

AN ASSEMBLAGE OF WOODEN OBJECTS FROM A WELL AT MANCETTER: A CATALOGUE AND REPORT BY S.J.ALLEN.

The Wood which is the subject of the following report was recovered during excavations at Mancetter, Warwickshire. I would like to thank Paul Booth and Helen Maclagan of the Field Archaeology Section of Warwickshire Museum for the opportunity to undertake this report, and George Learmonth of Birmingham City Museum for his assistance in recording the material and in preparing the illustrations.

The material in question was derived from the waterlogged deposits of a Roman well. The anaerobic conditions had preserved the wood quite well and very little decay had taken place subsequently. The assemblage had been deposited for conservation in Birmingham City Museum. Some work had been started on the wood prior to this authors involvement but had been abandoned; the only results were an extremely basic record and sketch of some of the artefactual material and the discarding of most of the underwood without record. A group of numbers had been assigned to certain objects (T1-6, T10) but the sequence was incomplete and it was not always clear which numbers had been assigned to which objects.

In addition, small finds numbers had been given to some objects recorded in the site notebook. In order to establish some degree of consistency in the catalogue it was decided to assign a new sequence of numbers (W 01-W 18). Any previously assigned numbers will be included at the end of the catalogue entry and a concordance of these codes is appended to this report.

Unless otherwise stated, all finds are from Site 20, Well 6, Layer 23 of the 1971 excavations. The dimensions are the maximum surviving. The species identifications were made by the author using a standard text (Schweingruber 1978).

W 01 Flat semicircular wooden board, very fragmented. Remains of eleven holes drilled from a board face truncated by the straight edge. 182 x 84 x 05 mm. Holes circa 03 mm diameter. Oak (*Quercus* sp) radially faced. T1 sf 32(?) Figure 1.

W 02 Fragment of underwood, one end trimmed and broken, other end broken. Recorded on photograph only. Circa 147 x 23 mm diameter. T2.

W 03 Fragment of charred wooden post. One end cut square, other end broken and abraded. Recorded on photograph and sketch only. 198 x 98 x 35 mm. T3.

W 04 Large fragment of timber pile. One end cut to a point with two axe marked facets. Sampled for dendrochronology (see separate report). 625 x 115 mm diameter. Oak (*Quercus* sp) whole, with bark adhering. T4 sf 25

W 05 Stave built bucket or tub, consisting of a circular base fitting into a groove cut across each of the twelve staves. Wear marks indicate the former presence of two binding hoops. Basal internal diameter 153 mm, rim internal diameter 208 mm, vertical height 285 mm. All components are Oak (*Quercus* sp) radially faced. T5 sf 27-31. Figure 2.

W 06 Fragment of underwood, recorded on photograph only. 38 x 20 mm diameter. T6.

W 07 Fragment of peg? very abraded, recorded on photograph only. 101 x 30-15 mm diameter. sf 26 (?).

W 08 Trough. Base and most of one side missing, both ends and remaining side complete but very fragmented. Sides and ends inclined away from base. Flange across complete width of object at either end. Axe marks on outer surfaces of both ends. Dimensions of complete object 790 x 400-395 x 206 mm deep. Flanges 102 x 25 and 40 x 27 mm thick. Sides 30-10 base 30-25 mm thick. Internal dimensions of trough at rim 570 x 352-350 at base 300 x 210 mm. Axe marks 110-40 mm broad. Oak (Quercus sp) halved. T10. Figure 3.

W 09 Sample from structural timber. Raised rib, one charred face-part of a plank with a longitudinal rebate? Width 306 x 40 mm thick, rib 40 mm high and 30 mm wide. Oak (Quercus sp) radially faced.

W 10 Stake fragment, both ends broken. 205 x 60 x 40 mm. Oak (Quercus sp) quartered.

W 11 Board fragment. 152 x 74 x 10 mm. Oak (Quercus sp) radially faced.

W 12 Stave fragment 295 x 55-20 x 35-10 mm. Oak (Quercus sp) radially faced.

W 13 Stake fragment. 140 x 40 x 35 mm. Oak (Quercus sp) radially faced.

W 14 Handle fragment? one edge flat, other edge sinuous, both ends broken. 260-220 x 60-45 x 20 mm. Oak (Quercus sp) radially faced.

W 15 Six plank samples, edges rounded, no working marks. Widths 285-265 x 48-44 mm thick. Oak (Quercus sp) all radially faced.

W 16 Six pieces of underwood rods, one of which very knotty. All ends broken no evidence of working. 175-93 x 23-15 mm diameter. Hazel (Corylus avellana) whole, little bark remaining.

W 17 Sixty-three (?) underwood fragments. Discarded without record.

W 18 Forty-eight (?) wood fragments discarded without record. Oak (Quercus sp) (??)

Certain of the above objects merit further discussion. W 01, the semi circular board fragment had a number of drilled perforations running in a line along its grain. This line had been followed by a break prior to its burial and therefore the board was almost certainly originally larger. A number of reconstructions are possible. The holes could have held a series of laces to link it to another similar board to form a hinged lid for a cylindrical container (though not W 05, the bucket, since it is too small). As a single larger object it may have been a disk with many rows of such perforations, functioning as a strainer. Finally the holes may have been cut to assist in the cutting of a row of teeth into the edge of the board, the teeth now having been lost. In any event the cutting of a line of holes along the grain of the wood would have made it quite weak and led to its breakage within a short period of time.

The bucket or tub, W 05, was built with thirteen wooden elements. The first of these was an Oak board, circular in plan with a chamfered edge, placed so that the chamfer was on the underside of the bucket. Around the base were positioned twelve staves, also of Oak, in varying degrees of completeness (numbered 1A, 1B, 2A, 3, 4 and 11 - 16). The rim ends were quite damaged and abraded and many of the base ends were also broken. Each staff was shaped, widening from the base end to the top end and from the inner face to the outer. In cross-section each staff was curved. When fitted together they form a cylinder tapering out from the base to the rim. A groove between 03 and 05 mm wide and some 04 mm deep had been cut across the inner face of the lower end. Where the base end survived intact, the groove was placed some 23 mm from the bottom of the staff. This groove allowed the chamfer of the base to slot into the staves.

The staves and base were found in a semi-articulated relationship and no bindings were present which would have held the staves in place around the base. An examination of the staves revealed that two distinct areas of wear were present on the outer faces of most of the staves. When compared it became apparent that these areas of wear formed two distinct bands encircling the cylinder. The uppermost of these was 80-50 mm from the rim and 90-35 mm wide while the lowermost was just above the level of the groove and 60-40 mm wide. These marks are consistent with those which would be produced by two hoops encircling the staves and rubbing against them.

It is not clear what these bindings were made of. No traces of corroded metal were found in the worn areas. Although leather and other organic material was preserved in the well, none was found wrapped around the tub. However the tub or bucket was not found in an articulated state. It is apparent that the bindings were removed before the bucket was discarded and this would imply that they were made of a material which would be worth salvaging and recycling. The most likely such material is a metal.

Metal bucket fittings are not known for Roman buckets. Those on the published examples from Skeldergate, York (MacGregor 1978, 47) and Gadebridge Park, Herts (Neal 1974, 187) are iron, and iron would certainly be a possibility for the binding of the bucket under discussion. It should be noted that the staves are not pierced for suspension and hence any handle would have to be fixed to the upper hoop. The single iron concretion on the outer face of staff 1A is not necessarily connected with the binding or suspension.

The function of the Oak trough, W 08, is not immediately apparent. The object was extremely fragmented - the complete side was rebuilt from more than nine large pieces and a number of smaller fragments. Owing to this it was not possible to identify any wear marks in the interior. The trough is rather massive to function as a mere container. It would seem to have been carved to resist rough treatment and the careful provision of the flanges suggests that the trough was intended to be handled. The impression given by these features is that the trough was intended to be used to transport its contents from one point to another. Unfortunately there is no evidence which would suggest what those contents were.

The trough, whilst apparently robust, was in fact flawed. It was carved from a halved trunk and the carpenter had used the curve of the outer part of the tree as a guide to shape the profile of the base. The carpenter did not remove all of the sapwood though. When the trunk was hollowed this meant that the base of the trough was almost entirely sapwood, much weaker and more prone to decay than the heartwood. The base would have been the part most susceptible to damage in any case. Its

weakening through the incorporation of sapwood would have greatly reduced its useful life.

The only underwood which was available for examination consisted of six pieces of underwood rod, W 16. This was identified as Hazel (*Corylus avellana* L) a tree frequently managed and coppiced to provide straight rods which can be used in the weaving and construction of wattle fences, hurdles or panels. The fragments from the well all have five complete annual growth rings and the remains of the bark, suggesting that this the rod(s) were cut in their sixth year of growth. It is no longer possible to determine how many individual trees are represented by the rod fragments, though obviously the figure lies between one and six. If the higher figure is taken then the evidence suggests that hazel was being actively managed within the site catchment area. If the lower figure is taken then the evidence for or against hazel management is inconclusive.

To summarise, much of the wood from the well was fragmentary and the original form of many artefacts could not be determined. Some of the wood such as the plank samples W 15 and the post base W 03 were of a size which would indicate their origin in a structural context. The charring present on the surfaces of these and other timbers suggest that they are derived from the clearing of a structure destroyed by fire.

The underwood was not especially informative, since very few fragments could be examined. To claim that this is direct evidence for active woodland management would be unjustifiable. The loss of the large number of underwood fragments by the first recorder of the assemblage was therefore unfortunate.

As far as the identifiable artefacts are concerned, the bucket or tub and the trough are of the most interest. The bucket is unusual in that only the wooden components were found. Very few wooden buckets have been recorded from Romano British sites despite the number of wells excavated. In contrast metal bucket fittings are more common, yet none were found with the Mancetter example. Troughs such as W 08 are quite rare - the author has been unable to locate any excavated and published parallels for this object. Hence its function remains unclear at the time of writing.

All of the species of tree identified are native to Britain and the artefacts made from them could easily have been produced locally. Planks and boards were obtained from the trees by converting them radially, either by sawing or splitting. Further evidence to suggest that an axe with a blade at least 100 mm wide was used to fabricate the trough. The use of a curved section chisel or gouge would have been useful in shaping the cross section of the staves of the bucket. A marking gauge or a try-square and knife had certainly been employed to mark out the location of the grooved prior to their cutting - the line had been drawn the whole of the way around the stave.

The wood assemblage from the well would appear to have been deposited in the well intentionally during the backfilling of the feature. The suggestion raised above, that the bucket or tub was stripped of its fittings prior to deposition, combined with the evidence of the burnt structural timbers strongly indicates that the deposition was deliberate.

The wooden artefacts, timbers and underwood were waste material, no longer required by the occupiers of the site. Their presence in the well would seem to be simply the result of finding a convenient place in which to dispose of a quantity of wood which could no longer fulfil any useful purpose.

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Appendix: A concordance of the finds references assigned to the wood
assemblage

<u>Catalogue Code</u>	<u>Earlier Code</u>	<u>Small find (sf) number</u>
W 01	T 1	32 ?
W 02	T 2	----
W 03	T 3	----
W 04	T 4	25
W 05	T 5	27-31
W 06	T 6	----
W 07	---	26 ?
W 08	T 10	----
W 09	---	----
W 10	---	----
W 11	---	----
W 12	---	----
W 13	---	----
W 14	---	----
W 15	---	----
W 16	---	----
W 17	---	----
W 18	---	----