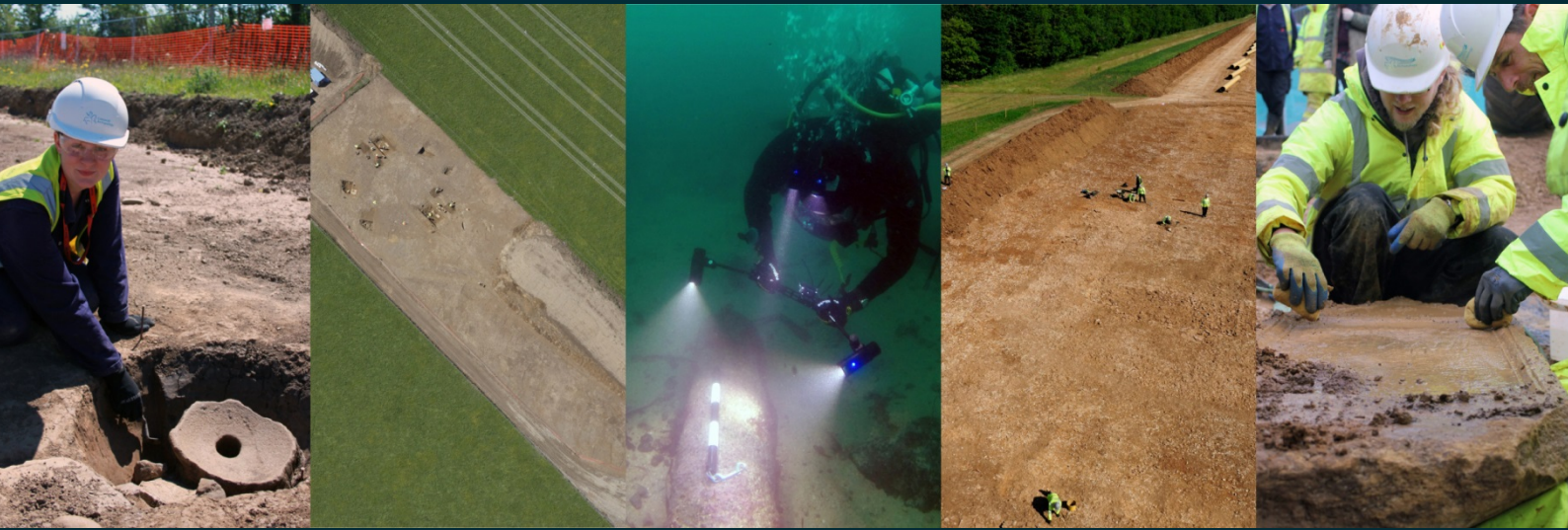


An Early Roman site at Beech Hill Road, Spencers Wood, Berkshire

*A draft article to be submitted for publication in
Berkshire Archaeological Journal*



for
Bellway Homes Ltd

CA Project: 779023
CA Report: 18402

October, 2018



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AN EARLY ROMAN SITE AT BEECH HILL ROAD, SPENCERS WOOD, BERKSHIRE

By RICHARD MASSEY and GRACE PERPETUA JONES, with ADAM HOWARD

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY SARAH COBAIN, KATIE MARSDEN, DAVID STARLEY AND SARAH F WYLES

SUMMARY

Excavation identified a ditch of sinuous plan which bounded features, including a metalled surface, on its south side, and may have defined an enclosure. A large, well-preserved deposit of pottery was recovered from a section of this ditch, which was closely dated to the Early Roman period of the first century AD. The features may be peripheral to a more extensive area of recorded Late Iron Age/Roman settlement located 200m to the north-east. Early Roman activity is attested elsewhere within the environs of this site, and the conjectural course of a Roman road runs c.250m to the west. The only confirmed post-Roman feature comprised a substantial post-medieval drainage ditch.

INTRODUCTION

In August, 2016, Cotswold Archaeology (CA) undertook an archaeological excavation on behalf of Bellway Homes Ltd, on land on Beech Hill Road, Spencer's Wood, Wokingham, Berkshire, centred on NGR: 471068 166033; (Fig. 1) (CA 2017).

Planning permission for residential development was conditional on archaeological investigation targeted on features identified by evaluation (CA 2016a), which were located within the north-west, north-east and south of the development site (Areas A, B and C).

The site

The Beech Hill Road site is 4.5ha in extent and comprises relatively level ground towards the southern end of a low ridge, situated between the River Loddon, c.1.0km to the south-east, and the Foudry Brook, 0.4km to the west. The highest point, at the south-west corner, is at an elevation of 60m aOD. At time of excavation, the site comprised a single arable field, enclosed by tall hedgerows and bounded to the east and south by Beech Hill Road and White House Lane respectively, and to the north and south by farmland, with adjacent modern housing to the north-east.

Insert Fig. 1 here

Fig. 1: Site plan, showing evaluation trenches and locations of Areas A, B and C (1:500)

Underlying geology comprises London Clay Formation, formed approximately 34 to 56 million years ago in the Palaeogene Period (BGS 2016). Superficial deposits, of river terrace plateau gravel, extend across the higher contours of the site.

The full excavation report, including specialist reports and data, and additional illustrations (CA 2017), can be found on the Cotswold Archaeology website: <http://www.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/>.

Archaeological background

Earlier Prehistoric (500,000 BC – 3000 BC)

While no earlier prehistoric remains are associated with the site, local fluvial gravel terraces have produced evidence of early human activity (Hosfield *et al.* 2007), although few such finds have been recorded locally. Two Neolithic flint axes were found c.700m to the north, and retouched flakes of Mesolithic and Neolithic character, were recorded locally by systematic surface collection (Ford 1987; Ford *et al.* 2011), and from the Warren's Croft site, c. 200m to the north-east (Butler 2005, 23-4).

Later Prehistoric (c. 3000 - 100 BC)

Surrounding cropmark features of probable later prehistoric date include those recorded at Sheepbridge Court Farm c. 700m to the east, and Lamb's Farm, Swallowfield, c. 400m to the south (Gates 1975, 33). These comprise enclosures, pits, trackways and linear features, representing aspects of prehistoric settlement landscape. Bronze Age material, associated with ditches and pits, was recorded at Diddenham Manor Farm, Grazeley, c. 1 km to the west (Wessex Archaeology 1990).

Late Iron Age/Early Roman (100BC – AD 100)

Scattered Iron Age features, including a pit dated by pottery, were recorded by evaluation c. 900m to the north-east (Taylor 2012). Evidence of Late Iron Age/Early Roman settlement was recorded at Diddenham Manor Farm, c. 900m to the west (Wessex Archaeology 1990) and a Gallo-Belgic stater was recorded from Spencer's Wood Common, c.500m to the east (Berkshire Historic Environment Record (BHER).

Within Area 2 of the neighbouring Warren's Croft site, a Late Iron Age/Early Roman re-cut ditch enclosed ditches, gullies and pits of varying size, but there was no evidence of internal

structures (Stevens 2005). Pottery groups conformed closely in composition to the large group recovered from Ditch 1003 of this site (Featherby 2005, 12).

Roman (AD43 – AD 410)

The conjectural course of a Roman road runs c. 200m to the west, as Margary's suggested route 160CC (1973, 166-7) (Fig 1). This postulated route, purportedly from Silchester to Henley, has since been dismissed (Whaley and Fairclough 2004). Later Roman features were associated with Area 2 of the Warren's Croft site, (Fig. 1; Stevens 2005), and a ditch containing Roman tile, c. 900m to the north-east, suggested a substantial building in the vicinity (Taylor 2012, 8). Notable concentrations of enclosed Early Roman settlement are associated with the southern tributaries of the Thames, and around the Thames-Kennet interfluvium, c. 5km to the north (Lobb and Rose 1996, 86-88).

Geophysical Survey

A geophysical survey conducted in 2015 (Archaeological Surveys Ltd. 2015) identified fragmented linear anomalies and a curvilinear feature within the south-eastern corner of the site. Weak positive anomalies identified along eastern margins were interpreted as a former land boundary.

Archaeological Evaluation (Fig. 1)

Evaluation in February, 2016 (CA 2016a), comprised an irregular array of twenty-two trenches, located to investigate geophysical survey anomalies. The fill of a small ditch (excavation ditch 1003) of Early Roman date, between Trenches 3 and 19 (Fig. 1), contained a large assemblage of locally-produced pottery, and fragments of fired-clay loom weights. A long, curvilinear post-medieval drainage ditch (excavation ditch 1004?) also extended across a number of trenches on the eastern and southern margins of the site. Two undated pits, and a small section of ditch, 3002, were recorded within the north-western corner of the site.

METHODOLOGY

The fieldwork followed the methodology detailed within the Written Scheme of Investigation (CA 2016b), and conformed to the brief provided by the county archaeologist and the period research objectives outlined in the regional archaeological research framework (Fulford 2014). Three excavation areas targeted features identified by evaluation (CA 2016a), and comprised Area A (0.16ha), Area B (0.04ha), and Area C (0.14ha), which were set out on OS National Grid (NGR) co-ordinates.

SUMMARY RESULTS OF EXCAVATION (FIGS 2-4)

Archaeological features cut a natural substrate of compact, mid-red/yellow/brown silty clay, and were sealed by a light-grey/brown sandy clay subsoil, of c. 0.1m depth across the site. This was covered in turn by a topsoil of friable, mid-grey/brown silty clay, averaging 0.2m in depth. Archaeological features dated overwhelmingly to a single phase of Early Roman activity (Period 1), with the exception of drainage ditch 1004, of later, post-medieval date (Period 2). A small number of features in Areas A, B and C were undated.

Area A

Period 1: Early Roman

Period 1 features in Area A (Fig. 2), were dominated by sinuous ditch 1003, which cut earlier ditch 1048 and bounded a number of features on its south side. The latter, included a shallow, elongated pit, 1049, metallised surface 1015, pit 1033 and an undated posthole, 1037.

Insert Fig. 2 here

Fig. 2: Area A: plan of recorded archaeological features (1:500)

Ditch 1003

Ditch 1003 extended slightly beyond the northern edge of Area A, and for an unknown distance beyond its eastern and southern edges. Six sections were excavated, in addition to the three recorded by evaluation (Fig. 2). Ditch 1003 was of irregular profile and plan, and displayed significant variation in depth, from 0.24m in the east, to 0.58m in the west.

At section 1026, Ditch 1003 displayed a width of 1.72m and depth of 0.61m, with steep, straight sides, and a concave base. It cut smaller ditch 1048 on its northern side (Fig. 3, section AA). A lower secondary fill, 1036, of grey/brown silty clay, contained no dateable material. The upper secondary fill, 1019, of similar character, was associated with a large deposit of Early Roman pottery, together with charcoal inclusions and a clay loom weight (Ra. 502). The pottery included a significant number of large, un-abraded and joinable sherds. Charred cereal grains and chaff from this fill may represent dispersed hearth debris.

Insert Fig. 3 here

Fig. 3: Section 1026 of Ditches 1003 and 1048 (1:20) and photograph (1m scale)

Section 1020, towards the western excavated extent of Ditch 1003, displayed a width of 0.65m and depth of 0.26m, with steep sides and a flat base. A single secondary fill of

red/yellow/brown sandy clay, number? contained a substantially complete, flint-tempered vessel, together with charred cereal grains and chaff. Section 1022 contained a single secondary fill number? of compact grey/ brown clay sand, with two near-complete vessels, Ra. 501 and Ra. 503. Ra. 503 was a wheel-thrown, black-surfaced sandy ware platter (PRN 254, Fig. 6, no. 13), which appeared to have been placed beneath Ra. 501, a flint-tempered plain jar of Middle Iron Age character (PRN 232/233, not illustrated). These two associated vessels appeared to represent a deliberately-placed deposit involving possibly curated items. Associated plant remains included barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and hulled wheat, emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*) and small numbers of weed seeds. This assemblage may be representative of dumped domestic settlement waste, possibly from the processing of stored semi-cleaned grain or spikelets (Hillman 1981, 1984).

Ditch 1048

The truncated remains of ditch 1048 were cut by ditch 1003, towards the eastern limits of their excavated extent (Fig. 3, section AA). This feature may represent an earlier boundary or enclosure ditch. Section 1039 of this ditch displayed a width of 0.45m and depth of 0.11m, with an asymmetrical profile and a flat base. A single secondary fill, 1040, of red/yellow/brown clay silt, contained Early Roman pottery.

Pit 1049

Pit 1049, a discontinuous, ill-defined feature, was aligned east/west for 6m, c. 3m south of Ditch 1003. Terminal section 1028 displayed a width of 0.99m and depth of 0.15m, with gradual sides and flat, even base. A single secondary fill, 1029, of grey-yellow sandy clay, contained Early Roman pottery and ceramic building material (CBM). Pit 1049 may represent the badly-truncated survival of a more extensive feature, the original function of which is unclear.

Metalled surface 1015

An area of metalled surface of irregular, sub-oval plan, 1015, was located 3m south-west of Ditch 1003 at its closest extent (Fig. 2). It measured 8.7m in length (east/west) and 4.4m in width, and was investigated by quadrants. A compact, grey/brown sandy clay fill, of 0.11m depth, contained Early Roman pottery, including sherds of south Gaulish samian, together with quern fragments and ironworking residues. The dark, humic character of this fill suggested domestic waste, and charred spelt wheat was recovered from Quadrant 1007.

Pit 1016

Within the north-west quadrant (1013) of metalled surface 1015, shallow pit 1016 was sub-oval in plan, with straight sides and a flat base. This feature, which appeared to cut metalled surface 1015, displayed a diameter of 1.08m and depth of 0.12m. A single secondary fill, 1017, of compact, grey/brown sandy clay, contained Early Roman pottery, burnt clay fragments, charcoal and ironstone.

Pit 1030

Sub-circular pit 1030, located c.3.5m to the south of ditch 1003, measured 0.75m in diameter, with a single fill, 1033, of red/brown silty clay (Fig. 2). This fill included two groups of fired clay fragments, together with a distinctive assemblage of charred plant material, including crop processing remains and abundant weed seeds. One fired-clay object from this fill belongs to a class of rectangular clay slabs commonly interpreted as oven plates of Iron Age or Roman date (Poole 2015). Other fired-clay fragments (1972g) from pit 1030 were too fragmentary to identify form or function.

Undated features

Posthole 1037

A single posthole, 1037, was located c.4m south-west of ditch 1003, towards the eastern end of Area A (Fig. 2). It was 0.32m in diameter and 0.14m in depth, with steep sides and a concave base. A white/grey sandy clay fill included sparse charcoal, but no finds.

Period 2: Post-medieval (Figs. 2 and 4)

Ditch 1004

A substantial post-medieval ditch (1004) was recorded within evaluation trenches 3, 18 and 19. It was of irregular profile, but at Section BB (Figs. 2 and 4) it displayed a width of 2.2m and depth of 0.81m (Fig. 4, section BB), with asymmetrical, steeply-sloping convex sides, and an irregular base. It ran on a largely south-west/north-east alignment across the eastern side of the site, but turned to the west towards its southernmost excavated extent. A primary fill, of dark, grey/brown silty clay, contained no dateable material and was succeeded by a secondary fill 1006, of yellow/brown silty clay, with occasional inclusions of post-medieval tile and brick.

[Insert Fig. 4 here](#)

[Fig. 4: Post-medieval ditch 1004: section \(1:20\) and photograph \(1m scale\)](#)

Area B

Undated

Area B contained a single undated feature, 2003, to the south-east of an undated, charcoal-rich pit, 1202, identified within evaluation trench 12 (Fig. 1). A single large pit **1202** was uncovered within the eastern end of **Trench 12**. The pit was circular in plan, with near-vertical sides and a flat base. It displayed a diameter of 0.47m and depth of 0.03m. A single fill (**1203**) containing a possible area of burning and a scattering of charcoal, was observed within the pit cut. No finds were recovered from this feature. While this charcoal was not assessed, a later prehistoric deposit of cremation-related material remains a possible interpretation.

Area C

A single feature 3002 within Area C was initially identified in evaluation trench 22, but was confirmed by excavation to comprise a thin deposit of mid-red/yellow/brown silty clay, subsequently interpreted as a natural feature (Fig. 1).

THE FINDS

Pottery

Grace Perpetua Jones

Introduction

A total of 4430 sherds of pottery (41,716g) was recovered. With the exception of a single post-medieval sherd from fill 1047 of ditch 1003 [1045], the assemblage is of Early Roman date. Sherds are in variable condition, with flint-tempered and grog-tempered wares often highly abraded, although sandy wares display comparatively little surface or edge damage. Moderate fragmentation is indicated by a mean sherd weight of 9.4g. The assemblage has been analysed according to the Standard set by the period-specific pottery groups (Barclay *et al.* 2016). The pottery from each context was quantified by number and weight, and recorded using a site-specific fabric and form series. The diameters of all rims have been measured, and the percentage present recorded as the Estimated Vessel Equivalent (EVE). Features such as decoration, surface treatment and evidence of use have also been recorded.

Context of recovery

The assemblage derives from just 16 contexts across five features (Table 1). The largest group came from enclosure ditch 1003, with 3021 sherds recovered from a single context (1019) of intervention 1020. The second largest group, consisting of 556 sherds (3398g), derives from metallated surface 1015, within the area bounded by ditch 1003. Smaller groups came from a possible internal ditch of this enclosure, 1049, and earlier ditch 1048, cut by 1003.

[Insert Table 1 here](#)

Table 1: Quantification of pottery by feature

Composition of the assemblage

The assemblage almost entirely comprises locally-produced coarsewares (Table 2). The most commonly occurring are the reduced sandy greyware and black-surfaced sandy wares, together accounting for 55.6% of the total number of sherds and 44.3% of the weight. The 'transitional' flint-tempered wares and grog-tempered wares are also prevalent (respectively 28.4% of the count and 41.9% of the weight, and 9.3% of the count and 8.7% of the weight). There are very few imported wares. The small quantity of samian (0.4% of the number of sherds) derives from southern Gaul, but is now highly abraded, with little left of its original surfaces. The sherds derive from the body and base of the vessels, and a flange from a Drag. form 35/36 dish with barbotine decoration, but the piece is burnt. The samian was recovered from metallated surface 1015, with the exception of one sherd from ditch 1048. A single sherd of amphora, a Dressel 2-4 wine container from the western Mediterranean, came from fill 1019 of ditch 1003 (Peacock and Williams 1986, Class 10). Oxidised wares are also poorly represented; the identifiable forms in these fabrics were all recovered from ditch 1003 and are noted below. The coarsewares are also discussed below, in their feature groups.

[Insert Table 2 here](#)

Table 2: Quantification of Pottery by Fabric Type

Ditch 1003

Pottery was recovered from six sections through ditch 1003, although most sherds derive from a large dump of material in fill 1019, of intervention 1018 (Figs. 5 and 6). In terms of the number of sherds, the sandy greywares form the largest component of this group, accounting for 44% of the number of sherds and 24% of the weight. The heavier, flint-tempered sherds conversely account for 29% of the number of sherds but 43% of the weight. The black-surfaced sandy wares account for 18% of the number and 24% of the weight. Grog-tempered wares are present in smaller numbers (6% of count and weight), with other fabrics poorly represented.

Amongst the reduced sandy wares, necked, cordoned jars are the most commonly occurring form. Five have carinated shoulders, with out-turned rims with internally-bevelled surface; all are in a black-surfaced sandy ware (forms R109, R124; rim diameter range of 130-200mm; Fig. 5. 7). Traces of soot on the smallest of these suggest use as a cooking vessel. The rim

of another vessel of this type is complete (R119; Fig. 5. 6), indicating a diameter of 230mm, but too little of the profile survived to ascertain whether it is part of a bowl or a jar. Necked, cordoned vessels with more rounded shoulders are also present (forms R108, R110, R111 and R123, seven vessels; rim diameters 140-260mm; Fig. 5. 5, 5. 8). Necked, cordoned jars, with angular and rounded shoulders, are paralleled at Silchester (Timby 2000, form J16), where they were frequently encountered up to the end of Period 3 (c. AD 40-c. 50-60), becoming less common thereafter. It was possible to reconstruct the profiles of a small number of vessels, revealing that some of the necked, cordoned forms are of bowl-sized proportions (Fig. 6.14). A small necked, cordoned bowl with angular shoulder (R125; Fig. 6.12) has a rim diameter of 100mm (0.3 EVE) and height of 85mm. Of particular interest is a bowl with short neck, out-turned and internally bevelled rim, and sharply carinated shoulder (R120; Fig. 6.11). The exterior surface and internal rim are smooth, with multiple pre-firing perforations through its base, indicating use as a strainer, or similar. It has a rim diameter of 180mm (0.8 EVE), base diameter of 75mm and is 105mm high. Fragments from 56 necked vessels were broken at the neck/shoulder join, and it was not possible to ascertain their form (recorded as R100, R101, R103 and R104; rim diameter range: 80-240mm). The neck and shoulder part of one decorated jar is almost complete, but was missing its rim and lower body (Ra. 507). It is long-necked, with at least two cordons, below which are two horizontal, parallel grooves. Between these grooves are bands of burnished chevrons.

[Insert Fig. 5 here](#)

Fig. 5: Selected early Roman Pottery from fill 1019 of Ditch 1003 (Nos. 1-10) (1:4)

Other forms in the reduced sandy wares include four bead-rimmed jars (R102; Fig. 5. 2), and imitations of Gallo-Belgic forms. The most commonly occurring are the platters. One has a curved wall and rounded rim (R107), with a rim diameter of 170mm and height of 30mm (Timby 2000, fig. 135, 690, form P8). Three other forms have an internally-moulded surface. Form R126 is a copy of a CAM 5A (Timby 2000, form P3), with upright beaded rim. Ten rim sherds of this type were recorded, representing at least two vessels, with a rim diameter of 240mm. Form R127 has a plain, outer wall, and is an imitation of a CAM 14 (one example). Form R129 has a more angular internal moulding, and copies CAM 5 (RA 503, rim diameter 200mm; Fig. 00.14). A base, probably from a platter, has four radial, rectangular, illiterate, stamps on its internal surface (PRN 403; Fig. 6.16). The stamps measure 19mm x 8mm; they are abraded but appear to be very similar to an example from a Period 3 feature at Silchester - perhaps made by the same potter (Timby 2000, fig. 106, 28). Two examples of a dish or platter with out-turned, rounded, lid-seated rim and carinated wall, defined by a horizontal groove, were recorded (R133). A similar form, but with straight wall, is also present; one complete profile measures 280mm in rim diameter and 45mm in height (R128;

Fig. 6.13). Five vessels in a greyware fabric with an out-turned, internally-bevelled rim and a long, sloping neck, represent copies of butt-beakers (R105, Fig. 6.17; Timby 2000, form BK1).

The oxidised wares include a ring-necked flagon with externally expanded rim, in a fairly hard, coarse fabric with buff surfaces and a pink core. The vessel is probably a product of the Verulamium industry, produced in the Brockley Hill /St. Albans area (R131, RA 508; Fig. 6.18). The form is classified in the Southwark type-series by Class IB, dating from the Flavian period (Marsh and Tyers 1978). It is paralleled at Verulamium, and there dated to AD 75-90 (Wilson 1984, fig. 82, 1925). A triangular rim fragment may derive from a butt beaker, but is too incomplete to identify. A small number of jars were also recorded in oxidised fabrics, including a bead-rimmed jar and three necked jars, broken at the neck/shoulder join.

[Insert Fig. 6 here](#)

[Fig. 6: Selected early Roman Pottery from fill 1019 of Ditch 1003 \(Nos. 11-20\) \(1:4\)](#)

The flint-tempered wares are handmade and, like those from Silchester, are limited in form. The most frequently occurring are the bead-rimmed jars, with 27 examples of type R112, a round-shouldered jar with internally thickened rim (Fig. 5. 1; cf Timby 2000, fig. 126, 489-490). Four vessels have a more defined, beaded rim (R113, cf Timby 2000, fig. 126, 478-485). A variant with a small, in-turned and tightly beaded rim, was classified as R114 (Fig. 5. 3). A very fragmentary beaded rim was assigned form code R115. Two vessels had soot deposits on their external surface. The bead-rimmed jars vary from 150mm to 260mm in rim diameter, with most below 200mm. Eight flint-tempered storage jars are represented (R117; Fig. 5. 9), with rim diameters of 360-400mm, where measurable. Fragments from six, highly-abraded lids are also present (L100; Fig. 6.19-20). It was possible to reconstruct the complete profile of a bowl with internally-thickened rim, slightly shaped around the rim exterior, and plain, flat base. It has a rim diameter of 180mm, and is 77mm in height (R118; Fig. 6.10). Other flint-tempered vessels include a jar of ovoid profile, with plain, rounded rim (R116, rim diameter 190mm; Fig. 5. 4). Two flint-tempered body sherds have post-firing perforations, presumably for repair, or to aid attachment of a cover, or similar. Most flint-tempered vessels were fired in an oxygen-poor atmosphere, with some unoxidised throughout, but most unoxidised on the exterior and through the core of the vessel, and oxidised on the interior.

The flint-tempered wares are equivalent to fabric F1, from Silchester, located c.10km to the south-west of Beech Hill Road. Timby notes that 'Silchester ware' has been recorded at a number of sites in the surrounding area, dating from the early 1st-century AD date or the

Conquest period (Timby 2000, 243). Few forms were represented amongst the grog-tempered wares, with two necked, cordoned jars (Timby form J7), of 150-160mm diameter. The most commonly occurring form in this sandy ware group is also the necked, cordoned jar (Timby 2000, form J16).

Metalled surface 1015

A total of 556 sherds (3398g) of pottery was recovered from metalled surface 1015. The proportion of flint-tempered wares was lower than that from ditch 1003 (7% of the count and 10% of the weight), and the reduced sandy wares slightly more frequent. Grog-tempered wares account for 9% of the count and 17% of the weight. Almost all samian recovered from the site came from this feature. The material from this context was in notably poorer condition than that from the ditch, with abraded surfaces and a lower mean sherd weight. Few vessel forms were identifiable, as most had broken at the neck/shoulder join and could not be reconstructed. The group includes six large jars, probably storage jars, in grog-tempered, flint-tempered, black-surfaced greyware and sandy fabrics. Also present is a greyware platter with rounded rim (R107; Fig. 6.15).

Ditch 1049

Interventions 1028 and 1041 of ditch 1049, a feature bounded by ditch 1003, produced 101 sherds of pottery (591g). The group is dominated by grog-tempered wares (75% by count and 83% by weight), perhaps suggesting a slightly earlier date, although the quantity is too small to draw meaningful conclusions. The forms include a grog-tempered storage jar (R117), a flat-rimmed dish (R130) in a sandy fabric, and a lid in a black-surfaced greyware.

Ditch 1048

Ditch 1048, cut by ditch 1003, contained 138 sherds of pottery (870g). The proportions of fabrics are similar to those from ditch 1003, with 74% in Romanised wares, indicating a post-conquest date for this feature. Amongst the flint-tempered wares are two jars with slightly beaded rim and internal thickening (R113; cf Timby 2000, fig. 126, 478-485); a grog-tempered storage jar (R117); three necked jars in reduced sandy wares, but broken at the neck (R101, R104) and a base from a south Gaulish samian vessel, now highly abraded, with part of a rounded, post-firing perforation through its wall.

Pit 1016

A small group of pottery (28 sherds, 101g) was recovered from this pit. All are body sherds, most in a black-surfaced greyware.

Discussion

The pottery assemblage from Beech Hill Road derives from very few features, and is dominated by sandy reduced-ware fabrics that were probably produced locally. The dump of pottery in fill 1019 of ditch 1003 is large, but most vessels are incomplete, and it was possible to reconstruct surprisingly few profiles. There are no obvious indications that this dump represents waste from pottery manufacture; it appears to be domestic refuse.

The occupants of the site appear to have had very little access to imported goods. A single sherd of amphora represents wine from the western Mediterranean, and fragments from four samian vessels originate from Southern Gaul; all are highly abraded. Copies of Gallo-Belgic vessels are present though, in oxidised and sandy reduced fabrics, and would have been produced relatively locally during the 1st century AD. The presence of such vessels suggests a willingness to adopt new culinary fashions introduced from the Continent, but perhaps not an ability to acquire imported originals. The presence of a platter base with the same, or very similar, stamp to one from Silchester, suggests that local occupants were drawing at least some pottery from the same source as the nearby town. Indigenous, Late Iron Age traditions, entailing use of grog and flint as tempering agents, continued throughout the 1st century AD, with flint-tempered wares becoming more popular than grog-tempered fabrics from the mid-1st century AD onwards (Timby 2000, 306-307). The occurrence of greyware fabrics indicates that all features are of post-Conquest date; the range of forms in the sandy wares accords with a Flavian date, and therefore a date in the last quarter of the 1st century AD for the assemblage as a whole.

Pottery Illustration Catalogue – all from context 1019 (ditch 1003)

Fig. 5

1. PRN 113, flint-tempered (F100), bead-rimmed jar (R114)
2. PRN 330, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), high-shouldered, bead-rimmed jar (R102)
3. PRN 235, flint-tempered (F100), round-shouldered jar with internally thickened rim (R112)
4. PRN 118, flint-tempered (F100), ovoid jar with plain, rounded rim (R116)
5. PRN 66, sandy greyware (Q100), necked, cordoned jar (R110)
6. PRN 350, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), necked, cordoned jar/bowl with sharply carinated shoulder (R119)
7. PRN 396, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), necked cordoned jar with carinated shoulder (R124)
8. PRN 392, sandy greyware (Q100), necked, cordoned jar with rounded shoulder (R123)
9. PRN 336, flint-tempered (F100), large jar with everted rim (R117)

Fig. 6

10. PRN 119, flint-tempered (F100), bowl with internally thickened rim (R118)
11. PRN 351, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), bowl with short neck, out-turned and internally-bevelled rim and sharply carinated shoulder (R120)

12. PRN 397, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), necked, cordoned bowl with angular shoulder (R125)
13. PRN 254, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), platter with internal moulding (R129)
14. PRN 400, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), dish with out-turned, bead rim and lid-seating (R128)
15. PRN 61, sandy greyware (Q100), platter with curved wall and rounded rim (R107)
16. PRN 403, black-surfaced sandy ware (Q101), platter/dish base with four radial, rectangular, illiterate stamps
17. PRN 63, sandy greyware (Q100), butt-beaker copy (R105)
18. PRN 255, oxidised ware (Q102), ring-necked flagon (R131)
19. PRN 120, flint-tempered (F100), lid (L100)
20. PRN 123, flint-tempered (F100), lid (L100)

Fired Clay

Katie Marsden

A total of 165 fragments of fired clay (7975g) was recovered from excavation and bulk soil sampling. Although a heavily-fragmented group, sufficient evidence of form remains in some cases to enable dating and identifying function. The few identifiable items, specifically loom weight fragments, represent craft or domestic activity. The majority of these (62%) were recovered from ditch fills, with the remainder from pits (15%), floor surfaces (13%) and other deposits (10%). In the majority of cases, fabrics are dark or patchy orange in colour, often with a dark, grey/black core. The fabrics frequently contain rare to sparse flint inclusions, probably naturally-occurring, and are medium to hard-fired.

The assemblage derives from ditches 1003 and 1048, pits 1030 and 1033, and metallated surface 1015 (Table 3). The pieces are largely abraded and highly-fragmented, and probably derive from hearth or oven structures. The material was formed from a fine to medium-grained sandy fabric, with few other inclusions. Surviving surfaces are roughly finished and generally flat, although a few curved pieces are also present. Firing is generally consistent, producing yellow/brown, oxidised surfaces and a grey/black, un-oxidised core.

[Insert Table 3 here](#)

[Table 3: Quantification of Fired Clay by feature](#)

One particularly dark fired clay object, of more than 50mm in thickness, came from metallated surface 1015 (context 1014). This, together with a highly-abraded fragment from ditch 1003 (context 1019) with at least two perforations, may represent oven plates. Two triangular-shaped objects were also recorded from ditch 1003 (context 1019). Neither is complete, but

both are perforated through at least two corners. Two joining fragments indicate that the side of one is 170mm in length and 55mm thick; the perforations are 10-11mm in diameter.

A second example is 65mm thick, with perforations of 15-17mm diameter. While such objects are typically classified as loom weights, Poole has recently suggested use as oven/hearth furniture (2015, 304). Part of a rectangular block from pit 1030 is 70mm wide and 52mm thick, and also likely to represent oven furniture (RA 505). A comparable object, in similar fabric, was recovered from an Early Roman context on the adjacent Warren's Croft site (Rayner 2005, 21). The remaining 53 fragments (1972g) are too fragmentary to identify form or function, and therefore cannot be closely dated.

Ceramic Building Material and Worked Stone

Katie Marsden and Richard Massey

A small quantity (eight fragments, 767g) of ceramic building material (CBM) is in poor condition, and includes highly-abraded brick fragments, of Roman date, from metallated surface 1015, and the subsoil. Later, post-medieval material comprises a pipe fragment with internal glazed surface, a flat tile from pit 1016, and three fragments from a curved roof tile, from ditch 1004.

Two quern fragments were recorded from metallated surface 1015. The largest (1262g) comprises part of a lower rotary quern-stone, of 320mm diameter (15% is present), and is 40mm thick, in a poorly-sorted, coarse-grained sandstone. The grinding surface is well worn. A second fragment is much thinner (20mm), in a fine-grained greensand.

The larger fragment is of a characteristic Old Red Sandstone clast, suggesting a West Midlands or Forest of Dean source. The smaller fragment is of Upper Greensand, with texture suggesting a Lodsworth, West Sussex, origin. This had a notably wide distribution-range during the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods (Peacock 1987). The thinned section of this fragment suggests secondary use as a rubber.

Metalworking Residues

David Starley

Only 1.2kg of possible industrial debris was recovered from features in Area A. This included small quantities of slag, which may derive from late prehistoric or Early Roman iron smelting (Table 4).

[Insert Table 4 here](#)

Table 4: Classification of ironworking debris by activity and type

The most distinctive fragment, classified as fayalitic run-slag, came from fill 1014, of metalled-surface 1015. Similar material has occasionally been observed in experimental iron smithing, but it is more typical of iron smelting. A small fragment of dense fayalitic slag, from ditch 1003 (section 1024), was associated with pottery of first-century AD date. This small, angular fragment was of a similar, iron silicate, composition, and while clearly from a larger block, was undiagnostic regarding the metallurgical process involved. One small ferruginous concretion may have comprised iron production/working waste.

A large, natural iron oxide/hydroxide concretion, from fill 1014, of metalled surface 1015, may derive from natural iron pan (Table 4). This may be archaeometallurgically relevant, as concentrated masses of such material, as 'bog ore', represent a high component of mineralised iron in local surface geology, and are likely to have provided a ready source of ore for smelting (see Dungworth 2007). There is no evidence to suggest that ironworking was ever a major economic activity on the site (see Smith 2017, 185). Small quantities of similar residues were recovered from the neighbouring Warren's Croft site (Keys 2005, 22-3), together with fragments of vitrified hearth lining, which may indicate ironworking in the vicinity. It is therefore probable that at least some of the material from this site represents peripheral deposition.

BIOLOGICAL MATERIAL

Plant Macrofossils and Charcoal

Sarah F. Wyles and Sarah Cobain

Nine bulk soil samples (125 litres) were analysed from five sections of ditch 1003, metalled surface 1015, and pit 1003, all of Early Roman date. Two samples were taken from fill 1019 of ditch 1003, from which a large dump of pottery was recovered. The samples contained only small quantities of charred plant remains, with the richest assemblage (47 identifiable items) from fill 1025 of ditch 1003. The level of preservation of charred material was variable throughout.

Ditch 1003

The assemblage recovered from fill 1025, of ditch section 1024, was dominated by cereal remains, with grains outnumbering chaff elements. These included barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) grain and rachis fragments and hulled wheat, emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), grain, spikelet fork and glume base fragments. Recorded weed seeds included oats (*Avena* sp.) and brome grass (*Bromus* sp.). This assemblage may represent dumped domestic settlement waste, possibly from the processing of stored semi-cleaned grain or spikelets (Hillman 1981, 1984).

The samples from ditch sections 1018, 1020, 1022 and 1045 produced small plant assemblages, all dominated by cereal remains. These included hulled wheat grain and chaff elements, some identifiable as spelt wheat, and seeds of oats and brome grass, and may represent dispersed settlement waste.

Metalled surface 1015

Quadrant section 1007 contained cereal remains, predominantly chaff elements, a number of which were identifiable as spelt wheat.

Pit 1033

A small assemblage from fill 1035, of pit 1033, differed in composition, in that weed seeds predominated. Cereal remains included barley and spelt wheat, with weed seeds including seeds of knotgrass (*Polygonum aviculare*), black bindweed (*Fallopia convolvulus*), sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella* group), medick/clover (*Medicago/Trifolium* sp.), rye-grass/fescue (*Lolium/Festuca* sp.), oats and brome grass. These are all species typical of grassland, field margins and arable environments.

Charcoal was generally limited in quantities present and was poorly preserved throughout, and permits few firm conclusions (Table 6). Of the taxa represented, oak (*Quercus petraea*), principally represented by heartwood, was the predominant fuel source, although field maple (*Acer campestre*), alder/hazel (*Alnus glutinosa/Corylus avellana*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and hawthorn/crabapple (*Crataegus monogyna*) were present to limited degrees. Some of this material may represent domestic refuse, particularly in fill 1024, of intervention 1024 of ditch 1003, in which almost all taxa recorded on the site were present.

Summary

The assemblages are generally representative of dispersed settlement waste, with some dumped material associated with the pottery assemblage from ditch section 1024. These plant and charcoal remains are compatible with the Early Roman date of the features. Spelt

wheat is the predominant cereal taxon within contemporary assemblages in southern Britain (Greig 1991). Comparable assemblages were recovered from other Late Iron Age and Early Roman deposits within the region, including at Meales Farm, Sulhamstead (Carruthers 1990), and Marnel Park and Merton Rise, Basingstoke (Pelling 2009).

Insert Table 5 here

Table 5: Charred Plant identifications

Insert Table 6 here

Table 6: Charcoal Identifications

DISCUSSION

Investigation confirmed the results of previous geophysical survey and field evaluation. The pottery evidence from Ditch 1003, and other features, suggests a relatively short-lived, post-Conquest phase of activity. The function and date of ditch 1003, and the limited number of associated excavated features, should be considered within the context of the neighbouring, and partly contemporary, Warren's Croft site (Stevens 2005), and the wider settlement landscape of this period. Ditch 1003 cut an earlier boundary ditch (1048), and bounded a number of features to the south, suggesting that these were contained within an enclosure of unknown extent. The presence of quern fragments associated with the metalled surface 1015, together with loom weight fragments and plant remains, infer domestic occupation, and fills contained relatively small plant assemblages, dominated by cereal remains (Wyles, this report). Plant remains might equally suggest crop processing activity, with metalled surface 1015, itself associated with cereal remains, possibly representing a threshing floor. The absence of animal bone throughout is striking, especially as local clay soils might be expected to favour bone preservation.

Investigations on the Warren's Croft site, immediately to the east of Beech Hill Road, revealed evidence of occupation extending from the Middle Iron Age to later Roman periods. Within Area 2 of this site, a series of features appeared to be closely contemporary with those recorded in Area A. Despite the presence of earlier Iron Age material at Warren's Croft (Stevens 2005, 5-6), Early Roman pottery groups conformed closely in composition to the large group from fill 1019 of Ditch 1003. Notable in this respect are the comparable proportions of reduced sandy and flint-tempered wares within the Early Roman group, which comprised 59% of the total Warren's Croft assemblage (Featherby 2005, 10-11). Despite the suggested affinity of this material with aspects of the Early Roman Silchester assemblage

(Timby 2000, 225-65), this phase of the Warren's Croft site displayed compositional traits which were arguably more typical of local 'rural' sites, including Reading Business Park (Timby 1992) and Park Farm, Binfield (Booth 1995).

The large pottery group from fill 1019 appears to represent a single depositional episode, quite possibly derived from the Warren's Croft site, in which case ditch 1003 may simply have provided a convenient location for disposal, following disuse. The range of forms and paucity of imported wares suggest relatively low status (see Evans 2001, 32-3), but is illustrative of the rapid economic and cultural changes affecting rural British communities during the post-Conquest period, and of aspects of social identity and acculturation at this time (Taylor 2001, 48-54). Comparable 'centre-periphery' economic relationships may be argued for a number of contemporary sites within the Silchester hinterland, including those at Thames Valley Park (Barnes *et al.* 1997), Ufton Nervet (Manning 1974), Arborfield Garrison (Pine 2003), Shinfield (Taylor 2010; Massey and Whelan, *forthcoming*) and Little London Road, Silchester (Moore 2011). Collectively, these appear to represent an emerging settlement landscape within an area of hitherto under-investigated clayland geology which is generally unresponsive to aerial survey.

The single secondary fill of section 1022 of ditch 1003 contained two near-complete vessels, of which one, Ra. 503, a wheel-thrown vessel, appeared to have been placed beneath Ra. 501, a flint-tempered vessel of Middle Iron Age type. While these two associated vessels could theoretically be contemporary, the presence of an apparently earlier Iron Age type is notable in view of the absence of authentically pre-Conquest material within the site. This appears to represent a deliberately-placed deposit involving curated items (see Hill 1995, 95-98), possibly relating to aspects of ancestry or descent (Bradley 2005, 79-80).

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