

# Further Excavations at Basing House, 1964-1966

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A previous report<sup>1</sup> described work on the Norman outer ditch and bank and also on a small ditch surrounding an adjacent rectangular enclosure. At site II, south of the Old House, a section through the Norman ditch and bank had provided evidence that there must be a Romano-British occupation site nearby.

In the work described here such a site was found and excavated in the open space immediately to the south of the Norman ditch and adjoining the old site II excavation (see Fig. 1 of the previous report.<sup>1</sup>)

The work was carried out in three phases:

*Phase 1.* (1964) was the survey and sectioning of a system of Iron Age ditches.

*Phase 2.* (1965) was the excavation of an area of Belgic occupation with superimposed Romano-British occupation, all sealed beneath the Court of Guard, a semicircular defensive earthwork of Civil War date.

*Phase 3.* (1966) was a continuation and rounding-off of phase 2.

## PHASE 1

A magnetometer survey on a one yard square grid of an area south of the Old House and outside the Norman outer ditch and bank was carried out in the Spring of 1964.

A number of magnetic anomalies were found, one series of which appeared to be in two continuous rows which met at a T junction (Fig. 1). It seemed likely that these particular anomalies represented a ditch system, and sections were cut at A, B, C and S to test this theory. The section cut at A was to examine the junction of the two ditches. The ditch which ran West from section S to section A and then curved north to section B, was about nine feet wide at the lip and three feet six inches deep, with steep sides and a flat bottom (see sections S & B, Fig. 2). This was called ditch II. The smaller ditch, I, which ran south from section A to section C was about eight feet wide at the lip and three feet three inches deep with a more rounded profile. The feature which showed that the two ditches were not contemporary was the sharp V shaped tongue of chalk which lay in the angle of the junction of ditches I and II (Fig. 3). Had the two ditches been cut at the same time a much more rounded intersection would have been produced, but the formation of this sharp tongue showed that ditch I was cut first and then allowed to silt up before ditch II was cut, excavating fresh ground to the east and recutting the old ditch to the north. At no point was any trace of bank found; this may well have been levelled in Roman times.

At section S another, later ditch was found cutting diagonally across the fill of ditch II, but was not sectioned. This was the ditch which surrounded the Civil War earthwork. The fill of ditch II at section S, where it was not disturbed by the Civil War ditch, consisted of brown earth and chalk in the top thirty inches (layers 2 & 3) containing much Belgic pottery (Fig. 2). The lower twelve inches (layer 4) was filled with darker soil with little pottery. A

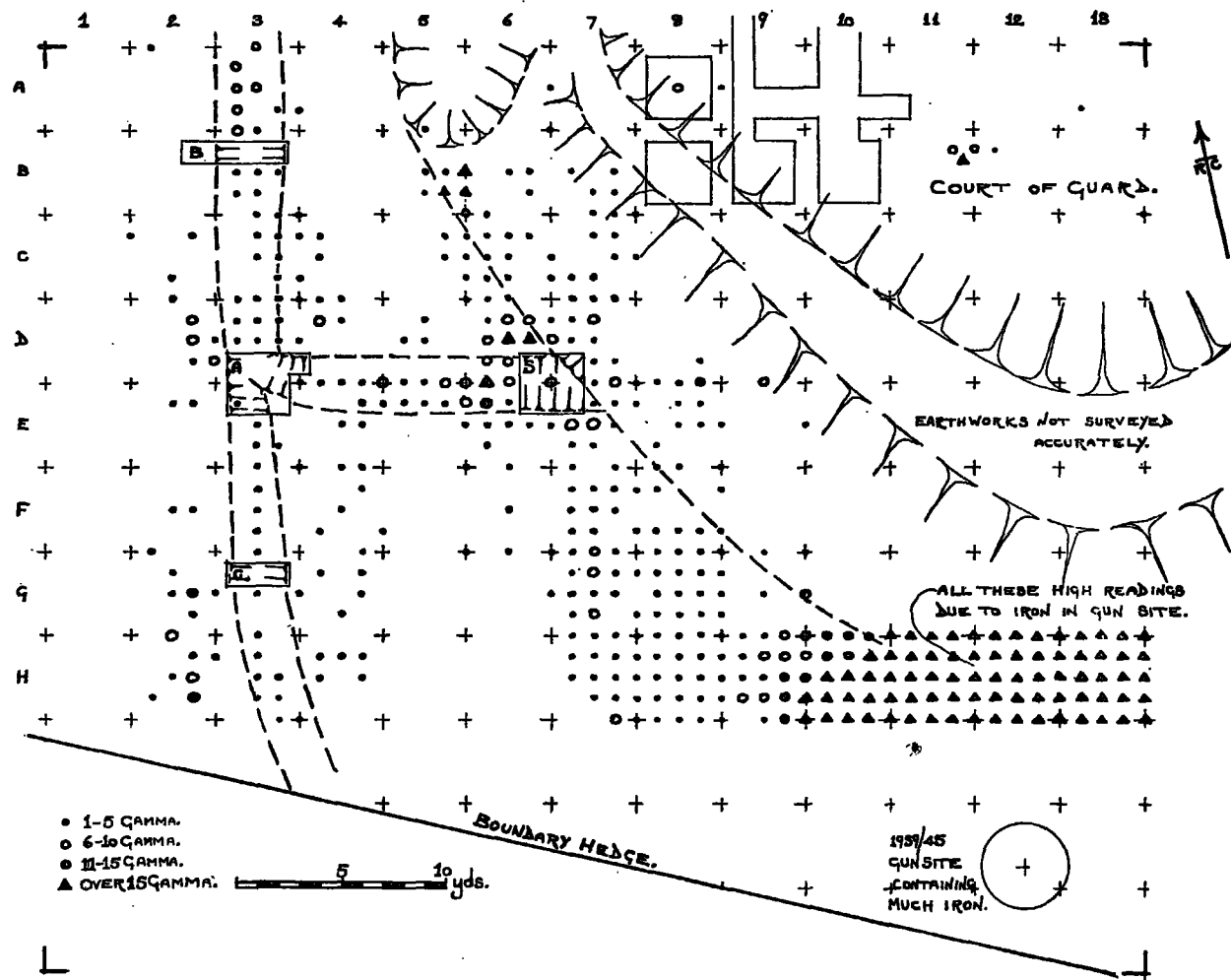
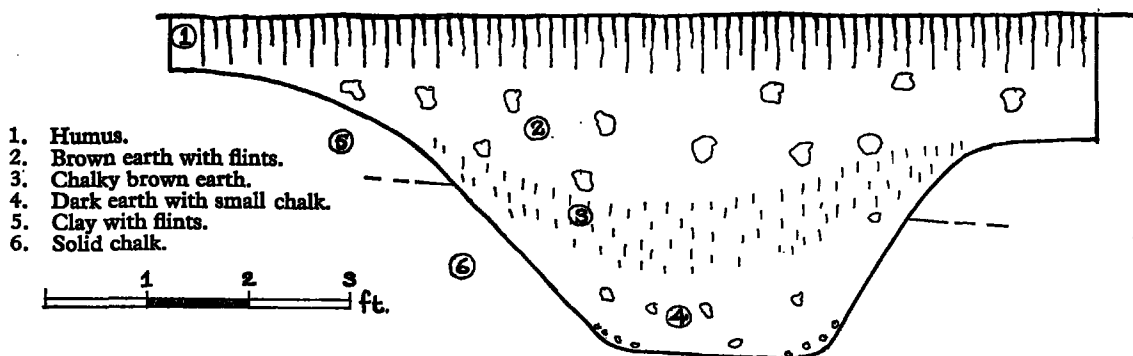
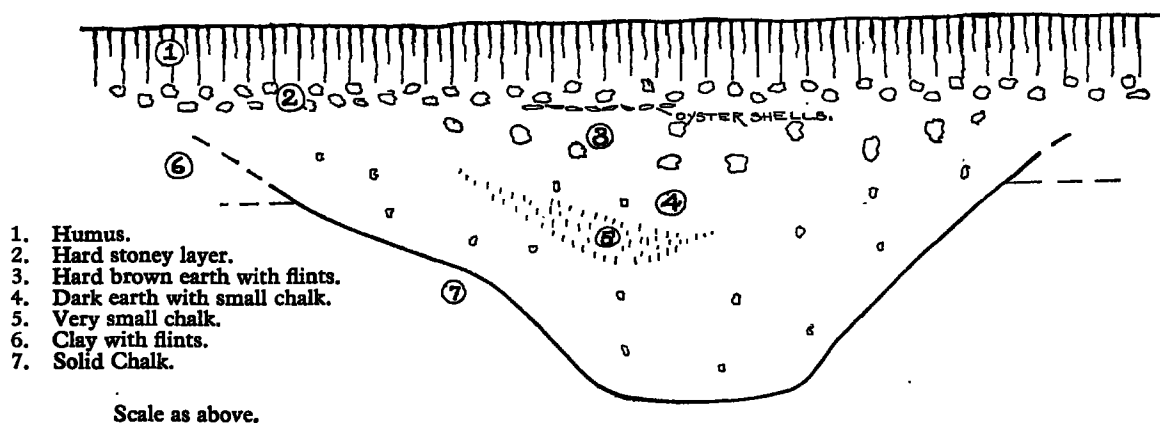


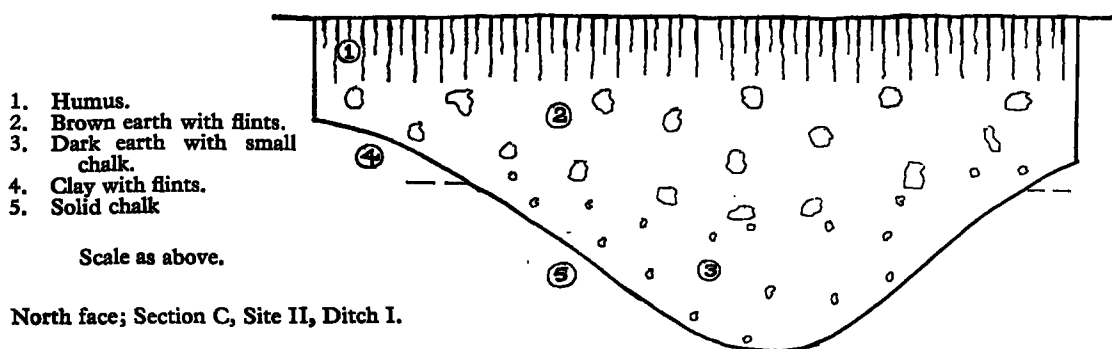
FIG. 1. Magnetometer survey of Site II.



West face; Section S, Site II, Ditch II.



North face; Section B, Site II, Ditch II.



North face; Section C, Site II, Ditch I.

FIG. 2. Sections of Belgic Ditches.

## FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT BASING HOUSE, 1964-1966

quantity of animal bones was found in the primary silt on the floor of the ditch (see Appendix 1). The ditch at the remaining sections A, B and C was filled with cleaner soil than at S and much less pottery was found, suggesting that the centre of Belgic occupation was located near section S.

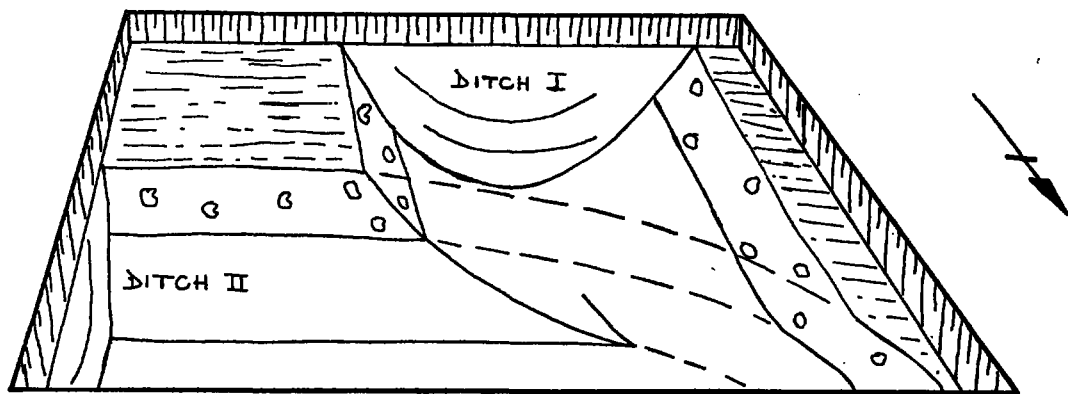


FIG. 3. The junction between Ditches I and II at Section A.

### PHASE 2

At the southern end of the section cut across the outer Norman bank and ditch in 1962, a 'floor' yielding early pottery was found.<sup>3</sup> A quantity of Roman pottery, tile and 4th century coins was found throughout this section. It was decided to extend the excavation in an attempt to find the source of the material and to this end a series of boxes was laid out (Fig. 5). The area chosen was immediately beneath the 'Court of Guard', a Civil War earthwork thrown up by the Royalists in the winter of 1644/5. The Civil War bank was of simple dump construction. Beneath the pre-1644 turf line was a dense level layer of heavily-burnt flint on a layer of small chalk (Fig. 6). The greater part of the Roman pottery illustrated (Fig. 7) was found on the burnt flint 'floor'. A few pieces were found beneath the chalk layer but nothing was found actually in the burnt flint or chalk. Beneath the chalk was an earlier turf line which was immediately above the natural yellow clay with flint. In boxes 8A, 8B, 9A and 9B however, a roughly circular depression was found cut some ten inches into the clay and filled with a dark soil similar to the pre-Roman humus, containing only flint waste flakes, probably of neolithic origin. The floor of this depression was covered with small flint gravel. Trodden well into the gravel was a quantity of pottery (Fig. 7) identical to that found in the ditches the previous year, in fact one piece was part of the large storage jar found in section S (Fig. 4, No. 17). Although specks of charcoal were found all over the gravel floor, no hearth was located. Part of the floor and the Roman layers above had been removed when a small channel (ditch III), running east and west had been dug. This channel was already silted to its brim when the earthwork of 1644/5 was constructed and a piece of Tudor tile of the type used in the building of Basing House (c. 1530) was found in the primary silt. No post holes were found in connection with the Belgic floor and apart from a few large flints around the edge of the depression, no sign of any walls was seen.

## HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

In the 4th century A.D. the abandoned Belgic hut site appears to have been levelled by filling any hollows with chalk, taken perhaps, from the banks of the Belgic ditches. This provided a flat floor which must soon have become uneven due to the softness of the filling of the Belgic depression beneath. This unevenness appears to have been made good by patching with burnt flint since the burnt flint was thickest over the Belgic depression. The burnt flint does not appear to have been burnt on the spot, i.e., it must have been derived from some activity elsewhere. No evidence was found of the nature of the activity which produced so much burnt flint, (approx. 9 barrow loads in 12 sq. yds.) unless a single piece of cokey-looking slag weighing 4 oz., and containing 62 per cent iron can be taken as a clue.<sup>2</sup> Two post holes were found in the Roman floor, but apart from several fragments of brick and tile, some with mortar still adhering, no other trace of a structure was found.

### PHASE 3

In 1966 the area of excavation was extended. The whole of 10B and 11B together with parts of 10A, 11A, 11C, 7Z and 8Z were excavated (Fig. 5). This work revealed a second Belgic hut site, again covered by successive layers of clay, black earth, chalk and burnt flint. There was a considerable amount of charcoal on the Belgic floor at the southern end of 10B, but no hearth structure was identified. Two further post holes were found, again taken through the Romano-British floor. 11C was barren while 7Z and 8Z contained only the edge of the Norman ditch.

A small amount of pottery was found on each of the two levels and is illustrated in Fig. 8. One Romano-British piece not illustrated was a small sherd of Samian ware with raised leaf decoration.

In addition to a few bones of domestic animals on both levels, some bones of children under two years old (but not new born) were found scattered on the Romano-British floor.

Those identified were:

Three Tibia  
One Ulna  
One Rib  
One Scapula (deformed)  
One Lower Jaw with Teeth

### ANIMAL BONES

#### *Section S*

Found resting on the chalk at the bottom of ditch II was the lower mandible of a horse of about six months, and the second phalange, cannon bone and splint bones of a horse of about eighteen months. The cannon bone was from an animal of medium size, perhaps a little larger than a Welsh hill pony. The mandible was broken in antiquity but the limb bones were not.

#### *Section A*

In addition to the second phalange of a horse and teeth of sheep this section also produced the incisor tooth and broken femur of a dog, about the size of an Airedale, and the molar of an Ox.

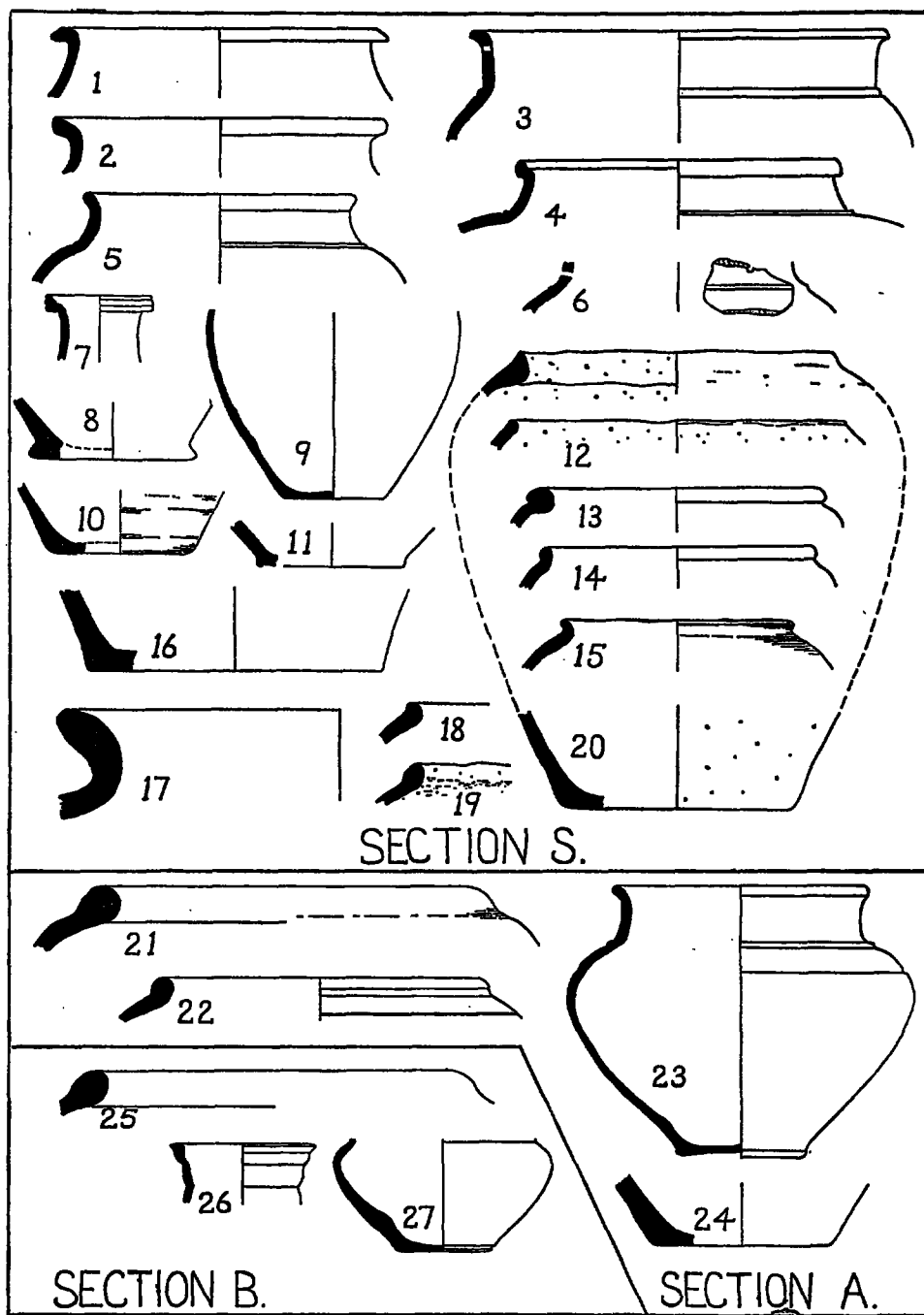


FIG. 4. Pottery from the Belgic ditches. Scale: 1/4.4.

## HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

### *Section C*

The only identifiable bone from this section was the splint bone of a horse, identical in size to the one from section S.

### *Belgic Hut (layer 7)*

The range of animals represented by the bones from the four ditch sections was repeated on the hut floor. Horse (cannon bone, much the same size as the one from section S, and vertebra). Sheep and lamb (cannon bone, vertebra, scapula, pelvic girdle and teeth). Also found were the lower mandible and incisor teeth of pig, some bones from a bird about the size of a thrush, several oyster shells and the shell of a common garden snail. Another broken cannon bone of a horse was found in layer 6 immediately beneath the small chalk.

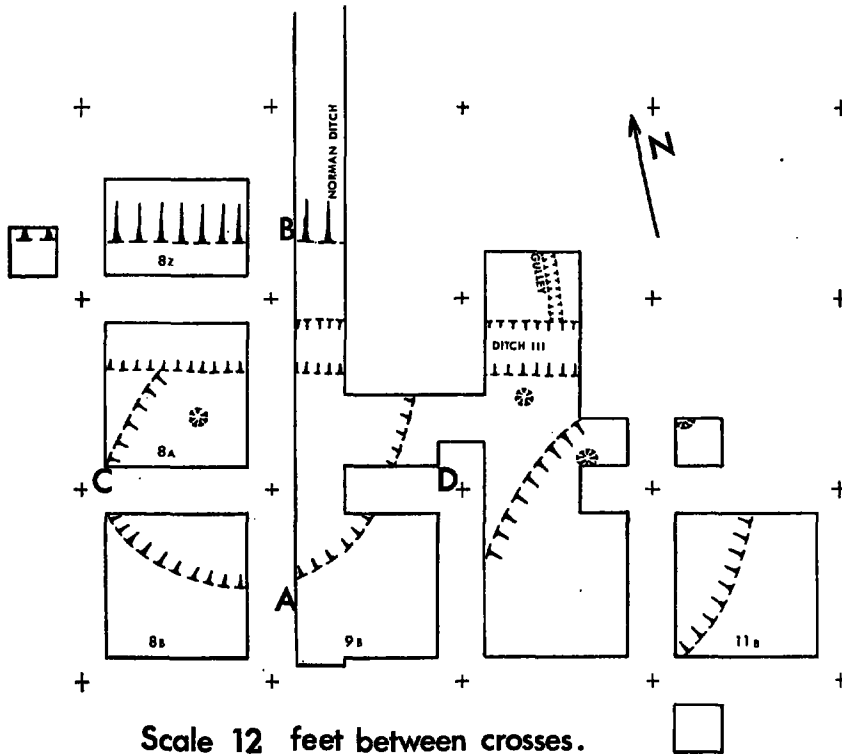


FIG. 5. Plan of main excavation, Site II.

### *Romano-British 'Floor' (layer 4)*

This floor produced examples of all the animal bones found in the earlier layers. Horse (second phalanx, second phalanx and a milk molar). Sheep (stragulas, humerus and nine molars). Pig (five incisors). Several oyster shells (smaller and flatter than those from the Belgic Hut). The only species found which was not represented in the earlier levels was the Celtic Ox (*Bos taurus longifrons*). This beast was represented by parts of a skull and horn core and one molar. Part of the skull of a fairly large dog was found in a post hole.

## FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT BASING HOUSE, 1964-1966

Another group of bones, found in the small channel (III) cut through the Romano-British layer, seems to have been deposited all together, probably some time in the middle of the 16th century. Most of the bones were of sheep, probably all from the same animal. Mixed with the sheep bones were those of two rabbits and a pole cat.

### POTTERY

The pottery can, with one exception, be divided into two groups, the Belgic wares from the ditches and the hut sites, and the Romano-British wares from the later occupations. The exception to these two groups is a small quantity of Samian ware, which represents about four vessels of two types.

The Belgic wares fall into two types, coarse, gritted, handmade, bead rimmed pots, and bowls in fine thin sandy or soapy wares. Whilst the Belgic pottery from Basing bears a general resemblance to the mid 1st century Belgic pottery from Camulodunum and Verulamium the most exact parallels are to be found at Silchester. Excavating in 1957 Boon<sup>3</sup> found a Belgic hut beneath an early Roman bank. The pottery which he found in this hut is identical to the Basing material both in style and ware. Boon dated the Silchester hut to c. 43 A.D. and therefore it is probable that the Basing Belgic occupation is of the same period.

The Romano-British wares can be paralleled at several sites<sup>4</sup> and seems to be much less localised than the Belgic material. Their dates agree very well with the evidence of the coins found on the site (all 4th century A.D.).

The Samian pottery appears from the ware and glaze to be early in the series, probably Claudian rather than Neronian. Unfortunately only one piece was stratified in its primary context, between the Belgic and the Romano-British layers, the rest had been disturbed and redeposited.

The pottery illustrated in Figs. 4, 7 and 8 is described in detail in Appendix 1.

### SMALL FINDS

The site has produced very few small finds. In the Civil War layers various pieces of iron, possibly from a soldier's equipment were found, but all too rusted and fragmentary to be identified. In the pre-Civil War turf layers, a large key of typical late mediaeval type and an iron ring and swivel, possibly of agricultural usage were the only finds. A number of nails about two inches long with a square shank, came from the Romano-British layer, also some smaller nails such as might be used in boots. The only 'Bronze' item from the layer was the 'button' (?) shown in Fig. 7, No. 34, which appears to have been cast and the front finished by turning on a lathe. No small finds came from the Belgic deposits. The four items shown in Fig. 7 are listed in Appendix 2.

### COINS

The three coins described below were all found in layer 3B, one inch above the burnt flint layer. They are all 4th century.

1. Diam. 17 mm. approx.

Obverse Head, diademed, of Emperor to right.

... D.A. ... PPAUG ...

Reverse Winged figure holding wreath to left.

? Standards in field to left.

? R in field to right.



## HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

2. Diam. 17 mm. approx.  
Obverse Trace of perhaps . . T.A. . .  
Reverse Trace of perhaps . . A . .
3. Diam. 17 mm. approx.  
Obverse Head, diademed, of Emperor to right.  
CONSTAN . . . . . AUG . . .  
Reverse Two soldiers facing, a standard between.  
GLORIA EXER. (Gloria Exercituum type).

### CONCLUSION

The work described in this report and the previous one started with a request from the owner that the Society should find, if possible, some clear evidence for the widely-held belief that the site was lived on before Norman times. Our first attack, on the Norman ditch, produced no evidence that it was a re-use of an earlier ditch. However, it did produce strong evidence for a Romano-British site nearby. Our second attack, on a rectangular enclosure shown by an aerial photograph, proved that this was post-Norman.

Success came with the use of a proton magnetic gradiometer, which revealed a complex of ditches south of the Norman ditch. Excavation established some of these as Belgic and suggested that the habitation site must be near our original section through the Norman ditch. We then laid out and excavated the customary square grid, finding both Romano-British and Belgic occupation sites. These provided evidence that the site was lived on just before the Roman conquest and again in the 4th century A.D., but no evidence that this small area was lived on at any other period before the Norman conquest. The Society has now ceased work on the site.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors wish to thank the Honourable P. C. Orde Powlett for permission to dig at Basing House, and members of the Aldermaston Archaeological Society who carried out the work. They also wish to thank the staffs of Reading and Basingstoke Museums for their help and advice, and to Dr. Grace Simpson for information on the Samian ware.

The small finds and pottery from the excavations are housed in the Museum on the site and may be viewed by arrangement with the owner, the Honourable P. C. Orde Powlett, Basing House, Old Basing, Hants.

### POTTERY

#### APPENDIX 1.

##### *Section S, Fig. 4.*

1. Dull pink, soapy ware.
2. Grey, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
3. Pink, black core, soapy, wheel-turned. 4 mm. hole bored below lip after firing, c.f. Silchester<sup>3</sup>, Fig. 5, No. 12. Claudian.
4. Grey, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Verulamium<sup>5</sup>, Fig. 34, No. 53, c. 50 A.D. Same ware as Silchester, Fig. 5, No. 8.
5. Black, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Camulodunum<sup>6</sup> 221B. Claudian.
6. Black, smooth, soapy, wheel-turned. 3.5 mm. hole bored after firing.

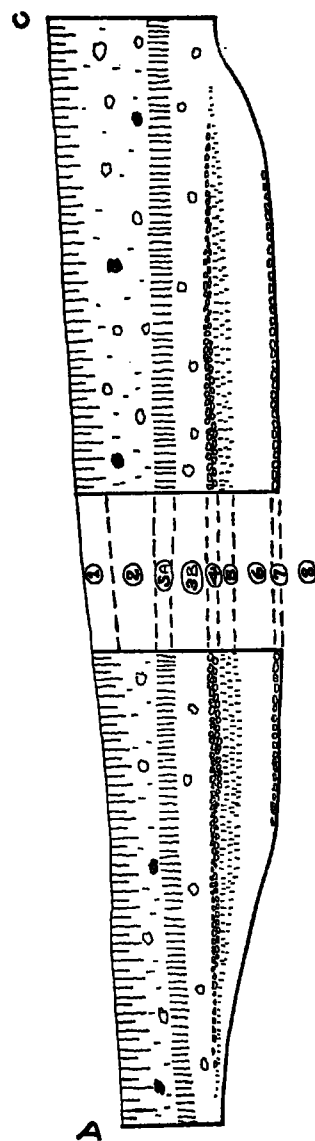
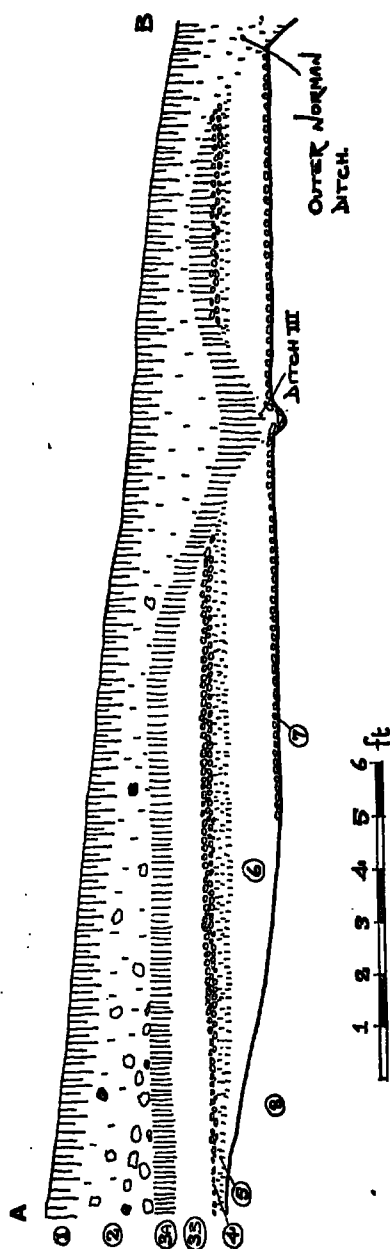


FIG. 6. Sections at Site II.  
 Layer 1: Humus, 2: Chalk rubble and flints, 3A: Pre-Civil War turf, 3B: Brown soil with stones, 4: Burnt flint (Romano-British), 5: Small chalk, 6: Black soil, 7: Partly cobbled floor (Belgic), 7: Clay with flints.

# HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

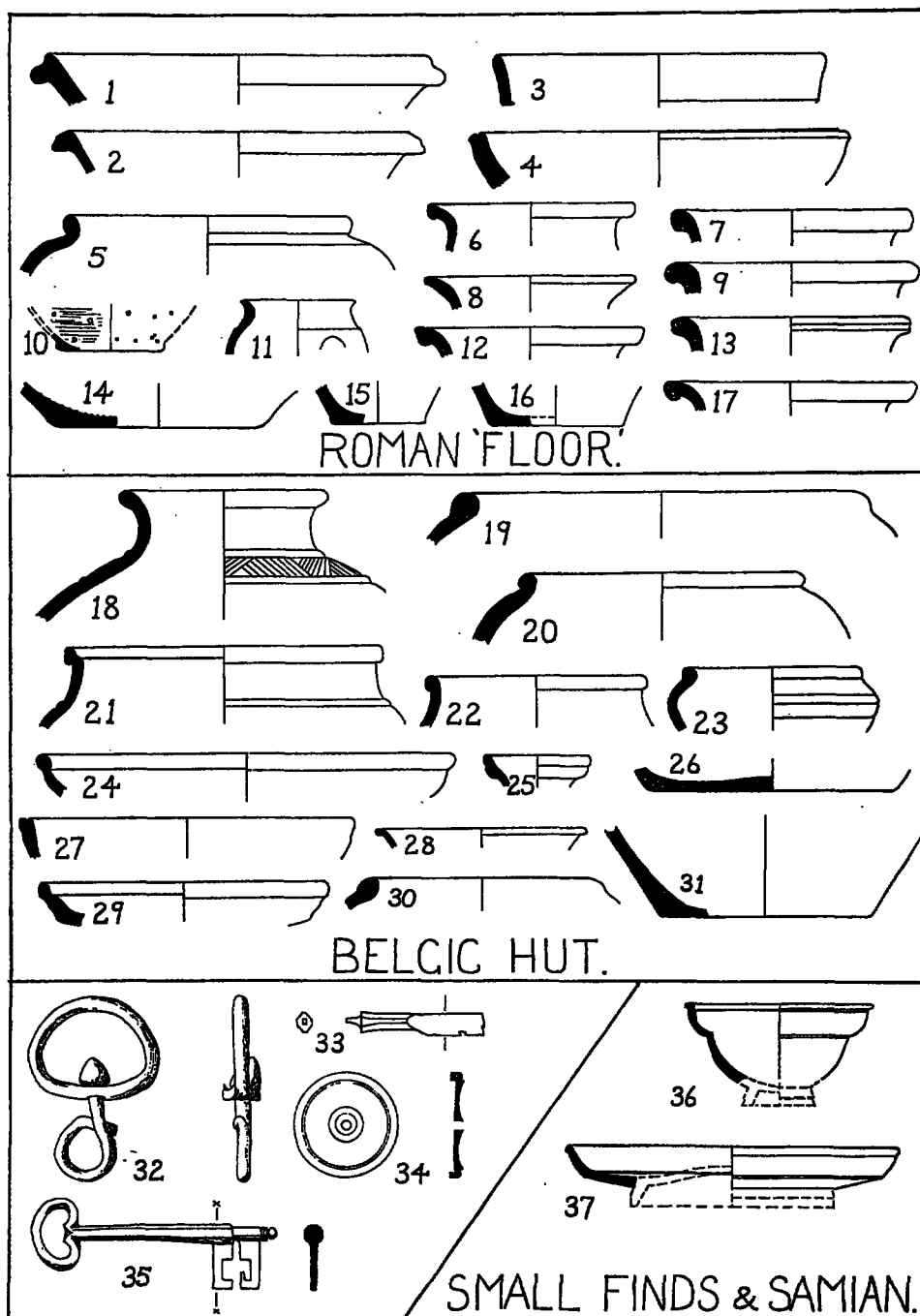


FIG. 7. Pottery from site II, 1965. Scale: 1/4-4.

## FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT BASING HOUSE, 1964-1966

7. Black, smooth, hard, polished outer surface and inside rim, inside neck rough sandy.
8. Brown, soapy ware, wheel-turned.
9. Black, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
10. Black, coarse, angular flint grits, outer surface burnished (with pebble?).
11. Pinkish, black core, soapy, wheel-turned, cf. Silchester, Fig. 5, No. 4. Claudian.
12. Black, heavily gritted with angular, white flint grits, handmade.
13. Black, hard, sparse gritting, wheel-turned. Rare.
14. Black, gritted, wheel finished, cf. Verulamium, Fig. 34, No. 57. Claudian.
15. Black, gritted, handmade, finished by wiping over with fibrous material, cf. Silchester, Fig. 5, No. 4. Same form but different ware.
16. Light brown, coarse gritted ware, cf. Silchester, Fig. 4, No. 19.
17. Pink, coarse gritted ware, cf. Silchester, Fig. 4, No. 23. Parts of this vessel were also found on the Belgic hut floor.
18. 19, 20. Black, coarse gritted ware, handmade, cf. Camulodunum 256 A.

### *Section A. Fig. 4.*

21. Pink, coated inside with grey slip, large white flint grits, cf. Silchester, Fig. 4, No. 22.
22. Black, with rounded pink and white grits.
23. Grey, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Silchester, Fig. 5, No. 8. Exactly the same ware.
24. Fawn, coarse, little grit, in primary silt of Ditch II.
25. As above No. 21.
26. Hard creamy ware.
27. Grey, hard, sandy, cf. Camulodunum 221 B. Claudian.

### *Romano-British 'Floor' Fig. 7.*

1. Light grey, slightly gritty, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Gillam<sup>4</sup>, p. 64, No. 231. 4th century.
2. Black, grey core, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
3. Pink, smooth, wheel-turned.
4. Black, hard, wheel-turned.
5. Black, pink core, hard, wheel-turned.
6. Black/grey, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Dorchester<sup>7</sup>. Fig. 13, No. 48. Probably 4th century.
7. White, hard, wheel-turned.
8. Grey, thin black slip, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Gillam Fig. 17, No. 147. 4th century.
9. White, hard, wheel-turned.
10. White ware, drawn up into  $\frac{1}{8}$ " diam. bumps on outside, brushed over with brown slip both outside and inside, coarse brush marks inside.
11. Thin black slip on grey core. New Forest ware, cf. May<sup>8</sup>, Plate LVIII, No. 3. 4th century.
12. Black/pink, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
13. Grey, hard, wheel-turned.
14. Pink, smooth ware, gritted on inner surface with coarse white (quartz?) grains.
15. Light grey, pink core, hard, wheel-turned.
16. Grey, hard, wheel-turned.
17. Light grey, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Dorchester Fig. 18, No. 231. Late 4th century.

# HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

## *Belgic Hut. Fig. 7.*

18. Light, pinky brown, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Silchester, Fig. 5, No. 7. Claudian.
19. Black/pink, hard, sandy, wheel-turned, cf. Silchester, Fig. 4, No. 22. Not later than 60 A.D. Also cf. Verulamium, p. 174, No. 2 (late pre-Claudian).
20. Black, small white angular grits, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Verulamium, Fig. 34, No. 57. Claudian.
21. Grey, sandy, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Verulamium, Fig. 34, No. 53, c. 50 A.D.
22. Pinky/brown, hard, wheel-turned.
23. Grey, coarse, sandy ware, wheel-turned.
24. Black, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
25. Black, hard, smooth, wheel-turned.
26. Black, hard and sandy, wheel-turned.

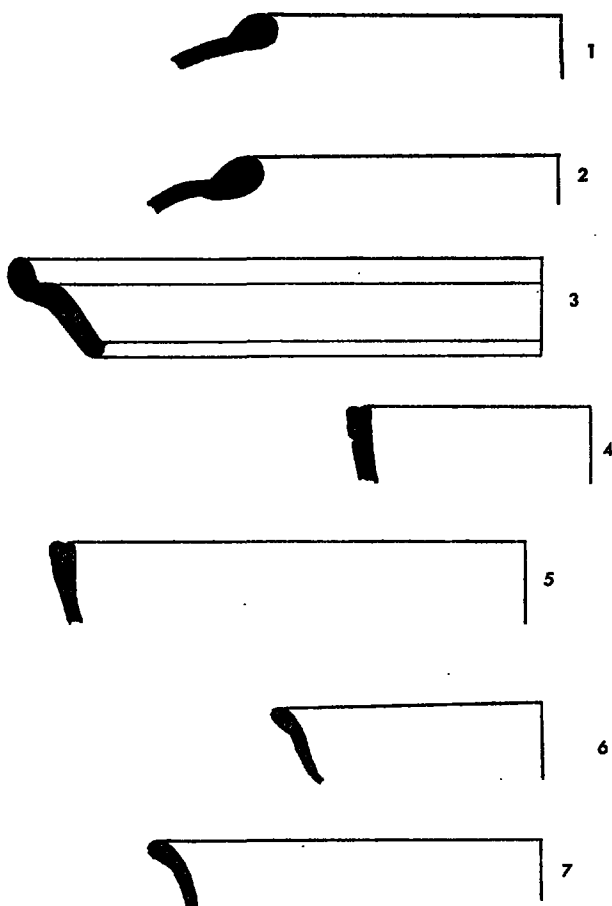


FIG. 8. Pottery from Site II, 1966. Scale: 2/5. 1 to 5 from Romano-British 'Floor', 6 and 7 from Belgic Hut.

## FURTHER EXCAVATIONS AT BASING HOUSE, 1964-1966

27. Black, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.
28. Black, smooth, wheel-turned.
29. Black, hard, wheel-turned, cf. Verulamium, Fig. 23, No. 9. Claudian.
30. Black outside, grey inside, sandy, wheel-turned.
31. Pink/grey, hard, sandy, wheel-turned.

### *Romano-British 'Floor'. Fig. 8.*

1. Light grey paste, dark grey surface with fine grit, wheel-turned.
2. Porous pinky-grey core, smooth soapy dark grey surface, hand-made, cf. May, Plate LXXVIII, No. 7.
3. Hard, light grey texture, surface slightly rough but not gritty, wheel-turned, cf. May, Plate LXXIV, No. 186. Belgic terra nigra.
4. Pink texture, dark grey slightly gritty surface, hand-made.
5. Hard, dark grey texture and surface, slightly gritty, wheel-turned.

### *Belgic Hut. Fig. 8.*

6. Soft brown, hand-made, cf. Boon, Fig. 5, No. 1.
7. Hard black texture with a little white grit. Outer surface bitumen-coated, hand-made.

In addition pieces resembling Nos 10 and 17 of Fig. 4 were identified.

### *Samian. Fig. 7.*

36. Hard pink paste, cherry red glaze. The rim of this vessel was found half way up in the ditch silt at section B. The body was stratified two inches above the Belgic Hut floor. Claudian.
37. Hard pink paste, cherry red glaze. Fragments of this vessel were found on the Romano-British 'floor'. Claudian.

## SMALL FINDS

### APPENDIX 2.

32. Harness (?) Wrought Iron.
33. Iron knife, blade broken, rectangular tang (broken).
34. Button, brass (?), front machined all over and polished, back recess rough as cast, hole drilled off centre.
35. Wrought iron key, made in three pieces, ring, shank and fret, welded together.

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