



Fig. 1: the remains of the defences in the north-west corner, photographed in 1926. Lavender Mound, probably a mill-mound, lies in the mid-ground behind the trees (Passmore Edwards Museum).

# Uphall Camp, Ilford, Essex: an Iron Age fortification

Pamela Greenwood

LARGE-SCALE EXCAVATIONS were carried out from 1987 to 1989 on the western half of Uphall Camp, formerly used as a chemical works (Fig. 1), prior to its redevelopment as a housing estate<sup>1</sup>. The Camp is apparently a univallate fort and is dated to the later middle Iron Age. It lies on the southern boundary of the parish of Ilford, on a gravel patch in the angle between the River Roding and a stream the Loxford Water (Fig. 2).

The earthworks were recorded by John Noble in c 1735 (Fig. 3); substantial traces were still visible in the 18th and 19th centuries<sup>2</sup>. Most of the camp was destroyed or covered over by Howards Chemical Works and by housing in the early 20th century. A

few fragments of the earthworks around the entrance were still visible in 1926 (Fig. 1) and photographs taken of the back gardens in Baxter Road also in 1926 clearly show the rise of the ramparts forming the boundary of the back gardens<sup>3</sup>; this rise was recorded again in 1979<sup>4</sup>. Subsidence in Roman Road nearby and changes in levels in other streets also mark the line of the Camp's defences (Fig. 4).

The precise arrangements of the ramparts and out-works is not clear, but their line can be traced from property and other boundaries and from the line of some streets, such as Victoria Road and Dane Road. A tentative reconstruction (Fig. 2) can be made using this evidence combined with a study of early

1. P. A. Greenwood 'Uphall Camp, Ilford' *Essex J* 23 no. 1 (1988) 19-20; *Victoria County History of Essex V* (1966) 251-2.  
2. P. M. Wilkinson 'Uphall Camp' *Essex Archaeol and Hist* 10 (1979) 220-1, plate 10; Passmore Edwards Museum Collect-

ions; Redbridge Local History Library, Central Library, Ilford.  
3. Passmore Edwards Museum Collections.  
4. P. M. Wilkinson, *op cit* fn. 2, 220.

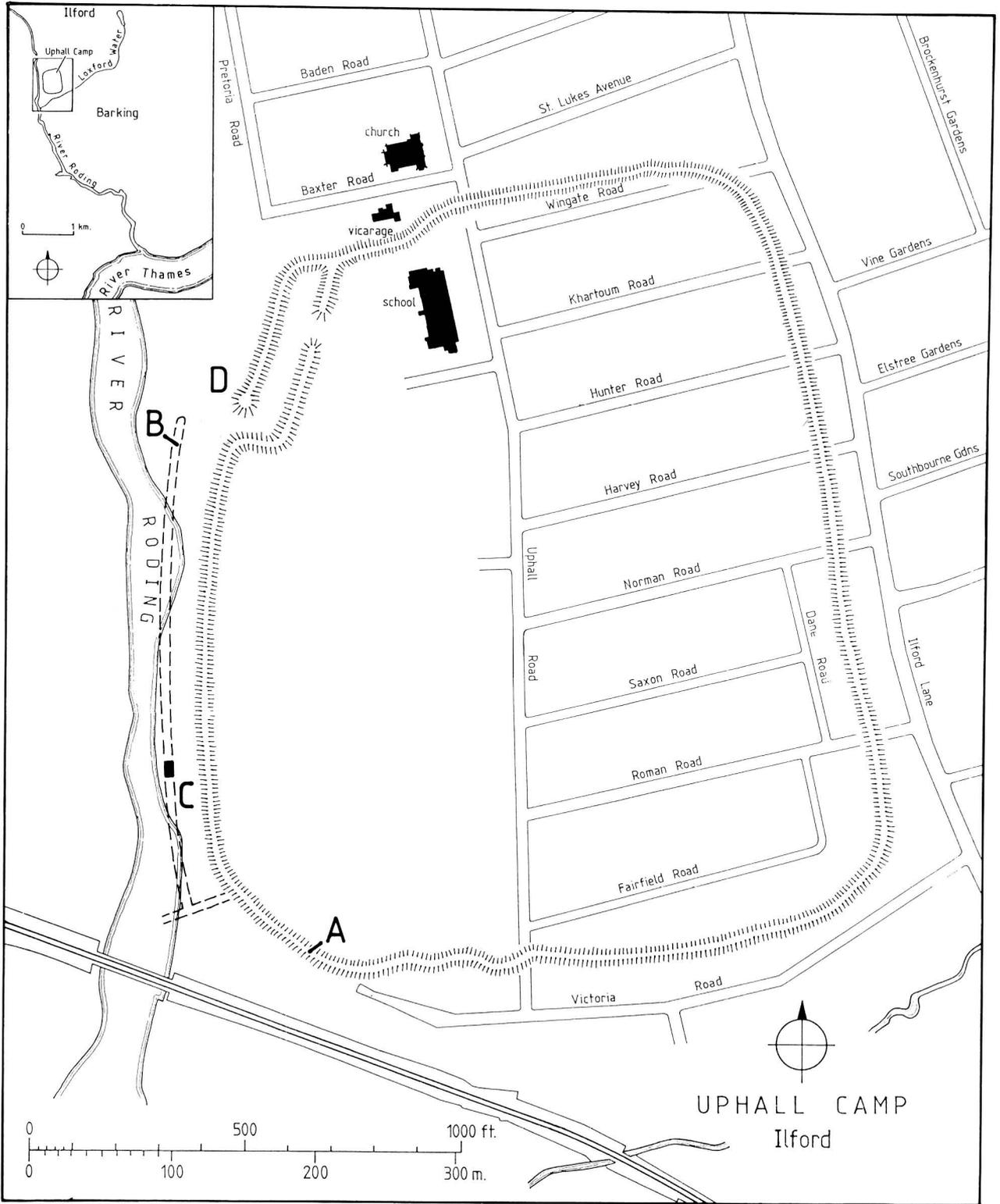


Fig. 2: conjectural plan of Uphall Camp based on archaeological, topographical and documentary evidence. A. hachured line marking the ditch and rampart of middle Iron Age origin, largely based on Crouch's survey; B. line of outworks derived from Noble's plan; C. massive ditch with late Iron Age pottery located in the current archaeological work and still being investigated; D. Lavender Mound, probably a 16th- or 17th century mill-mound. The entrance gap is conjectural.

photographs, Noble's plan and a survey by Crouch in 1868 (Fig. 5)<sup>5</sup>. Noble recorded a double arrangement of earthworks on the western side of Uphall Camp, the side with an apparent entrance. His plan illustrated Lethicullier's manuscript (now lost) of the *History of Barking*<sup>6</sup>. Fortunately, this is extensively quoted by Lysons who states 'On the north, east and south sides it is single trenched ... ; on the west side, which runs parallel with the River Roding, and short distance from it, is a double trench and bank.'<sup>6</sup> The final stages of the current watching-brief may enlighten us about this arrangement.

From the available evidence, the size of Uphall Camp can be given with reasonable accuracy: c 550 × 440m (600 × 480 yds), that is about 19.40ha (48 acres). A few records exist giving the height of the ramparts, a summary of which is made by Crouch<sup>5</sup>: the maximum surviving height in 1868 was 12ft (3.7m), some of the other surviving stretches being 9-10ft (2.7-3m) and often much less. Uphall Camp is the largest recorded 'hillfort' in Essex<sup>7</sup>, virtually comparable in area with Maiden Castle.

### Excavations

In 1960, when Howards carried out further building work, the Passmore Edwards Museum investigated the entrance area beside the 16th- or 17th-century Lavender Mound<sup>8</sup>. Here the bank and ditch contained middle Iron Age pottery and there were traces of a

palisade. Further work by the Museum in 1983 and 1984 on parts of the interior revealed drainage gullies, ditches and small pits<sup>9</sup>. This area is now within that of the main large-scale excavations. During 1983 and 1984 the chemical works were demolished, but redevelopment did not begin until August 1988 with the initial removal of the contaminated material present on parts of the site. For this reason, although it was possible to excavate totally the former gardens and workers' allotments along the Uphall Road frontage, parts of the interior and western edge of the site still remain out-of-bounds. The watching-brief of 1989 covers the accessible zones only. This also is to include an archaeological and environmental examination of the waterfront.

The following account is based on the preliminary examination of the initial results from this multi-period site.

### Neolithic and Bronze Age

The small scatter of Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age flintwork on the site, including a leaf-shaped arrow-head and a discoidal scraper, does not come from contemporary features, indicating that the area was perhaps used for farming and hunting, but not as a settlement. The earliest stratified finds are the fragments of an Ardleigh type urn, probably from a middle Bronze Age burial disturbed by later activity. An L-shaped ditch, possibly part of an enclosure or field boundary, was found during the watching-brief. It contained flint-gritted pottery, perhaps attributable to the Bronze Age.

### Middle Iron Age

This is the major period of occupation of the site, that of the massive earthworks and the only one so far to produce evidence of buildings. The settlement, judging from the relatively small area of the fortification actually excavated, was laid out in a regular way. As might be expected, the round-houses appear to be aligned, indicating some sort of street-pattern. 'Four-poster' structures have been located in particular areas, again pointing to some sort of designation of special zones of activity. Large quantities of charred grain from the post-pits and surroundings would confirm that these structures are granaries.

5. W. Crouch 'Ancient Entrenchments at Uphall, near Ilford' *Essex Review* 8 (1899) 51-3; W. Crouch 'Uphall Camp: Notes on Ancient Entrenchments near Barking on the left bank of the River Roding' *Trans Essex Archaeol Soc* 9 pt vi NS (1906) 408-12 (continued in 10 pt i NS (1909) 19-25).
6. W. Crouch (1906) 411; P. M. Wilkinson *op cit* fn 2, 220.
7. S. Morris and D. G. Buckley 'Excavations at Danbury Camp, Essex, 1974 and 1977' *Essex Archaeol and Hist* 10 (1978) 21-6.
8. P. M. Wilkinson *op cit* fn 2; Passmore Edwards Museum Collections; *VCH Essex* V (1966) 251-2.
9. P. A. Greenwood *op cit* fn 1.

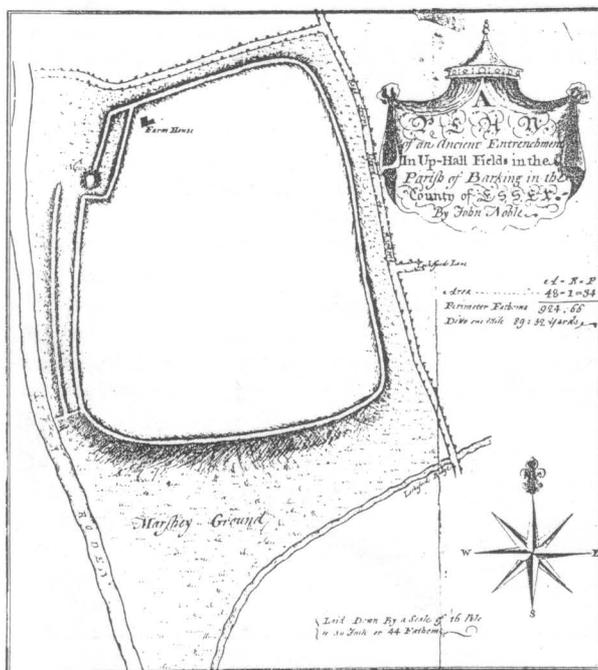


Fig. 3: plan of the earthworks by John Noble, c 1735 (Redbridge Local History Library).

Storage pits are notably absent and so are wells. At first it was thought that the nature of the underlying geology, a sometimes very loose river-laid gravel, might have accounted for this absence. However, the 1st-century and later defensive ditches are deep and steep-sided; in addition, a well was dug into the corner of the Roman enclosure (see below). Possible explanations are that we have been excavating in the wrong zone for wells and rubbish pits, or that the Iron Age people made do with the inconvenience of walking over to the River Roding or the Loxford Water for water and for rubbish dumping. A further water source is the spring situated in the entrance area and described by Lysons as 'a very fine spring of water, which was guarded by an inner work.'<sup>10</sup>

The middle Iron Age structures are of several types: round-houses or round-buildings, pennanular enclosures, 'four-posters', rectangular structures, ditches, post-holes and innumerable and ill-assorted small pits, small gullies and holes dug into the gravel. Many of the last three types are undatable and could belong to the Iron Age, Roman, medieval or later activity on the site.

### Round-houses

Each of the houses shows different characteristics (Fig. 6). The largest (House 4), with a predicted external diameter of the drip-gully of about 14.40m (47ft), was only half-excavated as the remainder lay under a car park. There was a large number of stake-holes in the interior and a few post-holes. Several are grouped around a large sub-circular post-hole indicating a central roof support. The rest of the 250 stake-holes or small post-holes must reflect many phases of internal constructions such as partitions, further roof supports and fittings. Traces of structures projecting beyond the entrance area appear to be the remains of a porch. Much smithying debris, such as slag, furnace-lining, calcined flints and iron objects, was dumped in the drip-gully, especially near the entrance.

Another house clearly had a porch and traces of a roughly circular arrangement of major posts within the drip-gully (Fig. 6, House 3). Inside, a group of stake-holes, forming a trapezoid pattern, may have been part of an internal structure or partition. The drip-gully had an external diameter of c 10m (33ft).

A double, overlapping set of gullies may have actually been one house rebuilt in a slightly different position or be two different ones constructed at different periods. One (House 2) had a drip-gully with an external diameter of 11.20m (36ft 9in) and squared butt-ends forming an entrance 4.20m (13ft 10in) wide. The gully was flanked by an internal ring of

post-holes indicating the external wall of the house. Much is still to be done on the interpretation of the internal features; there are signs of posts that might have been internal roof supports and partitions. Beside the entrance are alignments of posts and stake-holes forming a funnel/tunnel-shaped porch. Outside the house and concentric to the drip-gully was a series of post-holes apparently an enclosure fence.

Remains of the earlier house (House 1) are rather slight. The drip-gully is much shallower to the north and is narrower with an external diameter of 12.80m (42ft). Post-holes and stake-holes aligned around the inner side of the gully may represent the line of the house's external wall. Beside this group of houses in area D was a gully curving beyond the limit of the excavation. This may have been part of yet another house. Area D included at least four, if not five, round-houses and all with entrances facing eastwards away from the prevailing wind. Characteristically, all contained quantities of middle Iron Age pottery in the drip-gullies with marked concentrations at the butt-ends.

Part of a round-house (external diameter 14-15m (46-49ft)) was excavated in area E in controlled conditions, and, further west, another two round-houses have been partly excavated and recorded during the watching-brief, making a current total of seven or eight. They lie in a general band of settlement running north-south down the site. None have yet been located in the area close to the defences, perhaps an indication of some sort of exclusion zone.

One of the round-buildings does not share the characteristics of the other round-houses. It is smaller, with an estimated external diameter of 8-10m (26-33ft), has few internal features, little pottery in



Fig. 4: the eastern end of Roman Road, showing the subsidence caused by Uphall Camp's ditch, highlighted by the road markings. (Photo: Passmore Edwards Museum)

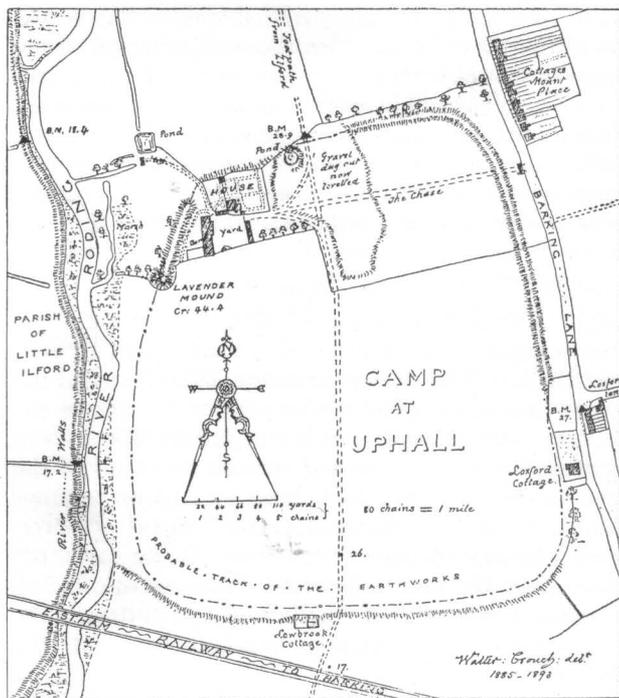


Fig. 5: Walter Crouch's survey of 1868.

the drip-gully and an extremely narrow entrance of 1.20m (4ft) which faces west, into the prevailing wind. This seems more likely to be an agricultural building, perhaps a barn or granary needing good ventilation. In addition, it is adjacent to a 'four-poster' and features containing little pottery and much carbonised grain.

### Rectangular buildings or structures

Less common than the round-buildings, these are mostly clustered in the area of the largest round-house. One of them, measuring 0.0m (00ft) is of beam-slot construction with some additional posts (Fig. 6). Given its small size, and without any special evidence, it is suggested that it may have been a shed for stores, tools or perhaps smaller farm animals.

A larger rectangular structure was post-built with large posts; part only was excavated as the rest still lies under a car park. The post-holes were not as large as those associated with the 'four-posters'. The other large rectangular structure is yet to be fully deciphered. Large numbers of stake-holes forming a general rectangular shape are flanked by some very large post-holes a short distance away. This may be part of a large building or enclosure with major posts and an internal wall or partition formed with stakes or small posts. Finds were few and most of the pottery was from a large storage jar.

11. *VCH Essex III* (1963) 149; Passmore Edwards Museum Sites and Monuments Record.

### 'Four-posters'

Five of these structures have been positively identified. Some are close to the round-houses in area D (Fig. 6), while three are grouped near the supposed barn in an area with large quantities of carbonised grain. Characteristically, these features contain little pottery, but have yielded much grain. They are interpreted as granaries.

### Pennanular enclosures (Fig. 6)

Two large enclosures with relatively deep ditches appear to have had some agricultural use, perhaps as stock pens. There is a general scarcity of coherent internal features, and the ditches are considerably deeper than the round-house drip-gullies. One such enclosure had traces of a fence barring the entrance.

### Late Iron Age

Although some of the middle Iron Age pottery, particularly the coarse wares, shows some late Iron Age affinities, until recently there had been no evidence of late Iron Age or Roman conquest period activity on the site. During the watching-brief on the western edge of the site a massive ditch has come to light containing early Roman pottery and much late Iron Age type shell-tempered ware. This mixture, indicative of a 1st-century AD date, is found in the upper to middle fills of this large, deep ditch. Although badly truncated by the factory buildings, it is about 2m (6ft 6in) deep and had a surviving width of almost 6m (19ft); projected to the ground surface, this would be about 8m (26ft). This ditch is currently interpreted as part of the defences of Uphall Camp, but appears to have been constructed as part of an additional earthwork at the time of the Roman conquest. It may be part of the double ditch and ramparts featured in Noble's plan and Lyson's account.

### Roman

Much of the area excavated contained no evidence for Roman activity on the site, but there are distinct Roman features in particular areas. Roman pottery and tile do not appear to have been dispersed around much of the site.

The first evidence for Roman activity was the earlier discovery of a samian bowl (a 2nd-century form), flagons and 'urns' with human bones<sup>11</sup>. Nothing further is recorded until excavations in 1987 uncovered the rounded corner of a deep, V-shaped, military style ditch. At first, because of a slight curve, it was thought that two corners had been located, suggesting that the structure was a watchtower or signal station containing 3rd-century AD pottery and a coin of Severus Alexander (AD 222-235) in the ditch fill. However, larger-scale excavations in 1988

UPHALL CAMP Area D  
Major Middle Iron Age features

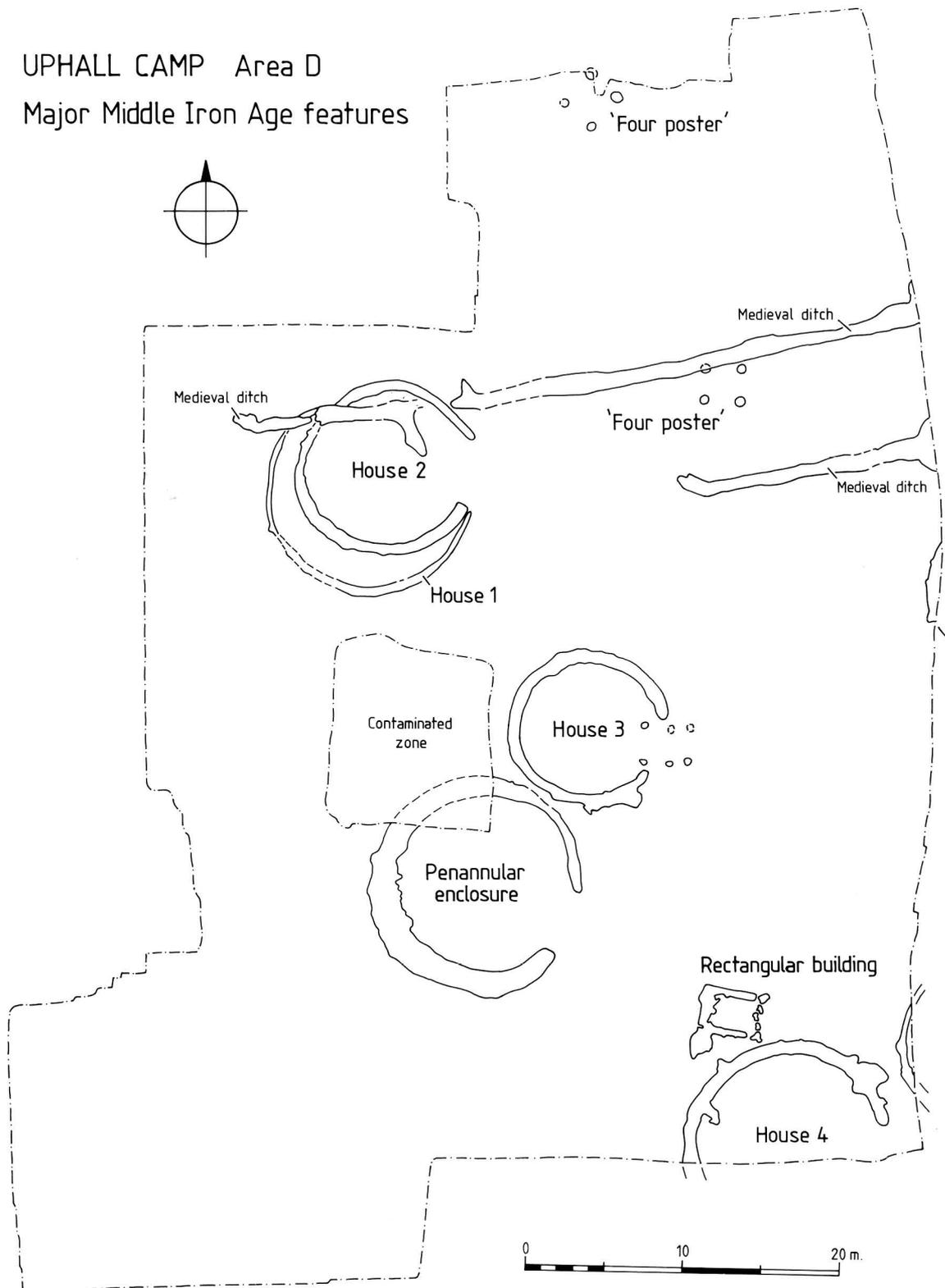


Fig. 6: area D: basic plan of the major middle Iron Age features.

revealed a long east-west length of this ditch which continues westwards into the area of the present watching-brief (Fig. 7). During the watching-brief more of the east side and the north-east corner of the enclosure were found. This had a deep well dug into the very corner, apparently in the Roman period. Site conditions did not allow us to excavate this fully. Features attributable to the interior of the Roman enclosure are few.

Ditches containing late 1st- to 2nd-century AD material, including more flagons, have been traced on the western side of the site. There is insufficient evidence to identify their precise function, but being relatively small and narrow they would appear to be field boundaries. Again the finds of flagons are reminiscent of grave goods. The discovery of a virtually complete flagon set upright in a pit which had been almost cut through by a modern feature may indicate a burial.

### Medieval and later use of the site

The next known activity on the site is a series of parallel east-west running ditches, probably field boundaries, dating to the end of the medieval or to the early post-medieval period. Some large pits belong to this period and may be tree-pits or small quarry pits. Later disturbances appear to be contemporary with Howards Chemical Works.

### Uphall Camp and its regional connections in the Iron Age

Uphall Camp is a very large fortification and, so far, is the only known site of its type in the region. Walbury Camp, near Harlow, is comparable in size and general shape (12.40ha (31 acres))<sup>12</sup>. Some of the pottery appears to be similar. There may also be



Fig. 7: the large Roman enclosure ditch with a corner in the background. (Photo: Passmore Edwards Museum)

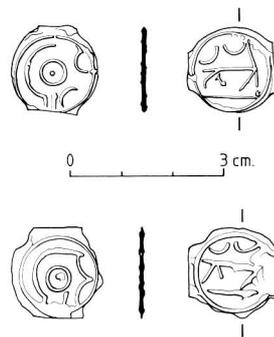


Fig. 8: two Class I potin coins.

comparable material from Mucking and certainly from Moor Hall Farm, Rainham<sup>13</sup> and Barking Abbey<sup>14</sup>. However, a preliminary examination does reveal differences, particularly in the larger quantities of shell-tempered wares from Uphall Camp. The finds from Uphall Camp may be slightly later in date, belonging to the end of the middle Iron Age. The two Class I potin coins, one associated with middle Iron Age pottery in one of the enclosure ditches, would belong to the pre-Caesarian period according to Haselgrove (Fig. 8)<sup>15</sup>.

On current information, it would appear that the settlement within the Camp belongs to the end of the middle Iron Age, but does not show any signs of continuity into the late Iron Age. The small amount of pottery from the entrance area investigated in 1960 fits in well with that from present excavations.

Uphall Camp was obviously a major centre for the region, but without analysis of the finds and more sites in the area, it is difficult to assess its importance. There is a possibility that, as the River Roding was navigable until relatively recently<sup>16</sup>, there may have been a small port serving the Camp. The entrance faces onto the Roding at a point where there was a small inlet, used by Mr Howard to berth his yacht. Here the contractors also uncovered the remains of a timber structure, dating to the 17th or 18th century<sup>17</sup>, which appears to have been part of a jetty. Thus there could have been a sheltered and defended port within easy reach of the Thames. Modern pollution and damage to this area is so bad that it may not be feasible to investigate the possibility of an Iron Age, or even Roman, port.

12. Morris and Buckley *op cit* fn 7, 22-3.

13. P. A. Greenwood 'The cropmark site at Moor Hall Farm, Rainham, Essex' *London Archaeol* 4 no. 7 (1982) 185-93.

14. Passmore Edwards Museum excavations 1985-6.

15. Dr Colin Haselgrove *pers. comm.*

16. *VCH Essex* V (1966) 239.

17. Identified by Barbara Colla, Assistant Curator Local History, Passmore Edwards Museum.

The site has yielded large quantities of carbonised seed and charcoal, particularly from some of the middle Iron Age contexts. With the hoped-for additional evidence from the river frontage, it might be possible to gain a good picture of the crops grown and of the surrounding vegetation. Unfortunately, soil conditions on the site are such that bone is rarely preserved. Other evidence for economic activity will be gained from the analysis of the iron slag.

The Camp's defences, even until earlier this century, were massive and its position on the patch of well-drained gravel partly flanked by the Roding and the Loxford water is a good strategic one. It lies on slightly higher ground and is in a dominant position for covering the Barking-Ilford and West Ham areas, with an additional advantage of a view down to the Thames. Such defences may have acted as a status symbol and deterrent. There are indication too that there was some refurbishment of the defences, by adding another ditch, in the later Iron Age or early Roman period. A proper understanding of the internal layout is not feasible as such a small proportion of the interior was excavated; much still lies under modern housing. However, the relatively small portion does show signs of 'street planning' and of concentrations of agricultural activity. There is some mutual exclusivity in the distribution of the pottery and carbonised grain, for example.

There may still be opportunities in the future to investigate the defences. It is extremely unfortunate that the site escaped statutory protection, particularly since Crouch voiced hopes in 1899 for the preservation of the entrance area and surviving section of the defences<sup>18</sup>.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the various owners of the site for permission to excavate. The excavations were funded as follows: 1983-84 by the GLC, 1987 by HBMC, 1987-88 by the Whithorn Trust and 1988-89, more than a year, by the London and Edinburgh Trust. We are very grateful to LET for both the full funding and the practical help and health coverage from their contractors. I would particularly like to thank Gavin Thomas, Robert Fish, John Savage, Martin Clifford, Mike Rowe and Alan Slingsby and their teams, Peter Rice and Dennis Miller and Nick Drury and their teams. I have also received much help from the staff of the Local History Library at Redbridge Central Library. John Kent and Colin Haselgrove have kindly commented on the potin coins. Thanks are also due to the various site supervisors, Edward Collins, Kevin Groarke, Charles Johns, Nigel Nayling, Ian Rowland and Bevis Sale, the team of archaeologists and volunteers and to Graham Reed for the drawings in this article.

18. Crouch (1899) 53.

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## Letter

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### Two felons from Surrey

I READ WITH interest Mr Nail's letter referring to the execution burials at Galley Hills<sup>1</sup> and your response. Lest anyone should now be misled, may I reiterate my comments on the subject<sup>2</sup>? Execution sites discovered in modern times share a number of common features which would lead one to expect that they share a common period of usage. Dating evidence is limited, but many are stratigraphically later than pagan Saxon burials, and a few have associated artefacts which indicate a late Saxon date. It would be a reasonable deduction from this that the site type has a period of currency centred around the 11th century. Aldsworth has pointed to the likelihood that late Saxon charters refer to these execution sites in Hampshire as "heathen burial places"<sup>3</sup>.

In contrast to this, there is no certain evidence which puts such sites in the medieval period proper. Executions in association with Hundred Courts may indeed be "well authenticated medieval activities", but I know of no document which refers to such a use for any of the known execution sites. This is unsurprising if they have a late Saxon *floruit*, but quite remarkable if they are medieval, given the quantity of historical sources which survive for the later period. On the specific question of Copthorne Hundred, its meeting place at Nutshambles is well established<sup>4</sup>. The Goblin

1. Tony Waldron and Gillian Waldron 'Two felons from Surrey' *London Archaeol* 5 no 16 (1988) 443-5.

2. Rob Poulton 'The former Goblin Works at Leatherhead: Saxons and Sinners' *London Archaeol* 5 no 12 (1987) 311-7.

3. F. Aldsworth 'Droxford Anglo-Saxon Cemetery, Soberton,

Works is about 2km (1¼ miles) distant: maybe "not far", but an awful long way to lug a corpse, and for what reason, given the perfunctory and disrespectful mode of burial? It is unclear whether Mr Nail intended to say that the Galley Hills burials were also "not far" from the Copthorne Hundred meeting place: if so, they are some 5km (3 miles) distant, and in any case were in Wallington Hundred<sup>5</sup> (and even further from its meeting place) until the 15th century. Burials are, however, known (though undated and of uncertain type) from the immediate vicinity of Copthorne Hundred meeting place, but they might as likely be Saxon as later, especially as the importance of the Hundred was greatest in the earlier period. Finally, "the destruction of the Galley Hills original Saxon burial by the erection of the gallows tree" does not "strongly suggest we are dealing with a period later than Saxon", but simply that executions occurred at some time after around 700 AD.

In sum, I would suggest that it is Mr Nail and not the editor who misleads the readers of *the London Archaeologist*, and the description of the Galley Hills burials as Saxon represents a judicious interpretation of the evidence.

Rob Poulton

Archaeological Field Officer  
County Planning Department, County Hall  
Kingston upon Thames, KT1 2DT

Hampshire' *Proc Hants Field Club Archaeol Soc* 35 (1979) 93-182.

4. D. Nail 'The Meeting Place of Copthorne Hundred' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 52 (1965) 44-53.

5. VCH Surrey 3 252.