

AN IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH SITE AT VIABLES FARM, BASINGSTOKE

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with contributions from F J Green, R T Schadla-Hall, V Snetterton-Lewis and A E Thompson

INTRODUCTION

Between 1974 and 1976, the Basingstoke Archaeological Society undertook a series of excavations at Viables Farm (SU6318 5050) to the south of Basingstoke, in an area of industrial development. The site, which lies on a slight

north facing chalk slope at 110 m OD, is one of a number recently examined in the area (Fig 1). The first season's work was directed by Mrs P Judkin, and subsequent excavation was directed by Duncan Russell who, through pressure of work, was unable to undertake the post-

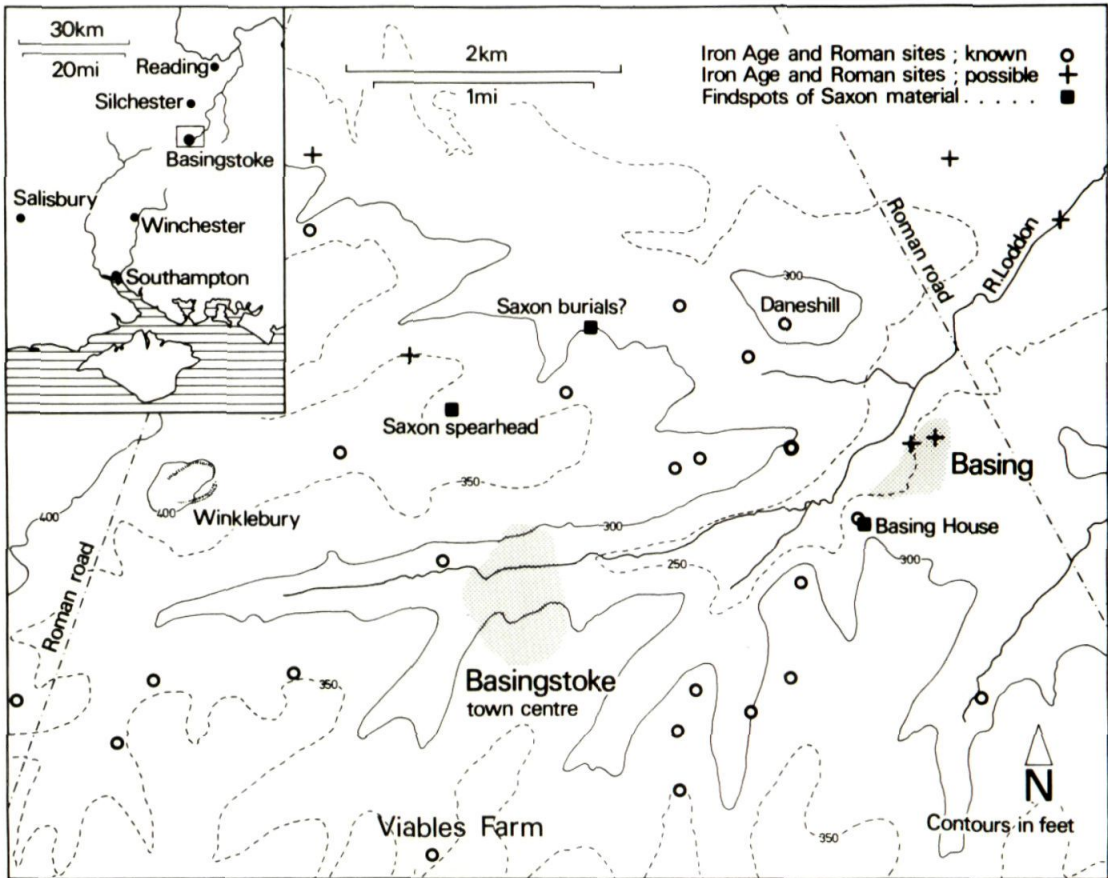


Fig 1. Map showing Viables Farm in relation to other contemporary sites in the Basingstoke area.

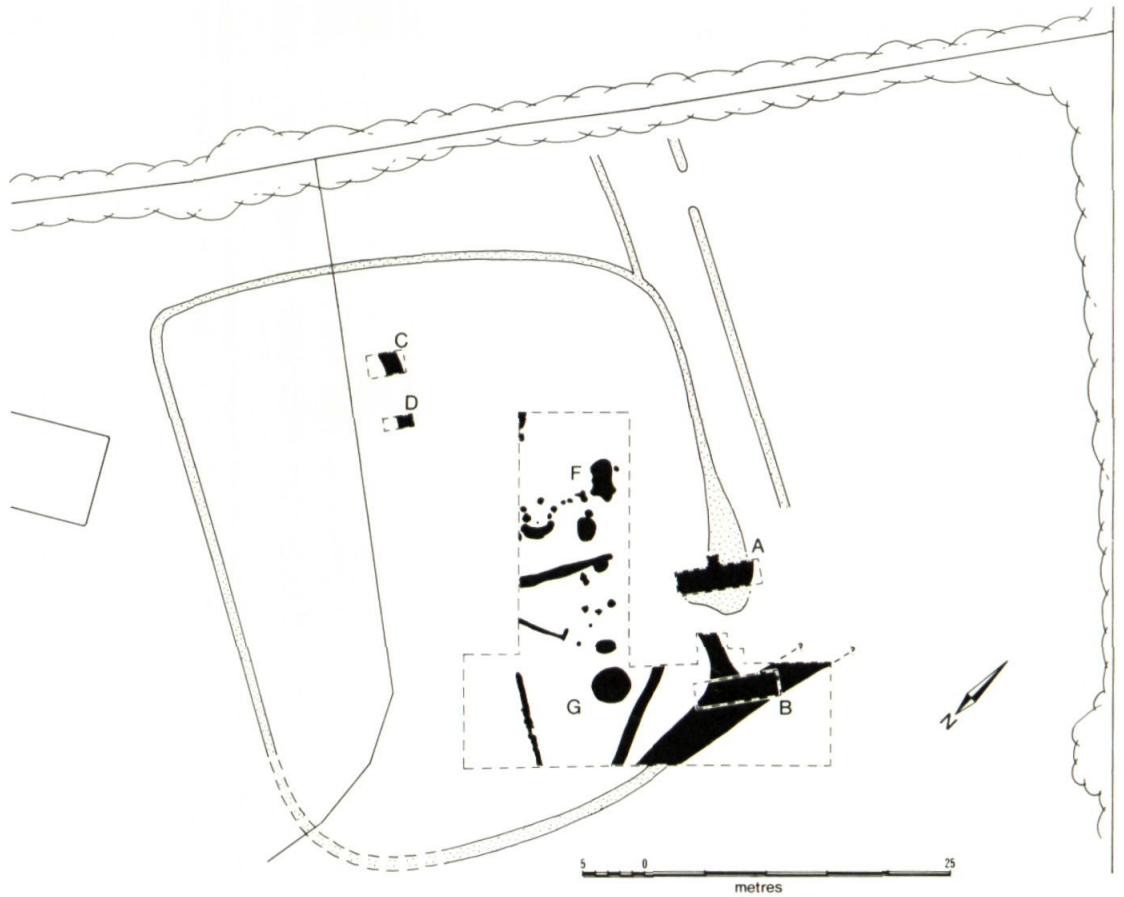


Fig 2. Viables Farm. Overall plan of the site showing the trenches excavated in relation to the features located by geophysical survey.

excavation work. This was organised by Martin Millett. The excavation and finds processing was done entirely by volunteers without the aid of grants, and as a result this report is less comprehensive than it might have been. Material not reported upon here is stored with the other finds and site records at the Hampshire County Museum Service (accession no A.1976.9 and .10). An important burial group from Pit 5 is published elsewhere (Millett and Russell 1982).

The site was located during road construction in 1973, and a magnetometer survey undertaken by Dr A J Clark of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory subsequently located the enclosure (Fig 2). In 1974 trenches 1-4 tested this enclosure ditch. The complete records of these trenches were not available to the authors. In 1975 trenches A-E were opened to investigate the northeast corner of the interior, the entrance and a lynchet next to the present hedge. The difficulties in interpreting the results of these

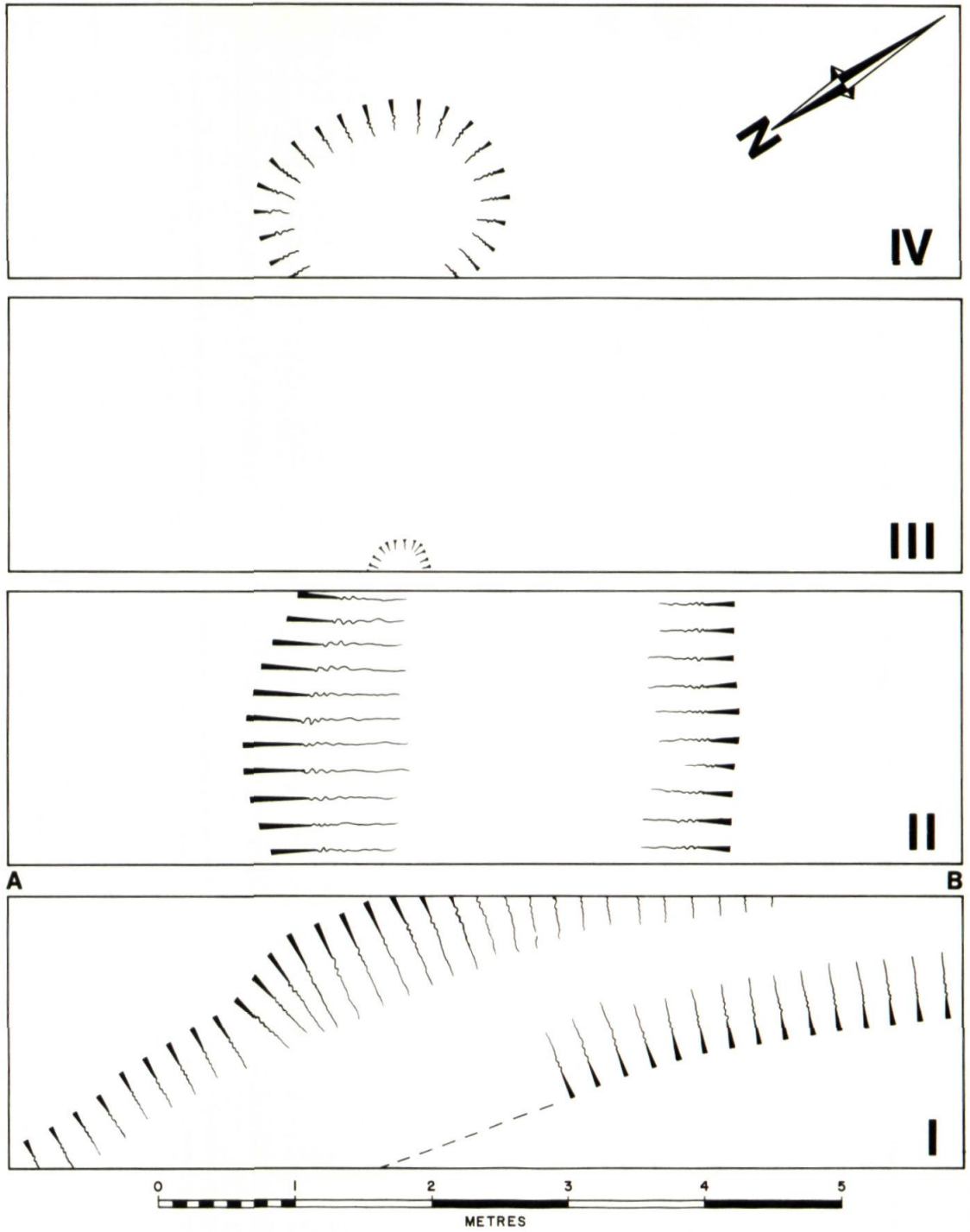


Fig 4. Viables Farm. Trench B, phases I-IV.

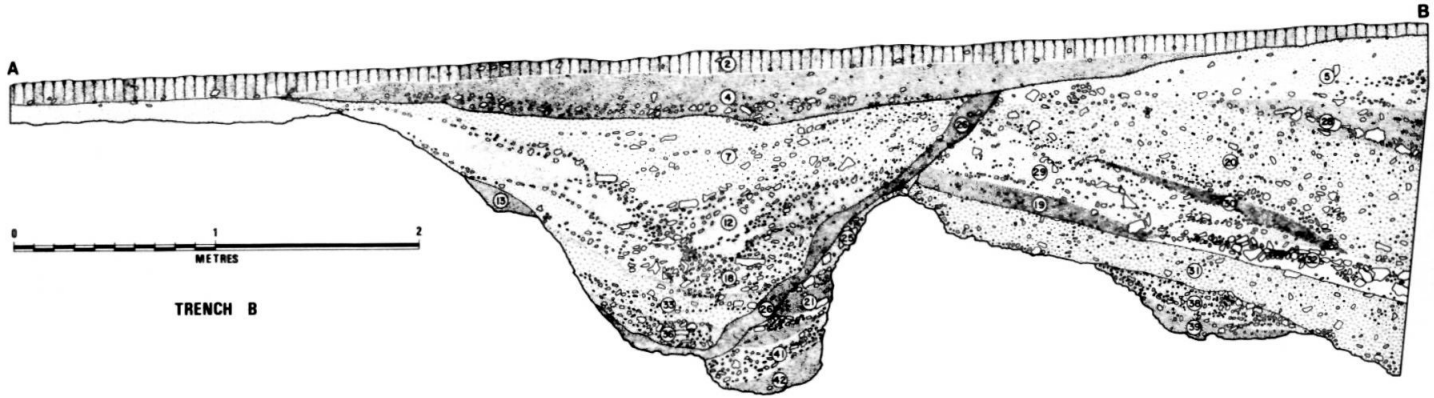


Fig 5. Viables Farm. Main section of Trench B.

major features were sampled.

CHRONOLOGY AND SEQUENCE

There were few stratigraphic relationships between features, and the site chronology has been established using these in conjunction with the pottery dating (Thompson below). There was little fine pottery, even in the Romano-British deposits, so absolute dating is impossible. The principal stratigraphic relationships were:

Trench B: this deep trench revealed several ditches with a number of recuts. The main phases are summarised in Fig 4 on the basis of the section (Fig 5).

Areas F and G: gully 1 overlaid Pit 4; Post holes 2 and 12 overlaid Pit 3; and Pit 1a overlaid Pit 1.

There are three broad types of pottery assemblage: those dominated by saucepan pot; those dominated by hand-made bead rim jars; and finally those with a full range of Romano-British forms. Some of the earlier assemblages were contaminated by sinkage into the tops of the pits, but the chronology of the site can be based on these ceramic phases, with some pre-Iron Age activity (Period 1) indicated by a scatter of worked Neolithic Bronze Age flint over the whole area (Schadla-Hall below).

These phases can be summarised:

Period 2. Pits 1, 1A, 3, 4, and 5 (Figs 3 and 6) contained saucepan pot assemblages with a few hand-made bead rim jars. This dates them to the third-first century BC (Fig 6). There is nothing to suggest what the functions of Pits 1 and 1A might have been, although other sites in northern Hampshire have similar features which are interpreted as quarries for chalk and clay (Millett forthcoming). Pits 3 and 4 are typical of the Iron Age and may have been for grain storage. In the northeast corner of the enclosure Trenches C and D uncovered a curving section of ditch *c* 2m wide and *c* 1m deep. The small amount of pottery recovered suggests a Period 2 date. The curve suggested a circular enclosure, and the diameter is too great for it to be a round house. The evidence suggests that in this phase the site was an unenclosed settlement.

Period 3. The main feature of this period is the enclosure ditch, phases I and II of which (Fig 4) in trench B had ceramic assemblages dominated by hand made bead rim jars (Figs 6 and 7), suggesting a date in the first century BC – first century AD. However, the single vessel, Fig 8 A2.1, from phase I leaves open the possibility that the enclosure was originally dug in Phase I (Thompson below). The course of the earliest phase of the ditch is uncertain especially in the entrance area where the western side may have originally continued southwards (Fig 2). Phase II (Fig 4) shows a change, suggesting proximity to the terminal. The bulk of the pottery from the 1974 sections was broadly contemporary with this phase, suggesting a major recutting.

The droveway to the south enclosure (Fig 2) is presumed to be contemporary with the enclosure. It is not possible on stratigraphic ground to associate any of the features within the enclosure this period, and the pottery is of little help. Where there is pottery, it is more consistent with a Period 4 date.

Period 4. The enclosure ditch became filled with rubbish, and its top contained Romano-British material as late as the fourth century AD. The top of the enclosure ditch in Trench B shows recuts, and there is a suggestion that a gully cut across the Period III gate (Fig 4 phases III-IV). The eastern terminal of the ditch had a well cut through it. As the trench collapsed into its shaft early in the excavation, all that can be said about it is that the material from its cone was predominantly third-fourth century. Within the area excavated there were a series of features which produced pottery of this period (Fig 3) including Pit 2, and the series of gullies, slots and post-holes. These are presumed to be structural elements of timber buildings, although they cannot be resolved into individual structures.

DISCUSSION

The site is one of a large number of similar ones in the area (Oliver and Applin 1979; Millett forthcoming; Applebaum 1953). It is clear from the present state of research that the rest of these sites, like Viabes, were often occu-

pied from the Iron Age through the Roman period. The date of the enclosure, in the first century BC – first century AD is similar to Cowdery's Down but rather later than Ructstalls Hill. This enclosure is also smaller than either of those. The sub-rectangular shape and the association with a droveway is typical of the

later Iron Age in Hampshire (T and S Champion 1981). The Iron Age pottery sequence is similar to that at both Ructstalls Hill and the Winklebury hillfort (Smith 1977). At Ructstalls Hill there was thought to be a break in the sequence at the end of the Iron Age. This seems to be a result of the dating of the pottery being

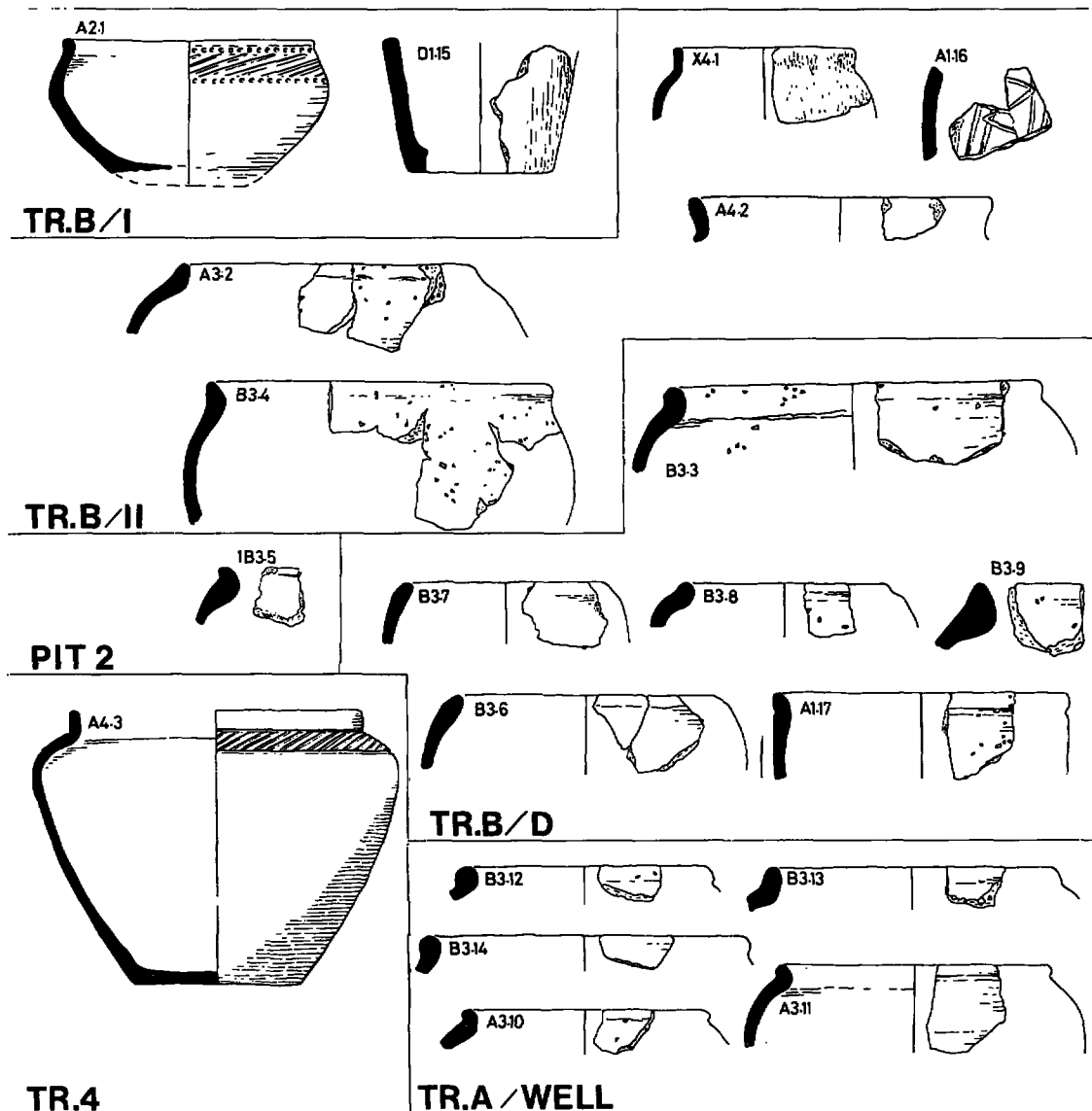


Fig 6. Viabes Farm. The pottery (scale 1:4).

confined to narrower margins than are used here, and the same problems probably account for the break in sequence noted at Ructstalls between *c* AD 100 and the late third century (Oliver and Applin 1979). The pottery evidence from Viables, Cowdery's Down and a re-examination of the published Ructstalls pottery suggests that the sequence was more likely to have been continuous, without breaks. Much of the difficulty seems to result from the conservatism of the pottery in the area, which has only recently been established (Millett 1979).

Without further excavation the economy of this site cannot be satisfactorily reconstructed, but it may be noted that the evidence of the burial (Millett and Russell 1982), metal-working and the horse-bit (Fig 8) combine to suggest that sites of this type need not have been at a subsistence level, but may have been socially and economically sophisticated (Wainwright 1979).

THE FINDS

Full finds reports are published on fiche with

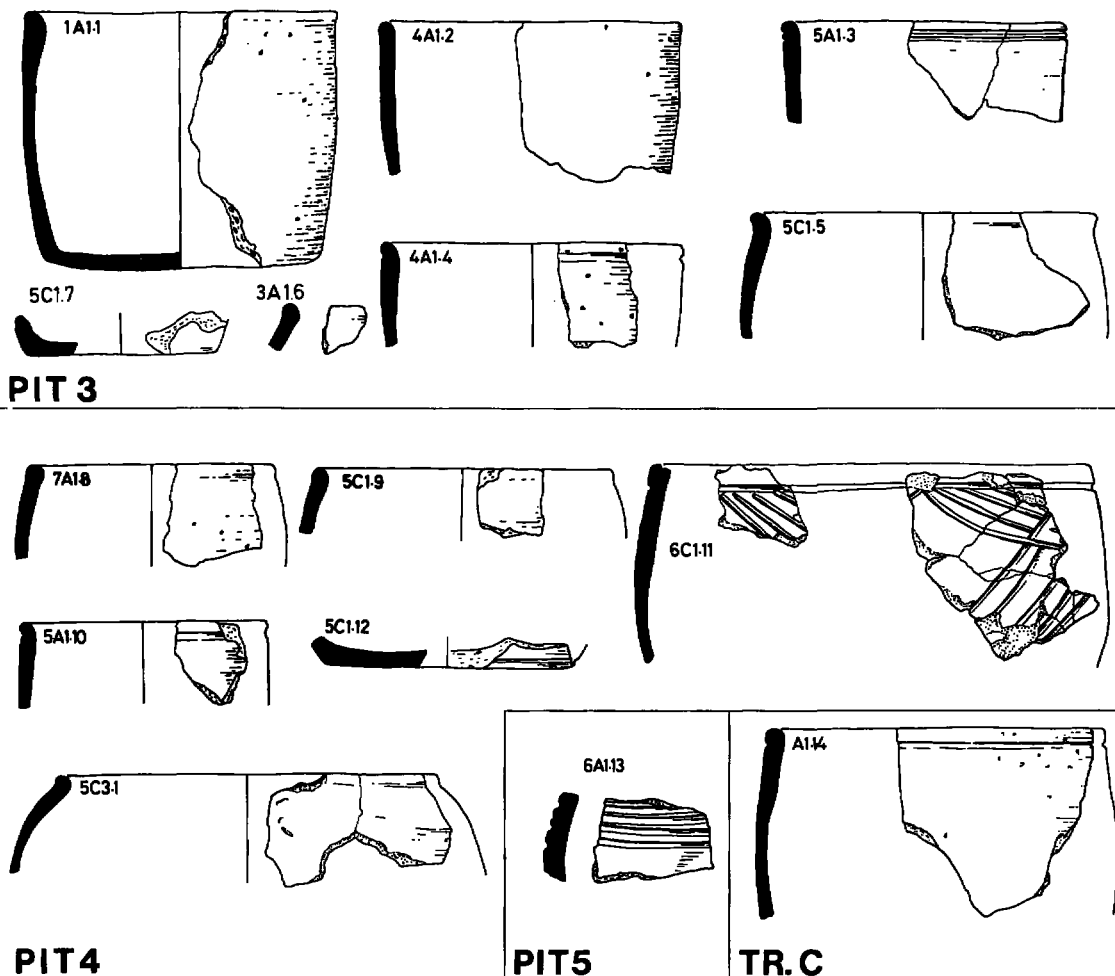


Fig 7. Viables Farm. The pottery (scale 1:4).

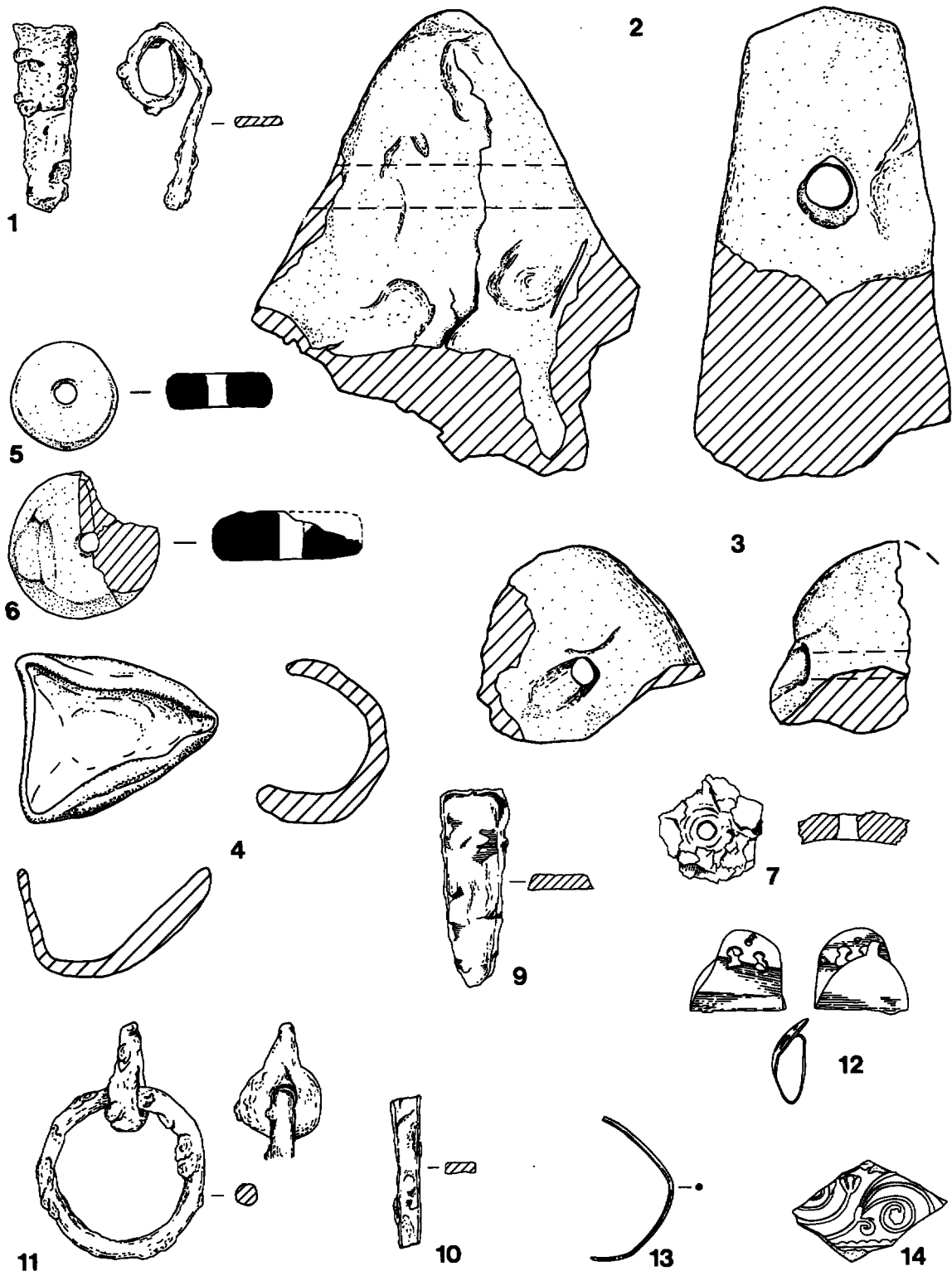


Fig 8. Viables Farm. The small finds and samian ware (scale 1:2).

summaries of the principal contents given below. Relevant illustrations are, however, presented here to enable the reader to use them with the fiche.

The Pottery (by Anne Thompson)

The material consisted of Iron Age and Romano-British fabrics. All the stratified Iron Age material is illustrated by group (Figs 6 and 7), whilst the Romano-British material is described with reference to other published material. The numbers on the drawings give, in order, the sherd's layer within its context, its fabric, and its form. Thus 7A1.8 means layer 7, fabric A, form 1 example 8. For Trenches A and B the phase is given in place of the layer number.

The visually identified fabrics, which are fully described on the fiche, are:

- A. Coarse matrix containing abundant medium to fine crushed flint.
- B. Coarse matrix with ill-sorted flint up to 5mm.
- C. Sandy matrix with variable quartz sand temper.
- D. Fine matrix with fine sand and some grog. Soapy feel.
- E. Fine sandy matrix with grog. Soapy feel.
- F. Coarse fabric with well sorted sand up to 1.5 mm.
- G. Farnham ware (Lyne and Jefferies 1979, 18, Fabrics A to C).

The occurrence of these fabrics is shown on Table 1.

The forms used to describe the pottery are discussed, and it is concluded that three ceramic phases can be distinguished.

- i) Groups consisting entirely of Saucepan pot types, dating to the second century BC and perhaps later.
- ii) Assemblages dominated by hand-made bead rim jars, with occasional wheel-thrown vessels, dating to the first century AD.
- iii) Assemblages containing a range of Romano-British forms datable to the first-third centuries AD.

These ceramic phases are fully discussed, and it is suggested that the dating of other sites in the area, like Ruckstalls Hill, needs revision with the evidence for a gap in occupation in the second century AD now removed.

The Samian Ware (by Martin Millett)

The assemblage was small and unremarkable. The single decorated sherd (Fig 8.14; a surface find) is Neronian-Flavian.

The Small Finds (by V Snetterton-Lewis)

The majority of the small finds, which are shown on Fig 8 are unremarkable. Two objects deserve comment; the triangular crucible used for copper alloys (no 4); and a probable fragment of iron horse bit (no 11).

Table 1. Viabes Farm. The occurrence of the principal fabrics by period.

Fabric Groups:	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	Others 'Non-Local'
<i>PERIODS:</i>								
<i>Period 2</i> (2.665 kg)	66%	15%	14%	0%	1%*	1%	1%*	0%
<i>Period 3</i> (2.130 kg)	35%	44%	6%	5%	6%	1%	2%	1%
<i>Period 4</i> (17.186 kg)	7%	36%	1%	3%	4%	6%	37%	6%

* = Probably intrusive

The Botanical Remains (by F J Green)

Twenty 150 ml samples were submitted by the excavator. The small sample size made comparison difficult. The range of species conforms to the pattern generally found on this type of site in Wessex.

The Flint (by Tim Schadla-Hall)

The bulk of the flint came from surface layers and only one tool was recovered, a barbed and tanged arrowhead of Conygar Type C (Green 1980) of the earlier Bronze Age. The blade and flake material is consistent with a Late

Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was undertaken by a small group of dedicated volunteers to whom we are extremely grateful. Special mention should be made of Peter Heath, Mark Corney and Mick Young. Mark Corney also prepared the publication drawings (with the exception of Fig 1 which was prepared by Simon James, and the pottery which was drawn by Anne Thompson).

Permission to excavate was given by the Basingstoke Development Group.

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