

# Excavations at 46—50 Foregate Street Chester, 1961

By J. B. WHITWELL AND S. M. McNAMEE.

## INTRODUCTION

OPPORTUNITY for archaeological excavation arose when the premises on this site were demolished in order to erect a new shopping block. Permission to excavate was granted by the architects Messrs. Ellery & Wallace, Northwich, acting for Property Development (Commercial) Ltd. The site is now occupied by Victor Value Supermarket, Helene and Millets. All the finds from the excavation are in the Grosvenor Museum through the permission of Eaton Estate, Eccleston. The work was financed by a grant from the Ministry of Works and Chester Corporation.

The excavation was directed throughout by Mr. F. H. Thompson, who also made the preliminary arrangements. The writers gratefully acknowledge help given by Mr. Thompson in the preparation of this report.

## SUMMARY

The site lies *c* 570 feet east of the east gate of the legionary fortress on the south side of Foregate Street, (fig. 1), which follows the line of Watling Street. This area, which is now accepted as the extra-mural settlement, has on several occasions yielded evidence of occupation.<sup>1</sup> But this excavation (site plan fig. 2) established a sequence of occupation throughout the Roman period for the first time. The primary occupation consisted of the post-holes of timber buildings associated with Flavian/Trajanic pottery. Two buildings which had floors of clay and in one case *opus signinum* were in use from *c* A.D. 120 — *c* A.D. 200. The next phase of occupation occurs towards the end of the third century and is represented by the heavy sandstone make-up and wall footings of a large but crudely constructed building which was bordered by a stone lined drain and a cobbled lane. This phase lasted *c* A.D. 280 — *c* A.D. 350 and is the last Roman occupation of the site. The two lower cobbled layers encountered in trench 1 which may be the southern edge of Watling Street rather than successive phases of a lane running south from it, are of similar date to the two stone building phases and show a similar lack of activity during the greater part of the third century. A north-south offshoot from the main water supply bordering Watling Street was encountered.<sup>2</sup>

After the Roman period the site was not in use until the thirteenth century. Few structural remains of this period were located but much pottery was recovered mostly from rubbish pits.

<sup>1</sup>*C.A.J.* (n.s.) xxvii (1928) 93-102, 187, xxxiii (1939) 64-116, xlvi (1959) 63-68.

<sup>2</sup>F. H. Thompson, *Deva: Roman Chester* (1959), 38 and 40.

## DESCRIPTION OF TRENCHES

**Trench 1** (fig. 3)

There was 2ft. 6in. depth of surface disturbance below which a rough cobbled surface was found. Layer 1 under the cobbles was black sticky organic soil with many animal bones obviously part of a medieval pit. A group of medieval pottery from this layer included one sherd from the kilns at Audlem, Cheshire, dated 1250-1300,<sup>3</sup> (fig. 6, no. 3).

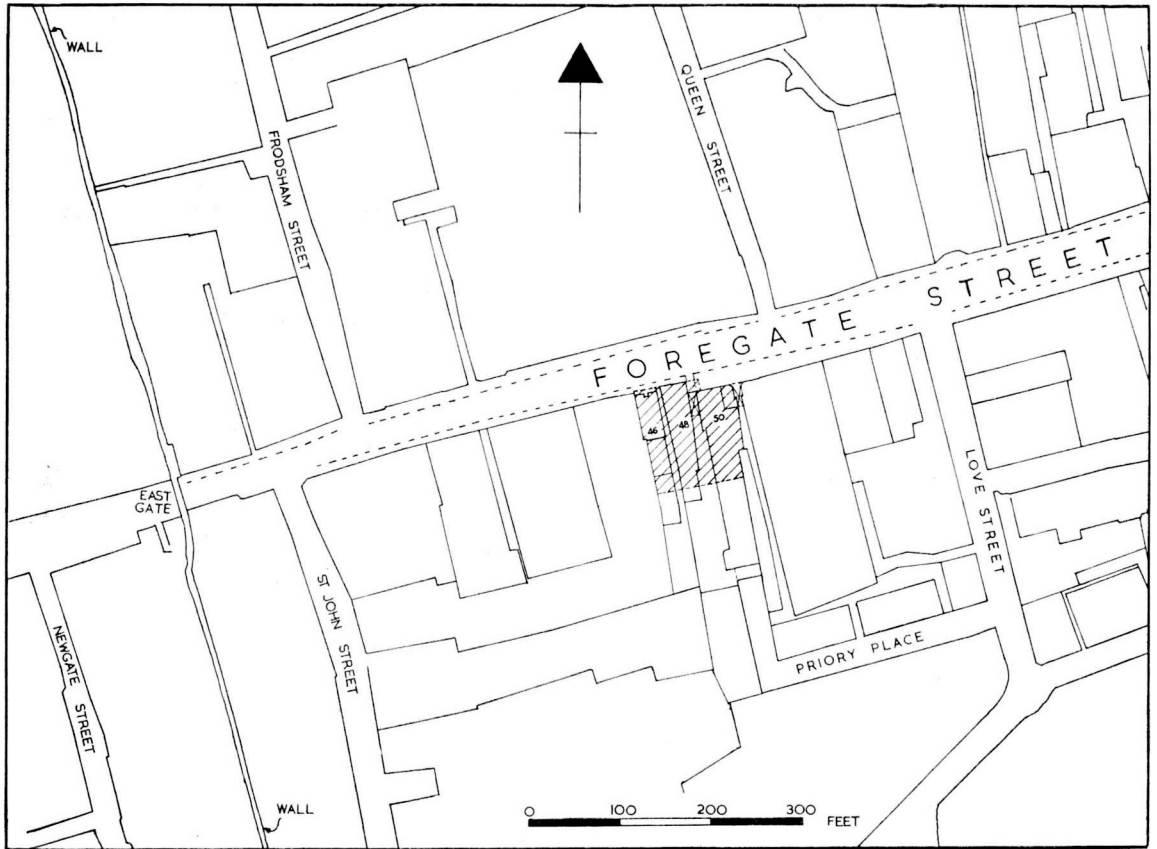


Fig. 1. Area plan showing the east wall of the legionary fortress and the site.

Layer 2 was a thin layer of sand containing no pottery over another cobbled surface at a depth of *c* 3ft. Layer 3 below these cobbles was again dark soil with bones and sandstone fragments and represented the latest Roman level and contained pottery dating to *c* 350 A.D. (fig. 6, nos. 5-7); this was sealed directly below medieval material of the thirteenth century with no intervening Saxon occupation.

<sup>3</sup>G. Webster and G. C. Dunning, A Medieval pottery kiln at Audlem, Cheshire. *Medieval Archaeology IV* pp. 109 ff.

Layer 4 was a surface of small cobbles and mortar in the western part of the trench. Layer 5 consisted of loose sandstone blocks and sand and layer 6 was mixed sand and pebbles in the eastern part of the trench; they are probably contemporary with Layers 7 and 8 dating from mid-late second century on the evidence of the black burnished rims and a fragmentary samian stamp of the potter PATRICIVS<sup>4</sup> kindly identified by Mr. B. R. Hartley (fig. 6, no. 8). He worked in the Antonine

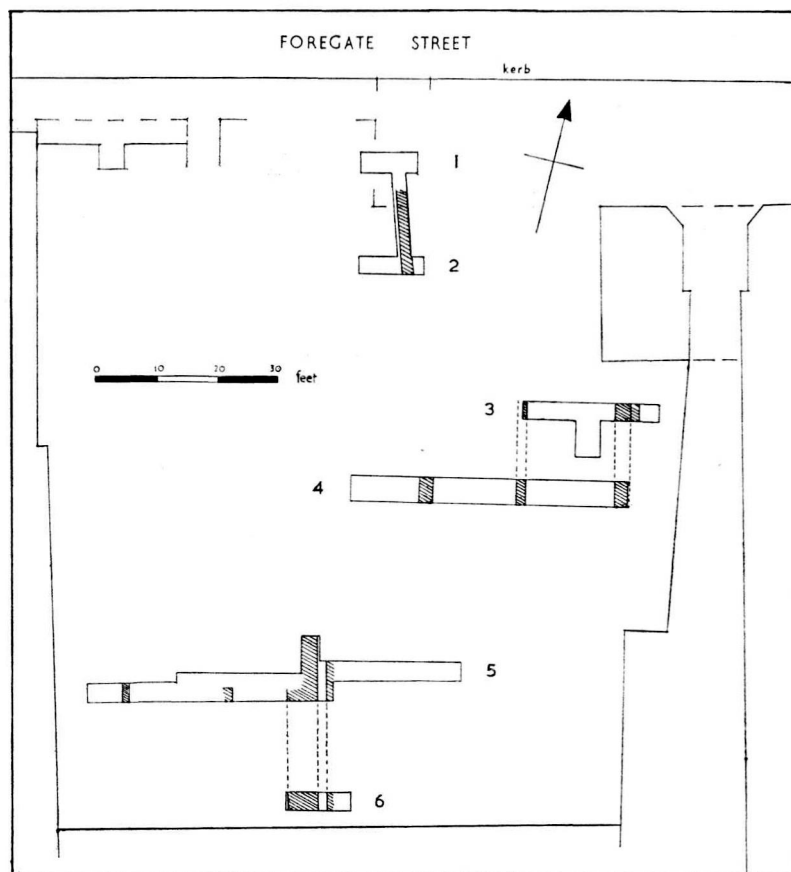


Fig. 2. Site plan showing position of trenches.

period and his stamps have been found in dateable contexts at Newstead, Verulamium and Wroxeter. Layer 7 consisted of brown sand and layer 8 of sand and grit with two thin bands of clay running through them one above the other.

Layer 9 in the eastern part of the trench was sandstone rubble and clay mixed, and represents the limit of excavation, but in the western part of the trench just above natural clay was a pebble layer which may have represented a lane running

<sup>4</sup>F. Oswald, *Index of stamps on Terra Sigillata*, pp. 233, 412.

south from Watling Street. Natural clay was reached at a depth of 9ft. and in it was a post trench with one posthole, the black fill of which was layer 10. The pottery from the post trench consisted of early pink and buff fabrics<sup>5</sup> with 1 sherd of lattice decorated fumed ware cooking pot giving a date of *c* 120 A.D. A Samian stamp of the potter SILVANVS operating in the reigns of Nero and Vespasian<sup>6</sup> gives the earliest date of occupation on the site (fig. 6, no. 16).

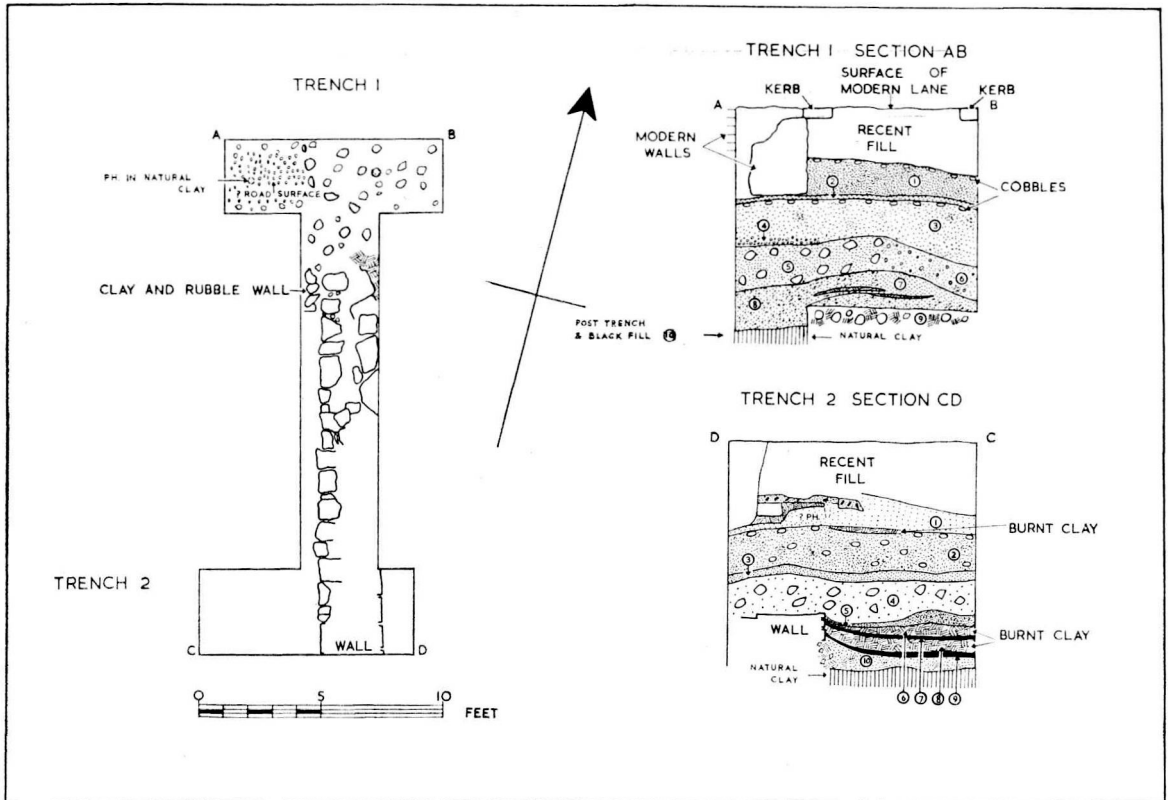


Fig. 3. Plan and sections of trenches 1 and 2 with linking trench.

### Trench 2 (fig. 3).

Layer 1 consisted of light brown sandy soil running up to a conglomeration of burnt clay, sandstone and charcoal in the east which was cut into by a recent rubbish pit, but was probably a medieval hearth. Pottery from this level was mainly sherds of glazed jugs of thirteenth century type (fig. 7, no. 17), with some Romano British survivals.

<sup>5</sup>W. F. Grimes, *The Works Depot of the Twentieth Legion at Castle Lyons, Holt, Denbs., Y. Cymrodor*, 1930.

<sup>6</sup>F. Oswald and T. Pryce, *An introduction to the study of Terra Sigillata*, pp. 54-55.

Separating layer 1 and 2 in the centre of the trench was a patch of burnt clay unrelated to any other feature. Layer 2 was loosely packed cobbles dark soil and again there was a mixture of Roman and medieval pottery (fig 7, nos. 18-20).

Layer 3 was a thin layer of sand similar to **Trench 1** layer 2 above. The latest Roman level which was layer 4 consisted of sandstone rubble and dark soil.

Layer 5 ran up to a sandstone wall running north-south in the eastern part of the trench and consisted of dark soil. It contained hammer head mortaria rims and a flanged bowl all of fourth century date (fig 7, nos. 21-23); this level may represent a late reoccupation of the site after the earlier phase of habitation.

Layer 6 again ran up to the wall and was burnt clay possibly from wattle and daub construction. Layer 7 was a black occupation level below 6 and goes with it, and pottery indicates a date in the middle of the second century with some earlier survivals (fig 7, no. 24). From layer 7 came an amphora sherd with the graffito QUART PVM, the significance of which is unknown. It makes sense neither as a name nor as a measure of weight<sup>7</sup> (fig. 7, no. 25).

Layers 8 and 9 repeat the sequence of 6 and 7 — burnt clay above black occupation soil. There was no pottery from these levels, but from layer 10, consisting of brown sand and clay running up to the foundations of the wall, the pottery indicated a late 1st Century early 2nd Century date for the primary occupation (fig. 7, nos. 26-29).

The wall was traced in a trench linking **trenches 1 and 2** for a distance of fifteen feet south-north.

### **Trench 3** (fig. 4)

Layers 1 and 2 were mixed soil, stone, ash and in 2 there was some clay also. The pottery from layer 2 was predominantly Roman late 3rd Century — 4th Century with a small amount of thirteenth century pottery (fig 8, nos. 30-43).

Layer 3 at the west end of the trench was clay and ash overlying a thin layer of clay which might be interpreted as a floor. No pottery was found.

The row of 3 stones at the west end of the trench which are associated with this possible clay floor, line up with a wall in trench 4, running north-south. This is interpreted as an internal wall.

At the east end a wall 2ft. 6in. thick, flanked on its eastern side by an open sandstone gutter was obviously the external wall of a building. This wall was also picked up in **trench 4**, both this and the internal wall occur at *c.* 7ft. depth.

In the centre of the trench the flue of what was probably a small furnace making nails was found. The flue walls which were 1ft. 8in. thick and heavily burnt on the inside, were constructed of clay and sandstone. Three layers of ash were divided by baked clay and finally a cement lined channel was constructed. A fragment of a samian mortarium and a hammer head mortarium (fig. 8, no. 44) and

<sup>7</sup>Information from Mr. R. P. Wright, cf *J.R.S.* 1962, p. 198.

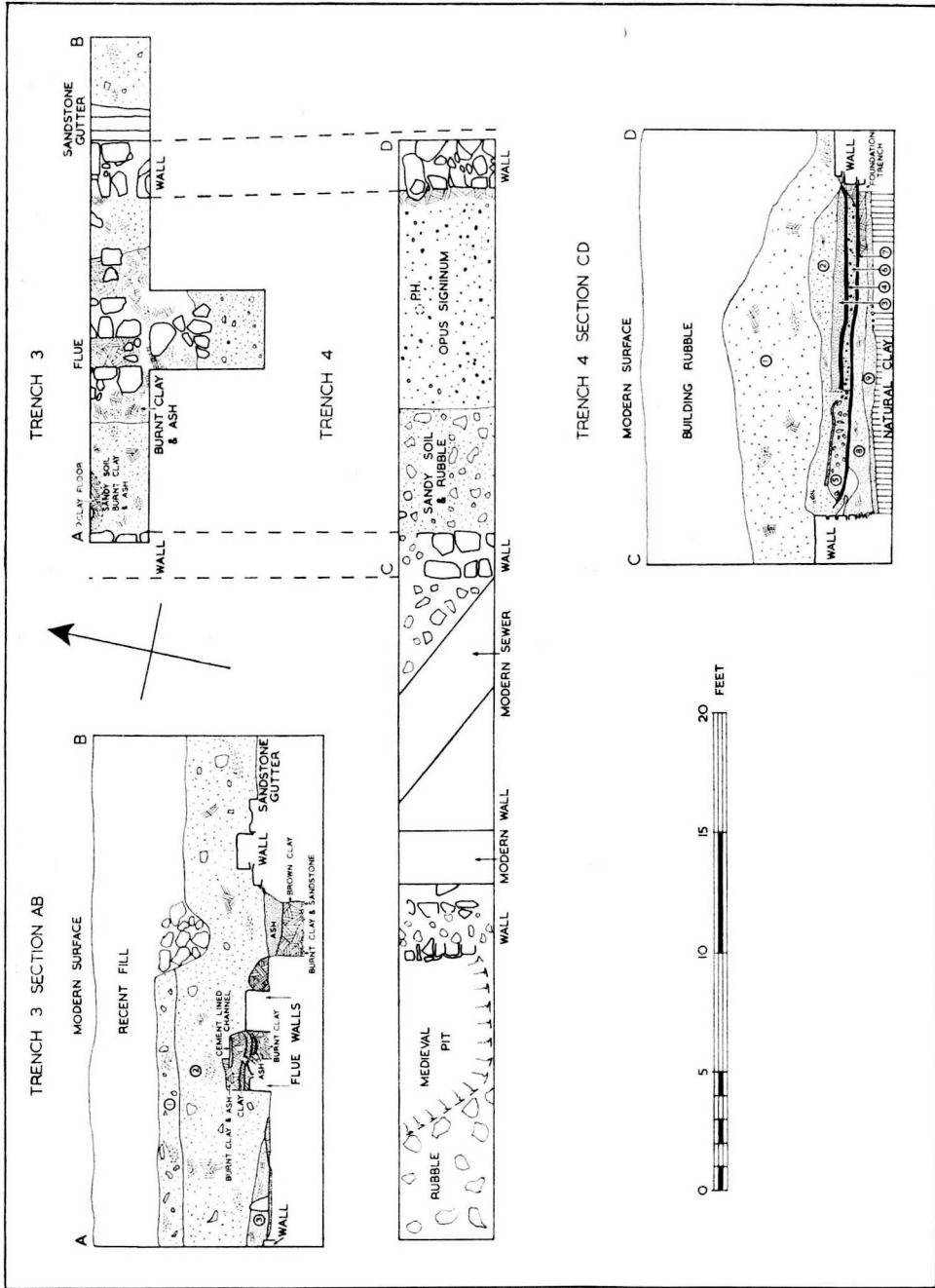


Fig. 4. Plan of Trenches 3 and 4 in correct relationship, and sections.

the rim of a necked jar of grey fabric suggested a third century date for the last phase of activity of this furnace. Iron nails were found in the ash and clay layers of this furnace.

An extension was made to the south in the hope of picking up the *opus signinum* found in **Trench 4** but it had been destroyed in the area explored.

A cut immediately to the west of the external wall, just inside the building located an ash layer *c* 8in. thick covering a clay layer of the same thickness, below which was a layer of burnt clay and sandstone small rubble. Both these clay layers may represent floors. Natural was not reached here.

#### **Trench 4** (fig. 4)

The recent fill encountered just below the surface in this trench contained a large amount of post medieval brown glazed ware. Layers 1 and 2 were similar to trench 3, that is a mixture of clay, ash and soil (figs. 9 and 10).

Layer 3 an *opus signinum* floor (maximum thickness 6in-7in) 8ft. 6in. in length extending at the east up to the clay packing of the external wall located in **Trench 3** and at the west probably to an internal wooden partition; slight traces in the section suggest timber uprights. Unfortunately there was no dating evidence below this floor or the remains of an earlier floor below it (layer 6).

Layer 4 was a black occupation level of *c* 2in. thickness below the *opus signinum* floor only.

Layer 5 consisted of small rubble and soil to the west of the *opus signinum* floor capped by a possible clay floor, extending to within *c* 1ft. of the internal wall found also in **Trench 3**. Pottery from this layer, including a tazza rim, suggested a mid second century date for the clay floor.

Layer 6 consisted of pebbles and grit below the black occupation material of layer 4 and represented an earlier *opus signinum* floor.

Layer 7 was a further occupation level extending right from the internal wall and underlying layer 5, right up to the external wall. This represents the first occupation of the building as it directly seals the foundation trench for the external wall.

Layer 8 was clay and sand below layer 7 running up to the clay packing of the foundations of the external wall.

Layer 9 was clean sand below 8, underlying this was natural clay at depth of *c* 10ft., in which one posthole about 4in. in diameter was found; pottery from the sand above natural included sherds of an early folded beaker and rustic ware and gave a Flavian/Trajanic date for this primary occupation.

This trench was extended to the west in the hope of picking up the other outside wall of the building, but the area was found to be much disturbed by a modern sewer and wall and a large medieval pit. Just to the east of this, a wall of rough masonry was found and presumed medieval though there was no chance of

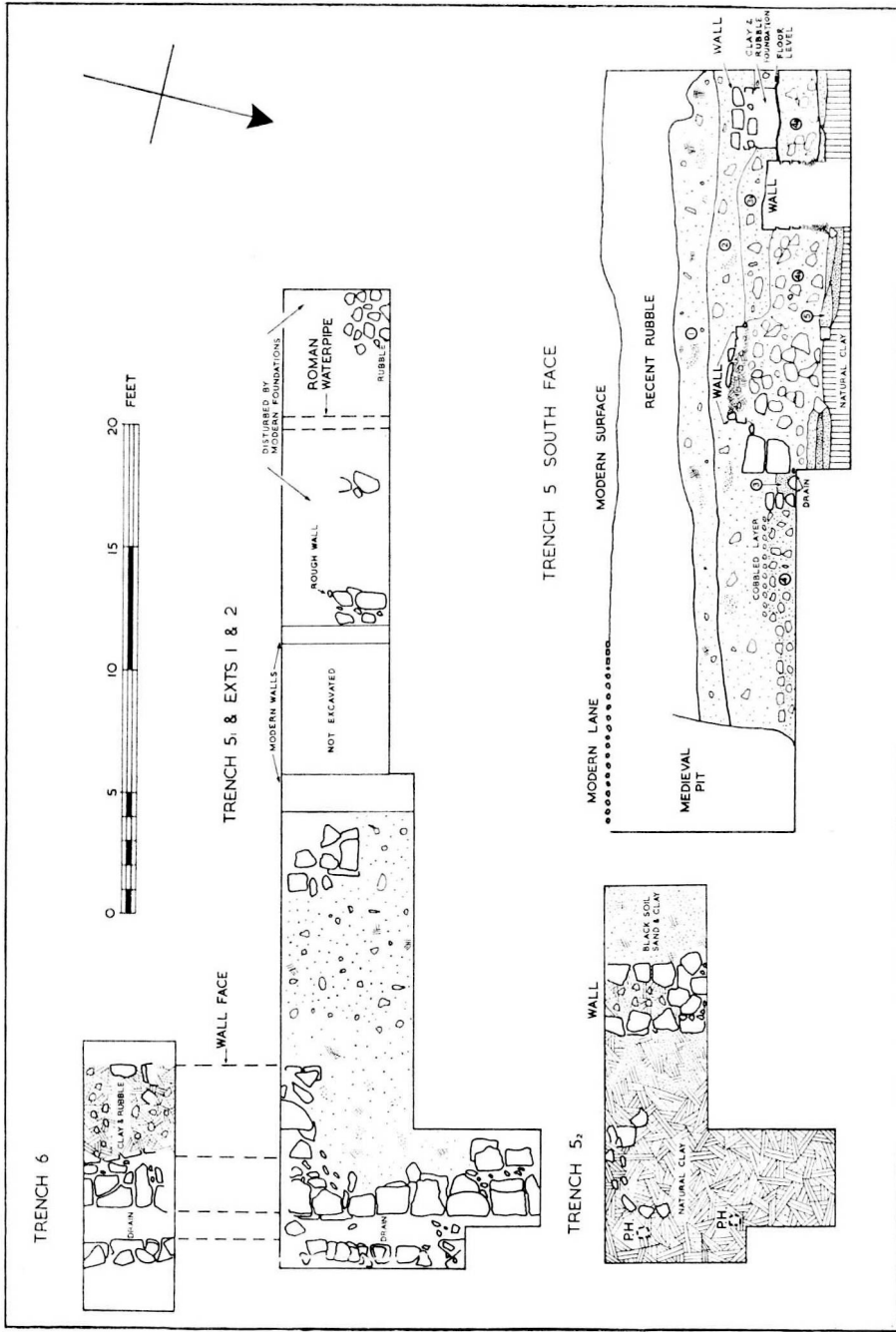


Fig. 5. Plans and section of trench 5, with trench 6 in correct position.



proving its date owing to modern disturbances. Whatever period it may be, it is interesting to note that its distance from the internal wall is the same as from the internal to the external wall namely 14ft. and it is 2ft. 6in. thick as is the external wall at the east end of trenches 3 and 4.

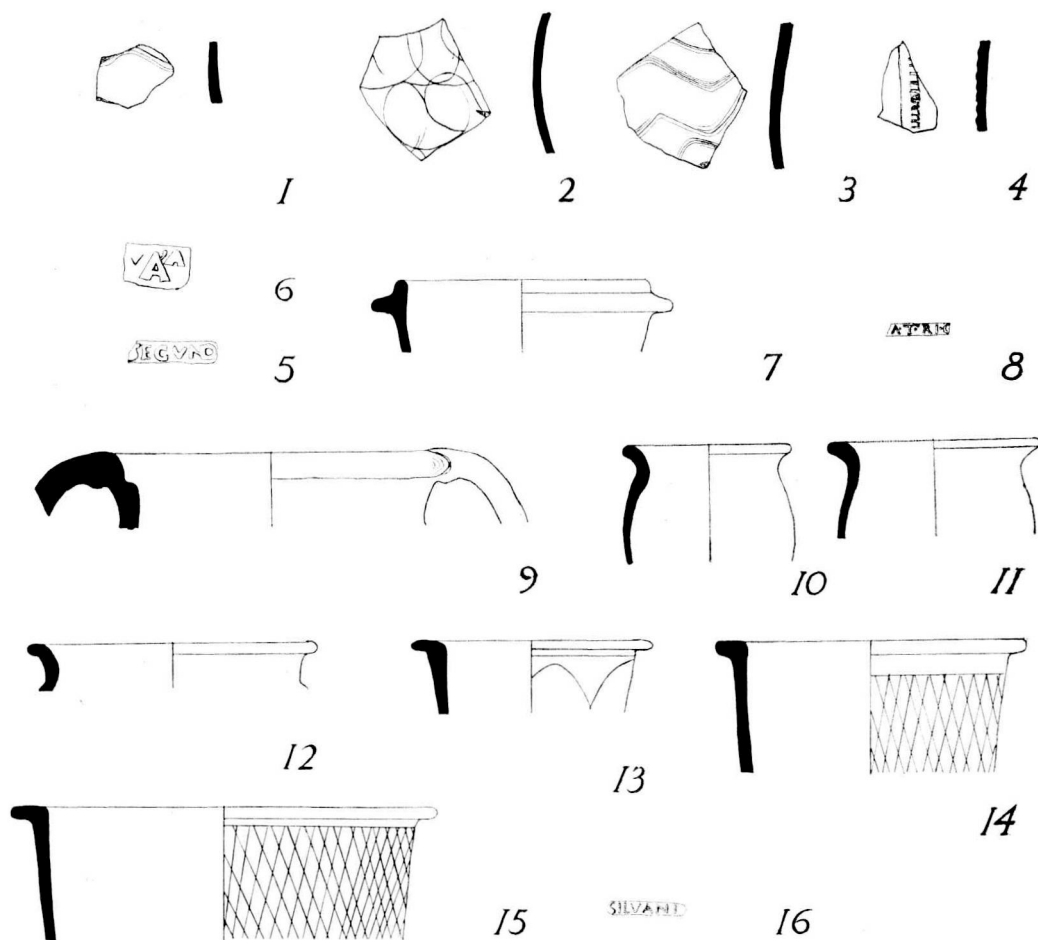


Fig. 6. Pottery, Trench 1.  $\frac{1}{4}$

### Trench 5 (fig. 5)

Layer 1 was light brown soil with ash, sandstone and lumps of clay, and layer 2 was dark sticky soil with sandstone and ash; the pottery from this layer was predominantly medieval (thirteenth century) with some late Roman survivals (fig. 11, nos. 54-61).

Layer 3 was the clean sand in the drain, it contained no pottery.

Layer 3a was the black soil and rubble immediately to the west of the wall in the centre of the trench running up to the wall at the west end where it was interrupted by the clay and rubble foundation for this wall but continued on the other side. A 4th Century cooking pot rim and dishes with looped lattice from this layer give the date of the latest occupation (fig 12, no. 63).

Layer 4 was the sandstone make-up below a cobbled layer to the east of the drain. This is a lane running north-south outside the building. A hammer head mortarium and dishes with obtuse latticing amongst earlier survivals give a late 3rd-4th Century date for this lane (fig. 12, no. 65).

Layer 4a was the sandstone make-up to the west of the drain, underlying the wall in the centre and the wall at the west end of the trench, but interrupted in between by another wall representing an earlier phase of building, to the west of which was a possible clay floor level associated with it. The pottery from this layer is Antonine (none drawn).

Layer 5 was a small pocket of black sticky soil below 4a, possibly a pit. The pottery from layer 5 includes rims of everted rim jars of Flavian/Trajanic date, but there is an Antonine dish and a ring neck flagon giving a date of *c* 180 A.D. for this pit from which also came a mortarium stamped (D) OINVS (fig. 12, no. 68).<sup>8</sup>

The drain and clay and rubble foundations of a 3ft. 6in. thick wall carrying the line of these features a further 8ft. 6in. to the S. were found in **Trench 6** — this trench contained nothing else of note and represents the southern most point that it was possible to excavate on this site (fig. 2).

When the drain and massive wall footings to the west had been removed, two postholes were found in the natural clay at a depth of *c* 10ft. (fig. 5, trench 5(2)). The postholes can be taken to date like those in **Trench 1** and **Trench 4** to a first or early second century phase of occupation.

Trench 5 was extended westwards to find out more about the building to which the drain and massive wall footings belonged with their accompanying cobbled lane, but the area was disturbed by modern walls and foundations so no further traces of this obviously substantial building were found. One interesting feature was however located, a series of interlocking Roman water pipes running north-south across the trench, obviously an offshoot from the main supply which seems to have had its source at springs in Boughton and to have been brought to Deva along the edge of Watling Street.

<sup>8</sup>Excavations at Wroxeter Report no. iv, 1914, p. 57, fig. 3, no. 49.

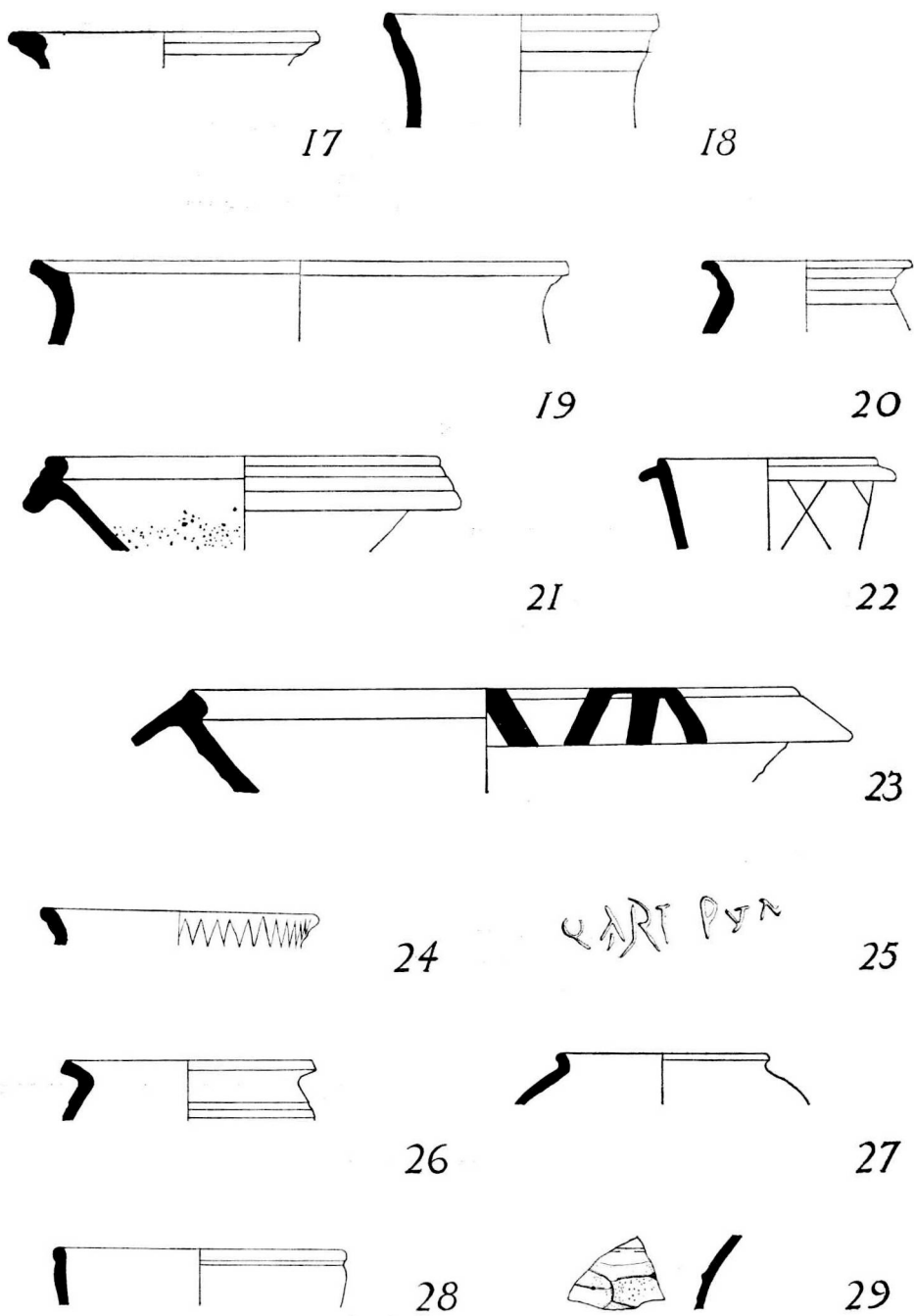


Fig. 7. Pottery, Trench 2. 4

**POTTERY**

**Note:** Apart from those examples headed medieval, all pottery in this catalogue is Roman.

**Trench 1 layer (1)**

*Medieval.*

1. Sherd — horizontal incised wavy lines, buff fabric, green yellow glaze.
2. Sherd — freehand scrolls, light brown fabric, patchy green glaze.
3. Sherd — incised wavy lines, light brown fabric, unglazed (Audlem kiln).
4. Sherd — notched vertical strip, orange brown fabric, yellow green glaze.

**Trench 1 layer (3)**

5. Amphora stamp SECUND.
6. Amphora stamp AA.
7. Flanged dish, grey fabric.

**Trench 1 layer (6)**

8. Samian stamp (P) A.TR.I.C.
9. Two handled flagon, Holt fabric, mica dusting.
10. Cooking pot, grey fabric.
11. Cooking pot, grey fabric.
12. Cooking pot, grey fabric.
13. Pie dish, black burnished, intersecting loops.

**Trench 1 layer (8)**

14. Pie dish, grey fabric, acute lattice.
15. Pie dish, black burnished, acute lattice.

**Trench 1 layer (10)**

16. Samian stamp SILVANI.

**Trench 2 layer (1)**

*Medieval.*

17. Jug rim, dark grey fabric, 13th century.

**Trench 2 layer (2)**

*Medieval.*

18. Jug rim, green yellow glaze.
19. Cooking pot rim, black fabric, brown glaze.
20. Cooking pot rim, black core, yellow pink surfaces.

**Trench 2 layer (5)**

21. Hammer head mortarium, off-white core, cream surfaces.
22. Pie dish, dark grey fabric, black burnished, obtuse lattice.
23. Hammer head mortarium, pipeclay fabric, cream surface, light brown painted strips on rim.

**Trench 2 layer (7)**

24. Cooking pot rim, black burnished, wavy line decoration.
25. Amphora sherd, graffito QUART PVM.

**Trench 2 layer (10)**

26. Cooking pot rim, orange brown fabric.
27. Cooking pot rim, cream fabric, matt black surface.
28. Bead rim bowl, red brown fabric, orange brown surface.
29. Rustic ware sherd, grey fabric.

**Trench 3 layer (2)**

30. *Medieval* jug rim, light brown fabric, traces of green glaze.  
 31. Cooking pot, black burnished.  
 32. Pie dish, grey fabric, incised cross decoration.  
 33. Bead rim dish, black burnished.  
 34. Pie dish, grey fabric, obtuse lattice.  
 35. Pie dish, grey fabric, matt black surface.  
 36. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 37. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 38. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 39. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 40. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 41. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 42. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric.  
 43. Bead rim dish, black burnished.  
 44. Bead rim dish, black burnished.

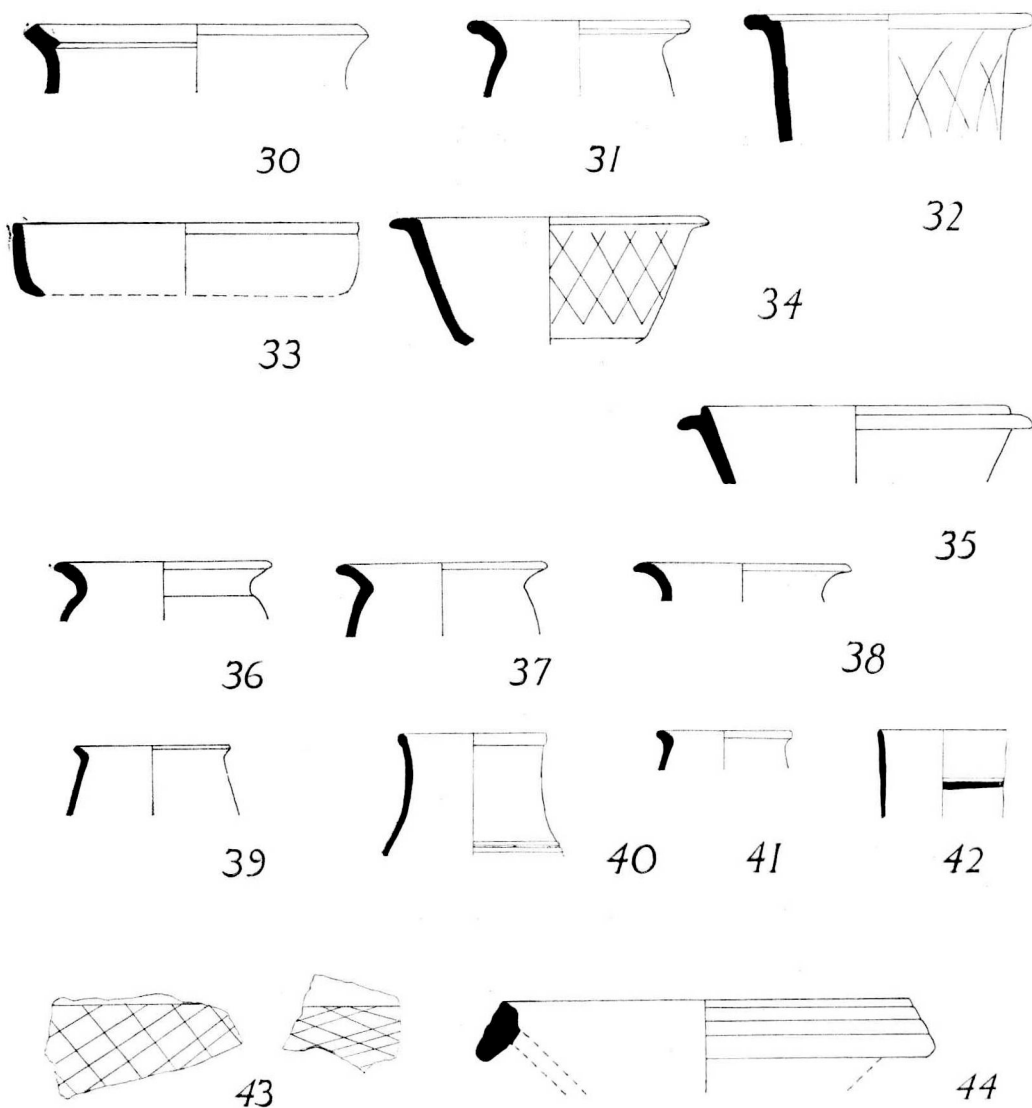


Fig. 8. Pottery, Trench 3. ↓

- 37. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric, shiny dark grey surface.
- 38. Cooking pot rim, grey fabric, smooth grey surface.
- 39. Colour coated beaker rim, orange brown fabric, metallic dark brown surface.
- 40. Colour coated beaker rim, cream fabric, dark brown surfaces, traces of barbotine decoration.
- 41. Colour coated beaker rim, orange yellow fabric, dark brown surfaces.
- 42. Colour coated beaker rim, orange yellow fabric, dark brown surfaces, reserved band.
- 43. Sherd, grey fabric, obtuse lattice.

**Trench 3 Clay and sandstone structure**

- 44. Hammer head mortarium, pipeclay fabric.

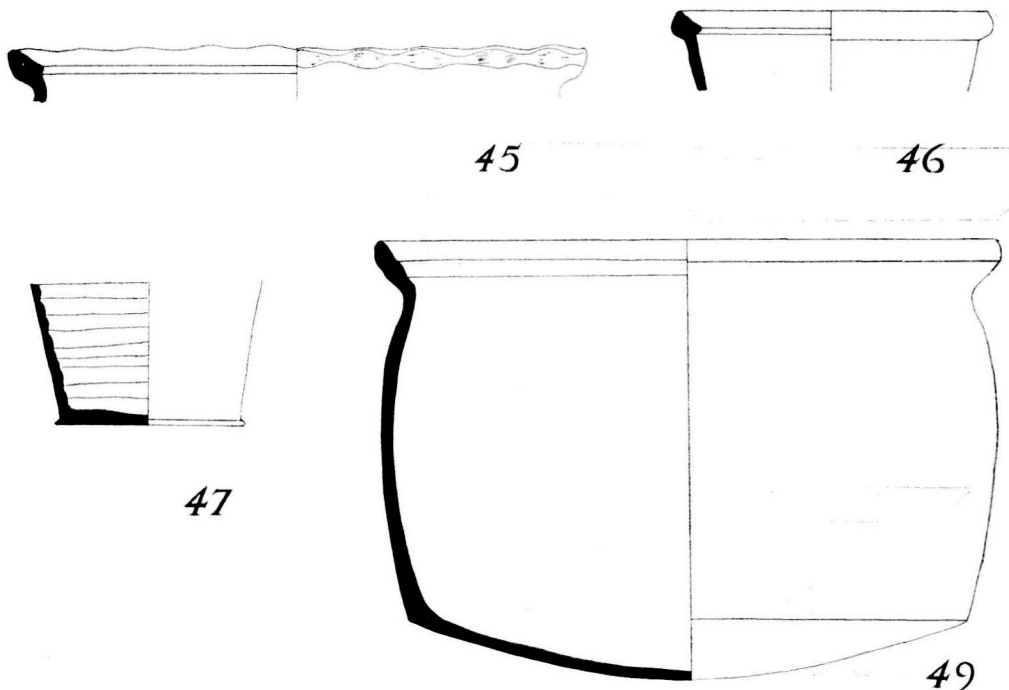


Fig. 9. Pottery, Trench 4. 4

**Trench 4 layer (1)**

*Medieval.*

- 45. Cooking pot rim, unglazed, thumb pressed (Audlem kiln).
- 46. Cooking pot rim, green glazed.
- 47. Base, cream fabric, apple-green glaze.
- 48. Large medieval storage jar, pitted cream ware, pink outer surface with streaky green to orange glaze, decoration of applied vertical thumb impressed strips, one strip also horizontally round rim; possibly three strap handles.

**Trench 4 layer (2) and W. ext. (2)**

- 49. Medieval cooking pot, pink brown fabric.  
W. orange brown surface purple in patches.

**Trench 4 layer (9)**

49a. Mended rim of platter Holt type 134? (not drawn).

**Trench 5 unstratified**

50. Sherd — cream fabric, green glaze, incised wavy lines, French thirteenth century import.

51. Medieval floor tile, interlacing *vesica* design.

52. Legionary stamped tile, LEGXXVVV.

53. Sub-rectangular dish, cream fabric, yellow glaze, 14th Century<sup>h</sup>

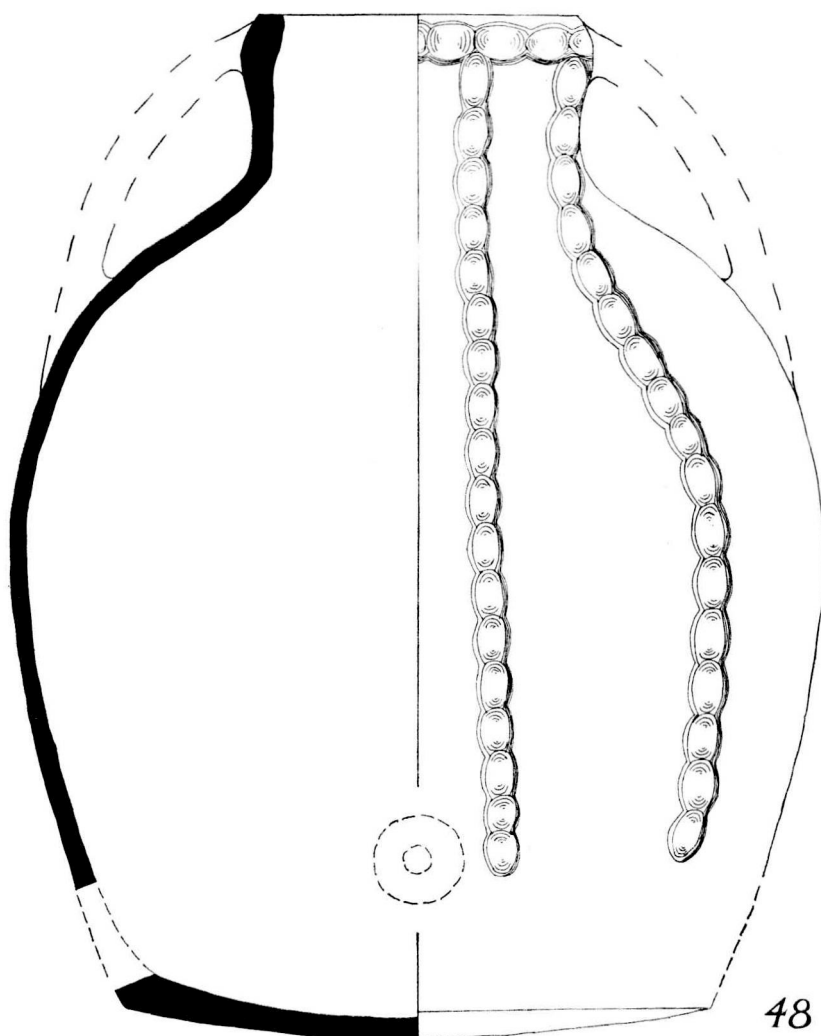
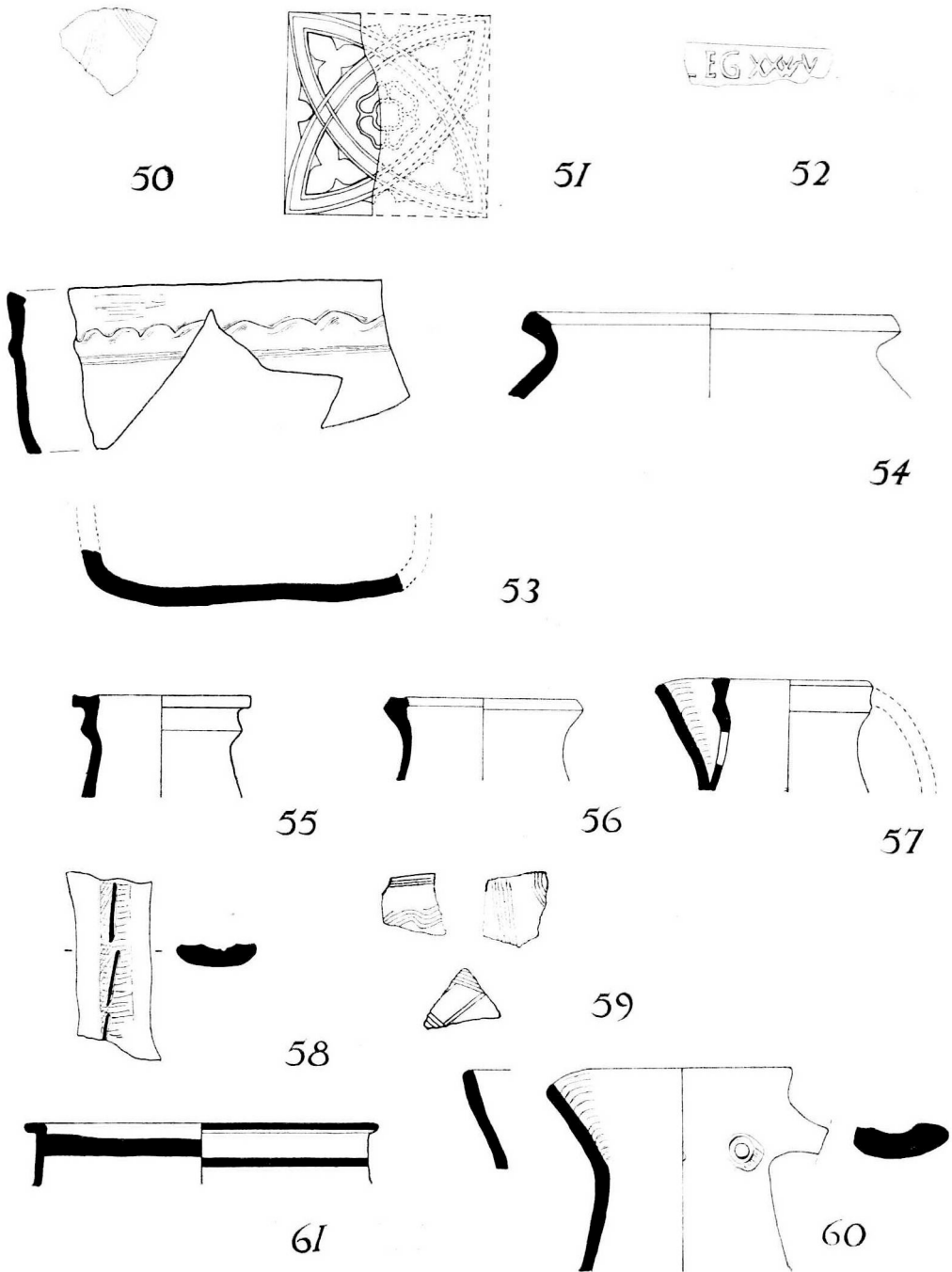


Fig. 10. Pottery, Trench 4. 4

Fig. 11. Pottery, Trench 5.  $\frac{1}{4}$



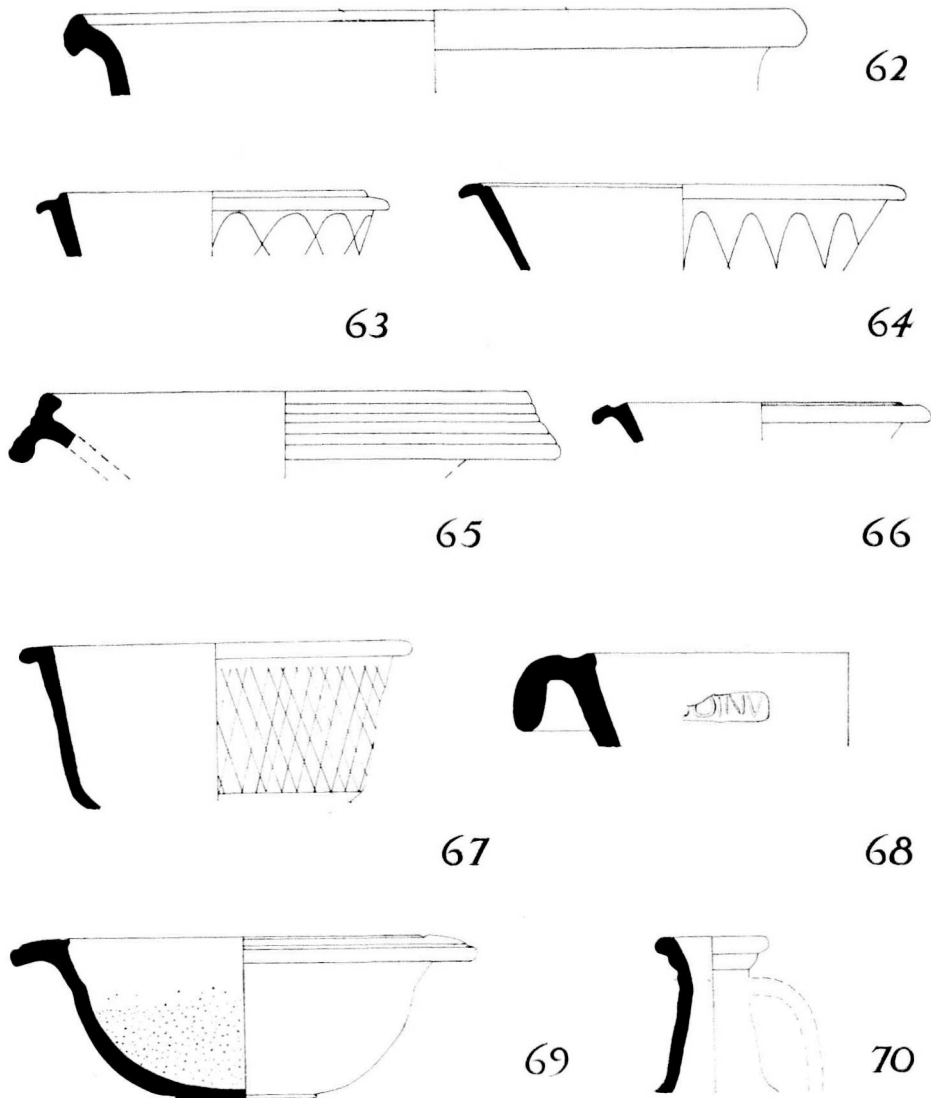


Fig. 12. Pottery, Trench 5. 4

**Trench 5 layer (2)***Medieval.*

- 54. Cooking pot rim, brown fabric, unglazed.
- 55. Jug rim, orange brown fabric, patchy light green glaze.
- 56. Jug rim, buff fabric, bright apple green glaze, bridge spout French import.
- 58. Strap handle, brown fabric, green brown glaze.
- 59. 3 shreds, cream fabric, green yellow glaze, incised wavy line, French import.
- 60. Rim and spout medieval jug, pink cream fabric, yellow brown glaze, rosettes on neck.

*Roman.*

- 61. Rim, white fabric, horizontal brown painted lines.

**Trench 5 layer (3a)**

62. Cooking pot rim, hard red brown fabric.  
 63. Pie dish, loop decoration.  
 64. Pie dish, loop decoration.

**Trench 5 layer (4)**

65. Hammer head mortarium, pipeclay fabric.  
 66. Pie dish, black burnished.

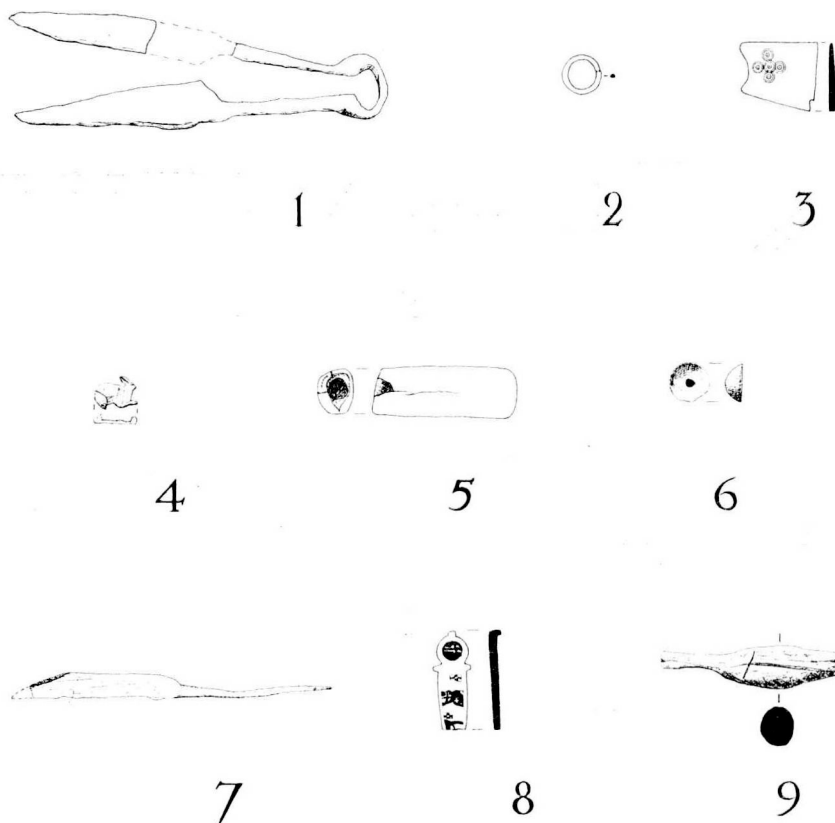


Fig. 13. Small Finds. †

67. Pie dish, acute lattice.  
 68. Mortarium rim stamped (D)OINUS<sup>9</sup>  
 69. Flanged mortarium, red brown fabric, red slip surface, fine grits.  
 70. Ring neck flagon, cream fabric.

**Small finds**

1. Tr. 2 (3) Medieval shears (Med. Cat. London Museum Fig. 47 1B).  
 2. Tr. 1 (4) Bronze ring.  
 3. Tr. 4 U/S Bone comb end, ring and dot. decoration.  
 4. Tr. 4 U/S Bronze hare brooch, traces of orange enamel in crescents representing hair. (London in Roman times, Fig. 4 p. 35).

**Small finds** (*continued*)

5. Tr. 2 Ext. (1) Bone knife handle, metal core.
6. Tr. 2 (2) Bronze stud.
7. Tr. 2 (2) Iron knife blade.
8. Tr. 5 (1) Bronze pendant with circular inset panel of blue and white enamel and rectangular broken panel w. blue and white decoration on background of yellow/brown enamel. The decorations are reminiscent of flags or blazons.
9. Tr. 4 U/S Wooden bung.

**Coin list**

U/S Nuremburg jetton; Obverse WOLF LAUFER IN NURNBERG.  
Reverse GOTTES SAGEN SOL. MAN LOB.

Link between trenches 3 and 4 (1) AE minim diameter 9 mms.

- Trench 4 (1) 1 AE Severus Alexander  
Obverse IMP C M AVR SEV ALEXAND AVG. Laureate head rt.  
Reverse . . . . AVG ?Figure type.  
1 AE 3rd Cent, radiate ?POSTUMVS.
- Trench 4 (1) 1 AE Tetricus Obverse TETRICVS PF, Radiate head rt.  
Reverse illegible
- Trench 4 (2) 1 AE 3rd Cent. radiate, ?Tetricus II.
- Trench 4 (5) 1 AE coin 3rd Cent. radiate, totally illegible.
- Trench 5 U/S 1 AR Antoninus Pius. Obverse ANTONINVS PIVS AVG, laureate head rt.  
Reverse CONCORDIA FELIX 2 figs. wearing togas.  
1 AE Claudius II Gothicus.
- Trench 5 (1) AE coin totally illegible.
- Trench 5 (2) AE coin totally illegible.  
AE coin, 3rd Cent. illegible.  
AE antoninianus with traces of silver wash.  
Obverse . . . . VNVS P.F. radiate head rt, Postumus.  
Reverse . . . . ? fig. holding 2 standards.
- Trench 5 (4a) AE 3rd Cent. radiate ?Tetricus  
Obverse . . . . radiate head rt.

