

BROCKLEY HILL

The Site of Sulloniacae?

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BISECTED BY Roman Watling Street and located in the high open country of north Middlesex is Brockley Hill, generally considered to be the site of *Sulloniacae*, which was mentioned in Iter II of the *Antonine Itinerary* as lying 12 miles from *Londinium* and 9 miles from *Verulamium*.

Like many sites it attracted the attention of early antiquaries. Firstly William Camden, about whom Norden commented in his *Speculum Britanniae*¹; "Where others have hitherto placed this Sullonicae at Chipping Barnet, regarding only the foresaid distances, Mr. Camden by diligent observance has found that it should stand on Brockley Hill." John Norden and not surprisingly William Stukeley, commented on the finding of Roman ruins, coins, urns and other antiquities there during the construction of houses. Findings of material in the 19th century, and in 1909, during the construction of tennis courts in the grounds of the Orthopaedic Hospital, suggested a Roman settlement of some importance².

Excavations (Fig. 1)

Despite curiosity and various theories it was not until 1937 that any archaeological excavations took place there³. Although a number of excavations have taken place since then⁴, the exact nature of the settlement is still not certain. Indeed conclusions are severely handicapped by their piecemeal nature. Those in 1937, 1947 and the 1950s were exploratory whereas those from 1968 onwards have been rescue operations in which speed has been the determining factor. Despite this a short summary of evidence so far obtained is both possible and clearly desirable.

Pre-Roman Activity

A number of worked flints, including a Mesolithic type core-tool⁵, have been found in the Roman levels

on the sites excavated. Yet another Mesolithic core-tool was found in 1959 during rather unproductive excavations on the east side of modern Watling Street⁶. From the 1953-4 excavations was found a Bronze Age polished flint "fabricator"⁷ and in 1950 a fragment of bucket urn was found during trenching, near Canons Corner⁸. A Bronze Age palstave has also been found near Stanmore Common⁹.

It is clear then that there was prehistoric activity at various parts of the site but there is, however, no clear evidence of Belgic (Pre-Roman) occupation.

Grims Ditch

In the summer of 1955 a trench was cut across the linear earth-work Grims Ditch in Pear Wood in the hope of determining its date¹⁰. As at Harrow Weald Golf Course, where the earthwork is about 100ft. wide, the clay rampart was found to lie on the north side of the ditch. A few sherds of Iron Age pottery were found, though not in such a context as to indicate that the ditch is quite definitely of that date. This earthwork, which runs from Pinner Green to the eastern edge of Pear Wood may well be a Belgic boundary ditch, quite possibly the southern boundary of the territory of the tribe of the Catuvellauni. However, until further excavations are conducted and a satisfactory quantity of datable material is recovered, ideally from the original topsoil or an underlying occupation layer, below the rampart, this cannot be certain.

Roman Watling Street

A road consisting of a clay bank capped with gravel and with side ditches has been located on the west side of modern Watling Street. This feature was excavated at Sites C, E and F in 1968 and its silt filled ditches contained unweathered 1st and 2nd century potsherds and tile fragments. At Site C, the

1. John Norden, *Speculum Britanniae* (ed. 1723), 23.

2. C. E. Vulliamy, *The archaeology of Middlesex and London*, 1930.

3. F. Cottrill, "Note on the trial excavation at Brockley Hill, 1937." *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* (1947), 686-687.

4. Excavations in 1947, 1950-51, 1952 and 1953-54, published in the *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* Reports on excavations by the writer, in 1968 and 1970 have been prepared and it is hoped that sufficient

finance will be found to enable their publication.

5. Found in 1970 and examined by Dr. A. Rosenfeld of the British Museum.

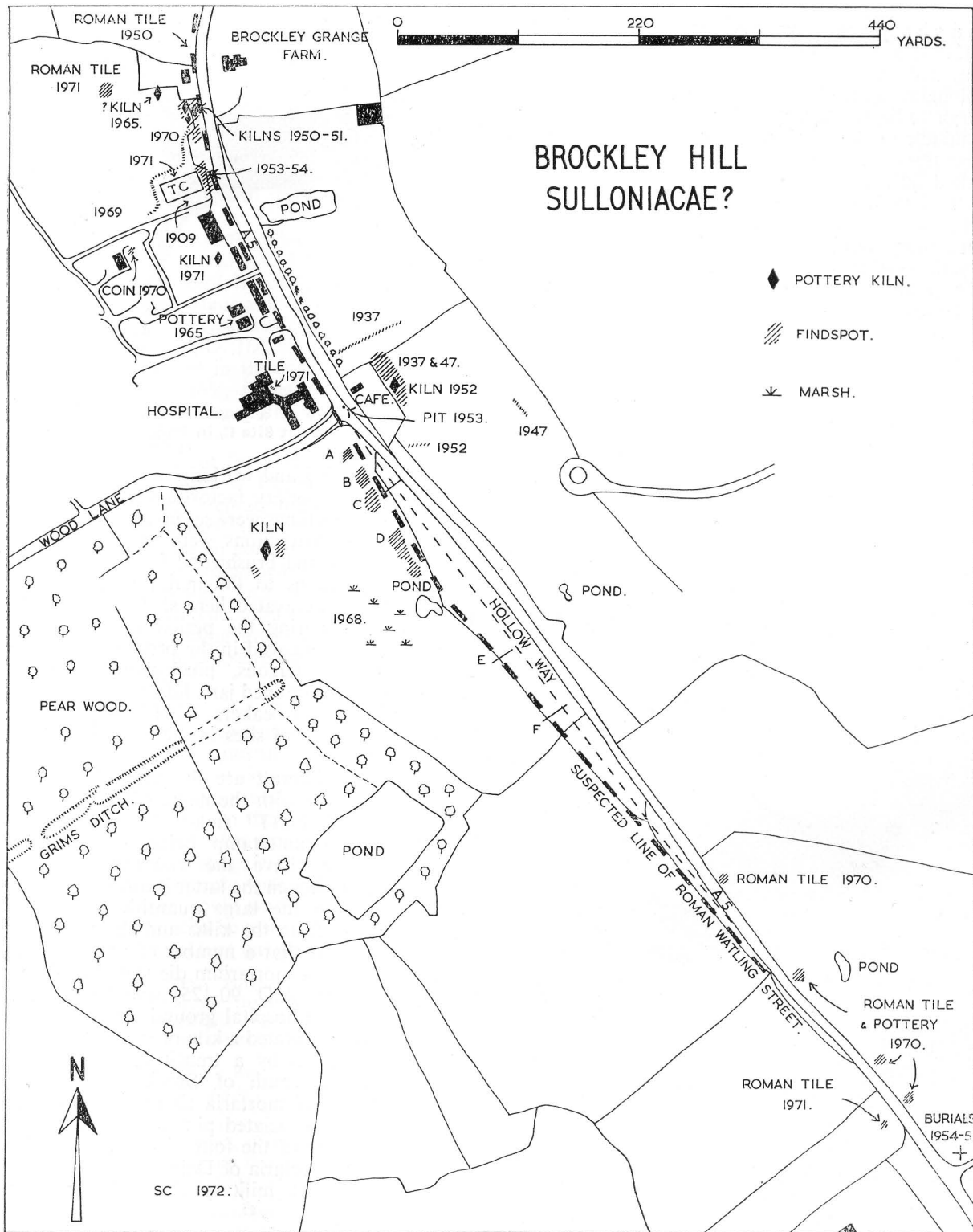
6. Examined by Dr. I. Longworth of the British Museum.

7. P. G. Suggett, "Excavations at Brockley Hill, 1953-54." *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* (1956), 73.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Information from Mr. J. Upton.

10. Excavations conducted by Mr. P. G. Suggett.



east ditch appeared to have been scoured and its infill contained a little 4th century pottery. At the sites mentioned the gravel was badly disturbed, robbed or ploughed away.

Prior to September, 1968, a line of trees ran along the middle of this road the entire length of the field. These trees, which were at least 200 years old, are marked on a field map of 1827. Between this road and modern Watling Street was found a hollow way, apparently of medieval date, certainly in use in the 18th century, but which had gone out of use by 1827, when the present road had come into being.

The road with side ditches is clearly earlier than the hollow way and would seem to be of Roman date. If so, then it must surely be Roman Watling Street. Furthermore a trench cut for a drain in 1953, near the transport cafe, disclosed a pit containing Samian ware (II), actually beneath the eastern half of the present road.

There seems good reason to believe, therefore, that Roman Watling Street is situated to the west of the present road and this is confirmed by the position of the industrial ribbon development.

The Pottery Industry

Although there is no evidence of Belgic (Pre-Roman) occupation at the site it is clear from the quantity of native ware in Flavian deposits that nat-

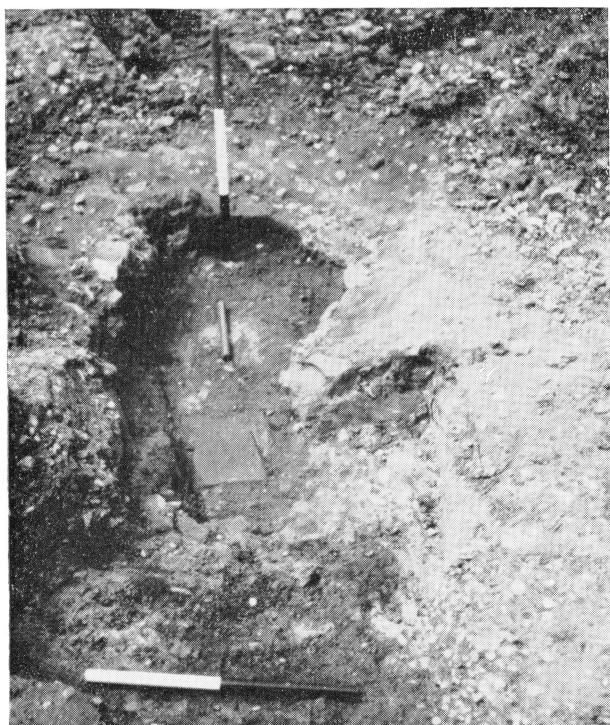


Fig. 2. Roman pottery kiln found during rescue operations in 1968.

Photo : S. A. Castle

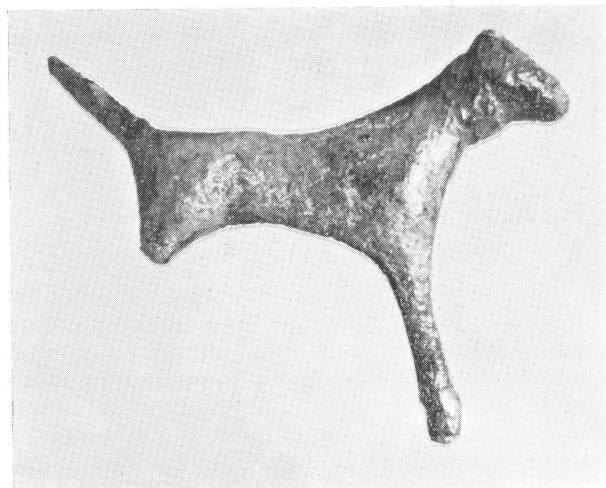


Fig. 3 Bronze figure of a dog found in a first century pit at Site C, in 1968.

(Photo: R. A. Gardner)

ive folk were living and working on the site.

In c. A.D. 70, pottery factories with claypits and possible hovel dwellings were set up alongside Roman Watling Street. Attractions were surely good clay, abundant timber and brushwood for fuel and excellent communications to the major markets. Seven kilns have been excavated here so far, all of which were in action during the period c. A.D. 70-160. These kilns were engaged in the production of mortaria, ring-necked flagons, pinch-mouthed flagons, small amphorae, cordoned jars, lids, reed-rimmed and carinated bowls and beakers. Kitchen ware of types found on a number of sites in the St. Albans region and at London.

Of particular interest are the mortaria, most of which are stamped with the name of the potter and accompanying "FECIT" (made it) counterstamp. Some have the name stamp twice, e.g. DOINUS/DOINUS, others have the counterstamp twice, FECIT/FECIT, though the latter is most unusual.

To judge from the large quantities of stamped waster mortaria from the kilns and their associated claypits, it is clear that a number of potters worked at Brockley Hill. A mortarium die stamp of the potter Matugenus (c. A.D. 90-125) was found during landscaping in the hospital grounds in c. 1900¹¹. In 1971 the writer excavated a kiln of the potter Doinus, which was revealed by a trench for a sewer, immediately to the south of Brockley Hill House. Large quantities of mortaria sherds were found in the furnace and associated pits, most of these with stamps from three of the four dies used by Doinus, c. A.D. 70-110. Mortaria of Doinus have been found on both civil and military sites throughout the province.

11. Information from Mr. G. W. Robinson who deposited his finds in Hendon Library.

as far north as Newstead, Roxburgh, as far south as Hassocks, Sussex and in both north and south Wales.

Other potters working at Brockley Hill included, Bruccius, Doccas, Lallans, Marinus, Matugenus, Melus, Saturninus and quite possibly Candidus, a potter whose products have so far only been recorded from Brockley Hill, London and Richborough. Indeed Brockley Hill was one of the principal centres of mortarium production in the Flavian to Trajanic period.

Production at three of the kilns excavated was confined to the period c. A.D. 70-130, but continued at the kilns to the north of Brockley Hill House (1950-51) as late as the Hadrianic to Antonine period. There is, however, no clear evidence as yet, of pottery production after c. A.D. 160, though it is clear that the site was occupied in the late 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries. It is possible, therefore, that later kilns await discovery elsewhere on the site.

Cremation Burials

In 1954 a trench cut for a sewer in the field immediately to the north of Pipers Green Lane, disclosed two, or more, cremation burials of late 1st to early 2nd century date¹². One of these (Fig. 4) consisted of a coarseware jar containing cremated human bones, which was accompanied by a small food vessel. A scatter of pottery and tile was found nearby but there was no evidence of any structures. Excavations in the surrounding area in 1955 disclosed no further burials but did locate the gravel metalling of an 18th century road.

Posting Station?

To judge from excavations so far conducted, Brockley Hill is clearly not the site of a city¹⁴, or of a town, more probably it consisted of a posting station, a few roadside shops and a village whose community was dependant on the production of pottery. There were probably also small farms in the surrounding area. A posting station would have consisted of an inn or *mansio* with stables, where travellers of the highway could water their horses, obtain refreshment and if need be rest for the night.

Since no such structure has been located it is clear

12. P. G. Suggett, "The Moxom Collection (a Romano-British pottery group from Brockley Hill)." *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* (1958), 60-64.

13. Information and photograph kindly provided by Mr. P. G. Suggett.

14. Such was suggested by Rev. A. R. T. Eales in his lecture on the History of Elstree (published), 1922.

15. A cremation burial was discovered in 1904 and a tile kiln and associated claypits in 1948 behind the Hollybush P. H. Furthermore, if the Viatores road No. 169, is a road and is Roman, there must have been a junction with Roman Watling Street, just west of Elstree Hill House.

16. I. E. Anthony, "Excavations in Verulam Hills Field, St. Albans, 1963-64." *Hertfordshire Archaeology*, 1 (1968), 9-50.

that further excavation is necessary. Furthermore, no evidence has been found to confirm that Brockley Hill is the site of *Sulloniacae*. Indeed, Elstree is also a good candidate¹⁴. The finding of mortaria stamped "SULLONI" at Corbridge, Northumberland, in 1937, points to the existence of a *Sulloniacae* in the late 1st century. These Corbridge vessels are of similar fabric to mortaria produced at Brockley Hill; however, of the 226 stamped vessels known from this site not one bears the stamp "SULLONI".

Excavations since 1937, though failing to locate a posting station or any large dwellings, had they existed, have provided a wealth of information about the pottery industry in the 1st and 2nd centuries. Brockley Hill was one of the principal potteries of the Verulamium region. The others were Radlett and Verulamium itself, where excavations in 1963-64 attested pottery production in c. A.D. 130-165¹⁵. Was pottery produced at Brockley Hill and in the Verulamium region in the 3rd and 4th centuries? If so, where?

Clearly, then, further excavations are necessary in order to solve the many problems posed by this site.

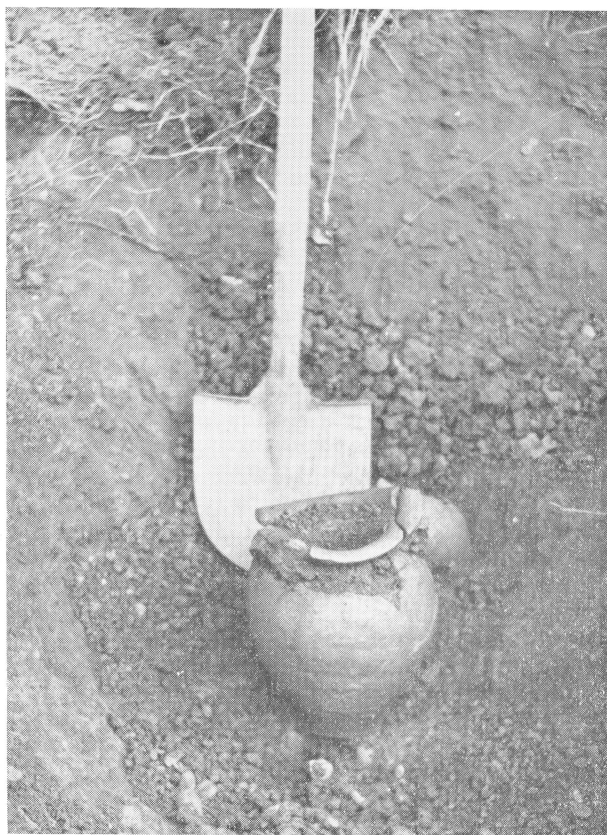


Fig. 4: Roman cremation burial discovered in sewer trench near Pipers Green Lane in 1954.

(Photo: P. G. Suggett)