

EXCAVATIONS AT BROCKLEY HILL, MIDDLESEX.

MARCH, 1952, TO MAY, 1953

By P. G. SUGGETT, M.A.

THIS Report summarises the work for the North Middlesex Archaeological Research Committee¹ on four sites (Fig. 1).

Site A was dug in August, 1952.² It sought the pottery kiln believed to lie close to the café and to complete the examination of the area begun by Miss Richardson in 1947.³

Site B was dug to test the view⁴ that the Roman road ascended Brockley Hill slightly to the east of the present Watling Street.

Sites D and E were also concerned with the line of the Roman road. At Site D a section was cut⁵ during the spring of 1952 across an old road reputed to represent the earlier course of Watling Street before it was resited slightly to the east at the beginning of the last century. Site E comprised four trenches dug for pipe-laying by the Colne Valley Water Co.⁶ in May, 1953, along the eastern sidewalk of Watling Street and across the road. These trenches were observed by Mr. G. F. Cole, who has written the account of this site.

Site C, part of the summer excavation of 1951,⁷ has been included for comparison with the other ditch sections.

SITE A (Fig. 2).

The pits.—Trenching of the remaining area disclosed more scattered pits akin to those found in 1947. They were filled with burnt debris and much pottery, including types of kiln ware not previously met. The pits appeared to show no true stratification: pieces of the same vessel occurred at widely varying depths, and fragments of Castor ware were often found at a low level. The Samian pottery suggests that they were in use from about 70 A.D. until the end of the 2nd century.

What these pits represent is uncertain. Some were mere scrapes; others large and regular, extending to a depth of over 5 ft. from the Roman ground level. No doubt their primary function had been as quarries for clay. In several, accumulations of clean clay suggested that the actual throwing of the pottery might have been carried out in them; such pits would have afforded an easy and economical means of protection from the weather. Others clearly served as the sites of kilns. Apparently all had also been used for waste pottery.

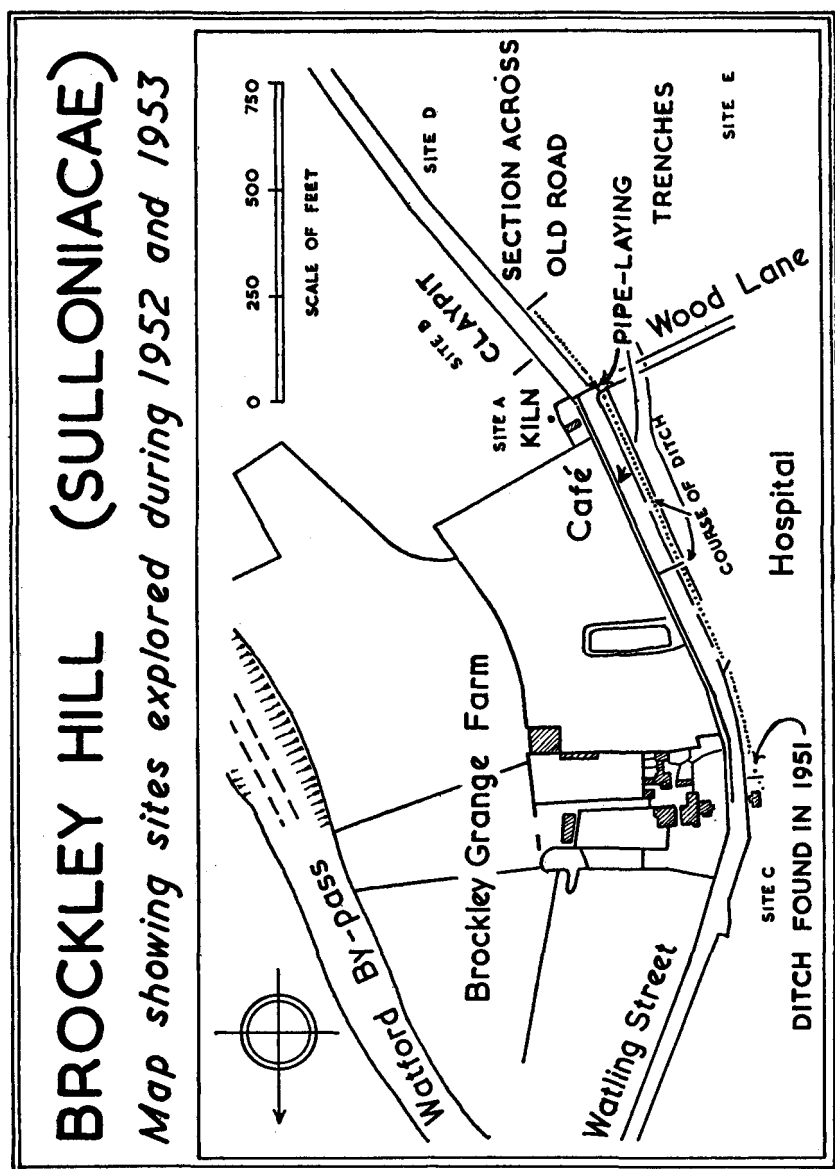
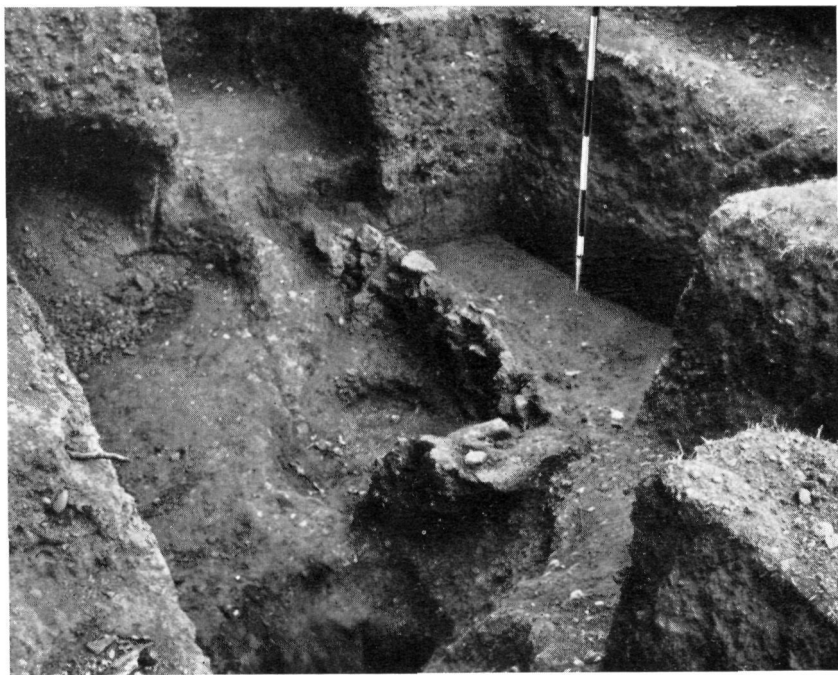


FIG. 1. PLAN SHOWING POSITION OF SITES. (BASED ON THE O.S. 25 IN. MAP WITH THE SANCTION OF THE COMPTROLLER OF H.M. STATIONERY OFFICE.)



[Photo by L. A. Probert

SITE A. THE KILN FROM THE SOUTH.

The pits were covered by 6 in. to 1 ft. of black soil, 1 to 2 ft. of brownish mixed soil, and the modern top soil. 4th century pottery was found in both the black and the brown soil, but not in the pits.

Probably the pits were filled in at the beginning of the 4th century when other parts of the site were cleared for cultivation.⁸ This levelling of the surface was followed by a period of ploughing. The site was then abandoned. Renewed cultivation is attested by finds in the mixed soil of pottery ranging from the 14th to the 17th centuries. Finally, in the late 17th century and 18th century several houses were built in the field immediately above the site and spoil from the foundation trenches seems to have been tipped downhill, increasing the build-up of the later layers, which are unusually deep for a hill-side site.

The kiln (Plate A).—As expected, a kiln was found within a few yards of Pit B2, part of which had been dug in 1947. The kiln lay in a pit, its walls about 1 ft. below the level of the natural clay. About three quarters of the structure on the western side had been destroyed by a later rubbish pit, but sufficient remained to show its design to be of the normal updraught type, oval and of greater width (estimated 8 ft.) than usual. Its clay walls were strengthened by broken tile. The stokehole at the south end led into the firing chamber through a rough tiled arch. Below this arch was found a drainage sump, 1 ft. deep, filled with broken pottery, the lowest vessel being a complete mortarium inverted. Much kiln packing and cut tiles were found, but none of the oven floor or roof. One piece of packing bore the impression of the rings and lip of a screw-necked flagon.

Probably the filling of Pit B2, a few yards to the north, included vessels fired in the kiln. The types found most often were small amphorae with a ring base, screw-necked flagons, reeded rim bowls and mortaria. The latter included many bearing the stamp of MELVS.

The working of the kiln can be approximately dated by (upper limit) a fragment of Samian, form 29, of about 70–80 A.D., found below the cobbling at the edge of the stokehole and (lower limit) the filling of Pit 9 containing nothing demonstrably earlier than the period of Hadrian (117–138 A.D.).

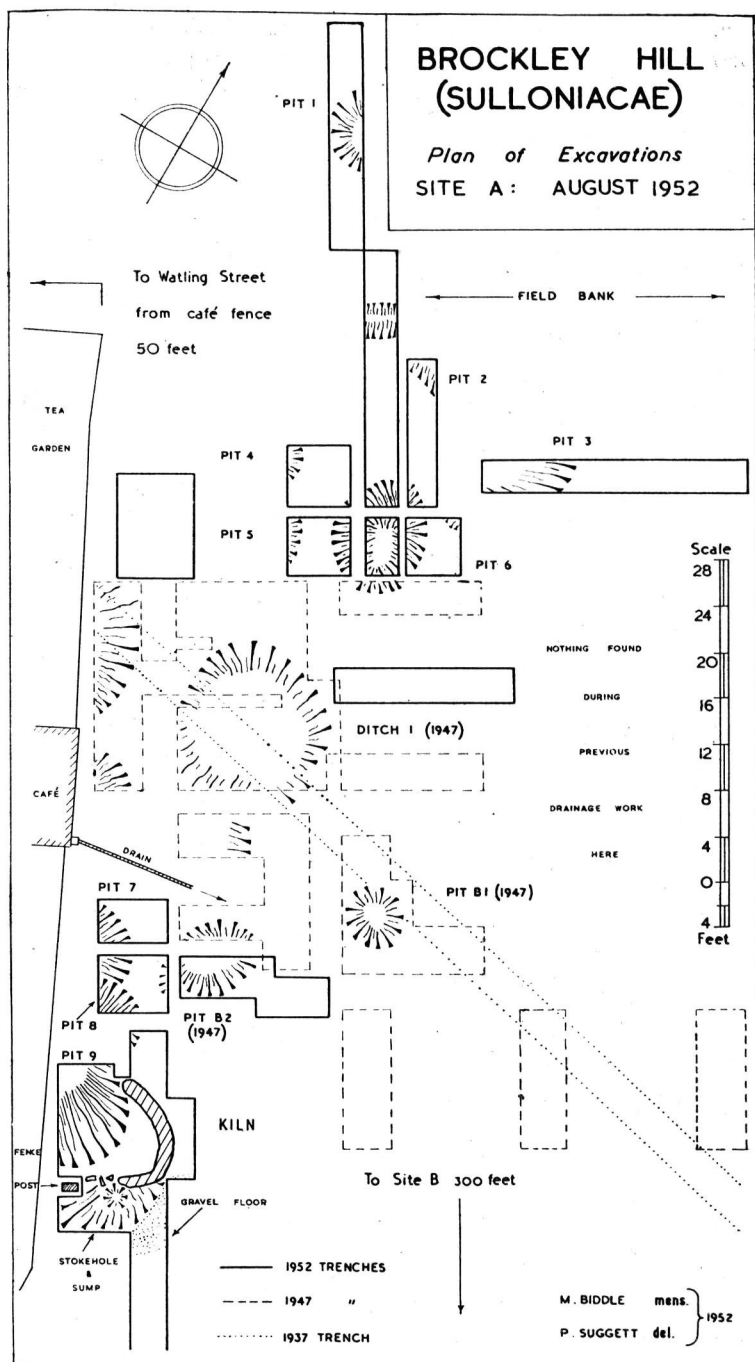


FIG. 2. PLAN OF EXCAVATIONS AT SITE A.

SITE B (Fig. 3).

Three hundred yards to the south of Site A a trench from the hedge boundary of Watling Street eastwards for 50 ft. showed a wide V-shaped ditch parallel to Watling Street and about 20 yards from it. The ground between road and ditch is sunken and suggests a hollow way, but no trace was found of any surface and the thinness of soil on top of the natural clay suggests that the level of the ground had been deliberately lowered to improve the drainage of the modern road.

East of this ditch part of the hillside had been quarried away. The filling of this quarry was fine greyish-white sand with small pockets of soil and charcoal and occasional pieces of kiln ware. Below this lay a metalled surface, some 9 ft. wide, of gravel with pieces of tile, bounded on the west by a small ditch. Possibly we have here one of the main dumps of sand from which the kilns were supplied. The sand would have been brought up Watling Street to this "bay" and drawn off as required for mixing with the raw clay.

The section across the larger ditch shows a modern recutting, marked by the upper filling of dark soil; the sandy filling beneath seems to be the result of silting over a long time and both mediaeval and 4th century pottery were found in it. The smaller ditch contained only kiln ware of the 1st and 2nd centuries. Both the stratigraphy and the pottery point to a 4th century (or later) date for the making of the larger ditch. Further evidence is obviously necessary, but there seems at least a strong likelihood that this ditch represents one of the side ditches of the Roman road at this period.

SITE C (Fig. 3)

Twenty feet west of the modern road a ditch of similar shape and dimensions was found in 1951.⁸ It was then assumed to be late 18th century, since material of that date was found in the lowest layers. Since 1951, however, this ditch has been found to continue at least as far as Site D, a quarter of a mile to the south, where Roman tiles and pottery occurred in some quantity in the bottom silting. It now seems likely, therefore, that the recutting shown in the section is the recutting of a Roman, and not a recent, ditch. The absence of a bank is explained by the fact that the spoil from the original ditch would have been thrown inwards to form the *agger* of the road.

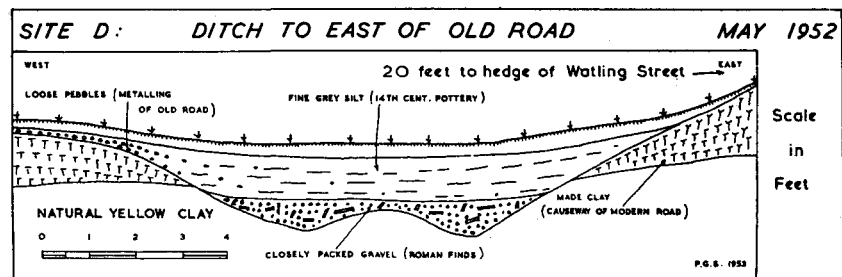
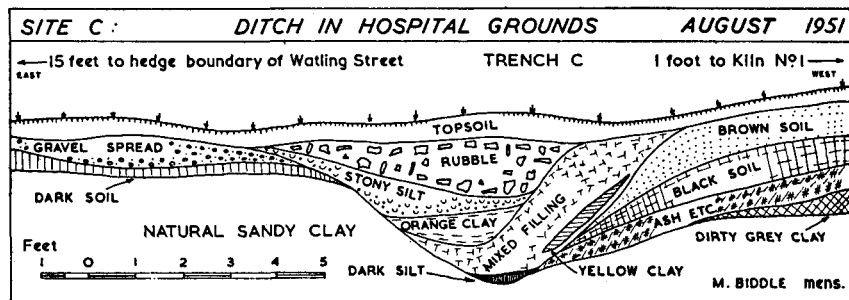
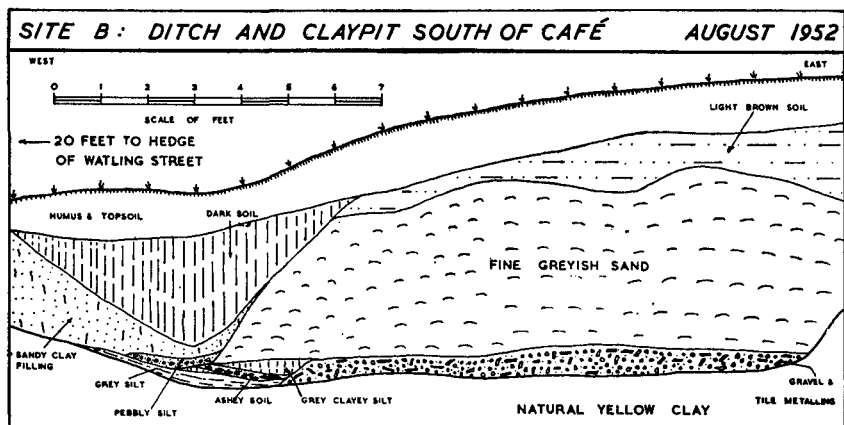


FIG. 3. DITCH SECTIONS.

SITE D (Fig. 3).

This section was cut across an old road which leaves the modern Watling Street at the bottom of the hill and rejoins it at the top. This is locally believed to be the course of Watling Street up Brockley Hill before *circa* 1800 and it was hoped that the Roman road would be found below it.

Excavations showed it to be of very light construction, about 13 ft. wide, with a small ditch on the west and a larger on the east. The road-surface was cambered and rested on a causeway of clay 2 ft. thick at the centre. The metalling had been destroyed except for a thin scatter of gravel.

The large ditch to the east appeared to be the continuation of that already described at Site C. The upper silting provided 14th century pottery, the lower a mass of closely packed gravel containing much Roman tile and some pottery of the 1st and 2nd centuries. The upper silting overlies the tail of the embankment on which the modern road is built. This embankment does not suggest Roman construction and the 14th century pottery may not lie in a primary position.

SITE E (Fig. 4).

The position of the Roman road itself was suggested by two trenches dug across Watling Street in May, 1953, for the purpose of laying pipes. Trench B, at the junction of Watling Street and Wood Lane, disclosed beneath the modern road a compact mass of dirty gravel almost 2 ft. thick and 13½ ft. wide. The remains of an old tree cut down to ground level when the road was widened during the last century marked its western side. The bottom layer of gravel produced nothing, but in Trench A, about 150 yards to the north, fragments of kiln ware and part of an iron casting were recovered from the same level. The road here passes over a pit somewhat resembling those found at Site A. Nothing came from this pit, which continued below the level of the trench, and it would be hazardous to fix any date for the construction of the road from the pottery evidence alone.

The line of this road ditch was picked up in Trenches A and C, but nothing was found in the filling.

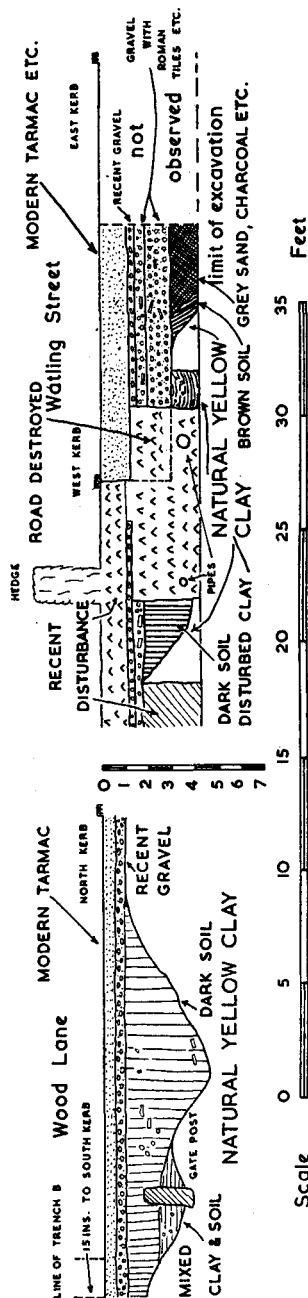
THE COURSE OF WATLING STREET.

The line of the Roman road must be established if questions about the site of Sulloniacae are to be answered. Little is

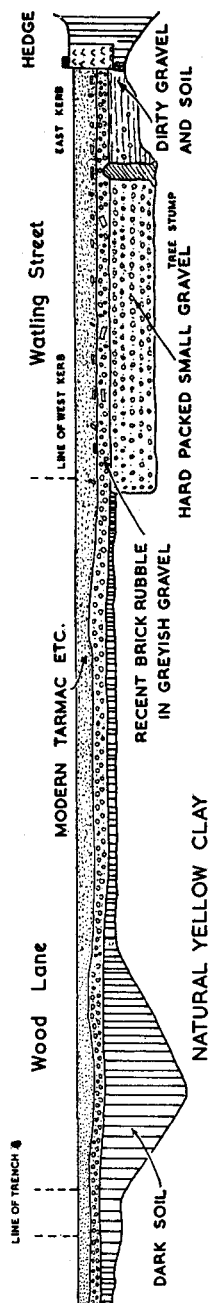
SITE E: PIPE-LAYING TRENCHES ACROSS WATLING STREET AND WOOD LANE

Trench C. Across Wood Lane

Trench A. West side of Watling Street



Trench B. Junction of Wood Lane and Watling Street



G.F. COLE 1953

FIG. 4. SECTIONS ACROSS PIPELAYING TRENCHES.

known about the course and construction of the road between London and St. Albans¹⁰; between Edgware and Radlett its line is believed to be that of the modern road, but this has never been proved.¹¹ The Committee began its investigations in 1950; then and in 1951 trial trenches were dug in fields 272 and 480 at the bottom of the hill. These gave negative results, save in showing that the Roman road must either coincide at this point with the modern Watling Street or be some distance from it.¹² The finding of ancient metalling below the modern road at Site E cannot itself be conclusive: the presence of Roman pottery in the lowest layers does not necessarily imply Roman construction. But the cumulative evidence of the metalling and the side ditches, which are spaced at the usual distance for an important road,¹³ affords good warrant for asserting that this metalling is the worn out remains of one of the most frequented roads in Roman Britain.¹⁴

THE FINDS

(Nos. 1-48 are from Sites A and B; W1-W9 from Sites D and E.)

I. COINS.

1. CRISPINA (wife of Commodus, 180-192 A.D.). AE *as*. *Obv.* (CRISPI)NA A(VGVSTA) bust r. *Rev.* VENVS FELIX type, but no legend visible. S.C., Venus seated 1. holding Victory and sceptre. Cohen 41. Top filling of Pit 5.

2. CONSTANTINE I (307-337 A.D.). AE minim. GLORIA EXERCITVS type with two standards. Mint mark illegible. Cohen 254. Brown soil above kiln.

II. POTTERY.

A. SAMIAN (Fig. 5)

Many small fragments were found in the filling of the pits, all late 1st and early 2nd century. The following pieces are illustrated:

1. Form 37. Poor dull glaze. S pattern below wavy line. Little bud and portion of saltire above. Style of MERCATOR of Lezoux. Domitianic. May, *Silchester Pottery*, plate XXV, No. 7. Top filling of Pit 1.

2. Form 37. Thin ware, good bright glaze. Narrow smooth zone, groove and row of opposed dolphins above slender

bead row. Below, winged cupid in free style decoration. Trajanic. Lezoux. O. & P., *Figure Types*, No. 384. *Roman Fort near Brecon*, p. 156, Fig. 7, No. S94. Top of Pit 7.

3. Form 29. Hard red clay, glossy glaze. Gadroons with bead row above. Two slight grooves at base. May, *Silchester Pottery*, Plate VI B. Vespasianic. Below cobble floor by stokehole.

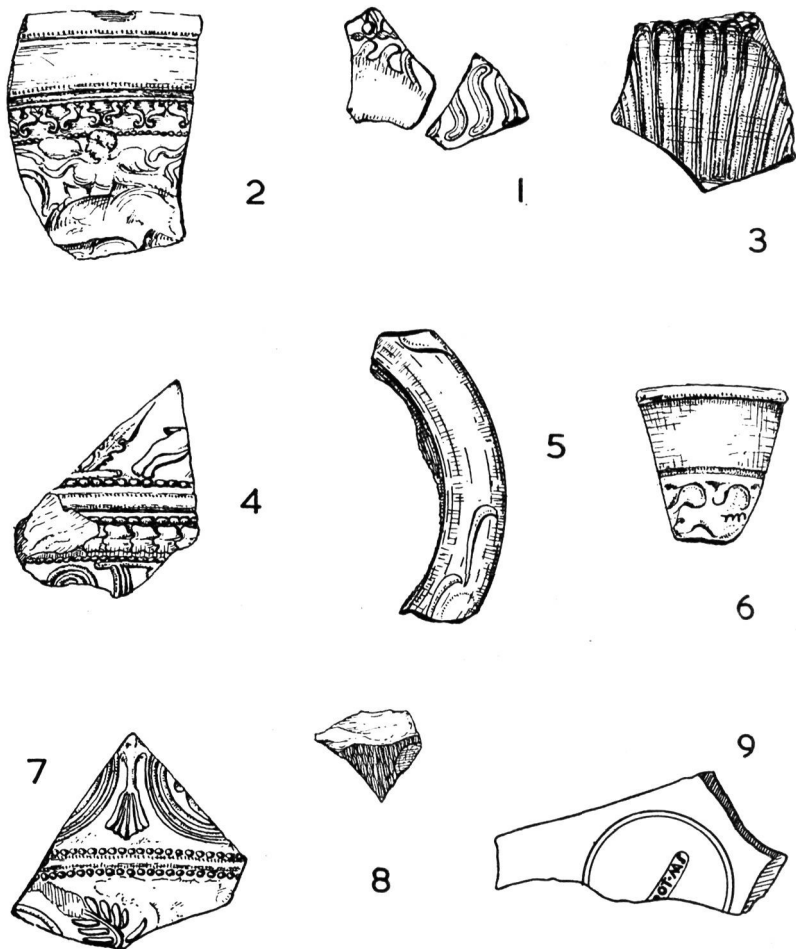


FIG. 5. SAMIAN WARE (SCALE $\frac{1}{2}$).

4. Form 29. Thick ware, good brownish glaze. Upper frieze showing foliated tendril and rear portion of animal (perhaps hare chased by dog). Bead row above and below

moulding. Central decoration of five pointed leaves. Festoon of lower frieze below bead row. Style of MURRANVS of La Graufesenque. O. & P., *Figure Types*, No. 2078. Vespasianic. Lower filling of Pit 8.

5. Form 36. Poor dark surface. Lotus bud decoration. O. & P., Plate LIII, No. 12. Trajan-Hadrian. Kiln debris.

6. Form 64. Orange clay, poor badly flaked glaze. Well defined lip above plain zone, separated by single deep groove from free style decoration (perished). Lezoux. Style of BVTRIO or LIBERTVS. O. & P., Plate XXI, No. 6. Trajan-Hadrian. Pit B2.

7. Form 37. Good brownish glaze. Rouletted decoration. O. & P., Plate LXXV, No. 2. Hadrianic. Pit B2.

8. Form 29. Soft pinkish clay, dull flaked glaze. Semi-circles separated by palmette suspended on cord as tassel. Bead row above and below moulding. Portion of ? seven lobed leaf from lower zone. Flavian. May, *Silchester Pottery*, Plate XI, No. 30. Middle filling of Pit 1.

9. Form 18/31. Portion of base with pronounced central kick. Good brownish glaze. Stamp reading (SAC)ROTĪ. MAS. Oswald, *Stamps on T.S.*, p. 227; *Wroxeter* I, p. 60, No. 105. Domitian-Trajan. Above cobbles by stokehole.

B. COARSE POTTERY (Figs. 6-8)

As in 1947, much coarse ware was found. The descriptions which follow are confined to fresh types; all are kiln ware unless stated otherwise. The series of amphora and flagon necks has been omitted entirely, as representing variants of types already published.

1-18 Mortaria. Some 52 stamped pieces were found, chiefly from the area around the kiln. Excluding illegible stamps, 8 potters are represented. The commonest stamps are MELVS (14 times) and MATVGENVS (10). These products were almost certainly made on the site. The origin of the other pieces is uncertain, but it is worth noting that several were burnt and cracked.

1. ^(A)MTVGEN. No doubt a stamp of Matugenus. The ligature is quite clear. Buff with orange coating. Cp. *Wroxeter* I, Fig. 16, No. 14. Layer 2.

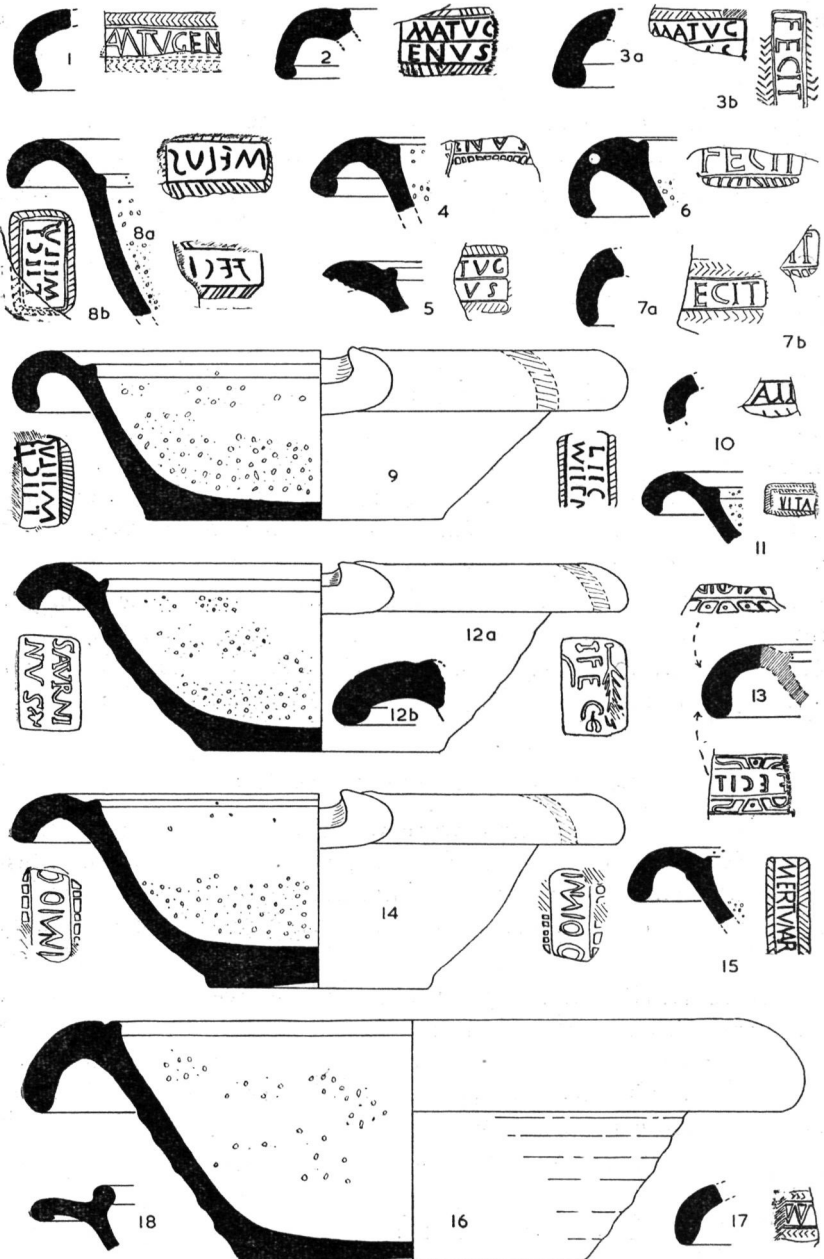


FIG. 6. COARSE POTTERY (SCALE $\frac{1}{4}$).

2. MATVGENVS. Dirty buff, burnt. Cf. *Caerleon, Prysg Field*, Part III, Fig. 58, No. 218; *Holt*, Fig. 61, No. 17; Walters, M2787, etc. Over kiln debris.

3a. Same stamp as (2), different die. Reddish surface, burnt.

3b. FECIT counterstamp. Dirty buff. Both pieces from top of kiln debris.

4. Another die of Matugenus. Yellow buff. Pit 9.

5. Another, in creamy buff. In kiln debris.

6. Bold FECIT counterstamp (probably of Matugenus) in orange buff. Above Pit 7.

7a and 7b. Counterstamp of Matugenus. 7a from Pit 8, 7b from bottom of Pit 2.

8a and 8b. Stamps of MELVS (retro), showing his characteristic raised flange. Cf. *Wroxeter* 1, Fig. 16, No. 9. Examples of both types were found in various fabrics. Pit B2 and surrounding area.

9. A variant of 8b. *Richborough* II, p. 95, No. 11; Walters, M2791. Several examples from Pit B2.

10. . . LLA. (retro) Sandy buff. May, *Silchester Pottery*, Plate LXXXIII, No. 3. Walters, M2827, gives the reading Mialla. Pit 8.

11. VITA. . Possibly a stamp of Vitalis, whose wares have been recorded at Lincoln (*J.R.S.*, XXVII, pp. 233-34) and other sites, chiefly in the north. Three examples from kiln debris.

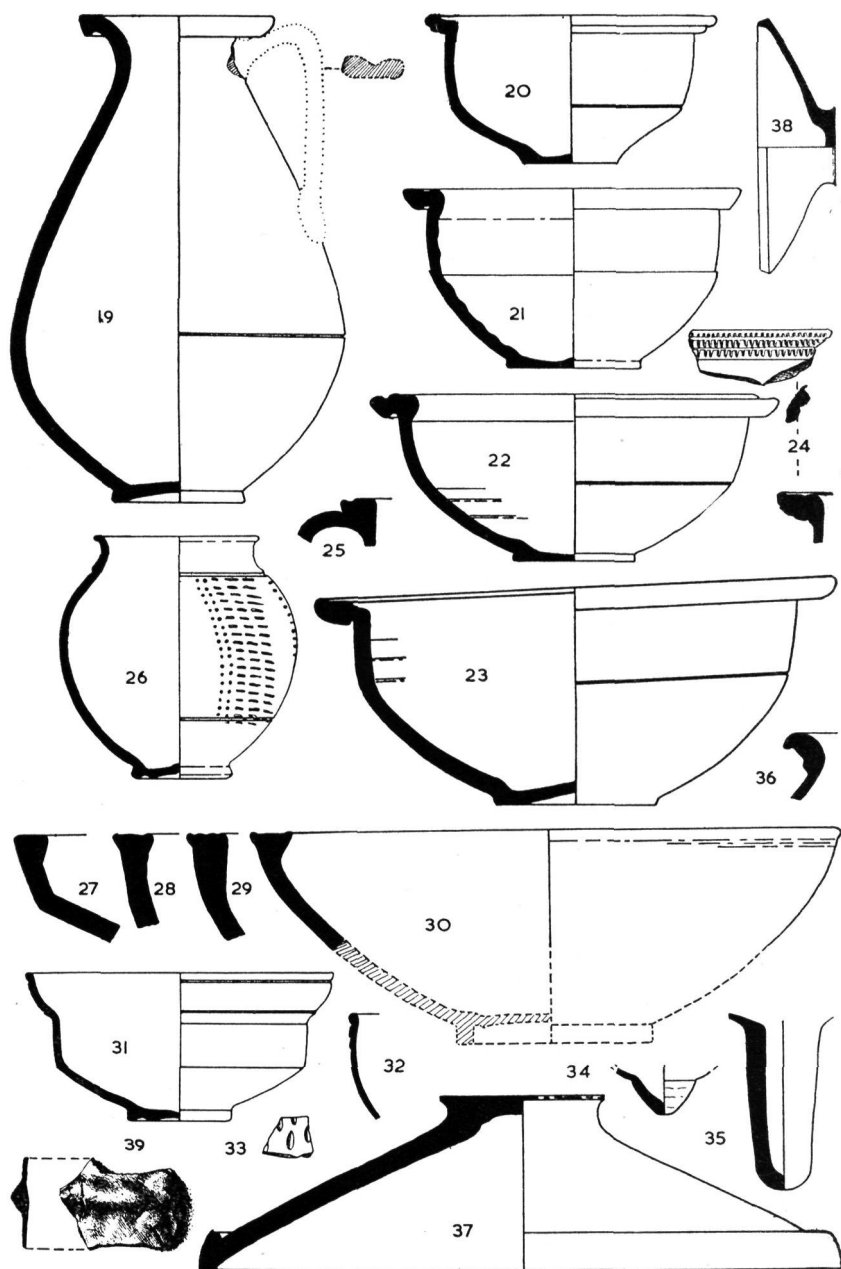
12a. SATVRNINVS FEC. Light buff. Complete vessel from bottom of stokehole sump; Walters, M2803; May, *Silchester Pottery*, Plate LXXXIII, No. 16. 12b, same stamp on heavier, flatter flange. Greyish white. Pit B2.

13. ANDIL FECIT (retro). Two separate fragments, both in buff, from Layer 2 over Pit 6 and upper filling of Pit 7. Figured in *B.M. Guide* (2nd ed.), Fig. 16, No. 1.

14. DOINVI or more probably DOMI (M inverted) for Domitianus. Light buff. Walters, M2829; May, *Colchester Pottery*, Fig. 7, No. 8. Below firing chamber of kiln.

15. MERTVMAR. Orange buff. Pit 9.

16. A large mortarium, spout missing. Perhaps a product of Matugenus. Above Pit 9.

FIG. 7. COARSE POTTERY (SCALE $\frac{1}{4}$).

17. Repeated V stamp. Three examples in sandy buff. Pit 9.

18. Non local type. Prominent bead, flat roll moulded flange. Dated at Verulamium Theatre to the end of the 2nd century (*Arch. LXXXIV*, Fig. 10, No. 10). Smooth whitish surface. In Layer 2 close to Pit 3.

19. Jug. Harsh, sandy red surface. Handle restored from a similar vessel in the Guildhall Museum. Imitates a common metal form. Pit 7.

20-23. Reed-rimmed bowls from Pit 2 and vicinity. All are cracked or distorted. Compare the series (Fig. 5) in the 1947 *Report*.

24. Reeded rim with rouletted decoration on underside. Dark buff with white slip. Topsoil over Pit 6. Cp. 1951 *Report*, Fig. 4, No. C32.

25. Fragment of reed-rimmed bowl with handle. Buff, burnt. Over Pit 9.

26. Poppy beaker. Grey black. Upright neck. Type common at *Verulamium* (Fig. 31, No. 39) during the second quarter of the 2nd century. Pit 7.

27-30. Series of dishes in buff and pink with inturned rims. Not a common type in the south of Britain and certainly not made in any quantity at the kilns. Cf. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 37, Nos. 11 and 20 (Flavian), and for a closer parallel *Caerleon, Jenkin's Field*, p. 65, Fig. 36, No. 129 (Trajan-Hadrian). Area around Pit 6.

31. Carinated bowl with ring base. Derived from the Samian form 29. Thin hard buff ware with lighter slip. These bowls first appear in the Flavian period and continue into the second quarter of the 2nd century. Cf. *Verulamium*, Fig. 31, No. 31 (deposit of 120-160 A.D.). This example is finely made and probably belongs to the turn of the century. Bottom of Pit 6.

32-33. Eggshell ware. Smooth hard white surface. 33 imitates cut glass decoration. Not a local product. Grimes, *Y Cymmrodor*, XLI (1930), pp. 163-4, describes this ware. Both pieces from Pit 8.

34 and 35. Amphora "pips." 34 in drab buff, 35 in yellow buff. 34 is of the globular type of vessel with rounded handles (Group F, *London in Roman Times*, Plate LV, No. 6) common

in the 2nd century; 35 the elongated type with straight handles (Group C or D, *ibid.*, Nos. 2-4), also of late 1st and early 2nd century date. 34 above pit level, 35 from Pit B2.

36. Wide mouthed cooking pot rim. Hard drab ware, burnt. Fine finish. Moulding at base of turn reminiscent, perhaps, of the Belgic butt beaker (*Verulamium*, Fig. 14, Nos. 31a-31d). Pit 6.

37. Large lid (diameter approx. 13 in.). Soft red. Pit B2.

38. Another, neatly made, in same fabric as No. 36. Pit 6.

39. Phallus. Thin hard buff, probably not local. From a vessel of "face vase" type. See May, *Silchester Pottery*, pp. 143-44. Pit 6 top.

40-42, 44. Examples of rough hand-made native pots, derived from Early Iron Age forms. Soft gritty fabric, brownish black surface. Cf. 1950 *Report*, Nos. 45-47. Pit 6 bottom.

43. Wide mouthed Belgic cordoned jar. Thinner, better fired fabric, smoother surface. Cf. 1951 *Report*, Nos. B1-7. Pit 6 bottom.

45. Fragment of bowl of "New Forest" type. Soft orange red, traces of red colour coat. Stamped spiral decoration as at Cowley (*Oxon.* VI (1941), Fig. 5, No. 39). Mid 4th century. Layer 2 over kiln.

46-48. Flanged bowls. Hard grey black. 4th century. 46 from sandy filling of ditch at Site B. 47 and 48 from Layer 2.

W1-W3. Mortaria from pipe trenches along eastern sidewalk of Watling Street (Site E).

W1. FECIT counterstamp of Matugenus (cf. Nos. 7a and 7b above). Sandy buff.

W2. . . LLVS. Smooth creamy buff. Probably a stamp of Sollus. The wide distribution of his stamps is indicated in *Jewry Wall*, pp. 219-20.

W3. FECIT counterstamp in pinkish buff.

W4-W9. Mediaeval pottery from the ditch at Site D.

W4. Rim of cooking pot in hard grey sandy ware. This form occurs at Welham Green (8 miles distant), where it is ascribed to the first half of the 14th century (*Trans. East Herts. Arch. Soc.*, XIII, pp. 39-42, Fig. 2).

W5. Fragment of sagging base, with marked carination at the junction of body and base. Of similar ware to W4 and possibly part of the same vessel.

W6 and W7. Cooking pot rims in hard sandy grey ware. Parallels from Welham Green (*op. cit.*, Fig. 3).

W8. Fragments of shallow bowl with slightly sagging base. Hard buff ware with grey core. Some of the flint grit has weathered out of the surface. ? Late 13th century.

W9. Jug neck with handle springing from simple, slightly out-turned, rim. Hard sandy grey ware. This type of jug occurs at Shefford, Beds. (*Trans. East Herts. Arch. Soc.*, IX, pp. 36-37, Fig. 3, No. 16). 13th or 14th century.

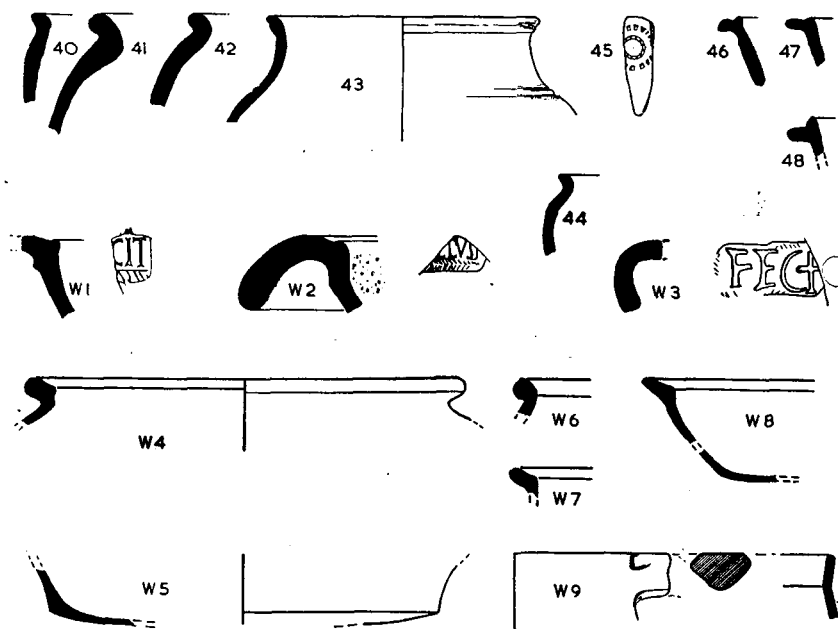


FIG. 8. COARSE POTTERY (SCALE $\frac{1}{4}$).

NOTES

1. Formerly the Sulloniaceae Excavation Committee. Name changed in 1952 as the Committee's activities widened.
 2. Thanks are due to All Souls College, Oxford, the owners of Sites A and B, and to their tenant, Mr. Geoffrey Lear, for leave to excavate; also to Mr. Elvey, proprietor of the café, for his co-operation. Sir Frederick Handley Page kindly loaned a tool chest for the period.
- Space forbids mention of all who helped on the sites. The volunteers deserve the Committee's warmest praise. Mr. F. C. Vickery drew the Samian ware;

Miss Dorothy Bushell identified the Samian stamp. Mr. D. F. Renn drew and described the medieval pottery. Messrs. J. C. Burt and L. A. Probert were again responsible for photography.

The Committee pays tribute to the work of its Chairman, Mr. Grimes, who has given unsparingly of his time and advice, and the writer is grateful for his help with details connected with the Report. Mr. M. Biddle drew a number of the sections and Mr. H. W. Prior prepared Fig. 4.

The finds have been deposited at the Hendon Central Library.

3. Published in the Society's *Transactions*, N.S., X, Part I (1948).
4. *Watling Street, Brockley Hill*, by Mrs. H. E. O'Neil, op. cit., X, Part II (1949).
5. By kind permission of the London County Council, owners of the ground.
6. Especial thanks are owed to the Company's foreman, Mr. Goodgame, who allowed access and gave every facility for examining and photographing the trenches.
7. See *Transactions*, N.S., XI, Part II (1953).
8. *Ibid.*, p. 178.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
10. The best account is given by Vulliamy, *Archæology of Middlesex* (1930), p. 207. For information regarding the Roman road at St. Albans see *Verulamium* (Soc. of Ant. Research Committee's Report No. XI), pp. 63 ff.
11. Pipelaying at Elstree during the early part of 1953 disclosed graved metalling, similar to that found at Site E, about 20 yards south of the cross roads in the High Street beneath the pavement and extending under the "Kettle Sings" café.
12. Close, *The Map of England*, (1932), pp. 125-6, suggests that the double bend at the top of Brockley Hill is the result of a mistake in setting out the road. But it is difficult to see what better line could have been taken to avoid crossing the marshy land lying to the south-west of St. Albans.
13. Conclusion confirmed (August, 1953) by pipelaying at the Canons Park roundabout. Gravel metalling, flanked on the east by a well marked ditch, was found under the modern road. A continuous trench for about a mile along the sidewalk of London Road to the west and Spur Road to the east showed no disturbance at any point.
13. Margary, *Roman Ways in the Weald* (1948), p. 51. The greater size and depth of the ditches at Brockley Hill reflect the exceptional need for drainage on the hill.
14. The width of the road exposed at Site E is a common Roman road measurement. It contrasts strangely with the section alleged to have been found some years ago at Handel's Smithy, Edgware, "24 ft. wide, with a gravel surface resting on a bed of large flint nodules interlocked." But this and the description given in Vulliamy, op. cit., rest on hearsay evidence and may not in fact refer to the road at all.