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North Hertfordshire District Council

An Archaeological Evaluation at

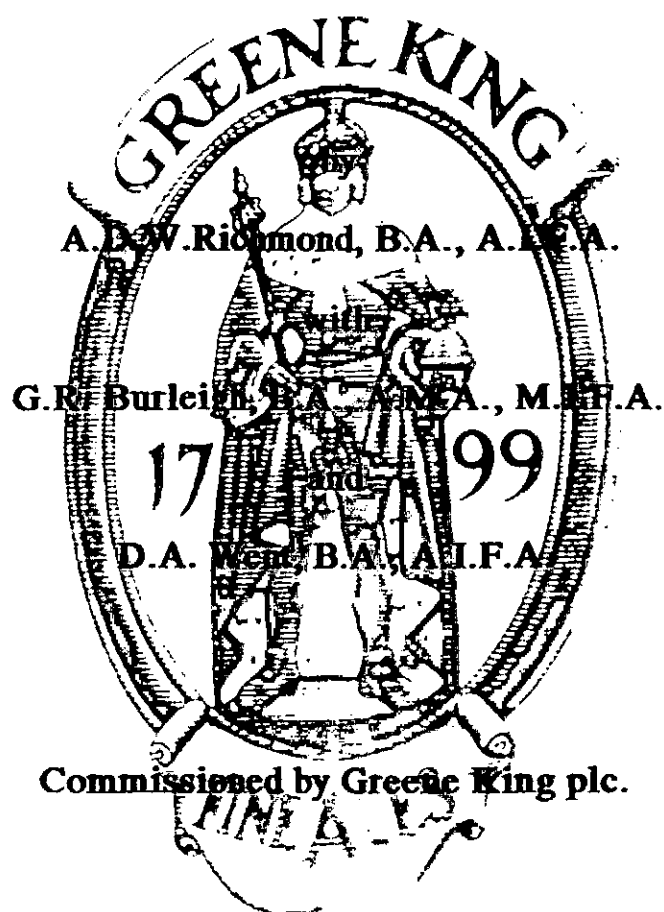
'The Engine Public House',

Baldock

Report No 17

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**An Archaeological Evaluation
at
“The Engine” Public House,
Baldock, Hertfordshire.**



Report No. 17

North Hertfordshire District Council Museums

Field Archaeology Section

Department of Engineering and Leisure Services

August 1992

“The Engine” Public House, Baldock.

N.H.D.C. Site Code: Bal-54 ‘92.

National Grid Reference: TL 245² 340¹⁰~~8~~.

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Cover illustration:

A scroll reflecting the style of the impressed decoration around the belly of an early Roman imitation samian pottery vessel found within Trench C, “The Engine” site.

Acknowledgements

The N.H.D.C. Field Archaeology Section would like to express its thanks to Greene King plc. for funding the archaeological evaluation, to Mr. Cowan, the landlord of "The Engine", and to the adjoining neighbours for their co-operation throughout the project.

Thanks are also due to the staff who carried out the excavations: Paula McCarroll, Tony Offord and Faith Pewtress.

The excavations were supervised and this report written by Andy Richmond, Assistant Site Supervisor with the North Hertfordshire Museums Field Archaeology Section. Gil. Burleigh, Keeper of Field Archaeology, had overall responsibility for the project and edited this report with the assistance of Dave Went. Mark Stevenson's hidden hand was once again responsible for assisting the final production of this report.

The following report is the fuller and final version of the Evaluation Report which was produced as an interim summary only, immediately after the trial trenching, in April 1992.

The cover design and illustrations were drawn by Faith Pewtress.

The reference work used for the identification of pottery in this report is the North Hertfordshire Museums Pottery Fabric Series, compiled by Helen Ashworth, 1990.

The fabrics from "The Engine" site have been classified and described according to their superficial characteristics with the aim of grouping together those of similar appearance, on the general assumption that they are likely to be of a similar date and from related sources of origin. Classification was by hand examination only, considering the basic criteria of texture, clay-matrix, and the size, frequency and type of the aplastic inclusions. A selection only of pottery sherds was examined from this site for the purposes of this report. The examination was carried out by A.D.W. Richmond and G.R. Burleigh.

N.B. The views which are expressed in this report are those of the authors, who take full responsibility for them. They are not necessarily the views of the North Hertfordshire District Council.

1. Introduction

1.1 In November 1991 planning permission was granted for development on an area of land to the south of "The Engine" Public House, Baldock. The application for development involved the erection of six houses together with parking spaces and an access road entering the plot of land from Orchard Road, to the west (see Figure 1). Attached to the grant of planning permission was a condition for an archaeological investigation of the area in advance of the new construction. The scheme of investigation includes provision for a field evaluation, followed by a report with recommendations for any further work deemed necessary as a result of the evaluation. This evaluation was necessary in order to determine the nature and scale of preserved archaeology below the present day ground level. This document is the full report of the field evaluation. Following on from the evaluation, a larger excavation has been recommended to enable the recording and interpretation of a sample of the very extensive and well-preserved archaeological remains on the site, as revealed by the trial trenching, before those remains are destroyed by the new development.

1.2 Archaeological interest stems from the fact that the plot of land to be developed is situated on the north side of the Mediaeval road, known as Whitehorse Street. It was considered possible that Mediaeval remains might be found in this area which is to the rear of the former burgrave plots on the north side of the market street. However, it would appear from the trial trenching that the area is beyond the probable extent of the Mediaeval burgrave plots which would have flanked the street, running in long thin strips at right angles to the road. More importantly in this instance, it was expected that evidence relating to the earlier Romano-British settlement of Baldock, known to exist elsewhere within the present day town boundaries would be located. Due to the lack of

recent development carried out in this area of the town, archaeologists know little concerning the extent of the Roman settlement to the north-west of the present day Whitehorse Street. Most investigations have been concerned with developments to the eastern and north-eastern portions of the town; to discover whether activity was prevalent in the Romano-British period this far to the north-west would be of considerable interest. The nearest previous investigation to this site was carried out in 1991 on the "Stationmaster's House" site, Bal-46, in Station Approach (see Figure 1). This investigation found evidence of Roman occupation in the 2nd to 4th centuries A.D., including a chalk quarry. The Engine site is at the junction of the main Roman road north out of Baldock, heading for Sandy, with the major east - west ancient route called the Icknield Way. It was considered likely that important Roman remains could be on the site, including the possibility of a cemetery.

1.3 The plot of land under investigation consisted of overgrown and largely neglected former gardens, with no evidence of buildings, other than sheds. In fact from the analysis of several Ordnance Survey maps it is thought that this piece of land has not been subject to any form of modern development, although local residents have mentioned the existence of a bowling green earlier this century. Several neighbours had converted borrowed parts of this overgrown plot into gardens with the permission of Greene King. This site may therefore have existed as an area of grassland bounded by Station Road to the north-east and Football Close to the north-west. If this were the case it would have considerable importance on the issue of preservation. If archaeological remains existed in this area they would not have been subject to the destructive impact of development as is so often the case within the boundaries of small towns.

The Engine P.H. , Location Plan

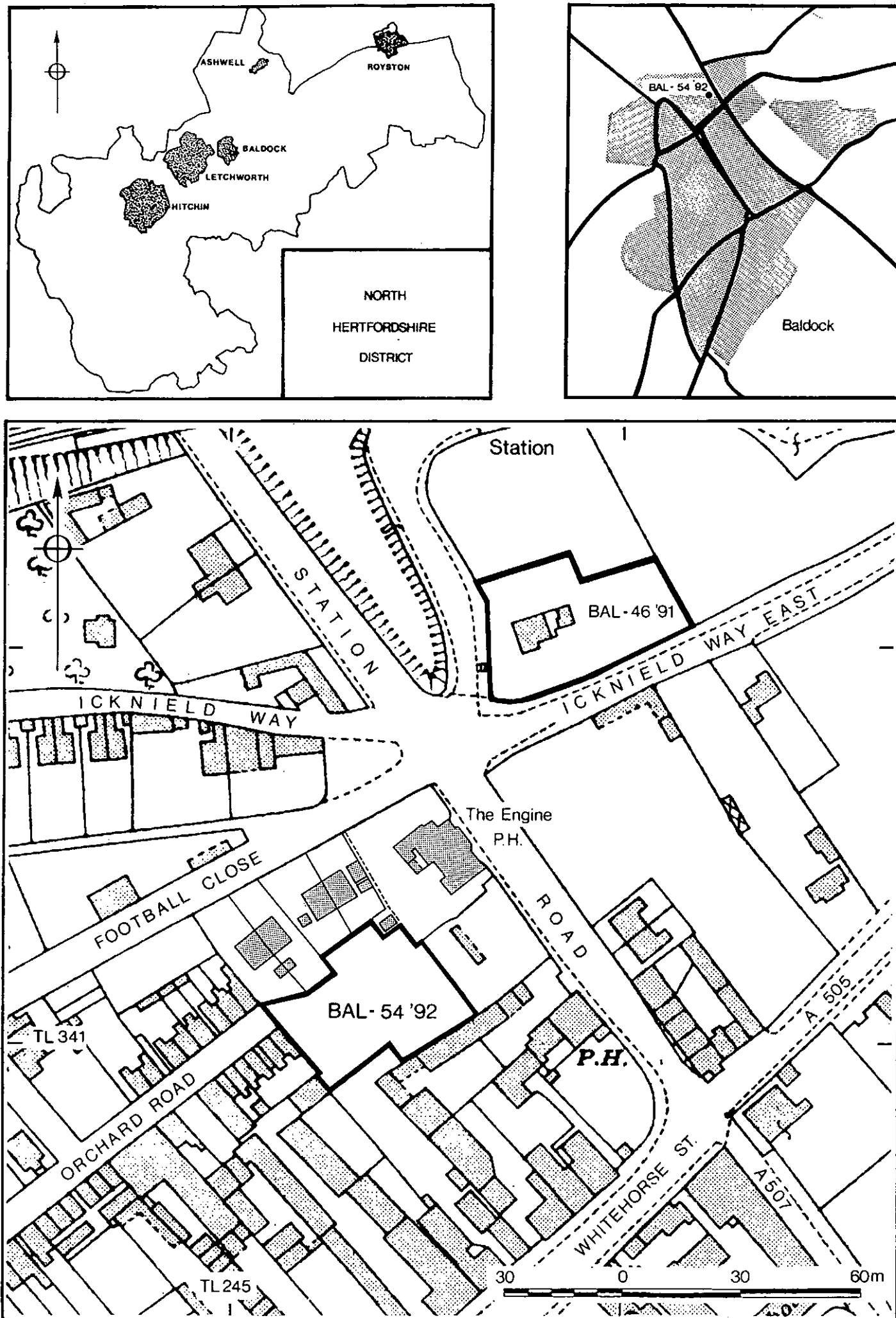


Fig 1

1.4 A preliminary period of evaluation by trial trenching was therefore undertaken where building work was to take place. Six trenches were opened up with a mechanical excavator and cleared of topsoil down onto the visible subsoil deposits and in places the chalk natural. It was immediately evident that a detailed

survey was required as several features of a probable Romano-British date were seen to exist. The evaluation was conducted in March 1992 by a team of four archaeologists. The project was funded by the owners of the land, Greene King plc.

2. Archaeological Setting

2.1 The present day small town of Baldock in North Hertfordshire is known to have started its life as a "New Town" in the Middle Ages. It is seen to have been a deliberate foundation in the middle of the twelfth century by the Knights Templar who were granted the rights for a market and a fair by King Richard in 1189 (Beresford, M. 1967,452). The town, at the point where the Great North Road crosses the Icknield Way, appears to have been well sited for a market and the settlement prospered, being based on the existence of two market places, one along the present day High Street and the other along Whitehorse Street.

2.2 The Medieval town was not however, the first settlement in Baldock. It appears that the development in the twelfth century was on a site to the west of a "long deserted but perhaps not quite obliterated Roman settlement" (Stead, I.M. and Rigby, V. 1986,29). This Roman element in itself had evolved out of an earlier Iron Age community which may have originated along the site of a spring-line in the vicinity of the modern railway. It is possible that elements of the Roman town still existed in the earlier Mediaeval period and were respected by the town planners of the day. Earlier roads may have been utilised, and good building material may have been removed from the ruins of Roman structures and re-used as the Mediaeval town developed and expanded. Knowledge of the Roman settlement of Baldock was non-existent until excavations in the 1920's and 30's by Mr. W.P. Westell, curator of the Letchworth Museum, and excavations in the late 1960's and early 1970's by Dr. I.M. Stead, then of the Ministry of Public Building and Works (Stead, I.M. and Rigby, V. 1986). Recent extensive excavations under the guidance of G.R. Burleigh, Keeper of Field Archaeology for the North Hertfordshire District Museums, have expanded upon this earlier work, perhaps enabling the most detailed picture of a Romano-British small town to

emerge (Atkinson, M. and Burleigh, G.R. 1992; Colley, C. and Burleigh, G.R. forthcoming; Richmond, A.D.W. and Burleigh, G.R. 1992; Burleigh, G.R. et.al. forthcoming).

2.3 The limits of the Roman settlement appear to have been demarcated by the series of large cemeteries known to exist to the north, east, south and south-west of the present day Clothall Road (formerly Pesthouse Lane). Only to the north-west have no cemeteries been located. However, this is more likely to reflect the lack of fieldwork conducted in this part of the town. The present investigations are therefore of considerable importance in helping to elucidate the nature of this north-western sector, and may help to throw more light onto the complex picture emerging of settlement development in Romano-British Baldock. The town appears to have grown steadily around the junction of several major roads, revealing an element of co-ordinated organisation demonstrating the early interaction between native and Roman traditions. The communication systems were of paramount importance in the Roman period. They afforded relatively quick contact between centres of importance and provided essential trade routes stretching throughout the Empire. At Baldock the Icknield Way, known to have been an important routeway along the edge of the Chiltern chalk escarpment from the Neolithic period onwards, converged with other roads which led to some of the major towns of Roman Britain. A primary road led southwards to the large provincial town of Verulamium (St. Albans), and ultimately on to Londinium (London), affording contact with the continent and communication systems reaching deep into the heart of the Roman Empire. Another important road stretched northwards to Godmanchester, Lincoln and beyond, whilst a third road led south-east, to Braughing and ultimately to the largest of all coloniae, Camulodunum (Colchester), originally the capital city of the new Roman province of Britannia. These

routes were doubtless the source of much trade during the period of Roman occupation allowing access to a great variety of goods and influences from much of the Empire.

2.4 It was around these communication systems that the town developed and grew, the roads often acting as visible boundary markers demarcating sub-divisions and properties within the settlement. Baldock developed as a prosperous small town, undoubtedly displaying the wealth of services to be expected from a settlement acting as a local market centre. The variety of burial practices which have come to light through extensive excavation programmes might suggest that Baldock was also fulfilling a separate function as the centre of local religious cults. In December 1967 a very rich La Tène III pre-Roman burial dating from the 1st century B.C. was discovered in a part of central Baldock, coincidentally known as "The Tene". A similar wealthy burial was found in 1981 on Upper Walls Common. The richest burial contained the cremated remains of the deceased together with undoubtedly prestigious exotica in the form of bronze bound wooden buckets, iron firedogs and an imported pottery amphora for fine wine or oil. Apparently the local aristocracy in the late Iron Age regarded Baldock as a suitable centre for the conspicuous display of personal wealth in their funerary ritual.

2.5 Baldock developed quickly following the Roman invasion in AD 43. The trackways

which had connected Iron Age regional centres were improved and soon came to carry the increased trade which was an integral part of the operation of the Empire. Imported goods, although still rare and expensive, began to appear in greater quantity in the town, alongside the products of local manufacture. Prosperity was reflected in the emerging street pattern and density of new buildings, as well as Romanised styles of pottery and articles of dress. The town continued as a market centre for an agricultural community and as a focus for religious activity.

2.6 The site under investigation is seen to lie toward what is believed to represent the north-western extreme of the Roman settlement, although no previous excavations have been carried out in this area to confirm such a view. The present evaluation will undoubtedly clarify the situation concerning the presence of Roman activity this far from the known centre. The plot of land lies close to the spring source of the River Ivel, likely to have been the main water supply for any occupation in the vicinity, and in all probability the focus of ritual activity. Also only one hundred metres to the north of the present site recent excavations by the Field Team discovered the existence of one of Baldocks' Romano-British quarries seen to have been in use from the third through to the fourth centuries AD, although earlier activity was recognised (Atkinson, M. and Burleigh, G.R. 1992).

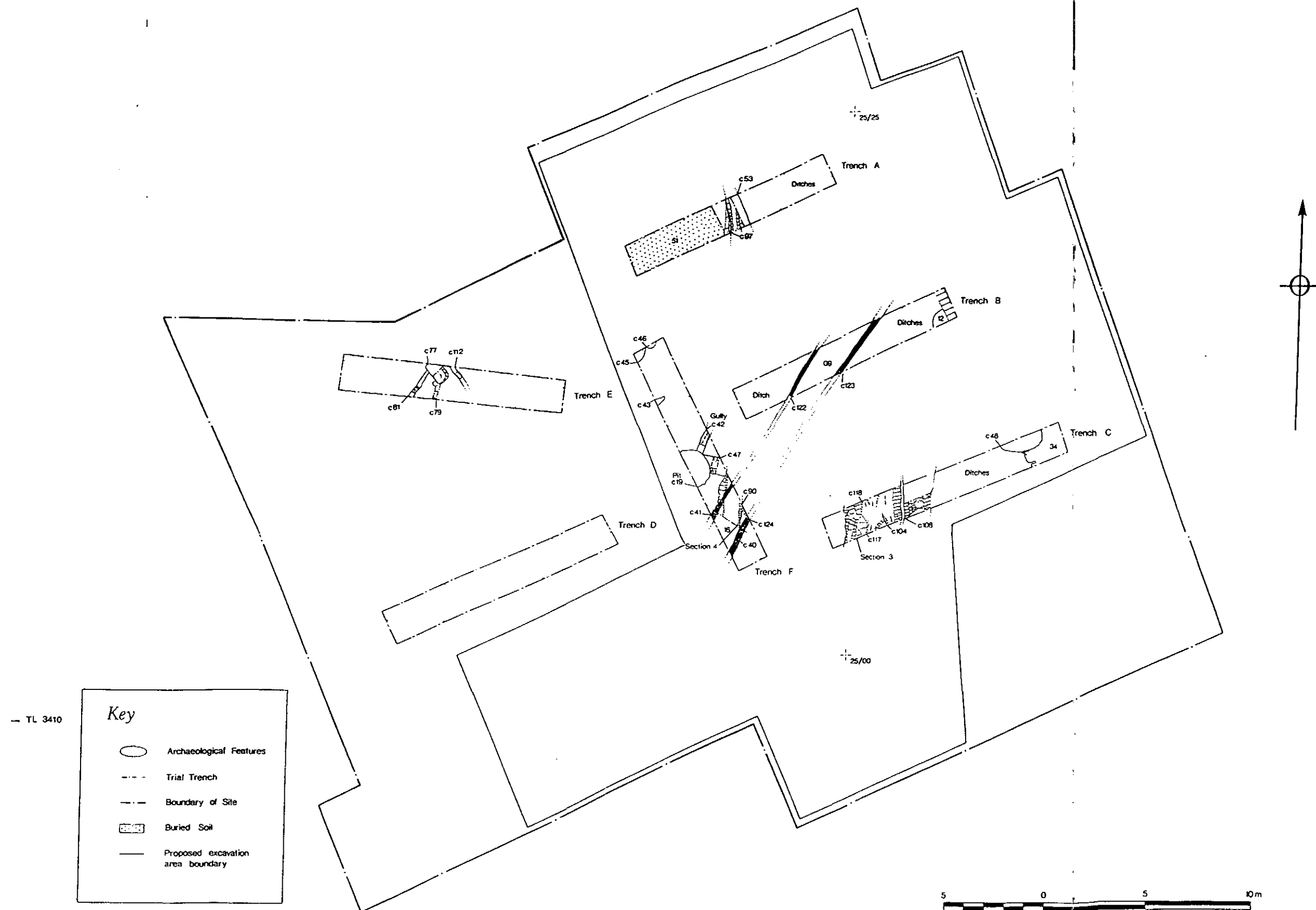
3. The Archaeological Investigation: Methodology

3.1 The investigations carried out by the Field Archaeology Section of the North Hertfordshire District Council, constituted an evaluation project aiming to determine the situation concerning the presence, and survival of buried archaeology in an area outlined for redevelopment. A series of six trenches, each 1.8m wide and up to 12 metres long, were positioned across the site in order to assess the nature, depth and survival of archaeological remains (see Figure 2). The trenches, A to F, were excavated using a JCB mechanical excavator with a 1.8m toothless ditching bucket attached to its back actor. Overlying material, topsoil and modern deposits were all stripped away to reveal the upper surfaces of any surviving archaeological deposits.

3.2 It was immediately clear that remains of a Romano-British date were present in at least

four of the trenches indicating activity across the site. The features discovered were numbered and plotted, classified and dated and a general account is given below. A full photographic archive was maintained. In certain cases the features were sampled for dating purposes and to determine the actual depth of stratigraphic archaeology present on the site. All recognised features were hand-cleaned by a team of four archaeologists. Where excavation took place, the accumulated deposits were methodically removed in a stratigraphic sequence until the chalk natural was reached. It was hoped from the evaluation that a reasonable picture of the buried archaeology could be outlined to provide us with a preliminary layout of the site prior to further investigations occurring before any construction begins.

The Engine P. H., Baldock : Location of Trial Trenches, 1992



4. Evaluation Results:

4.1 Trench A

(see Figure 2)

4.1.1 Trench A was located toward the northern most extreme of the plot of land intended for redevelopment. It was 10.5 metres long by 1.8 metres wide and was oriented approximately ENE to WSW. The mechanical excavator removed the dark silt topsoil [01], which existed to a depth of approximately 0.30 metres across the whole trench and then removed a more substantial sub-soil deposit [02], seen to be of a post-medieval date. This latter deposit had a high gravel-like content contained by a mid-grey silt matrix. No deposits were seen to contain evidence suggestive of Mediaeval activity. Evidently the burgrave plots, which must have existed along Whitehorse Street, did not reach this far north. Toward the half metre depth a further sub-soil deposit was encountered [51], which had a conspicuous concentration of white chalk flecks throughout. This deposit contained sherds of pottery of typical Romano-British styles.

4.1.2 Several sherds of a vessel were located display conspicuous black grog and shell inclusions within an oxidised orange-grey matrix. The pottery sherds were from a Fabric 3 vessel representing a cooking pot in use sometime around the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age. Other sherds, fabric 4 and 11 varieties, were also recovered. Both these styles were in use from the First century AD onwards. A samian fragment was found together with the carinated rim of a Fabric 7 vessel. Both could be dated to the early years of the First century AD. This layer appears to represent the existence of a Romano-British sub-soil horizon indicating evidence of occupational activity around the earlier years of the Roman settlement.

4.1.3 Cutting through this layer was a single

ditch [97], with no evidence of re-cuts. The ditch feature contained four fills [96,95,99 and 106], all silts with varying admixtures of chalk. The upper most fill [106], contained no finds, but the deposit below [99] produced pottery sherds from Fabric 3 and Fabric 16 varieties. The former ware is known to have been in use prior to the Roman occupation. The latter, coarse sand tempered style was in use from the late first century through to the late second century AD. The next fill [95], produced a quantity of finds. Together with a variety of pieces of butchered animal bone and oyster shell concentrations was a diverse collection of pottery sherds reflecting a range of distinctive wares in use during the first and perhaps early second centuries AD. An ovolo decorated piece of samian pottery was recovered as well as sherds from Fabric 12 grey wares, Fabric 2 grog tempered coarse wares and Fabric 8 gritty-textured storage vessels. These last pieces displayed non-geometric incised decoration, and represent undoubtedly the diversity of typical local household wares which will have been in use throughout the region. An example of a Fabric 18 ceramic was located in the lowest fill of the ditch feature [96]. Again dateable to the first century AD, these finer wares may represent the existence of local trade. This particular form may have arrived in Baldock having been produced in the Nene Valley region.

4.1.4 The largest feature visible within Trench A was a substantial ditch [53] traversing the site approximately north to south. Although this feature was not excavated it was seen to truncate the smaller ditch system outlined above, and contained characteristic pottery sherds from vessels known to have been in use during the first century AD. The size of this ditch is suggestive that it was a major element in a drainage complex undoubtedly associated with a nearby settlement.

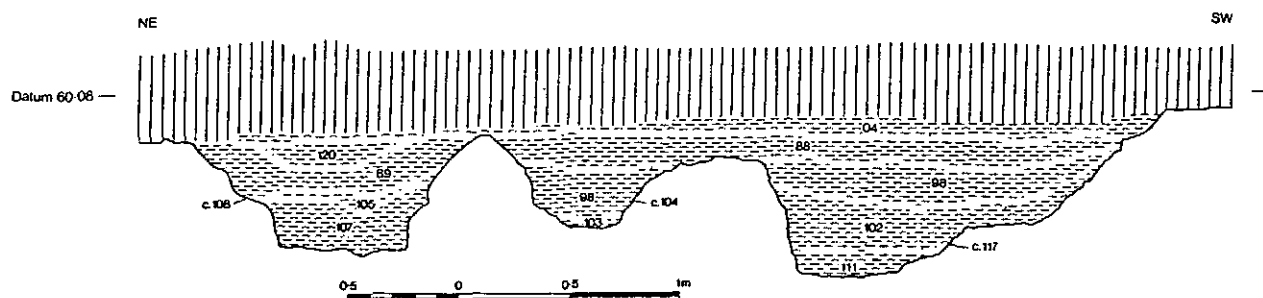


Figure 3. Section facing north-west, Trench C.

4.2 Trench B

(see Figure 2)

4.2.1 Trench B was oriented along the same axis as Trench A. It was approximately 11 x 1.8 metres, and was again machine cleared until a sub-soil horizon with evidence of Romano-British activity was located. Although no excavation took place within this trench, several features suggestive of occupation were identified. The sub-soil layer reached [05=08], is seen to represent the same Romano-British horizon located across much of Trench A [51]. The upper surface produced several Fabric 8 sherds, gritty textured with visible grog inclusions. Such pottery was common during the mid. to late first century AD.

4.2.2 Cutting through this layer were two parallel, linear features [06,07], oriented NE to SW. This most interesting arrangement was also picked up in Trench F, where a detailed analysis of the features took place. These linear features were composed of a fairly compact component of flint with mortar. Each was approximately 0.3m in width, however, the present evaluation was unable to determine the length of the features, or whether they returned at right angles. However, their composition and

character would suggest that they may be associated with the robbed-out foundation of a building. Separating them was a silty fill, with evidence of gravel concentrations and occasional mortar patches.

4.3 Trench C

(see Figure 2)

4.3.1 Trench C, again oriented on a similar axis to the previous two trenches, was approximately 12 x 1.8 metres. The visible feature within this trench, following machine removal of the topsoil and sub-soil deposits, largely consisted of the upper surfaces of a north-south oriented ditch complex. Following hand cleaning the existence of two parallel ditches was recognised, the larger evidently consisting of a primary cut with several re-cuts. These ditches were section excavated to determine their depth, date and possible duration of utilisation (see Figure 3).

4.3.2 The upper fill of the more substantial ditch [104], was nearly 3 metres in width. During excavation six markedly similar fills were located, all mid-grey earths [04, 88, 98, 103, 102 and 111], together with the truncated

remains of a conspicuously darker, compact silt-clay [119], toward the lowest interface of the complex. It was within this series of fills that a large quantity of ceramic debris was located. Although during the post-excavation phase of the evaluation several re-cuts were evident, truncating earlier channels within the complex, the earthy fills all appeared to have been deposited contemporaneously. The slight differences in matrix composition between the fills probably relate to the differential deposits utilised during the single process of deposition. It is worthwhile pointing out that sherds from some of the lower fills actually fitted pieces from the upper fills thus reiterating the contemporary nature of the process of infilling. Slow silting up of the ditch complex does not appear to have taken place.

4.3.3 The wealth of pottery discovered from the small section through the undoubtedly substantial ditch complex displayed an array of distinctive styles encompassing the spectrum of simple every day local forms to sherds of characteristic fine wares. These finer examples were often decorated and were almost certainly imported as exotica from production centres elsewhere in Britain and on the Continent. The diversity represented was really quite remarkable.

4.3.4 Many pieces recovered revealed the range of effective forms of decoration utilised by the Romans, including incision, excision, rouletting, comb-patterning and application in the form of rows of raised dots producing effective geometric designs. The presence of coloured slips was also recognised, as was the addition of mica dust to the surface of certain vessels, the process producing a metallic sheen. Such actions were clearly an attempt by local craftsmen to produce imitations of imported wares. Coloured slips were sometimes "trailed", like piped icing, across vessels, and although no examples of this last decorative technique were found within the ditch complex, a sherd was located within Trench F.

4.3.5 Potters imitating superior styles were

evidently concerned with emulating prestigious wares. Imported continental pottery such as samian, a fine style reflecting a symbol of a higher civilisation is known to have been produced at several key centres in the province of Gaul (France), and was expensive to obtain. Imitation will have therefore been practised far and wide; some forms clearly being better produced than others. Within the upper ditch fill [04], the remains of a fine grey ware, Fabric 5, imitation vessel were discovered. The sherds carried a series of impressed circular and linear geometric decorations and the pot had clearly been wheel thrown. This imitation form appears to be reflecting a particular samian style known as 'Dragendorf 30'. Such vessels, although copies of continental varieties, must nevertheless have been most desirable.

4.3.6 Several pieces of imported pottery were recovered from the larger ditch feature. The most complete piece of samian came from one of the lower fills [111], and although having the remains of a potters' mark it was not possible to decipher it. The form appears to have been of a small dish (Dragendorf 27) probably imported into Britain during the First century AD. A samian potters' mark was recovered from a portion of a Dragendorf 15/17 vessel located within fill [102]. The impression read ROPPV.S.[FEC]. and is seen to represent the work of the potter Roppus from La Graufesenque, near Toulouse in southern France, who operated between c.AD 60-80. Similar examples were found during the Verulamium excavations (Frere, S. 1972, 248. fig.82). Several other pieces of samian were recovered from the feature although no further potters' stamps were discovered.

4.3.7 The upper fill [04] of the largest ditch, (which also spread over the upper surface of the adjacent ditch [108]), contained numerous sherds, few showing signs of weathering revealing the favourable nature of preservation. All the pottery from this fill could be dated from the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age until the late first century AD. Fabric 2 and Fabric 3

sherds were quite prolific, all apparently from large storage vessels. Several Fabric 1 black grog-tempered sherds of a rather shapeless form were also located. Vessels of this style were presumably made locally from the nearest clay source. They were prevalent around the first century BC. Later forms included several Fabric 5, Fabric 6 or possibly 19, Fabric 9 flagon sherds, and Fabric 13 fragments, several pieces displaying characteristic carination. All these forms could be dated to the later first century AD. Within this fill was also found a base sherd from a mortarium, a cream coloured coarse ware with typical white quartz trituration grits. These were general purpose mixing-bowls, newly introduced into Britain by the Roman army, and had heavy rims for easy gripping and lifting. The grits on the inner surface of the bowls not only aided with the process of grinding they also helped to reinforce the vessel thus prolonging its life. Their production was nearly always concentrated in the hands of specialist potters.

4.3.8 The highest percentage of pottery came from the fill [88], directly below [04]. Many forms were represented displaying a wide variety of styles. The largest quantity of sherds came from Fabric 3 style vessels, seen to be storage containers with mixed grog and shell temper. The surface colours of these pots varied from oxidised red to reduced grey. These vessels will have mainly been hand made and will probably not have been traded. Fabric 4 style vessels were also well represented again having a characteristic shell temper. A number of the recovered sherds displayed varying degrees of carination (distinct profile angles), and several large Fabric 7 sherds are seen to have come from fine-grained cream-coloured flagons used for carrying wine and fine oils, possibly from production centres in Gaul during the earlier years of the first century AD. A range of other sherds were seen to have come from a number of Fabric 5, 8, 12 and 13 varieties, all known to have been in use during and, in some cases, beyond the first century AD.

4.3.9 Other finds from this context included a small quantity of butchered animal bone; however, the amount were not as high as might have been expected. The bone appears to derive from domesticates, probably pig, sheep and cow; but detailed analysis of these finds has yet to take place. A considerable number of oyster shells were also found.

4.3.10 The following three fills of the larger ditch feature [98,102 and 111] respectively, all produced a quantity of similar ceramic styles to those outlined above. The most conspicuous Fabric from [98] was 16, a coarse sand tempered ware of a dirty brown/red colour probably imported from the Verulamium region during the late first century AD. Fill [102] produced a wider variety of styles including several sherds of a fine white 'pipeclay' ware (Fabric 19). These fragments had a painted, high relief barbotine decoration in a rich orange colour, standing out markedly on the pale creamy texture of the vessel. The vessel was probably a flagon which may have been imported during the first or early second century AD. Other fine-ware fabrics were also represented within this fill, in particular several large, fine, sand-tempered grey-ware sherds (Fabric 19) with a glossy, black slip. These pieces had characteristic hand-applied studs of clay which would have travelled around the belly of the vessel. Such styles were probably imported from the Nene Valley region. The finest vessel represented was undoubtedly the samian variety with the visible potters' mark already mentioned above. However, a range of poorer quality wares, including coarse Fabric 12 and early style Fabric 1 sherds, were recovered reflecting a range of simple local forms which will have been produced on a continuous basis from the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age until the early first century AD. The lowest fill of the three [111] produced fewer finds, though those recovered were similar to those discovered throughout the other fills. Several large sherds of late Iron Age, grog-tempered pottery (Fabric 2) were recovered as well as the remains of a small Dragendorf 27

vessel which is known to have been one of the commonest samian cup styles utilised during the first century AD (Collingwood, R.G. and Richmond, I. 1969, 246).

4.3.11 Following the removal of all of the fills a substantial south-north oriented complex of inter-cutting ditches was revealed [104, 117, 118]. This obviously major re-cut ditch line, covering at least three distinct cuttings, with a maximum depth of 0.81 metres and width of over 3.0 metres, must have been a fairly well used feature up to and including the early second century AD whereafter it was evidently abandoned and rapidly filled up.

4.3.12 Parallel, and immediately to the east of this ditch complex, was another ditch consisting of four fills [28, 89, 105 and 107], and a single cut [108]. These deposits once again appear to have amassed at around the same time; slow silting up does not appear to have taken place. This feature was by and large shallower than the more substantial ditch complex immediately to the west and the fills contained conspicuously fewer pottery sherds. A quantity of Fabric 8 sherds came from fill [89], being grit-textured with visible grog inclusions. Such pottery can be dated to the mid to late first century AD and was probably locally made. This fabric was again represented within the lowest fill of the feature [107]. Occasional bone and oyster shell fragments were recovered, there were however, few other finds.

4.3.13 By and large this ditch feature appears to be contemporaneous with the larger complex running alongside it. Both appear to have been quickly and purposefully filled up with a quantity of domestic refuse following disuse. This action took place sometime during the earlier years of the second century AD. The limited trial section excavated could not verify the relationship between the two parallel ditches. It is possible that they represent the continually re-dug side of an enclosure, which could lie to the east or west. Alternatively, the ditches could relate to the drainage of the

known Roman road which ran more or less on the line of the modern Station Road. It is hoped that further work will be able to clarify the evidently complex situation and provide us with a more detailed chronological picture of the emergence, phasing, usage and eventual abandonment of these important features.

4.3.14 Toward the eastern extent of Trench C there existed what appeared to represent another substantial ditch complex [30], possibly orientated along a similar axis to those outlined above. This complex was cut by a large ditch [48] which contained an upper, calcareous fill [35]. Excavations were not conducted along this stretch of the trench, thus it was not possible to deduce the exact relationship between the various features. That a large complex is already known to have traversed this region, located at the western side of the trench, we may assume that this unexcavated feature be of an earlier or later date. It is probable that it relates to the unexcavated ditch thought to exist toward the eastern extreme of Trench A, [53]. If this is the case we would expect to pick up the feature toward the eastern end of Trench B. Without further excavations, however, it will not be possible to follow this line of enquiry.

4.4 Trench D

(see Figure 2)

4.4.1 Trench D, approximately 11.5 x 1.8 metres, was oriented east-west, toward the western side of the plot of land under investigation. The topsoil and sub-soil deposits were machined down to the chalk natural, during which operation no evidence relating to Romano-British activity or Mediaeval activity was encountered. When the chalk natural was reached, hand cleaning of the trench took place and several features penetrating the natural bedrock were recognised. Upon investigation the majority of these features turned out to be nothing more than penetrative root holes caused by the action of nearby trees. In several

instances periglacial deposits were encountered. Two of the features [63 and 67] appear to represent plough marks; similar linear features were also picked up in Trench E. No dating evidence was recovered from the fills of these features [62 and 66], thus the dating of them has to remain conjectural.

4.4.2 It should not be assumed that the land surrounding this trench contains no evidence of archaeology on the basis of the results from the evaluation. Activity here does, however, appear to be far less intense and we may tentatively conclude that this portion of land was outside the immediate area of Romano-British utilisation.

4.5 Trench E

(see Figure 2)

4.5.1 Trench E was also toward the western portion of the plot of land under investigation. It was approximately 11 x 1.8 metres and the topsoil and unproductive subsoil deposits were machined off until the chalk natural was reached. Whilst this was taking place a heavily burnt surface [70] located between two chalk layers [71 and 125] was encountered toward the eastern end of the trench. These deposits were seen to be relatively modern, possibly relating to outbuildings associated with the public house, or other structures, sometime during the earlier years of this century. During this process of machine removal no evidence

relating to a buried land surface was encountered as was the case within Trench A.

4.5.2 Following hand cleaning several features were recognised which visibly penetrated the chalk natural. As with Trench D several linear grooves were recognised [82, 83, 84] which appear to represent plough marks traversing the site approximately north to south. However, no finds were recovered from their fills [73, 74, 75], thus to try and date them, or relate them to other features recognised would be premature. Toward the centre of the trench a couple of gullies were seen [79 and 81], these were truncated by a sub-rectangular cut [77]. The single, shallow fill of the rectangular cut [76] produced no finds, which was also the case with the two gully fills [78 and 80], thus any dating of these features will have to remain relative. We can not be certain that they relate to the Romano-British activity known to exist elsewhere on the site.

4.6 Trench F

(see Figure 2)

4.6.1 The final evaluation trench, 11 x 1.8 metres, was positioned toward the centre of the plot of land under investigation, traversing the site approximately NNW to SSE. This trench provided a wealth of information and must mark the approximate western extreme of activity within the study area. The northern end of the trench was machined straight down onto

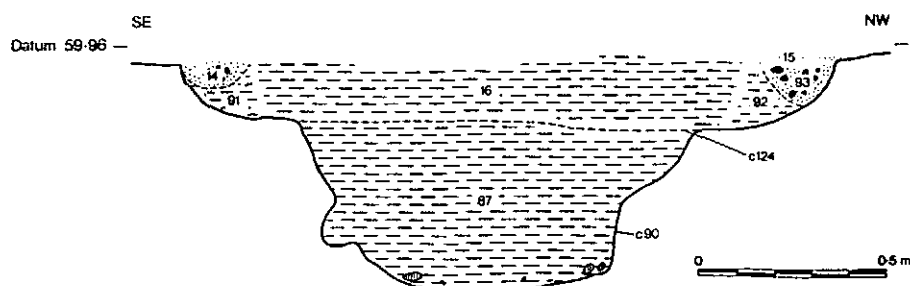


Figure 4. Section facing north-east, Trench F.

the chalk natural. Here several deposits [22, 24 and 25] were located which penetrated the natural bedrock. These features, which appeared to represent sub-rectangular pits, were not investigated further, however we may assume that they represent Romano-British activity on the stratigraphic basis of the deposits which sealed them.

4.6.2 Toward the southern end of the trench a range of features were identified, several seen to exist above the level of the chalk natural. The most conspicuous arrangement was the existence of two linear, rubble and mortar foundation lines [14 and 15] traversing the trench NNE to SSW, which were also located within the confines of trench B indicating that the feature is at least 14 metres in length. The most northerly of the two parallel lines was seen to be far more substantial than the southern one. It was very compact, with a high sandy mortar content surrounding a quantity of flint. There were no chalk inclusions within the matrix.

4.6.3 Separating, and stratigraphically above these two linears was a dark, silty fill [16]. This fill was removed in section and contained a variety of ceramic sherds generally dating to the latter years of the Roman occupation, although a few Late Pre-Roman Iron Age Fabric 3 sherds were also found. The later fragments included some characteristic Fabric 11 grey ware sherds and several colour coated styles including Fabric CC3 - a Nene Valley variety, common within Baldock during the third and fourth centuries AD, and Fabric CC5 - a Colchester colour coated ware in use from the second to fourth centuries AD. This layer, possibly representing the fill of a robbed out trench relating to the two linear features, appears to have been deposited during the fourth century AD (see Figure 4).

4.6.4 The sampling of the linear features [14 and 15] produced only a couple of small pottery sherds. A single Fabric 31 sherd, densely gritted and tempered with shell and small quartz grains, was recovered as well as a

single piece of a Fabric 4 style vessel. The date of the former ceramic is largely unknown as is its source, however, the latter sherd appears to be an early variety, which was in use from the first to the fourth century AD. These sherds, however, may relate to the phase of possible robbing already outlined and do not necessarily date the period of construction of the linear feature. Directly below the upper portion of the northern most linear feature [15] was a more compact foundation material, [93]. Within this conspicuous matrix were recovered examples of both Fabric 3 and Fabric 4 varieties. The Fabric 3 is an early ware, utilised during the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age, however, the Fabric 4 ceramic was in use over many years up to and including the fourth century.

4.6.5 Both of the linear foundation features appeared to rest within small cuts [40 and 41]. This point may argue against the idea that the whole feature represents the remains of a substantial robber trench, leaving only the northern and southern most traces in the form of linear bands of flint with mortar. Fill [16] did not appear to rest within a cut of its own, suggestive of a phase of robbing; however, the whole complex does look remarkably like the remains of a substantial foundation, probably representing a wall course. Further excavations will no doubt enable the complex situation to be resolved.

4.6.6 Directly below the two perceived cuts [40 and 41] were deposits [91 and 92], again reflecting the existence of a linear wall feature. Both [91] and [92] were compact, mid brown clay deposits, suitable for providing a stable and solid base for construction. Again these two contexts were positioned distinctly on either side of the linear complex, separated by [16] (see Figure 4). Context [91] produced no finds, however several sherds were recovered from the deposit [92]. The earliest sherds were Fabric 1 varieties, tempered with black grog pieces and in use during the First century BC and First century AD. Later, Much Hadham fragments were also found including Fabric

49a, which is known to have been produced during the fourth century AD. A larger cut [124] was perceived to exist below [91] and [92], encompassing the whole complex relating to the probable wall structure outlined. This wide shallow cut shared its edges with the smaller cuts [40 and 41] above, and was seen to penetrate the chalk natural on both sides (see Figure 4). Seen to exist below, however, was an earlier feature, evidently truncated by [124]. This earlier feature appeared to represent a ditch, oriented north-south, slightly different to the orientation of the probable wall foundation complex seen to exist above.

4.6.7 Upon section excavation of this lower feature a deep single fill [87=109] was located, truncated by [124], and contained within a steep sided north-south orientated cut [90]. The single fill, travelling to a depth of 0.40 metres, was a soft mid-brown silt and contained a quantity of finds including shell, butchered animal bone, decorated tile and pottery. Several Fabric 11, Fabric 4 and Fabric 41 sherds were found, all with a wide chronological usage ranging from the late first to the fourth centuries AD. More interestingly was the discovery of a range of colour coated sherds relating to Fabric CC3, Fabric CC4 and Fabric CC12 varieties. Fabric CC12 appears to have been a local red-slip ware, which was probably an imitation of Oxfordshire styles produced in the third and fourth centuries AD. The other two varieties were both produced from the late second to fourth century, however Fabric CC4 is seen to have been an import, possibly from

Eastern Gaul, whilst the other Fabric (CC3) was produced in the Nene Valley potteries. This last variety was the commonest colour-coated fabric in the third and fourth century Baldock.

4.6.8 The deposit was within a steep-sided cut [90], with a slight gradient running from north to south. This channel, 0.70 metres wide with a flat base was probably used as a drainage facility relating to a nearby settlement or road system. Following disuse it was filled with what appears to represent a rubbish deposit sometime during the fourth century AD. This feature was thereafter sealed under the foundations of a probable building represented by the linear foundations [14=07 and 15=06].

4.6.9 Several other features were recognised within the trench, however a full appraisal of them could not be conducted within the context of the evaluation. Toward the centre of the trench a large, circular pit penetrating the chalk natural was encountered. The upper fill of this [18] contained several sherds dateable to the second and fourth centuries AD. The cut [19], disappearing into the east-facing section, appeared to truncate the fills of two gullies [20 and 21] travelling north-eastwards and eastwards away from the large pit. The full stratigraphic sequence of these features could not be isolated, however, due to the limitations of the evaluation. Further work in the context of a larger-scale excavation programme would be beneficial in elucidating the spatial and temporal nature of these aspects of the Romano-British occupation of the site.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1 The limited evaluation carried out by the field team identified the existence of extensive and moderately well preserved Romano-British remains sealed below the present day ground surface. The results reiterate the necessity for a more detailed excavation programme and appraisal of the site prior to the ensuing development.

5.2 The evaluation successfully identified a series of important facets of Romano-British occupation within the six trial trenches. The identification of a buried Romano-British land-surface within Trench A [51], and probably existing within the confines of Trench B is of considerable importance. It is rather unusual to find such deposits stratified above the level of the chalk natural in Baldock, and a closer look at this horizon will hopefully throw light upon the type of land exploitation during the period of occupation. The ceramics associated with this layer were seen to date to the earlier years of the second century AD; however, these finds on the interface do not necessarily reflect the true age of this horizon.

5.3 The identification of structural remains in the form of a probable wall foundation at least 14 metres in length is also of considerable interest. If our initial interpretation is correct and this feature, which was picked up both in Trench C and Trench F, represents the remains of a substantial robbed out wall line, we may be looking at the discovery of an important building at the junction of major roads. Confirmation of this interpretation would represent a major archaeological discovery in the exploration and recording of the Roman town of Baldock. Buildings are generally not well represented within Roman Baldock, partly because of the devastating effects of ploughing which remove most traces of structures and floor levels. The plough has frequently only spared such structures and deposits as lay beyond its reach. The plot of land under investigation is seen to be away from the

known centre of the Roman town where we would expect to find the existence of several important buildings. The central core, more to the south of the present site, will have acted as the market centre. Away from the centres of many Roman towns, often flanking major access roads, existed a range of buildings, including inns or public lodgings (*mansiones*), undoubtedly important for the accommodation of officials and traders travelling between centres. It is possible that the evidently substantial structure encountered during the trial evaluation may relate to such a building. This plot of land is apparently on the north western margin of the town, near to important roads travelling to other local and regional centres. The junction of the Icknield Way and another road leading northwards to Godmanchester and beyond is known to lie close to the present site.

5.4 The series of Romano-British ditches, running approximately north-south across the eastern side of the plot, were selectively sampled and enabled us to gain a precursory layout of these features across the site. The distinction between major and minor ditch is necessary. The slighter examples, on average less than one metre wide, are generally common features within Roman Baldock, constructed largely for the purpose of private property demarcation and drainage around domestic or agricultural enclosures. More substantial ditches are rarer, sometimes being over two metres wide. Examples of this type of large feature were found alongside the Clothall Road during trial trenching in the 1960's (Stead, I. and Rigby, V. 1986,44), and usually represent major boundaries, sometimes between the settlement and an adjacent cemetery.

5.5 The substantial ditch sampled within Trench C can be placed within the major category. Limited hand excavation suggested that the feature was first dug in the Late Pre-Roman Iron Age, probably in the earlier years of the first century AD. The ditch was

apparently cleaned out and re-cut on a number of occasions and continued in use until it was rapidly backfilled with domestic refuse in the late first or perhaps early second century AD. Slow silting up of the complex does not appear to have taken place, as was possibly the case with some of the smaller ditches. This quick infilling is also demonstrated by the state of preservation of the artifacts which were deposited there; being mostly large unabraded fragments.

5.6 It is probable that the ditch complex in question represents the continually re-dug side of an enclosure, lying either to the east or west. The postulated enclosure could have been for domestic or cemetery purposes; however, no human burials were found within the trial trenches, although the limited nature of the hand excavation must be borne in mind. Alternatively the ditches could represent drainage ditches associated with a north-south oriented road. A Roman road is known to have travelled approximately along the line of the modern Station Road; however, definite evidence of it did not come to light during the evaluation. The existence of a number of pits in several of the trenches might suggest that the site is in an area of domestic enclosures. This interpretation would be reinforced by the presence of the probable building foundation.

5.7 Evidence toward the western side of the site was limited. It is possible that the plot of land is on the western margin of habitation, an area which possibly experienced the processes of expansion and contraction of activity associated with peripheral zones. That the majority of the

pottery recovered from the large ditch feature could be dated to the first and early second century AD says something of the extent of occupation at this time in Baldock. This period could represent a phase of expansion in a time of prosperity, possibly followed by a phase of contraction, or possibly change in concentration of population, during the second century AD when evidence is far less prolific. It is probable that it was not until the later third or fourth century AD that the area witnessed a second period of exploitation represented by the existence of the drainage ditch in Trench F overlain by the structural evidence relating to a substantial, robbed-out, wall. Further excavations will undoubtedly clarify a number of the above views.

5.8 From this limited evaluation the following recommendations are therefore made:

- a) A large part of the site should be stripped of topsoil to the archaeological levels in order to get a plan view of the extensive remains. These remains should be recorded in precise detail.
- b) Limited hand excavation should take place of a representative sample of the archaeological features, mainly by cross-sections, in order to understand their function, development and duration of utilisation. During this phase of the proceedings, artifactual and ecofactual samples will be retained for further examination.
- c) Following the period of on-site excavation and recording, finds and data will be processed and analysed within the framework of a detailed post-excavation programme, and a full report will be written.

Appendix: Quantification of Finds

Ceramics

Pottery *	21.780 kg
Building materials	5.850 kg
Clay pipe	0.030 kg

Other artifacts

Animal bone	3.435 kg
Shell	1.615 kg
Glass	0.265 kg
Worked stone	0.165 kg

Metal items

Iron	0.310 kg
Other metals	0.020 kg

* The total pottery weight does not include two vessels, a grain jar and a small beaker, which at the time of writing are on display in Baldock Library as part of an exhibition of recent work in the town.

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