

EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS OF A BRONZE AGE CEMETERY AND ROMAN SITE IN AVENUE GARDENS, ACTON, MIDDLESEX, 1882 AND 1981–85

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SUMMARY

Short programmes of excavation and observation carried out on two sites in Avenue Gardens, Acton between 1981 and 1985 were prompted by the discovery of Bronze Age cremation urns during the late 19th-century development of the area. Excavation of three trenches at 51 Avenue Gardens in 1981, and later site watching during redevelopment, located four phases of truncated features dating from the later prehistoric to the post-medieval periods. Two phases of hitherto unsuspected Roman activity, comprising a small series of ditches and pits, were dated to the early/mid 2nd and late 3rd–4th centuries AD respectively. A notable find from the earlier Roman phase was a virtually complete decorated Samian bowl. Subsequent observation of builder's trenches at the rear of 36 Avenue Gardens in 1985 recovered a substantial portion of a Bronze Age bucket urn. This discovery, together with the examination of building records, and of contemporary newspaper accounts relating to the original finds, has provided an opportunity to re-assess the cemetery. All finds and site records are currently held by the Museum of London.

INTRODUCTION

Late 19th-century speculative development of part of the Mill Hill Park Estate, Acton, resulted in the discovery, in July–August 1882, of at least

seven Bronze Age urns during digging for house foundations, most probably in the area centred round numbers 34 and 36 Avenue Gardens (*c.* TQ 198 797) (Anon 1883; Abercromby 1912, II, nos 470–470c; Barrett 1973, 116–8; see also Appendix below). The findspot lay five hundred metres south of the centre of Acton, a medieval settlement situated on the Uxbridge Road, the main London–Oxford highway.

Almost a century later, a proposal was made to the London Borough of Ealing to redevelop nos 45 and 49–51 Avenue Gardens, 50 metres or so to the south of the original finds. This resulted in a ten-day excavation carried out at TQ 1986 7967 in May 1981 by staff of the Museum of London's then Greater London Archaeology Department (subsequently DGLA, now MOLAS), together with members of the voluntary West London Archaeological Field Group. This revealed a small series of truncated features of predominantly Roman date cutting into natural sands and gravels.

Subsequently, the erection of a two-storey rear extension to no 36 Avenue Gardens provided an opportunity to examine an area thought to lie immediately adjacent to the 1882 finds, at TQ 1983 7971, and a watching brief was undertaken by Museum staff in May 1985. This resulted in the recovery of a further disturbed Bronze Age

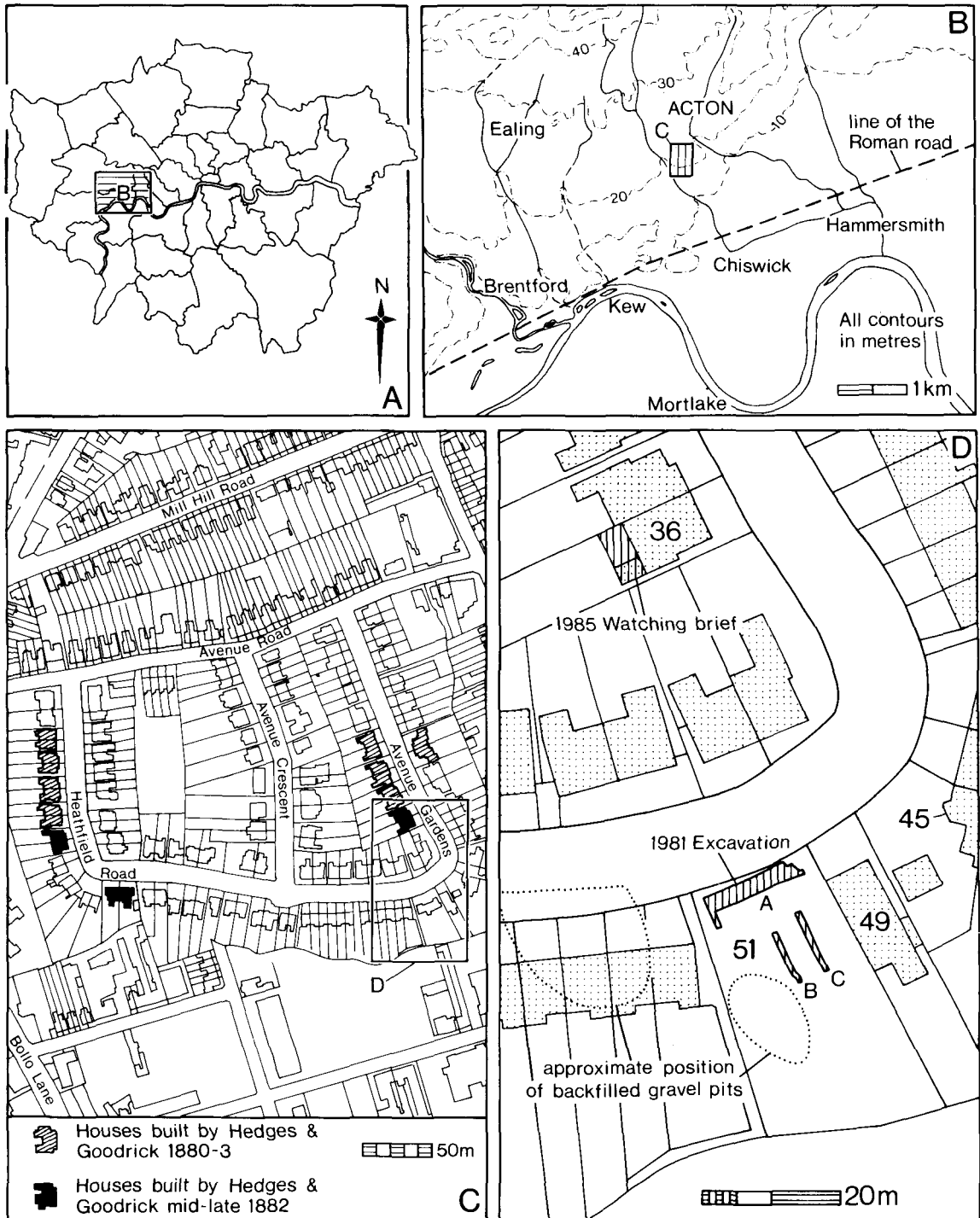


Fig 1. Site location (see Appendix for explanation of Fig 1C).

urn from the upper fill of a feature located in the side of a foundation trench.

GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

That part of the Mill Hill Park Estate comprising Avenue Road, Heathfield Road, Avenue Crescent and Avenue Gardens, occupies a promontory of Lynch Hill Gravel (Gibbard 1985, 37–8) overlooking the great loop of the Thames which runs south-eastwards from Kew to Mortlake and thence north-eastward back to Hammersmith (Fig 1 B). The locality is an elevated one, though the terrace edge itself is masked by a Head deposit which has been mapped immediately to the south and east of the 1981 excavation (Berry & Rollin 1981), beyond which the land slopes quite steeply down onto the Kempton Park or Upper Flood Plain Gravel (Gibbard 1985, 64–5). Undulating clay-loams or ‘brickearths’ (Gibbard’s ‘Langley Silt Complex’ (1985, 57–62)) mantle large areas of the terrace gravels in the vicinity, though they were not encountered on either site described here.

Bounded by the 20m contour, the promontory occupied by the Mill Hill Park Estate was originally flanked to the east and west by two small streams, which flowed into the Thames at Chiswick and Hammersmith (Barton 1962) (Fig 1 B). To the west the Bollo, Bollar or Boller Brook followed the line now taken by Bollo Lane to Turnham Green (Saunders & Purkis 1826); to the east, a branch of the Stamford Brook, known locally as The Warple (Barton 1962, 39), rose in North Acton, and flowed south-south-west down the west side of Horn Lane, and past the eastern flank of the promontory, before turning east and then south-east towards the Thames. No trace of either stream now remains on the surface.

Although not mapped by Jarvis *et al* (1983), interpolation of the soils of the district from other, less built up areas (as Macphail & Scaife 1987, 31–5) points to a cover of typical argillic brown earths, comprising well drained coarse loamy or sandy soils, often affected by groundwater. Elsewhere such soils are generally used for cereals, field vegetables, horticultural crops and some short term grass. Documentary sources (quoted in Gibbs 1939, 264, 266–7 & 271) indicate that the locality was given over to meadow in the early 13th century (John Mills

pers comm), and to meadow and pasture at the end of the 18th century (Milne 1800).

51 AVENUE GARDENS: 1981 EXCAVATIONS

Three trenches, designated A–C, were excavated using a JCB wheeled digger-loader, and positioned as close to the 1882 finds as possible (Fig 1 D) so as to coincide with the footings of the proposed development. Trench A measured 15m × 3m and was laid out parallel to the road in what had been the front garden of no 51 Avenue Gardens. Trenches B and C measured 8m × 1m and 9m × 1m respectively, and were laid out to the south of and at right angles to Trench A (Fig 2).

Following the cutting of a small sondage midway along Trench A, some 0.70–0.90m of topsoil and subsoil were removed by machine to a level just above the undisturbed natural, at which point hand excavation commenced. This was hampered by local variations in the drift geology across Trench A, and by modern disturbances in Trenches B and C, but revealed a series of truncated features cutting into the natural sands and gravels at the edge of the Lynch Hill Terrace (Plate 1).



Plate 1. 51 Avenue Gardens: view east along Trench A showing the line of the late Roman ditch [5] before excavation; the machine-cut sondage is visible against the southern section (compare with Plate 3). Scale 5 × 0.10m. Photograph: Museum of London.

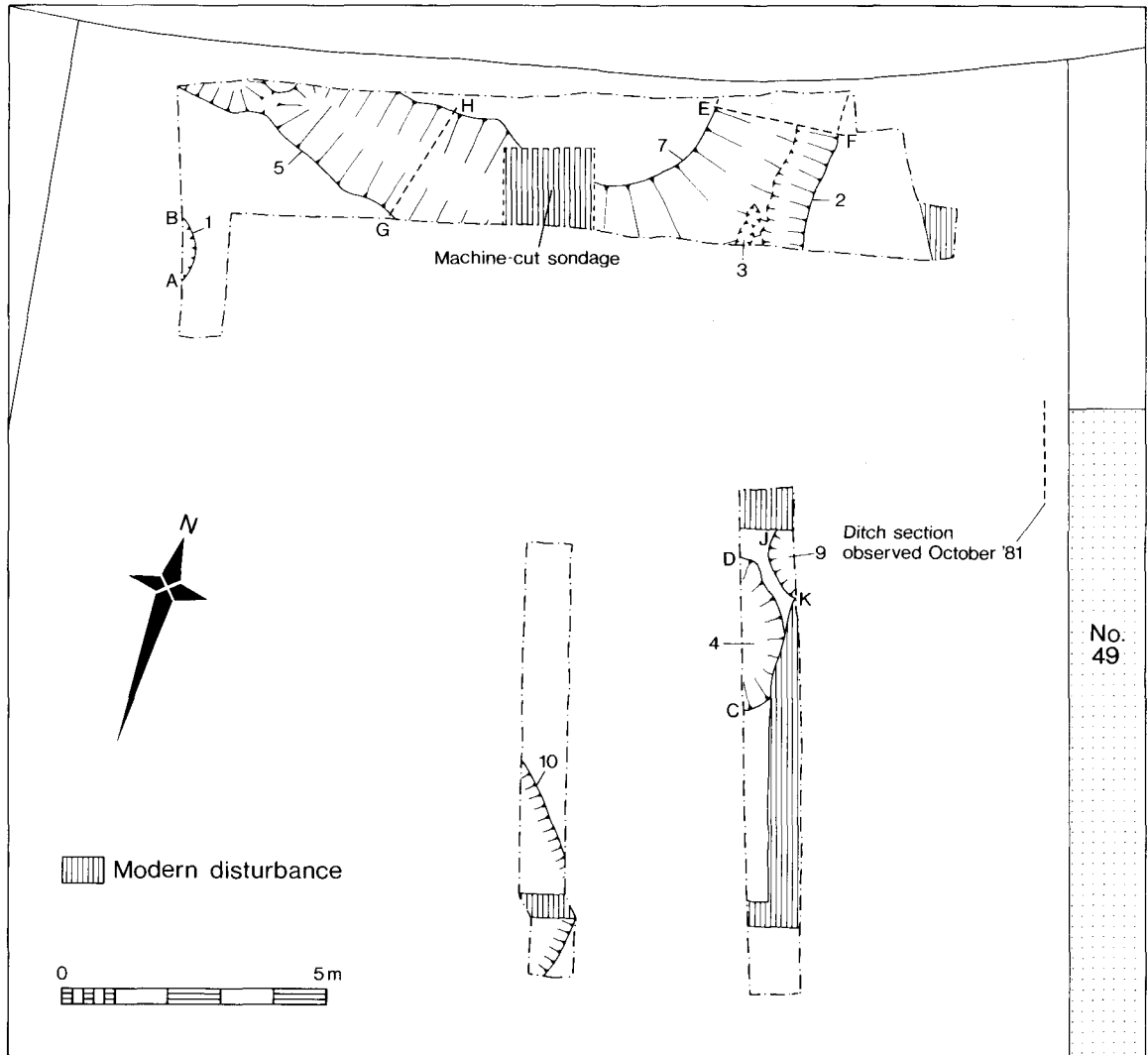


Fig 2. 51 Avenue Gardens: site plan.

Excavated contexts (summarised in Table 1) included lengths of three ditches and a probable pit in Trench A, part of what may have been a large ditch or scoop in Trench B and two pits in Trench C. Four discrete phases of activity could be identified: Phase I, late prehistoric; Phase II, early/mid 2nd century AD; Phase III, late 3rd/4th century AD and Phase IV, post-medieval.

Phase I, Prehistoric

Residual finds of struck flint and pottery aside, only one feature could be tentatively assigned to

the prehistoric period. This comprised part of a shallow pit or scoop, context [1], which was located against the N-S section at the western end of Trench A (Fig 2).

Measuring *c.* 1.40m NS by 0.25m EW, the feature survived to a depth of some 0.40m at its gently-shelving northern edge, but only 0.26m at its steeper southern edge—the discrepancy being due to the natural ground slope (Fig 3, section AB). It was filled with a light grey gravelly soil, containing a few pieces of burnt flint and one struck flint (Fig 4, no 10). The main fill graded imperceptibly upwards into a much looser moist grey gravel in a sandy matrix, which may

Table 1. Excavated contexts

Trench	Context	Phase	Description	Date
A	[1]	I	Shallow pit or scoop	?later prehistoric
A	[2]	II	Ditch	early/mid 2nd century
A	[3]	II	Ditch	early/mid 2nd century
C	[4]	II	Shallow pit or scoop	?early/mid 2nd century
A	[5]/[7]	III	Ditch	late 3rd/4th century
A	[6]/[8]	III	Upper fill of [5]/[7]	mid/late 4th century
C	[9]	III	Pit	3rd century
B	[10]	IV	Quarry pit	post-medieval
A-C	[11]	-	Old ploughsoil	-
A-C	[12]	-	Topsoil	-

represent a plough disturbed horizon, and which was in turn sealed by layers of subsoil [11] and topsoil [12].

Phase II, early Roman

A small N-S ditch, context [2], and the butt end of a second small parallel ditch, context [3], both located in Trench A, could be attributed to the earlier of two phases of Roman activity on the site (Fig 2). Both features had been cut into a localised patch of soft green-brown sand, and had been truncated on their western sides by the subsequent digging of a large ditch, context [5]/[7], on the same alignment (Plate 2).

Ditch [2] was traced across the full width of the trench and had a generally well-defined, flat-bottomed, V-shaped profile. It had survived to a depth of 0.35m and was 0.75m wide, although its width would have been closer to 1m but for the digging of the large ditch on its western lip (Fig 3, section E-F; Plate 2). Its fill comprised a dirty grey-black sand, containing a few small pebbles. Finds included several pieces of struck and burnt flint, a few abraded sherds of prehistoric and Roman pottery and Roman tile, and most of a decorated samian bowl of Drag form 30 dated to between *c.* AD 110-125 (Fig 6; Plate 4). Complete save for a small sherd and a few chips missing from the rim, this appeared to have been set upright towards the base of the ditch, and may have been broken during the subsequent digging of the large Phase III ditch [5]/[7] adjacent.

The butt end of a second flat-bottomed, V-profile ditch, context [3], lay immediately to the west of and parallel to ditch [2]. At the point where it ran into the section, it was 0.20m deep and 0.25-0.30m wide. It contained no finds, and

is attributed to this phase on the basis of similarity of profile and fill, a dirty grey-black sand, to that of ditch [2] adjacent.

One further poorly-dated feature may also belong to this phase of activity. This comprised a large, shallow pit or scoop with gently shelving sides, context [4], which was located at the northern end of Trench C (Fig 2). It had surviving measurements of 2.95m N-S, 0.85m E-W, and was 0.50m deep. Its lower fill comprised a compact, moist grey gravel, which graded upwards into a looser moist grey gravel (Fig 3, section CD). Finds included a few small sherds of Roman and residual prehistoric pottery, and some scraps of animal bone.

Phase III, late Roman

A single pit, context [9], located at the north end of Trench C, and two stretches of the same wide, shallow, right-angled ditch, contexts [5] and [7], located either side of the machine-dug sondage in Trench A, can be attributed to this phase (Fig 2).

Part of a single pit, context [9], located to the south of ditch [5]/[7], was identified at the northern end of Trench C (Fig 2). It appeared to be roughly circular in shape, with gently sloping sides, and had been cut through by modern wall foundations at its northern edge. Its fill comprised a loose, moist grey gravel, and contained a number of large, unweathered sherds of Roman pottery, including part of a cordoned bowl of South Essex origin of 3rd century date (Fig 7, no 14), and some scraps of animal bone (Fig 3, section JK). This feature may be the earliest of the Phase III contexts.

Ditch [5] ran E-W along the trench west of the sondage, and had been dug into the natural

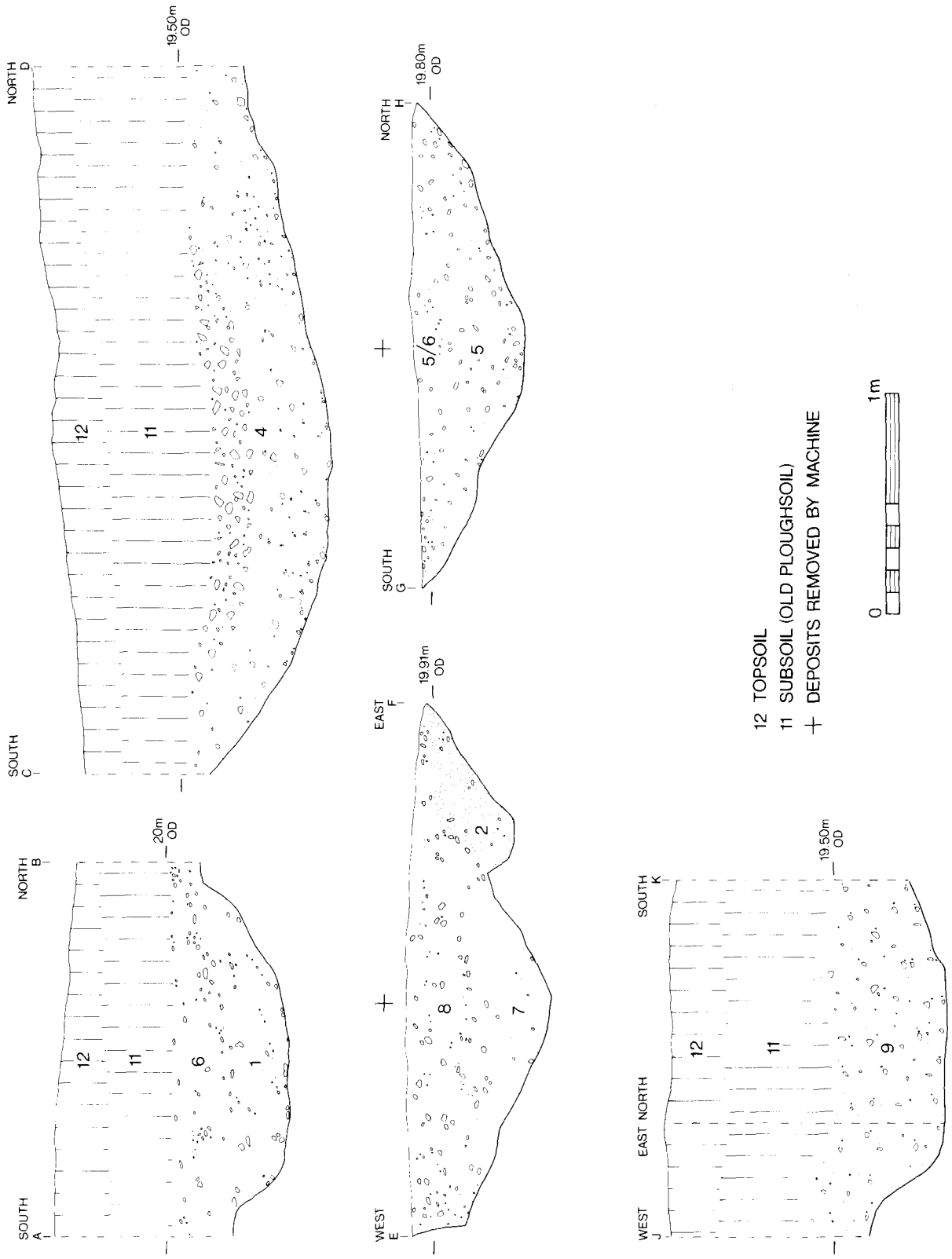


Fig 3. 51 Avenue Gardens: sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H and J-K.



Plate 2. 51 Avenue Gardens: north section of Trench A showing phase II ditch [2] on the right, cut by the large phase III ditch [7] (numbered [10] in the photograph). See also Fig 3, section E-F. Scale $5 \times 0.10\text{m}$. Photograph: Museum of London.

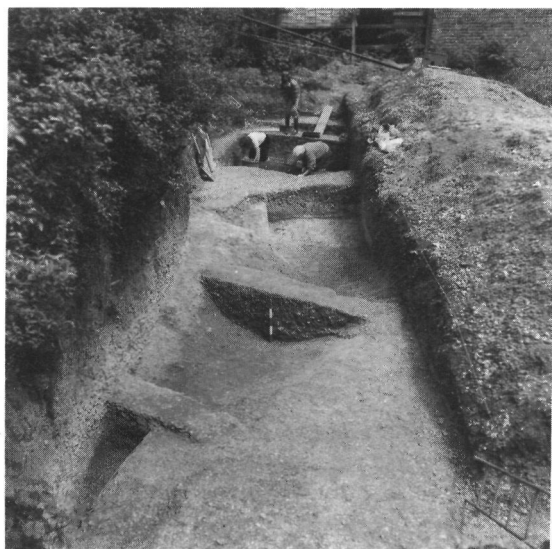


Plate 3. 51 Avenue Gardens: view east along Trench A following excavation of late Roman ditch [5]. Compare with Plate 1. Scale $5 \times 0.10\text{m}$. Photograph: Museum of London.

terrace gravel (Plate 3). It had a rounded, shallow V-profile 2.20m wide and a 'beaded' floor which varied in depth from 0.15m at the western end of the trench to 0.50m further east. Its fill comprised a compact fine grey gravel, although there were several thin lenses of dirty grey-black sand up to 0.10m thick at its base (Fig 3, section

GH). These coincided with areas where the ditch had broached spits of natural sand. Finds included a number of sherds of Alice Holt/Farnham, Oxfordshire and Nene Valley wares of late 3rd/early 4th century date (Fig 7, nos 1-11), fragments of tile, animal bone and burnt flint, together with residual prehistoric pottery and struck flint.

A layer of loose moist grey gravel, context [6], which was present across much of the western end of Trench A beneath the topsoil [12] and subsoil [11], was taken to represent the disturbed uppermost surviving fill of ditch [5] in this area. It spread as far south as the shallow pit or scoop [4], and can be equated with context [8] east of the sondage (see below). A sherd of Porchester 'D' Ware dates the context to the mid/late 4th century.

Ditch [5] continued east of the sondage, where it was dug into a much sandier natural, and re-designated [7]. Here it turned to the north and ran under the northern section, at which point it was 2.40m wide and 0.65m deep, and contained two clearly-defined layers of fill (Fig 3, section EF; Plate 2). The lower fill comprised a mottled grey-black sand containing a large number of gravel pebbles. Finds were similar to those from [5]. The upper fill, designated [8], comprised a mottled grey-brown and very compacted gravel, and was recorded across much of the southern half of the trench east of the sondage. Finds included sherds of late Alice Holt/Farnham wares, a small copper alloy/?base gold finger ring (Fig 8), and an abraded sherd of vegetable-tempered Saxon pottery. Context [8] can be equated with context [6] west of the sondage (see above).

Phase IV, post-medieval

A single large feature located in the south of Trench B can be attributed to this phase.

The feature had gently shelving sides at its northern edge, and was dug into a compact grey-brown natural gravel. Its dimensions were impossible to gauge in the limited area available, although it was at least 0.50m deep at the southernmost end of the trench. Its fill comprised a fine, friable brown loam and contained sherds of post-medieval pottery, animal bone, clay pipe, burnt flint and residual pieces of struck flint and sherds of prehistoric and Roman pottery.

**45 AND 49-51 AVENUE GARDENS:
WATCHING BRIEFS 1981 AND 1983**

Following the completion of the excavation, two periods of site watching were carried out later in 1981 and again in 1983, during the two-stage redevelopment of the site. Neither operation revealed much in the way of further information, beyond suggesting that the southern and eastern areas downslope of the excavation had been heavily disturbed in the post-medieval period.

However, digging of foundation trenches approximately four metres south-east of the eastern end of Trench A in October 1981, located a section of rounded, shallow V-profile E-W ditch c. 1.80m wide and at least 0.35m deep (Fig 2). Its fill comprised a compact grey gravel, though no finds were recovered. Further examination of foundation trenches dug across the projected alignment further east in 1983 failed to reveal traces of this or any other features.

THE 1981 FINDS

The bulk of the finds were recovered from the Roman contexts, and comprised small groups of pottery (including a number of residual prehistoric sherds) and a virtually complete decorated samian bowl, building material and several iron and copper alloy objects. Struck and burnt flint were found in nearly all contexts.

Struck flint

Eighty two pieces of struck flint were recovered during the 1981 excavation, of which all but one—that from pit [1]—came from residual contexts or were unstratified.

The raw material appears to have been won from the local terrace gravels. With the exception of one flake of puddingstone it is all of flint, and ranges in colour from smokey-brown through olive to a fine amber—the latter seemingly mainly reserved for blades and retouched pieces. The number of corticated pieces (53 out of 82) presumably reflects the small size of the parent nodules from which they were detached.

The collection can be classified as follows:

Flakes/spalls	34	Miscellaneous waste	19
Blades	10	Snapped blades/ blade segments	10
Core fragments	2		

Core trimming flake	1	Core tablet	1
Microlith	1	Utilised flakes	3
		Scraper	1

Apart from two worn and patinated flakes of Palaeolithic aspect (Fig 4, no 1) and several re-worked thermal pieces, the material is sharp and unpatinated, and referable to both Mesolithic and Neolithic/Bronze Age knapping practices.

Only two regular tools are present, an obliquely-backed microlithic point of characteristic earlier Mesolithic type (Fig 4, no 2), and a convex scraper (Fig 4, no 8), though several flakes show signs of utilisation along their lateral edges (*eg* Fig 4, no 9). Parallel-sided blades and blade-segments which, in view of the presence of the microlith can probably also be regarded as Mesolithic, form a small but significant proportion of the collection (Fig 4, nos 3-5), and can be contrasted with a number of crude, squat flakes, spalls and smashed pieces of presumptively later prehistoric date. The single stratified piece from context [1], a thermal fragment worked into a crude denticulate (Fig 4, no 10), forms part of this latter group.

Cores are absent, though two core fragments, one core tablet (Fig 4, no 6), a single trimming flake (Fig 4, no 7), three plunging blades (*eg* Fig 4, no 4) and the two refitting blades (Fig 4, no 3) suggest that flint was being knapped close to the terrace edge, most probably during the Mesolithic.

Prehistoric pottery

One hundred and forty six sherds of hand-made pottery weighing 1425g were recovered from all contexts on the site. As with the bulk of the struck flint, the sherds were residual within later contexts or were unstratified.

A majority of the sherds are small, abraded and undiagnostic as to form, though nine rims and a few shoulder fragments, several with finger nail and finger tip impressions, are present. Tempering agents, in descending order of frequency, include crushed burnt flint, sand, grog, organics and chalk/limestone. Most of the material is flint-tempered and likely to belong to the first half of the first millennium BC (*eg* Fig 5, nos 1-8). A few sherds with sand or grog temper probably date to the latter part of the Iron Age (*eg* Fig 5, no 9).

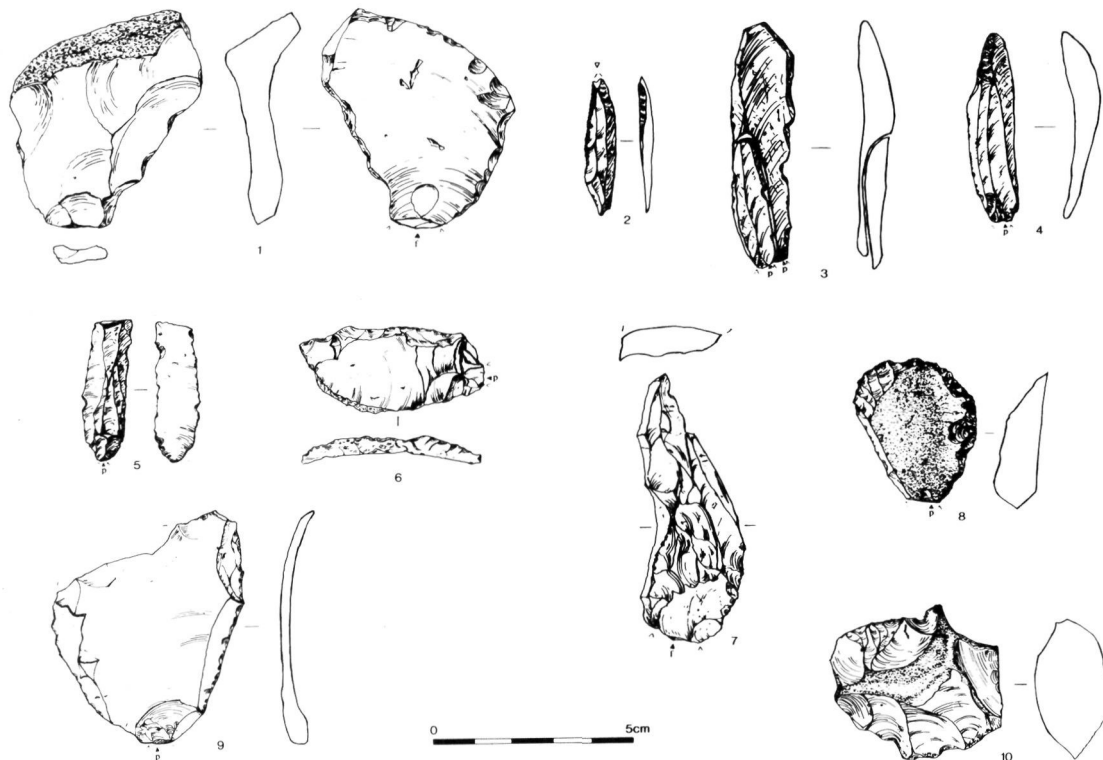


Fig 4. 51 Avenue Gardens: struck flint. 1. Palaeolithic flake with faceted butt, context [5]; 2. microlith, context [5]; 3-5. blades, all context [8]; 6. core tablet, context [5]; 7. core trimming flake, context [7]; 8. scraper, context [5]; 9. utilised flake, context [5]; 10. denticulate, context [1]

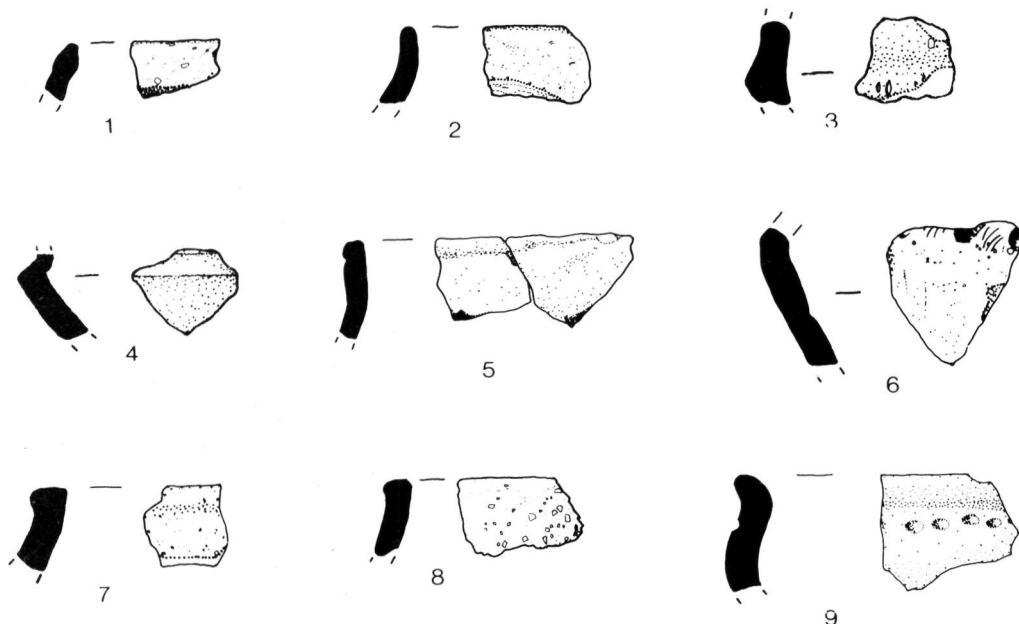


Fig 5. 51 Avenue Gardens: prehistoric pottery. 1. context [11]; 2-4 context [8]; 5. context [5]; 6. context [6/11]; 7/8. context [7]; 9. context [5]. Scale 1 : 2.

Roman pottery

Samian

Joanna Bird

Decorated bowl

Context [2]: An almost complete Dr 30 in the style of the potter X-13 ('Donnaucus') of Les Martres-de-Veyre, dating *c.* AD 100–125. The bowl has been restored from several pieces, some of them large. The rim diameter is 150mm, height 125mm, the diameter at the top of the decoration 144mm, and the footring diameter 70mm; the footring shows same abrasion, but still has rough clay adhering to it in places (Fig 6 & Plate 4).

The whole design survives, comprising four panels each repeated twice, designated A–H below. Apart from two figures, the motifs are all recorded elsewhere in X-13's work. The ovolo, the beaded rosette, and the ovoid and fine beads were all used regularly by him (*eg* Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 49, no 579).

Panels A, E. The seated figure is Jupiter, holding a thunderbolt; it is similar to Oswald type 3 (1936; 1937) but larger. Unless the partial figure on Terrisse (1968, plate 35, no 358) is this, it is apparently a new figure-type. The cushion motif below is on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 44, no 508.

Panels B, F. The upper portion, with diagonal beadrows and massed arrowheads, is paralleled on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 47, no 549. The finely modelled lion is not illustrated by Oswald, and has apparently not been recorded before; it is ridden (or teased) by a small cupid, a frequent figure on X-13 bowls (*eg* Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 46, no 544). Panel B has an S-shaped ornament, as Terrisse 1968, plate 35, no 431; this is replaced on Panel F by a corded motif, as Terrisse 1968, plate 29, no 10025.

Panels C, G. Victory, here with the skirt impressed again at the feet, given greater height and much more voluminous drapery. The same treatment is shown on Terrisse 1968, plate 29, no 304.

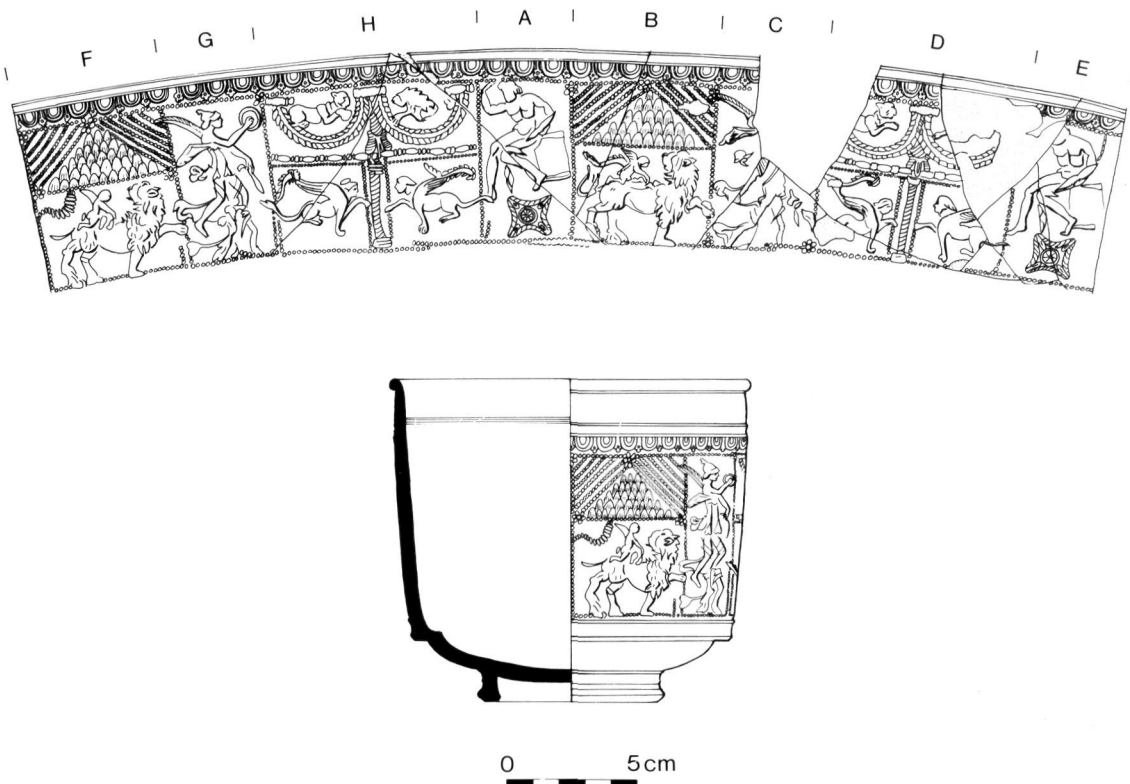


Fig 6. 51 Avenue Gardens: samian bowl from context [2] (see also Plate 4).

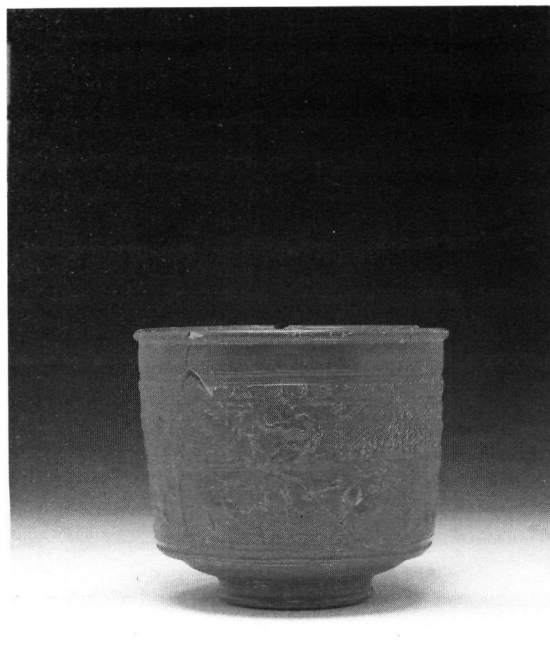


Plate 4. 51 Avenue Gardens: decorated samian bowl from context [2] (see also Fig. 6). Photograph: Museum of London.

Panels D, H. The pair of wreath festoons with astragalus supports is on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 43, no 491, the lioness on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 44, no 512, and the lion, here only partly impressed, on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 43, no 493. The leaf and corded stem are similarly used on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 48, no 566; the row of astragali is on Terrisse 1968, plate 36, no 338. The corded column in the lower portion is on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 45, no 516, the sphinxes on Stanfield & Simpson 1958, plate 44, no 502, and plate 45, no 523; the S-shaped ornament is that on Panel B.

Despite the fine modelling of the motifs, some of the details are clumsily impressed. The beadrows overlap in several places, clearly showing the use of a row of beads on a straight bar poinçon; other motifs overlap, especially onto the borders; there is inconsistency in the use of rosettes at the panel corners; and the wreaths in Panel D are rather cramped.

Other samian (not illustrated)

Context [5]: Dish sherd, Central Gaul, probably Trajanic–Hadrianic; overfired.

Context [6]: Dr 33, East Gaul (Trier or Rheinzabern), late 2nd to mid 3rd century.

Context [6]: Central Gaulish fragment, Hadrianic–Antonine.

Context [7]: Dr 36, Central Gaul, Hadrianic–early Antonine.

Context [8]: Dr 33, East Gaul (Trier or Rheinzabern), late 2nd to mid 3rd century.

Context [11]: Dr 18/31 or 31, Central Gaul, Hadrianic–Antonine; abraded.

Coarseware

Barbara Davies

The pottery (Fig 7) has been recorded and analysed using the Museum of London's system as described by Orton (1980) and summarised in Tyers & Vince (1983). It has been quantified by the 'estimated vessel equivalent method' (EVES), also described by Orton (1975). A table of the quantified Roman pottery (4.56 EVES, 4011g) is available in the archive listed in context order, together with an expansion of the codes used.

The contexts in which the pottery was found have been described above, from which it is apparent that, apart from the ditch systems in Trench A, there is little sequential development. As a whole the Roman assemblage is rather small and the majority of the sherds are quite abraded and largely undiagnostic. However, the site produced an interesting range of wares and vessel types, the majority of which are consistent with late Roman occupation. Alice Holt/Farnham appears to be the principal supplier to this area, although industries from Dorset (BB1), Oxford, the Nene valley and, of particular interest, South Essex are also reaching this market.

The evidence for imported wares other than samian is minimal—a single sherd from a Dressel 20 amphora made in southern Spain (context [6]). Samian forms an unusually high percentage of the total Roman assemblage but this is due to the presence of the almost complete vessel from context [2].

The principal vessel types are reduced or cooking vessels—the majority of which are supplied by the Alice Holt/Farnham industry. There appears to be a wide variety of fabrics within this group, ranging from fine to very coarse, but principally a medium/coarse variant, whereas late 3rd and 4th-century wares from

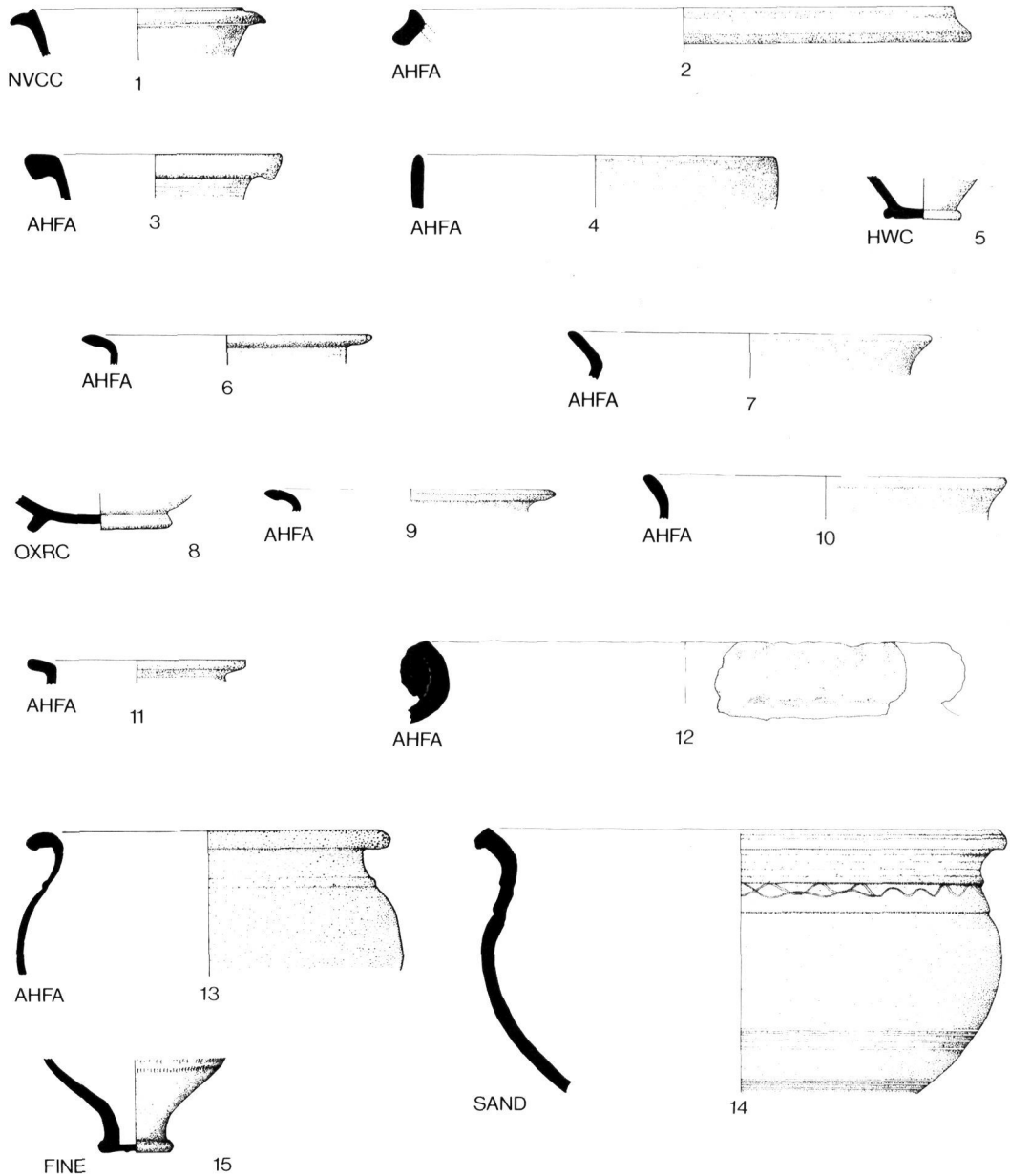


Fig 7. 51 Avenue Gardens: Roman (phase III) coarse ware from contexts [5] (Nos 1–11); [8] (Nos 12 and 13); [9] (nos 14–15). Fabric codes as follows: AHFA Alice Holt/Farnham; FINE miscellaneous fine ware; HWC Highgate 'C' sand-tempered; NVCC Nene valley colour-coated; OXRC Oxfordshire red colour-coated; SAND miscellaneous sand-tempered.

these kilns supplied to *Londinium* are generally made in a well-finished, fine sandy fabric. The Oxford and Nene Valley kilns are supplying the mortaria and fine wares, which is consistent with other sites in south-east England at this date.

A full pottery report is lodged in the site archive.

Saxon pottery

Five plain body sherds of handmade vegetable tempered fabric were recovered, one each from contexts [6] and [8], two from context [11] and one unstratified. (A further unstratified sherd was recovered during the watching brief conducted

at no 36 Avenue Gardens, 50 metres to the north.)

They may be compared with other early-middle Saxon ceramics recovered from sites in west London (eg Wheeler 1935, 138-9; Canham 1978, 85; Cotton *et al* 1986, 71).

Metal objects

Copper alloy/?base gold

Small plain finger ring of copper alloy or possibly base gold (Helen Ganiaris pers comm) with a flattened bezel, from context [8], the upper fill of late Roman ditch [7] (Fig 8).

Iron

A number of iron objects were recovered, principally from context [10], the post-medieval quarry. However, two nails came from contexts [6] and [8], the upper fill of late Roman ditch [5]/[7].

Building material

Susan Degnan

The building material from the site forms a typical assemblage of badly broken, highly

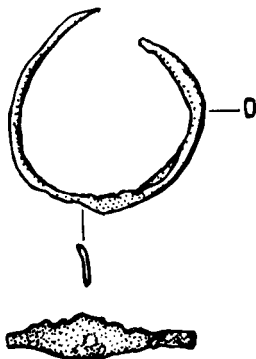


Fig. 8. 51 Avenue Gardens: copper alloy/?base gold finger ring from context [8].

abraded tile of the type usually found in dumped contexts.

All of the tile is Roman, except for four fragments of post-medieval peg roofers from context [10], the Phase IV quarry.

The Roman tile falls within the range of the common local fabric group, except for a single shapeless fragment of Museum of London fabric series 3058, a buff fabric with large iron ore and silty inclusions, from context [11].

The common local fabric group covers a range of red/orange sandy fabrics, from those with quite fine quartz grains to those with fairly coarse quartz inclusions; and which in addition have a scatter of iron ore and limestone. This fabric group has a long life; production seems to start in the 1st century and continues through to the late 2nd century.

There are the usual common forms present in this assemblage: *tegula*, *imbrex*, brick, flue tile and much that is too small and abraded to give any indication at all as to its original form. There are two tiny fragments of combed flue tile from contexts [6] and [8]. There is also a fragment of *tegula* with part of a signature mark—an identifying or batch mark drawn on the tile during manufacture.

Animal bone

The hundred or so fragments of animal bone recovered—principally from the Roman contexts—were so poorly preserved that no useful quantitative information could be derived from them. However, robust elements and/or teeth of cattle, horse, sheep/goat, pig and red deer were present in the Phase III (late Roman) contexts. A full list of identifiable bones, prepared by James Rackham following initial work by Margaret Wooldridge, has been deposited with the site archive.

36 AVENUE GARDENS: 1985 WATCHING BRIEF

In January 1985, routine inspection of Town Planning Applications submitted to the London Borough of Ealing located an application to convert no 36 Avenue Gardens into self-contained flats—a proposal involving the erection of a two-storey rear extension, and the provision of a refuse bin store and parking facilities. The

likelihood that such work would reveal further evidence relating to the Bronze Age urns recorded in 1882 prompted a short watching brief, which was conducted by George Chambers, Margaret Wooldridge and the writer in May 1985. In the event, only the digging of foundations for the rear extension disturbed the ground to a sufficient depth to reveal anything of archaeological interest (Fig 9, sections LM & NP).

The watching brief

Following the demolition of a one-storey kitchen extension at the rear of no 36, foundation trenches 0.70m wide were hand dug into the natural sands and gravels to receive the footings of the new extension. During this operation a workman discovered a number of sherds of coarse pottery close to the side of the trench at a depth of 0.65–0.70m from the modern ground surface, some 3m from the original rear wall of the property. Examination of the pottery showed it to be of Bronze Age type, and comparable in terms of form and fabric to the vessels discovered in 1882.

Section cleaning following the completion of the digging of the foundation trench revealed that the sherds had been deposited in a group close to the top of a shallow feature with a stepped or beaded base running E–W along the line of the section (Fig 9, section LM). The feature had cut into a spit of bright orange sand overlying gravel; its fill comprised a smooth, grey-brown sandy loam containing a few gravel pebbles. This was, in turn, sealed by a layer of loose grey gravelly soil overlain by layers of subsoil and topsoil.

Subsequent limited excavation into the section retrieved additional sherds from the upper fill of the feature, and also confirmed the workman's observation that they had been 'piled up', and did not come from a complete vessel. No traces of any accompanying scraps of cremated bone or charcoal were found, though two small flint flakes were recovered from a level just above that of the pottery.

Features visible in the section further north (Fig 9, section NP) included a large shallow V-profile ditch some 2m wide and 0.65m deep apparently running E–W across the trench. Its fill comprised a compact grey gravel. It had been cut by two further features at its northern edge, the later of which could be defined as a second

shallow V-profile ditch 1.40m wide and 0.40m deep-filled with a similar compact grey gravel. Part of a further small feature lay at the northernmost edge of the section. This was filled with a brown loam containing a number of gravel pebbles.

Following completion of the section-cleaning exercise, the lowering of the modern ground surface within the area of the rear extension was carefully monitored. However, this did not proceed to a level deep enough to disturb any further features, and nothing of interest was recorded.

The 1985 finds

In addition to the Bronze Age urn, a handful of unstratified finds were recovered during the section cleaning—primarily from the area of the largest V-profile ditch. These included a few sherds of prehistoric and Roman pottery, together with a single sherd of vegetable-tempered Saxon pottery.

The Bronze Age pottery

In all, 79 sherds of Bronze Age pottery were retrieved during the watching brief, comprising the complete profile of a single handmade bucket urn, with finger tip decoration on top of the rim, and an applied, finger-impressed cordon below (Fig 10). Five large and several small rim sherds are present, representing roughly one third of the original diameter; by contrast, nearly three-quarters of the base was recovered, represented by 11 sherds. The applied finger-impressed cordon is present on four sherds; it has detached from a fifth leaving a tell-tale scar.

The reconstructed vessel stands 350mm high, with a minimum rim diameter of *c.* 300mm, and a slightly oval base measuring 233 × 242mm. It has a coarse, sandy fabric which is hackly in the fracture, and tempered with abundant crushed burnt flint, the largest visible inclusion of which measures 9mm across. The core is dark grey-black in colour; all exterior surface colours range from red to brown. Interior surface colours range from grey to black, with the exception of the base, which is red to brown.

The vessel clearly belongs to the southern British Deverel Rimbury tradition of Bronze Age pottery. Although an Early Bronze Age genesis

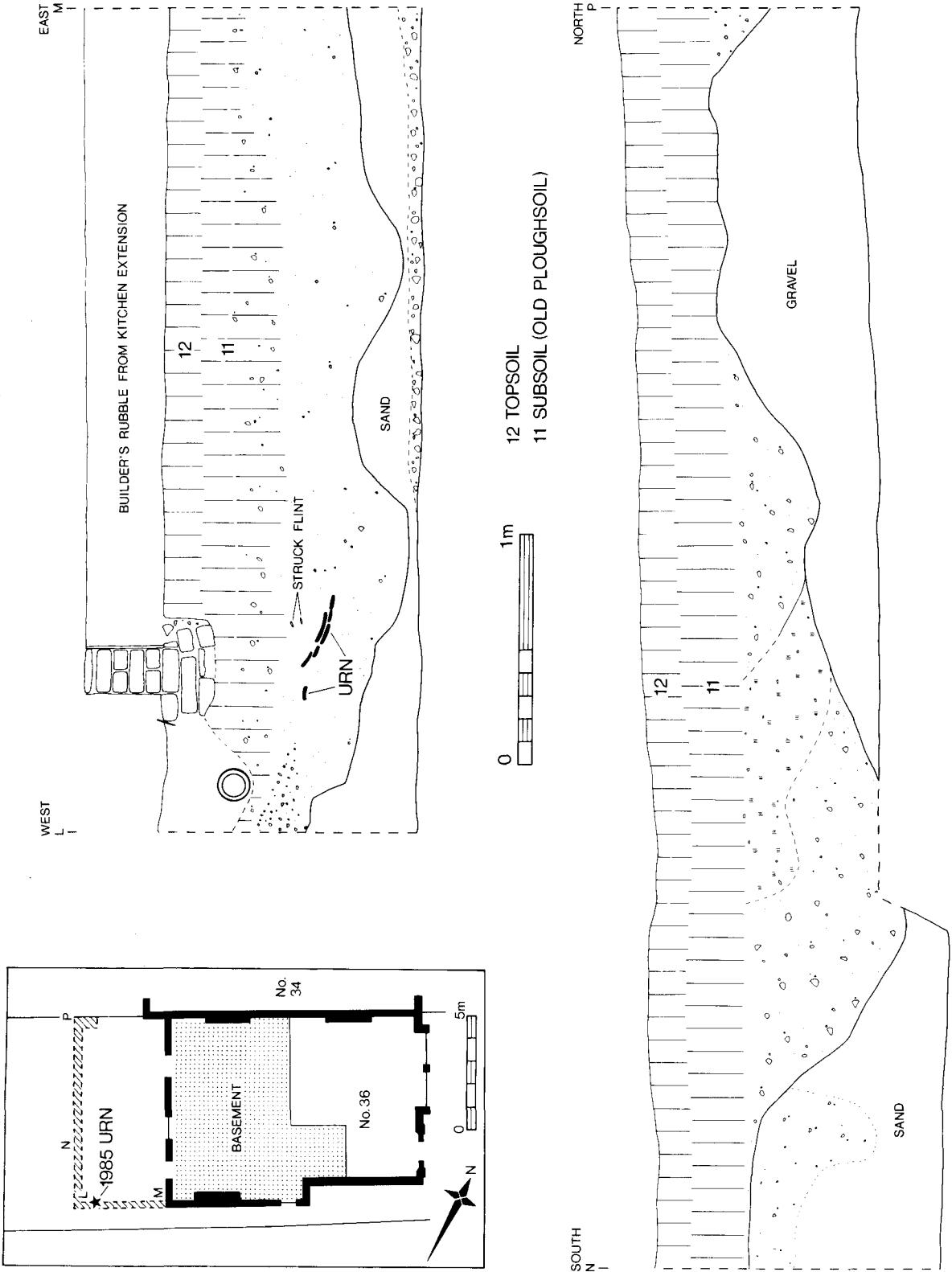


Fig 9. 36 Avenue Gardens: site location (inset) and sections L-M and N-P.

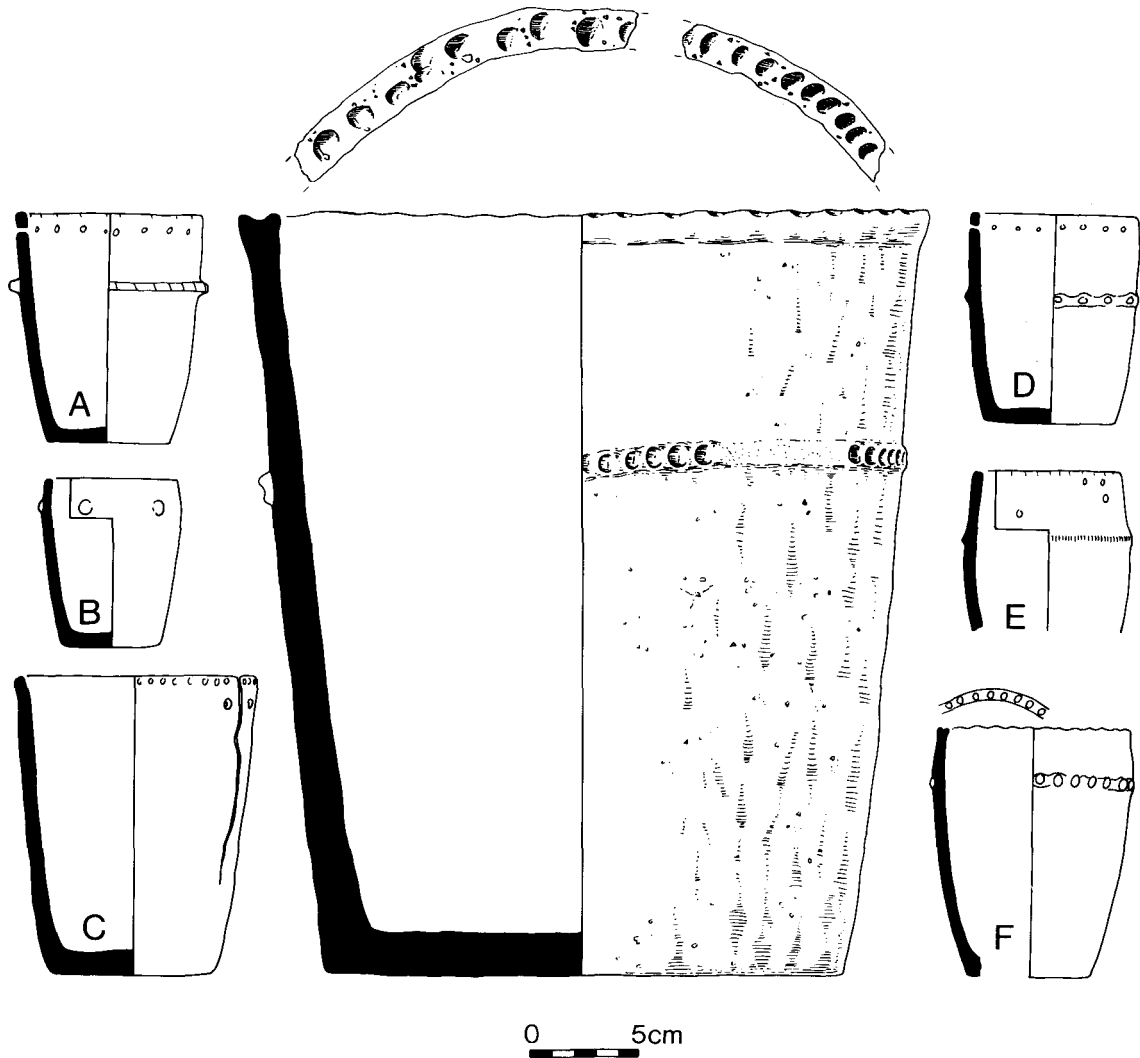


Fig 10. 36 Avenue Gardens: The Bronze Age urn found in 1985, and the 1882 vessels (A-F). Scale 1:12.

for this tradition is now acknowledged (eg Barrett & Bradley 1980, 9–10) following work by Barrett (1976), the bucket urns and globular urns which define it are still regarded as having a mainly Middle Bronze Age currency (eg Needham 1987, 108). Whatever its precise chronological significance, however, the Deverel Rimbury tradition is well represented in the lower Thames Valley, where in recent years the identification of a number of settlement contexts has begun to complement the long-known funerary evidence.

Little need be said here as regards vessel for vessel parallels for the new urn, for bucket urns with a similar combination of decorative traits, ie finger-tipping on top of the rim and a finger

impressed cordon below, are present in most of the local funerary assemblages, including the Acton cemetery itself (Barrett 1973). The paucity of the finer globular urns in such assemblages may, as Needham has pointed out (1987, 110–1), reflect the selection of specific vessel types for burial—particularly as globulars are now appearing in local settlement/domestic contexts (eg Muckhatch Farm (Johnson 1975); Staines (Barrett 1984); Sipson (Cotton *et al* 1986, 44), and possibly Osterley (Cotton 1981)). Equally, however, it may also reflect the inadequacy of our knowledge of these local cemeteries—none of which have been excavated under modern conditions.

AVENUE GARDENS 1981–1985: CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

A limited programme of excavation and observation, combined with documentary research, has provided new information relating to the previous use of the locality. This is considered here under four headings: *Earlier Prehistoric*; *The Bronze Age cemetery*; *Roman* and *Post-Roman*.

Earlier Prehistoric

The earliest finds recovered during the work comprise a number of pieces of struck flint. Two Palaeolithic flakes—one of Levallois type—are no surprise in an area of terrace gravels already notable for such discoveries (eg Roe 1968; Wymer 1968). However, situated at *c.* 19.75m (65ft) OD, these pieces lie towards the lower, southern limit of the known distribution of palaeoliths in the area—the majority of which have been recovered from positions closer to 30m (100ft) OD (Wymer 1968, 269).

The Mesolithic component within the lithic collection, which comprises a single obliquely-backed microlith and a number of flakes and blades, is of some interest—particularly since the recovery of two refitting blades suggests that it may not have travelled far from its original point of deposition. Diagnostically Mesolithic material has already been recorded from several sites in the locality, eg Creffield Road (Burleigh 1976; Bazely *et al* 1991, 28–9), Woodgrange Avenue (Haward Collection) and Woodhurst Road (Wymer 1977, 187). All three sites overlook the same two streams that skirt the promontory on which Avenue Gardens is situated.

The remainder of the flintwork, which includes the single stratified denticulate, appears to comprise the sort of crude debitage usually associated with later prehistoric work, *ie* broad, squat flakes struck with a hard hammer from poorly prepared cores (Pitts 1978; Fasham & Ross 1978). These pieces could relate to the Bronze Age pottery found in 1882 and 1985, or to the scraps of residual later prehistoric pottery excavated in 1981.

The Bronze Age cemetery

The discovery of the further Bronze Age urn in 1985, and the examination by John Mills of

property deeds and three contemporary newspaper accounts relating to the original finds, provides an opportunity to expand on the scanty details provided in Barrett's 1973 reworking of the Acton material (1973, 116–8).

Analysis of the building records for the Mill Hill Park Estate (see Appendix and Fig 1 C), for instance, has indicated that the cemetery was found in 1882 (not 1883), and that the discovery was very probably centred on nos 34–36 Avenue Gardens (rather than no 38, which was not built until 1904). As both nos 34 and 36 possess extensive basements (Fig 9, inset), it seems likely that it was during the digging of these that the original finds were made.

Three contemporary newspaper accounts, published in the *Acton, Chiswick & Turnham Green Gazette* for Saturday 22nd July, Saturday 29th July and Saturday 5th August 1882, make it clear that at least seven 'Roman-British' urns were discovered between 18th July and 5th August. An initial find of a single urn 'very prettily embossed' and 'in an excellent state of preservation', containing cremated bone and buried at a depth of two feet, was followed shortly afterwards by the recovery of another six dug out 'within a few feet of one another' at depths of fourteen inches. Of the latter group, all had 'received more or less injury, one having been entirely destroyed'. Although there is some confusion in the accounts, at least two of the seven urns, including the first to be discovered, appear to have been buried right way up, while the remainder may have been inverted. Later accounts, which speak variously of one urn, fragments of 'two or three others' (Anon 1883), and 'numerous urns...within a few yards of each other' (letter from Samuel Cobb in the British Museum (see below and Appendix)), add nothing new and clearly refer to this same discovery.

Although there are discrepancies between the descriptions of the urns contained in the newspaper accounts and the surviving vessels and supporting documentation held by the British Museum, it is possible that the single urn accessioned in 1889 (Barrett 1973, fig 4, no 3; fig 10, A), is to be identified as that first discovered on July 18th 1882 (see Appendix). The vessel is accompanied by a letter from Samuel Cobb, the then owner of 36 Avenue Gardens ('Oakleigh'), who notes that it was found 'in an upright position' and contained 'small particles of bones' which were subsequently reinterred in the garden of 'Langford House',

Cobb's former residence opposite 'Oakleigh' (probably to be identified as nos 43–45, partitioned in the Edwardian period (John Mills pers comm)). The remaining five urns accessioned by the British Museum in 1883 (Barrett 1973, fig 4, nos 1, 2, 4, 5 & 6; fig 10, B–F) may therefore represent the bulk of the second group of six, less the one 'entirely destroyed'.

The second of the newspaper accounts reports that the contents of the first urn were carefully examined by 'a gentleman', and found to comprise the remains of 'a person full grown'. Although many of the larger bones were so fragmented as to defy identification, the following were recognised: 'the last phalanx of one of the fingers—probably the index'; four teeth, one much worn; several cranial bones; the lower end of the humerus and a portion of the patella. Little information survives as to the contents of the other urns, though the latest of the three accounts notes that 'bones of different skeletons have been found in the remains of one cinerary urn'. (It is not clear from the context, however, whether a reference in the same account to 'two phalanges of the human hand...which undoubtedly belong to the skeleton of a boy, or of a slightly-built woman' refers back to the contents of the first urn, or to one of the subsequent discoveries.)

Either way, the presence of upright and inverted vessels, the fragmentation of the larger bones, the preservation of the phalanges, and the use of a single urn for multiple burial all find parallels in other, better recorded, Deverel Rimbury cremation cemeteries, which are usually found to comprise 'a series of discrete units or clusters' of between 10 and 30 burials (Ellison 1980, 117). The 1985 urn brings the minimum number of vessels known to have been found in the Acton cemetery to eight. All seven surviving urns are of heavy bucket form; the absence of finer globular vessels is consistent with the paucity of such vessels from other cremation cemeteries recorded from the region (Barrett 1973). (The largest cemetery at Ashford Common contained at least thirty urns, of which two were of globular type (Barrett 1973, fig 2 nos 15 & 16).) However, none of these Middlesex cemeteries have been excavated to modern standards, making matters such as the relative importance of urned to un-urned burial, choice of vessel type or burial pathology difficult to assess. Several groups of cremated bone do survive from the other local cemeteries, as at Ashford Common and Littleton Reservoir (Barrett 1973, 112 & 116), although

little attention has been paid to them. However, recent analysis of a surviving cremation from Littleton, held by the Museum of London, has allowed the remains to be identified as those of a single adult (Jan Conheeny pers comm.)

This aside, the siting of the Acton cemetery was apparently chosen to exploit the break of slope at the edge of the terrace gravels. Here, it could have been visible against the skyline when approached from the lower ground of Thames-side districts to the south and east. Although there is no compelling archaeological evidence to indicate whether its position was marked by a barrow beneath, within or round which the burials were deposited (the beaded ditch containing the 1985 urn showed little sign of curvature), such visibility is otherwise unusual for cremation cemeteries, whose sites—unlike those of barrow cemeteries—are rarely particularly conspicuous (Bradley 1981, 103).

Assuming that the beaded ditch in the fill of which the urn lay was neither Bronze Age nor domestic in function, the whereabouts of any accompanying settlement remain unknown. On analogy with other known Deverel Rimbury settlement/cemetery pairings, it may have lain between 50 and 300 metres distant (Bradley 1981, 100). The later prehistoric material recovered from no 51 Avenue Gardens, some 50 metres downslope to the south, however, is probably too late in date to be relevant here, dating as it does to the first half of the first millennium BC.

Roman

Although more substantial, the Roman evidence from the 1981 excavation is equally difficult to interpret satisfactorily—especially so since the contemporary ground surface has long been lost to the effects of agricultural and other disturbances. However, it can be reasonably stated that none of the features were structural in purpose; more likely the ditches represent field boundaries, and the pits and scoops small scale exploitation of the terrace edge to provide sand and gravel for floors or yard surfaces.

Although the earliest phase of Roman activity (Phase II) is datable to the early/mid 2nd century AD, a few scraps of Late Iron Age pottery hint at earlier activity—a suggestion supported by local finds of potin coins (Allen 1960, 205). Once established, however, the N–S ditch alignment (contexts [2] and [3]) was seemingly respected

throughout the subsequent Roman usage of the site. The presence of the virtually complete decorated samian bowl in ditch [2], and of the residual Roman building material in Phase III contexts, suggests that a settlement focus lay somewhere close by at this time. The reasons for the deposition of the samian vessel in particular can only be guessed at, though Merrifield's comments regarding the use of ditches for ritual deposits may be apposite here (1987, 37–40).

Laid out in the latter part of the 3rd century, the Phase III ditch [5]/[7] was the most substantial Roman feature discovered. It ran along the 20m contour at the edge of the gravel terrace before turning to the north on the alignment established by the Phase II ditches [2] and [3]. However, the upper fill of ditch [7], context [8], had spread across much of the southern half of Trench A east of the sondage, raising the possibility that the E–W element of the ditch originally extended further east, into an area not available for excavation in May 1981. Corroboration of this point is perhaps provided by the ditch subsequently seen in section during site watching in October 1981, although this did not produce any datable finds.

The width of ditch [5]/[7] suggests that it marked an important boundary—perhaps the edge of a field system laid out on a N–S, E–W axis. If this is so, it seems likely that the area enclosed lay to the north and west, *ie* the promontory of terrace gravels now occupied by the Mill Hill Park Estate. If the large (undated) E–W ditch recorded in section at 36 Avenue Gardens formed part of the same system, this would suggest a field width of some 50 metres.

Though thus limited, the evidence for Roman activity points to the existence of a small settlement exploiting the free-draining brick-earths and gravels seven miles west of *Londinium*. Given the natural advantages of the area, and the proximity of the London–Silchester road 1100m to the south (Margary 1967, Route 4a), together with the presence of the roadside village at Brentford two miles to the south-west (Canham 1978; Parnum & Cotton 1983), it is likely that a number of such establishments originally existed in the area. Indeed, 19th-century discoveries of pottery and coins from locations in and around Acton may help to pinpoint their whereabouts. Other small settlements are beginning to emerge from positions closer to the modern Thames (*eg* at Amyand Park Road and Heathcote Road, Twickenham (Stuart Hoad pers comm).) However, further fieldwork will be needed before

we are in a position adequately to reconstruct the pattern of Roman settlement in this quarter of the capital's hinterland (see Sheldon & Schaaf 1978, 81–3; Merrifield 1983, 139), or to comment meaningfully on matters such as the local economy or pottery supply.

Post-Roman

Post-Roman activity is represented by a handful of vegetable-tempered sherds of Saxon pottery and by a back-filled post-medieval gravel quarry. The sherds—two of which were incorporated in the upper fill of the late Roman ditch [5]/[7]—are the first indication of activity during this period in the immediate locality, although early-middle Saxon sunken-featured buildings are now known from Brentford and from Winslow Road, Hammersmith. The gravel quarry, located in Trench B in 1981, is probably that shown on the 1799 estate map of the area (John Mills pers comm) and was filled in between 1873 and 1894.

APPENDIX: MILL HILL PARK ESTATE AND THE DISCOVERIES OF 1882

John Mills

The earliest recorded discovery of Bronze Age cinerary urns on the Estate took place on 18th July 1882. A contemporary newspaper report in the *Acton, Chiswick & Turnham Green Gazette* for the 22nd of July stated that a 'Roman-British' urn was found by workmen employed by 'Messrs Hedges and Brandeth' in 'the Avenue-Crescent', Mill Hill Park. This urn which, in a subsequent newspaper article (29th July), was said to have contained calcined human bones, was deposited at the office of the builder William Willett's agent on the Estate.

A further six urns, all of similar character and decoration, made of 'baked clay', were discovered during the next fortnight, apparently on the same site; five of these survived removal relatively intact (*Acton, Chiswick & Turnham Green Gazette* for the 5th of August).

On the 2nd of November 1882 an urn of 'slightly burnt clay...of a cylindrical form, the remains of two or three others rather smaller, and a quantity of earth and burnt or calcined bones' which 'had been lately found in making excavations for houses at Mill Hill Park, Acton'

were exhibited by Messrs Hedges and Goodrick at a meeting of the Royal Archaeological Institute (Anon 1883, 106). Hedges and Goodrick gave these urns to Albert Hartshorne (then Secretary of the RAI) who deposited them in the British Museum. Five urns from Mill Hill Park, Acton appear in the Museum Accessions Register under the date 12th June 1883 (1883.6.12.1-5).

A further urn from Mill Hill Park reached the Museum through G. F. Lawrence by February 1889 (1889.2.9.1). An accompanying letter from the donor, Samuel Cobb of 'Oakleigh', Avenue Gardens, Acton, states that the urn was discovered in digging the foundations for 'Oakleigh' in 1883. It had been found with numerous other urns of a similar character, which had 'crumbled into small pieces on removal'.

The contents of the urn, comprising small particles of burnt human bone, were placed in a box and buried in the back garden of 'Langford House' (opposite 'Oakleigh'), where Cobb was then living. 'Oakleigh' can be positively identified with the present 36 Avenue Gardens (GLRO: MDR/1882/41/227; *Kelly's Directory of Ealing, Acton, Hanwell, Gunnersbury and Chiswick 1901-2*, 1907), and 'Langford House' with 43 Avenue Gardens (GLRO: MDR/1878/37/part 1/113 & MDR 1879/38/part 2/605).

While the findspot of Samuel Cobb's urn appears to be fairly well established, the exact location of the discoveries mentioned in the newspaper reports is more problematical. The first report, which refers to 'the Avenue-Crescent' is clearly second- or third-hand and is certainly inaccurate. The later references to Messrs Hedges and Goodrick are somewhat more useful.

James Hedges and John Goodrick, builders in partnership, feature in a number of leases and deeds of mortgage registered at the Middlesex Deeds Registry relating to houses in Mill Hill Park between 1880 and 1884, to which the builder William Willett was party (see Table below). These comprise nos 6-24 and 34-36 Heathfield Road, and nos 25-27 and 22-36 Avenue Gardens (see Fig 1 C). The ascription 'Hedges and Brandeth'—the builders' names mentioned in the newspaper report of 22nd July 1882—represents an apparent misquote on the reporter's part.

The leases of properties in Mill Hill Park to Hedges and Goodrick uniformly refer to plots of land with named or numbered dwellinghouses erected thereon, a plan of the relevant dwellinghouse appearing with each individual lease

(see Table 2 below). The leasing of houses and land on the estate to the builders appears to have been Willett's standard practice; the deeds of lease on house and land were used by the builders as security for a mortgage, which presumably provided working capital for the next building contract. (A number of firms were involved in house building in Mill Hill Park at this time, most of whom took out mortgages on the houses they had completed.)

Leases of houses to Hedges and Goodrick are given in the Table (bracketed references are to the Middlesex Deeds Register (MDR) at the Greater London Record Office (GLRO)).

The fairly regular intervals between the leases suggest that as one job (two adjoining semi-detached houses) neared completion, the next was begun. An average four to five months' work for building each pair of houses seems feasible, though it is likely that in several cases houses were being built concurrently (eg 14-20 Heathfield Road and 25-27 Avenue Gardens; 22-24, 34-36 Heathfield Road and 34-36 Avenue Gardens).

While no building contracts concluded between Willett and Hedges and Goodrick were individually registered at the Deeds Registry, two 'building agreements' are summarily recited in a deed of mortgage dated 20.12.1883 (GLRO MDR/1884/8/841). The later of these, dated 03.02.1883, refers to land having a frontage of approximately 131 feet on the west side of Avenue Gardens. This seems likely to comprehend the plots of nos 22-28 Avenue Gardens, which have a combined frontage of 130 feet 1 inch (GLRO MDR/1883/18/179-80; MDR/1884/6/228-9).

The periods of four months between agreement and lease for building nos 26-28, and six further months for building nos 22-24 Avenue Gardens tally fairly well with the interval of four to five months suggested above. Other variables that must have affected the contract would include—as today—other current contracts, availability of skilled labour and the weather.

From the above discussion it is possible to narrow the list of possible findspots of the 1882 discoveries from the list given in the Table above. First, those properties where leases to Hedges and Goodrick were signed before 18th July 1882 can be eliminated as these must already have been built by that date. Second, nos 22-28 Avenue Gardens can be eliminated, as building works must have started after conclusion of the building agreement of 03.02.1883. One of the

Table 2. *Leases of properties in Mill Hill Park*

Heathfield Road		Avenue	Gardens
House Nos	Lease date	House Nos	Lease date
6-8	27.07.80 (1880/24/866-7)		
10-12	19.11.80 (1880/37/1007-8)		
14*	16.11.81 (1881/39/656)		
18-20	16.11.81 (1881/39/657-8)		
		25-27	21.01.82 (1882/4/188-9)
		30-32	16.06.82 (1882/20/616-7)
22-24	03.10.82 (1882/39/1032-3)		
34*	13.12.82 (1882/41/228)	34-36	13.12.82 (1882/41/226-7)
		26-28	11.06.83 (1883/18/179-80)
		22-24	19.12.83 (1884/6/228-9)

*Nos 16 and 36 Heathfield Road are semi-detached properties never leased to Hedges and Goodrick for reasons unknown, but from visual inspection are clearly of one build respectively with nos 14 and 34.

three remaining properties, nos 22-24 and 34-36 Heathfield Road and nos 34-36 Avenue Gardens, seems most likely to have been the findspot of the urns found in July-August 1882 (Fig 1 C).

Of these, nos 34-36 Avenue Gardens must be singled out for special scrutiny as no 36 ('Oakleigh') is the reported site of Samuel Cobb's urn. Cobb's account of the urn's discovery is undated, but seems most likely to have been written between 1884 and the beginning of 1889. It was probably written at G. F. Lawrence's instigation around the time of the urn's deposition in the British Museum in 1889, by which time Cobb was no longer living in Mill Hill Park, having vacated 'Oakleigh' in 1887.

Although Cobb stated that the urn was found in digging foundations for 'Oakleigh' in 1883, this date seems unlikely in the light of the date of construction of the house as estimated from the lease, *ie* probably in the summer and autumn of 1882. Could it be indeed that Cobb's urn was the first of the discoveries to have been made on the Mill Hill Park Estate that year?

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