

A ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT AT STADEN NEAR BUXTON

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INTRODUCTION

The site was partly surveyed by the late L.H. Butcher (Butcher Collection, Sheffield Museum 1976. 987) and later by the author in April 1981. The settlement (SK 071722/067724) lies on a scarp shelf overlooking Duke's Drive near Buxton (Fig.1). It is an extensive site and may be multi-phased. The eastern section consists entirely of field enclosures, but near and on the site of the Colt Croft bungalow there is a semi-circular enclosure which may have been the site of a dwelling. During construction of the bungalow, Romano-British pottery, a beehive quern and part of a brooch were found. The central section is situated below the scarp outcrop on a broad shelf. This section shows a complicated series of linear and curvilinear banks and platforms. The features have been much reduced in height and extent by land clearance and levelling to improve the pasture. The best preserved feature is a large revetted platform which could be another house site.

The western section is the best preserved and shows a number of small rectangular enclosures and platforms. It is here that the rescue excavation of a domestic building took place in 1981. The building was discovered during levelling and ground improvements of a former Buxton refuse tip, which had encroached onto part of the settlement masking some of its features and filling a small depression or valley. The western part of the building, which had already been uncovered, showed some walling and part of a gritstone floor, and a small trial excavation indicated that it was part of the Romano-British settlement. Some pottery sherds and a flat quern fragment confirmed a Romano-British date.

THE EXCAVATIONS

Excavations took place between May and August 1981. Enough survived of the building to reconstruct the damaged part and to indicate its size and shape (Fig.2). The north wall was revetted on the outer face with massive limestone blocks, with smaller facing blocks on the inner face and with a rubble infill (Fig.4, Section A/B). The curving southern wall was built entirely of smaller stones. All the stones used in the building's construction were weathered and not quarried. The walls on average are one and a half metres thick.

The gritstone paving slabs were probably brought from the Black Edge-Burbage area some four kilometres to the northwest. The rear paving and western wall of the building had been removed by the J.C.B. operations. However, soil staining revealed during excavation showed the approximate line of the wall and enabled partial reconstruction: the building seems to have been pear shaped, with a narrow entrance half a metre wide on the eastern side. The paving had been laid on an earlier surface, probably a clay-earth floor, containing pottery and bone (Fig.4, Section A/B). This floor was immediately on top of the natural surface. There was no sign of a hearth on either of the two floor surfaces. Above the paving only an occasional pottery sherd was found; this may be due to animal disturbances.

A small concentration of pottery in the entrance area (Fig.3) was abraded as if from trampling, and the entrance passage also was worn or eroded. It is possible that the building is of one period, but during its lifetime the floor was renewed and laid with

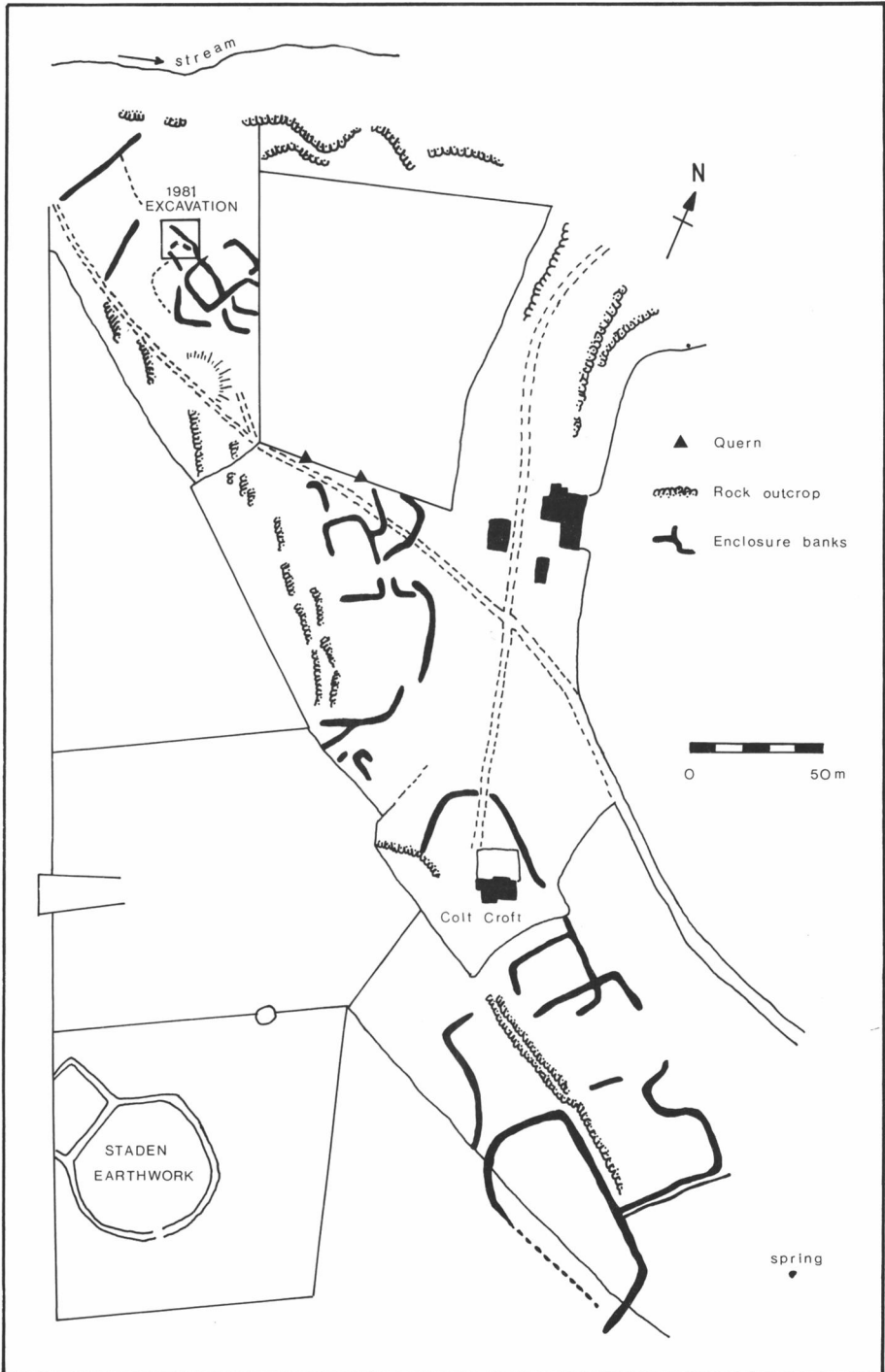


Fig. 1 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: plan of the settlement and enclosure system.

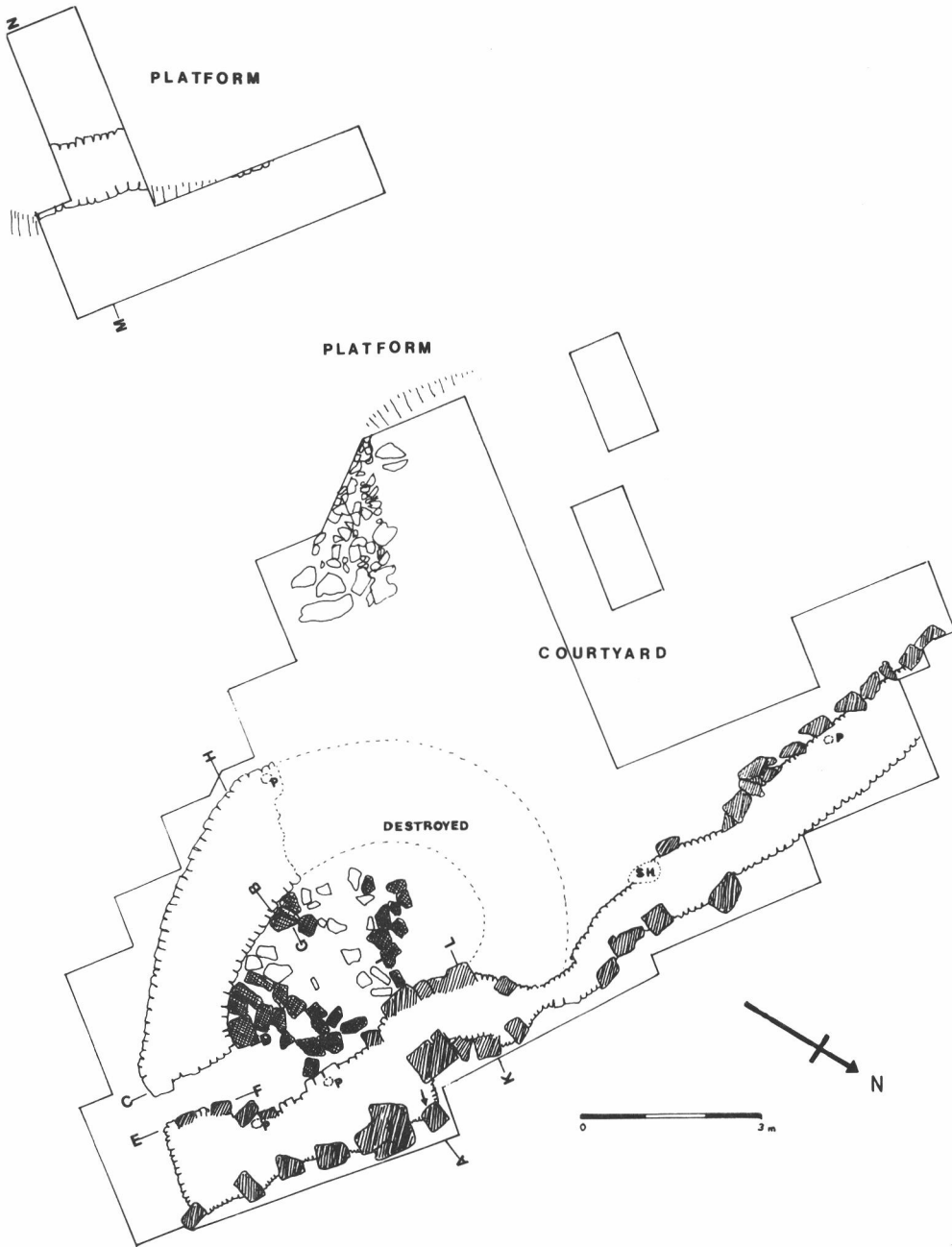


Fig. 2 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: plan of the excavations.



Fig. 3 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: distribution of excavated finds.

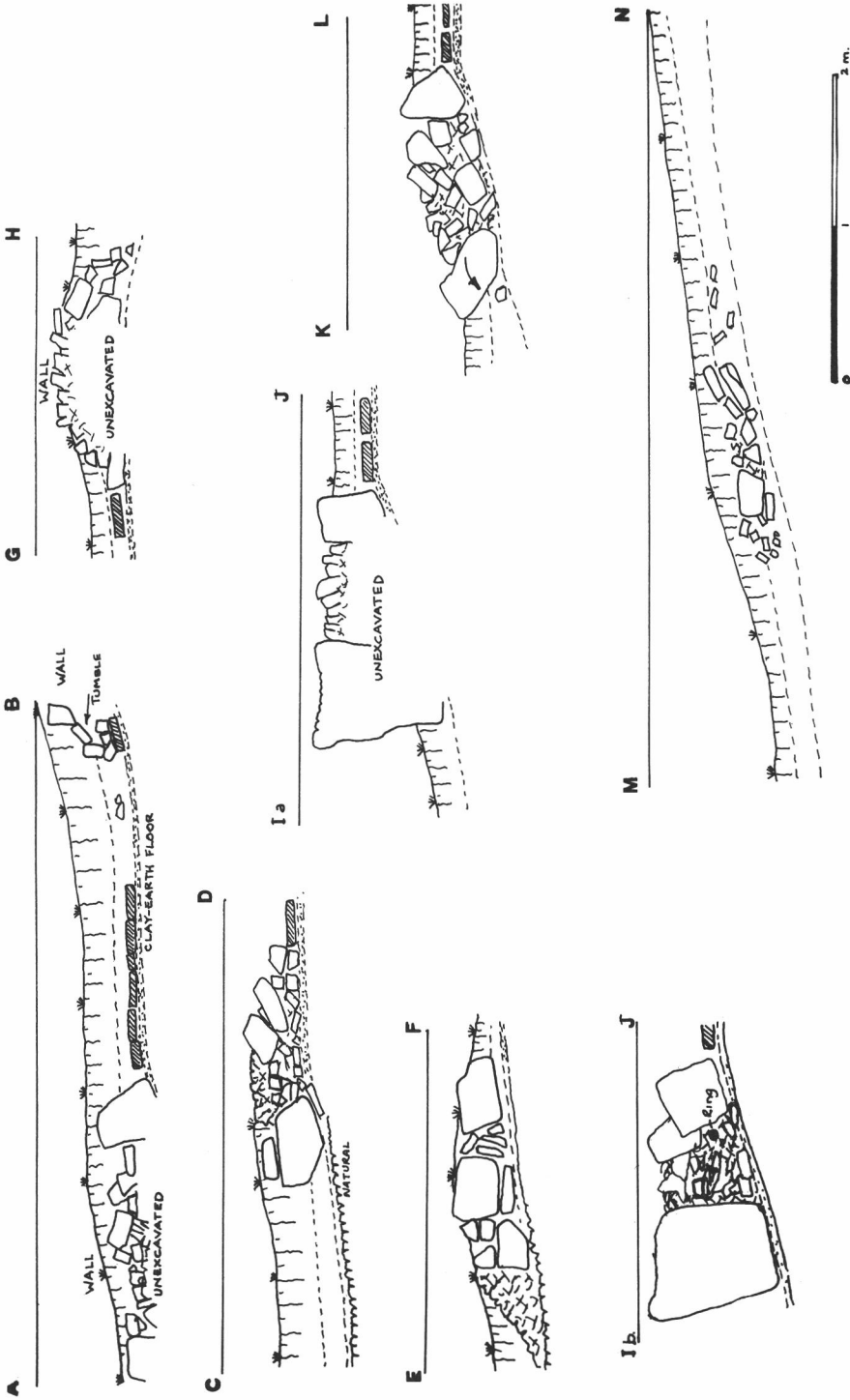


Fig. 4 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: sections through the excavated features. (For location, see Fig. 2)

gritstone slabs, perhaps to assist in keeping the floor dry. The lack of a hearth perhaps suggests an agricultural rather than a domestic use. A small number of shallow post holes, a few centimetres deep, was found in the building and enclosure walls (Fig.2). The two small post holes in the building wall near to the entrance may have been for a door or gate post. A single orthostat and rubble wall ran westwards from the building, forming one arm of what appears to have been a courtyard. A smaller curving wall to the south formed another arm, joining one of the revetted platforms.

THE FINDS

The pottery (Fig.5)

- 1 Black burnished ware, hard, dark grey-black, burnished with lattice pattern, flanged dish, sandy grey core. (Gillam type 307-8: A.D.120-180)
- 2 Black burnished ware, same matrix as above, plain straight sided bowl, bead rim. (c.f. Slack 73, A.D.120-140)
- 3 Black burnished ware, chamfered bases, same fabric as 1.
Note: Mr J. Samuels (Newark) suggests an Antonine date. The pottery does not appear to be B.B.1 from Dorset or from Rossington Bridge. It is possible that a midlands source exists (Webster, 1971).
- 4 Mortaria, cream fabric, stamped SEPTUMIA (Septiminius A.D.110-130), quartz and black grits. (see note below)
- 5 Flanged dish or bowl, red fabric.
- 6 Dish or bowl, grey fabric, everted rim, bead with groove below rim.
- 7 Derbyshire ware, rolled rim with groove in rim top.
- 8 Derbyshire ware, lid seated jar, simple everted form.
- 9 Derbyshire ware, lid seated jar, simple everted form.
- 10 Derbyshire ware bases, showing various forms: heeled, straight and slightly recessed.
- 11 Bead rimmed bowl or dish, orange fabric.
- 12 Everted rim jar, orange-buff fabric.
- 13 Base of jar, buff ware.

In addition, several small fragments of Samian were found, but too small for their forms to be identified. The fragments can probably be dated to the late first century and Antonine periods, and derive from central and southern Gaul (A. Anderson: *pers. comm.*).

Mortaria (KH)

Two mortaria rim sherds were found. The poorly impressed and perhaps eroded stamps are from a single die known for Septiminius, whose rim profiles clearly indicate a date of c. A.D. 100-130. He undoubtedly worked at Little Chester for a time (Brassington, 1971), where he produced an orange brown fabric. His more commonly used fabric was, however, cream, and it is not certain whether any mortarium in this fabric was made at Little Chester. This fabric would fit well with the production at the Mancetter-Hartshill potteries, where two of his stamps have been found (one of them from a kiln). The accumulated evidence for the abandonment of the Little Chester kilns is consistent with a date of A.D. 110-120. Stamps of his have now been found at Bucknall (Staffordshire), Coleshill (Warwickshire), Leicester, Little Chester, Manduessedum (Mancetter, Leicestershire), Metchley (Warwickshire), Ribchester (Lancashire), Staden, Vindolanda (Northumberland), and Wall (Staffordshire). The Metchley mortarium and the two forms from Little Chester were certainly made at Little Chester; the rest could well have been made at Manuessedum, though some manufacture in the soft cream fabric at Little Chester cannot be ruled out entirely.

The querns (Fig.6)

- 1 Large fragment of flat quern, with shallow groove near outer edge. Rectangular socket hole in side with angled hole through to upper surface.
- 2 Half rough-out of flat quern. Central holes (hour-glass type) do not meet. The raised inner core suggests that drilling may have been done by a hollow drill.

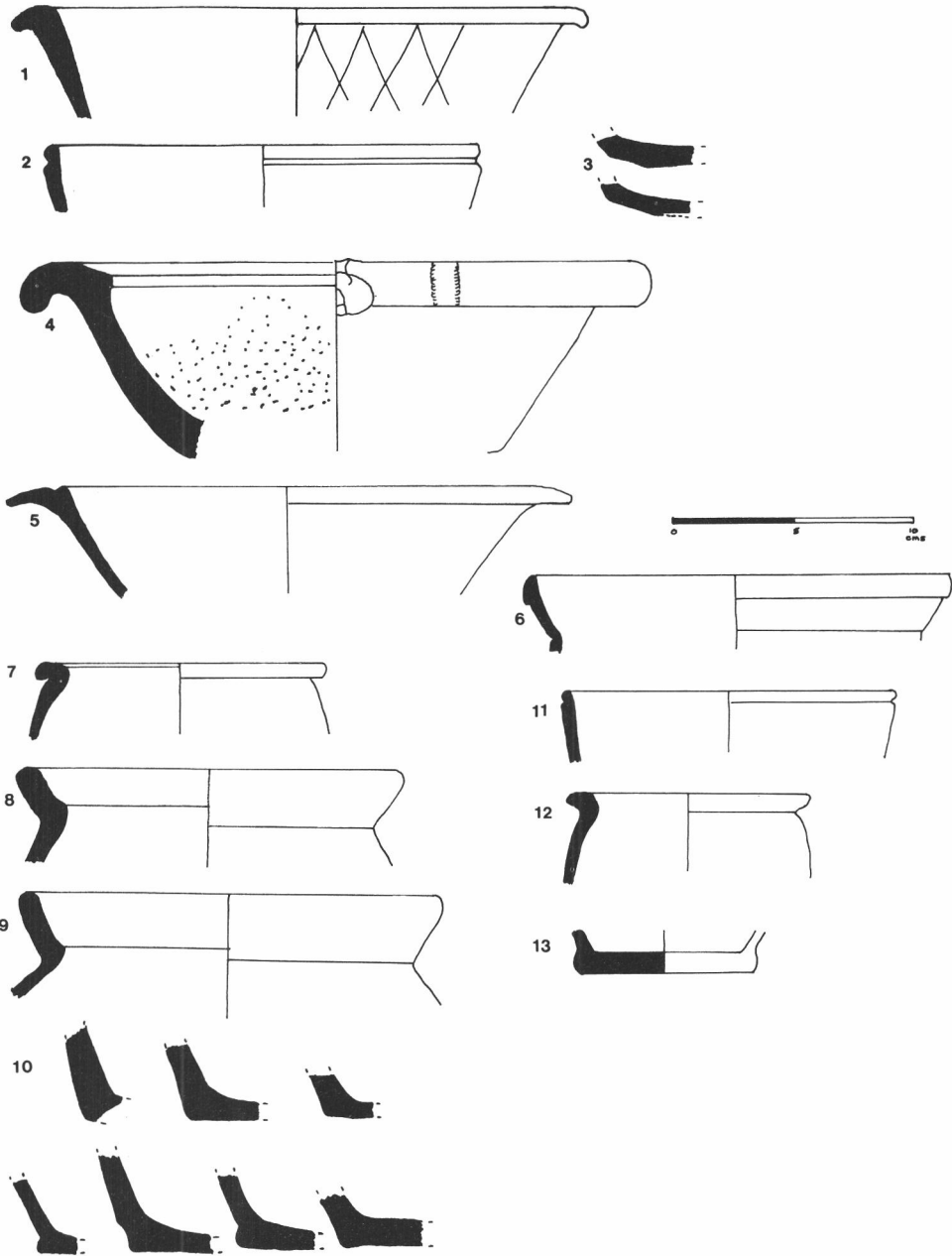


Fig. 5 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: pottery (for descriptions see text).

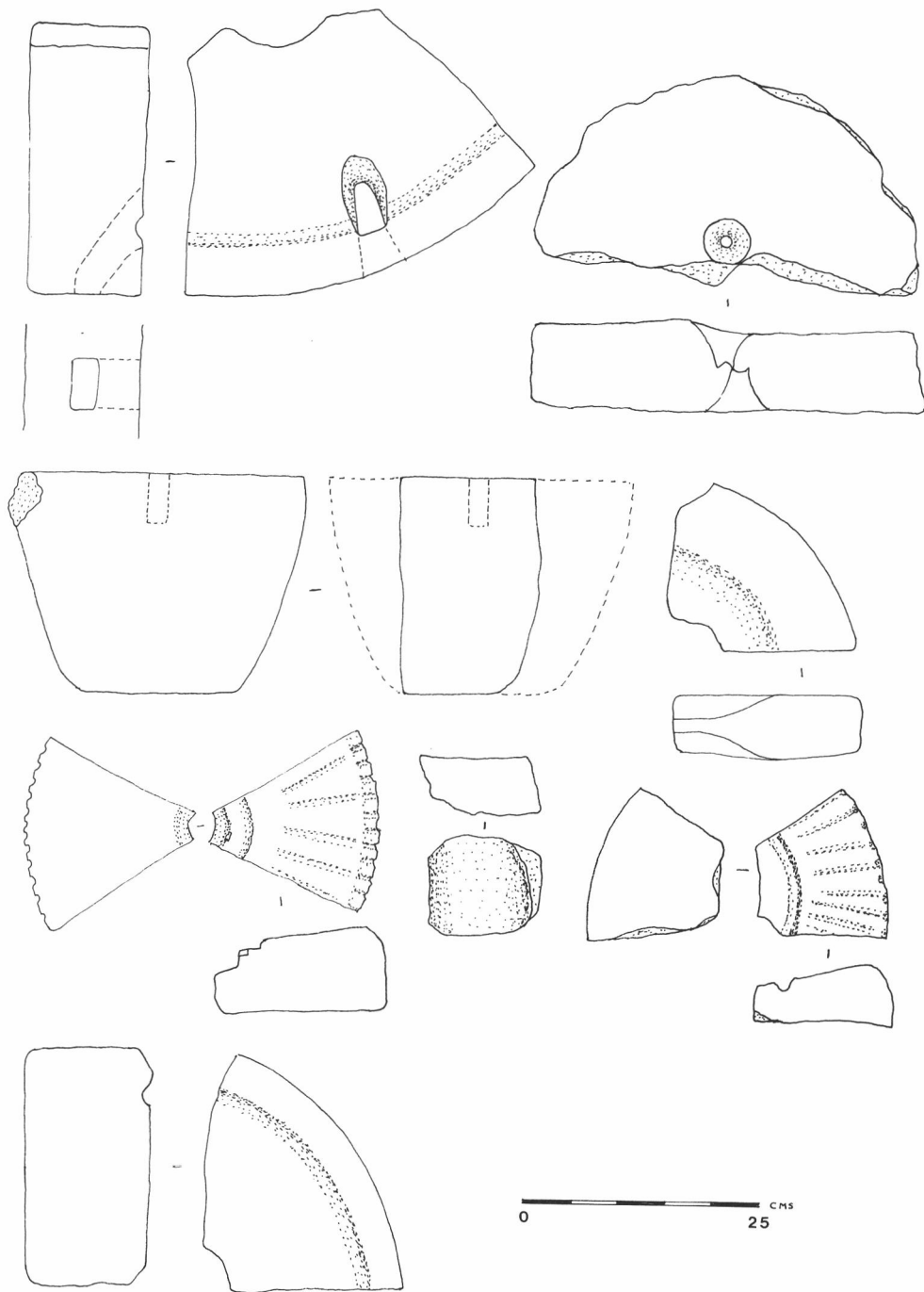


Fig. 6 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: querns (for descriptions see text).

- 3 Beehive type, trimmed for re-use in walling. Central hole and flat upper surface suggest that this is a bottom stone.
- 4 Small flat quern, with dished upper and lower surfaces.
- 5 Segment of flat quern, grooved on upper surface and along its edge; stepped central area around hole.
- 6 Very small fragment, slightly dished worn surface.
- 7 Segment of flat quern, with ringed groove around central area and horizontal grooves along upper surface.
- 8 Large fragment of flat quern; circular groove on upper surface near rim edge.

Animal Bones (MB)

Bones from the clay-earth floor of building

HORSE represented by:

- Metacarpal
- Fragmentary first phalange
- Upper molar (old individual)
- Upper molar (adult)
- Metacarpal (small, but mature animal)

OX represented by:

- Fragmentary long bone?
- Fragment of scapula
- Upper left and second molars (probably from same individual)
- Navicular-cuboid bone
- Upper molars (3)
- Upper premolar (young adult)
- Fragmentary third phalange

SHEEP/GOAT represented by:

- Lower molar
- Lower left third molar
- Fragmentary lower molars
- (N.B. Sheep and goat are indistinguishable by teeth alone)

Bones from revetted wall of building

OX represented by:

- Lower premolar
- Lower third premolar
- Lower molar
- Incisors (2)
- Distal end of humerus
- Proximal ends of scapula (2)

SHEEP/GOAT represented by:

- Lower molars (2)
- Lower third molar
- Lower premolar
- Incisor

PIG represented by:

- Upper premolar
- Fragmentary part of lower jaw with last two molars

Also many indeterminate bone fragments, probably of young animals of domestic breeds; some remains rather blackened and calcined.

Other objects (Fig.7)

- 1 Tile fragment, appears to be U shaped; may be form of imbrex.
- 2 Tile fragment, smooth on outer surface, slightly curved.
- 3 Flint flake, possibly retouched along one edge.

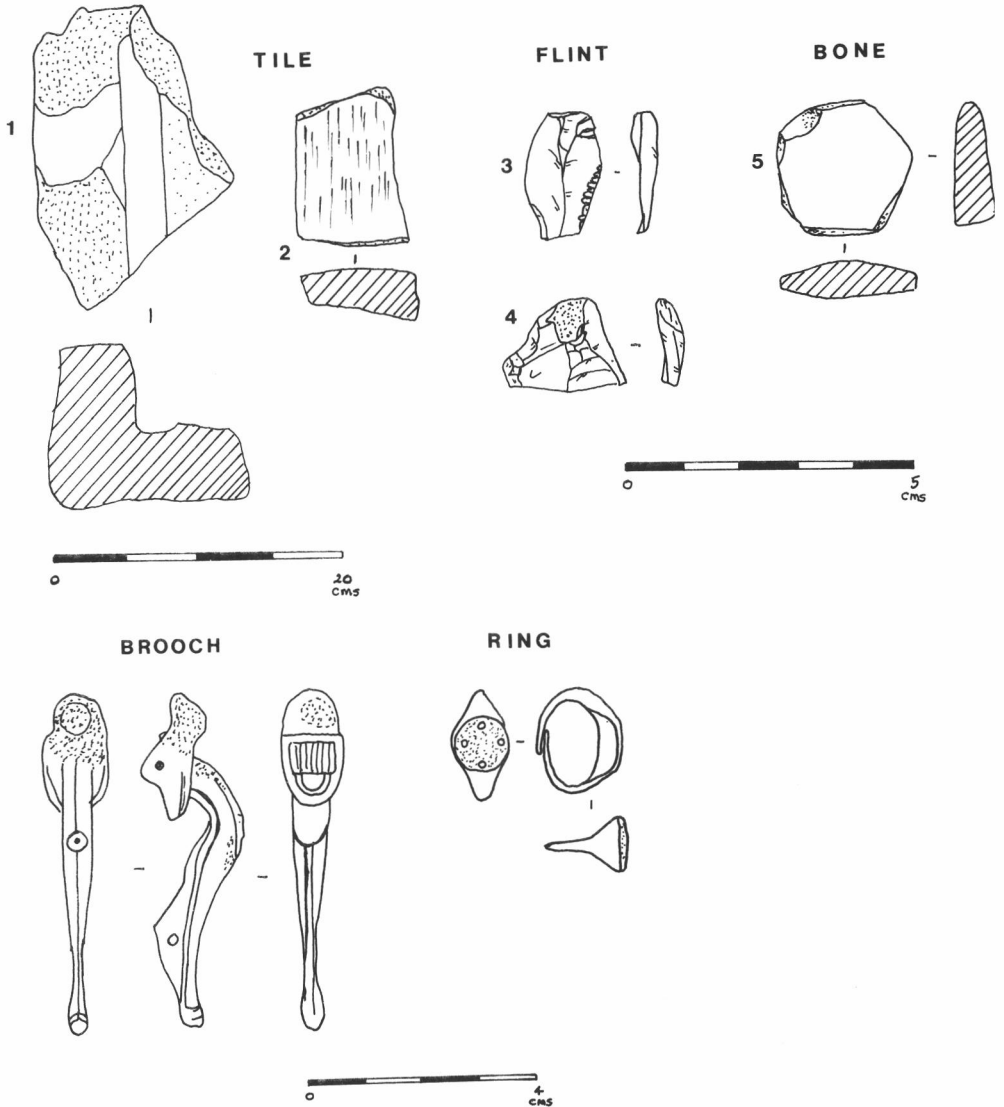


Fig. 7 The Romano-British settlement at Staden: other objects. (1,2 tile; 3,4 flint; 5 bone object; 6 bronze brooch; 7 bronze ring; for descriptions see text).

- 4 Flint flake without retouch.
- 5 Bone object, black in colour, polygonal, thicker at centre thinning to edges; use unknown, possibly a bone counter.
- 6 Bronze trumpet brooch, pin lost but spring mechanism in place but corroded; possible stud in centre of bow, corrosion on trumpet. Found at Colt Croft during building, together with some fragments of Romano-British pottery (now in Buxton Museum).
- 7 Bronze ring with overlapping ends, thickening at bezel; centre setting of blue glass or enamel, with four yellow pieces inset. Found in walling as marked in Figure 3.

DISCUSSION

The dating of the Staden settlement relies mainly on the pottery, the cumulative evidence of which places the occupation in the first half of the second century A.D., with indications of an extension into the middle and later decades of that century. Some of the forms of Black Burnished ware have a much longer age range (Webster, 1971). The excavations at Little Chester suggest that the manufacture of Derbyshire Ware had started by the Antonine period, and that there was a range of products by this stage (Webster, 1961). In general, Derbyshire Ware is dated from c. A.D. 140 to 350, but as the rim forms from Staden are simple, with none of the elaborations found later, the likelihood is that they are early in the sequence. Kiln sites for this pottery are known at Shottle (Kay and Hughes, 1963), Holbrook and Hazelwood (Kay, 1962), and there may have been another early kiln site at Alport Hill (Lomas, 1961). The fragment of a beehive quern raises the possibility of an early Roman or even pre-Roman date for the founding of the Staden settlement; the flints found on or near the old ground surface are also evidence that the site was used in earlier prehistoric times.

The tile fragments might imply the existence of a more substantial Roman building in the vicinity. However that may be, the numerous bones and quern fragments suggest that a mixed agricultural economy was practised by the Staden community, perhaps not significantly different from that of the area today. The quern fragments exhibit a remarkable variety of style and weight, though the reason for this is unknown. Pollen analysis at Leash Fen found evidence for a significant rise in cereal growing in the Peak District c. A.D. 40 ± 100 according to a radiocarbon determination (Phillips, 1969). Presumably the Roman military occupation meant that more grain had to be grown in the region to meet the demands of compulsory purchases and requisitions (Manning, 1975), as well as those of growing industrial activities and the normal requirements of local subsistence. A similar demand would have been placed on livestock. In this context it is not surprising to find early evidence for what seems to be intensive mixed farming at Staden, given its proximity to the fort and civil settlement at Buxton.

The number of Romano-British native settlements identified in the Pennines has increased dramatically in recent years. In the Derbyshire Peak District, Hart (1981) lists 46 sites which can be ascribed with reasonable confidence to this category, and there is less certain evidence for almost the same number again. Hart defines three principal concentrations of settlement (around Brassington, in the Dove valley, and in the upper Wye valley), though a more complex picture is emerging from current fieldwork. On the evidence of sites excavated in recent years such as Carsington (Ling and Courtney, 1981) and Roystone Grange (Hodges and Wildgoose, 1981), it seems clear that the agricultural economy of the Peak District was given a substantial impetus by the Roman occupation in the late first century, and continued to develop in subsequent centuries until the close of the Roman period. Much more detailed understanding is still needed of the Romano-British settlements in this region, but the evidence already points to a much more dynamic agricultural system here than envisaged even a few years ago.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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