

Irchester Roman Town: Excavations 1981-1982

by D WINDELL

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SUMMARY

Rescue excavations in connection with the widening of the A45 Road at Irchester Roman town were carried out between November 1981 and March 1982. Evidence of occupation of the late 2nd and 3rd centuries AD was found at the eastern extremity of the extra-mural settlement. Extensive trial-trenching and watching-brief work did not locate any significant occupation elsewhere within the threatened area, suggesting that extra-mural settlement was limited to ribbon-pattern development along roads. Re-examination of the defensive system at the south-west corner of the walled area revealed three ditches, which were back-filled in the late Roman period.

INTRODUCTION

The first written description of the Roman town at Irchester was published in the 18th century (Morton 1712, 517), but knowledge of its existence before that time is reflected in the origins of the local field and place-names. The settlement occupied an area of Northampton Sand and Liassic clays beside the River Nene. In the 2nd century AD an area of c 8ha on the south side of the river was enclosed by earthwork defences, strengthened in the 4th century by the addition of a town wall (Knight 1967, 108). Although the street pattern within the walled area has been defined through aerial reconnaissance, the details of its development and subsequent history remain poorly understood (*cf* Cowley and Foard 1979; RCHM 1979, 91). Similarly, the nature of the extra-mural

occupation which existed to the east and south of the town remains largely unknown and the positions of the roads within it are uncertain. Part of this area and the defended town itself comprises a Scheduled Ancient Monument, but other parts of the extra-mural settlement remain unprotected. Some extra-mural occupation to the south side of the town was recorded in 1962-63 when the present A45 road between Little Irchester and Rushden was constructed (Hall and Nickerson 1967). A more recent decision to widen the highway to dual-carriageway standard provided a fresh opportunity for archaeological excavation outside the town's defences and the results of that work, carried out between November 1981 and March 1982, are described in the present report. The original site records and archival information are deposited with NCC Archaeology Unit with microfiche copies lodged with the National Monuments Record (ref RCHM: NCC Archaeology Unit, Lt Irchester 1981, Level II, *ibid*, Lt Irchester 1981, Level III).

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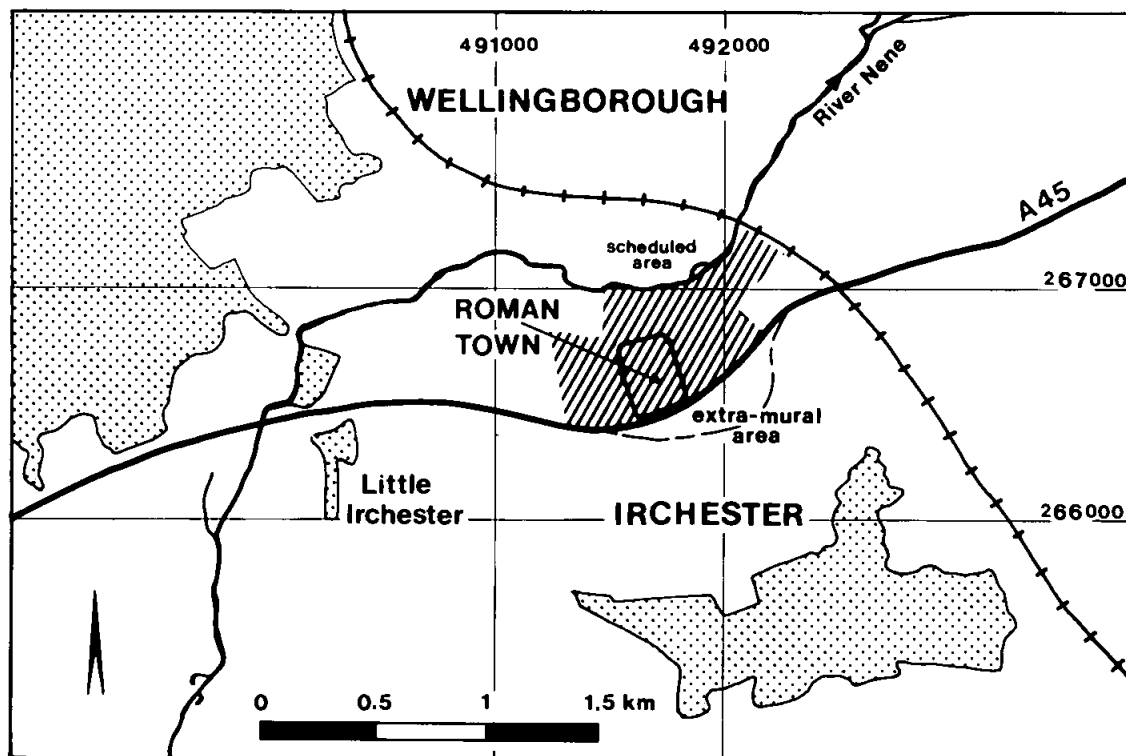


Fig 1 Irchester Roman Town: location

Mr A Dunks, and his staff for their goodwill and co-operation. I also acknowledge the landowners Whitworth Holdings Limited, particularly Mr Sowerby and Mr Miller for their interest and sufferance. I am indebted to the contributors to this report, Miss P Aird, Mr H Pengelly, Mrs L Monk and Mr B Dix, to Mrs P Stephenson and Mrs W Parry for their work on site, and to Mr C Addison-Jones for illustrations (FIGS 1-10 and 13) and Miss D Orchard for FIGS 11 and 12. I would also like to thank Mr D Hall for his advice and Mr A E Rollings for the loan of photographs of previous work and the members of Northamptonshire County Council Archaeology Unit for their help.

THE EXCAVATIONS OF 1981-82

OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGY

The area of destruction caused by the road widening formed a corridor, not more than 25m

wide, on both sides of the existing A45 through a considerable length of the supposed area of the extra-mural settlement. The objectives of the rescue work were to:

- i) assess the form and lay-out of the extra-mural settlement with particular regard to any road alignments.
- ii) assess the density and longevity of the occupation in different areas.
- iii) re-examine the evidence for the triple-ditch defensive system and to establish the date of its construction.
- iv) provide information, if possible, on the pre-Roman occupation of the site.

It was considered beyond the brief of the project to excavate any unthreatened areas.

A series of long trial trenches was cut along the threatened corridor to test for evidence of occupation. Within each land parcel each trench was designated by a sub-site number 1-6 (FIG 2). Only Sub-sites 2 and 4 revealed significant remains and elsewhere trial work and subsequent

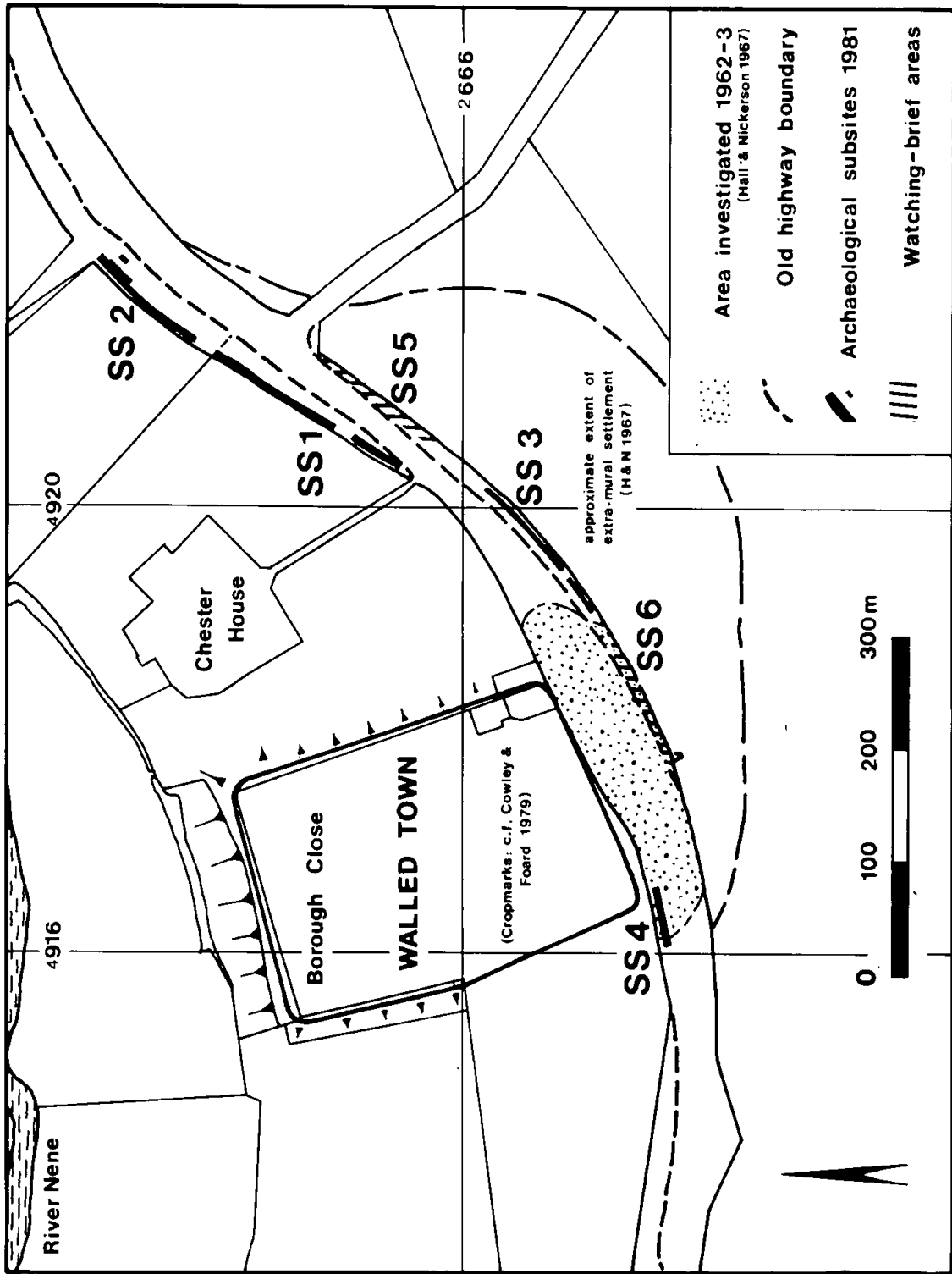


Fig 2 Irchester 1981-82: position of Sub-sites 1-6

watching-brief disclosed very few features, indicating a low density of occupation in those parts of the supposed area of the extra-mural settlement.

SUB-SITE 2 (FIGS 3-6)

The threatened area of OS land-parcel 2800 was tested by a trial-trench, 1.5m wide, running the complete width of the field (FIG 2). A complex of features occurred at its eastern end but elsewhere it was sterile.

An area of 33m x 10m was subsequently stripped of top soil adjacent to the features revealed in the trial-trench in order to establish the type and date of the occupation which was represented. Since the modern field to the immediate east of the sampled area had been quarried in modern times and only limited information regarding the cemetery to its north-east was available (Baker 1878), the excavation provided an opportunity to assess the nature of the extra-mural settlement at its most easterly surviving point. It was apparent that the site contained the remains of part of a single building and its plot. A small sample area was excavated through c 0.30m of stratification which provided dating evidence for its phases of occupation:

Phase I: predating the stone building.

Phase II: contemporary with the use of the building.

Phase III: postdating the building.

A further phase, II/III, was used to distinguish material which could fall within either of those phases.

Phase I: 2nd century AD (FIG 3)

The earliest features on the site were two small and indistinct soilmarks in the natural clay (contexts 70 and 71) which may have been archaeological but were probably of geological origin.

They were overlaid by a buried soil (40) in which a series of depressions, or ploughmarks (39), spaced c1.10m apart, gave the surface an undulating appearance. These plough marks were bounded to the east by a field boundary ditch (38) which produced the only dating evidence for this phase in the form of a single sherd from a pottery vessel which was not earlier than the mid-2nd century AD. Activity was ended with the deliberate back-filling of the ditch and plough-

depressions and the construction of the stone building.

Phase II: late 2nd to early 4th centuries AD (FIG 4)

This was the major period of occupation and the majority of the features could be assigned to it. In the small sample that was excavated it was possible to discern four sub-phases (a to d) but elsewhere material could not be ascribed to sub-phases and was simply designated Phase II.

Only part of the building was available for excavation, with the remainder lying beyond the threatened area; its full dimensions therefore remain unknown.

The walls of the building had been substantially constructed and were faced at either side with ironstone blocks with a rubble core. The foundations were set 0.3m into the natural clay and formed a structure 11m in width. Within the building the remains of a clay floor (18) overlay a bedding of crushed ironstone (41) which directly filled the earlier plough-depressions beneath.

There was a possible yard area outside the building which had been remetalled on several occasions and associated with one of its surfaces was a boundary ditch (25) which had been laid out parallel to the building. A trench was cut to the south to test its alignment where it was found to have many more recuts than in the north. This ditch had been recut a number of times and may represent a major boundary. At a later date the ditch near the building had been back-filled and a surface of limestone blocks (13 and 37) laid above it.

To the west, a short length of wall (46) had been built against the western side of the building and into this had been built a small oven (47). The oven was constructed of ironstone blocks and was 2.0m long and 1.3m in width. Two narrow flues (19 and 26) were present, one a replacement for the other, and both had been served by a shallow stoke-hole to the east.

To the west and south of the oven were other minor features, largely left unexcavated, including a spread of limestone metalling (67) and a linear soilmark (66).

Pottery from all contexts of Phase II was consistent with a date from the late 2nd to early 4th centuries AD but closer dating of the ceramics was not possible. The assemblages contained a higher

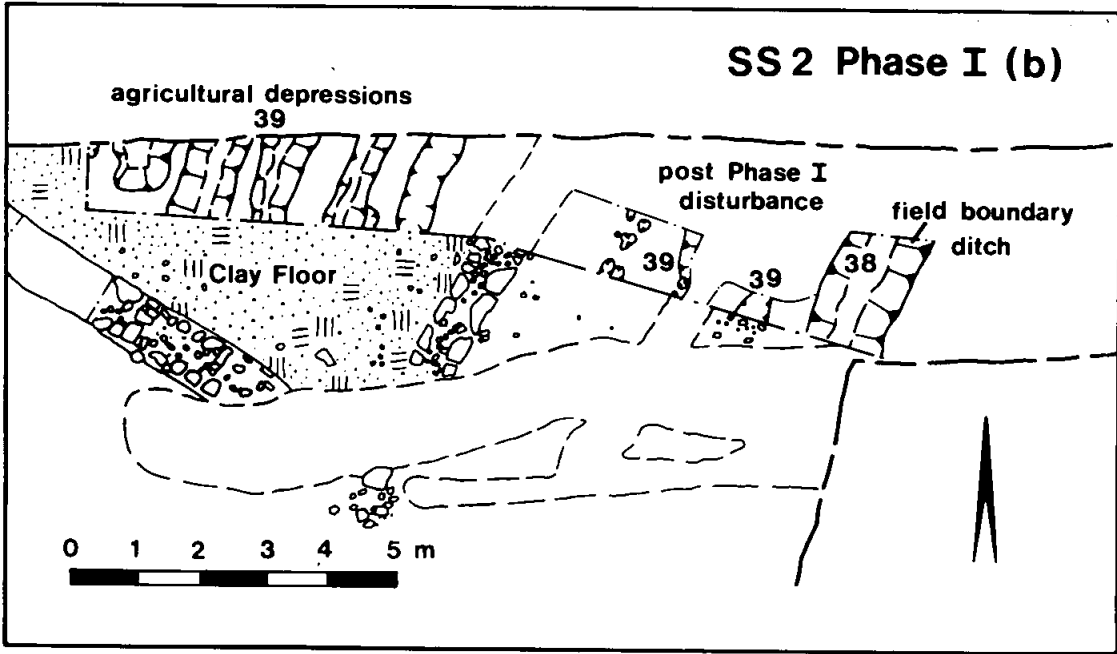


Fig 3 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 2: Phase I(b)

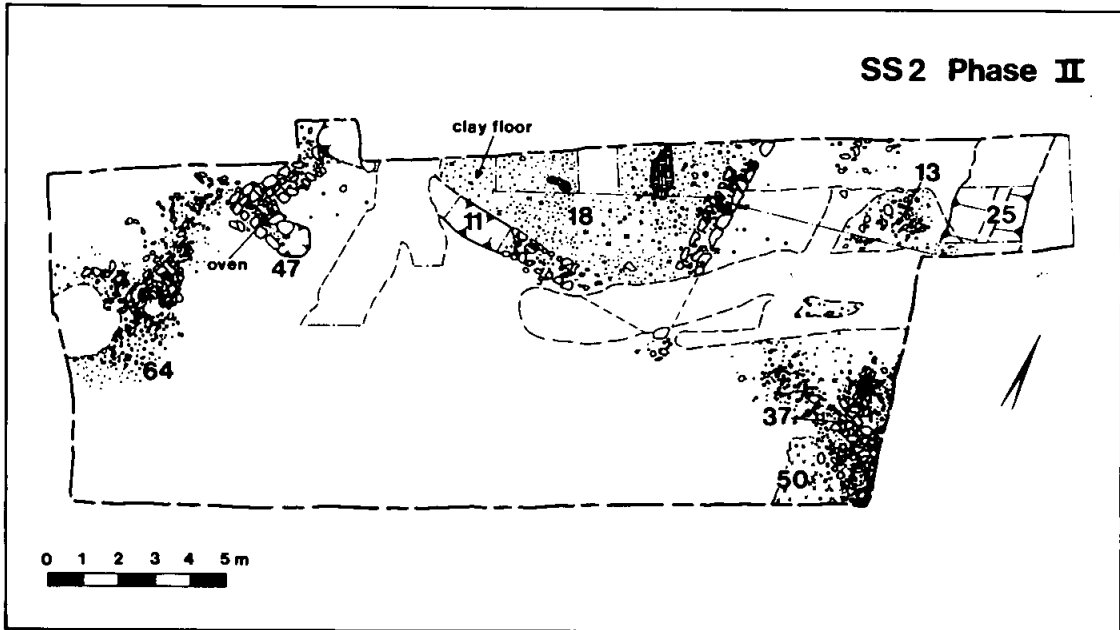


Fig 4 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 2: Phase II

proportion of grey wares and more varied forms than those from later phases. A coin of Constantine II, dated to 317-320 AD, was retrieved from the final remetting (37) of the yard, indicating the final use of the building in the early to mid 4th century. Of the ten coins retrieved from Sub-site 2 the latest was in the final back-fill of the boundary ditch (25) and could be taken to show the final abandonment of the building by the mid 4th century at the latest.

Phase II/III (FIG 5)

A small group of contexts was found which could have been contemporary with either the final period of use of the building or of a later date. This consisted of a pair of shallow gullies (15 and 48/69) cut through the surfaces to the east of the building probably for drainage, and two areas of rubble (51 and 63) to the south. The rubble was of limestone and ironstone blocks, clearly laid, but dissimilar to the other metalled surfaces and without worn surfaces or evidence of a structural function.

These contexts yielded pottery which bore closest similarity to the ceramic assemblages from Phase III features but they could not be shown to post-date the building.

Phase III (4th century AD?) (FIG 5)

Features post-dating the stone building included the robber trenches (11 and 42) of parts of the walls of the building and a number of ditches (9, 43/44 and 67/68) which were cut through both the building and the robber-trenches (FIG 5). These ditches were not on the alignments previously established and did not respect the position or alignment of the building of Phase II. They may have been post-Roman but the pottery retrieved was consistent with a 4th century date, including Oxfordshire colour-coated wares, particularly type C81:2 (Young 1977). Two coins were retrieved from features of Phase III, dated 318-320 AD and 330-337 AD but both were likely to have been residual in their contexts. The function of the ditches remains obscure; they may have formed boundaries to occupation elsewhere or could have been field boundaries of post-Roman date filled with residual material.

Following the filling of these ditches the site was disturbed by modern ploughing but thereafter it

had been turned over to pasture until the roadworks of 1981.

SUB-SITE 4 (FIGS 2, 7, 8, 9)

Sub site 4 was located at the south-west corner of the walled area (NGR SP916664) (FIG 2) in an area which previously had revealed a system of three ditches which contained late 'Belgic' and early Roman pottery (Hall and Nickerson 1967, 75). A section through the town's defences nearby had found only a single wide, flat bottomed ditch of the 4th century AD (Knight 1967). These findings appear contradictory, and so the opportunity was taken to re-examine the area.

Topsoil was removed from the batter left in 1962-63 in the area of the ditches. The face was drawn as a section and minor, selective excavation was undertaken to elucidate the stratigraphy and provide dating evidence. This revealed a number of features of Roman and later dates.

Roman features (Phase I)

Three ditches were found, cut into the natural sandstone but there were no stratigraphic links between them. The inner ditch (102) was the largest at 4.9m wide and 2.5m deep, the middle (101) was the smallest, 2.2m wide and 1.0m deep, and the outer (103) was 4.2m wide and 1.5m deep. All were filled with layers of ironstone and limestone rubble and silt. Their spacing was fairly even: 7.6m between the centres of outer and middle and 8.5m between the middle and inner. (There was a slight curvature on the section which may have accounted for a greater irregularity of spacing than noted by Hall and Nickerson (*loc cit*). The inner ditch yielded an assemblage of pottery consistent with a late 2nd to 4th century date and the outer a similar but smaller assemblage. Unfortunately, the middle ditch yielded no finds at all. Two coins were recovered from the innermost ditch (102); one of Tetricus, dated to 271 to 273 AD from the primary silting and the other of Constantinopolis, 330-337 AD, from the succeeding fill, indicative of back-filling not earlier than 330 AD.

Though these ditches were rather smaller and less regularly spaced than those recorded by Hall and Nickerson there was little doubt that they were the same ditches. No evidence of a single flat-bottomed ditch, from which a remodelling of the

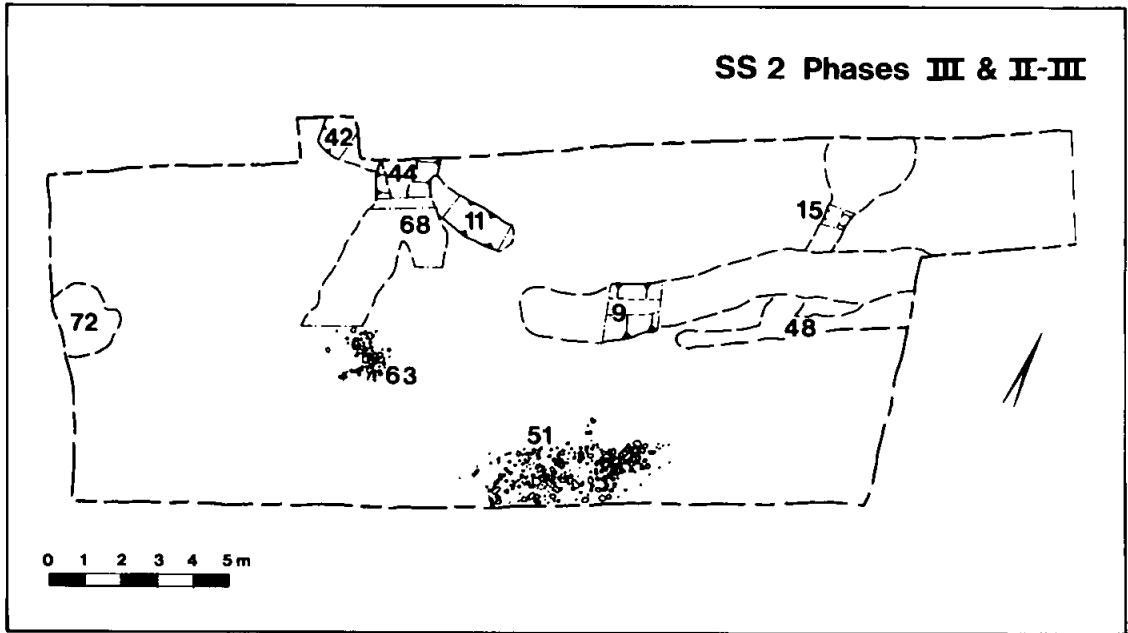


Fig 5 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 2: Phases III & II/III

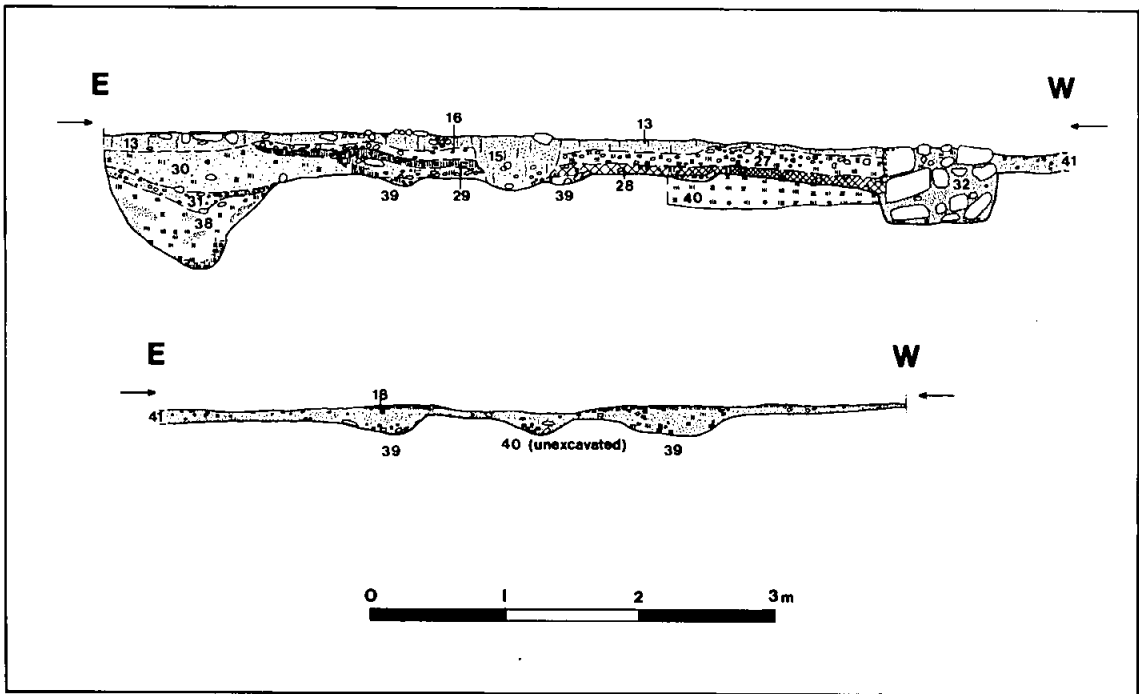


Fig 6 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 2: cross-section of major features

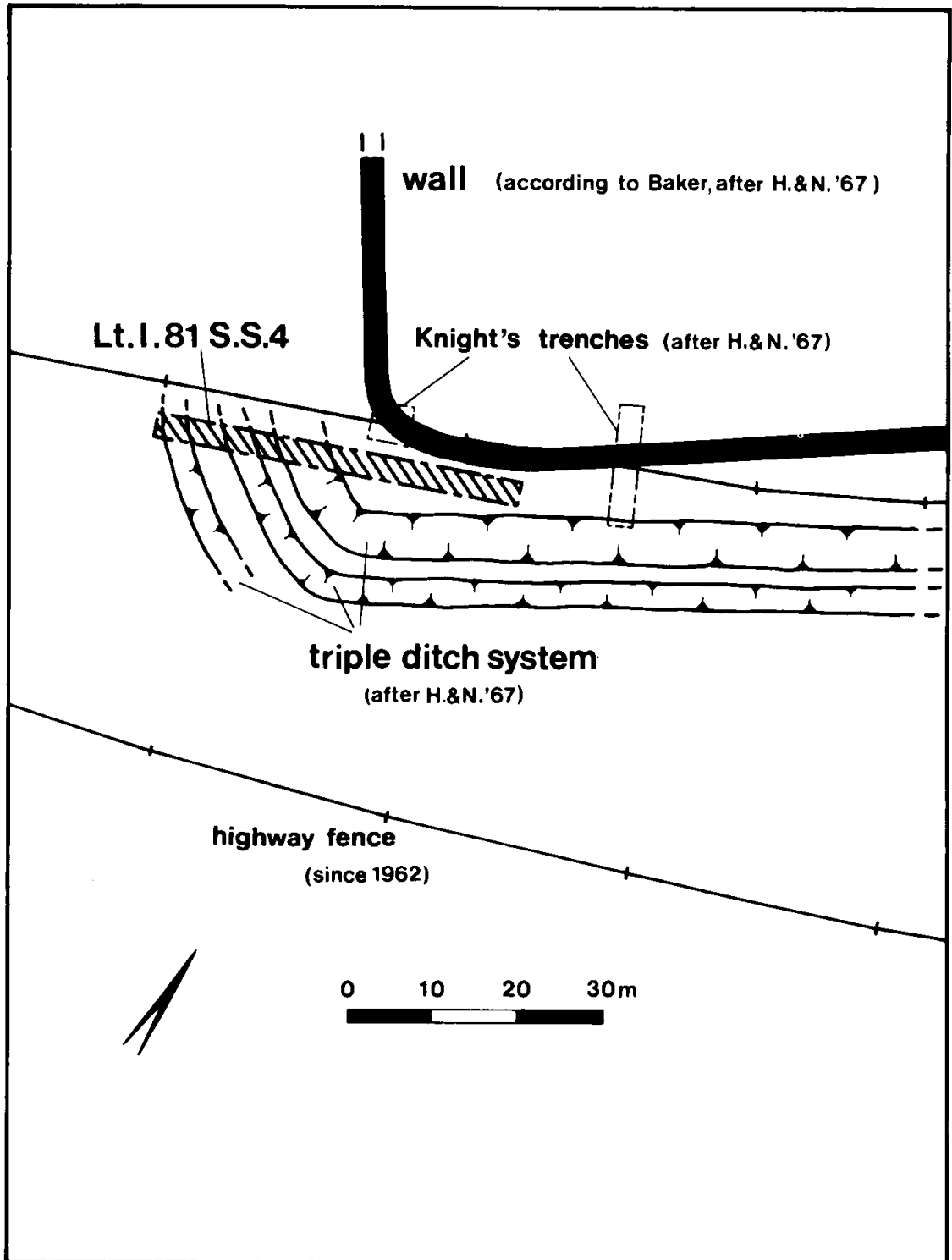


Fig 7 Irchester 1981-82: position of Sub-site 4

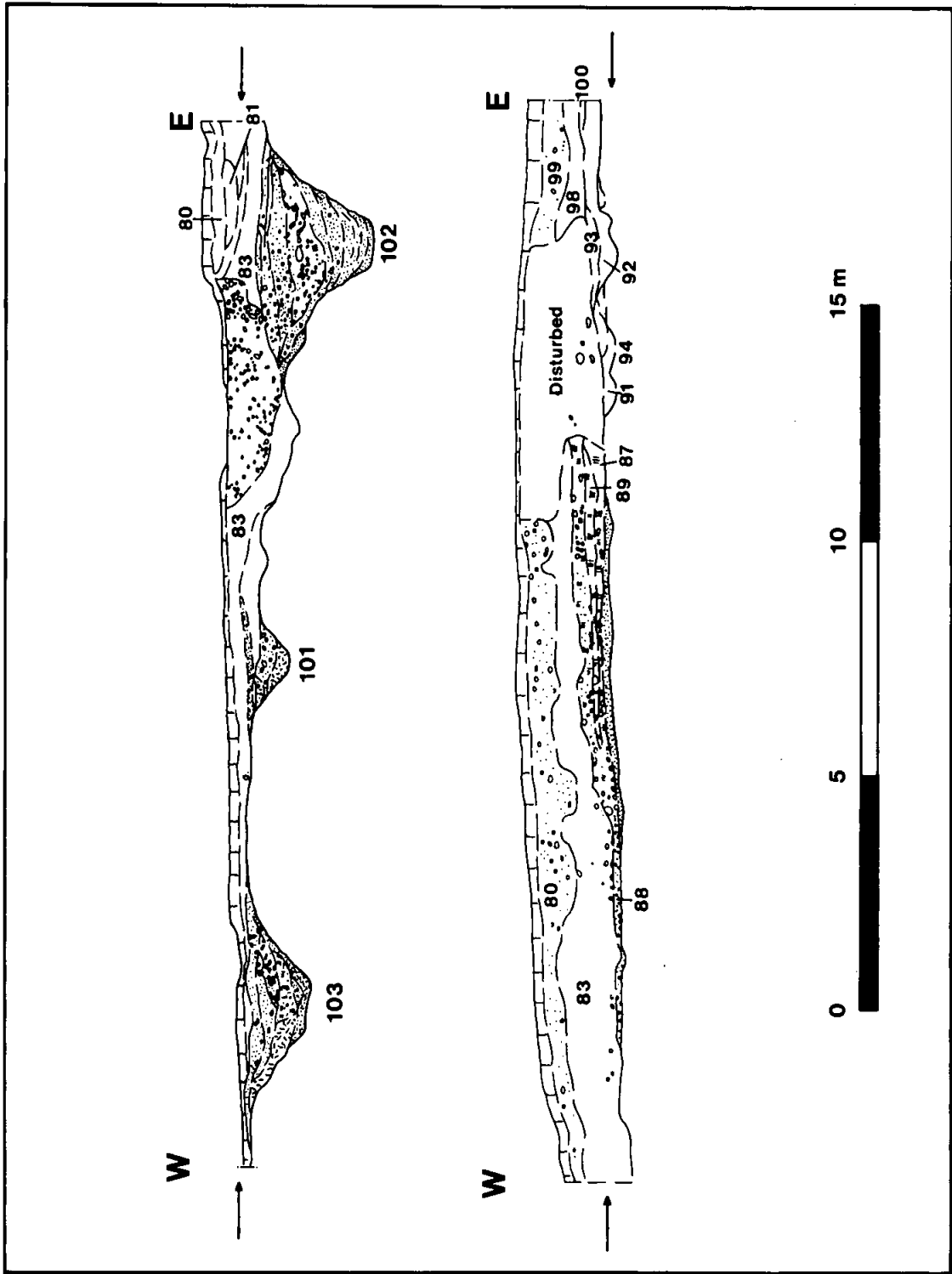


Fig 8 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 4: cross-section

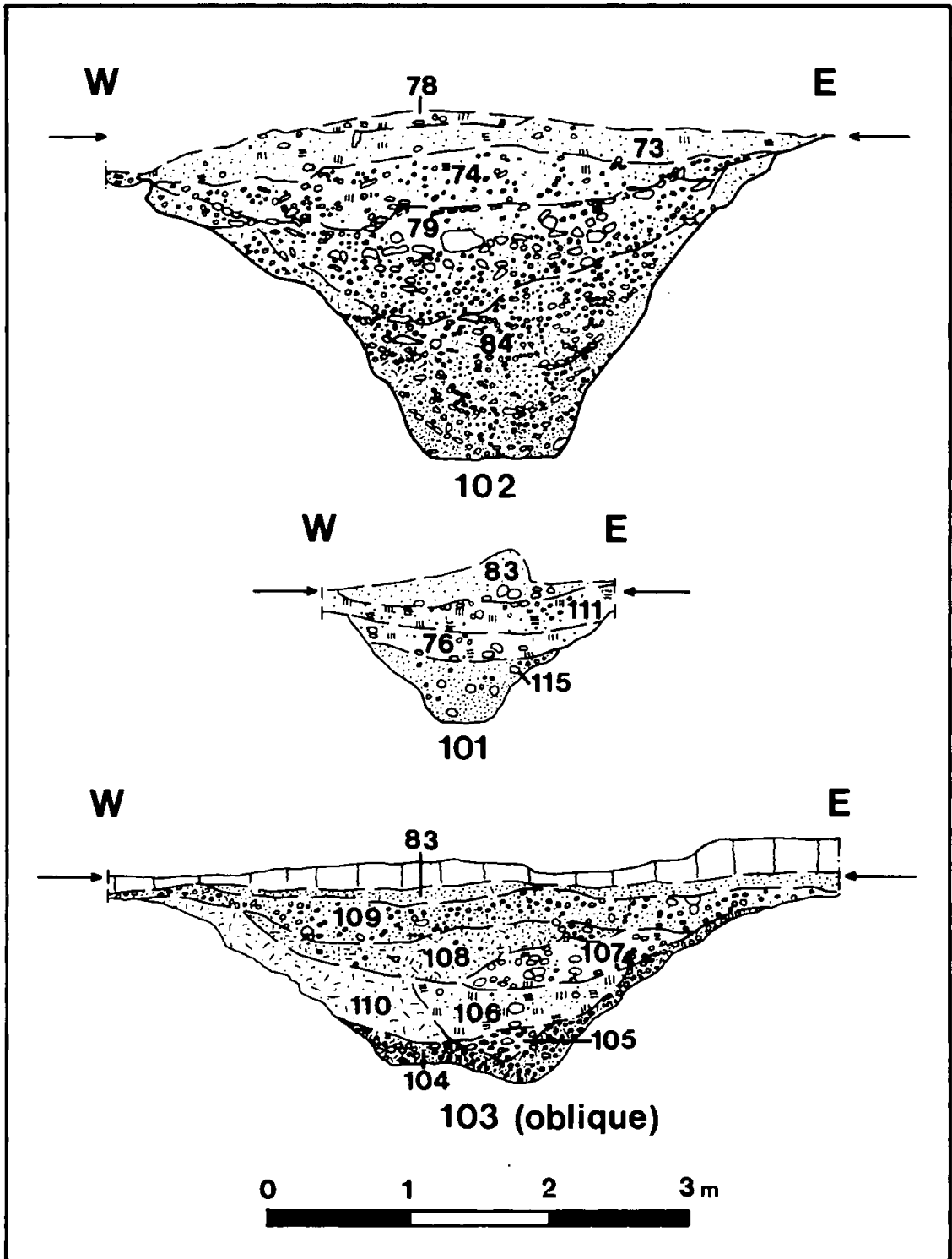


Fig 9 Irchester 1981-82: Sub-site 4: Sections of Roman ditches

defences in the 4th century had been proposed (Knight 1967), was found. The regularity of the spacing and similarities of their back-fills would suggest that the ditches were contemporary (*cf* Hall and Nickerson 1967, 76). However, the dating evidence indicated back-filling no earlier than the 4th century AD. No direct relationship between the ditches and the wall or rampart could be demonstrated as this would have required large scale excavation of unthreatened stratification. Cropmarks show two ditches aligned parallel to the town wall on the west (Cowley and Foard 1979) and this may suggest that the discrepancy of their alignment to the town wall as recorded by Baker (1878) is caused by the relation of that plan to modern surveys.

Other minor features of Roman date were also found and included small pits (92 and 97) and a metallated surface (96 and 100).

Post-Roman features (Phases II and III)

A large bank of limestone rubble, *c* 0.7m in depth and *c* 11m in width, overlay the Roman features and was, in turn, overlaid by a large lens of brown sandy loam (83) of up to 1.4m in depth. It can be interpreted as the remnants of the mound which is known to have existed in the south-west corner of the walled area. Knight referred to it as being 75 feet (22.9m) in diameter, resembling a large, ploughed, round-barrow and he interpreted it as debris from stone-robbing (Knight 1967, 107). It is marked on Baker's plan of 1878 and he stated that it had stood to a considerable height in his youth. Also a map of 1756 shows a 'temple' at this point which may refer to the same mound (RCHM 1979, 96). The surface of the mound is now almost obliterated but the section suggested that it was originally constructed from the debris of stone-robbing.

Later disturbances probably resulted from either the roadworks of 1961-62 or from previous archaeological activity.

OTHER SUB-SITES

Sub-sites 1 and 3 were trial-trenches and Sub-sites 5 and 6 were areas watched during earthmoving by contractors (FIG 2). Sub-site 1 revealed a single pit and a small scatter of limestone, Sub-site 5 yielded a single ditch of Roman date and Sub-site 6 revealed no features at all. Sub-site 3 did reveal

features probably of Roman date but consisting of thin scatters of rubble and small burnt areas which were too amorphous for interpretation or to suggest an area for further productive excavation. The major objective of these Sub-sites was to locate the southern Roman road but no road was found.

THE FINDS

SAMIAN, by H Pengelly (FIG 10)

The Samian ware, all of which is probably either residual in nature or unstratified, consists of 24 sherds representing 23 individual vessels from Sub-site 2 and 3 sherds from a single vessel found at Sub-site 4. The date range is Flavian to late-Antonine and includes the following recognisable forms: *SG* La Graufesenque, forms 30(1), 18(1), 36(1). *CG* Lezoux, forms 31 (5-1 from Sub-site 4), 45 or 43(3) 37(2), 33(2), 31R(1), 36(1).

There are no potters' stamps and only two decorated sherds: FIG 10a. Form 37, *CG* in the style of X-14 (the 'Donnaucus-Sacer' style of *S and S*, PL 84). The sea-monster is *D37*, 0.54, the stylised rock *RU141*. *cAD* 125-145. Context 11. FIG 10b. Form 30, *SG*, with ovolo and 'rod' used by Mercato. *cf* Knorr 1919, Taf 57, 19 and 20. *cAD* 88-105. Context 20/24. Abbreviations: *CG*: Central Gaulish. *SG*: South Gaulish.

D: figure type in Déchelette 1904

O: figure type in Oswald 1936-7

R: motif in Rogers 1974

S and S: Stanfield and Simpson 1958.

Comment

It was noted that the Samian ware from Sub-site 2 was consistently earlier in date than other material from the contexts or phases in which it was found and it was, therefore, considered to be residual. Of the twenty-four sherds, fourteen were of Antonine date and could be taken to substantiate a commencement of occupation in the late 2nd century AD. However, there were eight sherds of an earlier date; four Flavian to Trajanic and four Hadrianic or early Antonine. Other evidence showed that prior to the mid-2nd century, at the earliest, the area of Sub-site 2 was in agricultural use. Also, only one other sherd which need be earlier than the mid-2nd century was recovered, so the occurrence of these eight sherds of Samian is anomalous. It may suggest earlier occupation nearby, but this seems unlikely in the absence of other residual early material and the lack of evidence of such occupation in the trial-trenches. Alternatively, it may reflect the longevity of use of Samian (*cf* Howe *et al* 1980, 9; and Bulmer 1979, 49), or the reuse of Samian for other purposes in the 3rd or 4th centuries AD.

OTHER POTTERY

by P Aird (FIGS 11, 12)

Approximately 17kg of pottery were recovered from the excavations of 1981-82. Most of the material came from Phases II and III of Sub-site 2 and was dateable to the 3rd and 4th



Fig 10 Irchester 1981-82: Samian: Scale 1/1

centuries AD. Phase 1 of Sub-site 2 produced a single rim sherd, probably deposited no earlier than the mid 2nd century, which was similar to the only sherd from Sub-site 3. Sub-site 4 produced pottery consistent in date with the late 2nd to 4th centuries.

Fine Wares

Colour-coated wares from kilns in the Lower Nene Valley formed the bulk of the fine wares found. Vessel types include flanged bowls, plain-rim straight-sided dishes, a cornice rim beaker and a bowl which imitates Samian form 31. Indented beakers with applied 'scale' decoration are represented by body sherds. The final phase of occupation at Sub-site 2 produced examples of this ware showing characteristics which are thought to be late developments in the industry (Howe *et al* 1981, 8-9).

Sherds of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware were found in contexts of the latest occupation of Sub-site 2, or were unstratified. The rim of a small flanged bowl (FIG 11 no 14) and a beaded rim bowl were the only identifiable pieces recovered.

Some sherds of an orange coloured fabric with an orange colour-coat which may be products of the Hadham kilns (C Going, pers comm) were also found. There were also two sherds of colour-coated ware which could not be attributed to a known source.

The colour-coated wares together formed c12% by weight of the pottery recovered.

Mortaria

Only two fragments of mortaria were found and they appeared to have been made locally.

Coarse Wares

Black burnished wares are represented by rims of a jar and a dish (FIG 12 no 35) in BB1, and some body sherds which may have been of local manufacture.

The remainder of the coarse wares were probably made locally. For analysis they can be divided into seven fabric groups according to the inclusions in the clay body which are visible without magnification:

- A: grogged wares
- B: shelly wares
- C: sandy wares
- D: pastes
- E: grey wares
- F: white sandy wares
- G: white pastes

Fabric B was present in large quantities in contexts of all phases and accounted for over half the pottery by weight and c40% of the rims. But, since it was used for larger and more thickly walled vessels than were manufactured in other fabrics,

direct comparison of quantities by weight may be misleading. Nevertheless it was found that fabric B became more common in the later phases of Sub-site 2. Vessel forms included storage jars, narrow-necked jars and flanged bowls. Decoration was usually confined to rilling or combing, apart from incised wavy lines found on the upper surfaces of the flanges of some large bowls.

Grey ware (Fabric E) accounted for approximately a quarter of the pottery by weight and 40% of the rims. It was most common in Phase II of Sub-site 2, after which it became less frequent. Vessel forms include necked and flanged bowls, plain rim, straight-sided dishes, dishes with moulded rims and various types of jars. Decoration consisted of grooves, cordons, incised lattice and curvilinear designs and sometimes burnishing.

Fabrics A, C, D, F and G were rare and accounted for only four rims.

Pottery Catalogue (FIGS 11, 12)

Selected pottery from Sub-site 2 is shown in order of phases, followed by all the pottery from Sub-site 4. Each is allocated a number which serves also as an illustration number. A description of the vessel is followed by a numerical classification (in brackets) which relates to the form series established and described in Level III. The fabric group is then listed followed by the colour of the exterior/core/interior. Each entry is completed by the number of the context in which the vessel was found. Rims which have been illustrated in the Level III are indicated by the Pottery Reference Number (Pot Ref) allocated at that stage. Where appropriate a reference is added to parallels found during the excavations at Irchester in 1962-63 (Hall and Nickerson 1967; Knight 1967).

Sub-site 2

Only a selection of the pottery is catalogued; further information is available within the Level III pottery report.

Phase III (Nos 5 and 7 may be residual)

1. Necked jar (3ei). Fabric B. Grey and buff/grey and buff/buff. Context 44.
 2. Necked jar (3ei/ii). Fabric B. Dark grey/dark grey and brown-grey/brown-grey and dark grey. Context 43.
 3. Necked jar (3ei/ii). Fabric B. Grey and grey-brown/dark grey between brown/light brown and dark grey. Context 9.
 4. Necked jar (3eii). Fabric B. Buff/grey/buff. Context 44. (Pot Ref 13) *cf* Knight 1967, no 55.
 5. Beaker or jar (4d). Fabric E. Light grey/off-white/light grey. Context 43.
 6. Beaker or jar (-). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. Pale pink-orange fabric with orange-brown colour-coat. Context 11. (Pot Ref 17).
 7. Necked bowl (5aii). Fabric E. Grey/light grey/grey. Context 43. (Pot Ref 26).
 8. Jar or bowl (-). Fabric E. Black/light grey/mid-grey. Context 9. (Pot Ref 20).
 9. Dish (6a). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. Cream fabric with dark grey-brown colour-coat. Context 44.
- Unill. Beaded rim bowl. Oxfordshire colour-coated ware. (Orange fabric with red colour-coat). Context 42. As Young 1977, C81:2.

Southern Trench

10. Necked jar (3ei). Fabric B. Light grey/grey/buff. Context 6.
11. Necked jar (3ei/ii). Fabric B. Orange/grey/orange. Context 57.
12. Necked bowl (5ai). Fabric E. Grey/reddish brown/grey. Context 57. (Pot Ref 25).
13. Flanged bowl (5eiii). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. Pinkish grey fabric with metallic grey colour-coat. Context 57. (Pot Ref 33).
14. Flanged bowl. Oxfordshire colour-coated ware. (Orange fabric with red colour-coat). Context 57. (Pot Ref 42).
15. Dish (6a). Fabric E. Dark grey/dark grey/dark grey. Context 57.
16. 'Castor box'. Nene Valley colour-coated ware. White fabric with grey-brown colour coated on exterior, red-brown colour-coat on interior. Context 57. (Pot Ref 41).

Phase II/III

17. Necked jar (3eii). Fabric B. Dark grey (sooted)/dark grey/dark grey and red-brown. Context 15.
18. Flanged bowl (5eiii). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. Orange fabric with dark brown colour-coat. Context 69.

Phase II

19. Storage jar (3aii/iii). Fabric B. Buff/grey/buff. Context 41. (Pot Ref 1).
20. Storage jar (3aiv). Fabric B. Buff with orange and grey/buff and grey/buff with orange and grey. Context 13. (Pot Ref 4).
21. Channel-rim jar (3biv). Fabric B. Grey/grey/grey. Context 13. (Pot Ref 6).
22. Necked jar (3ei/ii). Fabric B. Dark grey to brown/grey/brown to dark orange. Context 13.
23. Necked jar (3eii). Fabric B. Buff/light grey between orange/dark grey. Context 13.
24. Necked jar. Nene Valley colour-coated ware. White fabric with red colour-coat. Context 13. (Pot Ref 15).
25. Beaker or jar (4d). Fabric E. Light grey/brown-grey/light grey. Context 22/24.
26. Beaker (4g). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. Light pink fabric with a brown colour-coat on exterior and red colour-coat on interior. Context 17. (Pot Ref 23).
27. Jar. Fabric E. Dark grey/dark grey/dark grey. Context 32. (Pot Ref 19).
28. Necked bowl (5ai). Grey/reddish brown/grey. Context 20/21.
29. Necked bowl (5aii). Dark grey/brown-grey/dark grey. Context 20/21.
30. Necked bowl (5aiii). Fabric E. Grey/grey/grey. Context 33.
31. Flanged bowl (5eiii). Nene Valley colour-coated ware. White fabric with dark brown colour-coat. Context 13.
32. Flanged bowl (5eiv). Fabric E. Dark grey/grey/dark grey. Context 37/5. (Pot Ref 34).
33. Bowl. Fabric B. Dark grey-brown/grey/dark grey-brown. Context 13. (Pot Ref 31).
34. Dish (5e/6b). Fabric E. Grey/grey/grey. Context 13. (Pot Ref 35).
35. Dish (6a). Fabric BB1. Black/black/black. Context 20/21. (Pot Ref 37).
36. Dish (6biii). Fabric E. Dark grey/brown-grey/dark grey. Context 20/21.

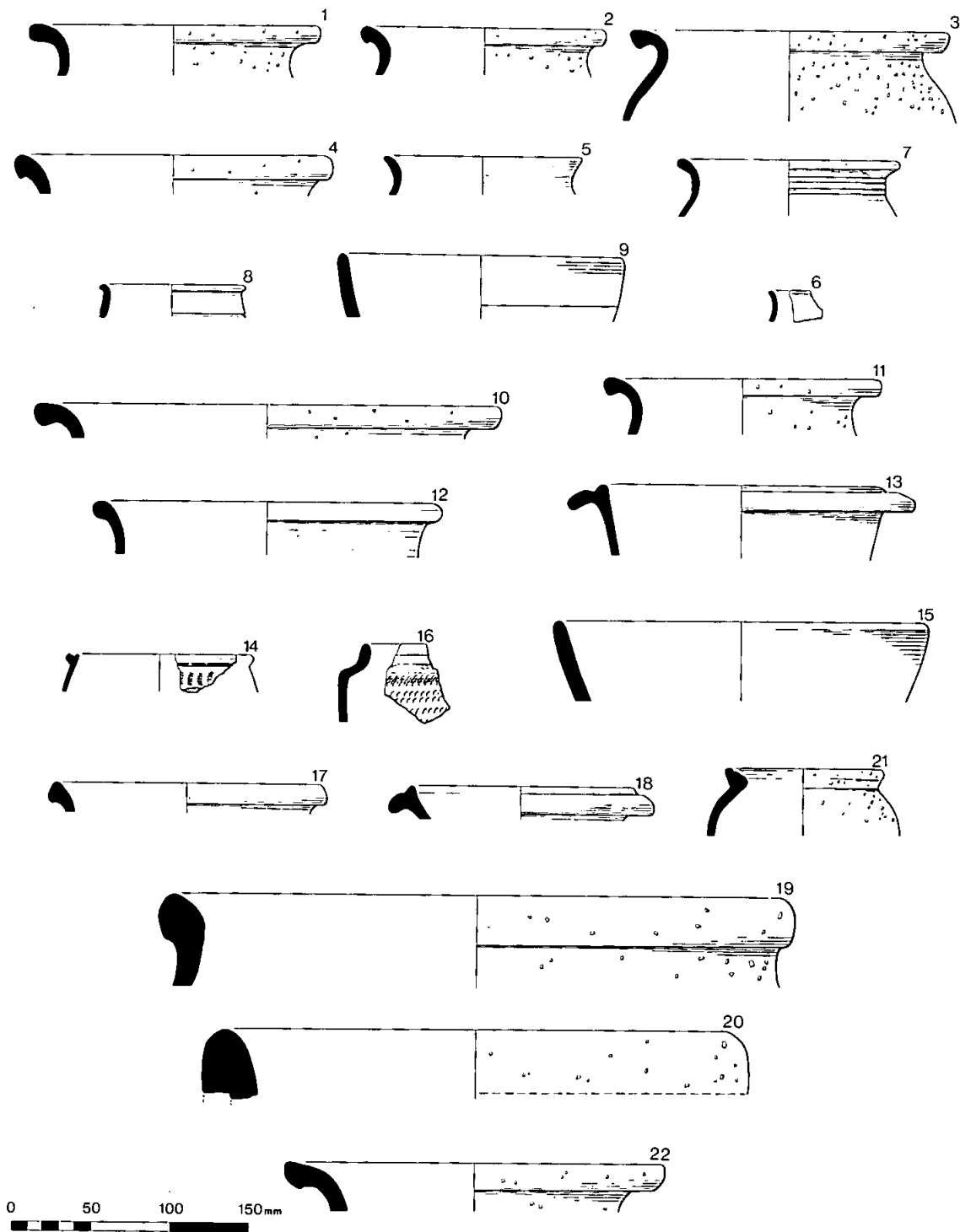


Fig 11 Irchester 1981-82: pottery. Scale ¼

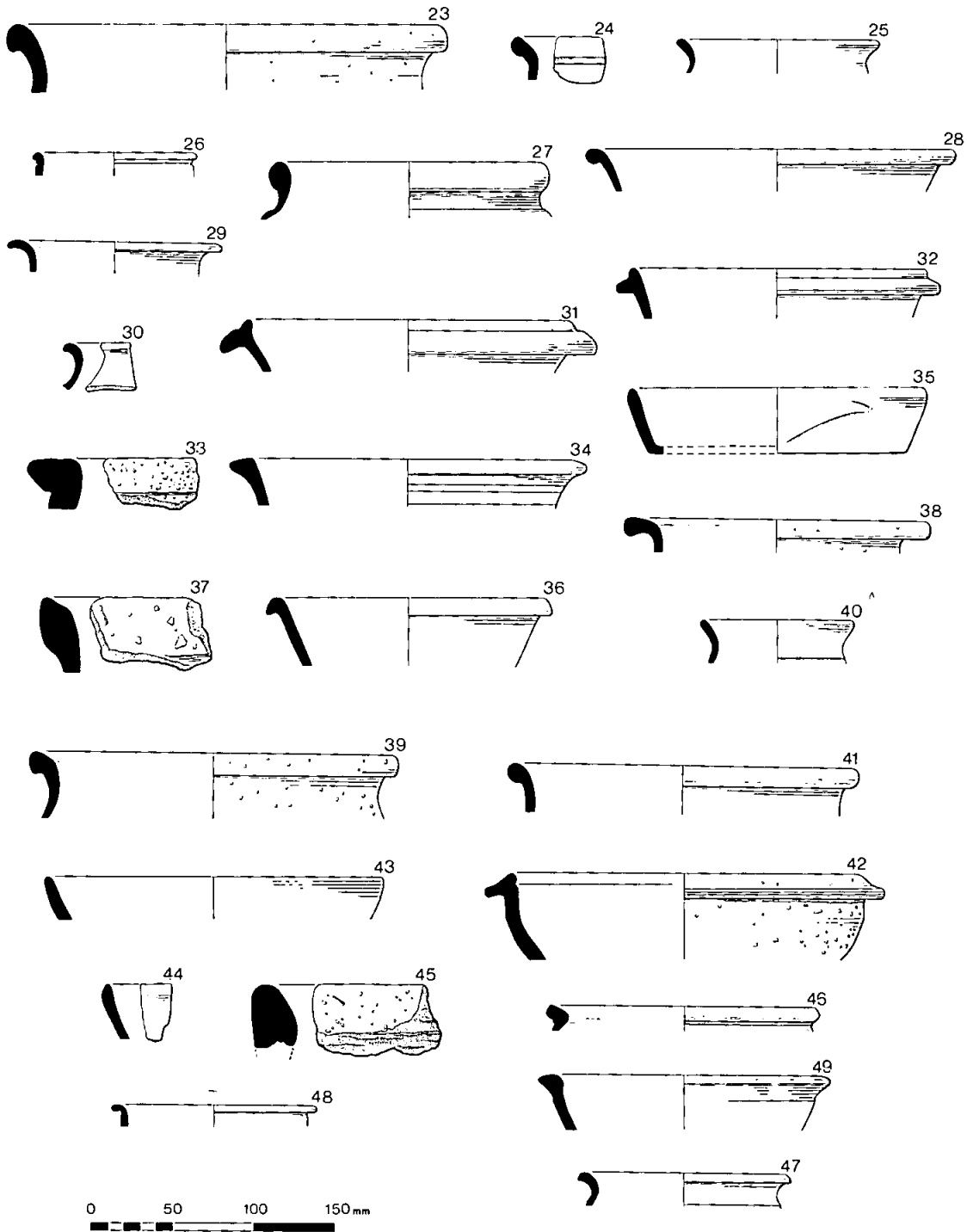


Fig 12 Irchester 1981-82: pottery. Scale ¼

Phase 1

37. Storage jar (3aiii). Fabric B. Light orange/grey/buff. Context 38.

*Sub-Site 4**From Ditch, Context 102*

38. Necked jar (3ei). Fabric B. Grey-buff/grey/buff. Context 84.
 39. Necked jar (3eii). Fabric B. Buff/grey/buff. Context 79.
 40. Beaker or jar (4d). Fabric E. Grey-black/off white to brown/grey-black. Context 84. (Pot Ref 22).
 41. Necked bowl (5ai). Grey/brown-grey/grey. Context 84.
 42. Flanged bowl (5e). Dark grey to dark brown/grey/buff and dark grey. Context 79. (cf Knight 1967, no 65).
 43. Dish (6a). Fabric E. Black/grey between brown/black. Context 79.
 44. Dish (6a). Fabric E. Grey to light grey/brown-grey/light grey. Context 73.

From Ditch, Context 103

45. Storage jar (3aiv). Fabric B. Buff/dark grey/buff. Context 107.

From Contexts 87, 88 and 89

46. Channel rim jar (3biv). Fabric B. Light grey/off-white/light grey. Context 87.
 47. Necked jar (3ei). Fabric A/G. Pink-white/off-white/pink-white. Context 87. (Pot Ref 11).
 48. Jar. Fabric E. Grey/light brown-grey/grey. Context 87.
 49. Bowl (5e/6b). Grey to buff/off-white/grey and pink. Context 87.

POTTERY: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The assemblages from Phases II and III of Sub-site 2 show a marked difference both in the fabric and form of the vessels. Phase II contained a wider variety of vessel forms and also had a higher proportion of grey wares to shelly wares than Phase III. The difference was sufficiently clear to suggest that some contexts initially assigned to Phase II fell more naturally into Phase III (Phase II/III). Similarly, in the southern trench of Sub-site 2 the pottery assemblage indicated that even the primary fills of the boundary ditch were later than the Phase II occupation.

The pottery evidence from Sub-site 4 was insufficient to date the fills of the ditches more precisely than within the period from the late 2nd to the 4th centuries AD. The predominance in the 3rd and 4th centuries of Nene Valley colour-coated wares over those from the Oxfordshire region is probably related to the location of the site. The small quantity of Black Burnished ware demonstrates the import of pottery from further afield, but the majority of the wares, including the two fragments of mortaria, were probably made locally.

GLASS
by L Monk

Only three glass fragments were found. All are from vessels and in 'natural' green glass, but all were found in unstratified positions.

1. Fragments of handle with raised central rib. Green glass,

scratched and worn. Possibly from a long-necked flagon cf Charlesworth 1972, FIG 76 no 20. c75-150 AD.

2. Very small fragment of the rim of a prismatic or cylindrical bottle. Pale blue-green. c75-150 AD.
3. Small green-yellow fragment. Possibly from a globular-bodied jar or flask. Very thin metal of good quality. Possibly 3rd or 4th century. Incipient iridescence.

COINS

by B Dix

- 1 Victorinus. Reverse uncertain. AD 269-271. (Sub-site 2, unstratified).
 1 Tetricus II. Reverse uncertain. AD 271-273. (Sub-site 4, context 84).
 1 Barbarous radiate. Reverse uncertain. AD 270-290. (Sub-site 2, context 13).
 1 Constantine II as Caesar. VOT XX issue. AD 317-320. (Sub-site 2, context 37).
 1 House of Constantine. Reverse uncertain. AD 318-320. (Sub-site 2, context 19).
 1 Constantine I. *HK* 60. AD 330-335. (Sub-site 2, unstratified).
 1 Urbs Roma. *HK* 58. AD 330-335. (Sub-site 2, context 44).
 1 Constantinopolis. Mint uncertain. AD 330-337. (Sub-site 4, context 79).
 1 Constans. *GLORIA EXERCITUS* (one standard) issue, mint uncertain. AD 337-341. (Sub-site 2, unstratified).
 2 Constantius II. *HK* 64. AD 330-335. (Sub-site 2, context 4).
 1 FEL TEMP REPARATIO, mint uncertain. AD 353-360. (Sub-site 2, context 6).
 1 Gratian. *CK* 1335. AD 367-375. (Sub-site 3, unstratified).
 1 Uncertain. (Sub-site 2, context 6).

Abbreviations: *HK*: Hill and Kent, 1960.

CK: Carson and Kent, 1960.

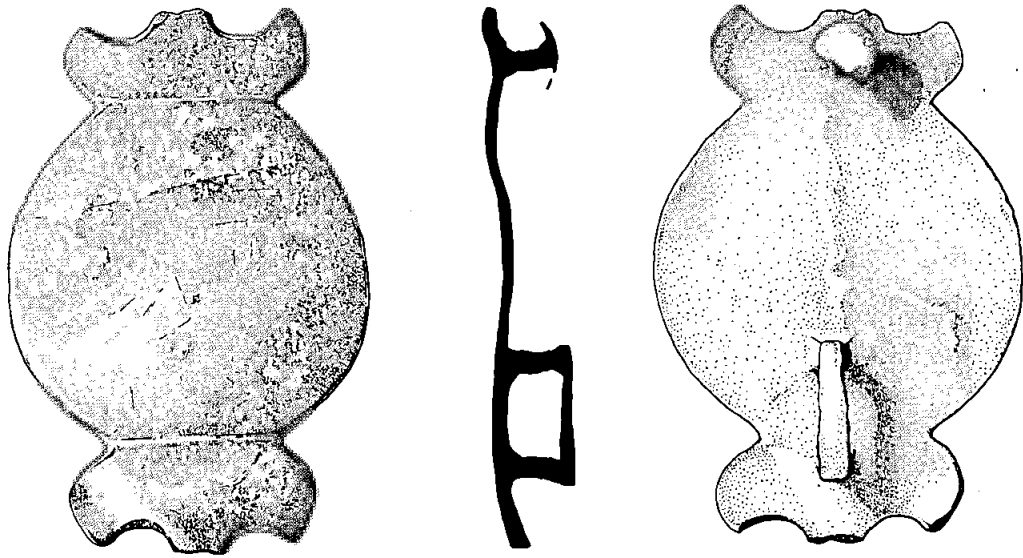
OTHER METAL FINDS
by B Dix

OBJECTS OF COPPER ALLOY (FIG 13)

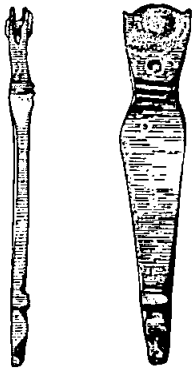
1. Harness-fitting with decorated terminals divided from a circular plate by single grooves. The decoration may have been identical at each end but in both places the central feature contained between a pair of lunate mouldings is broken. On the underside of the mount there is a rivet and a loop which would have held a trace passing at a right-angle to the main axis of the object.

The object could be military since similar items have been recorded from Mainz and among a hoard of Roman cavalry equipment from Fremington Hagg, Yorks. (Webster 1971, FIG 17, no 91). However it is not clear if the latter belongs to the original hoard of pre-Flavian equipment which appears to have been collected as Brigantian loot before the region was conquered, and it may have been added with other pieces at a subsequent date (information from Dr Graham Webster). The dating of the present item is therefore uncertain (Sub-site 2, Context 44; probably residual within this context).

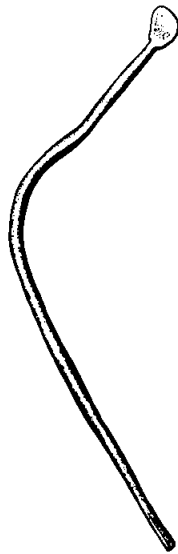
2. Strap-end of slender pear-shaped design cast in one piece with a split butt. Length: 47mm. The front terminal is decorated with faintly zoomorphic 'notched' ornament which is divided from the otherwise plain face by a single moulding.



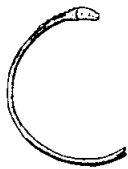
1



2



4



3



9

Fig 13 Irchester 1981-82: Roman metalwork. Scale 1/1.

The butt is separated by two grooves and splays towards a curved top edge with cut-out decoration at either side. It was originally fastened to a belt-end with two rivets, one of bronze and the other of iron. Scratches and other marks caused in use occur around the tip and on the underside of the butt.

The object combines in its general appearance and style of decoration some of the attributes of late provincial Roman-belt equipment (*cf* Hawkes and Dunning 1961, especially their type V) but, not being closely matched among published finds from which it differs in being very slender, the identification is not conclusive. Belts adorned with such fittings were frequently, but perhaps not exclusively, worn by military and other official personnel and remains from them have often been closely related to sites where the presence of late 4th century soldiery can be suggested (Hawkes 1974, 390-94; Simpson 1976, 203; Clarke 1979, 289-291). It is therefore unfortunate that the present, slightly atypical, example was not more securely stratified. (Sub-site 2, unstratified, recovered from topsoil).

3. Fragment of a finger-ring made of round-sectioned bronze wire which has been flattened at the point where a series of notches form a ribbed pattern along the otherwise plain outer edge. (Sub-site 2, Context 44).

4. Ligula with flat, angled scoop. The upper end of the stem is broken. (Sub-site 2, Context 34).

5. Pin stem, broken at both ends. (Sub-site 2, Context 37).

6. Crumpled and distorted fragment of thin sheet-bronze that is perforated around two of its edges by a series of roughly circular holes which may originally have contained rivets for attaching it to other metal, leather or wood. It may have formed part of a composite metal vessel or served as a decorative strip or binding. (Sub-site 2, Context 13).

7. Bronze wire flattened into a small loop at one end and pointed at the other where it appears to have been bent for use as a hook. (Sub-site 5, Ditch 1).

8. Small curved fragment of bronze wire from an unknown object. (Sub-site 4, Context 87).

OBJECTS OF IRON

9. Stylus. Length: *c* 102mm, but broken in two parts. The stem has been flattened to form an eraser at one end while at the other a distinct shoulder divides it from the point which is now bent. A thin band of yellow-metal, shown by X-ray fluorescence to be brass, has been inlaid towards the base of the stem.

Decorated iron *styli* would have been more costly to produce than simple handforged examples (*cf* Manning 1976, 34). (Sub-site 2, Context 9).

10. Fragment of binding. Surviving length: *c* 95mm, but the object is now bent. At either end of the surviving section two roughly square holes, each 7-8mm wide, represent points of previous attachment. (Sub-site 2, Context 20).

11. Rectangular-sectioned bar of indeterminate purpose. Length: 113mm. (Sub-site 2, Context 13).

12. Nail with square-sectioned, tapering stem. The head and point are missing. (Sub-site 2, Context 9).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The paucity of occupation evidence over great lengths of the modern road corridor through the extra-mural settlement suggests that the settlement was not as dense as was once believed. Evidence from Sub-site 2 showed that the eastern part of the extra-mural settlement was in agricultural use until the late 2nd century and occupation had only lasted to the mid 4th century AD. Also the building had been rather isolated apparently as there was no evidence of another adjacent to the west.

It seems that extra-mural settlement was limited to ribbon-pattern development along the roads, particularly to the south (*cf* Hall and Nickerson 1967) and to the east; the building at Sub-site 2 probably fronted onto the east-west road. Unfortunately, although the road pattern within the walled area is well established from cropmarks (*cf* Cowley and Foard 1979), there is little evidence of the extra-mural road pattern. Indeed, the only evidence remains the two photographs of what may be a road, aligned north-west to south-east, which were cut by roadworks during 1962-63. (These photographs were kindly lent by Mr A E Rollings and copies have been deposited in the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record).

Re-examination of the defences at the south-west corner of the walled area confirmed the presence of the three ditches first recorded in 1962 (Hall and Nickerson 1967). They were traced for *c* 75m along the southern side of the town at that time and two of the ditches appear in cropmarks for *c* 175m along the western side. The dating evidence retrieved indicated that the back-filling of the ditches took place in the late Roman period, rather than earlier as suggested by Hall and Nickerson. The regular spacing and similarity of the back-fill of the ditches would suggest that they were contemporary and presumably formed part of the civil defences, but this could not be directly established from stratigraphic information. The presence of more than a single ditch in civil defences is well established from such sites as *Manduessedum* (Mancetter, Warks; Mahany 1970); *Ancaster* (Lincs; Todd 1981) and *Margidunum* (East Bridgford, Notts; Todd 1970). Also Great Casterton (Rutland; Corder 1961) had three ditches at the most vulnerable part of its

IRCHESTER ROMAN TOWN

circuit of defences, which may offer the best local parallel.

Unfortunately, this work has not notably clarified the history of Irchester's defences. The only evidence for an early, military occupation of the site remains that listed in RCHM 1979. Evidence for the civil defences is limited to that

found in 1962-63 (Knight 1967) with the exception that no evidence of the large ditch of 4th century date was found and the three ditches examined would appear to have formed part of the defensive arrangements of the town rather than an earlier defence as postulated by Hall and Nickerson.

Lt. I. 81. SUB-SITE 4 : PHASE TABLE

Phase	Sub-phase	Feature	Contexts and Description	Figs.	Dims.(M)	Reins	Finds
0 Geology		'natural'	Crushed ironstone and light brown sand		—	—	—
		'natural'?	90, 91, 94, 95, as natural		—	—	—
I Romano-British	Defensive ditches	Ditch	103, and fills: 104, 105, 110, 106, 107, 108 & 109	8 9	wid 4.2 dep 1.5	Cuts natural	Pot No 45
		Ditch	101 and fills: 115, 76, 112, 111 & 75	8	wid 2.2 dep 1.00	Cuts natural	
		Ditch	102 and fills: 84, 79, 74, 73 & 78	8	wid 4.9 dep 2.4	Cuts natural	Pot Nos 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44 TS24
	Other features	Surface?	100, small ironstone and limestone fragments	8		Underlies 98 Overlies 96	
		'Make-up'	96, crushed ironstone in light brown sand		dep 0.25	Underlies 100	
		Burnt layer	93, ash and other burnt debris	8	dep 0.18	Underlies 98	
		Pits	92 & 97, yellow-brown sandy fills	8		Underlies 93 & 96	
II Post-Roman	—	Bank of debris	88, 89 & 87, bank of limestone and ironstone rubble and sandy brown loam	8	dep 0.70	Underlies 83 Overlies 90	Pot Nos 46 47, 48 & 49 OXCC
III Post-Med	—	Lens of 'make-up'	83, with other lenses, 99, 98, 85, 82 and 81	8	dep 1.4	Underlies 80 Overlies 88, 100, 82, 75	
IV Modern	—	Pit	77, 86, modern pit fill		dep 1.4	Overlies 86	
		Subsoil	80, mid grey loam and limestone rubble	8	dep 0.80	Overlies 81 & 83	

NOTES TO PHASE TABLES

- 1) These tables are a simplified version of the 'phase and contexts' tables at Level III. More detailed information may be found by reference there.
- 2) The numbers given under 'contexts and description' are those used on site and further details may be found by reference to Level III or Level II under the relevant number
- 3) Under 'Finds' — Pot No X indicates a sherd illustrated within this report and its Level IV catalogue number. TS X indicates a sherd of samian ware and the sherd number ascribed at Level III. OXCC indicates the presence of Oxfordshire colour-coated ware.

Lt. I. 81. SUB-SITE 2 : PHASE TABLE

Phase	Sub-Phase	Feature	Contexts and Description	Figs.	Dims.(M)	ReIns	Find
0 Geology	—	'natural'	Blue and yellow, sticky clay	—	—	—	—
		'natural'?	49, 65, blue and yellow sticky clay	—	—	Overlaid by 50, 66 & 64	—
I Pre-building activity C2nd or earlier	(a) ?Archaeological	Soilmarks	70, 71, Linear soilmarks		—	Overlaid by 40	—
	(b) Agricultural activity	Loam	40, iron-stained grey clay loam	3	dep 0.40	Cut by 38 & 39	
		Depressions	39, group of depressions, plough marks	3	wid 0.50 dep 0.10	Filled by 31 & 41	—
		Ditch	38, filled with redeposited natural clay	3	wid 1.30 dep 0.45	Overlaid by 31	Pot No 37
II Stone building and associated material later C2nd to early C4th	(a) Primary construction phase	External surface	31, crushed ironstone, with worn surface		dep 0.10	Overlaid by 18 Overlies 40	
		Floor make-up	41, crushed ironstone layer		dep 0.10	Overlies 40	Pot No 19
		Floor	18, mixed ironstone, clay and burnt areas	4	dep 0.05	Overlies 41	
		Walls	32, 45, large ironstone blocks in construction trench	4	wid 0.75 dep 0.60	Cut 40	Pot No 27
	(b) Occupation following II (a)	Pit	35, 36, filled with buff sticky clay		diam 2.65 dep 0.60	Cut 31	
		Loam	30, 34, mid grey-brown sandy loam		dep 0.30	Overlies 31	TS. 9 & 10
		Burnt layer	28, ash and charcoal etc		dep 0.08	Overlies 31	
	(c) External surface and boundary ditch	Make-up	27, 29, 33, yellow and blue sticky clay and sand		dep 0.10	Overlies 28 30 & 34	Pot No 30
		Surface	16, surface of small cobbles and pebbles		dep 0.05	Overlies 29	
		Silt	17, orange-brown silt, mottled grey		dep 0.05	Overlies 16	Pot No 26
		Ditch	Cut, 25, fills, 24, 23, 22, 21 & 20	4	wid 1.80 dep 0.62	Cuts 29 Respected by 16	Pot Nos 27, 29, 36, 37. T.S. 7 & 8.
	(d) Resurfacing	Rubble surface	37, 13, 14, limestone & ironstone blocks forming laid surface	4	dep 0.10	Overlies 16 17 & 50	Pot Nos 6, 23, 22, 24 & 31 T.S. 5 & 6
	No sub-phase assigned	Oven	47 and flue fills, 19 & 26	4		Cuts 46	
		Wall	46, large ironstone blocks, not aligned to 32 & 45	4	wid 0.82 dep 0.25	Post-dates 45	
		Rubble	64, spread of limestone and ironstone rubble		dep 0.10	Overlies 65	
		Soilmark	66, small, linear soilmark				
	Boundary ditch (Southern trench)	Primary cut	59, 58 & 57b			Cut by 60	
		1st recut	60, 56, 57, 54 & 53b			Cut by 61	Pots Nos 11, 15, 25 & 14 OXCC
		2nd recut	61, 53, 55			Cut by 10	
Final recut		10, 8, 7, 6			Cuts 53	Pot No 10	
II/III Possibly post-building	—	Rubble	51, 63, ironstone and limestone rubble	5	dep 0.10	Overlies 49	
		Gully	15, filled with mid grey clay loam	5	wid 0.60 dep 0.26	Cuts 13	
		Gully	48, 69, filled with mid grey clay loam	5		Cut 37	Pot No 18
III Post-building disturbance C4th or later	—	Robber Trench	11, 42, grey clay mottled orange and ironstone blocks	5	wid 0.85 dep 0.30	Cuts 45	Pot No 6 T.S. 2 OXCC
		Ditch	67, 68, ironstone rubble in mid-brown clay		wid 1.00	Cuts 11	
		Ditch	43, 44, dark grey humic loam	5	wid 1.30 dep 0.35	Cuts 42 & 67	Pot Nos 2, 7, 5, 1, 4 & 9, T.S. 11, 12 & 13
		Ditch	43, 44, orange sandy loam	5	wid 1.64 dep 0.45	Cuts 14, 15 & 48	Pot No 3

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