A Romano-British rural site at Eaton Socon, Cambridgeshire

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Excavations at Priors Gate, Eaton Socon, recorded Romano-British field-systems, enclosures and at least one droveway. Other features included a large number of quarry pits, as well as two ring gullies and a small rectangular enclosure, the latter probably shelters or windbreaks rather than evidence for settlement. Two irregular pits are interpreted as shallow watering holes. Activity spans the late 1st to 4th century AD, with a notable concentration in the late 2nd to early 3rd centuries. The distribution of pottery and animal bone suggests that a small rural settlement lay to the south of the excavated area. From the Flavian period onwards, this settlement was involved with small-scale mixed farming. Following a reorganisation of the landscape in the 2nd century, large enclosures appear to have functioned as part of a 'producer site', concerned mostly with stock rearing to provision more distant, less rural settlements. Animals consumed locally, particularly sheep and cattle, would have supplied secondary products including wool and milk for many years before slaughter.

Introduction

Priors Gate was excavated by Wessex Archaeology between December 2000 and February 2001. The site (TL 1680 5810) is located at the junction of the A45 and B1428, immediately south of the village of Eaton Socon, and about 2.5km south-west of St Neots town centre (Fig. 1). It lies within the valley of the River Great Ouse and is situated *c.*1.2km west of a bend in the river. A small stream, the Colmworth Brook, runs to the north of the site. The excavation is located on the third gravel terrace of the Great Ouse, at a height of *c.*18m OD, and the site itself is relatively flat. Geological deposits in the area consist of river terrace gravel interbedded with coarse fluvial sand overlying Oxford Clay.

A previous archaeological investigation *c.*20m to the east of the site (Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust 1999) produced evidence of probable Late Iron Age/Romano-British features and finds, including a number of pits and postholes. Nineteenth-century disturbance was also noted, in the form of pitting and dumped material. The Great Ouse valley is well known for evidence of the Romano-British rural landscape (see Discussion, below).

This report is designed to provide an accessible account of the results of the excavation. Full supporting specialist reports and data tables are available in the project archive and published on the web (see Internet reports, below). Selected pottery is illustrated and listed in Appendix 1 (Figs 8–10).

Site Phasing

Two possible Mesolithic/Neolithic worked flints and a further 36 fragments of probable Bronze Age date were recovered (Court, Internet report) hinting at some prehistoric activity, but all were found in later deposits. Five phases of Romano-British activity were identified (Fig. 2) through a combination of stratigraphic information and pottery dating (Discussion, below). Pottery fabric distribution by period is set out in Appendix 2. Most phases probably represent relatively short periods of time, and the latest reflects a specific event of ditch cutting. All Romano-British features referred to in this report are identified by context in Figure 3. The most intensive activity was in the central part of the site and dated mainly from the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD. In this central zone, within and between the ditched enclosures were remains of possible structures, pits and a watering hole. A droveway tapered slightly to the north, in the direction of the Colmworth Brook (above) and may have provided a means of corralling animals and driving them in the direction of water. A further watering hole was identified in the centre of the eastern enclosure.

A single intrusive Saxon sherd came from a ditch fill, its fabric comparable with early to middle Saxon (5th–7th centuries AD) material invariably found in small quantities in the upper fills of earlier features located within the Cambourne new town development area (Wessex Archaeology 2003) and at Eynesbury (Mepham 2004, 53–73). Post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation was recorded, particularly in the western part of the site, (not illustrated), although this had

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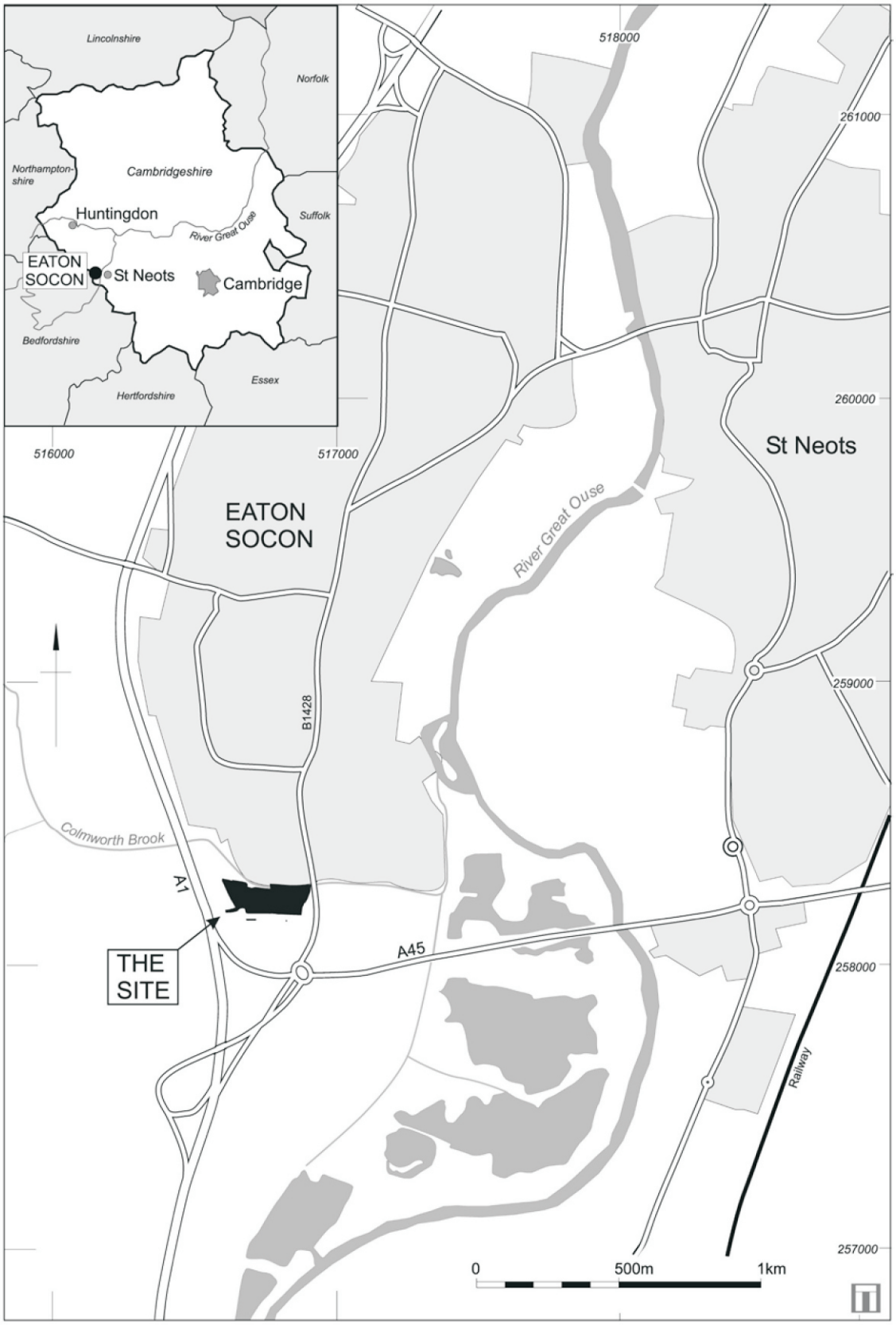

Figure 1. *Site location. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright 100028190.*

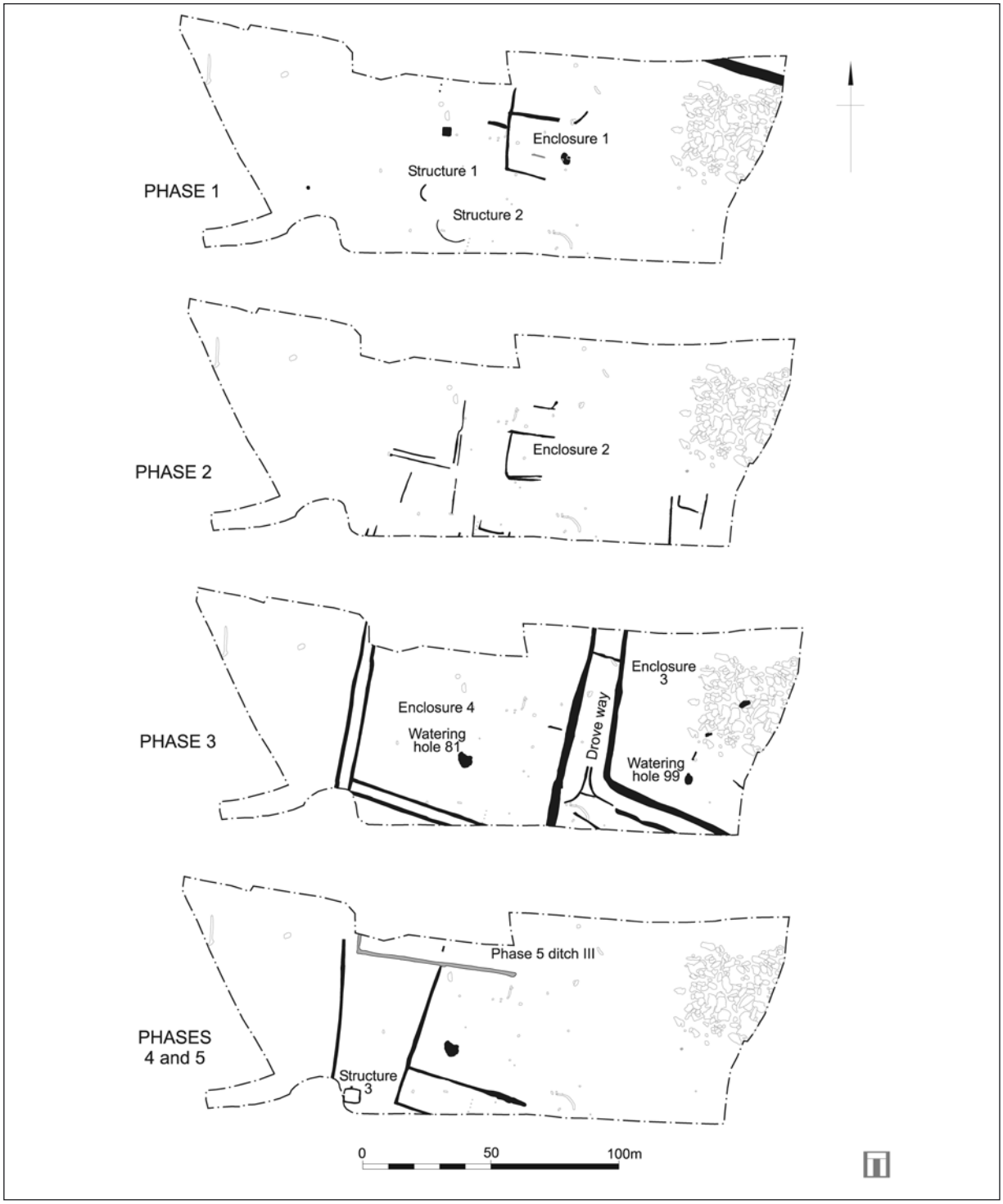

***Figure 2**. Phased development of the site.*

been largely destroyed by modern ploughing, an indication of considerable truncation by recent agricultural practices.

Undated features

A large number of crescent and sub-oval shaped tree throws were noted, predominantly in the central part of the excavated area (not illustrated). While most lacked finds, a few contained small abraded fragments of Roman pottery, or had been cut by Roman ditches and may indicate clearance of the area prior to the creation of the field systems. An undated palaeochannel (not illustrated), that ran along the northern limit of excavation, may represent a former course of the Colmworth Brook.

Many of the ditches produced wide date ranges, span-

Figure 3. *Numbered features referred to in the text.*

ning the 1st to 4th centuries AD, reflecting taphonomic and excavation problems common to large open features. Several small pits and postholes contained small sherds of abraded Roman pottery, but could not be phased. Two distinct clusters of postholes (to the west of Enclosure 1, and to the south of ditch 29) may represent the remains of windbreaks. The latter group follows a linear orientation and could have been associated with ditch 41 (Phase 2, see Fig. 3). Pit 201 cut droveway ditch 60 and thus dates to Phase 4 or later. Intensive gravel and sand quarrying took place in the northeastern part of the site. Most of these intercutting sub-circular pits were between 1m and 3m in diameter, and *c.*0.30m deep. A few sherds of 1st to 2nd-century pottery were recovered from pits 282 and 283, but the others produced no dating evidence (see Figs 2 and 3).

Three possible burial pits were identified during the excavation and are unphased. Pit 16, oriented east–west, with stones on its base was 0.5m deep and 3.0m long. This seems rather large for a grave, and no bone was retrieved. Another sub-rectangular pit (15) contained only unidentified bone and plant remains, perhaps more suggestive of food refuse (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report, Tables 1 and 2). One further sub-rectangular pit (34) contained a probable cow burial.

Chronological Narrative

Phase 1 (1st–2nd century AD)

The earliest phase of activity is represented by a number of ditches (Fig. 2). One (128) in the north-eastern corner of the site was over 4m wide and nearly 1m deep. It directly abutted a palaeochannel and may have originally been cut as a flood defence. The other ditches were less substantial, and lay in the central part of the site, forming a rectangular ditched enclosure: Enclosure 1.

The earliest segment of Enclosure 1 was ditch 281. The southern section of this ditch had been recut in this and later phases. The enclosure ditches were U-shaped in profile, and approximately 1m wide, although they varied considerably in depth. They may have been part of a roughly rectangular enclosure, perhaps a small paddock (measuring *c.*22 x 15m), whose eastern side was lost when ditch 60 was cut during Phase 3. Few finds were retrieved from ditch fills. Of note are a copper alloy Colchester-type two piece brooch, and a corroded coin, probably of early 1st-century date.

Potentially associated with this phase of activity were two curvilinear gullies (31, 80) (Structures 1 and 2, Figs 2–4). The latter contained a small amount of 1st- to 2nd-century pottery and a little animal bone. Neither of the gullies followed a well-formed arc and since both had well defined terminal ends, it is likely that they were constructed in this way and are not truncated house structures. Combined with the absence of hearths, this might support the idea that they were animal shelters or windbreaks for other activities. Structure 1 (gully 80) produced evidence that hulled wheats were processed nearby (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report). The presence of a concentration of ironworking slag in a similar, unphased gully (68) may be significant (Discussion, below).

A few pits are dated to this phase by 1st- to 2nd-century AD pottery, although a few sherds of 4th-century pottery were judged to be intrusive. These included a group of rubbish pits within Enclosure 1 (845, 848 and 850). Pit 845 was the largest and latest of the sequence. It was nearly 3m in diameter, 0.5m deep, and contained large quantities of domestic debris, including pottery (unfortunately a rather mixed assemblage, see Seager Smith, Internet report) and animal bone, within a matrix of organically rich soil. A large squarish, shallow pit (112), *c.*3.4m by 3.25m, lay to the west of Enclosure 1. Its two fills were humic and its shape is characteristic of a shallow water-trough, or water-tank, not dissimilar to one excavated at Little Paxton, Diddington, Cambridgeshire (Jones and Ferris 1994, 59).

Phase 2 (2nd century)

The main feature attributed to this phase is Enclosure 2 (Fig. 2), which cut and replaced the similarly sized Phase 1 Enclosure 1. The southern arm of this enclosure was subsequently recut (110, see Fig. 3). The orientation of this enclosure implies an association with a number of other shallow and narrow ditches in the vicinity. It appears that, during this phase, a more complex field system was created out of the initial rectangular enclosure, with an expansion to the south, west and possibly also east (Fig. 2). Since these features were quite narrow and shallow (0.05–0.36m deep), some may not have not survived, but those that remain suggest the existence of four and probably more small rectangular enclosures. The plan layout of these ditches suggests some may have defined associated droveways.

Phase 3 (2nd–3rd century)

In Phase 3, the field boundaries and enclosures were re-established on a much larger scale, suggesting a massive reworking of the landscape producing a formalised field system, that may have included a network of paddocks, major enclosures (Enclosure 3 and 4) and a droveway (Fig. 2). The orientation of this field system respected that of the Phase 2 enclosures, but earlier features were not retained. Changes in the organisation of space were presumably linked with a change in the function of the site, with perhaps a greater reliance on stock rearing in general, and cattle in particular (see Discussion below and Sykes, Internet report). The size of the largest enclosures would have been considerable, each in excess of 0.56ha. Few datable finds were recovered and several ditches have been included in this phase on the basis of spatial and stratigraphic association alone.

Two major ditches (60 and 76, Fig. 3) define a north-south oriented droveway, the longest-lived feature on the site. The ditches had similar profiles, but were not

uniform. They were widest to the south, and between 0.42m and 0.80m deep, a variation not obviously due to truncation. Ditch 60 appeared to have silted up relatively quickly, while ditch 76 had been recut on at least one occasion and had a more complex series of fills, suggesting it was maintained for a longer period of time. A lead pot-mend and two 4th century coins, including one of Valens (AD 364–78) were retrieved from the upper fill of ditch 76 (Wells, Internet reports).

The droveway framed by these ditches is quite wide, although one of similar dimensions has been excavated at Eynesbury on the other side of the Ouse (see Fig. 7 and Ellis 2004). Its width tapers to the north from 14m to 10m, suggesting a function related to control over the movement of animals, perhaps funnelling them in the direction of the stream. Internal divisions within the droveway (ditches and gullies 73, 75 and 92, Fig. 3) may have provided the means to sort and separate groups of animals (eg lambs from sheep; Pryor 1998, 100–105). At the northern end of the droveway, gully 130 abutted both ditches 60 and 76 and may have originally marked a trench for the temporary insertion of a wattle hurdle, or similar barrier, enabling the droveway to be blocked off for short periods of time.

To the west of the droveway was a rectangular enclosure (Enclosure 4 on Fig. 2). Further enclosures may be conjectured to the west, north, and south of Enclosure 4, suggesting an integrated network of paddocks and droveways. Ditch 4 has been attributed to this phase on the basis that it runs parallel to ditch 8, perhaps forming a narrow droveway between enclosures. It is likely that several pits within the enclosures also belong to this phase. These include two probable watering holes (81 and 99).

Pit 81 was irregular in shape and although over 5.3m in diameter, was only 0.7m deep. It contained a series of relatively homogeneous fills (Fig. 5). Its lowest, waterlogged, fill was a mass of compressed leaf material containing small twigs, oak bark, several pieces of worked wood, which did not appear to be *in situ*, and the only tool from the site, an iron punch (Court, Internet report). Waterlogged duckweed (*Lemna* sp.) seeds are characteristic of the still water environments found in ponds (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report). The presence of oak bark led the excavator to suggest the feature was a tanning pit, but this interpretation now seems unlikely (see Discussion, below) in the absence of other environmental evidence or any trace of an impermeable lining (*cf.* Williams 1993, 38–9). Waterlogged wood from this deposit consisted largely of willow, poplar and hazel/alder roundwood (up to 10mm in diameter), with the characteristic growth structure of coppice rods (Gale, Internet report). A few wood chips bore possible tool marks. One large fragment of worked wood was perforated and formed part of a double bridle joint, either refuse or part of a collapsed structure. Possible rough steps were cut into the north-eastern edge.

Pit 99 was tear-shaped, 3.25m by 1.45m in plan and was 0.80m deep. The pit had gradually silted up over

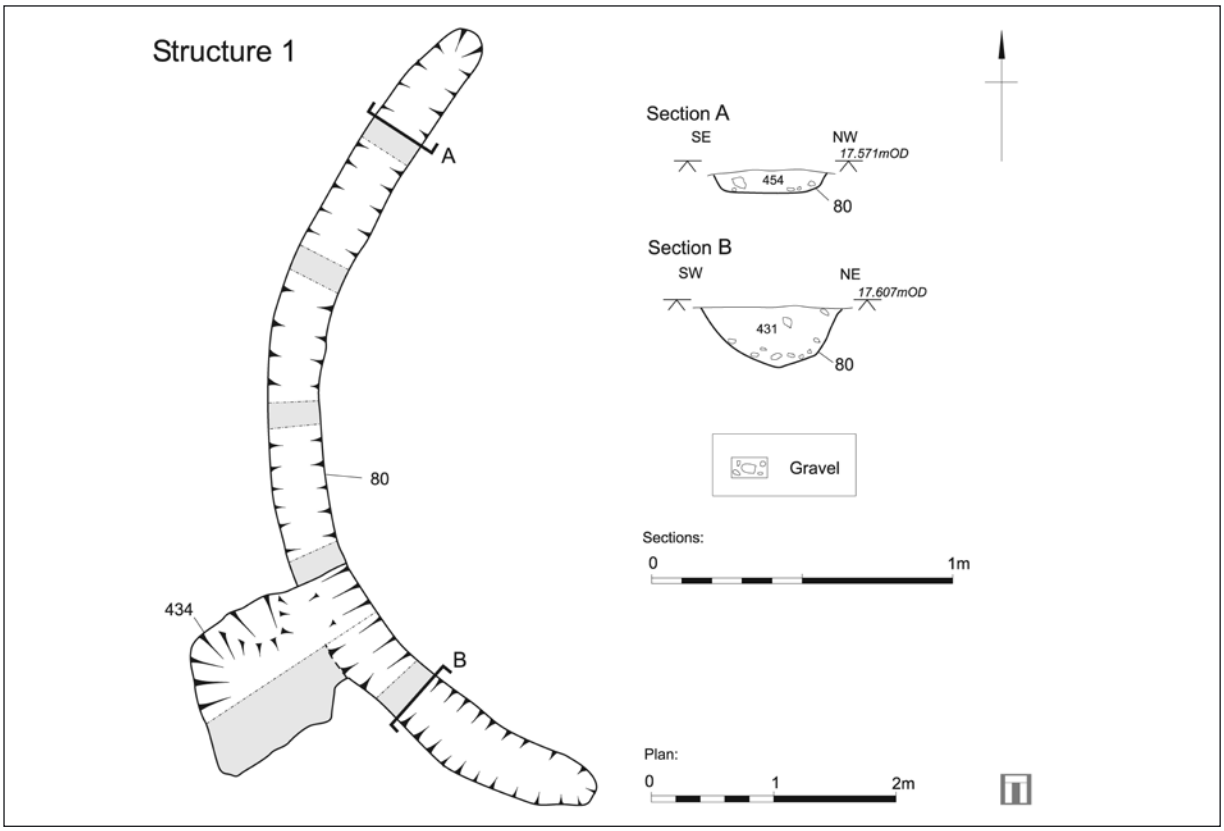

Figure 4. *Plan and profiles of Structure 1 (Phase 1).*

time, incorporating fallen twigs shed or cut from elder, willow or similar shrubs and hedges growing nearby (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report; Gale, Internet report). Insects (*Tanysphyrus lemnae*) which feed on duckweed (above) indicate that the pit held standing water (Robinson, Internet report). Oyster shells, animal bone, and pottery in the upper fill suggest a final use as a dump.

Phase 4 (3rd–early 4th century)

During this phase the central enclosure (Enclosure 4) was subdivided by ditch 28. It is possible that ditch 60 continued to form an eastern boundary to these fields, while Enclosure 3 may have remained in use (not shown on Fig. 2). The new ditches continued to follow the established alignments and were all *c.*1.2–1.4m wide and 0.25–0.35m deep. They probably represent modifications within the existing field system, perhaps linked to changing farming practices.

Of particular note is a small sub-square ditched enclosure (Structure 3) in the southwestern part of the site, measuring *c.*5.5m by 5m (Fig. 6). There were no associated postholes, and no finds or environmental evidence to assist in attributing function. It was perhaps more likely to have been a small livestock enclosure than a square cut barrow or the drip gully of a building constructed on ground beams. Pit 22, lay immediately adjacent and was undoubtedly associated with the enclosure, but was completely lacking in finds. Other features which potentially belong to Phase 4 are pit 277, which contained late pottery and the disuse backfills of the probable watering hole 81, which probably accumulated during the late 3rd and early 4th centuries.

Phase 5 (4th century)

A single feature, the recutting of ditch 285 as ditch 111 (see Fig. 3), represents the only stratigraphic evidence for a later phase of Romano-British activity. It is possible this ditch was related to the construction of a new enclosure to the north of the excavation area, and hence indicated a shift or expansion of the field system in this direction. Ceramic evidence suggests that after the end of the 3rd century, activity in this area decreased markedly in scale, and that settlement may have been relocated further away (Seager Smith, Internet report).

Discussion

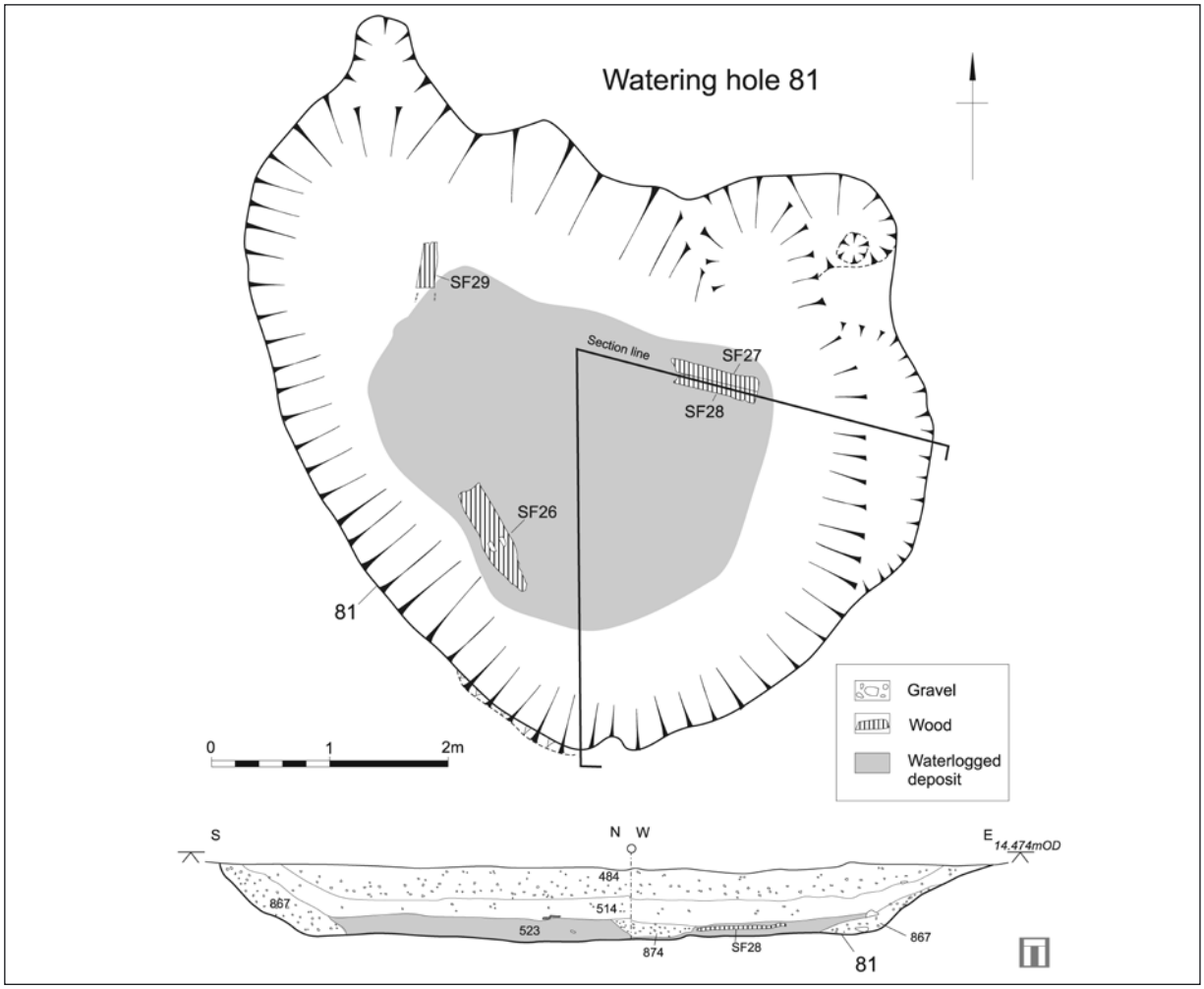

Figure 5. *Plan and profile of watering hole 81 (Phase 3–4).*

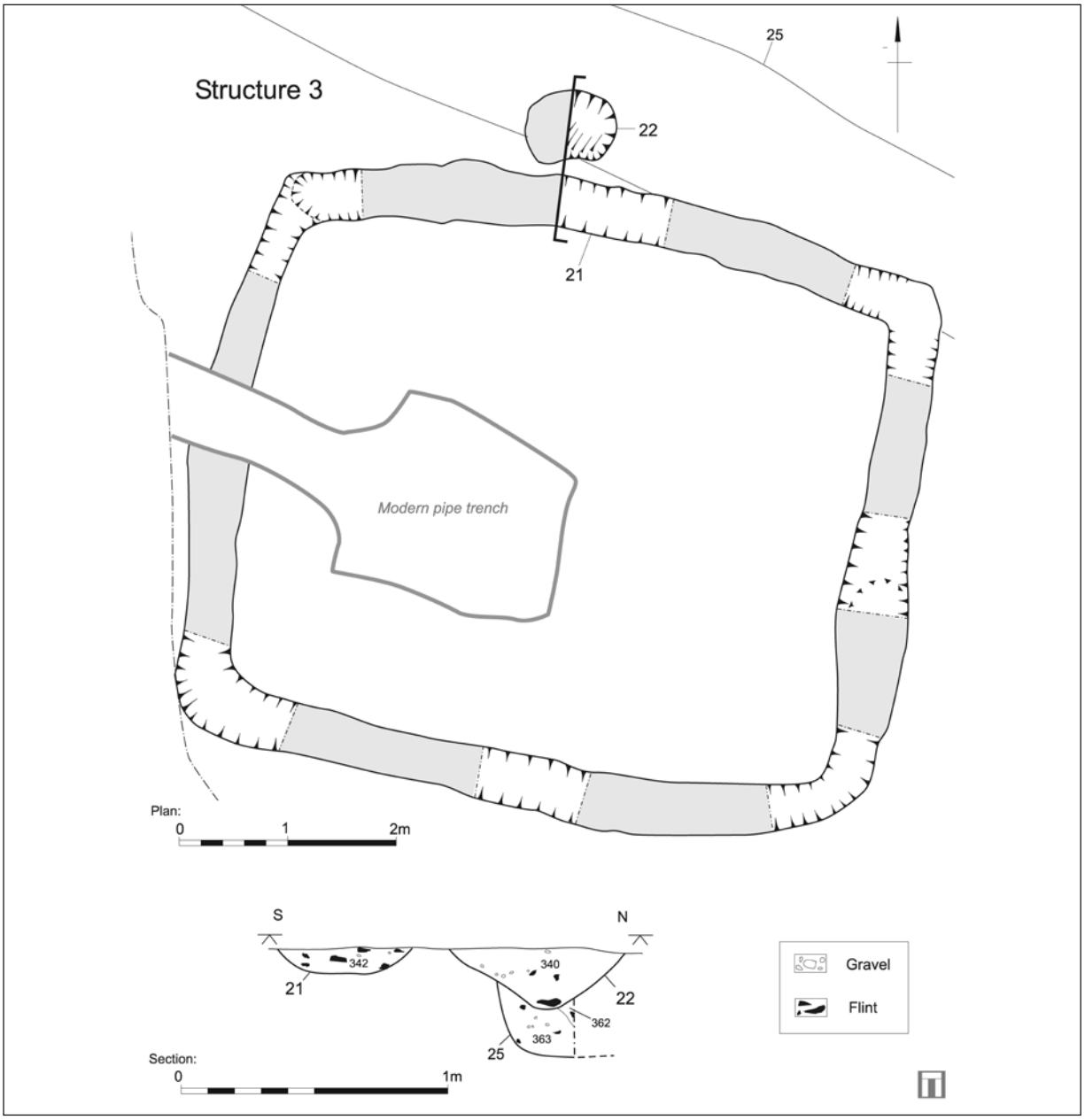

Figure 6. *Plan and section of Enclosure 4 and associated features (Phase 4).*

The Great Ouse valley in the Romano-British period

The site formed only part of a much larger Romano-British rural landscape comprising field systems, enclosures, animal paddocks and droveways on either side of the valley of the Great Ouse that were undoubtedly interspersed with pockets of rural settlement. Although no pre-Roman features were found on the site, it is probable that this landscape developed from a more organic complex of Iron Age field systems (eg Murphy 2000, 41). Just to the east of the site at Eynesbury (see Fig. 7) and at Cambourne, aerial photographs have allowed the identification of possible Iron Age relict field systems (Spoerry 2000) that may have been modified and expanded in Roman times.

From the later Iron Age onwards, more labour intensive and productive crops (such as club wheat) were introduced, possibly reflected in signs of increased investment in the land, and more fully settled and stable landscapes (Dawson 2000a, 107). New ditched boundaries and a complex series of rectangular enclosures emerged throughout the region (Hall and Coles 1994).

The site itself was initially identified from aerial photographs, while other cropmark sites are known to the south and north of Eaton Socon along the Great Ouse valley (Fig. 7; French and Wait 1988, figs 27–8). Further rectangular enclosures have been identified to the east, south, and west of the site. While many of these features are undated, their characteristic planned

and rectangular layout suggests most are likely to be of Roman date, and comprise field systems similar to those excavated at Priors Gate. This is supported by the relatively dense number of Roman pottery scatters and other finds, including coins and jewellery, from the immediate vicinity (Spoerry 2000, fig 12.2), some of which may represent settlement sites. Several high-status buildings or villas are thought to lie within *c.*2km of the site (Fig. 7, eg Borthwick 1997).

A Roman road runs from Godmanchester to Sandy, down the eastern side of the Great Ouse valley. The route of the Great North Road (the A1) that runs just west of the site may be prehistoric in origin (Woodcock 1949–51) and in the Roman period was a major road with associated settlements and burials. The gravel quarry pits found in the east of the site may have been related to road building or repairing activity in the vicinity. The fort said to lie between Eynesbury village and the river (Gorham 1820), may actually be a small Roman town or large villa estate (Ellis 2004, 107). Excavations by Alexander (1993) in Eynesbury have identified a possible villa site, dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries, while geophysical survey identified further enclosures and pits lying west of a north–south metalled trackway.

The evidence from Prior's Gate may be paralleled with that from Little Paxton Quarry a further *c.*8km up the river valley (Jones and Ferris 1994, 62–3), and with St Neots (Jones 2000), Great Paxton (Spoerry 2000), and Cambourne (Wessex Archaeology 2003) to the east of the site. Excavations by Wessex Archaeology only 1km to the east across the river at Barford Road, Eynesbury revealed a multi-period site that included a similar network of Romano-British field boundaries, enclosures and droveways (Ellis 2004, 44–7). Environmental evidence from these sites indicates an open pastoral landscape where grazing animals were present. In common with Eaton Socon, the focus appears to have been on intensive stock-rearing. The nearby road system presumably provided an efficient means of marketing produce.

Ceramic dating of Phases 1–5

Although pottery was the only artefact type to be found in any quantity on this site, there are few large feature groups. Only 14 features contained more than 20 sherds. The nature of the excavated features and the resulting problems of intrusion and residuality also limit the overall potential of the assemblage, more fully explained elsewhere (Seager Smith, Internet reports).

There are few discernible differences between the ceramic assemblages from Phases 1 and 2, which are probably fairly closely dated from the Flavian period to *c.* AD 120. The bulk of the assemblage dates from the early/mid to late 2nd century, relating to the reorganisation of the field system (Phase 3) and possibly implying an expansion of the settlement or at least increased rates of deposition in this area of its hinterland. The absence of East Gaulish samian clearly indicates an interruption of fineware supply during the early 3rd century, possibly a decline in nearby settlement. Indeed, few, if any, of the other fabrics and forms need belong within this period, say, the first forty years of the 3rd century although a coin (SF 32) probably of Severan (AD 193–235) date has been identified (Wells, Internet report). Although this period is a notoriously difficult to identify ceramically, it seems probable that the nature of activity changed at this time, perhaps becoming more agriculturally based. The presence of characteristically late Roman material indicates resumption of settlement during the later 3rd and 4th centuries. The relatively small quantities of late material suggest that this is likely to have been relatively short-lived, small-scale and/or a fair distance away.

The rural environment and economy

An enclosure system was developed on the site and maintained its alignment for almost the entire period, in part determined by the known Roman road to the west of the site and the Great Ouse valley itself. The boundaries of the field system lay well beyond the limits of the excavated area, and it appears likely to have continued in all directions. No entrance-ways were noted, although these may have lain beyond the excavation area, or have been formed from removable wooden plank bridging rather than formalised openings.

The site developed in a largely open landscape, although with woodland in the vicinity. It is likely that the woodland clearance occurred before the initial creation of the ditched enclosures in Phase 1 and some of the recorded but undated tree throws potentially relate to such clearance. Localised tree growth or woodland regeneration occurred later in the Roman period, as woodland species were noted in the initial fills of the Phase 3 watering holes. All of the environmental evidence indicates that the site was immediately surrounded by a landscape of predominantly open grassland, ideal for grazing animals. For example, analysis of land snails indicated an environment of long sward grassland, with a high ground water table, with areas of temporary, probably seasonal wetness (Allen, Internet reports). Charcoal in refuse deposits indicates the use of juvenile stems and hedge prunings for firewood. There was limited evidence for the survival of small stands of mature or managed woodland, providing coppice rods, poles and possibly larger timber (Gale, Internet report).

The Ouse valley suffered frequent flooding and alluviation during prehistoric and Roman times (Dawson ed 2000b), low-lying land on the floodplain at Eaton Socon probably underwent seasonal inundation and the high water table would have ensured damp or waterlogged soils throughout much of the year. No flood deposits were identified at Priors Gate, but environmental evidence provided ample evidence for wet or waterlogged conditions on the site. While some evidence for arable cultivation was identified, this was related to the earliest phases of activity on site (Phases 1 and 2) (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report). The most common cereals were hulled wheats, mainly spelt (*Triticum spelta*). Other potential crop species identified included degraded remains of the pea

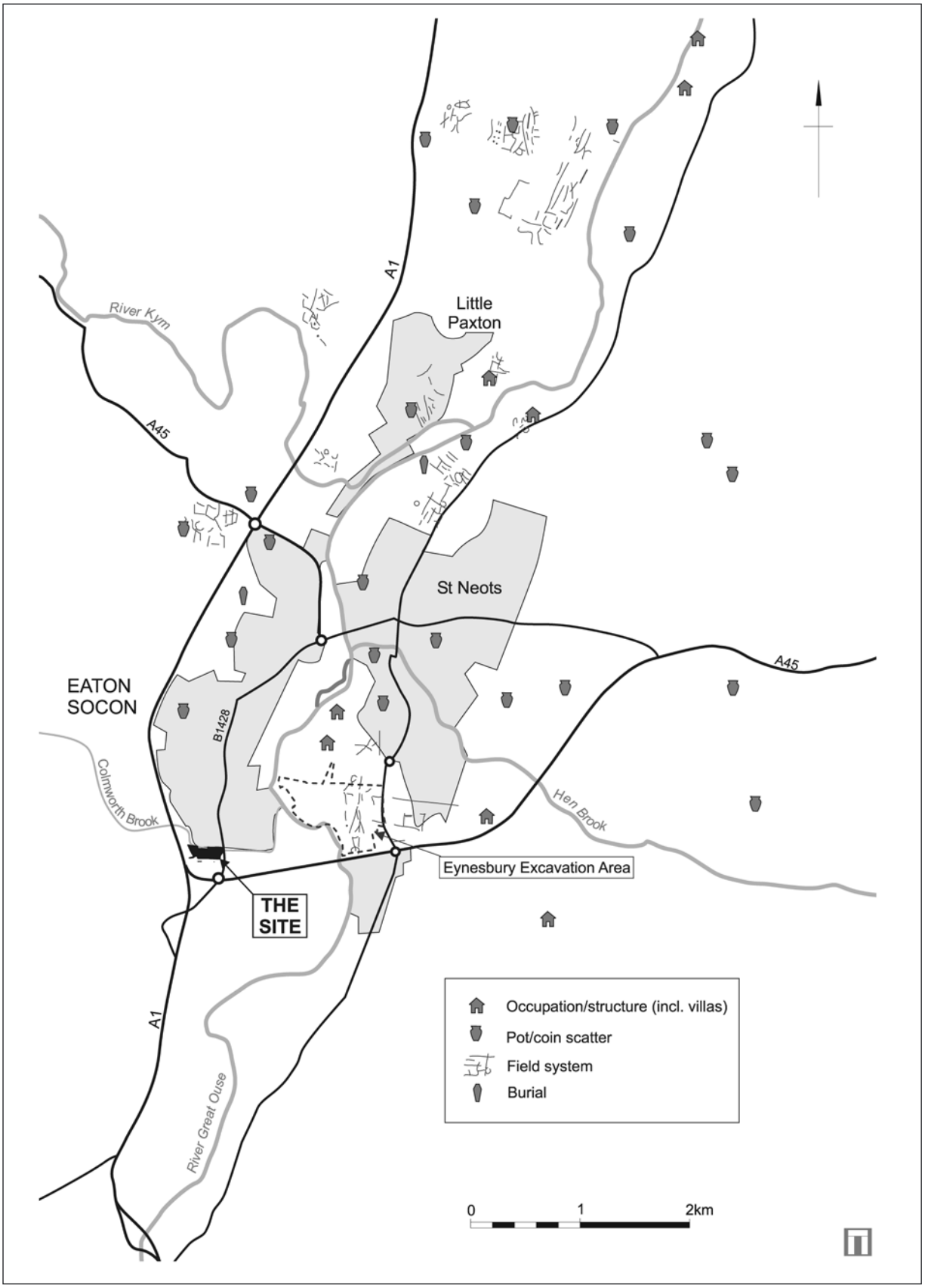

Figure 7. *Regional distribution of associated Romano-British sites. Reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright 100028190.*

(*Pisium sativum*) and celtic bean (*Vicia faba*). The presence of seeds of several low growing species, including clover (*Trifolium* sp.) and plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), suggests that the crops had been cut relatively close to the ground, probably with a sickle rather than a scythe (Rees 1981). The presence of a few basal culm nodes suggests some uprooting of crops, although this would be inevitable as the sickle got blunter. It is probable that the crops may have been partially threshed and the bulk of the straw extracted for use by animals. The presence of plantain and spike rush (*Eleocharis* sp.) suggests an inefficient ploughing regime, typical of ard cultivation. Evidence for processing hulled wheats (including the very fragile glume waste) was associated with Structure 1 and refuse pit 845 in Phase 1. After pounding, wheat grains may have been processed into cracked wheat or flour, or used to malt beer. Given the poor quantity of material, compared to other assemblages, where grain and large weed seeds predominate (*cf* Danebury, Jones 1984), it is likely that most of the material was stored in a fairly uncleaned state (ie on the ear and in husks). This is an indication of regular, relatively small-scale piecemeal processing (Stevens 1996; cf. Hillman 1981).

Evidence from all sources suggests that the occupants of the site predominantly focused upon the maintenance of livestock as part of a largely pastoral economy, with a particular emphasis on intensive stock rearing and movement from the third century. With the exception of a single, unphased hearth (96; Gale, Internet reports), there was no direct evidence of *in situ* domestic activity. Analysis of the insect remains from the site (Robinson, Internet report) indicates habitation structures built of timber in the vicinity, but not on the site itself.

Few finds were retrieved from any features, unsurprising given the site's rural character, although there were some indications of nearby settlement. The few fragments of ceramic building material (including *tegula* and *imbrex*) came predominantly from within Enclosure 1. The small quantities of slag and burnt clay recovered (Court, Internet reports) seem insufficient to indicate significant industrial activities in the immediate vicinity. Of some note, however, is the fact that 6082g of ironworking slag (70% of the site total) was retrieved from an unphased curvilinear gully (68, see Fig. 3), which could have a bearing on the interpretation of Structures 1 and 2 (above). The excavator's suggestion that watering hole 81 initially functioned as a tanning pit could indicate an additional use for the animals raised on the site, but that interpretation was based on quantities of wood bark in the primary fill, and little else. Equally, the presence in both watering holes of elder and alder (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report) which produce purple and black dyes (Grieve 1992; Grigson 1987) could hint at a connection with dyeing sheep wool. However, it is far more likely that these unlined pits, filled with stagnant water, lying in a damp environment, open for a considerable period, with hedges in close proximity, would have accumulated these remains without human agency.

Sections excavated across ditches produced on average only 100–500g of pottery, with concentrations apparent in the two substantial ditches that flanked the droveway (60 and 76) and features surrounding Enclosures 1 and 2. Only four features on the site produced more than 1kg of pottery. These were rubbish pit 845 and gully 124, both probably associated with Enclosure 2, and ditch 29 and gully 51 near the southern limit of excavation. The near absence of pottery from Structures 1 and 2, and features in their immediate vicinity supports the interpretation that they were animal shelters or windbreaks sheltering crop processing or ironworking rather than dwellings. The overall distribution of pottery suggests that the main focus of settlement activity lay to the south, beyond the limits of excavation. Only a single fragment of burnt clay from the site appeared to have derived from a wattle and daub structure.

A similar pattern emerges from the animal bone distribution. Little came from the vicinity of the identified structures, while most came from Enclosure 1 (ditch 76). Sheep bones were more numerous in the ditches, but cattle bone was more common in the pit and watering hole assemblages (Sykes, Internet report, table 1). The reason for this is uncertain, but the pits may contain primary butchery or food waste (*ibid*). Interestingly, features that produced large quantities of pottery did not contain a great deal of animal bone, suggesting an unexplained patterning in refuse disposal on the site.

It is suggested that the modifications of the ditch systems noted in Phase 3 were functionally related, and that they represent a transition from small-scale cereal and animal rearing to large-scale pastoral management. The presence of plants including hawthorn and blackthorn further supports the increased importance of stockbreeding, since they would have been used as hedges or fencing to surround the animal enclosures and droveways. Evidence for areas of hay meadow on the site itself was uncertain, but the presence of animal fodder was indicated by chaff and hay remains, as well as insects that feed on them. (Stevens and Clapham, Internet report; Robinson, Internet report). The presence of pastured domestic animals is suggested by scarabaeoid dung beetles, which comprised 6.7% of the terrestrial Coleoptera, while Lathridiidae (6.0% of the terrestrial Coleoptera) which feed on surface moulds on plant material, such as hay and straw, imply the presence of animal fodder on site.

The nature of the Romano-British pastoral economy is highlighted by the animal bone analysis (Sykes, Internet report). Cattle and sheep were probably raised at the site, and animals may have been butchered there, with meat both on the hoof and as flesh-bearing parts being exported to non-rural sites. The age-profiles for the cattle were unusual compared to other Cambridgeshire for which data is available. The presence of many aged beasts at Eaton Socon suggests those consumed locally had been predominantly used for secondary products (including milk and draught). The dearth of very young animals supports the pres-

ence of draught animals and suggests that arable production was a part of the site's economy.

The fact that some juvenile remains (including neonatal sheep and pig bones as well as a partial calf skeleton) were recovered indicates that animals were being bred on, or at least close, to the settlement. As such, Prior's Gate can most probably be classified as a 'producer' site, from where animals were raised and perhaps supplied to 'consumer' populations (Wapnish and Hesse 1988). Export of meat-animals may account for the poor representation of prime-aged individuals in the assemblage.

Decline in sheep from the 3rd century (above, Period 3) reflects a general shift towards cattle husbandry (eg King 1978), and agricultural intensification, reflected by the reorganisation of the landscape seen in Phase 3. Pigs were poorly represented, occurring at similar levels to other sites in the region, such as Stonea (Barker 1977) and Earith (Phillipson and Gilmore 1967).

Another unusual aspect of the assemblage was the distinct possibility that horseflesh, not commonly eaten in the Romano-British period (Simoons 1994, 187), was being consumed. Horse remains were found disarticulated, some with butchery marks and incorporated with food refuse. However, horse bones were frequently recovered complete, indicating that horses were not being processed to the same degree as the other food animals, and the age of these animals (5–6 years and 7–8 years) suggests that they were raised and maintained for riding or draught, rather than for meat.

There are few, if any, signs of high status. The pottery fabrics and forms are encompassed by the range of products expected in this area, dominated by sandy greywares from the Cambridgeshire region (see Appendices 1 and 2). The material generally compares well with assemblages from Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999), the Cambourne development area (Wessex Archaeology 2003) and Eynesbury (Mepham 2004) as well as from sites slightly further afield (Perrin 1999; Hancocks *et al* 1998; Hancocks 2001). Although utilitarian wares dominate the assemblage, at least limited access to, or use for, fine tablewares is indicated by the presence of samian, imported and British finewares (see Figs. 10.37 and .38). Notable omissions include samian and mortaria, although the coarseware forms imply the adoption of Romanised methods of food preparation. Amphorae and decorated samian vessels are notable by their absence although this is likely to be a reflection of status. In general, the distribution, condition and nature of the assemblage are consistent with the deposition and redeposition of domestic debris from a rural farming community.

Conclusions

While there have been a large number of excavations of Roman rural sites in Cambridgeshire, most of these have concentrated upon the high-status settlements, particularly 'villas'. Recent regional agenda (eg Going 1997; Going and Plouviez 2000) have lamented the lack of an informed understanding of the 'agrarian basis in the countryside' (Going 1997, 37). Little is published about the layout and appearance of Roman rural and farming sites, although the scale of the landscape recently revealed at Cambourne is huge and suggestive of high levels of organisation and specialisation (Wessex Archaeology 2003), as is Eynesbury (Ellis 2004). The excavation at Priors Gate has provided new evidence for the rural economy of the area in the Romano-British period, and the identification of a possible 'producer site'. The site produced a relatively low-status assemblage, although it was not itself a focus of settlement. A small quantity of imported pottery was present, along with table wares, small quantities of glass, a few coins and occasional fine objects, including a brooch (Court, Wells, Internet reports).

The site also provides some important evidence of earlier Roman activity dating from the later 1st century onwards. Until now, most of the Roman sites known in the area around western Eynesbury and Eaton Socon have dated from the late 3rd and 4th centuries (Spoerry 2000, 148).

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Appendix 1: A note on the Romano-British pottery forms and fabrics and list of the illustrated pottery
Rachael H Seager Smith

Among the Continental finewares samian predominates, with a fairly restricted range of forms present (Seager Smith, Internet reports, table 2). The low proportion of samian from Les Martres-de-Veyre is only to be expected (Marsh 1981), but the small amount from Southern Gaul is indicative of limited usage or availability of samian during the 1st century AD. One, a form 18 dish, carries a stamp of CASTVS who worked at La Graufesenque. The majority was from Lezoux and includes Hadrianic and early Antonine forms as well as later 31, 31R and 79 forms. The form 46 vessel stamped BONOXVS, can be dated to *c.* AD 125–150 (Brenda Dickinson pers comm). Broadly similar patterns of samian consumption have been noted at other sites in the region (Mills 1998; Dickinson 1999). The other imports are also mostly from Central Gaul (fabrics E122 and E128; Tomber and Dore 1998, 50, CNG BS and 52, CGN CC 1 respectively).

Mortaria from three different sources were recognised. In the 1st and 2nd century mortaria were derived from the Verulamium region (Fig. 9.21), while 3rd- and 4–5th-century types are from Oxfordshire and the Nene Valley (Fig. 8.7).

In this area, it is apparent that the traditional differentiation between the British-made 'coarse-' and 'fine-' wares is not based so much on fabric type as on individual vessel forms, the local industries making the entire range of utilitarian kitchen vessels as well as finer tablewares. The rest of the assemblage can be divided into two main groups consisting of oxidised and grey ware fabrics.

In general, the oxidised wares provided the intermediate quality wares between the imported tablewares and the utilitarian kitchen vessels. Decorated sherds from two vessels in fine buff coloured 'miscellaneous' fabrics (Fig. 10.37 and .38) indicate the availability of British finewares.

Sandy greywares dominate the assemblage, alone representing 60% of the sherds and 51% of the weight of the total assemblage. Potential sources include the Nene Valley and various kilns around Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999, 141, fig vii.1), Bedford and Milton Keynes (Marney 1989), including Caldecote (Slowikowski and Dawson 1993). Products from smaller centres at West Stow and Watisfield present in Cambridge (Hull and Pullinger 1999, 141, fig vii.1) may occur here. Lower Nene Valley (colour-coated) grey wares (Perrin 1999, 78) never formed more than a very minor component of the assemblage. The forms are largely utilitarian. First to early 2nd-century AD types are confined to a few Belgic style jars with everted or lid-seated rims, frequently cordoned (Fig. 8.4 and .5). A much-expanded range of forms is apparent from the middle of the 2nd century AD onwards.

The calcareous wares, containing fossil shell from the Jurassic beds in the South Midlands, follow in the native, pre-conquest ceramic tradition of the area. They were most common during the 1st and early 2nd centuries but suffered a severe numerical decline in the mid to late 2nd century, probably largely replaced by the sandy grey wares. A few late forms (eg Fig. 8.10) in this fabric indicate the wares continued in production throughout the Roman period.

The grog-tempered wares are also of 1st- to early 2nd-century date and were probably made locally. Most are from one vessel (Fig. 9.19). No examples of the distinctive pink grogged fabric, made in the Towcester/Milton Keynes area, were identified. Only one Black Burnished ware vessel was recognised. This low level of BB1 supply is paralleled at other rural sites in the region (Hancocks *et al* 1998, 45).

Figure 8

.1 triangular rimmed dish (R101); fine sandy greyware; unphased, tree throw 512, context 513.
.2 flat rimmed bowl (R101); Nene Valley grey ware; ?Phase 3, quarry pit 806, group 269, context 808.
.3 triangular, lid-seated bead rimmed jar (R103); shelly ware; unphased, tree throw 596, context 597.
.4 necked and cordoned jar (R104); sparsely tempered greyware; Phase 1, segment 984 of field boundary ditch 285, context 985.
.5 necked and cordoned jar (R104); sparsely tempered greyware; Phase 1, segment 767 of ditch 124, context 753.
.6 upright-necked jar with straight-ended rim (R105); moderately fine sandy buff ware; Phase 2, segment 551 of gully 30, context 550.
.7 mortaria with inturned bead and a down-turned reeded flange (R106); Nene Valley white ware; Phase 3, segment 537 of enclosure ditch 76, context 539.
.8 shallow bowl with a plain rim (R107); fine sandy greyware; Phase 1, ditch segment 623, context 624.
.9 shallow dish with a plain rim (R107); Nene Valley colour-coated ware; Phase 2, segment 969 of ditch 60, context 970.
.10 dropped flange bowl (R108); shelly ware; Phase 2, segment 791 of ditch 197, context 792.
.11 dropped flange bowl (R108); sparsely tempered greyware; Phase 4, segment 481 of ditch 29, context 482.
.12 copy of samian form Curle 23 (R109); coarse sandy greyware; Phase 1, rubbish pit 845, context 846.
.13 small everted rim jar/bowl (R110); sparsely tempered greyware; Phase 4, segment 490 of ditch 29, context 491.
.14 round-bodied bowl with flat-topped rim (R111); fine sandy greyware; Phase 1, rubbish pit 845, context 846.
.15 storage jar with a tall, rolled rim (R112); shelly ware; unphased, pit 928, context 929.
.16 necked jar with a grooved rim (R113); white ware with smoked surfaces; Phase 1, segment 799 of gully 267, context 800.

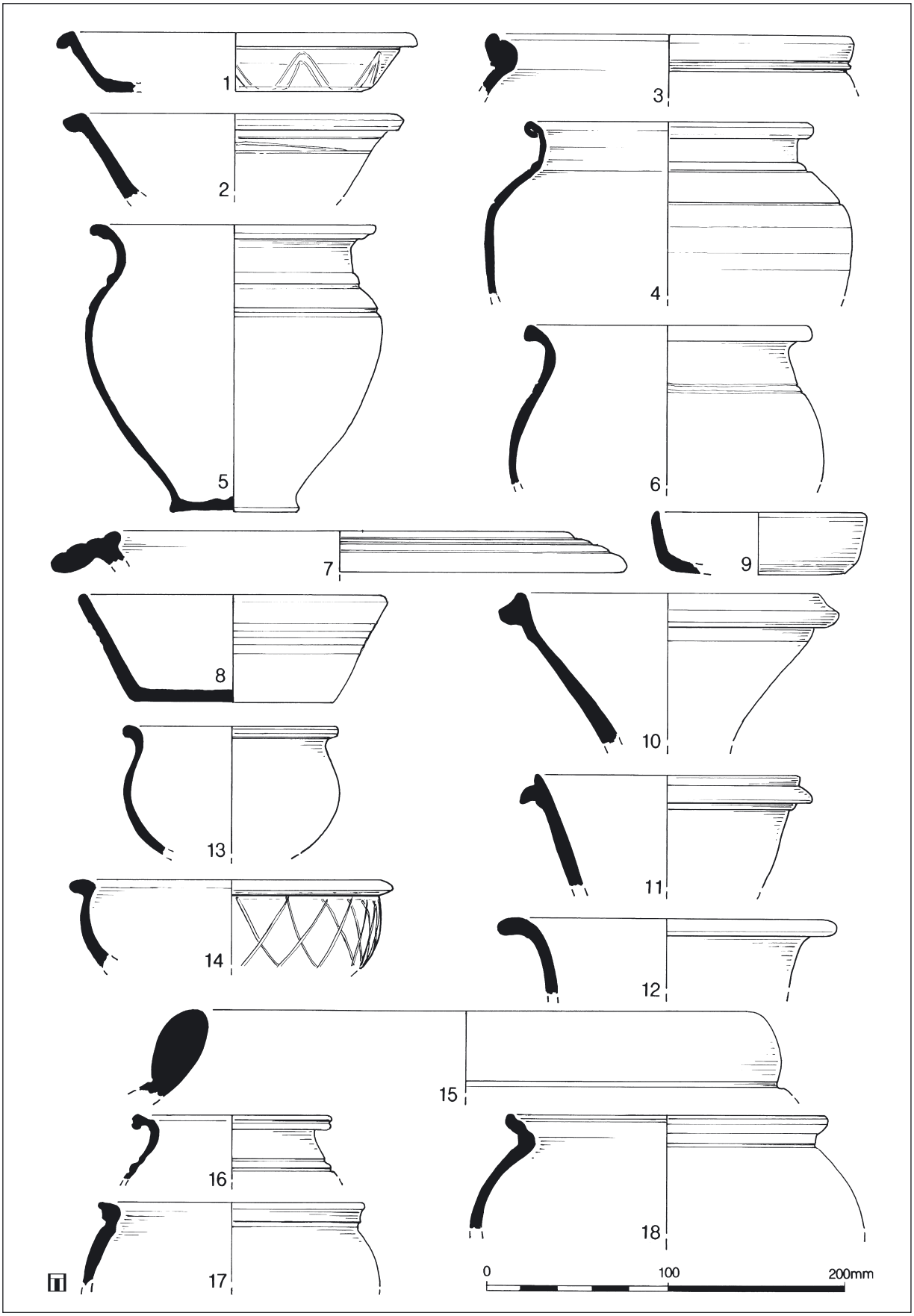

Figure 8. *Roman pottery .1–.18*

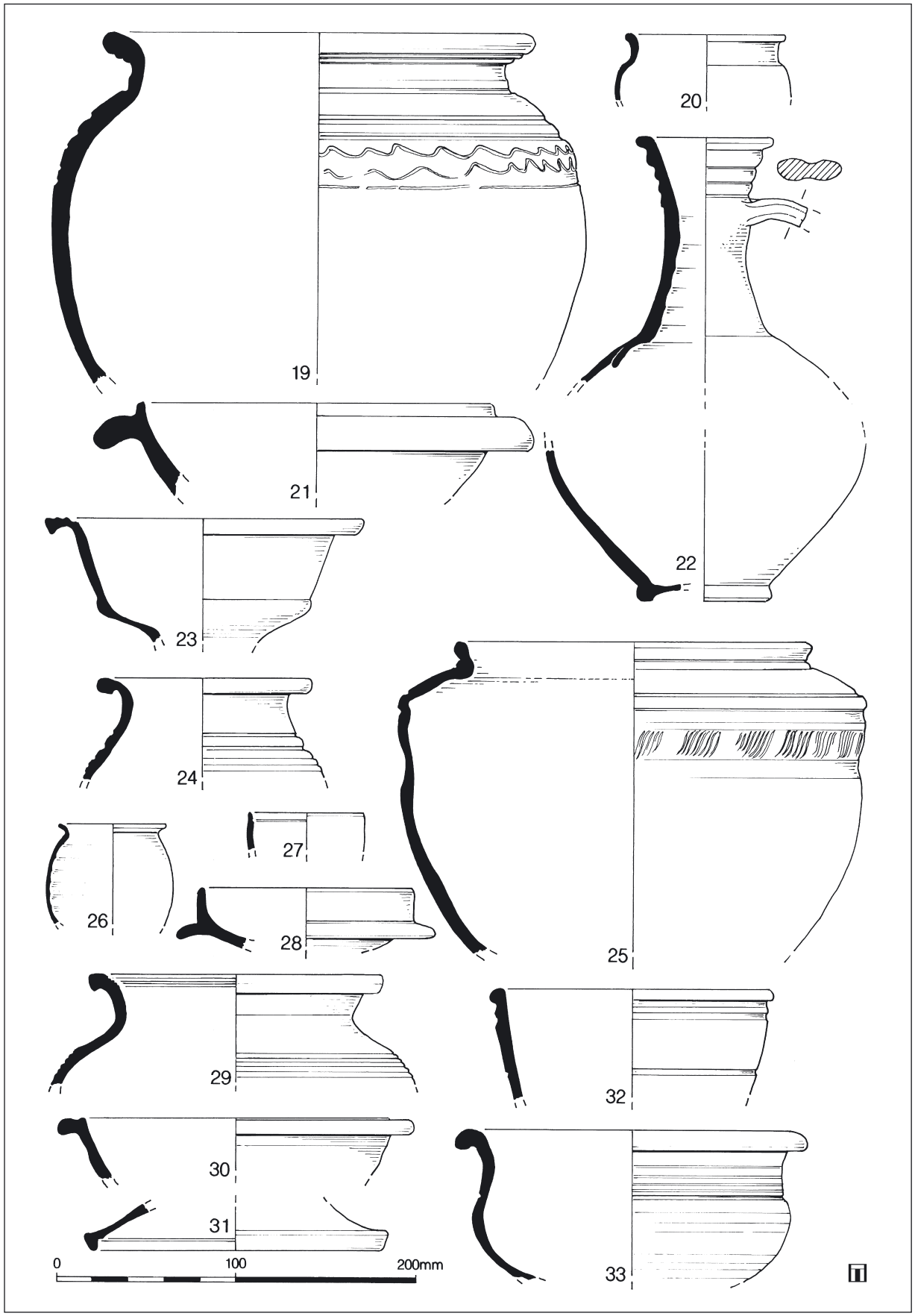

Figure 9. *Roman pottery .19–.33*

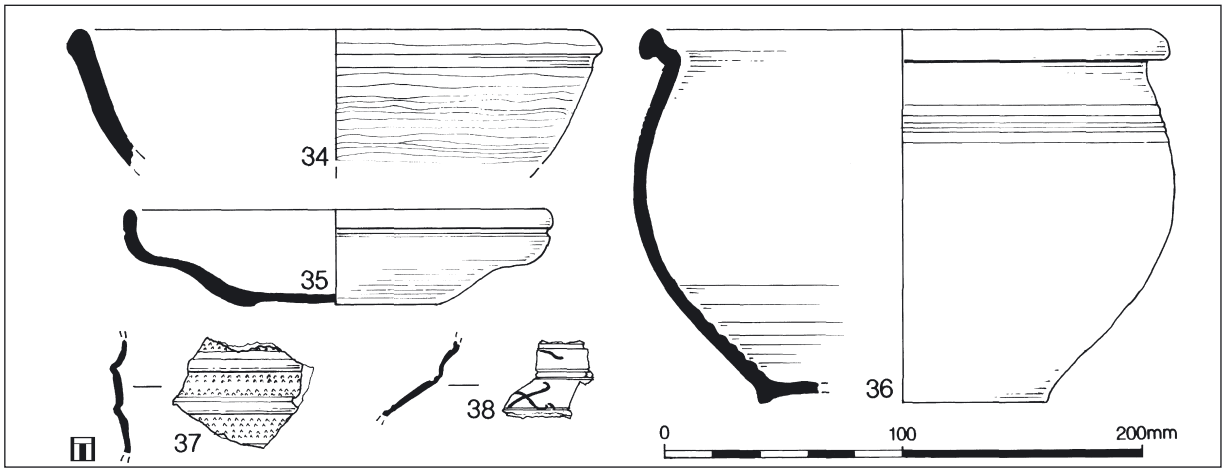

Figure 10. *Roman pottery .34–.36*

.17 jar with a moulded lid-seated rim (R114); shelly ware; Phase 1, rubbish pit 845, context 846.
.18 jar with a moulded lid-seated rim (R114); shelly ware; Phase 2, segment 510 of gully 30, context 511.

Figure 9
.19 high-shouldered necked jar with flared rim (R115); grog-tempered ware; Phase 2, segment 515 of gully 51, context 516.
.20 jar with upright rim (R116); Hadham oxidised ware; Phase 2, segment 600 of gully 110, context 601.
.21 mortaria with narrow, slightly inturned bead and heavy, downturned flange (R117); Verulamium region white ware; Phase 1, pit 711, group pit 112, context 559.
.22 ring-necked flagon (R118); Verulamium region white ware; Phase 1, segment 735 of ditch 124, context 736.
.23 carinated bowl with a rilled and hooked rim (R119); coarse sandy greyware; Phase 1, segment 735 of ditch 124, context 736.
.24 narrow-necked jar with an out-turned rim, grooved and cordoned on shoulder (R120); sparsely-tempered greyware; Phase 1, segment 735 of ditch 124, context 736.
.25 high-shouldered jar with lid-seated rim, grooves, cordons and decoration beneath shoulder (R121); coarse sandy greyware; Phase 1, segment 767 of ditch 124, context 768.
.26 beaker with a sharply everted rim (R122); Central Gaulish colour-coated ware; Phase 1, segment 735 of ditch 124, context 736.
.27 plain rim from small cup (R123); unprovenanced colour-coat; Phase 1, segment 735 of ditch 124, context 737.
.28 copy of samian bowl form 38 (R124); Nene Valley colour-coated ware; Phase 1, segment 992 of enclosure ditch 195, context 994.
.29 hooked rim jar (R125); sparsely tempered greyware; Phase 5, pit 1064, group 277, context 1079.
.30 'incipient' flanged bowl/dish (R126); Nene Valley colour-coated ware; Phase 5, pit 1064, group 277, context 1079.
.31 lid (R127); white ware with smoked surfaces; Phase 1, segment 754 of field boundary ditch 285, context 755.
.32 carinated bowl with double bead rim (R128); Harston Obelisk ware; Phase 4, segment 481 of ditch 29, context 482.
.33 wide-mouthed bowl with upright neck and rounded body (R129); sparsely-tempered greyware; Phase 4, segment 481 of ditch 29, context 482.

Figure 10
.34 bead rim bowl (R130); sparsely-tempered greyware; Phase 3, segment 969 of ditch 60, context 970.
.35 shallow bowl with a sinuous profile (R132); sparsely-tempered greyware; Phase 1, Structure 1, segment 432 of ring ditch 80, context 433.
.36 squat jar/bowl with an out-turned, lid-seated rim (R133); sparsely-tempered greyware; unphased, pit 875, group 81, context 904.
.37 body sherd from beaker or small jar with rouletted decoration between raised cordons; fine buff ware; Phase 2, segment 515 of gully 51, context 516.
.38 body sherd from shoulder of small jar or beaker with red painted decoration; fine buff ware; Phase 2, segment 515 of gully 51, context 516.

Appendix 2. *Pottery fabric totals by phase.*

	Phase	**1**		**2**		**3**		**4**		**5**		**RB unspec**		**P-med-mod**		**Unph/nat**		**Total**	
Fabric		*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*	*No.*	*Wt.*
Imports																			
SG samian	E302	6	60			1	3											7	63
CG samian (Les M)	E305	6	56															6	56
CG samian (Lezoux)	E307	3	66	3	56	12	133	1	19			2	5	2	35	1	3	24	317
CG black slipped	E122	1	2					1	3									2	5
CG c'coat	E128	3	10															3	10
Unprov c'coat	Q110	1	2			1	3											2	5
Mortaria																			
Verulamium w'ware	E207	4	150	1	478	2	660											7	1288
Oxford w'ware	E209					4	331											4	331
Nene Valley w'ware	E213			1	79	13	115	1	100			1	39					16	333
Oxidised wares																			
Verulamium w'ware	Q109	50	1124	1	49	5	61											56	1234
W'ware, smoked	Q108	6	119	3	131	2	17									1	17	12	284
Nene Valley c'coat	E176	4	73	3	26	15	333	10	184	5	153	3	28	1	5	3	89	44	891
Misc. oxidised	Q103	11	107	8	199	17	231	7	59	1	18	3	10	3	46	4	44	54	714
Grey wares																			
Sparse quartz	Q105	164	1502	91	551	160	1932	76	1040	4	175	14	84	4	41	11	207	524	5532
Coarse sandy	Q100	93	1716	15	109	95	1149	11	332	8	105	26	280	14	208	4	30	266	3929
Fine sandy	Q101	50	398	11	162	41	726	8	134	5	61	12	390	2	42	5	93	134	2006
Calcareous wares	C100	77	1148	71	926	68	1200	31	410	2	105	17	178	8	215	10	151	284	4333
Grog-tempered	G100			70	931	3	108	3	20	1	30	2	48					79	1137
Nene Valley g'ware	Q102					3	33	3	17			3	37			3	89	12	176
SE Dorset BB1	E101					2	81											2	81
Post-Roman																			
Saxon sandy ware	Q400	1	24															1	24
Red earthenwares	E600													3	42			3	42
Ind. Wares ('china')	E740					6	27							8	28	6	10	20	65
Totals		**480**	**6557**	**278**	**3697**	**450**	**7143**	**152**	**2318**	**26**	**647**	**83**	**1099**	**45**	**662**	**48**	**733**	**1562**	**22856**

all weights (Wt) in grammes

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