

Three Roman Sites in Northamptonshire: Excavations by E. Greenfield at Bozeat, Higham Ferrers, and Great Oakley between 1961 and 1966

by

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SUMMARY

Three Romano-British sites, in the parishes of Bozeat, Higham Ferrers and Great Oakley, Northants., were excavated by the late Ernest Greenfield in the period 1961–66. This occurred in response to identified threats which eventually led to the destruction of all three sites. The site at Bozeat comprised a stone-based, circular structure, of probable domestic use and late 2nd and 3rd century date. The site at Higham Ferrers revealed three phases of Romano-British occupation. A rectangular stone building of 2nd century date was succeeded by stone quarrying on part of the site. A third phase of occupation, from the late 3rd to the mid 4th centuries, comprised an unusual rectangular building with rounded corners. The remains of a mid 4th century coin hoard and some sherds of Saxon pottery were also found on the site. At Great Oakley, the remains of timber structures, including six post holes of a round house, were succeeded by a stone-founded, aisled building of broadly 2nd century date. This was interpreted as a farmstead, although no associated field system was recorded. Although limited in their extent, each of these excavations has provided useful information on the nature of Roman Northamptonshire.

INTRODUCTION

The three sites covered by this report (FIG 1) were all excavated in response to identified threats which eventually led to their individual destruction, respectively by cultivation, building construction, and ironstone quarrying. The rapid

increase in the pressure which was placed on the countryside in the post-war years resulted in an increased threat to the existence of archaeological sites which had previously been safe. In response the Ministry of Works employed a number of field archaeologists with the role of sampling sites in order to recover some data. Not infrequently, however, the sampled material was left for future processing and the information remained unpublished, as in the case of these three sites which were each excavated by Mr Ernest Greenfield in the period 1961–66.

Despite its limitations, particularly related to the extent of individual excavation, the information from each site is a useful addition to the knowledge of Roman Northamptonshire and provides further evidence for its character. Because of the limited time for excavation, however, the work was not as complete as would be desirable and frequently crucial questions have remained unanswered. At each of the three sites one or more stone buildings had their ground-plans identified but none was properly related to the surrounding site of which it formed a part. Furthermore, not only were the stratified remains only partially sampled but, in common with other excavations at the time, the finds were selectively retained. There is, therefore, an obvious imbalance in some of the evidence. Yet, if the Ministry of Works had not been aware of the importance of the archaeology, then many of these sites would have been lost for all time.

On behalf of the excavator I would like to thank the then landowners for permitting archaeological

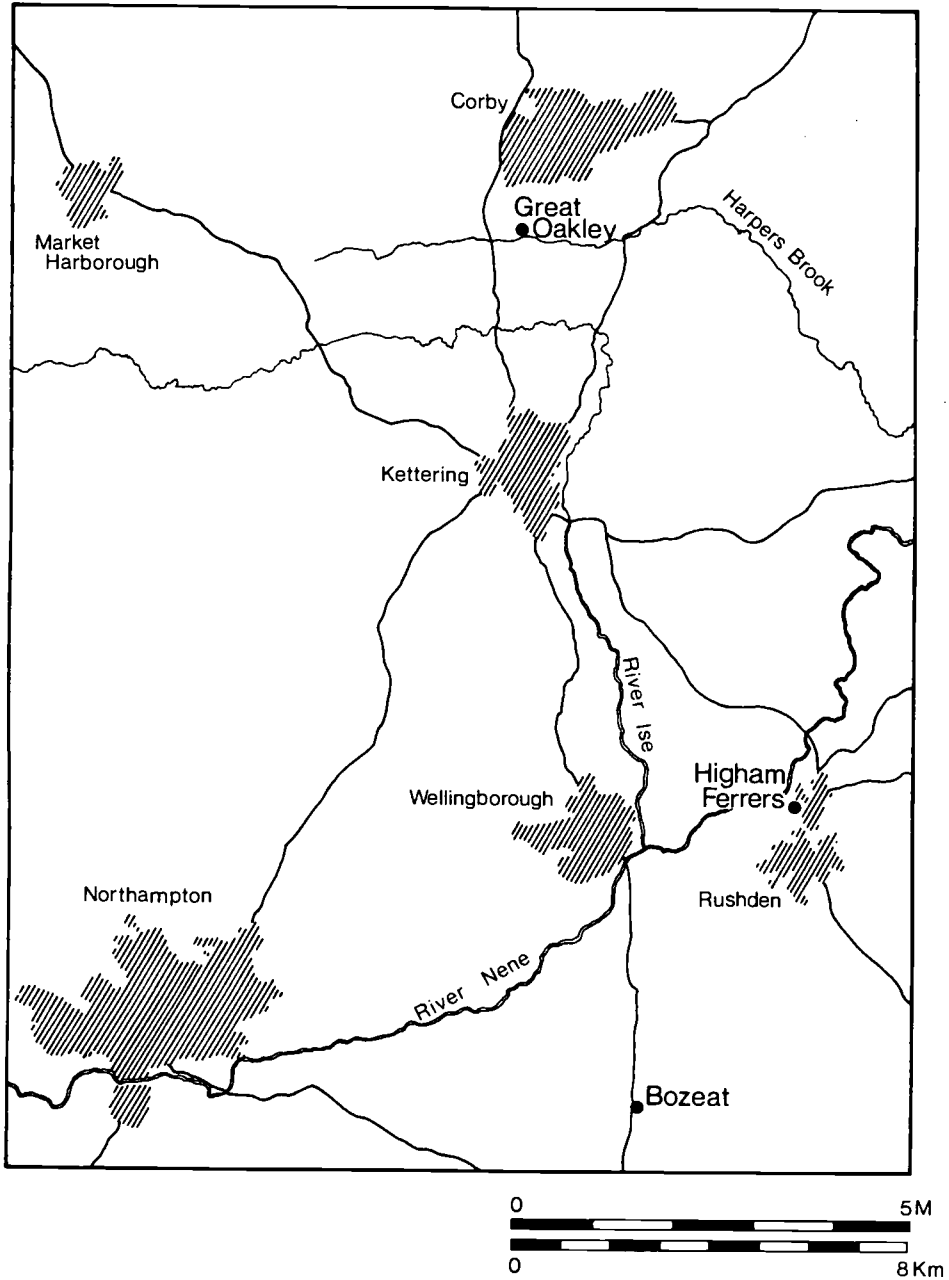


Fig 1 General location

work: for Bozeat, Mr S.H. Duthie; the Duchy of Lancaster at Higham Ferrers; and Mr H.M. Frost for Great Oakley. In preparing the results for publication I would like to thank Mr D.F. Mackreth for brooch-reports, and Mr J.R. Perrin and Miss E. MacRobert for their comments on the pottery. For all three sites the original excavation-records and finds have been placed with the Northamptonshire Archaeological Archive. Detailed site reports and finds' catalogues are also present.

BOZEAT

At Bozeat the site of a stone circular building which had been previously discovered and partially sampled by D.N. Hall and N. Nickerson (Hall and Nickerson 1970) was excavated in 1964 in advance of deep ploughing. The structure was located on glacial sand on the east side of a valley and slightly above the 200 ft (61 m) contour. The site, at NGR SP 896599, lies close to the modern county boundary between Northamptonshire and Bedford-

shire. The nearest contemporary settlement so far known lies about 1 mile (1.5 km) to the south-east.

THE SITE

The site occupied part of an area which was already utilised for agriculture, as suggested by ditches of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. One of them, D2, had been allowed to silt up prior to the construction of the building but no direct stratigraphic link existed with the other. The ditch into which part of the footings were cut (D2) contained only a small amount of dateable material but probably had not continued in use beyond the 1st century. It may have been replaced by a larger ditch, D1, about 15 ft (4.7 m) to the south-east, which contained 2nd century material. The excavated circular building did not impinge upon this ditch and could therefore be contemporary, but a direct link is absent and the lack of stratified dating material from the structure does not present firm evidence of association.

The building comprised an almost circular footing with a central square arrangement of four post pads; in addition four internal walls were present (PL. 1 and FIG 2). The outer wall had an overall diameter of between 50–53 ft (15.24–16.15 m) and was between 2 ft 6 in and 3 ft (0.76–0.91 m) wide. It was built of local limestone, although the individual stones were not large and each was arranged in a pitched fashion; where multiple courses survived each course dipped the same way.



Plate 1 Bozeat, general view looking west.

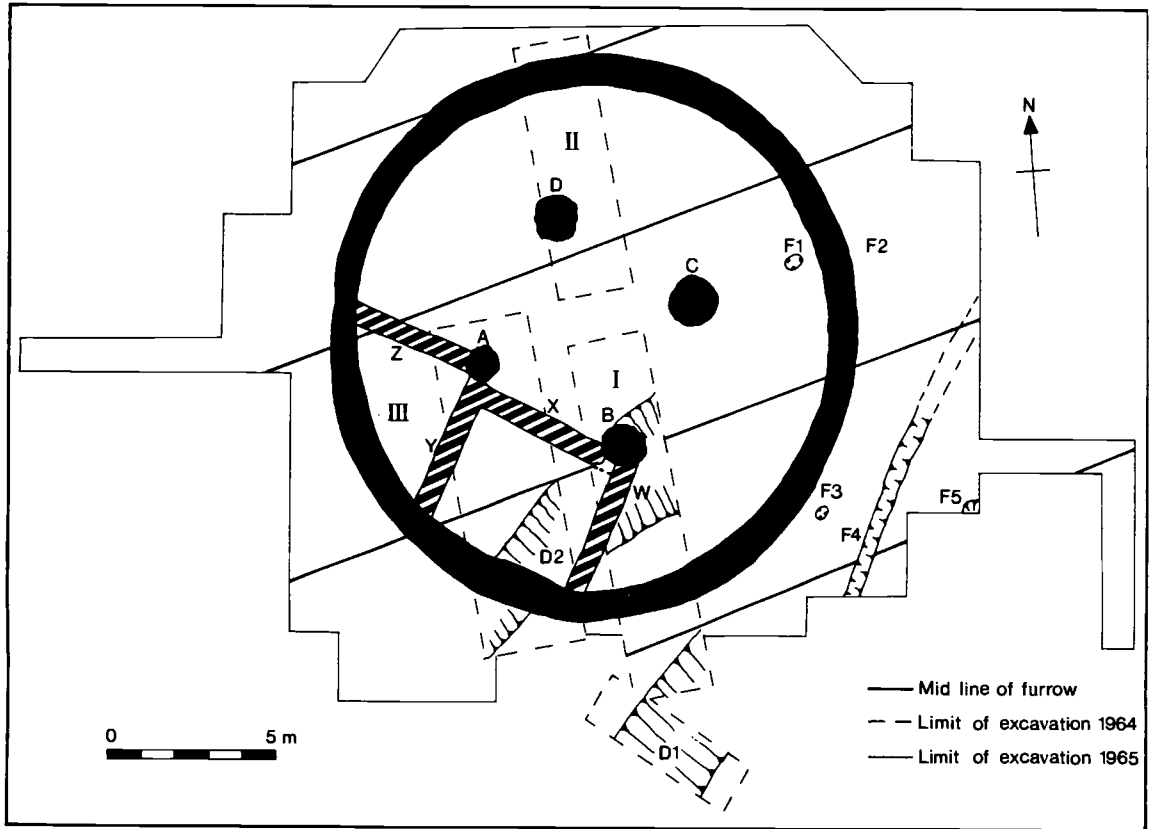


Fig 2 Bozeat – site plan

Within the building four post pads defined the corners of a near perfect square. The individual settings were substantial arrangements of stone between 3 ft and 4 ft (0.9–1.21 m) in diameter, though each varied in the scale of its footings. One was hardly more than 1 ft (0.3 m) deep whilst another example was 3 ft (0.91 m) deep. The arrangement of these four features around the centre of the structure suggests that they served as post pads for upright roof supports. Similar configurations of posts were first identified in House I at Little Woodbury (Bersu 1940) and later in a structure of Roman date at Winterton (Stead 1976, 51–52: Building E). Unfortunately, the upper surface of all four features had been lost and therefore it was not possible to identify post seatings; however, the size of the pads would allow the construction of a square of between 14 ft (4.26 m) and 16 ft (4.87 m) across. The size of these features and the fact that Pier B was cut through soft ditch fill suggest that they formed an important structural part of the building. It is hard to reconcile the circular nature of the structure with the square arrangement of roof supports, and it is probable that such a combination would have required the construction of something similar to a hipped roof. If this interpretation is correct the roofing material was probably thatch as it would allow greater flexibility of construction.

The main wall circuit displayed similar variety in the depth of its footings. For most of its length the wall survived as only one or two courses, but three or four courses were present where the footings cut into the earlier ditch (D2). At that point the wall trench extended about 3 ft (0.91 m) below the top of the surviving undisturbed subsoil whilst elsewhere it only extended to about 1 ft 3 in (0.38 m).

There was no evidence for the original height of stonework and it is unclear whether it extended to roof level or merely served as a base for a timber superstructure. However, the size of these footings was of such a magnitude that '... they were unnecessarily bulky for an all-wood building' (Hall and Nickerson 1970, 60) and it is clear that efforts were made to reduce the risk of subsidence caused by the wall settling into the less consolidated infills of the earlier ditch. This care and the size of the footings is inconsistent with a timber superstructure and may, therefore, indicate that the stonework extended some way above the Roman ground surface.

Three internal walls defined an area of approximately 13 ft × 12 ft (3.96 × 3.66 m) within the southern part of the building. The walls were narrower than those of the main circuit, being only 2 ft (0.6 m) wide, and were clearly a secondary feature. In the case of Wall W a narrow crest of subsoil was left between its

footings and those of the external wall and the stones showed no signs of having been keyed in. A similar peak of subsoil was present where this wall abutted pier B.

The almost square area enclosed by these walls lay on the same axis as that of the four central piers but its function is unclear. From the north-west corner of this area a further wall line was identified (Wall Z), but its irregular construction and the quantities of earth incorporated in the footing contrasted with the pitched stonework of the other walls. The whole was, however, given a similar appearance to the other walls by the single surviving course of pitched stones arranged over its upper surface. There was no evidence for a feature corresponding to Wall Z on the opposite side of the enclosed rectangular area. The change in construction technique denoted by this wall was interpreted by the previous excavators as suggesting that '... the supply of flat-stone had run out ...' (Hall and Nickerson 1970, 58), but if this wall was a later addition to the structure then the different construction technique is less surprising.

All four internal walls were narrower than the main wall, and whilst wide enough to bear a stone wall to some height it is perhaps more likely that they formed low sleeper walls which were extended upwards in wood or hurdle.

In addition to the remains of the stone building and the earlier ditches, three small undated postholes and a gully were recorded.

RELATED FINDS

Since neither Hall and Nickerson nor Greenfield sampled the footings, there are no finds to give a date for the construction of the buildings. The predominance of 2nd-century material recovered from the cultivation levels above the structure suggests that it was occupied during that period particularly since very little 3rd-century material was present.

The date of construction of the buildings was considered by Hall and Nickerson to be in the 3rd century AD, based on the identification of finds from what they believed to be a pit. It is probable, however, that the pit they recorded was the base of a furrow which they had observed in higher levels (Hall and Nickerson 1970, FIG 4): the chamfered top of the surviving wall in that area suggests that the furrow extended deeper than their original identification.

The nature of the excavation was such that most of the recovered pottery was unstratified, coming from post-Roman cultivation levels. The bulk of the recovered material dated from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD with storage jars, jars, and bowls being the predominant forms (I am grateful to J.R. Perrin for the dating of the pottery). The material from the robber trenches was of 1st to early 3rd century AD date and may suggest that occupation ceased in the third century since later forms were represented only by a single sherd from a Nene Valley colour coated beaker, which came from the ploughsoil and dated to the second quarter of the 3rd century. The deposit of pottery recorded by Hall and Nickerson from the upper levels of ditch D1 had a date of 150–200 AD (Hall and Nickerson 1970, 61–62: Nos 4–19) and may be contemporary with the occupation of the structure, either being deposited during its use or on its abandonment.

The pottery recovered from both excavations forms a typical domestic assemblage. Parts of eight Samian vessels were identified by B. Hartley from Greenfield's excavation. These

were all of Antonine date, apart from one (note in archive), corresponding with the date of the occupation suggested by the coarse pottery.

In addition to Roman pottery, fifteen sherds of early to middle Saxon date were recovered from the ploughsoil. Most were plain body sherds of vessels of indeterminate form although a single example was a plain boss.

Other finds included two copper alloy brooches, respectively of Nauheim-derivative and Colchester-derivative types of the early Roman period. Neither was related to the circular building. The remaining finds are types of objects which are not closely dateable and most lack association. They include two iron styli, however, one apparently decorated with grooves in an arrangement which is not closely paralleled (c.f. x-radiograph in archive).

SUBSEQUENT SITE HISTORY

The site suffered disturbance from both stone robbing and cultivation; the stone robbing was concentrated on the main wall although some of the internal wall footings had also been robbed at their junction with the main wall. The stones employed in the footings of the main wall were larger than those used in the other foundations, a fact which would have been apparent to the stone robbers if they were demolishing a standing structure. The robbing precisely followed the line of the wall and extended to below the level of the undisturbed subsoil within the structure. The occurrence of peaks of unremoved stones suggests either that some stones were unsuitable or that robbing was unsystematic, possibly being undertaken at different times. The robber trenches were of about the same width as the wall footings and had slightly flared sides; they seldom reached the natural sand below the stones. The small quantity of pottery from the robber trench infill does not form a distinct group from the rest of the finds and may, therefore, either be residual or suggest that the removal of stones occurred soon after the structure was abandoned.

Three medieval furrows ran approximately south-west to north-west across the area excavated by Greenfield and in places they penetrated the undisturbed subsoil. Hall and Nickerson recorded their presence (*ibid* 59, Figs 1 and 2) but did not recognise the depth to which they extended. Two of the furrows ran across the interior of the building and had removed stones where they crossed the footings. On the north-east exterior they had cut two parallel linear hollows into the subsoil, which Greenfield erroneously identified as drainage sumps flanking a metalled area. The furrow bases were between 5 ft (1.52 m) and 6 ft (1.82 m) wide and separated ridges of subsoil between 10 ft (3.04 m) and 12 ft (3.65 m) wide.

Several irregular areas of limestone were recognised at the base of cultivation, where stones were concentrated on the tops of the ridges but some were also present in the base of the furrows. It is possible that these formed the vestigial remains of a metalled area around the building but it is more likely they represent plough dragged material from medieval and recent cultivation. The latter interpretation is supported by the presence of a fragment of a medieval glazed vessel (BT 76) in the limestones on the west side of the structure. The apparent absence of areas of limestone within the structure probably reflects differential excavation as the interior was excavated to a lower level and therefore any stones once present removed.

The ridge and furrow survived until about 1948 when the ridges were bulldozed to facilitate modern ploughing (Hall and Nickerson 1970, 57).

DISCUSSION

The solid construction of the main wall and the four internal piers, together with the attempt to prevent subsidence into the earlier ditch, suggest that the structure was continued to some height in stone. The absence from the ploughsoil of a destruction deposit of stone commensurate with the suggested quantity of masonry may be understood if the building was robbed to its footings sometime before the area returned to cultivation. Stone robbing was demonstrable along most of the footings and may have occurred soon after the building was abandoned. However, parts of the masonry were left standing to sufficient height to have been further disturbed by ploughing. The renewed cultivation probably produced the scatters of stone which Greenfield interpreted as metalling, and it is suggested that his 'track' was part of this general cultivation.

Owing to the nature of the excavations and the poor preservation of the remains it is not possible to ascribe a precise date or particular function to the excavated building. The bulk of the pottery recovered, although derived from the lower levels of cultivation, suggests that the structure was of 2nd-century date, possibly continuing in use into the early 3rd century. While its circular form is similar to that of a number of rural shrines (cf., for example, Brigstock: Greenfield 1963; Thistleton: Greenfield, 1964; and Frilford: Bradford and Goodchild 1939), the absence of votive objects and the occurrence of internal divisions contrasts significantly with such sites. Association of shape has been used previously to suggest that the Bozeat building may have had a ritual function (Drury 1977, 70) but the lack of other evidence renders such an interpretation purely speculative. Circular buildings at this date also served as domestic structures, as for example Building E at Winterton which, like Bozeat, contained a central square of posts (Stead 1976). Such circular structures probably reflect a continuation of native building forms using romanised construction methods. In Northamptonshire other examples have been excavated at Stanwick (Neal 1989), Ringstead (Jackson 1980), Overstone (Williams 1976), and Thorplands (Hunter and Mynard 1977).

HIGHAM FERRERS

This excavation examined part of an extensive area of Romano-British occupation represented by cropmarks and finds from 40 ha. (99 acres) to the north-west of the modern town (RCHM 1975, 54-55). The first indications of Roman occupation, provided by the discovery of human skeletons during road building in 1960, led to a surface examination of the area by Messrs Hall and Nickerson who observed building materials and part of a wall footing. Information about their observations was conveyed to the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments who funded a small excavation by Mr E. Greenfield

in July 1961. The excavation covered an area about 60 ft (18 m) west to east and 65 ft (20 m) north to south around the wall footing previously observed, with additional trenches cut through other scatters of building materials about 300 yards (280 m) to the north-west (FIG 3).

THE SITE

The main excavation area at NGR SP 954689 lay upon Northampton Sand Ironstone, close to its margin with Upper Lias Clay at about 195 ft (60 m) OD and about 220 yards (200 m) to the east of the River Nene. There was only a shallow topsoil horizon, about 1 ft (0.3 m) thick, which had led to the disturbance and removal of some of the more vulnerable deposits such as occupation-levels. The area was finally destroyed in 1963 by the construction of a housing estate.

Stratigraphically, three main phases were present (cf. FIG 4): the earliest (Period I) was represented by part of a rectangular stone building (Building 1) with an additional room on its east side; the second (Period II) was represented by stone quarrying identified in the western part of the excavation area; the final Romano-British occupation (Period III) was represented by an unusual rectangular building with rounded corners (Building 2).

Most of the pottery from the excavation came from three main deposits: metalling associated with Building 1, quarry pit infill, and a pair of ditch cuts. In common with many excavations at this period the 'undiagnostic' body sherds were not always retained and this policy is reflected by the paucity of coarseware bodysherds in the recorded assemblage. In some instances the discarded sherds were noted but practice was not consistent. The imbalance in the ceramic assemblage caused by the selection of only rim or base sherds or those from 'fine' wares reduces the integrity of the material. No detailed discussion of the coarse pottery will be undertaken but where the material has a direct bearing upon the dating of the site it is noted and illustrated (FIGS 5 & 6).

BUILDING 1

Building 1 was only partially revealed and most of its remains had suffered stone robbing or had been removed in the course of Period II stone extraction. The north and east walls were represented by robber trenches, and only by wall footings for a short part of the east wall; the south wall lay beyond the limit of excavation and the west side was cut by later quarrying. The pronounced straight edge shown on the site plan along part of the west side of the metalling (stippled in FIG 4) may represent the edge of an unidentified robber trench. The surviving part of the structure extended for about 38 ft (11.5 m) from the southern limit of excavation and had an internal width of at least 14 ft 9 in (4.5 m) as indicated by the metalling, but excluding the room on the east side. It is unfortunate that a straight edge was evident for only about 10 ft (3 m) along the western side of the metalling, with the remainder having been disturbed by later activity, since it prevents the positive identification of that edge as the line of the west wall.

The north wall was represented by a robber trench traced for 8 ft (2.5 m) from an excavation baulk to a point where it had been cut away by the later quarry pit (F1). This length of robber

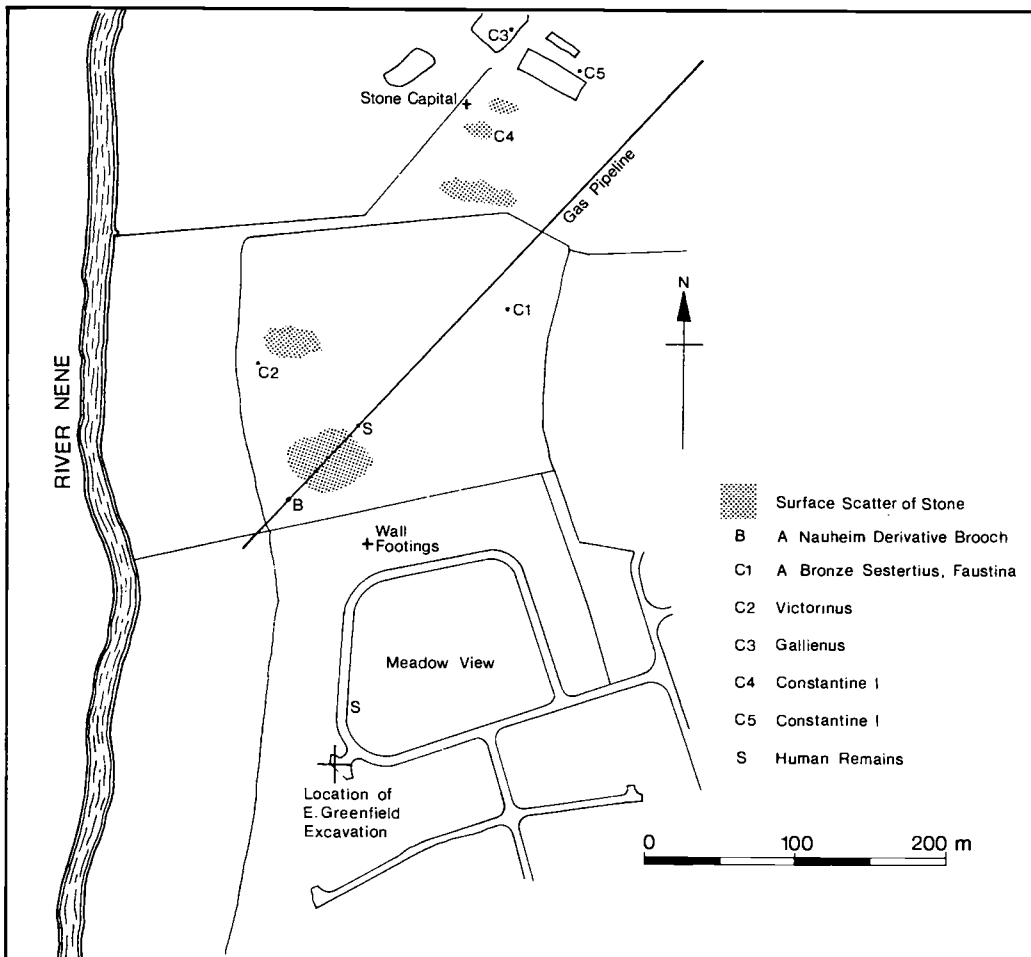


Fig 3 Higham Ferrers – situation

trench was flat bottomed with near vertical sides; it was about 1 ft 10 in (0.55 m) wide and up to 1 ft (0.3 m) deep. A dump of stones in the top of F1 led the excavator to suggest that the building post-dated F1 but re-examination of the evidence shows this interpretation to be incorrect.

The east wall of the building was denoted by a further length of robber trench (F2) and a short length of masonry footings. The robber trench was of similar width and depth to that along the north wall and also had a vertically sided, flat bottomed profile. The trench was traced for about 10 ft (3 m) from its probable junction with the north wall (the point of junction lay under an unexcavated baulk). A gap of about 4 ft 9 in (1.5 m) between the south end of the robber trench and the masonry remains probably represents an entrance or doorway. The masonry to the south comprised a single course of pitched stones, which in places overlay isolated horizontally laid slabs, with a few less regularly placed small fragments presumably acting as packing; no bonding material was recorded. The surviving masonry was

about 15 ft 4 in (4.7 m) long and 1 ft 5 in (0.45 m) wide but its line was continued to the southern limit of excavation by a shallow robber trench.

The metallised surface which may have abutted the west wall was composed of three layers of ironstone forming a deposit up to 1 ft (0.3 m) thick. It is unlikely that these layers represent different occupation levels and they probably derive from a single phase of infilling of a natural hollow. Any continuation of metallising to the north of the hollow presumably had been removed by later activity. Pottery recovered from the metallising had a late 1st to mid-2nd century date (*terminus post quem*) and is the only stratified evidence for the date of construction of B2 (FIG 5). The pottery was typical of a domestic assemblage of that date for this area; a similar date was indicated by the Samian.

A layer of apparent burning was recorded on a section through the building ('reddened floor') where it underlay the metallising described above. Unfortunately, there was no further

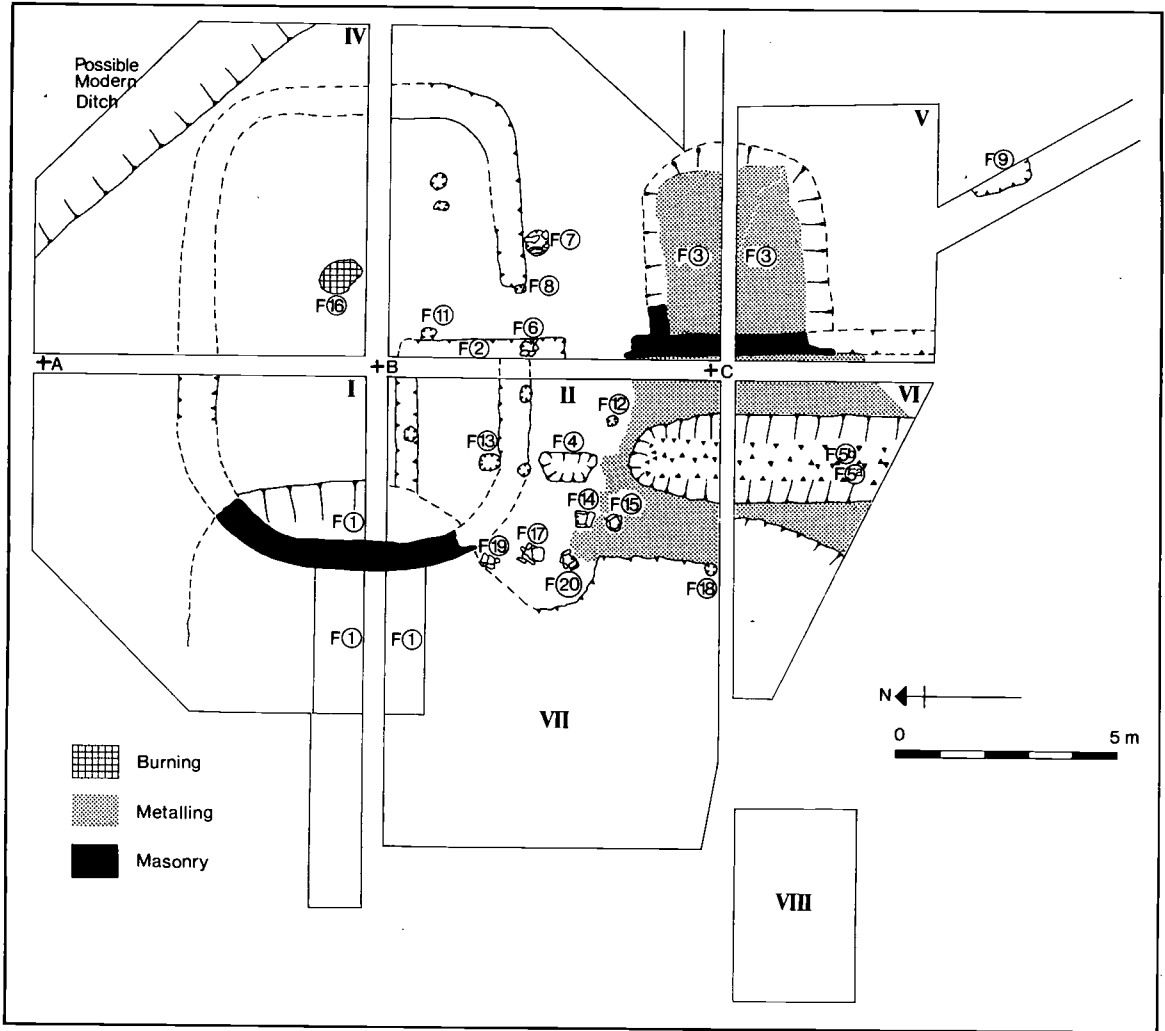


Fig 4 Higham Ferrers – site plan

record and it is unclear whether the entire surface was scorched or just a small area such as would be caused by hearths or similar limited activity. Twenty-three per cent of the reported Samian was burnt or scorched but, as there was no corresponding group amongst the coarse wares the significance of this is unclear (cf. archive-report by B.R. Hartley and H. Pengelly).

A short length of masonry extended eastwards from the remains of the footings of the east wall. This stub was only 1 ft 3 in (0.4 m) wide and about 2 ft 5 in (0.75 m) long and lay to the north of an area of metalling (F3). It was composed of a single course of large, horizontally laid slabs with no recorded bonding material. This arrangement of stones contrasts with the nature of the east wall of Building 1 with its smaller pitched stones, but it appears to have been keyed with it. Although it is not possible

to demonstrate conclusively that this short length of masonry formed a wall, the nature of the adjacent metalling (F3), with its straight, parallel sides, suggests that it lay within a building.

In cross-section the metalling was similar to that within the main part of the building and the pottery recovered was also of 2nd-century date. If the area was a yard, it is unlikely that its edges would have been so well defined. The metalling was about 13 ft 9 in (4.25 m) square, and about 7 in (0.2 m) thick. It lay in a shallow hollow (F3) and, as with the metalling in the building to the west, was composed of layers of ironstone rubble set in a matrix of light brown soil. While the north and south edges were straight and well defined, the eastern edge was less clear.

No internal features were recorded and the function of this additional structure is unclear. It was probably added to the main building at an early stage since the material recovered

from both groups of metallurgy was of a similar nature. The material from this structure represents a domestic assemblage of late 1st to 2nd century date. It is unclear at what date the structure was abandoned. The only finds from the robber trenches around the structure were one piece of brick and a fragment of tegula. The building was cut by the Period II quarrying (F1) and a series of later ditches (F5) had also been cut through the internal metal floor (probably Period III).

THE QUARRY PIT (F1)

The area of quarrying was sampled by two trenches dug adjacent to the west wall of Building 2. The feature (F1) was probably part of an extensive area of quarry activity. The two trenches lay either side of a baulk between areas I and II/VII, they were 3 ft 9 in (1.2 m) and 3 ft (0.9 m) wide respectively and both extended to about 10 ft 8 in (3.3 m) west of the west wall of Building 2. They examined only a small part of the overall area of disturbance which was otherwise suggested by surface variations.

The east side of the pit lay about 3 ft 9 in (1.2 m) within Building 2. It was cut into the limestone and was presumably intended for extraction. The examined portion had steeply dipping sides and its base lay at least 5 ft 9 in (1.8 m) below the scraped surface. Greenfield considered that the feature was overlain by Building 1, but the stones which he interpreted as part of the north wall of the building dipped steeply and almost certainly represented a dump of material into F1 probably from its south side. The other infills within the feature were largely soils, although a layer of ash and burnt material was present in the lower levels. This particular layer contained oak-charcoal (note by G.C. Morgan in archive), slag, and coal from the Middle Coal measure.

Much of the apparent dating evidence from F1 was probably residual, derived from Building 1, as reflected by the presence of only 2nd-century pottery in the lower 1.1 m of backfill, and it does not necessarily properly reflect the date of the limestone extraction. The presence of some later 3rd and 4th century forms in the upper fill may reflect the true date when F1 was levelled for the construction of Building 2. The material included two grey ware flanged bowls, and examples of both Lower Nene Valley and Oxfordshire wares (FIG 6 nos 32-42).

F1 was probably one of a series of quarry pits in the western part of the excavation, where others may be indicated by the sinuous edge of the metallurgy remaining as a surface in Building 1 (see above; cf. FIG 4). It is possible that the quarrying occurred as a series of isolated pits. A layer of 'green silt' in the south-west corner of the excavated area probably represented an infill (sag infill?) of quarry activity and contained early Saxon pottery as well as 4th-century Roman sherds. The Saxon material comprised sizeable fragments from the rims of three vessels, in one case in three sherds (FIG 6, nos 43-45). Their presence indicates nearby occupation, and although no Saxon structures were recognised some of the undated features could belong to that period.

BUILDING 2

Building 2 was of unusual form, being rectangular with rounded corners. The internal dimensions were 30 ft (9.2 m) east/west and 21 ft (6.4 m) north/south but, apart from at the west end, its

walls were denoted only by shallow robber trenches or slight soil variations which were left unexcavated. The surviving masonry of the west wall had a maximum width of about 2 ft 4 in (0.7 m).

The west wall was only preserved where it either was set into the top of F1 or had settled into its unconsolidated infills. The remains comprised two or three courses of pitched limestone; no bonding material was recorded. The scorching of some stones may indicate that the wall was built with re-used material. The outer face formed a straight edge about 12 ft (3.7 m) long but at both ends the wall curved to the east.

The south wall was represented by two robber trenches, about 10 in (0.25 m) deep, at either side of a probable doorway, 4 ft 9 in (1.5 m) wide, located at the approximate mid-point. A single posthole at the end of each robber trench (F6, F8 respectively) presumably supported the door-frame. The postholes had contained uprights up to 6 in (0.18 m) across, which in the case of F6 had been square.

At the east end of the south wall some curvature was indicated, although it was not as pronounced as that along the west wall. Unfortunately, corresponding remains were lacking in the north-east quarter of the excavated area, either because of shallow survival or the true absence of such elements. A single short length of robber trench was recorded for the entire north wall in which the remainder had presumably been lost through cultivation. The shallow depth of soil above building 2 resulted not only in the reduction of its wall-remains but also in the removal of virtually all of its floor.

Only two features were preserved within the confines of the building, a hearth (F16) and a small pit (F13) which contained the remains of a coin hoard. The hearth was located slightly to the north and east of the centre of the building. Its remains comprised an oval depression 3 ft x 2 ft 6 in (0.9 x 0.75 m) and a maximum of 2 in (0.05 m) deep in the surface of the natural; the infill was largely ash and burnt stones, twelve grey ware sherds were discarded from this feature.

The circular pit (F13) was located close to the inside of the southern wall about 3 ft 9 in (1.2 m) to the north of F1. It was 1 ft 1 in (0.35 m) in diameter and about 10 in (0.25 m) deep and contained a hoard of fourth century coins. The feature had probably been reduced by cultivation giving rise to a spread of contemporary coins through the base of the ploughsoil. The coins still in the pit dated to the period 330-341 AD with the exception of a single coin dated to 350-360. The coins from the ploughsoil demonstrated a similar date range with the addition of two further coins dated to 350-360. Detailed identifications and commentary by Dr Richard Reece are available in the series of archive-records.

Elsewhere a few slight surface irregularities were recorded. These were most common in the base of the robber trench and while possibly postholes, are perhaps more likely to have been caused during the removal of stonework. These features are plotted on the site plan (FIG 4) but should not be regarded as significant.

The date for the occupation of this unusual structure probably extended from the late 3rd to the middle of the 4th century. The evidence for dating the building to that period comprised the material from the upper levels of F1, sealed by the west wall. Those deposits contained a small number of pieces dateable to the later 3rd to 4th centuries including fragments of flanged bowls, some Oxfordshire colour-coat and a lower Nene valley colour-coated imitation Dr38 (FIG 6, no. 39). A date for the

construction of the building around the end of the 3rd century is supported by the range of late third-century coins from the same deposits. The demise of the structure cannot be as clearly assigned owing to the poor preservation of the internal surfaces. The number of 4th century sherds recovered from the lower ploughsoil (layer 2) indicates that occupation continued into that century but there was no clear cut off. If the date of the apparently contemporary ditches F5 (see below) is to be regarded as a reflection of the period of building occupation then it is again only possible to suggest occupation from the late 3rd-century to an indeterminate point in the middle years of the 4th-century; the coins are, therefore, perhaps the best indication of the true date range.

A ditched boundary extending northwards from the limit of excavation for 32 ft (9.7 m) cut the surface of the Building 1 metalling to a maximum depth of 2 ft (0.6 m). Only two cuts of ditch (F5a & 5b) were recorded but the configuration of the feature suggests that there were more. Both versions of the feature contained 2nd-century material, which had probably derived from the underlying levels (cf. FIG 5, nos 19–24). 3rd to 4th century forms were more frequent in the later cut (FIG 6, nos 25–31). The termination of these ditches 8 ft (2.5 m) to the south of Building 2, and the absence of any other boundary elements, suggests that the ditch and building may have been contemporary.

ISOLATED FEATURES

A number of shallowly preserved small features, especially post-holes, were recorded (FIG 4). In most cases there was no stratigraphic relationship with another feature and the finds usually comprised a single sherd allowing only the crudest dating, often only 2nd century onwards. The apparent concentration of such features in areas II and III is probably a reflection of the relative completeness of their excavation in contrast to other areas.

An alignment of three post-holes, F19, F17 and F20, with a fourth, F18, possibly extending the line further south, continues the orientation of the west wall of Building 2. The three post-holes lay about 2 ft (0.6 m) apart. They are unlikely to have been related to the occupation of Building 1 and probably formed a fence line associated with Building 2. F18 lay about 1 ft (0.3 m) to the south of the others. The three closely set post-holes lay about 7 ft 10 in (2.4 m) west of the gap between Building 2 and the ditch terminal, and could have served as part of that entrance arrangement, perhaps involving F14 and F15.

A shallow rectangular feature (F4) cut through the metalling within Building 1. It measured 4 ft 8 in (1.4 × 0.7 m) and was up to 1ft (0.3 m) deep. Within the infill were 24 oyster shells in addition to 2nd-century pottery which has probably derived from the underlying deposits.

A separate pit or ditch terminal was partially revealed beside the eastern edge of the trench (F9). It had almost vertical sides and cut into the natural ironstone to a depth of at least 2 ft (0.6 m) below the excavation surface although its base was probably not reached; it was perhaps a small quarry. The infill deposits were a layer of ash 1 ft (0.3 m) thick below a brown loam; the finds they contained were similar to those from the F5 series of ditches and in the upper levels of quarry pit F1 indicating a 4th century date.

A series of trenches was cut in an area 300 yds (c. 280 m) to

the north-west of the main excavation in order to examine a series of scatters of building materials. The trenches revealed a series of short lengths of wall on north/south and east/west alignments. The better preserved examples were constructed of horizontally arranged slabs. Owing to limitations of time none of these features was excavated, but their presence suggests the existence of further series of buildings at a distance. Other remains were noted nearby when a gas pipeline traversed the area in 1966 (FIG 4; cf. RCHM 1975, 54).

ASSOCIATED FINDS

ROMAN POTTERY

by E.H. MacRobert

Ceramic assemblages from specific contexts of stratigraphic significance were selected for assessment, namely F1, F3, F5a and F5b. No study has been made by the present writer of the other pottery from the excavations, and all the Samian and mortaria have been the subject of separate analyses (Hartley and Pengelly; Hartley respectively).

The purpose of the study was to provide summary chronological and typological information about the Roman pottery from the particular contexts, and no detailed analysis was undertaken. Indeed the value of the ceramic groups is limited by the evident selective retention policy during excavation, in general only rim sherds and occasional bases having been kept, although colour-coated body sherds were also retained.

No diagnostically early Roman pottery was identified, and the main ceramic range extends from the late 1st or early 2nd century to at least the 4th century. Throughout this period the pottery is typical of ceramic assemblages in East Northamptonshire. The majority of the material was probably produced fairly locally, the Lower Nene Valley industry providing the main source of colour-coated wares. Occasional pieces from further afield include Oxfordshire colour-coated ware and one sherd of BB1.

Some chronological sequence can be seen in the groups selected for assessment, although the later groups, particularly in F1, contained a considerable proportion of residual material and many pieces which are not chronologically diagnostic, notably grey and shelly ware necked jars. Vessels have been selected to show both the typological and chronological range of the material, but in the later groups most residual and undiagnostic pieces have been excluded.

FIG 5

F3 Various metallings.

Late 1st to 2nd century pottery.

- 1 Channelled rim jar. Shelly ware.
- 2 Channelled rim jar. Hard grogged ware.
- 3 Necked jar. Hard grogged ware.
- 4 Wide mouthed bowl. Hard grogged ware.
- 5 Narrow necked jar. Grey ware.
- 6 Multiple grooved necked jar. Grey ware.
- 7 Everted rim jar. Grey ware.
- 8 Indented beaker. Grey ware.
- 9 Pie dish. Grey ware.

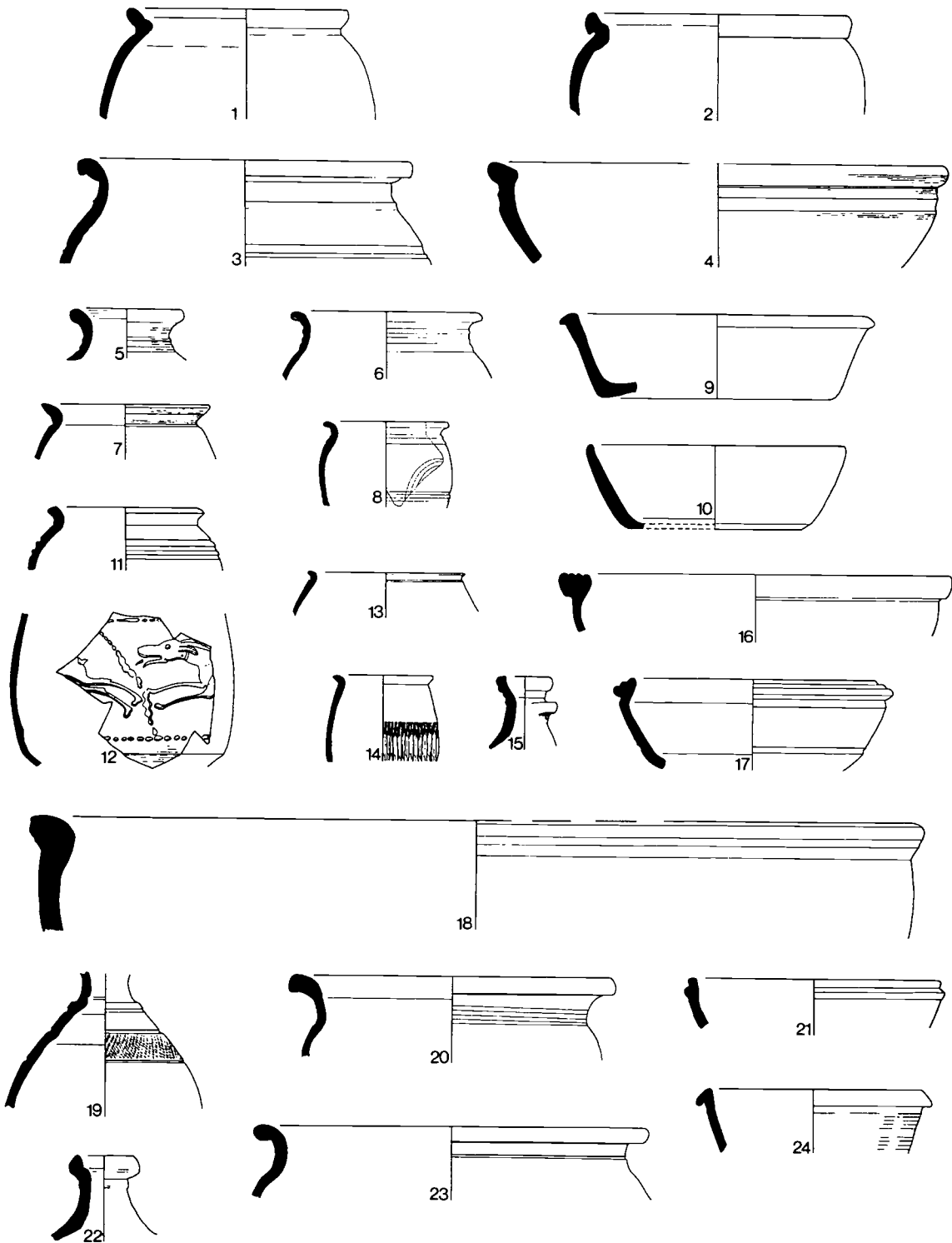


Fig 5 Higham Ferrers – Roman pottery, Scale 1:4
Northamptonshire Archaeology 1992, 24

- 10 Simple rim dish. Grey ware.
- 11 Everted rim jar. Oxidised ware.
- 12 'Hunt cup'. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 13 Cornice rim beaker. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 14 Everted rim beaker. Lower Nene Valley white ware.
- 15 Flagon. Lower Nene Valley white ware.
- 16 Reeded rim bowl. Coarse white ware.
- 17 Reeded rim bowl. Sandy ware with partly oxidised, partly reduced surfaces.
- 18 Large wide mouthed vessel. Shelly ware. Vessels of similar type and fabric have been found at excavations at the Roman town at Ashton, near Oundle, Northants (MacRobert, forthcoming). Their function is unknown but may not have been culinary. Indeed they may have been inverted and used as a cover.

F5A DITCH

Probably 2nd to 3rd century pottery (most likely residual and derived from former Building 1 metallurgy – IDM).

- 19 Narrow necked jar or flask. Grey ware.
- 20 Wide mouthed necked jar. Grey ware.
- 21 Flanged bowl. Grey ware.
- 22 Flagon. White ware.
- 23 Necked jar. Lower Nene Valley white ware. Pink "wash" on exterior surface.
- 24 Pie dish. Oxidised ware.

FIG 6

F5b Ditch.

3rd to 4th century pottery.

- 25 Wide mouthed necked jar. Grey ware.
- 26 Incipient flanged bowl. BBI.
- 27 'Castor box'. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 28 Indented beaker. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware. A cross has been scratched on the exterior neck of the vessel after firing.
- 29 Bead rim necked beaker. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 30 Bead rim dish, probably imitation Samian Drag 31. Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (Young 1977, C45).
- 31 Imitation Samian Drag 38. Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (Young 1977, C51).

F1 QUARRY PIT

Later 3rd to 4th century pottery.

- 32 Storage jar. Shelly ware.
- 33 Harrold-type flanged bowl. Shelly ware.
- 34 Simple rim dish. Grey ware.
- 35 Flanged dish. Grey ware.
- 36 Simple rim dish. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 37 Bead rim necked beaker. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 38 Necked beaker. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 39 Imitation Samian Drag 38. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.
- 40 Bead rim dish, probably imitation Samian Drag 31. Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware.

- 41 Necked bowl. Coarse white ware, red painted decoration. This vessel may be residual in this context.
- 42 Bead rim dish, probably imitation Samian Drag 31. Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (Young 1977, C45).

SAXON POTTERY

by P. Blinkhom (FIG 6)

From settlement-infill or a related type of deposit above former Roman quarry. All hand-made.

- 43 Probably a small baggy cooking pot. Dull grey to black, with wet hand-finish on both surfaces. Voids indicate light organic tempering, but otherwise heavily tempered with ferruginous and non-ferruginous sandstone up to 3 mm, with occasional limestone up to 2 mm and occasional flecks of gold mica.
- 44 ? Storage Jar. Dark grey to black, heavily burnished at both surfaces. Heavy organic temper but also containing sparse ironstone and limestone, each up to 1 mm.
- 45 Three joining sherds from a finely-made shouldered jar. Dark brownish grey to black, hard-fired. Very lightly but evenly burnished at both surfaces. Heavy temper of very finely crushed quartzite (? granite) with occasional pieces up to 3 mm; sparse flecks of gold mica; sparse limestone and chalk up to 4 mm.

BROOCHES

by D.F. Mackreth (FIG 7).

All brooches are made from a copper alloy.

1. Colchester Derivative

From sag-infill above quarry-pit F1 (HF499, BZ41, sf55). The head is missing. The bow tapers to a crude foot-knob under a cross-moulding. At the head is the lower part of a beaded ridge which dies out into the bow.

'This fragment belongs to a group of brooches centred on southern Northamptonshire and immediately adjacent areas. The craftsmen making the brooches employed a narrow range of motifs to produce different designs. The characteristics here which relate the piece to the whole are the beaded ridge and the form of the foot-knob. Dating is based on few examples: Verulamium, before 150 (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936, 206, Fig 43, 17, 18); Derby, Antonine (Dool et al., 1985, 285, Fig 125, 12); Leicester, before 220 (Kenyon 1948, 249, Fig 80, 10). These point to the 2nd century and may suggest that the type belongs entirely to that time.'

2. Trumpet

Within quarry-pit F1 (HF52, B 18, sf14). The spring is mounted on a pierced lug or ring behind the head of the bow. This has an enamelled cell on each side in the form of an elongated trumpet. The knob, of the usual petalled shape, appears to have run all the way round and is divided from the bow above and below by a flute and triple mouldings. The lower bow has six enamelled triangles on each side. All the enamel is a discoloured powdery opaque yellow. The foot-knob is made up of a repeat of the triple mouldings and has a sunken boss underneath.

'One of the two Trumpets from the Lunt, Baginton, Warks is

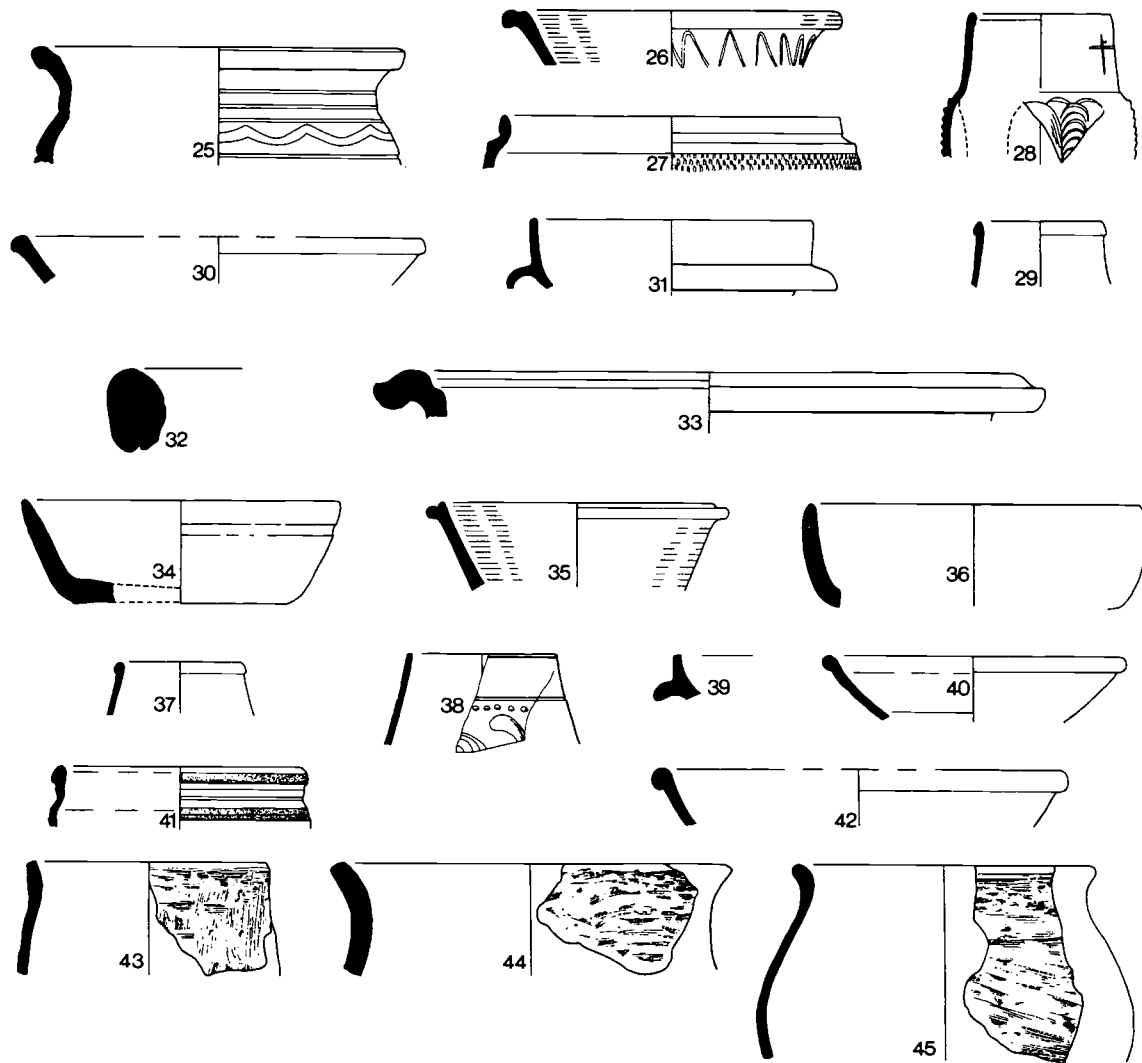


Fig 6 Higham Ferrers – Roman and Saxon pottery, scale 1:4

enamelled and both were made before 75 AD (Hobley 1969, 110, FIG 19.9; 1973, 66, FIG 19.8). Other dated enamelled brooches are few: Derby, 150–175 (Dool et al., 1985, 289–93, FIG 127, 25); Newstead, probably before 180 (Curle 1911, 322, pl. 3rd LXXXVI, 11–5; Hartley 1972, 54); South Shields, early third century (Miket 1983, 116, FIG 75, 126); Verulamium, 260–70 (Frere 1984, 25, FIG 7, 31); Rudston, after 370 (Stead 1980, 95, FIG 60.7). The bias of these is towards the second half of the 2nd century, but the one from Baginton is a reminder that a sweeping allocation to that period with a run on into the 3rd is inadvisable. The design of the head allows another group of Trumpets to be used. These have relief decoration of the same character and belong essentially to the Welsh Marches and the

West Midlands: Holcombe, 70–180 (Pollard 1974, 138–40, FIG 22, 2); Wroxeter, up to 130 (Kenyon 1940, 224, FIG 15, 4) and 110–30 (Bushe-Fox 1913, 26, FIG 9, 7); Derby, 150–75 (Dool et al., 1985, 191–3, FIG 127, 25, 28) and late 2nd century (ibid, 191–3, FIG 127, 27). The dating is much clearer: mainly the first half of the 2nd century for manufacture, survivors in use hardly going beyond c. 175.'

3. 'Hod Hill'

Base of ploughsoil (HF138, BZ20, sf 27). The pin is hinged. The head is cast to appear to be rolled-over to hold the axis bar and has a groove at each end to give the semblance of knobs on the ends of that. Only the upper part of the bow survives. There

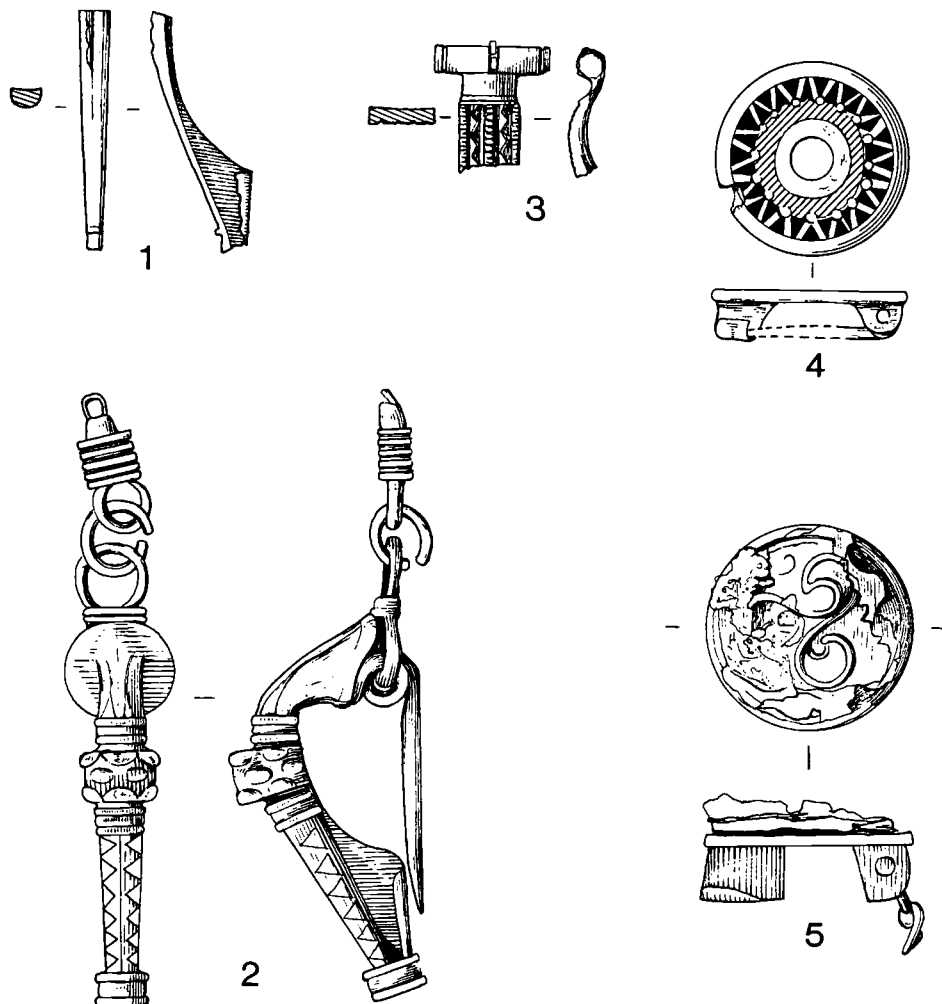


Fig 7 Higham Ferrers – brooches, scale 1:1

are three beaded ridges under a thin cross-moulding. Between each ridge is another intended to look like a wavy line.

'The variation in ornament in the Hod Hill type is such that it is hard to be sure which combinations should be regarded as having been standard. There is nothing here which cannot be found amongst the varieties, except the use of two wavy lines which are found on versions which have a completely cast head. These develop enamelled cells in which the wavy lines are reserved. The relationship with the Hod Hill is expressed very well in an example from Verulamium with the multiple mouldings on the lower bow frequently found on Hod Hills (Frere 1984, 27, FIG 8, 44). Dating is difficult. One from Camerton was earlier than 180 (Wedlake 1958, 226, FIG 55, 50B). The large group published from Augst offers little comfort for dating. The range is from the middle of the 1st century to the end of the 2nd, but one or two show that the

style was evolving in the latter part of the 1st century and possibly lasted to c. 150/75 (Riha 1979, 157–8, Taf 46, 1360–81).'

4. Plate

Upper levels of Ditch F5 (HF491, BZ39, sf 53). The sprung pin is held between two pierced lugs. The front of the circular plate is hollowed to receive enamel and has two reserved elements: an annulus in the centre and a ring of dots around that. The central cell contains what may be decayed enamel. The outer has red around its inner margin and a series of triangles of very dark glass in the outer, the triangles alternating in radial direction and may be set in the same red enamel as the rest of the zone, but the matrix is discoloured here. There is no trace of appliqué white metal decoration.

'The type is almost certainly British, but is uncommon, if

strict parallels are sought. Dating is sparse: Overstone, Northamptonshire, before the middle of the 2nd century (Williams 1976, 126, FIG 13, 107). This suits the general dating applied to enamelled plate brooches.'

5. Plate

Metalling in Building 1 (HF942, BZ45, sf 107). The pin is hinged. The front of the circular plate is covered with a decayed mass which may once have been a composition backing for the, now damaged, applied repousse plate. The design is the relatively common one of three interlocked S-forms creating a sinuous triskele.

'The main dating for this school consists of the coin types which were copied and these point to the second quarter of the second century (Goodchild 1941). One from Wigginholt was rather closely dated to 125-66 (ibid, 1, FIG 1) and another from Verulamium should, at 300-15, have been residual in its context (Frere 1972, 118, FIG 31, 24). The coin types display at least two dies for the more common design and several versions of the triskele are known, but there are not enough well preserved pieces for the groupings to be obvious.'

OTHER FINDS

by I.D. Meadows

A variety of objects was found in addition to the Roman coins, brooches, and a glass bottle-base. The most ancient item was a leaf-shaped flint arrowhead but the majority of objects were of either certain or probable Roman date. They form a typical assortment of personalia and domestic material. Some are elements from parts of buildings, for example four joiners' dogs, a drop hinge, and a split-spike loop.

The personal items include a variety of fragments from both bone and copper alloy pins, finger rings and bracelets. Part of a ligula and depilatory tweezers were also found. The domestic items include knives, a latch-lifter, and a barb-spring padlock-bolt with iron rings. A detailed finds' catalogue is retained in the Northamptonshire Archaeological Archive.

GREAT OAKLEY

In 1964 a surface scatter was discovered by the late R. Cross after ploughing. The scatter was centred around NGR SP 887869. In 1965 and 1966 work was undertaken by E. Greenfield as the site lay in an area earmarked for ironstone extraction. The first season's work comprised the excavation of a series of test pits and the structural remains encountered in them were further examined subsequently.

The remains lay on drift clay above the Northamptonshire Ironstone at about 125 yds (114 m) OD on the north side of the Harper Brook valley. The exposed remains formed a group of structural elements to the south of a metalled east-west track which was exposed at two points 79 yds (72 m)

apart. The track was 13 ft 3 in (4 m) wide with well defined edges; the absence of worn or rutted stones suggests that it served only light traffic. Owing to the strictures of time the construction of the route was not examined but in the form recorded it probably relates to the 2nd-century occupation of the site and may represent a formalisation of an earlier drove road.

THE SITE

In the area to the south of the track a series of earth cut features may represent the remains of timber structures (see report in archive). Of these remains only one structural group could be positively recognised, comprising six post-holes from a roundhouse between 14 ft 9 in-16 ft 6 in (4.5-5 m) diameter. Whilst the nature of the configuration was recognised during excavation not all of the features were excavated and dating material is limited to only three sherds. While it is likely that this structure was overlain by the later stone-founded aisled building, no direct stratigraphic relationship was preserved.

The aisled building was only partially revealed. The exposed portion was largely at the east end, with the remainder examined by means of two parallel east-west trenches which extended to the west wall of the building. The structure was about 113 ft (34.5 m) long and 41 ft (12.5 m) wide (measured externally). It was represented by a shallowly preserved stone wall 2 ft 2 in (0.65 m) thick, built of roughly squared limestone rag which survived to a maximum one or two courses high, with no recorded bonding material. Some of the stones had probably been reused since they showed signs of having been scorched. The building contained two rows of posts which divided the interior into two aisles 6 ft 6 in (2 m) wide and a nave about 21 ft 4 in (6.5 m) wide. Greenfield recorded the location of 28 post-holes, 14 in each row, but the location of the majority was based upon an extrapolation of the spacing of the eastern most pair. Of the excavated examples none showed signs of post replacement. The spacing of the excavated postholes was about 6 ft 6 in (2 m) apart.

Only the east wall was completely exposed and a wide, double doorway was observed. The entrance was marked by an increase in the size of the wall masonry and also by two opposing arcs which extended from the first post-hole in each row to join at the approximate mid-point of the east wall. The change in the nature of the masonry coincided with a part of the wall which did not extend above the surface of the exposed natural - this may indicate stone robbing, but it could equally reflect the entrance; if so, the two shallow arcs were possibly the result of the corners of the doors dragging. The doorway suggested by these features would have been about 13 ft 3 in (4 m) wide, and thereby similar to that described at Lynch Farm, Orton Longueville, Cambs. (Jones 1975).

The long axis of the aisled building lay parallel to the track but unfortunately the area between the building and the route was not examined. No floor level was identified within the excavated portion of the building but that only represented

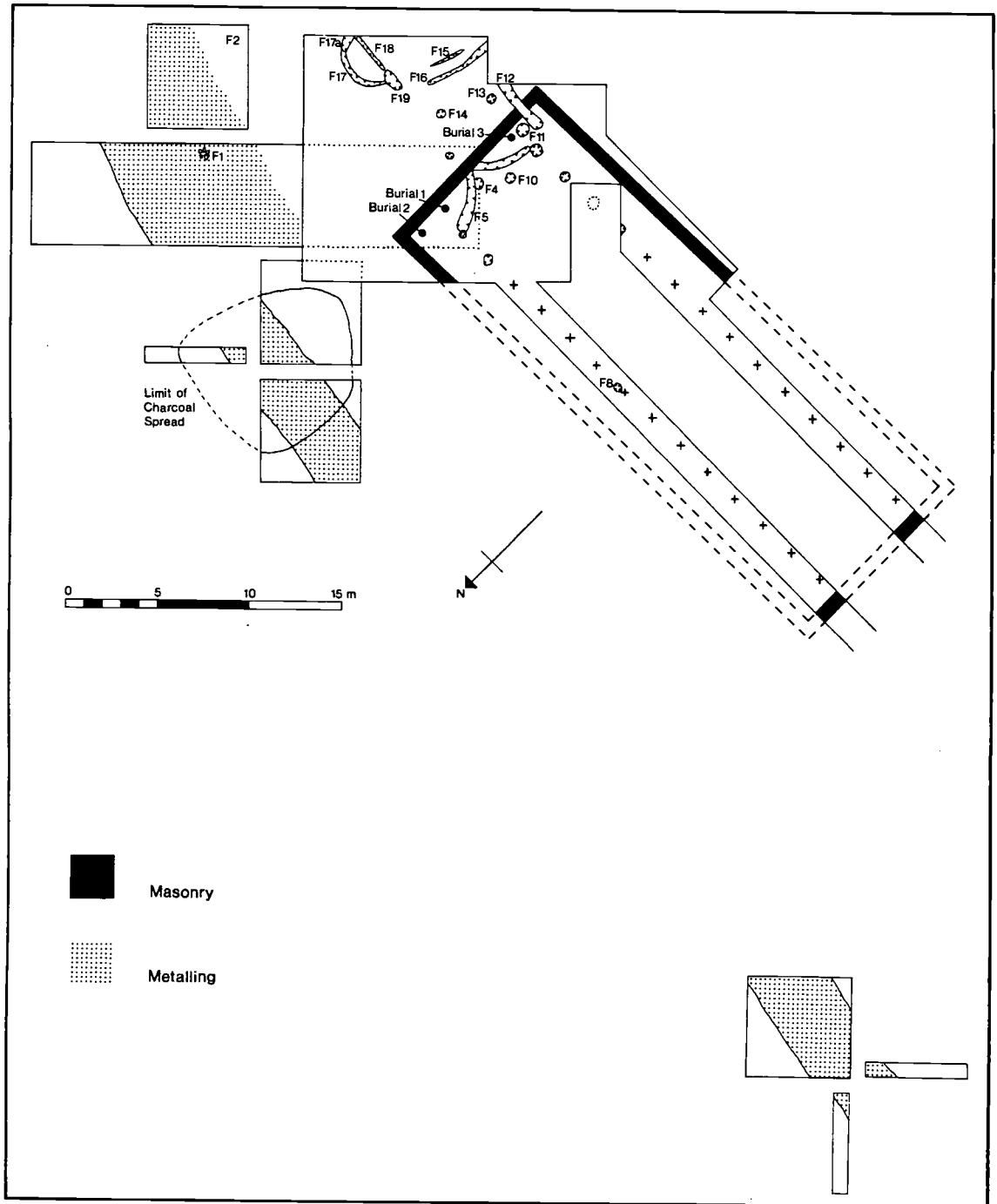


Fig 8 Great Oakley – site plan. NB: Crosses indicate potential location of post-holes not proved excavation.

about 20% of the total area. The pottery recovered within the structure and also the finds from the ploughsoil indicate that occupation continued only to about the end of the 2nd century AD. The site was probably originally occupied in the late 1st century AD but owing to the small size of the assemblage and the even smaller proportion of stratified material this date can only be approximate. Part of an unusual iron brooch was found, comprising the bow and incomplete spring of a 'Drahtfibel' derivative (4 not illustrated). Mr D.F. Mackreth reports:

'Three-coil brooches of this or the Nauheim Derivative type are restricted in distribution to the south-east of England and are commonest in Kent. They occur otherwise sparsely as far away as Wiltshire and Essex and slightly beyond. Few have been published, principally, one suspects, because they were considered to be unworthy of comment being the ultimate in 'Poor Men's Brooches'. Iron examples are also found and it is amongst the very few published that the best indications of an early date are to be found: Skeleton Green, c. 10 BC to c. 25 AD (Partridge 1981, 132, FIG. 66, 3); Puckeridge c. 25 AD - Claudian (Partridge 1979, 35, FIG 6, 3); Maiden Castle, c. 25-75 AD (Wheeler 1943, 252, FIG 85, 34). One from Little Amwell, Herts (excavation, C. Partridge, to be published) seems to have had a pierced, if not open-framed, catch-plate which points to the casual use of three coils in the 1st century BC. It is not certain that the apparent high incidence of iron three-coil brooches in Hertfordshire is a true reflection of a distribution centred there, or if it is only a product of the emphasis of excavation. The large number of three-coil brooches from Canterbury of both these general types should show that the absence of a fourth coil was intentional, rather than having been the result of careless manufacture. It is possible that iron specimens not only predate c. 75 but also c. 50.'

CONCLUSION

The remains revealed by excavation at Great Oakley probably represent part of a farmstead, but the identification is tentative since no associated field-system was recorded. Additional fieldwork in the area has only produced a few pits about 273 yards (250 m) south-west of the aisled building (Jackson 1982, 10). The site was destroyed by ironstone quarrying in 1978.

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