

SALVAGE EXCAVATIONS AT OLD DOWN FARM, EAST MEON

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INTRODUCTION

The site was discovered by chance in December 1976, by a mechanical excavator operator who was engaged in the back-filling and levelling of a disused chalk quarry. The discovery was reported to Peter Fasham, Director of the M3 Archaeological Rescue Committee, whose team carried out some initial small-scale recording and excavation. Over the following two months, in atrocious weather and ground conditions, spasmodic archaeological investigations were undertaken by George Walker, a local archaeologist. Almost all the visible features were sampled, and quantities of artefacts, mostly pottery, were recovered. Additional work, mainly recording, was carried out by the Winchester District Archaeologist. The following short report is an attempt to correlate and interpret the incomplete information recovered from the salvage operations.

THE SITE

The site is located on a gentle south-east facing slope of Old Down, 175.0 m above sea level, about 2.50 km north of the village of East Meon. The plan (Fig. 1) shows the position of the site; the investigated area comprised merely a small part of a much larger complex, some of which had already been destroyed by the chalk quarry. The remainder of the complex lies in the fields to the north and south. The area available for excavations was small, and therefore provides an incomplete picture of the total entity.

The identification, sampling and recording of the archaeological remains were carried out in the most difficult conditions. A period of very cold and wet weather, the extremely disturbed Clay-with-flints topsoil and a limited time-schedule did not allow complete excavation of any feature. Most of those located were sampled and recorded. In some cases it was not possible to fully record individual features,

and almost all surface stratigraphy had been destroyed. However, sufficient information was recovered to allow a broad general understanding of the site.

The major features located were two ditch systems which appeared to form a southern perimeter of a small enclosure (Fig. 2; 1, 2). Their differing alignments suggested that they were not contemporary. The critical evidence, which would either have proved or disproved this, had been removed by the chalk quarry. Ditch 1, identified on both sides of the quarry, was shallow with an original depth of about 1.00 m; only the bottom 0.30 m survived. It was V-shaped, with a surviving width of 1.70 m at the top. A narrow causeway across the eastern section allowed access to the interior of the enclosure. A wider, slightly in-turned entrance may have existed on the west but this could not be definitely determined.

Ditch 2, also located on both sides of the quarry, was smaller, being only 1.10 m wide at the top; it also survived to a depth of 0.30 m. It had a causeway across the eastern section; the western end petered out in a rounded terminal. It had been recut at least once during its lifetime.

Quantities of pottery from Ditch 1 (Figs. 3, 4), including some plain Samian sherds, dated its abandonment to the second half of the second century AD. Thus, a date for construction during the preceding fifty years might reasonably be postulated. In contrast, the excavations of Ditch 2 yielded no adequate dating evidence whatsoever.

A number of smaller features, both inside and outside the enclosures, were identified and sampled. A group of postholes (Fig. 2; 3) may represent the remains of a post-built structure. Most of the other remains were a series of pits (Fig. 2; 10, 11, 12), postholes (Fig. 2; 7, 9, 14, 15, 16) and gulleys (Fig. 2; 4, 5, 8, 13) which did not appear to be related. The tiny quan-

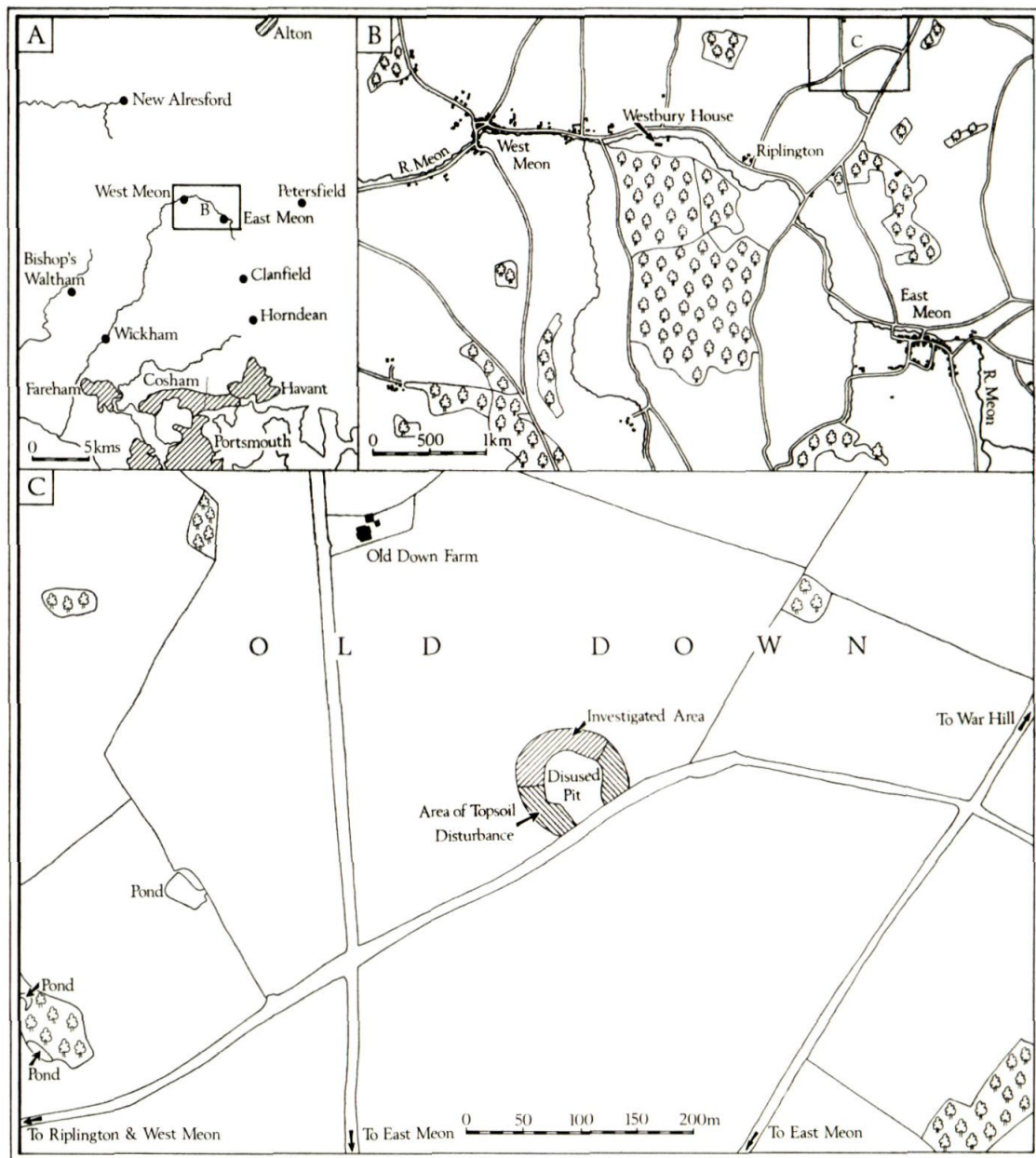


Fig. 1. Old Down Farm: Site location plans.

titles of pottery found in a few of these features dated them to the second century AD (Fig. 5. 23-7), although the flint-gritted sherds from Posthole 15 could conceivably be attributed to the latter part of the Iron Age.

Of greater interest were two isolated cremation burials. One was placed in an almost square pit and appeared to be covered by a layer of large flint nodules (Fig. 2; 17). It contained a number of complete, but broken,

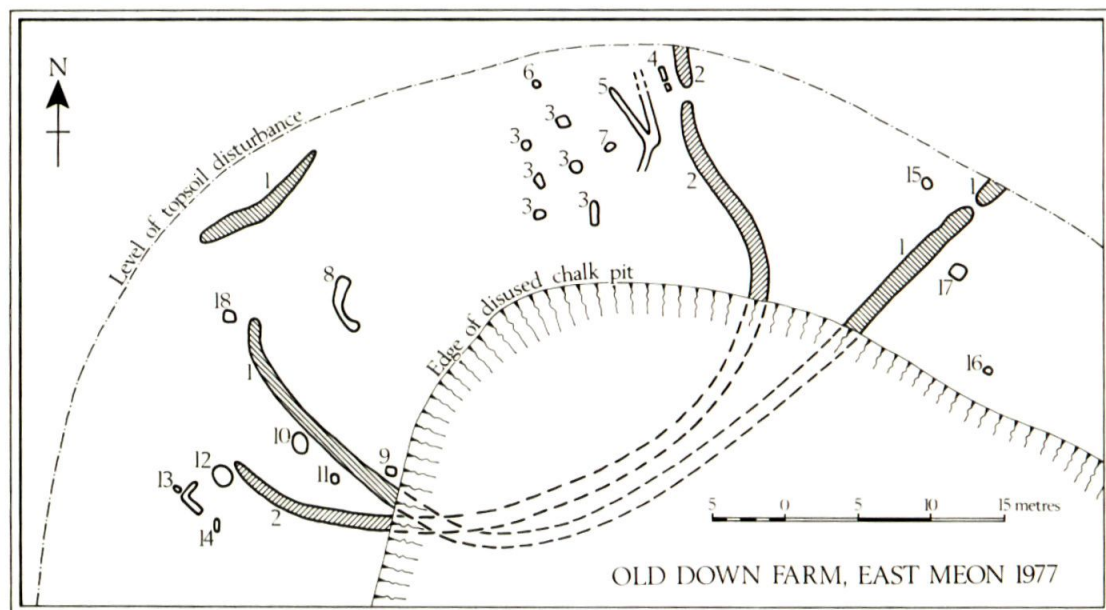


Fig. 2. Old Down Farm: Plan of excavated features.

pottery vessels, together with some grave furnishings which included glass, shale and bronze-work (Fig. 6). The pottery vessels, two of which had been deliberately holed in the base, date the cremation to the late first or early second century.

The second cremation was a single, broken urn in an area of dark sand and silt. The top half of the pot had been destroyed. It contained only cremated bone fragments; there were no grave goods (Fig. 2; 18).

THE POTTERY

The vessels illustrated are representative samples of larger groups, particularly in the case of Ditch 1. Unless otherwise indicated, most of the pottery was manufactured in a coarse, grey, heavily sanded fabric, which formed almost 75% of the total ceramic assemblage.

Ditch 1 (Figs. 3, 4)

1. Samian bowl; Dr 18/31R; in poor condition.
2. Samian flange; Dr 38; in poor condition.
3. Samian bowl; Dr 18/31.
- 4, 5. Small jars with curved, everted rims.

- 6-8. Dishes of varying sizes with simple rounded rims; no. 7 burnished.

- 9-13. Jars with everted rims of varying section.

- 14-17. Bowls with straight sides and reeded rims of varying sections.

18. Necked jar with everted rim.

19. Flagon neck.

20. Indented beaker with plain rim; New Forest fine ware; colour coated (Fulford 1975, Type 27, pp. 50-3).

- 21, 22. Beakers with beaded rim; New Forest fine ware; colour coated (Fulford 1975, Type 4, p. 56, 61).

Gulley 4 (Fig. 5)

23. Samian bowl; Dr 33; in poor condition, with all slip missing.

24. Bowl or jar, with everted, rounded rim.

Gulley 5 (Fig. 5)

25. Samian base; Dr 18/31; in poor condition.

Gulley 8 (Fig. 5)

26. Bowl or jar with slightly out-turned bead rim; coarse, heavily sanded red fabric.

27. Bowl or jar with rounded projecting rim.

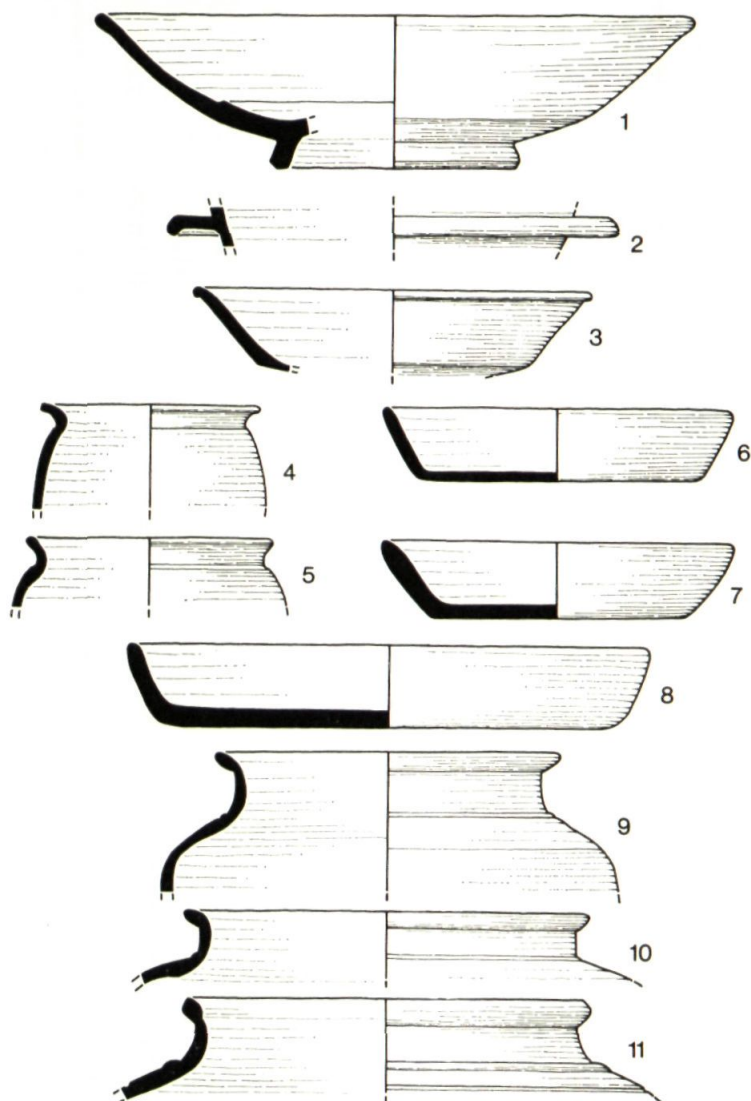


Fig. 3. Old Down Farm: Pottery from Ditch 1. Scale $\frac{1}{3}$.

Cremation 17 (Fig. 5)

- 28. Bowl with curved, everted rim.
- 29. Dish with straight, reeded rim.
- 30. Dish or bowl with slightly upturned, reeded rim.
- 31. Jar with curved, everted rim; deliberate hole in base.
- 32. Necked jar with simple, everted rim.
- 33. Dish with plain, rounded rim and raised base.

- 34. Bowl with projecting rounded rim; deliberate hole in base.
- 35. Jug neck.

THE FINDS

Apart from quantities of iron nails, roof- and box-tile fragments and pieces of quern-stone, the only other finds came from the cremation group.

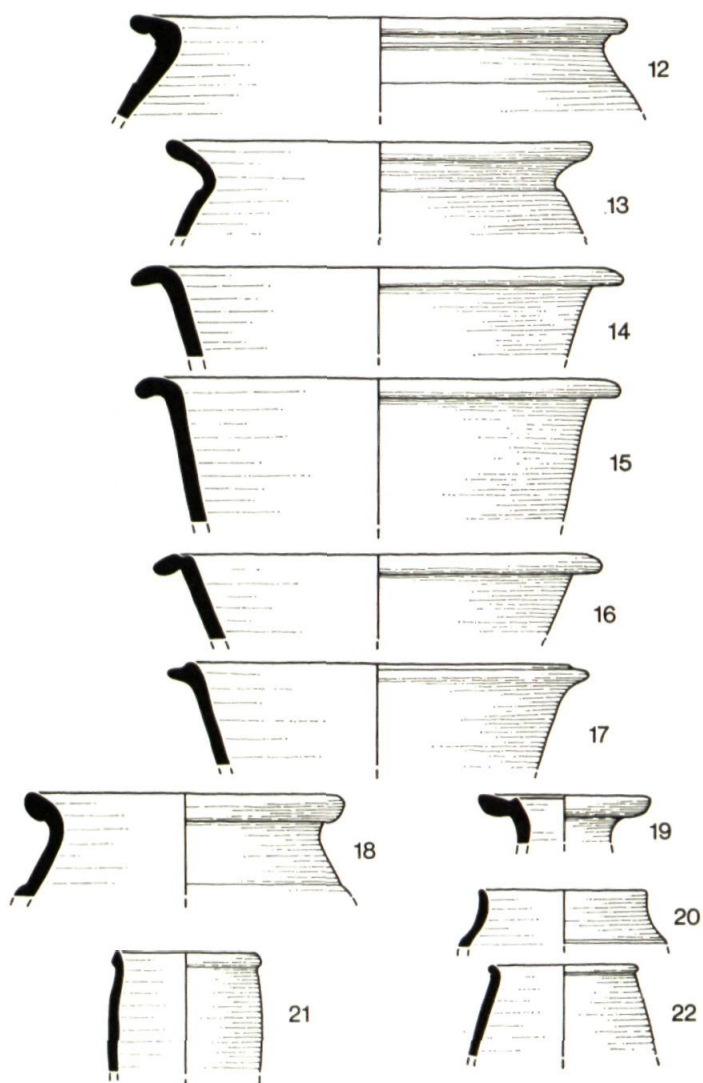


Fig. 4. Old Down Farm: Pottery from Ditch 1. Scale $\frac{1}{3}$.

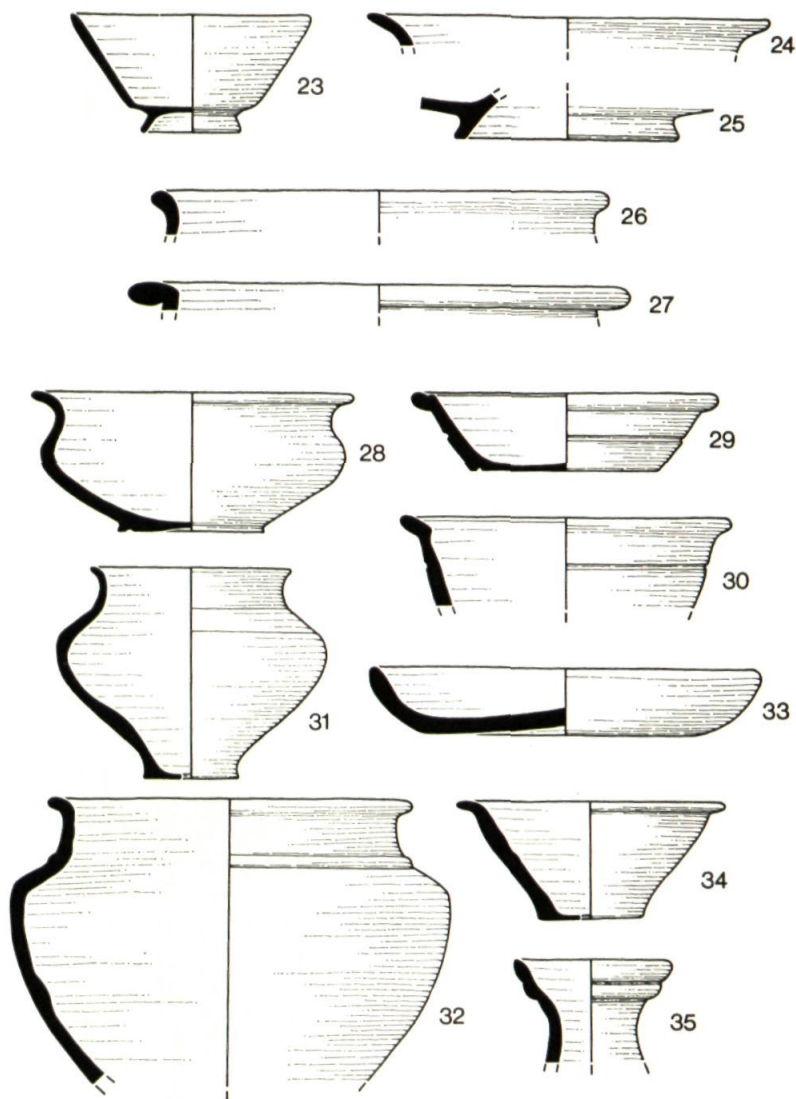


Fig. 5. Old Down Farm: Pottery from Gullies 4, 5 & 8 (nos. 23-27) and Cremation 17 (nos. 28-35). Scale $\frac{1}{2}$.

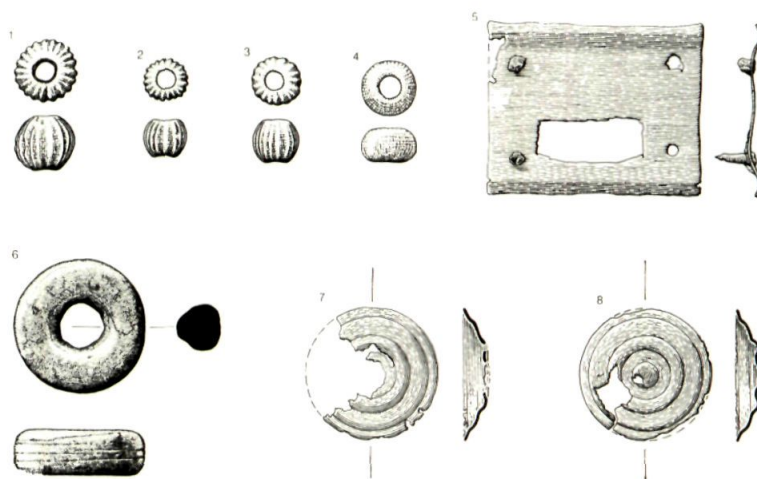


Fig. 6. Old Down Farm: Finds from Cremation 17. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

Cremation 17 (Fig. 6)

1. Melon bead; deep blue glass.
2. Melon bead; turquoise frit.
3. Melon bead; turquoise frit.
4. Annular bead; dark grey-green glass.
5. Bronze plate, with irregular rectangular opening; four rivet holes, two rivets, one bronze, one iron.
6. Shale spindle-whorl.
7. Circular bronze brooch or button.
8. Circular bronze brooch or button.

SUMMARY

The circumstances of discovery, and the conditions under which the excavations were undertaken at Old Down Farm, did not allow a more thorough and detailed exploration of the archaeological remains before they were destroyed. The features described above are a representative fraction of a much larger Romano-British rural farm complex. Indeed, the quantities of roof- and box-tile fragments seem to indicate a building of some substance in the vicinity. It is typical of many such occupation sites known on the Hampshire chalk

downlands (Collis 1968 and 1970; Schadla-Hall 1978, 30, 109–21). Old Down Farm adds little new information to our present knowledge of such sites, but seen in its local context it assumes a greater importance. Fieldwork and excavations in the West Meon area have already established a broad outline of the late prehistoric and Romano-British exploitation of this section of the Meon Valley (Lewis and Walker 1976). Investigations at Old Down Farm have provided much needed detail and refinement to the overall understanding of the area.

Acknowledgements

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Note

The finds and documentation relating to this site will be deposited in Winchester City Museum: the Museum catalogue number for the site is 3017.

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