

A Cutting Across the Saxon Defences at Wallingford, Berkshire 1971

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IN November 1971 it was noted that a G.P.O. trench running across the Kine Croft, Wallingford, had cut into the western defences of the Saxon burh. The trench was cut along the length of a made path which ran through an existing gap in the defences (FIG. 1). It was observed, however, that immediately below the present ground surface there was evidence of an embankment and archaeological levels.

Accordingly both sections of the trench were rapidly cleared, immediately prior to backfilling, and the northern section was recorded (FIG. 2).

THE SECTION

1. The natural subsoil, which lay at a depth of approximately 1.25 m. below the present ground surface, consisted of clean natural gravel.
2. Above this there was a layer (15 cm.) of red/brown weathered natural.
3. On top of this lay the old ground surface, which was well mixed red/brown loam and appeared to constitute a plough soil.
4. *First bank.* This was clearly constructed of horizontal turves sitting directly on the old ground surface. In the time available it was impossible to record the individual turves.
5. At the back of the first bank, lying on the old ground surface, was a layer of clean grey silt.
6. *Second bank.* There was a clear break between the first and second banks. The latter consisted of a homogeneous fine sandy loam. There was no evidence of turves in the second bank, which measured 2.75 m. in width at the bottom.
7. Behind the second bank lay a considerable volume of mixed silt and general accumulation.
8. Two pits of presumably post-medieval date.
9. Modern tarmac path.

DATING EVIDENCE

Two small sherds of grey Romano-British pottery were recovered from the old ground surface.

One small sherd of orange Romano-British pottery was found in the First bank.

In the silty layer between the First and Second banks was a thick sherd of dark, wheel made cooking pot, containing small quartz grains and large flint fragments; although there was nothing diagnostic about this sherd it is acceptable as being late Saxon. A fragment of the side of a Roman mortarium bowl was also found in this layer.

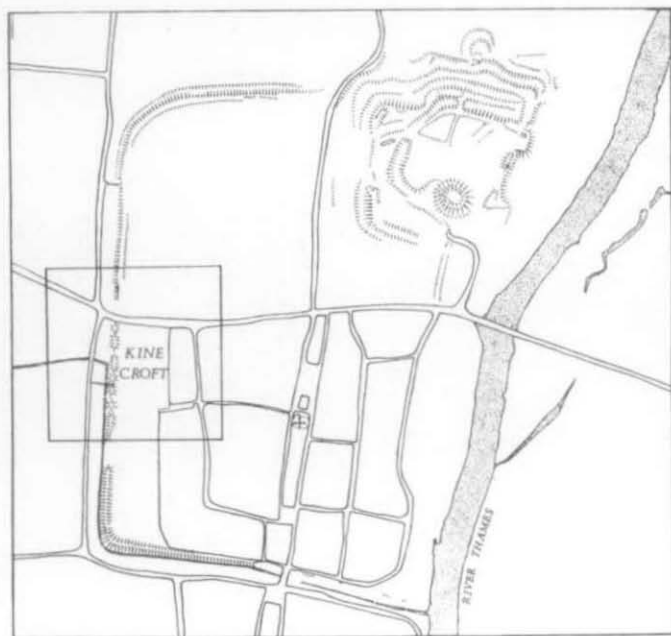
In the built up material in layer 7 was a sherd of tripod pitcher, consisting of an orange sandy fabric, with patchy orange/green glaze and three horizontal

WALLINGFORD

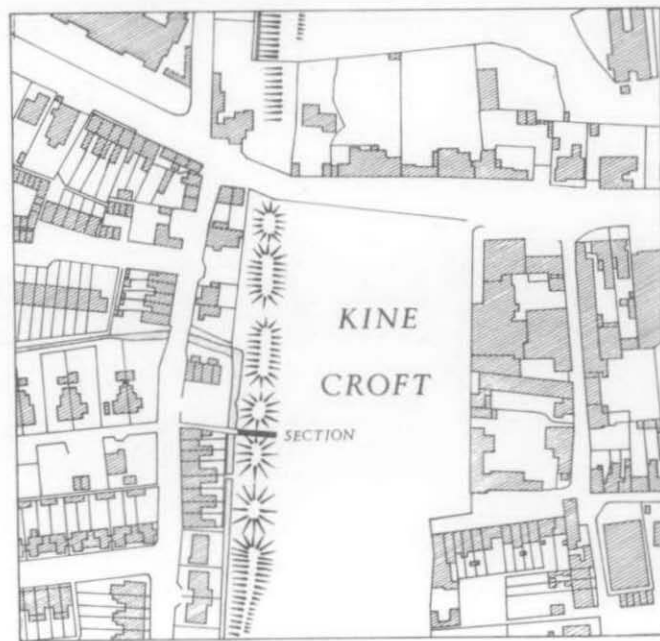
KINE CROFT

1971

LOCATION PLANS



100 0 100 200 300 400 500 600 800 1000
METRES FEET



20 0 20 40 60 80 100 50 0 50 100 150 200 250
METRES FEET

FIG. 1

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WALLINGFORD KINE CROFT 1971
RAMPART SECTION

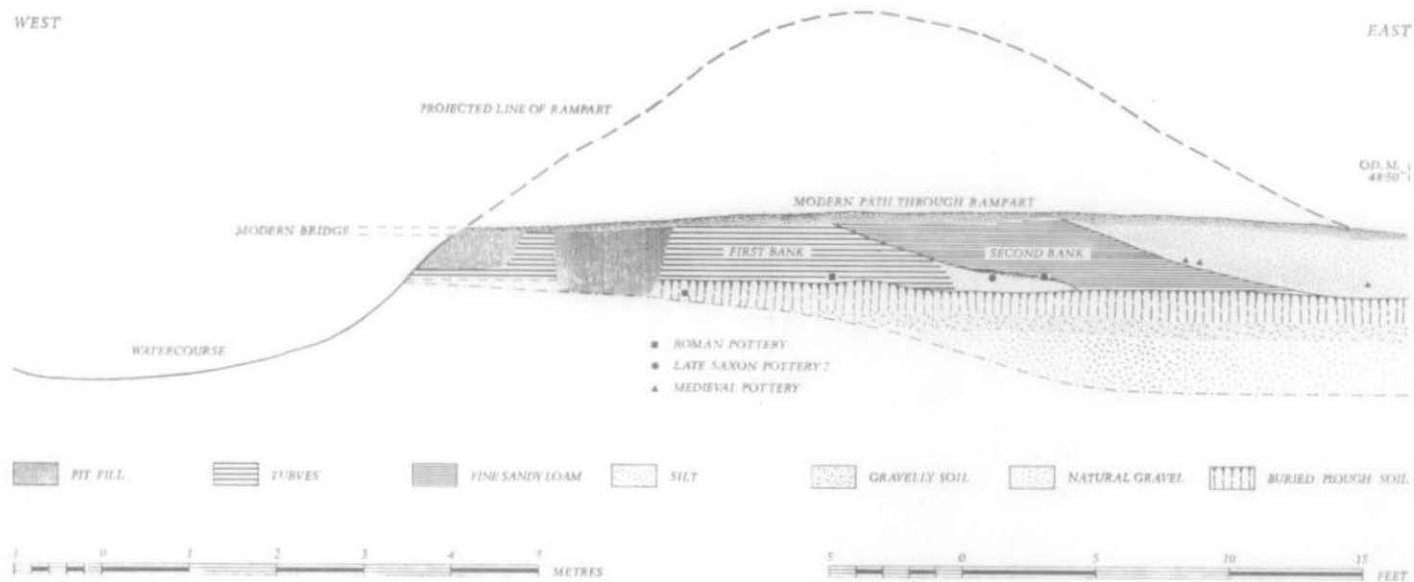


FIG. 2.

grooves, presumably 12th century. There were several medieval sherds of sandy fabric, in this layer.¹

INTERPRETATION²

It is assumed that the eight virgates mentioned under Wallingford in the Domesday Book refer to the creation of the *burh* on agricultural land ;³ in which case the old ground surface identified in this section could have been part of the open-fields of the pre-*burh* settlement at Wallingford.

The First bank observed in this section appears to correspond with Brooks' primary bank, and therefore presumably dates from the reign of Alfred. However, apart from the turves there were no other constructional details, such as the vertical timbering found in Brooks' excavations.

There was no dating evidence for the Second bank but by analogy with Brooks it probably represents the late Saxon heightening of the rampart, which in the case of the castle excavation was accompanied by the replacing of the turf and timber revetment by a stone wall.

The silt and material at the back of the banks appear to have built up over a considerable period of time during the medieval period. It is worth noting that the present profile of the rampart is misleading as the original bank dips well below the modern ground surface.

During the course of the G.P.O. work the edge of a ditch was identified running some 2 m. east of Croft Road ; its top fill contained medieval pottery. The road therefore effectively preserves the outer limit of the ditch, and all the houses on the eastern side of Croft Road lie over the ditch. The present water-course represents a canalization of the ditch which must have involved partially cutting into the Saxon defences.⁴

Thanks are due to David Sheard who drew the final section.

Mrs. S. Rutland and Mrs. J. Greenaway of Reading Museum observed two pits in the cable trenches across the Kine Croft. One at SU 60485936 was filled with dark soil and was covered by between 2 and 3 feet of brown soil. Its greatest depth from the top of the trench was 5 feet. Its diameter could not be measured because only part of it was visible at the time. Some medieval sherds were found in the soil on the side of the trench.

The other pit was at SU 60478942. It was 23½ inches in diameter filled with very dark brown soil and covered by 3 feet of brown soil. Its greatest depth from the top of the trench was 5 feet. Medieval sherds, including some of 12th century date, from the dark soil on the side of the trench must have come from this pit. A fuller report will appear in *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*, LXVI.

The sherds are in Reading Museum (accession no. 13 : 72).

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¹ The pottery and original plans are deposited at the Oxford City and County Museum, Woodstock.

² Cf. N. P. Brooks, 'Description and interpretation of the Saxon Defences', *Med. Arch.*, xi (1967), 262.

³ *V.C.H. Berkshire*, i (1906), 325 ; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (1943), 522.

⁴ In August 1972 a pipe-line culvert was cut for the Mill Brook and the ditch levelled off.