

SALVAGE EXCAVATION OF A ROMAN ENCLOSURE AT THE WATERMEAD ROUNDABOUT, BUCKINGHAM ROAD, NEAR AYLESBURY

ALISON HAWKINS AND HAL DALWOOD

Salvage excavations recorded a small rectangular Roman enclosure, possibly a stock compound, dated to the late second to third century AD.

Introduction

In January 1987 a new roundabout was constructed on the Buckingham Road, 0.5 miles north of Aylesbury in the parish of Weedon (SP 81786 15414), in order to provide access to the Watermead housing development where construction was shortly due to commence. During this work, Mr Bill Kirk (Bucks County Council Engineers Department) observed archaeological features exposed by mechanical operations and contacted the County Museum. A brief salvage excavation was subsequently carried out by Aylesbury Past Project and directed by the writers, with the kind permission of the developers and site agent. Within the restrictions of construction work only a limited area could be observed and recorded (Fig. 1). The site is low lying (at 74 mOD) on the edge of former watermeadows 150 m north of the River Thames. The site archive is retained at Buckinghamshire County Museum (CAS 5550; site code AWM 87) as are the finds (Acc. No. 286.1987).

Description of Archaeological Features

The ditch (104) initially observed was exposed within the available area, and selectively excavated. It was found to be U-shaped, c.1.00 m wide and c.0.30–0.40 m deep. In plan the ditch formed a rectangular enclosure; two lengths, respectively 29.0 m long (south-west–north-east) and 19.0 m long (north-west–south-east) joined at a sharp right angle, and a further length of ditch was observed, parallel to and 25.5 m south-west of the

latter section. Although the ditch was recut at the northern corner it seemed certain that it was a single construction, forming a rectangular enclosure, c.25 m wide by over 29 m long. No other features were observed on the site, which had been mechanically stripped and scraped before excavation, so postholes or other shallow features would certainly have been removed. The ditch sections recorded contained a uniform clay-silt fill, and the finds may be taken as coming from a unitary context.

The Artefacts

The total area of the site, the surrounding area, and the spoil tips were searched with a metal detector, but no archaeological material was recovered. The ditches contained Roman pottery, as well as some residual material.

Prehistoric

Four flint flakes were recovered, which reflect the widespread but sparse distribution of lithic material in the Aylesbury area, including low-lying areas (Dalwood and Platell 1988). In addition, ten sherds of Late Iron Age pottery were recovered.

Roman

A quantity of Roman pottery was found, including one complete pot, and also one broken spindle whorl (Fig. 2.3). Animal bone and shell was also found. Although this material is not described in further detail, it may be noted that nearly all the animal bone was cattle.

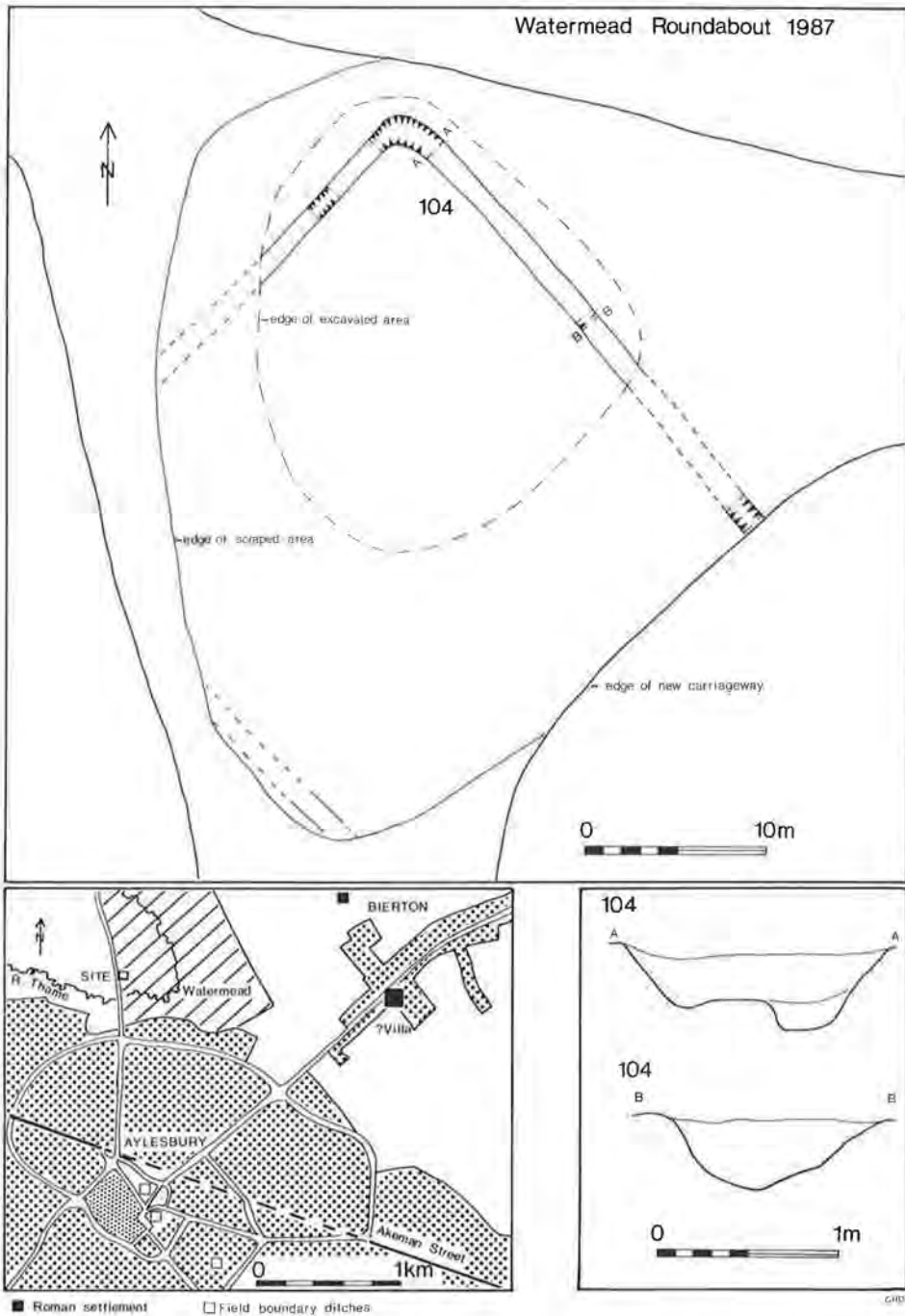


Fig. 1. Watermead Roundabout: location, plan of excavated area and sections.

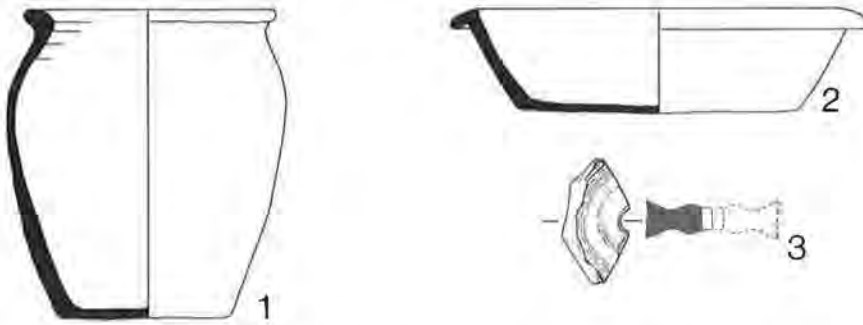


Fig. 2. Watermead Roundabout: Roman pottery (scale 1:4) and spindle whorl (scale 1:2).

The Roman Pottery (based on Benfield 1987)

There were 93 sherds including those from the fill of the ditch and unstratified material. Two vessels are illustrated (Fig. 2).

Other datable pottery (not illustrated) included one sherd of a Dressel 20 amphora, one rim sherd of a samian cup (Drag. 33) and three body sherds of Oxfordshire *mortaria*, type not recognizable (Young 1977). The absence of any late Oxfordshire or Nene Valley colour-coat wares is surprising, even for such a small sample, as it is common as residual material from sites all over Aylesbury (Benfield 1987), and this evidence supports a late second to early third-century date for the enclosure.

Catalogue of Artefacts (Fig. 2)

1. Jar, complete, hand made in coarse shelly fabric. A very similar ware appears in late second to early third-century deposits at Towcester (Woodfield 1983, 87, fig. 23.90) (context 102, fill of ditch).
2. Bowl, Nene Valley type Grey Ware paralleled at Towcester in late second to early third-century deposits (*ibid.* 83, fig. 21.65) (context 103, fill of ditch).
3. Spindle whorl, made from base of pot, diam. (est.) c.40 mm (SF 200, unstratified).

Discussion

The ditches were clearly Roman in date, and appeared to form a small rectangular enclosure c.25 m wide by over 29 m long. Although the ditches as excavated were shallow, the upper

levels had been removed by machining, and the original profile and depth cannot be accurately estimated. The low-lying position of the enclosure must be significant; it lies only 150 m north of the River Thames, in an area of former watermeadow which was likely to have also been subject to flooding in the Roman period. The enclosure can perhaps be interpreted as a stock compound.

Roman field ditches have been recorded at a number of other sites in Aylesbury and Walton (Fig. 1; Allen 1982, 84, 102-3; Dalwood and Hawkins forthcoming), and Roman pottery and other artefactual material is found ubiquitously within Aylesbury (Allen 1982, 105; Benfield 1987). Roman settlements in the Aylesbury area are located at Walton Court (Farley *et al.* 1981) and Bierton (Allen 1986; Miles 1981), which lie c.2 km respectively south-west and north-east of Akeman Street as it passes through Aylesbury (Fig. 1). It may be that the Watermead Roundabout enclosure formed part of the estate of the postulated Bierton villa (Allen 1986, 76-7) whose territory certainly included the low-lying clay soils of the Vale of Aylesbury (Jones 1986). Its suggested interpretation as a stock compound might be supported by the presence of cattle bone in the fills of the ditch, although it is more likely that the animal bone and pottery represent domestic rubbish deposits imported to the site from settlement locations, which may lie no closer than the Bierton settlement, 1.5 km to the north-east on higher ground.

Acknowledgements

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