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The Excavations of a Romano-Celtic temple at High Wood, Harpsden, Oxfordshire 2015-2021

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With contributions by
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Abstract

Over seven seasons of excavation 2015-2021, South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG) investigated the partial remains of a Romano-Celtic temple complex with the inner temple chamber or cella surrounded by a walkway referred to as an ambulatory. These remains are set within a rectangular temenos enclosure that encompasses a range of rooms to the north. These buildings appear to have suffered a catastrophic collapse in antiquity.

The complex overlies evidence of Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British exploitation of the site and there is evidence of a possible Beaker period burial in the locality.

BACKGROUND

There has been an enduring but unsourced local rumour of the existence of a Roman temple in High Wood.

Location and local features

The site lies in mainly deciduous woodland on the Phillimore Estate in Harpsden, South Oxfordshire, at an altitude of 90m (see Fig. 1) and covers about 0.4 hectares with the core area at SU 75117956. The surface geology is a capping of Winter Hill gravels with pockets of clay overlying chalk that is at a depth of probably no more than 2m.

It is located on a plateau of high ground, surrounded by chalk lands, and is bounded by a shallow east-west fold in the land to the south just 25m in depth. The plateau continues northwards for 1km before falling away to Harpsden Bottom. The deciduous woodland cover is underlain throughout with brambles and bracken, and extensive clearance was needed to reveal the terrain. Mature beech, oak and holly trees surround the site and constrained excavation.

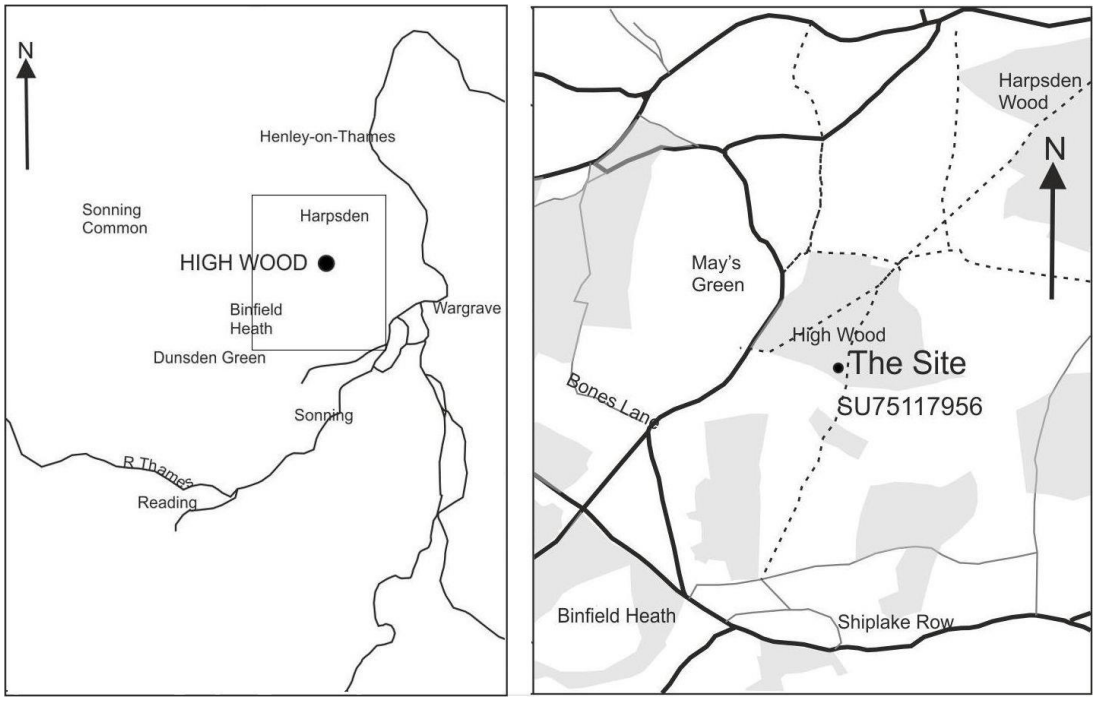

Fig.1 Regional setting displaying rivers and settlement; Locality showing site relative to roads and woodlands (based on open-source mapping).

Recent study of old maps and documents (Lloyd, 2019) has shown that the land has undergone several changes of use throughout the centuries, areas having been at different times part of an open-field system and, later, given over to coppicing and beech wood. A parish map of 1840 shows that the older heart of High Wood was probably to the north of the area presently under investigation.

LiDAR imaging shows an embankment surrounding the 'Windmill Field' (now under woodland cover) to the west. This feature had been interpreted as a possible Roman road but is now identified as a wood bank. There are also signs suggestive of ridge-and-furrow cultivation within the present-day woodland to the east of the site (Fig. 2).

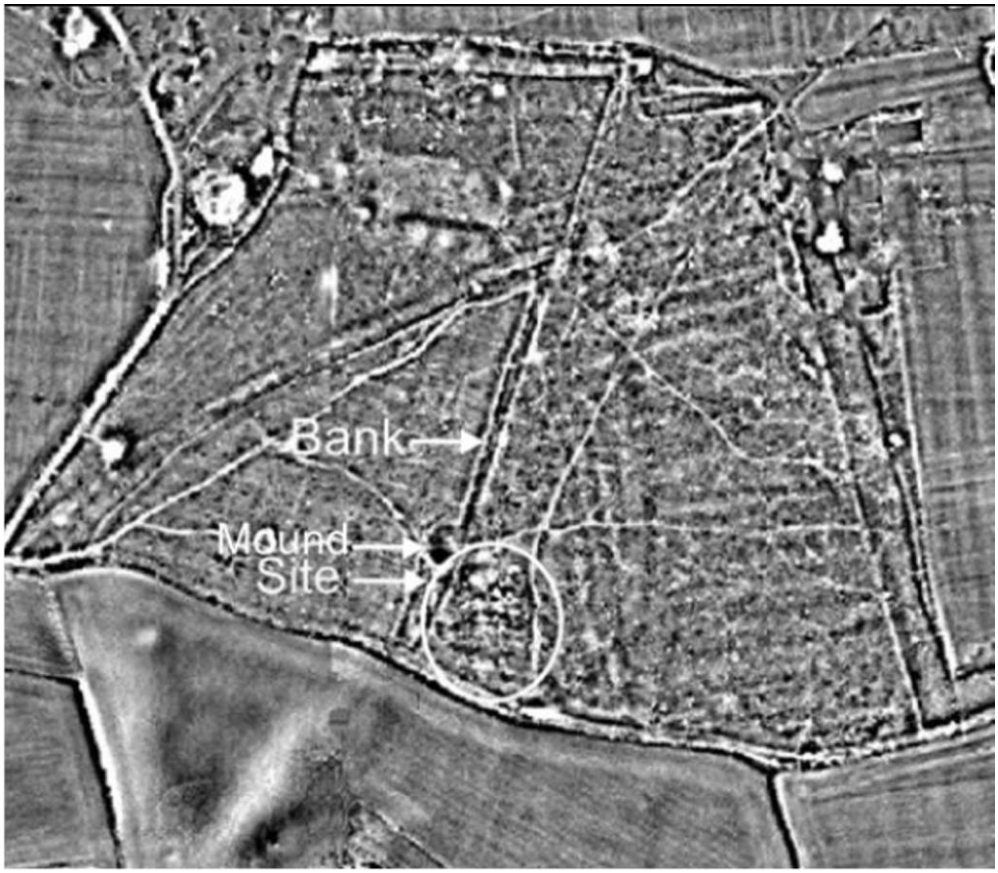

Fig. 2 LiDAR image of the site. Source: https://houseprices.io/lab/LiDAR/map

A mound, the presence of the linear feature and a dished depression 1m deep within the excavation site presented problems for which solutions can be proposed.

A number of pits and general surface disturbance are attributed to sustained but unauthorised metal detecting activities commencing in the late 1970s and continuing up to the present time.

The mound

This feature alerted archaeologists in the latter part of the 20th century to the possibilities of this site. It lies 15m to the west of the excavation site and comprises a roughly oval dome approximately 2m high measuring approximately 21m x 20m with a spread in shallow 'fingers' to the south which measure 26m x 4m and 14 x 6m respectively. The overall measurement of the feature is approximately 608m² and is situated on the line of the disused wood bank running through the wood from north to south, which is shown on the 1841 tithe map then bordering the western end of the wood. Notably this boundary respects, and curves round, the mound, indicating the antiquity of the latter feature (Fig. 2). A mature beech tree standing on the mound is thought to be 180-200 years old as calculated from the measure of its circumference and implies that the mound was created at that time or earlier.

The nearby enclosure

Satellite imagery has revealed the crop marks of a double-ditched rectangular enclosure with rounded corners lying 250m to the south east of the excavation site (Fig. 3). Although not yet investigated or dated, it nevertheless exhibits the characteristics of an LIA/ERB enclosure. A geophysical survey in 2017 failed to elicit information beyond that apparent in the Google Earth image.

Fig. 3 Crop mark of double-ditched enclosure. Copyright © Google

Early investigations

The site of a probable Roman building first came to the notice of modern archaeologists when Clive R Hart of SOAG undertook a field survey in advance of a proposed new Henley to Reading road (A4155) on 26 March 1972. He recognised the presence of Romano-British building materials, within the mound, and suggested that they indicated a connection with a nearby villa (Hart, 1973). The road was not built and subsequently Henley Archaeological and Historical Group (HAHG) explored the site and excavated the mound which they believed initially to be the base of a windmill. Between 1977 and 1983 members of HAHG undertook a thorough excavation of this feature. They recovered a metric tonne of Roman ceramic building material (CBM), 2,237 sherds of pottery, a quantity of animal bone, and 17 worn coins dating from the early 1st to the late 4th century. Of note were 1,016 pieces of wall plaster, which displayed an unsophisticated decorative theme.

	Weight (g)	**%**
White	13882	78
White moulded	448	2
Red	2453	14
Red design	215	1
Red stripe	570	3
Red Moulded	362	2
Green	3	0
Total	17933	100

Table 1 Painted plaster from the mound

HAHG were throughout this period troubled by the activities of unauthorised metal detectorists who were disturbing and plundering not only the mound but an area immediately to the east where they had exposed some walls and destroyed others (Cottingham, 1996). It may be that their detecting is at the heart of a local rumour: that there was a hoard of Iron Age coins discovered in High Wood. This rumour is tantalising but thus far lacking in evidence.

Many finds from the HAHG excavations have been located and analysed. Photographic evidence in their archive shows that a few plastic bags -which presumably contained artefacts from the mound - were reburied on site, and a photograph shows the burial site as within the south perimeter of the mound.

SOAG EXCAVATIONS

In 2013, SOAG members Janet Ridout Sharpe, Chris Francis, and Phil Carter carried out dowsing within High Wood. They observed much disturbance of the ground to the east of the mound and, following further examination, large quantities of Roman tile and pottery sherds lying on the surface, along with considerable flint from masonry structures.

In 2014, David Nicholls of SOAG gained permission from the landowner and initiated work at the site setting up the logistics and raising a cohort of volunteers.

Three small geophysical surveys were targeted over the proposed excavation site and adjacent to it. In late 2014, David Thornley of Reading University and Mike Green of SOAG conducted successive magnetometry investigations. The initial survey revealed no clear diagnostic information. Rafael Korzinsky from Reading University used hand-held Ground Penetrating Radar, but this did not produce conclusive results, possibly due to the massive extent of localised ground disturbance and the general random scatter of building rubble.

During a test-pitting exercise in 2015, one pit was located specifically to investigate an apparent wall that had become visible during the clearance of the site. Several broken quern stones had also been noted within the area. The 'wall' was formed without bonding material and comprised flints, Roman ceramic building material and quern stones.

Alongside and partly under the 'wall', was found a cache of five supermarket plastic bags. These contained Roman pottery (mainly rims) and other items including three masses of *lorica hamata* (chain mail) that were dated to the Roman period.

At a depth of 0.9m, a series of large flints covered a void which contained the remains of a garden fork and a spade dated to the 20th century. At the time of their discovery, these finds were puzzling. However in 2018, a local metal detectorist came forward and admitted to ownership of these tools, the creation of the 'wall' feature and the deposit of the plastic bags of artefacts which he had recovered from the surrounding area but did not wish to retain. He confirmed that another group of detectorists also were digging on the site at the same time.

Recording in 2015 and early in 2016 had been conducted on a grid-and-spit system with spit levels noted and, while these identities were preserved, a system of recording individual contexts within numbered trenches was substituted in 2016 and retained in subsequent work. The placement of trenches was later amended to match the perceived orientation of the walls.

The excavation site contains a saucer-shaped depression approximately 1m deep which encompasses the centre of the northern range of buildings. To the east and west, and at a higher level, the extent of the building complex is defined approximately by east-west ridges which contain building debris.

Throughout all trenches, towards the eastern side of the site, the dark woodland topsoil lay to a depth of approximately 20cm but the layer below, to a further depth of 40-60cm, continued as a similar soil and was distinguishable only by its content of tile and knapped nodular building flints until an underlying uniform 'natural' of gravels in sand and clay was discerned. However, from the western part of Room 2 (see below and Fig. 5) as far as the north-western corner of the complex, the layer of woodland soil overlay an homogenous sandy soil which is not a typical local geological deposit.

The ruinous southern extent of the complex remains as a random spread of building material, in part accumulated in a ridge. Despite an extensive search in five test pits and two trenches, it was apparent that any structures in this area had been completely destroyed - presumably as a deliberate strategy - in subsequent agricultural or woodland management activities.

Mature beech and oak trees had been planted around the excavation site, in many places overlying the building remains. They were of similar age - approximately 150-180 years old - and the planting appeared to

have been deliberately placed to form a glade to contain the site. This created difficulties in excavation as due deference had to be paid to root spread. The advice of the Forest Manager for the Phillimore Estate was to avoid such trees. As a result, there are unavoidable gaps in the plan of the buildings as revealed.

Pre-Roman occupation

During test pitting in 2015, a metal detectorist searching the site on behalf of SOAG found a rare incomplete basket ornament of the Early Bronze Age (Fig. 11). It dates to the earliest phase of the Bronze Age, c. 2400-2200 BC, often known as the Beaker Period (Wilkin 2016). Its presence raises the possibility of a burial of this period in the very near vicinity; however, no further evidence has been found. Its significance is discussed in the Finds section and in the final discussion.

A hand axe that was found in 2021 within a Roman context of itself does not suggest occupation of the site during the Palaeolithic.

Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British

The site has significant evidence of being utilized in the Late Iron Age to the Early Romano-British era.

SOAG's investigation found important traces of metal working beneath the Temple layer. Within the excavation, underlying the east of Room 3 (see Fig. 14), was an oblong cut (2.5m x 0.3m) with a sub-circular 'bowl' in the middle showing evidence of high temperature burning and containing a lower fill of a fine sooty soil with a strong magnetic response (see Fig. 14, context 520). Surrounding this feature, and probably in association, were four post holes cut into the natural in a rectangular array measuring 4m x 2m (Fig. 14, contexts 511, 512, 513 and 523). These features were interpreted as a rectangular roofed shelter for a smithing furnace or, possibly, a pit for the pre-roasting of iron ores (J R L Allen, pers.com.). The roots of a mature beech tree constrained clear photographic recording. Adjacent to this feature, to the east, was a deposit of sooty soil which appears to be related to the furnace. Both features underlay fragments of the mortar floor of the later building. There was no evidence of iron ore but two small worked billets of worked iron (Fig. 19) were recovered from this area.

At the western end of the building range, at the base of Room 1, was a substantial deposit of slag and smithing spall measuring 2.5m x 1.3m, set in a depression in the natural (Fig. 11, contexts 613 and 913). Some of this showed concave profiles such as might be expected from the bases of a bowl furnace used for iron smelting. Two pieces of worked iron, a nail weighing 10g with a large oval head, and a much-corroded bar 225mm in length, with an apparent square cross-section, were also present: Unfortunately, there is no stratigraphy available to date this deposit, but it has been suggested that the slag is characteristic of bloomery operation in the LIA/ERB period (J R L Allen, pers.com). There was no evidence of a metal-working structure within Room 3 and no evidence of a bloomery furnace was seen elsewhere on the site. This deposit could not be dated but there is an assumption that it was related to the metal working seen underlying Room 3.

In Room 2, a waste pit underlay the later southern wall (Fig. 10, context 242). This contained animal bones, a Late Iron Age silver unit of Cunobelinus (see illustration and report below), a seal box lid, a La Tène brooch, a Colchester Type AD C1 brooch, a fragment of an ox goad, a belt fitting, and a drill shank (Fig.4).

Fig. 4 Late IA/ early RB finds from pit underlying wall 1. Seal box lid 2. La Tène fibula 3. Colchester style fibula 4. Ox goad fragment 5. Belt fitting 6. Drill shank

Outside and to the north of the wall of Room 2 was a further waste pit (Fig. 9, context 135) which contained, in its primary fill, several sherds of LIA/ERB pottery.

The discovery, by invited metal detectorists, of five unstratified LIA coins from the site, of which two are gold staters and two are silver units, is remarkable. It is unlikely that high value coins would be lost casually in any number and suggests deliberate deposition.

No signs of 'residential' construction of a LIA/ERB date have been found but, clearly, there was significant activity on the site during this period.

An undated hearth of closely laid cobbles (Fig.5, context 1724) was found set in the natural within the eastern ambulatory wall and accompanied by an adjacent area of burning (Fig. 5, context 1720). Although overlying stratigraphic evidence was not available, it was set within the 'natural' and lower than the soil level which underlay the ambulatory wall (Fig. 5 context 1721). It was thus assumed that these features must have lain under a floor to the Temple ambulatory and were from earlier activity.

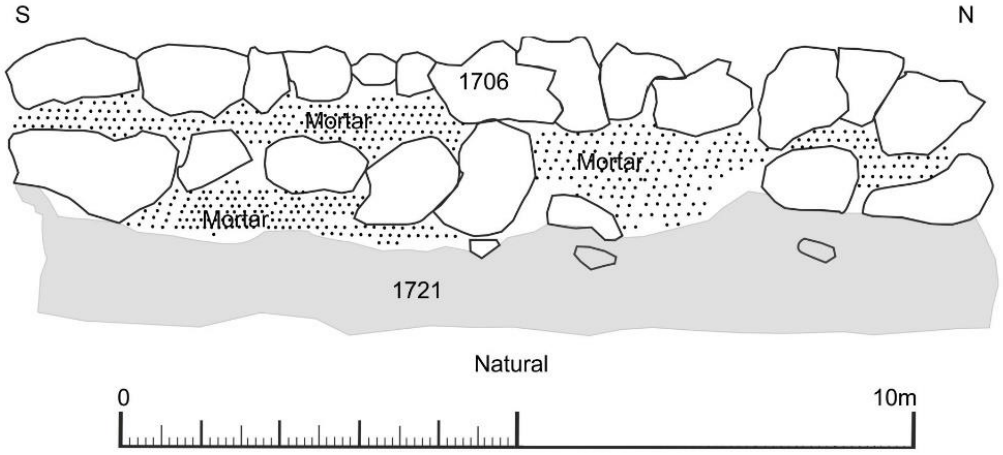

Fig.5 Section of east ambulatory wall

THE ROMANO-CELTIC TEMPLE

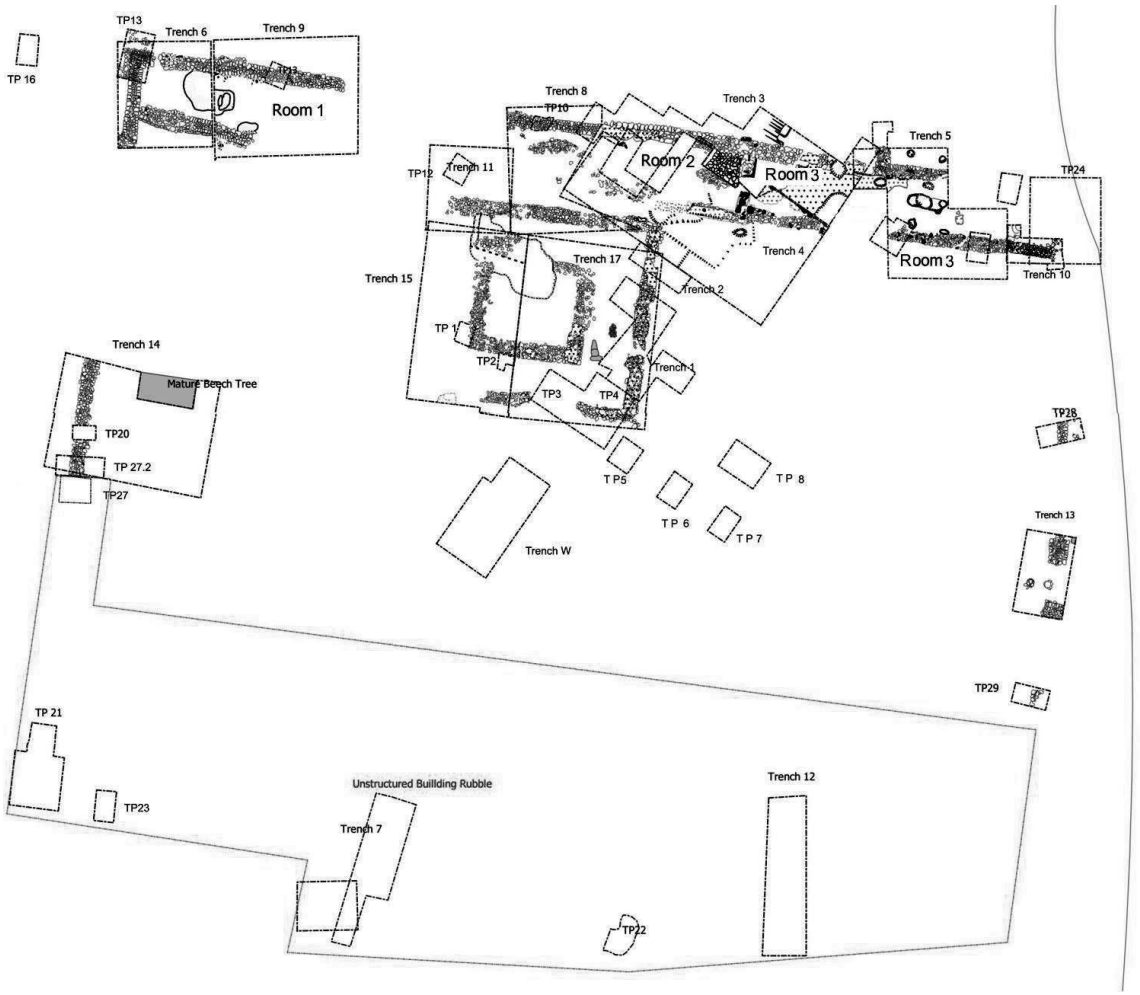

Fig. 6 Plan of excavated area

The building complex now identified as a temple was discovered over several seasons of digging. It was in the final season, 2021, that the innermost room, the *cella*, was excavated. From that point on the walls previously excavated and recorded could be properly evaluated.

The ambulatory and cella

Excavation of these features was undertaken over three seasons. The eastern and northern walls of the ambulatory were the first to be excavated and recorded. When the *cella* was excavated partially in 2021, the last season of the project, the remainder of the cella ambulatory were recognised and revealed.

All walls in the ambulatory and *cella* were mortareapproximately 60cm in width and, although many of the outer flints were knapped, the construction was somewhat irregular in contrast with the more regular walls of the *temenos*. The corners were particularly robust in their construction.

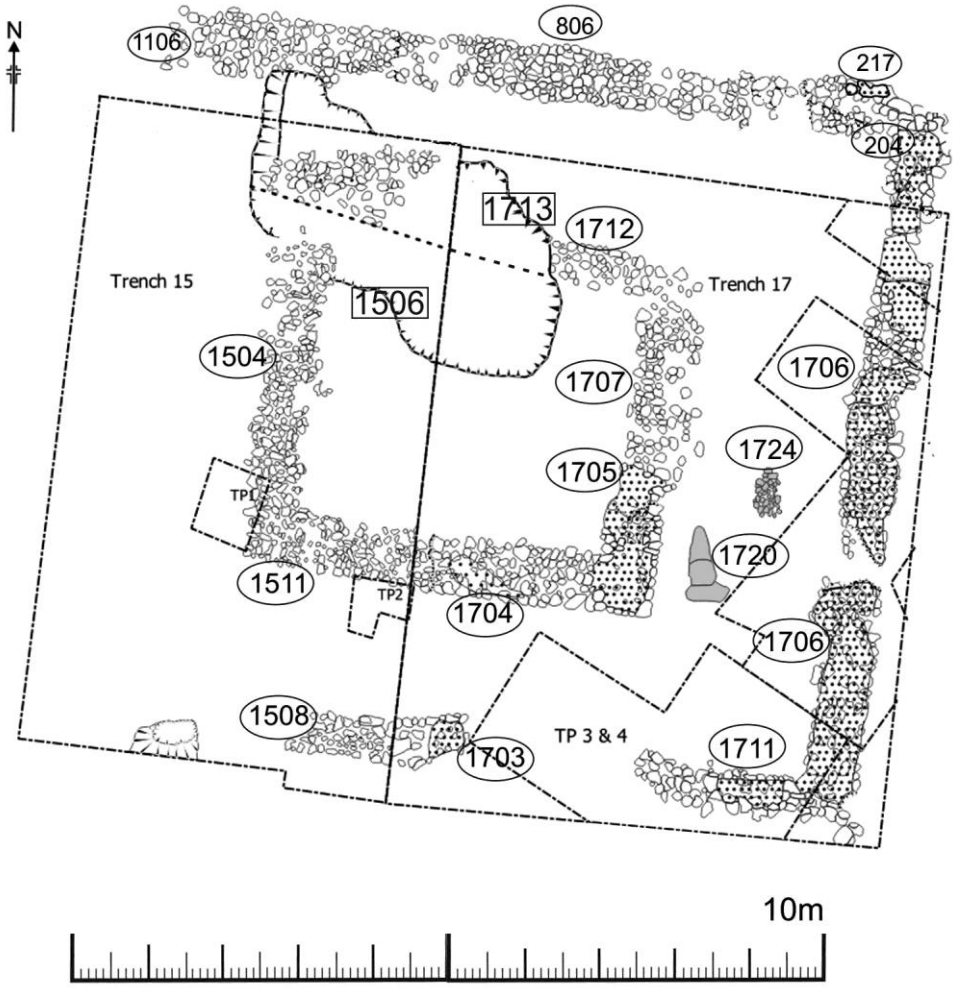

Fig. 7 Plan of the cella and ambulatory

The rectangular ambulatory was found to measure 10m north-south and an estimated 11m east-west. It contained the central *cella* measuring 5m north-south and 5.5m east-west. Notably, the foundations stood on a brown subsoil which overlay the natural (Fig. 5 context 1721). The ambulatory was located a mere 80cm from the southern wall of the northern rage of rooms incorporated in the *temenos*, and these are described below.

The north-east and south-east wall corners of the ambulatory and the south-east corner of the *cella* remained intact with four courses of flints and heavy mortaring, but it was clear that much of the remaining walls had been robbed or removed; the surrounding sandy soil contained very few flints. Evidence of robbing was provided by an undated broken metal tool found wedged under the base of the north-east corner of the ambulatory within the point of its west return.

The presumptive western ambulatory wall was not present, with neither indentations in the natural layer nor mortar flecks evident. A sondage across the likely line also failed to produce any remains.

Throughout the inner areas of the ambulatory and *cella*, the stratigraphy was a uniform sandy soil containing sparse flints and a few small coins only. The brown subsoil that underlay several parts of the walls did not continue into these areas. Intriguingly, two clay pipe fragments were found in this matrix, and one lying on the natural layer.

All the walls in the Temple had been subject to subsidence in various degrees (for example, the northern cella wall by 3° to the north; the ambulatory eastern wall by 2-3°, south to north). This dip was aligned towards a hole which underlay the north-western corner of the cella. Indeed, the cella wall is truncated and appears to have tumbled into this feature. The hole (Fig 6, contexts 1506/1713) had near-vertical sides, was 84cm deep, and was shaped as a rough oval measuring 4.5m x 2.7m. It was filled with wall rubble and CBM

and contained a number of interesting finds. These included a sherd of a C2–3 Moselkeramik indented beaker, a Palaeolithic hand axe and 12 coins of dates ranging from the 2nd to the 4th century AD.

There were a few small fragments only of roof tile in this area, but the mound had been found to contain a metric tonne that probably came from here and the adjacent room in the northern range of buildings.

Fig. 8 The cella and ambulatory as revealed. Photograph Copyright © Richard Miller

The surrounding temenos enclosure

This complex probably took the form of a rectangular enclosure. The northern wall was 47m long and incorporated a range of rooms. The rooms had an internal width of 2.8m with the ambulatory set centrally 80cm only to the south. The precise extent of the *temenos* cannot be confirmed as the southern end was heavily disturbed with no extant constructional remains.

Most of the outer walls of the complex had remained intact and revealed a flat surface of neatly laid knapped flints laid as 'headers' to the outside faces. However, the insides of the rooms – and to a lesser extent the areas immediately outside the walls – contained substantial amounts of knapped nodular wall flints and *lydions* (flat bricks), which comprised approximately 20% of all CBM by weight. Substantial amounts of roofing tile were found within all the rooms and adjacent to all of the excavated walls of the *temenos* together with scatters of nails

Work in 2018 had revealed that the walls of the northern run of rooms, both to the east and west, had subsided towards the centre of the range by 8° from the west and 1.5° from the east. Furthermore, towards the centre, the outer, northern, wall of Room 2 had slid on its foundation by 15cm to the south. There is also evidence that the outer wall had been strengthened in the centre by the insertion of an additional course of flints and a possible buttress.

The western section of the building range

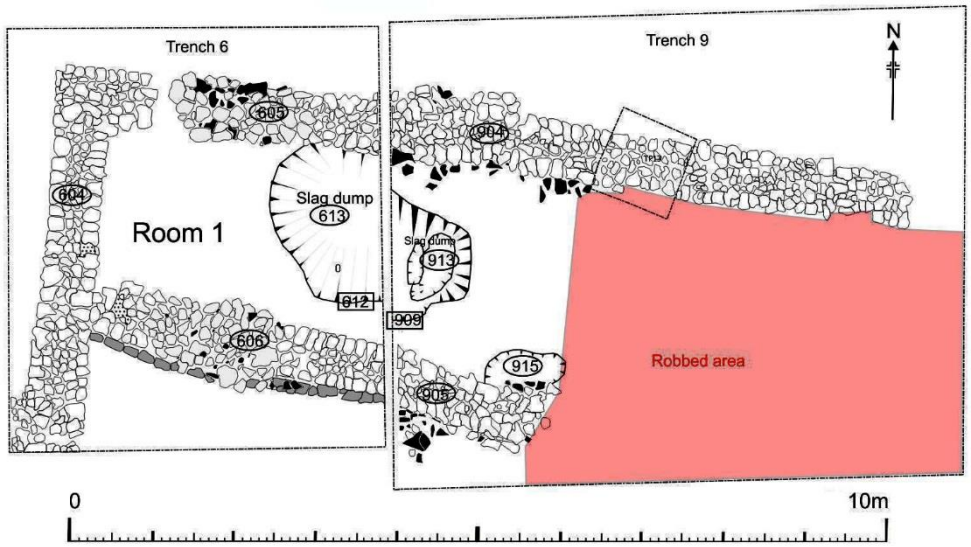

Fig. 9 Plan of the north-western corner of the building

The western section of the building range is identified as Room 1. The northern outer wall of the *temenos* was of a similar nature and construction to that seen to the east in Rooms 2 and 3. An inner east-west wall was soundly built with a projecting plinth to the south side and formed a room 2.8m wide internally. However, this was truncated to the east after 6m and from this point an area to the south-east had been completely cleared of building collapse rubble.

Each wall had subsided by 8° easterly towards the centre of the range and had been displaced and damaged in opposing segments. This damage could have been caused by later woodland management.

A layer of roofing tiles was overlain by scattered building flints, suggesting a roof collapse in Room 1 followed by disturbance of the walls.

There was no evidence of a floor or of a dividing wall between Rooms 1 and 2 which may have been one lengthy room.

Fig. 10 Compilation photograph of the north-western corner of the building range

The centre of the building range

The central room, Room 2, was divided from its easterly neighbour, Room 3, by a strongly constructed north-south wall with heavy mortaring, a strengthening course of tiles below the top course and a top surface layer of *lydions*.

A doorway, 1m across, was situated in the middle of this dividing wall. Iron objects found adjacent to this feature are interpreted as door fittings (Fig. 8).

Fig.11 Door furniture

This dividing wall returned westward to form the southern wall of Room 2 and was lap-jointed with a mid-course of mortar continuing unbroken throughout the return. After the return, the west-running southern wall deteriorated and what remained was a bed of very strong mortar 75cm in width and 5cm thick which continued for 2.4m but, from this point, it appeared to have been robbed (Fig. 10, context 214). A section of the base, 1m square, had clearly been disturbed as it was found offset 1m to the north of the line (Fig. 9, context 231). A 'ghost' wall line continued westwards for a further 2.7m as a regular spread of mortar chips only (Fig 9, context 230).

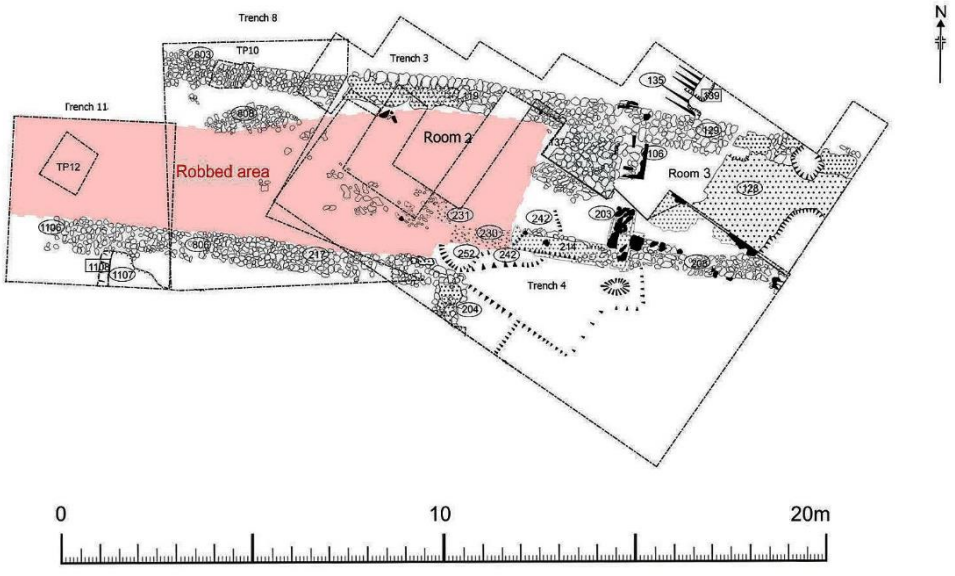

Fig. 12 Plan of the centre of the building range

Thereafter to the west, the southern wall has disappeared entirely. This absence appears to coincide with the robbing in Room 1 to the west and the adjacent ambulatory and *cella*. It was significant that the western section of the trench cut displayed no sign of wall remains or robber trench but showed a homogenous and undisturbed deposit of sandy soil.

The whole of this area within the building range to the south of the outer wall was devoid of building rubble apart from a 1m wide deposit immediately up against the outer northern wall.

Whereas the rooms of the range were seen to contain a spread of wall flints and CBM from the building collapse, it was notable that the western end of Room 2 and part of Room 1 to the west was devoid of such material.

It is possible that there may have been further dividing walls between Rooms 1 and 2 of which no trace now remains and there was no evidence of a floor.

The eastern section of the building range

Fig. 13 Part of southern wall and part of entrance way, the deterioration of the southern wall and the north-eastern corner of the ambulatory

The room to the east of the range is identified as Room 3. It was, throughout, 2.8m wide internally and had a mortar floor some 8cm thick that was overlaid, in a small area only, by a skim of finer mortar. Undated, and unidentifiable, small body sherds of pottery and ferrous items were found in sampling below the floor and pockets of root disturbance pierced this layer. A small area in the northern part of the floor showed evidence of burning, possibly indicating the site of a brazier.

To the west of Room 3, a mortar floor stopped at the threshold in the dividing wall in a clear straight edge but there was no evidence of a paved threshold.

To the east, the floor deteriorated after 8m with fragments only remaining. Significantly, a piece of floor (50cm x 25cm) overlay the early furnace. Some 2m to the east of this feature there was evidence of smithing, and the soil recovered contained slag and spall. This deposit also underlay a small portion of the later concrete floor and appears to be associated with the furnace.

The outer and inner walls of the room had both subsided to the west by 1.5° which may be compared with settlement of walls seen in Rooms 1 and 2. There was no evidence of flint-based dividing walls within Room 3 - which was some 15m in length - although it is possible that this long room may have been originally divided by a structure which has since disappeared.

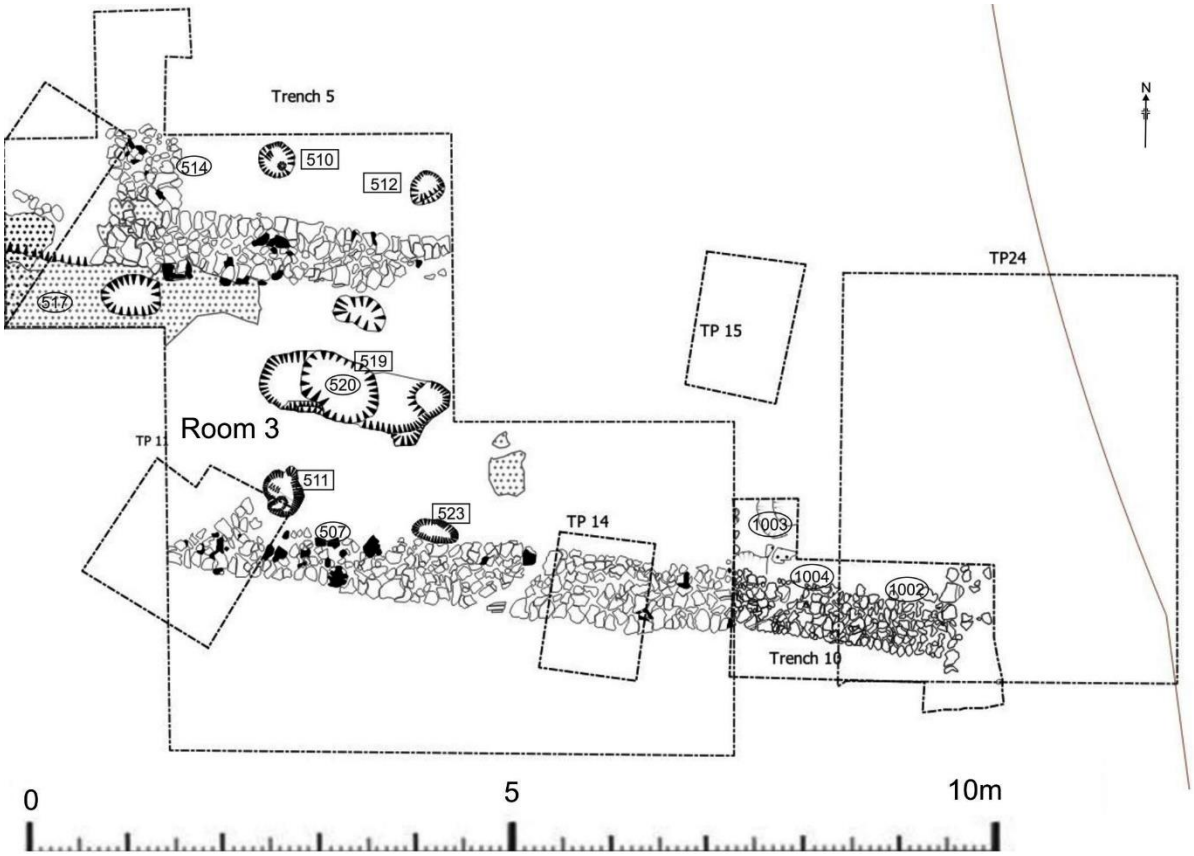

Fig. 14 Plan of the north-eastern corner of the building range

Excavation of the outer wall was constrained in the north-east by the roots of a mature beech tree but, beyond this point, and under the public footpath, the eastern terminus of the outer wall had been completely robbed out.

Some 4m of the outer wall had been removed leaving a mortar trace only. Immediately adjacent to this, a rectangular wall-like construction, 0.75m x 0.75m formed of three courses of unmortared flints (Fig. 14, context 514), abutted the northern outside of the wall. As this stood alone and did not appear to form part of a room, its purpose could not be determined, but it may have been a buttress.

A less regular and unmortared wall ran to the east of the dividing wall to form the southern wall of Room 3 and was clearly constructed either contemporaneously with, or shortly after, the dividing wall as shown by the provision of a short 'tenon' joint projecting from that wall into the construction of the latter. At the eastern end, this deteriorated to one layer of flints which overlay 30cm of loamy soil. By contrast, the northern (outer) wall was built down to 10cm above the natural stratum which suggested that, if they were constructed contemporaneously, the former was laid at ground level, while the latter, deeper, wall was probably formed within a construction trench. The relatively flimsy southern foundation suggests that this room was less substantial than Rooms 1 and 2.

The inner wall continued, under the public footpath to end in a fragmentary T-junction which indicated orientation of the eastern end of the range, and giving an overall length of 47m of the northern building range.

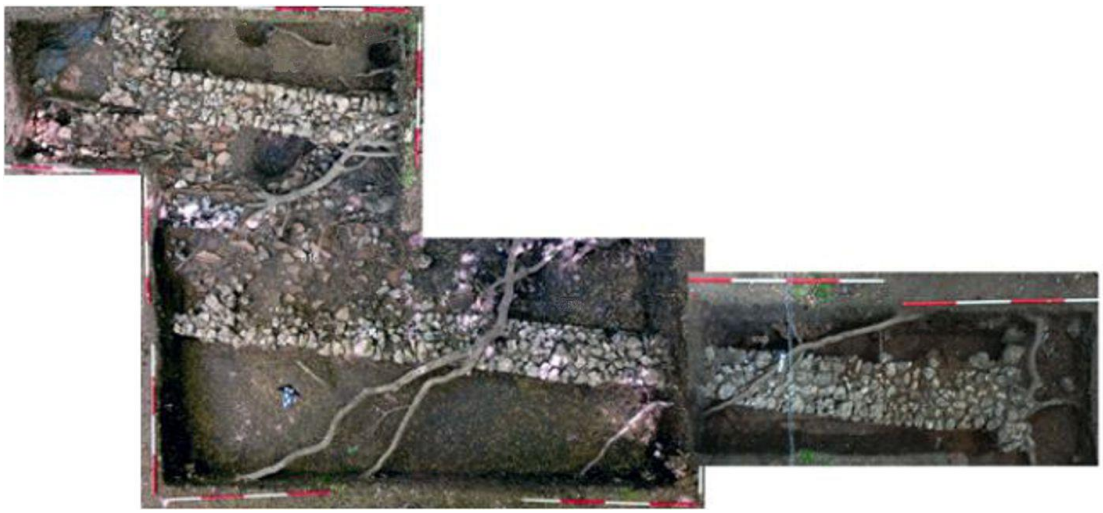

Fig. 15 Compilation photograph of the north-eastern corner of the building range

The western temenos wall

Excavation along the western wall was constrained by the presence of mature trees on the line but trench 14 revealed a 5.6m run of unmortared basal course of wall with much tumble which suggested that originally there had been at least one further course of wall. The trench contained a tumble of roof tiles, but careful examination failed to reveal a structural foundation by way of postholes, beam slots or post pads to support a roof on the inside.

The eastern temenos wall

The T-junction at the eastern terminus of the northern building range provided an alignment of the eastern wall which was pursued in a test pit and followed in a 4.5m x 5m trench. This revealed a carefully constructed entrance 2.2m wide and projected as buttresses, measuring 1m across, to both sides of the eastern temenos wall.

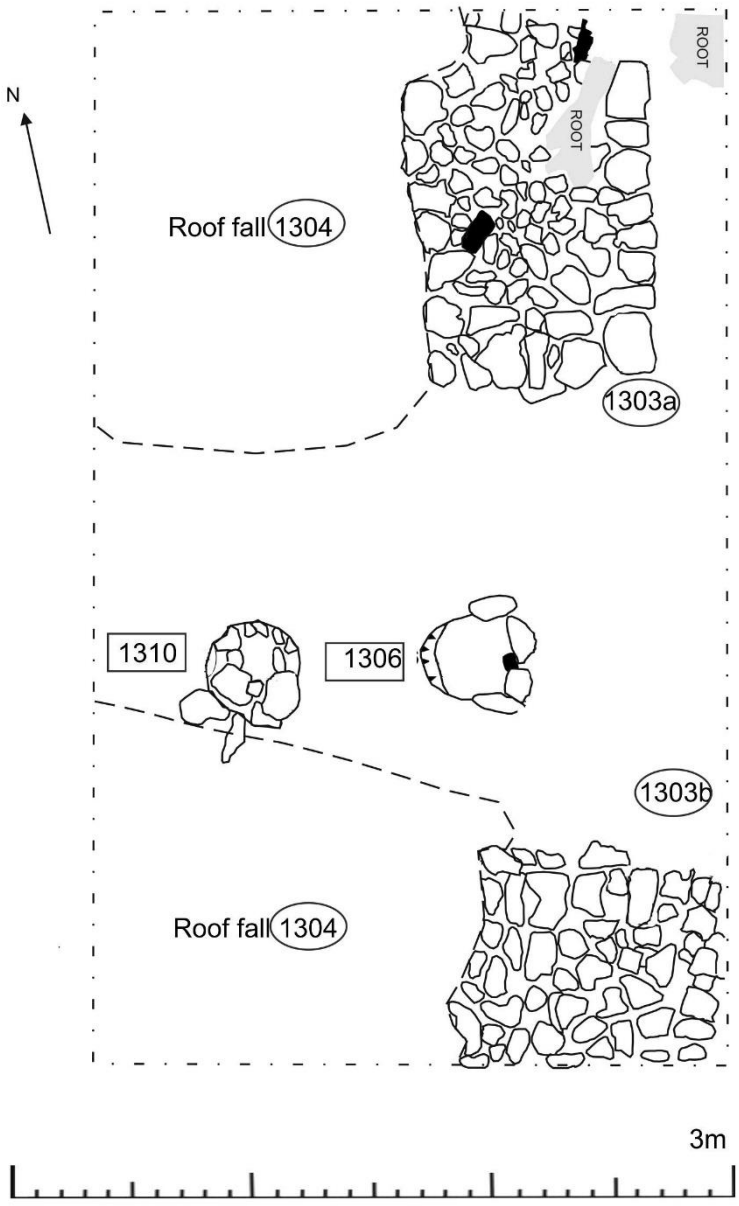

Fig. 16 Plan of the eastern gateway

Approximately in the centre of the gateway, two post holes with flint packing were revealed (Fig. 15, contexts 1306 and 1310). If the posts were contemporaneous with the built entrance, access would have been restricted to some 55cm on either side of them. This suggests that the post holes may have belonged to an earlier period than the gateway. Unfortunately, clear stratigraphic evidence was lacking.

Excavation immediately inside the gateway revealed a clear entrance area bounded by a roof fall (Fig. 15, context 1304), which spread from the entrance both to north and south. Post holes, pads or wall foundations in support of this roof were not discerned.

Further to the south, in a further test pit, the wall was present but was damaged and indicated the extent of the intact wall remains at approximately 25m from the north eastern corner, thereafter deteriorating into a spread of wall flints and CBM seen in a further test pit.

Further examination of the eastern wall was constrained by the presence of mature trees.

The southern area

A ridge of higher ground, standing proud of the land surface by between 10cm and 30 cm, ran east-west across the southern aspect of the site and formed a discrete and regular alignment which ran parallel to the northern *temenos* wall. Spreads of knapped flints and CBM but no constructional remains were found in a further series of interventions.

Clearly, this feature suggests the location of southern buildings or wall, but it has been disturbed catastrophically. Whether this is the result of agricultural activity has not been determined but the old boundary between beech wood and coppice may not be coincidental. There is evidence of pit-like intrusions along this line, most particularly to the east. This remains unexplained but may be related to unauthorised metal detecting mentioned above.

A possible chronology

The date range of ceramic roof tiles (Warry 2006 and Warry pers.com.) suggests that the Temple was erected sometime in the 2nd to 3rd century AD.

The area of the ambulatory and *cella* and part of the adjacent building range may have been disturbed in antiquarian times. The creation of the mound is the singular most important feature to support this hypothesis. The infill of non-local sand is the other. The pipe stems found in the disturbed Roman layer (one lying on the natural) have been tentatively dated to the second half of the 18th century and as such may provide the clearest dating probability. An archival search has not revealed any record of such a dig, so no firm conclusion can be reached.

Abandonment of the complex

There are indications of a collapse of the northern range of the temenos buildings and the ambulatory and *cella* due to subsidence of the underlying ground. The slope of the walls by 1.5° from the east and 8° from the west towards a clear depression in the centre accompanied by a slump inward of the outer wall of the northern range, an apparent attempt to underpin the outer wall with an additional course of flints and a possible buttress in the north-eastern sector all point to subsidence as a reason to abandon this range. It seems possible that this may be attributed to the hole which is interpreted as a naturally occurring solution sinkhole in the underlying chalk stratum. This apparent sinkhole measured 5m x 2.75m and a 50% section was excavated to natural at a depth of 84cm. As noted above, wall flints, aligned with the northern ambulatory wall, and a number of artefacts were found within the fill of this pit.

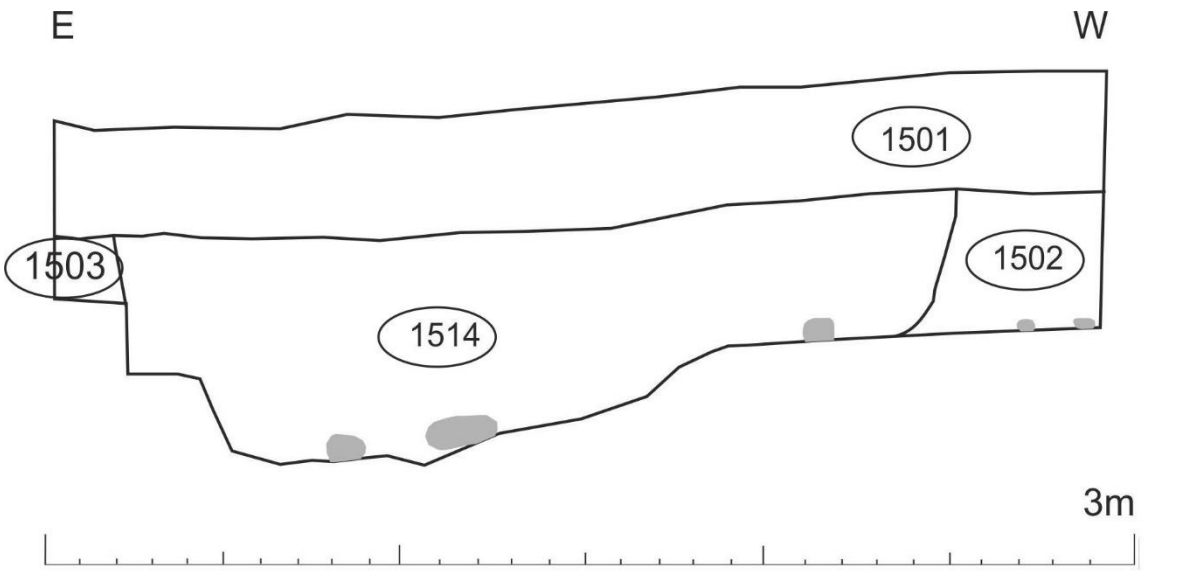

Fig 17 Section of the sinkhole

THE FINDS

Iron working evidence

John Scarborough and Chris Francis

There were two main areas of iron working discovered at High Wood, one in the north-east corner of the enclosure (Room 3), and the other in the north-west side of the enclosure (Room 1).

The presence of iron working was indicated by areas of unusually dark soil and masses of irregular solid material (slag).

Samples of the dark soil were washed and dried, and the iron-rich fraction separated with a magnet. Microscopic analysis showed micro-slag with flakes of hammerscale and globules, consistent with smithing and fire-welding (Dungworth & Wilkes, 2009).

Rooms 1 and 3 contained large quantities of slag. The majority of the slag was found in Room 1 (6.5kg) (Fig. 14, context 1003) and Room 3 (13kg) (Fig. 12, contexts 613 and 913).

In Room 3 the slag was on both sides of the northern flint wall, and extended below the assumed floor level and below the wall. This would indicate that the smithing in this area pre-dated the construction of the *temenos* wall. Not all of this area was excavated: digging was necessarily limited by a large beech tree to the north. The wall was not disturbed and the trench not extended to the south.

By contrast, in the north-west corner (Room 1), the slag was under a roof fall and entirely contained between two walls. It did not extend underneath the walls, implying that this area may have been used for iron working during the lifetime of the building. However tantalising this notion might be, the evidence is equivocal: there was no evidence of a floor level and it is possible that the deposit might relate to a pre-Temple phase.

The bulk slag can be subdivided into four general types:

1. Magnetic dense slag with one plano-convex surface that could be smithing hearth bottom (9.7kg)
2. Less magnetic and less dense non-diagnostic slag (2.5kg)
3. Non-magnetic light slag with larger vesicles and a ‘flowed’ surface (7.3kg)
4. Iron fragments that could have dropped off in the forge or whilst smithing (2kg)

It was difficult to determine the difference between smithing slag, secondary refinery slag and bloomery furnace slag (Keys, 2010). However, it is possible that the iron-working processes at High Wood were smithing only and did not include smelting. First, there is no known local source of iron ore and, second, the high temperature in a furnace produces vitrified clay lining (Crew, 1995) of which no trace was found. Despite the lack of local iron ore sources it is still possible that there could be remains of a bloomery furnace nearby but as yet undiscovered.

Two pieces of suspected partially consolidated bloom (164g and 268g) were found in Room 3 (Fig. 11), either side of the southern wall. Each was sectioned and slag inclusions were seen in the iron. It may therefore be postulated that the iron at High Wood could have been traded in the partially consolidated bloom form as well as in ‘currency’ bars (Cleere & Crossley, 1995) or this may be evidence of an undiscovered bloomery furnace.

Fig. 18 Polished sections of billet from north-eastern working area

The micro-slag rich area in Room 1 extended to roughly 2.8m x 1.9m with the larger part in to the west. During the excavation of the eastern part of Room 1, an attempt was made to locate a smithing anvil position by plotting the micro-slag density. The method used was to measure the magnetic susceptibility on a 25cm grid at 3cm depth intervals for seven levels. This was then plotted in a spreadsheet with grey scale representation of the magnetic susceptibility values. The results indicated that the highest concentration of micro-slag was near the western part and the northern wall of the room. The spreadsheet clearly matched the grey to black intensity of the soil in the trench. It was not possible to locate exactly the position of the anvil since there is no equivalent data for the part of the room adjacent to the western wall, where there was a larger spread of black soil and more bulk slag.

Animal bone

Janet Ridout Sharpe

The assemblage comprises 2023 bones and teeth weighing 13.6kg. The bones were collected by hand. Sieving through 10mm mesh was employed during the first two seasons of excavation but no fish bones or bones measuring less than 10mm were recovered, resulting in a bias towards domesticated livestock. The assemblage includes 254 bones previously excavated from the mound by HAHG.

The bones were identified to species and body part as far as possible, using the author's reference collection and bone atlases (Schmidt, 1972; Cohen & Serjeantson, 1996). Each fragment was recorded using the Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) method which 'estimates the maximum number of individuals' (O'Connor, 2000). All ribs and vertebrae (except the atlas and axis), together with unidentifiable bone fragments were classified by size into 'large mammal' (mostly cattle) and 'medium mammal' (mostly sheep); intermediate fragments, many of which were probably from pigs, were classed as 'mammal'. Age at slaughter was estimated by epiphyseal fusion status and tooth eruption and wear (Silver, 1969; Payne, 1973; Bull & Payne, 1972; Grant, 1982). Morphometric data was recorded if possible. A full record of the assemblage is available in the site archive.

Nearly all the bones were fragmentary and in good to poor condition with varying degrees of humic staining. A relatively small proportion (9%) was charred or burnt. Ten fragments (0.5%) were calcined. Few (2%) had been gnawed by dogs, indicating that bone waste had originally been buried or otherwise protected from scavengers.

Composition and distribution

A total of 966 (47.8%) bones were identified to species (Table 1). Cattle, sheep and pigs together accounted for 891 (92.2%) of the identified bones, of which sheep comprised about half (52.2%) and cattle and pigs each contributed about one-quarter (21.1 and 26.7% respectively). The differential preservation of larger elements at the expense of smaller and more fragile bones suggests that sheep are underrepresented. These proportions are reflected by the unidentified medium, large and mammal bone categories.

Species	HW15	HW16	HW17	HW18	HW19	HW21	Mound	Total
Equid	1	4	3		2		4	14
Cattle	35	71	40	2	21	7	12	188
Sheep	75	201	94	17	7	16	55	465
Pig	42	54	60	8	23	16	35	238
Fowl			1					1
Dog			1					1
Fox			1	1			3	5
Red deer		1	3		2	1		7
Mustelid							5	5
Rabbit	4	2	10				8	24
Goose		2						2
Partridge		1						1
Pheasant	1	3						4
Lapwing		1	1		1			3
Snipe			1					1
Jackdaw				1				1
Passerine		3	2	1				6
Total identified	158	343	217	30	56	40	122	966
Large mammal	*26*	*81*	*43*	*2*	*8*	*5*	*9*	*174*
Medium mammal	*100*	*198*	*157*	*18*	*4*	*7*	*103*	*587*
Mammal	*79*	*109*	*71*	*5*	*9*	*3*	*20*	*296*
Total unidentified	*205*	*388*	*271*	*25*	*21*	*15*	*132*	*1057*
Overall total	363	731	488	55	77	55	254	2023
Weight (kg)	1.880	5.015	3.600	0.404	0.854	0.427	1.376	13.556

Table 2 The number (NISP) of animal bones and teeth recorded from each year of the 2015-2021 excavations at High Wood (no bones were recovered in 2020), together with the bones recovered from the High Wood Mound excavation by HAHG in 1977–1983.

Bones were recovered from the following areas: Test pits 1-6 across the southern ambulatory and Trench W to the south (2015); outside the east wall of the ambulatory and the centre of the north range in Grids G10–17 (2016); Rooms 2 and 3 in the north range in Trench 4 (2017); east and west ends of the north range in Trenches 5 and 6 (2018); various parts of the north range in Trenches 8-11, the southern boundary of the *temenos* in Trench 12 and the east entrance in Trench 13 (2019); and the Temple footprint in Trenches 15 and 16 (2021). The bones from the Mound may also represent the Temple footprint.

Two main concentrations were identified. One was a dump of animal waste against the outside of the east ambulatory wall, perhaps originally buried against the foundations. The other concentration came from the

Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British pit(s) beneath the north range. The proportions of domestic livestock found in this earlier context and from the rest of the site show that the high proportion of sheep was maintained over a long period. A deposit of six pig mandibles was found at the east entrance.

Livestock

Fourteen equid bones and teeth comprised 1.5% of the mammalian livestock. The bones were relatively small and may have come from ponies. Fusion data indicated that the animals were most probably aged over 18 months and the crown height of the teeth suggests adult but not elderly animals. Horse meat was rarely consumed in the Roman period but there is evidence to suggest that young animals may occasionally have been ritually slaughtered (Allen, 2017). Two bones show evidence of butchery (chopping) and a first phalange carries two parallel knife cuts at its proximal end. Most of the teeth were damaged but the enamel folds on one were clear and resembled those of a mule (Armitage and Chapman, 1987; Davies, 1987). Equid teeth are subject to variation, and it is not possible to confirm the presence of a mule on the basis of a single tooth; nevertheless, this tooth is plausibly that of a mule (S. Payne, pers.com). The identification of a Romano-British donkey at Mount Farm, Berinsfield (Wilson and Allison, 2010) raises the possibility that some of the small 'horse' bones from High Wood could be those of donkeys.

Most cattle were slaughtered between 4 and 8 years of age. This suggests they were exploited for traction or as breeding stock, rather than primarily for meat and were culled when they ceased to be economically productive. A similar slaughter pattern, with most animals killed aged between 4 and 8 years, is frequent on Romano-British sites (Maltby, 2017). The prime age of slaughter for meat production is between 1.5 and 3 years (Allen 2017); only four elements fell into this age category. Few bones were sufficiently well preserved to permit measurement. Eight complete astragali ranged in length from 53.3-67.2mm (mean 62.6mm) and thus represent both small 'Iron Age' cattle and larger 'improved' stock (Wilson et al, 1978). Five fragments of cattle horn core were too small for breed identification.

Sheep and goat bones are notoriously difficult to tell apart although archaeological evidence suggests that goats were very much in the minority in Roman Britain (Maltby, 2017). The only diagnostic bone fragment from High Wood, the base of a horn core, was definitely that of a sheep and it is assumed that most, if not all, of the small artiodactyls were sheep. Most (63%) were slaughtered after 3 years of age; approximately 50% of these were killed between 4 and 6 years with some as old as 8-10 years. This corresponds to a pattern of exploitation for sheep secondary products (wool and milk). Sheep raised primarily for meat were mostly slaughtered in their second year (Maltby, 2017) and only three elements from High Wood represented that age category. However, there was a significant proportion (27%) of young lambs aged less than 1 year, which are unlikely to have been slaughtered for meat. At least 18 elements represented very young, neonatal or perinatal lambs. The slaughter pattern for sheep at High Wood therefore shows a high peak of animals aged 3 years or more and a secondary peak of lambs aged less than 1 year. The bones were mostly those of small, gracile animals which represent Iron Age stock and are typical of rural Romano-British assemblage (Allen, 2017). Just two elements exceeded the Iron Age norm and may represent a larger breed.

Pig bones and teeth indicated that most animals (70%) had been killed in their second year, which falls within the general pattern of pig slaughter recorded for Romano-British sites (Allen, 2017). The remainder were killed in their first or third year with one animal exceeding 4 years at slaughter. Among the youngest age group, at least three animals had been slaughtered at less than 6 months of age and some very small bones suggest the presence of sucking piglets, which are considered to have been a luxury food item (Maltby, 2017). The size of the pigs at High Wood is unknown but their bones were larger and more stocky than those of the sheep. Worthy of note is a fragmentary left pig mandible which appears to show the congenital absence of the lower first premolar.

A single chicken bone was recovered from the top soil. This may be intrusive but it came from a bantam: most Romano-British fowls were bantam breeds (Allison, 1977). The bone was not spurred and may have come from a hen.

Butchery practices

The bones seem to have been chopped into relatively small portions, suggesting that the meat was stewed in pots rather than roasted on spits. Despite cattle bones being in the minority, the much larger size of cattle compared with sheep indicates that as much, if not more, beef was consumed on site than mutton. Nearly half of the long bones had been chopped longitudinally, probably to extract the nutritious marrow. Knife cuts

were identified on only 3.7% of the bones overall and could be the result of filleting the meat (most knife cuts were seen as parallel transverse cuts on rib fragments) and skinning the animals. The highest proportion of knife cuts (on 10% of the bones) was recorded from the Temple footprint in 2021, suggesting that the use of knives may have had a ritual function. Two bones (a sheep scapula and a pig mandible) carried distinctive 4mm-square puncture holes on one face only that did not penetrate the bone: these may have resulted from implements used to handle the carcasses.

The presence of waste elements in the form of non-meat-bearing skull and foot bones suggests that cattle, sheep and pigs were all slaughtered on site. The proportions of waste elements from cattle and sheep indicate that the meat from these animals was utilised in the same way. The relative frequency of pig mandibles may suggest that pigs' tongues were considered a delicacy or they may have had ritual significance.

The bone dump against the ambulatory wall contained a high concentration of sheep bones (86.2%) and a large proportion of waste elements, suggesting that this was a specific dump for sheep waste and indicating, from its position just south of the presumed Temple entrance, that sheep were the preferred beast of sacrifice. Three of the sheep bones from this dump, comprising atlas, axis and first cervical vertebrae, were closely associated and may represent the same individual: the cervical vertebra had been chopped through vertically, suggesting that this animal had been decapitated.

Other mammals and birds

One vertebra of a moderately large dog was recovered from a surface deposit and may be intrusive. Since 36 bones (2%) showed evidence of dog gnawing, dogs appear to have been present at the site although dead dogs were apparently disposed of elsewhere.

Red deer were represented by three antler fragments and four bones that show deer were occasionally hunted and butchered on site but formed only a very small component of the assemblage. One antler formed part of the beam complete with burr to show this antler had been naturally shed. The brow tine had been removed and the tip of another antler showed saw marks on the 'cut' surface. The broken tip of a third tine appeared to have been gnawed by mice. Grant (2007) suggests that antler, as a valuable raw material, may have had votive significance.

The remains of several rabbits were found during the course of excavation and are considered intrusive since rabbits were rare exotics in Roman Britain. The bone assemblage from the Mound, which is interpreted as an antiquarian spoil heap, contained an unusually high proportion of intrusive animals. These included fox and rabbit bones and also the remains of a polecat or, more likely, a domestic ferret lost while rabbiting in the Mound sometime during the last 200 years.

Four pheasant bones are probably of recent origin, given the present use of the site for pheasant rearing. Like rabbits, pheasants were rare imported exotics during the Roman period. Wild bird bones could be Roman in date or they may be more recent. A wild goose may have been killed and brought to the site from the Thames below. Partridge, lapwing and snipe may date from a period when the area was unwooded. Partridge and lapwing are typically birds of arable fields and suggest that the site could have been cultivated at some stage in the past. The jackdaw prefers woodland and may be a more recent arrival.

Discussion and conclusion

The closest parallel to the High Wood Temple appears to be the temple at Woodeaton but unfortunately no animal bone report was published. The High Wood assemblage may be compared with those from two other temple sites in the general area: Lowbury Hill on the Berkshire Downs (Hamilton-Dyer, 1994) and Faringdon in Vale of White Horse. (Hamilton-Dyer, 2004). At all three sites sheep accounted for more than 50% of the livestock with roughly similar proportions of cattle and pigs. In contrast, the assemblage from Harpsden villa (Ridout Sharpe, in preparation), which lies about 1km to the north east of High Wood and both is both contemporary with the north range and shares a similar environment, shows a high proportion of cattle bones compared with sheep, and very few pigs.

Site	Type	Date	Equids		Cattle		Sheep		Pigs		Total
			NISP	%	NISP	%	NISP	%	NISP	%	NISP
High Wood	Temple	LIA-4	14	1.5	188	20.8	465	51.4	238	26.3	905
Lowbury Hill	Temple	LIA-4	6	1.1	124	21.6	338	59.0	105	18.3	573
Faringdon	Temple	1-4C	5	6.5	18	23.4	39	50.6	15	19.5	77
Harpsden	Villa	3-4C	6	8.7	37	53.6	22	31.9	4	5.8	69

Table 3 The relative proportion of livestock species from High Wood compared with those from other sites and Harpsden Villa

t High Wood, equid and chicken bones were scarce and red deer were minimal at Lowbury Hill. The Lowbury sheep bones contained a number of neonatal or very juvenile bones in addition to those of mature animals, again as at High Wood, and it was concluded that the assemblage consisted of both sacrificed lambs and mature sheep slaughtered for feasting (Hamilton-Dyer, 1994). The presence of both very young and older lambs aged less than 1 year at High Wood suggests that ritual activity took place in both the spring (the Celtic festival of Beltain) and autumn (Samhain). Sheep also predominated at Wanborough temple on the North Downs in Surrey where Pipe (1999) draws attention to the presence of calcined bones that indicate a combustion temperature of at least 700–900 degrees centigrade, equivalent to that of a cremation pyre: the few calcined fragments found at High Wood may also represent 'burnt offerings'.

Fragmented and butchered bones are characteristic of temple assemblages, reflecting sacrifice and feasting. King (2005) notes the ritual deposition of mandibles at some temple sites: this may explain the deposit of pig mandibles near the east gate to the *temenos* at High Wood. The relatively high proportion of knife cuts on bones from the Temple footprint may also be indicative of ritual activity, as perhaps is the presence of butchered equid bones (Allen, 2017). The fact that sacrifices appear to have been performed immediately outside the temple building (Hennig and Booth, 2000) correlates with the bone dump against the ambulatory wall south of the assumed east entrance to the Temple.

The siting of High Wood in an elevated position with extensive views is shared by the temples at Lowbury Hill and Faringdon (King (2005) suggests that the catchment areas for such temples may have been extensive and that worshippers from far and wide may have brought with them animals for sacrifice and feasting, animals that may have been well past their prime.

Bronze Age gold ornament

Anni Byard

Fig. 19 EBA basket ornament

The following was written for the coroner on discovery of the gold ornament.

Report for HM Coroner on potential Treasure Case 2015 T460 from Binfield Hearth, Oxfordshire

Finder: South Oxfordshire Archaeology Group.

Circumstances of discovery**:** Discovered by a metal detector user while participating on a controlled amateur archaeological investigation on private land in the parish of Binfield Heath, Oxfordshire.

Description**:** A fragment of gold foil, possibly originally oval in plan but now bent and with a corrugated appearance. No decoration visible. There is a hole through the foil near to the outer edge and there is a small tab visible on one of the folds however this may be due to the condition of the object. Both this possible tab and the hole are features seen on some Early Bronze Age 'basket' ornaments, often interpreted as earrings or hair decorations. They are usually found in pairs however singular finds are also known (see discussion below).

For comparative examples see treasure cases 2015 T72 (Hampshire) and 2012 T774 (Oxfordshire)

Measurements: 16.8mm long, 11.7mm wide, 0.2mm thick and 0.35 grams.

Metal composition: Non-destructive X-ray fluorescence analysis of the fragment undertaken at the British Museum indicated a surface composition of approximately 92-93% gold, 4-5 % silver, 2% copper.

Discussion: Based on appearance, shape, and size it is suggested that this gold foil does represent an incomplete basket ornament of Early Bronze Age date. There are several examples of singular discoveries of basket ornaments that have been tightly folded, many often incomplete and assumed to have an altered use, possibly as beads or in the case of the Amesbury Archer's Companion, possibly a deliberate post-mortem deposition within the mouth. One example from Chalbourn on the Isle of White is missing its tang but the foil has been pierced twice near the break (PAS database reference IOW-B16625).

This class of object belongs to the earliest phases of metallurgy in Britain. These are usually associated with burials and a very rare, dating to the earliest phase of the Bronze Age, c. 2400-2200 BC. Such objects are variously referred to as ‘basket ornaments’ or ‘basket earrings’, or ‘hair rings’. They are in any case personal ornaments and have been found in pairs in graves dating to the early Beaker period. Whether worn on hair, ears or items of costume, they were rolled into a +basket shape in use.

Conclusion: Therefore, based on this object being of prehistoric date and of precious metal it constitutes treasure under the stipulations of the 1996 Treasure Act.

Ceramic building material

Kevin Hayward

Some 7.8 metric tonnes of fragmentary ceramic building material were recovered from the Mound and the Temple complex, and the assemblage may be dated from the characterisation of the lower cutaway inserts of the *tegulae* (roof tiles) which comprise Warry types 4 and 5 [AD 160–260] and Warry types 1, 15 and 16 [>AD 240] (Warry, P, pers.com. and Warry, 2006).

A site visit was undertaken on 23 June 2018 in order to establish the types of fabric used for the many hundreds of kilogrammes of ceramic building material (*tegula, imbrex* and *lydion* brick) already recovered from the 2018 excavations. Examination was taken on site using a hand lens (Gowland x10). Small sub-samples of *imbrex*, brick and *tegula* were taken and underwent further visual examination using a binocular microscope Brunel.

Hand specimen examination of the *tegula, imbrex* and brick show them to be broadly made of the same fabric.

HIGH1. Red – fine to coarse orange sandy busy fabric often with a reduced (dark) core) in the thicker brick elements. Flecks of mica speckled intermittently throughout and impressions of chaff (grass) and hollowed-out shell occasionally present as are discontinuous yellow silt laminae. Fine sandy moulding sand.

HIGH1 Tegulae have the finest sandy fabric

HIGH1A Brick has a thicker reduced core with occasional flint pebbles and an abundant finer gritty matrix than HIGH1. The *imbrex* samples have a similar fabric.

All ceramic elements have a fine sandy matrix or chaff vegetative matter.

The mortar was also examined. There was a very hard white-cream sandy gravel lime mortar from HW18 [517] with flint pebble inclusions, chaff impressions, possible shell impressions and chalk inclusions.

The chalk and flint in the mortar are an indication of a local production source in the immediate area.

The centralised fabric *HIGH1* (albeit with variations on a theme) in the ceramic building material is again an indication of one production site with flint inclusions indicating local production.

The chain mail

Quita Mould

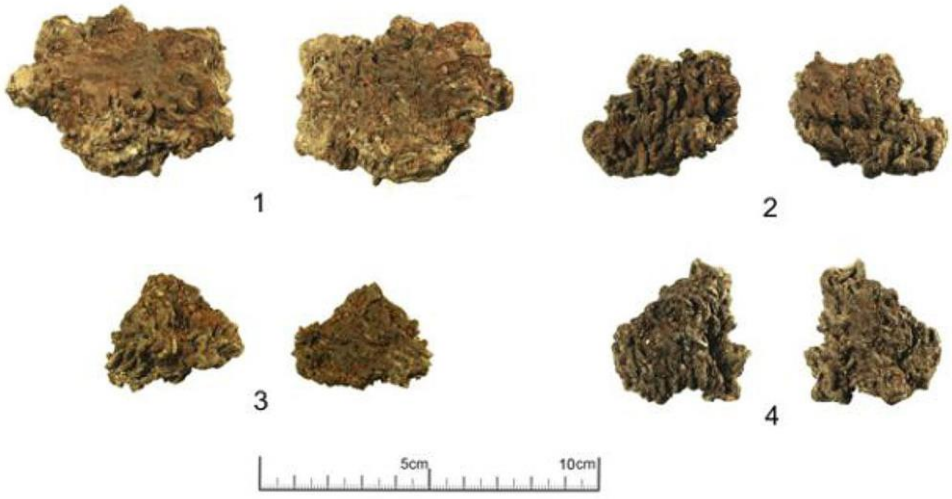

Fig. 20 Lorica Hamata

Four masses of articulated mail rings (1-4) were recovered from the site of a Roman structure, during the first season of exploratory work by SOAG in 2015.

Pottery and coins from the site indicate 3rd or 4th century activity with Late Iron Age activity also suggested. Each concretion is comprised of a series of interlocking rows of links, which could be seen by eye to be 7mm in diameter and approximately 1-1.5mm thick. The broken links were either round in section or slightly flattened on the upper and lower faces. Each concreted piece appeared to be folded so that one row of links now lays on top of another. Piece 1 could be seen to comprise 8 rows of 10 or more links; piece 4 had at least 8 rows of 8 links. Such detail was visible because the iron was not heavily encrusted. This is a feature also noted on mail links found elsewhere. The iron was in good condition with a small amount of surface cracking. Small pieces of charcoal were present amongst the encrustation. The dimensions of the four concretions are given below:

Piece	Length	Width	Breadth	Weight
1	36mm	27mm	15mm	13g
2	45mm	43mm	20mm	22g
3	68mm	50mm	2Omm	62g
4	34mm	33mm	16mm	13g

Table 4 Dimensions of lorica hamata concretions

Mail is comprised of rows of joining links (rings) each link passing through four others. Roman mail (*lorica hamata*) may be comprised of alternating rows of riveted and welded links or of 'solid' rings (that is rings without a joint or weld) and riveted or welded links (Bishop and Coulston, 1993). The process of manufacture and the tools involved have been reproduced experimentally by D N Sim.

Few constructional details were recognisable on the majority of the links when the concreted lumps were viewed in X-radiograph (at 80Kv) but in cross section the broken links were revealed more clearly. The majority of the cross sections visible were of round section suggesting that those links were made of wire. A very small number of riveted links, at least three individuals, were visible in the radiographic image under low magnification (x4 and x40) located around the perimeter of the groups where individual links are most clearly visible. A riveted link, visible at the lower edge of piece 2, and another at the lower edge of piece 3, each articulates with a ring of notably flatter section to each side; other links of flatter section are also visible elsewhere. These links with flattened upper and lower faces are likely to be 'solid' rings (that is complete rings not riveted or welded together) punched from sheet. No examples of butt- or scarf-welded joints were noted during examination of the X-radiographs.

It is useful to compare these findings with others from elsewhere. Mail is often found as encrusted lumps and, as James has noted (2004), oxidation of the iron makes exact measurement of the individual links impossible. These pieces from High Wood are in good condition and measurement of exposed individual rings did not differ markedly from those measured from the X-radiographic image. A rapid survey of other examples of mail where measurement has been attempted would indicate that these mail links from High Wood fall within the size range commonly recovered. A large group of individual links, recovered by sieving from the Chester amphitheatre and dating to the last quarter of the 1st century, measured by eye between 7mm and 9mm in diameter and about 1mm thick. The increased accuracy provided when measured from enhanced radiographs showed little significant difference, with the vast majority falling between 6mm and 8mm in diameter. Links presumed punched from sheet, riveted links, and butt-jointed links were all present in the group. Six measurable ring-links present on corroded mail of late first century date recovered from the sand floor on site VI8 at the Deanery Field, Chester, were also 7mm to 9mm in diameter. One of these same pieces had ring diameters of 7mm and employed alternating rows of punched rings and riveted wire links (Manning, 1985). Probably the best-preserved mail to be recovered to date comes from Dura-Europos, Syria and is of third century date with ring diameters measuring between 6mm and 10mm (James, 2004). The fragments of Roman mail of third century date found at the Roman-Germanic battlefield at the Hartzhorn, in Lower Saxony, Germany had individual rings measuring about 5mm in diameter. No significant distinction can be seen in the size of the individual links employed throughout the Roman period. For this reason, no independent dating can be suggested for the four concretions of mail from High Wood on the basis of the link size or constructional features.

The hand axe

Fig. 21 Hand axe from the cella

This white-patinated, flaked, ovate hand axe appears to be Palaeolithic in date and shows soft hammer percussion flaking. It may have originally been found in the Pleistocene Thames gravel deposits in and around Henley or the Black Park beds between Caversham and Henley, which is well known for yielding Palaeolithic artefacts (Wymer,1999).

It was found in the silted fill of the sinkhole which underlay the north-western corner of the *cella* and is believed to have originated under the floor of the *cella*. There is no established type seriation for this form so dating is problematical and, although thought to be Palaeolithic, a Neolithic date cannot be discounted. Many similar finds from other Romano-British sites are Neolithic in date.

It is possible that the object was seen as of some significance and was found by a local inhabitant, 'curated' and placed as a 'votive' offering. Katharine Walker's PhD thesis includes an examination of Stone-Age axe-heads, of both Palaeolithic and Neolithic date, found in Gaulish temples and concludes that this is consistent with their presence as votive objects (Walker, 2015).

Late Iron Age coins

Daphne Nash Briggs

Five Late Iron-Age coins are a tiny remnant of all that must originally have been lost or deposited on the High Wood site before the Claudian conquest. Nonetheless, they span an important phase in the history of a place near the Catuvellaunian borders that must have been of some importance in its day, and they shed a little light on some of the people who may have frequented it.

Fig. 22 Gold stater

Gold stater, 17–19 mm, 5.92g.

Southern region, British Qb class 2b, *c*. 54–50 BC. DK 156; ABC 488 (Selsey Uniface).

Reverse die 18 with nine spoke wheel on the reverse (BMC 463). Obv. almost blank.

Rev. Triple-tailed horse r., 9-spoke wheel below, abstract charioteer's arms above, "coffee bean" (solar-chariot) symbols behind and in front, zigzag ground below, pellets above and in front.

British Qb class 2 staters were all struck from a single obverse die that had worn flat by class 2b, and was eventually paired with at least 88 reverse dies during a brief period of intensive production in a few discrete annual batches. Most 2b dies have eight-spoke wheels, very rarely nine: BMC 463 (BMC Hobbs, 1996) is also from this reverse die 18, only the eighth die in the long 2b series. HW19 SF54 comes from early in the 2b series, probably struck in 53 or 52 BC: its obverse still shows traces of the original class 2a British Qa biface wreath (cf. DK 152-154) A final group with lower mean weight had wheels with seven or six spokes and can be assigned to 51-50 BC (D K Sills 2017). British Qb probably furnished a heavy contribution from Hampshire and West Sussex to the enormous annual tribute that Julius Caesar imposed on the defeated British coalition in 54 BC, four annual instalments of which were almost certainly paid (Sills ibid. pp. 721–30, esp. 727–8). This coin is in very fresh condition: it must have gone to ground soon after being struck.

Fig 23
Bronze unit of Dias

Bronze unit, 15–17 mm, 1.3 g.

Catuvellauni, Diassu, *c.* AD 1–10. ABC 2748.

Obv. bearded portrait facing right; TASC behind, DIAS in front.

Rev. Centaur playing aulos (double pipes). Crescent above, VER below. Ring in front of the centaur, who wears a cavalry helmet.

This freshly struck coin shows little sign of wear from circulation: it was probably a contemporary loss or deposit. Diassu is known from three silver and two bronze types and was, it appears, on constructive terms with Roman Gaul (cf. Henig, 2007). A classically trained engraver cut these dies with a realistic portrait flanked by his patron's name and patronymic, implicitly in Latin: DIAS[su-] TASC[iovani filius]. On the reverse a modified centaur from Classical legend, styled like an image on a Roman signet gem (Henig, 2007), wears Tasciovanos' cavalry helmet (e.g. gold staters ABC 2577, 2580) and names his father's Catuvellaunian mint and royal seat, VER[lamion]. Tasciovanos had several known sons in prominent positions, including Cunobelinus, his likely chosen heir, who stepped seamlessly, it seems, into command of Verlamion after their father's death in around AD 8-10. Diassu must have been active towards the end of Tasciovanos' long reign (*c*. 25 BC-*c*. AD 10), perhaps extending into his brother's, and his name may reflect the nature of his office. Inscribed more fully as DIASSV on silver units type ABC 2742 196–7 (Sills, 2017), it may best be understood as a title for someone ritually initiated to a sacral position, (Delamere, 2003 and 2019) and it is a plausible conjecture (Sills, 2017) that Tasciovanos encouraged surplus sons, including Diassu, into druidical careers-in effect as peripatetic district officials and ritual associates in his rulership-thereby reducing rivalry in his kindred. Diassu's bronze units have an unusually high zinc content, probably from rendering a consignment of heavy, attractive, but otherwise useless brass denominations from Augustan mints in Gaul (Nemausus after 29/28 BC, Lugdunum after 10 BC).

Fig. 24
Gold quarter stater of Cunobelinus

Gold quarter stater (no recorded weight or diameter)

Cunobelinus, r. Catuvellauni and Trinovantes *c.* AD 1 or 8–41. Second coinage, after *c*. AD 8, class 3e, perhaps AD 15–20, dies 29/35. DK 582, ABC 2816.

Obv. Barley ear, no central stalk, slanted detail at base of stem. CA M[V]

Rev. Wild horse prancing right, wavy branch above, [CVN below, off flan].

*F*ig. 25
Silver unit of Cunobelinus

Silver unit, 12mm, 1.25g

Cunobelinus, r. Catuvellauni and Trinovantes *c.* AD 1 or 8– 41, ABC 2870.

Obv. Winged portrait bust of a young male wearing a garment brooch-pinned on his right shoulder, CVNO in front.

Rev. Sphinx seated l., TASCIO in front.

Cunobelinus' first gold coinage (*c.* AD 1-8, ABC 2771, 2807) was struck at Camulodunon, but was confined to Trinovantian lands, whilst his father, Tasciovanos, still ruled at Verlamion. At this point Cunobelinus was, in effect, a Trinovantian (district) ruler, perhaps on the strength of a marriage alliance with the house of Augustus' protégé in Essex, Dubnovellaunus. His reign as sole ruler of both Catuvellauni and Trinovantes began after Tasciovanos' death, perhaps in *c*. AD 8, and silver unit HW17 SF56, probably from early in his reign, could have been struck at Verlamion, and was certainly designed to appeal to Catuvellauni, naming his father TASCIO[vani f.], as his brother Diassu had also done (HW17 SF1). The style of the wings both of the sphinx and behind the bust may be designed to echo the winged insignia of Cassivellaunus (ABC 2433, 2472, etc.), famed as leader of the British coalition in 54 BC, who coordinated payment of the British war indemnity (see notes on HW19 SF 54) and was Tasciovanos' dynastic predecessor and likely close kinsman. Cunobelinus' silver unit asserts his rulership, emulating the young Augustus with a version of Augustus' own first signet, with a sphinx, for official correspondence (Pliny and Suetonias). The version on early Augustan silver *cistophori* from an Asian mint was the model used for Cunobelinus' sphinx (RCV 1584).

Cunobelinus' second gold coinage (HW15 SF5), redesigned when he succeeded Tasciovanos at Verlamion *c*. AD 8, but struck at Camulodunon, circulated very widely as he and his dynasty extended their influence in southern Britain (Sills, 2017). Camulodunon was his permanent royal seat, in succession to Dubnovellaunus, and undoubtedly with Augustus' blessing: his father Tasciovanos had coveted Camulodunon in vain (Sills, 2017). Class 3e of Cunobelinus' vast gold coinage, including the HW15 quarter stater, probably coincided with the early years of Tiberius' reign, *c.* AD 15–20, after renewal of Cunobelinus' treaty with the Empire on Tiberius' accession. Dies for gold quarter staters, primarily issued for royal payments and donatives within the realm, were often kept in service until flaws developed from the stress of striking coins by the thousand: both dies here were reaching the limit of their usefulness. The coin itself shows additional signs of wear from subsequent handling, and could well have been lost or deposited several decades later, even after AD 43.

Coinage struck by Epaticcus, son of Tasciovanos (TASCI F[ilius] on gold staters, ABC 1343), is found south of the Thames, and is therefore classed as Atrebatic, although Epaticcus himself was a Catuvellaunian district ruler, beholden to his nominal or actual elder brother Cunobelinus. His gold staters, with explicit patronymic, replicate Cunobelinus' signature barley-ear obverse (e.g. quarter stater HW15 SF) and Tasciovanos' virtuosic hands-off horseman reverse (ABC 2577), but with his own name, EPATICCV. Epaticcus' very fine, classically trained engraver had a distinctive style of writing the letter A with a dot in place of the cross-bar, seen on both sides of this example – this engraver was inherited, briefly, by Cunobelinus' son, Caratacus, when Epaticcus retired or died in c. AD 41.

Fig. 26

Silver minim of Epaticcus

Silver minim, 12 mm,0.29g.

Epaticcus, Catuvellaunian ruler south of the Thames, *c*. AD 20– 40, ABC 1370.

Obv. EPATI, pellet in ring above and below.

Rev. Snarling boar's head r TA below

Calleva must have been a crucial node on long-range slave procurement routes for Roman Gaul, with increasing emphasis on Kent and the Thames estuary in the first century AD. Commanding the northern district of Tincomarus' southern kingdom, and ruled by Tincomarus' kinsman Eppillus, Rex Calle (ABC 1160, c.20 BC–AD 1, before Eppillus moved to a more promising location, in Kent, c.AD 1-15), Calleva must have been a loss to Verica's southern kingdom and his Commian dynasty when it came under Epaticcus' control. Silver minims, often found on or near temple sites, as at High Wood, may well have been issued in connection with such places' role in the conduct of public life, for instance at festivals or judicial assizes, and been favoured as affordable Temple offerings. The boar's head on this minim mirrors Verica's minim ABC 1268, probably early in Verica's series (r. c. AD 10-40), in a gesture towards the southern dynasty.

Roman coins

Paul Booth

The excavation, including associated metal-detecting activity, produced a total of 175 Roman coins, plus five Iron Age coins reported separately. The coins from the excavation were scanned with the principal aims of providing dating for the site sequence and characterisation of the assemblage as a whole, in turn informing interpretation of the site. The condition of the coins is quite variable, ranging from very good to very poor. While relatively few are extremely heavily encrusted, details, particularly of mintmarks, are often unclear even when the general type is identifiable. Some manual cleaning was undertaken by the specialist to facilitate identification, and 15 coins were recommended for formal cleaning by a conservator, but this work had not been done at the time of writing. Detailed identifications were made where possible, with notes of obverse and reverse types and mintmarks, and standard references to volumes of RIC (Mattingly, H, et al, 1923-1984) or LRB (Hill, P, Carson, R A G and Kent, J P C, 1976) (the latter used in lieu of RIC volume IX) were noted where possible. Wear was recorded (approximately) using the categories defined by Brickstock (2004), but these have to be treated with extreme caution. All the coins are listed in an Excel spreadsheet and summarised in terms of issue periods and broader phases defined by Reece (1991).

Date	Reece Period	Numbers	Phase total	% of 168 coins assigned to phase
-41	1	1		
41-54	2	1		
54-68	3	3		
69-96	4	6		
96-117	5	3		
117-138	6			
138-161	7	1		
161-180	8			
180-192	9			
193-222	10			
222-238	11	1		
238-260	12	1		
Phase A other		3	**20**	11.9
260-275	13	13		
275-296	14	18		
Phase B other		17	**48**	28.6
296-317	15	4		
317-330	16	5		
Phase C other		1	**10**	6.0
330-348	17	30		
348-364	18	21		
364-378	19	36		
378-388	20	2		
388-402	21	1		
Phase D			**90**	53.6
3-4C uncertain		7		
TOTAL		**175**		

Table 5 Quantification of coins by issue period and phase

The assemblage

The earliest Roman coin is an issue of Augustus of 19 BC. The first century AD is well-represented; two Claudian asses, one a typical 'Claudian copy' (assigned to period 3 in Table 1 above), are followed by a further as and a dupondius of Nero. Five coins of Vespasian include a single denarius, and the sixth coin assigned to period 4 is a possible dupondius of Domitian, identified some time ago by another specialist but now impossibly decayed. Two sestertii and a dupondius of Trajan are notable for their good condition – one of the sestertii and the dupondius (2021 sfs 45 and 44 respectively), only slightly worn, were recovered from fill 1714 of a feature underlying the Temple building (see below). Later second-century coins are almost

entirely absent, and the early/mid Roman periods conclude with a denarius of Severus Alexander and a large radiate of Valerian.

Numbers of coins increase from the later third century in line with the national trend. Period 13 comprises issues of Gallienus, Postumus, Claudius II, Victorinus and Tetricus, while all irregular ('barbarous') radiates are assigned, somewhat arbitrarily, to period 14. A significant number of radiates, however, remain in a condition that does not permit close identification or assessment of regularity of striking. No regular issues of period 14 were identified. Thereafter coins of all periods are present, with Reece periods 17 to 19 characteristically well represented. The types are almost entirely the standard ones: Genio Populi Romani and Soli Invicto Comiti for period 15, Beata Tranquillitas and Providentiae Caess for period 16, Constantinopolis (but not Urbs Roma), Gloria Exercitus (two- and one-standard types), Pax Publica, and Victoriae DD Augg Q NN in period 17. Period 18 coins include a Gloria Romanorum issue of Magnentius, but otherwise consist almost entirely of irregular Fel Temp Reparatio types. One of these (2015 C8), however, is of some interest; it is an AE3 of Magnentius with the FTR fallen horseman reverse, but both faces are clearly overstruck. A fragment of the underlying obverse legend reads]CONST[and then]AVG[, and illegible fragments of the earlier reverse legend can also be seen. Period 19, the best-represented individual period, again produces only the standard reverse types; Gloria Romanorum (14), Securitas Reipublicae (17) and Gloria Novi Saeculi (5). Unusually, issues of period 20 are more common than those of period 21 (albeit that there are only 2 and 1 coins of these periods respectively) and include an issue of Magnus Maximus. Where mintmarks could be read (see above) their occurrence generally followed established trends; in period 17 six coins were assigned to Trier and one to Arles, whereas in Period 19 six coins were from Arles, five from Lyons and one from Siscia.

Discussion

The early Roman coins in this assemblage suggest a continuation of the activity implied by the Iron Age coins. The Augustan denarius might possibly have been a deposit contemporary with the Iron Age pieces rather than a post-Conquest arrival at the site. However, though in discussion of the large hoard of mainly Iron Age coins from the temple at Wanborough (Surrey), deposited c AD 51, Cheesman (1994) argued that the Roman Republican, Augustan and Tiberian coins were probably post-conquest introductions. For a summary of further discussion of the character of that assemblage see Cheesman 2007. It is counted as a hoard by Bland (2008). The issues concerning the Wanborough material prompt the question of the character of the High Wood assemblage. A number of contexts produced several coins, but while these were mostly deposits of a generalised character some of the coin groups were of interest. For example, layer 205, a basal layer above the subsoil, produced six coins, a worn radiate of Tetricus and a fairly tightly dated group of five coins, four of which were of the House of Valentinian. Other subsoil layers were 602, which produced five coins ranging from two late 3rd-century radiates to another issue of the House of Valentinian, and 1302 in the area of the eastern gateway, which produced eight coins, mostly late 3rd and early 4th century, but ranging from a denarius of Severus Alexander to an irregular nummus of Magnentius or Decentius. Perhaps the most interesting groups were from contexts 1507 and 1714, respectively the western and eastern halves of the solution sinkhole under the north-west wall of the ambulatory and *cella.* Together these produced 12 coins, but their interpretation is not completely clear. The earliest pieces were a sestertius and a dupondius of Trajan (mentioned above), both only slightly worn, but the remaining coins were two radiates, four issues of period 17 and five of period 19, the latest, of Gratian, dated AD 375-378. The implication of this is that, unless they were redeposited, the original depositional context of the Trajanic pieces within this feature was rather different from that of the later coins, though precisely how is unclear. Beyond these 'groups' (and the coins from layer 205, for example, were quite widely distributed) the evidence suggests a fairly broad distribution of coins across the site.

The paucity of significant clusters of coins that might reflect deposition of a specifically religious character need not necessarily be significant. Despite the fact that a temple can be seen as a relatively straightforward location of special deposits, the need for careful consideration of this sort of interpretation (Garrow, 2012) is still relevant here. King's statement that 'coin deposition at temples may usually have been deliberate' (2008) carries the implication that this was not always necessarily the case. A variety of factors might have affected the quantity and distribution of coins across temple sites (and in the case of High Wood earlier looting of the site was probably particularly significant) and would have included 'the local requirements of the cult practice at each site' (King, 2008). At High Wood it is of course possible, and perhaps likely, that the great majority of the coins were originally specially deposited, but the present evidence does not allow the identification of such actions.

As indicated above the majority of the coins from the site are of later Roman date and individually unremarkable. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of coin 'loss' can be compared with data from across the region to shed further light on the character of the assemblage. The most obvious comparisons are with coins from other probable or certain temple or shrine sites in the region (Table 4). Such sites are relatively few in number, but there are significant assemblages from the well-known site of Lowbury Hill (Davies 1985; Boon 1994), a site with a probable temple/shrine component at Childrey (PAS data, Naylor and Byard, forthcoming) and Marcham/Frilford (provisional summary data, including the material from the 1937-8 excavations (Sutherland, 1939) by kind permission of Simon Blackmore and Gary Lock; Kamash et al (2010) for a summary of the site). Data from the major temple complex at Woodeaton are also presented, but the most prominent group of coins from this site belong to a hoard of the AD 340s (King, 1978). Only a very small assemblage was recovered in the excavations of 1952 (Sutherland, 1954); it is particularly unfortunate that the substantial earlier assemblages from Woodeaton listed by Milne (1931) cannot be broken down for detailed comparative analysis in terms of Reece periods.

The coin loss patterns for these sites show a reasonable degree of variety. Prior to the late 3rd century the numbers of coins involved are small, but High Wood has the highest proportions of 1st-century and Trajanic coins except for Woodeaton. The relative scarcity of Hadrianic to mid-3rd century coins at High Wood is notable, but these issues are not common anywhere (except again at Woodeaton, based on Milne's figures). Late 3rd- to early 4th-century coins are fairly evenly distributed across all the sites, though late 3rd-century representation is slightly higher at the downland sites of Lowbury and Childrey.

All the assemblages are dominated by coins of period 17 (from AD 330) and later. Except at Woodeaton, period 19 (House of Valentinian) coins are more common than those of period 17. At Woodeaton, the large Constantinian hoard can be set to one side (though it may be relevant), but it is fairly clear from Milne's list of other coins (1931), despite its lack of precision, that Constantinian coins outnumber those of Valentinian; only the tiny assemblage from Kirk's excavation at Woodeaton follows the trend seen at the other temple sites. That trend is a reversal of the pattern more typical at settlement sites (see below) notwithstanding that the representation of period 19 coinage on Oxfordshire sites is typically higher than the PAS national average (I am grateful to Anni Byard for relevant data). At High Wood (and in the tiny Woodeaton assemblage) the difference between period 17 and 19 quantities is not particularly marked, but it is notable at Marcham and particularly so at Lowbury and Childrey. This characteristic at Lowbury was commented upon by Davies (1985) as a result of his analysis of the coins from Atkinson's excavation of 1913-1914 (Atkinson, 1916). Davies drew attention to a parallel with the religious site at Nettleton (Wiltshire) and concluded that this was a likely interpretation (Davies, 1985). In the light of subsequent work at Lowbury it was the relationship between coins of periods 19 and 21 that drew the attention of George Boon (1994), who

demonstrated widely divergent patterns in a number of temple sites, with period 21 coinage well represented at Brean Down and Lamyatt Beacon in Somerset, at Nettleton (Wiltshire) and at Uley (Gloucestershire). The very poor representation of period 21 coinage at Lowbury was matched for example at Lydney (Gloucestershire), while rather higher proportions in relation to period 19 were noted at Woodeaton (based primarily on Milne's list) and at Frilford based on Bradford and Goodchild's excavation. While the Woodeaton figure is reasonably clear, the Frilford one was skewed by hoard material, and the more recent longer combined list prepared by Blackmore makes it clear that period 21 is only thinly represented there, at a slightly lower level than seen at Childrey, and slightly higher than that at Lowbury and High Wood, at both of which the relevant numbers are minimal.

Overall, therefore, in terms of Oxfordshire temple/shrine sites there is reasonable consistency in coin loss patterns, but Woodeaton appears to stand slightly apart from the other sites, particularly in the 4th century, with stronger coin 'loss' representation in periods 17 and 21 (and possibly in period 18 as well) contrasting with the period 19 peak in the other sites.

The explanation for such variation is unclear, but comparison with further site types in the region is also useful in establishing the extent to which the local 'shrine/temple pattern' is distinct.

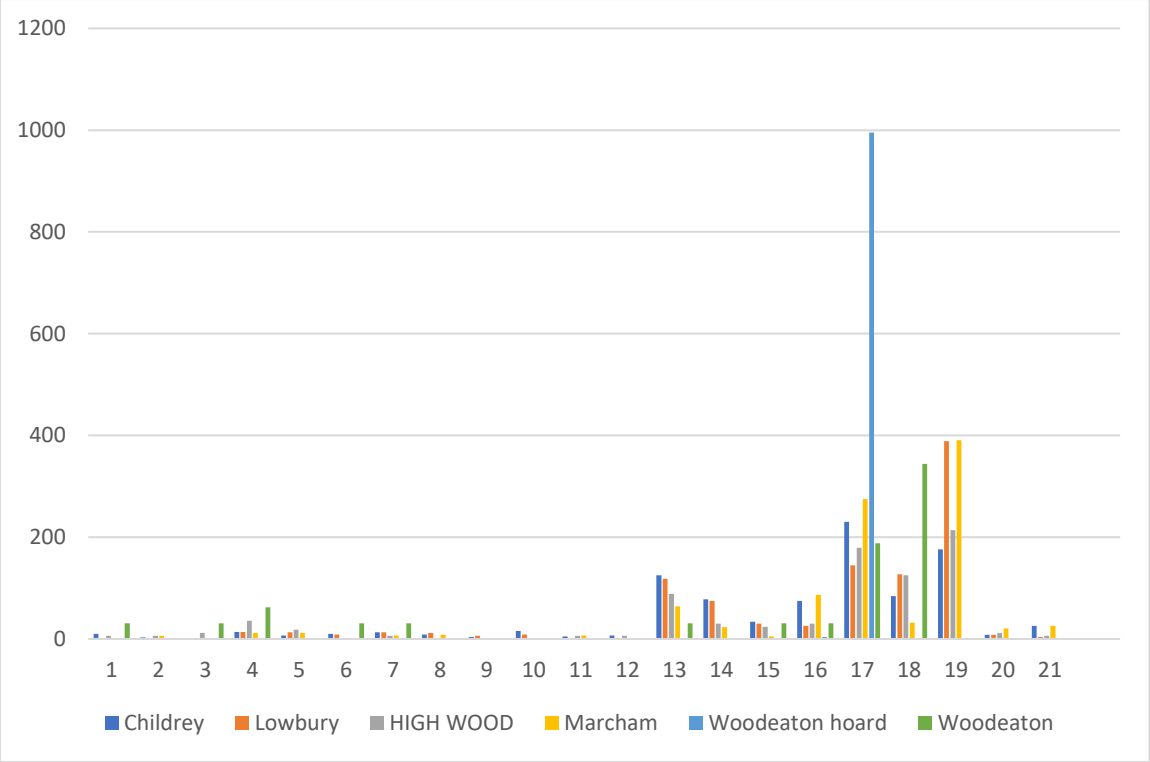

Table 6 Comparative coin loss patterns by Reece period High Wood and selected Oxfordshire temple/shrine assemblages

Since there are relatively few closely adjacent sites with significant quantities of Roman coins the comparison is based on four assemblages, three from villas (Cox Green, Maidenhead (Bennett, 1962) (Allen et al 2015), Yewden, Hambleden (Thorn, 2011), and Gatehampton Farm, Goring (unpublished list by the writer) within a radius of c 15km from the site, and one from the villa-related settlement at Didcot some 25km distant (Booth, forthcoming). The only other significant assemblages closer than 25km to High Wood are those from Lowbury (already discussed) and the 'small town' of Dorchester-on-Thames, the latter with very particular characteristics that make it unhelpful for the purposes of this comparison. Further comparative summaries from more distant Oxfordshire and Upper Thames valley sites have been presented by Booth (2010) and Walton (2018).

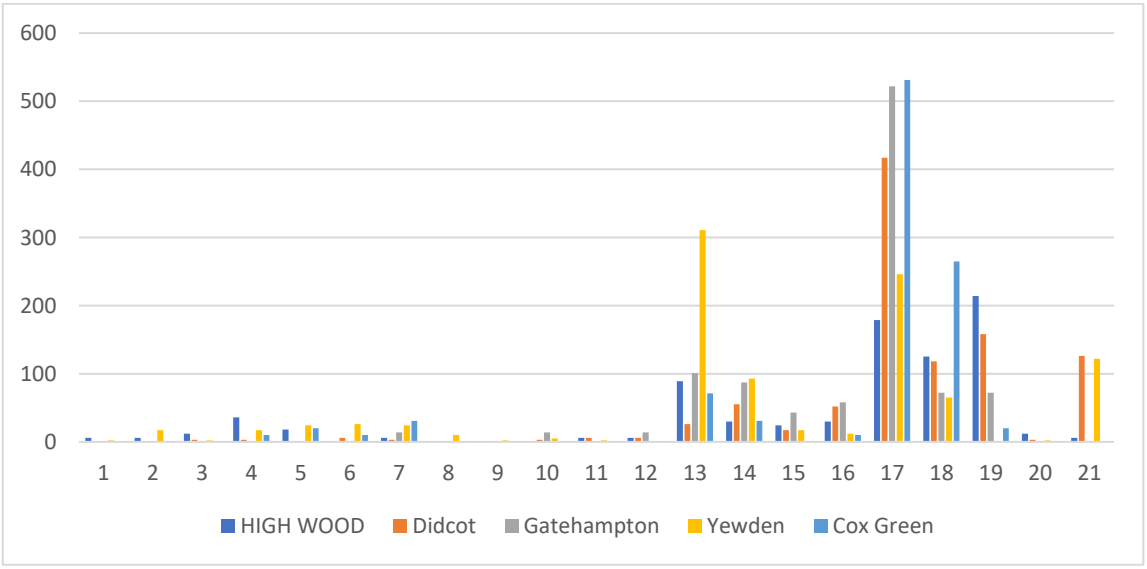

Table 7 Comparative coin loss patterns by Reece period High Wood and selected regional settlement site assemblages

Like the temple/shrine sites the coin loss patterns of selected rural settlements show a certain amount of variation, but as mentioned above all have higher peaks of loss in period 17 than in period 19, in contrast to the pattern at the temples including High Wood. This aspect is particularly noticeable in the eastern sites, with Valentinianic coins poorly represented at Cox Green (where the assemblage is dominated by issues of periods 17 and 18) and bizarrely, completely absent in the large assemblage from Yewden, which nevertheless shows a substantial (well above the British mean, see e.g., Walton 2012) component of period 21 coins. Yewden also has a prominent late 3rd-century component, so in many ways it stands slightly apart from the other villa groups. Apart from High Wood, the site with the highest representation of period 19 coinage is Didcot which, like Yewden, also has a strong period 21 presence and, unlike Yewden, appears on the basis of the coins to see continuous fairly intensive activity right to the end of the Roman period. This variation in the evidence for latest Roman activity - a significant presence at Yewden and Didcot, absence in the admittedly smaller groups from Gatehampton and Cox Green - reflects the similar variation in the temple sites. Overall, however, the broad distinctions between the 'temple' and 'rural settlement' groups are clear. For what it is worth the 'rural settlement' pattern, dominated by Constantinian issues, is sustained in the 12 coins from the villa at Harpsden Wood (Boon, 1951) (Allen et al, 2015) only 1km north of High Wood and almost certainly associated.

Pottery

Some 17,163 sherds of pottery have been recovered, weighing in total 218,403g, all of which have been classified using the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) coding system (MOLA, 2019). In general, the sherds had not been abraded by movement in the soil and were fragmentary with a mean weight of 12.7g.

Dating of the rim forms of reduced grey coarse wares has relied on the work of Marsh and Tyers in Southwark (Marsh & Tyers, 1978) and Lyne and Jefferies (1979) on the Alice Holt pottery industry.

The pottery indicates a continuous sequence of occupation of the site from the Late pre-Roman Iron Age throughout the Romano-British period as tabulated.

A significant portion of the assemblage comprised body sherds of reduced coarse wares which, although clear as to fabric and body type, could not be classified as to specific forms or date. Excluding such items from the analysis of date range reveals an even spread of total identifiable vessels by sherd weight of all types dated to between the 1st and 2nd century (50.1%) as compared with the 3rd and 4th century (49%).

Of the nine Late Iron Age sherds, all were residual: six were recovered from the Mound and three from mixed undated soil under the roof fall to the north of and inside the eastern gateway (Fig. 15 context 1305 lying under context 1304).

Some 95% of the assemblage by weight comprised undatable small sherds of coarse reduced grey wares, without evident rim form, which could be assigned only to the general (C1–C4) category.

The understanding of the sources of grey wares is a problem ubiquitous to the study of pottery for the period and, as a generality, it has been conventional to emphasise the dominance of the early Alice Holt potteries of the Hampshire/Surrey border. However, any kiln which reproduced the forms common to the period and had access to Gault clays together with the often-nearby Greensand might be indistinguishable from Alice Holt produce. Such geologies are available in parts of South Oxfordshire. It is thought that at least some of this pottery may be from unidentified, local regional sources (Booth, P., pers. com.). However, we have little evidence for local kilns of the period, the nearest known being at Compton, 14km to the west (Harris, 1935), although there is a rumoured kiln at Swan Wood, Nettlebed 5.5km north-north-west.

There is a significant presence of hard, pale-grey gritty sherds which are similar to the produce of the later Alice Holt (Farnham) kilns but, again, they could be from regional producers who had access to similar raw materials and technology.

Sherds which were classified as 'Highgate Wood Poppy-head Types' were similar in both form and fabric to the wares of those potteries, but it is possible that they, also, may be of a more local and unsourced regional manufacture (Booth, P. pers. com.).

There were 82 black-burnished style vessels (eve's 210, weight 1182 g) that could not be sourced; their fabric was sandy and did not exhibit the 'cod's roe' character of the Poole, Dorset potteries.

Some six small sherds of Nene Valley colour-coated cups were recovered from widely dispersed contexts.

Date Range	All Sherds Sherd Count	Est. No. Vessels	EVEs	Weight g	Identifiable Forms only Sherd Count	Est. No. Vessels	EVEs	Weight gms	Weight %
LIA	9	7		233	9	7		233	0.8
C1	124	93	585	2,273	124	93	585	2,273	7.5
C1-2	686	538	3,834	13,944	686	538	3,834	13,944	45.9
C2	103	86	398	1,721	103	86	398	1,721	5.7
C1-3	68	60	210	783	68	60	210	783	2.6
C1-4	15,339	13,665	6,551	188,040					
C2-3	318	267	1,541	4,540	318	267	1,541	4,540	15.0
C2-4	126	111	163	1,613	126	111	163	1,613	5.3
C3	103	86	395	1,721	103	86	395	1,721	5.7
C3-4	280	232	640	3,419	280	232	640	3,419	11.3
C4	5	5		81	5	5		81	0.3
MED	2	2	18	35	2	2	18	35	0.1
Totals	**17,163**	**15,152**	**14,335**	**218,403**	**2,050**	**1,487**	**7,784**	**30,363**	

Table 8 Pottery analysis by date range

Fabric Code	Sherd count	Est. No. vessels	Eve's	Weight gms
Alice Holt, Farnham	106	69	90	1017
Black burnished style	94	82	210	1182
Unsourced egg shell	2	2	5	7
Medieval green-glazed	2	2	18	35
Unsourced grey ware	16177	14211	12705	206384
Grog-tempered	72	61	105	985
Highgate Wood Ware C	56	29	43	355
Cologne colour-coated	5	4	6	21
Unsourced white-slipped	5	2	18	110
Late Iron Age	14	8		480
Moselkeramic	20	15	30	79
Nene Valley colour-coated	6	4		24
Oxfordshire colour coated	151	138	180	1168
Unsourced oxidised	172	152	298	2699
Oxfordshire parchment	5	4		78
Oxfordshire red/brown coated	45	44	146	523
Oxfordshire white-coated	13	131	70	181
Oxfordshire white ware	112	108	314	2400
Samian	72	72	99	421
Shell-tempered	34	14		254
Totals	**17163**	**15152**	**14335**	**218403**

Table 9 Pottery analysis by industry

Some 10% of sherds, by weight, had no identifiable form but, of the remainder, the majority comprised bowls and jars (86%). Despite best endeavours the analysis may be subject to inaccuracies given the difficulties inherent in distinguishing between bowls and jars from small fragments.

There are differences in pottery deposition between the early C1-C2 and the later C3-C4 periods. Of the dateable rim sherds 60% are from the earlier and 17% only from the later (23% are dated more broadly to C1-C3 and C2-C3).

A wide variety of pottery forms was found with a range of jars and bowls predominating: jars totalled 10,642 vessels (eve's 7006, weight 165,207g.) bowls totalled 852 vessels, (eve's 4247 and weight 17,794 g). Dishes were frequent with fragments of 404 vessels, (eve's 1842 and sherd weight 6,291g), with flagons and lids in small quantities. Notably, there were no amphorae among the collection.

Form Code	Date Range AD	Description	Sherd count	Est. No. vessels	Total Eve's	Weight gms
1	50-400	Flagons - form unclear	62	61	93	879
1A	50-100	Ring-necked flagon	2	2		160
1B	50-200	Ring-necked flagons	6	6	30	5
1B3	70-100	Ring-necked flagon	1	1	10	76
1B6	120-140	Ring-necked flagon	1	1	9	15
1C	60-160	Pinched-mouth flagons	3	2	4	8
1D	50-100	Disc-mouthed flagon. Imitation	1	1	8	33
1F	70-140	of metal form; (M&T fig 233)	8	8	82.5	11
		Subtotal flagons	84	82	236.5	1187
2	40-400	Jars - form unclear	11834	9607	609.5	140159
2A	40-100	Bead-rimmed jars	67	51	40	1562
2A4	40-120	Bead-rimmed jars	1	1	7	7
2A12	50-180	Bead-rimmed jars	7	1		27
2A15	50-100	Bead-rimmed jars	1	1	6	130
2A17	120-200	Bead-rimmed jars	3	1		30
2B	50-100	Short-necked jars	8	3	10	17
2C	50-100	Necked jar with carinated shoulder	1	1	5	68
2D	60-160	Necked jars with Figure 7 rim	604	359	2819	7802
2F	120-250	BB type everted rimed jars	250	205	1281.5	3390
2F1	120-200	Black-burnished-type everted-rimmed jars, upright rim; distinct bead at lip	5	5	10	14
2G	50-160	Necked jars with Figure 7 rim	10	7	18	270
2G1	50-160	Necked jars, cordoned and Fig.7 rim	12	12	74	223
2H	100-200	Neckless jars with horizontal rim	21	16	81.75	234
2J	60-160	Large jars with simple everted rim	21	11	32.5	671
2L	50-160	Large jars with simple everted rim	54	43	133	2841
2M	60-160	Rolled-rimmed storage jars	20	14	95	997
2N	50-80	Necked jars with high rounded shoulder	10	8	51	212
2P	50-80	Small necked jars with everted rim	6	4	24	76
2PD	50-400	Pedestal-based jars	21	16	70	264
2Q	50-80	Necked, round-bodied jars with cordon	14	12	62.5	204
2R	60-160	Narrow-necked jars	6	5	39	48
2T	50-400	Necked jar	7	6	8	28
2U	50-400	Narrow necked globular jars	36	36	366.5	84
2V	50-400	Storage jar	44	35	162.5	970
2W	50-400	Lid-seated jars	63	54	438.5	2343
2Z	50-270	Fat-rimmed jars	205	138	562	2536
		Subtotal jars	**13331**	**10652**	**7006**	**165207**
3	50-400	Beakers - form unclear	208	163	230	1231
3A	50-80	Butt beakers	2	2		11
3C	50-100	Everted-rimmed beaker	2	2	25	6
3D	50-250	Double-curve beaker	1	1		27

3F	70-160	Poppy-head beaker	11	10	10	1
3F3	100-160	Poppy-head beaker - variant	3	3	4	51
3F4	100-160	Poppy-head beaker - variant	6	4		15
3F5	100-160	Poppy-head beaker - variant	5	3	15	78
3G	50-100	Carinated beaker	1	1	2.5	23
3H	50-100	Beaker with rounded body and tall neck	2	1		7
		Subtotal beakers	**241**	**190**	**286**	**1450**
4	40-400	Bowls - form unclear	348	316	762	4809
4A	50-160	Reeded-rimmed bowl	48	40	317	788
4A4	100-130	Reeded-rimmed bowl	3	2	8.5	34
4A5	115-150	Reeded-rimmed bowl	5	5	23.5	111
4A6	115-150	Reeded-rimmed bowl	2	2	13	16
4A7	120-150	Reeded-rimmed bowl	8	6	25	20
4A8	150-200	Reeded-rimmed bowl	4	3	22	130
4B	70-120	Bowl with Aoste mortarium -like flange	2	1	8	145
4C	50-400	Deep cylindrical bowl	12	11	66	21
4D	50-100	Imitation DR 29	14	10	47	403
4DR30/37	50-400	Dragendorff form 30 or 37	1	1		5
4DR31	50-250	Dragendorff form 31	1	1	3	12
4DR37	70-400	Dragendorff form 37	1	1	8	21
4F	60-160	Bowl with flat, hooked or folded-over rims	29	26	308.5	461
4F1	70-120	Bowl with constriction	11	7	38.5	8
4F2	60-160	Bowl with less constriction	2	2	7	114
4F3	70-140	Shallow bowl with no constriction	4	4	23	37
4F4	70-140	Folded-down rim	5	2	7	116
4F5	60-110	Bowl with flat rim	6	3	12	32
4F6	100-160	Bowl with flat, square-profile rim	6	5	27.5	52
4G	120-160	Flat-rimmed bowl with vertical wall	18	18	89	69
4G2	120-160	Bowl with A-type rim	2	2	12.5	270
4G3	120-160	Bowl with B-type rim	8	8	17	31
4G4	120-160	Bowl with prominent rim, rectangular section	2	1	10	61
4H	120-300	Round-rimmed BB type bowl	60	53	298	915
4H1	120-300	Round-rimmed bowl M&T Type 4H	1	1	7	8
4H3	120-300	Shallow bowl with vertical side and triangular rim	4	3	17	42
4H5	160-300	Undecorated M&T type 4H	1	1	34	40
4K	50-140	Surrey Bowl	2	2	5	14
4L	50-400	Bowl with lid-seated rim	2	2	15	26
4M	250-400	BB type flanged bowl	319	289	1951	8817
4MX	50-400	Other flanged bowl	10	8	52.5	87
4N	25-400	Necked bowl	43	16	13	79
		Subtotal Bowls	**984**	**852**	**4247**	**17794**
5	50-400	Dishes - form unclear	170	139	548.5	2277

5A	50-100	Dish with plain exterior profile	38	38	142.25	381
5C	90-130	Plate with wide flat rim	3	3	48.5	109
5DR18/31	90-150	Dragendorff form 18/31	3	3		52
5J	50-140	Dish with simple rim	217	208	1072	3341
5J1	120-250	Plain-rimmed dish	3	3	16	59
		Subtotal Dishes	**444**	**404**	**1842**	**6291**
6	50-400	Cups - form unclear	8	8	5	50
6DR33	70-200	Dragendorff form 33 cup	2	2	10	22
		Subtotal Cups	**10**	**10**	**15**	**72**
7	50-400	Mortaria - form unclear	28	26	33	616
7C48	270-400	Mortarium Young Type 48	1	1	8	25
7C49.2	240-400	Mortarium Young type 49	3	2	23	25
7GRR	160-250	Grooved rim and flanged mortarium	1	1	6	30
7M17	240-400	Mortarium Young type M17	2	2	16	59
7M17.4	240-400	Mortarium Young type M17.4	1	1	5	92
7M18	240-300	Mortarium Young type M18	1	1	11	80
7M20	240-300	Mortarium Young type M20	2	1	15	9
7M20.1	240-300	Mortarium Young type M20.1	1	1	6	149
7M6.5	100-170	Mortarium Young type M6.5	3	2	9	38
7WC4	240-300	Mortarium Young type MWC4	1	1	11	38
		Subtotal Mortaria	**44**	**39**	**143**	**1161**
9	50-400	Lids - form unclear	9	9	55	118
9A	40-400	Lid	13	13		69
		Subtotal lids	**22**	**22**	**55**	**187**
9H	50-400	Strainer	4	5		158
Unclear	50-400	Unclear	2009	2905	518	24968
Totals			**17163**	**15152**	**14335**	**218403**

Table 10 Pottery analysis by form

In the 1st and 2nd centuries, there was a modicum of fine wares with 72 sherds of Samian (99 eve's and a total weight of 421g.) from scattered contexts and five sherds of Moselkeramic recovered from the pre-Temple pit underlying the southern wall of the building range. (Fig. 9, context 242). This period accounts for 84% of all dateable jar rims by sherd weight, particularly bead-rimmed jars type 2A and necked jars type 2D (illustrated Fig.26). The 217 fragments of type 5J dishes (eve's 1072; weight 3,341g) were a significant presence (illustrated Fig 26).

In the 3rd and 4th centuries there was a reduction in deposition of jars to 16% only of the total jar assemblage and which is restricted to 2F BB-type everted-rimmed jars. The period also saw the emergence and predominance of 4M BB-type flanged bowls. (Both types illustrated Fig. 26). Fine wares were slightly more common with products of the Oxford industry recovered amounting to 175 sherds (eve's 530 and weighing 3,182 g). Notably, this included fragments of 39 different forms of *mortaria.*

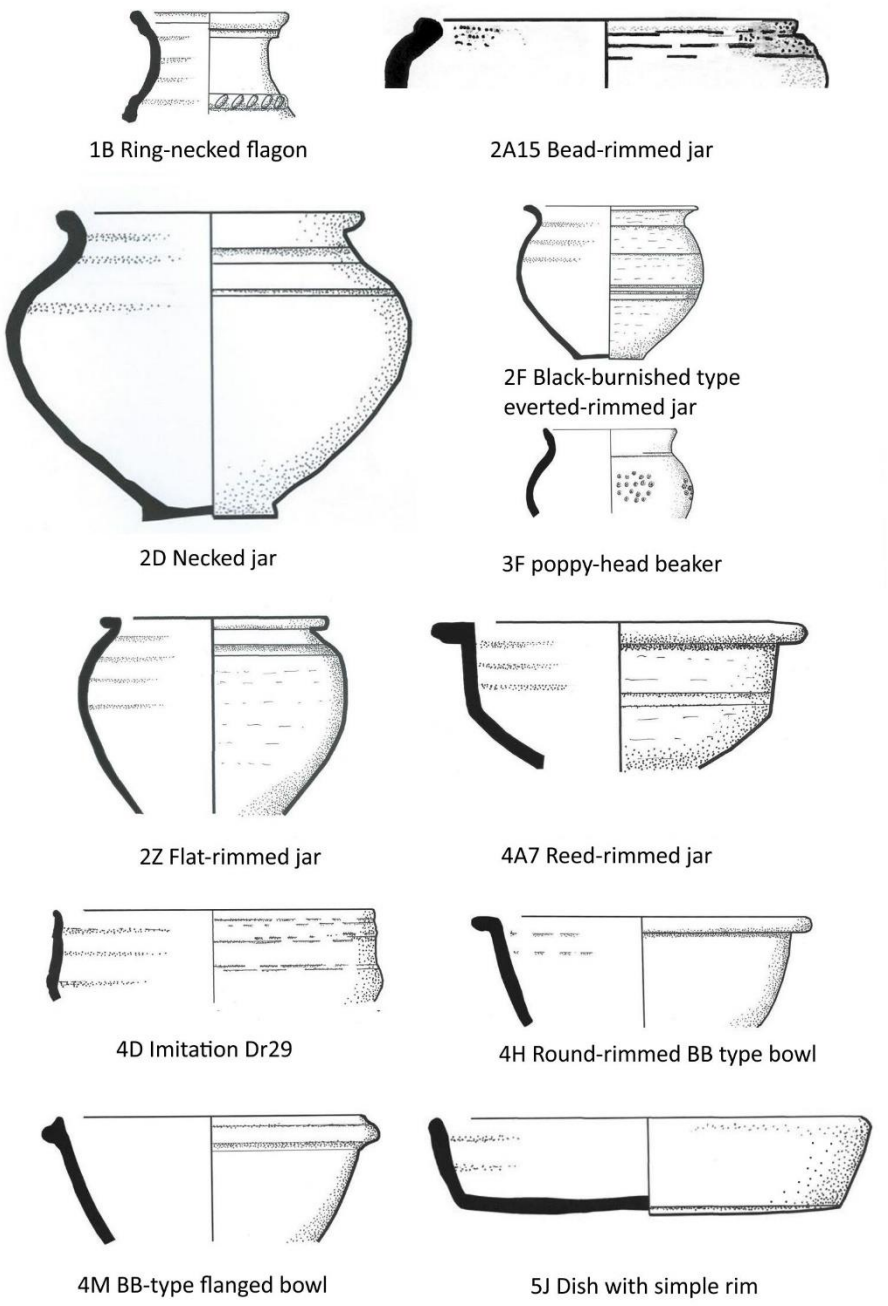

Fig. 27 Significant pottery forms recovered. After Lyne & Jefferies (1979)

Querns and millstones

Ruth Shaffrey

Work at High Wood between 2015 and 2021 produced a total of 89 rotary quern and fragments from a maximum of 82 objects weighing 74kg in total. These have been fully recorded and details are available in the project archive. An overview is presented here.

Stone types and forms

The querns at High Wood are made from Millstone Grit, Old Red Sandstone, Greensand (mainly from Lodsworth), and lava (Table 9). Millstone Grit accounts for the highest quantity by both fragment count and by weight and includes a very coarse feldspathic gritstone and a medium to coarse-grained feldspathic sandstone. Both stone types are often seen in quern assemblages across southern and central England and are likely to have their origins in south Derbyshire. At least two millstones (measuring 65cm and 90cm in diameter) are present amongst the assemblage of Millstone Grit and the remainder are of indeterminate diameter so could be from either hand-powered rotary querns or mechanically powered millstones.

Querns of Old Red Sandstone include examples of Quartz Conglomerate and of pebbly sandstone but both are from the beds in the Upper Old Red Sandstone and both are typical of outcrops in the Forest of Dean/Wye Valley. Querns and millstones of Old Red Sandstone were in common circulation during the Roman period in this region (Shaffrey, 2006). The finer-grained sandstone from the Millstone Grit is very similar when examined by eye to the coarser-grained Old Red Sandstone and these cannot be distinguished by eye: five querns in total could be either Old Red Sandstone or Millstone Grit.

Millstone Grit	26
Old Red Sandstone	17
Old Red Sandstone/Millstone Grit	5
Lodsworth Greensand	16
Greensand	1
Lava (Mayen)	1
Total	**66**

Table 11 Quern and millstone stone types

A total of 22 querns are made of Greensand and almost all of these (21) are from the quern quarries at Lodsworth in West Sussex. A single quern is of a different type of Greensand, not from Lodsworth but it has not been possible to provenance this quern more closely. There is also a single fragment of German lava quern. It is extremely well-used and worn so nothing can be said about its form but its presence is noteworthy because despite being present in number at Silchester (Shaffrey, 2021), other substantial excavations have failed to produce querns of lava and the only other published examples from the general region are from Yarnton, some 43km to the north (Roe, 2011).

Millstone Grit, Old Red Sandstone and Lodsworth Greensand were all quarried and used to produce querns throughout the Roman period and between them they account for the vast majority of querns of Roman date in the region (Shaffrey, 2011). The querns and millstones from High Wood are essentially from unstratified contexts, but are almost certainly of Roman origin: Lodsworth stone was only quarried up until the end of the Roman period, and the larger fragments of Old Red Sandstone and Millstone Grit are of Roman form.

Discussion

The number of querns and the presence of millstones at High Wood is unusually high and clearly indicative of organised and centralised grain processing in the vicinity. This is unlikely to have been at High Wood itself, however, because it was not the location of occupation or industry. Querns are sometimes found on or near temple sites - for example at Bancroft in Buckinghamshire (Williams and Zeepvat, 1994 and Tyrell, 1994) - but usually in proximity to associated occupation. The likelihood is therefore that these were brought onto

the site either as more substantial fragments, which were then broken up (indeed some millstone fragments appear to be from the same artefact), or as a selection of smaller fragments. This collection is likely to have been so that the fragments could be reused as hones and/or building stone.

Shell

Janet Ridout Sharpe

The excavation recovered just 54 oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) shells and fragments weighing 489g. No dumps of shell were found, although it is possible such may occur elsewhere on the site: Kamash et al. (2010) reported a large midden including oyster shells in the south-east corner of the *temenos* at Marcham/Frilford. None of the shells from High Wood came from the Temple footprint, 22 (41%) were found in the north building range and 20 (37%) to the east and south-east of the ambulatory wall. Most of the shells were found singly with occasionally two together, so a group of six from a Late Iron Age/early Romano-British pit beneath the north range could represent a deliberate deposit.

Ten left (lower) and five right (upper) valves were sufficiently complete for measurement. The mean height (umbo to ventral margin) of the left valves was 72mm (range 67-81mm) and that of the right valves 61mm (range 58-66mm). This compares with overall mean values for Roman oysters of 80.4 and 72mm respectively, showing that the High Wood oysters were about 10mm smaller than the Roman average and were not top quality. Below-average size oysters appear to be the norm for inland sites in Roman Britain (Someville, 1997). Similar numbers of identifiable left (18) and right (14) valves suggest that the oysters arrived at High Wood intact.

Fourteen shells (26%) had been infested by the marine worm *Polydora ciliata* and one by the larger *P. hoplura*, showing that the oysters had been transported overland from the south coast (Somerville, 1997), rather than up the Thames from the east coast. There was no evidence of infestation by the boring sponge *Cliona celata*, which was comparatively rare in Roman times. Variation in shell shape (circular/subcircular, triangular/subtriangular and elongated) suggests that the oysters had been harvested from different beds on both hard and muddy or silty substrates (Campbell, 2002).

One comparatively large, complete left valve (height 76mm) had a manmade hole in the centre. This was punched through from the outside, resulting in a sub rectangular hole of approximately 15 x 10mm, the edges of which do not appear to be worn. One shell fragment showed the trace of another anthropogenic hole. The reason for these holes is unknown.

Large deposits of oysters have been found at some temple sites, including Lowbury Hill (Somerville, 1997) and Marcham/Frilford in South Oxfordshire (Kamash et al 2010). In contrast, Wanborough temple in Surrey yielded only 24 complete shells and five fragments (Williams, 2007) and none was reported from the temple at Faringdon (Weaver and Ford, 2004). Whether the presence or relative absence of oysters at religious sites, as votive offerings or for feasting, reflects the nature of the rituals conducted and the deities worshipped at these sites remains to be determined.

Spindle whorl

Fig. 28 The spindle whorl

The spindle whorl was found out of context in the collection of items stashed by an unauthorised metal detectorist. It is made of a baked clay fabric, grey/buff in colour changing slightly to a light red. It has small 1mm inclusions of fragments of tile red brick or clay and slightly larger impurities of limestone up to 3mm in particle size. The weight is 27g. It is almost flat on the underside with the upper side of low dome profile. It is pierced by an almost central hole of 6.5mm. The overall size is 42.5mm diameter with an average thickness of 15mm. It appears to have been used, as contact surfaces are slightly smoothed.

The item has not been dated but is similar in character to spindle whorls dated to the Late Iron Age.

DISCUSSION

Pottery and coin evidence indicates exploitation of the site from the late pre-Roman Iron Age and continuing throughout the Roman period. The gold ear decoration might suggest activity in the Early Bronze Age but this has no corroborating evidence.

That the site was exploited during the Late Iron Age/Early Romano British period is shown by coin losses, the remains of metal working features and waste pits. Unfortunately, these features cannot be more closely dated, but the situation of the High Wood Temple site close to a possible Late Iron Age enclosure might be significant. If the rumoured hoard of Late Iron Age coins has some basis in truth, it might be conjectured that it represented a dedicatory deposit to a precursor temple, or that the site held some earlier - and possibly other religious - significance. For now this is simply conjecture, and only further archaeological work in the area could provide more evidence.

Nevertheless, the SOAG excavations have brought a good deal of clear evidence to light.

The foundations of the Temple buildings consist of a *cella* measuring 5m x 5.5m surrounded by an ambulatory measuring 10m x 11m set within a *temenos* measuring 47m x at least 25m. The gap between the ambulatory and the southern wall of a range of rooms in the northern wall of the *temenos* is a narrow 80cm. Unfortunately, there is no clear stratigraphic sequence to demonstrate that ambulatory and northern rooms were contemporary.

The purpose of the range of rooms in the north of the *temenos* is correspondingly unclear. Only one room has a concrete floor and the only evidence of heating is the brazier. Could they have offered accommodation for a priest or Temple servant; lodgings for visitors or, perhaps, space for the accoutrements of ritual activities, which may have involved sacrifice?

Although the footprint of the Temple is clearly discernible, there was no *in situ* evidence to indicate the form of the overlying superstructures, which must be inferred. It is likely that the *cella* followed the generally accepted form of a substantial half-timbered tower infilled with plaster (Lewis, 1966); it is possible that the 18kg of painted plaster found in the Mound spoil heap originated within this structure. The irregular construction of the walls of the ambulatory and *cella* as contrasted with those of the *temenos* suggest that the former were built for supportive strength rather than aesthetic appearance. The frequency of *lydions* recovered suggests that the walls may have had a capping layer of these to provide a foundation for a possible half-timbered superstructure.

As the whole of the deposits within the internal area of the ambulatory and *cella* appeared to have been removed down to the natural stratum by previous excavation, and apparently backfilled with an imported sandy soil, there was no surviving evidence of flooring, which may have been provided by beaten earth or clay or may have been floor boarded. Artefacts found in the fill of the apparent sinkhole within the ambulatory might suggest that they had laid originally under a wooden floor - possibly some having fallen through cracks therein - as suggested similarly at the Romano-Celtic temple at Bourton Grounds, Bucks (Green).

Roof falls from within the eastern and western *temenos* walls imply that the inner area was surrounded by some form of colonnade or 'cloister'. However, at no point was evidence found for post holes, post pads or beam slots to provide a supporting structure.

Unfortunately, the date of the Temple buildings cannot be derived from stratified and dateable artefacts (although they are clearly later than the underlying LIA/ERB waste pits). Roof tile forms suggest that the Temple was constructed in the 2nd century AD at the earliest.

The wall flint was probably sourced from the adjacent chalk lands and, although a contemporary kiln has not been found, it may be significant that a brick works existed from 1869 until 1935 at Shiplake some 0.75km to the south-east and this might suggest the local source of clays for ceramic building material.

Collapse and abandonment of the complex probably occurred as a result of subsidence towards the hole underlying the north-western corner of the *cella* which contained collapsed wall. As coins continued to be deposited on the site until the mid-late 4th century AD, this evidence suggests the likely date of the collapse. The hole was interpreted as the surface manifestation of an underlying solution sinkhole in the underlying chalk, such as are not uncommon in the Chilterns (British Geological Survey, 2021).

The date of earlier excavation remains unsettled. However, the fragment of clay pipe found lying on the natural within the Temple area has been dated to the second half of the 18th century by the diameter of the bores (2.4mm diameter = 6/64ths) (Cambridge Archaeology Field Club, 2012), which may suggest a possible date range for a prior excavation. This accords approximately with the dating of the nearby 'mound' spoil heap. Against this may be set the retrieval of six coins of Romano-British date, but these may be residual.

There is debate over the significance of the siting of Romano-Celtic temples within the landscape. Hingley, in reporting on the temple complex at Frilford (Oxfordshire), summarises in stating the following: 'Wilson in 1973 suggested that most Roman temples were not sited in relation to Roman features (towns, villas or roads), but occurred in traditional locations, either on the sites of pre-Roman settlements, or in isolated locations in the countryside' (Wilson, 1966), and this could be the situation at High Wood. However, he suggests that the Frilford site may have been related to an earlier Iron Age shrine (Hingley, 1975). No such evidence was revealed at High Wood.

Although there is no evidence as to the dedication of the temple, Wilson suggests that "we could go so far as to state that where a temple is identified from its characteristically 'Romano-Celtic' plan, the dedication may be assumed to be Celtic also" (Wilson 1975).

Unlike as seen at other comparable temple sites (Wanborough, Surrey [O'Connell and Bird, 1994] and Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Bagnall Smith, 1998)] there were few finds which could be construed definitively as votive offerings and it is possible that artefacts such as sceptre bindings, figurines and metal work may have been removed over the centuries up to and including any antiquarian dig or unauthorised metal detecting. However, it would seem clear that much of the assemblage of coins was votive and certain objects such the hand axe and the Early Bronze Age ear decoration could well have been such.

It is suggested that the mass of oyster shells present may have been of a votive nature or evidence of feasting and, perhaps, the same may be true of the pottery assemblage which seems large compared with the modest domestic occupation revealed. It is possible that the bowls and jars may have contained foodstuffs or beverages as votive donations or for ritual feasting and that the change in emphasis from jars in the earlier period to bowls in the later may represent some change in ritual practice.

The Temple complex is partially analogous to the excavated Temple at Woodeaton (Goodchild and Kirk, 1994), both in size, layout and the eastern orientation of the gateway into the *temenos* although there is a difference in that Woodeaton is flanked on each side by circular buildings (Hennig and Booth, 89, Fig 4.7). Also differently, at High Wood, the northern range of rooms and the ambulatory are located adjacently and 80cm only apart. Unfortunately, there is no clear stratigraphic sequence to demonstrate that these constructions were contemporary. However, it is postulated that they were, as the undamaged north-eastern corner of the ambulatory stands at the same height as the nearby undamaged part of the intact dividing wall of the domestic range (3.8m away) and it is possible that both buildings collapsed in the same episode.

The inner part of the *temenos* was excavated adjacent to walls only – apart from the heavily disturbed area to the south – due to the presence of mature trees and there remains the possibility that there might be further undiscovered buildings, coins and other finds remaining within the dense tree cover.

The high ground of the western part of the Chilterns holds few known remains of the Romano-British period, although there is a nearby known villa lying at Harpsden (SU756 804; distance approx. 1km to the north). This was excavated decades ago and methodologies have progressed, so the interpretation of the site does not match today's expectations (Rivers-Moore, 1953). The proximity of this building might indicate some connection with the Temple, as yet not divined.

Of equal importance may be the discovery of a number of metallic finds dating to the Roman period from nearby Coppid Hall (1km to the south west). These are now in the collections of Reading Museum and comprise a silver brooch, a bronze ring, part of an earring, a number of lead seals and fragments of figurines in the shape of the head of an eagle and a portion of an animal's leg. Further details as to precise site or

provenance do not exist but are indicative of a nearby contemporary site of some standing (Reading Museum accession numbers REDMG : 2022.3.1-15).

There is a 'corridor' villa at Bix, some 6 km to the north (Nicholls et al, 2006) and indications of settlement at Blounts Court, presently under investigation by the Berkshire Archaeological Society, 3km to the west.

More remote, but possibly within the ambit of the Temple, are a number of other sites. The recently excavated, and as yet partly published, villa at Gatehampton in the Goring Gap lies in the river valley some 12km to the west (Williams, H, Full publication awaited but interim reports contained in a range of SOAG Bulletins up to 2020) while the Mill End and Yewden villas at Hambleden, 10km to the east, lie on a valley floor and there are indications from geophysical survey and crop marks of two nearby unexcavated Romano-Celtic temples (Eyers, 2011).

The Portable Antiquities Scheme database contains clusters of Roman metallic finds, which may indicate presently unknown settlement sites within the vicinity of the Temple, at Henley-on -Thames, Rotherfield Greys and Shiplake.

The area has had little call for commercial archaeological intervention and amateur work has been minimal. However, this limited spread of known and suggested sites provides mounting evidence that the Temple may have been established to serve a populous but now hidden landscape. The hinterland was possibly set within the natural boundary of the southern loop of the Thames but its northern extent cannot be estimated. In the Roman period this was bounded by major Roman roads from Dorchester to Silchester and Dorchester to Henley-on -Thames respectively. This area is now predominantly rural with a mix of farming activities and it is conceivable that these resources would have been exploited similarly in the Roman period. At present the evidence points largely to exploitation of the lighter soils of the chalklands.

The discovery of the Temple at High Wood brought a very satisfactory conclusion to several seasons of excavation. Though the finds in the first few seasons were hard to interpret and the evidence of others having dug in search of antiquities somewhat dispiriting, there was great pleasure in revealing a building of such significance long lost in woodland.

It is to be hoped that the evidence amassed here will take its place in the wider context of Romano-British temples and contribute to our understanding of life and worship in the period.

THE ARCHIVE

The site archive has been deposited at Oxfordshire Museums Resource Centre, Cotswold Dene, Standlake, Oxfordshire OX29 7QG.

Samples only of pottery and wall plaster recovered have been retained as have quern stones specified for retention by the reporter. The remainder have been reinterred on site at at SU475129.508 179556.001 at level 89.960m.

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