

Excavations at Faccenda Chicken Farm, near Alchester, 1983

By MARTIN FOREMAN and SEBASTIAN RAHTZ

With contributions by GILLIAN JONES, BRIAN HARTLEY, JUSTIN HUGHES, and JOHN GIORGI & MARK ROBINSON

SUMMARY

A limited excavation was carried out $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north of Alchester. Pits and ditches of the late 1st to the late 2nd centuries indicated extensive drainage work, abandoned by the early 3rd century and covered in alluvium.

INTRODUCTION

This report describes work carried out on the site south of the manager's house at the Faccenda Chicken Farm, Chesterton, Oxon (SP 5725 2085). The archaeological interest of the site was noted by R.T. Rowley and R.A. Chambers, and five weeks of excavation was undertaken by the Oxford University Department for External Studies in July and August 1983 under the supervision of Trevor Rowley, Sebastian Rahtz and Mélanie Steiner. John Giorgi, Justin Hughes and Martin Foreman undertook post-excavation as part of the Oxford In-service Archaeology Training scheme.

The site is located east of the junction of Akeman Street and the road from Alchester to Towcester (Fig. 1). It was hoped to trace one or both routes, as well as recover information about occupation at this distance from the Roman town, but in the event the excavation was occupied almost exclusively with Roman ditches. The site served as permanent pasture prior to development, and was waterlogged in winter, the wet conditions being typical of the flood-plain of the River Ray. The subsoil consists of pleistocene gravels.

There were three methods of excavation: firstly, the modern stream (Fig. 2) was substantially deepened and widened by the contractors, revealing features in both banks; only partial excavation of the north bank back into the 45 degree slope was permitted, while the south bank was only cleaned. A number of environmental samples were taken from this area (positions marked on section, Fig. 6, and reported on below). Secondly, trenches 1 and 3 had already been dug by the contractors to a certain depth for drainage, and trench 1 was completed by hand. Thirdly, trenches 2, 4 and 5 were excavated by machine in an attempt to answer specific questions.

We would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Faccenda Chicken Farm and their contractors, and thank the volunteers who came to dig, especially Louise Armstrong and Jim Dudfield. Christine Jones assisted on site and with background research as part of her In-Service Archaeology course at the Department for External Studies. We are grateful to C.J. Young and R.A. Chambers for their comments on an earlier draft.

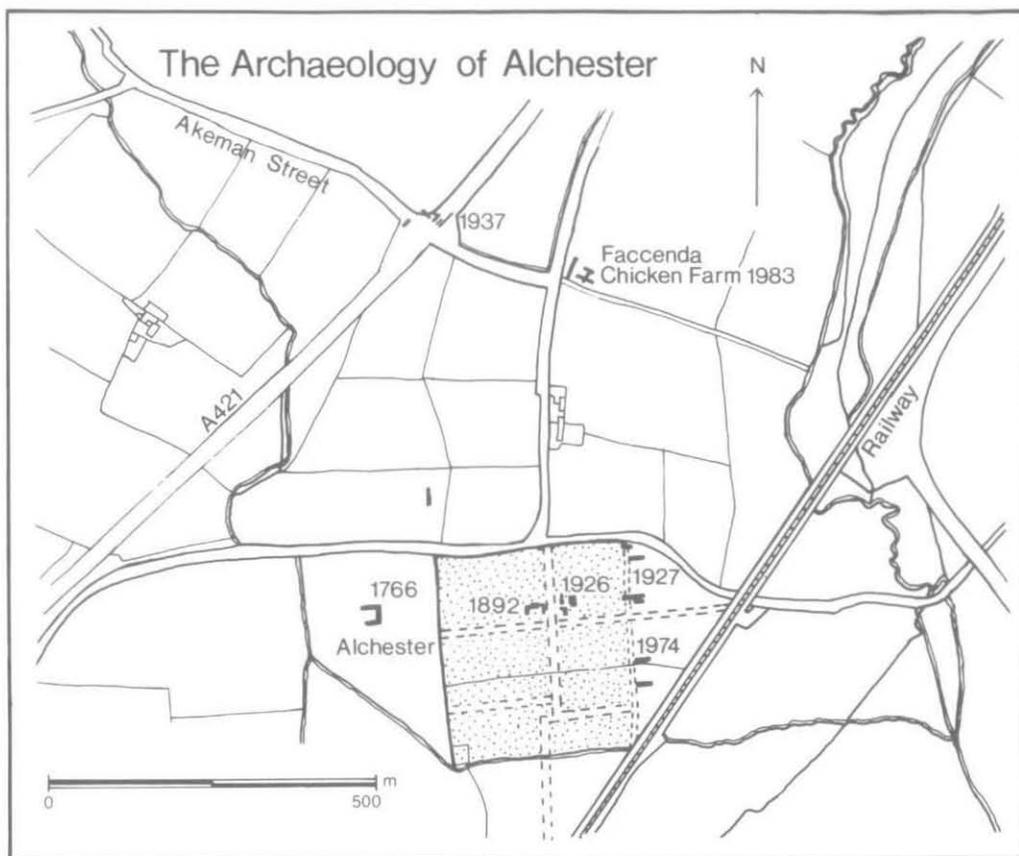


Fig. 1. The Archaeology of Alchester 1766–1983.

All the illustrations are the work of Mélanie Steiner and the report was typed by Shirley Hermon and Sebastian Rahtz. The archive and finds have been deposited at the Oxfordshire County Museum, Woodstock.

THE EXCAVATION

Phase 1 (Fig. 3)

The earliest activity on the site is Roman, and appears to have been the digging of pits for the dumping of rubbish (contexts 103, 105, 118, 140), and of straight, parallel ditches (189, 185=154, 183=142, 125). The alignment of ditches was generally east–west, with a gentle fall from west to east, suggesting a drainage function, carrying water towards the river Ray. The fills of the ditches were characteristic of waterlain material (M. Robinson, pers. comm.), and one of the pits (118) contained waterlogged remains of a wooden plank. It is possible that this timber was part of a sluice-gate or even a bridge structure, but there is sadly insufficient evidence, either in the features or the timber itself, to be positive. Two samples were taken from features on the south bank of the stream (250, 252 not on Fig. 2), the contents of which are reported on below. The analysis suggests that they may have been ditches, but the excavation evidence is not sufficient to support this. The wet conditions

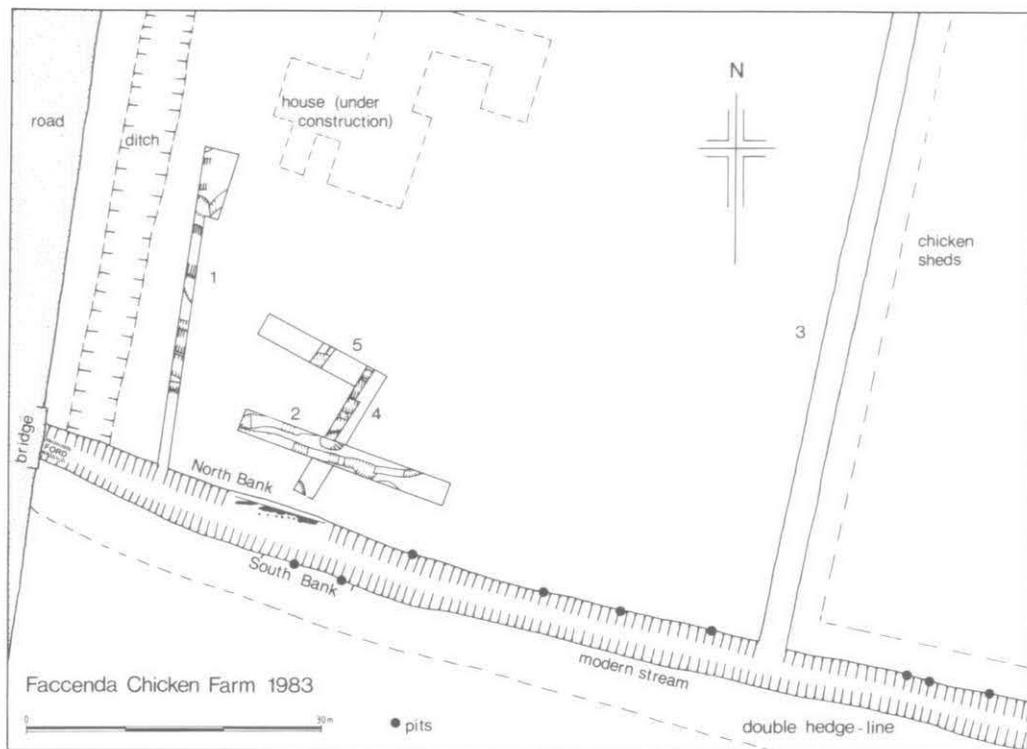


Fig. 2. Faccenda Chicken Farm 1983.

argue against a storage function for the pits and horse, sheep and cattle bone (reported on below, p. 38) were included in the debris, probably from nearby settlement.

There are few stratigraphic links between features to establish a relative chronology but absolute dating is possible from diagnostic pottery forms: pit 105 and pits on the south bank of the stream (264, 265) contain late 1st- and early 2nd-century pottery, pit 118 contains fragments of 2nd-century poppy-head beaker, while ditch 212 includes Flavian/Trajanic samian in its fill.

Phase 2 (Fig. 4)

At the southern end of trench 1, a wide new ditch (126) was dug, with substantial gravel banks on either side and two channels at the bottom (114, 105); north of this was a large shallow ditch (176), over 6 m wide, from whose excavation gravel was spread to the north and possibly to the south to form the banks on either side of 126. On the south side of the latter was a line of wooden piles parallel to the ditch (208-210; one was taken for examination, see below) which may have acted as a revetment to the gravel; they were cut through or surrounded by a layer of silt (207, see North Bank section, Fig. 6). On the north side of 126 a small ditch (147) was one of the few north-south alignments on the site.

Ditch 176 contained mid-2nd-century pottery (forms 010, R31) while the southern of the two channels of 126 contained Central Gaulish Samian of the same date.

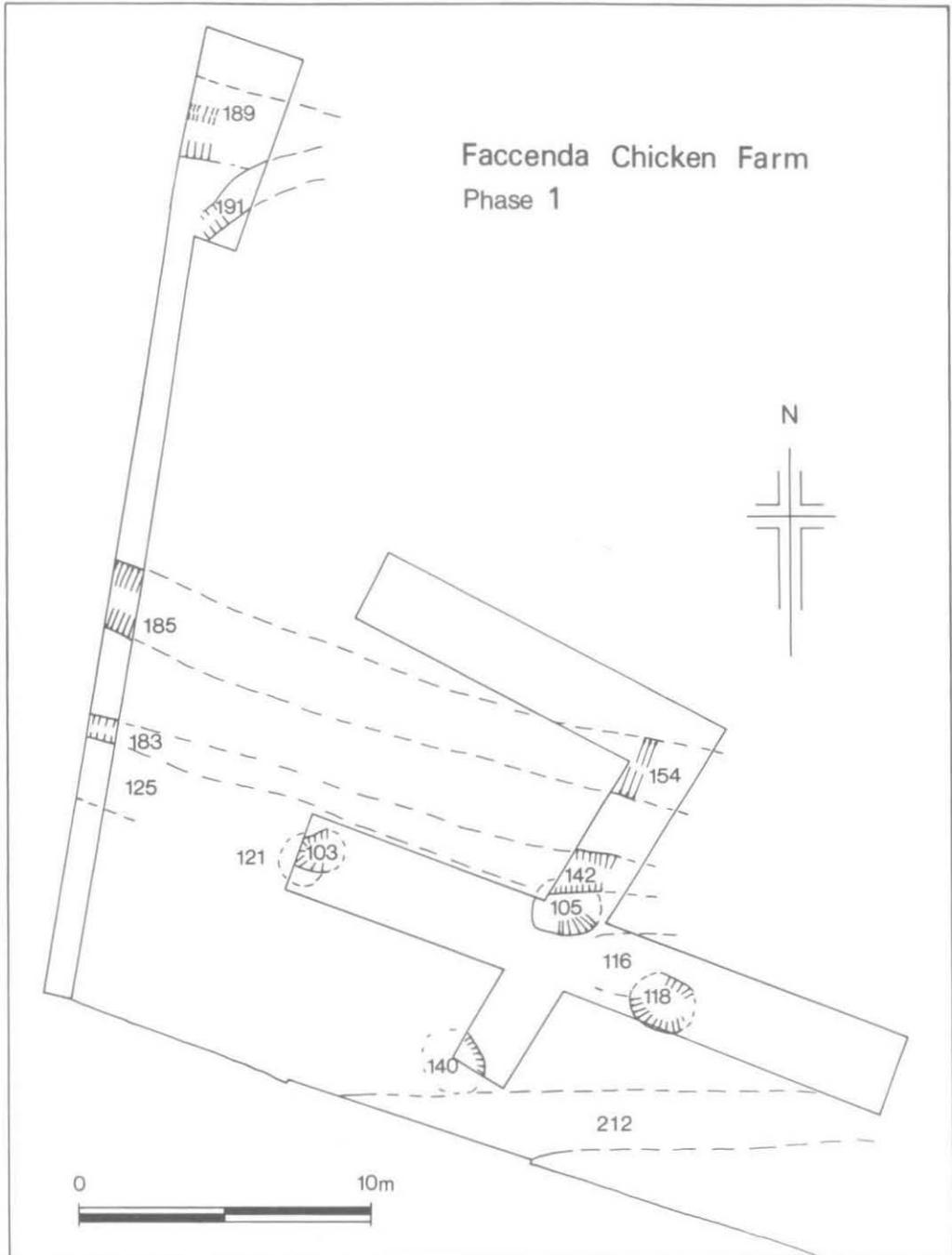


Fig. 3. Phase 1.

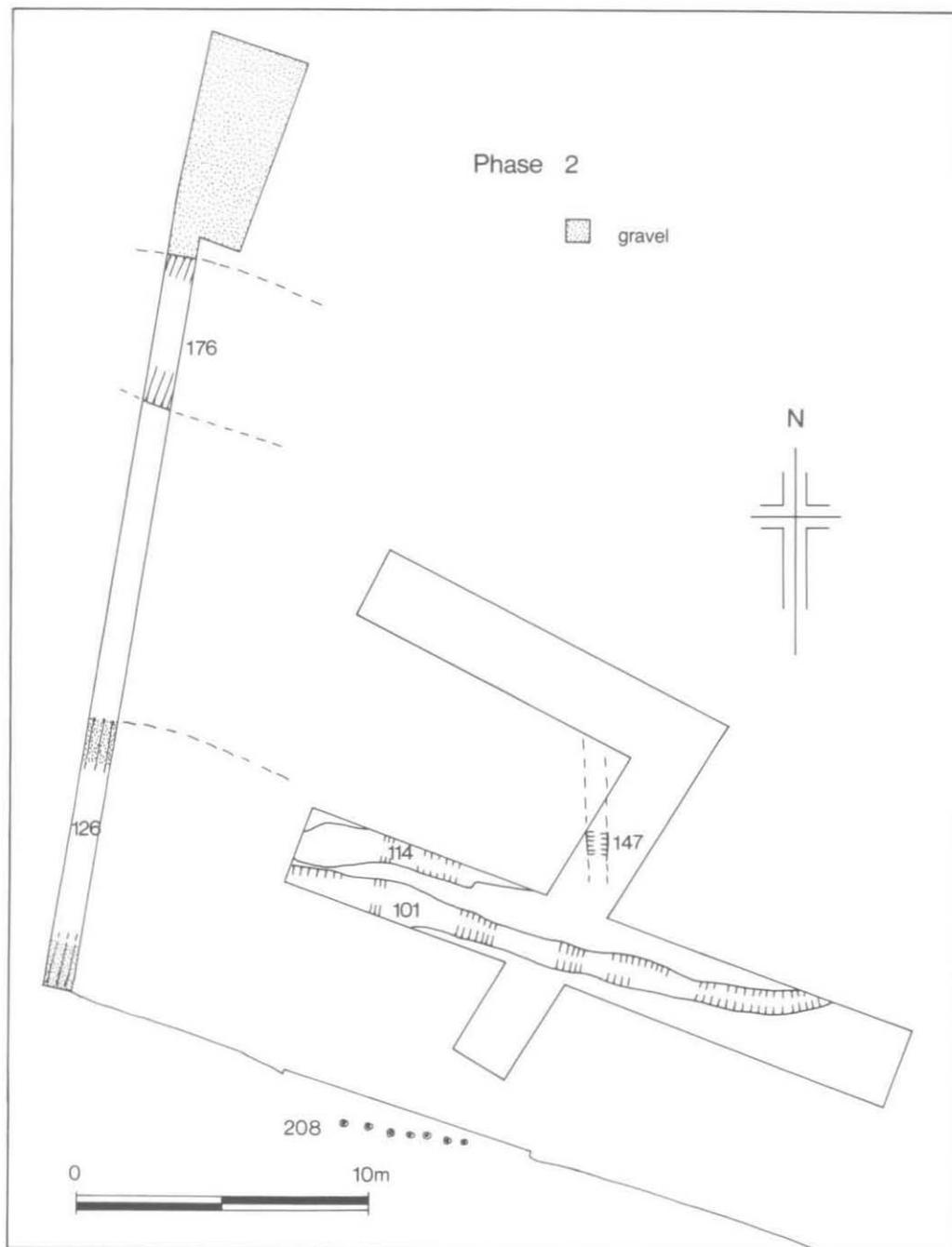


Fig. 4. Phase 2.

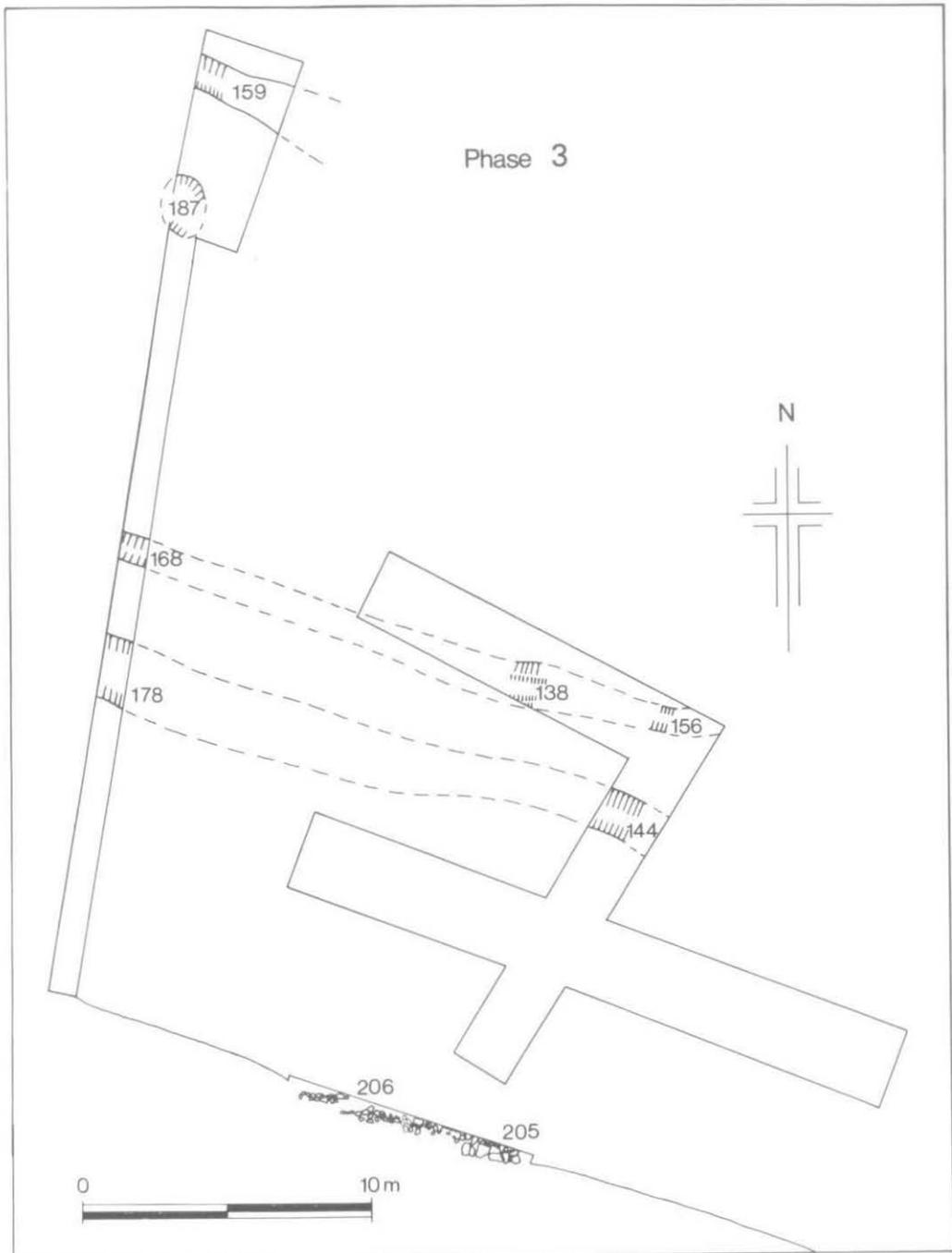


Fig. 5. Phase 3.

Phase 3 (Fig. 5)

Further ditching followed the construction of the large ditch/channels, though it is uncertain whether it postdated their disuse, as their alignment was apparently respected by the new works. Ditches 178 and 144 are on the same east-west alignment, almost certainly to be identified as the same feature; recutting is possible, and may account for a disparity of level and fills. The V-shaped section of ditch 168 (=138 & 156) may indicate that its function was not simply for drainage.

There was continued deposition of material over the wooden piles of phase 2 (layers 206 and 205, see section Fig. 6), with substantial flat stones in several lines (see plan and section); it is possible a metallised surface was laid down along the southern side of a clogging and diminished ditch. If this was the case, it was not, however, detected in trenches 2 and 4. The alternative is that the small area of exposed stones represented lines of revetment, replacing the wooden piles, rather than flat surfaces. The rising level of phase 3 ditching compared to phases 1 and 2 suggests a rise in local water level consistent with the filling of old channels.

The fill of these ditches included pottery, horse, pig, cattle and sheep bone and scraps of leather (not kept) from context 138. The pottery remains consistent with a second century date, but Antonine Samian becomes more common. Globular beaker forms, which cease production *c.*150 AD, must impose caution upon dating this group of features too late, though they are stratigraphically later than the banked stream. Mortaria make up over half the large sherd-count in ditch 168 and are of a type discontinued after 170 AD (form M2); on the strength of these forms a late 2nd-century date is suggested for the filling of the ditches. Ditch 159 is similar in shape, and the horizon from which it is cut, to 168, and thus is assigned to this phase, despite a lack of dating information.

Phase 4 (not illustrated)

Evidence for the abandonment of the site comes with the failure to renew drainage channels, and the consequent build-up of fine grey silt-sand over most of the area (layer 182 in trench 1, 202 on the North Bank, see section Fig. 6). This reached its highest point between the phase 2 ditches and covered the gravel banks – perhaps a seasonal inundation similar to those which characterised the area till the modern insertion of deep ditches, suggested by presence of marshland molluscs in the alluvial layers. The sandy soil in this alluvium may originate from clearance of ditches, as it is unlikely to be naturally deposited on marshy ground. The overlying deposit (146, 134) in trench 4 was harder and gravelly, and here an alluvial origin is unlikely.

The pottery from both the alluvium and its gravelly counterpart was mixed, with a high residual content which may indicate dumping of soils in addition to a process of natural alluviation. A 1st-century brooch from the stony layer 130 may also have been imported in dumped material. A few sherds of hard oxidised ware of 3rd-century type come from these upper layers, e.g. 204, though most of the pottery remains of early fabric types. These upper layers sealed the 1st- and 2nd-century layers, except at the north end of trench 1.

Unphased and post-Roman

The north end of trench 1 was not covered by alluvial deposit, due in part to the raising of its level by dumps of gravel (161, 162, 158, 171) in phase 2, cut by ditch 159 in phase 3. There are a number of small postholes (163–7) on the north side of 159, following its

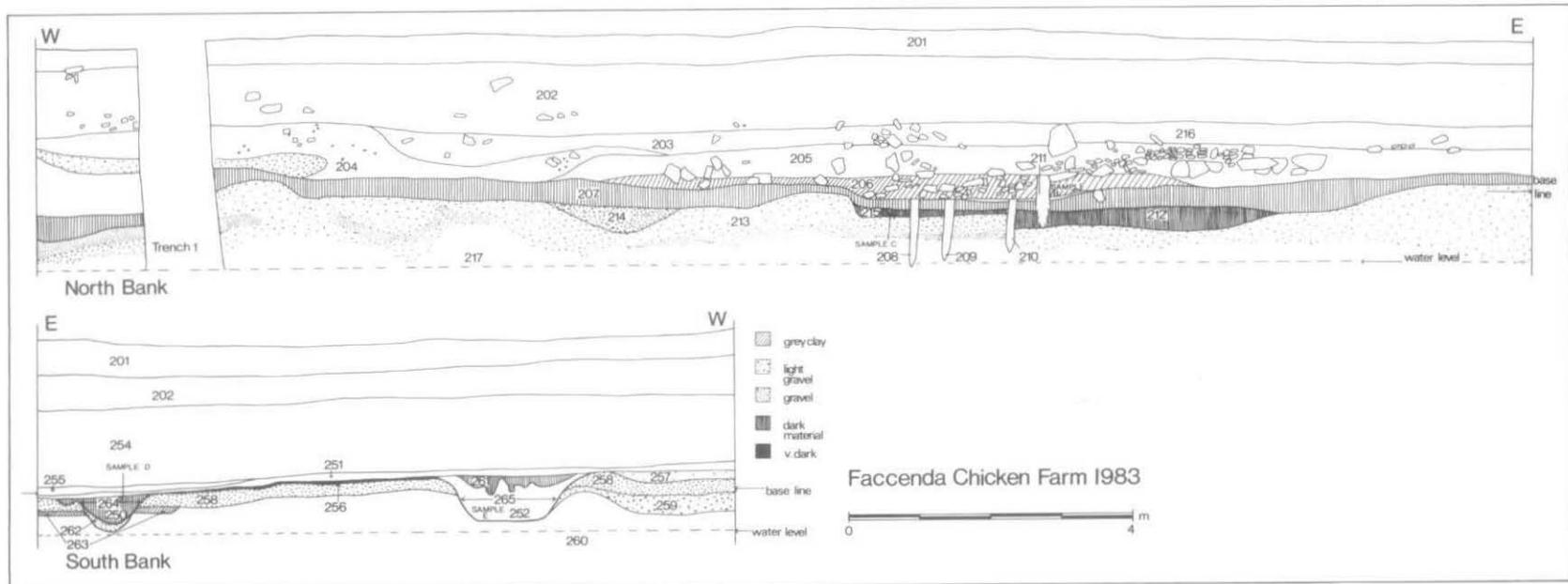


Fig. 6. Sections: north bank and south bank.

east-west alignments and perhaps representing a reinstatement of a long-standing boundary. Features were observed in trench 3, and may indicate the continuation of those recorded, but time did not allow the section to be drawn. More features appeared along the modern stream face on the north bank, the positions of which are plotted on Fig. 1. All these were of pit/ditch type.

A pebble and clay surface immediately east of the present bridge (Fig. 2) on either side of the stream had clay pipe fragments on its surface and is interpreted as a medieval ford over the stream. If, as discussed further below, the Roman road to Towcester follows the line of the modern road, we may suggest that the medieval road is very close to the Roman predecessor, both being obliterated by the modern bridge and tarmac, except where the ford remains visible.

THE FINDS

THE POTTERY By JUSTIN HUGHES

Some 2,229 sherds of Romano-British pottery from the site were analysed; it is reasonable to assume that finds from the lower deposits are undisturbed, although residuality is likely between the inter-related ditches and pits. The fabrics identified (correlated where possible with the fabrics in Young's corpus of Oxfordshire Pottery)¹ are described below with the proportion by weight of the total assemblage given as a percentage. A list of forms commonly found in that fabric is given, following the corpus of Young, and selected examples are illustrated by phase in Fig. 7 (see catalogue below). 96.51 per cent of the total pottery weight from the site is of local manufacture.

1. Ra

Reduced ware (Young - Reduced Ware Fabric 1); coarse; major inclusions: grog. Basically grog-tempered fabrics, with different sherds containing quartz, quartzite, mica, chalk and iron ores in varying proportions. Some pot fragments that have only been low fired in the kiln have burnt-out material apparent. The colour ranges from grey through to brown, orange and yellow. The texture tends to be hard and coarse in some sherds but the bulk are smooth and soapy to feel.

Main forms: storage jars, e.g. R20, 28.35 per cent.

2. Rb

Reduced ware (Young - Sandy Grey Ware); coarse; major inclusions: quartz. These are locally manufactured sandy grey wares. There are variations in the coarseness of the secondary inclusions and in the colour which prompts a subdivision of this fabric, see **Rc** below.

Main forms: Jars and bowls, e.g. R23, R24, R38, 29.11 per cent.

3. Rc

Reduced ware (Young - Sandy Grey Ware); coarse; major inclusions: quartz. Some sherds contain chalk grit tempering. The cores are generally darker grey than those in **Rb**, i.e. grey through to black.

Main forms: open-necked jars, e.g. R38, 4.27 per cent.

4. Rd

Reduced ware (Young - Fine Grey Ware); These sandy wares contain very occasional inclusions, if any. Occasional decoration and surface wash is apparent. The colour is almost uniformly grey, and the cores are fractured evenly throughout.

Main forms: necked jars, e.g. R24, 10.57 per cent.

¹ C.J. Young, *Oxfordshire Roman Pottery*, BAR 43 (1975).

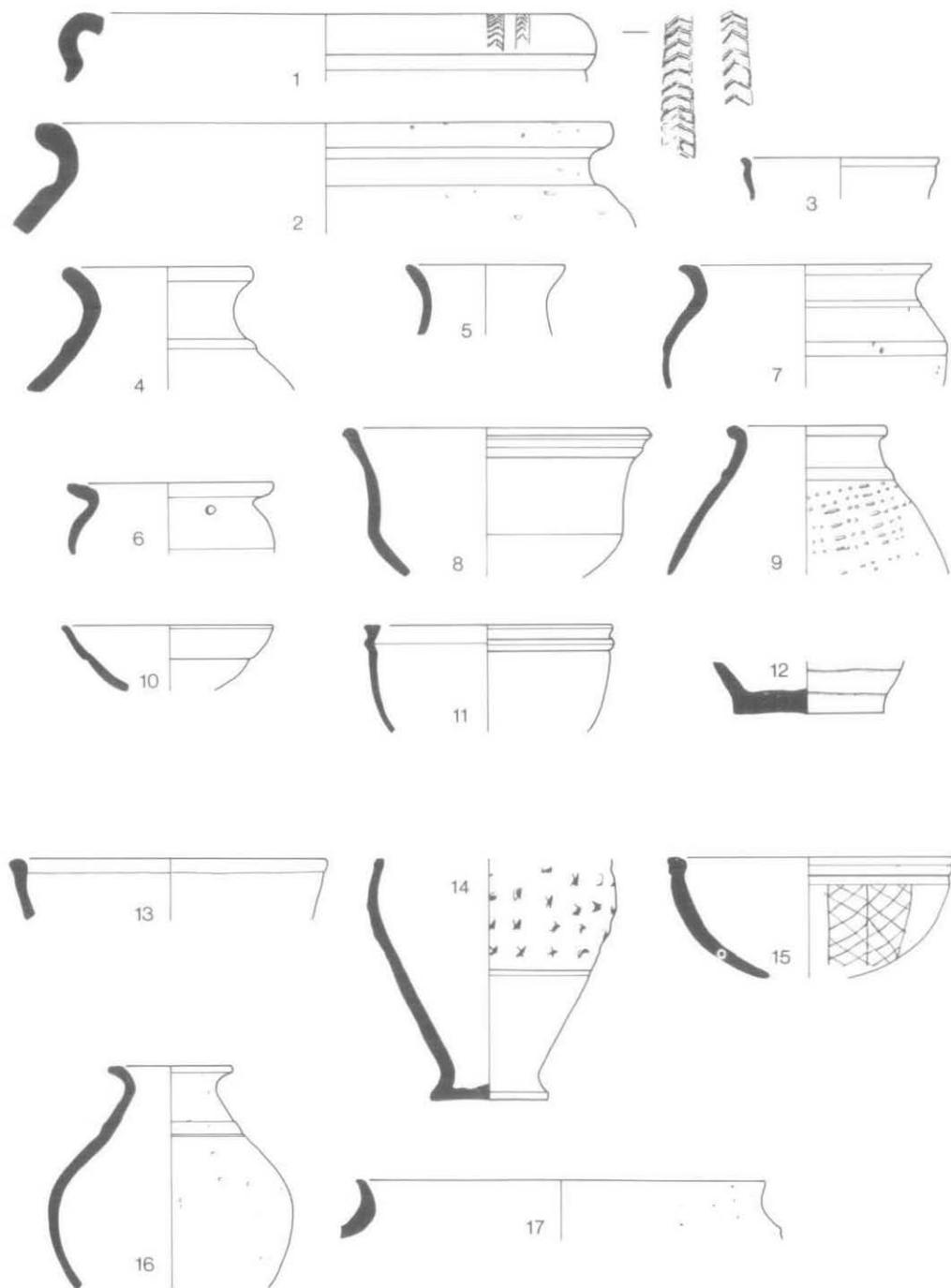


Fig. 7. Roman pottery.

5. **Re**

Reduced ware (Young - ?Fine Grey Ware); fine, but distinct from **Rd** in that they are harsher with more inclusions, mainly quartz, and they are brown in colour. Rare.

No diagnostic forms. 0.36 per cent.

6. **Sg**

Calcite gritted ware; major inclusions: shell, though some chalk and limestone grit; all laminated through the surface of the fired fabric. The colour ranges from orange through to brown and dark grey. Mostly hand-made vessels, finished on a wheel.

Main forms: storage vessels. 4.53 per cent.

7. **Oa**

Oxidised ware (Young - Fine Oxidised Ware); A hard sandy ware incorporating little or no visible temper, occasional quartz. The surfaces are generally smooth and orange, and are frequently powdery in texture.

Main forms: jars and beakers, e.g. 010 and 018, 3.97 per cent.

8. **Ob**

Oxidised ware (Young - Coarse Oxidised Ware); A hard ware with visible temper of large sand grains. A fair proportion in this category were not left in the kiln long enough for full oxidation, and therefore the cores are often grey.

Main forms: jars, e.g. 010 and Beakers 018?, 8.31 per cent.

9. **Wa**

White ware (Young - Coarse White Ware); A hard sandy fabric with visible temper; major inclusions: quartz with some mica, red and black sand and occasional iron. Often a powdery texture.

Main forms: bowls, e.g. W59. 1.87 per cent.

10. **Wb**

White ware (Young - Fine White Ware); hard and sandy but finer powdery feel than **Wa**. Colour ranges from cream/white to dark grey. Moderate quartz inclusions.

Form: ring-necked flagon - W2. 1.42 per cent.

11. **M**

Mortaria with black, grey, white or pink, and rounded and trituration grits.

Main forms: mortaria M2, 3.67 per cent.

12. **A**

Amphora - only four sherds were found.

Forms: undiagnostic. 0.96 per cent.

13. **CC**

Colour coated ware; only one tiny sherd fragment was retrieved in the stratified areas of the site. Four sherds were also found in cleaning back trench 1. White, with red/black colour coat.

Form: undiagnostic. 0.07 per cent.

14. **BB**

Black burnished ware type 1

Main forms: open-necked jars and bowls, e.g. R53 form. 0.67 per cent.

15. **Samian**

A full identification of the Samian sherds by Dr. Brian Hartley is included in the archive deposited in the Oxford County Museum.

The reduced wares (probably all Oxfordshire wares) make up over three-quarters of the pottery from the site and are present in every layer. From pottery fabric **Rb**, the most

abundant, it is hard to distinguish the products of specific kilns as large numbers of sites produced sandy grey wares.

Fabric **Ra** is prominent in phase 1, but by phase 2 its decline accompanies the rise of fabric **Rb** to 50 per cent of the assemblages, and vessels in this fabric may take over the function of the large **Ra** storage vessels, or the bulk storage function itself may become less important.

At Shakenoak² it is suggested that the handmade shell-gritted wares are not brought onto the site after c.120 AD and at Faccenda too they decline from 6 per cent to a possibly residual 3 per cent between phases 2 and 3.

All the major fabric groups of local manufacture show indication of early issue. Fine grey ware **Rd** (which ceased production in the late 2nd century), for example, comprises 10.57 per cent of the total. Some of the oxidised wares may be later, perhaps circulating up to the middle of the 3rd century,³ but the bulk are c.80–180 AD.

The most common forms of vessel are those, like R24 and R28, which derive from Belgic design. Of the rarer ones, R41 occurs in all 3 occupation phases, and R68 and W54, imitations of samian form Dr. 37, occur in phases 2 and 3 and with the samian itself there is a preference for plain vessels typical of 2nd-century Oxfordshire. Decorative motifs and forms show a predominance of Belgic styles over imported fashions.

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED POTTERY

(Forms from Young corpus)

Phase 2

1. M 2; mortarium with stamp on rim. Context 177.
2. O 10; wide-mouthed necked jar with everted rim. Fabric **Ob**. AD 50–400+. Context 177.
3. O 45; bowl copying Dr 37. Fabric **Oa**. AD 100–200. Context 177.
4. R 15; necked jar. Fabric **Rb**. Context 177.
5. R 34; necked jar. Fabric **Rb**. Context 177.
6. R 38; Rim with drilled hole, necked bowl derived from Belgic forms. Fabric **Rb**. 1st to 4th century. Context 177.
7. R 38; as above, but finer fabric. Context 177.
8. R 56; straight-sided bowl. Fabric **Rb**. Context 177.
9. R 34; Poppy-head beaker. Fabric **Rd**. 2nd century. Context 180.
10. R 62; Context 180.
11. R 68; bowl copying Londonware imitation of Dr 37. Fabric **Rb**. 2nd century. Context 180.
12. Base with incised line added during turning.

Phase 3

13. ? R 34; jar, variant of poppy-head beaker. Fabric **Rb**. 2nd century. Context 139.
14. R 68; as above, with incised lattice decoration. Fabric **Rb**. Context 169.
15. O 34; bead rim bowl. Fabric **Ob**. 2nd century. Context 205.

Phase 4

16. R 15; narrow-necked jar, Belgic derivative. Fabric **Rd**. 1st to 4th century. Context 134.
17. Jar. Fabric **Ob**. Context 204.

² A.C. Brodribb, Hands and Walker, *Shakenoak I & IV BAR* (1968–1972).

³ cf. Middleton Stoney (S.P.Q. Rahtz and R.T. Rowley, *Middleton Stoney: Excavation and Survey in a North Oxfordshire Parish 1970–1982* (Oxford Univ. Dept. for External Studies, 1984)).

Pit 118 Wood

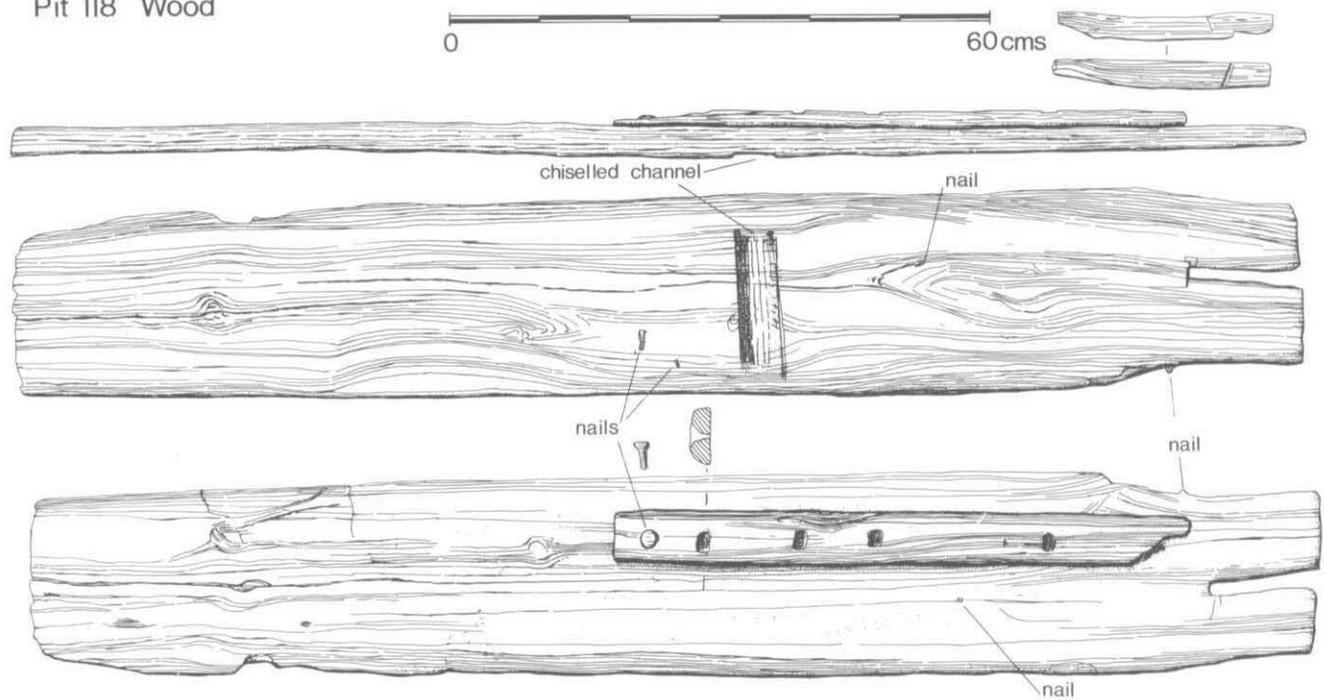


Fig. 8. Wood from Pit 118.

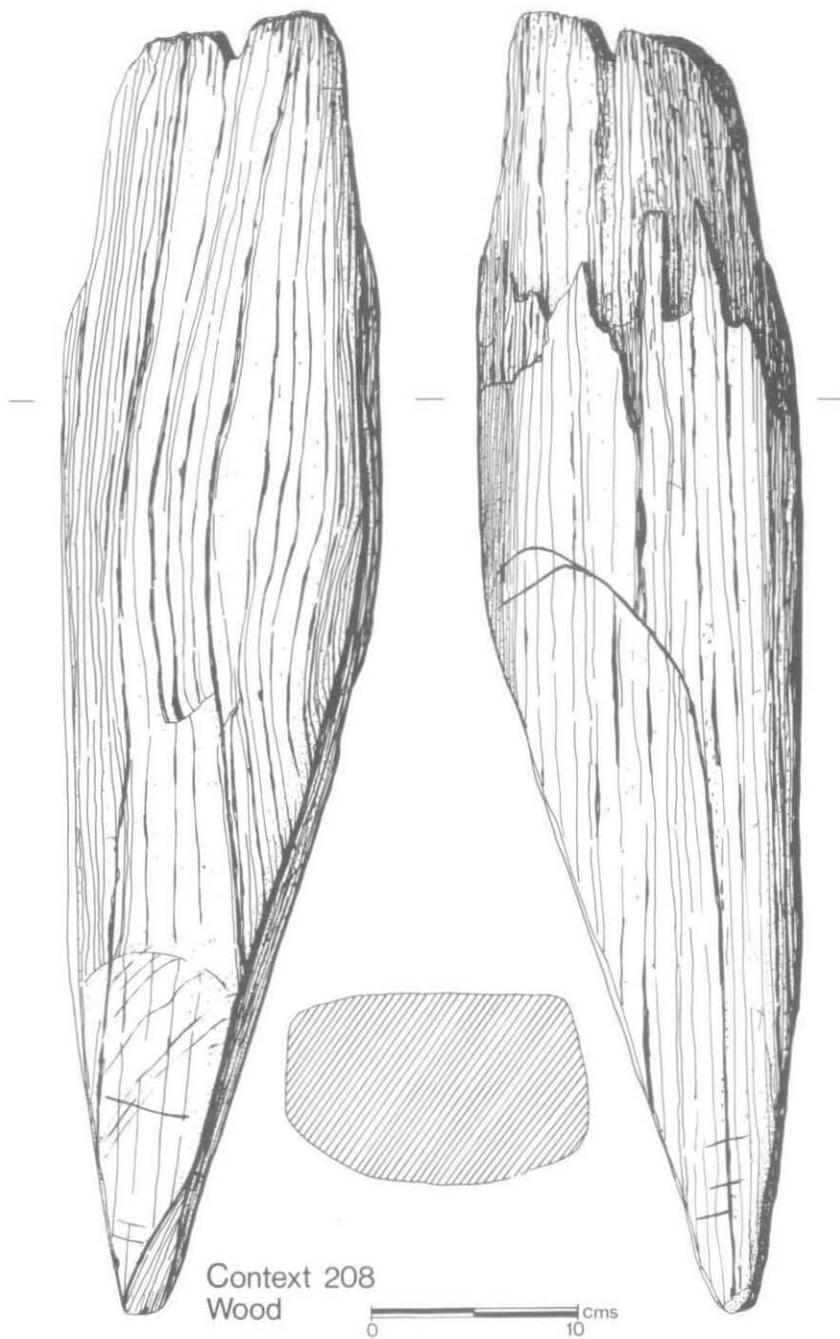


Fig. 9. Wood from Context 208.

OTHER FINDS

a) *Copper Alloy*

Context 130 (phase 1): a two-piece bronze brooch in poor condition, with pierced catchplate and the spring covered by a hood, was found in context 130 (phase 1). A pierced and inscribed example came from Alchester,⁴ while a similar, though larger, example is dated to 55–75 AD at Verulamium.⁵

Trench 1 unstratified: bronze strip (3.2 cm. × 1.3 cm.) with hole for fixing at one end. There are two incised lines on one edge, and both ends are broken.

b) *Iron*

Context 131 (phase 4): knife (7.9 cm. × 2.4 cm. with 4 cm. tang).

Contexts 139, 179, 254 have nail/spike fragments in poor condition.

c) *Stone*

Context 186 (phase 1): a fragment of Hertfordshire pudding-stone quern (geological identification by H. Powell, University Museum, Oxford).

Context 112 (phase 3): A single flint platform core, of local chert, with flakes detached: there were no signs of platform preparation but traces of mishits were present (identified by R. Holgate).

d) *Glass*

Unstratified: a fragment of green Roman glass.

e) *Preserved Wood*

Context 118 (phase 1): a plank of wood (pedunculate oak) from the black greasy clay at the bottom of pit 118, in a good state of preservation (illustrated in Fig. 8). It measures 141 cm. × 22 cm. × 3 cm.; attached to the top was a strake or fillet (64 cm. × 6.3 cm. × 2.3 cm.), dressed on three sides, one end being broken. There are five nail holes along the length of the strake, with one nail going through the plank below and clenched into it. Although the strake was found on the plank as illustrated, parallel to its edge, there is no evidence that any other nails penetrated the plank, suggesting perhaps that the position of the strake is misleading and that the purpose of the strake was to fasten the surviving plank to others. The 'underside' of the plank has a shallow chiselled channel across the short dimension; two small, round depressions (for or from nails) at one end suggest that this was some form of attachment. A number of other nail remains were noted and are marked on the illustration. Both the long sides of the plank are substantially intact and dressed, but neither end can be confidently stated to be original.

Another small piece of wood (illustrated alongside the plank in Fig. 8) was found beneath one corner of the plank, but this did not appear to have broken off it. Some of its edges are man-made, but one of the longer sides has broken along the grain of the wood. There is a small chiselled groove.

There is no clear evidence of the function of the plank, though the strake makes it almost certain that it was part of a structure rather than a self-contained object (like a modern builder's plank).

⁴C. Hawkes and J.W. Iliffe, 'Excavations at Alchester' *Antiq. J.* ix (1926–8), 181–2 and Fig. 4.

⁵S.S. Frere, *Verulamium Excavations* i (1972), 115, Fig. 9.

Context 208 (phase 2): one of the row of stakes (208–210), phase 2) was kept (illustrated in Fig. 9). It is 62 cm. long, maximum width 14 cm., and is chamfered to a point. About 40 rings are visible. The stake is a half-log of oak, split without removal of sapwood and roughly squared, cutmarks suggesting the use of an axe or adze to make the point. The loss of the upper part makes it impossible to estimate the original length.

Both pieces of wood were examined by Dr. J. Fletcher (Oxford Research Laboratory for the History of Art and Archaeology) with a view to dendrochronological dating, but neither had sufficient rings. We are grateful to Gus Milne for comments and to Mélanie Steiner for observations made while drawing the wood.

f) *Animal Bone*

The animal bones were kindly identified by Gillian Jones, but as they were not systematically kept on site, a formal list is not given here; we may note that species present were cattle, sheep, horse, pig and dog, with a higher-than-average proportion of horse. A horse metacarpal had cut-marks on the distal end, suggesting the use of the skin of tendons.

g) *Human Bone*

A single human mandible fragment with worn teeth was noted by Gillian Jones.

THE ENVIRONMENT By John Giorgi and Mark Robinson

Introduction

Waterlogged conditions at the site prompted the sampling of Roman contexts for preserved plant and invertebrate remains. Four samples were analysed in the University Museum, Oxford with reference to the collections housed there. There was insufficient time for a quantitative investigation of the full range of biological material in each sample, so presence only was recorded for some taxonomic groups in some of the samples.

The Samples

Sample B, North Bank Section Context 206

Mid/late 2nd century AD layer of grey sandy silt. 1 kg. was sieved to 0.2 mm. and sorted thoroughly for mollusca. Other taxa were absent.

Sample C, North Bank Section Context 215

Early 2nd century AD ditch-fill of dark brown organic gravelly loam. 1 kg. was sieved to 0.2 mm. and sorted thoroughly for mollusca. The presence of seed and insect taxa was also noted.

Sample D, South Bank Section Context 250

Late 1st century AD ditch or pit fill of dark-brown organic sandy silt. 0.5 kg. was sieved down to 0.2 mm. and sorted thoroughly for macroscopic plant remains, molluscs and insects (examining a 1/10th subsample of the fraction 0.5 to 0.2 mm. and multiplying it for the total). A further 7 litres was floated onto a 2 mm. aperture mesh. The flot was examined for the presence of macroscopic plant, mollusc and insect taxa.

Sample E, South Bank Section Context 252

Late 1st century AD ditch or pit fill of mixed grey and black organic loam with much charcoal (mostly *Quercus*) and some gravel. 7 litres was floated over a 0.5 mm. aperture sieve and the flot examined for the presence of waterlogged macroscopic plant, mollusc and insect taxa. The flot was then boiled in concentrated sodium hydroxide solution, washed, and boiled in a mixture of two parts glacial acetic acid to one part concentrated sulphuric acid to dissolve cellulose. Concentrated nitric acid and sodium hypochlorite solution were carefully added to the acetolysis mixture to oxidize other organic material. When all the organic material had been dissolved, the flot was washed, dried and all the carbonised seeds and chaff extracted. An additional sub-sample of 252 was washed over a 0.2 mm. sieve, so that the presence of small, waterlogged, seeds could be noted.

Results

The analysis of plant remains gave interesting results, so identifications have been given (Tables 1 to 5). The evidence from the molluscs and insects was unexceptional, so reference will only be made to them in the text. Waterlogged plant remains from the 0.5 kg. sub-sample of D (context 250) are quantified, otherwise presence is shown in Tables 1 to 2. Carbonised plant remains from the 7 litre sub-samples of E (context 252) are quantified, otherwise presence is shown in Tables 3 to 5. The nomenclature and habitat information for the plants is from Clapham et al.⁶

The Environment of the Site

Sample D, Context 250

The molluscan evidence suggests this context to have been a wet ditch with slowly moving water for some of the year (although the possibility that it was a pit into which the shells had been introduced by flooding cannot be excluded). The mollusca included *Valvata cristata* (a 'flowing ditch' species), various Planorbidae, *Pisidium* sp. *Sphaerium* sp. as well as some marsh and terrestrial species⁷. Several individuals of *Hydrobius fuscipes*, a beetle favouring stagnant water, were identified. Cases from the aquatic larvae of Trichoptera were also present. The seed results tend to agree with the invertebrate evidence for the habitat within the ditch. There was a relatively low representation of submerged aquatic plants, *Chara* oospores being the most numerous. The emergent to bankside species included *Lycopus europaeus*, *Iris pseudacorus* and perhaps *Elocharis* S. *Palustris* sp. while the beetle *Prasocuris phellandri* suggests the presence of aquatic Umbelliferae.

The two most important groups of seeds present in terms of number of species were from plants of damp grassland and from plants of various disturbed habitats. The latter included both plants which had been growing on the site and material imported by man. The grassland probably contained clumps of the tussock-forming rushes from the *Juncus effusus* group, several species of *Rumex* and perhaps *Filipendula ulmaria*. It is uncertain whether the grassland was closely grazed or not; some of the species are favoured by heavy grazing, but *Rhinanthus* sp. is characteristic of meadowland.

Seeds of *Urtica dioica* were particularly numerous, and nettles probably grew alongside the ditch and in neglected places. Many of the annuals of disturbed ground, for instance

⁶ A.R. Clapham, T.G. Tutin and E.F. Warburg, *Flora of the British Isles* (2nd edn., 1962).

⁷ Habitat information on aquatic molluscs is from B.W. Sparks, 'The Ecological Interpretation of Quaternary Non-Marine Mollusca', *Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* clxxii (1959-60), 71-80.

Chenopodium and *Atriplex* spp., probably grew on the site, but some, including *Agrostemma githago*, very much an arable weed, are likely to have been imported with cereal crops threshed on the site. The waterlogged plant remains included glumes of *Triticum spelta*, and a limited amount of carbonised spelt wheat chaff was present. The numerous waterlogged fragments of wheat epidermis (bran) had possibly been derived from this threshing activity, although it is also characteristic of human sewage.

Of particular interest is the recovery of a single waterlogged seed (mericarp) of *Caucalis platycarpus*, an alien weed of arable fields and waste places which has not previously been recorded from archaeological contexts in Britain. Waterlogged seeds were identified of another species which was perhaps brought to the site amongst the cereals and for which there are few previous archaeological records: *Ranunculus sardous*. It is a weed of damp arable fields and waste places.

Seeds from two members of the Umbelliferae likely to have been cultivated for culinary purposes were present amongst the waterlogged seeds. One of them, *Coriandrum sativum* is now well known from Roman sites. The other remains unidentified but is possibly *Chaerophyllum aromaticum*, and similar seeds have been discovered on several sites in the region⁸.

The ditch probably had scrub or a hedge growing alongside it for part of its length. There was evidence for woody species from a variety of remains, including thorny twigs of *Crataegus* or *Prunus*, *Alnus* catkins, leaf abscission pads and fragments of deciduous leaves. An apple core could have been from a wild tree or from fruit brought to the site by man.

Evidence from the insect remains was limited, but several individuals of *Anobium punctatum* and *Ptinus fur*, beetles which tend to be associated with timber and mouldy plant remains inside buildings, reinforce the archaeological evidence for the proximity of a settlement, although these beetles are not entirely synanthropic.

Sample E, Context 252

The molluscan assemblage from this sample was relatively similar to that from sample D, although the absence of *Valvata cristata* might indicate that context 252 was more subject to stagnation. The waterlogged macroscopic plant remains also comprise a similar group to sample D, and mostly suggest the presence of similar habitats. Seeds of *Ranunculus sardous* were again present. In addition, a seed of *Papaver somniferum* was identified, this plant possibly being cultivated as an oil or culinary seed crop in Roman Britain. The only component of the waterlogged plant assemblage missing, or very much reduced when compared with sample D, was threshing debris and cereal remains.

Sample E was, however, particularly rich in carbonised chaff, grain and arable weed seeds, suggesting the threshing and cleaning of cereal crops on the site. Barley was the best-represented crop, with some of the grains being recognizable as from the six-row, hulled variety. Spelt wheat was also present in small quantities. The oat remains are all likely to have been from *Avena fatua*, making wild oats and vetches/tares (*Vicia* or *Lathyrus* spp.) the most abundant weed seeds. The high proportion of weed seeds (and oat chaff) in relation to the cereal chaff suggests that many weeds were accidentally harvested with the crops. The ecology of some of the weed species suggest that the crops processed on the site had been grown in various localities: *Eleocharis* S. *Palustres* sp. requires waterlogged conditions whereas *Tripleurospermum maritimum* tends to be favoured by lighter soils. The single charred seed *Vicia faba* is interesting because celtic/field beans seem only rarely to be found in Roman contexts, whereas they frequently occur in Saxon and medieval carbonised seed assemblages.

⁸ M.A. Robinson, in *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Oxon* (CBA Research Report, forthcoming 1984).

Sample C, Context 215

This ditch differed from the earlier features, because the mollusca suggest that it carried clean moving water throughout the year. *Valvata cristata* was the most abundant species, but *Bithynia* sp., an aquatic gastropod of more fastidious requirements, was present. The assemblage also contained a range of Planorbidae and a few terrestrial individuals. The range of seeds from this sample was more restricted than in samples D and E, but abundant seeds from three aquatic species, *Callitriche* sp., *Ranunculus S. Batrachium* sp. and *Apium nodiflorum* confirm the molluscan evidence for rather more water in this ditch. The insects again included Trichoptera and *Prasocuris phellandrii*.

The seeds from terrestrial plants were dominated by four species: *Rumex* sp., *Urtica dioica*, *Conium maculatum*, and *Sambucus nigra*. All can grow on disturbed then neglected ground and most of them are particularly favoured by nitrogen and phosphorus rich soil. Suitable conditions would occur where refuse had been dumped onto an area of waste ground. This vegetation probably prevailed in the immediate vicinity of the ditch. The presence of a few carbonised *Triticum* remains and a few waterlogged seeds of light-demanding annuals such as *Valerianella dentata* show that human activity continued in the area.

Sample B, Context 206

This deposit contained a mixture of aquatic and terrestrial molluscs and possibly represents sediment which had been cleared out of a ditch.

Discussion

The evidence from the waterlogged samples suggests that the 1st to 2nd century AD settlement at Faccenda was situated on wet ground. The depth at which organic preservation began in contexts 250 and 252 shows that the water table can only have been about 0.15 m. below the contemporaneous ground surface. A comparison between the level of these contexts in the South Bank and Ditch 215 in the North Bank section suggests that the water-table subsequently rose to about the level of what had been the ground surface. This event was probably facilitated by the deposition of Layer 254 (South Bank Section), clay which sealed the old ground surface and contexts 250 and 252. Layer 254 was not examined, so its origin, dumped or alluvial, remains uncertain. The upper layers in the North Bank section had an alluvial component, but they also contained mixed gravel and rubble. They were probably dumped dredgings. Elsewhere on the site, where there was no Roman earthmoving, Roman sherds were sealed beneath a thin covering of alluvial (clay) loam containing abundant shells of *Succinea* or *Oxyloma* sp. and *Trichia hispida* gp.

The very rich assemblages of plant remains from context 250 and 252 suggest that the settlement had an environment of wet grassland and disturbed ground, with some scrub or hedges present. Arable crops were processed on the site and the weeds included one species, *Caucalis platycarpus*, new to the archaeological record. The late 1st century AD settlement exhibited a 'Romanised' character with the presence of culinary Umbelliferae. In many aspects the environment of the settlement seems to have been similar to that around late 1st century AD ditches on the site of the eastern defences of the nearby town of Alchester⁹. There, ditches ran through wet pastureland and one of the samples contained a seed of coriander.

⁹ M.A. Robinson, 'The Environment of the Roman Defences at Alchester' in C.J. Young, 'The Defences of Roman Alchester', *Oxoniensia* xl (1975), 161-70.

TABLE 1: WATERLOGGED SEEDS

	Number of Seeds		
	C	D	E
cf. <i>Chara</i> sp.	-	20	+
<i>Ranunculus</i> Sect. <i>Ranunculus</i> sp.	+	1	+
<i>R. sardous</i> Crantz	-	2	+
<i>R. flammula</i> L.	-	1	+
<i>R. S. Batrachium</i> sp.	a	5	-
<i>Papaver rhoeas</i> L., <i>dubium</i> L., <i>lecoquii</i> Lamotte or <i>hybridum</i> L.	-	1	-
<i>P. argemone</i> L.	-	4	+
<i>P. somniferum</i> L.	-	-	+
<i>Brassica</i> or <i>Sinapis</i> sp.	-	1	-
<i>Thlapsi arvense</i> L.	-	-	+
Cruciferae gen. et sp. indet.	-	11	-
<i>Viola</i> spp.	-	-	+
<i>Hypericum</i> sp.	-	10	-
<i>Silene</i> sp.	-	1	+
<i>Lychnis flos-cuculi</i> L.	-	-	+
<i>Agrostemma githago</i> L.	-	7	+
<i>Cerastium</i> cf. <i>holosteoides</i> Fr.	-	2	+
<i>Myosoton aquaticum</i> (L.) Moench	+	-	-
<i>Stellaria media</i> gp	+	12	+
<i>S. graminea</i> L.	-	-	+
<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	-	17	+
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	-	36	-
<i>Chenopodium</i> or <i>Atriplex</i> spp.	-	31	-
<i>Linum catharticum</i> L.	-	6	-
<i>Medicago lupulina</i> L.	-	1	+
<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i> (L.) Maxim.	-	5	-
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.	+	-	+
<i>Potentilla</i> cf. <i>erecta</i> (L.) Rausch	-	1	+
<i>Rosa</i> sp.	-	+	+
<i>Prunus spinosa</i> L.	-	-	+
<i>Crataegus</i> sp.	-	+	-
<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	-	+	-
<i>Epilobium</i> sp.	-	1	-
<i>Callitriche</i> sp.	a	-	-
<i>Chaerophyllum temulentum</i> L.	-	-	+
<i>Torilis</i> sp.	-	8	-
<i>Caucalis platycarpus</i> L.	-	+	-
<i>Coriandrum sativum</i> L.	-	1	-
<i>Conium maculatum</i> L.	a	2	+
<i>Apium nodiflorum</i> (L.) Lagg.	a	2	+
<i>Aethusa cynapium</i> L.	-	2	+
<i>Angelica sylvestris</i> L.	-	+	-
<i>Daucus carota</i> L.	-	4	-
Umbelliferae gen. et sp. indet.	-	-	+
<i>Bryonia dioica</i> Jacq.	+	-	+
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> agg.	+	33	+
<i>P. persicaria</i> L.	-	11	-
<i>P. lapathifolium</i> or <i>nodosum</i> Pers.	-	1	-
<i>P. convolvulus</i> L.	-	+	+
<i>Rumex acetosella</i> agg.	-	-	+
<i>R. crispus</i> L.	-	2	+
<i>R. cf. obtusifolius</i> L.	-	1	+
<i>R. sanguineus</i> L.	-	+	-
<i>R. conglomeratus</i> Murr.	-	7	+
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	a	58	+
buttercup	+	1	+
lesser spearwort	-	1	+
water crowfoot	a	5	-
poppy	-	1	-
poppy	-	4	+
opium poppy	-	-	+
wild mustard, charlock etc.	-	1	-
penny-cress	-	-	+
violet	-	-	+
St. John's wort	-	10	-
ragged robin	-	1	+
corn cockle	-	-	+
water chickweed	+	-	-
chickweed	+	12	+
stichwort	-	-	+
fat hen	-	17	+
orache	-	36	-
black medick	-	1	+
meadow sweet	-	5	-
blackberry	+	-	+
common tormentil	-	1	+
rose	-	+	+
sloe	-	-	+
hawthorn	-	+	-
(crab) apple	-	+	-
willow-herb	-	1	-
starwort	a	-	-
coriander	-	1	-
hemlock	a	2	+
fool's watercress	a	2	+
fool's parsley	-	2	+
wild angelica	-	+	-
(wild) carrot	-	4	-
white bryony	+	-	+
knotgrass	+	33	+
red shank	-	11	-
black bindweed	-	+	+
sheep's sorrel	-	-	+
dock	-	2	+
dock	-	1	+
dock	-	+	-
dock	-	7	+
dock	a	58	+

<i>Urtica urens</i> L.	small nettle	-	2	-
<i>U. dioica</i> L.	stinging nettle	a	282	+
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	hazel	+	+	+
cf. <i>Anagallis</i> sp.		-	1	+
<i>Solanum</i> cf. <i>dulcamara</i> L.	woody nightshade	+	-	-
<i>S.</i> cf. <i>nigrum</i> L.		-	1	+
cf. <i>Scrophularia</i> sp.		-	-	+
<i>Rhinanthus</i> sp.	yellow rattle	-	2	-
<i>Euphrasia</i> sp. or <i>Odontites</i> sp.		-	1	+
<i>Mentha</i> cf. <i>aquatica</i> L.	water mint	-	2	-
<i>Lycopus europaeus</i> L.	gipsy-wort	-	4	-
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i> L.	self-heal	-	2	+
<i>Galeopsis tetrahit</i> agg.	hemp-nettle	-	1	+
<i>Plantago major</i> L.	plantain	-	6	+
<i>Galium aparine</i> L.	goosegrass	-	-	+
<i>Galium</i> sp.	bedstraw	-	1	-
<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.	elder	a	1	+
<i>Valerianella dentata</i> (L.) Poll.	lamb's lettuce	+	-	+
<i>Senecio</i> sp.	groundsel or ragwort	-	-	+
<i>Tripleurospermum maritimum</i> (L.) Koch	scentless mayweed	-	2	-
<i>Arctium</i> sp.	burdock	-	+	-
<i>Carduus</i> or <i>Cirsium</i> sp.	thistle	+	-	+
<i>Centaurea</i> sp.		-	3	-
<i>Leontodon</i> sp.	hawkbit	-	1	+
<i>Sonchus asper</i> (L.) Hill	sow-thistle	-	6	+
<i>Taraxacum</i> sp.	dandelion	-	1	-
<i>Juncus bufonius</i> L.	toadrush	-	10	+
<i>J. inflexus</i> L., <i>effusus</i> L. or <i>conglomeratus</i> L.	rush	-	320	+
<i>J. articulatus</i> gp.	rush	-	20	+
<i>Juncus</i> sp.	rush	-	70	-
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i> L.	yellow flag	-	+	+
<i>Eleocharis</i> S. <i>Palustres</i> sp.	spike rush	+	9	+
<i>Carex</i> spp.	sedge	+	4	+
<i>Avena</i> sp.	oats	-	-	+
<i>Bromus</i> sp.		-	2	-
cf. <i>Triticum</i> sp.	wheat	-	mf	-
Gramineae gen. et sp. indet.	grass	+	22	+
Varia		-	52	+
Total			1127	

Information: + indicates presence; a, abundant; mf, many fragments

TABLE 2: OTHER WATERLOGGED PLANT REMAINS

		C	D	E
<i>Alnus glutinosa</i> (L.) Gaertn.	(alder)	-	+	-
Bryophyta	(moss)	+	+	+
Bud scale		-	+	+
<i>Crataegus</i> or <i>Prunus</i> sp.	(hawthorn or sloe) thorny twig	+	-	+
Deciduous leaf fragments		-	+	+
Leaf abscission pad		-	+	+
<i>Malus sylvestris</i> Mill.	(crab apple) endocarp fragment	-	+	-
<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i> L.	(wild radish) pod	-	-	+
<i>Rubus</i> or <i>Rosa</i> sp.	(blackberry or rose) prickle	-	-	+
<i>Rumex</i> sp.	(dock) stem fragment	+	+	-
<i>Trifolium</i> sp.	(clover) calyx	-	3	+
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L.	(spelt wheat) glume base	-	7	-
<i>Triticum</i> sp.	(wheat) glume base	-	5	-

<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> sp.	(vetch or tare) pod	-	+	-
<i>Viola</i> sp.	(violet) pod	-	+	-
Wood, twig fragments		+	+	+

Information: + indicates presence.

TABLE 3: CARBONISED CEREAL GRAIN

		C	D	E
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L.	spelt wheat	+	+	3
<i>Triticum</i> sp. (hexaploid)	wheat	-	-	13
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L. lateral grain	six-row hulled barley	-	-	15
<i>H. vulgare</i> L. or <i>distichon</i> L. median grain	hulled barley	-	-	10
<i>H. vulgare</i> L. or <i>distichon</i> L.	hulled barley	-	+	20
<i>H. vulgare</i> L. or <i>distichon</i> L.	barley	-	-	21
Cereal N.F.I.		-	+	108
Total				190

Information: + indicates presence; N.F.I., not further identifiable.

TABLE 4: CARBONISED CHAFF

		C	D	E
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L. glume bases	spelt wheat	+	+	15
<i>Triticum</i> sp. glume bases	wheat	-	+	11
<i>Triticum</i> sp. brittle rachis internodes	wheat	-	+	4
<i>Triticum</i> sp. awn fragments	wheat	-	+	-
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. rachis internodes	barley	-	-	79
<i>Hordeum</i> sp. awn fragments	barley	-	-	3
<i>Avena fatua</i> gp. floret bases	wild oat	-	-	8
<i>Avena</i> sp. awn fragments	oat	-	-	70
Total				190

Information: + indicates presence.

TABLE 5: CARBONISED SEEDS

		Number of Seeds		
		C	D	E
<i>Ranunculus flammula</i> L.	lesser spearwort	-	-	2
<i>Silene</i> sp.	campion	-	-	1
<i>Atriplex</i> sp.	orache	-	-	20
<i>Chenopodium</i> or <i>Atriplex</i> sp.		-	-	6
<i>Trifolium</i> sp.	clover	-	-	28
<i>Vicia faba</i> L.	broad bean, horse bean	-	-	1
<i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> spp.	vetch or tare	-	+	50
cf. <i>Vicia</i> or <i>Lathyrus</i> spp.	vetch or tare	-	-	37
Papilionaceae gen. et sp. indet.		-	-	7
<i>Polygonum aviculare</i> agg.	knotgrass	-	-	2
<i>Rumex</i> spp.	dock	-	-	10
<i>Lithospermum arvense</i> L.	corn gromwell	-	-	1
<i>Euphrasia</i> or <i>Odontites</i> sp.		-	-	1
<i>Prunella vulgaris</i> L.	self-heal	-	-	1
<i>Galeopsis tetrahit</i> agg.	hemp-nettle	-	-	1

<i>Plantago lanceolata</i> L.	ribwort, plantain	-	-	1
<i>Galium aparine</i> L.	goosegrass	-	-	1
<i>Tripleurospermum maritimum</i> (L.) Koch	scentless mayweed	-	-	12
<i>Iris pseudacorus</i> L.	yellow flag	-	+	-
<i>Eleocharis S. Palustris</i> sp.		-	-	22
<i>Carex</i> sp.	sedge	-	-	1
<i>Bromus</i> sp.		-	+	-
<i>Avena fatua</i> gp.	wild oat	-	-	3
<i>Avena</i> sp.	oat	-	-	41
cf. <i>Avena</i> sp.	oat	-	-	24
Gramineae gen. et sp. indet.	grass	-	+	70
N.F.I.		-	-	10
Total				353

Information: + indicates presence, N.F.I., not further identifiable.

DISCUSSION

It is perhaps surprising that no evidence was found on the Faccenda Chicken Farm site of the Iron-Age activity found 300 m. to the west in the 1937 excavation (marked on Fig. 1) at the junction of the Chesterton Lane and the Oxford-Bicester road.¹⁰ It is possible that the north-south Roman road from Alchester reflected an earlier boundary to occupation; if this is so, it may be 'delimiting' the marshland area around the River Ray, which includes present-day Otmoor. The road from Dorchester crosses the moor ('perverse alignment . . . through the middle of the wettest land for miles around'¹¹) and it has been suggested that the Romans may have undertaken some drainage of Otmoor,¹² the extensive drainage activity work on the Faccenda site being part of a wider scheme (though this may be too grandiose a word to describe gradual work) to utilize the River Ray wetlands, associated with the major settlement at Alchester. Here there is some evidence from Young's excavation in 1975 (marked on Fig. 1) on the eastern defences of the town for a deliberate raising of the land-level in the late 1st century. This would be earlier than the early 2nd-century ditching at Faccenda, and it is unlikely that the early ditches at Alchester, which Young suggested were a boundary between settlement and agricultural land,¹³ are to be correlated with the Faccenda ditches, though their contents of bone, pot, preserved timber (Young does not describe this, so we are unable to compare this with the Faccenda plank) and water-logged silt are similar.

The closest parallel to the Faccenda Chicken Farm ditches are those on the 1937 excavation on the Chesterton site, Harden's Ditch One, Ditch Four and Ditch Five.¹⁴ All of these are described as being full of 'black occupation earth' (a gloriously evocative term we might do well to exhume) with late 1st- to mid 2nd-century pottery, over a primary fill of sticky grey clay (at Faccenda there is an exactly similar sequence in ditch 168 (=138 & 186). It is interesting to see that a butt-end was found to Harden's Ditch One, indicating that this ditch at least was probably not used for drainage. The east-west alignment of most

¹⁰ D.B. Harden, 'Excavations at Chesterton Lane, Alchester, 1937', *Oxoniensia* xxxix (1939). Note that Young found no Iron Age occupation at Alchester (op. cit. note 9 above, p. 151).

¹¹ C.J. Bond, 'Otmoor', in *The Evolution of Marshland Landscape*, Oxford University Dept. External Studies (1981), p. 118.

¹² M.A. Robinson, op. cit. note 9 above.

¹³ C.J. Young, op. cit. note 9 above, 151.

¹⁴ Harden, op. cit. note 10 above, 26-28.

features is the same as the Faccenda site and it is not unlikely that some of the ditches might join up.

The Faccenda Chicken Farm ditches almost certainly acted as boundaries, as those on the north of the site maintain a consistent alignment through all three phases of activity, and postholes restate this line; while the parallel alignments of ditches could suggest trackside ditches, there is no proof of their contemporary construction, nor signs of metalling between them. The Chesterton lane site shows cobbling laid over ditches following their disuse,¹⁵ while alluvial silting and dumping over the Faccenda Chicken ditching also suggests a peripheral status in the 3rd century.

The character of the shortlived occupation, as seen in the ceramic and environment records, is consistent with that of the Chesterton lane site and early phases at Shakenoak, Alchester and Dorchester, while the pottery record is naturally heavily biased by the proximity of kiln sites between Dorchester and Alchester producing grey wares. The lesser use of shell-gritted Oxfordshire wares and Samian suggests conformity to local rural norms. It is difficult, with the limited area of occupation, to assess the nature of activity on the Faccenda site; it is clear that, unless it is related to an entirely separate rural site, the features must be related to the occupation centred on the town at Alchester. In date, the main activity at Faccenda (in the mid 2nd century) falls between the early ditches at Alchester and the formalisation of the defences in the early 3rd century (suggesting a contraction of the 'habitation' area, seen in many places in the 3rd century in the Roman empire). We should see Faccenda, therefore, as part of the largest extent of activity based on Alchester, when serious attempts were being made in the town, and in the outer areas like Faccenda, to drain the land. It is not possible to say how close 'real' occupation (i.e. houses) came to Faccenda, for the pottery and bone could have been dumped from a source some distance away; the environmental evidence (see above) for beetles associated with house timbers may be significant.

It remains to discuss the Roman road system north of Alchester, a confused subject most thoroughly canvassed by Margary.¹⁶ There seems little doubt that the road (see Fig. 1) from the south enters the south gate of Alchester, kinks slightly and leaves by the north gate to head straight north until it swings slightly to the east by the Faccenda site, following the line of the old Bicester road. There is a greater problem with Akeman street coming from the west; it was seen at Chesterton in the 1937 excavation, and is traced again east of Graven Hill, but the route between, especially the point of crossing the tributary of the Ray, is not clear (it is possible, as some writers have suggested, that there was no single route, but a variety of trackways from the prehistoric period onwards). There are two possibilities: either that it continued straight to the river along the line of the present-day double tree-line forming the field boundary on the confused mass of streams; or it may have taken a sharp bend to the south and turned to the east along the north edge of Alchester to cross the river at Langford Lane. The 1983 excavation does not seem to help in resolving the problem; if the features seen in the south bank of the stream are north-south ditches, as the environmental evidence suggests, then they would cross the double tree-line. Excavation of this line might solve the problem.

The Society is grateful to the Oxford University Department for External Studies for a grant towards the publication of this paper

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁶ I.D. Margary, *Roman Roads of Britain*, i (1955), Road 160a.