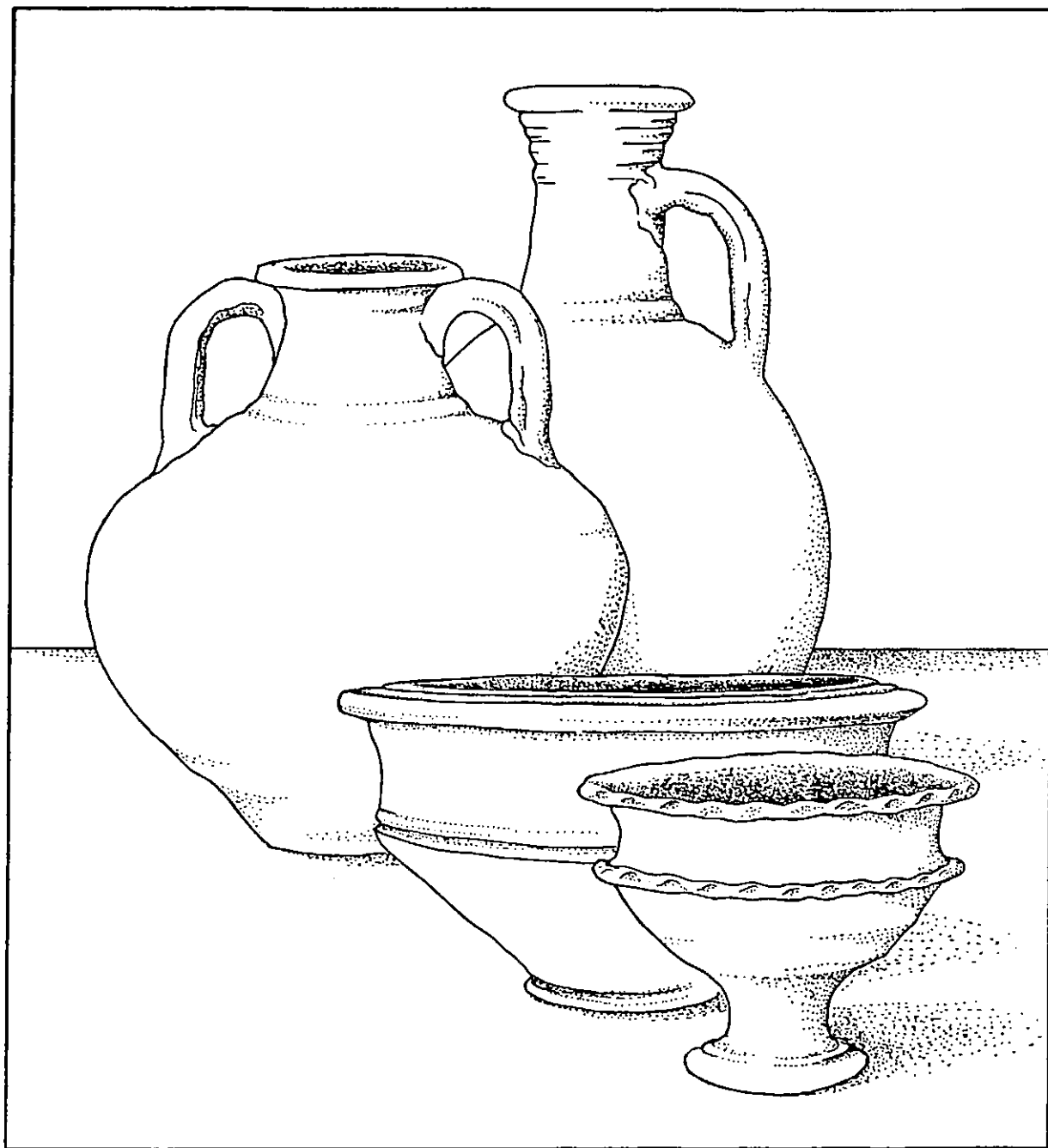


15-17 High Street Elstree



Archaeological Evaluation



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THE HERTFORDSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

**15 - 17 HIGH STREET, ELSTREE
Hertfordshire**

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

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15-17 HIGH STREET, ELSTREE, ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

INTRODUCTION

Nos. 15-17 High Street, Elstree (TQ 178955), lie on the west side of Watling Street and are located between the Timber Cottage and Romeland archaeological sites which produced evidence of Roman tile production (Fig. 1). Immediately north and west of Nos. 15-17, in pasture land, the ground falls gently away and clay extraction pits and waste tips, extending for several hundred metres, are readily identifiable. = 0786

The redevelopment of Nos. 15-17, from a Marble Works to residential accommodation, gave rise to trial trenching prior to the groundworks. The trenching was carried out by the Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust in October 1991.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The most recent investigation of the area behind No.15 High Street was by members of the Stanmore, Edgware and Harrow Historical Society in 1948-50 (Castle 1977). This work, 'disclosed a number of waste dumps of Roman tiles, coarseware pottery, and the torso of a human figure in fired red clay' (ibid.). = 0787

Immediately to the north of No.15, at the site of Timber Cottage, evidence of Roman roof, flue tile and/or brick production was revealed during excavations by O'Neil (1951) and Adam (1963). Two flues were located by O'Neil, but little pottery was found. Similarly, on the same site, Adam revealed more waste dumps of Roman tile, a metre deep, and a roughly paved area adjacent to where fires had been lit. Some pottery = 0785

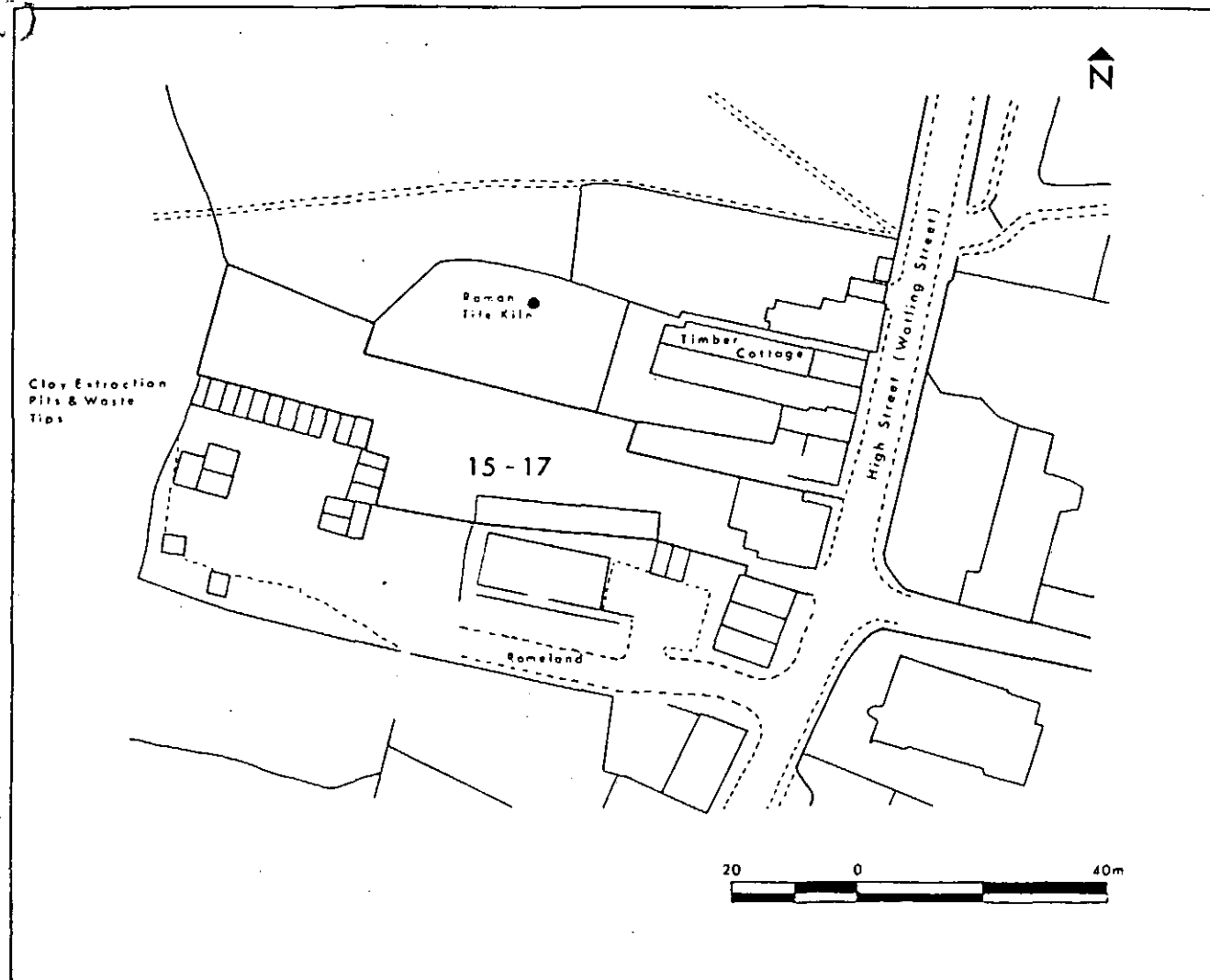


FIG. 1 15-17 HIGH STREET, ELSTREE. Site location

was recovered, including Samian ware of Flavian date (AD70-100), but unfortunately the finds were stolen before they had been adequately studied.

South of 15-17 High Street, on the Romeland site, further evidence of tile production was observed in 1986 during groundworks (Britannia, xvii (1987), 327-8). Some late 1st-/early 2nd-century pottery was recovered.

METHOD OF WORK AND OBJECTIVES

The entire area of Nos. 15-17 is overlain by a thick layer of tarmac and concrete which is largely to be retained; the ground disturbance will be limited to the digging of foundations, piles, and a service trench.

The trial trenching was undertaken within the confines of the foundations of the new buildings, the trenches were limited to 0.60 m. wide and 1 m. deep (Fig. 2). These restrictions were partly off-set by the existence of several Test Pits which, when reopened, permitted the stratigraphy to be observed to a depth of 3 m.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

Trench 1 (Fig. 2) was located towards the back of the property, it was 20 m. in length and overlay the outline of a foundation trench.

On excavation, it was evident that the ground level had been increased during the period of the Marble Works (c.1950-1990). The overburden comprises demolished building material and fragments of marble, overlain by a reinforced raft of concrete. The overburden and concrete are between 0.75 - 0.90 m. thick. Below the demolition material is a post-Roman soil horizon (a dark brown humic layer) which in turn overlies Roman brick and tile waste. The latter is located 1 m below the present day ground surface.

A Test Pit was later re-excavated along the course of Trench 1 but it was too shallow to be of value (1.25 m.).

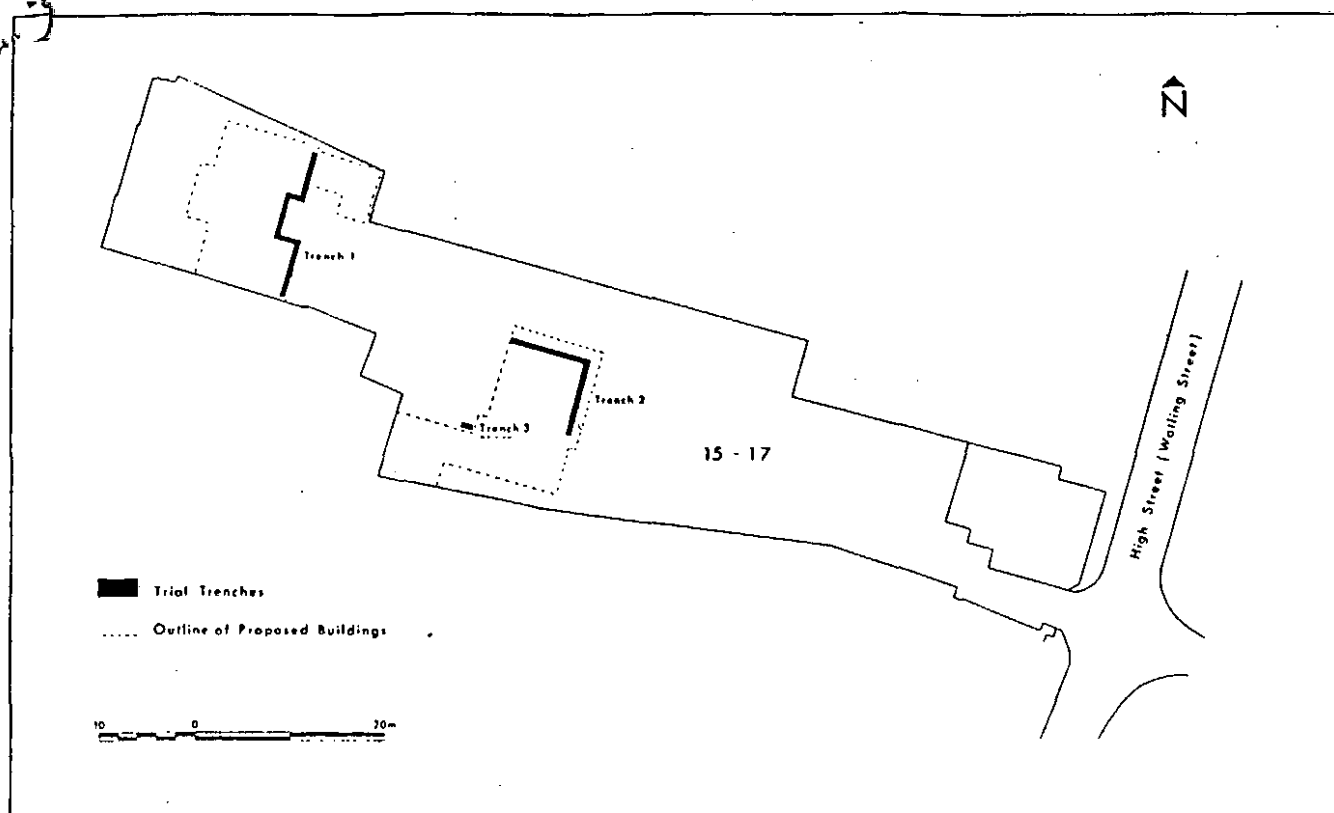


FIG 2. 15-17 HIGH STREET, ELSTREE. Trench location.

Trench 2 (Fig. 2) also overlay the outline of a foundation trench. It was L-shaped and measured 8 m. (north/south) and 9 m. (east/west).

The concrete and demolition material is less substantial than previously observed (c. 0.40 m.). Once again, below the demolition material, a post-Roman soil horizon (0.20 - 0.30 m. thick) is present. Below the soil horizon is a brown clay layer (Contexts 3 and 7) which contains numerous Roman brick and tile fragments, and pottery sherds. Other layers with a greater evidence of burning were observed (Contexts 4, 8, 11). Pottery sherds from the same vessels were found in different layers indicating that they were all part of a single-act of dumping. The dump is 0.40 m. thick and traceable along the entire course of Trench 2.

3

The greatest concentration of pottery coincided with the layer containing the most brick and tile (Contexts 3 and 7). Less brick and tile occurred within the north/south length of Trench 2, though at the maximum permitted depth of 1 m. greater quantities of tile waste was visible.

At the junction of Trench 2 a Test Pit, 2 m. x 2 m., was dug to a depth of 3 m., and the composition of the dump was observed in greater detail. It was seen to overlie a layer of redeposited clay (Context 9) which incorporates occasional patches of burning and tile fragments, and is 0.90 m. thick. This layer would seem to correspond to one recorded by O'Neil (1951, 230) and described as a 'made-up yellow clay'. Below the redeposited clay (Context 9) is a thin layer of burning (Context 12), which overlies the natural yellow clay subsoil. All of the layers within the Test Pit dipped eastwards suggesting that they are filling the hollow of a former clay extraction pit.

Trench 3 (Fig. 2) was observed to a depth of 2.5 m. The same sequence of layers as observed within Trench 2 is present; Roman tile deposits were visible at 1.70 m.

THE ROMAN POTTERY

At least 2019 sherds (fragments) of pottery, weighing over 25 kg, were recovered during the course of the excavation. All the pottery came from Trench 2, the majority from Context 3.

A few sherds represent grey ware jars from the kilns at Highgate Wood, north London, where pottery was being produced between c.AD60 - 160. One or two very abraded fragments are from moulded beakers (Fig. 3, No. 1) which imitated early

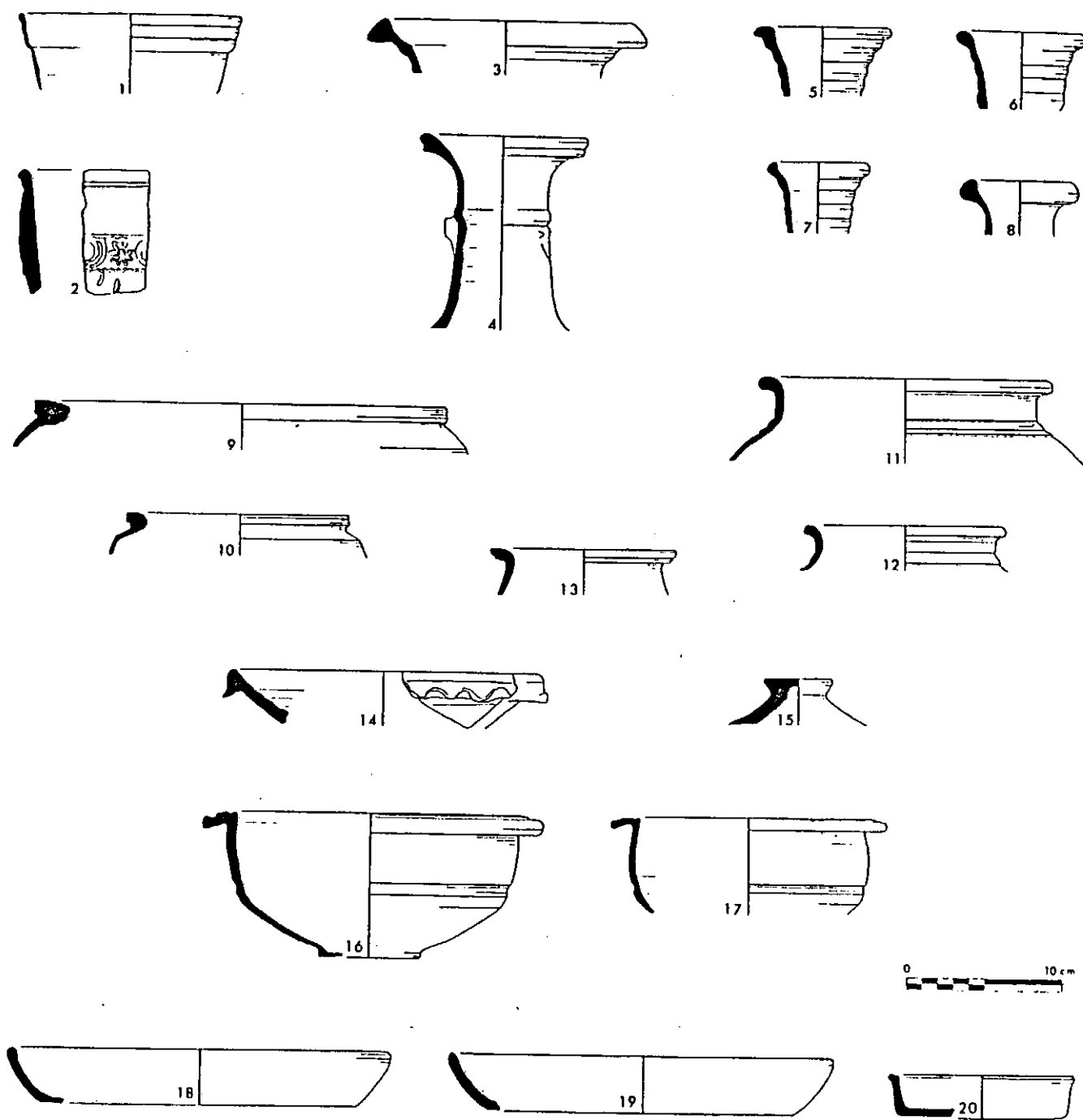


FIG. 3: ROMAN POTTERY FROM 15-17 HIGH STREET, ELSTREE.

1 Moulded beaker, Gallo-Belgic Ware. 2 Samian bowl. 3 Amphora/flagon. 4 Two-handled flagon. 5-8 Ring-necked flagons. 9-10 Jars with moulded bead rims. 11-12 Cordoned jars. 13 ?Beaker. 14 Tazze. 15 lid. 16-17 carinated bowls. 18-20 dishes.

imports from the continent. There are also two fragments of Samian ware decorated bowls (Fig. 3, No. 2). This fine tableware was imported from southern Gaul (France), perhaps towards the end of the 1st century AD.

The majority of the pottery however, is made from a granular, sandy, buff/white or orangey-pink coloured fabric which was typical of the Verulamium (St Albans) region industries. The assemblage includes a large number of flagons (Fig. 3, Nos. 3-8), including two-handled flagons, also known as "lagenae" and ring-necked flagons. Various jar types (Fig. 3, Nos. 9-12) are represented for instance, jars with moulded bead rims (Fig. 3, Nos. 9-10) and jars with cordons around the base of the neck (Fig. 3, Nos. 11-12). Other vessels include beakers (Fig. 3, No. 13), tazze, used for burning oil or incense (Fig. 3, No. 14), lids (Fig. 3, No. 15), carinated bowls with horizontal grooved (reeded) rims (Fig. 3, Nos. 16-17) and shallow dishes (Fig. 3, Nos. 18-20).

All these vessels were manufactured during the 2nd half of the 1st century or the beginning of the 2nd century AD, most probably during the Flavian period (c. AD70 - AD90).

Confirming this date are the stamps found on four fragments of mortaria. Mortaria are large, heavy, general purpose mixing bowls. They have heavy rims for easy gripping and lifting, and their fabric contains grits to reinforce the vessel and to aid mixing and grinding. They often had a spout for pouring. Production of these vessels was confined to specialist potters whose names can be identified from their stamps on the rims of vessels. All the stamps on the mortaria from 15-17 High Street are very abraded and difficult to read. It has, however, been possible to identify all of them.

The mortaria stamps are as follows:

Stamp 1	'Martialis'	Double impression	Production period AD 80-120
Stamp 2	'Melus I'	Reverse impression	Production period AD 90-135
Stamp 3	'Doinus'	Impression from his latest die	Production period AD 85-110
Stamp 4	'Matugene'	- - - -	Production period AD 80-125

The pottery from Nos. 15-17 High Street is of particular interest because quite a few of the sherds have been burnt, and several of the flagon handles are slightly twisted and mis-shaped. The condition and concentration of these sherds indicate that the pottery from the dump layers represents "wasters"; that is pottery that has not been fired successfully and has either cracked or broken during firing and has been discarded as sub-standard. The pottery assemblage also includes a fragment of kiln furniture: a possible tuyere (used to direct air into a kiln), and several fragments of burnt clay with crazed and over-fired surfaces. It is possible that the latter may also have formed part of a kiln structure.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological evaluation has demonstrated that extensive Roman deposits are present within the boundaries of Nos. 15-17 High Street, Elstree. These deposits are as little as 0.60 m. below the present day ground surface.

The presence of kiln furniture, pottery wasters, brick and tile indicates that the dump represents debris from kilns which were in production during the latter 1st century and early 2nd century AD. The hilltop site at Elstree is known to have been a flourishing tile manufacturing centre in the 1st - 2nd centuries AD. The two kilns excavated by O'Neil (1951)

are less than 30 m. to the north. It is quite likely that the tile industry included pottery production; dual production has been found at other sites. The evidence available is, however, insufficient to demonstrate conclusively that pottery production was being undertaken at Elstree; it does however strongly suggest that this was the case.

Parallels for the Elstree pottery, in fabric and form, are to be found on the kiln sites at Brockley Hill, Greater London. The sites at Brockley Hill belonged to a group of local potteries known collectively as the Verulamium region industry. This was the best known of the early Roman pottery industries in south-east England. Potteries at Radlett, Brockley Hill, Bricket Wood and St. Albans, were set up along Watling Street as early as AD48-55, soon after the Roman conquest (AD43). The Elstree pottery probably represents another kiln site belonging to this group. All the potteries produced similar wares. The mortaria potters are of particular interest as Matugenus, Melus and Doinus are all known to have worked at Brockley Hill (Martialis's exact working area is unknown). There is evidence of potters using more than one workshop in the same general area. In theory, therefore, it would be quite possible for any of these potters to have worked at Elstree as well as at Brockly Hill.

The industry became of outstanding importance in the Flavian - Trajanic periods (AD70 - 120), producing many forms, such as mortaria, flagons and bowls, which were newly introduced from abroad by the invading Roman army. A likely stimulus for the rapid expansion of the Verulamium region industry may be the shift in emphasis from Colchester to London, which became the capital of the new province following Boudicca's rebellion and burning of Camulodunum (Colchester) in AD61.

As well as meeting the needs of the army, the industry was well placed to serve the growing demand for Romanised products

in the new villas, farmsteads and towns. Its principal markets became London and St. Albans. After the mid 2nd century, the industry went into decline, although manufacture on a much reduced scale continued until sometime in the 3rd century. The pottery assemblage from Nos. 15-17 High Street, Elstree, reflects this decline; none of the Elstree pottery dates beyond the 2nd century.

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The pottery report was written by Karen Waugh; with notes on the mortaria supplied by Kay Hartley..

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