

# EXCAVATIONS AT STANTON LOW, IN THE UPPER OUSE VALLEY, DURING MARCH, 1957

M. U. JONES

THE gravel pit at Great Linford, west of Newport Pagnell, was first opened in 1938 and since 1945 has been worked by the Bletchley Concrete Aggregates Company. Quarrying is in a wet pit with the gravel extracted by underwater suction from pontoons after mechanical removal of the top-soil. On the west side of the quarry removal of the top-soil had, in the late spring of 1956, reached the riverside field lying north-east of the farmhouse called Stanton Low. Some of this soil was taken to private gardens at Stony Stratford, but the greater part was redeposited along the south bank of the river, being intended in particular to strengthen the berm here lying between the River Ouse and the quarry.

In January, 1957, Robert Harris, a schoolboy member of the Wolverton Archæological Society, recognised on these spoilheaps, by now washed by frequent floods and rain, Romano-British pottery, with roofing and flue tiles and stone. The site, which was unrecorded, was brought to official notice, and in consequence of its impending destruction it was examined on behalf of the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works between 4th and 25th March, 1957.

This verified a Romano-British settlement, developing possibly from earlier habitation, comprising four stone buildings at least. The placing of three of these along the modern south bank of the river (one at the point where an artificial channel enters it) raises questions of the nature, site and function of the upper Ouse during this period; while recent discoveries of nearby sites<sup>1</sup> along a ten-mile stretch of the river emphasised valley settlement in a remarkable way. Several of these sites have, moreover, produced calcite gritted pottery with a distinctive type of cooking-pot which is probably of native origin.

## THE SITE

The National Grid Reference of Stanton Low farm, recently ruinous, is 42/839427, and the site lies along the north of field 49 on the 25-in. O.S. Buckinghamshire X.5 sheet (1925 edition). It is bounded on the north by the main bed of the River Ouse, which is here a mature, meandering, braided stream with a general direction of flow from west to east, and by an artificial channel which enters the stream from the west and provides a short cut for flood water south of the ruinous Haversham Mill, being known locally as a

back brook. The maiden river bank is 191 ft. above O.D. with added top-soil. The river rises rapidly after rain and the flat valley bottom, about half a mile wide, is liable to floods.

On both solid (Fig. 1) and drift maps the site is shown as on valley gravel, changing to alluvium just south of the river. Rising ground on the north and south is of oolitic limestone which has created a natural bridgepoint in the immediate area utilised by the present gated road between Great Linford and Haversham.

Boring for gravel has shown a 6 to 12 ft. bed of gravel underlying 3. ft of

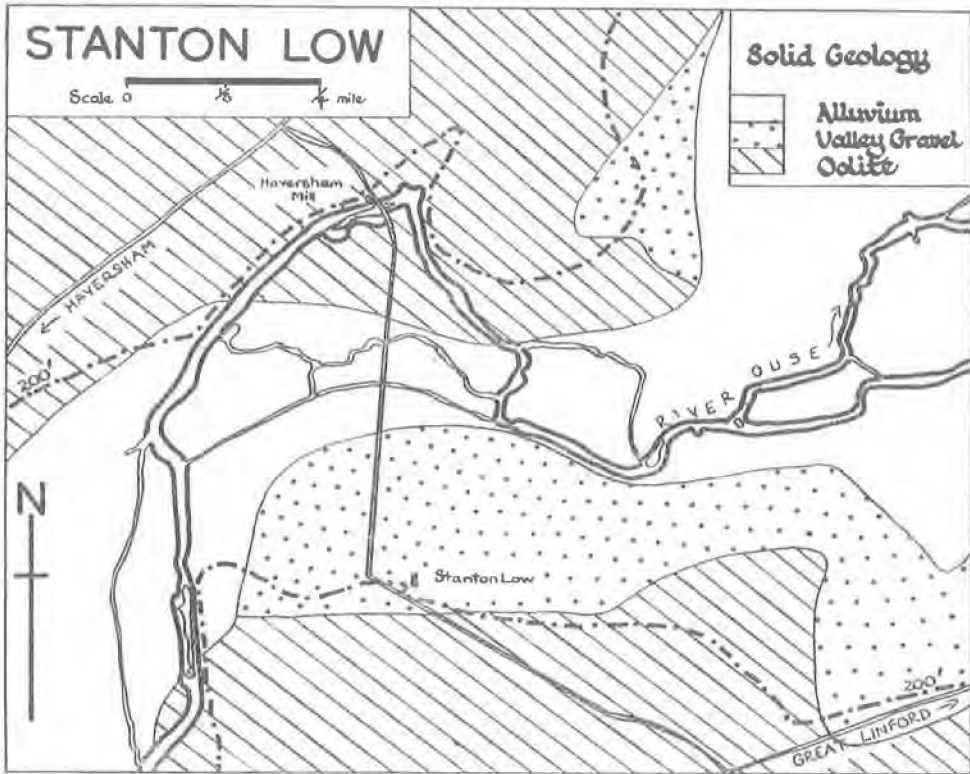


FIG. 1. The solid geology of the site, based on the 6-in. O.S. map, with geological information superimposed from the 1-in. Geological Sheet, kindly lent by Mr. A. B. Crook.

top-soil. This gives an average section comprising 9 in. of silt and humus, overlying 3 in. of gravelly soil in which are numerous mole runs. Below is a stoneless brown soil which gives way imperceptibly to ginger soil with an increasing content of gravel which is rich in flints. The gravel bed is deeper nearer the river and in places overlies a blue clay. The water-table, which occurs just below the top of the gravel bed, has undoubtedly been affected by the artificially maintained water-level of the quarry, by weirs, and by modern river control. Nevertheless, since water was encountered at occupation and

building levels, the water-table must have been much lower during the Roman period, and the likelihood of land subsidence<sup>2a</sup> cannot be ignored.

The land has an excellent reputation for pasture and has not been ploughed within living memory. The field has no traditional name, and a search for documentation<sup>2</sup> has failed to discover any early topographical information. Together with field 13, west of the Great Linford-Haversham road, it is overlain by ridge and furrow aligned north-south and bounded along the north and the south by what appear to be headlands. The north headland

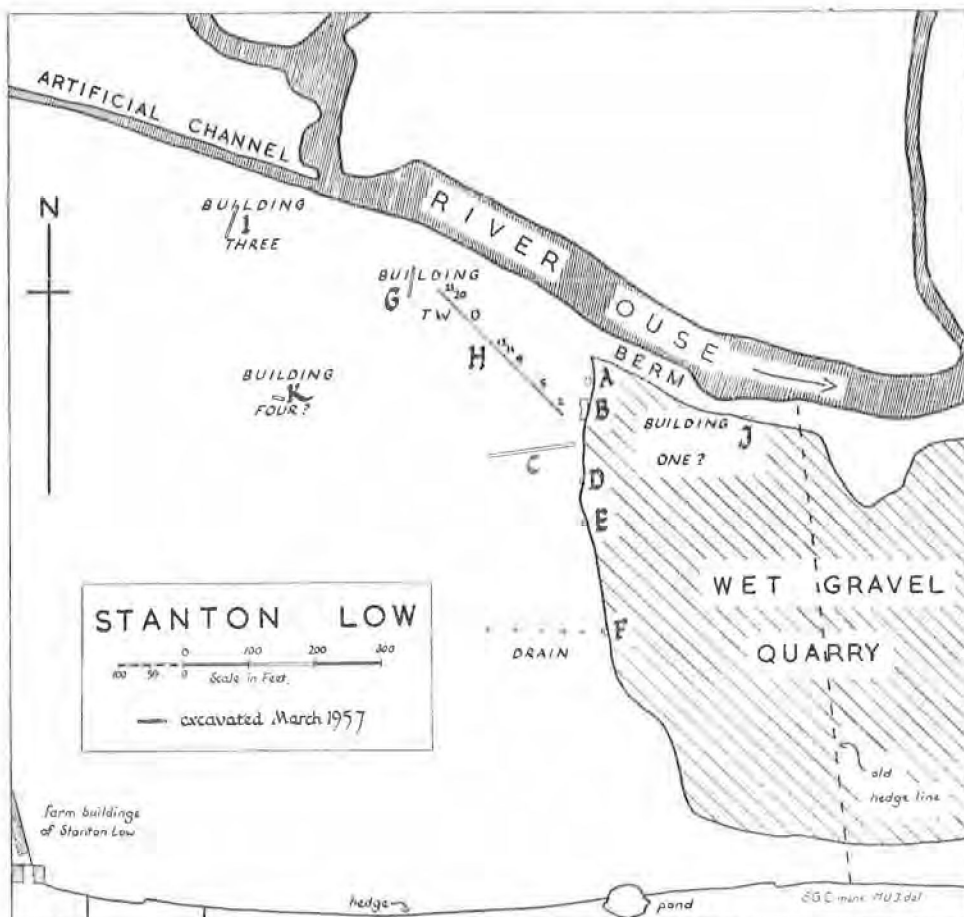


FIG. 2. Areas excavated during March 1957.

lies alongside the river and the artificial channel, while the south headland forms a distinct raised bank which extends, in field 49, not quite to the road. At the north and south extremities of the furrows the soil lies now so wet that rush grows there. It seems possible that the site may have remained uncultivated since the depopulation, in the early sixteenth century,<sup>3</sup> of the deserted village of Stantonbury,<sup>4</sup> which, air photographs suggest, lies  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile farther west.

## THE EXCAVATION (See Fig. 2)

The examination of the site had three aspects. In the first place disturbed soil, stone and signs of burning along the quarry face were investigated (trenches A, B, D, E, F, J) with the conclusion that the building or buildings from which came the pottery and building debris on the spoil heaps had been almost entirely destroyed. Then, in an attempt to discover the extent of the site, trial trenches (C, G, H, I, K) were cut across the area to be destroyed in 1957, and also in areas in which field study and air photographs<sup>5</sup> together suggested buildings might be. This resulted in the discovery of the sites of two further certain and one probable stone buildings.

### TRENCH A

Soil reddened by burning appeared here, below the 3-in. gravel layer indicating the base of the humus, but evidently its cause had been mostly destroyed, since excavation disclosed only a 7-in. diameter posthole and, a yard away, two lengths of timber barely 1 ft. long, about 6 in. wide and lying parallel 2 ft. apart.

### TRENCH B (See Fig. 3 and Plate I)

This was cut to elucidate a 16-ft. long extent of disturbed soil. Over much of its length loose stone projected. At the south end a posthole 1 ft. 3 in. wide and 3 ft. 6 in. deep had been bisected, and at the north end what appeared to be a pit, between 2 and 3 ft. wide, which contained stone and burnt soil and continued below the waterline, at 4 ft. below the modern surface. The trench encountered two well-preserved timbers and a larger area was therefore opened up, which could not, however, be entirely excavated.

But it did disclose what had probably been a timber building: a lean-to against a drystone wall. The timbers, 5 and 7 ft. long, were set in shallow trenches cut in undisturbed soil. They lay roughly parallel, 1 ft. apart, and with a posthole at either end (1 and 3). Parallel to the inner timber, and at a distance of 6 ft., lay a straight line of stones set into the ground at the same level; while between the two was dark soil with traces of burning nearer to the stones.

It seems possible that the timbers formed sleeper beams (though why two is not clear) for a timber-framed lean-to, perhaps with a thatched roof.<sup>6</sup> Reeds still grow in the river and the burnt soil might have resulted from the burning of the thatch. Unfortunately, only three undatable sherds were found in association with this structure.

Two further postholes and one possible one were also found: 3, 4, and 5 on the plan. With posthole 2 they form an arc of a circle 8 ft. in diameter; while postholes 3 and 4 slant in towards its centre. The wall of a circular hut seemed, however, an unlikely explanation of their function, since what would have been its interior contained stone scatter in brown soil, no occupation layer being apparent.

The "pit" was another puzzle. Although it contained several thin slab-like stones—similar to those used for well-building and for pitching (a technique

used in Romano-British times, and since, for wall foundations, floors and yards)—there was insufficient evidence to suggest what had been its purpose.

### TRENCH C

The purpose of this trench was to check the area next to be destroyed, but it produced little of interest. Abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery

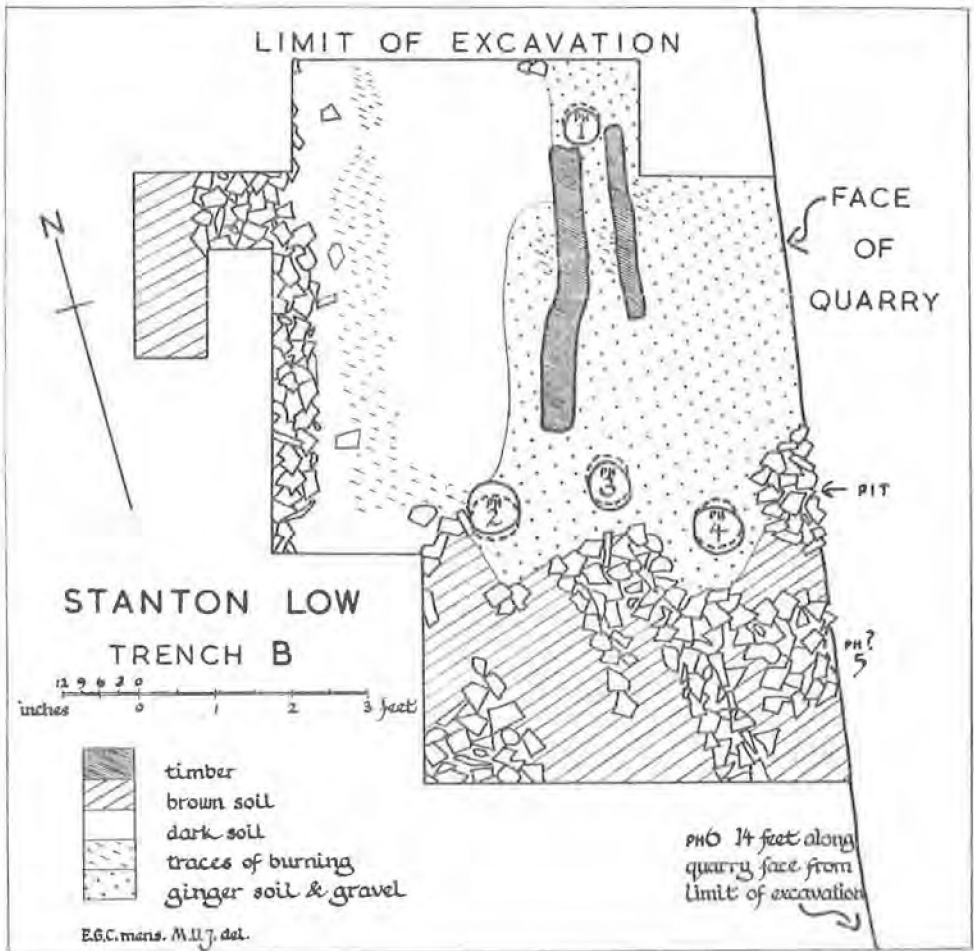


FIG. 3. Plan of Trench B.

lay among a stone and gravel scatter below the humus, which suggested an old surface, perhaps a well-trodden area near to buildings. The influence of ploughing in producing a pan should also be taken into account, since on this level also was a piece of medieval roofing tile, splashed with green glaze, similar to those found by the Wolverton Archæological Society in excavations in Stantonbury churchyard, half a mile west of the site.

#### TRENCH D.

Disturbed soil here included a shallow pit filled with soft, dark unstratified earth containing charcoal with an 8 ft. long scatter of loose stone to the north. Excavation of the pit, however, a yard in from the quarry face produced so little pottery, and that so abraded, that it seemed more likely to have been a field ditch, though a spread of thin slab-like stones on its floor seemed unusual. However, this explanation is consistent with the wide date range of the pottery, which included part of the side and base of a large hand-made vessel of hard calcite gritted fabric of Iron Age A type, a scrap of samian ware and a fourth-century-type mortar rim.

#### TRENCH E

This section of dark earth did appear to have been part of a rubbish pit. It contained a fair amount of pottery (33 sherds), mostly with clean breaks, animal and avian bone fragments, oyster shells, three nails and a 2-in. length of iron, possibly part of a strap or tie. Stone and gravel extended over it, suggesting that the pit had ceased to be used while the site was still occupied. This is borne out by the second-century date of much of its contents, which included samian ware (Drag. form 18/31). Calcite gritted pottery (v. page 1) was also in this pit.

#### TRENCH F

Stone suggesting wall foundation occasioned this trench, and Romano-British pottery was found among the top stones. However, this piece of human activity on the site belongs to some improver, probably of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, since excavation showed it to be a covered drain (v. separate note) of a type then advocated. The pottery possibly came from plough scatter when the drain was cut or the stones collected.

#### TRENCHES G AND H

A slight rise in the ground, together with an indication of better drained land in the winter air photograph, suggested the existence of another building site on the river bank. Trenches G and H (comprising twenty-one 10-ft. lengths separated by yard baulks) were planned to pick up its extent. At H2 what seemed to be a ditch 2 ft. 6 in. deep was crossed, in the lower filling of which, beneath a scatter of stone, came many sherds of a calcite gritted cooking-pot (Fig. 5, no. 8). H5 produced the only coin excavated (v. page 210), a sestertius of Antoninus Pius, A.D. 148/9, from just below the top-soil. At H12 a 2-ft wide spread of pitching (thin slab-like stones set tight about 45° from the vertical) crossed the trench (v. Plate xviii). There was nothing to suggest whether these stones were wall foundation, or part of a floor or yard, but they did seal and therefore post-date what was apparently a hearth beneath (stones laid in burnt earth) from which came pottery and a fragment of a loomweight (v. Fig. 4, nos. 1 and 6). This was just below the water-table, 2 ft. 6 in. below the modern surface.

Building debris—stone, rough tesseræ *c.* 1 in. square, clay roofing tiles, mortar and plaster—had begun to appear at H11. At first pieces were few and

abraded, but they steadily increased until at H20-21 part of a concrete floor foundation occurred at 2 ft. 6 in. below the modern surface, the ground here being higher than at H12. Trench G also contained much building debris. Since neither trench could be opened up, however, and since more work is intended on this part of the site, no more detail is given.

#### TRENCH I

Similarly, this trench proved the existence of a third river-side building suggested as well by sherds and tile fragments in molehills on a platform of raised ground. Here occurred another concrete floor foundation 4 ft. 6 in. below the modern surface and at the level of the water-table. Of particular interest among the building debris which formed a layer over 3 ft. thick above the floor were pieces of tessellated pavement made up of  $\frac{1}{2}$ -in square tesserae of much finer quality than those from Building Two (trenches G and H—v. page 203).

#### TRENCH J

Unfortunately, what proved to be the only surviving fragment of Building One, which had produced the original evidence of the site, lay in the narrow berm between river and quarry. Not only had it been disturbed, but during the time available the river was high and the valley flooded, and only in the last few days had river and quarry water levels equalised sufficiently to make a hurried examination<sup>7</sup> possible before the berm was restrengthened.

Two 3 ft. lengths of wall, 2 ft. wide and one to two courses high, about 25 ft. from the river-bed, were exposed. That on the west was parallel, that on the east at right angles to, the river. Between them was a gap of 5 ft. The stones were not dressed, but they were mortared together, and bedded directly on to the gravel bed, without dry foundation stones beneath. The soil overlying the walls was very dark, and this, with the fact that the mortar seemed baked hard, and the reported finding of flue tiles nearby, suggested that the masonry might have been associated with a hypocaust system, the gap between the lengths of wall being possibly an opening for a stokehole. At the same time the soil also suggested black silt from the very near river-bed. Stone jutting out from the quarry face suggested that walls might have extended both sides of this masonry (about 10 ft. east and 30 ft. west of the gap).

The masonry was dismantled and one stone (from the west wall) was seen to be a fragment of a 6-in. diameter stone column. A rim of rosette-stamped red ware was found in the soil above the walls, while in the mortar of the east wall was a rim fragment which appears to belong to an imitation samian form 38 bowl, of which larger sherds had already been extracted from the quarry face. A late date thus seems likely for this piece of building, and it is hoped that further excavation of the site might help to elucidate its significance.

#### TRENCH K

Very slight parching of the grass on the summer air photograph suggested yet another building, though its existence rests on less certain evidence than that of the three buildings already located. Stone, rather better squared than

elsewhere on the site, was, however, encountered immediately below the humus and it continued to a depth of 2 ft. With it were fragments of painted wall plaster, clay roofing tiles, pottery and oyster shells. Further excavation is intended here.

## THE FINDS

### THE POTTERY

For the most part, the excavated pottery was unstratified, and, being fragmentary and frequently abraded, it is consequently of limited value for comparison. Hand-made vessels were represented by a few sherds of Iron Age A, A2 and AB type, but most of the pottery was wheel-made. Recognisable types include mortaria, pie dishes, straight-sided dishes, reeded rim bowls, flanged bowls, necked bowls and jars, folded beakers, storage jars, amphoræ and cooking-pots. Samian, colour coated, grey, red, imitation samian, black burnished, poppy head and, most noticeably, calcite gritted wares were represented. The site would thus seem to have been occupied throughout the Roman period.

### SAMIAN POTTERY

I am indebted to Mr. B. R. Hartley for the following comments:

1. Sherd excavated from H13, in disturbed soil below the humus containing debris from Building Two. Form 29. Lower zone with gadroons alternating with wavy lines. This arrangement is typical of the La Graufesenque potter GERMANUS and the gadroons are of a rather unusual kind certainly used by him (cf., Hermet, *La Graufesenque*, pl. 102, 42). The dull, brownish slip is also found on his stamped bowls, so we need not hesitate to assign this piece to him. c. A.D. 65-80.

2. Scrap of base with part of stamp. Surface find. Form 18, etc., with lustrous slip. Stamp ending in IX. This piece is certainly South Gaulish ware, probably c. A.D. 65-75. This stamp may be that of an illiterate potter (cf., Hermet, *op. cit.*, pl. 113, 1-20) or of a potter such as FELIX.

3. Part of stamped base. Surface find. Form 33. Central Gaulish ware. Stamp uncertain ( )TI M, ?). Not closely datable, but probably mid or late second century.

### *Iron Age Pottery* (see Fig. 4)

I am indebted to Mr. A. Warhurst for the following comments:

1. Excavated from hearth below pitched stones in H12 (v. page 203). Many fragments of a large Iron Age hand-made vessel of degenerate situlate form including much of the rim. Rim diameter c. 14 in. The fabric is hard and calcite gritted with a sooty deposit on the outside surface. The flat-topped rim shows faint diagonal incisions giving a cabled effect and in places there is an inwardly projecting lip. This is a profile and decoration originally of Iron Age A2 type, but the degenerate form, hard fabric and large size suggest a late Iron Age A vessel. In the Ouse valley-Midlands area, where there is no overall B or C influence, this vessel may well precede the Roman period by only a few years.

Ref. Fengate, *Archæological Journal*, C, types T1 and O3.



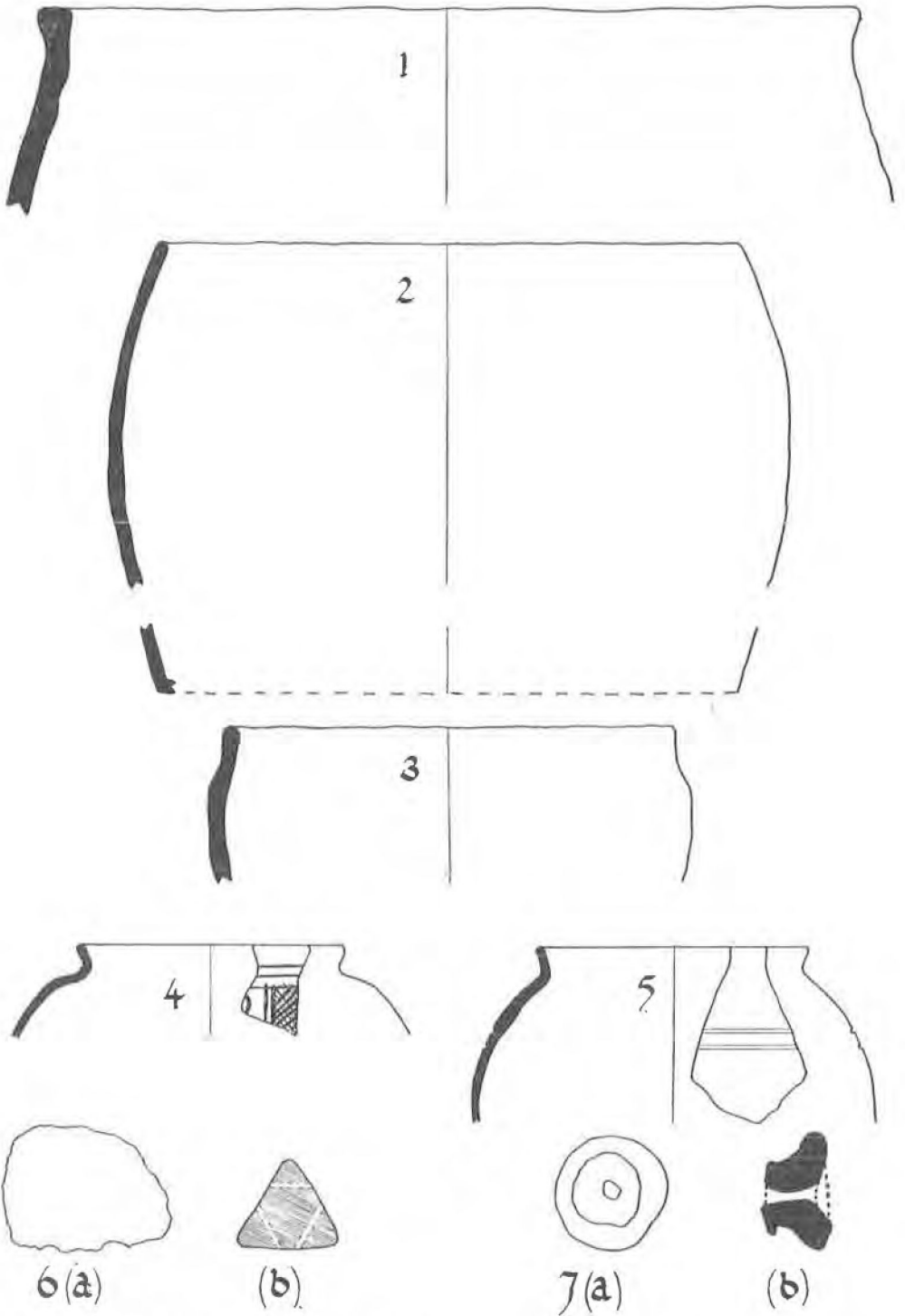


FIG. 4. (†). Iron Age pottery, painted pottery, loomweight and spindle-whorl

2. Excavated from H13, in lower levels of disturbed soil containing debris from Building Two (cf., Samian 1) above. Nine sherds, one rim, three fragments of base of large hand-made barrel-shaped jar. Fabric very hard with little calcite grit. Traces of finger marking on the interior surface. Plain rim. Rim diameter  $9\frac{1}{2}$  to 10 in. Eight of these sherds, including the three base fragments, and all of the lower parts of the vessel, show a black burnished surface. The latter feature and rim are of Iron Age AB type, but fabric is harder than anything of this date and the vessel cannot long pre-date the Roman conquest.

3. Surface find. Rim of large hand-made vessel of hard calcite gritted fabric of Iron Age A type. Very degenerate situlate form of Iron Age A type. Rim diameter  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in.

#### COARSE POTTERY (see Figs. 4 and 5)

Because of its predominance, the examples selected for illustration are chiefly of the calcite gritted ware already mentioned, of which the most common type is a cooking-pot, usually rilled on the shoulder and with an internal thickening of the rim forming a rebate as if for a lid, although no lids were found.

The type occurred at Jewry Wall, Leicester,<sup>8</sup> (Types A and B) where it is described as "apparently mainly confined to the Midland region". It occurred there from A.D. 35, was common up to A.D. 80, while examples were found up to A.D. 325. Parallels from Margidunum (first century) and Tripontium (no date) are quoted, and a similar rim form is noticed from Verulamium<sup>9</sup> from late Belgic and early Roman levels.

The rim form occurred at Manduessedum<sup>10</sup> at about A.D. 70, and also at Corbridge<sup>11</sup> where it is dated A.D. 190-260. I am indebted to Mr. A Oswald for the following additional find sites of this type of pot, all, except for Lydney, indicating an East Midland distribution: Casterton, Duston, Sandy, Guilden Morden, Letocetum, Red Hill (Thrumpton, Northamptonshire), Lydney (Gloucestershire).

Nearer at hand such pots have occurred in Ouse side gravels farther down the river in Bedfordshire, at Belgic sites at Felmersham-on-Ouse<sup>12</sup> and at Wyboston.<sup>13</sup>

Similar gritted ware has, moreover, recently been found, also on valley gravel, in the immediate neighbourhood of Stanton Low: at Cosgrove,<sup>14</sup> Haversham,<sup>15</sup> Sherington and Emberton.<sup>16</sup> It is hoped, therefore, that further work on the Stanton Low site might help to establish the different types and dating of this regional pottery,<sup>17</sup> as has been done with Derbyshire ware (thought to be third century)<sup>18</sup> which is also distinguished by cooking-pots with internally rebated rims. It seems possible that the distribution of the pottery along the Ouse might help to elucidate Romanisation along this significant route.

The general characteristics of the pottery are as follows, individual variations being indicated in the descriptions of the types illustrated: 8 to 21. The ware is wheel-made of a coarse paste heavily impregnated with white calcitic grit, which appears to be mostly crushed shell. With the cooking-pots the

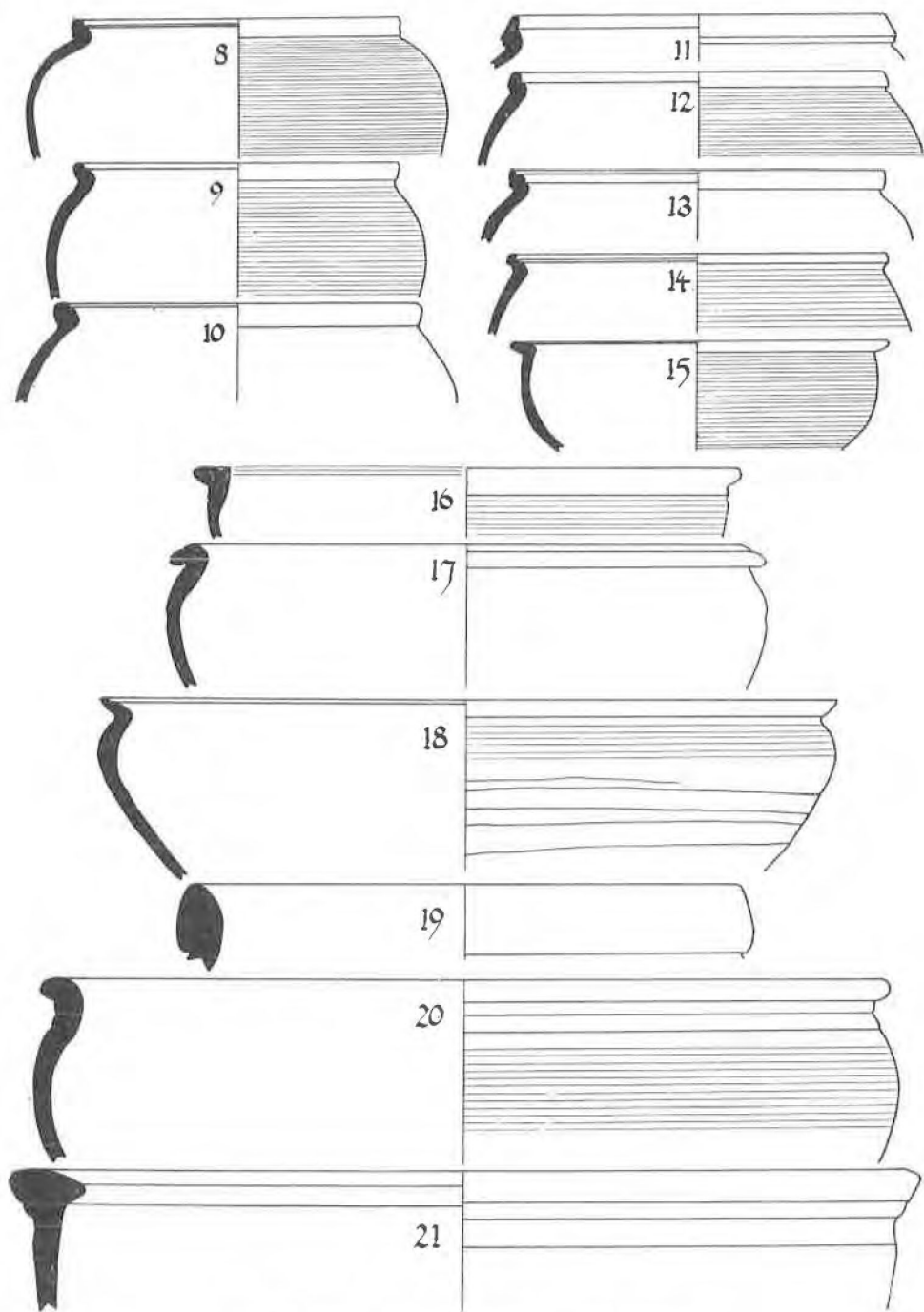


FIG. 5. ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ). Types of calcite gritted pottery.



PLATE XIII. Attrib. workshop William Stanton.



PLATE XIV. Attrib. workshop William Stanton.



PLATE XV. Neptune. Attrib. Richard Osgood.



PLATE XVII. Trench B, looking north. Sleeper beams on right and drystone wall on left. (The notch in the dark soil of the floor was cut to test its depth.) In the foreground are post holes 2 and 3.

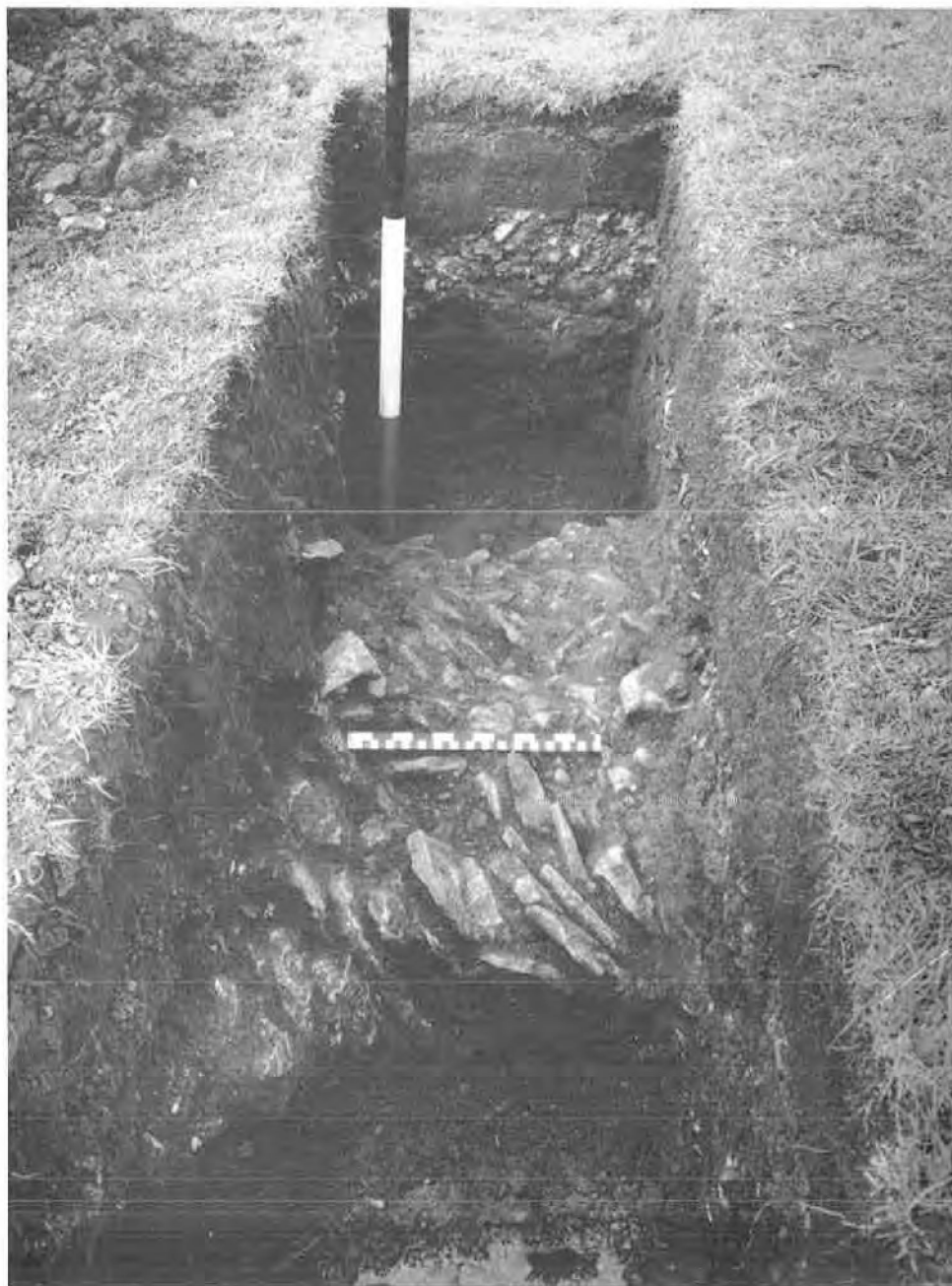


PLATE XVIII. Pitched stones in Trench H12. Beneath these stones—and just below the waterline—was apparently a hearth from which came pottery and a fragment of a loomweight of Iron Age type.



PLATE XIX. Length of drain looking west from quarry face. The five ranging poles indicate its not quite straight continuation for 170 ft. The water in the foreground is the edge of the wet gravel quarry.





PLATE XX. The covering stones removed to show the construction of the drain.

paste is invariably soft, but it is much harder with the larger bowls and storage jars. The appearance is porridgy and the softer paste has a soapy feel.<sup>19</sup> The outsides of the pots are usually rilled.<sup>20</sup> The colour range includes buff, salmon pink and black, more rarely grey; while cooking-pots are blackened externally.

8. Excavated from lower filling of ditch outside Building Two at H2 (*v.* page 203). Although many sherds of this pot were found, there was no base and the section could not be completed. Below the rilling, however, there is vertical combing. Salmon pink, grey in fracture, blackened externally.

9. Surface find. Salmon pink, grey in fracture, blackened externally.

10. Surface find. Pinky buff inside and also in fracture. Very considerably blackened externally and also in fracture. Not rilled. This shape resembles Margidunum "The Commandant's House" Plate XVII No. 21, a flanged milk-bowl.

11. Excavated from H12, outside Building Two, on a level with the pitched stones (*v.* page 203). Salmon pink, grey in fracture, rim only blackened externally. The sherd is not large enough to show whether or not the pot is rilled.

12. Excavated from brown soil beneath a stone scatter 18 in. below the surface outside Building Two at H9. Salmon pink, pinky buff in fracture. Considerably blackened externally.

13. Surface find. Black. Not rilled.

14. Surface find. Salmon pink, pink and grey in fracture. Blackened externally.

15. Excavated from rubbish pit (?) Trench E. Bowl, flat rim with groove. Buff inside and in fracture, and blackened externally and in fracture. Hard paste, few grits, and several have fallen out.

16. Surface find. Bowl, flat rim with two grooves. Dark grey on surfaces and in fracture.

17. Surface find. Bowl, angular rolled rim with groove. Black on surfaces and in fracture. Few grits. Not rilled. This shape resembles Margidunum "The Commandant's House" Plate XIII No. 2.

18. Surface find. Bowl, everted angular rim with groove. Surfaces pinky buff, grey in fracture. Few grits. Faint incised lines below rilled shoulder.

19. Extracted from among stones jutting out from quarry face west of Trench J (*v.* page 204). Storage jar. Rolled rim. Inside surface abraded and grits fallen out. Pinky buff, grey in fracture.

20. Surface find. Bowl (?), rolled rim, outer edge of which is abraded. Grey on surfaces and in fracture.

21. Surface find. Storage bin (?). Flat-topped rim is everted and slopes and extends inwards. Buff on surfaces and in fracture.

I am indebted to Mr. A. Warhurst for these comments on a rimsherd of a painted jar (Fig. 4, No. 4) and another which may be of the same ware (No. 5). This, too, appears to have a predominantly local significance.

4. Surface find. Rim of wheel-turned vessel with everted rim of pale grey fabric with salmon coloured slip. Diameter of rim *c.* 4 in. Decoration painted in red-brown paint includes panels of cross hatching and part of a circle.

Such painted ware has been found on a small number of sites in Northamptonshire, viz. Bannaventa, Duston, Little Houghton and Little Billing. It appears to have had a comparatively local distribution (although similar painted ware of much harder and cleaner fabric is known from Leicester) but has not yet been found in closely dated deposits. At Bannaventa, however, two sherds of this ware occurred in a pit with three fragments of "Black Samian" ware attributed to the potter PATERNUS of mid-second century date (v. *Journal Northants. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, Vol. XXXIII, p. 137, Figs. 51 and 52). Other finds at Bannaventa and at Little Houghton and Little Billing would appear to be somewhat earlier from their pottery associations, probably early second century.

5. Surface find. Rim of fabric similar to above, possibly with some painted decoration. Rim diameter c.  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in.

#### THE COINS

Only one coin was found during excavation, two more being surface finds. They have been identified by Mr. D. W. MacDowall of the British Museum as follows:

1. Excavated from outside Building Two just below the top-soil of H5 (v. page 203).

Sestertius of Antoninus Pius, A.D. 148/9. Cf. *B.M.C.R.E.*, IV, p. 298, No. 1823; *R.I.C.*, III, p. 133, No. 855.

Obv. ANTONINUS AUG PIUS PP TRP XII

Head of Pius laureate right.

Rev. COS IIII

S and C left and right low in field. Aequitas standing left holding scales (r) and cornucopiæ (l).

2. Surface find. Undated antoninianus of Tetricus I, A.D. 270/273. *R.I.C.*, V, 2, p. 409, No. 101.

Obv. IMP TETRICUS P F AUG

Radiate, draped and cuirassed bust of Tetricus right.

Rev. P (AX) AUG

Pax standing left holding sceptre (left).

3. Surface find. Constans. A.D. 337-341.

Rev. Type of Gloria Exercitus—one standard.

#### OTHER FINDS

Since so few finds altogether were excavated (most of the pottery having come from the stripped area and from the spoil heaps) the dearth of objects is not unexpected. The following provided the only direct evidence of the economy of the site, though they offer no more than a sketchy proof of expected domestic tasks.

(i) Loom-weight? Excavated with pot No. 1, v. Fig. 4, No. 6 (a) and (b). I am indebted to Mr. A. Warhurst for these comments. Fragment of baked clay with large particles of calcite grit in the fabric. The fractured surface shows two impressions which must have been perforations through the original

object at an angle of about  $20^\circ$  to each other. Possibly part of a baked clay loom-weight of Iron Age type. Such loom-weights could be triangular or roughly rectangular in shape. The former are commonly found on Iron Age sites and are usually perforated three times (v. diagram 6 (b)—not to scale). The angle of the perforation usually exceeds  $45^\circ$ , although if the weight were roughly made there might be some variation in this angle. Although of Iron Age type, the triangular loom-weight was in use at Camulodunum until Flavian times. It is not a criterion in itself of Iron Age occupation, even at an advanced site such as Camulodunum, and therefore even less so at Stanton Low in what is generally a backward area.

Ref.: *Maiden Castle*, p. 294.

*Camulodunum*, p. 349.

*British Museum Iron Age Guide*, Fig. 179.

(ii) Spindle-whorl? (v. Fig. 4, No. 7 (a) and (b). Surface find. Hand-made burnished black perforated object of baked clay containing calcite grit. The surface is worn on the smaller convex end. It resembles a spindle-whorl, though seems to be unduly large and heavy (2 oz.) for this purpose. However, even larger objects of this kind are classed as spindle-whorls at Maiden Castle<sup>21</sup> as "no other use suggests itself".

(iii) Quern fragments. I am indebted to Professor F. W. Shotton for the following petrological report.

(a) Rough slab, 6 in.  $\times$  5 in.,  $1\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick, rough grooves on one side forming small sector of a circle.

(b) Part of slab, 4 in.  $\times$  4 in.  $\times$   $1\frac{3}{4}$  in., pecked<sup>22</sup> on one side by pits at about  $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. centres, the other side part-flattened by grinding. Sample cut from the middle of this.

(c) Triangular slab, 5 in.  $\times$  4 in.  $\times$   $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. One side pecked into rough pits at c. 1-in. centres, the other side part-flattened by grinding.

The rocks are all very much alike—a coarse, loosely-cemented, felspathic grit with pebbles occasionally up to  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. The felspar is very fresh. There is some difference in colour, from reddish brown to yellowish, but this not significant and is partly due to surface staining. Under the microscope, specimen (b) reveals:

Numerous very irregular grains of quartz, often composite and showing strain polarisation.

Frequent angular grains of fresh microcline.

Rare rock grains, mostly quartz-schist, and occasionally a fine basic igneous rock.

I have no doubt that this is Millstone Grit (this is a stratigraphical term and carries no implications that the specimens were necessarily parts of millstones). The rock is abundant in England, from North Staffordshire and North Derbyshire northwards. The nearest place from which it could have been brought is, therefore, the area south-west of Sheffield, but it could have originated from much farther than this.

The stones could not have occurred locally in Glacial Drift, for this in Buckinghamshire is derived from the north-east and could not be expected to contain blocks of Millstone Grit.

## BUILDING MATERIALS

Except for the pillar fragment from Trench J (v. page 204), all the stone on the site, though evidently from destroyed buildings, was oolitic limestone as quarried. (Older buildings in the neighbourhood, it seems worth mentioning, have rubble walls, while collapsed field walls and part of the south wall of Stantonbury church have produced scatters of smallish stones very like those found during excavation.) Mr. G. Osborne, of Olney, has identified its source as the old quarries half a mile west of the site, just beyond Stanton Low farmhouse. The coarse tesseræ from Building Two, roughly made and about 1 in. square, in shades of yellow, pink and grey, he has also identified as local oolite. Of the small black and white tesseræ from Building Three (v. page 204) Dr. T. Barnard has reported from slides kindly made by Professor Shotton:

The white limestone I would say was Turonian in age (Middle Chalk). It contains numerous chalk spheres, specimens of foraminifera such as *Nodosaria*, *Textularia* and "Rotalids", indicating Middle Chalk Age. The limestone is partly recrystallised and this is very common of the Turonian chalks. This limestone could have been collected locally.

Regarding the black recrystallised limestone, I would not consider this to be a marble (of course, I have not seen the original rock), but it reminds me strongly of some of the black recrystallised limestones of Liassic age, which again could easily have been brought to the Buckingham area. It could even have been collected from glacial debris.

The prefabricated building materials include clay roofing and flue tiles, made both in the more usual red fabric and also in a calcite gritted buff ware resembling that of storage jars. The key for fixing plaster on the flue tiles was made by scoring with a comb-like object in both linear and cursive designs. An unusual feature of the imbrices (half-round roofing tiles) was a wavy scoring across the end. This may also have been utilitarian. Bricks,  $1\frac{7}{8}$  in. thick, came from Building Three.

The cements, mortars and plasters will be reported on later.

## CONCLUSION

From the meagre results of this test excavation which has produced no building plan, practically no stratification, and few significant finds, it is not possible to assess the nature and importance of the Stanton Low site. Moreover, other recently known sites in the Upper Ouse valley are just beginning to develop a picture of a much more significant region than was up to now suspected. Nevertheless, what little evidence there is does provoke speculation.

The earliest dated find is a sherd of samian ware of c. A.D. 65-80; the latest a coin of A.D. 337-341. The Iron Age pottery and the presumably native (Corintian?) calcite gritted ware are probably incapable of close dating, but they imply a pre-Conquest beginning for the site. The hearth producing Iron Age pottery and loom-weight suggest a tribal settlement which later raised buildings, using local materials, yet following Roman fashions, covering several acres. On the actual evidence therefore, Stanton Low could have been simply a river-

side farmstead utilising the rich pastures on the valley gravel, which needed little initial clearing.

But why choose a building site so close to the river that not only is flooding inevitable, but the very foundations are at times in water? Stanton Low is the only one of the Upper Ouse sites (Deanshanger, Cosgrove, Haversham and Emberton) which is actually on the river. Before one can speculate why however, one must ask how much, if at all, has the river shifted its course during the past two thousand years, and how much has the water-table risen and why. The reasons for the latter may well range from actual land subsidence to the activity of earthworms causing building foundations to sink.<sup>29</sup>

Assuming the Ouse has not changed course here, there are several quite good reasons for this riverside site: river crossing, by ford or bridge; water transport; water power. And naturally all these could have obtained simultaneously. Some sort of river crossing must have existed, if only to reach neighbours at Haversham. Lending support to the water-power theory is the artificial channel which might originally have been cut in Roman times to drive an undershot wheel, presumably for milling corn, grown perhaps on the higher, oolite, valley slopes. The Lower Ouse was certainly used for transport, making it possible to travel by water, via the Car Dyke, the Foss Dyke, the Trent and Yorkshire Ouse, as far as York. If shallow-draught barges did manage to reach Stanton Low, they might even have come as far upstream as Stony Stratford, linking with Watling Street. . . . And so on—only further excavation can fit Stanton Low more exactly into the picture of Roman Britain.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Deanshanger (Northamptonshire), Cosgrove, Haversham, Emberton. Two other known sites are higher up the river—Tingewick, *v. Records of Bucks.*, Vol. III; and Foxcote, *v. Records of Bucks.*, Vol. V.

<sup>2</sup> At the County Record Office; at Althorp; at the Bodleian Library; and at the Lincolnshire Archives Office.

<sup>3a</sup> *Antiquity*, March 1936, p. 36: Fenland subsidence considered in relation to the riverside Romano-British village of Welney.

<sup>3</sup> *V. Records of Bucks.*, XVI, Part 1, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> The addition of -bury to the name Stanton (preserved by the farms Stanton Low and Stanton High) does not indicate a stronghold, but comes from a family name Barri. *V. Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*.

<sup>5</sup> Only R.A.F. vertical photographs, taken on 16th January, 1947, and on 28th May, 1947, were available. They showed no distinct cropmarks.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. similar buildings in the courtyard of Ditchley villa. *V. Oxoniensia*, Vol. I.

<sup>7</sup> With the consent of the Great Ouse River Board.

<sup>8</sup> *Society of Antiquaries Research Report, Jewry Wall, Leicester*, p. 116. Postwar rescue of finds from building sites in Leicester has also produced much of this ware.

<sup>9</sup> *Society of Antiquaries Research Report, Verulamium*, Fig 18, Belgic pottery, Group B.

<sup>10</sup> *Transactions Birmingham Archaeological Society*, Vol 53, and also forthcoming Vol. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Archæologia Aeliana*, fourth series, Vol. XXXV, p. 17, No. 151.

<sup>12</sup> *V. Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XXIX, Nos. 1, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *V. Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, Vol. L. In view of the problem of a high water-table at Stanton Low, the flooding of the Wyboston site during Belgic occupation is of special interest.

<sup>14</sup> Seen by the kindness of Mr. C. W. Green.

<sup>15</sup> Seen by the kindness of Robert Harris.

<sup>16</sup> Seen by the kindness of Mr. B. Blake.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Archæology of the Cambridge Region*, p. 212, where C. Fox remarked that the chronology of what he called "British Gritted Ware" was of some local importance. He considered it to be "undoubtedly of native and probably of local (East Anglian) manufacture". From his description, however, the grits are of flint, not of shell.

<sup>18</sup> *V. Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XIX, No. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Dr. F. Oswald's description of rilled cooking-pots from the Claudian well at Margidunum in *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. XIII.

<sup>20</sup> *V. Society of Antiquaries Research Report, Richborough*, II, p. 97, for the derivation of rilled cooking-pots. I have not been able to trace the Newport Pagnell example there quoted.

<sup>21</sup> *V. Society of Antiquaries Research Report, Maiden Castle*, p. 294.

<sup>22</sup> *V. op. cit.*, p. 322 ff. Pecking of both upper and lower stones of Iron Age rotary querns is noted. The stone, however, is mostly local limestone.

<sup>23</sup> *V. Antiquity*, December, 1957, No. 124, "Worms and Weathering", R. J. C. Atkinson.

<sup>24</sup> *V. Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XXIX, p. 159, "Excavations on the Cambridgeshire Car Dyke, 1947".

## NOTE ON AN OLD LAND DRAIN

DURING the excavation of Stanton Low Romano-British site in the upper Ouse valley between Newport Pagnell and Wolverton, which was being quarried away by gravel extraction, one exposure of stone on the quarry face turned out to be a covered land drain. In a trench, about 14 in. wide and 30 in. deep, had been set thin slabs of stone (the local oolite) lining the bottom and about 9 in. of the sides. Within this space additional slabs formed a V-shaped trough, which was roofed over with large slabs, covered in their turn by stone rubble. No estate plan was known which showed the land drains, so a short length of the drain was exposed, when abraded sherds of Romano-British pottery and oyster shells were found among the stone rubble. The drain was therefore opened up at five further intervals along a distance of 170 ft. (and it has since been observed to continue for another 330 ft.).

Each time a length of drain was opened up, water gushed up through the stones, though it was apparent the drain no longer functioned, since the channel was choked with black silt. It was not possible to take levels, but the drain was constructed along—not down—the valley bottom, about 500 ft. south of the river. Although the outfall of the drain was about 6 in. above the water-level of the wet quarry, it was not discharging. As well as running along the valley, the drain was also parallel to the headland bounding an area of ridge and furrow and it passed through the wet ends of these furrows.

Although Roman agriculturists gave directions on making covered land

drains, they are not, it seems, known in this country. Nor does it seem necessary to look for any particular antiquity for this drain, since it conforms in layout and make-up so closely to a pattern advocated in *Practical Agriculture* by R. W. Dickson in 1805.

With very comprehensive illustrations Dickson showed how a boggy valley could be drained by constructing a drain to run just below the spring line parallel to the river. Further drains cut at right angles conveyed the water collected by this drain at intervals to the river. Certainly a good deal of water lies now, after wet weather, along this part of the field, which is just below the valley slope of oolite. Dickson, moreover, gave several sections to illustrate the construction of such drains, and one agrees very closely with the Stanton Low example.

In a trench 18 in. wide and 30 in. deep are laid flat stones forming a triangular section for the passage of the water. These are covered with a third flat stone, above which are laid "round land stones or faggots of brushwood" followed by "an inverted sod, straw, heath or rushes" and finally "loose mould" to fill up the trench.

In the building of the Stanton Low drain it seems likely that the larger stones, forming the actual drain, were freshly quarried, but that at least some of the rubble stones placed on top, among which occurred the pottery and shells, were dug out or collected from the stone scatter of Romano-British buildings, the ruins of which litter this field. This perhaps constitutes an argument in favour of the site having been ploughed later than the sixteenth-century depopulation of nearby deserted Stantonbury.

M.U.J.