

First-Century A.D. Finds from Mill Lane, Benson, Oxon.

By MICHAEL PARRINGTON and C. D. DE ROCHE

INTRODUCTION

IN May 1976 Mr. R. Wadley of Hampsden, Mill Lane, Benson, reported finding pottery in his garden at SU 619915 to the Wallingford Historical and Archaeological Society. The site was subsequently investigated by the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit and the finds were found to consist of first-century A.D. pottery and a British coin of Addedomaros.

We are grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Wadley for their help and interest, to Alison Alden who drew the pottery, to Bob Wilson for his report on the bones and to the Heberden Coin Room at the Ashmolean Museum for identifying the coin. The finds from the site are in the possession of Mr. Wadley, and have been given the P.R.N. 4468.

THE SITE

The site is located on the southern outskirts of Benson to the west of the airfield. Mr. Wadley recovered the pottery and animal bone from two areas, when he was gardening in the front garden (area A) and when he was putting up a fence in the rear garden (area B). The finds from area A were concentrated in an area of light sandy soil which showed up as a soil mark against the darker natural clay with flints. Part of this feature was excavated by Mr. Wadley and found to be *c.* 0.5 m. deep. Subsequent excavations in the vicinity of this feature uncovered a V-shaped ditch of similar depth and *c.* 0.75 m. wide.

In area B pottery was recovered from a hole *c.* 0.3 m. square and 0.5 m. deep dug for a garden fence post. A number of other post-holes were also dug in area B but no finds were recovered from them apart from one fragment of post-medieval tile.

Other finds were a bronze brooch subsequently lost and a British bronze coin of Addedomaros¹ of the late first century B.C. or early first century A.D. Mr. Wadley has also recovered Iron Age and Romano-British pottery from the gardens of neighbouring houses. Bob Wilson identified the animal bone remains as sheep 7 fragments, pig 5, cattle 3, horse 3 and domestic fowl 1. Half of these were teeth. Of 12 unidentified fragments one had two saw cuts. It is uncertain if all the animal remains are contemporary with the pottery.

THE POTTERY. By C. D. DE ROCHE

Ceramic material from area A consists of two tile fragments and a great variety of sherds of the Belgic period. No complete profiles could be constructed but most of the discernible forms are those common in the Upper Thames Valley such as necked bowls,

¹ R. P. Mack, *The Coinage of Ancient Britain* (1964), Nos. 273-274, 99-100.

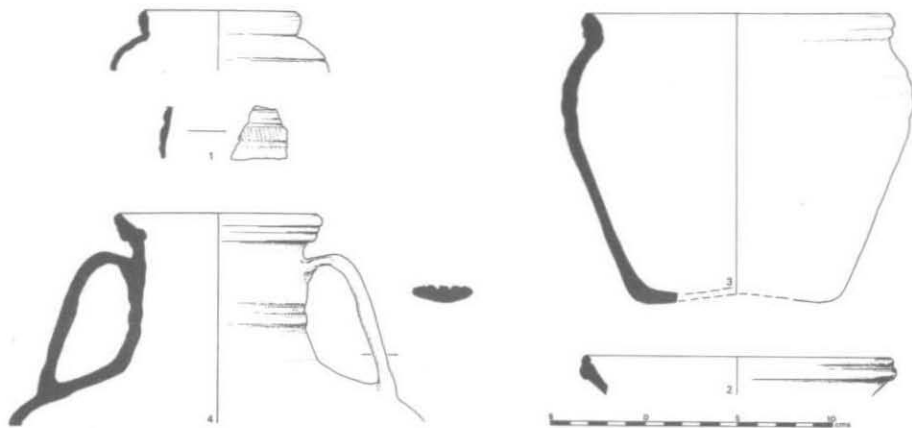


FIG. 1
First century A.D. pottery from Mill Lane, Benson. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

vessels with everted, flaring or bead rims, some rippled or corrugated shoulders, and flat or foot-ring bases. Sherds of four butt beaker types were recovered. Several body sherds and a base are from the same vessel as the butt beaker sherds from area B (see below). Other thin, fine, light grey (Munsell Color 10YR) sherds with grooved and combed decoration presumably belonged to a similar form. Another sherd, of finer paste and highly burnished, may be an import but the vessel form is not known. The everted rim and decorated body of another vessel (FIG. 1, No. 1) indicates a girth beaker of the earlier first century A.D. One black burnished rim sherd of a platter (FIG. 1, No. 2) closely resembles Camulodunum 28, which are native copies of a Gallo-Belgic form entering Britain around the conquest period.²

The range of fabrics is great, from the vesicular, usually thick types used for large jars, to the hard, very uniform and fine-grained grey wares of the Belgic-Roman transitional period.³ Flint, quartz, shell and other calcareous material, and vegetable matter, are the inclusions commonly identified. Decorative techniques employed include burnishing of entire surfaces or bands or patterns, liberal use of cordons and grooves, combing and tooling of lines and, in one instance, twisted cord impressions on a slipped vessel. One grooved concave neck has a post-firing perforation just below the rim.

The assemblage from area B consists of sherds from eight vessels. The large size of the sherds and the number which join suggest that the pots may have been nearly complete when deposited. The bases are flat. Two belong to heavy, coarse vessels of c. 18 cm. base diameter with plant material and a variety of other inclusions in the paste. Another base, of thinner, sandier fabric, had a pentagon roughly incised from the exterior to remove the centre of the base. The fourth base belongs to a globular jar with rounded shoulders and upright rim, with crushed shell inclusions (FIG. 1, No. 3). Two round-bodied vessels with bead rims, one with a concave neck and horizontal grooves and cordons were found. Various reddish-yellow (Munsell Color 7.5YR) body sherds of a butt beaker, with internal rilling and external bands of combed decoration, match the foot-ring base from area A. The eighth vessel is a globular amphora or flagon (FIG. 1, No. 4) with two reeded strap handles, a slight neck cordon, and an upright reeded lip with internal flange. The pink (Munsell Color 5YR) fabric has smooth, very pale brown (Munsell Color 10YR) surfaces and is non-calcareous with white quartz grains and occasional reddish mineral inclusions.

² C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, *Camulodunum* (1947), 220 and 222.

³ D. W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972), 121-2.

The best local parallel for this distinctive form is from Dorchester.⁴ Reeded strap handles are common at Bagendon,⁵ but Camulodunum Form 165, a native copy of Forms 161-3 of the Tiberio Claudian period, is the most accurate parallel in fabric and form.⁶

The date of this closed group from area B agrees well with the time period proposed for material from area A and suggests that this site witnessed considerable activity at some time during the first century A.D. The recovery of a few similar sherds from Benson was reported in *Oxoniensia*, xx (1955), 90. Contacts with Bagendon to the west and the Trinovantian area to the east are postulated. Although these vessel forms are conventionally placed in the pre-Conquest period, recent research⁷ indicates their continuation throughout the first century A.D.

DISCUSSION

It seems clear that there was a first-century occupation site in the vicinity of Mr. Wadley's house. Many of the sherds from area B are fairly large and it is probable that Mr. Wadley's post-hole was cut into a pit. In area A most of the finds came from a linear ditch. The coin was found some distance away from the ditch finds and whilst it is tempting to try to associate the pottery with the coin the discrepancy between the date of the coin and the pottery, which may have continued in use into the second half of the first century A.D., makes the association less likely. Addedomaros is thought to have been a Trinovantian king reigning from c. 15 B.C. to 1 B.C.⁸ His coins are mostly found in Essex but some are known in Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.⁹ It is uncertain whether this distribution reflects trade or aggression but future excavations may provide an answer.

⁴ S. S. Frere, 'Excavations at Dorchester on Thames', *Archaeol. J.*, 119 (1962), 114-149, Fig. 13.

⁵ E. M. Clifford, *Bagendon: A Belgic Oppidum* (1961), Fig. 51.

⁶ *Op. cit.* note 2, 248.

⁷ Pers. Comm. C. J. Young.

⁸ *Op. cit.* note 1, 94-5.

⁹ *Op. cit.* note 1, 96-7 and map 14.