

A ROMANO-BRITISH WASTER HEAP AT ALLEN'S FARM, ROCKBOURNE

By TONY LIGHT

With contributions by Jennifer Price and David Algar

ABSTRACT

A large quantity of New Forest type waster pottery was extracted from spoil produced by the digging of a fish pond, and subsequent excavation revealed that the sherds had formed part of the fill of a U-shaped ditch. To the south-west this ended at an area of compacted gravel which extended beyond the limits of the excavation. The location of the kiln or kilns is uncertain but a possible site was suggested by geophysical survey.

Detailed pottery and finds reports are presented in the microfiche section, 31-45.

INTRODUCTION

In 1974 Mr and Mrs Read, the then owners of Allen's Farm, noted large quantities of sherds in the spoil heaps produced during excavation of a pond at their trout fishery. The late Mr Selwyn Ingrams undertook to recover as much as possible from the spoil and subsequently began a small excavation in order to determine the nature of the deposits. This was continued during the following summer with the help of members of the Avon Valley Archaeological Society.

It was immediately apparent that many of the sherds were wasters of typical New Forest types, suggesting the probability of a kiln group in the vicinity. A geophysical survey failed to produce positive results although a weak reading indicated a possible kiln about 30 metres to the south-west of the excavated area.

LOCATION (Fig 1)

The site is located on the western bank of a tributary of the River Avon known as Sweatfords Water, mid-way between Rockbourne and Fordingbridge at Allen's Farm (SU 132160). The large villa at West Park, Rockbourne is one

mile upstream and the late third and fourth century pottery kilns within the New Forest are some four miles to the east. A narrow belt of alluvium and valley gravel overlays red-streaked clays of the Reading Beds.

THE EXCAVATIONS

The following excavation notes have been largely composed from records obtained from Mr Ingrams' widow, Mrs Joyce Ingrams.

Trench A (Fig 2), a U-shaped ditch 180 cm wide and 75 cm deep (Fig 3) ran from south-west to north-east towards the stream, having originally continued through the trout pond where its section was clearly visible at the south-west edge. On the opposite bank, at a distance of five metres the feature was less distinct and considerably shallower.

The fine, dark grey primary silting of the ditch was about twenty cm deep and contained sherds from three vessels of which two were large storage jars. One was of typical New Forest fabric with the other being Wessex grog-tempered ware. The third vessel was a New Forest bowl, (Fulford form 82) without overall red slip but with two internal horizontal bands of red painted wavy line decoration. (Fig 10, 208) Above this layer a wedge of brown silt with a high humus content up to ten centimetres deep at the north-western edge faded away towards the centre of the ditch.

There was now a deliberate filling of the remaining ditch with a ridge of gravel up to 35 cms high along the centre followed by two separate deposits of gravelly earth, both containing large quantities of New Forest waster sherds. These layers were clearly also the source of the pottery discovered some two metres to the

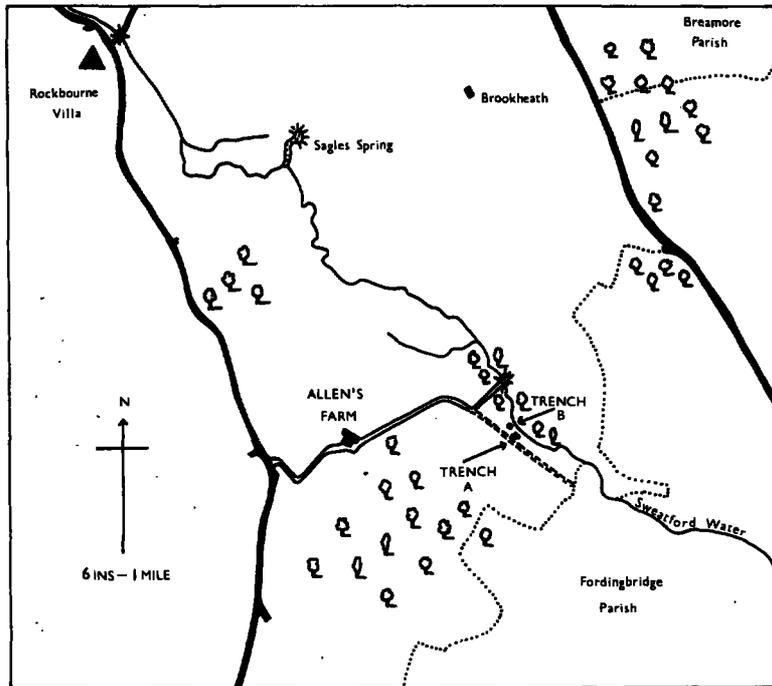
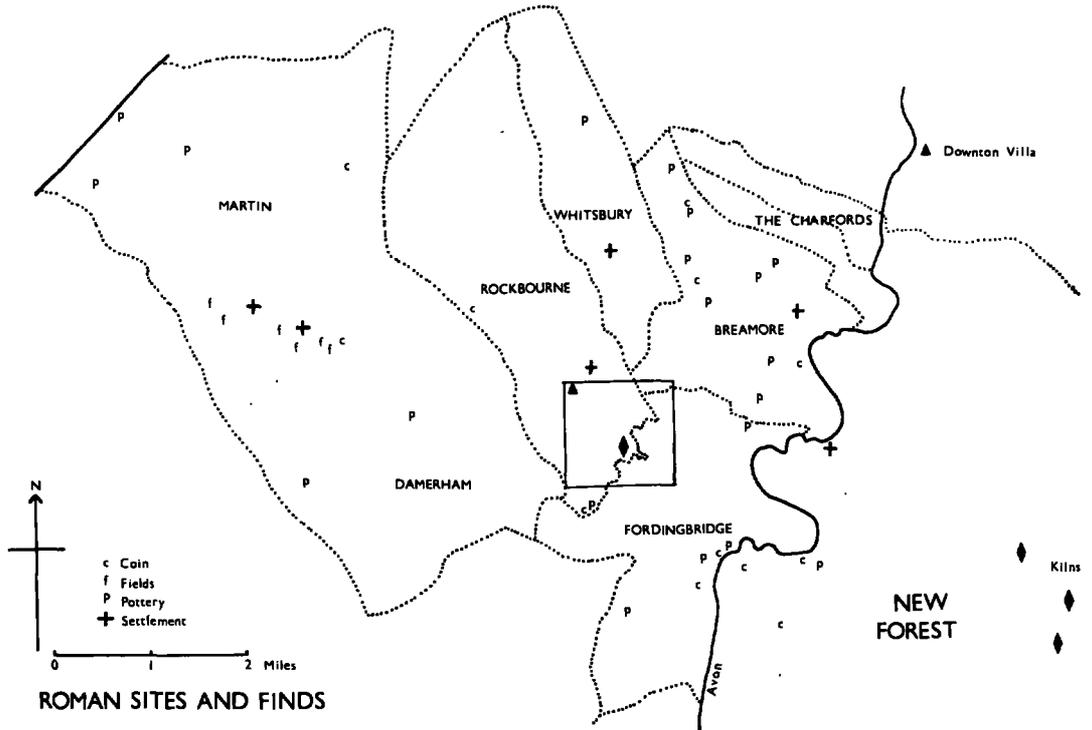


Fig 1. Location map of excavation site at Allen's Farm and details of other Roman sites and finds in adjacent areas of Hampshire.

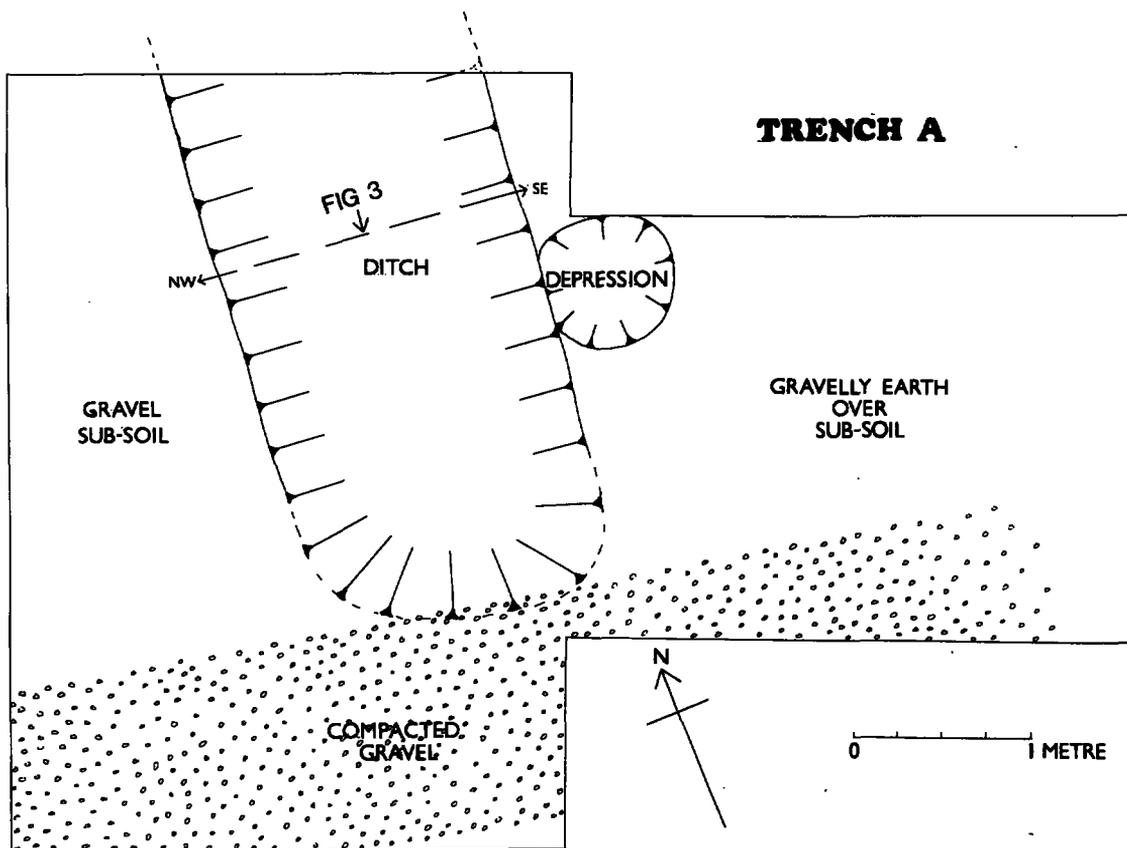


Fig 2. Allen's Farm: plan of Trench A.

north-east during excavation of the pond. Mixed with the sherds were several patches of a fine blue-grey clay.

During the initial investigations ten coins of second century date were found in the spoil heaps and a further eight were recovered from the upper level of ditch fill in the course of excavation, together with an unstratified antoninianus of Gallienus (AD 253–268).

Adjoining the ditch on the south-east a circular depression 80 cm in diameter and 20 cm deep at the centre contained black earth with many sherds and a coin of Constans (AD 346–350).

To the south-west the ditch ended at a com-

pacted gravel surface 125cm in width and at least six metres in length, running from north-west to south-east. From the tread above this a coin of Valens (AD 367–375) was recovered.

Trench B This was three metres square at a distance of ten metres to the north of trench A. Gravel subsoil appeared approximately 30cm below the surface and contained no features of significance. The area had a thin scatter of both coarse and fine wares in a brown alluvial soil.

THE FINDS

Summaries of the finds reports are presented below with the full details included in microfiche.

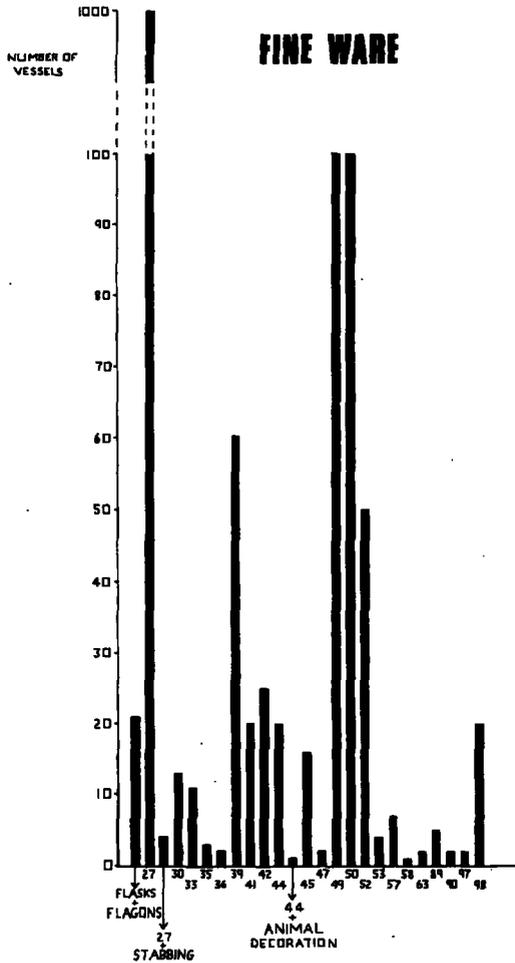


Fig 4. Allen's Farm: histogram showing the estimated numbers of fine ware vessels of each form.

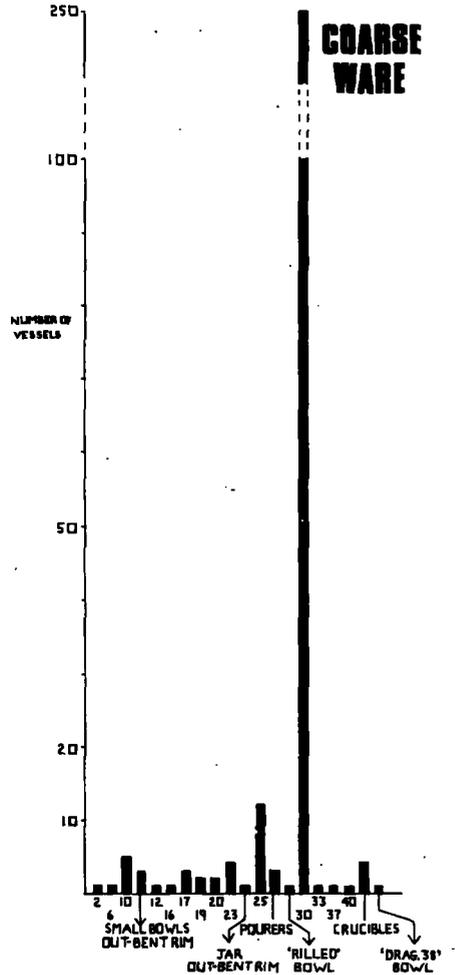


Fig 5. Allen's Farm: histogram showing the estimated numbers of coarse ware vessels of each form.

rustication and incised concentric circles with white paint decoration.

The largest stratified deposits of New Forest pottery are from Portchester (Fulford 1976) and although the earliest groups from there are for the period AD 280-290 there are no large assemblages before AD 300. In deposits dating from before AD 325 however incised concentric circles with and without white paint decoration were common whilst there is a notable absence of rouletted wares from the whole sequence.

By contrast at Chichester (Down 1978) a number of New Forest beakers with rouletting were obtained from pit groups securely dated to the period AD 260/270-300. A large group from the Barton Field Villa at Tarrant Hinton, Dorset is similarly dated on coin evidence and contains both rouletted and rusticated beakers.

On present evidence therefore rouletting would seem to be one of the most important indications of the relative dating of early material.

CONCLUSIONS

It is probable that one or more New Forest type kilns existed within a short distance of the excavated area and on the information available a likely date for the forms represented in the waster heap is early in the last quarter of the third century. The coin evidence also suggests a relatively early date, the eighteen from the main sherd deposit having a range of at least Hadrian (AD 117–138) to Commodus (AD 177–192). Most were very worn indicating a long period in circulation. Clearly they had formed part of a small hoard, possibly being discarded into the primary waster heap after the currency changes of the third quarter of the third century. The worn antoninianus of Gallienus (AD 253–268) is likely to be more representative of the true date of the group.

There is both pottery and coin evidence to suggest that the final levelling of the area occurred after AD 350. The red painted bowl found in the ditch silt is of a form dated to post AD 345 at Portchester (Fulford 1975) and a centenionalis of Constans (AD 346–350) came from the adjoining circular depression which was filled at the same time as the ditch.

The late date of levelling of the area and the finding of a coin of Valens (AD 367–375) on the gravel hardstanding show that to some degree occupation of the site continued for at least a century after the probable abandonment of the kiln.

This is as yet the only New Forest type kiln site discovered beyond the bounds of the Forest and its proximity to Rockbourne Villa implies that it was probably on part of the villa estate. There are however no more than five or possibly six sherds in the site Museum which can be attributed to the kiln with any confidence. The numerous examples of rouletted, stabbed and

concentric circle beakers in the collection are largely from kilns which were being fired at a considerably higher temperature. There is thus no evidence to suggest that the Allen's Farm potter had a greater degree of access to the villa market than his contemporaries within the Forest.

The raw blue/grey clay mixed in with the waster heap deposits may well have been the remains of a load intended for potting and must have been imported from within the Forest as clay of this type does not occur to the west of the Avon. It is therefore perhaps reasonable to speculate that the determining factor in the siting of the kiln may have been the availability of land and timber at a time before the advantages of concentrating the whole process near to the more abundant resources of the Forest had become apparent.

It has been suggested that small vessels were intended as funerary objects (Swan 1973). If this was so then it is clear that the potter here was operating largely with the intention of satisfying this aspect of the market.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr and Mrs Read the former owners of Allen's Farm for allowing access to their land and for their interest in the progress of the excavations; Mrs Vivien Swan BA, FSA, for considerable help in assessing the pottery both during and after the excavation; Mr Tony Giles, Director of the excavations at Barton Field Roman Villa, Tarrant Hinton, Dorset for allowing access to unpublished material from the site; Mrs B Jarvis the then owner of Rockbourne Roman Villa for permission to examine the pottery in the site Museum.

REFERENCES

[see also p 4]

Down, A 1978 *Chichester Excavations* 3.

Fulford, M G 1976 Pottery in Cunliffe, B W Excavations at Porchester Castle 1.

Fulford, M G 1975 *New Forest Roman Pottery*, BAR 17.

Swan, V G 1973 Aspects of the New Forest late Roman Pottery Industry in CBA 10 117-134.

Author: Tony Light, Middle Burgate House, Burgate, Fordingbridge, Hants SP6 1LX.

© *Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.*