

EXPLORATION OF A ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT AT SARRATT BOTTOM

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With contributions from the CVAHS team

In the ten years between 2005 and 2015 Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society (CVAHS) carried out extensive geophysical surveys and a number of small-scale excavations in areas at and around Sarratt Bottom. These were aimed at locating the remains of a Roman villa thought to have existed in the area of Valley Farm. When explored, most of the modern-day selected areas yielded interesting Romano-British materials which were recovered at levels just below the uppermost surfaces. A remaining field covering a large area on the south of the river was explored by geophysics. One small area of this field had been investigated in during 1972 and recent excavation of three further areas by CVAHS has led to exposure of undisturbed Romano-British features and finds.

INTRODUCTION

There is good evidence for evenly spaced villas along the river Chess, from where the river rises on the periphery of Chesham to where it joins the river Colne at Rickmansworth. As is the case in many areas, villas appear to have developed from existing local settlements in the late 1st or early 2nd century. Early investigations in the 1960s were made at Latimer by Keith Branigan, then team leader of the CVAHS group. Between 1964 and 1971 Branigan carried out significant large-scale excavations at Latimer, identifying a Romano-British villa site occupied – with occasional gaps – from c.AD150 to c.400 (Branigan 1971). Work on the villa at Latimer exposed a variety of rooms, bath suites and an underfloor heating system. Branigan (1967, 139 & 47) also drew attention to evidence of even spacing of villas every 2-3km along the Chiltern valleys. It is worth noting that a similar pattern of villa distribution also occurs along the Ouse valley and Nene valley in Northamptonshire, both of which are also considered part of the *civitas Catuvellaunorum* (Zeepvat 1987, 1991; Zeepvat & Radford 2010; Deegan & Ford 2008).

In this paper we explore areas associated with the Romano-British settlement at Sarratt Bottom. During the 19th century, exploration of the area around the old Sarratt church by St Albans Archaeological Society (SAHAAS 1896) uncovered Romano-British artefacts and cinerary urns. In 1907,

excavation was carried out by the local ploughman and landowner Peter Clutterbuck, resulting in exposure of the remains of an apsidal Romano-British building just north of the Valley Farm farmhouse (Anderson 1909) in Church Field. The building (Fig. 1) measured 11.6 x 16.4m with a semi-circular apse 5.2m across at the west end. The flint and mortar walls, some 0.8m thick, stood in some places nearly one metre high. Coins and pottery sherds were recovered and a scatter of bricks and flue tiles was noted in the vicinity, together with foundations of walls further up the hill to the north.

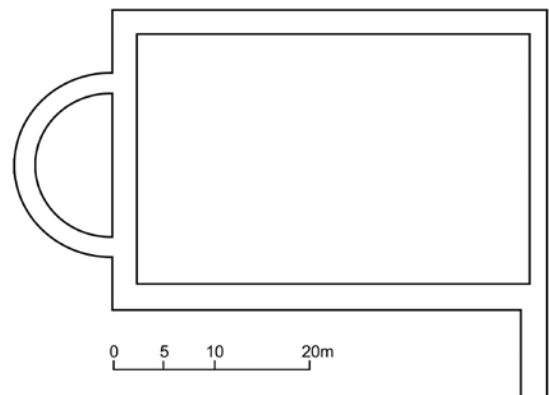


FIGURE 1 Church Field: Romano-British apsidal building excavated in 1907, with mortared flint walls surviving up to 1m high

In 1969 the CVAHS Field Group started systematic walking of the ploughed fields at Valley Farm, Sarratt. To the north of the apsidal building, they identified and mapped several spreads of building material and pottery. The largest area produced pottery, roof and flue tiles, along with many large flints and puddingstone. *Opus signinum* and mortar were also found, together with a spread of floor tiles all distorted by heat. Coins dating from the reign of Trajan (96–117) through to Honorius (393–423), were scattered throughout the fields. Metal detectorists working in the area at the same time revealed that they had found brooches, jewellery and coins, including a hoard of 29 coins of Vespasian (69–79) to Marcus Aurelius (160–180).

Finds made during field walking on the south

side of the river opposite Valley Farm and adjacent to Mount Wood led to investigations in 1972 by Rosalind Dunnet and the CVAHS Field Group. Excavation of an area about 12 x 10m revealed a 3rd-century corn-drying oven (Fig. 2), associated with various pits and an infant burial. Pottery from this excavation dated from the mid-1st to the 4th century and the finds were published by Dunnet (1985).

In recent years, CVAHS has carried out geophysical surveys and excavations in five nearby areas, all associated with Sarratt Bottom (Fig. 3). These were; Valley Farm (VF); South Field (SF); Frogmore Meadow (FM); Mount Wood Field (MW) and Holywell Corner (HW). The finds made in these areas are described and their significance discussed.

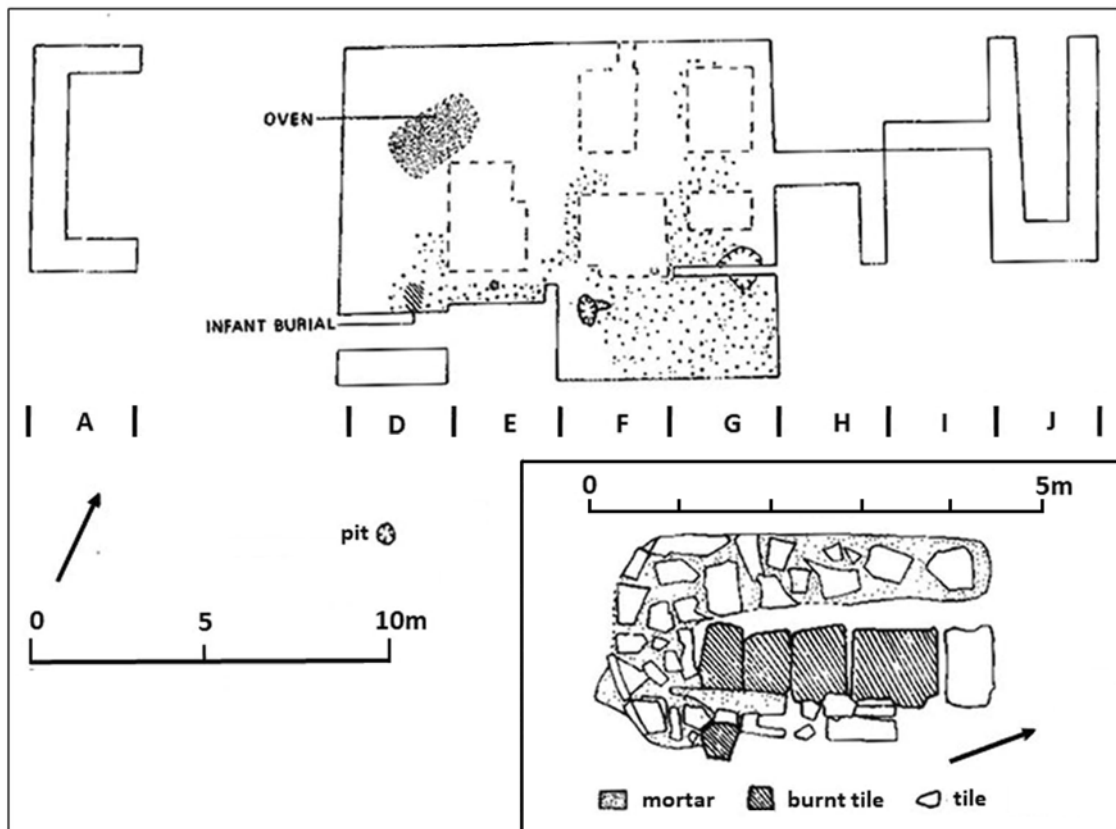


FIGURE 2 Mount Wood: 1972 excavation of a Romano-British corn-drying oven, showing location of infant burial

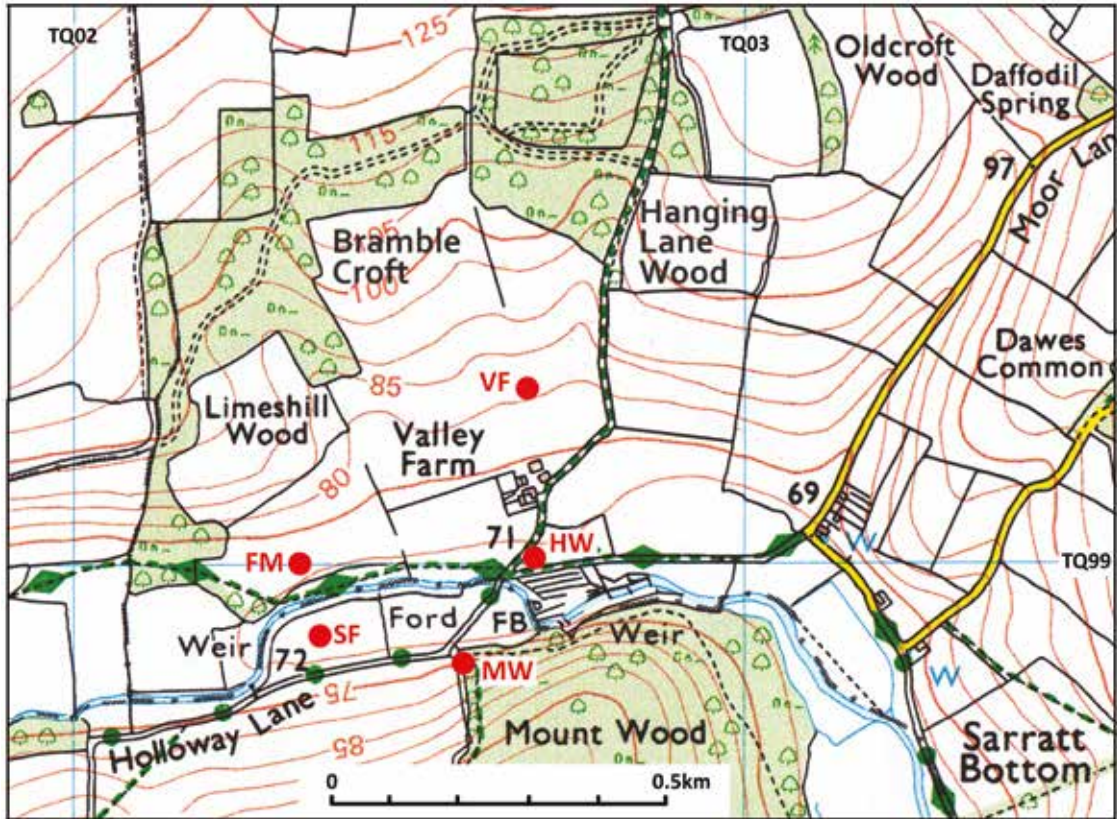


FIGURE 3 Location of areas covered by this report: VF-Valley Farm; SF-South Field; FM-Frogmore Meadow; MW-Mount Wood; HW-Holywell Corner

VALLEY FARM

CVAHS carried out an extensive geophysical survey of the Valley Farm area in 2005–6. The areas around the farm which were ploughed in the distant past, are now divided into fields of grass occupied by horses. Six areas were surveyed, of which four showed features suggestive of structures. However, it was only possible to excavate in one field lying north of the farm buildings. This was near to an area where in 1969–1975 CVAHS field walkers noted significant patches of building materials, including burnt tiles. The resistivity survey across Area 4 identified a significant rectangular feature comprising a banked and ditched enclosure measuring 40 x 30m (Fig. 4). Three trenches were excavated.

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 5.5 x 1m and was placed across the east side of the possible enclosure revealed by the resistivity survey. Below c.35cm of turf and topsoil was a layer of compacted angular flints and pebbles embedded in orange-brown clay (001). Both this layer and the underlying clay (003) were cut by a ditch with shallow, sloping sides and a rounded base c.70cm wide and c.30cm deep (Fig. 5) at the corner of the enclosure. Immediately below the topsoil items were found, including one well-shaped blade (Fig. 6.1b) along with a few small blades, a flint flake, a microlith and a fragment of a sharpened stone. The lower levels within the ditch fill contained six small pieces of pottery and charcoal (Table 1, Trench 1).

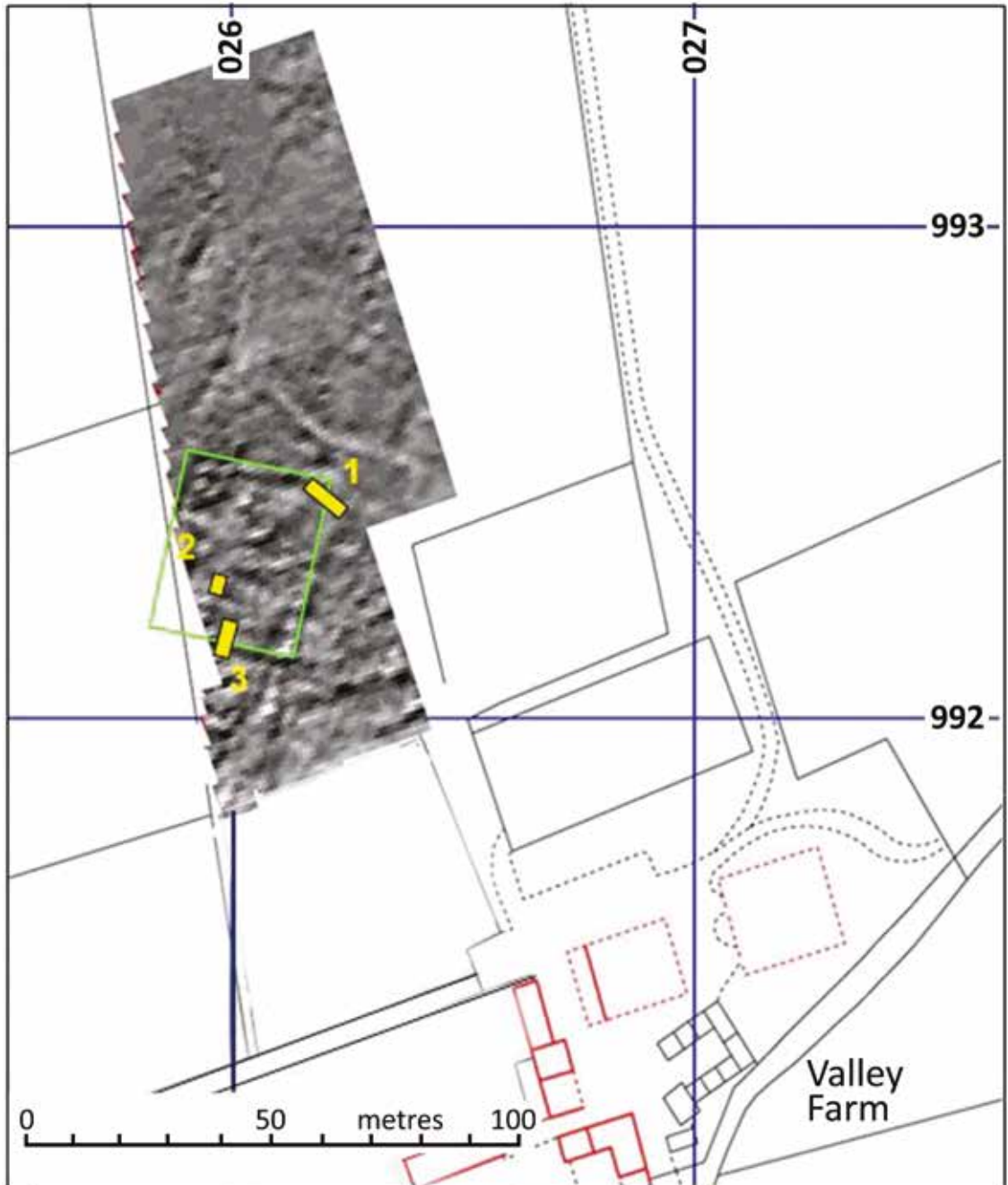


FIGURE 4 Valley Farm: geophysical survey plot, showing rectangular feature (green) and location of excavation trenches 1-3

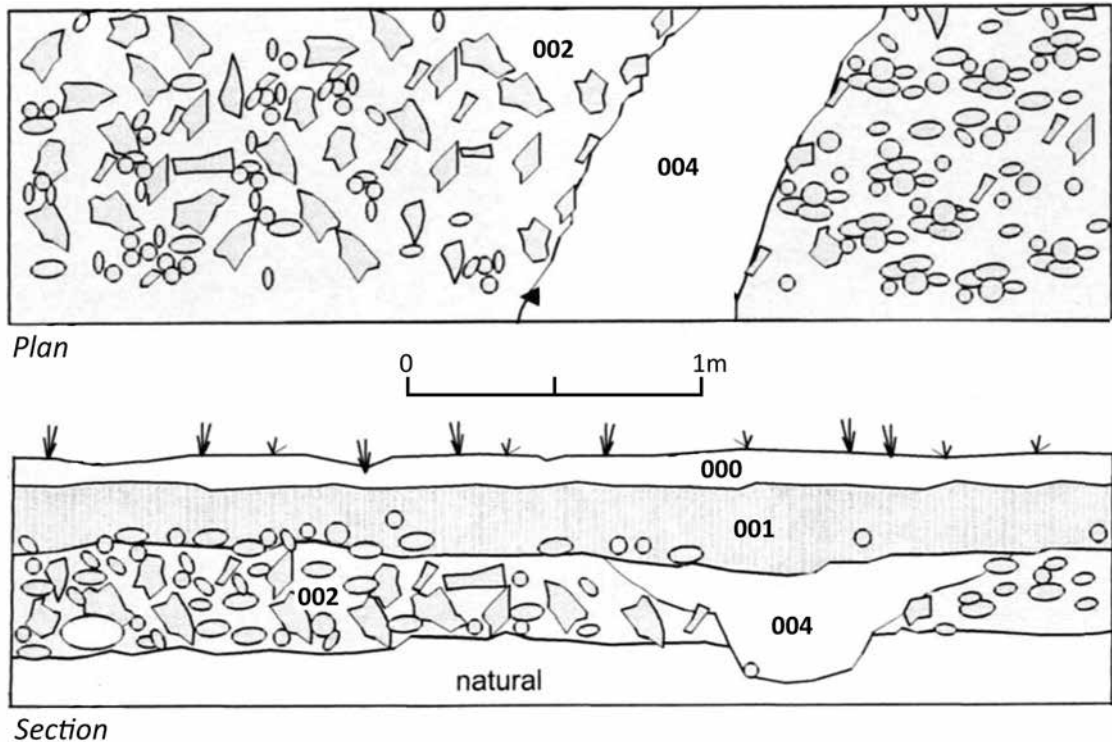


FIGURE 5 Valley Farm: Trench 1 plan and section

Trench 2

Trench 2, measuring 2 x 2m, was located in the south-west quarter of the enclosure. Here, quantities of Romano-British roof tile (*tegulae* and *imbrices*), floor tile and flue tile fragments lay immediately below the turf along with small pieces of charcoal. The trench deposit was divided by three layers. At about 30cm below turf level (Cxt 1) there was a distinct dark brown layer which contained fragments of quern stones, a mortarium and pottery fragments, together with residual flints (Table 1, Trench 2). Two bronze *sestertii* were also found at this level; one in the south corner of the trench in an ashy deposit while in the north-west area another coin with a poorly defined surface was located. At c.40-46cms depth (Cxt 2) a worn intaglio from a ring, together with a second well-made ancient blade (Fig. 6.1a) and a number of small pot fragments were found. At 70cm depth (Cxt 3), patches of gravel appeared to be natural. While no *in-situ* structures were associated with this trench, there were several indications of human activity.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was 1 x 4m long traversing the southernmost enclosure boundary ditch at a right-angle. Fragments of Romano-British roof tile lay immediately beneath the turf and extended over the entire trench surface. Tile, pot fragments and charcoal were common throughout this deposit to a depth of c.23cm (Table 1, showing Trench 3, Ctx 1, 3 and 4) and were considered to have been redistributed by ploughing. At the north end of the trench a patch of large flints was uncovered while at the south end an area of friable pinkish mortar with embedded Romano-British tile emerged. This feature continued under the eastern baulk and was explored further in a 1 x 1.3m extension at the southern end and towards the east. This revealed a spread of brown-yellow soil which appeared to have been dumped in the ditch; in addition, an area of friable pink mortar with embedded tiles and fragments of wall plaster were also encountered. The finds indicated a demolition layer perhaps dumped in the past by farmers.

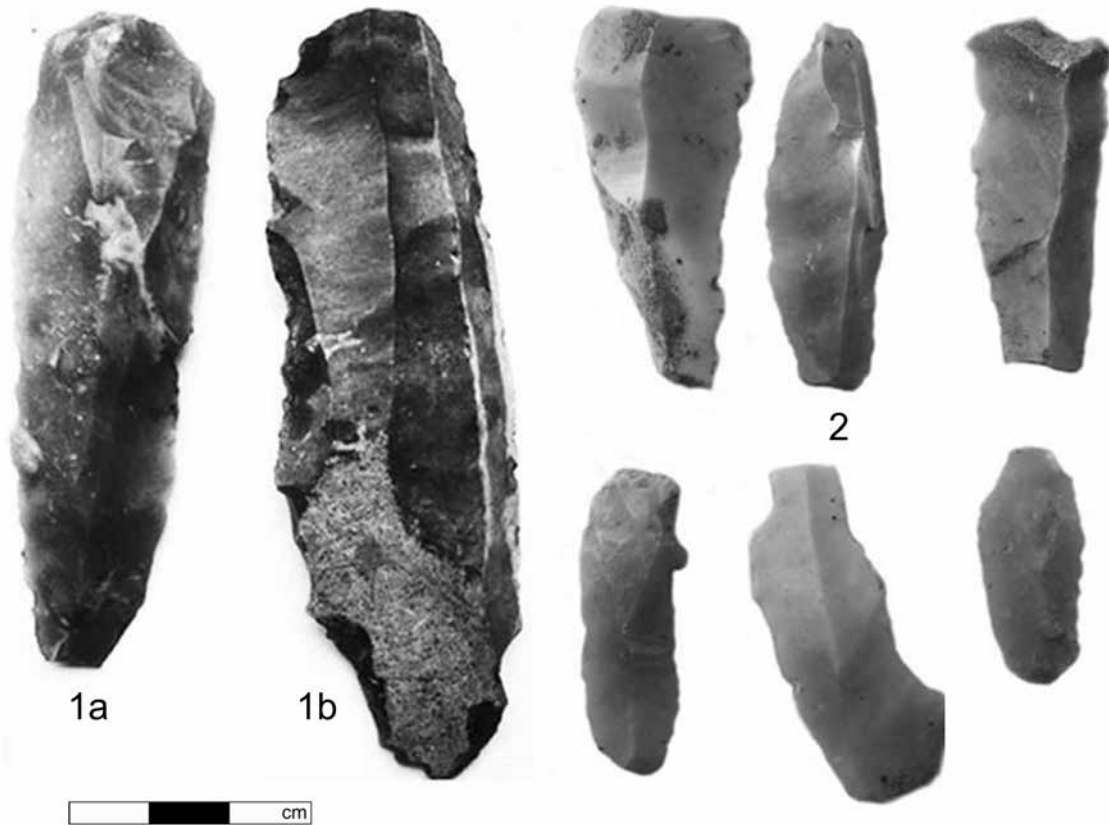


FIGURE 6 Valley Farm: Prehistoric worked blades (1a, 1b) and flint flakes (2) recovered during excavation (scale 1:1)

The Pottery

The pottery assemblage was domestic in nature and almost entirely Romano-British in origin covering the period from 1st to 4th centuries and comprised 142 sherds with a total weight of c.1.3kg. Most of the sherds were small and abraded. The assemblage was domestic in nature, deriving from a mixture of small jars, large storage jars, bowls, flagons, mortaria, and amphora, together with a few higher-status sherds. The number of non-identical rims suggest that at least 23 individual vessels are represented. At least twelve different fabric types, mostly sandy or grog-tempered wares, were present and represented geographically diverse sources such as the Nene Valley, Much Hadham, Verulamium, Oxford and possibly London in addition to the local orange and grey wares.

The general distribution of fabric types are

summarised in Table 1, divided by pot type, trench and context. A selection of the recovered fragments are described below.

Trench 1:

A sherd found in the ditch fill was from a large buff-coloured storage jar with combed surface of late 1st century date. This is a Belgic form, common in the Late Iron Age.

Trench 2:

Three sherds of pink Verulamium ware were recovered, including part of a flagon neck. In addition, two black burnished ware sherds were found, one of which included the rim of a small pot. A reeded-rim bowl of grey-ware dating from late 1st to early 3rd century was also recovered and was possibly a copy of an Iron Age form.

TABLE 1 Pottery, wares and contexts, from Valley Farm Area 4, Trenches 1-3

| Valley Farm Fabric | Trench 1 | | | | Trench 2 | | | | Trench 3 | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Ctx 1 | | Ctx 2 | | Ctx 4 | | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 1 | | 3 | | 4 | |
| | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g | no | wt g |
| Samian ware | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Colour coat ware | | | 1 | 3 | | | 1 | 5 | 1 | 5 | | | | | | | | |
| Grog-tempered ware | | | 1 | 3 | 1 | 10 | 3 | 15 | 6 | 60 | 4 | 20 | 1 | 15 | 1 | 20 | | |
| Coarse grey ware | | | | | 1 | 5 | 7 | 35 | 16 | 185 | 2 | 15 | 21 | 175 | 4 | 35 | 11 | 63 |
| Common orange ware | | | | | | | 7 | 63 | 4 | 70 | | | 6 | 63 | 1 | 10 | 1 | 35 |
| Much Hadham ware | 2 | 20 | | | | | | | | | | | 3 | 35 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 25 |
| Nene Valley ware | | | | | | | | | 1 | 10 | | | 4 | 18 | | | | |
| Imported wares | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 5 | 2 | 75 | | |
| Verulamium ware | | | | | | | | | 3 | 17 | | | 5 | 35 | 6 | 25 | 2 | 10 |
| Black burnished ware | | | | | | | | | 2 | 20 | | | | | | | | |
| London ware | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 5 | | | | |
| Oxford ware | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 1 | 55 | 1 | 15 |
| Total number | 2 | | 2 | | 2 | | 19 | | 33 | | 6 | | 43 | | 16 | | 19 | |
| Total Weight g | | 20 | | 6 | | 15 | | 120 | | 367 | | 35 | | 351 | | 225 | | 148 |
| Total number 142 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total weight g 1287 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Trench 3:

Here the topsoil was rich in pottery, including a sherd of a small jar with line decoration, perhaps an import from the Lower Rhine or a Nene Valley copy; sherds of Verulamium ware including the handle of a flagon; a lid fragment; the rim of a reeded-rim bowl; eight sherds of Much Hadham ware; two sherds of fine grey ware with a white slip decoration from the London or Alice Holt kilns. Three amphora sherds and two fragments from Oxford ware mortaria were recovered, together with a fragment of a colander or cheese press.

Building Materials

Trenches 2 and 3 yielded quantities of roof tile fragments from immediately below the turf. About 3,000 tile fragments weighing more than 60 kg were recovered, some with mortar attached. One fragment had an incised decoration and another a paw print, probably of a dog. Roof tiles, both *tegulae* and *imbrices* were recovered along with fragments of combed flue-tiles which would have been associated with hypocausts. *Opus signinum* had been dumped into the Trench 3 ditch below the tile fragments, mortar and wall plaster.

Flints

A number of residual worked flints were found. A shaped blue palaeolithic blade of the Cresswellian type (Stringer 2007) was recovered from Trench 1 (Fig. 6.1b) and another from Trench 2 (Fig. 6.1a). Seven microliths from the mesolithic period were found in Trenches 1 and 2.

Quernstone

Two fragments of quernstone, one from Trench 2, Ctx 2 and the other from Trench 3, Ctx 1, were recovered. These were both the same type of stone, a reddish brown conglomerate including small pieces of white marble-like stone as the grinding surface. The geographic origin of this material has not been established.

Coins

Two coins, both bronze *sestertii*, were recovered from Trench 2. One showed the head of the Emperor Trajan (AD97–117) on one side with a standing female form on the other. The second coin was much worn.

Other Finds

As noted above, a small intaglio formerly mounted in a ring was found in Trench 2. The stone is opaque blue and although damaged it is possible to make out a standing figure with one leg raised, perhaps reminiscent of the ‘leaping Apollo’ motif.

Discussion: Valley Farm

The finds from these three trenches are evidence of human occupation, spanning the Roman period from the late 1st to the 4th century. The presence of flue tiles, *opus signinum*, pot, metal finds, coins and an intaglio indicates that a high-status building once stood in the vicinity. The rectangular enclosure itself pre-dates the dumping of Romano-British materials and can likely be classified as a feature associated with a Late Iron Age settlement. In addition, the prehistoric worked flints and blades seem to suggest that early Palaeolithic and Mesolithic travellers had passed through this area long ago.

SOUTH FIELD

In 2009 CVAHS focussed on a site laying immediately south of the river Chess with Holloway Lane to the south (Fig. 3). A resistivity survey (Fig. 7A) identified a series of parallel drainage gullies, the same as those mapped in the 1970s by CVAHS’s Jonathan Milford. These features identified the field as a linear water meadow ideal for spring flooding. Fig. 7B shows a 19th-century farmer maintaining similar drainage gullies (Cook, Stearne & Williamson 2002). The modern resistivity survey highlighted a likely palaeochannel and various other structures predating the laying of the drainage gullies. Three possible areas for excavating trenches lay to one end of the major gullies.

Trench 1

Trench 1, measuring 1 x 4m, was positioned near the river bank, across the point where the feeder channel carried water into the flood channel system. Excavation exposed the sub-turf soil which narrowed on either side of the channel (Fig. 8.1). This overlaid a dark brown loam which was c.30cm in depth in the centre of the channel, narrowing to either side of the channel which was made up of coarse gravel. A deliberate placement of large flints seemed positioned to reinforce the landward side of the channel. A few 18th-century

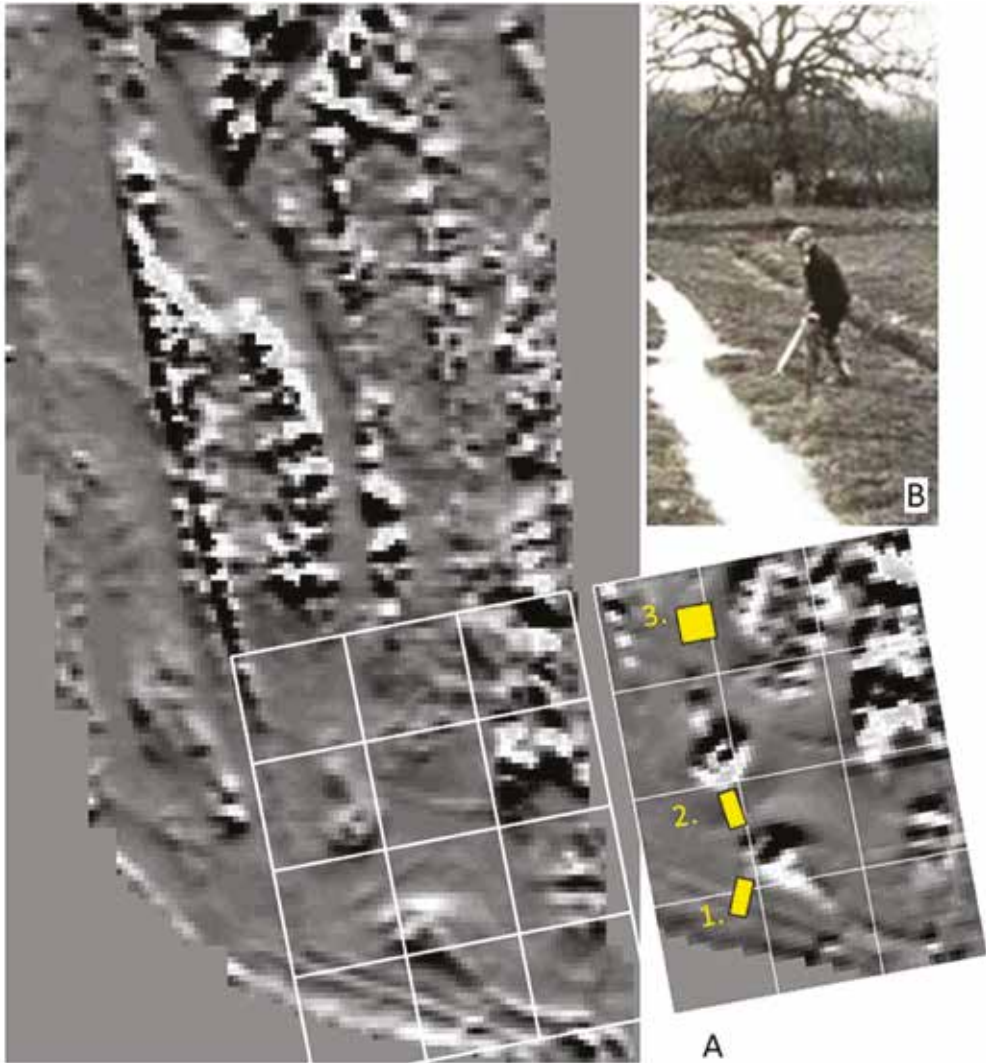


FIGURE 7 South Field: A: resistivity survey plot, showing selected trenches for excavation. B: old photo showing a 19th-century farmer maintaining similar gullies in a water meadow

clay pipe stems and two square section iron nails were recovered from this trench.

Trench 2

Trench 2, measuring 1x 4m, was positioned to intersect a linear feature, distinctly different from the drainage gullies. In this trench, the upper layer immediately below the topsoil was crammed with flints angled across the width of the trench from c.25-60cm depth (Fig. 8.2). Where these flints were not particularly deep they were underlain

by a deposit of grey brown clay. At c.60-70cm depth a large tree root occupied an organic peaty, wet deposit, which appeared to be just above the water table.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was situated further to the east in an area separate from the drainage gullies. Initially three small 1 x 1m test trenches, 3m apart, were excavated at this location; two of these yielded small numbers of Romano-British finds. Exca-

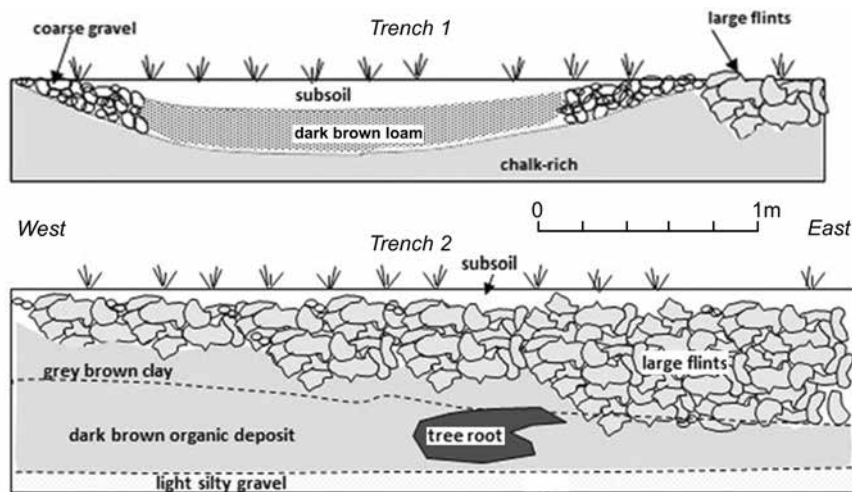


FIGURE 8 South Field: south-facing sections, Trench 1 and Trench 2

vation of the third trench exposed a deposit at about 20 to 40cm depth containing a number of finds, so the area was expanded to 2 x 3m, uncovering a substantial layer of Romano-British material (Fig. 9). This included a mixed assortment of building materials and numerous roof tiles, as well as domestic items such as pottery and household goods. These appeared to be a dump of Romano-British material lifted from elsewhere. White chalk was encountered at c.45cms depth across the entire trench, below which water level was reached. In addition to these finds, field walking and exploring animal burrows revealed occasional pot fragments and roof tile. These included one roof tile with a sandal imprint and another with a dog paw-print.

The Pottery

South Field yielded 180 pottery sherds, most of which came from Trench 3. These included 93 sherds of local coarse grey or orange ware. In addition, there were 67 sherds of a buff, hard sandy ware, possibly from Verulamium; these included six rim sherds, probably from the same jar, and ten base sherds, probably from four jars. These could all be refitted. In addition, the unstratified items recovered in animal burrows included one samian sherd and eight Nene Valley colour-coated sherds with barbotine decoration.

Discussion: South Field

South Field was of some interest because the geophysical survey confirmed the presence of linear raised features running east-west indicating its use in the 18-19th centuries as a water meadow (Cook, Stearne & Williamson 2002). Trench 1, close to the river, examined the feeder channel which originally transferred water to the drainage gullies. Excavation further inland identified an area used sometime in the past for dumping Romano-British building debris. The date of this deposit is difficult to assess but may have taken place in the 18th century when arable land was enclosed and fields cultivated.

FROGMORE MEADOW

In April 2009 the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (H&MWT) excavated two ponds to encourage voles and built a viewing platform. The work was subject to a watching brief (Kaye 2009). A mechanical excavator was used to cut both ponds, with sides sloping to a final depth of 1m linked to the open river. Marion Wells of CVAHS identified and recorded the finds from the watching brief.

The unabraded base of a samian bowl, was recovered from Pond 1 along with a layer of fire-cracked flints which seem to have been the discarded remnants of heated stones – the age of this deposit was unclear. From Pond 2, two joining pieces of



FIGURE 9 South Field: excavating Trench 3

TABLE 2 Pottery recovered from South Field, Trench 3

| South Field | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|------------|----------|
| fabric | type | n | % |
| Samian | | 1 | |
| Nene Valley colour coat | beaker | 8 | 4 |
| Ver ware | bowls, | 1 | |
| Possibly Ver ware | jars and flagons | 66 | 37 |
| | Mortaria | 4 | 2 |
| Coarse grey ware | bowls, jars, beakers | 78 | 43 |
| Common orange ware | jars and bowls | 15 | 8 |
| other | | 7 | 4 |
| Total | | 180 | |

an orange ware flanged bowl were recovered from the silt. Below this, layers of flints and chalk blocks formed a surface. This contained Romano-British sherds, including a rim sherd of a black carinated bowl, three black ware bases, two reeded rims, one mortarium base and two fine ware bases possibly, glazed. It was suggested that the area of chalk blocks may have been a platform from which votive offerings could be cast into the river.

In February 2011, with the agreement of H&MWT, CVAHS undertook a resistivity survey covering an area 40 x 70m, parallel to the river but c.10m from the bank and ponds. Linear anomalies were noted and five areas (Trenches 1-4 & 6), were excavated (Fig. 10).

Trench 1 (2 x 1m)

The stratigraphy within this trench comprised a gravel/flint layer overlying a thin clay layer followed by an organic-rich loamy layer, beneath which roots with traces of charcoal were visible. These deposits appeared to indicate at least two episodes of flooding, interspersed with dry periods. The present-day water-table was at c.70cm depth. Five Romano-British pot fragments were found near the surface of this trench.

Trench 2 (2 x 1m)

Trench 2 was located to examine a strong linear resistivity anomaly in an area 20m east of Trench 1. Beneath the topsoil a compacted layer of pebbles and flints was revealed, associated with fairly recent horseshoes and a nail. Several Romano-British

pot fragments were also recovered. At a depth of c.34cm, large flints were encountered, below which lay grey gravel, above a dark soil at a depth of 45cm.

Trench 3 (2 x 2m)

Trench 3 was located at the north end of the survey area over medium to strong linear resistivity anomalies. Beneath the topsoil, excavation recovered 190 Romano-British fragments of pottery and pieces of bone, mostly from the upper gravel-rich stony layer. At c.45cm depth a layer of dense silty chalk, sterile of finds, extended down to the water table.

Trench 4 (2 x 1m)

Trench 4 was opened close to Pond 2 of the watching brief, in order to determine whether the chalk block platform exposed during creation of the pond extended to the west. The upper layer of the trench contained some unstratified pot fragments, while other fragments were recovered from the lower level. Part of a chalk block surface was visible on the south-east side of the trench, while excavation at the west end exposed a rising bank of flint and pebbles. This latter feature contained no finds. Further excavation revealed a homogenous chalky silt.

Trench 6 (2 x 1m)

This trench was located adjacent to Trench 3. It produced a small number of finds from similar stratigraphy.

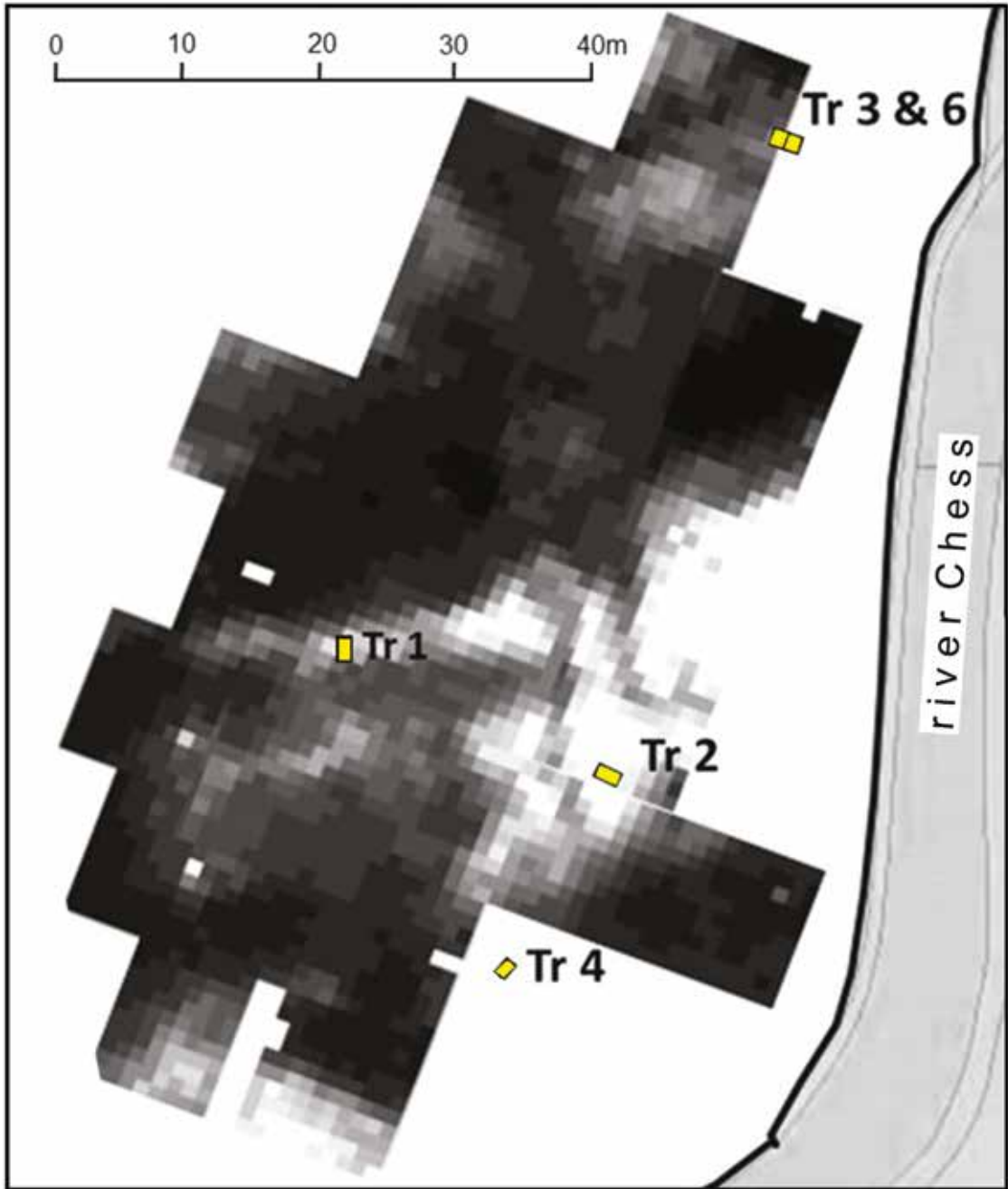


FIGURE 10 Frogmore Meadow: resistivity survey showing locations of excavated trenches

TABLE 3 Pottery from Frogmore Meadow, various contexts

| Frogmore Meadow | | Trench | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------|----------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------|----------|--------------|
| | Fabric | unstrat. | 1 | 2 | 3 Ctx 0 | 3 Ctx 1 | 3 Ctx 2 | 4 unstrat. | 4 Ctx 2 | 6 | TOTAL |
| SAM | Samian | 12 | | | 1 | | | 1 | 1 | | 15 |
| CC | Colour coated | 8 | | 1 | | | | | 2 | | 11 |
| FGW | Fine grey ware | 28 | | | 1 | | 6 | | 3 | | 38 |
| AMP | Amphora | 2 | | | | | 9 | | | | 11 |
| COW | Common orange | 27 | 2 | 1 | 3 | | 17 | | | | 50 |
| GW | Coarse grey ware | 42 | 3 | | 7 | 11 | 27 | | 2 | 1 | 93 |
| SPG | Soft pink grog | 3 | | | | | 2 | | | | 5 |
| LGW | Local grogged ware | 14 | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 15 | | | | 33 |
| GSJ | Grogged storage jar | | | | | | 3 | | | | 3 |
| BB2 | Black burnished 2 | 5 | | | | | | 14 | | 8 | 27 |
| VER | Verulamium ware | 3 | | 1 | | 25 | 59 | 2 | | | 90 |
| OX | Oxford ware | 2 | | | | | | | 1 | | 3 |
| TOTAL | | 146 | 5 | 4 | 13 | 38 | 138 | 17 | 9 | 9 | 379 |

The Pottery and Other Finds

The pottery came from both unstratified and stratified contexts. The unstratified deposits yielded 146 sherds, while stratified deposits in Trenches 1, 2 and 3 produced 198 sherds (see Table 3). In Trench 4, unstratified deposits and Ctx 2 contained a total of 26 fragments while 9 sherds were found in Trench 6. The number of recovered pot rims indicated that at least 70 vessels were present. About 50% of the pottery seems to have been made locally, while 20% appears to derive from the Verulamium area with a small quantity from Oxfordshire kilns. The assemblage also included fragments of fine wares such as Samian from Gaul, colour-coated wares from the Nene Valley and large amphorae which may have been made in Verulamium in the 1st century AD.

A range of different rim fragments from jars and bowls are shown in Fig. 11. Two jars of a fine hard grey ware fabric are illustrated (1 & 2). A number of other grey ware sherds are decorated with white slip and incised lines. Local products include coarse orange sandy wares which represent 13% of the total (3-5). Coarse grey sandy wares represent 24% of the total and include jars 6-8 and bowls 9-14. One of these bowls is carinated (13); another has a reeded rim (10). The assemblage also includes a "dog bowl" (11), a flanged bowl (12) and a beaded rim bowl (14). Local grogged wares make up 11% of the total and comprise storage jars, cooking pots and bowls for the kitchen. Eight sherds of a black burnished ware with an everted rim were also recovered from an unstratified context. One of these (15) is wheel made and has a silvery finish with a band of vertical markings on the shoulder. Examples of Verulamium ware comprise flagons in a pink sandy fabric (16), in addition to jars and dishes.

Three of four mortaria sherds showed characteristic pink grits of an Oxford ware vessel of the 2nd to 4th century, while the fourth comprises a rim from a white parchment-ware mortarium. Several amphorae sherds of thick, buff and sandy ware with very few inclusions were also identified. Fragments of quern stones and animal bone were present in very low numbers.

Discussion: Frogmore Meadow

Small numbers of finds were found beneath the soil layers uncovered in Trenches 1, 2 and 4 while Trench 3 yielded numerous pot fragments and

mortaria at c.25-35cm depth. The variety and quality of the pot is particularly good and points to a Romano-British settlement in the nearby area. The pot and mortaria recovered from this area appeared to be well preserved and suggestive of a single transfer. Below this level lay a gravel-rich layer associated with large flints as well as chalky silt, lying immediately above waterlogged layers.

MOUNT WOOD FIELD

In 2010 and 2011 the CVAHS team continued exploration of the general area with a view to assessing the extent of the Romano-British settlement. Mount Wood Field to the south of Holloway Lane was the next area investigated (Fig. 3). This field slopes steeply towards the lane and river in the bottom of the valley. Over many years this has resulted in erosion of the hill-side, with downward movement of soil associated with variable soil conditions and depths. It was in one area of this field that a Romano-British corn drying oven was identified and explored in 1972 by CVAHS (Dunnet 1987). This indicated that other areas might yield such features.

In 2010, the first stage of the work comprised a resistivity survey covering an area 240 x 100m, followed by magnetometry which covered two-thirds of the same area. The relative extents of these surveys are shown in Figures 12.A and 12.B, along with the location of subsequent trenching. Trenches 1.1, 1.2, 4 and 5 are described below: Trenches 2, 3, 6 and 7 failed to reveal any notable structures or features.

Trenches 1.1 and 1.2

Magnetometry and resistivity identified possible features on the east side of the field, c.65m above the lane. Trench 1.1, 1.5 x 1.5m, was positioned across the slope. Removal of topsoil was followed by excavation through mid-brown loam with scattered flints to c.18-28cm depth. Pieces of Romano-British tile, pot and animal bone were found at this level. Continuing excavation encountered a darker soil at c.50 to 66cm depth. Here, pot sherds, metal objects, *tegulae* and *imbrices* were present, mostly towards the south-east corner of the trench. Subsequent excavation continued through lower levels which showed no evidence of deposits or residues and at a depth of 95cm to 1.1m, natural chalk was reached.

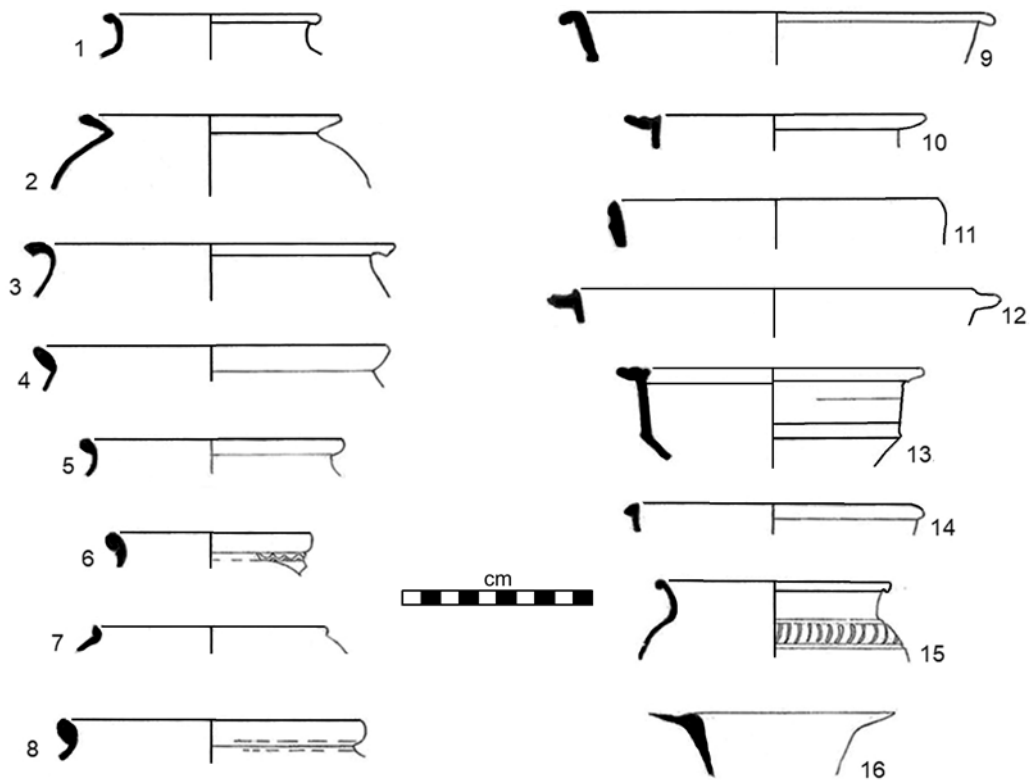


FIGURE 11 Frogmore Meadow: Romano-British pottery. Grey ware (1, 2); orange sandy wares (3-5); jars (6-8); bowls (9-14); carinated and reeded-rim bowls (10 & 13); 'dog bowl' (11); flanged bowl (12); jar with patterned shoulder (15); fine upper rim from bowl/cup (16)

To determine if the finds made in Trench 1.1 were part of a more extensive spread, Trench 1.2, 1.5 x 3m, was opened to the south-east. As in Trench 1.1, at c.18-28cm depth this trench encountered a deposit containing Romano-British finds. Below this was a medium-dark soil layer and thereafter, a relatively dark soil containing finds was encountered at c.48-55cm depth. At 70cm depth it became clear that a relatively deep, man-made ditch was present (Fig. 13). This feature had been cut into the chalk and crossed the trench on a north-east to south-west alignment. At the south end of Trench 1.2 was a chalk bank which appeared to have been cut through from top to bottom in the past.

The Pottery

The combined pottery assemblage from Trenches 1.1 and 1.2 (excluding unstratified fragments)

comprised 1020 sherds weighing some 6kg. More than 50% of the assemblage comprised grogged wares, grey wares and coarse orange wares, but sherds of Verulamium, Much Hadham and Oxford wares were also present. The pottery is quantified in Table 4.

The most common fabric was grogged ware, comprising 228 sherds mostly from jars and four sherds from a large storage jar. These were most common in Ctx 1/2 and Ctx 2a. Grey wares, 145 sherds, were also relatively common, being most abundant in Ctx 3 and Ctx 3a, but varied in quality. Samian sherds were most common in Ctx 4 and Ctx 6a/b.

Some jars had smooth surfaces, others were hard with inclusions or comprised a hard sandy fabric. One of these was decorated with a black line around the neck. In addition, there were 86 Samian ware sherds including bowls, small cups

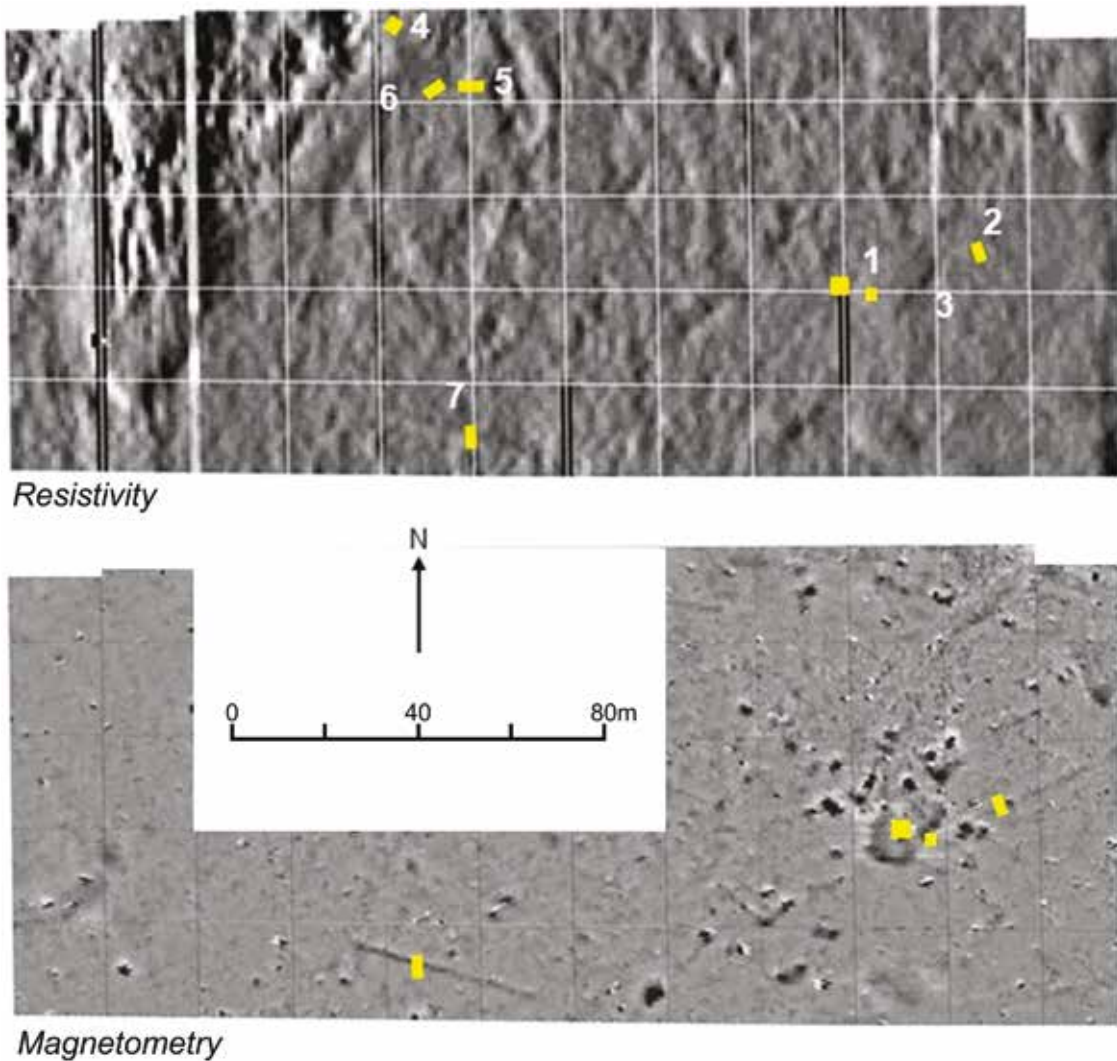


FIGURE 12 Mount Wood Field: plots of magnetometry and resistivity surveys, with locations of excavated trenches

and mortaria. Oxford ware was represented by a rim and a body sherd of a mortarium. Hedgerley ware included the base of a hard, sandy jar and there was one large body sherd from an amphora.

Grogged wares. Fig. 14, .1-3. Local grogged ware jars.

Grey wares. Fig. 14, .4-8. Jar, hard, sandy fabric (4); Jar, hard sandy fabric decorated with a black line 1cm wide around the neck of the jar (5); Bowl,

hard with few large inclusions (6); Bowls, hard, sandy (7 & 8).

Samian wares. Fig. 14, .9 Dragendorff 37 bowl; no. 10. Plain bowl.

Colour coated wares. Fig. 14, .11-13. 125 sherds of various colour-coated wares were recovered. Illustrated are the base of a beaker with a worn red slip (11); a handle, no trace of slip remaining (12); a beaker rim with black slip (13).



FIGURE 13 Mount Wood Field: Trench 1.2 after excavation, showing location of east to west ditch

Verulamium ware. Fig. 14, .14-16. 100 sherds of Verulamium ware included flagons, mortaria and jars. Illustrated are a jar of rough, sandy, pink fabric (14); a jar of sandy pink fabric (15) and a mortarium in a pink fabric (16).

Fine grey ware. Fig. 14, .17-19. 142 sherds of fine grey ware were present. Illustrated are a jar of smooth surface and no inclusions, (17); a small bowl or beaker ornamented with a pair of parallel incised lines around the rim (18); a body sherd decorated with black lines (19).

Common red ware. Fig. 14, .20-21. 176 sherds of common red ware included bowls and jars, one with a pedestal base 3.6 cm in diameter, two body sherds with black decoration and a roughly-cut counter 2.5cm in diameter. A reeded-rim bowl is shown in 20 and a bowl 21.

Other Finds

A range of other finds was recovered. A selection of these are listed in Table 5. Figure 15 shows

two sherds of mortaria (1) and two quernstone fragments (2 & 3), one of which was fashioned from Millstone grit, probably from Derbyshire, while the other, now in two pieces, is a lava quern stone, likely imported from the Mayen region in Germany. Figure 16 shows other finds, including the iron pin and spring from a fibula brooch (1), a copper-alloy harness fitting (2), a piece of clear orange/brown glass (3), a copper ring (4) and a long pin, likely used for holding a garment (5).

Coins

During the excavation of Trenches 1.1 and 1.2, forty-six coins were recovered. Amongst these were five minims, one *sestertius*, one *denarius*, and sixteen *antoniniani*. Many of the coins were corroded or calcreted. However, a selection of those that could be identified are shown in Figure 17. Find numbers are indicated in brackets.

Caracalla. [37] Sestertius of the reign of Caracalla, AD192–217. The reverse was very worn, so its image has been omitted.

Severus Alexander. [43] Denarius, was from the reign of Severus Alexander, AD225–235. This has a marching figure on the reverse carrying a spear.

Gallienus. [50] Antoninianus from the reign of Gallienus AD253–260, with a panther or tiger on the reverse and the inscription LIBERO P CONS AVG.

Postumus. [2] Antoninianus of Postumus, AD260–268, with Hercules on the reverse leaning on a club, holding a bow with a lion's skin draped over his arm, and the inscription IMP C POST.VS P F AVG. This coin has some intact silvering.

Victorinus. [1] Antoninianus of Victorinus, AD269–271. The reverse shows Virtus standing right, holding spear and shield.

Tetricus I. [13] Antoninus of Tetricus 1, AD270–273. The reverse shows Sol advancing left.

Tetricus II. [11] Antoninianus of Tetricus II AD273–274, as the portrait is clean-shaven. The reverse shows Spes advancing.

TABLE 4 Pottery from Mount Wood Field, Trench 1.1 & 1.2

| Mt Wood Field | Ctx 1/2: Ctx 2a | | Ctx 3:Ctx 3a | | Ctx 4: Ctx 6a/b | | Total | |
|----------------------|------------------------|-------------|---------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| Trench 1/1a | n | wt g | n | wt g | n | wt g | n | wt g |
| Samian ware | 12 | 44 | 27 | 50 | 47 | 205 | 86 | 299 |
| Colour coated wares | 38 | 92 | 55 | 227 | 32 | 115 | 125 | 434 |
| Local grogged ware | 132 | 767 | 36 | 565 | 60 | 485 | 228 | 1817 |
| Grogged storage jar | 2 | 50 | 2 | 140 | | | 4 | 190 |
| Verulamium ware | 46 | 314 | 33 | 215 | 21 | 165 | 100 | 694 |
| Fine grey ware | 60 | 160 | 68 | 215 | 14 | 60 | 142 | 435 |
| Hadham ware | 1 | 25 | | | 4 | 15 | 5 | 40 |
| Hedgerley Ware | | | | | 1 | 35 | 1 | 35 |
| Grey Ware | 37 | 366 | 103 | 695 | 5 | 40 | 145 | 1101 |
| Oxford Ware | 1 | 40 | | | 3 | 160 | 4 | 200 |
| Calcite gritted ware | 1 | 10 | | | 2 | 20 | 3 | 30 |
| Coarse orange ware | 73 | 514 | 80 | 560 | 23 | 75 | 176 | 1149 |
| Imported ware | | | | | 1 | 275 | 1 | 275 |
| Totals | 403 | 2382 | 404 | 2667 | 213 | 1650 | 1020 | 6699 |

Tetricus II. [11] Antoninianus, badly worn, probably *Tetricus II*.

Carus. [23] Antoninianus of Carus AD282–283, Aequitas standing facing left on the reverse.

Trench 4

Descriptions of this trench and associated pottery finds were reported in detail in *Records* (54, 61) and are therefore discussed here only in brief. The resistivity survey identified a narrow linear signal in the lowest, boggy area of Mount Wood Field: excavation of a trench across this feature revealed a ditch on a roughly east-west alignment, sloping downwards towards the bottom of the field and still apparently acting as a soakaway. The ditch had a V-shaped cross-section and contained large flints interspersed with voids and pieces of mostly black pottery. The natural clay surface, into which the ditch was cut, was encountered c.50cm below ground level. It seems very likely that this was a soakaway ditch to drain the field: judging by the relative uniformity of pot type, it appears to represent one distinct period in the early life of the site. In all, 627 pottery sherds were recovered (Table 6) from depths of c.50 to c.100cm. The sherds mostly

comprised grogged ware types, some of which could be joined. Fragments of charcoal were also found throughout the ditch fill.

Trench 5

Trench 5 (4 x 1m) was opened to examine a roughly linear resistivity signal. As elsewhere in this field, the topsoil, c.30cm deep, contained small pieces of abraded pot and building material. Below this was a mixed, chalky layer interspersed with clay and flint patches. No artefacts were found on what appeared to be a natural chalk. However at the eastern end of the trench, at c.35cm depth, was a small bone identified as an unfused human infant femur. Following this discovery, the soil lying above the chalk was carefully sieved and more than 70 small bones were recovered from a 1 x 1m area including an unerupted molar tooth, skull fragments, vertebrae, ribs, pelvic and limb bones (Fig. 18). The size and unfused status of the bones indicated that this was an infant within the first 6 months of life. This find has some affinity with the infant burial found in the same field close to the Romano-British corn dryer (Dunnet 1985). No other finds associated with Trench 5 were made, although the natural chalk was fully exposed.

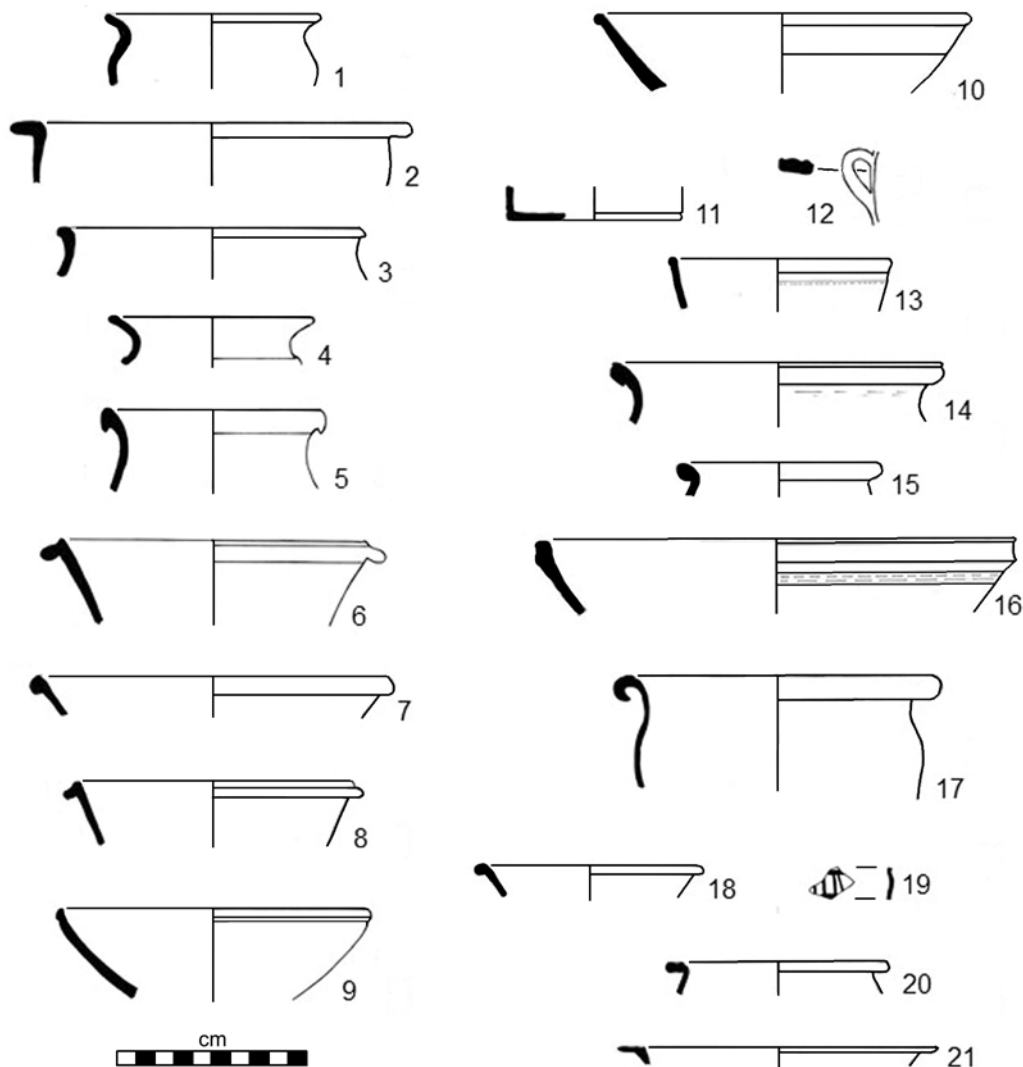


FIGURE 14 Mount Wood Field: pottery from Trenches 1.1 and 1.2

Discussion: Mount Wood

The discovery of a ditch with deposited features and finds in Trenches 1.1/1.2 indicated that these were Romano-British features, similar to those in other locations examined and recorded in the Valley Farm area. The nature of these observations is supported by the further identification of finds in the Trench 4 ditch which were rich in Romano-British pot fragments and the discovery of the infant burial in Trench 5.

HOLYWELL CORNER

In 2010 attention was turned to the west end of a field at the junction of Hanging Lane and Holywell Lane, adjacent to the north-east corner of Mount Wood Field (Fig. 3). The area was divided from the steep sloping main field by bushes and small trees, and was only just above the river level. Three trenches were opened, two of which are described below.

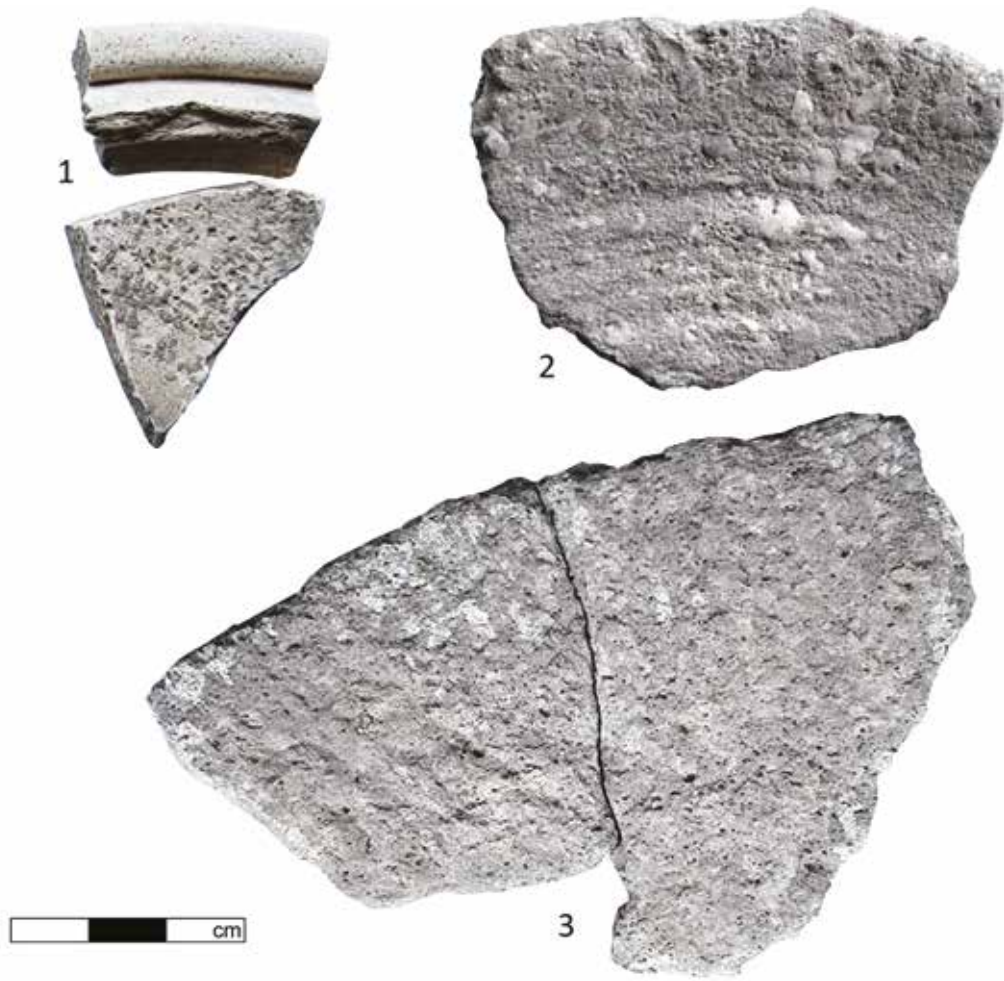


FIGURE 15 Mount Wood Field: mortaria and quernstone fragments from Trenches 1.1 and 1.2 (*scale 1:1*)

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 1 x 3m. The upper layer, c.45-60cm deep, comprised dumped rubbish, including many 1950s labelled drink cans, lumps of asphalt and concrete. Below this, at c.45-65 cm depth, pottery fragments along with mortaria, quern stone pieces, small numbers of animal bone and tile, all of Romano-British date, were found. A selection of the pottery is illustrated (Fig. 19), including a worn body sherd from a Samian bowl showing part of a running animal, possibly a hound or a deer (1); reeded rims of grey ware bowls (2 & 3); a complete profile of a “dog bowl” (4); the rim of a bowl (5), a grey ware jar (6) and the base of a small jar (7). Verulamium wares present included

four joining pieces of a mortarium (8), a small bowl or cup with traces of a brown colour coat (9), a flagon handle (10) and a jar (11).

Trench 3

This was more-or-less adjacent to Trench 1, though it became clear that two thirds of Trench 3 had had been disturbed in recent years by pipe-laying, leaving only a small undisturbed area at its south-west end. Here, Romano-British finds were recovered from a brown chalk-rich soil at c.50-70cm, and included pottery and tile fragments as well as animal bone and shells. Below 70cm, no finds were encountered: excavation to a depth of 77cm revealed an increasingly damp,



FIGURE 16 Mount Wood Field: metal objects and a glass fragment from Trenches 1.1 and 1.2 (scale 1:1)

odour-rich, friable black/dark brown soil.

Some of the pottery recovered from this trench is illustrated in Figure 20. This includes a rim sherd from a Samian bowl (12), a calcite-gritted storage jar (13), grey ware jars and bowls (14-17), Verulamium ware including two mortaria (18, 19), a bowl (20) and a jar (21), common red ware comprising the base of a possible oil lamp (22), a bowl (23) and a jar (24). In addition, there was also a possible oil lamp base. The quantification of pottery finds from both ditches is shown in Table 7.

Discussion: Holywell Corner

Considering the finds from both trenches it is significant that all the buried pot, mortaria and

quern stones were fragmented, as found for most of the areas discussed. This area may have been a dumping ground during the Romano-British occupation.

CONCLUSIONS

Examination of the available information regarding early Romano-British discoveries at Sarratt Bottom, such as the 1907 excavation of an apsidal building, together with finds of pottery sherds and coins scattered across the same general area in 1945 and 1969, indicated the presence of a Romano-British settlement in the immediate area. This was confirmed by Dr Dunnet's excavations in Mount Wood Field during 1972 (Dunnet 1985). The more recent work by CVAHS between 2005 and 2017 provided considerably more evidence of a Romano-British settlement. Investigation of Valley Farm and other areas in the immediate surroundings has yielded copious information, materials and finds. The finds made during excavations in South Field and Frogmore Meadow, to the north and south of the river, both included Romano-British pottery. The excavation in Mount Wood Field revealed, artefacts including pot sherds, metal items and quern-stones and a single infant burial, at considerably lower depths. A third area of excavation (Wells *et al.* 2014) exposed a deeply dug ditch which yielded deposited Romano-British pot representing an early period of occupation. All these deposits clearly indicate the presence of a significant Romano-British settlement.

With regard to Holywell Corner, one might consider the local name, 'Holywell', for this area. There has been speculation that this was once the site of a 'holy well', and on various earlier occasions Romano-British sherds had been discovered here. The proximity of this site to water might suggest that the accumulation of Roman artefacts here points to a 'religious' site, although there is no direct evidence of this.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Particular thanks go to Stuart Bryant and Isobel Thomson, formerly of the Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Unit. Thanks are also due to Simon West and Nicki Alexander from St Albans District Museum Service, for their help with pottery identification during the early excava-

TABLE 5 Finds from Mount Wood Field, Trenches 1/1a

| Mt. Wood Field Trench 1 | Ctx 1 | Ctx 2 | Ctx 3 | Ctx 4 | Ctx 5 | Ctx 6 | Ctx 7 | Totals |
|------------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Tile | frags discarded | | | | | | | |
| Box Flue Tile | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| Tessera | 0 | | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Rubbing Stones | 2 | | | | | | | 2 |
| Quernstone | 5+ | | | | | | | 5+ |
| Window Glass | | | | | | | | 1 |
| Vessel Glass | | | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Worked Flints | 2 | | 11 | 5 | | 1 | 1 | 20 |
| Oyster | 14 | | | | | | | 14 |
| Mussel & others | 6 | | | | | | | 6 |
| Lead | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |
| Nails FE | 51 | 5 | | | 4 | 4 | 4 | 68 |
| Hobnails FE | 11 | 1 | | 1 | 1 | | | 14 |
| Objects FE | 10 | 1 | | | | | | 11 |
| Objects CU Alloy | 1 | | | | | | | 1 |

TABLE 6 Pottery from Mount Wood Field, Trench 4

| Trench 4 Ctx 003 | | | |
|-------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Mt. Wood Field | no. | wt. g | % wt. g |
| Grogged storage jar | 232 | 4389 | 51.4 |
| Burnished ware | 13 | 215 | 2.5 |
| Local grogged ware | 307 | 3294 | 38.6 |
| Grey ware | 55 | 468 | 5.5 |
| Local orange ware | 4 | 47 | 0.6 |
| Verulamium ware | 7 | 15 | 0.2 |
| Flint tempered ware | 2 | 10 | 0.1 |
| Hedgerly ware | 1 | 39 | 0.5 |
| Oxford ware | 5 | 55 | 0.6 |
| Samiam ware | 1 | 1 | >0.01 |
| Totals | 627 | 8533 | |



FIGURE 17 Mount Wood Field: Selection of coins from Trenches 1.1 and 1.2 (*not to scale*)



FIGURE 18 Mount Wood Field: Romano-British infant burial recovered from Trench 5

TABLE 7 Pottery from Holywell Corner, Trenches 1 and 2

| Holywell Corner | 2010 | 2017 | Total | % ages |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Trench 1 | Trench 3 | | |
| Samian | 4 | 7 | 11 | 6 |
| Nene Valley Colour coat | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Grey ware | 20 | 71 | 91 | 51 |
| Verulamium Ware | 14 | 24 | 38 | 21 |
| Common Red Ware | 9 | 25 | 34 | 19 |
| Calcite gritted storage jar | | 3 | 3 | 2 |
| Totals | 48 | 131 | 179 | 100 |

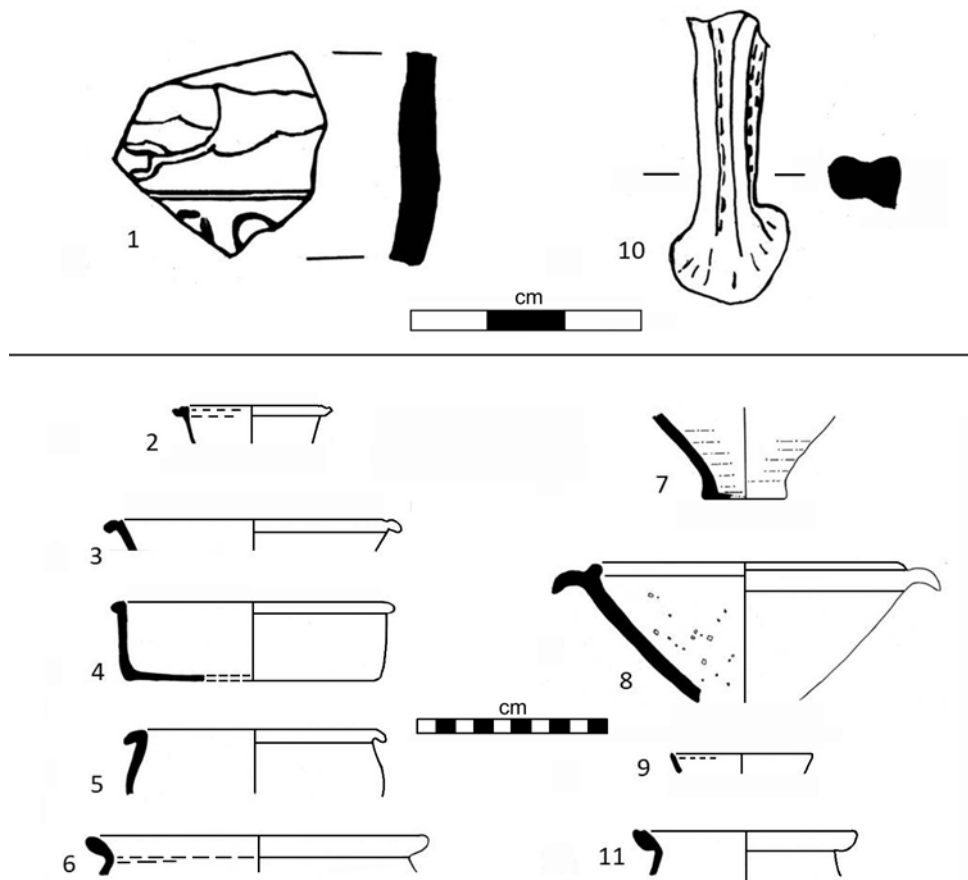


FIGURE 19 Holywell Corner: pottery and mortaria recovered from Trench 1

tions. CVAHS would also like to thank Diane and Keith Howard for allowing excavation on areas of their land at Sarratt Bottom.

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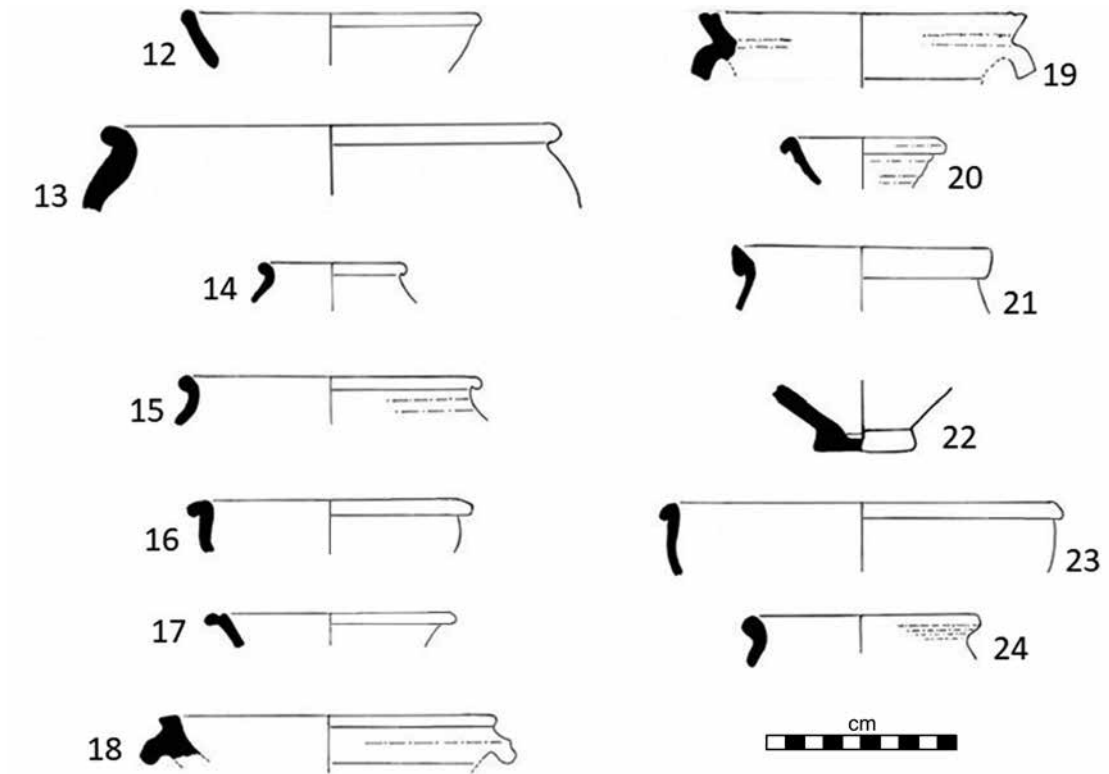


FIGURE 20 Holywell Corner: pottery and mortaria from Trench 3

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