AN IRON AGE ENCLOSURE ON STAINES MOOR, MIDDLESEX

BY A. E. BROWN

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE POTTERY

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This note is a record of trial excavations carried out during 1963 and 1964 on a site of the Early Iron Age on Staines Moor, Middlesex.

THE SITE

The site was discovered on an air photograph of Staines Moor taken by Fairey Surveys Ltd. on 14th June 1959. At TQ 03257413 the photograph showed a grass mark representing the silted up ditch of an enclosure (Plate A). The eastern portion of the enclosure lay in another field which had just been cropped and the full outline could not be made out, but it was probably sub-rectangular. There was an entrance gap in the south-west side. The internal area of the visible portion of the enclosure was about 500 sq. yards.

The enclosure is in a low-lying position between the rivers Colne and Wyrardisbury, 200 yards from either; both flow into the Thames at Staines, 3000 yards to the south of the site. The subsoil is gravel, capped by about one foot of alluvium of sandy clay.

To the east of the Colne and 600 yards from the site lies the King George VI Reservoir. Since the excavation took place a new reservoir has been built by the Metropolitan Water Board in the area of the Runemede Rifle Range, around TQ 025735, but the site has so far (1971) remained safe from destruction and lies in rough pasture.

In addition to the enclosure the air photograph showed a large number of ditches forming complicated patterns to the north of the site in the area of TQ 034745 and in the vicinity of the site itself. Some of the markings around TQ 034745 can be seen to tie in with existing hedge lines and many correspond with field boundaries shown on a map of Stanwell parish in 1748 preserved in the Middlesex Record Office, but others in this area and around the site could not be explained in this way and belong to a different system of narrow straight-sided fields and field ways arranged in a very regular fashion and unrelated to the existing boundaries.

THE EXCAVATION

The excavation was carried out at weekends during late 1963 and the middle of 1964 at the suggestion of the then Field Officer of the London Museum, Dr. Francis Celoria. Much of the equipment was provided by the Museum and many of the problems of transportation were solved with his help. A debt of gratitude is also due to the volunteers who worked on the site.

The aim of the work was the stripping and excavation of that portion of the enclosure visible on the air photograph. As a preliminary a section was cut through the enclosure ditch and a start was made on the laying out and excavation of a grid of trenches in the interior of the site. However, while this was in progress, the land unexpectedly changed hands and the new owner refused to allow the work to continue. The trenches had to be filled in, and the account offered here is, therefore, a brief record of a very incomplete excavation. The field notes and drawings, together with the finds, have been deposited in the London Museum.

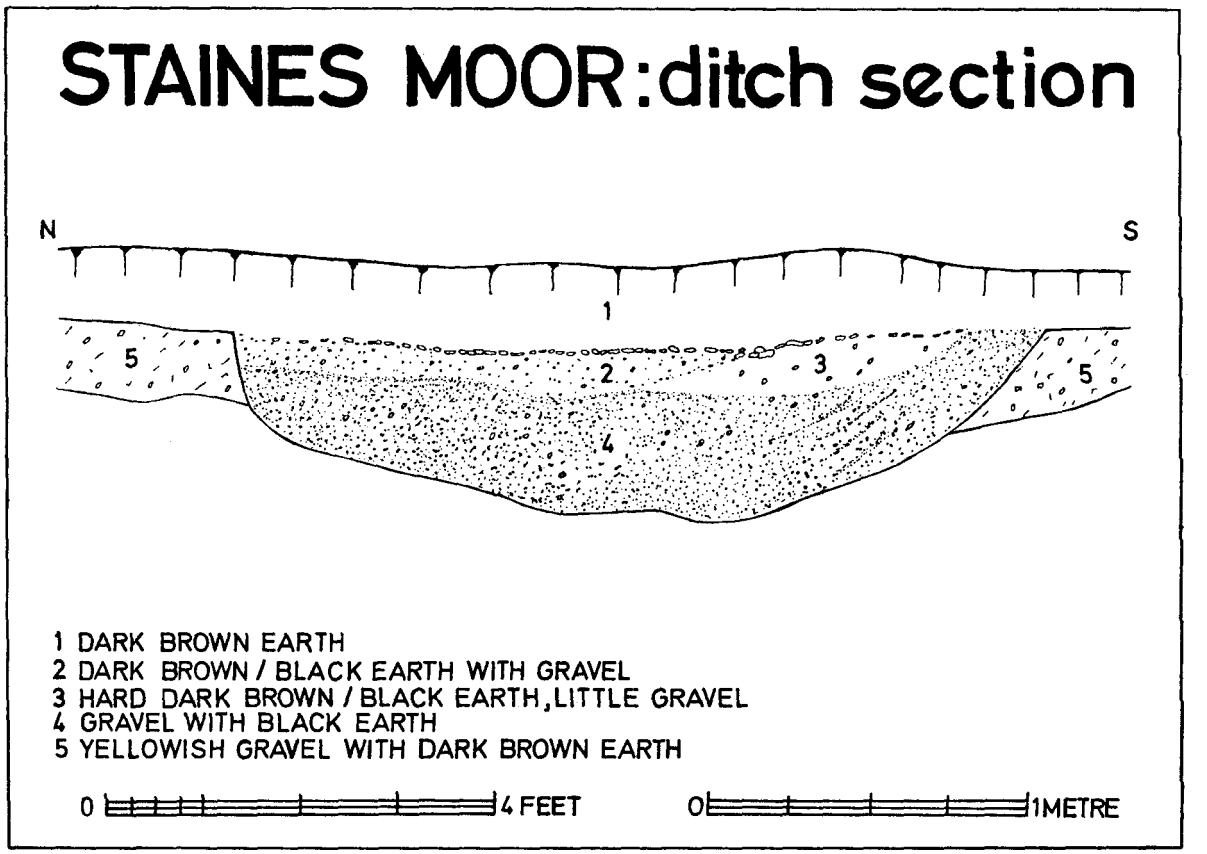

Fig. 1 Ditch section, Staines Moor

1. THE DITCH
The south-west side of the enclosure was sectioned at a point 25 feet from the south-east hedge of the field in which the site was identified. The ditch was U-shaped, 8 feet wide and 2 feet 6 inches deep (Fig. 1). The fill contained burnt flints, flint flakes, pieces of burnt clay, pottery fragments and animal bones.

2. Features within the enclosure. A line of trenches was laid out as a continuation of the line of the ditch section, to serve as a basis for a complete grid. In these trenches the following features were identified:
   (a) 21 feet from the inner edge of the ditch, a pair of more or less oval depressions (Features 1 and 2) filled with dark soft earth. Feature 1 was shallow and 10 inches across; Feature 2 was 1 foot 9 inches deep and 1 foot 6 inches across and contained a piece of unidentifiable bone.
   (b) 12 feet to the north-east of (a) two gullies (Features 3 and 4) running north-west to south-east. Both were filled with dark earth and pebbles. Feature 3 terminated in the trench and was 1 foot 6 inches across and 2 feet deep; it contained some burnt flints. Feature 4 was 3 feet across and 2 feet 4 inches deep; it yielded pottery fragments, many small pieces of burnt clay, some bone fragments, burnt flints and a small flint flake.
   (c) To the north-east of (b) the end of a gully or small oval pit (Feature 5). This contained black earth and gravel together with some burnt clay and burnt flints. To the north-east of this was an extensive spread of hard dark earth and gravel (Feature 6). A section across it showed it to be cut 5 inches into the gravel subsoil at the point excavated. It produced burnt clay, burnt flints, and pottery fragments.

A start was also made on the excavation of the entrance and the outline of the butt of the ditch on the north side of this was exposed but not excavated. Pottery and burnt clay was found in the topsoil and on the surface of the ground in the area of this feature.

FINDS

POTTERY

BY T. C. CHAMPION

The 96 sherds from Staines Moor were all small, and very few joins were possible. Many were badly abraded at the edges, and on most the surfaces had suffered from the gravel in which they had been buried. Only seven sherds showed distinctive features, four bases and three rims; the remainder were all body sherds with no angles and no decoration. No profiles were restorable.

Five different groups of fabrics were represented, with variations between individual sherds in each group:

A Dark greyish-brown surfaces, grey to black in the core, containing very much medium-sized sharply-angled flint gritting which protrudes through both exterior and interior surfaces.

B Surfaces orange-brown and black, core brown to black containing much tempering, both of flint which is mostly small but can be up to 8 mm in length, and also of crushed pottery. The surface is rough and in some cases very pitted.

C Lightish grey surfaces with darker grey core, containing small amounts of very fine flint grits and occasional finely crushed pottery fragments. Fabric very sandy, giving surfaces a slightly gritty feel.

D Similar to C in colour of core and in tempering, but of finer clay and much less sandy. External surface smoother than C, and grey to greyish-white in colour.

E Similar to B, but finer and darker. Moderate amount of tempering, of finely ground flint and pottery.

Of these five groups, A was clearly distinct from the others, while D and E seemed to be finer versions of C and B respectively. The distribution of the groups is shown in the table.

The seven sherds with distinctive features are shown in Fig. 2.

1. From Feature 4. Fabric E. Thick base well smoothed on the interior.
2. Topsoil. Fabric B. Sherd from the bottom of the body, but not actually the base. From the way the fracture has occurred, it is probable that the vessel was made by applying the wall to the outside edge of a clay disc forming the base.
3. Topsoil. Fabric B. Small fragment of worn base. Diameter indeterminable.
4. Topsoil. Fabric B. Very badly abraded fragment of a base of indeterminable diameter.

5 and 6. Topsoil. Fabric C. Two small fragments of rim. Possibly from the same pot despite variations in precise form.

7. Topsoil. Fabric B. Two small abraded joining fragments of rim of a vessel of unknown diameter. The top is decorated with one complete circular impression and traces of a second. These are made not with the finger, but with the end of a bone or stick.

The interpretation of these sherds is made difficult by the almost total lack of diagnostic features and of local groups for comparison. The commonly-used criteria of form and decoration are of little use, since there are no profiles and only a single decorated fragment, while the surviving rims and bases are of the most generalised types. On the evidence of the fabric the group can be assigned to the Iron Age, and to the earlier rather than the later part of it, because of the absence of the smoother, dark-coloured fabrics so common in the later phases of the Iron Age, and the presence of impressed ornament, which seems to be characteristic solely of the earlier phases. Further precision is impossible until more and better pottery groups are available for the area.

Decoration on the flattened top of the rim is less common in Iron Age pottery than that on the vertical surfaces of shoulder, neck or rim, and it appears to be predominantly a south-eastern feature. Cabling in such a position occurs not infrequently, *e.g.* at West Harling (Clark and Fell, 1953, Fig. 12, Nos. 22, 29, 30 and Fig. 13, Nos. 33–36); Leigh Hill,

Cobham (Lowther, 1945, Fig. 4, B1) and Abington Pigotts (Fox, 1924, Fig. 2A), but circular impressions are harder to parallel. Among published examples are those from West Harling (Clark and Fell, 1953, Fig. 12, No. 18) and Danbury (Dunning, 1934, Fig. 1, No. 1), and there are unpublished sherds with similar decoration from Minnis Bay, Birchington, Kent, and in Prittlewell Priory Museum, Southend-on-Sea.

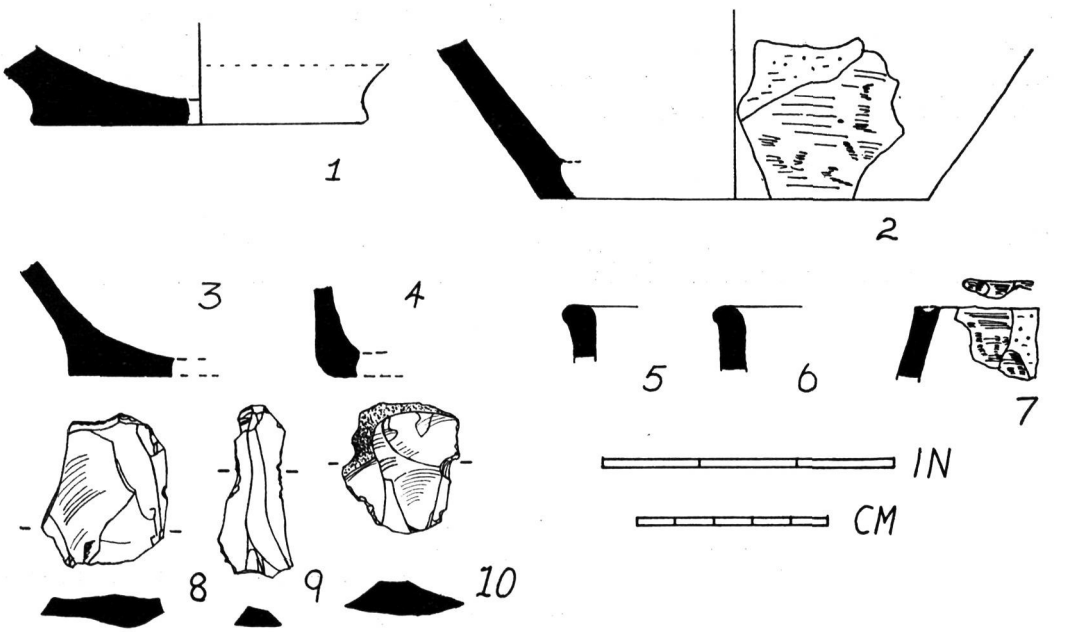

Fig. 2
Pottery and flints, Staines Moor (½)

TABLE TO SHOW DISTRIBUTION OF POTTERY BY FABRIC GROUPS

Location	A	B	C	D	E
Topsoil	1	34	8	–	–
Ditch Layer 4	–	1	–	1	–
Feature 4	–	5	–	–	2
Feature 6	1	33	2	–	–
Area of entrance	–	8	–	–	–
	2	81	10	1	2

BURNT CLAY

A considerable quantity of small pieces of soft reddish burnt clay was found, either in the topsoil or in the features noted above. This could have come from a variety of sources and, for example, represent daub, or material from ovens.

FLINT

Some 70 flint flakes turned up in the excavation, mostly from the topsoil. For the most part they were simple flakes struck from gravel nodules. The presence of flints on an Iron Age site need cause no surprise; for other examples see Staple Howe (Brewster, 1963, p. 135) and Grimthorpe (Stead, 1968, p. 165). Three flints are illustrated in Fig. 2:

8. Crude scraper of coarse flint patinated yellow.
9. Thin flake with some retouch along the edges.
10. Rough scraper, patinated cloudy blue but re-worked along one edge to show brown flint.

A quantity of burnt flints was also recovered from the topsoil and from some of the features. These are common on Iron Age sites and are the result of cooking or the parching of spelt before threshing (Helback, 1952, pp. 232–3).

BONE

Few bone fragments were recovered; one tooth each of horse and cow from Layer 4 of the ditch and a few unidentifiable fragments from Features 2 and 4 and the topsoil.

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