

FIELDWORK AT LAWN FIELD, BURITON, HAMPSHIRE

by ELIZABETH DES BRISAY

ABSTRACT

Fieldwork on the Upper Greensand shelf below the South Downs escarpment has revealed a Roman site of some interest. Finds of some Roman military equipment and the presence of earthworks suggest the possibility of a Roman military establishment. The discovery of fragments of imported marble and stone from the Mediterranean indicate an early and relatively luxurious Roman building. There is also evidence of pagan Saxon occupation.

THE SITE

Situated on Upper Greensand, on comparatively high but level ground, the site (Fig 1) is 450 m from the Chalk South Downs escarpment (NGR SU 743202). The south-west edge is bounded by a stream, and along the north-east edge the land slopes away very steeply into a gully, along the bottom of which runs another stream. The field is at present under arable use, and during certain times of the year a considerable number of earthworks become apparent (Fig 2). The most probable explanation is that the main ones are in some way connected with the Roman occupation and the lesser ones perhaps with a medieval field system.

There has been little evidence of soil erosion in Lawn Field, and ploughing is not disturbing the Roman buildings, in contrast to Wolver Brow (des Brisay 1989) where the plough has dislodged the foundation stones of the building, and disturbed a very large quantity of tile. This latter site is now under grass and thus protected for the immediate future.

The only aerial photographs of the Lawn Field are high-level verticals taken in the 1950-60s. These, unfortunately, do not show any building positions or other features.

PREHISTORIC SETTLEMENT

Some finds of prehistoric date suggest early occupation of the southern to south-eastern area of the site. Half a Neolithic flint axe, a long flint tool (130 × 25 mm) described by the British Museum as a fabricator, some coarse

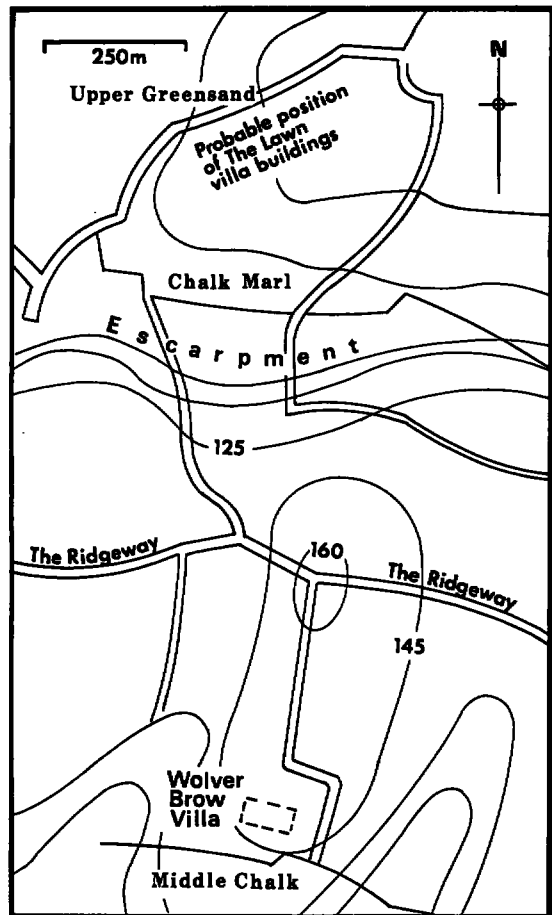


Fig 1. Lawn Field, Buriton: general location.

flint-gritted pottery of Bronze Age type, and a spindle whorl have been found. Also, flint flakes, and a saddle quern stone from the Lodsworth quarry near Petworth, were recovered from the edge of the field. Within the field was half a mortarium of the same stone (160 × 150 mm, 80 mm on thickest edge). A stone triangular tapering handle extends from the bottom of the mortarium, perhaps to steady it while in use.

There was an interesting find in the Manor garden, close to the Lawn Field, when some deep digging dislodged a rim and two other fragments of a very fine Beaker period pot (Fig 3). No greater than 5 mm in thickness, with a

complicated design of parallel lines and triangles made with a fine square-toothed comb, this almost certainly comes from an Early Bronze Age burial.

There is no evidence of Iron Age occupation. In the Buriton area, the people of this period seem to have settled on the chalk uplands above the escarpment, rather than on the Upper Greensand shelf.

ROMAN FINDS

The position of the scatter of Roman pottery and tiles is indicated on Fig 2. There are

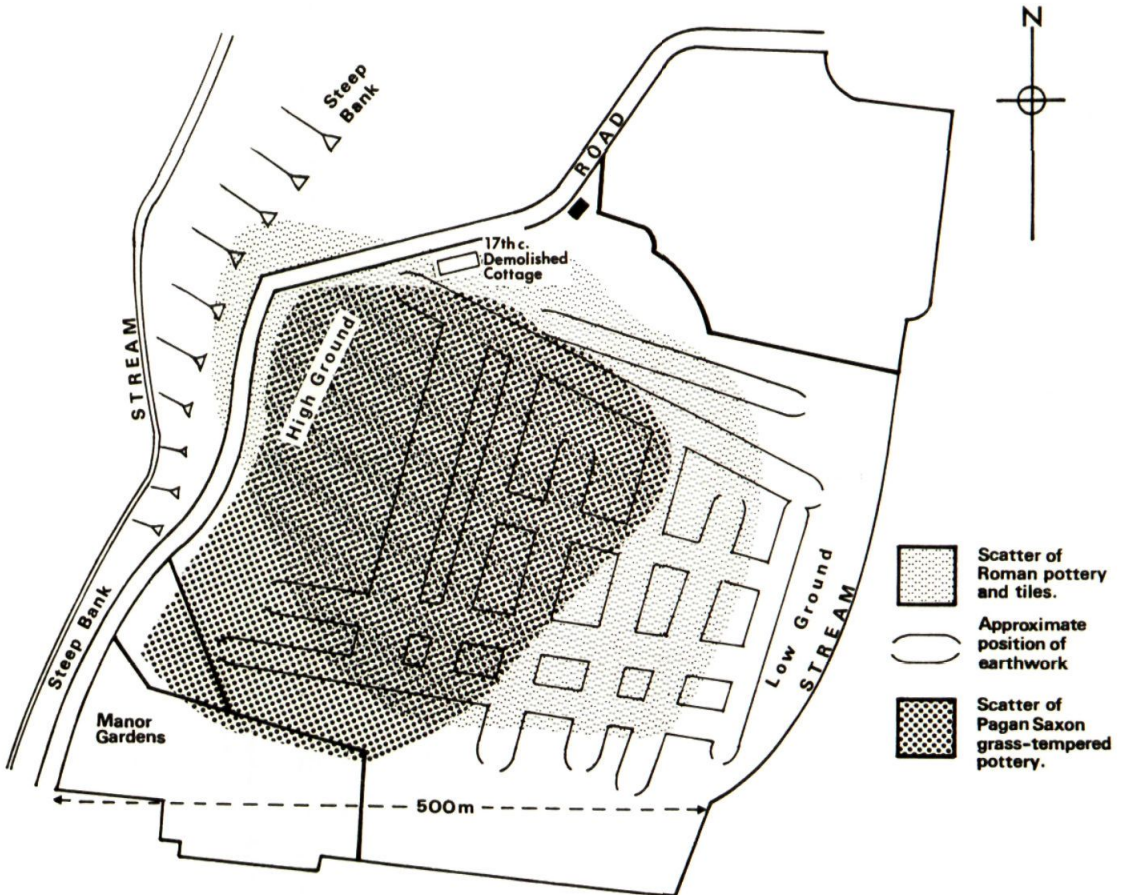


Fig 2. Lawn Field, Buriton: site plan.

concentrations of both pottery and, separately, tiles on different areas. One area of high density of tile is situated at the north-westernmost part of the field, where *tegulae*, *imbrices*, stone floor tiles and fragments of box-flue tiles have been ploughed up. The incidence of tiles is less frequent further south-west on the lower ground. There is a greater density of pottery on high ground across the top of the field, also diminishing towards the south-west. The bronze objects of military affinity have been found almost entirely on one section of the field.

Clay Tiles

Two comparatively large fragments of box-flue tiles have been found. Both have diamond-shaped designs, one made with a 3-toothed comb, and single lines, presumably by a knife, the other by 8- and 7-toothed combs. The corners of these tiles are present. There are several small pieces with various designs, one possibly roller-stamped with a rosette, being only 10 mm thick. Tiles of this thickness have been dated to the 1st century AD (inf E W Black). Another fragment has 10-toothed combing with very narrow teeth, and the rest have wavy undulating lines. All these measure 10–15 mm thick, slightly below the thickness of 15–17 mm recorded for 1st-century to 130/140 AD tiles elsewhere (inf E W Black). There is one *tegula mammata*, the *mamma*, of rectangular shape, 15 × 20 mm, and 15 mm high, being positioned just over 25 mm from the edge.

Of the other clay tiles, there are about two dozen fragments of *tegulae*, divided equally between very chalky fabric, similar to those on Wolver Brow (des Brisay 1989), and very good strong red fabric. The flange in each case is quite different, possibly implying different suppliers or different episodes of roofing activity. Of the remaining tiles, only three pieces are *imbrices*, the rest being primarily *bessales*, including some quite sizeable pieces.

Stone

Of the many different varieties of stone present on the Lawn Field, the most interesting are those imported from the Mediterranean. There is a rectangular piece of Green Porphyry, 57.5 mm in length (broken at both ends), 40 mm in width and 20 mm in depth, possibly a piece of *opus sectile*, from the

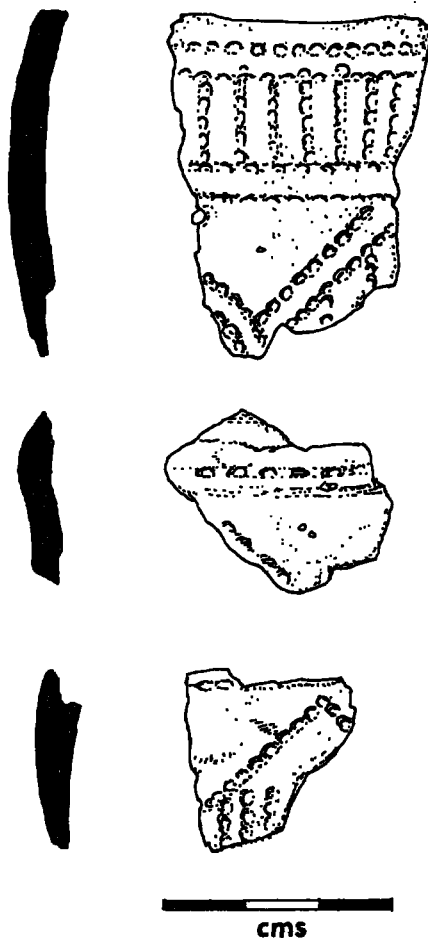


Fig 3. Lawn Field, Buriton: prehistoric pottery (scale of 3 cm).

Marathonisi quarries near Sparta, Greece. Called *Marmor Lacedaemonium Viride* by Pliny, it was quarried in Classical times and was a stone associated with the early Roman Empire. The problem in tracing its presence in Britain is that the stone can be confused with Porfido Verde Antico from Thessaly (Watson 1916), which is the variety recorded at Fishbourne (Cunliffe 1971). Lacedaemonian Porphyry has been found from an arcade in the temple of Claudius at Colchester, and almost certainly at Ely (Glam), where Wheeler (1922) described it as Green Peloponnesian Marble. Otherwise it would seem to be absent from Britain.

A diamond-shaped stone, 65 × 35 × 22 mm, is composed of Silt-stone from Italy. It is formed of

layers of volcanic dust, not quite fine enough to be Mudstone, possibly Rhyolite/Tuff, silicified and mineralised (inf R Sanderson, Geological Museum). This piece of stone is discoloured, but was probably used for the same purpose as the Porphyry. Another piece of marble facing or moulding was white with grey veining, similar to marble from Fishbourne described as coming from Greece or Asia Minor. Two fragments of imported volcanic lava have been retrieved from the top of the field. This particular stone was used by the Romans as a building stone, since it is easy to handle and cut (inf R Sanderson).

When a mechanical excavator was tidying the field edges, it dislodged some stone tiles. They are about 22.5 mm in thickness and probably square, with their top surfaces worn down, so that one could assume that they had been used as flooring. Composed of a creamy, shelly limestone, the same colour as Quarr Abbey stone, but different in configuration, they are possibly Binsted stone from the Isle of Wight. No stone roofing tiles have appeared, but there are three pieces of Purbeck stone, varying from 5 to 15 mm in thickness. Each piece shows signs of chiselling on one side, possibly as keying for mortar.

One ornamental stone of micaceous sandstone with circular iron banding has been found. This has been cut and smoothed on both sides to 10 mm in thickness, possibly for use as cladding. Portland stone has been found in quantity on the site; the pieces showing signs of tooling and cutting, perhaps for use in building. Sandstone is also present, usually 20 mm in thickness, well-finished on both sides, almost certainly flooring. Mr G Jones, Geological Museum, described it as Sandy Limestone or Calcareous Limestone, containing calcite and quartz.

Two large slabs of stone, one brought to the surface by the excavator, the other lying on the surface near the bottom of the field, are interesting because of the amount of work they have received from a mason. Composed of a dense micaceous sandstone, the larger one is roughly triangular, weighs 19.95 kg, and measures 430 × 340 × 80 mm. The top surface has been worked with a fine grooved tool to give it a relatively smooth surface. The underside has been deeply chiselled and has a little mortar remaining in the grooves. One corner shows a circular iron mark cut into the stone: about a third of a circle is present, c 360 mm dia. The smaller stone is rectangular, weighs 6.40 kg, and measures 500 × 110 × 50–60 mm. The working on it is identical to the larger stone, but the chiselling has

been carried out in a series of semi-circles and no mortar remains. The top has been completely smoothed by wear in the centre, but shows signs of the grooving tool at both ends. The chisel used on both of these stones would have measured about 7 mm wide.

A piece of grey stone arch, measuring 230 mm on the outside and approximately 45–50 mm thick, has been found. It was broken and the interior badly scratched by an agricultural seeding machine. It is an unusual variety of stone to be found in the area, coming from the Coal Measures – the nearest sources being South Wales and the Bristol area. Robin Sanderson of the Geological Museum described it as an impure medium-grained micaceous sandstone, containing streaks and fragments of coalified plant remains. In repairing this stone, it was found to be soft and crumbly – probably only suitable for building. Tooling marks on the outside are similar to those on the two previous stones.

Quern-stones and Hones

There are three small edges of quern-stone of Lodsworth stone from near Petworth, and two centre pieces of ferruginous sandstone. All are so small that they may not necessarily belong to quern-stones, but be used for other grinding needs. The hones are mainly composed of quartzitic stone pebbles almost identical to those found at Wolver Brow, but are an infrequent find.

Pottery

The Roman pottery sherds are fairly evenly distributed over the whole of the area marked in Fig 2. Some 1196 rims have been recovered from the ploughsoil, and their fabrics are given in Table 1, together with the number of sherds of the more interesting types.

The types of fabric and kiln sources would point to an occupation throughout the Roman period. There is one small sherd of *terra nigra* type pottery with a glossy black finish, one of *terra rubra* with signs of an embossed design, and a small quantity of samian ware, which tends to survive badly in the slightly acid soil. These pieces would represent the earliest pottery. Late Iron Age/Early Roman flint-gritted fabric, found so plentifully on the Wolver Brow site, is absent.

Late Roman pottery is represented by Oxford colour-coated imitation samian ware, stamped with rosettes, demi-rosettes and other designs. There is

Table 1: Lawn Field, Buriton: Roman pottery

Type	Rims	%age	Sherds
Alice Holt/Farnham	651	55	
Surrey buffware	152	13	
Rowlands Castle	140	12	
Black Burnished	126	10.5	
Grog-tempered	35	3	73
Oxford colour-coat	37	3	
New Forest fine ware	23	2	153
Cream fabric Mortaria	18	2	10
Flint-gritted Mortaria	2		
Oxf. CCW Mortaria	3		
Samian	3	0.25	10
Thumbed large storage jars			10
Early flint-gritted roll rims	6		
Total rims	1196		

also grog-tempered pottery from the end of the Roman period.

Ironwork

Most of the ironwork has not been collected because of the problems of identification, and the rapid deterioration of this material once removed from the soil.

The main iron artefact found is the upper half of an iron sword tang with a double spherical top, which can be linked to the other bronze finds of military affinity catalogued below. There is a Roman rake-prong, missing its hook for attachment to a wooden clog and handle, and the middle section of a Roman farrier's tool, similar to an example in Chichester Museum. Also found were 'dogs' for joining timber (inf Ralph Jackson, British Museum). There is a plentiful supply of nails in the plough-soil, mostly post-Roman, but a small quantity of definite Roman date.

Other Finds (Figs 4-7)

- A Small bronze plaque, possibly an ornament from a box. Right side slightly reconstructed.
- B Part of a harness pendant. The finial is bronze, the remainder silvered over bronze.
- C Strip of bronze inlay with iron staining on the inside, the iron rivet having corroded away.
- D Bronze fragment with bronze rivet.

- E Small piece of bronze inlay with iron staining on the lower side.
- F Bronze, purpose unknown.
- G & H Bronze boss studs.
- I Possible bronze terminal to a Roman scabbard, the whole showing traces of silvering. The dashed line indicates the upper area which would not originally have been visible.
- J Domed bronze mount from a military belt plate, with an ornamental bronze snake on top - half missing.
- K Bronze object with two iron studs, badly corroded - possibly a hinge.
- L Large bronze stud.
- M Possible part of an ornamental bronze buckle.
- N Two bronze arrowheads, probably post-Roman.
- O Top part of a bronze sword pommel, the lower edge slightly flattened to facilitate soldering to the lower part.
- P *Opus sectile* stone in Lacedaemonian Porphyry.
- Q Diamond-shaped *opus sectile*.
- R Red Jasper, imported from Italy, with one facet ground flat and highly polished. There is no record of Jasper being used for ornamental work in building, only in jewellery (inf Dr Susan Walker, British Museum). This find must therefore be connected in some way with the manufacture of jewellery.
- S Carved and drilled bone. The holes are probably for brush bristles. Probably not Roman.
- T Bronze tube, manufactured from one sheet rolled over and soldered. Now slightly split, and with two slits cut on either side of the bottom lip. There appear to be pieces missing from the top.
- U Bronze object with traces of silvering. Possibly the tongue from a large buckle, or a spatula, which might have had a probe at the other end.
- V Iron spur, much damaged, with hook at the heel-plate. Probably a rivet spur.
- W Harness *phalera* in heavy cast bronze, of 1st century date. This one, having only one loop, would not be at a junction, but would be for decorative purposes. The four irregular pin-holes which pierce the *phalera* would almost certainly have held a bronze decorative object. The outer surface is silvered.

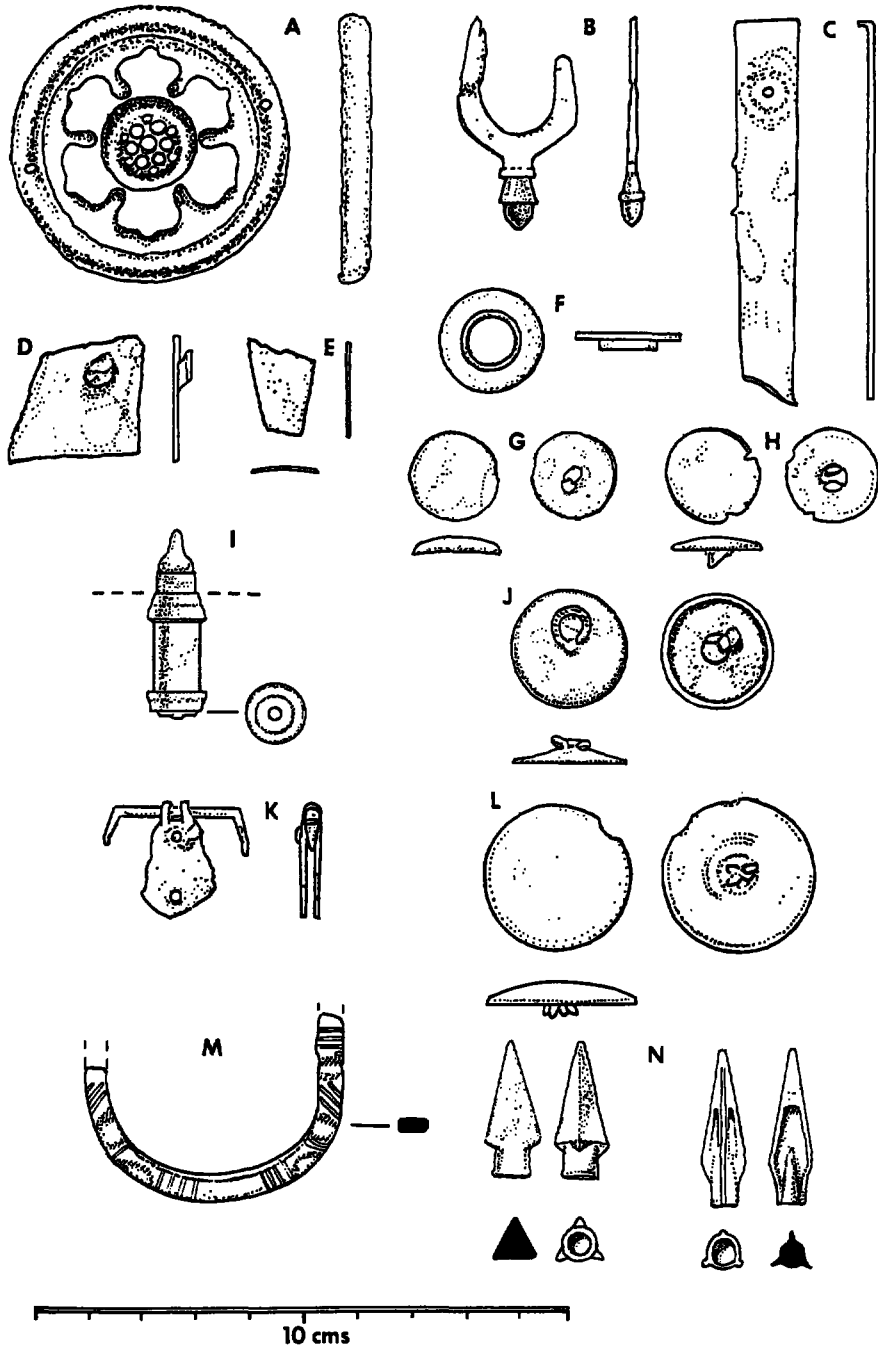


Fig 4. Lawn Field, Buriton: Roman and probably Roman finds, A-N (scale of 10 cm).

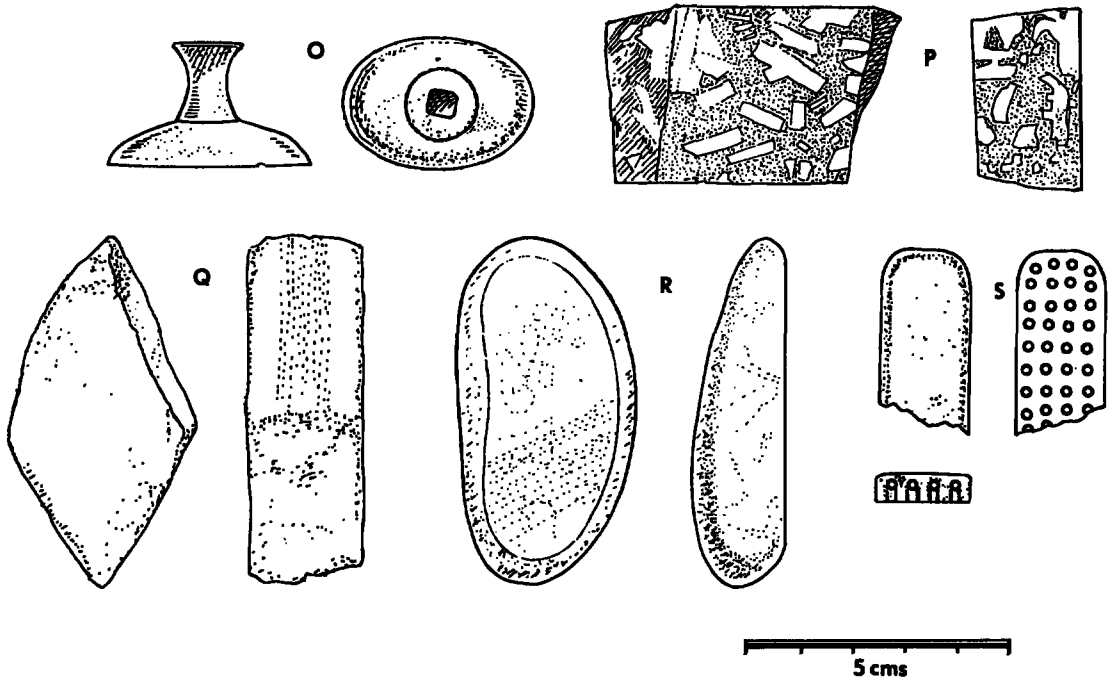


Fig 5. Lawn Field, Buriton: Roman and probably Roman finds, O-S (scale of 5 cm).

- X Probable bronze harness pendant, similar to one from Fingringhoe, Essex (Webster 1981). Much damaged.
- Y Bronze ring, probably one of the suspension-rings for holding a scabbard in place.
- Z Hollow-cast bronze object, rough on the inside, smooth and polished externally. There is a square hole in the base, a smaller round hole in the top, and a hole of more complicated profile on one side, opposite which, internally, is a projecting flange. The profile of the side hole resembles a hand-rail in outline, and the best interpretation of the object is a junction/terminal for a piece of furniture or other similar fitment. A wooden post could enter the base, and link internally to the rail entering from the side. The hole at the top could house a cylindrical fitting of some sort. It is probably of early Roman Imperial date, and has a similar bronze patina to the other Roman objects from the site.

Coins

based on notes by J Creighton, King Alfreds College, Winchester

- 1 Copy of an *as* of Claudius I (41-54)
- 2 *Dupondius* of Trajan (98-117)
- 3 Small bronze, possibly a copy, of Claudius II (268-70), struck after his death. Rev: CONSECRATIO, altar

INTERPRETATION OF THE ROMAN FINDS

The bronze finds suggest a military establishment of the 1st century AD. Whether it was a camp, fort or other type of base, and whether it was occupied by legionaries or auxiliaries is impossible to establish at present. One can only conclude that there were soldiers present, and that some of them were mounted. The earthworks may be associated with the mili-

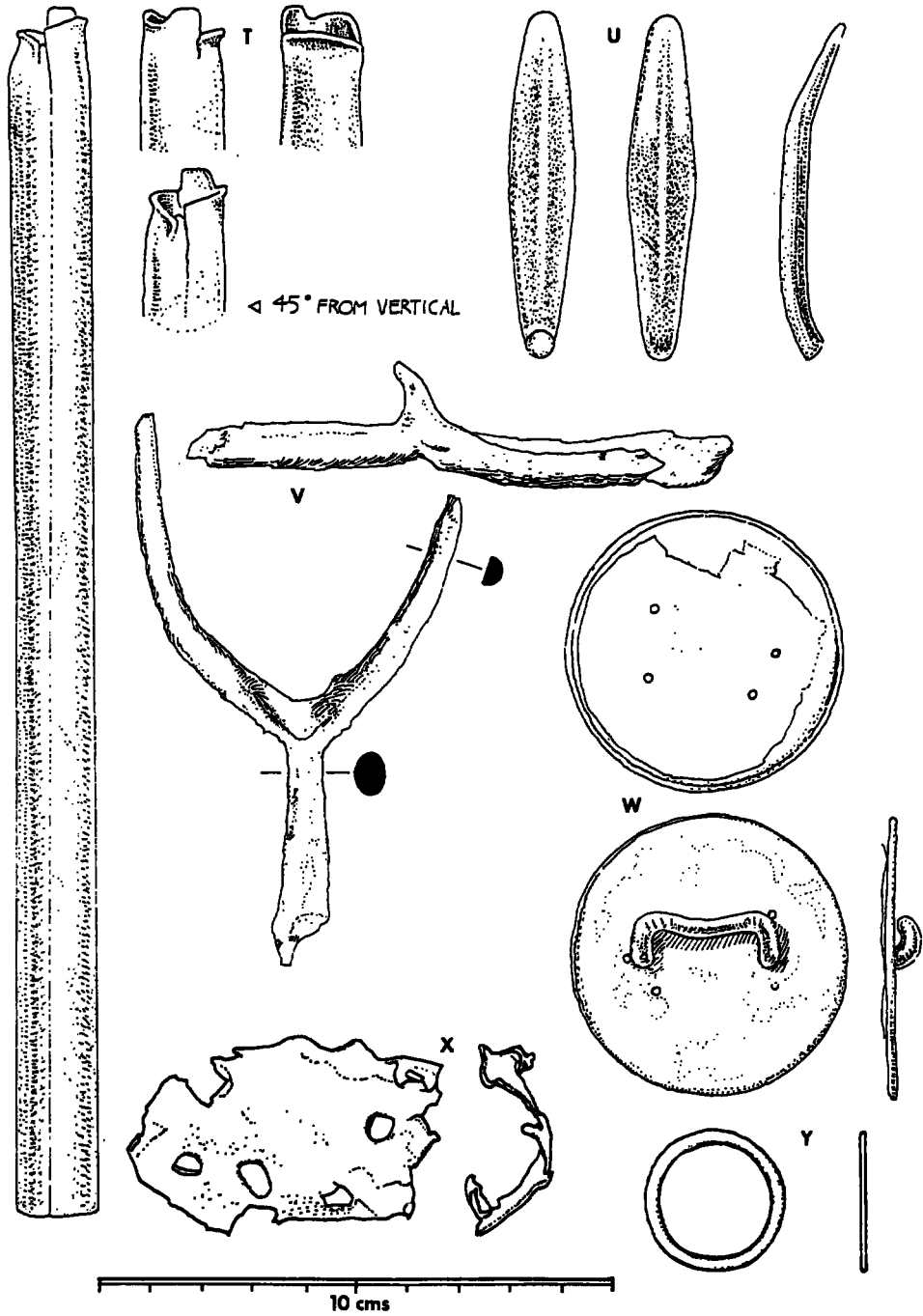


Fig 6. Lawn Field, Buriton: Roman and probably Roman finds, T-Y (scale of 10 cm).

tary occupation, but it could easily be the case that the later Roman and subsequent activity is responsible for them.

Later in the first century, a Roman building or villa of some status was established, with occupation of the site continuing through the whole of the Roman period. The Lawn villa is just under one mile north of Wolver Brow villa (des Brisay 1989), and the two sites are linked by ancient trackways (Fig 1). It seems possible that the Lawn site was the more important, since Wolver Brow appears not to have been established until the second century. The latter site has also yielded large quantities of quern-stone fragments, a find almost absent from the Lawn villa. This may indicate an arable-based agricultural economy at Wolver Brow, the product from which would seem to have provided sufficient for both villas.

There are strong indications that the Lawn villa was not isolated, but part of a larger complex underlying the whole of the south-eastern area of Buriton village. An iron-smelting site exists beside the main stream in the village which was investigated in the 1970s, and yielded slag samples and more than 900 Roman nails. This site is still in the course of study.

SAXON EVIDENCE

The Saxon occupation area extends towards the Manor gardens (Fig 2), but as most of this area is under pasture, it is impossible to tell the nature and extent of the evidence. 215 sherds of grass-tempered pottery have been collected. These can be divided roughly into two types; a soapy fabric with a great deal of vegetable matter, and a slightly more sandy fabric but still with a large amount of grass tempering. Most of this pottery is blackish sometimes with the outer side fawn to reddish. The thickness varies greatly. The later Saxon pottery tends to wear badly in the soil, but there is a considerable amount of Saxon flint-gritted pottery, often orange or ochre colour on the outside, and hand-made, sometimes burnished. There is a small amount of flint-

gritted grey fabric with a slurried surface. Three pieces of grass-wiped pottery, mid-Saxon, and Saxon pottery with shell and chalk inclusions were also found. The chalk tends to burn out in the firing, leaving a corky appearance. One sherd of this type has a rouletted design of small rectangles. Only two of the grass-tempered sherds are decorated, one with a simple stamped cross and the other with only part of the cross present.

This collection of pottery is ample evidence of an early Saxon settlement on this site. The greater proportion of grass-tempered pottery over later Saxon fabrics may point to a diminishing Saxon presence or, more probably, to the lack of durability of the later Saxon wares. On the face of it, some form of continuity in occupation seems likely, given the development of the village nearby, and the Manor immediately adjacent. It may be relevant at this point to note that the place-name Buriton is of Saxon origin, meaning 'the settlement by the fort'.

POSTSCRIPT

Lawn Field adjoins the paddocks of Buriton Manor House. Probably Elizabethan, this house was greatly enlarged in the early 18th century, and the Lawn Field was an area of parkland attached to the house. Buriton Manor was bought by Edward Gibbon, grandfather of the historian, in 1724, and inherited by his grandson in 1770 on the death of his father, also Edward. The historian described the house as 'An old mansion in a state of decay, converted into the fashion and convenience of a modern house; the aspect of the adjacent grounds was various and cheerful; the downs commanded a noble prospect, and the long hanging woods in sight of the house could not perhaps have been improved by art or expense.' (Gibbon 1796). It is interesting to consider that Edward Gibbon was examining this view from his first floor library window across a site which, unbeknown to him, spanned the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Edward Gibbon was to leave Buriton Manor

Z

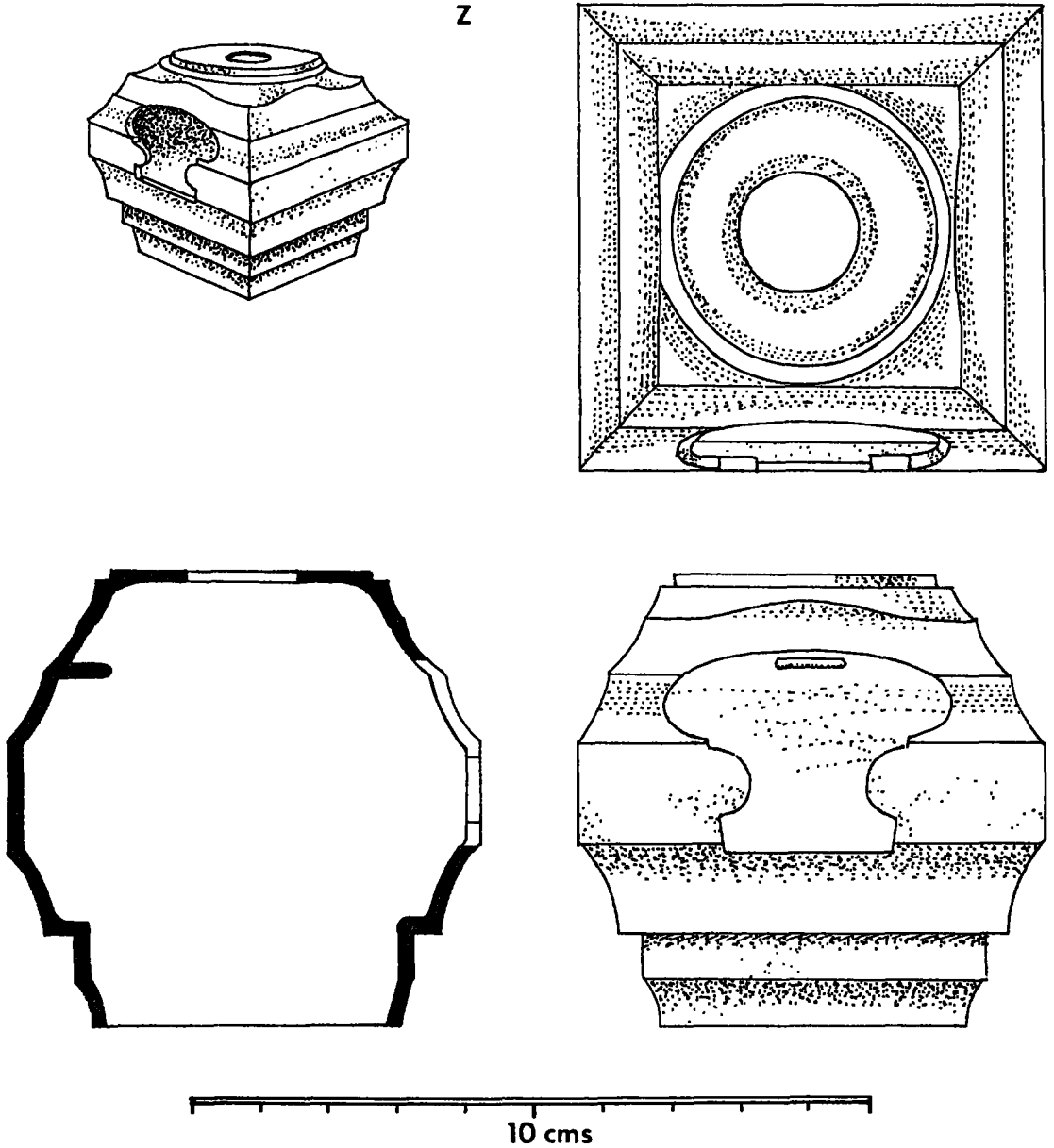


Fig 7. Lawn Field, Buriton: Roman find, Z (scale of 10 cm).

two years after his father's death and, contrary to local tradition, let the manor until five years before his own death, the proceeds from the tenancy, both of the Lawn Field and the Manor, helping towards his work on the 'Decline and Fall'.

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