



ST ALBANS & HERTFORDSHIRE  
Architectural & Archaeological Society

This article has been republished with kind permission of  
Prof. Martin Biddle.

[www.stalbanshistory.org](http://www.stalbanshistory.org)

April 2015

# Colne Valley, near Hamper Mills, Watford

BY MARTIN BIDDLE

## I. THE ROMAN SITE AT HAMPER MILLS

DURING excavation for ballast at Hamper Mills in 1930 Dr. Norman Davey noted the destruction of a Roman building (Fig. 1, Site 1) and later published some of the large amount of pottery recovered.<sup>1</sup> The pottery there described has a final date at the end of the second century A.D.

After the publication of these finds further pottery was recovered including the CASTUS mortarium stamp (Fig. 2, 41).

During 1950 and early 1951 it was noticed by the writer, together with Messrs. L. H. Barfield and A. R. Millard, that erosion of the east bank of the ballast pit (now a lake) by flooding had revealed various features of Roman and pre-Roman date (Fig. 1, Site 3). The first of these, Pit A, 133 yd. north of Site 1, was a shallow scoop, about 2 1/2 ft. deep and 15 ft. across, full of dark earth which contained much pottery (Fig. 2, 1-29) and two brooches (Fig. 4, 1-2), together with some bones. There was no sign of any stratification in the fill. The pottery falls into two very definite groups: native or "Belgic" wares, and Roman wares, the latter being in the majority. The earliest pottery dates to the last quarter of the first century A.D.; the latest sherds are Hadrian-Antonine in date. Native wares are mixed indiscriminately throughout the fill, and, unless the contents of this pit are derived from an already mixed deposit, this would seem to suggest at least a localized survival of native wares into the mid-second century. The Samian pottery, such as it is, agrees well with the date of the coarse pottery.

<sup>1</sup> *St. Albans and Herts. Archit. and Arch. Soc. Trans.*, 1931, 137-40. See also *London and Middx. Arch. Soc. Trans.*, 1936, N.S. VII, iii: "Some Earthworks of North-West Middlesex," by Hugh Braun. The building was sited at National Grid Ref. TQ/097941. The writer is most grateful to Dr. Norman Davey for discussion of, and visits to, the various sites, for the loan of notes, and for the drawings in Fig. 3. Thanks are also due to Mr. Alan Millard for help with the field-work, for loan of finds and for discussion of the sites, and to Mr. Wilfred Shawcross for drawing Figs. 1 and 4.

Twenty-three yd. north of Pit A was a trace of a further pit, B, and 15 yd. north of that traces of another pit, C. Both of these had been almost entirely destroyed by erosion and ballast excavation. Pit C yielded two sherds of Samian, Form 18/31, Domitian-Trajan in date.

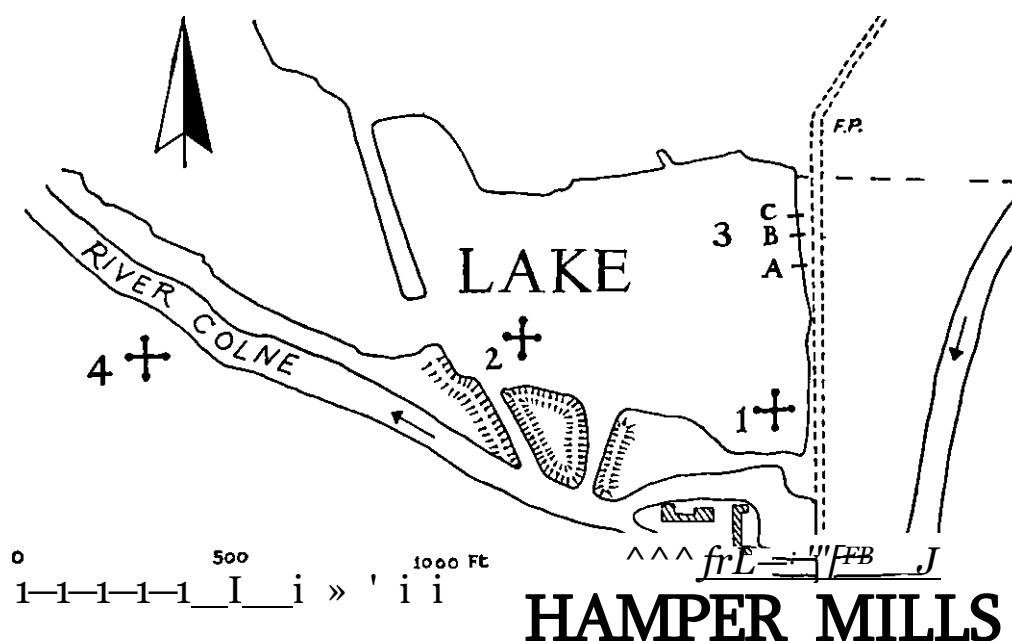


FIG. 1. THE AREA ROUND HAMPER MILLS, SHOWING SITES 1-4.

North of Pit C, extending as far as the north-east corner of the lake, was a layer of brown soil, about 3 ft. thick towards the north. This contained the flue-box tile (p. 81), two second-century mortarium rims (Fig. 2, 38-39), the quern (p. 81) and a number of tile fragments, which may indicate the proximity of another building, probably to the east. Under this brown soil was a thick layer of clay which was only observed in section. It contained only native "Belgic" pottery (Fig. 2, 30-37). This, together with a partially destroyed burnt clay area, possibly a hearth, on its north side (also associated with Belgic pottery including a Belgic-Claudian rim) probably represents an area of purely native occupation, pre- or early Roman in date.

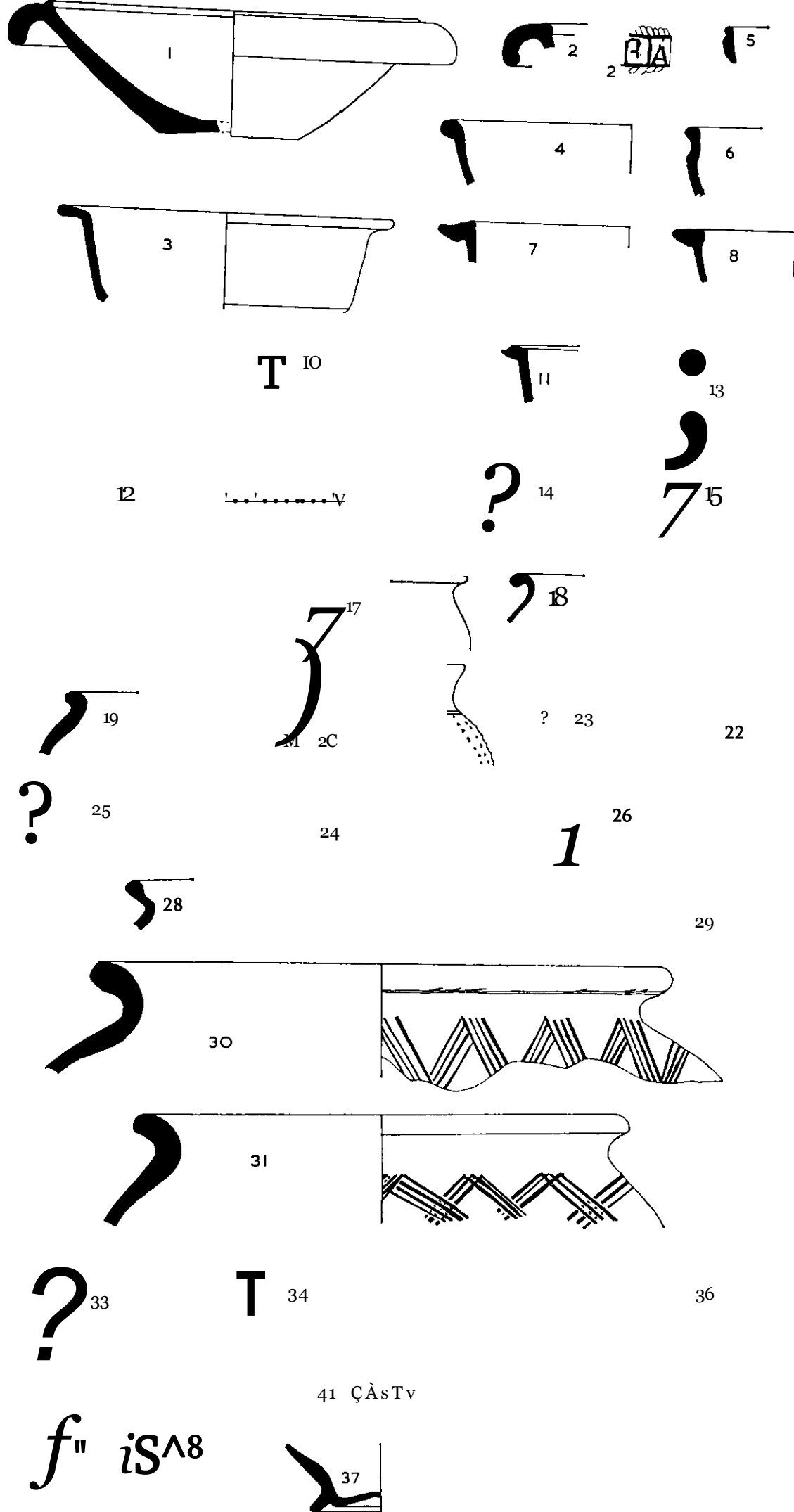


FIG. 2. POTTERY (p. 82) FROM SITE 3. 1-29 FROM PIT A. 30-37 FROM THE BELGIC AREA. 38-41, MISCELLANEOUS. (ALL 1/4.)

Under this Belgic area, right in the corner of the present lake, were traces of a deep pit, or channel, full of very black soil with animal bones, wood remains and pottery. This may indicate an earlier course of the Colne: when the fields to the east of the lake are flooded the first area to be submerged, and the last to clear, is a strip 15 to 20 ft. wide, running due east to the Colne from the north-east corner of the lake. This may indicate the line of a former watercourse (broken line on plan, Fig. 1).

In the summer of 1951 the late Mr. B. H. St. J. O'Neil visited the site, together with Dr. Norman Davey, and pointed out the line of a possible trackway in the field east of the lake. This area may well contain further remains and might give a clue to the purpose of the building destroyed in 1930.

Since the site lies on a trackway at a crossing of the Colne<sup>2</sup> it may well have grown up as a settlement around a ford.

It seems therefore that romanised occupation began in the mid- to late first century A.D. on the site of a slightly earlier Belgic settlement. The reason for the desertion of the site towards the end of the second century (a few small sherds of Castor ware, first appearing in this area in post-Antonine times, came from the area of the 1930 building) is not so clear. A solution may appear from the results of the excavation of the Roman building on Moor Park Golf Course.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE SMALL FINDS

*Objects of Bronze* (Fig. 4, 1-2).

1. Penannular bronze brooch, presumably second century. From Pit A.

2. Bronze brooch with head-stud and hinged pin. Decorated with blue enamel. An example of Collingwood's Group Q (*Arch. of Roman Brit.*, 1930, Chap. XV). Second century A.D. From Pit A.

There were several other small bronze fragments from Pit A.

<sup>2</sup> See note i above.

<sup>3</sup> Excavated on behalf of the Merchant Taylors' School Archaeological Society, 1956-57, by Mr. Alan Millard.

### *Objects of Iron.*

A few nails of square section with flat heads came from Pit A.

### *Glass.*

A foot-ring of blue-green glass came from Pit A and a ribbed handle of blue-green glass (probably-second century) from the topsoil.

### *Flints.*

A number of worked flints occurred in the Belgic and Roman levels, including Pit A. These should be compared with the flints from the Park Street villa (*Arch. J.*, CII, 63) and include a very rough-worked, thick point; whole and fragmentary blades and flakes, some retouched or utilised; and a small blade-core with a double striking platform.

### *Patterned Fuel Tiles.*

Mr. A. W. G. Lowther, F.S.A., has most kindly examined these and reports that one piece is from his Group I (W-Chevron), Die No. 5, and that the other, which is possibly a tessera cut from a flue tile, may be of Die 4.

### *Quern.*

Fragment of the lower stone of a rotary quern. Unstratified. Mrs. J. E. Morey of the Geological Survey and Museum, kindly examined this and reports that the specimen is similar to the millstone grits (of Carboniferous Age) in the Midlands and North of England, which have been and are used extensively for millstones and querns.

### *Flora and Fauna.*

Pit A contained charcoals of hazel, oak and ash, which were kindly examined by Mr. George Taylor, Keeper of Botany, British Museum (Nat. Hist.).

The same pit contained the incomplete lower jaw and molar-tooth of an ox, the molar-tooth of a sheep or goat and a fragment of the upper jaw of a pig. These were kindly identified by Dr. F. C. Fraser; Keeper, Department of Zoology, British Museum (Nat. Hist.).

*The Samian Pottery.*

The Samian pottery was all very broken and only one very small decorated sherd was recovered from Pit A, possibly of form 37. One fragment of a potter's stamp occurred: /CA. The forms represented in Pit A are: ?18, 18/31, 27, 31, 33, and 36. The occurrence of form 27 indicates a date prior to c. A.D. 150. The examples of form 18 were doubtful; the series thus probably begins with the Domitian-Trajan 18/31.

## THE COARSE POTTERY

## REFERENCE TO ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Brockley Hill, 1951</i>	P. G. Suggett, "Report on the Excavations at Brockley Hill, Middlesex," <i>London and Middx. Arch. Soc. Trans.</i> , N.S. XI, 173 ff.
<i>Camulodunum</i>	C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, <i>Camulodunum</i> , Res. Comm. Report, Soc. Ants. Lond. XIV (1947).
<i>Canterbury, 1945</i> <i>Jewry Wall ..</i>	Audrey Williams, <i>Roman Canterbury</i> , No. 3. K. M. Kenyon, <i>Jewry Wall, Leicester</i> , Res. Comm. Reports, Soc. Ants. Lond., XV (1948).
<i>Lockleys</i>	J. B. Ward Perkins, <i>Antiq. J.</i> , XVIII (1938), 339 ff.
<i>Ospringe</i>	W. Whiting, <i>et alii Excavation ...at Ospringe</i> , Res. Comm. Report, Soc. Ants. Lond., VIII (1931).
<i>Park Street ..</i> <i>Richborough IV</i>	H. E. O'Neil, <i>Arch. J.</i> , CII (1945), 21 ff. J. P. Bushe-Fox, <i>Richborough</i> , Res. Comm. Report, Soc. Ants. Lond., XVI (1949).
<i>Verulamium ..</i>	R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, <i>Verulamium</i> , Res. Comm. Report, Soc. Ants. Lond., XII (1936).
<i>Verulamium Kiln</i> <i>Verulamium 1949</i>	P. Corder, <i>Antiq. J.</i> , XXI (1941), 271 ff. M. A. Cotton, <i>St. Albans' Archit. and Arch. Soc. Trans.</i> (1953), 13 ff.
<i>Atkinson: Wroxeter</i>	D. Atkinson, <i>Wroxeter, 1923-27</i> (1942).

PIT A (Fig. 2, 1-29).

1. Mortarium of coarse cream ware. The bead rises above the rim. Cf. *Richborough IV*, Pl. XCV, 501, 502, c. A.D. 50-100.

2. Mortarium of hard cream ware, with a flattened bead rising above the rim. Stamped ATEI [*retro.*, impressed vertically downwards. This is the stamp of the potter who signed himself ATEPO on a pot from *Verulamium* (Pit VI), Fig. 31, 38.

3. Pie Dish of hard black ware. Broad rim, chamfer at base. Cf. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 19, 4 and p. 81. The general type is common at the beginning of the second century, but this example is most closely paralleled at Caerleon (*Arch.* LXXVIII, Pl. 19, 9) where it is dated to the Flavian period.

4. Pie Dish of blue-grey ware with roll rim. A common Antonine type. Cf. *Verulamium*, Fig. 33, 51.

5. Dish in hard white ware. A derivative of a Belgic form. Cf. *Brockley Hill*, 1951, Fig. 4, 34-35. Late first century.

6. Dish of coarse red ware of native type. An early form of the bead rim dish. Cf. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 20, 10 and p. 86. Second century.

7. Reeded rim bowl in hard dark grey ware. Well defined moulding. The outer edge of the flange is lower than the inner part of the rim. This is a feature

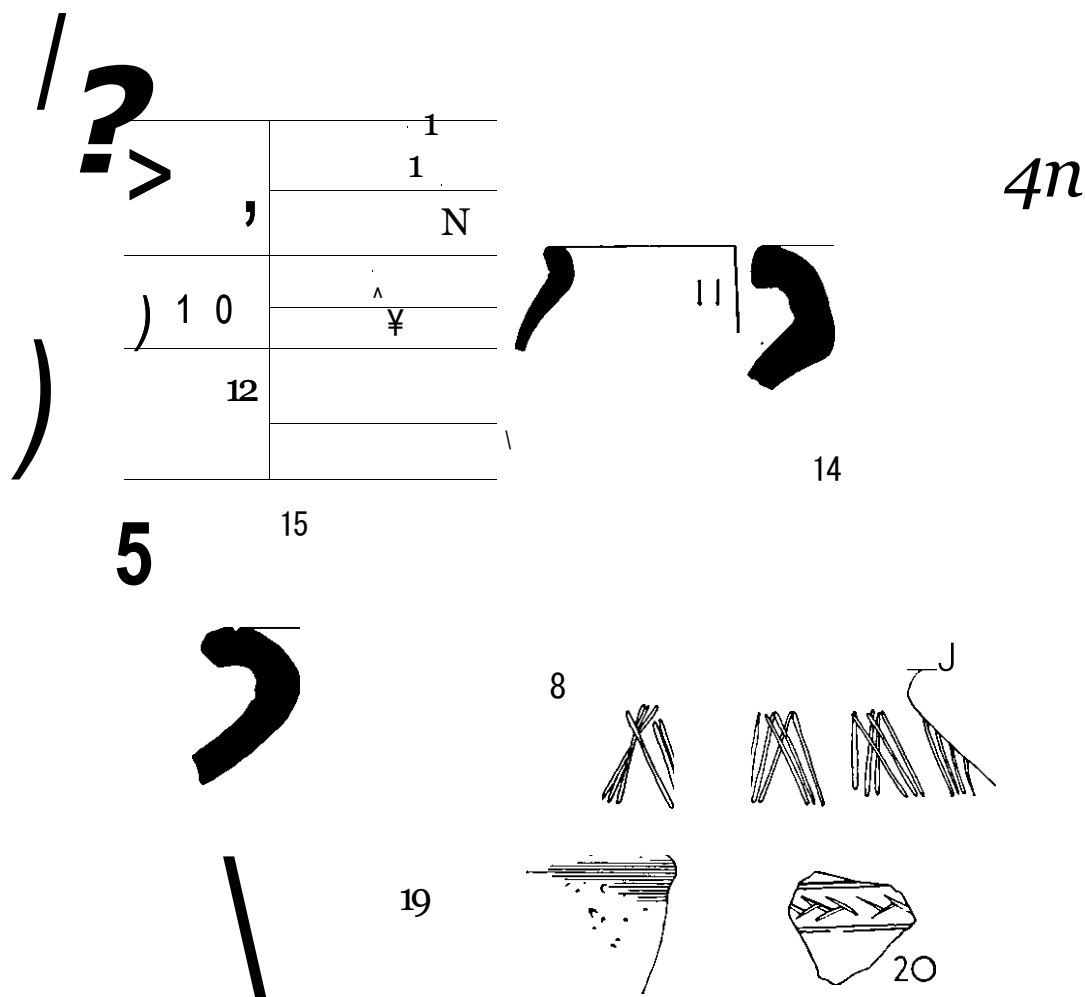


FIG. 3. POTTERY FROM BELGIC AREA AT SITE 2. (1-N, 13-20) AND FROM SANDY LODGE GOLF COURSE, SITE 5 (12). (ALL 1/4.)



of the reeded bowls from this site, but does not appear to be common elsewhere with this type of rounded flange section, except at Verulamium, though it is normal with the rectangular rim forms of Flavian bowls. Cf. *Verulamium*, Fig. 35, 69. Late first century—Hadrianic.

8. Reeded rim bowl similar to No. 7 but with less well defined moulding and flange level with rim. Cf. *Verulamium*, Fig. 35, 71. Hadrianic.

9. Reeded rim bowl of hard grey ware. Well moulded. Cf. *Verulamium Kiln*, Fig. 2. Hadrian-Antonine.

10. Reeded rim bowl of hard blue-cream ware. Twisted in firing. Cf. *Park Street*, Fig. 17, 8. Hadrian-Antonine.

11. Reeded rim bowl of soft, dark grey ware, prominent central ridge. Not a common type. Probably early second century. For centre of flange forming rim, cf. in general *Verulamium*, 1949, Fig. 6, 12.

12. Necked jar of greyish-brown ware with red-brown exterior, decorated with impressed broken vertical lines. A common type at Verulamium. Cf. *Verulamium*, 1949, Fig. 6, 23, 24, and p. 70 for a full discussion of this type. First quarter of second century.

13. Necked jar of hard, dark grey, Belgic ware. Cf. *Lockleys*, Fig. 8, 41, 42 and p. 362. Mid-first century A.D.

14. Necked jar of hard reddish-brown ware in the Belgic tradition. Cf. No. 13 above.

15. Necked jar of hard cream ware. Common at Verulamium. Cf. in general *Verulamium*, Fig. 31, 41. Hadrian-Antonine.

16. Necked bowl of grey ware with white slip on exterior.

17. Jar of hard cream ware with rolled over rim. Cf. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 27, 51. Early second century A.D.

18. Everted rim jar of hard grey ware. Rolled over, but badly twisted in firing. Cf. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 27, 53. Mid-to-late second century A.D.

19. Bead-rim jar of black Belgic ware. Cf. *Camulodunum*, p. 269, Form 259. A.D. 10-65.

20. Poppyhead beaker of grey ware. Cf. *Verulamium*, Fig. 31, 39. Second quarter of second century.

21. Poppyhead beaker rim of grey ware.

22. Rim of either a necked jar or possibly a poppy-head beaker. Grey ware.

23. Rim of a small jar or beaker. Grey ware with white slip on exterior. A late first century type. *Jewry Wall*, Fig. 27, type B.

24. Small pot of hard buff-cream ware. Similar to *Verulamium*, Fig. 30, 31. A.D. 120-160.

25. Jar of hard grey ware. Cf. *Ospringe*, Pl. XLIII, 520. A.D. 150-190.

26. Storage jar in cream ware, fired grey on exterior. Square rolled-over rim.

27. Storage jar in hard cream grey ware similar to No. 24.

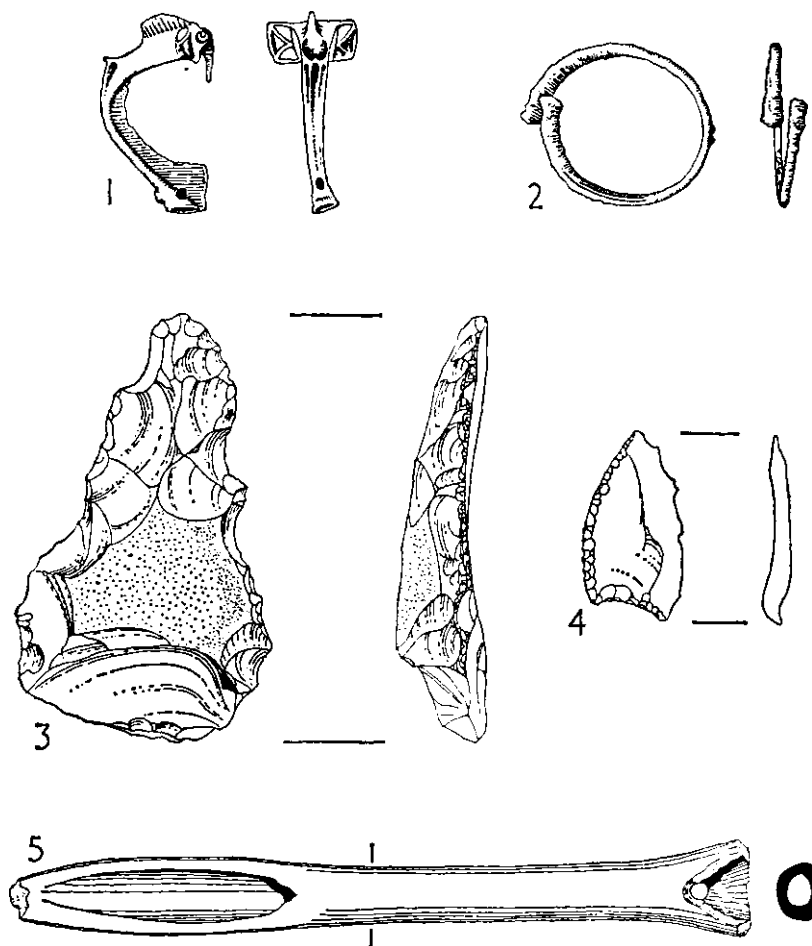


FIG. 4. OBJECTS OF BRONZE (NOS. 1-2, SITE 3, PIT A), FLINT (NO. 3 SITE 4, No. 4, SITE 5) AND BONE (NO. 5, SITE 4). (ALL 1/4.)

28. Storage jar in soft grey ware, with a rebate for a lid. Cf. *Canterbury*, 1945, Fig. 5, 4. This example has less well defined moulding and is probably earlier.

29. Lid of coarse, soapy, black Belgic ware.

The pottery from Pit A also included part of a "Belgic" tazza of soft reddish ware.

POTTERY FROM THE BELGIC AREA (Fig. 2, 30-37) (p. 79).

30. Rim of a very large storage jar. Diameter 13 in. Reddish soapy ware, blackened in places on exterior. Badly flaked inside. Cross hatch-line decoration. Found in the clay layer.

31. Similar to above but much finer ware and more carefully made. Cf. *Lockleys*, Fig. 7, 29.

32. Bowl of coarse soapy black ware. Cf. *Park Street*, Fig. 16, 17. Before A.D. 60.

33. Jar of pinkish buff ware. Grey core. Similar to *Park Street*, Fig. 16, 14, but the rim is here less rolled over.

34. Small jar of fine soapy brown ware. Carefully moulded rim. Similar to *Park Street*, Fig. 16, 2, but not certainly cordoned.

35. Jar of fairly hard black ware. Rolled over rim.

36. Bowl of slightly soapy black ware with reddish-brown exterior. Wide groove under rim.

37. Base of a well made jar of sandy brown ware with some large grits. Well-defined central kick.

MISCELLANEOUS POTTERY FROM THE SITE (Fig. 2, 38-41).

38. Mortarium of cream ware with double-beaded rim and down-rolled flange. This type is not always late and is found at Brockley Hill in the early second century. *Brockley Hill*, 1951, Fig. 4, M.6.

39. Similar to above but exterior face of flange is not rounded.

40. Mortarium of cream ware, badly abraded. Single-beaded rim. Probably the same date as Nos. 38, 39.

41. Mortarium stamp on typical hook-rim mortarium. "CASTUS" impressed vertically downwards. A simpler version of this stamp than usual. Cf. *V.C.M. Herts.*, IV, pp. 159-162. Late first-early second century.

The pottery from the site also included three fragments of Castor ware from the area near the building found in 1930. This ware begins to appear in this region in post-Antonine times.

## II. A BELGIC SITE NEAR HAMPER MILLS

In 1930, during the destruction of the Roman building noted above, Dr. Norman Davey recovered from the grab at Site 2 (Fig. 1) a group of Belgic pottery. Fragments of pointed wooden stakes were also found indicating some wooden structure.

The pottery (Fig. 3, 1-20) was apparently all of coarse, gritty, greyish-black ware. It consisted mainly of two types: jars with beaded rims (1-5, 7-9, 11) and larger pots with heavy rolled-out rims (13-18). There is one possibly globular pot (6) with a series of very light horizontal scorings. No. 13 is part of a narrow-mouthed jar and No. 19 is a simple open bowl. The herring-bone decoration on No. 20 was fairly common on the pottery of Belgic type from Site 3 and the heavy storage jar (18) was also closely paralleled on the latter site.

Bead-rim pots were very rare in Belgic Verulamium (Wheeler, *Verulamium*, 171, Fig. 21, 66a and b) and their occurrence here would seem to date this group after the Claudian invasion. The lack of romanised wares on the other hand probably precludes a date after c. A.D. 75.

## III. FINDS FROM THE MERCHANT TAYLORS' SCHOOL RIFLE RANGE, 1954

During the construction of a 0-303 rifle range at Site 4 in 1954 (Fig. 1) a mixed collection of material was recovered from layers of gravel and other material laid down by various movements of the Colne. The lowest level, which was of dirty brown gravel with organic remains, was lying on chalk and sealed by nearly 4 ft. of deposit. It contained a bone gouge (Fig. 4, 5) of Early Iron Age A-type (cf. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle*, Pl. XXXIV, 3), a sherd of Roman pottery, an antler and bones of *Bos sp.*, moderate size, cf. a modern Guernsey cow; *Equus sp.*, pony, cf. Welsh Cob; *Cervus Elaphus*, red deer.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Mr. E. S. Higgs for these identifications.

The lowest level also contained a roughly triangular flint-flake tool (Fig. 4, 3) mostly unifacial but with some working on the main flake surface near the bulb of percussion. It retains some of its original cortex. The broad flake scar at the base of the dorsal surface is of a more recent date than the remainder of the flaking.

Clay pipes and Roman pottery occurred in the upper levels to a depth of just over 2 ft. All these finds are clearly redeposited and result from changes in the course of the Colne over the width of its flood-plain.

#### IV. FINDS FROM SANDY LODGE GOLF COURSE

From 1950 to 1955 a watch was kept on the bunkers of Sandy Lodge Golf Course (Site 5). This produced a number of finds ranging from Mesolithic to late medieval in date.

In 1911 a flagon of red ware with wide five-ringed mouth, double-ribbed handle and oblate spheroidal body was found 100 yd. east of the golf house. Later a copper coin of Faustina, wife of Antoninus Pius, was found close by.

Obv. DIVA FAUSTINA. Head of Faustina.

Rev. Temple with statue of Faustina.

S.C. AETERNITAS below.

In 1929 the excavation of a large bunker in the north-east corner of the Course produced pottery and tiles including mortaria fragments and a jar of "native" orange ware with rising rim and cordoned shoulder (Fig. 12, 3).<sup>5</sup>

A map marked with the individual find spots and details is in the possession of the Archaeology Branch, Ordnance Survey, but here it will suffice to note the main classes of finds. All the finds, except one late medieval glazed tile, came from the northern half of the golf course where the soil is very sandy. To the south it turns suddenly to clay.

A miscellaneous collection of flints was recovered including one typical Mesolithic axe, one narrow-backed blade (Clark's category B.1), one rod-form

<sup>5</sup> *Antiq. J.*, X, 1930, 253; *J.B.A.A.*, n.s. XXXV, 1929, 293.

(Clark B.2), a number of scrapers, some broken blades and flakes and one *petit tranchet* derivative (Fig. 4, 4) of Clark's class F (*Arch. J.*, XCI, p. 36-7, Fig. 2 and p. 51, Fig. 10, 37) which may be of secondary Neolithic date. Some of the flints may also be Bronze Age.

One fragment of a Late Bronze-Age or Early Iron-Age vessel with an applied cordon decorated with finger-tip impressions, showing marks of the nails, made of grey-brown ware with many large white grits, was found near the centre of the Course. Small featureless Early Iron-Age sherds came from all over the course and Romano-British pottery occurred in several places, but especially in the north-east of the course, where it was mainly of second century date.

A small medieval site, possibly a hut area of fifteenth century date, was identified about 130 yd. east of the Club House.