

# A ROMANO-BRITISH FARMSTEAD AT ST MARY ABBOTS HOSPITAL, MARLOES ROAD, KENSINGTON

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*With contributions from John Giorgi, Louise Rayner and Angela Wardle*

## SUMMARY

*Excavations at the former St Mary Abbots Hospital revealed the first archaeological evidence for Late Iron Age and early Roman occupation in Kensington. Structural remains in the form of postholes, slots and gullies represent farm buildings of the early Roman period. Along with a series of linear and curvilinear ditches this is the earliest recorded evidence of occupation in Kensington and makes an important contribution to archaeological knowledge of this area of London.*

## INTRODUCTION

An archaeological evaluation followed by an excavation took place between 25 July and 16 September 1994 in the grounds of the former St Mary Abbots Hospital, Marloes Road, Kensington W8. The site lies on the eastern side of Marloes Road and south of Kensington High Street (TQ 2567 7916; Fig 1). The evaluation and excavation were undertaken by the Museum of London Archaeology Service prior to redevelopment. The main excavation area totalled 1145sq m and the total area investigated was 1500sq m. The evaluation stage identified Roman features in one of seven trenches, and subsequent excavation concentrated on an area extending out from this productive trench. (Site Code MAK 94.)

No Late Iron Age activity had been documented in the area before the present excavations

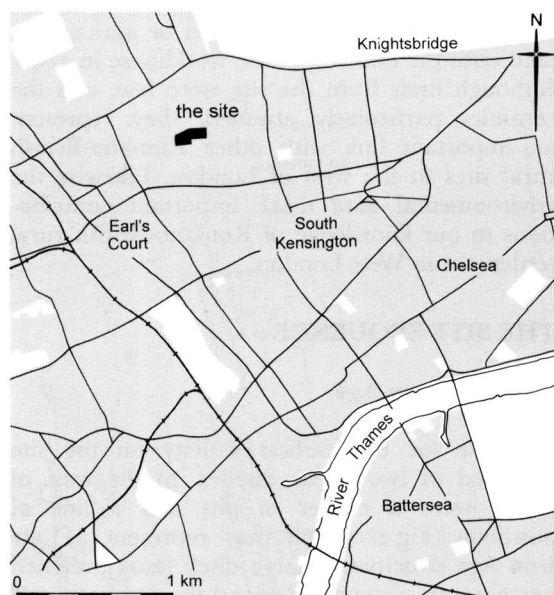


Fig 1. Site location

took place. The main Roman road from *Londinium* to *Calleva Atrebatum* (Silchester) lies beneath the modern Holland Park Avenue and Notting Hill Gate, passing about 1.3km to the north of the site. It has been suggested that a subsidiary Roman road, 'Akeman Street', runs along the line of the present Kensington High Street, approximately 400m to the north of the site, but this remains unconfirmed (Merrifield 1983, 122).

Excavations at 11–15 Thorney Court, 500m to the north-east, in 1976 found that most of the archaeological evidence had been destroyed by quarrying (Hill 1994, 11). There was little other evidence of Roman activity within a 1km radius of the site, the only find being a samian lamp recovered during the construction of Gloucester Road underground station, approximately 200m to the south-east. A possible Roman 'villa' may have existed in the region of Lansdowne Road, Notting Hill, approximately 1.5km to the north-east, where two stone coffins were found in the mid 19th century (Whipp 1975, 4).

The site lies to the west of the Roman city of *Londinium* and just outside the 'town zone' (Merrifield 1983, 127), which is thought to have extended to the present day Marble Arch. No Roman occupation immediately to the west of the town zone had been recorded before the excavations at Marloes Road.

These excavations revealed the first evidence for a multi-phase occupation of the site during the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods, after which it remained as open or agricultural land until the building of the workhouse in 1848. Although finds from the site were few, and the ceramics particularly abraded, they represent an important link with other Romano-British rural sites to the west of London. Likewise the environmental data make important contributions to our knowledge of Romano-British rural settlement in West London.

## THE SITE SEQUENCE

### The Late Iron Age

Evidence for the earliest activity on the site consisted of two linear ditches, to the west of which were a cluster of pits and a line of postholes (Fig 2) which may represent a Late Iron Age structure. A large ditch [2.03], aligned north-south, extended beyond the southern and northern limits of the excavation, curving to the south-east and possibly enclosing land to the east. A second ditch [2.02], of which only a 1.6m length was recorded, was also aligned north-south (Fig 8, section 1). The relationship between the two ditches was lost as a result of modern truncation, so that it is uncertain whether or not they together formed part of a field system. It would seem, however, that the larger ditch defined the eastern limit of the Late Iron Age occupation, and that the secondary ditch defined

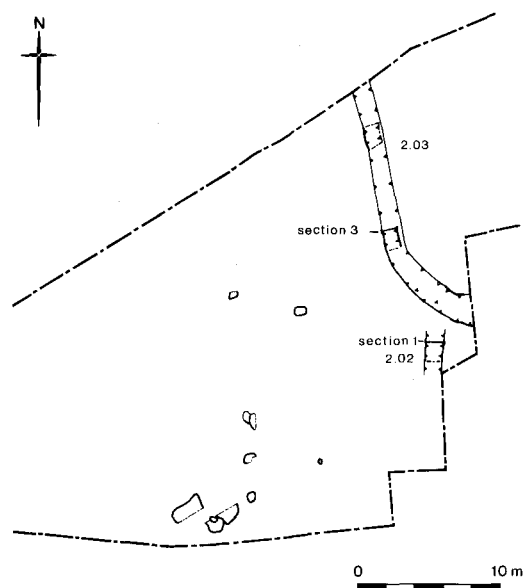


Fig 2. Late Iron Age features

it further south. The larger ditch measured at least 19m in length and was up to 2m wide and 0.96m deep. Pottery recovered from its fills has been dated to the late 1st century BC and early 1st century AD (see pottery report below). Environmental samples from the fills produced the largest concentration of environmental

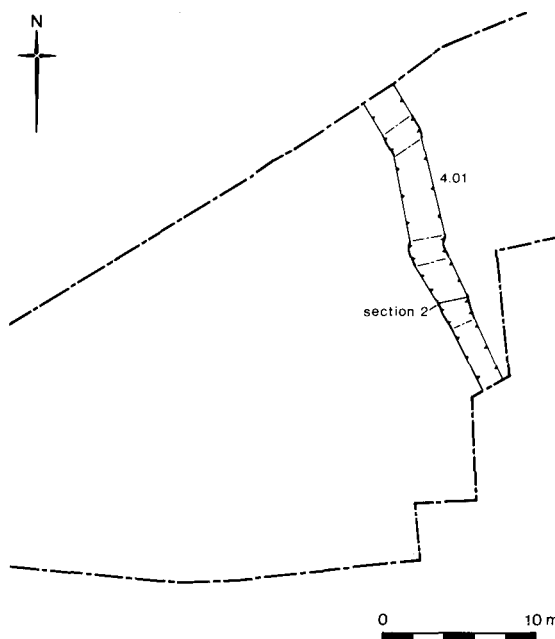


Fig 3. Roman boundary ditch

remains from the site (see below). Roman tile, along with large quantities of daub, was also recovered from the feature, but may have been intrusive. Fragments of loomweight of probable Iron Age date (see below) were also recovered. The presence of demolition material, mostly consisting of small fragments of daub, suggest a wattle-and-daub building nearby. A large fragment of mudbrick recovered from the secondary ditch also indicated the presence of a nearby building.

To the west of these ditches a series of postholes was recorded, five of which formed a north-south alignment parallel to the main ditch. The postholes were up to 0.80m in diameter and 0.18m deep. Pottery recovered from the backfill suggests an early 1st-century date. The size of the postholes suggests that they may have formed part of a substantial structure. Two very irregular features were excavated to the west of the

postholes and produced small amounts of 1st-century pottery and burnt flint. It is possible that these features, which survived to a depth of 0.50m, were pits for the storage of food, although there is no environmental data to substantiate this.

### Early Roman period

This represents a second phase of the site, although the sequence between phases 1 and 2 was very tight. During this period the major north-south ditch was recut on almost the same alignment, although this time it did not curve to the south-east but continued south to the limit of excavation (Fig 3, Fig 8 sections 2 and 3). It divided an occupation area to the west from open land in the form of a field system to the east. A series of north-south and east-west linear features with associated postholes formed the

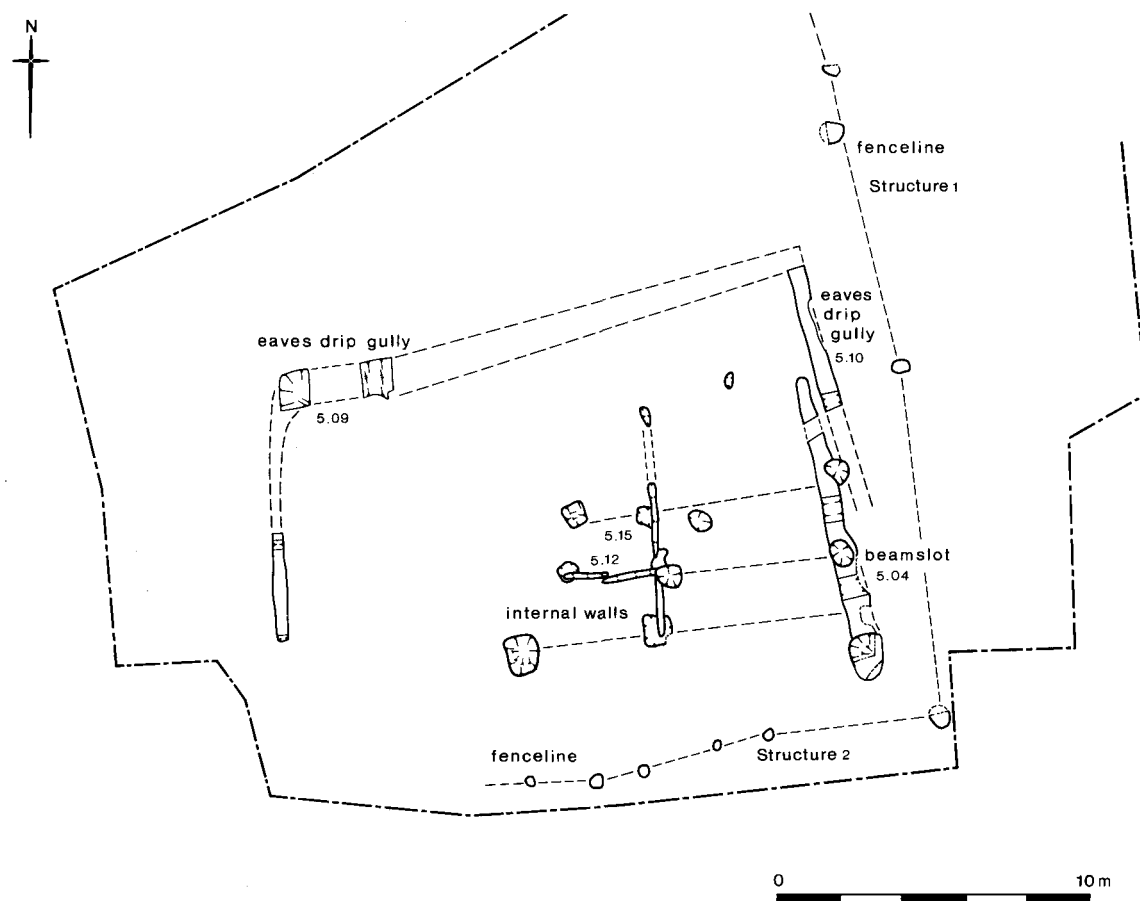


Fig 4. Roman Building 1

foundations of a large rectilinear building (Fig 4) which was subsequently enlarged to the east and north (Fig 5). Contemporary with the ditch and Buildings 1 and 2 was a series of ditches to the east which formed part of a complex field system severely truncated in the building of the later hospital. The buildings, ditch and field system appear to have been abandoned towards the end of the 2nd century.

The major north-south boundary ditch was very productive of both finds and environmental data. Pottery recovered from the lower primary usage fills of the ditch has been dated to AD 60-70. The upper disuse fills have been dated to the mid 2nd century suggesting that the feature was in use throughout this period. Other finds included a fragment of Iron Age loomweight and several fragments of Roman 1st-century glass (see below). A fragment of mudbrick and fragments of Roman tile and daub were also recovered

from the later fills. Environmental samples produced the second largest amount of seeds found on site.

To the west of the ditch and aligned with it were the truncated remains of a possible wattle-and-daub building. Two linear features formed the external western, northern, and eastern limits of Building 1. The linear feature [5.09] in the west ran north-south for 9m then turned to the east through 90° and ran for 3.7m before being truncated by later features. Up to 0.80m wide and 0.50m deep, this L-shaped linear feature served as an eaves drip gully. Parallel to it to the east was another linear feature [5.10] aligned north-south and measuring 4.8m in length by 0.56m wide and 0.20m deep. This may also have served as an eaves drip gully. Immediately to the west and parallel to this a third linear feature [5.04] was excavated. This was 4.9m long, 0.50m wide and 0.33m deep and was interpreted as a

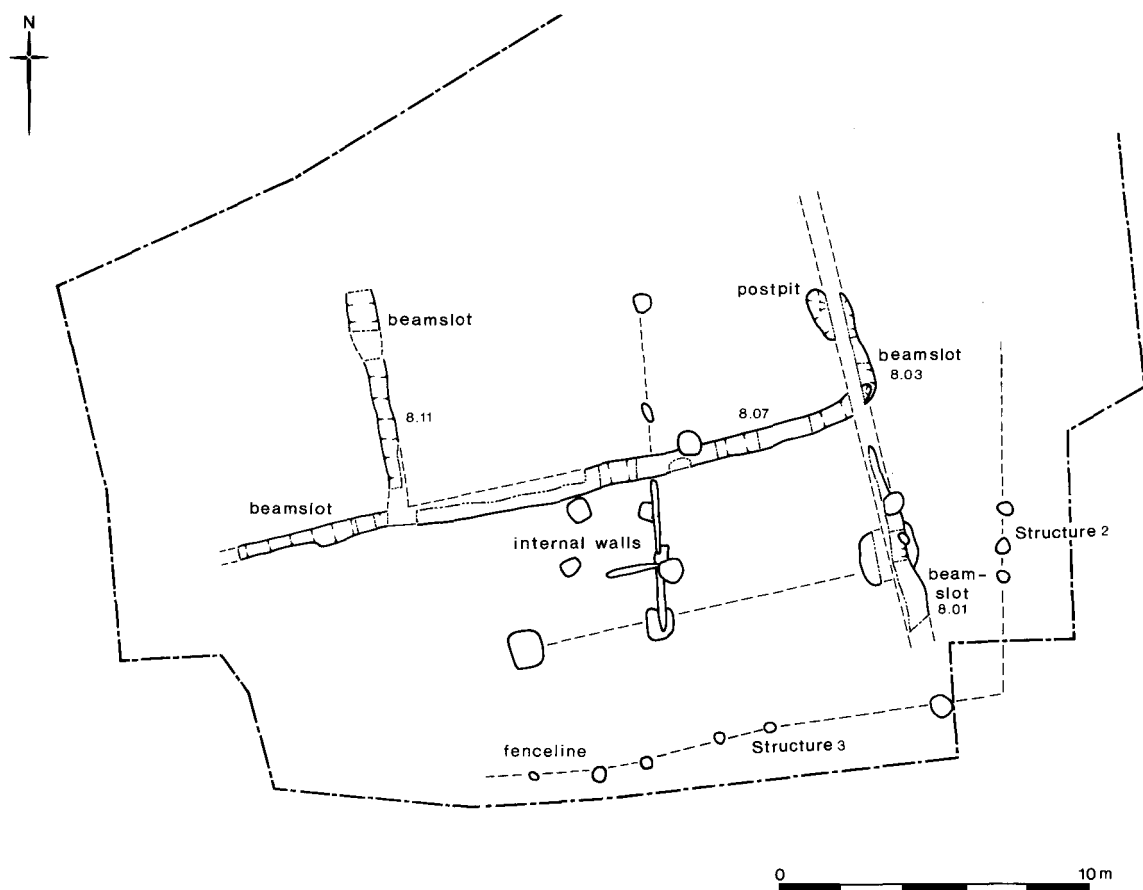


Fig 5. Roman Building 2

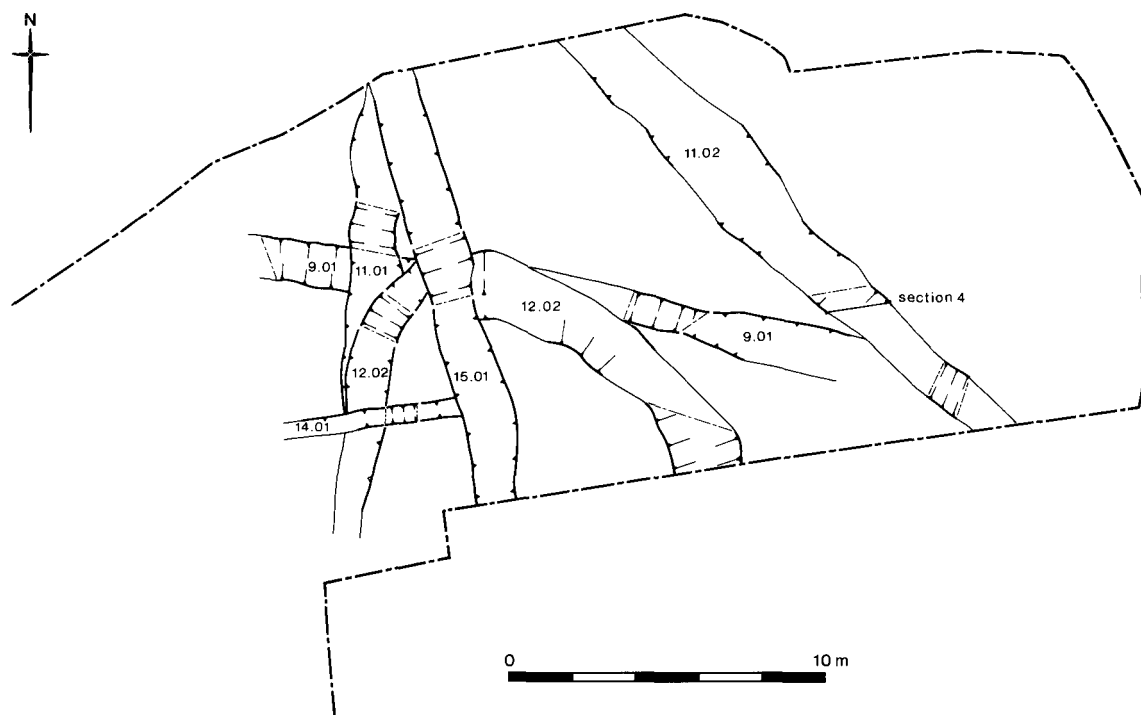


Fig 6. Roman field system

beamslot. The fill contained charcoal and daub fragments. Four large postholes truncated this feature. The posthole at the southern end of the beamslot measured up to 1.38m in diameter and was 0.39m deep, while those to the north measured up to 0.90m in diameter and were 0.2m deep. The size of these postholes suggests that they may have been supports for a substantial building, and that the beamslot and postholes formed the eastern wall of Building 1. Within the area delineated by the eaves drip gullies and beamslot, a series of intercutting narrow slots and postholes was excavated. The four slots [5.12], [5.15] formed the internal partition walls of the building and were aligned north-south and east-west. At the junction of these slots were two substantial postholes measuring up to 0.76m in diameter and 0.11m deep, the second of these apparently a replacement for an earlier post. The east-west wall was recorded to the west of the north-south wall and no sign of the partition wall was recorded to the east, perhaps the result of later truncation. At least two smaller rooms measuring 5m by 2m were created by these internal walls. To the east and west of the

building two rows of postholes, Structure 1 and 2, may represent north-south and east-west fencelines around Building 1.

Building 1 was later extended to the east and west. A linear feature [8.07], 20m in length and

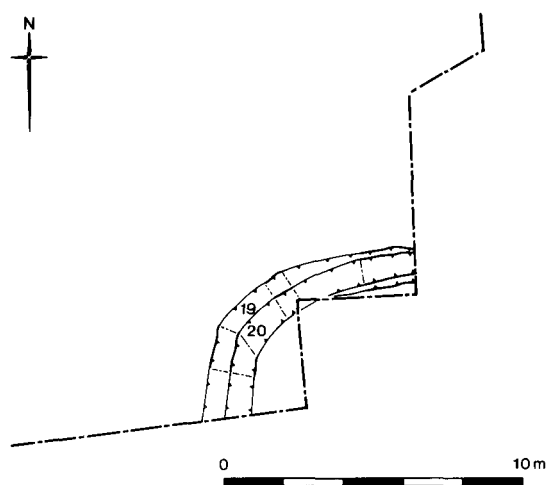


Fig 7. Roman curvilinear ditches (19=12.01; 20=13.01)

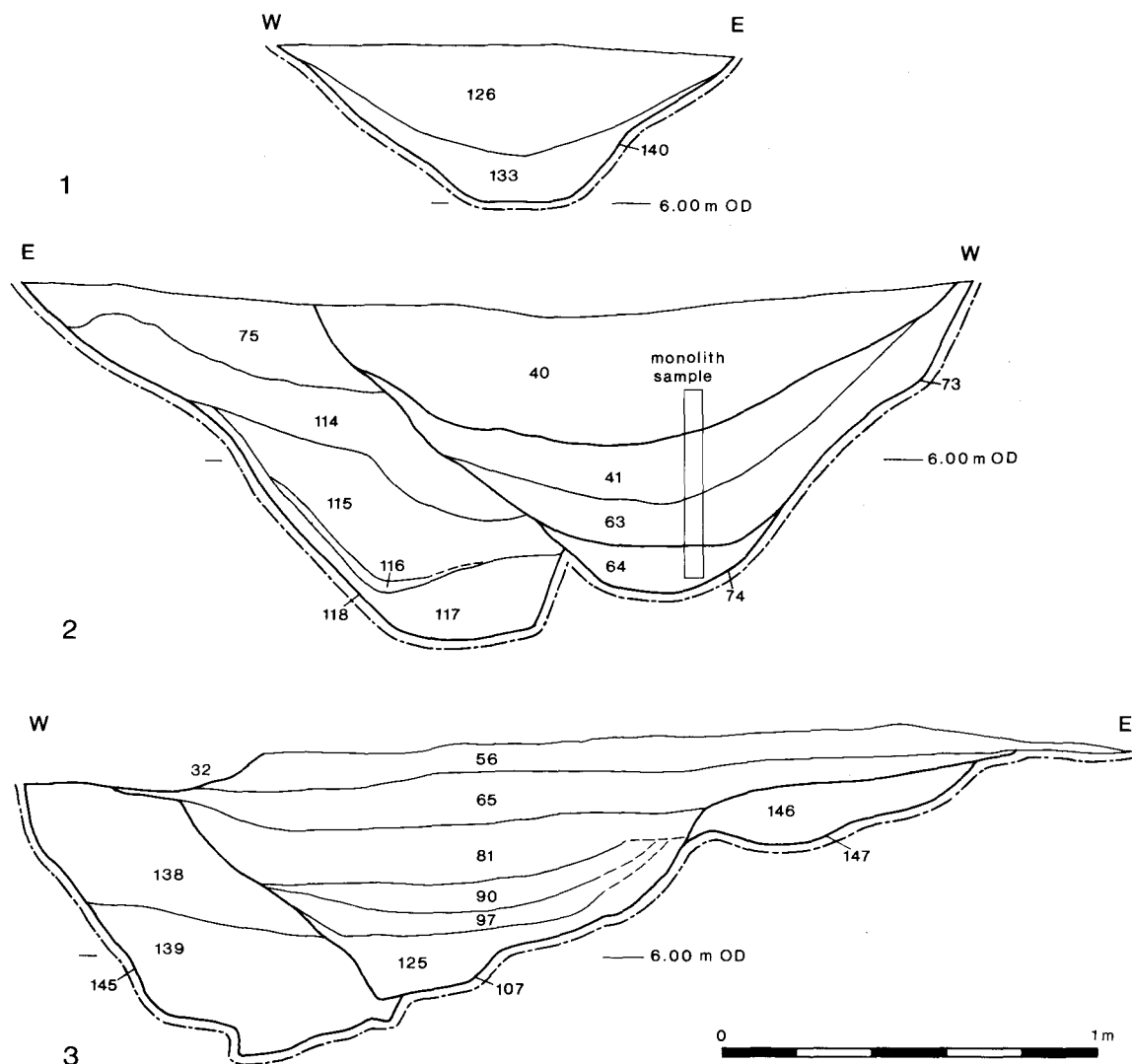


Fig 8. Sections 1-3

truncated to the west, bisected Building 1 to the north and south. The eastern wall was also extended at this time, moving beamslot [8.01], [8.03] 2m to the east. No additional eaves drip gullies survived, perhaps the result of modern truncation. To the north, one or possibly two, rooms were formed measuring up to 14m by 7m, while in the west a further north-south slot [8.11] formed an additional room 7m by 5m. To the south the internal partitions were retained, abutting the east-west slot. The fenceline to the south was retained while the eastern fenceline was moved 2m to the east (Structure 3).

To the east of the north-south boundary ditch six intercutting ditches were excavated and recorded in an area 28m by 14m (Fig 6), severely truncated by foundations of the hospital building. The ditches formed no particular pattern and were curvilinear as well as linear. The earliest [9.01], aligned north-west-south-east and extending 19m, was 1.2m wide and 0.34m deep. It was truncated by a north-south ditch [11.01] parallel to the boundary ditch. This was recorded for 10m, and was 1.5m wide and 0.84m deep. To the east a north-west-south-east ditch [11.02] was recorded for 19m. It extended into the

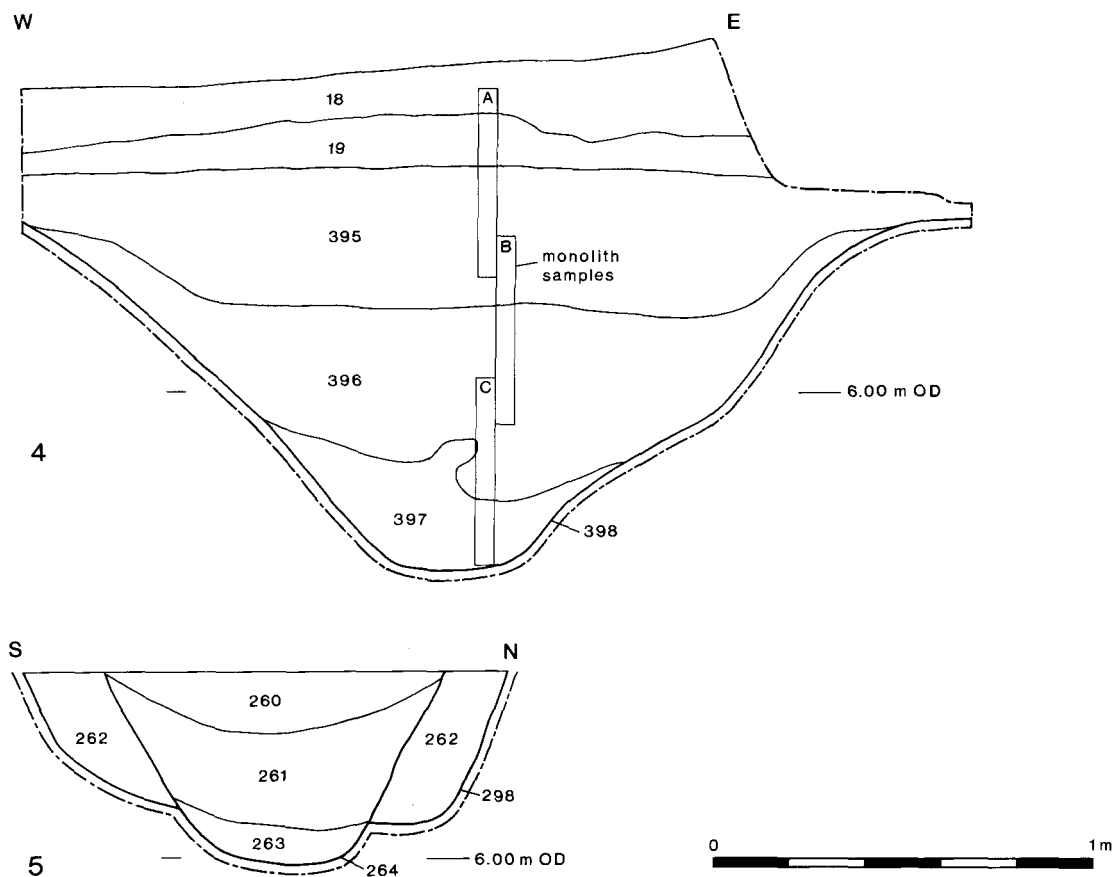


Fig 9. Sections 4 & 5

northern and southern limits of excavation (Fig 9 section 4). The north-south ditch was replaced by a curvilinear ditch [12.02] 19m long in total and extending beyond the southern limit of excavation. The fill contained medium fragments of daub and tile, and appears to have been naturally deposited with cultural material washed in. An east-west V-shaped ditch [14.01], 5.2m long, up to 0.60m wide and 0.54m deep, the narrowest ditch in the sequence, replaced the curvilinear ditch. It was succeeded by a north-south ditch [15.01] which extended to the northern and southern limits of excavation. This measured 14.5m in length, 1.7m in width and was 0.30m deep, and was the latest in the series of ditches. Pottery recovered from its fill is dated late 1st century to the second half of the 2nd century.

To the south of Buildings 1 and 2 and to the south-west of the field system a curvilinear ditch [12.01] (Fig 7) cut through the southern part of

Building 2. This ditch was recut within a short period, and was 10m long, 1.26m wide and up to 0.83m deep. The fill of the earlier ditch was a clayey silt with burnt flint and pottery fragments, occasional daub fragments and a partial samian dish. The later recut of this ditch [13.01], on the same alignment, was 9m long, 0.88m wide and up to 0.52m deep. The fills were clayey silt and sandy silt, and the ditch would appear to have silted up and gone out of use. The fills contained burnt flint and pottery. The dating of the recut is late 1st to late 2nd century.

Several undated and unstratified features did not appear to belong to either Building 1 or 2 although their size and shape was indicative of postholes. The excavated area was sealed by a post-Roman alluvial deposit up to 0.38m thick which resulted from a complex process of flooding and dry land (Howe 1995, 9). Finds recovered from this deposit range from the Late Iron Age to the post-medieval period.

## The charred plant remains

John Giorgi

The site was extensively sampled for charred plant remains, samples being taken mainly from ditch and posthole fills from all phases of the site. Sample size ranged from five to 60 litres. Eighty-six samples were processed by flotation using mesh sizes of 0.25mm and 1mm for the recovery of flot and residue respectively. The flots were dried and scanned using a binocular microscope, while the residues were dried and sorted for environmental remains and artefactual evidence.

Twenty-six samples produced identifiable charred plant remains, with mixed assemblages of mainly cereal grains plus smaller amounts of chaff fragments (spikelet forks, glume bases, rachises) and weed seeds (Table 1). The ditch fill [2.03] produced over 50% of all remains, although individual sample assemblages were generally small. Very small fragments of animal bone were sorted from 12 sample residues, although virtually all the bone was simply classified as indeterminate sheep-size fragments due to the poor state of preservation; one fragment from ditch fill [4.01] showed evidence of burning, while a sheep or goat tooth fragment was identified in ditch fill [2.03].

Cereals included wheat (*Triticum* spp.), barley (*Hordeum* sp.) and oat (*Avena* sp.). Almost 60% of the grains, however, could not be identified owing to their poor state of preservation. Wheat was the best represented cereal, with several species identified on the basis of both grain and chaff fragments; this included the glume wheats emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and spelt (*T. spelta*) and one grain of either emmer or einkorn (*T. monococcum*). Grains of free-threshing bread wheat (*Triticum aestivum* s.l.) were recognised by their characteristic short, squat, rounded morphology. Several well preserved hulled barley grains were present. Oat grains and awn fragments were also found but the absence of diagnostic floret bases meant that it was not possible to establish whether these grains were derived from wild or cultivated species.

A small number of weed seeds was recovered although few could be identified to species level. Most of the better represented taxa were from high seed-producing plants, for example, goosefoots (*Chenopodium* spp.), rushes (*Juncus* spp.), and possibly mayweed (cf *Tripleurospermum* sp.). The

seeds were from plants that can grow in a range of habitats but particularly from weeds of waste places and cultivated ground, and from grasses, especially bromes (*Bromus* spp.), which were well represented. Other common species included sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella* agg.), which may be found on heaths, short grassland and cultivated ground, mainly on acidic, sandy gravels. Sixteen rush seeds were found; these are usually indicative of damp conditions.

Previous archaeobotanical research in the area is limited; however, several sites to the west of St Mary Abbots, in the vicinity of Heathrow on the West London gravels, produced the same range of charred cereals, represented by grains and chaff fragments, both in Iron Age deposits at Stockley Park, Dawley, and early to late Roman deposits at Wall Garden Farm, Sipson (Giorgi 1993). At Long Lane, Ickenham in north-west London, a small number of bread wheat grains were also identified in Roman deposits (Giorgi 1995b). Urban deposits from Roman London show that spelt wheat and barley are generally the best represented grains, with emmer and bread wheat appearing less frequently and oat being only occasionally found. Archaeobotanical results from other Iron Age and Romano-British sites suggest a similar pattern for the rest of the country (Greig 1991, 310), although bread wheat and oats may have become more widely cultivated in the later Roman period (Jones 1991, 23); the earliest samples at St Mary Abbots however contained both bread wheat and oat. Emmer has been mainly recovered from sites in the south-west and far north of the country, while einkorn was rare in the Roman period and was probably only a weed of the other cereals. All the cereals may have been used for human consumption; bread wheat produces a soft flour with good bread-making qualities, and all the other grain types may have been used on their own or in mixes for bread or in soups or stews. Barley may have been used for brewing and, together with oats, as animal fodder.

The detection of crop husbandry practices is limited by the fact that few weed seeds were found and even fewer could be reduced to species level. As different species within a genus may also grow in a wide range of habitats, it is difficult to determine whether many of the seeds represent weeds of cultivated ground or of waste places and disturbed ground. Rush seeds in the richest sample could indicate cultivation of damp soils or plants simply growing in one of the ditch



features. The range of weed seeds, however, compares well with other Roman rural sites but is also comparable with urban sites in Roman London.

The small size of most of the individual charred assemblages makes it difficult to determine whether they represent the residues of products or by-products of particular stages of crop-processing. The three samples which produced more than 50 plant remains, the ditch fills [2.03] and posthole fill [5.07], showed a predominance of grain, which was also evident in most of the other samples. The grains and chaff fragments are indicative of the later stages of crop-processing and cleaning; indeed, glume wheats are often stored in their husks for transport and storage. It is difficult to interpret the weed seeds in terms of crop-processing by-products for the reasons given above, but some of the larger grass seeds, for instance the bromes, are characteristic of stored grain products, as being of a similar size, they are difficult to separate from the grain by sieving. Most of the charred plant remains were recovered from ditch fill samples in close proximity to the building; this suggests that activities associated with the preparation of cereals for consumption may have been taking place within, or close to, the building.

### **The registered finds**

*Angela Wardle*

The identifiable objects of Iron Age and Roman date in this small assemblage are all domestic items as, for example, the four ceramic weights which may provide evidence of textile production. Six glass vessel fragments, which comprise the major part of the Roman group, date from the 1st, or at the latest, early 2nd century. Four fragments derive from ditches [4.01], [12.02], [13.01], two from other Roman features and a bead comes from the post-Roman alluvium, which was the most productive context on the site (eight finds). The glassware includes some fine tablewares, for example fragments of good quality 1st-century monochrome glass, notably a brown ribbed bowl which suggests that the local inhabitants had sufficient wealth to purchase these items as well as more utilitarian containers. Although small, the Roman assemblage is of some significance, providing evidence of 1st-

century activity in an area of London about which little is yet known.

### **Fired clay weights**

Two of four weights made of fired clay (Fig 10) came from Roman contexts, and two were from ditch fills of the north-south boundary ditch which contained pottery of 1st-century date or earlier (Groves 1994). Weights of varying form have been found on many Iron Age sites, the triangular shape being the most common, as at Danebury (Poole 1984, 406). Such objects are conventionally interpreted as loomweights and as such would have been used on a warp-weighted vertical loom, archaeological evidence for which is limited, being generally confined to the weights themselves (Wild 1970, 61-3). Weights made of fired clay could clearly be used for purposes other than weaving, but the presence of several fragments in a restricted area strengthens their identification as loomweights, as was the case at Glastonbury, where groups of triangular weights were found with weaving combs (Poole 1984, 406). Interpretation of the objects as loomweights would provide evidence of textile production in the area during the Late Iron Age. The degree of abrasion, however, indicates considerable movement in the soil, and their exact source is unknown.

A small collection of flints was recovered from the site but no diagnostic artefact types were present.

### **Ceramic building material**

A quantity of highly abraded ceramic building material was recovered from the excavation. The majority of the material comprised small fragments of highly abraded daub with a small amount of ceramic tile. The daub bore no impressions such as wattle marks, and although some of the fragments had been partly burnt it is not possible to say whether they formed part of wattle and timber walls or hearths (Howe 1995, lxxxii). Two fragments of possible mud-bricks could have formed part of a clay and timber building somewhere in the vicinity. Two fragments of roofing tile and one of box flue-tile were also recovered, and although their presence might suggest a building with a tiled roof and a

Table 1. The charred plant remains

Species	Common name	Group Feature	2.03 Ditch	2.03 0-100	2.03 0-70	2.02 Ditch	2.02 0-70	2.04 ph	5.04 Cut	5.15 Cut	5.15 Cut	5.08 ph	4.01 Ditch	—	—	—	5.21 ph	5.23 ph
<i>Triticum dicoccum</i>	Emmer	FI	4															
<i>T. cf. dicoccum</i>	Emmer	FI	4		1													
<i>T. monoccum/dicoccum</i>	Einkorn/emmer	FI	1															
<i>T. monoccum/dicoccum</i>	Einkorn/emmer	FI	5															
	Glume base																	
<i>T. spelta</i>	Spelt	FI	1															
<i>T. spelta</i>	Spelt spikelet fork	FI	1															
<i>T. spelta</i>	Spelt glume base	FI	3															
<i>T. cf. spelta</i>	Spelt	FI	1															
<i>T. dicoccum/spelta</i>	Emmer/spelt	FI	5		1													
<i>T. aestivum</i> s.l.	Bread/club wheat	FI	3											2				
	Bread/club wheat	FI	5													1		
<i>T. cf. aestivum</i> s.l.	Bread/club wheat	FI	6															
<i>T. spelta/aestivum</i>	Spelt/bread wheat	FI																
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	Wheat	FI	35	1	4							3		8	1	2		
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	Wheat spikelet fork	FI			3													
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	Wheat glume base	FI	25		7						1		1	2				
<i>Triticum</i> spp.	Wheat rachis	FI	14															
<i>Hordeum sativum</i>	Barley	FI			2							3		1				
<i>cf. H. sativum</i>	Barley	FI	2		2													
<i>Hordeum/Triticum</i> spp.	Barley or wheat	FI																
<i>Hordeum/Triticum</i> spp.	Barley or wheat	FI	4									14	1			1		
	awn																	
<i>Avena</i> spp.	Oat	AFI	3															
<i>Avena</i> spp.	Oat awn	AFI	4															
<i>cf. Avena</i> spp.	Oat	AFI	2									13			18			
Cerealia	Indet. cereal	FI	84	1	49	2					1	25	3	16	5	4		2
Cerealia	Indet. cereal	FI	1															
	culm node																	
<i>Clematidium</i> spp.	Goosefoot etc	ABCDHF	20		1						1			1		6		

Table 1. (Cont.)

Species	Common name	Group	Feature	Habitat	Context	Sample no	Sample size (l)	2.03	Ditch	2.03	0-100	0-70	Ditch	2.02	ph	5.04	Cut	5.15	Cut	5.15	5.08	ph	Ditch	4.01	—	—	—	—	—	ph	5.21	5.23
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	Orache	ABFGH	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
cf. <i>Medicago/Trifolium</i> spp.	Medick/clover	ABDI	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Leguminosae indet.	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> agg.	Knotgrass	ABG	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Polygonum</i> sp.	—	ABCEFG	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> agg.	Sheep's sorrel	AD	26	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Rumex</i> spp.	Docks	ABCEFG	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
cf. <i>Trifoliarosperum</i> spp.	Mayweed	AB	10	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Onopordum acanthium</i> L.	Scotch thistle	ABC	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Juncus</i> spp.	Rush	ADEH	16	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Lolium</i> cf. <i>temulentum</i>	Rye-grass	AB	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Lolium/Festuca</i> spp.	Rye-grass/fescue	BCD	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Bromus</i> spp.	Bromes	ABD	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Bromus/Lolium</i> spp.	Bromes/-rye-grass	ABDI	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Avena/Bromus</i> spp.	Oat/brome	ABCDI	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
<i>Phalaris</i> type	Reed grass/canary grass	BE	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
Gramineae indet.	—	ABCEDEHI	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
indeterminate	—	—	16	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	
TOTAL	—	—	330	2	83	3	1	7	2	7	60	5	48	15	26	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	

Species	Common name	Group	Feature	Habitat	Context	Sample no	Sample size (l)	8.01	lin cut	16.04	pit	ph	16.05	13.01	ditch	13.01	ditch	13.01	16.11	16.12	16.11	16.18	16.19	ph	ph	ph	ph	ph	ph	ph	ph
<i>Triticum aestivum</i> s.l.	Bread/club wheat	FI	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	Wheat	FI	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Hordeum/Triticum</i> sp.	Barley or wheat	FI	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Cerealia	Indet. cereal	FI	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
cf. <i>Medicago/Trifolium</i> spp.	Medick/clover	ABDI	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> agg.	Sheep's sorrel	AD	15	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Bromus</i> sp.	Brome	ABD	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
<i>Avena/Bromus</i> sp.	Oat/brome	ABCDFI	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
indeterminate	—	—	2	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
TOTAL	—	—	4	4	24	1	2	3	2	1	6	2	2	1	6	2	2	1	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

**Key:** A = weeds of cultivated ground; B = weeds of waste places and disturbed ground; C = plants of woods and marginal land; D = open environment (fairly undisturbed); E = plants of damp, wet environments; F = edible plants; G = medicinal plants; H = commercial, industrial use; I = planted, cultivated in.

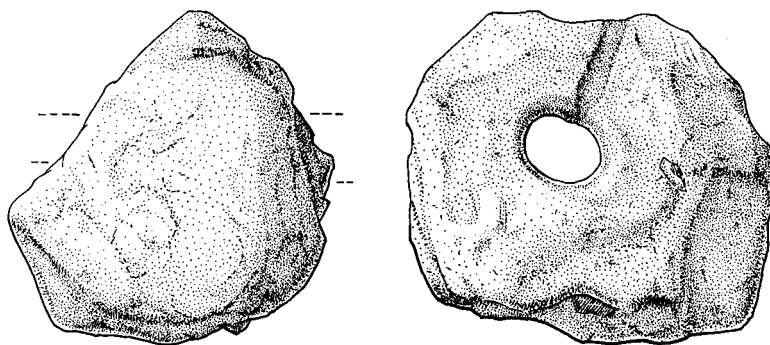


Fig 10. Fired clay weight

heating system there is no other evidence to support such a speculation.

## The pottery

*Louise Rayner*

The site produced a total of ten standard MoL boxes of pottery, dating to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age, Late Iron Age and Roman periods. The condition of the pottery is generally poor with fragmentary sherds and highly abraded surfaces. The assemblage was recorded using standard MoLAS codes for fabric, form and decoration and quantified by weight and estimated vessel equivalents (EVEs). The assemblage totalled 27.8 EVEs and 25,024g. The assemblage is important for two reasons. First, for the material dating to the late Iron Age since there are only a handful of chronologically comparative groups from the London region as a whole, and secondly for the location of the site to the west of *Londinium*.

A small number of sherds were identified as Late Bronze Age-Early Iron Age in date. These were recovered residual with later material, but distinctive in both coarse and fine, flint-tempered fabrics. An abraded rim sherd from a bipartite jar was recovered from context 235 which dates from the end of the 2nd millennium BC through to the ninth century BC in the Thames Valley (Barrett 1980).

A total of 35 contexts assigned to the Late Iron Age phase produced pottery (1.17 EVEs/1305g); the majority (1.13 EVEs/1105g) being recovered from excavated sections of the large north-south ditch [2.03]. All of the pottery from this phase has either grog-tempered or

vesicular fabric and most vessels, where identifiable, are handmade. The most commonly recorded form is a simple bead-rimmed jar. This form is consistently present in the vesicular fabric, the shape of the voids suggesting the fabric was predominately shell-tempered. At least six individual vessels of this type have been recorded from the large ditch, including context 114, where a fragmentary but partially complete example was recovered (Fig 11, No.5). The jars are very simple in character; the rims have slight internal thickening but no external groove to demarcate the bead. This form, developing from the middle Iron Age tradition of wide-mouthed, rimless jars, appears to begin in the 1st century BC and continues as a handmade form into the post-conquest period (Stead & Rigby 1989, 192; Thompson 1982, 235).

Other vessels from the Iron Age ditch include a necked jar and a cordoned beaker with combed decoration. Both these vessels are in a hard fired, thin walled, grog-tempered fabric. The necked jar is handmade with a slight cordon at the base of an upright neck. The beaker is very fragmentary and the internal surface so badly damaged that it is not possible to establish the method of manufacture. However, the sherds clearly represent a single vessel with multiple cordons and zones of vertical combed decoration, most probably from a barrel or butt beaker. Grog-tempered imitations of Gallo-Belgic forms are a common component of Late Iron Age and early Roman assemblages, particularly in the south-east of England, where wheel thrown copies form part of a ceramic tradition, commonly termed 'belgic' (Thompson 1982).

The dating of this group rests largely on the presence of the grog-tempered vessels, including one of Gallo-Belgic derived form, and on the

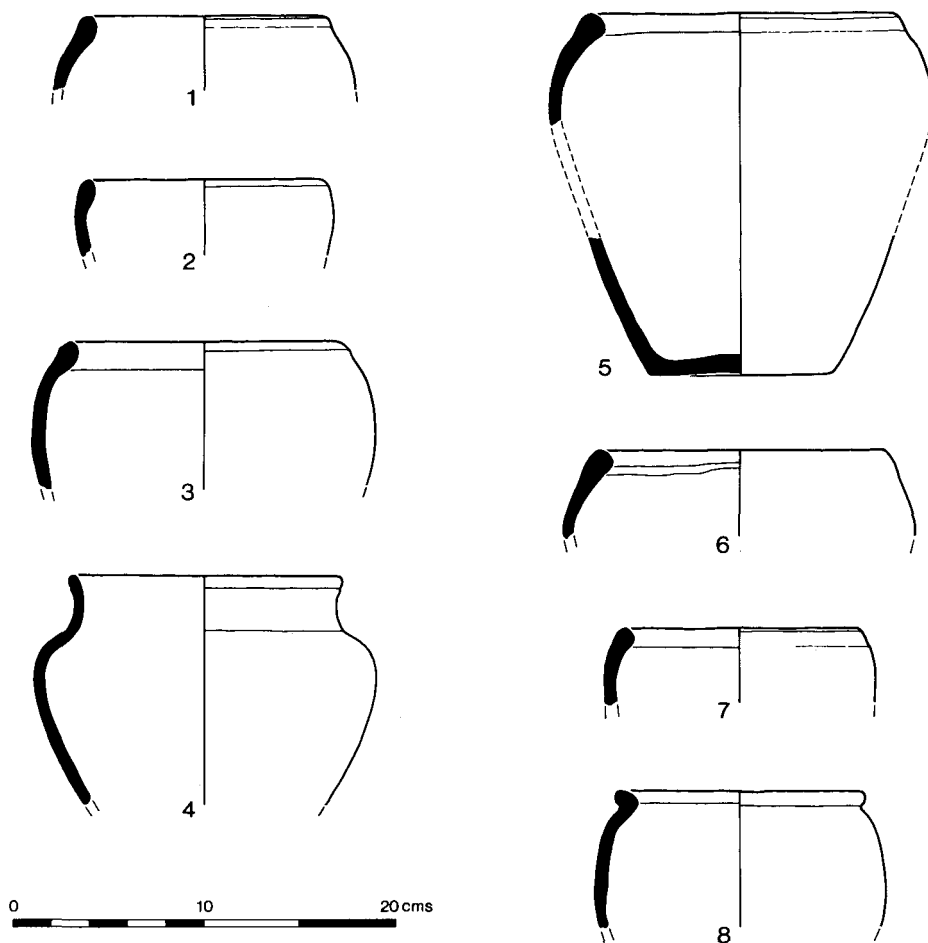


Fig 11. The pottery from Iron Age ditch [2.03]: 1. Shell-tempered bead rim jar. 0.11 EVEs; 24g [context 164]; 2. Shell-tempered bead rim jar. 0.22 EVEs; 116g. [context 165]; 3. Shell-tempered bead rim jar. 0.27 EVEs; 235g [context 165]; 4. Grog-tempered necked jar. 0.14 EVEs; 120g [context 165]; 5. Shell-tempered bead rim jar; base and lower part of vessel. 0.20 EVEs; 477g [context 114]; 6. Shell-tempered/quartz bead rim jar. 0.12 EVEs; 84g [context 114]; 7. Shell-tempered bead rim jar. 0.16 EVEs; 28g [context 116]. From Roman Ditch [4.01]: 8. Grog-tempered bead rim jar. 0.94 EVEs; 205g [context 97]

absence of products from the Romanised industries, common in London by c.50/55AD. The lack of comparable assemblages and absence of associated imports, or other intrinsically datable artefacts, makes closer dating more difficult, but the group clearly belongs to a ceramic phase earlier than the assemblages from the earliest levels in the City and Southwark, most probably lying within the last decades of the 1st century BC and early 1st century AD.

Comparable assemblages are rare from the London region, but two are worth noting in relation to the material from St Mary Abbots, as they are likely to be broadly contemporary. Assemblages from both Park Street, Southwark

(PRK90) and site 14 at Brentford include vesicular and shell-tempered bead rim jars alongside grog-tempered necked and cordoned jars. A probable sherd of imported Gallo-Belgic white ware butt beaker was also in the Park Street assemblage (Groves in prep; Tyers 1996; Parnum & Cotton 1982).

By comparison the early Roman assemblage is distinguished by the presence of wheel-thrown sandy wares, including vessels produced by the main industries that supplied the City and Southwark from c.50/55AD until the mid 2nd century AD, such as kilns in the Verulamium region, Highgate Wood, and Alice Holt/Farnham, Surrey. Imported wares are recorded

for the first time in this phase, with small quantities of South Gaulish samian. In general, the composition of the Roman assemblage fits within the pattern of ceramic supply established for the City and this is no doubt a reflection of the near proximity to a road providing access to traded goods, going both into and out of *Londinium*.

The early Roman phase appears to date from the late Neronian/early Flavian period (c.60–70AD), with the main north-south Roman ditch [4.01] producing material of this date in the lower fills and of mid 2nd-century AD date in the upper fills. This ditch group also includes re-deposited material from the earlier phase, probably derived from the cutting of the Roman ditch along a similar alignment to the Iron Age ditch. The grog-tempered bead rimmed jars are of interest from this phase. These jars differ from the Iron Age examples, with a more triangular rim profile and an external groove to demarcate the bead (Marsh & Tyers 1979, type IIA1–4). Also present are bead rimmed jars with square rim profiles and a groove on the shoulder (Marsh & Tyers 1979, type IIA7–8), which are frequently found in the pre-Flavian groups from the City and Southwark. The comparison of the two ditch assemblages has highlighted typological changes in the bead rimmed jar which appear to have chronological implications.

Both the Late Iron Age and Roman assemblages are clearly domestic in character, as both are dominated by a range of vessels used for food preparation, cooking and storage. For the Late Iron Age, the presence of some partially complete, if fragmentary, vessels may suggest the *foci* of occupation is within the nearby vicinity.

## DISCUSSION

The archaeological evidence at St Mary Abbots Hospital provides the first evidence of Late Iron Age and early Roman activity in the area directly to the west of the Roman city of *Londinium*. Other sites to the west, particularly Long Lane, Ickenham (Lakin 1994, 1–12), and Holloway Lane, Harmondsworth and Wall Garden Farm, Sipson (Lewis & Mason in prep). Sites on the West London Gravels, have also produced occupation and agricultural evidence for this period. The St Mary Abbots site, however, provides an important link between the two periods, indicating that occupation was continu-

ous in this area. The large rectilinear building is unusual in that the shape and construction was uncommon until the later Roman period. There are examples of this type of building, however, at Ditchley, Oxfordshire (Frere 1978, 305), Barton Court, Abingdon (Branigan 1987, 86), and at Ilchester (Smith 1987, 298–9) where remains of timber-framed buildings have been recorded dating to the 1st century. There is less evidence in the environs of London, where Romanisation saw the replacement of circular buildings by rectilinear 'villas', usually built of stone, in the 3rd to 4th centuries. Timber-framed buildings have been recorded to the west in both Brentford and Staines. At Brentford there was little information concerning size or shape, though the buildings dated to the 1st century (Canham 1971, 294), and at Staines postdated the 3rd century (Crouch 1976, 85–6). Excavations at Wakerley in the Welland valley recorded an enclosed settlement, established in the Belgic period and occupied through to the Roman period, that included possible rectilinear timber buildings and a late 2nd-century barn of roughly the same size as that at St Mary Abbots (Branigan 1985, 132).

Although the Late Iron Age features were not sufficiently detailed to confirm that they represent a structure, their function as part of a possible enclosure certainly indicates activity at this date, while the artefacts, in particular the pottery and loomweights, suggest that a settlement existed close by. It is probable that later activity, especially the construction of the hospital, has destroyed much of the evidence, though it may still survive in the unexcavated area to the south-east. The lack of definite Late Iron Age features may also indicate that occupation of the building was continuous into the early Roman period. The presence of Late Iron Age pottery in the boundary ditch may indicate earlier activity in the area. The fact that the boundary ditch was recut after a relatively short period on almost the same alignment also suggests that occupation was continuous between these periods. The lack of archaeological evidence for Late Iron Age activity to the east of the boundary ditch implies that this area was not developed agriculturally until the early Roman period.

The major north-south ditch is important. It might represent an enclosure ditch of which all other evidence has been lost, but as it was not seen to the south of the occupation area during the evaluation stage it may not have turned to

the west at all and so would not have enclosed the area where occupation activity was recorded. If not an enclosure ditch, what can its purpose have been? No notable gradient was observed during excavation, so that it cannot have been primarily intended as a drain. It does however appear to have served as a demarcation between an area possibly used for cultivation and one given over to occupation. The dating of cultural material from the ditch suggests that it went out of use by the end of the 2nd century, which corresponds with the disuse of the building. It is not possible to define the relationship between this ditch and the curvilinear ditch which postdated the building. This would appear to have been the latest Roman feature on site, and it perhaps enclosed uninvestigated land to the south.

The lack of determinate features such as hearths, floor surfaces, and of agricultural evidence such as corn dryers, impedes interpretation of the rectilinear structure and the site at large. The evidence of the fragment of flue tile and roofing tile tentatively suggests the existence of a larger, possibly masonry, building in the vicinity, for which there is no other evidence. The size of the building, however, would suggest that it served as a barn where animals and agricultural products may have been kept. As noted above, the presence of the larger grass seeds is characteristic of stored grain and may add weight to the possibility that grain was being produced as well as stored at St Mary Abbots before being distributed to *Londinium*.

As such a small area was excavated, it was not possible to distinguish any field system, and modern buildings to the north and south of the excavated area may have destroyed further evidence of the ditches. No archaeological activity was recorded in trenches 75m to the east and 30m to the south-east. With little of the environmental evidence coming from the 'cultivated' part of the site no fuller interpretation is possible.

## CONCLUSIONS

The excavations at St Mary Abbots Hospital have produced, for the first time in Kensington, important archaeological evidence of the Late Iron Age/early Roman period. This compares with contemporary sites further to the west of London and provides an important link between

the hinterland of *Londinium* and the capital itself. The pottery recovered from the site indicates that activity was taking place over a long period of time. Although there is no direct evidence for an Iron Age settlement the presence of the pottery in the boundary ditch does suggest that such a settlement was nearby. The pottery also shows that occupation continued into the Roman period suggesting that the farmstead had existed over a period of time. Environmental evidence was unable to confirm that farming was taking place on the site, but it does show that the final processes of crop cleaning took place in the area of the building, supporting its interpretation as a farmstead. The closeness of the farmstead to the putative Roman road 'Akeman Street' would have allowed easy access to *Londinium* 6km to the north-east. The presence of Roman glass would also suggest that trade was taking place between the City and the farmstead which, if it was crop producing, could have supplied the City. The decline of *Londinium* in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, which saw many areas abandoned and the population reduced, may help account for the decline and disuse of the farm building and field system at St Mary Abbots. If food consumption and the demand for staple food products dropped, small farms in the hinterland would have been the first to be affected.

The archaeobotanical data from St Mary Abbots provides some information on the range of cereals consumed at the site, which was similar to charred remains from other Roman settlements in the area. The quantity and quality of the evidence on its own however is insufficient to determine whether it was a crop-producing site; most of the charred remains were mainly derived from the final stages of crop cleaning. On the other hand, the range of weed seeds and crop-processing debris, albeit limited, is comparable with that of other rural Romano-British sites. It is therefore possible that the area around the site was being used for cereal cultivation.

The coincidence between the decline of the city of *Londinium* and that of St Mary Abbots is suggestive, although a direct link between the two cannot be made and depends largely on negative environmental data and imprecise information about the actual course of 'Akeman Street'. There is evidently a need for further archaeological investigation in the hinterland of the Roman city, particularly in the area to the west, with a view to collating data concerning

food production and communications. It is understood that recent work in the area of Kensington High Street to the north of the site carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) has uncovered further important evidence of possible Roman and Saxon occupation in the Kensington area. Future work of this kind may facilitate interpretation of the settlement at St Mary Abbots and lead to a wider understanding of the infrastructure that supported the population of the capital.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks go to Taylor Woodrow Property Company Limited for the generous funding of all stages of this project.

The author would also like to thank MoLAS colleagues who have contributed to this article; in particular John Giorgi (palaeobotany), Louise Rayner (Iron Age and Roman pottery), Angela Wardle (registered finds), Susan Banks, Jeannette van der Post, Kikar Singh (drawings), and Penny Bruce and Robin Densem (project managers). Special thanks also go to Robin Nielsen who supervised the archaeological evaluation and excavation and for his contribution to the post-excavation assessment.

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