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**Excavations of Romano-British Sites at Tockington Park Farm
and Westerleigh, South Gloucestershire, in 1997**

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Excavations of Romano-British Sites at Tockington Park Farm and Westerleigh, South Gloucestershire, in 1997

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With contributions by Geraldine Barber, Hilary Cool and Mark Corney

The construction of a gas pipeline in 1997 between Pucklechurch and Seabank, to the north and east of Bristol (Fig. 1), occasioned a programme of archaeological investigations which were carried out on behalf of the pipeline contractors by McGill Archaeological Consultants (McGill 1998). Desk-based assessment and trial-trenching were carried out to identify and, where possible, avoid areas of archaeological sensitivity, and an archaeological watching brief was maintained on the subsequent stripping of the pipeline wayleave. The most significant findings from the project relate to the Roman period. Further investigations at two sites affected by the pipeline are discussed in this report: a Romano-British inhumation cemetery and enclosure ditches near the villa at Tockington Park Farm; and features spanning the late 1st to mid 3rd century, probably part of a rural settlement site, near Westerleigh. Roman activity identified in a number of locations on the Avonmouth Levels further to the north will be addressed in a separate report (Masser *et al.* forthcoming).

TOCKINGTON PARK FARM

Introduction

The vicinity of Tockington Park Farm (Fig. 2) had been identified as an archaeologically sensitive area in the preliminary stages of planning for the pipeline. The existing farm buildings occupy the site of a Roman villa, which was partially excavated by Maclean (1887; 1888). He uncovered in total 32 rooms, some of which were seen to extend under the modern farm buildings. The general plan of the villa was reported to be trapezoidal, measuring 73 m north–south by 49 m east–west, and consisted of a series of buildings grouped around a courtyard with some inter-connecting corridors.

The description of the excavations notes the exposure of mosaic floors with geometric designs, a hypocaust system, and fragments of painted plaster, but few finds were reported. Some indications were seen that the villa had been damaged or partially destroyed by fire. The walls of some of the contemporary farm buildings were reported to have utilised the Roman foundations, perhaps suggesting a degree of continuity of use of the site. To the east of the villa a bath-house had been built adjacent to a natural spring, from which it took its water. The presence of this spring undoubtedly influenced the siting of the villa and it may explain why subsequent occupation of the site was built upon its ruins. Another factor influencing the villa's location was the Roman road from Gloucester to Sea Mills, the route of which is mostly followed by the modern Gloucester–Bristol road (A38), less than a kilometre to the north-west of the villa (Margary 1973,

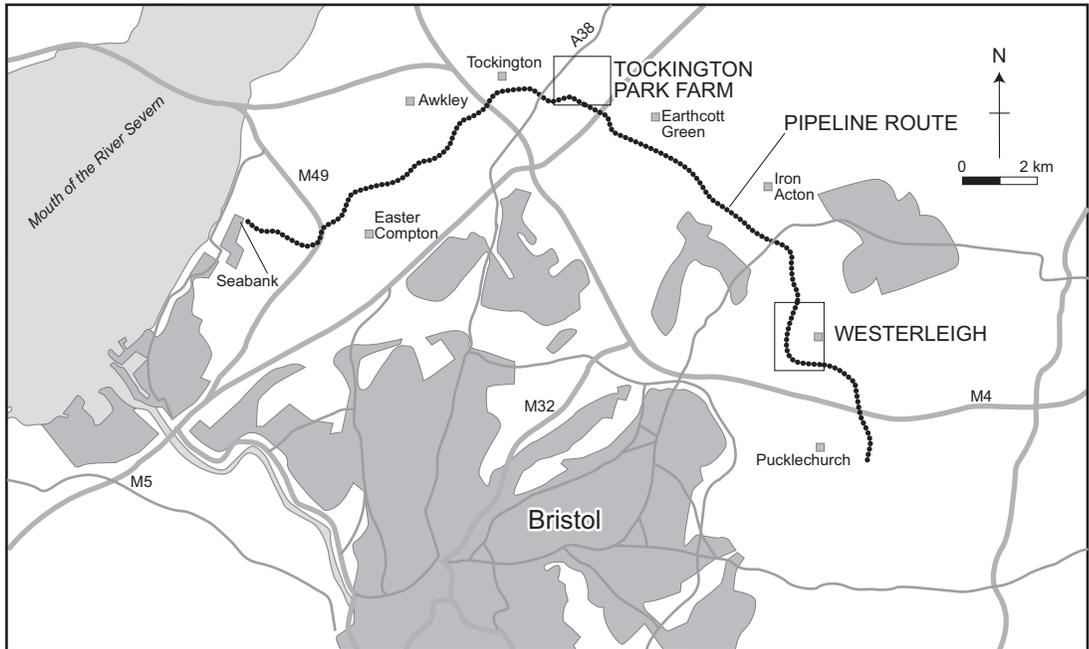


Fig. 1. Pucklechurch to Seabank pipeline, 1997: locations of sites.

140–1). Maclean carried out no work on the environs of the villa, and on the basis of his excavation results scant conclusions can be drawn as to its history.

The archaeological investigations required in mitigation of the pipeline construction works therefore offered a valuable opportunity to shed new light on the Tockington villa. Moreover, while many early excavations of Roman villas in south-west England targeted the main buildings, and the typologies of their ground plans and architecture are well documented (if in need of reappraisal in terms of their social context: e.g. Smith 1978; Hingley 1989), relatively little work has been carried out on their environs and the evidence for associated activities in their vicinity is often sparse. As archaeological interest has shifted from the structure of the Romano-British villa itself to the role it played in the wider social and economic landscape, awareness of the need for such evidence has grown.

The 1997 Investigations

A magnetometer survey carried out by Engineering Archaeological Services (EAS) in 1995 to the north of the villa detected at one end of the survey area a number of linear anomalies, which may represent part of a Romano-British field system (Fig. 3). The pipeline was consequently re-routed to pass c.80 metres to the south of the villa. A second magnetometer survey, undertaken in January 1997 by Geoquest Associates, covered a 35-metre wide corridor along the new pipeline route. This identified a series of anomalies, interpreted as ditched enclosures, over an area around 60 m wide

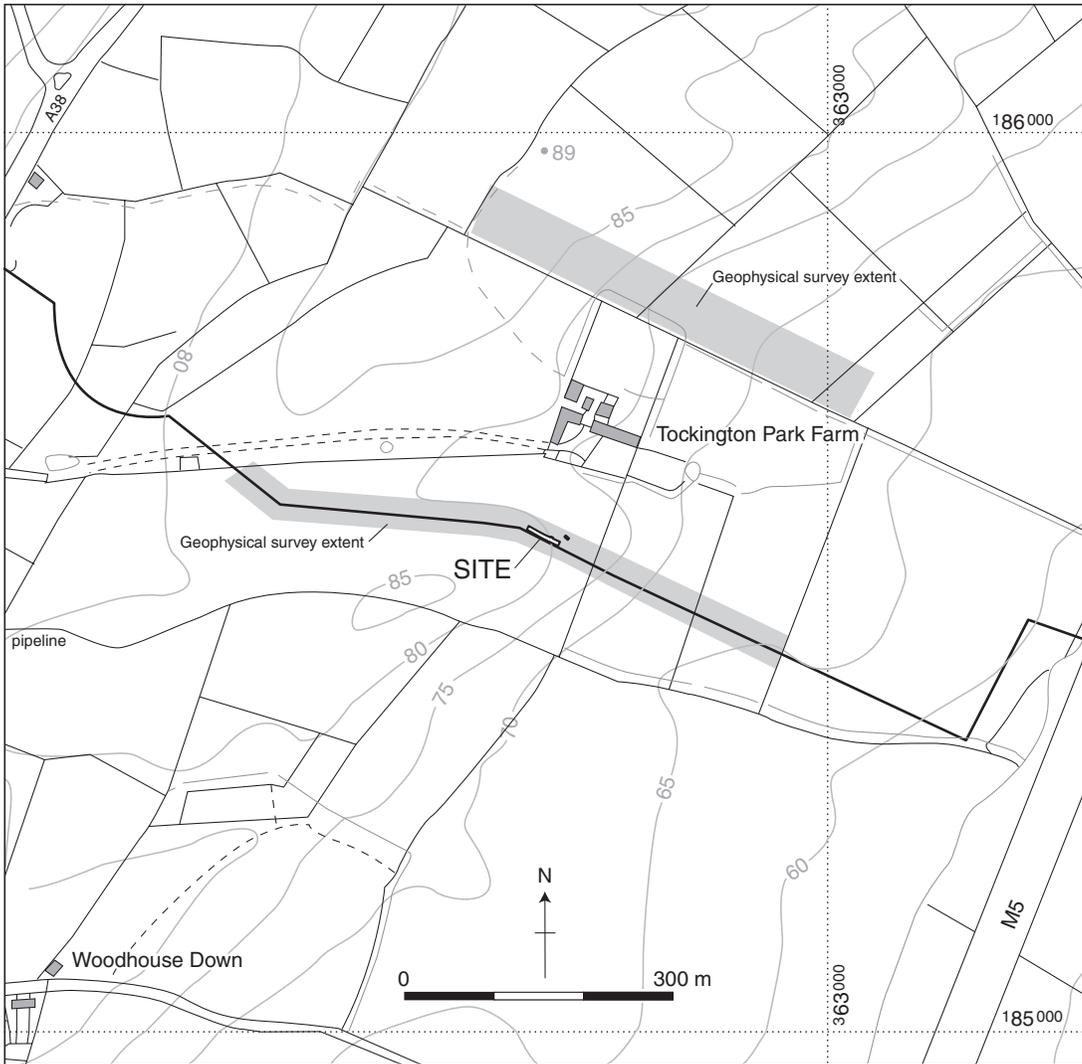


Fig. 2. Tockington Park Farm: site location.

directly to the south of the villa site. Two evaluation trenches were excavated to test the interpretation of the anomalies. As they confirmed the presence of Roman features, an archaeological excavation of the features identified by the geophysical survey that were to be affected by the laying of the pipeline was carried out in March 1997 by McGill Archaeological Consultants.

Evaluation Trench A was extended into an area measuring 40×5 metres wide, to cover the features affected by the pipeline. The other evaluation trench, Trench B, lay within an area



Fig. 3. Tockington Park Farm: geophysical survey areas and trench locations.

unaffected by the pipeline and did not require further investigation (Fig. 4). A mechanical excavator was used to remove the topsoil and also an underlying soil layer, up to 0.2 m deep, which was cut by modern land drains and a number of demonstrably modern features probably associated with cultivation. Beneath this level, Roman features were cut into yellow-grey clay, a subsoil horizon overlying the Lower Lias limestone, which was reached at the base of some of the deeper ditches. Where the depths of features are quoted, they are given in relation to this machine-cut surface.

The Enclosure Ditches

Part of a system of enclosure ditches excavated in Trenches A and B can be seen to correspond to the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey. A ditch, context [08], crossed the south-east end of Trench A, with another, context [32], meeting it at right angles from the north-west. Both were substantial features, at least 2.0 m wide and 0.6 m deep, and a section excavated at their junction confirmed that they were contemporary. To the north-west were two parallel ditches, contexts [10] and [23], on the same alignment as ditch [08]. The fills and dimensions of these ditches, both *c.* 1.0 m wide and 0.35 m deep, were very similar. Ditch [10] appears to correspond to the north-west side of the enclosure apparent on the geophysical survey, while [23] may correspond to the detached linear feature running parallel with it to the south-east. Ditch [17], excavated in Trench B, had dimensions and alignment similar to [08], and clearly corresponds to another feature which appears on the geophysical survey, extending the system of enclosures to the north-east on a slightly different axis.

Two other excavated features may be part of the same system of ditches. The north-east terminal of a ditch, [64], was excavated 11 m to the north-west of [08], and follows a similar alignment: it may be the continuation of a detached linear feature identified on the geophysical survey to the south-west of Trench A. Ditch [04] followed a slightly more northerly orientation. It was excavated towards the south-west side of the trench, where it was found to be 1.0 m wide and 0.6 m deep, while a second section excavated to the north-east showed that it became very shallow at this point, suggesting that the feature terminated or was interrupted. No geophysical anomaly corresponding to this feature was identified.

The majority of the pottery from the site (367 sherds, 67% of the stratified assemblage by sherd number) was recovered from these ditches. The material consisted mainly of late 2nd- or early 3rd-century coarse ware sherds, many quite small and abraded and possibly residual. No obviously later sherds were recovered, however, except from ditch [17], which appears to be somewhat later than the other features.

The Inhumations

Five graves, [51], [62], [40], [47] and [50], containing inhumation burials were excavated within the enclosure defined by ditches [08], [32] and [10] (Fig. 4). They were laid out in relation to the ditches and in a row about 1 m to the south-east of ditch [32]. All the heads were to the north-east with the exception of [51], which had a more northerly orientation. The graves varied in depth and none showed evidence for a coffin or other associated structure: although nails were present in the fills of three of them, these are considered rather as part of the residual material which occurred in all the graves. No grave goods were identified although in two graves, [40] and [51], hobnails were recovered around the feet. The skeletons were found to be in a generally fragmentary state, due to the soil conditions and the shallowness of some of the graves which had left them exposed to subsequent plough truncation. In addition to these inhumations, described below, thirteen fragments of adult long bone shaft were recovered from the fill of ditch [10]. As no artefacts

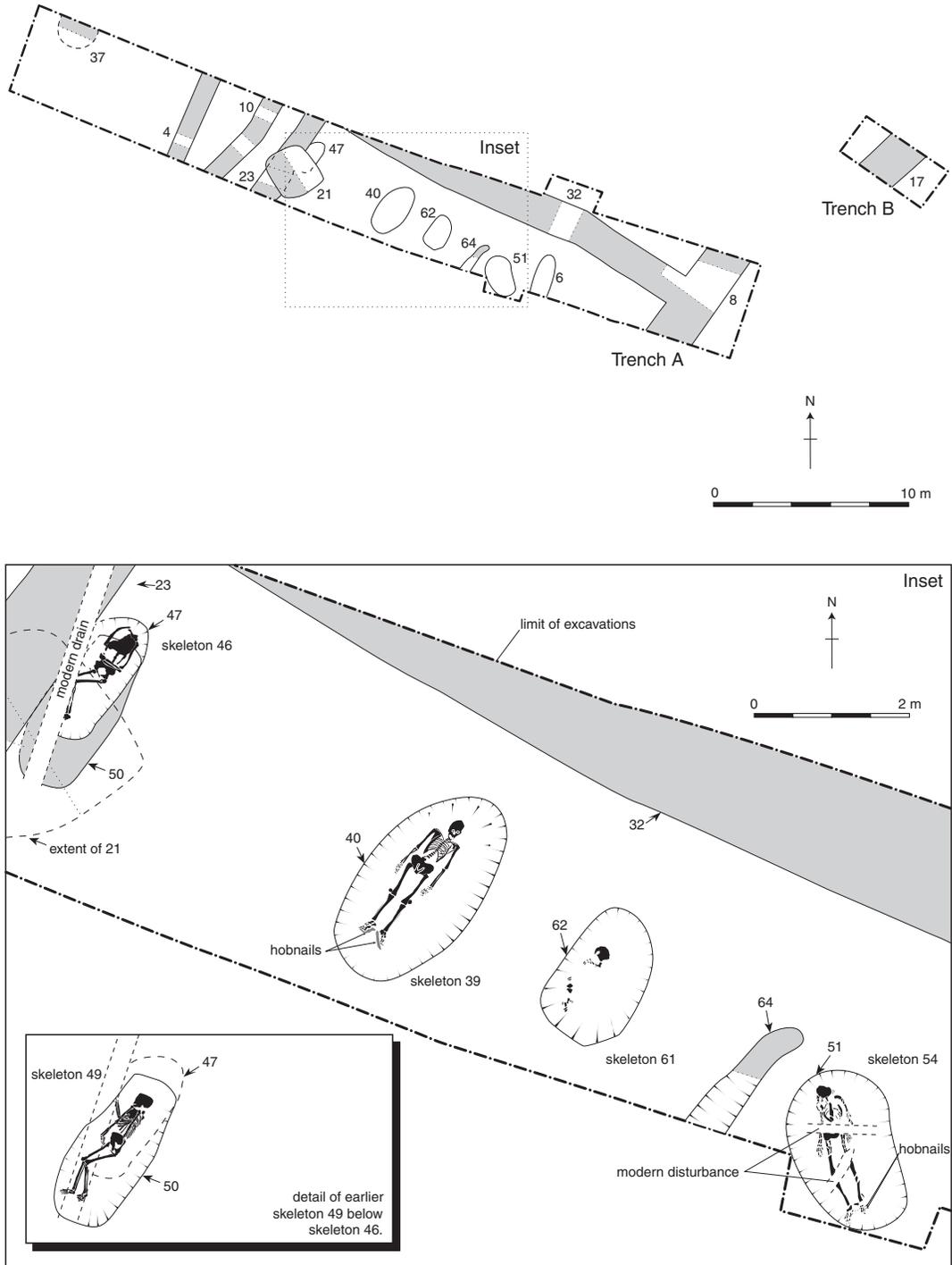


Fig. 4. Tockington Park Farm: post-excavation site plan with inset showing details of burials.

interred with the bodies have survived, apart from the hobnails which are not closely datable, the only dating evidence consists of pottery from the grave fills. In total, 103 sherds were recovered from the fills, representing 19% of the stratified assemblage from the site. All of this material appears to be residual and does not differ significantly from the sherds identified from the adjacent ditches.

Grave cut [51] was on average 0.1 m deep below the exposed surface of the subsoil, and it contained skeleton [54], which was buried in a supine position. The areas of the pelvis and upper legs had been disturbed by a land drain and another modern feature, interpreted as a plough furrow. Hobnails were recorded from around the feet.

Grave cut [62] was no more than 0.1 m deep, and the skeleton within it, [61], had been badly disturbed by plough truncation. As part of the skull survived at the north-east end, the orientation could be determined, but beyond this the position of the body is unknown.

Grave cut [40] was deeper than the others, on average 0.5 m, and was substantial enough to register on the geophysical survey. It contained skeleton [39], buried in a supine position with the arms to the sides, the left hand facing palm upwards, the right palm downwards. The hobnails from footwear worn by the individual were recorded *in situ*.

Grave cut [50] was up to 0.35 m deep and contained skeleton [49], which was lying on its right side with the left arm extended and the right arm flexed. Grave [47] was cut into the top of the backfill of Grave [50], but without causing any disturbance to skeleton [49], and varied in depth from 0.1 m in the area of the head to 0.2 m at the feet. The skeleton, [46], was interred over the top of the earlier burial, on the same alignment and also on its right side, though *c.*0.5 m further to the north-east. The grave was partially truncated by a shallow pit [21].

HUMAN REMAINS by Geraldine Barber

Skeleton [54]

About 75% of the skeleton was present, but in a very fragmentary condition. The left shoulder, spinal column and most of the pelvis were missing. The skeleton was probably that of a female. The skeleton is adult, but no estimation of age could be made due to poor condition of the bones. Six teeth were identified, with a fair degree of dental calculus on them. One molar had been affected by a large carious cavity. This skeleton also showed evidence for osteoarthritis in the left and right hands. The left hand had osteoarthritis of the thumb base and scaphoid bone in the wrist, with eburnation, pitting and osteophytes on all three joint rows of the fingers. All of the phalanges examined had evidence for osteoarthritis, indicating at least four fingers on each hand were affected. This degree of disease is quite striking, and is typical of a pattern that tends to affect older individuals. There is some evidence for pitting and changes in the shape of the joint surface contour on the temporo-mandibular joint of the mandible. This is also suggestive of osteoarthritis, but the joint was too fragmentary to obtain a definite diagnosis.

Skeleton [61]

About 35% of the body was present, all in a very poor condition. Fragments of the skull, right arm, leg and pelvis were all that remained. Six teeth, all with large occlusal caries cavities, were also identified. The skeleton was probably that of an adult male, but no age estimation could be undertaken. No evidence for any skeletal pathology was observed, except for some slight pitting in the right orbit.

Skeleton [39]

The skeleton, that of an adult male aged between 25 and 30 years, is in a poor condition of preservation, with the skull and all of the long bones in an extremely fragmented state. The body was 85% complete, with only the right shoulder area (clavicle, scapula and some ribs) and the mandible missing. None of the bones could be measured, due to their fragmented condition. Although the mandible and most of the maxilla were missing, twenty-five teeth were present. These were all in good condition, with no evidence of caries. A mild degree of calculus was present on all of the teeth. A small amount of periosteal new bone was observed on the mid-shaft surface of the left tibia. This is a common finding on many skeletons and is not of great significance. The right calcaneus and talus of the ankle had eburnation on their articulating joint surfaces, with some osteophyte (new bone) formation and joint surface pitting. This description is typical of the osteoarthritis of the ankle. Such disease of the ankle is relatively unusual and is often associated with leg trauma such as a fracture. No evidence of such a trauma was noted on any of the bones present in the skeleton.

Skeleton [49]

The skeleton, that of a male aged over 50 years, was in a poor condition of preservation. Over 90% of the skeleton was present, with only some ribs, vertebrae and the right hand missing. Most of the mandible and maxilla were also absent, except for the area of the first four upper right teeth and first six lower right teeth. Five of those teeth were lost ante-mortem (before death). There were fourteen loose teeth, all badly worn and two with caries cavities. There was evidence of osteoarthritis on the identified fragments of the cervical vertebrae. This is a common finding in older individuals and is of little significance. In addition there was a small area of periosteal new bone formation on the lower third of the shaft of the right fibula.

Skeleton [46]

The skeleton was in a very poor and fragmented condition. About 60% of the body was present. The skull, mandible and shoulder areas were missing, as was most of the spine, pelvis and the lower right arm and leg. The skeleton was that of an adult male. Due to the poor condition of the skeleton, it was not possible to estimate the age more accurately. This skeleton had osteoarthritis of the thumb base and wrist (distal ulna). The eburnation, pitting and osteophytes present on the affected joints suggest that this individual was an older adult. No other pathology was observed.

Disarticulated remains

Thirteen fragments of adult long bone shaft were recovered from context [65], the fill of ditch [10]. No pathology was noted on any of the fragments.

Other Features

Three other features can be characterised as shallow pits or hollows. On the basis of the pottery assemblage they appear to be broadly contemporary with the graves and ditches. Context [37] was a poorly-defined feature, up to 2.0 m wide but no more than 0.15 m deep. Context [06] was an elongated oval or linear feature less than 0.05 m deep. A subrectangular pit [21] was recorded cutting the top of both Grave [47] and the adjacent ditch [23]. It was 3.2 × 2.7 m wide and no more than 0.18 m deep. There is little evidence for the function of these features, and it is possible that [06] and [37], in particular, are not deliberately cut features.

The Finds

POTTERY AND CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL by Mark Corney

Of the 932 sherds of pottery examined from the site, 538 came from stratified contexts and the remainder from initial topsoil clearance. The majority of the stratified pottery derived from ditches and smaller groups came from a single pit and the grave fills. Seventy-one pieces of ceramic building material and seventeen pieces of poorly fired clay, probably derived from oven or kiln linings, were also recovered, only 31% coming from stratified contexts.

The pottery

The pottery assemblage consists largely of coarse wares displaying a restricted range of forms, while fine wares and mortaria are comparatively rare and amphorae entirely absent. Much of the pottery is highly abraded. The relatively small sherd size indicates a considerable degree of weathering and suggests that much of the material may be residual in the contexts from which it was excavated. The small size of the assemblage, the abraded nature of the sherds and the lack of a coherent regional Romano-British fabric type series (Bennett 1985; Timby in Ellis 1987) has precluded the possibility of creating a meaningful form type series for much of the material.

Late Iron Age

Twenty-four conjoining sherds occurring residually in ditch [23] and five unstratified sherds are typical of the Late Iron-Age tradition in the southern Cotswolds. They can be broadly paralleled at the Uley Shrines (Woodward and Leach 1993).

1st century A.D.

No very early Roman coarse wares were noted, but four small and abraded sherds of South Gaulish samian, all in the fabric typical of products from the main centre at La Graufesenque, were recovered. All were residual or unstratified.

2nd–3rd-century A.D. coarse wares

The majority of the assemblage (90.1% by sherd number) consists of coarse wares. Severn Valley ware and related locally-produced forms account for 53% of the total number of sherds. Severn Valley ware is a predominantly earlier Roman industry, flourishing in the 2nd and early 3rd centuries with continued, but reduced output in the 4th century. The forms represented in the assemblage, notably the tankards and jars, are largely typical of the main period of production (Webster 1976; Tyers 1996). Among the local coarse wares, orange/brown fabrics, which have been noted elsewhere in the region as being more typical of an earlier Roman date (Bennett 1980, 159–81; Bennett 1985), are most common. Grey wares are also present, some in forms typical of a later 2nd- and 3rd-century A.D. date.

South Dorset black-burnished ware occurs in small quantities in most of the stratified groups and makes up 14.6% of the total number of sherds. Many of the sherds cannot be dated with much precision, but the general trend in the region is for such products to increase in frequency in the later Roman period (Timby in Ellis 1987). The largest stratified group of BB1, including diagnostic forms of late 3rd- to 4th-century date, comes from ditch [17].

Fine wares

Eighteen sherds of Central Gaulish samian were recognised: all were products of the main centre at Lezoux with a date range c.140–200 A.D. The majority of the forms represented are plain: cups (Dragendorf 33) from ditch [23], bowls (Dragendorf 31) from ditch [44], Dragendorf 18/31 from

ditches [8] and [23], Dragendorf 38 from Grave [51] and Walters 79 are all represented. Two sherds from a decorated bowl of Dragendorf 37 were unstratified. This is a ‘freestyle’ bowl displaying motifs and figures in the tradition of the *Paternus/Cinnamus* workshop and dating to c.150–180 A.D. The bowl had been broken and repaired in antiquity with lead rivets. Three repair rivet holes are visible on the sherds, one still retaining part of a rivet.

Nine sherds of Oxford colour-coated ware were noted. They included five sherds of an open bowl of Young (1977) form C45, dated c.270–400 A.D., and a fragment of a folded beaker of indeterminate form but probably no earlier than c.250 A.D., from ditch [17]. A small rim sherd recovered from ditch [44] is from a beaker of indeterminate form which is also unlikely to be earlier than c.250 A.D.

The ceramic building materials

Among the 71 pieces of brick/tile examined, 7 *tegulae*, 1 *imbrex* and 2 floor tiles were noted. As with the pottery from the site, much of the tile/brick may be residual.

The pottery from the inhumations and ditches in Trench A is consistent with a late 2nd- or early 3rd-century date. No obviously later material is present but, in view of the scarcity of securely dated diagnostic forms and the likely presence of many residual sherds, a later date is possible. There was no significant variation in the types represented among the majority of the excavated features. Ditch [17] in Area B is the one exception, producing a number of later 3rd- and 4th-century forms, absent from the other features, together with much residual material.

METAL WORK by Hilary Cool

Activity in the vicinity of the villa during the 1st or 2nd century A.D. is represented by an unstratified fragment from a ‘T’-shaped copper-alloy brooch (Fig. 5). The principal category of find from this site was the hobnails that accompanied two of the inhumations. The presence of nailed shoes in the burials is not surprising as there is a marked concentration of this rite in the Dorset to Gloucestershire area, especially at rural sites (Philpott 1991, 167). As far as can be deduced from the X-radiographs, the heads often appear rounded rather than sharply pyramidal, suggesting the shoes may have been old when put in the graves. The hobnails were generally found as individual elements and so the nailing patterns cannot be reconstructed.

The shoes in Grave [40] must have been very heavily nailed given the number of hobnails that can be identified. At least 126 were found around the feet of the skeleton (Context 39) and at least 39 additional loose hobnails were recovered from the lower fill of the grave (Context 41). The hobnails have domed heads and a maximum length of 12 mm. Most survive as individual nails with the largest joined group consisting of five nails.

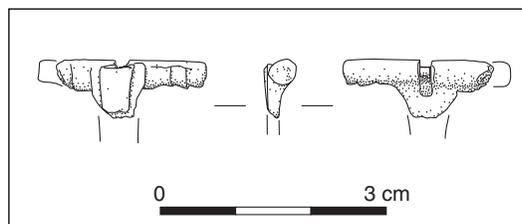


Fig. 5. Tockington Park Farm: copper-alloy brooch buckle (unstratified).

The hobnails in Grave [51] were found in two groups. Nineteen nails found around the left foot of the skeleton had both domed and pointed heads, with a maximum length of 11 mm. Two nails associated with the right foot had pointed heads and a maximum length of 9 mm. One additional hobnail, 16 mm long with a pyramidal head, could not be definitely assigned to either foot, and at least 14 loose hobnails were recovered from the fill of the grave. If the groups from around each foot each relate to one shoe, it must be doubted whether these were a pair given the disparity seen in the nailing. For a pair of shoes found in the cemetery at Poundbury, Dorset, it was suggested that some disparity might be expected because of repairs (Mills 1993, 99), but the difference seen here is so great that this explanation seems unlikely.

The only other finds of likely Roman date were nails. Examples were recovered from the fills of Graves [40], [47] and [51].

FAUNAL REMAINS by Geraldine Barber

Some 277 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the excavation. Eighteen fragments of cattle bone were identified, eight of sheep/goat, and three of horse. The assemblage was considered too small a sample to yield any useful information about the economy of the occupation associated with the cemetery.

Discussion

The date and character of the cemetery

On the basis of the pottery recovered in significant quantities from the fills of all the ditches and graves, the cemetery at Tockington Park Farm appears to date broadly from the late 2nd or early 3rd century. More precise dating has proved impossible as the majority of sherds are of relatively undiagnostic coarse wares and much of the material is likely to be residual, and for these reasons a later date cannot be ruled out. However, in view of the absence of definite 3rd-century pottery types among substantial assemblages from the graves and the adjacent ditches, this seems unlikely. Although the presence of unstratified and residual Late Iron-Age sherds indicates activity of that date in the vicinity, there is no evidence for use of the site in the earlier Roman period. Four sherds of 1st-century samian were identified, but as a fine ware this is likely to have been curated and deposited at a later date, and the absence of early Roman coarse wares is telling. The assemblage from ditch [17] in Trench B, in contrast to the other ditches in Trench A, includes many 3rd–4th-century forms, indicating that the feature represents a later extension to the enclosures, perhaps accompanying a shift in the focus of activity.

The tradition of extended inhumation appeared in Britain from the mid 2nd century and became widespread and largely displaced cremation as the dominant funerary rite during the 3rd century (Philpott 1991, 53–60). The remains from Tockington Park Farm are typical in many respects of small cemeteries associated with rural settlements that are known from this period. Although its full extent is not known, the cemetery must be assumed to continue for some distance to the south-west, and it appears to be bounded by the ditches to the north-west at least. No grave goods or unusual features in the form of burial were found to indicate any special distinctions of social status. Hobnailed shoes, with which two of the bodies were buried, commonly occur in inhumations, especially in central southern England from the late 2nd century. They do not appear to have any particular connotations of class or gender, although they are more frequent on rural sites than in towns (Philpott 1991, 165). They may simply reflect the prevalence of nailed footwear at a time when people were normally buried fully-clothed. Although none of the graves is especially deep

or elaborate, the cemetery appears to have been laid out in a careful and orderly fashion, with a relatively regular spacing of the burials suggesting above-ground markers indicated the positions of the graves. On the basis of such a small number of burials, several of them in a very fragmentary state, there is nothing to be said about the specific social status of the individuals represented.

The superimposition of Grave [47] on top of Grave [50] calls for comment since, given the regular layout of the cemetery, this is hardly likely to be accidental. Two distinct grave cuts were observed, and the body in Grave [47] was placed ≈ 0.5 m further to the north-east than that in [50]. This rules out the possibility that they were interred at the same time, but their presence in what was effectively the same grave, both on their right side, may indicate that a close relationship between the individuals concerned was being commemorated.

Burial in the Romano-British landscape

Regarding the relationship between the burials and the ditches, two possible interpretations should be considered. The graves may have been placed in an already existing feature of the landscape, with the ditched enclosures originally serving some other purpose such as paddocks for livestock or compounds for domestic settlement. Alternatively, the ditches could have been dug specifically to enclose the burials (Esmonde-Cleary 2000, 137–8).

The fact that the area covered by the ditches, as recognised by the geophysical survey, is restricted to an area no more than 60 m wide on the brow of a hill, suggests that the ditches were exclusively associated with the burials. The enclosure of Romano-British cemeteries is a consistently recurring feature in both rural and urban settings, and a number of reasons has been proposed for it. The delineation of a ritually segregated space for the purposes of burial could serve to keep the dead in their place, preventing ritual pollution or interference by the dead in the affairs of the living, but the protection of the dead against material or non-material interference from the world outside the burial ground may also have been deemed necessary. That ditches and other boundaries carried a range of culturally specific meanings beyond their mere practical utility is a commonplace assertion. In the case of Roman Britain it is illustrated by the frequency with which burials are found in ditches around settlements and fields. The liminal character of such locations would have been utilised and reinforced by such practices, whatever the specific beliefs involved. The fragments of human bone from ditch [10] may be from the remains of a burial within the ditch rather than a chance find introduced from a disturbed grave elsewhere.

The presence of significant quantities of pottery and bone in the features indicates, however, that domestic activities were taking place around the cemetery, probably before and possibly during and after it was being used for burial. Other than the graves and ditches, three ephemeral features were excavated. They may be shallow pits but they gave little clue as to their purpose. One of these, pit [21], was overlying two of the graves, and all three contained a similar range of material to that encountered in the other features. Whatever the nature of the activity represented by the finds, it can at least be assumed that the cemetery was part of an inhabited landscape and that no strong taboos prevented access to it or even its use for dumping refuse.

The villa reassessed

The location of the cemetery, in a prominent and highly visible situation on the upper slopes of a small hill overlooking the site of the villa, is a common though by no means universal one for cemeteries associated with villas, in so far as these are known and understood (Esmonde-Cleary 2000, 130–2). However, there is no evidence that it is contemporary with the villa buildings excavated by Maclean, as little evidence for the date of the villa apart from a coin of Carausius (287–293) was reported. Tockington is one of a group of 90 villas, remarkable for their number and wealth, within the territory of the Western Belgae. Although villas developed elsewhere in

the west of England from the early 2nd century, none of the villas in this area has any evidence for occupation before the late 3rd century, a fact that led Branigan (1977a) to argue that the region had been an imperial estate until this time. Todd (1989), highlighting the complexity of land ownership in the Roman Empire, points out that documentary evidence for such imperial estates is lacking and that other factors such as the existence of large private estates may account for the lack of accumulation of wealth by a villa-building class in parts of Britain.

Unless Tockington is exceptional in being much earlier than the other villas in the territory, the cemetery probably pre-dates it, with the possible exception of the extension of the enclosure to the north-east represented by ditch [17]. The settlement with which it is associated, and which the villa probably replaced, should perhaps be sought in the vicinity. It may in fact be identifiable in part as the features located by the 1995 geophysical survey to the north of the villa. Villas were seldom established in a completely empty landscape, and on sites in the region excavated with modern techniques, for instance Chew Park (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977), Gatcombe (Branigan 1977b) and Marshfield (Blockley 1989), a long sequence of activity on the site, often extending back to the pre-Roman Iron Age, can invariably be demonstrated. In many cases such a relationship with earlier settlement may be accounted for by the physical advantages of the location. Although evidence for actual continuity of occupation may be lacking, the history and associations of a site may have been relevant to the social and economic processes by which the villa landscape developed here in the late 3rd century.

WESTERLEIGH

Introduction

During archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping of the wayleave for the pipeline, a spread of stone rubble and cut features associated with Roman pottery were identified on the south-east facing slope of a small hill to the west of Westerleigh (Fig. 6). The site was previously unknown and an examination of aerial photographs of the area had given no indication of its presence. With the exception of the Roman road linking Bath and Gloucester, which is thought to have passed some 240 m to the east of the site (Margary 1973, 141), the nearest known evidence of Romano-British activity is 3.3 km to the south-east at Emerson's Green where timber buildings, ditches and inhumation burials of 2nd–4th-century date have been excavated (Parry 1996). Despite this apparent isolation, it became clear from the excavation that use of the site had continued, if sporadically, from at least the beginning of the 2nd century A.D. to the late 3rd and possibly early 4th century, and had involved the deposition of substantial quantities of pottery, quernstones and other material indicative of settlement.

Cremation Burials of the 1st–2nd Century A.D.

A group of four shallow pits containing human cremations, contexts [08], [10], [14] and [17], was excavated towards the north-east corner of the site (Fig. 7). None of the pits was more than 0.12 m deep, and the effects of plough truncation on such ephemeral features may account for some of the variation in the quantities of bone recovered. Cremation burial [08] was observed to be cutting the western edge of [10].

Three of the cremation burials contained fragments of pottery. Severn Valley ware of late 1st- or early 2nd-century date occurred in [08] and [14], while sherds of a hand-built vessel, apparently

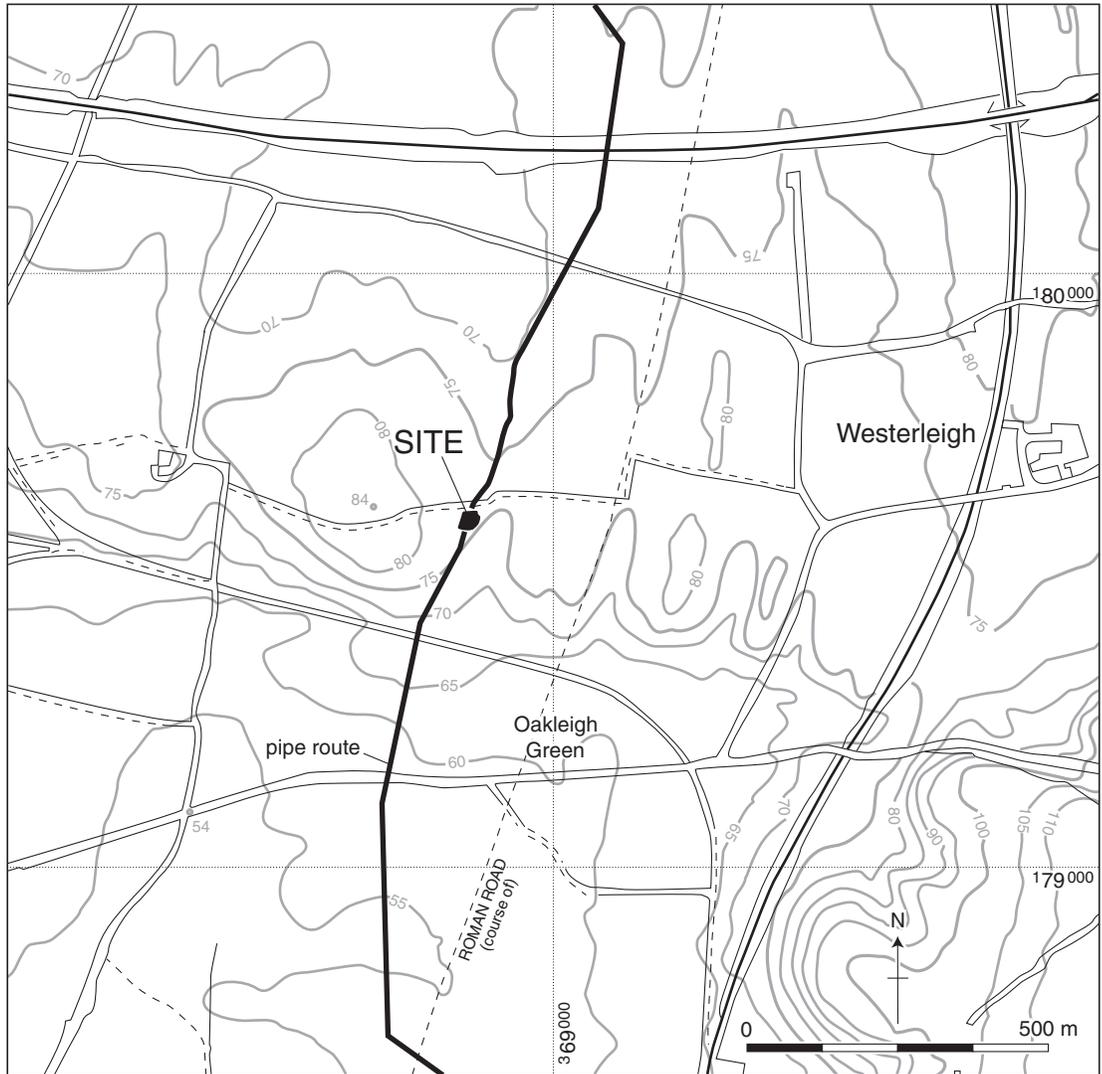


Fig. 6. Westerleigh: site location.

of mid 1st-century date, were found in [17]. Although there was no positive evidence that pottery had been deliberately deposited with the cremations, the excavator of [14] noted a large concentration at the east end of the pit, and the pot in [17] appears to be from one vessel. The only other evidence for the inclusion of pyre goods or other items associated with the funerary ritual was a cremated bone from a bird in [14].

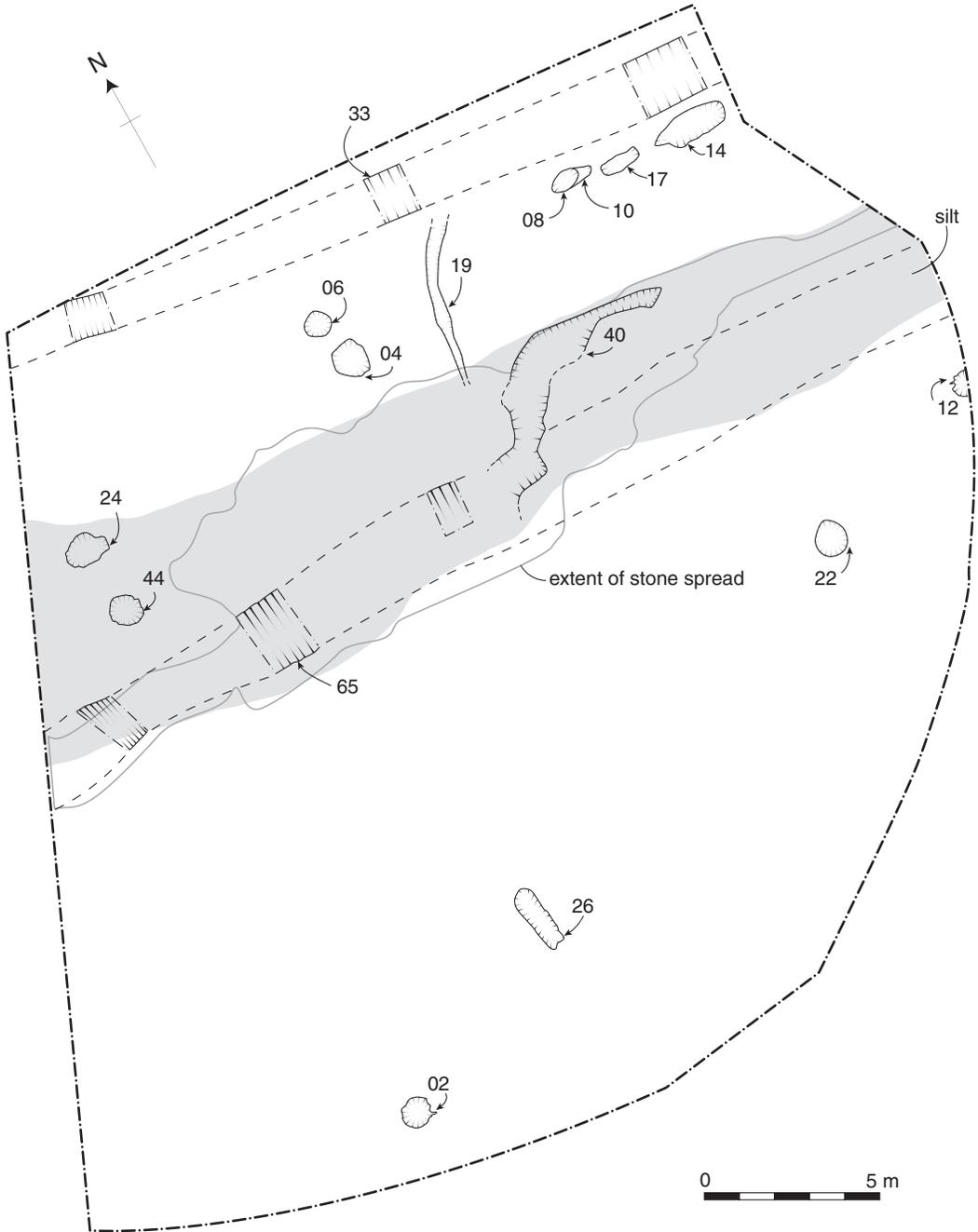


Fig. 7. Westerleigh: post-excavation site plan.

CREMATED BONE by Geraldine Barber

Context [08]

Approximately 1,000 fragments of human bone weighing 425 gm were recovered. A minimum number of one adult was estimated for this sample, with at least the upper body part (and right knee) of that person being present in the sample. Less than 20 fragments were identifiable to body part, and a more accurate age estimate was not possible.

Context [10]

Eighty-two fragments of human bone weighing 10 gm were recovered. The few fragments identifiable to body part included skull and long bone fragments. A minimum number of one adult was estimated for this sample, but it was not possible to estimate the age more accurately.

Context [14]

Approximately 5,200 fragments of bone weighing 1.9 kg in total were recovered. Fragments identifiable to body part included skull and long bone fragments, a right patella, a fibula shaft fragment, part of a sacrum, a femoral head fragment, two cervical vertebrae fragments, a metacarpal shaft and part of a phalange. From these a minimum number of one adult was estimated, although a more accurate age estimate was not possible. From the size of the patella and the femoral head the skeleton appears to be that of a female, although distortion by heat during the burning process can cause bones to shrink (McKinley and Roberts 1993) and this must be at best a tentative sex estimate.

In addition a fragment of non-human bone, part of a tarso-metatarsal bone of a bird, was also identified in this sample. The bird could not be identified to species, but was adult and approximately the size (or slightly larger than) a chicken.

Context [17]

Almost 400 fragments of human bone weighing 110 gm were recovered. Less than 10 fragments were identifiable to body part; they included long bone fragments, a skull fragment and part of a left patella. From these a minimum number of one adult was estimated.

Other 2nd-Century Activity

In the south of the site a rectangular pit [26] was excavated (Fig. 7). It had steep sides and a flat base and it was of appropriate dimensions to contain an extended inhumation, being 1.95 m long, 0.55 m wide and 0.25 m deep. Although no human remains were found within it, the distribution and orientation of groups of nails at the feature's corners suggest that it had been dug to contain a wooden box which has entirely decayed. The extreme paucity of unburnt bone found on the site as a whole, in contrast to an abundance of pottery and other finds, adds weight to the argument that poor preservation conditions have resulted in the total decay of any skeleton in this feature.

Seven other pits, [02], [04], [06], [12], [22], [24] and [44], with an apparently random distribution across the excavated area, were also excavated. Most were somewhat irregular, shallow-sided scoops similar in dimensions to the cremation burials, between 0.08 and 0.15 m deep, while [22] was a rather more substantial feature up to 0.3 m in depth. As they all contained high concentrations of charcoal and ash, prior to excavation it was thought likely that these would also contain cremations: in fact none did. Although all contained burnt material, only in [04] and [44] was the base of the pit noted as being heat-affected, and in both cases this may have been caused by the deposition of material that was still hot rather than by burning *in situ*. A layer of charcoal and burnt clay in the base of [04] was covered by a lining of flat stones, and the presence of less structured

arrangements of stones was a recurring characteristic of the other pits. All the pits were sampled and analysed for macrobotanical evidence, but the only remains identified consisted of a single charred grain of wheat (*Triticum* sp.) from [22]. Only three of the pits contained pottery, and diagnostic forms from these appear to place them somewhat later than the cremations, though perhaps earlier than the ditches discussed below: [06] and [24] produced BB1 rim forms of 2nd–early 3rd-century date, and Severn Valley ware sherds from [22] included forms that do not occur earlier than the mid 2nd century. There remains some ambiguity over the function of the pits, although the similarities between them suggest that they should be regarded as a group of related features. Since no trace of cremated bone was found in any of them, it is difficult to see them as features associated with the cremation rite like flues for helping pyres burn or pits for disposing of pyre debris (McKinley 2000; Polfer 2000).

3rd–4th-Century Ditches and Related Deposits

Two ditches, cut across the site on an east–west orientation, represent a later phase of activity. Soil layers masking these features initially hampered their recognition. The northern ditch [33] was not traced in its entirety but excavated within three sondages. It was over 1.0 m wide and at least 0.4 m deep, and the silting deposits recovered from it contained pottery of broadly mid 3rd-century date, including Oxford colour-coated and Rhenish wares and diagnostic forms of samian and BB1.

Ditch [65] was concealed beneath layers of silt and deliberately laid stone, and was identified and excavated only towards the western side of the site, where two sections proved it to be 2.0 m wide and 0.7 m deep. A third section further to the east identified the northern edge of the ditch. That it probably extends at least as far as the eastern edge of the excavation is suggested by the broad band of silty and stony deposits which overlay the ditch to the west and was recorded right across the site. In the two fully excavated sections, the lower 0.4 m of the ditch contained a silting deposit from which sherds of Severn Valley ware, samian and BB1, indicating a late 2nd-century or later date, were recovered. The upper profile of the ditch had been backfilled with a deposit consisting largely of stones, predominantly blocks of locally-occurring sandstone of various sizes, and including two quernstone fragments. This stony layer extended beyond the edges of the ditch itself to cover an area *c.*6 m wide from north to south. It also filled an irregular linear feature [40], up to 0.3 m deep, which continued for *c.*6 m to the north-east of the ditch. The pottery recovered from this deposit, and from layers of silt further to the east and west that appear to occupy a similar stratigraphic position in relation to the ditch, accounts for 82% of the stratified assemblage and is consistently of mid 3rd-century date. Two copper-alloy finds, a ring and a brooch (Fig. 8), may also have derived from these deposits.

The stone layer was recorded in some detail, in order to investigate the possibility that it derived from a collapsed structure: although linear alignments of stones were identified, these may simply have occurred as a result of packing the upper part of the ditch with stones. It is possible that the disused ditch was simply being used as a convenient place to dump stones cleared from a field as well as domestic refuse. However, the deposit may also have served a more specific purpose as a stable and well-drained surface within an area of domestic activity. Perhaps it was laid in preparation for the construction of a building to prevent subsidence into the ditch, but as ploughing of the site had caused a certain amount of truncation and disturbance to the deposits no unambiguous trace of any related structure could be identified.

A narrow gully [19], up to 0.42 m wide and 0.13 m deep, also contained quantities of pottery of late 2nd- or 3rd-century date. As its stratigraphic relationship to ditch [33] was obscured and its southward extent was unclear — the feature becoming progressively shallower before petering

out — its position in the chronology of the site is unclear. An association with the ditches and the stone deposit accords with the dating evidence and the character of the feature, which may be a drainage gully or a footing for a fence.

The Finds

Pottery, a total of 3,576 sherds, constituted the bulk of the finds from the site. Two fragments of rotary quernstones made from red sandstone were found amongst the stone rubble deposits overlying ditch [65]: these were both from upper stones 400 mm in diameter and up to 50 mm thick, with remnants of shallow hoppers surrounding the central eye. The commonest metal finds were fragments of iron nails: eleven were recovered from pit [26] and single examples from other features including gully [19], ditch [33] and the stone surfacing. Other undiagnostic finds from the site included a large rove (a metal plate for the attachment of a rivet), small fragments of copper-alloy and lead-alloy sheet and a fragment of lead-alloy rod. A copper-alloy brooch and a ring were recorded as unstratified finds, but probably derive from the stony deposit across the site.

POTTERY by Mark Corney

The earliest evidence for use of the site is a small group of sherds from cremation burial [17]. They are in a hand-made fabric of pre-conquest type but the form, a developed bead-rim jar, is a post-conquest type and probably dates to the period *c.*50–80 A.D.

Local coarse wares belonging to the Severn Valley ware tradition (Webster 1976) dominate the assemblage, accounting for 60% of the stratified pottery. South-east Dorset black-burnished ware (BB1) only accounts for 7% of the total. This low percentage is at variance with the regional average of *c.*20% (Allen and Fulford 1996) and may be of chronological significance.

Although classic later Roman BB1 forms, notably everted rim jars, straight-sided bowls and drop-flange bowls (see Woodward *et al.* 1993 for the full type series) are present, fine ware products of the Oxford and New Forest industries (Fulford 1975; Young 1977) are very few, comprising only six sherds in the entire stratified assemblage. These fine wares, and local shell-tempered coarse wares, should be present in some quantity if activity was continuing into the 4th century A.D. The rarity of these fine wares is significant in chronological terms and, when viewed with the absence of later mortarium types, strongly suggests that occupation does not extend much beyond the beginning of the 4th century.

The assemblage contains a number of late samian ware forms such as Dragendorf 44/Walters 81 and Walters 79/Ludowici T1, which are generally products of the East Gaulish industries and consequently unusual in western Britain. The presence of these forms in conjunction with 'Rhenish' wares imported from eastern Gaul and the Rhineland (Symonds 1992) may indicate a link (perhaps via the Severn Estuary) with the Rhineland in the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries A.D. It is possible that an unusual wall-sided mortarium form from the stone surfacing may also originate from the same region.

BROOCH AND RING by Hilary Cool

Two unstratified finds, shown in Fig. 8, are diagnostic and can be closely dated. The brooch is an example of a large clumsy form with a distribution centred on Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset (Hull type 138, Hattatt 1987). Mackreth (1982, 58, no. 23) notes dated examples which would suggest

that this was a 2nd-century form. When complete, it would have had a head loop and would probably have appeared very similar to an example from the temple at Nettleton, Wiltshire (Wedlake 1982, no. 48, fig. 53), though the head plate was probably concave-sided rather than triangular.

The finger-ring has the typical simple expanded form of the 1st to 3rd centuries and is set with a moulded glass bezel of a common Romano-British type thought to be based on radiate coinage (Henig 1974, 164). Such bezels are often found set in rings of this form, or in the 3rd-century variety with side flanges exemplified by a recent find from Headbourne Worthy, Hampshire (Denford 1997, 177). A 3rd-century date may thus be suggested for the ring. Its presence is a further example of the spread to the rural peasantry of the Roman habit of using intaglios (Henig 1974).

Catalogue

Plate-headed bow brooch (Fig. 8, left). Copper alloy. Damaged head plate with vestigial wings; hinge casing behind wings retaining iron hinge bar and stump of pin. Bow tapering to wide projecting foot (damaged) and hollowed at back in upper part; upper bow has horizontal rib with diagonal nicks and pair of prominent vertical ribs below; lower bow plain with truncated triangular section; upper and lower bow divided by 3 transverse ribs with concavity above. Foot plate broken. Present length 77 mm; width wings 23 mm.

Finger-ring (Fig. 8, right). Copper alloy. 'D'-sectioned hoop expanding to bezel; back of hoop missing. Bezel set with oval light-green glass intaglio with moulded impression of standing figure. Present width 26 mm, bezel 14 × 11 mm.

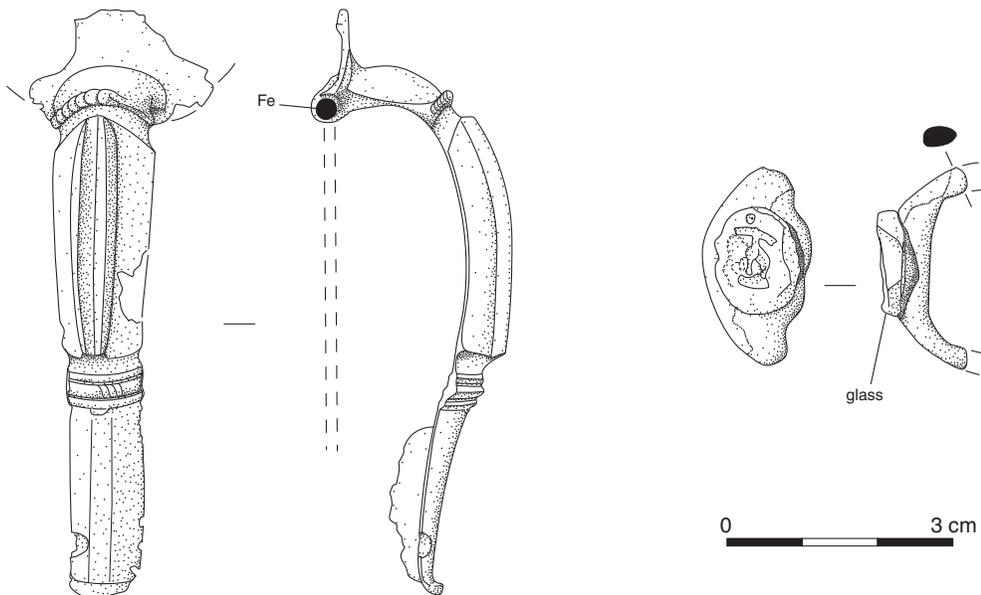


Fig. 8. Westerleigh: brooch and ring (unstratified).

Faunal Remains and Environmental Evidence

With the exception of the cremated bird bone from [14], only 16 fragments of animal bone were recovered from the whole site. The only remains identifiable to species were four cattle bones from the stone layer (Barber 2001). This lack of faunal remains appears to be a result of poor preservation conditions rather than past activity. Charred plant remains were also very scarce, occurring in only two out of 16 bulk samples taken, despite the presence of charcoal in most of the contexts sampled, particularly the pit features (McGill 2001, 221).

Discussion

The small area excavated within the pipeline wayleave has revealed only part of an area of activity which is undoubtedly much more extensive. Use of the site has been shown to extend at least from the late 1st to the mid 3rd century A.D., though perhaps with interruptions and changes in the nature of occupation. At least two phases are represented. The identification of groups of contemporary, associated features is hampered by a relative lack of stratigraphic relationships and closely datable finds, but a change of use between the 2nd- and 3rd-century phases can perhaps be distinguished.

Early use of the site, in the late 1st and/or early 2nd century A.D., comprised the deposition of the cremation burials and may have been largely associated with funerary ritual, inasmuch as no features of a different character can be definitely associated with them. Unenclosed and unaccompanied cremation burials occur in both urban and rural cemeteries in use from the 1st to 4th centuries, often associated with cremation burials with accompanying grave goods or with inhumation burials which gradually displace cremations as the dominant rite from the late 2nd century onwards (Philpott 1991, 53–60). In south-west England, unaccompanied cremation burials are known to occur singly or in small groups within or close to settlements, as at Herriott's Bridge and Ben Bridge (Rahtz and Greenfield 1977) and Sea Mills (Bennett 1985). The lack of elaboration in such burials, shallow and lacking grave goods, does not necessarily indicate low status, as the symbolic focus in the mortuary ritual was most likely to be on the cremation itself, and the subsequent burial of the remains may have been little more than an afterthought (McKinley 2000). The presence of an extended inhumation in a wooden coffin may represent a continuation of the funerary associations of the site, or it may be broadly contemporary with the cremations, as the use of coffins was widespread by the later 2nd century. It is difficult to tell, from the area exposed, whether we are dealing here with a more extensive cemetery or with a small group of burials in a settlement context.

Later occupation, in the 3rd or 4th century, is characteristic of rural settlement, with the large quantities of pottery recovered from the ditches and the stone deposit indicating the proximity of domestic activity. The complexity of the evidence suggests that this was of considerable duration, as the backfilling of ditch [65] indicates a change in the layout of the site and gully [19] seems to be unrelated to the two ditches, [33] and [65], and to represent a different phase. The function of the shallow pits and their position in the chronology of the site are unclear. The proximity of the Roman road may be relevant to the location of the site, although it seems more likely to be one of the small rural settlements which, as archaeological work on the route of the M5 motorway (Fowler 1976; 1977) has shown, were densely distributed in the countryside of the Roman West Country.

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