

SITE EVALUATION AND WATCHING BRIEF AT LONDON ROAD, HOLYBOURNE, ALTON

By DAVID GRAHAM

with contributions by M A B LYNE and R A MERSON

ABSTRACT

Site evaluation and subsequent watching brief at a housing development on land previously occupied by Croucher's Factory. The work located the badly disturbed remains of Roman timber buildings, pits and wells and showed that the Roman town at Neatham had originally extended across most of the site.

INTRODUCTION

The site of Croucher's factory NGR 74144116 (now known as Bourne Place) lies on the south side of London Road and immediately to the east of Vindomis Close on the eastern outskirts of Holybourne (Figs 1 and 2). The area was potentially significant in that Vindomis Close was built on the centre of a Roman small town and there was every expectation that this settlement had originally continued eastwards under the present site.

In 1988 the land was acquired for housing development by Clarke Homes Ltd and as a result the author was asked to carry out an archaeological site evaluation by Mr M F Hughes of the Hampshire County Planning Department. The work was completed in the autumn of 1988 and led to a site watching brief being included in the planning consent.

This note therefore covers the results obtained from both the evaluation and the watching brief, which was completed in July 1989. The site archive and finds have been deposited with the Hampshire County Museum Service (Acc No A1990.5).

Background

The centre of the partially excavated Roman small town at Neatham (Millett and Graham

1986) lies immediately to the west of the current site and is crossed firstly by the north-south Silchester to Chichester Roman road and secondly by an east-west road running from Winchester towards London (Fig 1). The excavations under Vindomis Close also revealed the remains of an internal street system lined with timber buildings and their associated yards, which contained wells, hearths and rubbish pits (Fig 2).

In addition, 1st/2nd century Roman cremation burials have been found along the stream to the north and to the south of Bourne Place (Fig 1).

Several large Roman buildings are also known to have existed in the countryside immediately surrounding the town.

Topography and Geology

The Bourne Place development covers an area of approximately 1.15 ha and lies on the eastern end of a terrace of river gravel to the north of the river Wey. The gravel underlies the western two thirds of the site, but beyond this point has been cut by a small stream (now carried in underground pipes) which also marks the eastern boundary of the development. This eastern third of the site consists of the heavy alluvial clay, which has been exposed by the action of the stream.

The original land surface sloped eastward with increasing steepness, especially from the edge of the gravel, down to the stream and also sloped southwards, though less steeply, to the river Wey. The gravel terrace itself, thus formed a well drained and not unreasonably steep surface in Roman times. This natural slope was extensively altered however, prior to the construction of the recently demolished

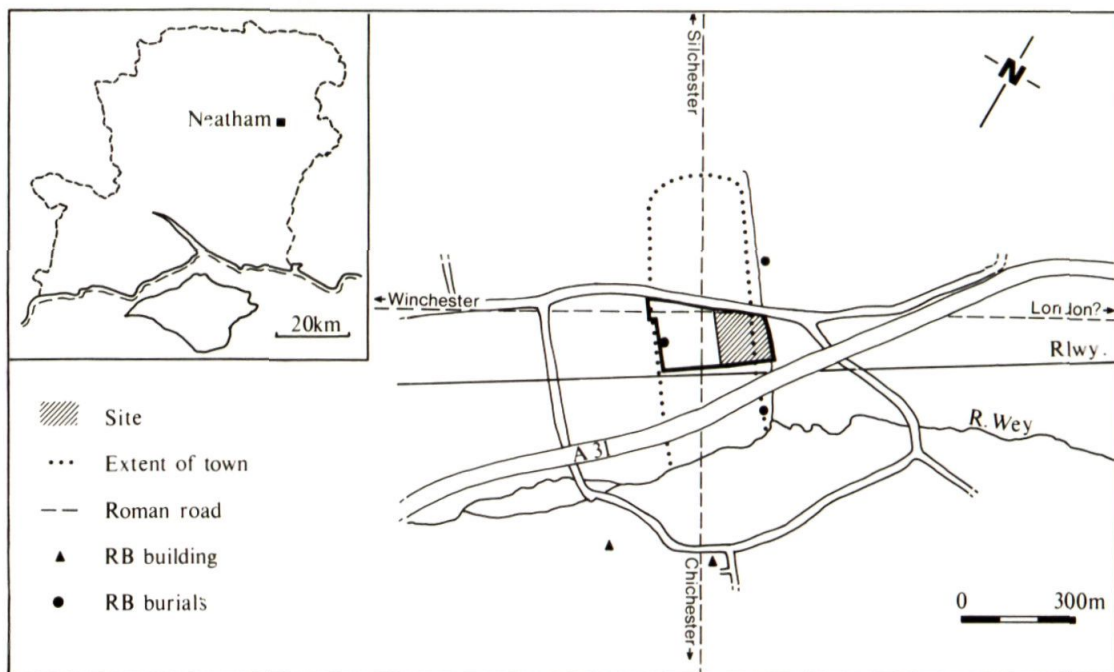


Fig 1. Location Plan.

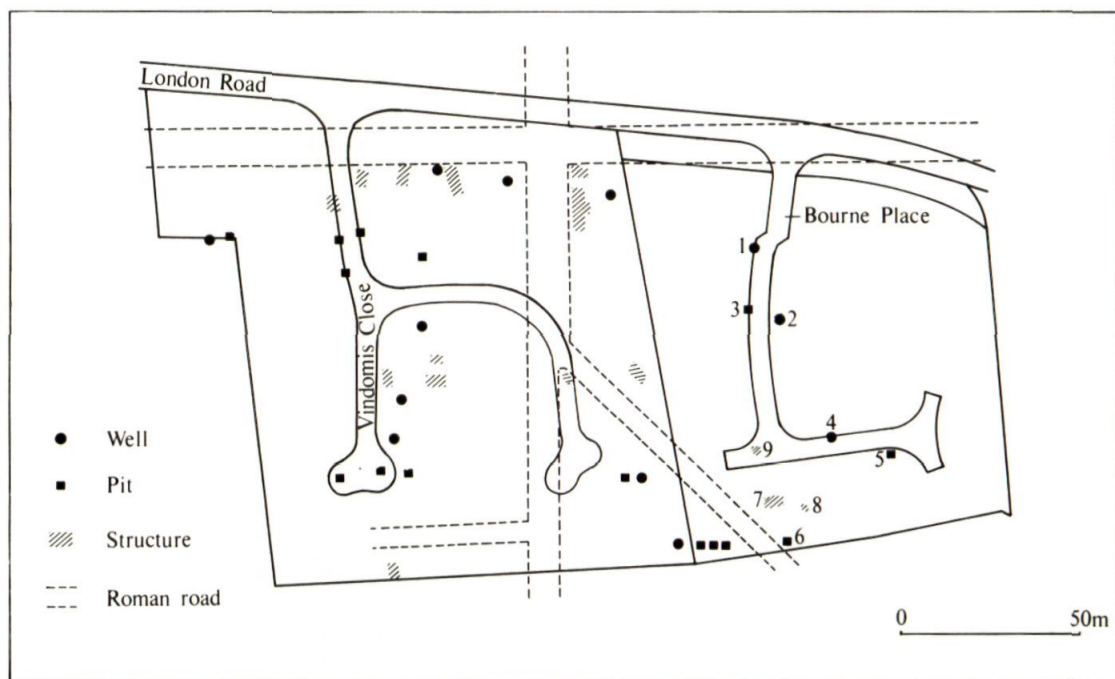


Fig 2. Site Plan.

factory (Croucher's). Gravel was removed from the western half of the site and extensive dumping of spoil occurred elsewhere, to a depth of 3.60 m of material over the stream, in order to level the site. This has resulted in the modern ground surface, on the western side of the site, being lowered by up to 1 m, with obvious effects on the survival of the Roman material; while elsewhere the Roman levels have been buried almost beyond reach. A number of modern rubbish pits and concrete hut bases were encountered during the site evaluation, relating to a Land Army Camp built during the Second World War, but on the whole these did not appear to have disturbed the Roman levels. Croucher's factory itself and its associated car park had covered approximately the northern half of the site and greatly restricted the areas available for investigation.

THE RESULTS

The site evaluation consisted of the excavation, initially by machine, of a number of small trial trenches over as much of the site as was available. Intact Roman occupation material was found at depths varying between 1.0 m and 2.0 m in the south west quarter of the site. To the east, where the original ground surface lies up to 3.60 m below the modern surface, only one trench was dug deep enough to reach the Roman levels, which here consisted of a light scatter of pottery and tile and yielded one coin. The original surface of the north west third of the site had been removed, as described above, and this had had the effect of leaving only deeper archaeological features intact (Fig 2).

Several of the trial trenches in the south western part of the site were amalgamated in an attempt to try to establish the nature of the Roman occupation. In so far as could be seen in the restricted areas examined, the archaeological levels were identical to those found during the excavations on the 'Vindomis Close' site. As in that case, the bulk of the superficial Roman levels had been destroyed by later ploughing, but a thin layer of occu-

pation material remained intact, overlying structural features. The main trench exposed an apparently rectangular laid gravel surface and post holes (plan deposited with site archive), though not enough of this feature (Fig 2: 7) was uncovered to allow for a proper interpretation. Two other similar areas of gravel (Fig 2: 8 and 9) were located in nearby trial trenches, though again because of the depth of soil cover, it was not possible to strip a large enough area to plan the shape of these features. However, as the 'Vindomis Close' excavations had recorded a small Roman road heading towards the south west corner of the current site (Fig 2), it seems probable that these surfaces represent the floors of timber buildings fronting the road. In all cases the overlying occupation material yielded quantities of abraded 3rd/4th century pottery and a number of coins of similar date range.

Elsewhere on the site a number of truncated pits and wells were recorded during deeper earthmoving works by the developers (mainly during the construction of the sewer). In no case was it possible to empty a well completely, but again, these appeared to be very similar to those excavated under Vindomis Close.

Well 1 (Figs 2 and 3) had the usual conical head, produced by erosion and collapse in the Roman period, but appeared originally to have had a stone lined circular shaft. A rectangular, stone lined pit (Fig 3, 101) had been dug into the top of the fill, though the function of this was unclear. Well 2 (Figs 2 and 3) was sectioned to a depth of 3.5 m by a sewer trench. It had been dug through an earlier pit and appeared to be associated with a surrounding gravelled surface and a small ditch. The shaft itself was rectangular in shape and contained a number of fill levels, which yielded a considerable quantity of pottery, the larger sherds coming from the lower levels. Two coins and a number of bronze small finds, including a fine cloak pin (Fig 4: 1), were also recovered from the shaft. The section showed two small recuts, the upper one of which (205) contained a human skeleton. This had largely been removed in the sewer trench works, but the top

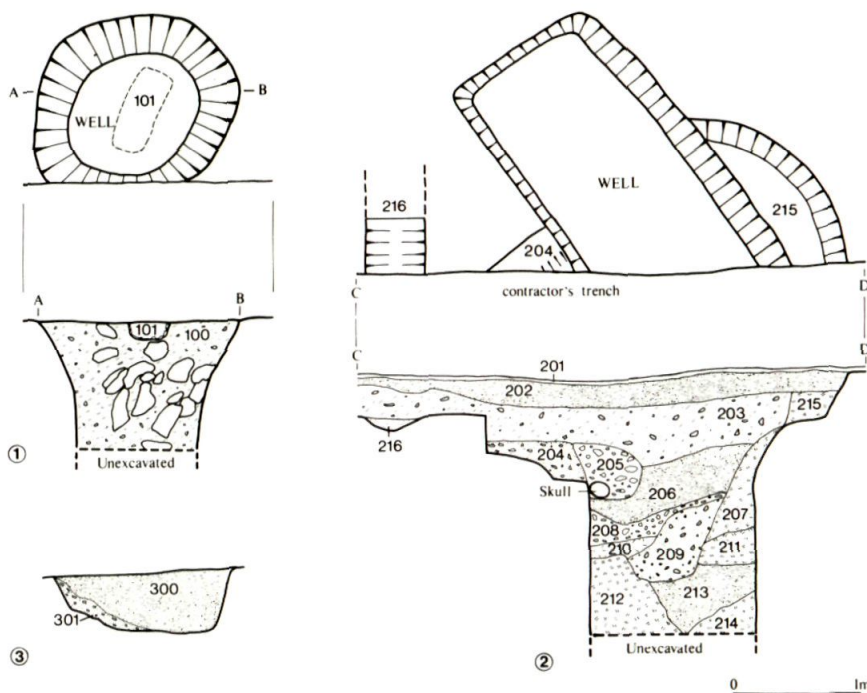


Fig 3. 1. Well 1 – plan, showing feature 101 superimposed; 2. Well 1 – section; 3. Well 2 and associated pit: – plan; 4. Well 2 and associated pits – section; 5. Pit 3 – section. Stratigraphys; 100 Clay/soil; 101 Humic soil; 200 Topsoil; 201 Gravel; 202 Dark occupation; 203, 204 Flint/soil – light brown; 205 Clay/chalk; 206 Dark occupation; 207 Light brown clay; 208 Chalk; 209 Flint/occupation; 210–212 Clay; 213 Dark occupation; 214 Clay; 215 Gravel/soil; 216 Gravel/soil; 300 Dark occupation; 301 Light brown clay.

of the cranium remained in section (the cranium was examined by Dr M Hewett, who was of the opinion that the burial was that of a normally developed adult). No burial goods were found in the pit, though of course the majority of the grave had been destroyed by the developer's machine. It was not possible, for reasons of time, to record more than the top 2 m of the fill. Well 4 (Fig 2) was observed, though not recorded, by a volunteer. It consisted of a shaft, exposed to a depth of about 1.60 m, which was filled with clunch blocks. Some of these blocks were squared and showed signs of tooling and must have come from a building. Elsewhere on the site three truncated pits were exposed (Fig 2: 3, 5 and 6), all of which contained the usual domestic debris. These pits were observed by volunteers but, with the exception of pit 3, were not planned.

CONCLUSION

The site posed considerable difficulties for detailed interpretation, as on the one hand in places all Roman surface features had been destroyed, whereas elsewhere the features were buried so deeply as to render excavation nearly impossible. Nevertheless the general pattern of Roman occupation seems to be a continuation of that found under Vindomis Close. The Roman small town had therefore originally continued, at least in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD, over the western two thirds of the Bourne Place site. This coincides with the area of the drier river gravel terrace. To the east of the gravel, the ground had originally sloped steeply down to the stream, which appears to have formed the boundary of the Roman settlement (site observation in 1973,

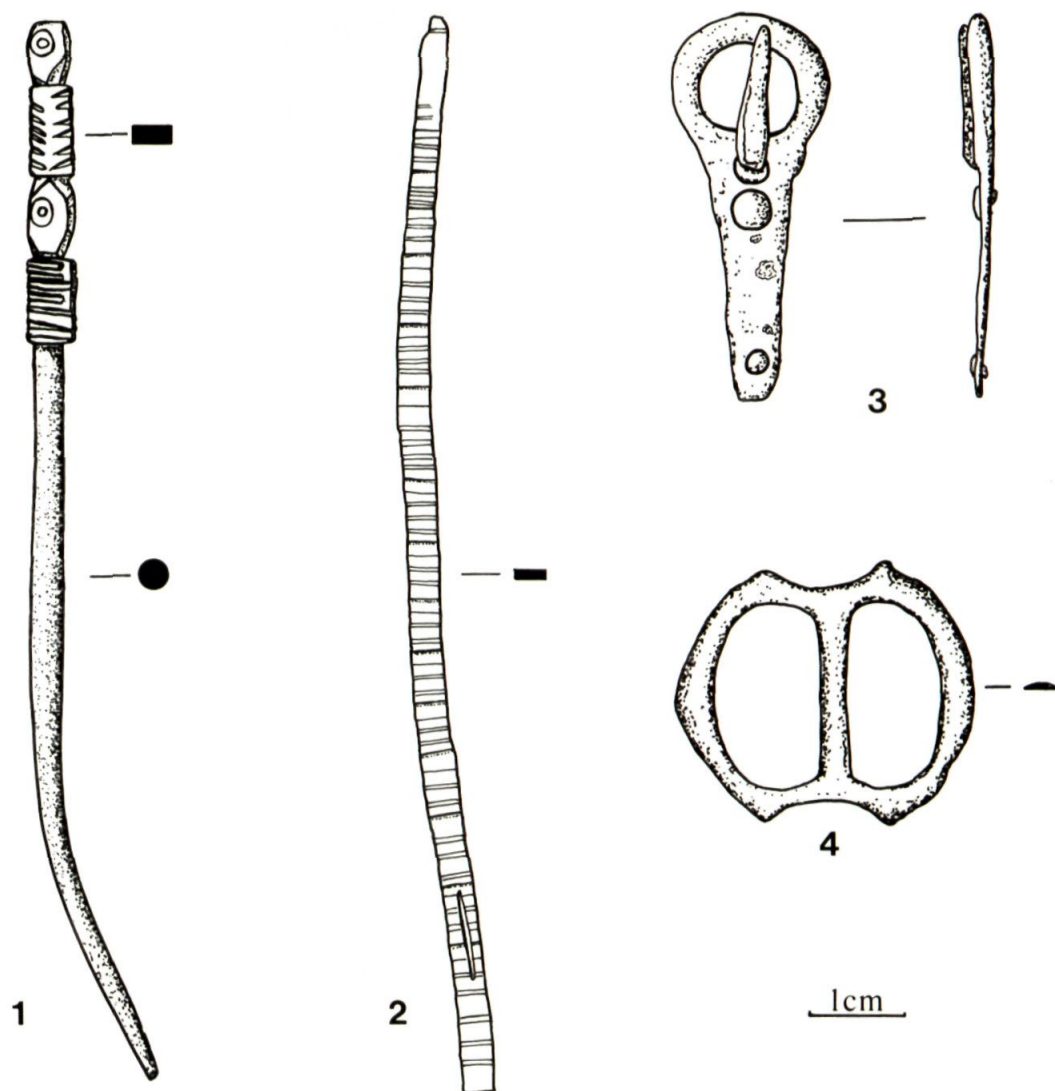


Fig 4. Small finds. 1 Bronze clothing pin with decorated head (from 203). 2 Flat bronze strip with parallel groove decoration (from 203). 3 Bronze strap buckle (Stray find, probably medieval). 4 Bronze belt fitting (Stray find, probably medieval).

on a development immediately to the east of the stream, failed to produce any Roman features).

No signs of any defensive or boundary ditches were noted, despite a careful watch on the developers' deep sewage trench works, which cut well into the natural and provided a section across virtually the whole site from

east to west. It therefore seems most unlikely that any earthwork defenses existed on this side of the town and perhaps, by inference, on any other side (but see discussion Millett & Graham 1986, 158). It is worth mentioning at this point however, that a substantial defensive rectangular enclosure, probably a man-sio, is known to lie within the area of the town

itself, just to the north west of the current site.

Analysis of the pottery from wells 1 and 2, by Malcolm Lyne, (below) has led him to suggest that both features were filled in at the same time (late 3rd century), and indeed in one case, separate pot sherds recovered from the upper fill levels of the two shafts, actually fitted together. This might indicate a general levelling and rebuilding of this area of the town at this date. The human burial in well 2, presumably dates to the early 4th century AD, as a coin of Constantine II (AD 324–330) was recovered from the overlying layer: (203). Occupation on the site appears to continue into the 5th century as a coin dating to the period 388–402 was recovered from the uppermost layer (201).

THE FINDS

Pottery by M A B Lyne

Most of the pottery recovered came from three well like features – none of which could be bottomed in the time available. Of these three features only 200 produced a large enough assemblage for analysis (Table 1). The material, which consisted overwhelmingly of

Alice Holt products, was largely dateable to the period AD 200–270 with a little earlier pot and some sherds attributable to the last quarter of the 3rd century. The presence of a cross join between sherds from layers 203 and 215 high up and low down in the tipped fills respectively, suggests that the pottery producing layers of rubbish were all derived from a common source and thrown in over a short period of time.

Although the material from layers 203 to 215 appears to be derived from the same midden, it seems possible that this rubbish dump was still being added to, whilst portions of it were thrown down the well, as the fill settled. It is unlikely that hand made grog tempered wares and Oxfordshire red colour coated vessels appeared at Neatham much before the end of the 3rd century and it is noticeable that these fabrics are only present in the uppermost rubbish tips.

Layer 202 lies in the very top of the well and includes a much higher proportion of post AD 270 Alice Holt black and white slipped wares, an Oxfordshire colour coat bottle of Young's type 8 and a type 29 beaker (1977). Grog tempered ware is also present. Although the assemblage includes large quantities of residual material some of the pot is clearly of slightly later, early 4th century date.

Table 1

<i>Layers descending</i>	202 <i>EVES</i>	203 <i>EVES</i>	206 <i>EVES</i>	209 <i>EVES</i>	213 <i>EVES</i>	215 <i>EVES</i>	Total <i>EVES</i>	%
Alice Holt pre-270	143	118	110	79	83	74	607	56.3
Alice Holt post-270	133	26	36			7	202	18.7
Six Bells ware	6						6	0.6
Coarse sanded	36						36	3.3
BB1				P			P	P
Oxidised fine				100			100	9.2
Hand made grogged	P	P					P	P
Samian				6			6	0.6
Nene Valley colour coat		P			P		P	P
Oxfordshire red colour coat	103	P	12				115	10.7
Oxfordshire white ware						7	7	0.6
Total	421	114	158	85	183	88	1079	

(p = present but not in sufficient amounts to quantify)

Table 2

	Crouchers		EVES	Manor Cottages		Binsted 1981		AH 52 No of pots
	No of pots	%		No of pots	%	No of pots	%	
Jars		57.7%			39.0%		44.5%	64.2%
C1.1	15	15.2	139		1.0		11.5	26.2
3A	7	7.1	52		1.0		10.0	6.5
3B	28	28.3	198		30.5		30.5	20.5
3C	7	7.1	42		6.5		10.0	11.0
Bowls		12.1%			23.8%		21.5%	10.5%
5A	3	3.0	40		3.5		2.8	2.5
5B	9	9.1	69		20.3		12.7	7.0
5D								0.5
5E								0.5
Dishes		7.1%			19.5%		12.7%	10.5%
6A	5	5.1	32		19.5		12.7	7.0
6B	2	2.0	7					3.5
Strainers								
5C								0.5
Beakers								
2	9	9.1	98		6.5		4.3	1.3
Wet storage								
1A	1	1.0	8		3.5		1.5	2.5
Bottles								
1B	1	1.0	14		1.0		1.5	0.5
Dry storage								
1C							1.5	0.3
4	3	3.0	30		1.0		1.5	1.0
9	2	2.0	19		1.7		1.5	2.2
Lids								
7	6	6.1	56		1.0		2.8	4.0
Beehives								
10	1	1.0	5				2.8	0.3
Miscellaneous					3.0			2.3

Analysis of Alice Holt vessel forms present shows that this assemblage differs markedly from the Manor Cottages one (Graham 1990); conforming more closely with the percentages from the contemporary waster dump AH52 at source (Table 2).

This kind of comparative study is still in its infancy, but recent work by the author on assemblages from all over south east Britain would suggest that an assemblage like that from Manor Cottages, where combined dish and bowl percentages exceed that for jars, is abnormal outside the London area. One might speculate that this abnormality was due either

to specialised activities or occupation of the site by people of non local origin with a preference for the BB1 derived cooking pot, bowl and dish set as opposed to local Iron Age rooted forms. The figures from Crouchers are more orthodox and probably represent the broken crockery of the Romanised indigenous population.

The smaller assemblages from the other two features, 100 and 300, appear to be of similar 3rd century date and all three collections are further paralleled in the bulk of the fill of the defensive ditches of the nearby 'mansio'.

Coins by R A Merson

<i>Context</i>	<i>Metal/size or denomination</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Details</i>
N88/9	Æ 3 large fragment	346/8-350	CONSTANTIUS II. Rev [FEL TEMP] REPARATIO, phoenix on Pyre or Globe, mint missing.
N88/9	Æ 3/4	330-335	Uncertain. Rev Gloria Exercitus, Two standards.
N88/9	Æ 3 fragment	364-375	VALENS. Rev [SE]CURITAS REI[PVBUBLICAE], Victory left, mint missing.
N88/9	Æ 4 surface largely missing	c 330-341?	Obv Diademed head r. Rev Standing figure.
N88/8	Æ 4	3rd/4th cent	Obv Virtually no detail (possibly radiate head?).
Well 2-201	Æ 4	388-402	Obv - Rev Salus Reipublicae, Victory l., captive below, Chi-Rho in left field. Could be Rome mint.
Well 2-203	Æ 3	324-330	CONSTANTINE II as Caesar. Obv. CONSTANTIVS IVN NOBC. Rev PROVIDENTIAE CAESS, Gateway STRU-TRIER [LRBC 33 9ckl.].
N88/2	Æ 3/4 small flan	341/6-348	Obv - Rev Two Victories: Victoriaeddauggnn.
Stray find	Æ 4	330-337	Constantinopolis. Rev Victory on prow, mint missing.
Stray find	Æ 4	330-335	CONSTANTINE II. Obv CONSTANTIVS IVN NOBC. Rev GLORI-AEXER-CITVS, Two standards, *SLG -Lyons. LRBC 203.
Stray find	Æ 4	337-341	THEODORA. Rev PIETA[S ROM]ANA TRP - Trier. LRBC 129.
Stray find	Æ 4	341-346/8	CONSTANS OR CONSTANTIUS II. Obv CONSTA-SPAG (sic). Rev [VICTO]RIA-AVGVSOR. PLG -(Lyons only). Barbarous copy of LRBC 255.
Stray find	Æ 10 mm thick flan	4th cent	Obv Diademed head r. Rev ?Fallen horseman copy.
Stray find	Æ 3	367-375	GRATIAN. Rev Gloria Novi Saeculi, Arles.
Stray find	Æ 3	c 317-324	Constantinian head l. Rev Beata Tranquillitas, VOT/IS/XX -TR TRIER.
Stray find	Æ	Late 3rd cent	Barbarous radiate. Rev -
Stray find	Æ Ant (large frag)	270-273	TETRICUS I or II. Rev I TU, figure advancing left with arm outstretched holding wreath or patera or similar.
Stray find	Æ 3/4	4th cent	Obv Diademed head r. Rev -
Stray find	Æ 3	364-375	VALENTINIAN I. Rev Securitas Reipvblicae. Mint?
Stray find	Æ 4 large fragment	337-341	CONSTANS. Rev Gloria Exercitus, 1 standard ^M = Trier. LRBC 133.
Stray find	Æ small residual core	4th cent?	-
Stray find	Æ 4 13 mm	4th cent	Obv. Diademed head r. Rev Fel Temp Reparatio, Fallen horseman copy.
Stray find	Æ 3	c 324-6	Constantinian head. Rev PRO[VIDENTIA]E CAESS, Gateway.
Stray find	Æ 3	c 320	Constantinian helmeted head r. Rev ?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Clarke Homes Ltd, for their co-operation and for funding the initial site evaluation and Hampshire County Council for covering the costs of the site watching brief. Messrs Hughes and Oake of the County Planning Department made the work possible and are particularly to be thanked for their encouragement and advice. The actual work was carried out by volunteers from the Alton Archaeological and Historical Society and the Farnham and District Museum Society and thanks are especially due to John Boas, Geoff Hoare, and Eric Waite.

REFERENCES

- Graham, D 1990 Excavations at Manor Cottages, Neatham, Alton, 1984-86, *Proc Hampshire Field Club Archaeol Soc* 46: 17-30.
- Millett, M & Graham, D 1986 *Excavations on the Romano-British Small Town at Neatham, Hampshire 1969-1979*, Gloucester & Hampshire Field Club Monograph 3.
- Young, C J 1977 *The Roman pottery industry of the Oxford region*, Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, British Series 43.

Author: David Graham, Stannard's View, Frith End, Bordon, Hants GU35 0QR.

© Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society.