

EXCAVATION OF AN EARTHWORK IN COMMON WOOD, PENN AND DISCOVERY OF A ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT

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The work described here was carried out between 2003 and 2005 at Common Wood, Penn, by the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society Field Group. The major archaeological feature of this woodland is an earthwork enclosure located on a hill-top plateau. Excavation led to the discovery of a Romano-British settlement. An initial topographic survey revealed a sub-rectangular enclosure of about 1.5ha with a substantial outer bank, an inner ditch, a pond on the west side and a conspicuous, outward turning, entrance on the south side. Excavation across the ditch in an area close to this entrance led to the recovery of quantities of household waste including hearth ash, fragments of jars and bowls dating from the late 1st to early 3rd centuries AD, a brooch and two pieces of quern stone. A metal detection survey of the excavation surfaces and surrounding area uncovered iron implements, possibly agricultural, two more brooches typical of the 1st century AD and coins dating to 1st to 3rd century AD. The excavation of what appears to be a dump of tap slag and furnace fragments associated with other Roman-British refuse, points to a connection between the people living in the enclosure and iron working.

INTRODUCTION

Penn and Tylers Green Residents Society acquired Common Wood, Penn (NGR SU 9112 9470) in 2003 (Fig. 1). As part of the management plan, the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society (CVAHS) Field Group was asked to assess the archaeological significance of the wood. This preliminary study led to the survey and excavation of an earthwork enclosure in Common Wood during 2004 and 2005.

The main topographic feature of Common Wood is a broad ridge of Cretaceous upper chalk (soft white chalk with many flints) rising to 165m. The ridge is capped by reddish-brown tenacious clay containing largely unworn and sometimes unbroken flints. At the west and north-west ends of the ridge the clay-with-flints gives way to pebbly clay and sand derived from the Eocene Reading Beds, set in a clay and sand matrix. Lower down the slope to the north, along the line of Deadman's Dane Bottom, this merges with glacial sand and gravel that make up the valley bottom. The chalk bedrock is

sometimes exposed on the north-east and southern slopes of the ridge.

HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

For more than a thousand years Common Wood, together with the adjacent Penn Wood and Kings Wood, formed the southern part of 4000 acres of common heath and woodland called Wycombe Heath or Holmer Heath. The heath included areas now occupied by Hazlemere, Holmer Green, Penn Street and Winchmore Hill.

It seems likely that from Saxon times all the woodland in the north of Penn Parish was called Penn Common Wood. The Roque map of 1761 shows Common Wood as Penn Wood and the Bryant map of 1824, as Penn Common Wood. The Old English *penn* means enclosure and during Saxon and Norman times Wycombe Heath was used for hunting wild boar and deer. By 1206 Wycombe Heath was common land and used by the inhabitants of surrounding parishes to pasture pigs,

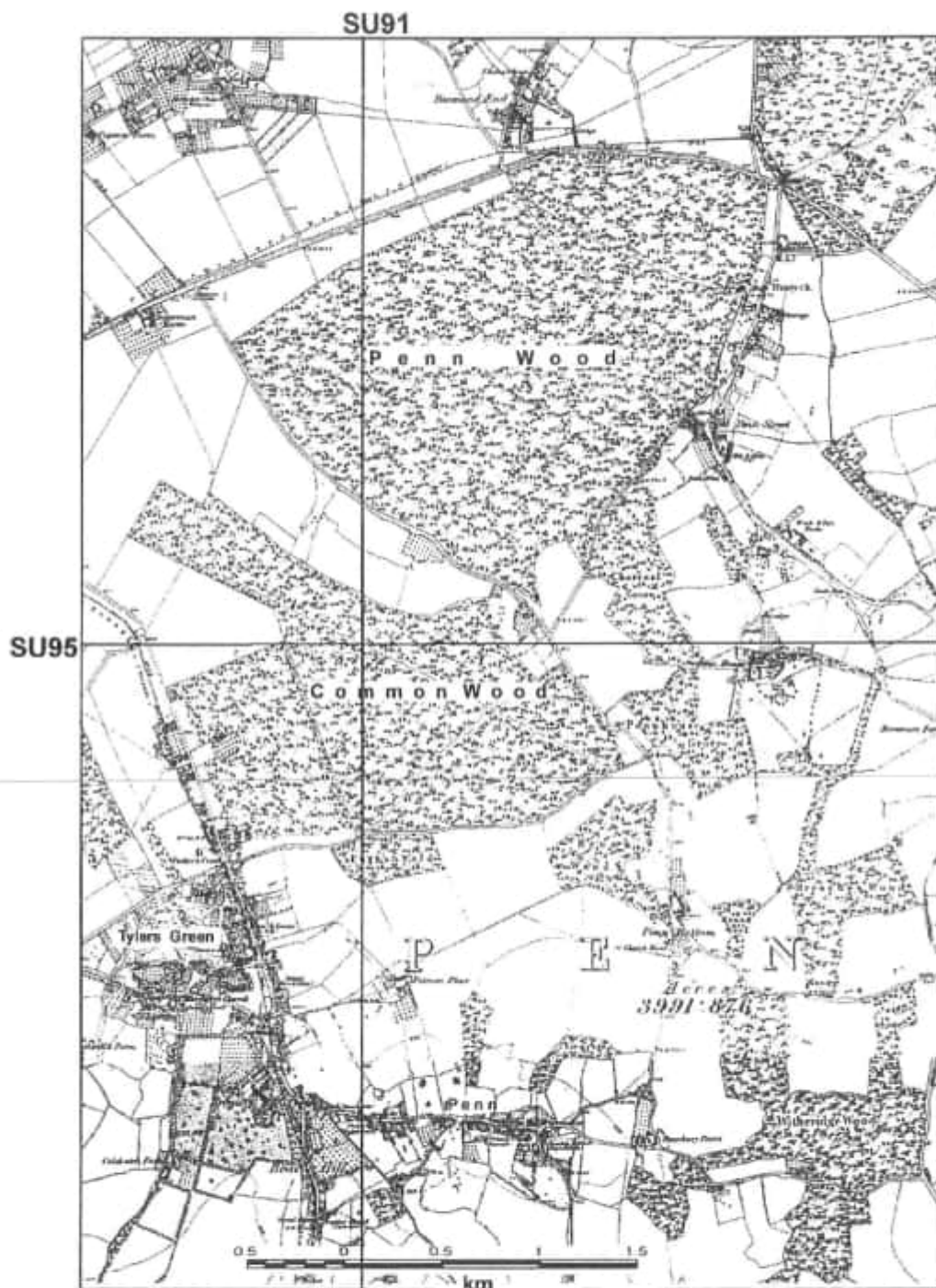
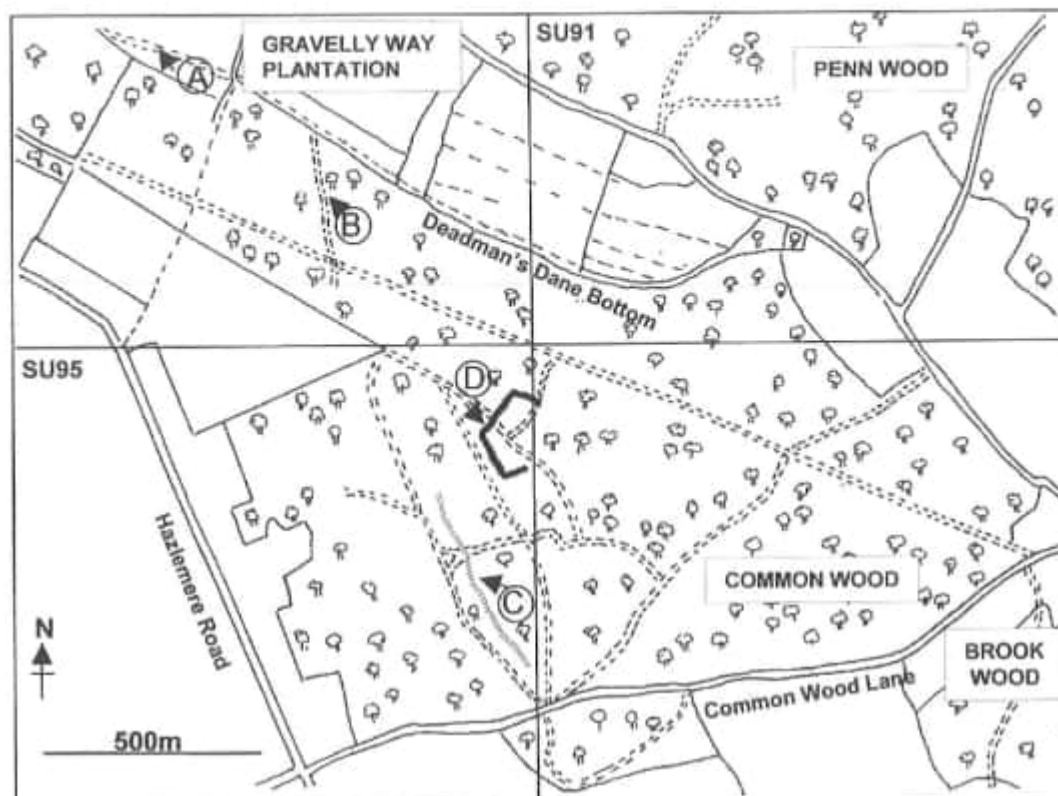


FIGURE 1 Part of an 1883 OS map showing the positions of Common Wood and Penn Wood relative to Tylers Green and Penn villages



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FIGURE 2 Map of Common Wood showing the main features of archaeological interest. A. Route of Deadman's Dane Bottom. B. Remnant holloway running between the Common Wood plateau and Deadman's Dane Bottom. C. Double ditch and central bank, probably a remnant boundary. D. Earthwork enclosure. Present day footpaths are shown as dashed double lines

graze cattle, dig clay, chalk and sand and collect fuel and timber (Green 1999). Both Common Wood and Penn Wood formed part of Penn Manor until 1222 when Segrave's Manor was formed from confiscated land; however, both returned to Penn Manor in the early 17th century. Records show that in 1372 Segrave's Manor made a significant income from the woodland, selling bundles of firewood, which were taken to the Thames by horse and cart. In 1855 the Enclosure Award ended commoners' privileges and both Common Wood and Penn Wood became the private property of the first Earl Howe (Green 1999).

An ancient trackway, known as Deadman's Dane Bottom forms the north-eastern boundary of Common Wood (Fig. 2). This track was once the main

valley-bottom route through Penn Parish but is hardly recognisable as a route today. Aerial photographs show that as late as 1947, Deadman's Dane Bottom was a tree-lined track where it crossed the adjacent golf course (Fig. 2, A). A remnant of a holloway (Fig. 2, B) descends northwards from the Common Wood ridge, linking the plateau to Deadman's Dane Bottom and is most noticeable where it crosses a long east-west chalk track through the wood.

As with most Chiltern woodland, Common Wood preserves a number of minor earthworks in the form of banks and ditches. One striking example is a double bank with central ditch (Fig. 2, C) running parallel and to the east of the modern south-north track through the wood. The banks are

0.5m high in places and are too close together to have defined a trackway; rather they appear to be a major boundary, perhaps dividing two areas of land ownership. This feature is largely aggraded where it crosses the plateau top.

The most significant earthwork feature in Common Wood is an enclosure (SMR 5680; Fig. 2, D), located on the ridge plateau within a wooded area, which was noted and reported by Mike Farley (Bucks County Museum) in 1987. Little was known about the origin and date of this earthwork, which does not appear on any of eleven maps of 1761 to 1972 (Miles Green personal communication) nor on the Penn Estate Map of 1852 (Earl Howe Estate). The structure and integrity of the enclosure is threatened by woodland/vegetation overgrowth, by reforestation activities and increased use of footpaths crossing the bank. With this in mind and in collaboration with Penn and Tylers Green Residents Association it was decided to carry out further investigations in order to throw light on the origin and function of the enclosure and record its present structure.

Vegetation obscures much of the bank's circuit and the eastern side has been removed by reforestation work. Nevertheless, a preliminary walk-over showed the structure to be of significant size, comprising a bank with a broad shallow internal ditch. Local opinion favoured the idea that the enclosure was medieval and used for animal stock; the presence of a pond on its west side supported this idea. Examination of the bank, however, suggests that the entrance through it by the pond was not original but had been formed by constant passage across the bank.

It was decided to carry out a detailed exploration of the earthwork by topographic survey and a series of small-scale excavations.

TOPOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Visibility was limited by trees and vegetation so that topographic survey was confined to the circuit of bank and ditch and a few metres either side (Fig. 3). The enclosure is roughly 'D' shaped. The presumed course of the eastern side was removed by forestry work, as judged by widespread damage to the ground surface – deep furrows made by heavy vehicles and tree-pull pits – in this area. Furthermore, aerial photographs of 1979 (Bucks CC Archaeological Archive) show a cleared area which

coincides with the expected position of this side of the enclosure. The disturbed area was walked systematically but no reliable evidence of the eastern bank was found. The south and west sides of the enclosure have a substantial external bank, 8–10m wide in places. At present the bank varies in height from 1m on the north-west side to a little over 2m at its south-east extremity (southern entrance below) but was probably much higher when first constructed. The associated inner ditch runs the length of the bank with a width of approximately 3m and a depth of 1.0–1.5m. As seen today, the earthwork is about 170m north-south and 110m east-west at its surviving widest point, and may have enclosed roughly 1.5ha (3.7 acres).

In addition to the dip in the bank by the pond (C in Fig. 3), two entrances were identified which appear to have been purposefully built. On the western side of the enclosure a causeway several metres wide crosses the ditch (A in Fig. 3). On the southern side, an entrance is marked by a deliberate break in the bank (B in Fig. 3). The bank here is significantly higher than elsewhere and turns outwards at ca.45° from the main circuit bank; the internal ditch terminates close to the point where the bank begins to turn outwards. The outward turned bank forms the western side of the entrance. There is no corresponding structure on the eastern side of the gap and at present, we assume that this was also destroyed during tree clearance work, along with the rest of the eastern circuit. From what remains it is difficult to assess the width of the original entrance.

EXCAVATION METHODOLOGY

All areas to be excavated were surface stripped of vegetation and leaf mould by hand. Trenches were positioned to avoid turbation due to animal burrowing and tree/vegetation roots. Advice on environmental issues, especially on the presence/absence of sensitive flora in the areas of excavation (Roger Wilding, Wycombe Wildlife Group) was also taken into account. All trenches were hand excavated, numbered in sequence of excavation and a complete section/context record kept. Eleven trenches were excavated; the positions of trenches 1 and 2 are shown in Fig. 3 and trenches 3–11 in Fig. 5A. The surfaces of the excavations and spoil heaps were scanned with a metal detector during the course of the work.

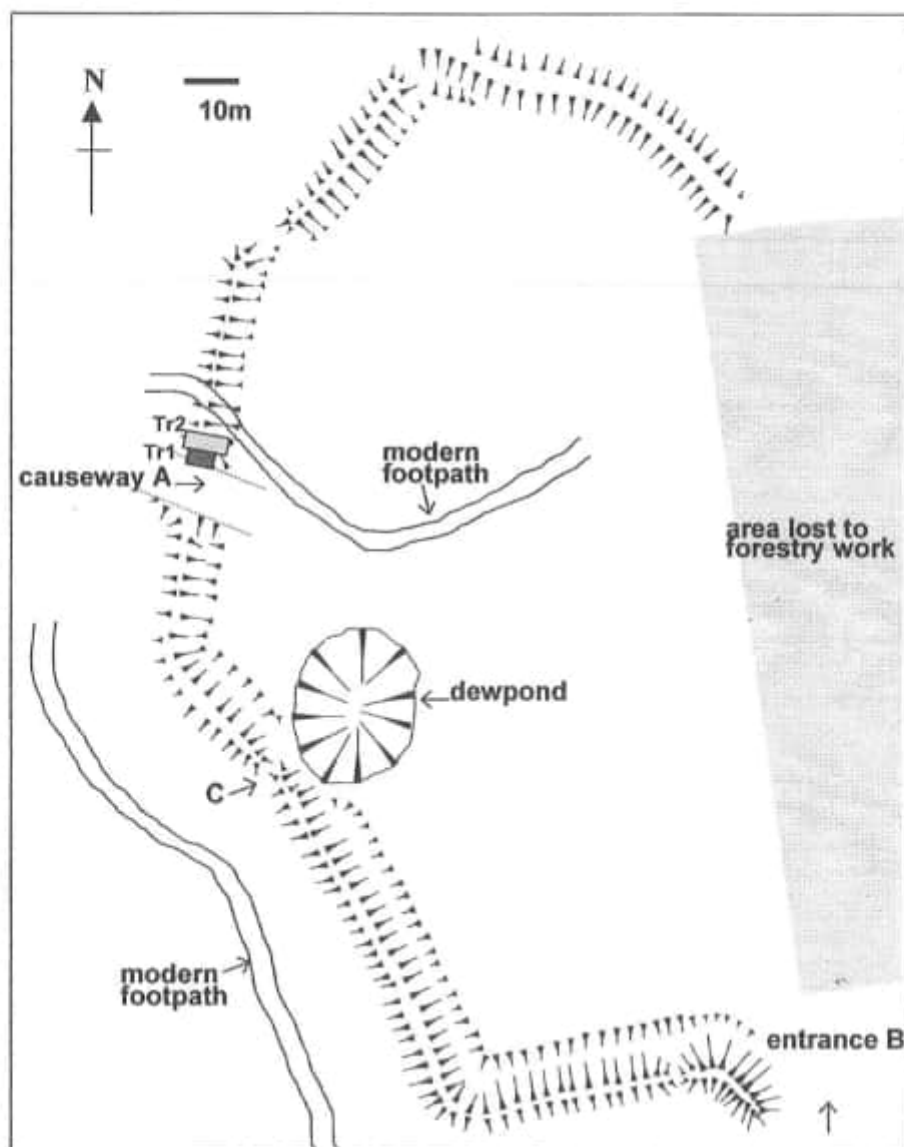


FIGURE 3 Topographic map of the Common Wood earthwork enclosure showing the position of entrances and Trenches 1 and 2

EXCAVATION RESULTS

Causeway (Trenches 1 and 2)

Structure

The causeway on the western side of the enclosure is 6–7m wide (A in Fig.3). Two possibilities were

considered: this structure could be contemporary with the enclosure and represent the natural land-surface, undisturbed by the building of the ditch and bank; or it could post-date the enclosure and have been built by filling in the ditch and modifying the bank. Small-scale excavation was carried out to decide between these possibilities and to

throw light on the date and function of the enclosure.

A cut 1m wide was made into the north side of the causeway, down to and through the uppermost level of the ditch surface (Tr 1 Fig. 3). Examination of the deposits and stratigraphy (Fig. 4 Trench 1) indicates that it was laid some time after the enclosure was constructed. The causeway was built up of compacted orange/brown, sandy clay (context 1005/1006) containing small angular/sub-angular flints and pebbles. At its base, a layer of large, flatish, flint nodules was found, which may have provided an initial base where the causeway later crossed the underlying damp ditch. Beneath the causeway the upper layers of the ditch fill (contexts 1003, 1010, 1011) were apparent. Cutting back the causeway fill showed that the ditch deposits continued beneath the body of the causeway and retained a profile very similar to that in the open ditch. A metal button was uncovered at the junction between the causeway fill and the underlying ditch deposits. The button has been identified as Georgian, 1714–1830 (Graham Kenlin Museum of London Advisory Service), suggesting that the causeway was built between 150 and 300 years ago.

Ditch profile and fill

A second trench, Trench 2 (2.5m x 1m), was dug close to the causeway in order to establish the profile of the ditch and the nature of its fill. The fill consisted of an upper layer of silty-loam (context 2003; Fig. 4), rich in organic material, overlying similar layers with greater flint and pebble content and increasing evidence of water-logging (context 2010). Below this, the deposits became wetter with a yellow and pink-grey hue, interspersed with green-grey patches emitting a sulphurous smell (contexts 2011/2012). This could be explained as accumulation of decomposed animal waste or natural vegetation. The lowest level (context 2012) contained occasional large smooth pebbles and flints, which may have been placed deliberately to improve drainage or provide stepping stones. The ditch was cut into brown, stiff, tenacious clay of which a further c.20cm depth was excavated to confirm its undisturbed nature. At this location, the ditch was c.1m deep and c.3.5m wide and ditch fill sediments were 30–35cm deep. No artefacts or animal remains were found. Measurements of pH 5.5 indicated an acidic environment and explained the absence of shell and bone.

Southern Entrance

This area (B on Fig. 3) was explored in two phases of excavation. In all, eight trenches were dug to examine the structure of the bank and ditch and make-up of the entrance surface (Fig. 5A). Two further trenches explored an area identified as “rich in iron” by metal detecting.

Structure of the bank (Trench 3A)

A cut (1m wide) was made through the bank near to the entrance, where the bank is c.1.4 m high. This demonstrated that the bank is composed of clay, with four distinct layers differing in angle of deposition, colour and compaction (Fig. 4, Trench 3A; contexts 3A003, 3A004, 3A005, 3A006). There was no evidence of a palisade on the top of the bank but such evidence may have been lost as the bank eroded over time. One objective in sectioning the bank was to identify the original ground surface, buried at the time the bank was built. Analysis of buried paleo-soils can give information about past environments and might have provided material suitable for radiocarbon dating. However, no buried soil was found. Apart from a number of struck flint flakes, no artefacts were found in the bank material.

Ditch profile and fill (Trench 3B 2m x 1.5m: Trench 6 1m x 1m: Trench 11 2m x 1m)

Trench 3B was cut immediately to the north of and extending Trench 3A (Fig. 5A). This trench sectioned the ditch in a north-west to south-east orientation. It was immediately apparent that the nature of the ditch fill at this location was significantly different from that encountered in Trench 2 near to the causeway. Within 10cm of the surface, clusters of burnt flint with fragments of pottery were found. There were also patches of black burnt deposits and grey, soft ash. The concentration of pottery fragments and ashy deposits increased with depth and were maximal between 19 and 50cm from the surface. The pattern of deposition suggests that the ditch here was used as a rubbish tip for domestic waste. At about 70cm depth, the bottom of the ditch fill and the natural, undisturbed clay surface were reached. Overall more than 300 fragments of pottery were recovered from this trench along with an almost complete copper-alloy brooch and two pieces of quern-stone. All these finds appear to date to the Romano-British period.

The profile across the ditch at this position was

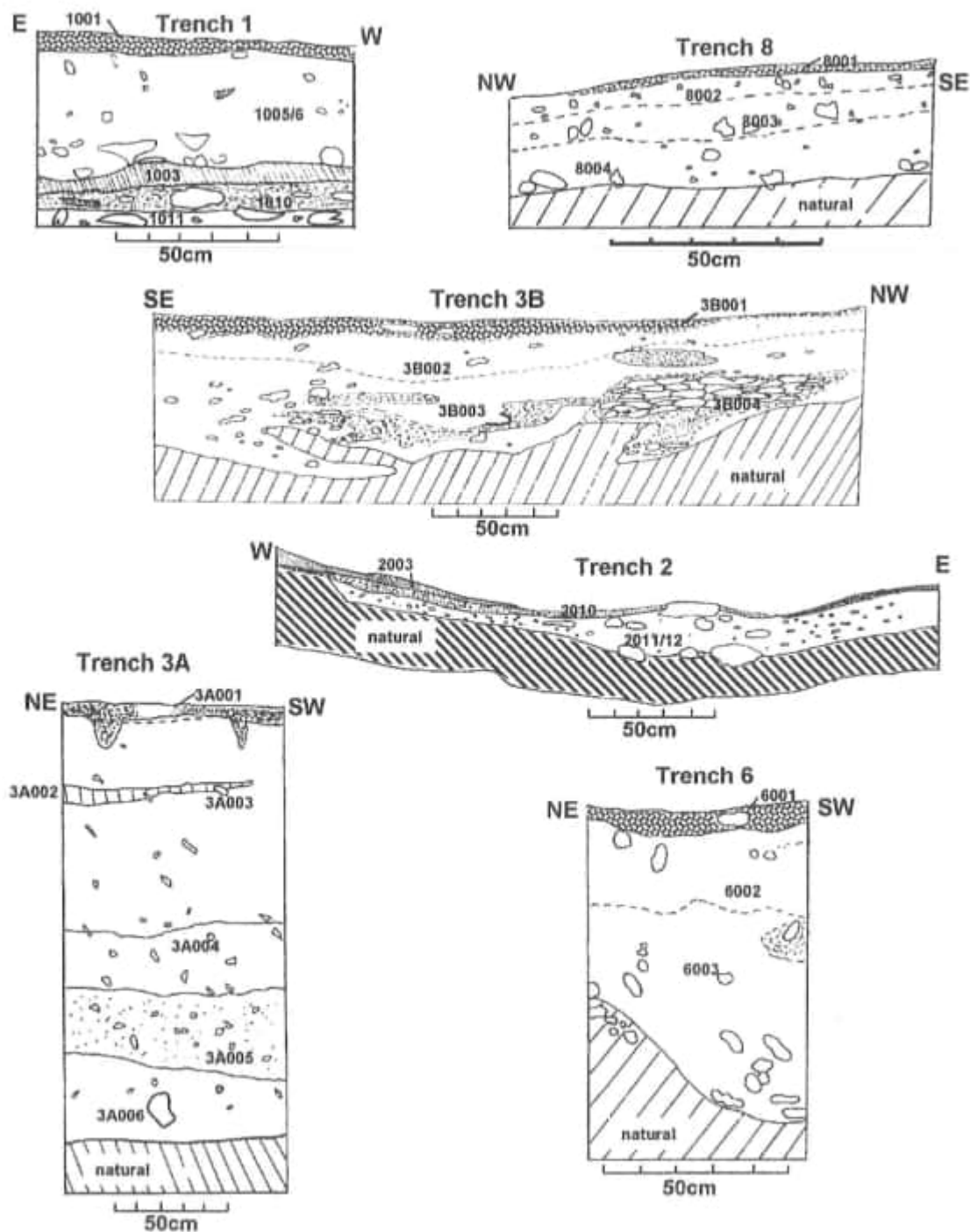


FIGURE 4 Section drawings of some trenches showing the physical relationship of contexts (numbered) and depth of deposits. Orientation of each section and scale are also indicated

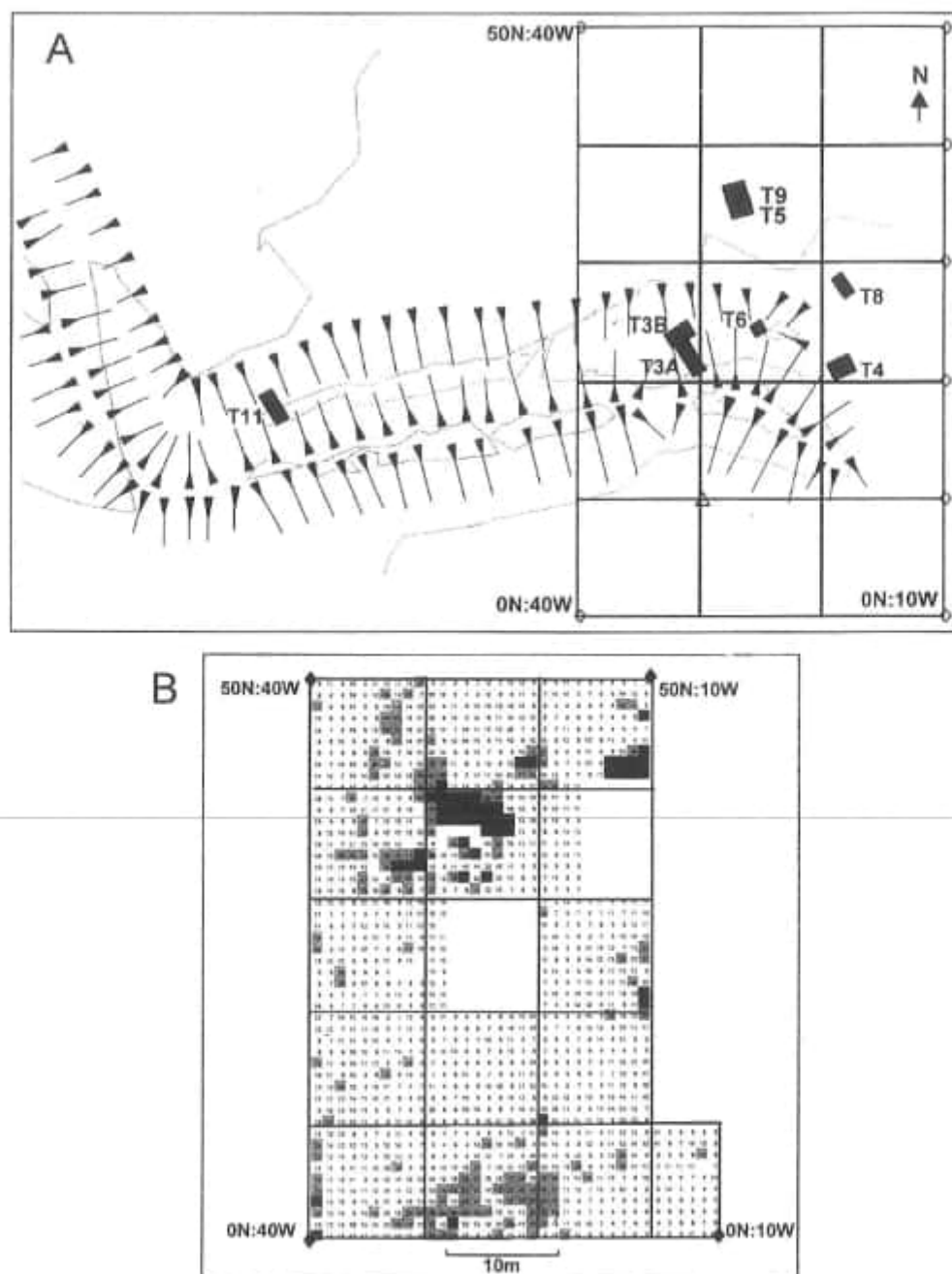


FIGURE 5 A. Part of the topographic map showing the structure of the southern entrance and positions of Trenches 3 to 11. The 10m x 10m grid used in the magnetic susceptibility survey is also shown. The triangle at 10N30W marks the position of fixed station 2 used in the topographic survey.

B. Results of the magnetic susceptibility survey across the grid shown in A. Areas of high susceptibility are shown in black, medium in dark grey and low in pale grey

complex with evidence of natural slumping of the side walls and the dumping of quantities of pebbles and flints, particularly on the side of the ditch adjacent to the enclosure interior (Fig 4. Trench 3B). It seems likely that this rubble might have come from clearance work within the enclosure or was collected specifically to reinforce the side of the ditch wall.

Two further trenches were excavated across the ditch in order to determine the extent of domestic waste dumping in the ditch. Trench 11 (1m x 2m) was excavated in the south-west corner of the enclosure, 40 to 45 metres west of Trench 3B. Its contents were similar to those of Trench 3B. At c.15cm depth, a patch of large irregular flints was found and a scatter of pottery. At c.20cm depth a roughly circular, grey ashy area 20cm x 20cm was uncovered, rich in fragments of pottery.

Trench 6 (1m x 1m) was positioned c.3m east of Trench 3B within the ditch but close to its terminus. In the section (Fig. 4 Trench 6) the rise of the ditch end is evident. The ditch fill (contexts 6002 and 6003) here contained little evidence of hearth deposits although 20 sherds and a fragment of glass were recovered.

Entrance surface (Trenches 4 and 8)

Two trenches, 4 and 8, were dug to explore the entrance surface (sections not shown). Trench 4 (2m x 2m) lay to the west side of the entrance near to the outward turned bank. At c.8–10cm below the surface, patches of closely-fitting flint nodules and rounded pebbles embedded in a grey clay layer (context 4001) were encountered. In the north-west corner of the trench, on top of the pebbles, several pieces of orange-red Romano-British pottery were found. At c.25cm below the surface, two further large areas of closely aligned flints/pebbles were found (contexts 4004/4005), which could represent filling-in of areas likely to form puddles. Excavation of trench 8 (2m x 2m), to the east of trench 4, cut down through several relatively shallow but distinct layers of clay with scattered flints and pebbles (Fig. 4, Trench 8). At about 15cm below the surface an isolated area of closely compacted flints, perhaps placed to fill a pothole, was encountered (context 8003). These two trenches provided no evidence of deliberate surfacing of the entrance route although occasional maintenance of the natural surface seems to be indicated.

Within the enclosure

Trench 5 (2m x 2m; section not shown) was placed across an area identified as containing iron rich deposits by scanning with a metal detector. Burnt flint and pieces of slag were visible close to the surface; the slag increased in density with depth and was maximal between 15 and 25cm (contexts 5002, 5003). At this depth the slag was more concentrated in the northern half of the trench, while the south-east corner showed patches of blackened/burnt surface. Several pieces of Romano-British pot were recovered within and below the main concentration of slag. Excavation at depths greater than 35cms (context 5004) found no further slag or pot and there was no evidence of *in situ* structures. Thus, although 18kg slag together with several fragments of furnace wall were found they were presumed to be residual and to represent a waste deposit.

MAGNETIC SUSCEPTIBILITY SURVEY

In addition to excavation, a magnetic susceptibility survey was carried out on a 50m by 40m grid over the general area of the southern entrance (shown in Figs. 5). Measurement of magnetic susceptibility determines the degree to which soil can be magnetized when subject to a magnetic field and is a particularly good procedure for detecting areas of burning – hearths, kilns and furnaces (Clark 1990). This survey identified two major areas of interest, shown as dark zones in Fig 5B; the first, at grid position 38m north/26m west, lay immediately adjacent to Trench 5 where evidence of iron working had been uncovered. The second, at grid position 40m north/10m west, lay immediately to the north of an unexcavated 18th century saw-pit.

The area adjacent to and north of Trench 5 was further explored by excavation of Trench 9 (4m x 4m) and an additional 25kg of slag and several fragments of pottery were recovered. As with Trench 5 small fragments of furnace wall were found but no evidence for *in situ* structures.

Excavation of the area adjacent to the saw-pit found ashy deposits at 5–8cms depth, which were taken to be the remains of wood burning associated with forestry activity. Deposits beneath this layer appeared to be natural clay-with-flints.

METAL DETECTING SURVEY

The grid laid over the area of the southern entrance was also surveyed using a metal detector and walking along lines laid at 1m intervals. This led to the discovery of a number of iron and lead artefacts and several Romano-British coins, the latter were broadly focussed on the main entrance route and around Trench 9.

FINDS

Flints

Ten struck flint flakes (Fig. 6) were found during excavation of the bank (contexts 3A002 and 003; n=6) and adjacent ditch (3B001-003; n=4). A flake was also recovered from Trench 5 (context 5002). These have been identified as Late Neolithic/early Bronze Age debitage flints (Jon Cotton, Museum

of London) confirming what is known from similar finds in the general area, that humans were exploiting the upland landscape of the Chilterns 5000 years ago.

Quernstones

Two edge fragments from small rotary quernstones of about 0.5m in diameter were found in Trench 3B, each of a different type of millstone-grit. Direct comparison suggests that the stone is similar to Derbyshire millstone-grit. Similar millstone-grit quernstones have been identified at Gadebridge Park, Herts villa (Neal 1974) and other Romano-British sites in the Chilterns (Brannigan 1973).

Metalwork

Two copper-alloy brooches and a small fragment of a third were also found. The brooch excavated in Trench 3B is of the 'Hod Hill' type (Fig. 7B), the

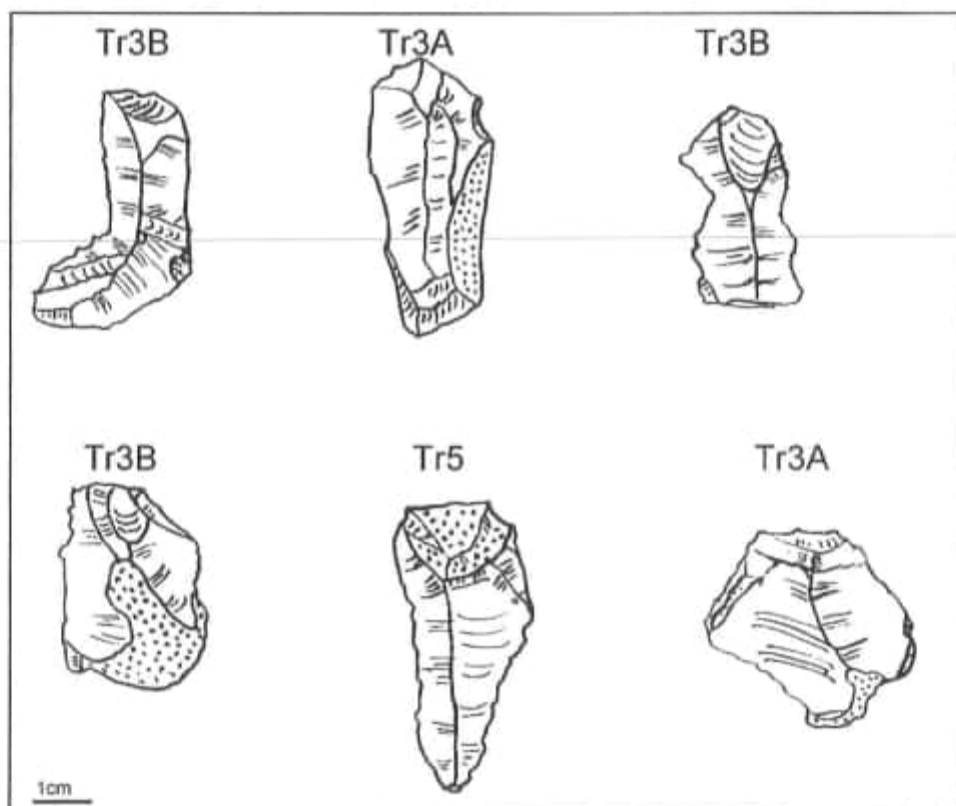


FIGURE 6 Examples of worked flints found in Trenches 3A, 3B and 5

other, recovered using a metal detector, is a 'Dolphin' type (Fig. 7A); both date to the 1st century AD. The fragment (Fig. 7C) was not identified to type.

Seven iron artefacts were found during the metal detection survey of the grid laid near to the southern entrance. These are very corroded and X-ray imaging only marginally improved their definition. However, comparison with metal finds from Boxfield Romano-British farm near Stevenage (Going and Hunn 1999) suggest that these might include part of a sickle, a plough coulter and metal edging for a wooden shovel. Two small pieces of highly oxidised lead, one of which is probably a weight, were also found during this survey.

Slag

The slag recovered from Trenches 5 and 9 has been identified as dense fayalytic (iron silicate) tap slag (Prof. Thilo Rehren, Institute of Archaeology UCL). The fragments show a characteristic appearance with one side exposed to air while the metal was in a molten state and the other exposed to a firm earth surface. This is good evidence that the slag was tapped from the furnace in a fluid state

and ran out across the ground, a process used mainly in the Roman period. Although a number of small fragments of clay furnace were mixed with the slag, none provided clues about the shape or size of the furnace and none were suggestive of tuyeres (Historical Metallurgy Society datasheet 5). Since there was no evidence for *in situ* structures it seems likely that the slag recovered during excavation represents a waste dump. It is perhaps worth noting that this dump is about 15m north-west of the presumed main entrance to the enclosure.

Coins

Thirteen Romano-British coins were found during excavation and the metal detection survey on the grid around the southern entrance. This is a substantial number for a relatively small area and it is unfortunate that the acidic soil conditions meant that most were severely corroded. Six coins are Roman sestertii (*a bronze sestertius was worth 1/100th of a gold aureus*), two of which retain sufficient intact surface for identification: a Trajan AD 98-117 and a Marcus Aurelius AD 161-181.

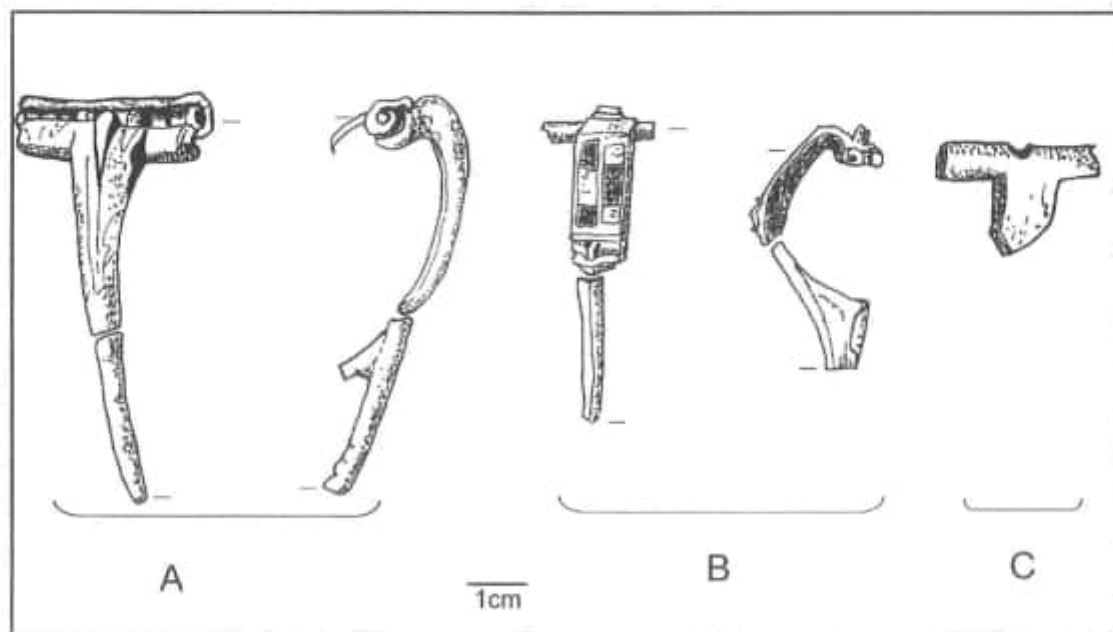


FIGURE 7 Bronze brooches found during excavation and metal detecting survey. A and B are Dolphin and Hod Hill types respectively, both dating to 1st century AD. C was not identified

The smaller coins are either antoninianii or denarii and one of these was dated to the 3rd century AD by the presence of radiate crown on the emperor's head (Dr Jenny Hall, Museum of London), a motif introduced for the first time in the early third century c.215AD (Casey 2002).

Pottery

The pottery was sorted into a type series using a simplified version of the sixty-six fabrics described by Neal (1987). The assemblage comprised a total of 404 sherds with a total weight of 2.61 kilograms. The sherds were almost entirely of the Romano-British period and fit well into a time period from late first century to early third century AD.

All sherds are abraded and small with an average weight per sherd of 6.45g. The condition can be explained by broken pot lying on the surface for a period of time prior to the sherds being cleared into the ditch. The low soil pH has led to further surface degradation in all but the hardest fabrics and loss of shell particles from the shell-tempered ware. This assemblage appears to be domestic and not high status, with a low proportion of fine wares. The forms are a mixture of small jars, large storage jars, bowls and flagons and mostly grog-tempered or sandy wares. It is notable that overall, the variety of different wares is diverse for the size of the assemblage.

Counting numbers of non-identical rims suggest at least forty nine individual vessels are represented. At least ten different fabric types were present. The general distribution of fabric types is summarised in Fig. 13, which shows that the most common are coarse grey sandy (40%) and grog tempered (26%) wares. A comparison was made of the Common Wood assemblage with that from the kilns at Fulmer and Hedgerley which lie c.10–12 km from Common Wood (Brannigan 1994) but no similarities were found (Aylesbury Museum archive resources).

Pottery was recovered from almost all trenches close to the southern entrance (Fig. 5A) with more than 90% found in the inner ditch fill (Trenches 3B, 6 and 11). The next sections describe the types of fabrics and vessels found in each trench, context by context and the data are summarised in Table 1. Drawings of a selection of sherds are shown in Fig. 8 and are referred to in the text by a number in square parentheses.

Trench 3B

Context 3B001 (n=29), 70% of the sherds from this context are buff/orange grog-tempered wares, some with added sand and include a base sherd from a narrow-necked jar. 20% are sandy wares including a rim sherd from a bowl. The remaining 10% consist of three base sherds from poorly preserved samian (terra sigillata) bowls [8, 8a]

Context 3B002 (n=117), 50% of the sherds from this context are soft grog-tempered wares in grey and buff including rims of storage jars [6]. A further 30% are hard sandy wares including fragments of jars and bowls [1]. Fourteen sherds are of a pinky/white fabric, which is possibly Oxford ware (OXID). The remaining sherds include some very small fragments from fine-wares including two samian bowls, two grey jars with evidence of a white slip [2, 4] together with a base of a large storage jar made from grey shell-tempered ware. A small tessera, 10mm x 12mm, made of sandy grey ware (CGW) was also found in this context.

Contexts 3B003, 3B005, 3B007 and 3B008 (n=173). These contexts are considered together because they were all clearly part of a sequence of deposition of domestic waste. About half of the sherds from these contexts are of sandy ware while most of the remainder are grog-tempered wares, some with added sand. Examples of rim fragments from jars and bowls are shown in Fig 8 [9, 11, 12, 13, 19]. Small numbers of fine ware fragments, including samian ware and a grey ware with white slip, were also recovered [18] together with a single sherd of a late first-century poppy-headed beaker [17] from 3B005. It is notable that a single rim sherd of black shell-tempered ware, possibly of Belgian type, was found in 3B003.

Trench 4 (n=7)

The seven sherds recovered from this trench include three refittable base sherds from a single small orange grog-tempered pot of very friable fabric.

Trenches 5 and 9 (n=19)

These trenches are considered together since they both overlaid the same deposit of iron slag. Base sherds from a shell-tempered storage jar and fragments of grey sandy ware bowls were recovered from contexts 5001, 5002 and 5003. Eleven sherds were found in context 9005 of which six were grog-tempered, three were grey fine ware with a white

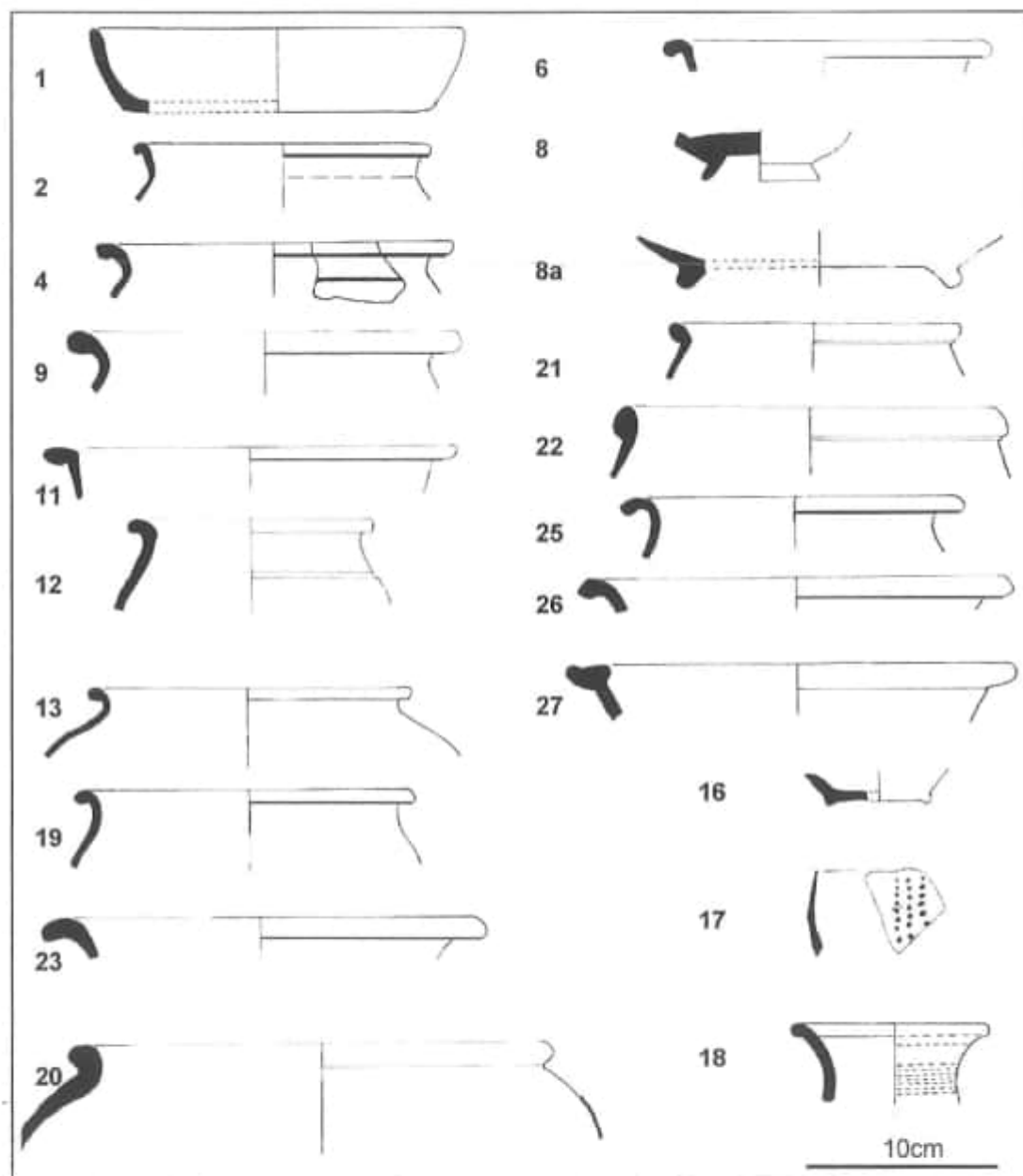


FIGURE 8 Some examples of pottery forms from Common Wood: 1 COW. 2 FGW. 4 FGW. 6 NGR .8 TS. 8a TS. 9 CGW. 11 CGW. 12 CGW. 13 CGW. 16 VER. 17 poppy head beaker. 18 FGW. 19 NDSG. 20 NGR. 21 FGW. 22 VER. 23 NDSG. 25 NDSG. 26 NDSG. 27 VER. Scale 1-2.5

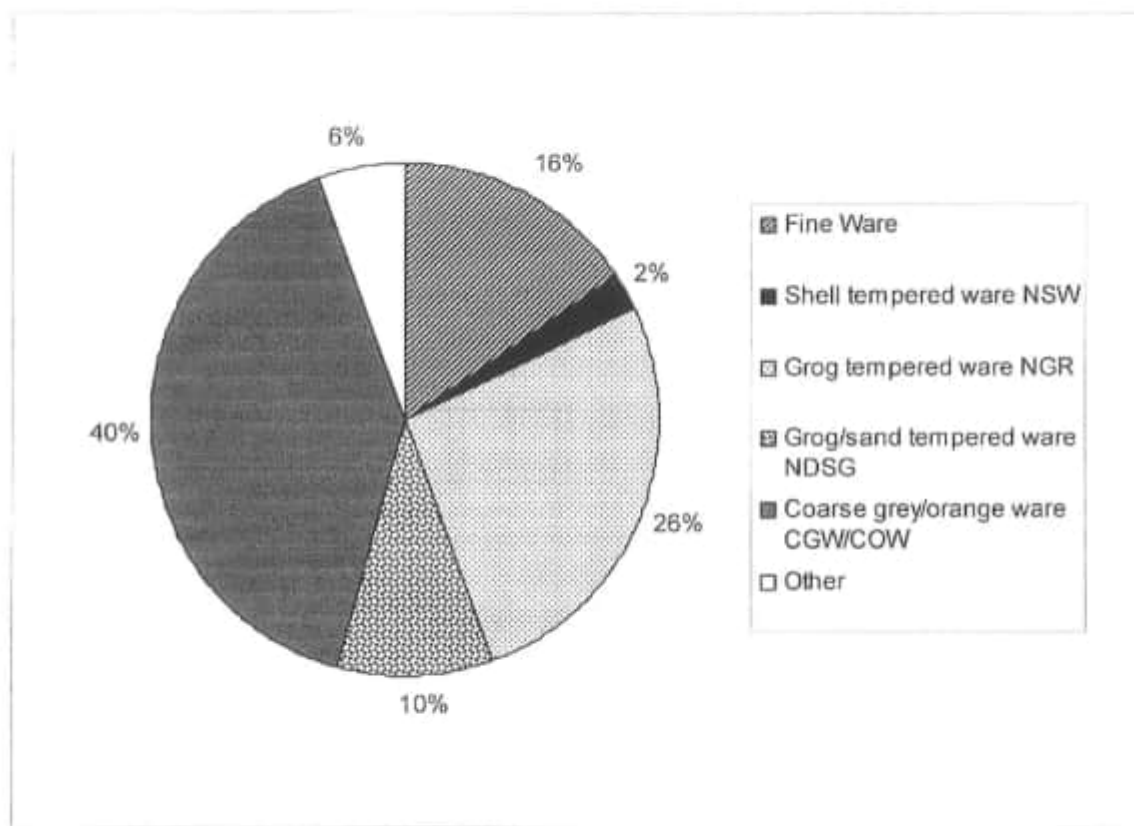


FIGURE 9 Chart showing the percentage proportions of pottery ware types amongst the Common Wood assemblage

slip and two were from a grey sandy ware bowl.

Trench 6 (n=23)

Sherds recovered from this trench include two rim sherds from a large shell-tempered storage jar from context 6001, rim sherds from a large storage jar of grey grog-tempered ware and jars of buff and grey sandy wares from context 6002, together with other mixed fragments from context 6003, among which was a rim from a grog-tempered jar.

Trench 10 (n=1)

A single sherd, found amongst the surface leaf-litter, was of a soft dark grey shell-tempered ware.

Trench 11 (n=33)

Context 11001 yielded fragments of grog-tempered ware jars including a rim from one large vessel

[20], grog/sand tempered wares [23] and sand tempered fabrics, among which were orange sandy sherds of Verulamium region ware from the St Albans area [22]. There was also a rim sherd from a fine grey ware jar [21]. Verulamium region wares were also encountered in contexts 11002 and 11003, including fragments from the base of a bowl [16] and a bowl rim [17]. Other finds from context 11003 included a dark grey rim sherd from a shell-tempered jar and three rim sherds from hard grey sandy ware jars, an example of which is shown [26].

Other pottery finds

Two other rim sherds were found in the interior during the course of the magnetic susceptibility survey. A single body-fragment of a mortarium made of a pinky/cream fabric with clear and rosy grits,

possibly Oxford ware, and a rim sherd from a large shell-tempered storage jar.

DISCUSSION

Age of the earthwork

Dating of the earthwork is not easy. There was no buried soil from which dating might have been achieved. The oldest objects are struck flints found within the body of the bank and in two of the trenches. Some aspects of the structure of the enclosure are suggestive of a prehistoric date, in particular its sub-rectangular shape and remnants of an imposing, outward turning, south facing entrance. While the bank is impressive in places, particularly adjacent to the major entrance, it diminishes in height elsewhere. This format, with the entrance as the most impressive feature, has been noticed for Iron Age earthworks, not only hill-forts but also non-defensive enclosures such as at Gussage All Saints, Dorset (Collis 2001; Wainwright 1979). It is worth noting, in this context, that the 1.2ha enclosure at Gussage has an outer bank and internal ditch as at Common Wood. However no distinctive Iron Age material has been recovered from Common Wood.

The sole reliable source of dating information for the Common Wood earthwork comes from pottery and coins found in the ditch and near to the major entrance. All suggest a Romano-British date and provide a firm *terminus ante quem* of first century AD for the presence of the enclosure. The presence of a single fragment of a possible 'Belgic' pot could indicate an earlier date but can also be simply explained by the continued manufacture and/or use of this type of pot after the Roman conquest.

A Romano-British settlement

The discoveries made during excavation demonstrated that a Romano-British settlement was present from the 1st to 3rd century AD. Currently, the density of the undergrowth and woodland within the enclosure has obstructed the identification of dwellings or other structures. However, household waste was dumped along the entire length of the ditch on the south side and in the area around the southern entrance. Pottery fragments, numbering 384 in total, and other artefacts were recovered from Trenches 3B, 11 and 6 alone, even though in combination these trenches only covered 4.5m of

ditch length. Overall, the finds provide significant evidence of domestic activity, cereal grinding and preparation of food. There are the remains of jars, bowls and dishes as well as evidence of ash from hearths. There are also signs of maintenance of the ditch sides and perhaps the entrance surface.

These observations raise questions about what the Romano-British occupants of Common Wood were doing there. The recovery of substantial quantities of iron slag might indicate that metal smelting was taking place, but as yet there is no evidence for *in situ* furnace structures and the slag deposits appear to be waste dumps; nor is there any obvious source of iron ore unless it was brought in from elsewhere. The number of coins found in the area of the southern entrance is interesting and could indicate that money was changing hands.

The proximity of the Shardeloes Roman estate at Mantle's Green Amersham (Yeoman and Stewart 1992) and the High Wycombe villa (Hartley 1959), just 4km and c.5km respectively from Common Wood, raises the possibility that families associated with these estates spent part of their year at the enclosure. For example farm workers, busy in the valleys during spring and summer, may have come to the enclosure later in the year to over-winter cattle, prepare charcoal and/or smelt iron? Whatever the pattern of occupation, a good water supply would have been essential. Could the pond be of Romano-British construction? This is not without precedent. The ponds at Greenmoor, Woodcote (SU646812) in the south Oxfordshire Chilterns, which are also relatively close to an earthwork enclosure, are thought to be Romano-British in date (Woolley 2005). The pond in Common Wood holds some water for most of the year, however the nature of local hydrology and construction of the pond remain to be investigated.

The discovery of a Romano-British settlement associated with the Common Wood enclosure was unexpected. Until now there have been only a handful of reported surface finds of Roman artefacts around this locale with none from within Common Wood (Fig. 10). However, there is good evidence that other Chiltern enclosures were occupied during the same period.

Other enclosures in the Chilterns and nearby

A survey of the Ashridge estate encountered fourteen banked enclosures, predominantly sub-

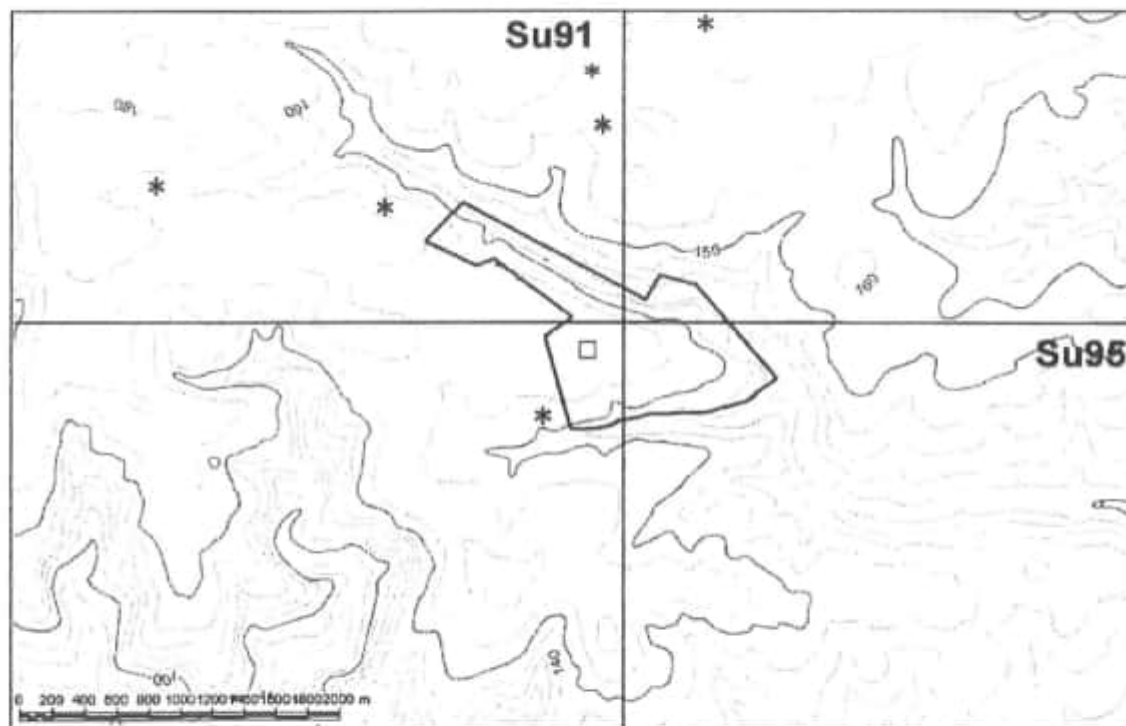


FIGURE 10 Distribution of Sites and Monuments Record find-spots for Romano-British artefacts within a 4km radius of Common Wood

rectangular and enclosing areas up to 2 ha, some of which yielded Belgic pottery and distinctive Roman wares on surface searching (Morris and Wainwright 1995). There were also frequent finds of iron slag. The overall interpretation was of evolution of Romano-British settlements from a pre-existing late Iron Age settlements and an association with nearby agricultural settlement. As at Common Wood, most of the area was subsequently either uncultivated common or woodland until the last century, thus preserving the ancient earthworks.

Pike (1995) reviewed nine earthwork enclosures found in upland Chiltern woodland. Two appeared to be medieval as judged by dateable pottery finds. Four had subsidiary enclosures either within or adjacent to the enclosure bank which were perhaps monastic lodges (Simco 2003). Notably, three other sites produced evidence of iron working and were all within 5km of Common Wood and the Amer-sham and High Wycombe villa estates.

Further afield, an archaeological survey in the Northamptonshire Forest District encountered twelve possible Late Iron Age/Romano British enclosures and copious evidence of iron and charcoal working (Simco 2003). However, as with the earthworks considered by Pike (1995) none of these sites have been excavated and their definitive date and function remain conjectural.

Recent history

It seems likely that some enclosures were reused. At Common Wood the causeway was a late addition to the earthwork. It is likely that it was added to facilitate transport movement of timber; the wood is dotted with 18th-19th century saw-pits which are more plentiful on the plateau than on the slopes. Another possibility for later use is stock herding. A local metal detectorist is reported to have found 'many croatal bells scattered through the wood'. Such bells were in use from the 16th to the 19th centuries and were most often associated

with grazing sheep (Morris personal communication).

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