the wall was robbed out.



Feature 7 (wall running left to right) and Feature 8 (wall from top to bottom)

Feature 9: Trench 3 (Excavation of 2001)

The back fill of 2001 was exposed in the excavations of 2002; to assure that the two sites conjoined. Feature 9 was thus the excavation Trench of 2001.

Feature 10 Trench 3 (Large stone blocks)

A Series of Large stone blocks initially thought to be a structural element, but later seen to be a pile of robbed stones from the villa walls.

Feature 11 Trench 3 (Robber Trench)

A Sub-Oval trench at the southern edge of walls F8. This represents the robbing of the interior wall and went to a depth of c25cm, max width c 75cm. Filled with a rubble layer.

Results:

The excavations of 2001 answered the research questions posed above. It is clear that the preservation conditions of the villa vary depending which field you are in. To the west (Squires Leaze) the survival conditions are excellent, with the wall surviving up to 5 courses in depth. One is able to determine construction techniques and find stratified deposits. The field to the east (Mistress Leaze) is altogether different. Ploughing has severely damaged the site and little by way of structure remains although much Roman material is still present. This being said, the high quality of the Villa remained constant in Trenches 1 (2001) and 3 (2002).

As far as one can see from the keyhole operations undertaken in 2001 and 2002, the villa was built in one phase. No clear difference in activity was discernible in the two rooms examined, though there was a clear domicile function.

Trench 2 not only revealed that the effects of ploughing were far more extensive to the east, it also showed that the long linear feature visible on the magnetometer plot was in fact a probable shallow trench of indeterminate date.

Conclusions:

The villa certainly existed by the early third century and appears to have gone out of use in the fourth century or afterwards (three coins of the later third Century AD have been found in the building, and one of the early fourth Century AD). The construction of this building utilised classic Roman structural techniques, with the diagonally laid stone for drainage. With the quality of workmanship (and indeed stone) of the walls, combined with the drainage elements, the window glass from 2001 and large Pennant roof stones, one is led to the conclusion that this was a building of quality.

Site Potential:

It seems that survival of the site is excellent in one field (Squires Leaze) to the west and poor to the east (Mistress Leaze). Given that badger activity is revealing material of high quality in Squires Leaze and the neighbouring field, Chesters Leaze, there remains the possibility that this is the site of the most important structure and that its preservation might be quite good. The site is not threatened, being under careful farming regime. The excavations of South Gloucestershire Council in 2001 and 2002 have been a small-scale affair to evaluate the quality of the site, its dates and survival conditions.

Small Finds

Objects of Copper Alloy:

SF130

Trench 3 Layer 29.

Copper Alloy Fibula

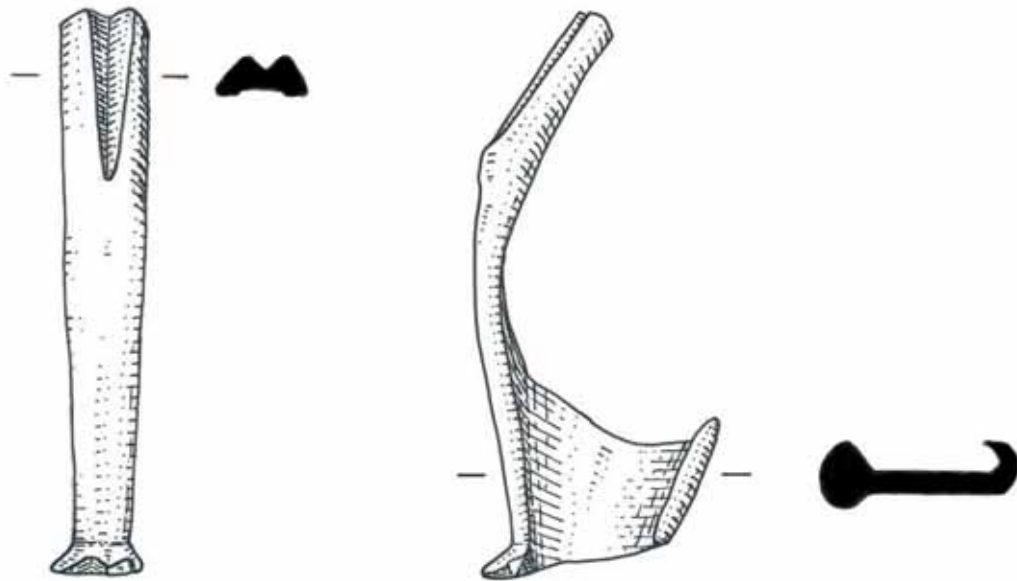
Length: 41mm

Width: 22mm

Thickness: 3mm max.

Weight: 6g

Comments: A Roman brooch plate with spring coil and pin now missing. The preservation of the bronze is good though patina present all over.



Scale 2:1

SF129

Trench 3 Layer 35

Copper Alloy Pin (not illustrated)

Length: 21mm

Diameter: 0.5mm

Weight: <1g

Comments: A tiny fragment of a copper alloy pin which is badly corroded and thus not deemed worthy of illustration.

SF132

Trench 3 Layer 29

Copper Alloy Strip Fragment (not illustrated)

Length: 17mm

Width: 3mm

Thickness: <0.5mm

Weight: <1g

Comments: very small thin flat strip of copper alloy. Incised line running longitudinally along the strip with a series of small, incised decorative lines running from this central incision to the edges. Decorative fragment of strip, indeterminate function.

Objects of Iron:

(None illustrated)

A large number of iron objects was recovered from the excavations at Horton in 2002. As is usual on such sites, the vast majority of these were iron nails or nail fragments and thus deemed not to be worthy of illustration. Some 46 such objects were retrieved out of a total of 48 ferrous objects. The remaining two were a lump of iron slag, and a small iron hobnail which was retrieved from a Roman cobbled track Feature4.

Coins:

SF 121

Trench 3 layer 29

Diameter: 22mm

Weight: 4g

Coin of Allectus

Obv: IMP C A(LLECT)US PF AVG. Allectus facing right with radiate crown and cuirass

Rev: LETIT(I)A AVG. A across Fields. Mint Mark ML (Londinium).
Letitia standing facing left holding wreath.

AD 293-6

SF 124

Trench 3 layer 26

Diameter: 23mm

Weight: 4g

Coin of Carausius

Obv: (I)MP CARAUSIU(S PF AVG). Carausius radiate and cuirassed bust right.

Rev: PROVIDEN(TIA). R across Fields. Mint Mark ML (XXI) (Londinium).

Providentia facing left holding globe and sceptre

AD 286-293



SF 121: Coin of Allectus



SF 124: Coin of Carausius

Objects of Lead:

Trench 2 Feature 4

Lead Weight with iron eyelet and iron suspension arm

Length: 56mm (top of eyelet to base of weight)

Max Width: 48mm

Weight: 344g

Diameter of iron eyelet: 20mm external, c9mm internal.

Comments: A sub-conical Roman lead steelyard weight with sub-rounded base. The lead weight is formed around a central iron bar which has been flattened out at the base of the weight and curved into a circular eyelet at the apex of the weight. An iron suspension arm was found hooked through (*in situ*) the eyelet of the weight. Combined, this object weighs almost exactly a Roman pound and would have been used for quantifying weights.

Iron suspension arm:

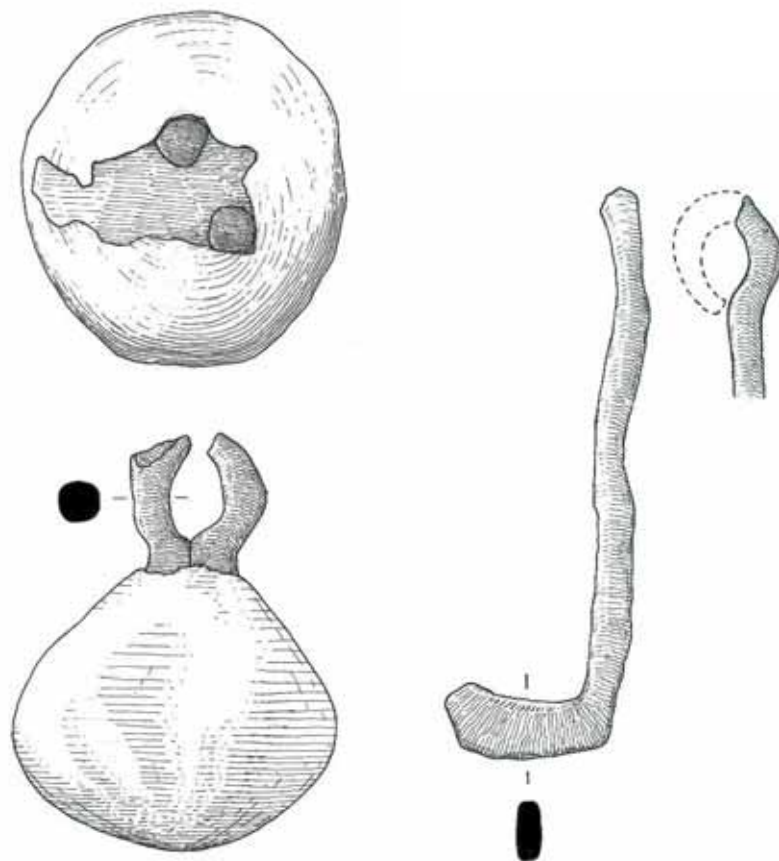
Length: 77mm

Width: 24mm (projecting part), c4mm average width for bar

Thickness: 4-5mm

Weight: 6g

Comments: Iron bar of sub-rectangular cross-section. Bent over at one end so that the object is "L" shaped. This lower part of the bar was found hooked through the iron eyelet of the weight and it is presume that this object is integral with the lead object as part of the steelyard weight.



Scale 1:1

The Roman Pottery from Excavati

Gloucestershire: 2002

By

David R Evans

ton, South

Introduction

Horton continues to produce a small collection of pottery consistent with a mainly late C3 to late C4 date for the site.

Dating and Discussion

The range of types and fabrics remains internally consistent (see exception below), it is nice to have another example (no 2) of south midlands shell tempered ware which adds to the later C4 range for the site. The exception to the general trend for the site, is the beaker in south-western BB1 (no 11) which has a late C1 date. It was recovered from a layer of what may be upcast from the foundation trenches of the Roman building. South-western BB1 was a development of a local industry in the Exeter region which was boosted by the presence and ceramic requirements of Legio II Aug in the south west. The legion transferred to Gloucester cAD67 and later to Caerleon in south Wales. Horton lies well within the distribution range of the fabric, while unusual on civil sites such finds are not uncommon. While a military presence on the Horton site cannot be excluded, the context is likely to be civil. What is important to note, is the date of the vessel, which indicates occupation at or near the site much earlier than has been suggested by the rest of the material from the site. The vessel may have contained a cremation.

Catalogue

- 1) Fragmentary, burnt rim in BB1 similar to Gillam (1976) no 12, early C4. (context 25)
- 2) South Midlands Shell Tempered Ware (Tyres 1999, 192-3), jar imitating very late C4 BB1 forms (derived from vessels like Gillam 1976, 82-3). 350 to (possibly) sometime in the C5. (context 35)
- 3) Flanged bowl in BB1 Gillam (1976) no 48, early-mid C4. (context F5)
- 4) Flanged bowl in BB1 Gillam (1976) no 49, mid C4. (context 21)
- 5) Bead rimmed bowl in Oxfordshire red ware (Young 1977) 270-350 +. (context 29)
- 6) Bead rimmed bowl in Oxfordshire red ware (Young 1977) 270-350 +. (context 29)
- 7) Lid or deep bowl in local grey ware with a dark wash. (context 29)
- 8) Jar with a large bead rim in BB1, difficult to closely parallel but of generally C3-C4 date. (context F4)
- 9) Mortarium in Oxfordshire white ware (Young 1977) 270-350 +. (unstratified)
- 10) Body sherd of Peacock class 10, (Peacock & Williams 1986) olive oil amphora from the Cadiz region of Spain, the fawn-pink-light grey fabric sandwich is consistent with a C3 date for the vessel. The sherd is included because of the relative rarity of amphorae on 'rural' sites, (see Evans 1997 p327 for discussion). (context F10)
- 11) Complete profile of a small beaker in south-western BB1. The foot-ring is unusual but not entirely unprecedented (see Holbrook & Bidwell 1991 fig 36, 7.1 8.1, 8.2). The rim profile is similar to a number of vessels illustrated in Holbrook & Bidwell (1991) figs 37-38. The closest parallel in Dorset BB1 is Gillam (1976) no 1 which is dated to the early-mid C2. Perhaps originally a cremation vessel. The current vessel is of C1 date with a range of 80-100 being most likely. (context 33)

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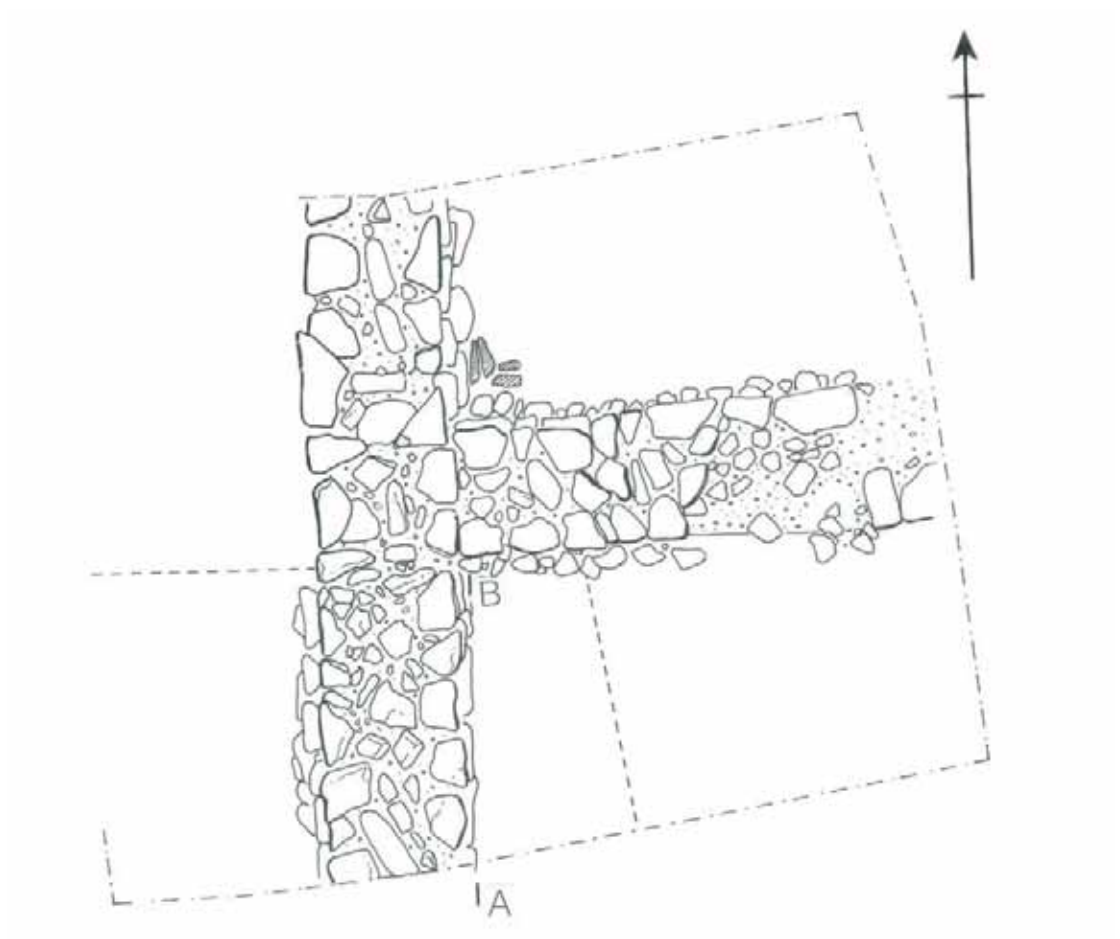
Acknowledgements:

The excavations would not have been possible without the work of the following people, Co-director David Evans, site supervisor Danielle Wooton, Andre Gilardoni, Betty Iles, Daniel Parsons, Maggie White, Mike Martin, Jill Martin, Andrew Jackson, Don Watts, Norma Jones, Tony and Jean Harcourt, and Amy Coulthard. DEFRA kindly gave permission for work on the site. Main thanks go to John, Nicola, Paul and Rose Mastrangelo for allowing work on the farm and for their many suggestions, physical efforts and kindness to the site over the years.

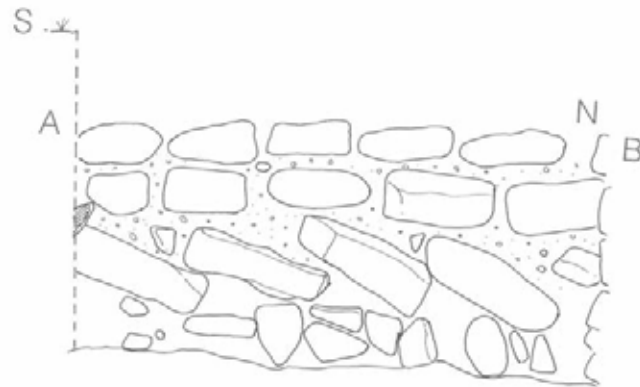
List of Contexts: Horton 2002:

<i>Context Number</i>	<i>Trench</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Layers</i>		
18	2	Topsoil
19	2	Yellow/Grey Clay
20	2	Yellow Clay
21	2	Cobbling
22	2	Brown Clay
23	2	Tight Cobbles
24	3	Topsoil
25	3	Brown Soil W of Wall F6
26	3	Rubble in Soil

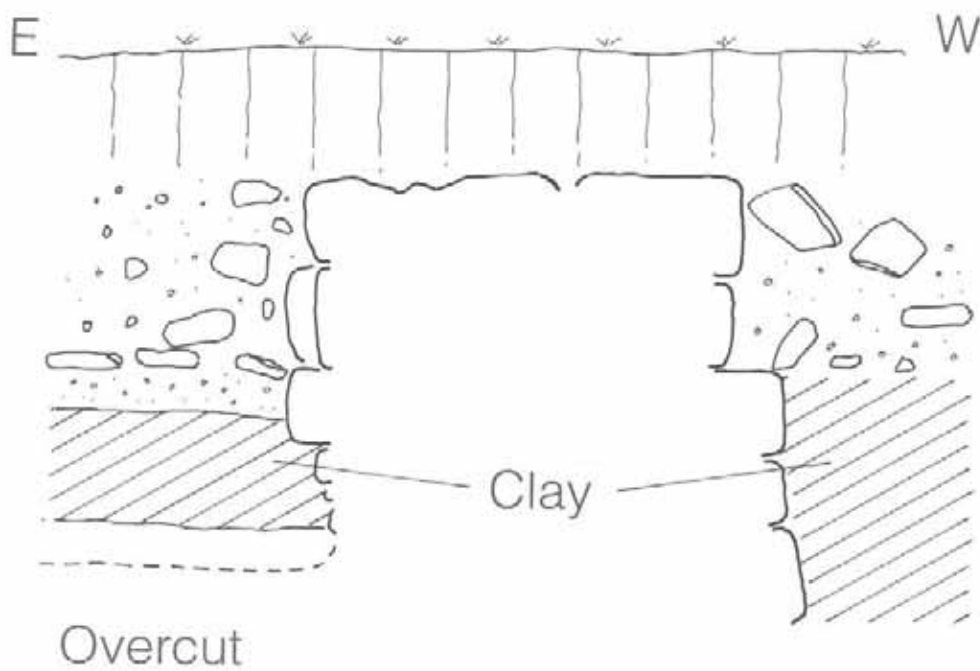
27	2	Fill of F6, Grey Clay Soil
28	3	Roof Slabs
29	3	Yellow Mortar
30	3	2001 Backfill
31	2	Dark Grey Clay
32	3	White Mortar splodge
33	3	Grey Clay, Mortar + Charcoal
34	3	Yellow Mortar
35	3	Grey/Brown Clay + Charcoal
36	2	Burnt/Heated Layer
37	3	Flat Stones
38	2	Grey Clay
39	2	Grey Clay
40	2	Orange/Yellow Clay
41	2	Stones and Roof Tile
42	2	Mortar
43	2	Large Stone Rubble
44	2	Charcoal
45	2	Pale Grey Clay
<i>Features</i>		
4	2	Linear Cobbling
5	2	Large Stones –Wall?
6	2	Foundation Cut
7	3	Wall
8	3	Wall
9	3	2001 Trench
10	3	Large Stones
11	3	Robber Trench
12	2	Small rectangular Cut



Plan of Trench 3, 2002



Wall Elevation, Trench 3, to show stones set at an angle to facilitate drainage

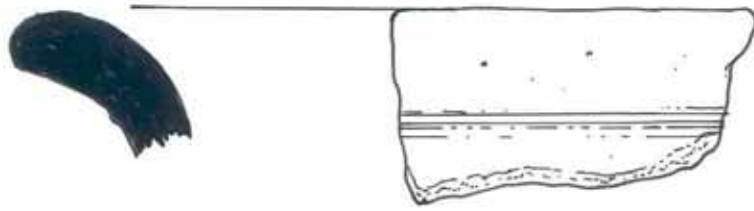


Profile of the exterior wall of the Roman Building at Point A

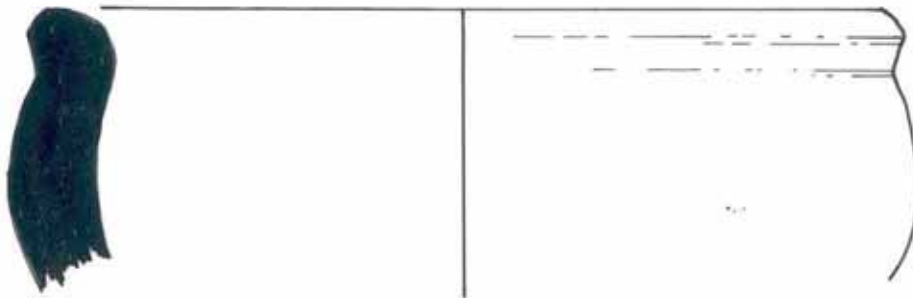
Pottery Illustrations

(Alison Wilkins)

Scale 1:1 except sherd 7: scale 1:2



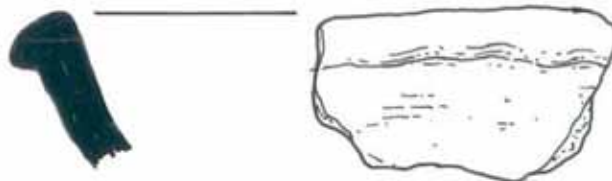
Hor 02: Sherd 1



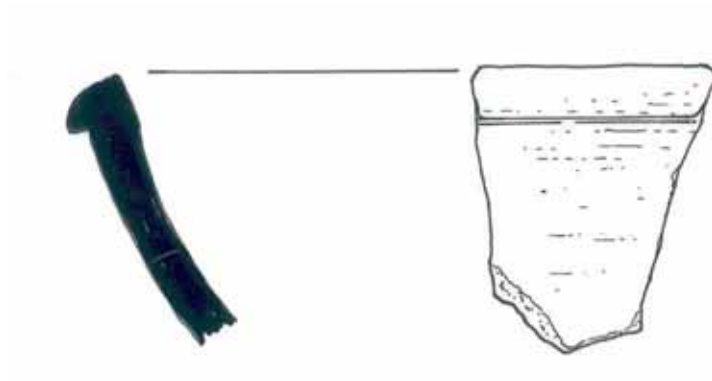
Hor 02: Sherd 2



Hor 03: Sherd 4



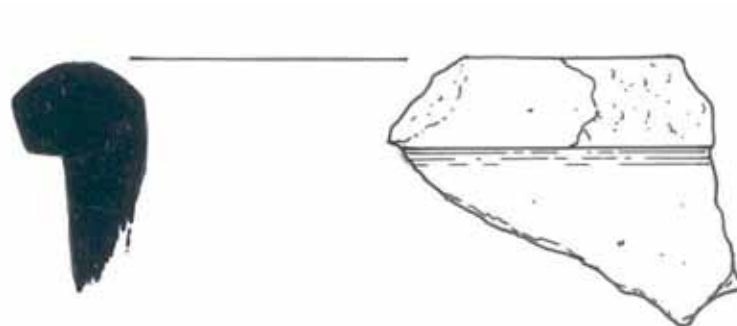
Hor 03: Sherd 5



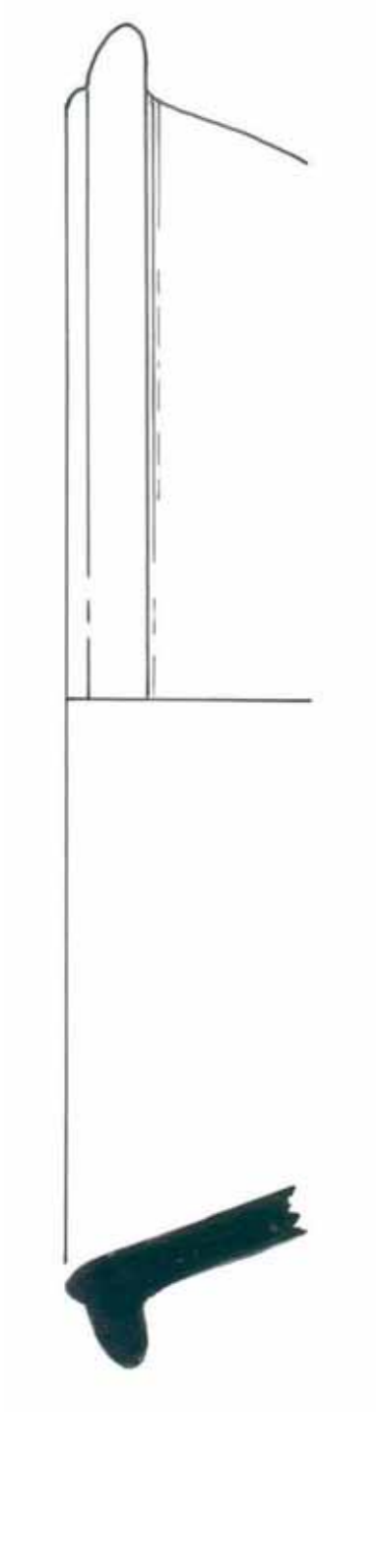
Hor 03: Sherd 6



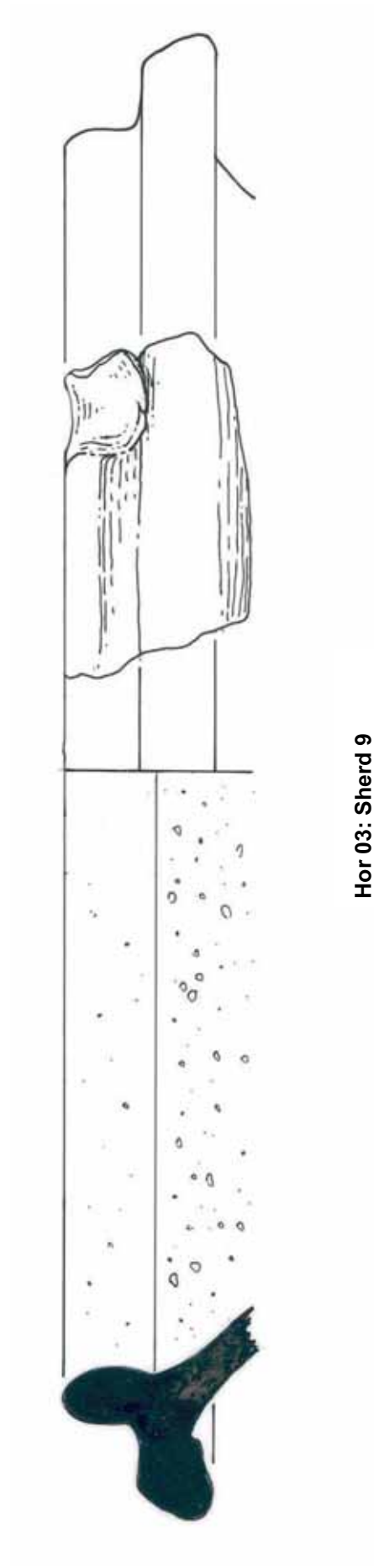
Hor 03: Sherd 7 (Scale 1:2)



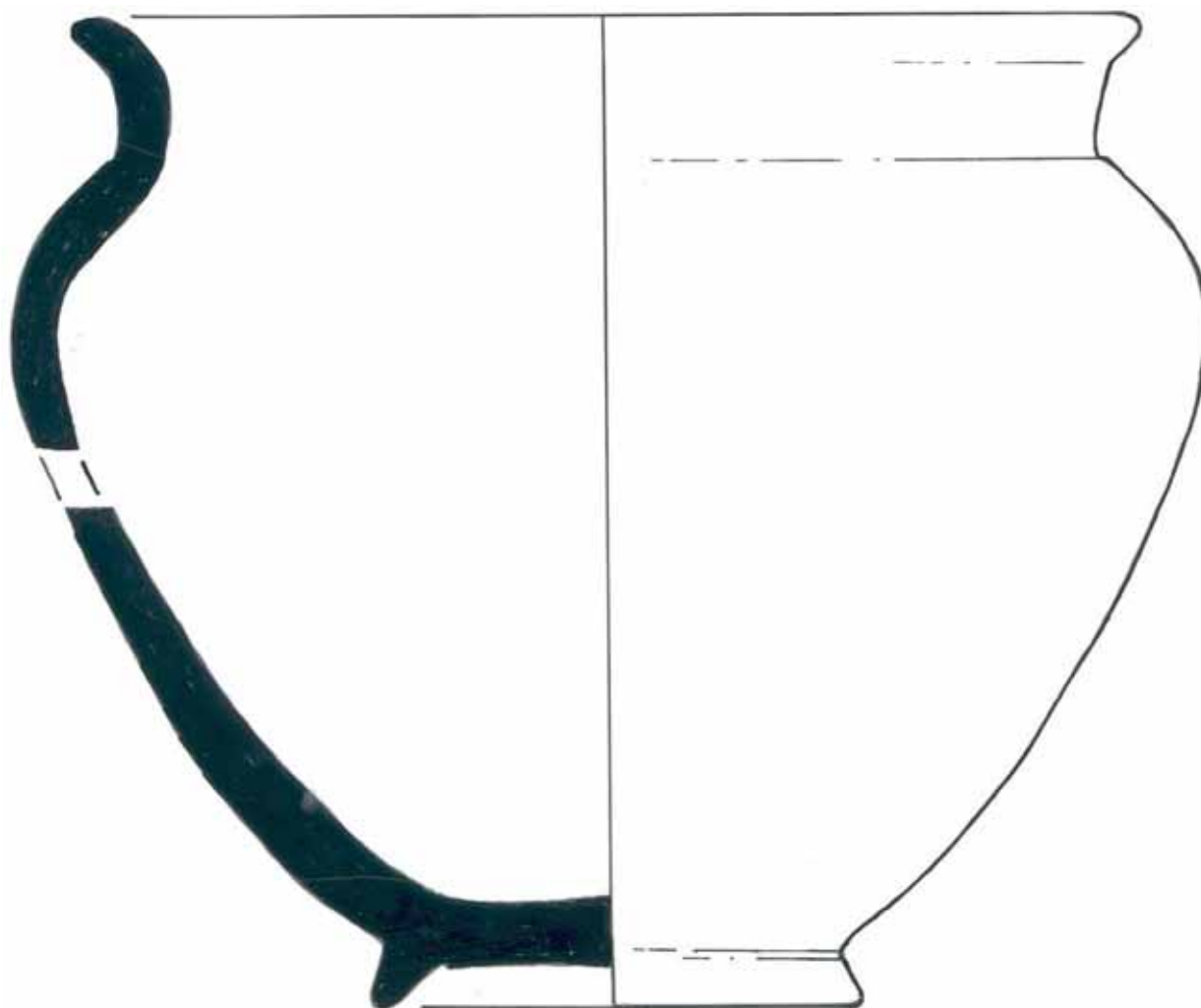
Hor 03: Sherd 8



Hor 03: Sherd 3



Hor 03: Sherd 9



Hor 03: Pot 11