

THE ROMANO-CELTIC SHRINE AT LITTLE PAXTON, DIDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

SALVAGE RECORDING 1986-7: REPORT

SUMMARY

This report describes the results of archaeological salvage recording at the site of a Romano-Celtic shrine at Little Paxton Quarry, Diddington, Cambridgeshire during 1986-7. The shrine complex comprised a rectangular ditched enclosure containing a circular foundation-trench, interpreted as being for a *cella*, and a pit. The finds included three bronze letters, a 'yoke-shaped object' and coins of later 3rd-4th century date, described in this report. Other finds comprised pottery of similar date, and animal bone. The shrine is set within the context of more recent work at the quarry, which began in 1992 and is on-going.

INTRODUCTION

The salvage recording was undertaken by the Cambridgeshire County Council Manpower Services Commission (MSC) archaeology team, in advance of gravel extraction at Little Paxton Quarry (centred on NGR TL 203657, Fig. 1A-B) in 1986-7. The work was facilitated by the quarry company, English China Clays (Quarries) Limited (now Aggregate Industries Limited). This report was prepared by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit to integrate the results of this earlier fieldwork with the Unit's more recent programme of excavations at the quarry, which includes two settlements of Romano-British date (Jones and Ferris 1994, Jones forthcoming). The preparation of the report was funded by a research grant from the School of Historical Studies of the University of Birmingham.

The complex of crop-marked features including the shrine (centred on NGR 208659, Figs. 1B-2) is located 1.5km to the east of Diddington Village, 0.5km to the west of the River Great Ouse. The shrine was first recorded as a crop-marked enclosure, measuring approximately 70m by 40m and with its long axis parallel to the river (Cambridgeshire SMR No. 1160a). To the west of the shrine is a north-south aligned stream-channel (not illustrated), mapped by aerial photography.

The most recent programme of archaeological investigation at the quarry, which commenced in 1992 has investigated settlement and activity dating from the Neolithic to the Romano-British periods in the area to the west and southwest of the shrine (Jones in press). The Neolithic-Bronze Age was represented most widely by ploughsoil scatters of flint artifacts and by pits, some forming pit-circles (Jones 1995). The more extensive Mid-Late Iron Age settlement remains comprised nucleated farmstead enclosures (Jones 1995, and forthcoming), and a single, square barrow (Jones 1998). The earlier of the two excavated Romano-British settlement complexes was located to the east of the shrine. The settlement comprised a cluster of ditched farmstead-enclosures associated with stock-pens, some probably continuously in use from the Late Iron Age (Jones forthcoming). The abandonment of this complex around AD 120 may have been associated with the establishment of a settlement 0.5km to the south. This later settlement was focused around a 'ladder' enclosure, which, together with later enclosures to its east, was occupied until the end of the Roman period. A function associated with stock control has been suggested for the 'ladder' enclosure (Jones and Ferris 1994), and the associated insect remains suggest that this enclosure complex was set within open pasture.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the fieldwork in 1986-7 was to record the identified features in plan, and also to undertake some limited hand-excavation to provide details of their profiles, fill sequences, and to recover datable artifacts. The site was fieldwalked in January 1996 by the Sawtry Archaeological Group, with limited results. The second stage of archaeological fieldwork involved observation and recording, following removal of the topsoil in May 1986. The shrine enclosure ditch soon became readily identifiable on the ground because of the growth of camomile along the ditch fills. The features identified were base-planned at a scale of 1:500. A 2m-wide section initially cut across the southern enclosure ditch was continued across the adjoining side of an internal circular foundation-trench. Full stratigraphic details survive for this cutting, although details of the other hand-dug sections, unfortunately, do not survive. Later, in 1987, the removal of the gravel 'hogging' into which the shrine features were cut, was monitored, and further finds were recovered from the bases of the identified features.

A brief report describing the results was prepared soon after the salvage recording (Alexander n. d.) but no further analysis was undertaken at that time. In view of the limited on-site investigations possible within the context of the salvage recording, this report should not be interpreted as an exhaustive, or detailed, account of the archaeology. Analysis of the associated pottery and animal bone is outside the scope of the present, preliminary report, and would probably provide further contextual evidence on activities at the shrine, both sacred and profane.

The finds and archive for the shrine site are available in the Cambridgeshire County Council archaeological store.

RESULTS

Description

The cropmarked features (Fig. 2)

The shrine is located on the first and second gravel terraces of the River Great Ouse (SMR No. 11660a). It forms part of an extensive multi-phase palimpsest of crop-marked features located on the west bank of the river (Evans 1997, plate 1). The northernmost feature, a 'deflected' ring-ditch (A), located atop a slight natural knoll, dated in the range 1840-1780 cal. BC (Evans 1997, 19) is interpreted as a mortuary enclosure respecting an earlier cremation pyre (B) to its south. Further ring-ditches were located to the south (C-D and possibly E). The large, sub-square enclosure (F) to the east may be of Late Iron Age date (SMR No. 11660b). An L-shaped arrangement of possibly associated rectangular enclosures (G-H), the latter sub-divided into small possible animal pens or plots of probable Romano-British date, lay to the east and south of the shrine, following its alignment. A roughly east-west aligned ditch, following the orientation of enclosure group G, cut across the northern part of the shrine interior. Towards the southeastern corner of the shrine was a circular feature, measuring approximately 15m in diameter. Drove-way J, and part of drove-way K, roughly cut at right-angles to the alignment of enclosures G and H, were probably contemporary. In the northern part of the shrine interior was a possibly circular crop-marked feature, not tested by fieldwork.

The salvage recording (Fig. 3)

The features recorded were cut into the orange-brown sand-gravel (the 'hogging').

As recorded in plan after topsoil stripping, the enclosure measured a maximum of 63m by 51m (measured from the outside of the ditches). The enclosure ditch did not define a regular, rectangular shape. Its northern and eastern sides appeared to be slightly inturned, and, as may be anticipated, the ditch was broader at the right-angled corners of the enclosure. The ditch measured an average of 3m in width and was cut to an irregular, flat-based profile. The excavated ditch section on the southern side of the enclosure measured a maximum of 3.3m in width and 1.2m in depth. As first recorded by aerial photography, an entrance 4m-wide was located to the north of the mid-point of the eastern side. The crop-mark evidence indicated that the ditch terminals were enlarged, particularly on the southern side, where a pit measuring 4m in diameter and 1.5m in depth (not illustrated) was hand-excavated in 1987.

Two features, a circular foundation-trench (F100) and a pit (F103) were recorded within the enclosure interior. No trace was recorded at excavation of either the east-west aligned linear feature, or of the circular feature recorded by aerial photography in the north of the enclosure. The pit was located in the approximate centre of the enclosure, in line with the eastern entrance, and measured 1.2m in diameter. The circular foundation-trench was 15m in diameter (measured from its outer edges). It was cut to a U-shaped profile, measuring a maximum of 1m in width and 0.5m in depth. Feature F100 was backfilled with a dark brown sand-clay-loam (1010), which also extended over the contemporary ground surface on both sides of the feature. No floor levels or other associated features or deposits were found within the circular foundation-trench.

The earliest cut of the enclosure ditch (F101) on its southern side was dug through the backfill (1010) of the circular foundation-trench (F100), and into the underlying subsoil. The primary fills of ditch F101 comprised a mottled dark yellow-brown sand-silt-loam (1007), and a dark yellow-brown clay-sand (1006), recorded on its northern side. Layer 1006 was overlain by a deposit of dark yellow-brown clay-sand (1004), recorded on the northern side of the ditch. Above was a layer of yellow-brown sand-silt-loam (1005). The mostly-backfilled circular foundation-trench (F100, 1010) was sealed by a shallow layer of dark brown sand-clay-loam (1009), which also extended to the south, overlying backfill layer 1004 in ditch F101. Backfilled ditch F101 was later re-cut (F102). This re-cut also truncated the extreme southern edge of the uppermost backfill (1009) of feature F100. Re-cut F102 was dug to an irregular profile, with a flat-based slot in its centre. The re-cut measured a maximum of 3.3m in width and 1m in depth. The re-cut was backfilled with a layer of very dark grey-brown sand-clay-loam (1003), overlain by a deposit of dark brown sand-clay-loam (1001) which infilled the remaining hollow of the re-cut ditch.

Finds summary

A total of 14 coins was recovered during salvage recording at the shrine, providing the main source of dating. With the exception of No. 3 none had contextual information, but they may have derived from features F100-F102, although this cannot be proven. The coins recovered may be dated in the range 261- c 353. Nine coins may be dated in the range c 261-275, including rare coins of Aurelian, and Severina, his wife. This chronological group notably did not include any 'barbarous radiates'. The remaining five coins are dated in the broader range 286- c 353. This group includes coins of Carausius, Maximian, Constantine II, Constans and

one of the House of Constantine. Two votive bronze letters ('S' and 'V') and part of a 'V' or 'M' were recovered from shrine ditch F103 (1003), together with a copper alloy 'yoke-shaped' object.

Interpretation

The rectangular ditched enclosure may be interpreted as a *temenos*, or sacred precinct (Rodwell 1980, 212), as is also suggested by the recovery of three votive bronze letters. The proximity of the circular foundation-trench (F100), to the southern side of the ditched enclosure (F101-2) suggests that an internal earthen bank to the enclosure is unlikely, if, as is suspected, the two features were originally contemporary. Alternatively, the Little Paxton *temenos* could have been enclosed by a fence, set within features F101-2, such as at Hayling Island (Downey *et al* 1980). The excavated southern segment of the enclosure ditch (F101) indicates that it was re-cut (F102) after infilling.

The large pit cut into the southern entrance terminal at Little Paxton was recorded by aerial photography and excavation. It could have been a post-pit for a timber upright, as at Hayling Island (Downey *et al* 1980, fig. 14.1), and Woodeaton (Goodchild and Kirk 1955, 19), possibly forming a gate-post. Alternatively the pit could be interpreted as containing a votive deposit, as at Uley (Woodward and Leach 1993, 307), where a pit for the deposition of votive offerings (a *favissa*) was cut into a deeper ditch segment. An eastward-facing entrance is common nationally (Drury 1980, 59) among *temenoi*. At Little Paxton this entrance arrangement lay on the river side of the *temenos*, which might have provided practical advantages.

The circular foundation-trench (F100) defined an enclosed space interpreted as a *cella* (Wilson 1980, 7), which would have contained the inner sanctum of the shrine, where the cult object was situated (Rodwell 1980, 212). The circular foundation-trench at Little Paxton measured 1m in width, a sufficient size to contain the footings of a load-bearing timber wall. An unusual feature of this *cella* was the apparent absence of evidence for an entry-gap. The *cella* trench appeared to be a continuous feature, possibly because the entry-gap may have been re-sited.

No tile was found at Little Paxton, suggesting that the *cella* roof was of thatch or wooden shingles. Another possibility is that the *cella* was open. The layer of dark brown sand-clay-loam (1010), measuring 0.3m in depth, recorded both on the outside and inside of the circular foundation-trench F100 could in part at least represent a floor or *in situ* occupation deposit. Another possibility is that this material was an alluvial deposit. The stratigraphy in the single recorded section at Little Paxton suggests the circular foundation-trench (F100) had gone out of use before the cutting of the primary enclosure ditch (F101). Alternatively, it is possible that feature F100 was contemporary with an earlier cut of the enclosure ditch, which had been completely scoured-out by ditch F101.

A number of circular *cellae* have also been recorded in Late Iron Age and Romano-British contexts, perhaps most notably at Hayling Island (Downey *et al.* 1980), although the square or rectangular *cella* form is more numerous. Often a further, concentric wall outside the *cella* defined a surrounding ambulatory, used for ritual processions and the display of votives, and provided the characteristic Romano-Celtic plan. No evidence was found for such a structure at Little Paxton, although it could be represented by a feature such as a gravel path (e.g. at Collyweston, Building F, Knocker 1965, 57-8), which might not have been identified during salvage recording. Ambulatories performed more than a merely structural function – being sometimes used to restrict access.

The eccentric placement of the *cella* within the *femenos* is a notable feature of the Little Paxton site. A similar, off-centre arrangement is recorded at Hayling Island (Downey *et al.* 1980), and at Gosbecks (Drury 1980, fig. 3.3.12). This off-centre placement is usually explained by the siting of the *femenos* enclosure relative to a sacred tree, post, or stone, which may have been represented at Little Paxton by pit F103. Although no details of the pit fills are available, it is possible that this feature may have contained a standing stone, timber-post, or massive rotting tree stump. At Uley (Woodward and Leach 1993, 308, F19) Shrine XVI was built around a tree, possibly originally associated with a sacred grove. Central pits within *cellae* are found at Hayling Island (ritual post or stone), at Temple 8, Gosbecks Farm, near Colchester (Crummy 1980, fig. 11.13), and also more extensively, including shrines in Gaul, Germany and Czechoslovakia.

FINDS

The votive copper alloy objects by Lynne Bevan

Three votive letters (Nos. 1-3, Plate 1) and a yoke-shaped object (No. 4: Plate 2) were recovered from the primary fill (1003) of the re-cut (F102) of the southern shrine ditch. The letters, comprising a 'V', an 'S' and the arm from a second 'V' or an 'M', were first described in *Britannia* by Hassall and Tomlin in their annual review of Roman inscriptions (1987, 367). The letters were all made from sheet copper alloy which has been bent into a 'V'-shaped profile to make them appear three-dimensional, presumably by being hammered over a wooden former. This type of letter appears to have been the most common among examples found, although cruder, flat letters are also attested. Occasionally the letters would have been gilded to make the effect even more impressive (Hassall 1980, 85).

There have been several discoveries of votive letters at shrine sites, at some of which they are believed to have been sold, probably for visitors to formulate their own inscriptions and nail them onto wooden plaques (Henig 1984, 147-148), or perhaps very basic inscriptions on plaques were sold ready-made. Find-spots include Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Kirk 1949, 45, nos: 30-32, Goodchild and Kirk 1955, 28 nos:1-5, fig. 10 and pl. IIIc), Aldeby, Norfolk (Edwards 1978), Hockwold, Norfolk (Green 1986, 70, no. 54 and fig. 43), and Springhead, Kent (Wright and Hassall 1971, 289). Examples were also found at Lydney, Gloucestershire (Wheeler and Wheeler 1932, 102, no. 8, pl. XXXIV), at Pakenham, Suffolk (Hassall and Tomlin 1990, 371), at Brigstock, Northamptonshire (Wright and Hassall 1972, 353) and in Essex at Holbrooks, Harlow (Conlon 1973, 37 and fig. 4), Kelvedon (Wilson 1972, 331), Ivy Chimneys (Hassall and Tomlin 1981, 379), and Great Chesterford (Miller 1995, fig 22:201, 47). While the majority of letters have nail holes from being hammered into wood, there are instances of soldering the letters, for example at Great Chesterford (*ibid.* 1995, fig. 22:201, 47).

Most of the letters were found singly or in small groups, although seven to ten letters were found at Woodeaton and 45 letters and fragments of letters at Lydney (Bagnall-Smith 1995, 185). While none of the letters 'has ever been recovered in sequence and no inscription has been reconstructed' (Henig 1984, 147-148), 'presumably the dedications were usually very short and formal, merely recording the names of god and donor who had paid his vow – VS(L)LM' (*ibid.* 147-148). The example cited by Henig is a common abbreviation of 'VOTUM SOLVIT (LAETUS) LIBENS MERITO' (which translates as 'paid his/her vow joyfully, freely and deservedly'), which was often further shortened to 'VSLM' (minus 'joyfully'), for example as seen on a miniature altar from Vindolanda (de la Bédoyère 1989, 155, fig. 94:f). Bagnall-Smith

has suggested that some of the votive letters from Woodeaton had formed the inscription 'VSLM' (1995, 185). It is possible that the Little Paxton letters had been used to form this popular inscription, which was conveniently brief and versatile, since it could be used in connection with any vow or deity. Although this identification remains only a possibility, if the fragmentary letter is actually an 'M' (rather than a second 'V'), only the 'L' (or possibly two letter 'L's'), is missing.

In contrast to the letters from Lydney, most of which are believed to have comprised a dedication to the aquatic god Nodens (Bathurst 1879, 13), it is not possible to ascertain the identity of the deity approached at the Little Paxton shrine. One possibility is that the letters were connected in some way with the yoke-shaped object (No. 4, Plate 2) found in the same shrine ditch fill. This object had been formed from a possible bracelet with knobbed terminals and was decorated with three pieces of metal (one each of silver, copper alloy and iron) arranged at intervals along its length. It appears to have been deliberately re-shaped rather than being deliberately bent and distorted in the manner of ritually-'killed' material, such as a bracelet from Lowbury, Berkshire (Atkinson 1916, 44, pl. XII, 35, Bagnall-Smith 1995, fig. 20, 195-196) and the miniature spears from Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Henig 1984, fig. 70, 149-150, Bagnall-Smith 1995, fig. 8, 184-185) and Uley, Gloucestershire (Henig 1993, fig. 110 and fig. 115, 131-133). The regularity of the shape also argues against post-depositional damage.

The shape is problematic, since it may have represented a yoke, or perhaps was intended to suggest the face and horns of an ox or bull, or even a serpent. Seen in this context, it might have been regarded as a transformed object, possibly to suggest an identification with, or an attribute of, a deity or a deity's attendant beasts - as opposed to being sacrificed to a deity as a ritually-'killed' object. Bracelets and rings were considered to be suitable gifts for deities (Henig 1984, 151). Bracelets were a common class of offering at many shrine sites, including Lydney and Uley where, together with toilet articles, they have been linked with 'fecundity and healing', largely perceived as female concerns (see Woodward and Leach 1993, 327-335 for full discussion). Subsequent research at Great Witcombe, Gloucestershire, has revealed a high number of bracelets which have been dated to 'the 3rd and 4th centuries' by their style of decoration (Bevan 1998, 86). It should be noted that the style of knobbed terminal is not typical of most Roman copper alloy brooches and neither is the unusual decoration in the form of three different metals which must surely have been significant.

Although it is not possible to definitively reconstruct either the inscription or the purpose of the 'yoke-shaped' object from Little Paxton with great confidence, nor to begin to comprehend the rituals carried out at the shrine and the ideology behind them, the copper letters appear to represent a medium for interacting with the gods which has a generally eastern geographical bias. Of course, the large collection from Lydney and the letters from the Oxfordshire sites are outside this general area, but the letters and the associated rituals do appear to have had a particular resonance and emotional currency in the east and southeast of Roman Britain.

Catalogue (Nos. 1-4 are from feature F103, 1003)

- 1 'S'-shaped votive letter made from sheet copper alloy. The letter is made from one piece of sheet which has been bent into a 'V'-shaped section to make it appear three-dimensional. One nail hole is visible at one end and another in the centre of the letter. The third hole has been lost through slight damage to the other end. Length: 82mm, width: 10-16mm, thickness of plate: 0.5mm. Plate 1.
- 2 'V'-shaped votive letter made from sheet copper alloy. The letter is in one piece, and has been bent into a 'V'-shaped section to make it appear three-dimensional. Two nail holes are visible, one at the intersection of the two arms and another at the end of one arm. The third has been lost as a result of

slight damage to the second arm. Length: 78mm, width of arms: 12mm, thickness of plate: 0.5mm. Plate 1.

- 3 Arm from a votive letter with a tapered end and terminal nail hole. The general shape and size of this fragment suggests that it might have originated from a second 'V', similar to No. 2 above, or from an 'M'. Length: 64mm, width: 14mm, thickness of plate: 0.5mm. Plate 1.
- 4 Copper alloy ?bracelet with two oval terminals bent into a yoke shape, onto which three circular pieces of metal have been attached. Interestingly, the metals are all different, comprising silver, copper alloy and iron. Length: 144mm, diameter: 2mm. Width of metal attachments: silver: 2mm, copper alloy and iron: 1.5mm. Plate 2.

The Coins by Roger White

A total of 14 coins were recovered. As a group, the sample is too small to do any statistical analysis, especially since the context is so insecure, but there are a number of interesting features present in the group that are worthy of comment. The coins were generally in good to excellent condition, although some had surface corrosion locally, and all were legible.

The most important point to make in the first instance is that the group presents aspects untypical of even a small group of coins from a Romano-British site. There are no coins dating before 261, while the latest is of c 353, they are of generally good quality, and there is only one irregular coin (Reece 1995). The limited date range is not completely unusual, but is *prima facie* evidence for a brief occupation of the site after a foundation in the mid-3rd century since ordinarily one might expect at least one or two coins of an earlier date than this, and the common issues of the 4th century are largely missing. Having said this, though, it is not impossible that a small group such as this would lack early coins and, in itself, this absence cannot be used to exclude the possibility of earlier occupation. Numismatically, however, the group is of interest for the lack of copies of mid-late 3rd century date (the so-called 'barbarous radiates'), while only a single example of an irregular coin of 4th-century date was found. Two thirds of the coins (nine in total) present in the group are of this date (c 260-275), and of these two are rare coins of Aurelian (including one of his wife; Plate 3). These are by no means common site finds in Britain, since for much of the reign of Aurelian (270-75) Britain was under the control of the 'Gallic Empire', represented in this group by Tetricus and his son. Tetricus was deposed in 273 and presumably the coins of Aurelian were introduced into Britain in the period after 273. However, any coins that were introduced are rarely found on site since they have a higher silver content than the usual coins of the period and, under Gresham's Law, vanished rapidly from circulation (Reece 1987, 19-20). The coins of Tetricus and Gallienus in this group are also all regular, a rarity at this period, and this again argues for a selection process that targeted coins of good quality for deposition. Alternatively, it may be that these coins were lost or deposited at a date closely contemporary with their issue periods, but without knowing their context it would be misleading to speculate further.

The remaining five coins are less closely grouped, covering the period between 286 and c 353. With the exception of the latest coin, a *Fel. Temp. Rep.* copy, all are of good quality and are generally well preserved. The coin of Carausius does have some surface corrosion that does make its precise identification uncertain. This is unfortunate, as coins of the Rouen mint are rare in Britain and this example lies beyond its normal range of distribution (Casey 1994, fig. 4). However, the portrait type and regular quality of the coin suggest that it is in fact from another, more common, mint. The remaining coins are unremarkable as site finds, as they are types that are among the most commonly found in Roman Britain. The large coin of Maximian (No. 11, Plate 3), however, is an unusual site find in this condition: it still bears traces of silver wash and

lies at the heavier end of its weight range (Plate 3). Such coins are not normally found on site since they have a relatively high silver content, as with the coin of Aurelian discussed above, and this too argues for a deposition date close to the time of issue.

Catalogue (Nos. 9 and 11 are illustrated on Plate 3)

All the material is unprovenanced, with the exception of No. 3 from the northern terminal of the *femenos* ditch.

1. GALLIENUS date: 261 diam: 21mm	denom: ANT mint: ML wt. 3.4g	cat: 5.1 462 die axis: 12	Obv: [GALLI]ENVS AVG Rev: PMTRPVIIII[COSIIIPP] wear: WSW
2. CLAUDIUS II date: 268-70 diam: 20mm	denom: ANT. mint: --- wt. 1.7g	cat: as 5.1 77 die axis: 6	Obv: [IMP CL]AVDIVS AVG Rev: [OR]IEN[SAVG] wear: SW/W
3. CLAUDIUS II date: 268-70 diam: 20mm	denom: ANT mint: RM? wt. 2.9g	cat: 5.1 15 die axis: 6	Obv: [IMP]CLAVDIVS AVG Rev: AEQVITAS AVG wear: SW/W
4. TETRICUS I date: 270-3 diam: 18mm	denom: ANT mint: --- wt. 2.6g	cat: 5.2 130 die axis: 7	Obv: [IMP]C TETRICVS PFAVG Rev: SP[ES AVG] wear: WW
5. TETRICUS I date: 270-3 diam: 18mm	denom: ANT mint: --- wt. 2.8g	cat: as 5.2 130 die axis: 12	Obv: [-] Rev: [SPES AVG] wear: C/C
6. TETRICUS I date: 270-3 diam: 17mm	denom: ANT mint: --- wt. 2.7g	cat: 5.2 131 die axis: 6	Obv: [-]TETRICVS[-] Rev: ?[SPES AVG] wear: WW
7. TETRICUS II date: 270-3 diam: 18mm	denom: ANT mint: --- wt. 1.6g	cat: RIC V, 2 255 die axis: 1	Obv: [CPE TETR]ICVS CAES Rev: [PIETA]S AVG wear: WW
8. AURELIAN date: 270-5 diam: 23mm mm P	denom: ANT mint: SIS wt. 2.9g	cat: 5.1 247 die axis: 6	Obv: IMP [AV]RELIANVS AVG Rev: ORIENS AVG wear: SW/SW
9. SEVERINA date: 270-5 diam: 22mm mm AXXT; see Plate 3.	denom: AUREL mint: TIC wt. 3.5g	cat: 5.1 9 die axis: 7	Obv: SEVERINA AVG Rev: PROVIDENDEOR wear: SW/SW
10. CARAUSIUS date: 286-9 diam: 22mm	denom: AUREL mint: RN? wt. 4.2g	cat: 5.2 639 die axis: 1	Obv: [IMP]C CARAVSIVS PFAVG Rev: FOR[TVNA] AVG wear: SW/SW (surface corrosion)
11. MAXIMIAN date: 305-7 diam: 29mm note: SJF ITR for SJF PTR - see Plate 3	denom: FOLL mint: TR I wt. 11.9g	cat: 6, 644b var die axis: 6	Obv: IMP MAXIMIANVS PAVG Rev: GENIOPOPVLIROMANI wear: SW/SW
12. CONSTANTINE II date: 336 diam: 17mm	denom: --- mint: CONS P wt. 1.5g	cat: 7, AR395; HK 399 die axis: 12	Obv: CONS[TANTINVS]IVNNG Rev: GLOR-[IAEXERC]ITVS 1std wear: SW/SW
13. CONSTANS date: 347-8 diam: 16mm	denom: --- mint: TR P wt. 1.7g	cat: 8, TR 195; HK 150 die axis: 6	Obv: CONSTAN-SPFAVG Rev: VICTORIAE DDAVGGQNN wear: SW/SW
14. H. of CONSTANTINE date: 353+ diam: 11mm	denom: --- mint: --- wt. 1.3g	Obv: [-] cat: c. of ? die axis: ---	Rev: [-] FH3? wear: WW

Conventions

Mints: AR - Arles; ML - Milan; RM - Rome; RN - Rouen; SIS - Sisica; TI - Ticinum TR - Trier

Denomination: ANT – Antoninianus; AUREL – Aurelianus; FOLL – Follis

A copy or counterfeit of a particular issue is denoted by single quotation marks.

Condition of the obverse and reverse is indicated by the following conventions:

UW	Unworn	VW	Very worn
SW	Scarcely worn	EW	Extremely worn
W	Worn	C	Corroded

Weights are recorded in grams, flan diameters in millimetres. Die axis is indicated by clock reference.

Catalogue references are to relevant volumes of RIC (Roman Imperial Coinage) or Hill and Kent (HK) (Late Roman Bronze Coinage, Vol. 1).

DISCUSSION

Location

The placement of the Little Paxton shrine relative to the immediately adjoining ring-monument, and barrows, which may have survived as upstanding earthworks at the time, was probably deliberate. An association between Romano-Celtic shrines and temples and early prehistoric ritual or funerary monuments has been suggested at a number of sites. Local examples include Haddenham, Cambridgeshire (shrine built over the ditch of a Bronze Age barrow, Evans 1997, 20) and Mutlow Hill, Cambridgeshire (shrine adjoining a series of urned cremations, Woodward 1992, 20). A similar association is recorded between shrines and Severn Cotswold barrows (Woodward and Leach 1993, 305). Other examples are recorded at Brean Down, Avon (shrine north of round-barrow); Slonk Hill, Sussex (Drury 1980); Harlow (France and Gobel 1985; temple overlay Bronze Age pit), and at Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943). An association between Romano-Celtic temples and Neolithic henge-monuments (e.g. feature A at Little Paxton, Fig. 2) was tentatively suggested by Woodward (1992, 29) at Condicote and Arminghall.

The later Iron Age landscape in the immediate vicinity of the shrine would have been dominated by the large crop-marked enclosure (F, Fig. 2), which lay just to the east of the shrine. The size of this enclosure, measuring approximately 150m north-south, could suggest a non-utilitarian function (see Woodward and Leach 1993, fig. 210). In contrast, the largest of the recently-excavated Iron Age enclosures at Little Paxton, probably associated with pastoral farming, measured approximately 50m across (Jones forthcoming, fig. 4). In the most recent survey of shrines the author noted that Iron Age shrines were generally located within open areas adjoining settlements which were set aside for ceremonial use, or in topographically prominent positions, in each case spatially distinct from domestic complexes (Woodward 1992, 18). Excavation has also identified religious practice at focal points in Iron Age settlements (e.g. South Cadbury, and the Colchester *oppidum* (Drury 1980, 55-6).

The Little Paxton shrine was notable for its location away from major centres of population and the main communication routes in the Roman period. The local market centres would have been at Godmanchester, 10km to the north, at Sandy (Dawson 1995), 12km to the south, and possibly at Cambridge (Burnham and Wachter 1990, 248), 20km to the east. A temple dedicated to the local god *Abandinus* is recorded at Godmanchester (*ibid.*, 128). Ermine Street, leading to Godmanchester, lay on the eastern bank of the Ouse. A further road route has been postulated (Edwardson *et al.* 1966, 136) skirting Grafham Water, to the west of Little Paxton.

The nearest ford across the River Great Ouse may have been near Little Paxton Church (Tebbutt 1969, 57), to the southeast of shrine.

The earliest Romano-British activity in the vicinity of the shrine comprised a group of ditched stock compounds sited to the west (Jones forthcoming), a focus probably occupied continuously from the Late Iron Age, until around AD120. Later Romano-British activity was focused around a 'ladder' enclosure, approximately 500m to the south of the former site, which was occupied from around the middle of the 2nd century until the end of the Roman period. This enclosure complex was almost certainly associated with pastoral farming (Jones and Ferris 1994), as indicated by evidence of its layout and associated environmental data.

Roman shrines were located in urban, military and rural locations. Of the rural temples, 43% were sited in isolated locations (such as Little Paxton), although temples were not usually associated with simple farmsteads (Woodward 1992, 18). A total of 57% of all Roman temples was sited near prehistoric occupation. Of the shrines located in isolated sites, 22% were built near springs and streams. The Little Paxton shrine may have been sited relative to the early prehistoric ritual earthwork monuments, a possible Iron Age shrine, and because of the site's proximity to the River Great Ouse, and its tributaries.

Morphology and interpretation

Prehistoric

The eccentric placement of the *temenos* relative to the pit (F103), which may have originated as a tree, provides the strongest evidence for a long-standing tradition of the religious significance of the Little Paxton shrine. The earliest focus of ritual activity may have been provided by the henge (A, Fig. 2) to the north of the shrine. It is possible that a grove associated with the henge could have occupied the area where the shrine was later laid-out. This re-use could represent a continuing (although not necessarily continuous) veneration for the locale.

Although no evidence for an Iron Age shrine at Little Paxton was found during salvage recording, the possibility should not be discounted. The Roman *temenos* enclosure and *cella* could have scoured-out all evidence of an Iron Age predecessor. The Celtic religion 'workshipped invisible forces of nature in the open air, venerating such objects as trees and standing stones...not as divine in themselves but as the abode of deities' (Lewis 1966, 4), the shrines being located in forests, or secret, watery places.

Details of some of the excavated circular Iron Age and Roman shrines are tabulated (Table 1). An Iron Age origin for the Little Paxton shrine may be suggested by the adoption of a circular shrine form, although this form was unusual in the Iron Age (Drury 1980, 60). More commonly, the shrine is square or rectangular in plan (Wilson 1973, 36-7). The circular *cellae* at Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, 127), Frilford (Bradford and Goodchild 1939) and Hayling Island (1st century BC, Downey *et al.* 1980), and possibly Thistleton (Drury 1980, 207) all derive from circular pre-Roman shrines (Downey *et al.* 1980, 294). Hayling Island may be the best example of a mid-1st century BC circular shrine replaced by large circular shrine, forming a parallel with the large circular shrines of central and western Gaul, being outside the mainstream of Romano-Celtic temples (Downey *et al.* 1980, 289). The deity worshipped at Hayling Island may have been a celtic version of the Roman god Mars, to whom some of the circular temples of western and central Gaul were dedicated. This circular shrine form is derived from

contemporary circular huts - the intention being to provide the deity with a 'hut'. Simple circular shrines also occur in the Roman period in Gaul, Raetia and Pannonia (Drury 1980, 69, fig. 3.5). The location of the Nettleton Shrub shrine (Wedlake 1982), opposite a spring and close to a river, suggests a pre-Roman ritual significance for the site, in a similar location to the Little Paxton shrine.

The Muntham Court, Uley and Kelvedon shrines both overlay Iron Age occupation, although a *nexus* between this earlier occupation and the Roman shrine cannot be demonstrated. In some cases the Roman re-use of an Iron Age site is represented by a square or rectangular cella form, for example at Harlow, Middlesex (France and Gobel 1985), Wood Eaton, Oxfordshire (Goodchild and Kirk 1955), and Lydney (Wheeler and Wheeler 1943).

TABLE 1: Details of circular Roman cellae

Name	Date	Diam	Reference	Other details
Hayling Island	AD 60 on	13m	Downey <i>et al</i> 1980	Drystone walled, with ante-chamber
Frilford	To 4 th cent	11m	Bradford and Goodchild 1939	Drystone walled
Brigstock	2 nd cent	11.5m (Max) 13m	Greenfield and Taylor 1963 Drury 1980, fig. 3.7	Oval pennanular trench, similar to Iron Age round-house. Timber-framed. Circular shrine
Collyweston	3 rd -4 th cent	12.6m	Knocker 1965, 54-7	Timber-framed
Thistleton	1 st cent and 2 nd cent	12.5m (2 nd cent)	Wilson, D. R. 1965, 207.	Two cellae. Earliest, timber-framed structure of possible pre-conquest date
Nettleton	Late 2 nd -mid 3 rd cent	10.1m	Wedlake 1982	Drystone walled, no ambulatory
Muntham Court		10.7m	Drury 1980	Overlies Iron Age site
Kelvedon	To end 2 nd cent		Wilson 1972, 333-4 & fig. 11	Timber-framed. Overlies Iron Age site
Aideby, Norfolk	-	18m	Edwards 1978, 94, fig. 49.	Pennanular
Bowes	3 rd cent	6.5m	Drury 1980, fig. 3.8	Drystone walled
Housesteads	3 rd century	4m	Drury 1980, fig. 3.8	Drystone walled
Maiden Castle		9m	Wheeler 1943	Site L. Oval in plan. Drystone walled

Roman

Other circular shrines at Collyweston, Mutlow Hill, Cambridgeshire, and Brigstock are located away from known Iron Age activity (Table 1). Nationally, it is relatively unusual, but not unknown, for a Roman shrine to be on the site of an Iron Age predecessor (Woodward 1992, 17). Woodward (1992, 19) records a total of 86 shrines of Romano-British date. The Romano-Celtic shrine type (circular, square or rectangular *cella* surrounded by an ambulatory, forming two concentric functional spaces), and the simpler, circular *cella* form, exemplified by the Little Paxton example, co-existed through the later Iron Age and the Roman period (Rodwell 1980, 218). As Blagg (1986, 15) notes 'religion was an important means towards the assimilation between the Roman and British cultures'. Simple circular and polygonal shrine buildings are notably well represented in the territory of the *Coritani* (Todd 1991, 112).

As Table 1 indicates, the circular *cellae* measured in the broad range between 4m (Housesteads) and 18m (Aldeby) in diameter. Measuring 15m in diameter, the Little Paxton example is noteworthy for its large size. Although circular *cellae* are not often associated with ambulatories, one possibility is that the excavated feature at Little Paxton comprised the ambulatory, not the *cella* wall. The close proximity between the southern side of the *cella* and the inner edge of the southern *femenos* ditch, possibly leaving no space for an ambulatory outside feature F100, perhaps supports this interpretation. However, it is equally possible that there was no associated ambulatory.

An alternative interpretation of the circular foundation-trench F100 at Little Paxton is that it formed the outside wall of a temple of hybrid square and circular plan (Drury 1980, 70). In these examples the circular, outer wall encloses four post-pits, which would have defined the four corners of a timber-framed tower or *cella*, representing elements of the square and circular *cella* plans, as suggested by the name of the type. This hybrid design is represented by excavated examples from Bozeat, Northants Wilson, 1966, 207), and Hockwold, Norfolk (Wilson 1966, 209), measuring respectively 15.25m and 9m in diameter. It has already been noted that the Little Paxton *cella* is larger in diameter (15m) than other excavated circular examples. A possible explanation for this larger-than-usual size could be that the Little Paxton example formed part of this hybrid group, in which case an external ambulatory would not be found. It is possible that such post-pits were not identified at Little Paxton because of the circumstances of the salvage recording. The possible second crop-marked circular foundation-trench (not illustrated) in the north of the *femenos* enclosure was not identified during salvage recording, and its interpretation as a *cella* is purely speculative.

The associated coins date in the range 261-353, although stratigraphic details are only available for one coin (No. 3). White (p.000 above) noted that the coins fell into two groups, the first dated 260-275 being relatively closely-dated; the second group, dating 286-353, less so. The absence of earlier coins is notable, especially given the evidence for the continued, if not continuous, veneration of the locale as suggested by the circular *cella* form, originating in the Late Iron Age, and the placement of the *femenos* in relation to the sacred tree or other marker. It is possible that traces of earlier, Iron Age, or early Roman activity were scoured-out by later activity, or that an earlier phase of activity could not be identified, given the limited resources available for salvage recording. Alternatively, the dating may merely reflect the broader switch of patronage to rural locations (Millett 1990, 195) in the later Roman period. The floruit of rural temples, of Romano-Celtic, rather than Roman association are a particular feature of late Roman Britain.

The bronze letters and the 'yoke-shaped' object confirm the ritual association of the site. Unfortunately, these finds do not shed light on the nature of the deity venerated here. One possible clue is provided by the *cella* form. Downey (1980) notes that circular shrines in Britain and Gaul often venerate Mars, but any inferred association of the Little Paxton site with this deity is pure speculation.

Level of importance

Some temples in rural locations located at/near tribal boundaries (e.g. Coleshill, Warwickshire, Blagg, 1986, 16) may have performed an important function within contemporary patterns of trade and exchange. Other sites had a more local importance, including 'family shrines'. Despite the limited evidence from Little Paxton, some attempt should be made to relate the site to the 'hierarchy' of rural temples proposed by Rodwell (1980b, 233-4, Table 2).

TABLE 2: Classification of temples/shrines (After Rodwell 1980b, 233)

Type	Type sites or reference	Details
Proprietary shrine/temple (Type 3)	Chedworth (nymphaeum), Stroud, Petersfield and Lullingstone	Physically separate structure in villa or farmyard complex. Used communally by resident family and estate workers
Estate temple (Type 4)	Chedworth, Titsey, Lamyatt Beacon, Great Chesterford	Located at a distance from a villa. For proprietors', or communal use
Local cult centre (Type 5)	Lydney, Uley. Smaller-scale sites include Pagans Hill, Coleshill, Harlow, Colchester 2-5, Farley and Woodeaton,	Rural/ semi-rural site with evidence for dominance of a single deity, including ancillary buildings, e.g. bath-house.
Major rural sanctuary (Type 6)	Gosbecks, Colchester	Very extensive rural site, used for tribal gatherings.
Natural shrine (Type 7)	Rahz and Watts 1979, Apx 2	Natural shrine, e.g. grove, spring or river, initially at least lacking religious structures. May have been 'improved' in Roman period by construction of buildings to house/ service the deity

Note: table excludes smaller examples (Types 1-2), and larger, urban or military types (8-12)

At the simplest level, the shrine could comprise no more than a single room or alcove (Type 1), or a purpose-built structure for the use of a single family (Type 2). The association of the Little Paxton temple with a family or single estate is not proven on the present evidence. Type 5 may have been intended to provide communal places for religious activity and fairs for a sub-tribal group, a *pagus*. It is possible that the Little Paxton shrine could have functioned at this level. Shrines and temples at Godmanchester (*Abandinus*) and Ancaster (*Viridios*) could have served a rural *pagus* population, despite their urban base. Additionally, the circular form of the Little Paxton shrine, and its suggested association with a 'sacred tree' (pit F103) could suggest the Roman *temenos* was built to perpetuate the memory of an Iron Age predecessor in the form of a natural shrine (Type 7). Local cult centres would not have required ancillary buildings such as guest-houses or baths (Leech 1986, 272), as found, for example, at Lamyatt Beacon.

Although not yet studied in detail, the suggested crop-marked complex of small fields or paddocks (Fig. 2, H) to the east of the shrine could have been associated, possibly forming the pens of sacrificial animals, although there is no present structural or faunal evidence to support this hypothesis. The bracelet deliberately formed into a 'yoke-shaped object' from the shrine could provide a tantalising link between the ritual focus and the possibly-associated animal pens. Millett (1990, 210) has suggested that some rural estates may have been owned by temples, although such an association is difficult to prove.

A similar interpretation might perhaps be suggested (but not proven on the present, limited evidence) for the Late Iron Age/ early Romano-British stock-pen complex to the west (Jones forthcoming), or the later 'ladder' enclosure (Jones and Ferris 1994). Examination of the composition of the animal bones from Uley identified a quantity of sheep and pig, which were thought to represent a specially-bred sacrificial herd (Woodward and Leach 1993, 333), while the votive animals at Hayling Island were sheep and pig (Downey *et al* 1980, 294), and at Gosbecks the faunal remains included numbers of pig's heads (Crummy 1980). The analysis of faunal remains can also elucidate the nature of the deity being worshipped – the red deer antlers found at Henley Wood (Watts and Leach 1996, 271) suggesting an association with the god *Cernunnos* and fertility.

CONCLUSION

Despite the limitations of fieldwork undertaken in a salvage recording context, the results are nevertheless of importance, particularly given that such rural shrines are relatively neglected at a national level. The circular shrine is an important example of a morphologically-unusual type, possibly originating in the Iron Age, and representing a desire to perpetuate the sanctity of a native ritual site. The site is also significant as possibly representing a religious focus at no more than *pagus* level. Of interest is the probable association between the site and the nearby early prehistoric ritual monuments, and in particular the suggested 'sacred tree' or other marker (F103) around which the Little Paxton *temenos* was laid-out. An intriguing possibility is a functional, or even a proprietorial, nexus between the shrine and the nearby stock-pens and enclosures of Late Iron Age and Romano-British date. Further research will address this important aspect of the shrine's setting.

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THE ROMANO-CELTIC SHRINE AT LITTLE PAXTON, DIDDINGTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

SALVAGE RECORDING 1986-7: REPORT

by Alex Jones

with contributions by Lynne Bevan and Roger White

FIGURES

- 1A The River Great Ouse valley and Little Paxton
- 1B Little Paxton and the shrine site
- 2 The shrine site and the surrounding features; the crop-marked evidence (after Cambridgeshire C.C. and Rog Palmer)
- 3A Plan of the shrine (at 1:500: the crop-marked enlargement of the southern enclosure ditch terminal is shown as a dashed line; the position of pit F103 is approximate)
- 3B Section through enclosure ditch F101-2 and circular foundation-trench F100 (at 1:50)

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- 1 Details of circular Roman shrines
- 2 Types of temples/shrines (After Rodwell 1980b, 233)

PLATES

- 1 The bronze letters (scale 1:1)
- 2 'Yoke-shaped' object (scale 1:1)
- 3 Coins of Severina (No. 9, upper) and Maximian (No. 11, lower: both at scale 1.5:1)

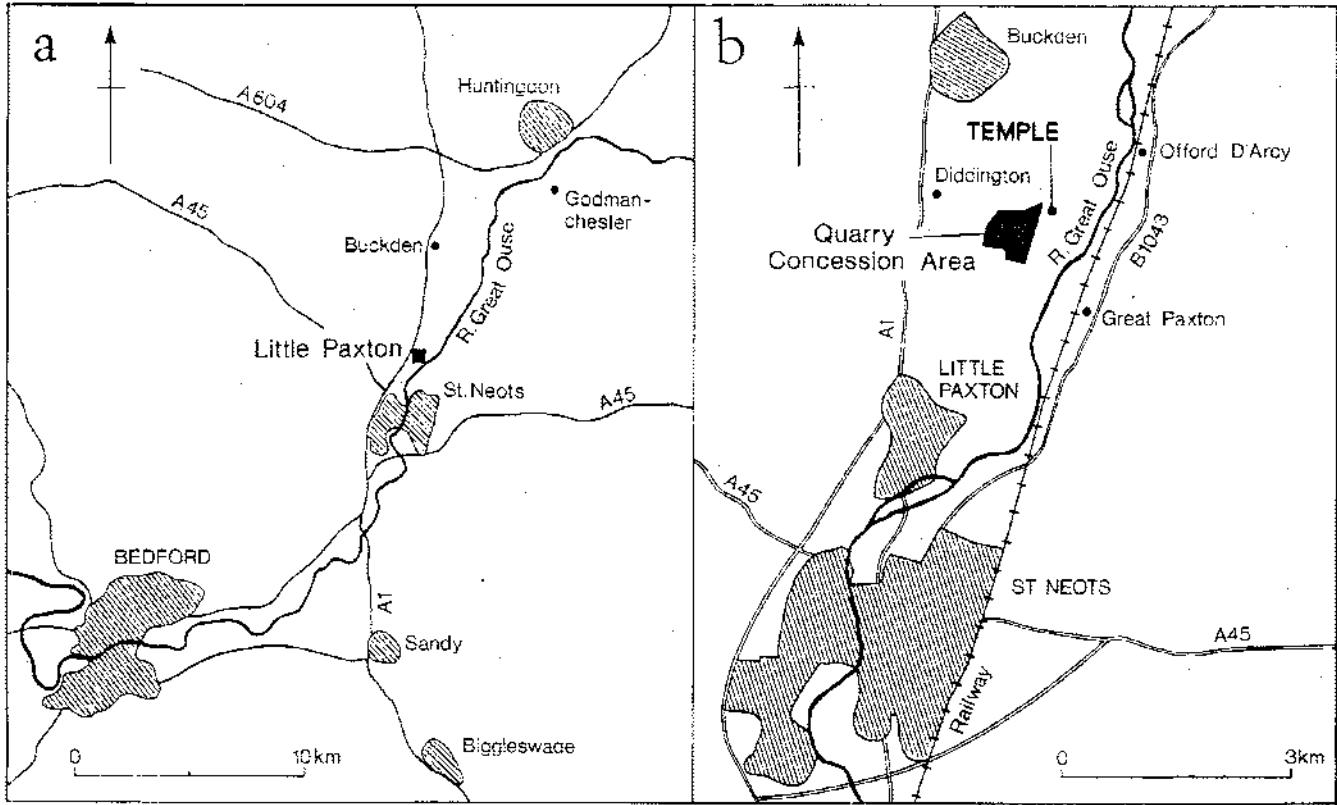


Fig. 1

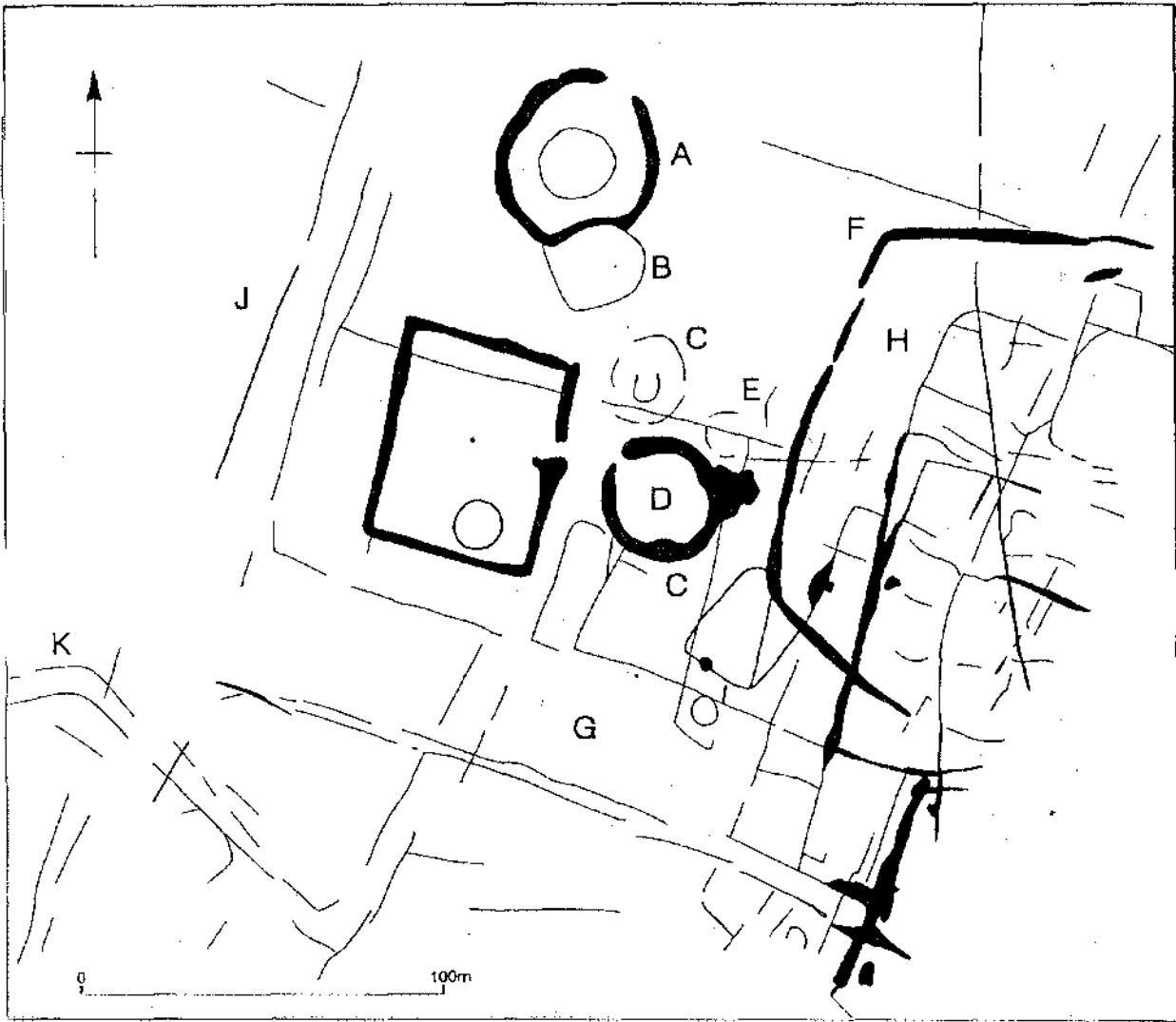


Fig. 2

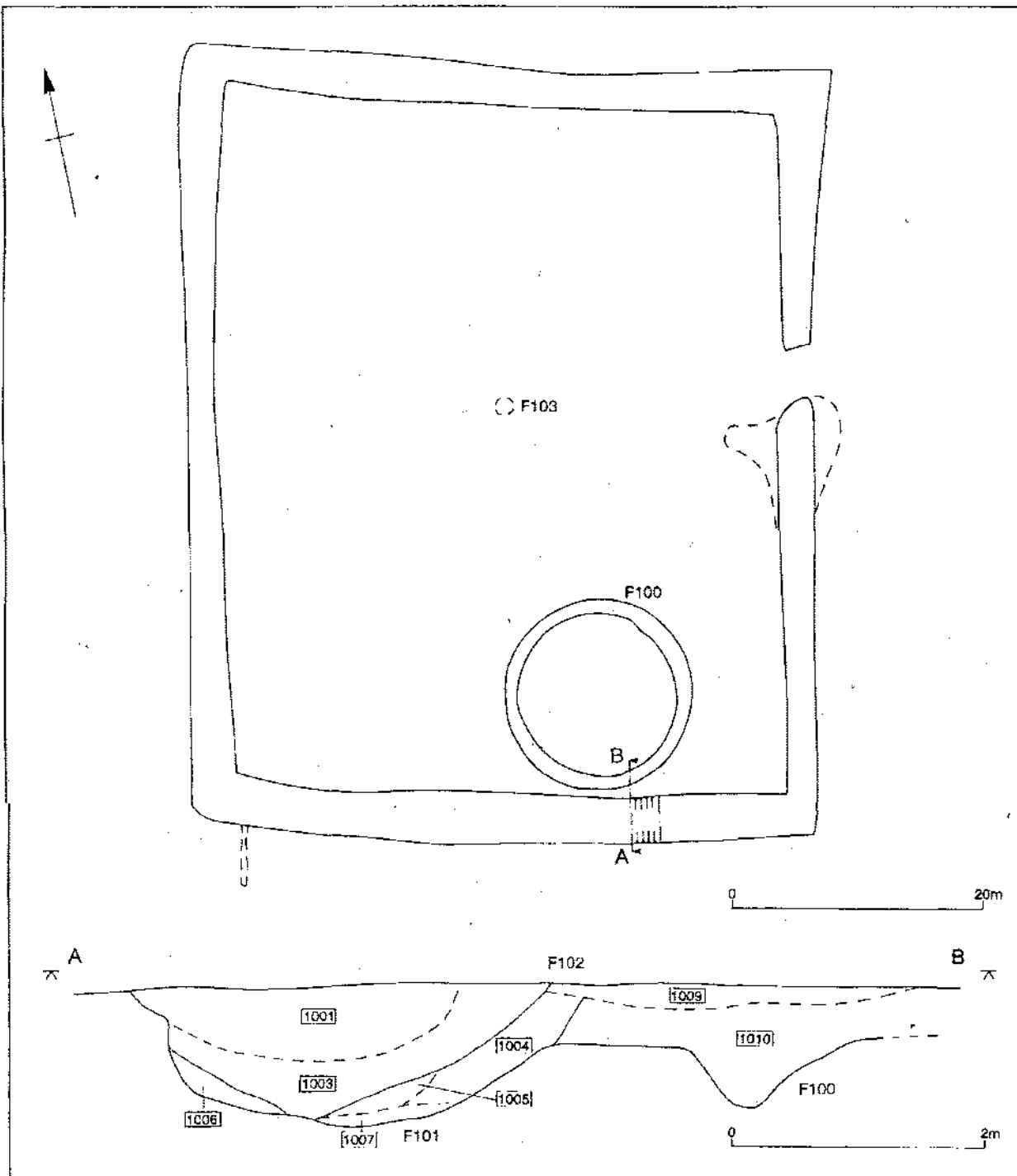


Fig. 3

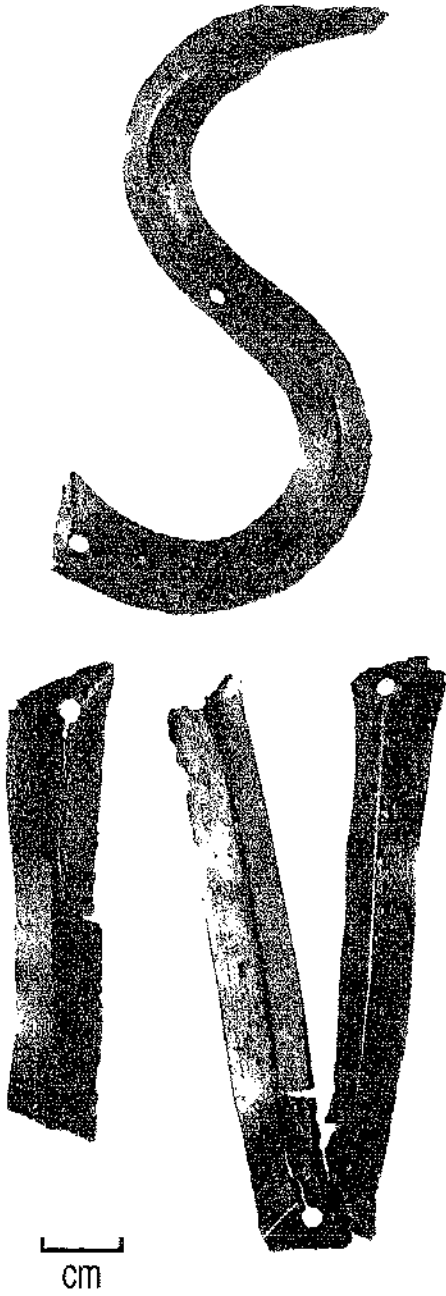


Plate 1

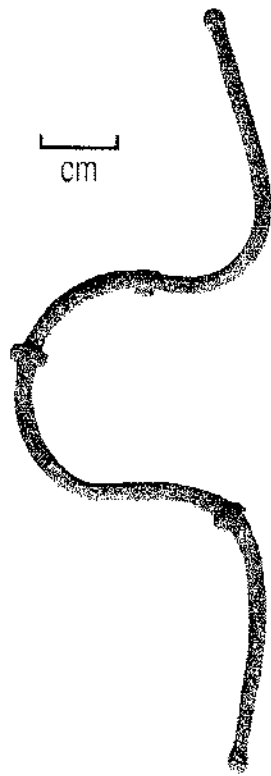
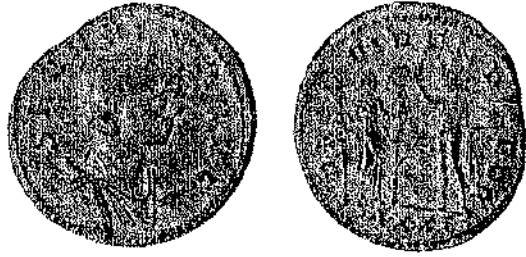


Plate 2



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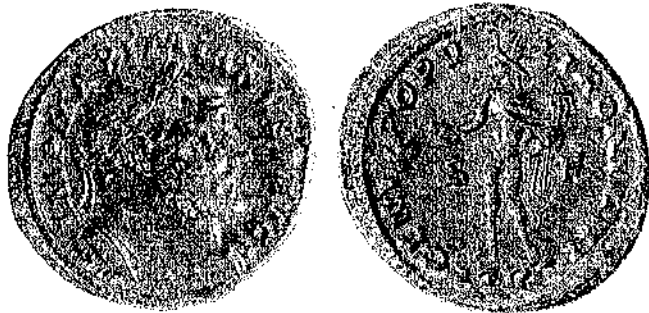


Plate 3