

AN EARLY IRON AGE PIT AT REGENT'S PARK, SOUTHAMPTON

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with contributions by T Champion and B Biddle

INTRODUCTION

This site, located in the back garden of 80 Prince of Wales Avenue, Regents Park, was excavated in August and early September, 1984. It was discovered by the McCormick family, who were excavating a soakaway for a proposed house extension. Their son Michael noticed a complete pot, and the fragments of two more, which he brought to God's House Tower Museum in Southampton. They were tentatively identified as Early Saxon at first, but further examination suggested they were of Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age date, as discussed below.

As a result of this find Southampton Museums Archaeology Section requested and received permission to conduct further investigations. The site code is SOU 189 and all archives and finds have been deposited in Southampton City Museums.

THE SITE (Figs 1-3)

The site (Nat Grid Ref SU 3920 1363) was located on the edge of the plateau gravels, 16.5m above Ordnance Datum. The ground slopes away immediately to the west towards Tanners Brook and gently to the south towards the Test. The clay of the Bracklesham Beds, which underlies the gravel, is exposed on these slopes.

The soakaway pit dug by the McCormick family was approximately one metre square, and 1.45 metres deep, with vertical sides, and was dug into the natural gravel. The overburden, consisting of garden topsoil and a gravelly sandy loam subsoil was approximately 0.4m deep, and beneath it, except where cut by features, was the natural gravel.

Two major features were visible in section.

The first, feature 1, showing in the south face and extending about 0.5m along the west face, appeared to be a shallow pit. At its northern end in the west section, a small feature, possibly a stake-hole or small post-hole, was visible; while at the eastern end of its south section was another slightly larger feature. The second major feature, feature 2, appeared to be a deeper pit, showing in the north and east sections. The location of the soakaway pit had unfortunately completely severed any direct relationship between the two features.

The excavation involved extending the soakaway on three sides, in the hope of revealing the extent and nature of the two major features. Due to building regulations it was not possible to extend the pit to the west, towards the house. The pit was extended 1.05m to the north, in two stages, 1m to the south, and 0.5m to the east.

On excavation the two major features, 1 and 2, appeared to form one sub-rectangular pit 2.8m long, 1.2m wide, and cut into the natural gravel to a depth of 56cm below its surface. Due to the location of the soakaway pit it was not possible to be certain but the shape of the features suggests this interpretation. The pit had a small round feature 7cm deep cut into the bottom at the northern end.

It was noted that the fill of feature 2 remained moist throughout the period it was exposed, despite the prevailing dry weather. This was in contrast to the fill of feature 1 (context 6) which dried out once exposed. The fill of feature 2 was subject to intense worm and root action. This was a major cause of the homogeneity of the fill and the diffuse nature of the smaller deposits within it.

The primary fill, context 19, was a very

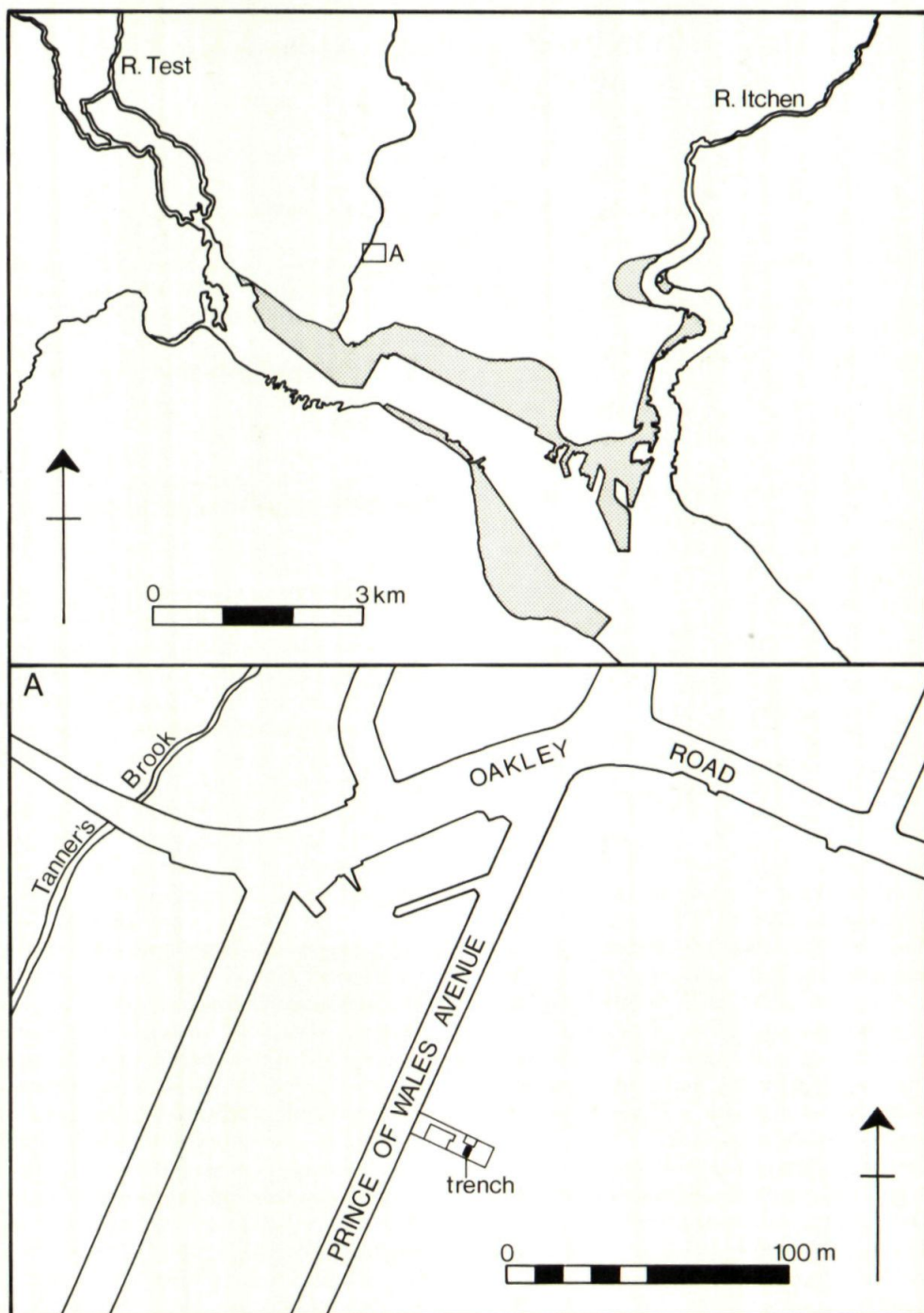


Fig 1. Regent's Park, Southampton: location maps (reclaimed land stippled).

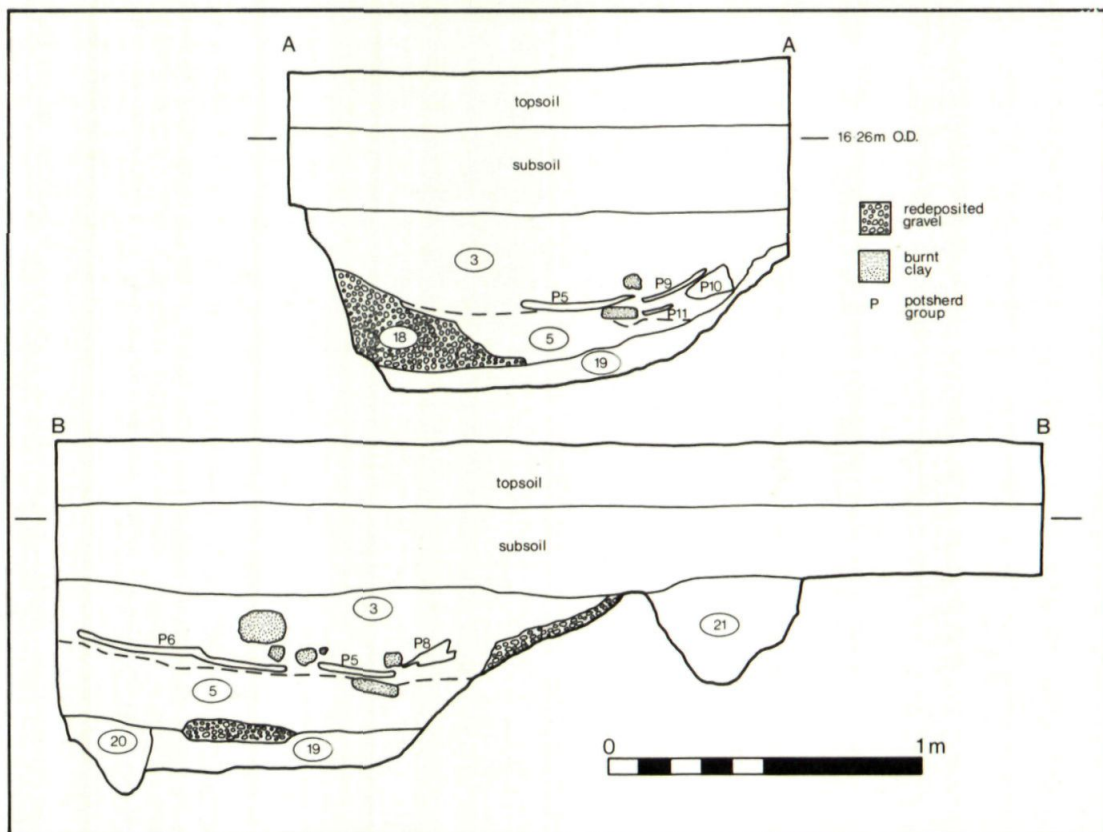


Fig 2. Regent's Park, Southampton: E-W (top) and N-S (bottom) sections.

gravelly sandy loam, containing a few charcoal fragments and carbonized cereal grains. This was partly sealed by redeposited gravel (context 18) on the west side, probably due to slumping of the side of the pit.

The upper fill, comprising contexts 3 and 5, was a fairly homogeneous silt loam with common flint pebbles, many of them burnt or red-patinated. Although common throughout, the burnt flints were more numerous in the upper part of the fill, but there were several other concentrations, usually associated with fragments of burnt clay and reddening of the soil. Charcoal fragments, burnt bone fragments, carbonized grain and particles of fuel ash slag were found throughout.

The lower part of this fill, context 5, was

similar, but also contained small diffuse deposits of a light coloured material, possibly ash or lime, and a slightly larger amount of burnt bone fragments and ash slag.

The boundary between context 3 and 5 was very diffuse, due to the similarity of the layers and to worm action. However, noticeable amounts of the light-coloured materials occurred immediately under some of the groups of pot sherds, and context 5 was presumed to predate the deposition of these sherds.

Both contexts contained lumps of burnt clay, some fairly soft and friable, several of which measured over 10cms across. Most were rounded but one was flat.

The pot sherds were mainly found in distinct groups, consisting partly of sherds which clearly

joined. They were located in the lower part of context 3, at the interface between contexts 3 and 5, and in the upper part of context 5. Most of the sherds were of large shouldered jars of a very coarse grass-tempered fabric. Rim and shoulder forms suggested the presence of two vessels, which was confirmed by further examination. Two groups contained sherds of both pots. Each group of sherds was numbered when found. To avoid confusion the individual vessels, which are discussed below, were allocated

numbers equivalent to sherd groups which did not contain sherds of more than one pot. Thus pot 4 comprised sherds from groups 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, and possibly 7. Pot 8 comprised sherds from groups 5, 8 and the southern portion of group 9, adjacent to groups 5 and 8. The plan (Fig 3) shows the location of these groups in the pit. Pots 1, 2, and 3 are the vessels originally brought to the museum.

One of the sherd groups sealed a small jar (pot 10) of similar fabric, which was upright and

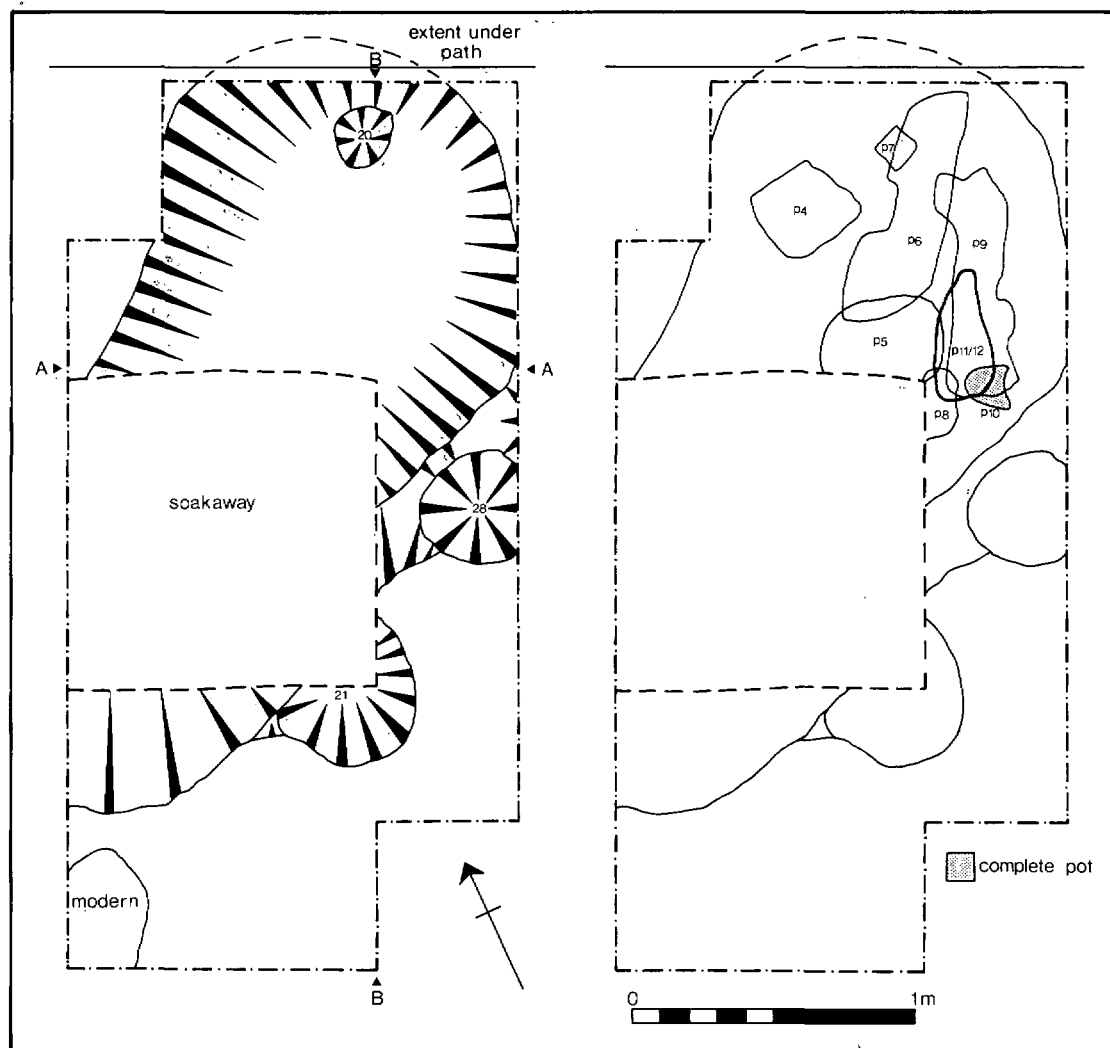


Fig 3. Regent's Park, Southampton: the pit as excavated (left), and location of pot sherd groups (right).

near-complete *in situ*. This was lifted as one block complete with its contents, and removed to the conservation laboratory. The contents, which were similar to the soil of context 5, were removed and washed through a 500 micron sieve. The sieving produced a number of small fragments of burnt bone, small fragments of charcoal, a few carbonized cereal grains, small particles of hammerscale and fuel ash slag. Very small fragments of the coarse pottery were common.

Two groups (5 and 8) of the coarseware sherds had been cut through during the excavation of the soakaway, but no sherds of this fabric were among those brought to the Museum. The extremely coarse and rather friable nature of the fabric probably resulted in it not being noticed when the soakaway was being dug. Unfortunately, the soil from the soakaway had already been removed and disposed of before the archaeologists began work and it was not therefore possible to recover material from it. The absence of any base sherds from the two large jars is probably a result of this.

The positioning in the pit of large groups of sherds lying flat, some with concave faces upwards, may have contributed to the unusual degree of moisture retention in the pit.

Carbonized cereal grains were present in the lower part of context 3 and throughout context 5. Some small concentrations were noted, and a large deposit, forming a rounded block some 150mm across and several centimetres deep, was found immediately under one small group of sherds, part of one of the large jars. Most of this deposit was lifted in one block and sieved in the laboratory, producing over 4000 complete and many fragmentary grains (see following report). The remainder was treated as a soil sample, and produced over 200 grains and fragments. The deposit also contained fragments of burnt bone, fuel ash slag, hammerscale and burnt clay, as well as many small fragments of coarse pottery. Given the degree of disturbance of the soil many of the carbonized grains found in the pit were probably derived from this deposit.

At the north end of the pit a small round feature (context 20) 200mm² in diameter was cut

into the gravel, 70mm deeper than the pit bottom. It cut the primary fill, and was apparently sealed by context 5, but this was unclear, the soil being very similar.

A bowl shaped depression, context 26, adjoined the pit to the south-east. It was 260mm deep, from the top of the gravel, about 400mm in diameter, and the fill was indistinguishable from context 3. The boundary was diffuse, and it as impossible, therefore, to determine whether the feature cut the pit, was cut by it, or was contemporary.

The feature at the south end of the soakaway, feature 1, was shallower, and the gravel sloped up steeply from the bottom. It did not extend as far as the east edge of the soakaway. On excavation its shape and position suggested that it formed the southern extremity of feature 2, being more silty, and containing fewer burnt flints. It also failed to retain moisture in the same manner, but this was probably due to its shallowness and the absence of large pot sherds. The finds from context 6 were similar to those from contexts 3 and 5, consisting of charcoal and burnt clay and bone fragments, with some carbonized cereal grains, and a few pot sherds.

Adjacent to the eastern edge of feature 1 was a round feature, context 21. It was 420mm in diameter, and 330mm deep, from the surface of the gravel. The fill was different from context 6, being more sandy. The boundary was diffuse due to worm action, and it was not possible to determine whether 21 cut feature 1, or vice-versa. The position of 21 in relation to feature 1 is similar to that of 28 in relation to feature 2, although the former was slightly deeper. Both slightly overlapped the edge of the supposed pit.

SAMPLING AND FINDS

It was decided to take extensive soil samples, to aid recovery of any small items which might otherwise be missed. Bulk samples of standard 5000ml size were taken from the main layers. Further samples of varying sizes were taken from the soil surrounding each group of pot sherds, in the hope of recovering any material specifically associated with the pots. However,

the degree of disturbance of the soil had probably obscured any such relationship. The soil removed from the pot sherd groups during cleaning was also sieved.

All samples were washed through a 500 micron mesh.

The results of the sieving were consistent throughout the sampling programme. Bulk samples and smaller samples both contained burnt bone fragments, carbonized cereal grains, small particles of hammer scale and smithing slag, and fragments of pot. Burnt clay fragments and fuel ash slag were commonly found. A few very small and unidentifiable fragments of copper alloy were also found.

The hammer scale and associated particles of slag were present in sufficient quantities throughout the pit to indicate iron-working in the vicinity, contemporary with the deposition of the contents (G McDonnell, pers. comm.). Many of the small particles of burnt clay and flint obtained from sieving were found to respond to a magnet, indicating that they had been subjected to fairly intense heat. The evidence for iron-working, together with the number of burnt clay fragments and burnt flints, suggests that part of the material deposited in the pit was derived from the vicinity of a smithy.

Several small fragments of a ferruginous sandstone were found in the pit. It would have been possible to obtain iron from this, but the process would have been very inefficient.

One worked stone object (Fig 5, no. 1) was found in context 6. This was examined by Dr David Williams of the Department of Archaeology, Southampton. It is part of a rubber for a saddle quern in a dark grey glauconitic sandstone, identical to material from Lodsworth, Sussex.

The bone from the site was examined by Jennifer Bourdillon, of the Wessex Faunal Remains Unit, Southampton University. The larger fragments of burnt bone were identified as sheep and red deer antler. The remaining small fragments were unidentifiable, apart from a few which were possibly human. The few unburnt bones were also of domestic mammal, with one exception which might be human, but it is probably young cow. However, these were all

found in the upper part of context 3 and may have been derived from the later overburden.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Southampton City Museums are grateful to Mr and Mrs J McCormick for permission to excavate, and for the donation of the finds to the Museum; and especially to Michael McCormick for bringing the site to the Museum's attention. The author is grateful to the City Archaeological Officer, Mark Brisbane, for his advice, to Dr Tim Champion for his report on the pottery, Brian Biddle for his report on the seeds, and to Jennifer Bourdillon, Dr David Williams and Gerry McDonnell for their comments. Thanks are also due to Clive Debenham for his assistance on site, Simon Griffin for drawing the pottery and to Angela Cousins for her typing.

THE POTTERY by Dr T C Champion (Figs 4-5)

1. Small jar in coarse light brown fabric with plentiful dark sand, sparse small to medium angular flint, and occasional large voids. Exterior vertically wiped.
2. Furrowed bowl in fine dark grey fabric, with sparse small angular flint and some finely crushed chalk; exterior mid-brown to dark grey, well burnished. Decoration of broad burnished furrows in horizontal band above shoulder, overlain by three panels each of four oblique furrows (two panels and the spacing between them survive, so that the original pattern can be restored with confidence).
3. Furrowed bowl, fabric and finish similar to no. 2. Three broad burnished furrows above the shoulder.
4. Large jar in coarse light brown to orange fabric, with sparse rounded flint up to 5mm, heavily vesicular; the voids presumably result from the loss of organic matter. Exterior vertically smoothed. Diagonal impressions across the top of the rim to give 'piecrust' effect, and finger-nail or stick impressions on outside of the rim; shoulder pinched to produce sharp profile and finger-tip impressions below the angle.
8. Large jar in coarse light brown to dark grey fabric similar to no. 4. Finger-nail impressions on shoulder.

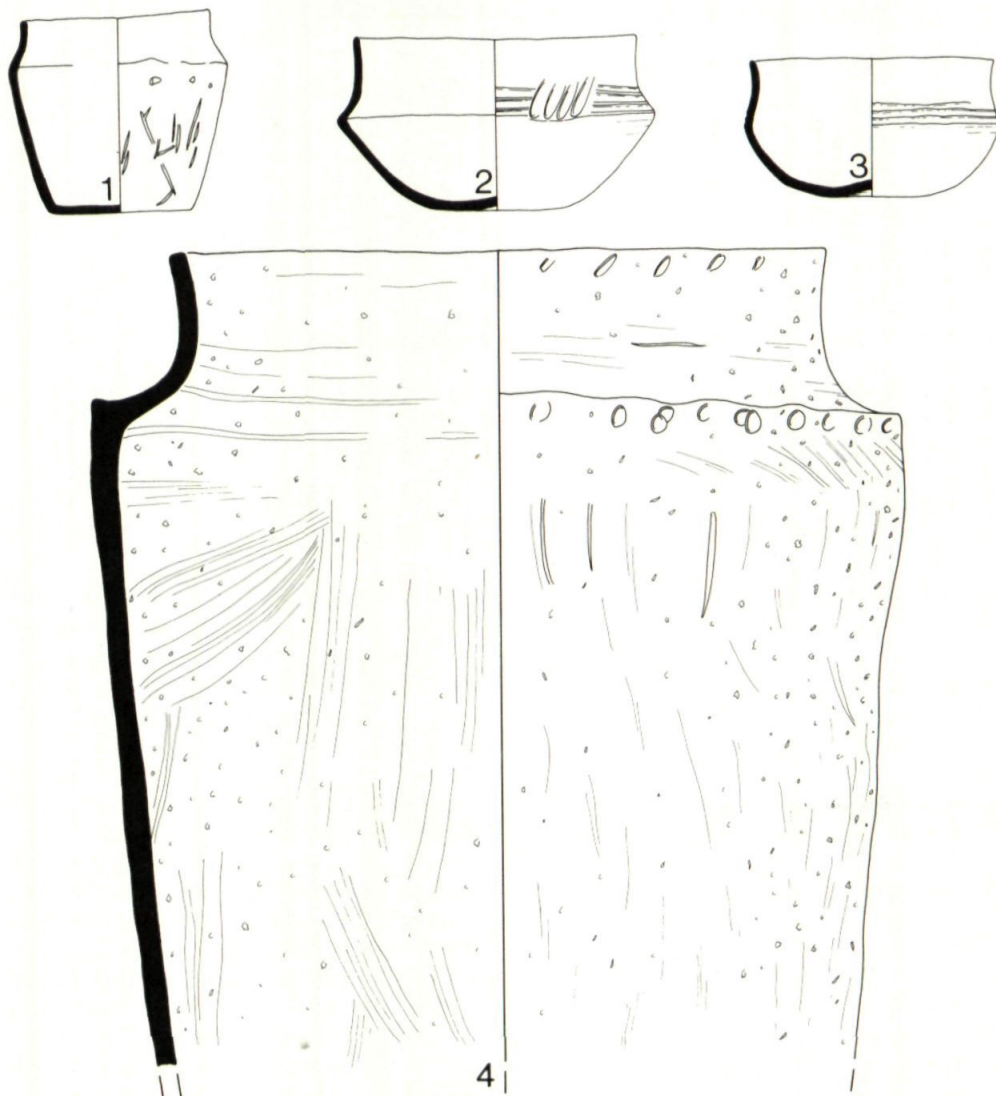


Fig 4. Regent's Park, Southampton: the pottery. Scale $\frac{1}{4}$.

10. Small jar in coarse, very vesicular fabric similar to no. 4. Exterior shows light vertical scoring. Finger-tip impressions on outside of rim and on top of shoulder.

There were also a number of other small sherds from the initial discovery of the pot. They are mostly coarse wares compatible with those

described above, but one is a fragment of a late Iron Age or early Roman lid. Since they are from somewhat insecure contexts, they are not further discussed.

This assemblage clearly belongs to the ceramic tradition of the period covering the end of the Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron

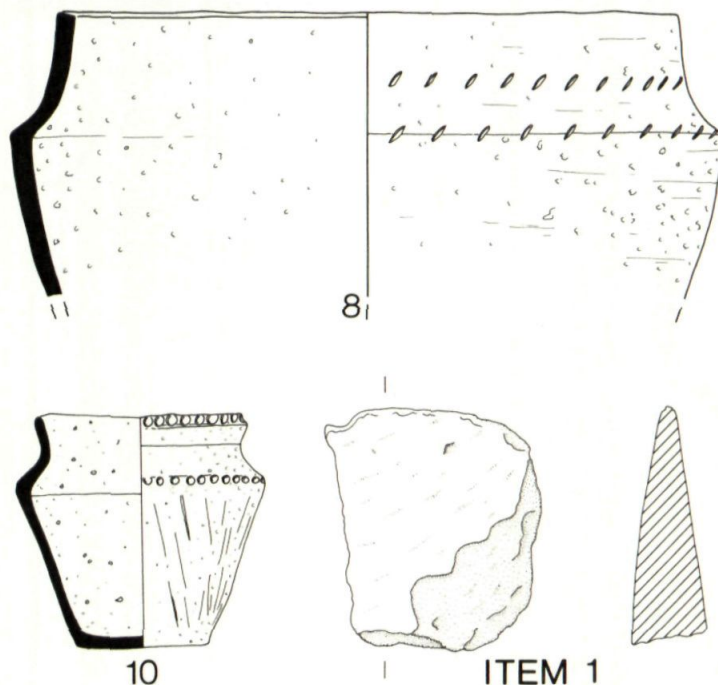


Fig 5. Regent's Park, Southampton: the pottery, and the sandstone quern rubber (Item 1). Scale 4.

Age, and all the vessels can to some extent be paralleled on other sites of that period in Hampshire.

The distinctive furrowed bowls (nos 2-3) belong to a class long recognised as diagnostic of the earliest Iron Age pottery. They are not the earlier type, characterised by biconical form, short shoulders and sharply defined furrows, attributed by Cunliffe (1978, 33 & 351) to his Early All Cannings Cross group, but the later type with higher rims and broader, shallower furrows, characteristic of his Later All Cannings Cross group and continuing into his All Cannings Cross-Meon Hill group (Cunliffe 1978, 35, 38, 355). Bowls of this type are found locally, for instance, at Meon Hill (Liddell 1935, 27), Old Down Farm, Andover (Davies 1981, Fig 15, 26 and 29) and Winnall Down (Hawkes 1985, Fig 52, 10-18); there are also examples among the collection of pottery from the Iron Age features excavated at St. George's Street, Winchester (Cunliffe 1964, 55 and fig 12, 1-2). These two

new examples are entirely typical of this class of bowl, though they lack the haematite coating found on some and there is no good parallel for the panels of oblique furrowing on no. 2.

The coarse-ware jars can also be matched on local sites, both in form and in decoration. The forms include the high rounded shoulder and short upright rim of no. 1, and the sharper shoulders and longer necks of nos 4, 8 and 10, while the decoration is executed by means of finger-tip and finger-nail impressions on the top of the rim (no 4), the outside of the rim (nos 4 and 10) and the shoulder (nos 4, 8 and 10). These features are well paralleled in the assemblages from Old Down Farm (Davies 1981, 104-8 and Figs 15-16) and especially Winnall Down (Hawkes 1985, 61-62 and Fig 53).

The fabric of the two furrowed bowls (nos 2 and 3) suggests manufacture on the chalk downlands to the north of the Hampshire basin, while the others could have been made locally.

One unusual characteristic of these jars is

their size. The majority of published jars of the early Iron Age have shoulder diameters in the range 16–25cm (heights are generally more difficult to estimate with any precision, but seem to fall within the same range). None of these jars falls within this range, two being larger and two smaller. Jars larger than the average have been recorded, for example, at Winnall Down (Hawkes 1985, fig 53, 48) and Portsdown (Bradley & Lewis 1968, Fig 16), but ones smaller than average are rarer, though they do exist, for example at All Cannings Cross, Wiltshire (Cunnington 1923, Pl 29, 5–7). Quite why this particular pit should contain jars which all fall at the two extremes of the size range of the period is not clear.

The date of the pottery can be broadly defined. The ceramic sequence outlined for Wessex by Cunliffe (1978) now needs to be revised in the light of the new evidence provided by the large assemblage from Danebury. The earliest phases from that site have produced a ceramic assemblage characterised by the presence of scratch-decorated, cordoned bowls and predominantly undecorated coarse wares; furrowed bowls are entirely absent and finger-tip and finger-nail decoration are very rare (Cunliffe 1984, 310), though Danebury is within the geographical distribution of those traits. The

simplest solution is that there is a chronological distinction between the two types of assemblage (Cunliffe 1984, 254); though both could be assigned to Cunliffe's original All Cannings Cross-Meon Hill group, this must now be divided into earlier and later phases, of which the earlier is absent from and predates the start of occupation at Danebury in mid-sixth century BC. The Phase 3 pottery at Winnall Down was not subdivided on this basis, and that phase is dated from the sixth to the third century BC (Fasham 1985, 18); at Old Down Farm, however, the early Iron Age pottery was divided in this way, into Phases 3 and 4, and Phase 3 was assigned to the seventh century BC.

Though precision is impossible, the pottery from this pit should therefore be dated to the seventh or early sixth century BC.

THE PLANT REMAINS by Brian Biddle

The charred grain and other seeds were obtained from the Regent's Park pit soil samples. There were forty two samples in all which produced seeds, but the composition of the samples and the observations of P R Cottrell detailed above suggest that the grain all originated as one deposit, and it is treated as such in this report. The exception to this is the non

Table 1. *SOU189 Total Seeds*

Species	Synonym	Number	Max	Min	Mean	Frequency
CORYLACEAE						
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.	Hazel	3	1	0	0.07	0.07%
POLYGONACEAE						
<i>Polygonum persicaria</i> L.	Persicaria	3	2	0	0.07	0.07%
<i>Polygonum lapathifolium</i> L.	Pale Persicaria	2	2	0	0.04	0.05%
CHENOPODIACEAE						
<i>Chenopodium album</i> L.	Fat Hen	9	5	0	0.21	0.21%
GRAMINEAE						
<i>Bromus secalinus/mollis</i>	Rye Grass/Chess	58	12	0	1.38	1.34%
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L.	Spelt Wheat	108	33	0	2.57	2.49%
<i>Triticum cf dicoccum</i> L.	Emmer Wheat	5	5	0	0.11	0.12%
<i>Triticum cf aestivum</i> L.	Bread Wheat	5	5	0	0.11	0.12%
<i>Hordeum cf vulgare</i>	Hulled Barley	4147	705	0*	98.73	95.51%
Seed Sp Indet		2	2	0	0.04	0.05%
Cereal Fragments		3281				75.56%

arable weeds (*Chenopodium* and *Polygonum*) which were localised within the pit, and were probably not contaminants of the original grain deposit. Table 1 is a combined list for the whole feature with the species identified in the order of Flora Europaea (Tutin *et al.* 1964–1980), showing the total, maximum, minimum, and mean number of seeds and the total as percentages of the total number of whole seeds.

The Remains

The seed remains proved to be almost entirely of barley, with only a few other seeds. There were no spikelet fragments, and a very few lemma and/or palea fragments adhering to some of the grains. This would equate to Hillman's processing stage 16, although stage 14 (hand sorting for weeds of the same size as the prime grain) may have been omitted. The level of impurities is also well within the current UK intervention standard for barley which permits up to 12% impurities (MAFF 1985). Only one sample failed to produce any barley.

The barley all appears to be of a hulled type, although probably not all of the same species. There are some of the lop-sided lateral grains that are found in six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), but insufficient to make the 2:1 that would be expected if the grain were all six-row. It is possible, therefore, that the grain represents a mixture of six and two-row barley (*H. vulgare* and *H. distichon*), although Monk (1985 pers. comm.) has suggested that the laterals may have been undeveloped and lost in processing. Considering the purity of the crop the latter seems more likely. Furthermore the barley had all been sprouted, as could be seen from the absence of

embryos on the grains. This suggests that the grain had been malted, most probably for brewing, prior to becoming charred. Green (1985 pers. comm.) has informed me that the overall composition of the sample resembles the waste material removed from modern malt dryers, and similar grains have been recovered from 'corn dryers' at Foxholes Farm, Hertfordshire (Monk 1985 pers. comm.) and Catsgore, Somerset (Hillman 1981). In the latter case it was spelt rather than barley that had been malted.

The remainder of the seeds can be considered as weeds within the barley crop, except where noted above. The wheat may have been a relic of previous cultivation. Also in the samples were many small fragments of cereal grains. These were almost certainly barley, but were too small to be quantified with the rest of the seed.

Summary and Conclusion

The deposit was composed of sprouted (malted) barley with few contaminants. This implies some activity other than storage was going on in the area, most probably brewing. It is also possible that 'corn dryers' were located in the area. If further excavation becomes possible, it would be worth considering the possibility of finding structures that could have been used for the drying of cereals.

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