

# Roman Finds and Animal Bones from Kingston Hill Farm, Kingston Bagpuize, Oxon.

By MICHAEL PARRINGTON

## INTRODUCTION

**D**URING the excavation of a trench for a water pipe in a field to the south of the farm buildings at SU 40859990 a quantity of Roman pottery was disturbed by the mechanical excavator. Following notification of the find in May 1975 by Mr. P. Christiansen, the farmer, the section of the trench was drawn. A small exploratory excavation was also carried out during which more pottery and bone was recovered, and building debris of probable Roman date was recorded (P.R.N. 10604).

I am grateful to Mr. Christiansen and his wife for their help and hospitality during the work at the farm and also to the members of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit who assisted during the excavation and publication of the report. The pottery was drawn by Robin Spey, and Mary Harman has kindly reported on a human skull from this site. Philip Armitage is thanked for his report on the horn cores.

Kingston Hill Farm is a mile to the north of Kingston Bagpuize on a small hill at 300 ft. O.D. During Mr. Christiansen's excavations a trench varying between 80-90 cm. in width and *c.* 1 m. deep was dug into natural sand on an east-west alignment. Roman pottery and bones were recovered from the trench at a point *c.* 40 m. south of the farm buildings and limestone fragments and what appeared to be a mortar floor were noted in the section. At the west end of the trench a human skull and cattle bones were recovered (P.R.N. 5923) in 1974.

## THE EXCAVATION

A small area *c.* 4 m. N.-S. by 9 m. E.-W. was stripped by machine on the north side of the pipe trench to a depth of 30-40 cm. At this level the mortar floor (layer 2) referred to above and a spread of stones (layer 3) was planned. These features were left *in situ* and further excavation by hand revealed a pit (layer 5).

### *The Layers*

Layer 1 was the brown sandy top-soil overlying layers 2, 3 and 5.

Layer 2 was a spread of soft yellow mortar measuring 2 m. E.-W. by 1.4 m. N.-S. flecked with red tile fragments (*opus signinum*).

Layer 3 was a stoney area west of layer 2. The larger stones were up to 80 cm. in length but the majority were quite small, 10 to 15 cm. long.

Layer 4 was an area of sandy soil to the west of and below the level of layer 2.

Layer 5 was an area of darker soil to the north of layers 2 and 3. This feature

was probably a pit but as the sides were not defined and it was not fully excavated it is impossible to be certain.

Layer 6 was a ditch-like feature showing in the section to the east of layer 2. The fill was black soil below brown sandy soil. The relationship between layer 6 and the other features was not shown in the section but it is probably later as it contained sherds of grass-tempered pottery similar to Saxon pottery excavated at Radley.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE FINDS

Several hundred sherds of pottery were recovered from the site, the majority of which was coarse grey ware with a few sherds of 'Oxfordshire ware' colour coat. The date range of this pottery is from the 1st to the 4th centuries A.D. The only illustrated material recovered from a stratified context was that from layer 5 which consisted of two sherds (FIG. 1, Nos. 8 and 9) and twenty body sherds which included two colour-coated sherds. This feature is 4th century in date.

Layer 6 also contained stratified pottery, six non-joining body sherds of grass-tempered pottery, and one rim sherd of Roman grey ware. The remaining pottery is unstratified. Most of it was recovered by Mr. Christiansen from the pipe trench and the remainder was recovered during the controlled excavation. Seven sherds of unstratified pottery are published here for their intrinsic interest (FIG. 1, Nos. 1-7). They appear to be 1st century in date and possibly form a contemporary group. In addition to the pottery and bone, two tesserae, several fragments of Roman tile and a fragment of a triangular clay loomweight were recovered. Three metal objects were found—a nail, a spike and a tanged iron knife. The most interesting finds from the site are undoubtedly the animal horn cores which are reported on below by Bob Wilson and Philip Armitage.

One coin was found on the site and has been identified by the Heberden Coin Room, Ashmolean Museum, as an Antoninianus of Tetricus Caesar :

Obverse C P I V E S V T E T R I C V S C A E S  
Reverse I L L E G I B L E  
Date c. 273-4

#### THE POTTERY (FIG. 1)

- 1 Wide mouthed necked jar, burnished on neck and body (cf. E. Harris and C. J. Young, 'The Overdale Kiln site at Boars Hill', *Oxoniensia*, xxxix (1974), Fig. 7, Nos. 7-11).
- 2 Jar in coarse grey quartz gritted fabric with blackened surfaces (cf. S. S. Frere, *Verulamium I* (1972), Fig. 106, No. 194, dated A.D. 60-75).
- 3 Small jar in grey sandy fabric.
- 4 Flagon in hard pink fabric (cf. *Verulamium I*, Fig. 102, No. 106, dated A.D. 60-75).
- 5 Jar with girth grooves in dark grey fabric with grey surfaces. Highly burnished externally.
- 6 Butt-Beaker in grey fabric with grey surfaces.
- 7 Small jar in grey quartz gritted fabric fired pink on surfaces and blackened.
- 8 Pie dish in black burnished ware (cf. *Verulamium I*, Fig. 135, No. 1162, dated 310-15, and A. C. C. Brodrick *et al.*, *Shakenoak IV*, Fig. 38, No. 673).
- 9 Pie dish in grey fabric with grey surfaces (cf. C. J. Young, 'Excavations at the Churchill Hospital 1971', *Oxoniensia*, xxxviii (1972), Fig. 9, No. 55).

#### HUMAN REMAINS. By MARY HARMAN

The remains consist of a skull, mandible and six cervical vertebrae of a man aged over 45 years. Dental health was poor, three teeth having been lost from the upper jaw, while of those remaining, five had serious caries, and there is evidence of abscesses in four areas of the jaws. There are two wormian bones in the lambdoid suture.

<sup>1</sup> M. Avery and D. Brown, 'Saxon Features at Abingdon', *Oxoniensia*, xxxvii (1972), 66-81.

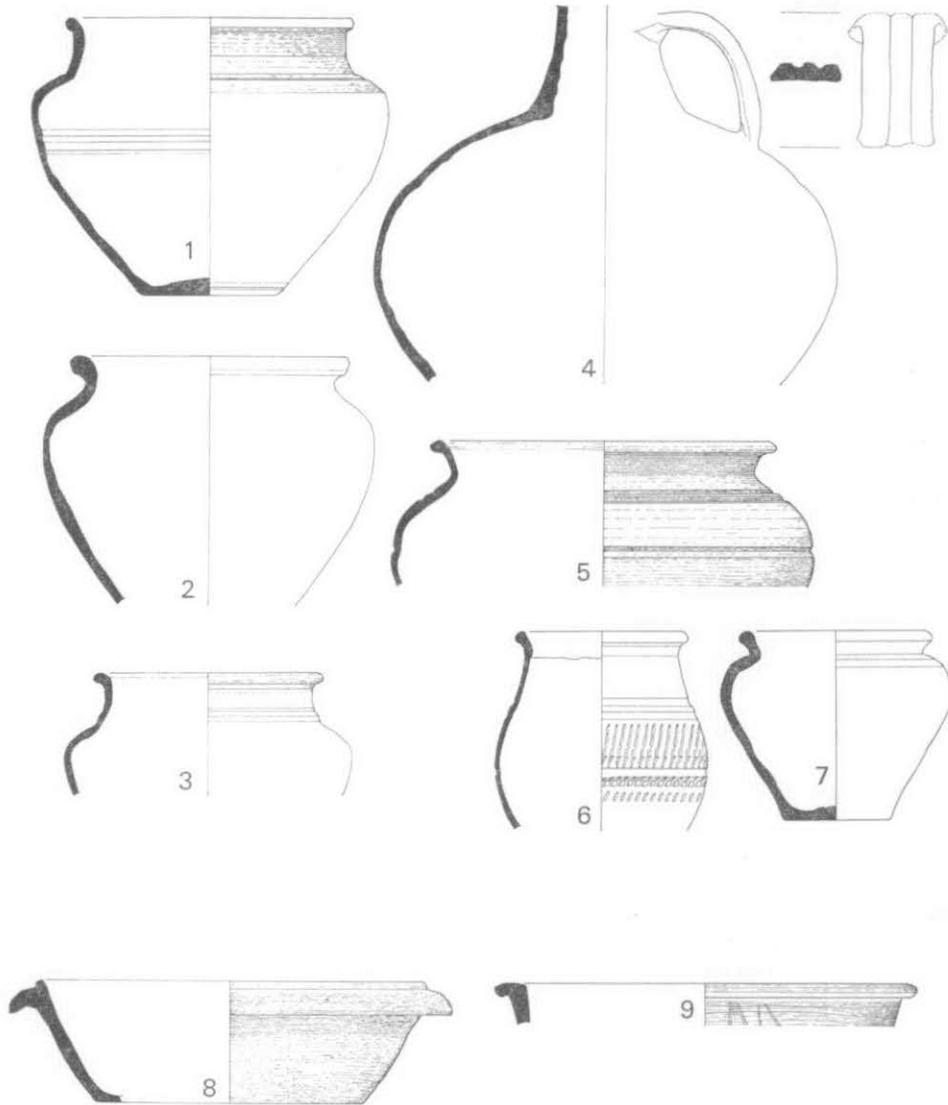


FIG. 1

Roman Pottery from Kingston Hill Farm. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$ .

THE ANIMAL BONES. By BOB WILSON

*Observations* After reunification of newly fragmented material, there are 46 rather incomplete cattle horn cores, 34 other cattle fragments, six sheep, a pig mandible and a horse vertebra. Exclusive of the horn core debris, 42 of 114 fragments are identified. Most unidentified bone appears to be cattle skull debris. Half of the sample is newly broken and 8% is considerably weathered or leached from within the soil.

Since the cattle horn cores predominate in the bone debris of layers 1, 3, 4 and 5, all the bones are treated as the same deposit, layers 1 and 5 having pieces of the same core and layers 2 and 6 producing no bone. At least 24 individuals are represented by the cores, and a minimum of 4 cattle, 2 sheep, pig and horse are represented by the other bones.

The majority of undamaged horn cores appear to be chopped off the side of the skull by blows from the ventral (6), anterior (5), anterior-dorsal (1), and possibly posterior directions. Twelve blows appear to respect the brain, but one anterior frontal base is chopped more transversely toward it. In addition to this pattern, one core seems to have been chopped off transversely, and one other horizontally, both about 4 cm. from their bases. Another core has a knife cut in the horizontal plane, anterior side, 2.5 cm. from the base. Fine cuts occur in front of another base and may be skinning marks.

Other likely cattle butchery marks are: cuts below a mandible condyle, transversely chopped vertebra, lumbar vertebra and a sacrum broken or chopped laterally, 3 scapulae broken at the neck, one trimmed on the spine and the anterior blade edge, two ulnae broken at the articulation and split posteriorly down their shafts, the tuber calcis of a calcaneum split down posteriorly and with a transverse cut anteriorly above the articulation, trimmed tibia shaft and 4 metapodial ends split longitudinally.

A sheep metatarsal has transverse cuts on its anterior proximal end.

Measurements (total lengths): pig third molar, in wear, 29 mm. and sheep metacarpal, 124 mm.

*Discussion* The butchery marks showed in unusual detail, defining a butchery pattern from a large sample of cattle horn cores. Most were chopped off the skull from under or forward of the horn base and toward the top and rear of the skull. A similar chopping pattern below the horn base was noted by Chaplin for medieval cattle horn cores from Coventry.<sup>2</sup> This seems practical if the heads were laid or held for chopping with their muzzles upended, or with their underside, *i.e.* their jaws, uppermost. Previously the heads may have been severed from the backbone.

Fine cuts at the base of one core indicate that the skin was removed from the head and one supposes that then the cheekmeats (note mandible cut below condyle) and tongue would be cut out before the horns were lopped off. Chopping appears mainly to have respected the brains, which might have been consumed.

The abundance of horn cores indicates that they had been collected purposely, but there is only one knife cut and possibly two chopped-through cores to indicate horn sheath removal. These marks occur 2-4 cm. out from the horn base, but they are less convincing than the saw cuts around single Iron Age cores from Appleford, Abingdon and Rainsborough.<sup>3</sup>

In the following report on the sexes of the horn cores, it is clear that the cores of bulls and castrates outnumber those of cows. Possibly one cow core is present in the medium-horned group,<sup>4</sup> but sixteen male and castrate cores are identified in it. Reasons for a selective horn demand by horn workers are not obvious. The evidence is more comprehensible if the medium-horned castrates and perhaps some of the bulls were kept as draught animals on a predominantly arable farm. Buying and selling might have contributed to the uneven ratio of cores largely derived from bulls and oxen slaughtered and eaten on the site.

*The Sex of the Cattle Horn Cores.* Identified by PHILIP ARMITAGE, British Museum (Natural History)

The original assemblage of mainly incomplete horn cores was numbered from 1 to 39 and for each sexed horn core this number is given first, followed by measurements in millimetres of the basal circumference and the length of the outer curvature (in brackets).

*Medium-horned group:* Male; (a) 'large stubby' 25 172 (150), 26 200 (157 est.),

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Chaplin, 'The animal remains from the Well Street Site, Coventry'. *Trans. Birmingham Archaeol. Soc.*, 81 (1961), 130-8.

<sup>3</sup> R. Wilson, 'Appleford and Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon', in preparation. Saw-cut horn core from Rainsborough on display at Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1969.62).

<sup>4</sup> P. L. Armitage, pers. communication.

<sup>5</sup> P. L. Armitage and J. Clutton-Brock (in preparation).

28 185 (153 est.), 29 193 (170 est.); (b) 'smaller' 8 143, 10 140, 12 137 (164), 16 153 (141).  
Castrate; 1 188, 2 180, 3 163, 4 181, 5 181, 6 195, 7 179, and 27 165.

Totals of 8 male and 8 castrate horn cores.

*Short-horned group*: Male; 35 124 (122), 36 115 (113). Castrate; 13 121, 31 132, 32 138. Female; 17 121, 18 (no measurements) and 20 112 (116).

Totals of 2 male, 3 castrate and 3 female horn cores.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Roman finds are not common in the Kingston Bagpuize area. An R.B. occupation site lies N.-E. of Kingston Hill Farm (P.R.N. 1690) and another site is recorded to the west of Kingston Bagpuize (P.R.N. 7897). A late Roman find is known from the south of the parish (P.R.N. 7606) and the famous hoard of over 2,000 early 4th-century coins was found in the adjoining Fyfield parish.<sup>6</sup> No Roman finds are known from Longworth parish which lies to the west of Kingston Bagpuize parish and the nearest Villa site is that at Frilford (P.R.N. 7115).

It seems clear from the Kingston Hill finds that a Roman Villa is situated somewhere in the vicinity of the present farm building. The finds from the site indicate occupation throughout the Roman period with activity also in the Saxon period. The animal horn cores present an interesting insight into Romano-British farming and butchery techniques in the early 4th century A.D. It seems unlikely that the Kingston Hill Villa is an isolated phenomenon as the archaeological evidence suggests, and it is to be hoped that fieldwork in this area will reveal more sites in the future to augment our record of this part of Roman Britain.

*The Society thanks the Department of the Environment for a grant for this report.*

<sup>6</sup> E. T. Leeds, *A Hoard of Roman Folles from Diocletian's Reform (A.D. 296) to Constantius Caesar, (1946)*.