EXCAVATIONS AT MAIDENBROOK FARM, CHEDDON FITZPAINE, 1990

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THE EXCAVATIONS, by I.M. Ferris

INTRODUCTION

Maidenbrook Farm (ST 248262) lies about half a mile to the north-east of Taunton, in the parish of Cheddon Fitzpaine, Somerset (Fig. 1). Proposals for a substantial development there (a development which was subsequently not proceeded with) led to the commissioning of an archaeological evaluation. The evaluation was carried out under the direction of Richard McDonnell during late January and early February 1990. Further trial trenching and area excavation took place between 4 June and 31 August 1990 for Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit under the direction of Iain Ferris. This report brings together the results of both phases of work and draws upon the background research and initial interpretation of the first phase results provided by Richard McDonnell.

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY, by R.G. McDonnell

The site lies within the Vale of Taunton and is situated on the northern edge of the flood plain of the River Tone. The Vale is formed by the gently rising ground leading to the Quantock Hills in the north and by the similarly rising ground leading to the Blackdown Hills in the south. The western end of the Vale is blocked by the lower slopes of the southern part of the Brendon Hills and by the hill country of the Devon border. To the east, the River Tone drains into the Somerset Levels. The site is low-lying and is situated at the end of a low promontory of land with Maiden Brook on its west side and Allen's Brook on its east side. The farm buildings themselves lie in the shallow valley created by Maiden Brook, where the stream has been diverted to create a water control system. The Tone Valley is here cut through by the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal.

The British Geological Survey map of 1984 shows that the whole site is covered by rock of the Mercia Mudstone Group (formerly known as Keuper Marl). A thin band of alluvium is associated with Maiden Brook and to the north, on the promontory, an outcrop of First Terrace Gravels is recorded. Nowhere during the excavations was the Mercia Mudstone revealed; a typical soil profile on the site of the area excavation consisted of *c.* 0.20 m–0.25 m of ploughsoil overlying a deposit of alluvium between 0.30 m and 1.20 m in thickness, sealing deposits of gravel which are probably First

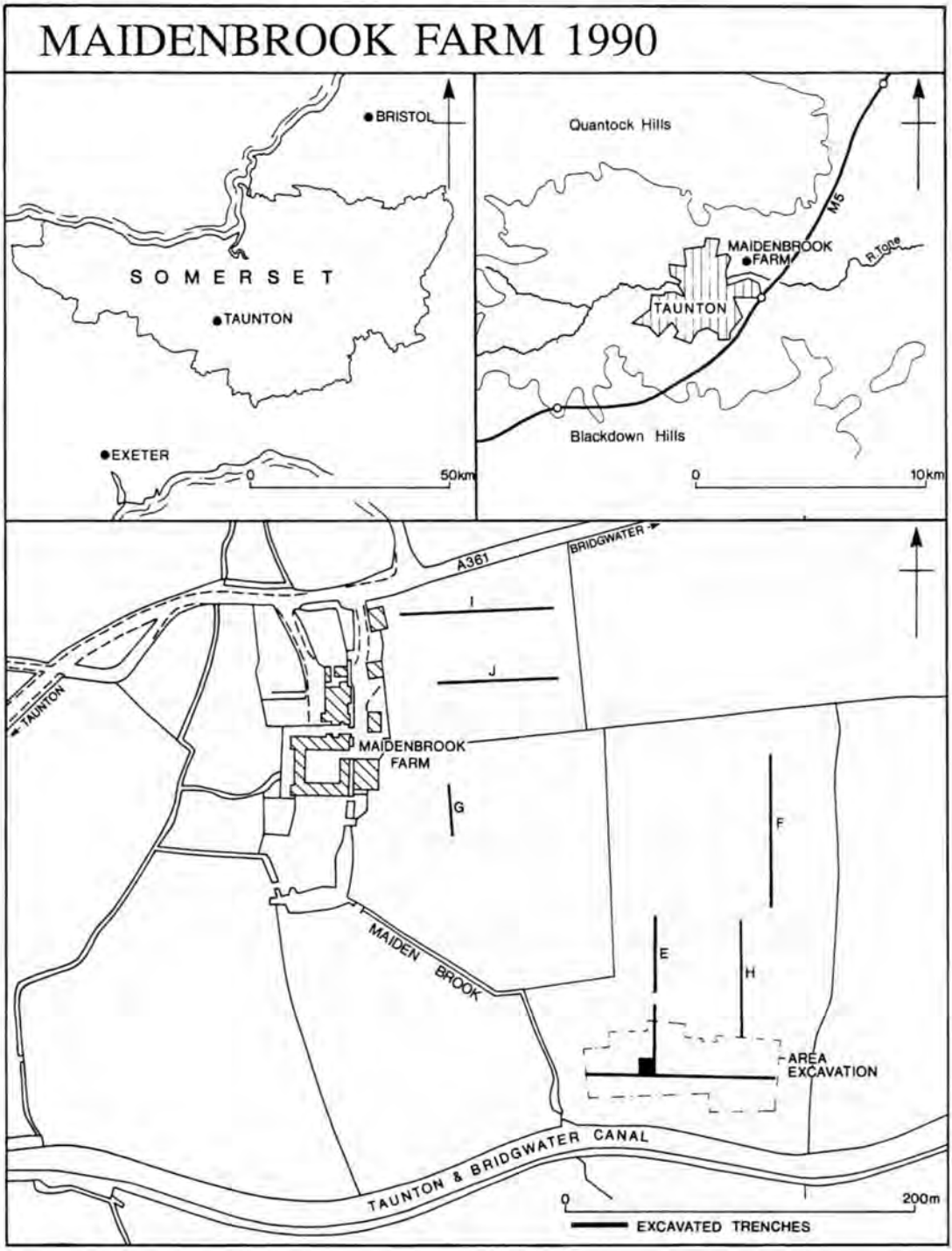

Fig. 1 Location plans. (M. Breedon)

Terrace Gravels and occur in the area between 15 m–38 m above OD (Edmonds and Williams 1985). In other parts of the Tone Valley the First Terrace Gravels, of varying depths, lie immediately over deposits of the Mercia Mudstone Group; these gravels are about 100,000 years old and date from the Ipswichian interglacial (Edmonds and Williams 1985).

Evidence of a fluctuating water table was recorded both in the alluvium – in which two principal phases of deposition could be distinguished – and in the gravels. Oxidised irons, forming the distinctive mottling associated with gleyed soils, and the blackened deposits of magnesium dioxide were present in both materials. Under the conditions of high rainfall experienced during the evaluation in early 1990 the high water table appeared to have a dynamic horizontal mobility through the gravels; in one particular trial trench the piercing of the alluvial capping released water under pressure in the gravel which flowed upwards, in the manner of an artesian well, and quickly flooded the trench.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The farmland adjacent to the Bridgwater and Taunton Canal was known to be of potential archaeological significance through aerial photographic evidence, cropmarks having been noted there by Mick Aston in the 1970s (transparency held by Somerset County Council Department for the Environment). These cropmarks appeared to indicate the presence of a sub-divided rectangular enclosure and a circular enclosure, with less distinct linear features, perhaps field boundaries, lying to the east. It was in the field containing the cropmark features that the archaeological work was concentrated, although further trial trenches were dug elsewhere within the development zone, and will be considered below.

THE EXCAVATION

The initial evaluation (Fig. 1) consisted of five machine-dug trenches (Trenches A–E) in the southern part of the field containing the cropmarks and two further trenches (Trenches F and G), one to the north of the field (Trench F) and the other in the adjacent field to the west (Trench G).

The second stage of work consisted of the machine stripping of an open area of approximately 4800 m^2 around the cropmark complex, taking in evaluation Trenches A–D. The identification during the evaluation of an interface between two periods of alluviation, a horizon at which point negative archaeological features could be seen to be cut into the upper surface of the first alluvial deposit, meant that machine stripping proceeded straight down to this level, with the surface subsequently being cleaned by hand. There was no vertical stratigraphy in any part of the site, save a single levelling spread near the very eastern margin of the area; the subsequent division of the excavated features and structures into phases of activity (Fig. 2) was made, therefore, on the basis of spatial grouping (highlighting obviously related negative features), of a few crucial stratigraphic relationships between certain features, and of the dating of pottery and other finds recovered from the backfills of features. A large number of features, particularly the smaller ones such as post-holes, contained no finds, and this sometimes cast doubt upon their assignment to a particular phase. On other occasions finds were only broadly datable, especially in the case of the locally-produced Romano-British coarsewares, and this has conspired against the definition of finer subdivisions within the broad phases.

Three further trial trenches were also excavated, one (Trench H) linked to the open

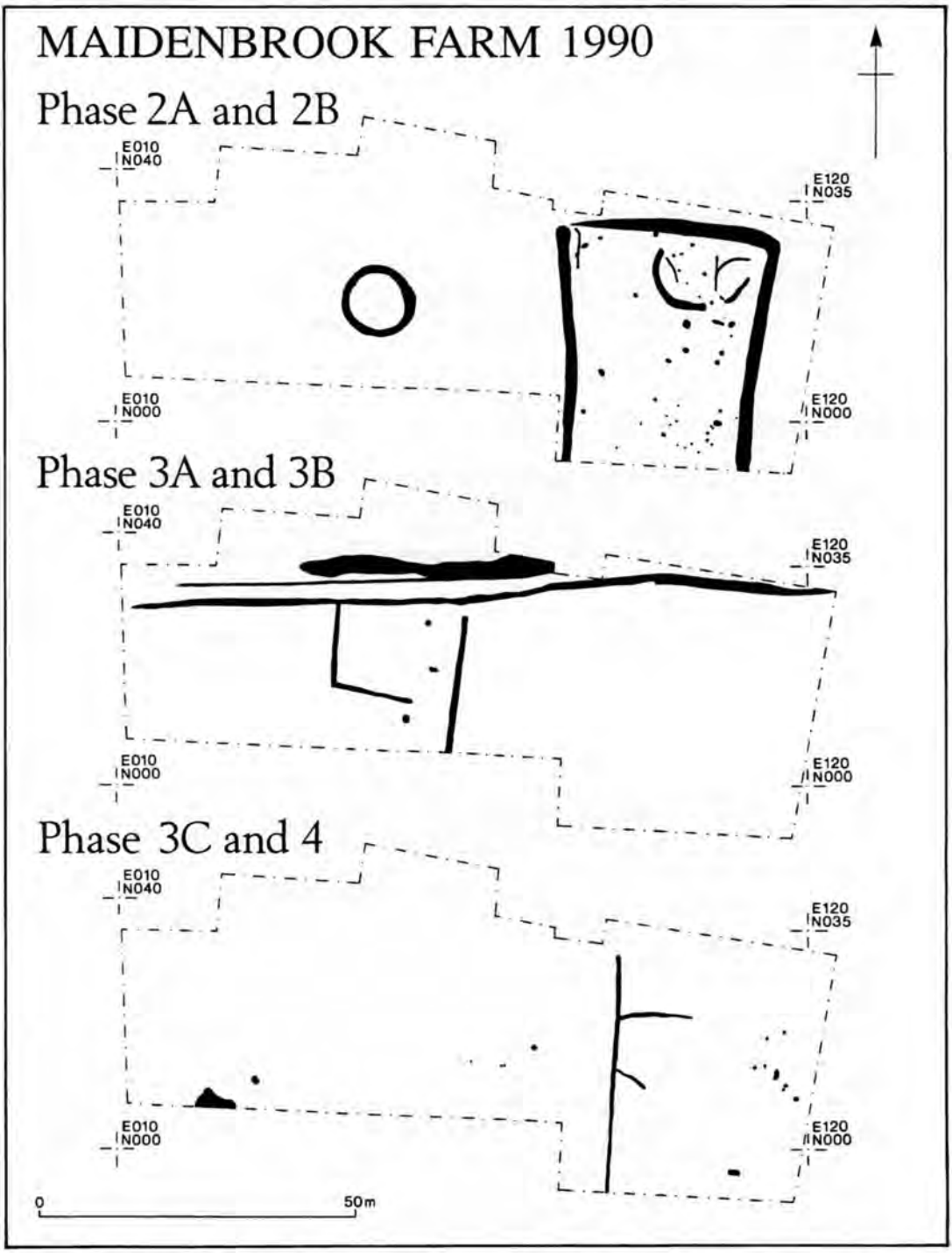

Fig. 2 Simplified plan model of site development, locating main elements of each phase. (M. Breedon)

area and the other two (Trenches I and J) in an orchard to the east of the farm itself. No archaeological evidence was recovered from these trenches and they will not be further discussed.

PHASE 1

Activity of this phase was represented by artefactual evidence only. As the flint report (*below*) indicates, there were in the recovered flint assemblage sufficient numbers of artefacts and waste flakes to suggest only a transient presence in the area in the Mesolithic period, rather than the location here of a site of any longevity, as had originally been proposed.

The natural gravels seemed to form a number of isolated knolls in the Tone floodplain, and these knolls were considered to be the sites of most potential for locating evidence of prehistoric activity. It was decided, therefore, to remove the primary alluviation deposit overlying one of the knolls within the southern part of the open area excavation in the hope of collecting further worked flints and, perhaps, of identifying contemporary archaeological features. Despite carefully cleaning *c.* 275 m² of the exposed gravel, however, no features or significant artefact scatters were recorded.

PHASE 2 (Fig. 2)

Activity in Phase 2 consisted of the creation and use of two principal structures, namely an isolated circular 'enclosure' to the west (Phase 2A) – certainly identifiable as the circular cropmark – and to the east a large, possibly rectangular, compound with numerous internal features (Phase 2B). The absolute contemporaneity of these two structures cannot be either satisfactorily demonstrated or denied. Neither represents an occupation area – these must be nearby – but finds testify to an organised and systematic disposal of rubbish away from the occupation zone.

The Circular Enclosure (Phase 2A)

The circular enclosure, of *c.* 9 m internal diameter (Fig. 3), was defined by a seemingly continuous ditch (F5), enclosing an area of little more than 70 m². The only internal feature was a small posthole (F7), backfilled with a compact, dark charcoally sand.

The enclosure ditch, defined in plan as a dark soil stain clearly visible against the yellow–orange alluvium, had been partially cut away to the south by a later feature belonging to Phase 3. Four sections were excavated across the line of the ditch, and showed that it was *c.* 1 m in width and a maximum of 0.95 m deep, with a profile varying from an uninterrupted V-shape to a stepped-V profile with a pronounced cleaning slot along the base (Fig. 3). Its primary backfill consisted of a red–brown silt mixed with quantities of sand and gravel (1054) overlain by a cleaner yellow–brown silt again with gravel (1053), doubtless representing episodes of in-washing and collapse rather than deliberate backfilling; the same was true of the overlying deposits of gravel and alluvium mixed with gravel (1048, 1062) which appeared to be classic slumping deposits. Overlying the slumped layers, but encountered only in the largest excavated section, was a linear tumble of closely-set, regular slate slabs (1055), many at rest in an upright or near-vertical position; the location of the slabs, along the eastern edge of the ditch, suggested that they were part of a former wall (F27) or wall foundation around the outer circuit of part of the enclosure, which had been subsequently pushed into the then partially-backfilled ditch (Fig. 3; Plate 2). A length of *c.* 2 m of this collapsed walling was recorded and excavated in plan. In the other excavated sections there was encountered, overlying the slumped mixed gravels (1048, 1062), a deposit of soft,

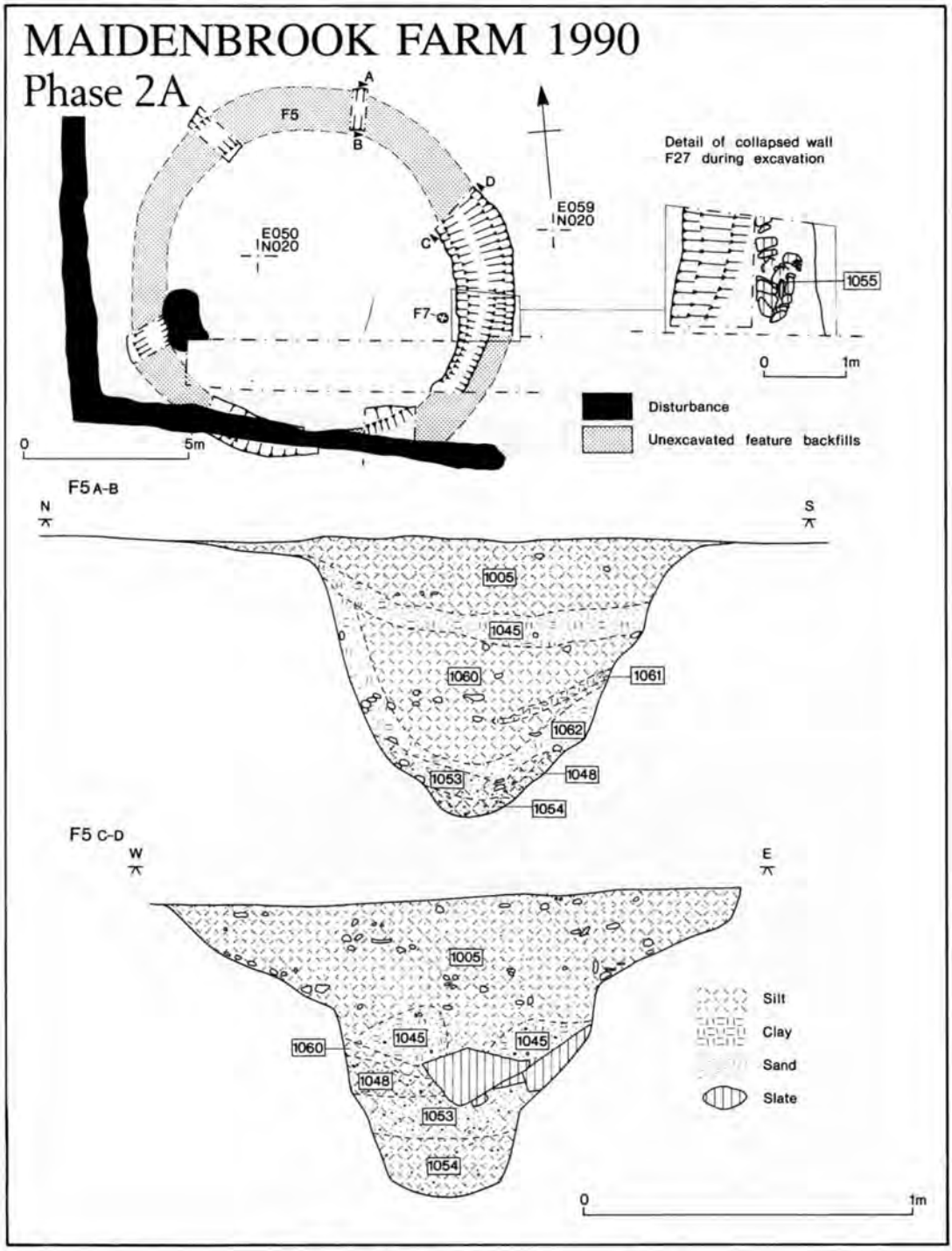

Fig. 3 Phase 2A: plan and sections of F5. (M. Breedon)

Plate 1. View across the western part of the site (from the north-west), showing circular enclosure F5 of Phase 2A and boundary wall F4 of Phase 3B. (E. Newton)

Plate 2. Close-up of collapsed wall F27, in ditch F5 of Phase 2A. (E. Newton)

Plate 3. Drainage gulley F208 of Phase 2B under excavation. (E. Newton)

Plate 4. View across eastern part of site (from the north-east), showing fully-excavated drainage gulley F208/F282 and other features of Phase 2B. (E. Newton)

mottled grey silt (1060); it varied in thickness from 0.10 m to 0.40 m, and probably represented a final episode of in-washing before the deliberate backfilling of the ditch, to the top of its cut, with a series of mixed silts containing stones and gravels (1005, 1045).

The small internal size of the feature suggests that 'enclosure' is probably too broad a description of its function; the feature may, more specifically, have been a fold for penning single animals or a small number of animals, with posthole F7 probably being intended for a tethering stake or post. While there is no evidence for an entrance, further excavation might have revealed the presence of an entrance causeway, though, more probably, planking or timber could have been laid across the ditch to provide a temporary walkway. The presence of the toppled wall F27 suggests that all or part of the outer circuit was further protected by a low stone wall.

Such a ring ditch could have been part of a circular building or house, but at Maidenbrook, where associated domestic rubbish is almost completely absent, this seems unlikely. The feature could, however, be a later Iron Age shrine (as in Cunliffe 1991, Fig. 19.9, or Rahtz *et al.* 1992, Fig. 172) but once more there is not even circumstantial evidence to support this identification.

Dating the feature is difficult because only 14 potsherds were recovered (all either Fabric 2 or Fabric 15), with form sherds coming from the soil surrounding collapsed wall F27 and from the uppermost backfill deposit 1005. These sherds suggest initial use of the enclosure in the later Iron Age and its being in a general state of decay and disrepair for a considerable time before it was finally backfilled and levelled in the late 1st to 2nd centuries AD.

The Rectangular Compound (Phase 2B)

The western boundary of this compound lies *c.* 24 m to the east of the circular enclosure. Its shape could not be conclusively established as only three of its defining ditches (to the north, west and east) lay within the area of excavation. The fourth, southern, ditch had either been truncated by the canal or lay beyond it, on the canal's south bank. The east–west internal diameter of the enclosure was between 26 m and 30 m. An area of about 1000 m^2 of its interior was exposed and excavated.

It is clear from the plan of this feature (Fig. 4) and from the individual ditch sections (Figs. 5 and 6) that while the northern and eastern ditches (F215 and F201) are similar in size, form and profile, the western ditch (F202) is rather different. It may be that the western ditch is an earlier feature, perhaps a boundary of some kind, and that the compound was subsequently created by using part of this pre-existing feature and by digging three new ditches. Both the western and northern ditches terminate as butt-ends, and it is suggested that the north-west corner may have contained an entrance, two elongated ?postholes (F263, F283) being possible evidence for a timber entrance gate.

The western ditch (F202) was traced in plan for a length of *c.* 37 m, and four sections were excavated across the feature, including one section at its rounded, terminal butt-end to the north. The profile of the ditch was best seen in the northernmost sections, since the area to the south, towards the canal, would appear to have been levelled down, probably during the construction of the canal itself, and the feature here truncated. The ditch was *c.* 1.90 m to 2.20 m wide and, in the north, *c.* 1.10 m deep with a rounded profile. Its backfill consisted of a primary deposit of soft, brown clay and silt (2013) with many inclusions of charcoal and flecks of decayed animal bone, along with quantities of stones and gravel. This was overlain by a very clean, red-brown sand (2012), varying in thickness from 0.05 m to 0.25 m, itself overlain by a soft, mixed brown sandy silt (2011) with numerous inclusions of charcoal and stone, more compacted towards the top of the deposit and containing a noticeable concentration of slate fragments and chippings (2009). The uppermost fill consisted of a very compact, clean mid-brown sandy silt

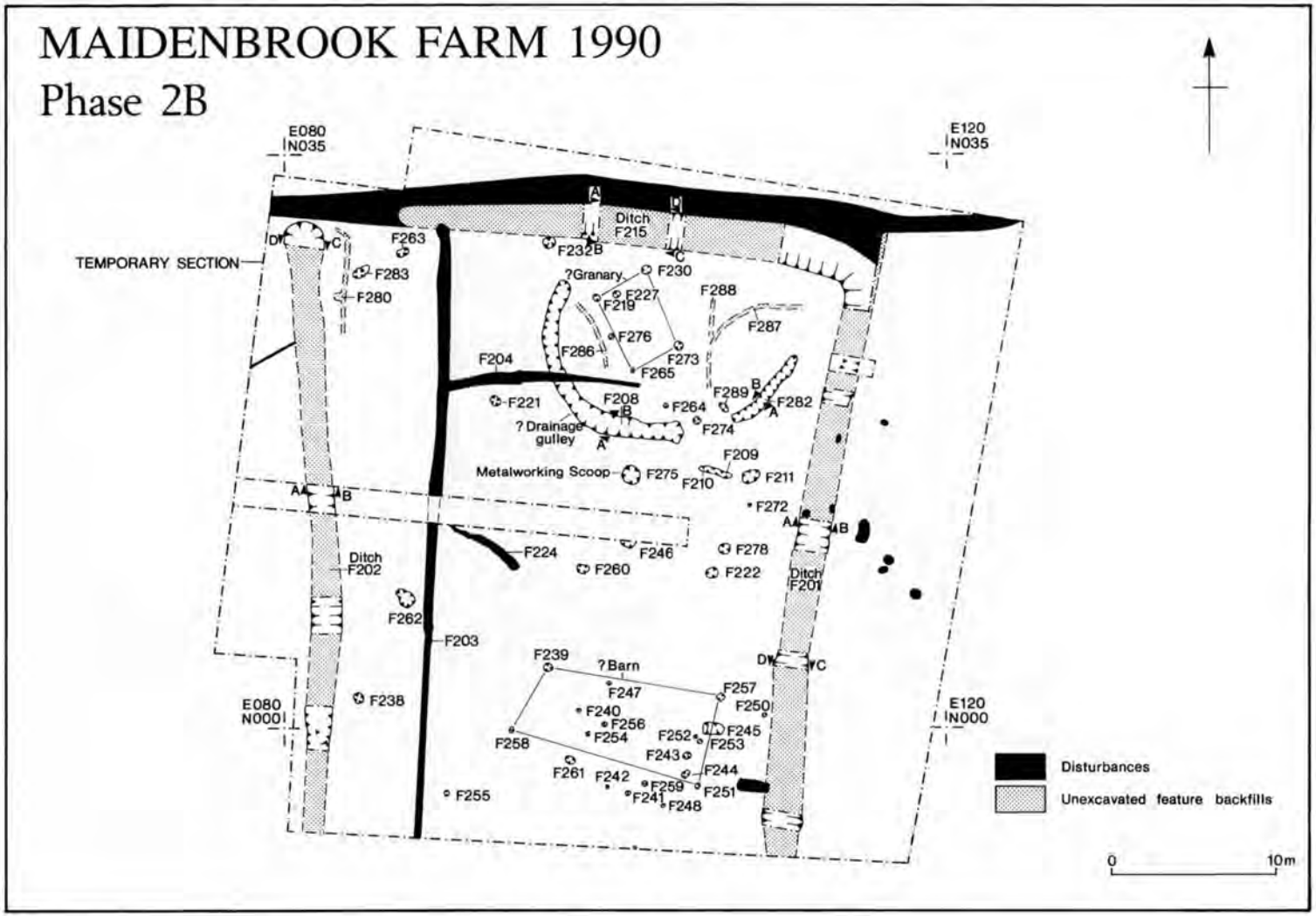

Fig. 4 Phase 2B: plan. (M. Breedon)

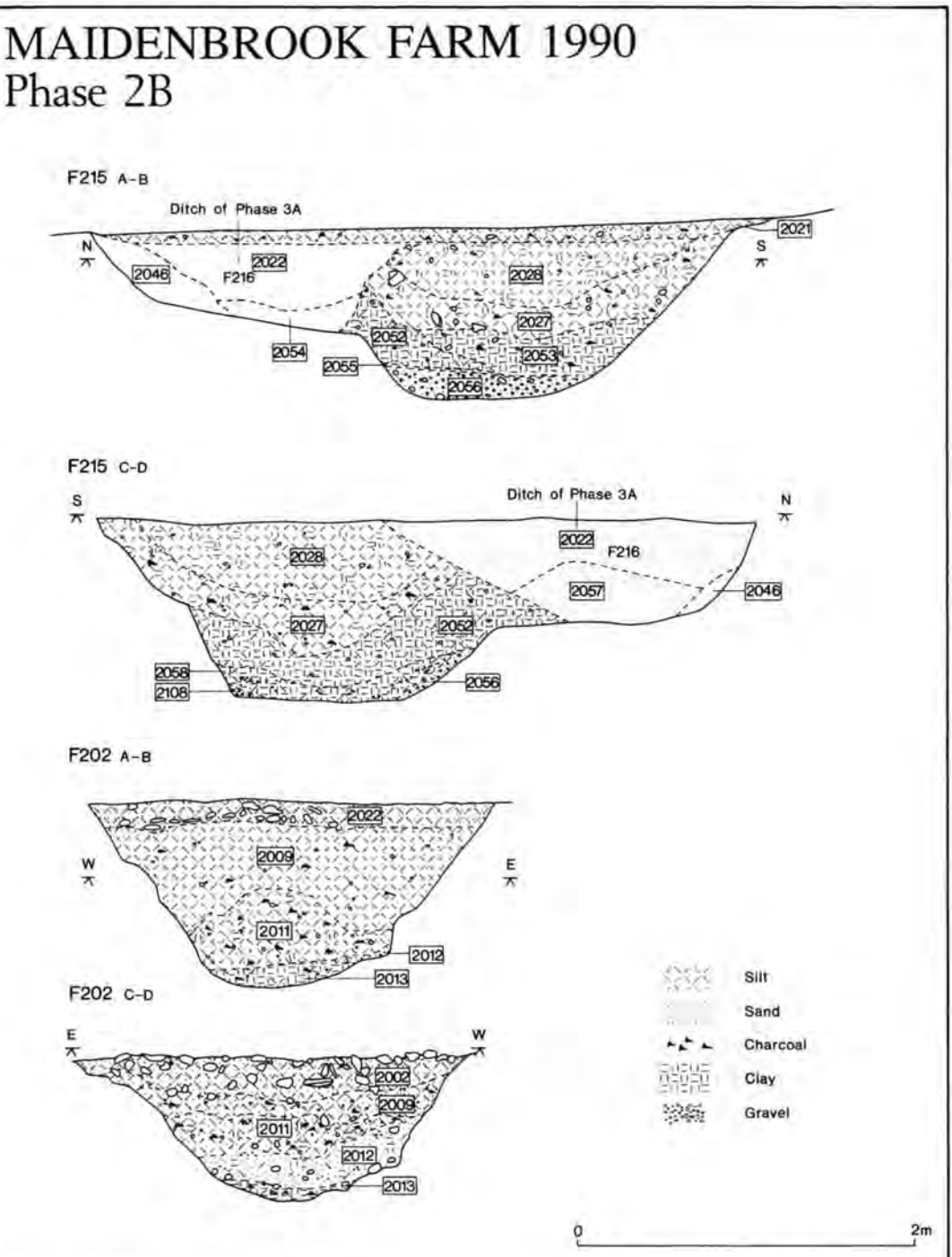

Fig. 5 Phase 2B: sections of F202 and F215. (M. Breedon)

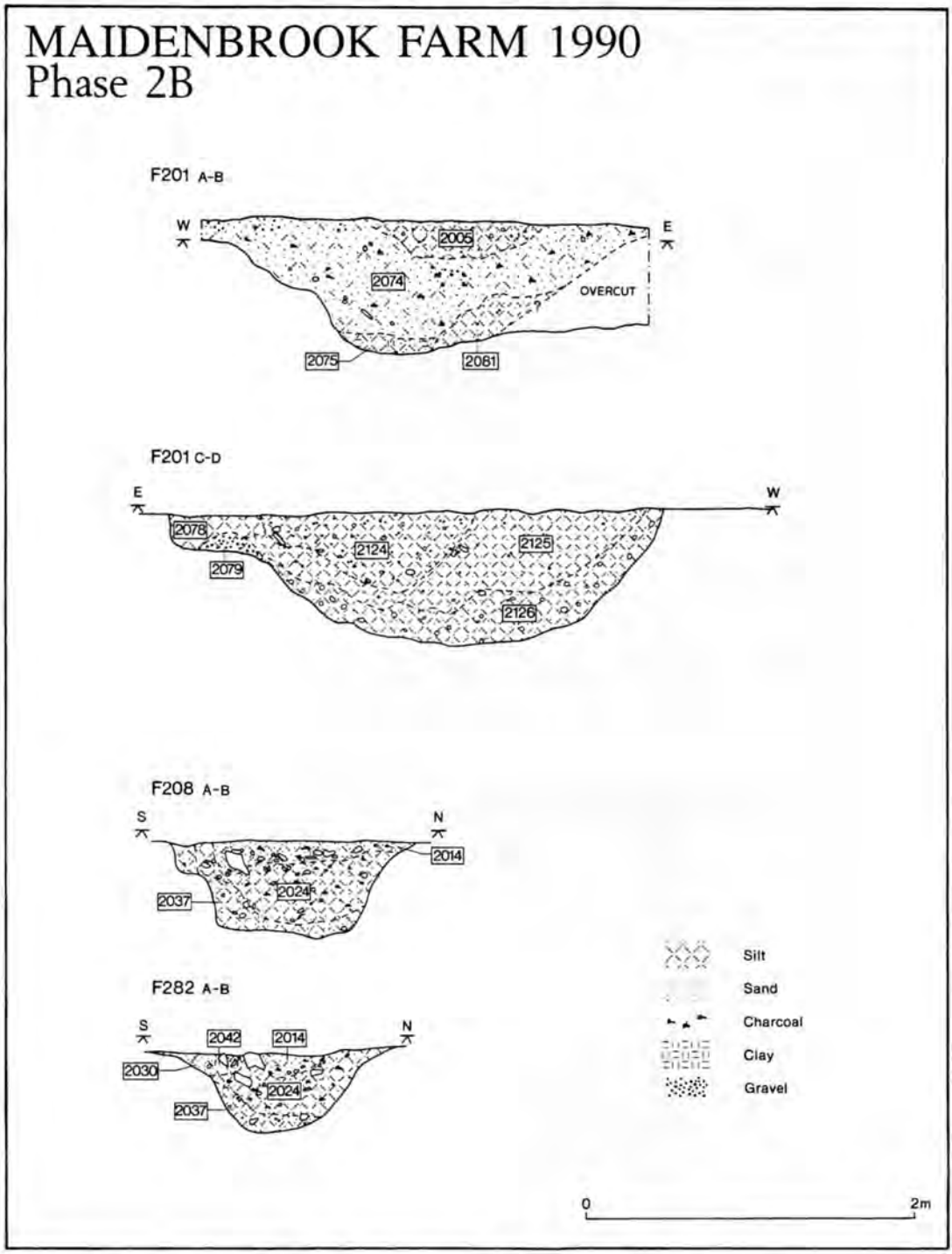

Fig. 6 Phase 2B: sections of F201, F208 and F282. (M. Breedon)

(2002) with many cobbles, particularly in its upper surface; this cobble concentration and the dark colour of the upper backfill distinguished this ditch in plan from ditches F215 and F201.

The northern ditch (F215) was butt-ended to the west and *c.* 30 m long, turning in the east to run north–south, the eastern compound ditch (F201) being demonstrably contemporary – as shown by the area excavation of the ditches at the north-east corner – and identical in size and form. For this reason these two ditches will be discussed here as a single feature; details about the creation and use of the feature and the numbering of equivalent layers from one section to another will be conflated from three sections dug across F215, from the area excavation at the north-east corner of the compound, and from five sections dug across F201 (Figs. 5 and 6). The ditch was *c.* 2 m–2.25 m wide and up to 1.25 m in depth; it had suffered the same truncation by levelling in the south as ditch F202, while in the north its northern edge had been cut away in places by a feature of Phase 3. The ditch had a generally bowl-shaped profile with a flat base; there was evidence along its whole length for the weathering of the sides and for the consequent collapse of gravel off the sides and into the bottom of the feature (2056), and for the in-washing of silt and clay shortly afterwards (2058). Overlying this was a deposit of compact, blue–grey clay (2055), varying in thickness from 0.02 m to 0.35 m, whose nature suggested deposition during a prolonged period of waterlogging along much of the open ditch. Further evidence of weathering and collapse was recorded before the deliberate backfilling of the then 0.65 m–0.80 m deep ditch took place (deposits 2027 and 2028).

For dating the three ditches there is evidence from both coins and pottery. From the uppermost backfill (2002) of the western ditch F202 came two Roman bronze coins, an issue of Nero (AD 54–68) and one of Hadrian (AD 117–134), with sherds of BBI pottery (Fabric 1) coming from the backfill deposits 2009 and 2011. From the primary deposit 2008 came sherds of local BBI copies (Fabric 2), undatable grey wares (Fabric 11), and residual Iron Age pottery. From the northern and eastern ditches came a larger assemblage of pottery (158 sherds) of which 80 sherds were Iron Age types, though these always occurred in deposits with Romano-British wares. The deposits backfilled deliberately into the ditches included such mixed assemblages, though with sherds of BBI (Fabric 1). Two sherds of 4th century Oxfordshire wares (Fabric 4) came from the uppermost backfill deposit of the eastern ditch.

Outside the compound, to the east, was a 0.10 m–0.15 m thick linear spread of dirty, mixed sandy silts with gravel. It ran parallel to the central portion of the eastern ditch, overlying the upper surface of the first alluvial deposit and partially spread over, and concealing, the outer cut of the then backfilled ditch. This deposit was rich in pottery, containing 108 sherds, of which 63 were residual Iron Age types; it seems likely that this spread of soil represents the levelled base of a spoil heap for earth used to backfill the ditch, the nature of the soil suggesting that it had been brought from a nearby former area of occupation.

Associated with the ditches were various other features, such as postholes, stakeholes, hollows or scoops, gullies and small ditches (Fig. 4), most of which were in the interior of the compound but which had no direct stratigraphic link one to another. Attempts to group these features into meaningful structures have, with two exceptions, generally proved impossible. The various parameters for grouping postholes (that is, differences in size and/or depth, the differing natures of their fills and backfills, and differentiation by dating of pottery contained within the backfills, and combinations of these individual parameters) have all failed to reveal any significant information.

A number of post-compound features, cutting the upper backfill of the ditches, can be

assigned to Phase 3; a number of postholes outside the compound to the east, and sealed by the levelling spread of spoil there, have been assigned to Phase 2. The most convincing interior structure identified lay to the north and consisted of an interrupted, crescent-shaped ditch (F208/F282) defining a half-circle of ground with an interior area of *c.* 70 m^2 (Fig. 4). The ditch had been dug in two sections, both with rounded terminals to the north and flattened terminals to the south; but the two stretches were of different dimensions, that to the west (F208) being *c.* 0.95 m–1.20 m wide and 0.40 m–0.50 m deep with a rounded but ragged profile, and that to the east (F282) being *c.* 0.60 m wide, 0.30 m–0.35 m deep and more rounded in profile (Fig. 6). The eastern ditch (F282) had been backfilled with deposits of mixed, dark brown sandy silt and the western ditch F208 with a series of mixed, dirty sandy silts, containing quite large quantities of pottery (2014, 2024, 2037). Of the 251 sherds recovered, 235 were of an Iron Age date; the other 16 were Romano-British, and included two pieces of 4th century Oxfordshire wares (Fabric 4) from the uppermost backfills. Between the two southern terminals of the ditches was a gap of *c.* 3 m, probably intended to provide access.

The original function of this feature is not readily apparent, but a range of interpretations deserves discussion. The excavation of the ditches revealed no internal structure and this fact, together with their shape and irregularity, almost certainly allow us to discount the identification of the feature as a post-in-trench hut or building. In the interior zone defined by the ditches there was evidence for an ephemeral structure, either polygonal or square in shape, represented by postholes all with similar fills. (Possible combinations are either a four-post structure formed of F230, F227, F273 and F265, or another larger and more square four-poster formed of F230, F219, F273 and F265.) Flanking the suggested structure on either side were curving gullies (F286 to the west, and F287 to the east, the latter in association with a north–south aligned linear gully F288); each gully was only a few centimetres deep and was defined by dark soil stains. While penannular ditches, with or without internal postholes, have sometimes been designated as 'ritual' in function (for discussion of such features in general *see* Parrington 1978, 34), a more probable explanation in the case of the Maidenbrook feature is that it represents a run-off, storm-water or drainage gully cut through the first phase alluvium down to, but not into, the upper surface of the free-draining gravel, around either a small granary, as represented by one or other of the two posited rectangular structures in the interior, or a stack-stand which would also require adequate provision for drainage of the surrounding area.

Elsewhere within the interior of the enclosure there were cut into the alluvium 27 postholes or stakeholes; some had slate packing *in situ*, others had noticeable quantities of slate chippings in the backfill, and yet others had a similar, but chipping-free, dark clay silt fill. These postholes make no very convincing structural entities, though a grouping of 18 variously-sized postholes to the south, within a rough rectangle 5 m by 12 m and formed by F239 (north-west corner), F258 (south-west corner), F251 (south-east corner) and F257 (north-east corner), may reflect the former position of a small timber barn or shed.

To the south of the crescent-shaped ditch was a bowl-shaped hollow (F275), about 1 m in diameter and 0.30 m deep at its centre, backfilled with a number of charcoal-rich deposits containing slag, bronze flecks, charcoal and burned clay, the total weight of slag being 0.53 kg. Nearby were two further features with charcoal-rich backfills, namely F209/F210 (a trench 2 m long and 0.50 m wide) and F211 (an ovoid hollow 1 m wide and 0.30 m deep). Although neither contained slag nor metallic waste, it is likely that they are contemporary with F275, and that the three features in association provide evidence of small-scale metalworking.

PHASE 3 (Fig. 2)

The compound of Phase 2 would appear to have gone out of use and to have had its ditches completely backfilled by the time the activity of Phase 3 commenced. This activity can be divided into three separate sub-phases on the basis of the spatial arrangement of features; firstly there was established a linear boundary, defined by a ditch (Phase 3A) and later by a ditch and wall (Phase 3B); secondly, there was the laying out of a rectangular enclosure against, and to the south of, this boundary, and to the west of the former Phase 2B rectangular compound (Phase 3B); and thirdly there was activity in the area of the former Phase 2B compound (Phase 3C). The activity areas examined during the excavation were peripheral to the settlement focus but again demonstrated through analysis of the finds recovered that rubbish was disposed of in an orderly manner and dumped to backfill features in the area under discussion.

The Linear Boundary (Phase 3A/3B) (Fig. 7)

This boundary was recorded for a length of 108 m, running roughly east–west across the northern part of the open-area excavation, and continuing beyond the limits of excavation in both the east and the west. The feature was much more distinct in plan in the west where the second alluvial deposit was more regular in its thickness and manner of deposition (Fig. 7). Nine sections were dug across the boundary line.

The boundary initially consisted of a flat-bottomed ditch (F28) 0.80 m–1 m wide and 0.40 m–0.60 m deep, the ditch to the east cutting into the upper backfills of the northern Phase 2B rectangular compound ditch. The backfill of F28 varied over its length, suggesting a number of instances of backfilling rather than a single action. There was some primary silting (1037) but generally the feature would appear to have been kept clean, as there was no evidence for the accumulation of slumped or weathered deposits derived from the ditch sides before backfilling took place; in the east, a deposit of blue–grey clay (1057) at the base of the feature does, however, suggest waterlogging for some period of time.

In the west, two 24 m and 9 m long stretches of single-course walling (F4), comprising angular fragments of slate with the occasional river cobble, were exposed overlying the backfilled ditch. Whether this walling, or, more properly, wall foundation, was originally continuous over the whole line of the backfilled ditch, or whether sections of the ditch remained open and were contemporaneous in use with the wall, cannot be said.

From most of the stretches of ditch excavated little pottery was recovered. Out of a total of 25 sherds the latest was a sherd of 4th century Oxfordshire pottery (Fabric 4). However, from the easternmost excavated section came 207 sherds of various dates, including a waster of Fabric 14 (*see below*), suggesting the use of spoil, for backfilling purposes, derived from a nearby occupation site. In the matrix of the wall foundation (1004) was found a sherd of 4th century New Forest pottery (Fabric 5).

To the north of this boundary, and running parallel to it, were noted two very shallow and narrow gullies (F14/F20, F19), represented in plan by dark linear soil stains, and probably marking field drainage channels. The backfills of both of these features contained Roman pottery.

The Rectangular Enclosure (Phase 3B)

To the south of the boundary, and to the west of the former compound of Phase 2B, was laid out another enclosure. The overall shape and extent of this enclosure cannot be satisfactorily gauged, as portions of it lay beyond the southern limit of excavation (Fig. 7). Its boundaries and internal sub-divisions were formed by *c.* 0.80 m–1 m wide and

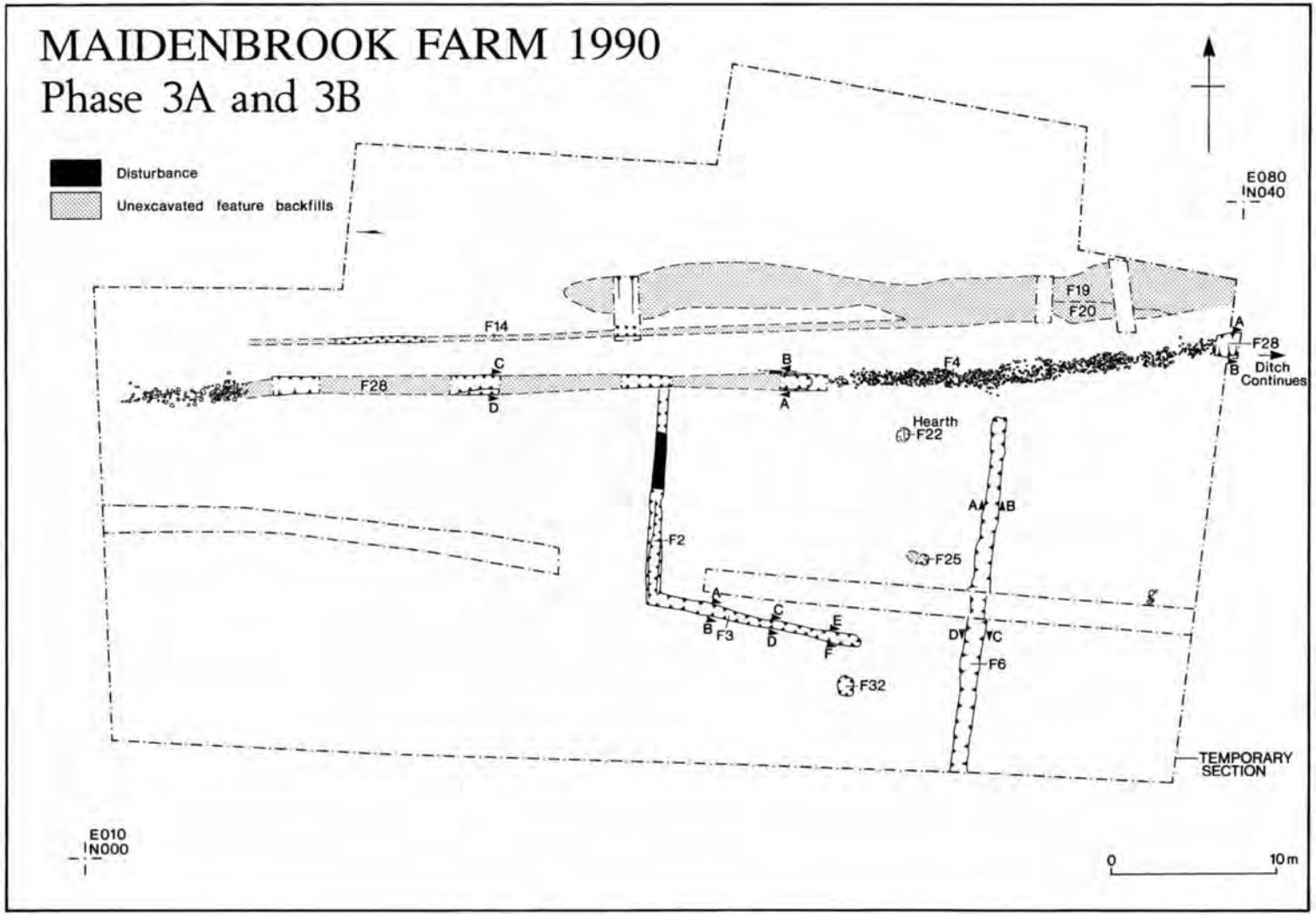

Fig. 7 Phase 3A and 3B: plan. (M. Breedon)

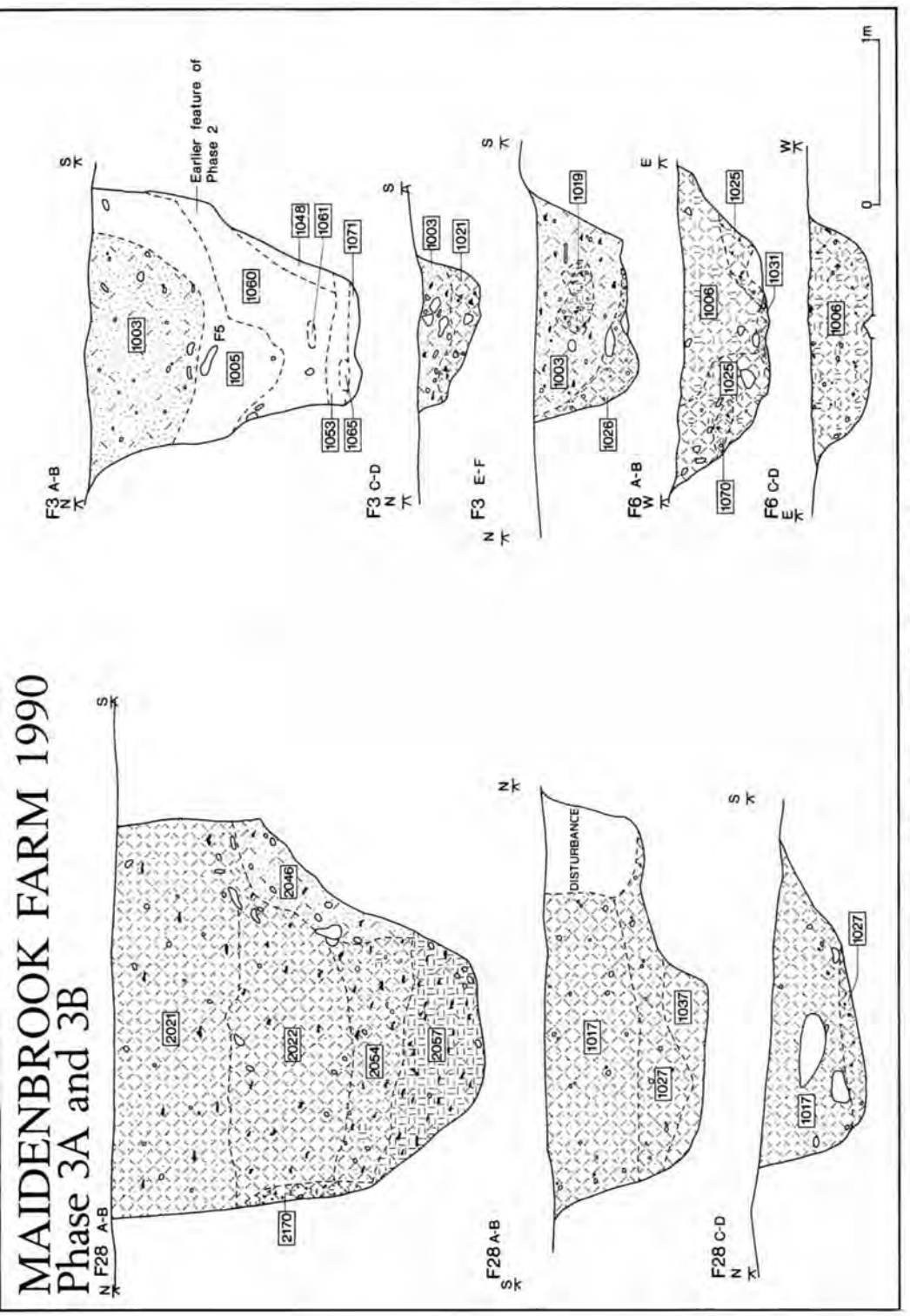

Fig. 8 Phase 3A and 3B: sections of F3, F6, F28 and F281. (M. Breedon)

0.20 m–0.35 m deep, straight-sided, though partially recut, flat-bottomed ditches or trenches (F2, F3, F6). Excavation of these features by longitudinal as well as lateral sectioning failed to reveal any internal structure, postholes or stakeholes associated with the trenches (Fig. 8). The eastern boundary trench (F6) was excavated over a length of 22 m, and was seen to terminate in a butt-end to the north, some 2 m south of the older linear earthwork which formed the northern enclosure boundary, perhaps indicating an entrance at this point. The trench was backfilled with a series of spatially distinct mixed deposits (1006, 1025, 1031, 1070), suggesting deliberate backfilling in a protracted operation.

The western boundary was formed by trench F2 and was partially cut away by a later disturbance towards its centre. The relationship with the northern boundary was not established, as F2 became increasingly shallow to the north, perhaps truncated by further disturbances. The trench ran north–south for a length of 13 m and then turned a right-angle to proceed another 12 m in an east–west direction (called F3), terminating in a rounded butt-end. Trench arm F3 cut through the upper backfill and sides of the Phase 2A ring ditch feature F5 (Fig. 8: F3, Section A–B). As with the eastern boundary trench, there was no evidence of silting or weathering-infill, but rather for backfilling by the dumping of numerous individual deposits, perhaps bucket or barrow loads (F3: 1003, 1019, 1021).

In the interior of the rectilinear unit, *c.* 18.5 m east–west by 15 m north–south, formed by F2/F3 and F6 against the northern boundary, were two isolated features, namely a possible hearth and an elongated scoop or hollow. The hearth (F22), towards the north-east corner, consisted of a *c.* 0.15 m deep hollow, infilled with burnt soil, charcoal and slate fragments, overlain by burnt slates in a matrix of burned red clay flecked with charcoal. The scoop or hollow (F25), further to the south, was *c.* 0.20 m–0.35 m deep and roughly ovoid in shape, being backfilled with a single deposit of gravel in a dirty, purple-brown silty sand matrix. To the south of trench F3, in a presumed second unit of the enclosure, was an isolated, roughly square hollow (F32), only *c.* 0.20 m deep and with a similar backfill to scoop F25.

The defining ditches/gullies of this enclosure produced considerable quantities of pottery, with very little residual material, the majority of the pottery being either locally produced wares, 3rd to 4th century BBI forms or, in a few cases, diagnostically 4th century sherds of Oxford products (Fabric 4) and New Forest wares (Fabric 5).

Other Activity (Phase 3C)

Activity of this phase is difficult to define as it makes little coherent structural sense. The phase includes all features that either can be demonstrated to post-date activity of Phase 2 by stratigraphic relationship (this applies to features in the east of the site), or which spatially cannot be assigned to a specific period but which contain Roman pottery. Some of the latter group of features might belong to an earlier phase, while some of them may be connected to activity in Phase 4; there is simply no way to tell (Fig. 2).

In the east, the most substantial feature was a north–south aligned gulley, traced in plan for a length of *c.* 37 m, whose northern, rounded terminal cut into the upper backfill of the Phase 2B compound ditch F215 (Fig. 4). Three sections were excavated across the gulley and revealed that the feature was *c.* 0.30 m–0.40 m wide and 0.35 m–0.40 m deep with gently sloping sides and a flat base. Its numerous backfills contained quantities of residual Iron Age pottery and some Roman material, though none of the diagnostically late material found in Phase 3B. The form of this feature suggests a link with the gullies/ditches of Phase 3B, and could be contemporary with the enclosure ditch F6.

Linked to gulley F203, and to its east, were two slightly curving and irregular gullies (F204, F224), both only 0.15 m–0.20 m in depth, F204 cutting through the upper backfill

of the Phase 2B circular ditch F208 (Fig. 4). Further east were a number of postholes either cutting the backfill of the eastern Phase 2 compound ditch F201 (postholes F225, F267, F268) or lying just outside it (F228, F266, F269, F270). Five of these (F266, F267, F268, F269, F270) had slate packing and were in a possibly significant alignment. Two other features, elongated hollows (F229, F249), were possibly contemporary. To the west of gully F203 were four postholes (F8, F9, F26, F33), all with similar fills but containing no finds.

In evaluation trench F (Fig. 1) a number of slight ditches or gullies were recorded, though only a single sherd of Romano-British pottery was recovered from the backfills. These features may be part of a field system associated with Phases 2 and 3.

PHASE 4

The activity of Phase 4 was limited to the west of the site and comprised the digging of a large, irregular-shaped scoop (F24/F25), *c.* 6 m in diameter, to a depth of *c.* 0.60 m into the natural gravel. The form and position of this feature, in an area where the first alluvial deposit was relatively thin, suggest that it was a quarry pit dug specifically to extract gravel. A small sherd of early post-medieval pottery from the fill suggests its date. Another more regular feature (F23), to the north, may have been dug for the same purpose.

THE FINDS

THE POTTERY, by L. Bevan

THE PREHISTORIC POTTERY

From the excavations at Maidenbrook Farm 586 sherds of prehistoric pottery weighing a total of 5.707 kg were recovered, comprising some 25.13% of the total pottery assemblage by sherd count, 16.12% by weight (Table 1). This numerically small assemblage – with a low ratio of feature sherds to undecorated body sherds, nearly all of which originate from residual contexts containing Romano-British material – is important, particularly on a local level, despite its residuality.

At Maidenbrook Farm seven prehistoric fabrics (Fabrics 15–19 inclusive and Fabrics 21 and 22) have been identified which are also attested at the nearby site of Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989, 39–53). Among these fabrics, the Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age periods, Middle to Late Bronze Ages and Early, Mid and Late Iron Ages are all represented.

Pre-Iron Age ceramics are not represented in any quantity at Maidenbrook Farm, although their presence there could be used to support the evidence derived from Norton Fitzwarren for a generally local south-western production and supply. Of the four Middle Iron Age fabric groups at Maidenbrook Farm, Fabric 16 is Glastonbury Ware and has parallels in form and decoration in the contemporary assemblage at Meare Village East which lies some 20 miles to the north-east in the Somerset Levels (Rouillard 1984, 183-219). Fabric 23, a fossil shell-tempered fabric which does not occur at Norton Fitzwarren, has also been identified as Glastonbury Ware; this group, the largest part of the prehistoric assemblage by weight, contains many parallels in form and decoration with the assemblage from Meare Village East. Finally, Fabric 15 in the Maidenbrook Series has been dated to the Late Iron Age (Woodward 1989, 42), with close parallels in form and decoration at South Cadbury (Alcock 1980, 698–705).

It is in the relationship of the Iron Age pottery to the ceramic assemblages from larger, chronologically well-established, sites that the main value of the Maidenbrook Farm assemblage lies, being indicative of ceramic contacts during the Middle and Later Iron Age on a regional south-western basis, the fuller significance of which may emerge in the light of future discoveries.

For this reason, further examination of the pottery, especially the decorated wares, would be valuable, as would comparison with other, as yet unpublished, assemblages, particularly the huge assemblage from South Cadbury.

Table 1

Quantification
The Prehistoric Pottery Assemblage

	Fabric	NF Fabric	Sherd Count	% of Prehistoric Pottery Assemblage by Sherd Count	Weight (gms)	% of Prehistoric Pottery Assemblage by Weight
S/Q/mudstone	15	8	279	47.61%	2,451	42.94%
S/felsp tuff	16	9	20	3.41%	220	3.85%
Q/mica/s'stone	17	6	20	3.41%	122	2.13%
vesicular	18	10	4	<1.00%	19	<1.00%
grog	19	1	2	<1.00%	17	<1.00%
sand	20		1	<1.00%	6	<1.00%
grog	21	2/3	5	<1.00%	89	1.55%
felsp tuff	22	5	1	<1.00%	12	<1.00%
fossil shell	23	(Meare 8)	253	43.00%	2,754	48.25%
sand/shell	24		1	<1.00%	17	<1.00%
Totals			556		5,707	

Fabric Series

Detailed analysis of the fabrics was not conducted beyond examination by eye and by microscope at a magnification of 1 x 25. The future application of thin-sectioning may prove instructive, refining the fabric groups described below, and perhaps identifying the sources of inclusions. As seven fabrics (Fabrics 15–19 inclusive and Fabrics 21 and 22) are paralleled in the Norton Fitzwarren fabric series, fabric descriptions provided below adhere closely to those provided by Woodward (1989, 41–2).

In view of the residuality of the assemblage and the functional nature of the area excavated, detailed quantification by form was not considered worthwhile. Instead, the discussion is based upon the identification of stylistic parallels with a view to drawing chronological inferences from comparable collections.

Fabric 15 Fig. 9, nos 1–8. Final Iron Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 8. Sparse fine sand/quartz/mudstone. A fairly clean clay matrix containing a scatter of well-sorted sub-angular quartz grains, average size 0.30 mm–0.80 mm, reasonably-rounded grains of mudstone, a little quartzite, and particles of fine sand, the latter sparsely distributed throughout the fabric. The colour ranges from grey–brown to near black. This fabric has been dated to the Late Iron Age based upon the comparative material from Norton Fitzwarren and from South Cadbury (Alcock 1980). Forms: the ratio of globular jars with upright necks (Fig. 9, nos. 1–2) to slight-shouldered bowls (Fig. 9, no. 3) is 2:1. Some examples from the globular group also have slightly everted rims (Fig. 9, no. 6). Parallels from South Cadbury, also attested at Maiden Castle War Cemetery, include the rim of a high-shouldered bowl or jar in a brownish–grey fabric (Fig. 9, no. 4) and a rim sherd from a bowl with a bead rim (Alcock 1980, 698–705, Fig. 17, 569:1, 598:4). Forms and decoration are typically Durotrigian in character, ranging from simple linear decoration (Fig. 9, nos. 5–6) to more formalised registers of incised design enclosed by girth grooves with a burnished surface (Fig. 9, nos. 7–8). This fabric represents 47.61% of the prehistoric pottery assemblage by sherd count, 42.94% by weight.

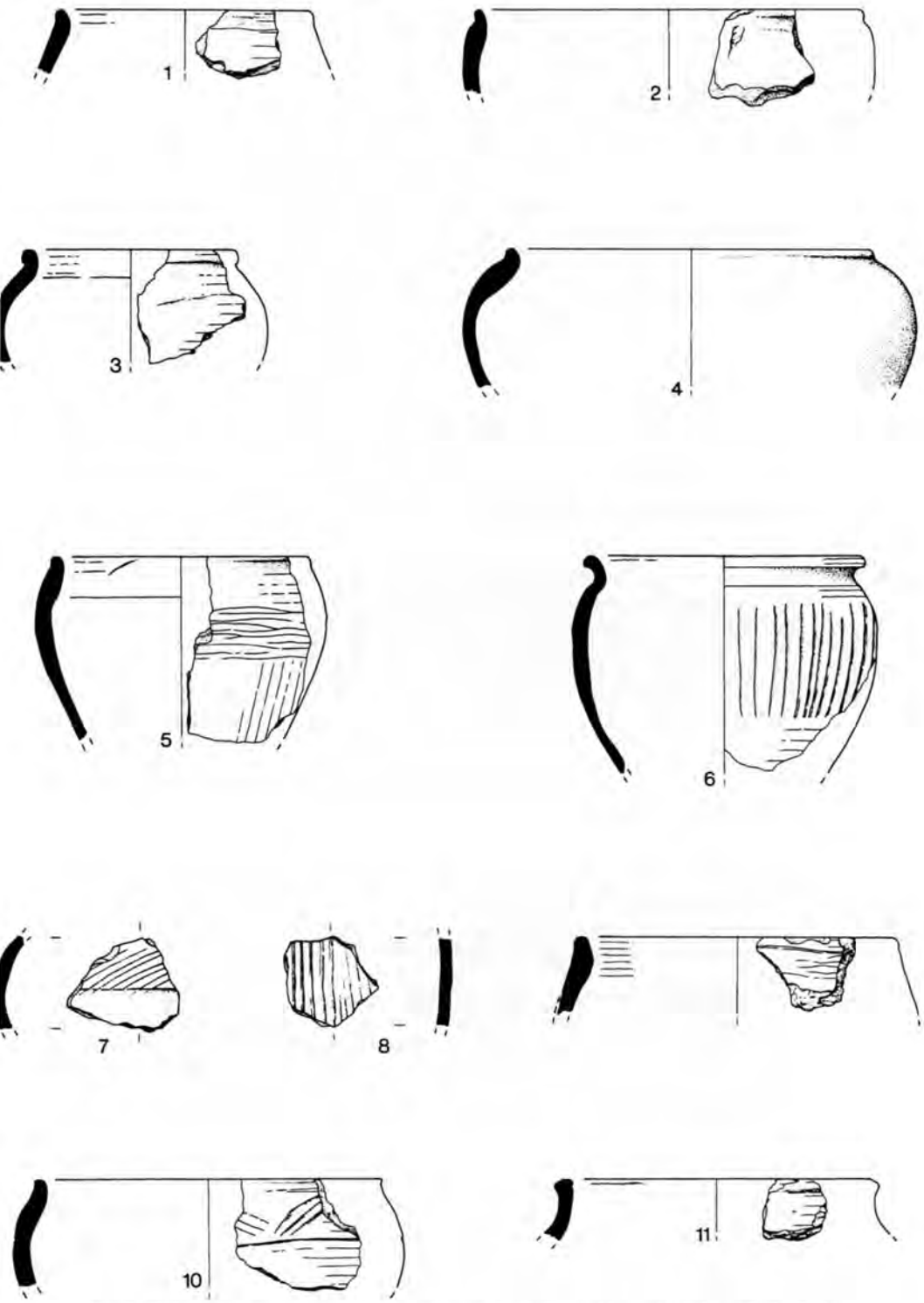

Fig. 9 Prehistoric pottery: nos. 1–8, Fabric 15; nos. 9–10, Fabric 16; no. 11, Fabric 17. (N. Dodds)

Fabric 16 Fig. 9, nos 9–10. Middle to Late Iron Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 9. Fine sand/felspathic tuff. The clay matrix of this dark grey to black fabric contains a high frequency of felspar, some quartz grains and a random distribution of mica and quartzite. The volcanic element which characterises this fabric at Norton Fitzwarren may have originated from Beacon Hill near Shepton Mallet (Woodward 1989, 52–3). This small assemblage includes three rim sherds from globular bowl forms (e.g. Fig. 9, no. 10) and one rim sherd from a plain-rimmed bowl (Fig. 9, no. 9). One rim sherd (not illustrated) has a close parallel at Norton Fitzwarren: a sherd from a shouldered bowl with a flat-topped rim (Woodward 1989, 48, Fig. 20:46). The Norton Fitzwarren example is undecorated but the comparable sherd from Maidenbrook Farm bears traces of an incised chevron motif which can (like the example Fig. 9, no. 10) be related both to other examples at Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989, Fig. 21:49, 50, 52, 55) and to the contemporary Glastonbury ware assemblage from Meare Village East (Roulliard 1987, Fig. 21:P49). Two decorated body sherds (not illustrated) can also be related to the geometric and curvilinear groups respectively. The first bears incised linear decoration similar to a sherd from Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989, Fig. 21:55). Although no direct parallels are present at Meare Village East, the decoration is geometric in character. The second sherd can be more closely related to the Glastonbury curvilinear group, comprising part of 'a hanging festoon ornament doubly outlined with the lower angle shaded by oblique lines' (Roulliard 1987, 211, Fig. 5.22:P261, P245 and Fig. 5.23:P9, P58). This numerically small but stylistically interesting group comprises 3.41% of the total prehistoric pottery assemblage by sherd count, 3.85% by weight.

Fabric 17 Fig. 9, no. 11. Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 6. Quartzite/mica/sandstone. A dark brown to near black fabric containing large, frequent grains of quartzite from 1 mm to 3 mm in size, occasional particles of mica and a little sandstone. A local source to the west of Norton Fitzwarren has been proposed for the quartzite pebbles which characterise this distinctive fabric (Woodward 1989, 53). Only one diagnostic feature sherd, a rim sherd from a shouldered jar with an out-flaring rim (Fig. 9, no. 11) has been identified in this small collection, which has a close parallel in form and fabric at Norton Fitzwarren where a larger sherd had decoration below the rim (Woodward 1989, Fig. 19:31). This small group, comprising 3.41% of the total prehistoric assemblage by sherd count, 2.13% by weight, has been dated to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age (Woodward, pers. comm.).

Fabric 18 Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 10. Vesicular. Brownish–black in colour with dense fine and medium-sized vesicles, probably originally tempered with local Jurassic limestone or Palaeozoic (Malvernian) limestone. Only four body sherds are represented in this fabric. Fabric 18 represents less than 1% of the total prehistoric assemblage. It has been dated to the Iron Age (Woodward 1989, 42).

Fabric 19 Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 1. Grog. A hard fired grey–brown fabric containing large particles of grog densely distributed throughout matrix and frequent large-sized grains of quartz, average size 2 mm. A local origin has been proposed for this fabric which has been dated to the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (Woodward 1989, 52). Only two badly-abraded body sherds have been recovered in this fabric, comprising less than 1% of the total prehistoric pottery assemblage.

Fabric 20 Middle to Late Iron Age. Sand-tempered. A hard-fired black fabric with well-sorted grains of sand throughout the matrix. Large voids and poor surface condition may relate to some form of additional vegetable tempering. Only one sherd, a rim sherd from a bead-rimmed jar, is recorded (not illustrated), a typical Glastonbury Ware form of Middle to Late Iron Age date (Woodward, pers. comm.) which represents less than 1% of the total prehistoric assemblage.

Fabric 21 Fig. 10, no. 12. Late Bronze Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabrics 2/3. Grog. A grey–brown fabric containing sparsely-distributed large fragments of grog and some quartz grains. A local origin has been proposed for this vesicular fabric made from poor quality clay for which a Late Bronze Age date has been suggested (Woodward 1989, 52). One rim sherd from a jar with finger impressions below the rim and four body sherds have been identified in this fabric (Fig. 10, no. 12) which accounts for less than 1% of the total prehistoric pottery assemblage.

Fabric 22 Fig. 10, no. 13. ?Bronze Age. Equivalent to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 5. Felspathic tuff. A hard-fired black fabric containing occasional inclusions of felspar, quartz grains and a little mica and quartzite. The volcanic element in this fabric, in common with Fabric 16 (Norton Fitzwarren 9) (*see above*), may have originated in the vicinity of Shepton Mallet (Woodward 1989, 52). Only one body sherd has been identified in this fabric, characterised by a register of two triangles infilled by linear decoration and enclosed by two girth grooves (Fig. 10, no. 13). This important sherd, for which no parallels have yet been identified, has been dated to the Bronze Age, possibly the Later Bronze Age (Woodward, pers. comm.).

Fabric 23 Fig. 10, nos. 14–19; Fig. 11, nos. 20–5). Middle to Late Iron Age. Equivalent to Rouillard Fabric 8 (Rouillard 1987, 184). Fossil shell temper. The colour ranges from brown to grey and black. The matrix of this fabric, which is 'soapy' in texture, contains well-sorted particles of fossil shell. This Middle to Late Iron Age fabric is particularly common at South Cadbury where the fossil shell was available locally (Woodward, pers. comm.). This collection of plain and decorated vessels, the largest prehistoric fabric group from Maidenbrook Farm, comprises an assemblage of Middle to Late Iron Age Glastonbury Wares. Forms are divided fairly equally between plain-rimmed bowl and jar forms (Fig. 10, nos. 14, 16, 17), some with upright and slightly everted rims (Fig. 11, nos. 21–2). Decoration conforms in general style to the geometric group at Meare Village East described by Rouillard (1987, 208–11), consisting of girth grooves enclosing registers of incised designs and intricate cross-hatch. One example (Fig. 11, no. 20) corresponds to Rouillard's curvilinear group (1987, 211–4) although a direct parallel has not yet been identified. In some respects this example, consisting of a simple incised wave design, can be assigned to Rouillard's 'Miscellaneous' category (1987, 216–7, Fig. 5.25:P219); the form is similar but the design is undisciplined in the Meare Village example, and less formalised than the Maidenbrook rim sherd. The most common designs at Maidenbrook are registers of incised linear decoration enclosed by girth grooves (Fig. 11, nos. 21–3), characterised at Meare Village by chevrons with linear infilling and dense cross-hatch. When chevrons occur at Maidenbrook Farm, they have been left blank. Occasional instances of cross-hatch occur at Maidenbrook Farm, for example a body sherd (not illustrated) in which the cross-hatch is enclosed by a double bank of girth grooves at the shoulder, in the manner of the jar at Meare (Rouillard 1987, Fig. 5.21:P288) although no rim is available for comparison in the Maidenbrook example. This large group represents 43% of the total prehistoric pottery assemblage by sherd count, 48.25% by weight.

Fabric 24 Sand/shell. This sandy black fabric has a moderate scatter of shell inclusions throughout the matrix. Only one rim sherd is recorded from a shouldered jar with a slightly everted rim (not illustrated), plain except for two girth grooves irregularly applied at the shoulder. This fabric has been assigned a Middle to Late Iron Age date and related to the contemporary assemblage at Meare Village East (Woodward, pers. comm.). This fabric represents less than 1% of the total prehistoric assemblage.

THE ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY

The combined Romano-British pottery assemblage from the 1990 evaluation and excavation amounted to 1,745 sherds, 17.7 kg in weight (Table 2). The general condition of the pottery assemblage was poor. A high degree of fragmentation was recorded and only a few profiles of

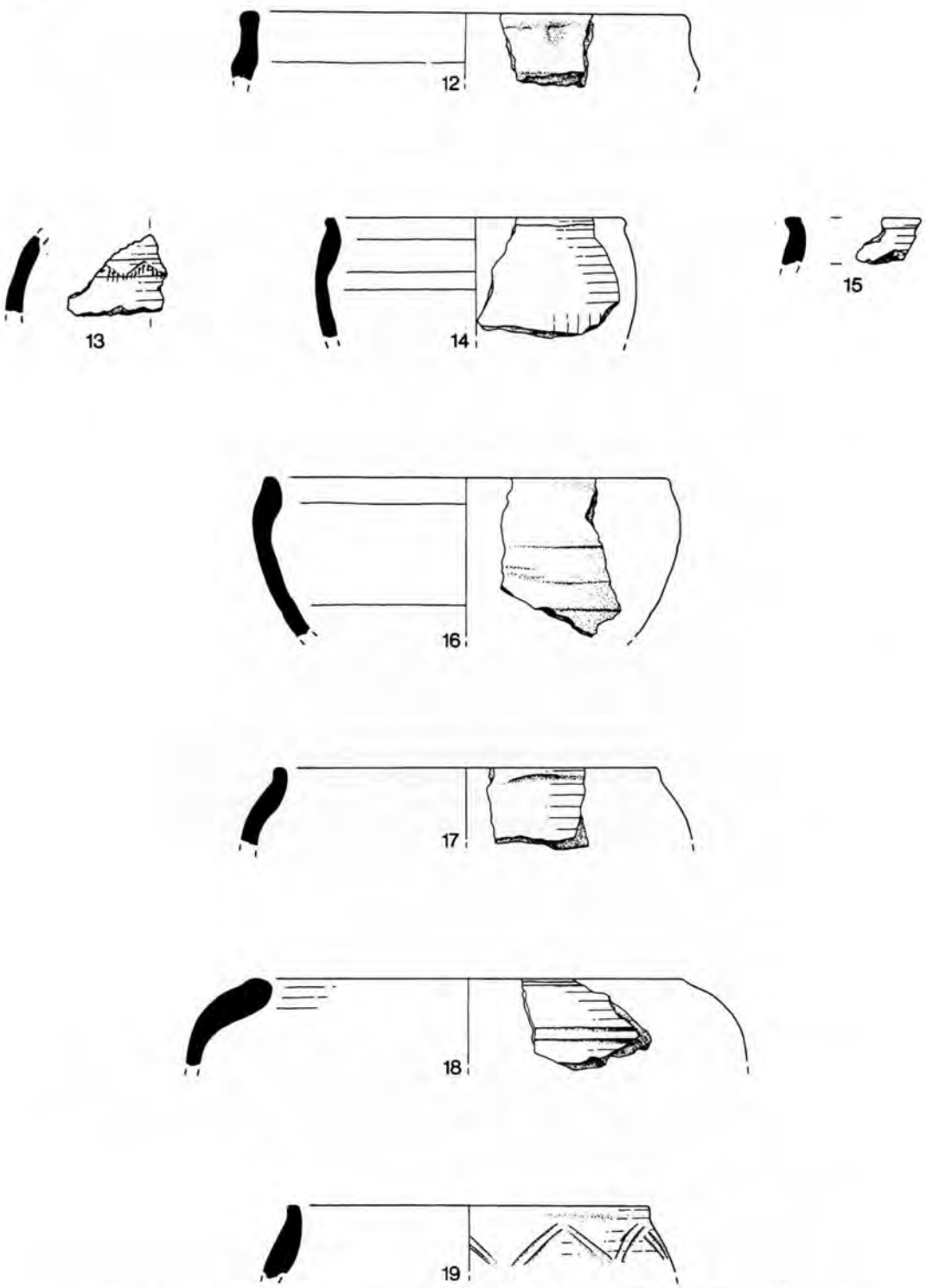

Fig. 10 Prehistoric pottery: no. 12, Fabric 21; no. 13, Fabric 22; nos. 14–19, Fabric 23. (N. Dodds)

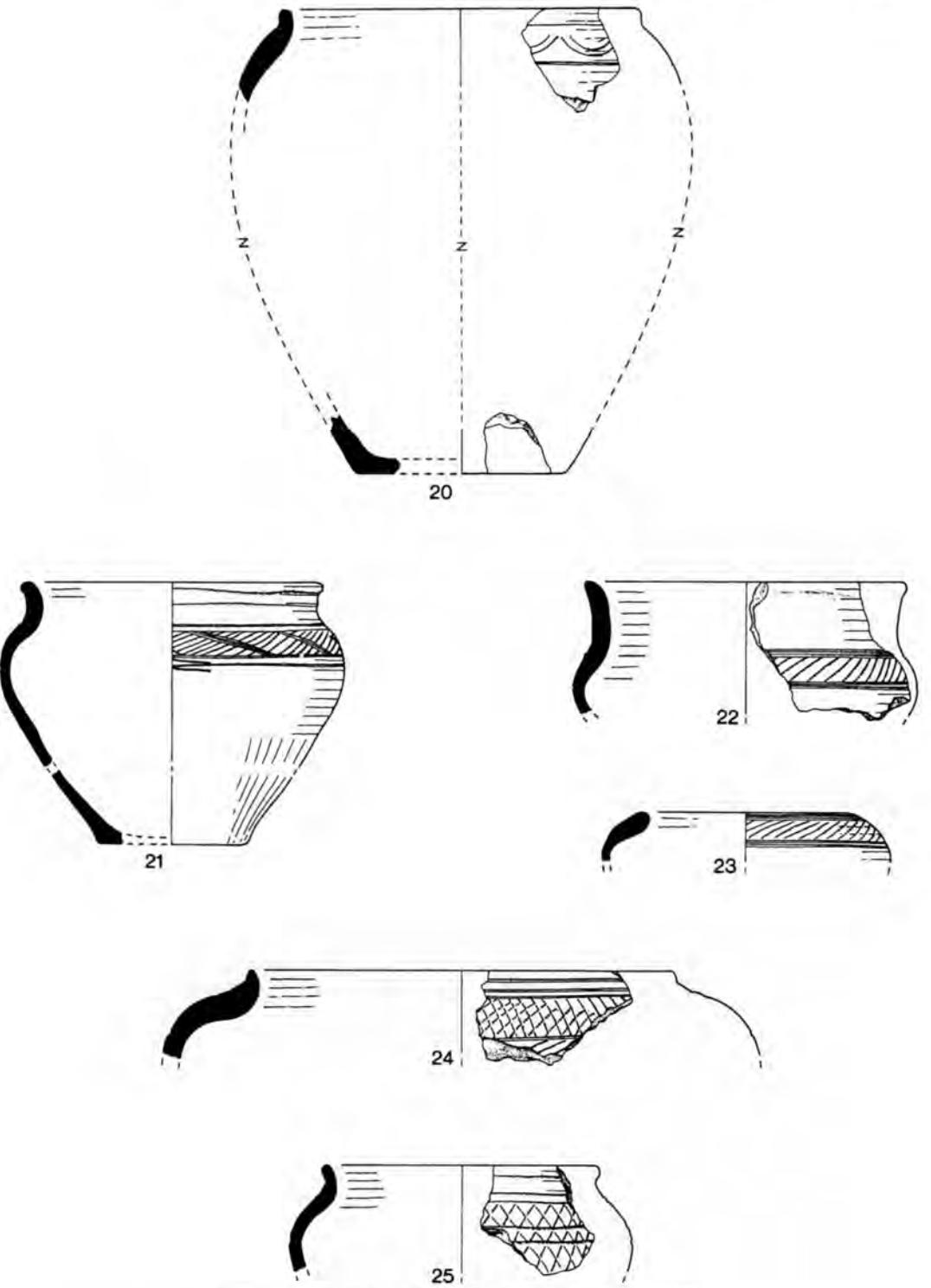

Fig. 11 Prehistoric pottery: nos. 20–25, Fabric 23. (N. Dodds)

Table 2

Quantification
The Roman Pottery Assemblage

	Fabric	NF Fabric	Sherd Count	% of Roman Pottery Assemblage by Sherd Count	Weight (gms)	% of Roman Pottery Assemblage by Weight
BB1	1		576	33.00%	6,603	22.24%
BB1 Copies	2		198	11.34%	1,981	6.67%
Samian	3		4	>1.00%	34	>1.00%
Oxford	4		31	1.77%	410	1.38%
New Forest	5		6	1.00%	70	>1.00%
quartz/s'stone	6		14	1.00%	85	>1.00%
micaceous grey	7	(Ilchester)	11	1.00%	92	>1.00%
mica/iron	8	13	27	1.54%	159	>1.00%
colour coats	9	12	7	>1.00%	28	>1.00%
grey ware	10	2	84	4.81%	915	3.08%
grey ware	11	7	104	5.95%	1,268	4.27%
grey ware	12	8	275	15.75%	6,204	20.89%
red/buff, sand	13		254	14.55%	6,000	20.21%
coarse sandy and misc.	14	1	151	8.65%	5,559	18.72%
coarse grey	40	10	2	>1.00%	207	>1.00%
micaceous mortarium	41	M1/13	1	>1.00%	73	>1.00%
Totals			1,745		29,688	

vessels were reconstructable. The repertoire of forms was also limited; storage jars, often with simple everted rims, predominated among the local coarsewares which comprised 49.74% of the assemblage by sherd count, 67.18% by weight. There was a high incidence of abrasion, indicating in some cases the passage of a considerable time between the initial breaking of vessels and the deposition of sherds in refuse deposits. None of the Romano-British material was recovered from modern ploughsoil deposits and therefore such an explanation could not account for such a noticeable degree of abrasion damage.

A number of contexts contained mixed assemblages of early and later Romano-British pottery, which in some cases also occurred in contexts with Bronze Age and Iron Age pottery. The value of the residual pottery on its own is limited, other than for the purposes of quantification and analysis of the total site assemblage, but analysis of the material recovered from primary contexts allows a chronological overview. Non-local wares are poorly represented on the site, with the exception of four sherds of Samian, two of which are from Central Gaul and date to the 2nd Century AD (*see* discussion by fabric), some fragments of Oxfordshire Ware (2 mortaria fragments, 29 vessel fragments), six New Forest Wares, and a total of 576 sherds of Black Burnished Ware (BBI), the only recognisable forms of the latter suggesting a late 3rd or early 4th century date. The overall assemblage is essentially rural and parochial in character. Non-local wares comprise only 35.35% of the total assemblage by sherd count, 23.97% by weight. The assemblage comprised predominantly locally-produced coarsewares to which a general 2nd century date has been assigned, based upon similar forms from Ilchester (pers. comm. P. Leach).

Initially, it was hoped that the Roman pottery from Maidenbrook Farm could be related to the assemblages from the larger nearby Romano-British settlements at Ilchester and Shepton Mallet; in the event, examination of the pottery revealed that only one fabric, a locally-produced fine ware from Ilchester, could be positively identified at Maidenbrook Farm and even then only in the form

of a few sherds (*see* discussion Fabric 7). As has been stated above, however, there are a number of comparable coarseware forms from Ilchester, and it soon became apparent that the real importance of the assemblage lay not in its relation to these major regional Roman sites, but in purely local terms in relation to the recently published nearby site at Norton Fitzwarren where distinct parallels can be discerned (Timby 1989). Both assemblages share a high proportion of locally-produced coarsewares, with three of the four grey and buff coarsewares known from Maidenbrook Farm being represented at Norton Fitzwarren. Fabric 14 of the Maidenbrook series, which corresponds to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 1, shares a similar repertoire of forms, comprising thick-walled handmade storage jars, usually with a distinctive finger-impressed decoration, and other storage vessels with a countersunk handle which have been assigned a 4th century date by comparison with other local examples (Timby 1989, 54). In addition, one sherd of mortarium (Fabric 41), previously known from Norton Fitzwarren, was identified at Maidenbrook Farm.

The presence of one obvious waster, a badly-distorted base-sherd in Fabric 14, and the possibility of another waster in Fabric 13, which is exclusive to the site, does not support the existence of an on-site pottery production although the possibility cannot be entirely discounted in view of the nature of the small area excavated. It should be noted that a local source has been proposed for Maidenbrook Fabric 14/Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 1 (Timby 1989), perhaps a source local to both sites from which these geographically and chronologically close sites were supplied.

Another factor common to both sites is the under-representation of non-local wares, unsurprising in view of their shared, essentially rural character. The general composition of the assemblage and the relative proportions of the various fabrics would tend to support the hypothesis advanced for the Norton Fitzwarren assemblage that this area of the south-west 'was more or less self-sufficient in pottery and had little or no contact with outside markets' (Timby 1989, 57).

Fabric Series

The pottery was sorted into 16 fabrics on the basis of a macroscopic examination followed by further identification with a microscope at 1 x 25. The pottery was recorded in detail in the form of a catalogue which, with the finds, has been deposited with Somerset County Museums Service. The material was quantified according to sherd count and weight. More detailed quantification was considered unnecessary in view of the factors discussed above.

Several close parallels in fabric and form were identified in the Norton Fitzwarren Roman Pottery Type Series housed at Somerset County Museum. For this reason, and for purposes of future comparison, a similar format to that employed in the Norton Fitzwarren report has been used here and, where applicable, descriptions have adhered as closely as possible to the comprehensive fabric catalogue provided for that site by Timby (1989).

Fabric 1 Dorset Black Burnished Ware (BBI). For definitive description *see* Gillam 1976 and Williams 1977. Forms represented: jars (as Gillam Types 7, 11/12/13), straight-sided dishes, bead-rim and flanged dishes (e.g. Gillam 46) and simple-rimmed beaker of cooking pot form (e.g. Gillam 24). 33% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 22.24% by weight.

Fabric 2 A moderately hard, dark grey to black ware with a dark grey core containing a sparse density of fine rounded to sub-angular quartz, occasional fragments of ?shale, clay pellets and very sparse, fine white mica. Fabric and forms imitate BBI. Forms: simple everted-rim jars and flanged dishes. Mainly wheelthrown vessels although a few examples appear to be hand-made. This fabric of probable local origin also occurs in quantity at Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989, Fabric 5). 11.34% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 6.67% by weight.

Fabric 3 Samian Ware. For description *see* Hartley 1969. Only four sherds are represented, namely one body and three rim sherds from bowls but the degree of abrasion precludes precise identification. One body sherd may relate to DR 38 and one rim sherd to DR 31, both bowl forms, Central Gaulish in origin and of the late 2nd century AD. One rim-sherd may represent the inward-curving lip of a non-spill ink-well (Hartley 1969, 246, Ritterling 13, Fig. 76:13). The body sherd is South Gaulish. Less than 1% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, less than 1% by weight.

Fabric 4 Oxfordshire Ware. For description *see* Young 1977. With the exception of one body sherd from a whiteware mortarium, this small collection comprises red colour coats. Several forms are represented, the majority of which are severely abraded, including rim-sherds from a flanged bowl (Young 1977, C51), a bead-rimmed bowl (Young 1977, C45) and two mortaria (Young 1977, C100). 1.77% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 1.38% by weight.

Fabric 5 New Forest Ware. For description *see* Fulford 1975. The collection comprises four body sherds, probably from beakers (Fulford 1975, 24–5: Fabric 1a), and one mortarium rim-sherd (Fulford 1975, 26: Fabric 2b) (the latter similar to Fulford 1975, Fig. 25:102, the main phase of production of which was between *c.* AD 270–350). One other noteworthy rim-sherd from a double-beaded, pulley-wheel, open-mouthed, notched jug, (Fulford 1975, 48 and Fig. 11, type 17.5 (Fabric 1a)) has been dated to between *c.* AD 350–400. Less than 1% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count and by weight.

Fabric 6 Fig. 12, no. 1. A fine dark grey to black ware with a mid-brown to dark grey core containing a moderate density of sub-angular to angular quartz grains with occasional fragments of sandstone up to 2 mm. Forms: wheelmade vessels, including one rim-sherd of a bowl with a plain, near-upright rim (Fig. 12, no. 1). There are no known local parallels for this fabric, which represents less than 1% of total Roman assemblage.

Fabric 7 Fig. 12, no. 2. A distinctive micaceous fine-textured greyware. Medium hard grey to pinkish brown micaceous fabric with moderate-to-common, well-sorted quartz inclusions and sparse-to-moderate iron grains. Well-known at Ilchester in a variety of wheel-made, plain and decorated forms, the antecedents of which can, in some cases, be traced to Durotrigian forms (Leach 1982, formerly Group 9: Gii, 141–2; now Edwards 1988, Fabric 27). A limited repertoire of forms is represented at Maidenbrook Farm, consisting of body sherds and three rim sherds from bead-rimmed bowls (Fig. 12, no. 2), and a body sherd (not illustrated) with double-grooved decoration near to the base of a vessel, similar to an example from Ilchester (Leach 1982, 157, Fig. 72:243). A micaceous clay source on the southern border of the Yeo Valley has been proposed for this fabric, and the distribution suggests that the Ilchester type represents another example of a widespread early attempt to produce local grey 'fine wares' (Leach 1982, 142). This fabric, which can be regarded as originating in the vicinity of Ilchester, represents less than 1% of the total Roman assemblage at Maidenbrook Farm.

Fabric 8 Fig. 12, nos. 3–4. A moderately soft, very fine orange micaceous ware containing sparse fine red–brown iron grains. Forms: wheelmade bead-rimmed bowls (Fig. 12, nos. 3–4). Conforms to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 13 (Timby 1989, 55). 1.54% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, less than 1% by weight.

Fabric 9 Colour coats. Moderately soft fabric, orange or pale grey in colour containing a moderate scatter of fine rounded to sub-angular quartz, brown iron and clay pellets. Forms: seven body sherds were recovered from a thin-walled form, probably a small flagon and one very abraded partial handle from a similar vessel. Analogous to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 12 (Timby 1989, 55). Less than 1% of total Roman assemblage.

Fabric 10 Fig. 12, nos. 5–8. A moderately soft, generally reduced pale grey ware with a grey or reddish core. The matrix contains sparse rounded to sub-angular quartz grains with angular quartzite, occasional ?shale and mica. Forms: vessels are generally wheelthrown, everted-rim jars with a few hand-made exceptions (Fig. 12, nos. 5–8). The source of this fabric probably lies close to the site in common with Fabric 2 of the Norton Fitzwarren Type Series with which it is analogous (Timby 1989, 54). Represents 4.81% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 3.08% by weight.

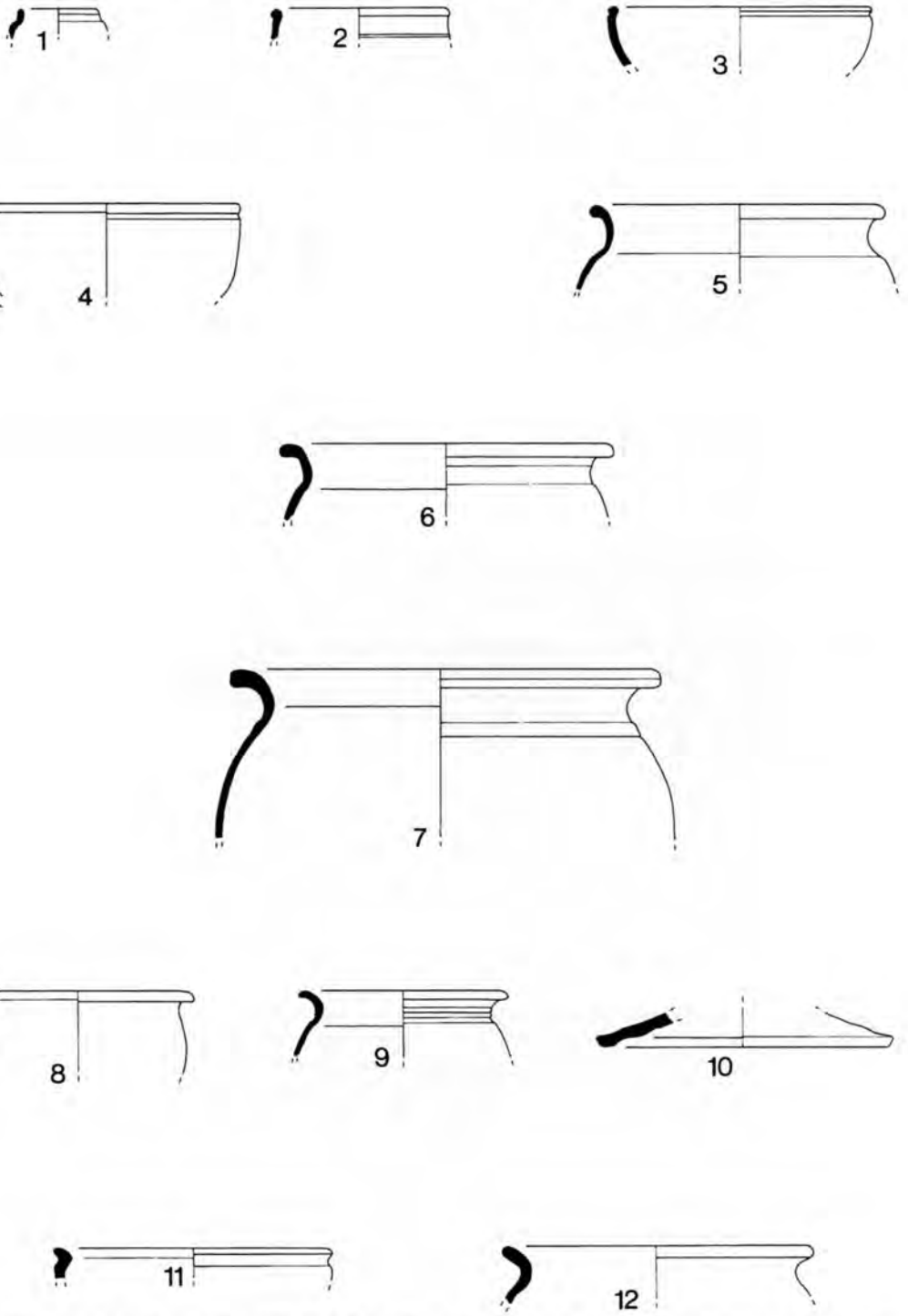

Fig. 12 Roman pottery: no. 1, Fabric 6; no. 2, Fabric 7; nos. 3–4, Fabric 8; nos. 5–8, Fabric 10; nos. 9–12, Fabric 11. (N. Dodds)

Fabric 11 Fig. 12, nos. 9–12. Hard mid to light grey dense sandy ware, a coarser version of Fabric 10 above. The matrix contains a common density of fine sub-angular to angular quartz with sparse rounded grey clay pellets and fine mica which gives the surfaces a sparkling appearance. Fabric and forms are analogous with Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 7 (Timby 19889, 54). Forms include wheelmade, everted-rim jars, a simple lid and a straight-sided dish (Fig. 12, nos. 9–11). 5.95% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 4.27% by weight.

Fabric 12 Fig. 13, nos. 13–19 and 21. A moderately hard, mid-grey ware, coarser in texture than Fabric 11, characterised by a moderate frequency of well-sorted, highly-polished, rounded quartz grains and white sub-angular to rounded quartzite and sparse fine mica. Forms include simple everted-rim jars, bead-rimmed bowls (Fig. 13, nos. 13, 16, 18, 21) and a fragment of a vessel with a countersunk handle (not illustrated). This fabric conforms to Norton Fitzwarren Fabric 8 (Timby 1989, 54). 15.75% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 20.89% by weight.

Fabric 13 Fig. 13, no. 20; Fig. 14, nos. 22–8. A coarse hard-fired predominantly reddish to buff coloured, occasionally black, fabric with moderate to fine sand. Also contains occasional mica and sub-angular quartz grains, the latter up to 6 mm in size, distributed with medium density throughout the fabric. Forms include a variety of wheel-made thick-sided storage vessels with everted and double-grooved rims (Fig. 13, no. 20; Fig. 14, nos. 22–8). One of the latter examples has incised 'slash' decoration (Fig. 14, no. 26). There are no known parallels for this fabric for which a local source is proposed, but the finding of a possible waster in this fabric at Maidenbrook may be significant. 14.55% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 20.21% by weight.

Fabric 14 Fig. 15, nos. 29–32. A moderately hard-fired sandy fabric, buff to grey in colour. The matrix contains a moderate scatter of inclusions: sparse angular white quartzite up to 3 mm across, rounded quartz grains, sparse ?shale fragments, fine white mica and occasional grains of fine sandstone. Forms: thick hand-made storage jars with thumb-impressed decoration and knicked inner rim surfaces (Fig. 15, nos. 30–1; Timby 1989, Fig. 22:1–5). In common with Norton Fitzwarren, the only other vessel type recognisable in this fabric, which conforms exactly to Fabric 1 of the Series (Timby 1989, 53–4) was a single countersunk handle (Fig. 15, no. 29), a more complete version of the example excavated from Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989, Fig. 22:6–7). Timby lists several local occurrences of this form of storage jar which is well known from 4th century contexts in the south-west region (Timby 1989, 54). The Norton Fitzwarren examples have been petrologically identified to a local source, an interesting attribution in the light of the discovery of a waster in this fabric at Maidenbrook. 8.65% of total Roman assemblage by sherd count, 18.72% by weight.

Fabric 40 A hard-fired grey ware containing a common density of fine rounded to sub-angular quartz grains and possible ?shale or mudstone inclusions up to 3 mm in size scattered throughout the matrix. Fine white mica is also present. Only one distinctive but fire-blackened sherd occurred at Maidenbrook Farm, a body sherd from a thick-walled storage vessel. This fabric corresponds exactly to Fabric 10 of the Norton Fitzwarren Series (Timby 1989, 54) where examples of similar vessels are recorded. A local source is proposed for this coarse fabric. Less than 1% of total Roman assemblage.

Fabric 41 A single body sherd of very fine, soft, slightly micaceous orange mortarium in a fabric similar to Fabric 8 and corresponding exactly to Norton Fitzwarren Fabrics M1 and 13 respectively. The matrix contains very sparse angular quartz, dark red to brown iron ore and very fine white mica, with the trituration grits composed of white, angular quartzite fragments ranging from 1 mm to 5 mm in size. A probable source 'local to the south-western region' has been proposed for the examples from Norton Fitzwarren (Timby 1989, 56). Less than 1% of total Roman assemblage.

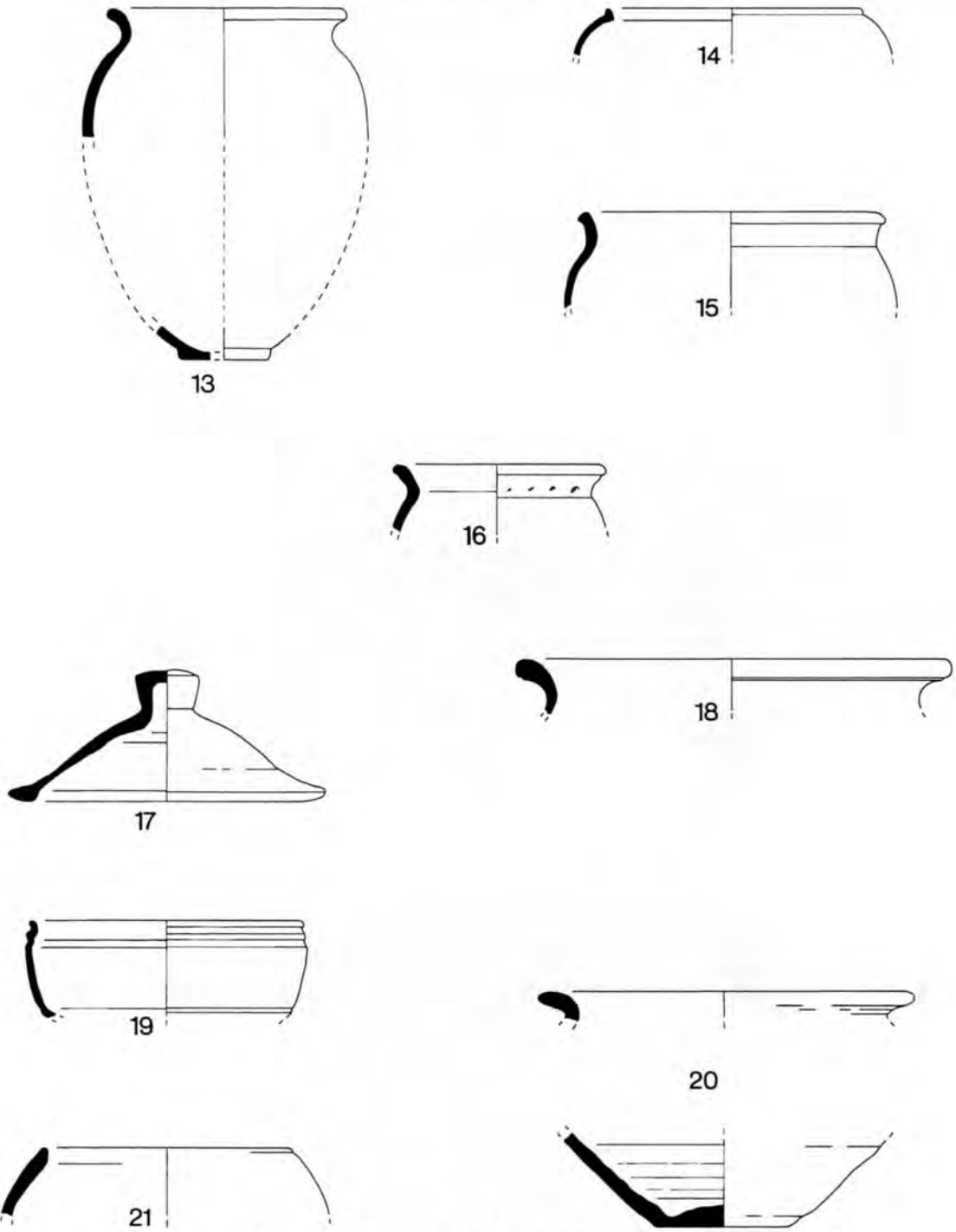

Fig. 13 Roman pottery: nos. 13–19 and no. 21, Fabric 12; no. 20, Fabric 13. (N. Dodds)

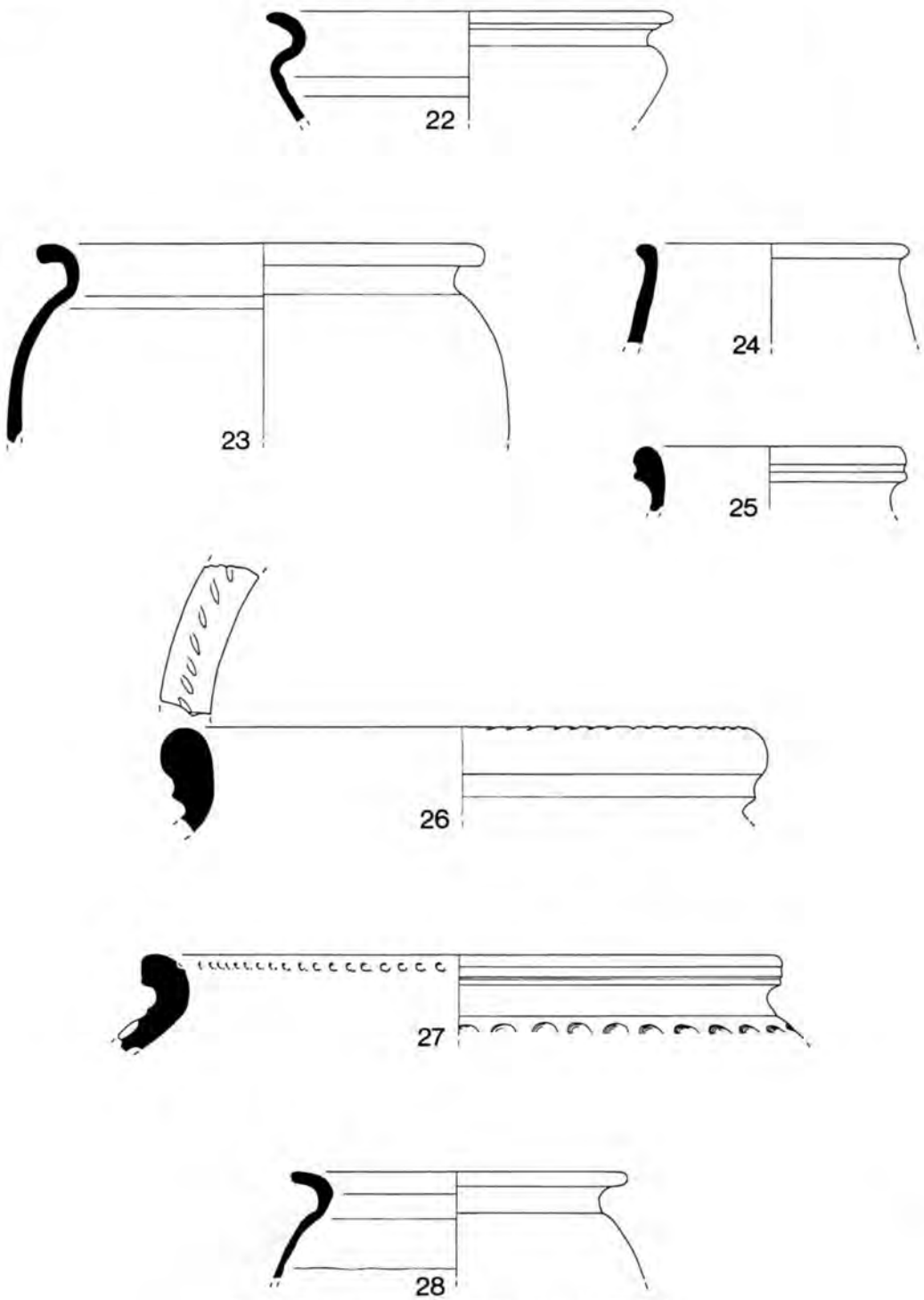

Fig. 14 Roman pottery: nos. 22–28, Fabric 13. (N. Dodds)

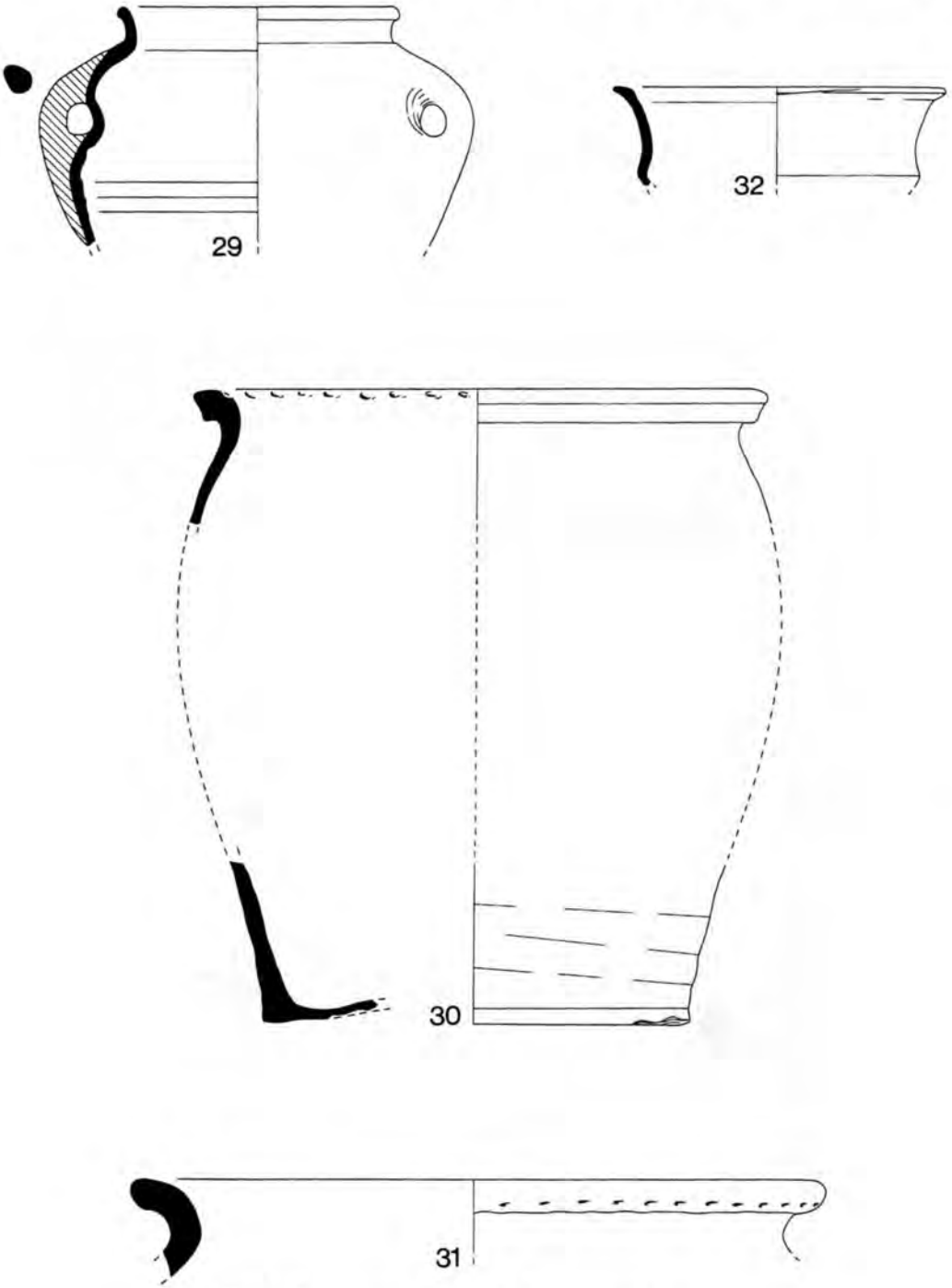

Fig. 15 Roman pottery: nos. 29–32, Fabric 14. (N. Dodds)

COINS, by A.S. Esmonde Cleary

Three copper alloy coins were recovered from the excavations. Their discussion as a group would be of no value.

1. Nero, *as*, AD 54–68. (2002. Backfill of ditch F202, Phase 2B.)
2. Hadrian, *as*, AD 117–134. (2002. Backfill of ditch F202, Phase 2B.)
3. Nero, *as*, AD 54–68. (2085. Backfill of ditch F236, Phase 2B.)

ROMAN OBJECTS OF JET AND SHALE, by I.M. Ferris

1. Complete jet hairpin with off-centred, cuboid, faceted head and tapering, round-sectioned shaft with pronounced central swelling. Length 70 mm. Dimensions of head 7 mm by 5 mm. The cuboid motif was popular on jewellry from AD 250 onwards (Crummy 1983, 23), and this pin must fall in the general date range of late 3rd to 4th century. Fig. 16, no. 1. (1003. Backfill of F3. Phase 3B.)
2. Fragment of round-sectioned shaft of jet pin. Length 34 mm. Not illustrated. (2014. Backfill of gulley F208. Phase 2B.)
3. Three fragments of circular-sectioned bracelet or armlet of Kimmeridge Shale. Diameter uncertain. Not illustrated. (1081. Backfill of gulley F6. Phase 3B.)

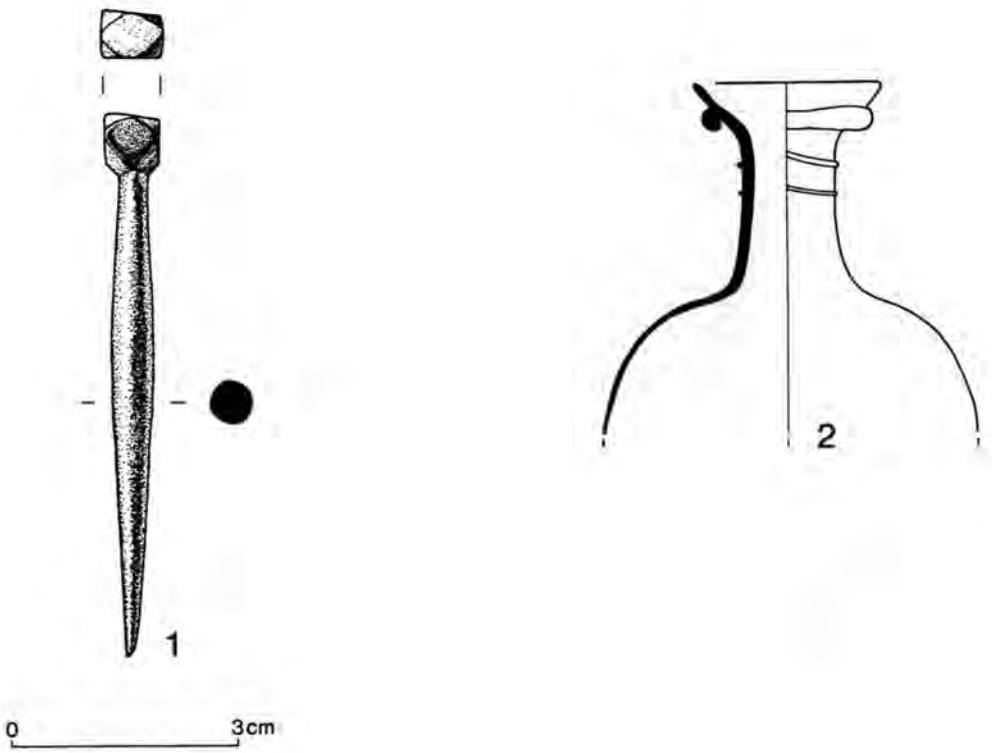

Fig. 16 Other finds: no. 1, jet; no. 2, glass. (N. Dodds)

OBJECTS OF IRON, by I.M. Ferris

Nails
Nineteen iron nails were recovered by excavation, six from the topsoil. The remaining nails all came from the backfilled gulleys of the Phase 3B rectangular enclosure, as follows: F2 (1004), four nails; F3 (1003, 1019, 1021, 1022) 8 nails; F6 (1006) one nail. The nails were of two types, the first (eight examples) being the extremely common Manning Type 1 (Manning 1985, 134–5), the second being shorter nails perhaps of Manning's Types 7–9 which were used as upholstery nails.

Objects
1. Fragments of a knife or tool blade. Form uncertain. Not illustrated. (2024. Backfill of semi-circular gulley F208. Phase 2B.)

2A. Portion of rim of iron ?bowl. Diameter 9 mm. Not illustrated. (1028. Backfill of boundary ditch F28. Phase 3A.)

2B. Raised iron mount (?from 2A) on rectangular plate. Hollow, with internal iron fitting to facilitate attachment. Not illustrated. (1028. Backfill of boundary ditch F28. Phase 3A.)

METALWORKING RESIDUES, by I.M. Ferris

Metalworking residues, in the form of slags, were recovered from only one excavated feature, F275 of Phase 2B, from whose backfill (2150) came 0.530 kg of iron smithing slag and hearth bottom. This material was not further analysed.

ROMAN GLASS, by I.M. Ferris

Beads
A small bead of blue glass, possibly one section of a segmented bead. (Topsoil.)

Vessels
Sixteen fragments of Roman vessel glass were recovered from the excavation, including ten otherwise undiagnostic pieces of common blue–green bottle or jar glass (from topsoil collection and from the backfill (1003) of gulley F3 of Phase 3B). Other vessels represented were as follows:

1. Light green glass. Neck and mouth and three conjoining pieces of shoulder of flask or jug. Rim rises above the mouth of the jug. Neck decorated with trails. Fig. 16, no. 2. (1081. Backfill of gulley F6 of Phase 3B.)
2. Colourless. Rim and body fragment of beaker or cup with two faint wheel-incised lines below rim. Rim has been knocked off and lightly ground; has slightly outsplayed profile. Probably a vessel similar to a 4th century example from Porchester Castle (Harden 1975, no. 10a, 371). Not illustrated. (2003. Backfill of gully/ditch F203 of Phase 3C.)

ROMAN TILE AND BRICK, by I.M. Ferris

A small quantity of tile and brick was collected from the topsoil during machining but this material was so undiagnostic, fragmentary and abraded that it has not been considered here. From excavated features came 1.076 kg of Roman tile and brick, broken down as follows:

F215 Fragment of tile. Weight 0.334 kg. (Enclosure ditch of Phase 2B. Backfill deposit 2163.)

F3 Two fragments of tile, one a portion of an imbrex roof tile, the other displaying marks for keying. Weight 0.212 kg. (Ditch/gulley of Phase 3B. Backfill deposit 1003.)

F203 Two fragments of tile, one a portion of a tegula roof tile with flange. Weight 0.29 kg. (Gulley of Phase 3C. Backfill deposit 2163.)

OBJECTS OF STONE, by I.M. Ferris and R. Ixer

Querns

1. Fragment of upper stone with rimmed central hopper. Original diameter 422 mm, thickness 45 mm; *c.* 30% of stone present. Made from coarse-grained Devonian old red sandstone (identification of this and other stone by R. Ixer). Not illustrated. (1073. Backfill of F32 of Phase 3C.)
2. Fragment of upper stone. Original diameter *c.* 400 mm, thickness 70 mm; *c.* 15% of stone present. Same geological origin as no. 1. Not illustrated. (1073. As no. 1.)
3. Small fragment of possible quernstone. Geology as nos. 1 and 2 *above*. Not illustrated. (1004. Backfill of boundary ditch F4 of Phase 3A.)

Roof Tiles

1. Complete slate tile with circular peg-hole. 300 mm long and 110 mm wide. Made from Phyllite. Not illustrated. (1003. Backfill of gulley F3 of Phase 3B.)
2. Fragment of slate tile with circular peg-hole. 110 mm wide. Made from Phyllite as with No. 1. Not illustrated. (1004. Backfill of boundary ditch F4 of Phase 3A.)

THE FLINTS, by L. Bevan

Forty-three flint artefacts and waste flakes were collected in the vicinity of Maidenbrook Farm from evaluation trenches and the subsequent open-area excavation. The collection comprises the following recognisable artefacts: one micro-core, two larger multi-platformed cores, five blades and three scrapers as well as 32 struck flakes of varying size.

This collection can be broadly assigned to the Mesolithic period on the basis of blade size and core types. The multi-platformed cores, also known as opposed platform cores because of the unusual method of working – flakes were struck alternately from platforms at either end of the core – are typically Mesolithic in character. The micro-core, created by the detachment of bladelets, dates to the Later Mesolithic period and it is probable that the rest of this small collection is contemporaneous, representing elements of a homogenous group which bears witness to human activity during the 5th millennium BC.

The Maidenbrook Farm flint assemblage bears little artefactual similarity to other local groups from the vicinity of the River Tone, an exception, collected from a surface scatter at Greenway Farm, North Petherton, some four miles to the north-east, being a truncated blade, dated by Norman (1975) to the Earlier Mesolithic, which closely resembles one of the Maidenbrook blades. Such artefactual similarities are rare and cannot provide a chronological framework for the Maidenbrook material in terms of tool typology or materials used. Fideoak Park, three miles south-west of Maidenbrook, close to the River Tone at Bishop's Hull, is the site of a productive chert tool industry where flint accounted for only 15 per cent of the material collected (Seaby 1951). Seaby proposed that the chert used at Fideoak originated in the Blackdown Hills to the south. A similarly high ratio of chert to flint has been recorded in a chronologically mixed, but predominantly Mesolithic/Neolithic, assemblage containing a number of blades and blade-like elements from Norton Fitzwarren, where it has been suggested that 'the Mesolithic contribution is more important than any other' (Saville 1989). Although the majority of the diagnostic pieces suggestive of Mesolithic activity at Norton Fitzwarren are made of chert, the presence of two flint items, a pyramidical microcore (Fig. 10:2) and a 'possibly Mesolithic' piece (Fig. 11:9), attest to Mesolithic flint-working on the site. Saville suggests that the 'greater use of Greensand chert rather than flint for the Mesolithic items results from easier or preferential access to the raw material at this period' (Saville 1989).

High incidences of Greensand chert usage and comparatively low flint utilization have also been reported at Fideoak Park, Greenway Farm and other local sites (Norman 1975). At Maidenbrook, however, only three struck flakes of chert were recovered and these were of the coarse low-quality yellow chert present in the river gravels in the form of unworked nodules and broken fragments. The flint used at Maidenbrook may also have originated from the river gravels since, with the

exception of several pieces which exhibit extensive white patination and one scraper and one flake of reddish brown flint, the majority of the Maidenbrook Farm material ranges from light to dark grey colours which are represented in the nodules of flint present in the gravels here. Although small and of unpredictable quality these nodules may have provided a source of raw material for the Maidenbrook flint tools and debitage rather than the Wiltshire source favoured by Grinsell (1985). Alternatively, deposits of clay-with-flints-and-chert lie further south in the Blackdown Hills bounded by deposits of Upper Greensand and chalk, increasing in intensity in the area of Chard.

To conclude, this small assemblage, the interpretation of which is made difficult by the small number of recognisable artefacts and the high incidence of edge-damage and patination, does not represent the existence of a prehistoric site of any longevity or discernible purpose, but it does indicate human activity during the Later Mesolithic Period. This period is under-represented in the West Country in contrast to the earlier chert-dominated sites recorded in the area.

DISCUSSION

THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

Prehistoric Activity

As has been noted in the flint report (*above*) there is little local comparative material for the Mesolithic artefacts from Maidenbrook Farm. Other sites in the Tone Valley are represented by the find spots of single items only at Taunton and Norton Fitzwarren (McDonnell 1991, 14) and a relatively large assemblage at Fideoak Park, Bishops Hull (Seaby 1951). However, Bevan (*above*) views the latter as not strictly comparable owing to its dependence on chert, rather than flint, as the raw material for tool making. Only one direct correlation can be made with an artefact from the surface collection at Greenway Farm, North Petherton. The provisional interpretation of flints collected during an evaluation at Nerrols Farm, only a short distance to the north of Maidenbrook, across the A361, suggested that though few pieces in this relatively small assemblage were diagnostic, the group could be broadly dated from the Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age with 'perhaps some reasonable emphasis on the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age' (McDonnell 1991, 17).

While a certain quantity of pre-Iron Age pottery was recovered at Maidenbrook, sherds of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age and Middle/Late Bronze Age being represented, these were few in number and all in residual contexts. However, they do testify to a nearby, extended, presence, possibly in the form of a settlement or farmstead. The evaluation at Nerrols Farm also recovered pottery that 'may also date from the Late Neolithic' and together these pieces of evidence suggest utilisation of this stretch of the Tone Valley from the late Neolithic/Bronze Age onwards, an unsatisfactorily vague and largely undefined presence which must be viewed in context with the present rather sketchy knowledge of this period in the region and with the present distribution patterns of Bronze Age activity, represented by sites and find spots of hoards, pottery and metalwork (Ellis 1989, 65, Fig. 24).

Late Iron Age and Romano-British Activity

The quantities of Iron Age pottery found at Maidenbrook Farm, again in residual contexts, suggest increased settlement activity nearby in this period. It is likely that the compound and possibly the circular enclosure of Phase 2 have their origins in the late Bronze Age and that like so many sites in the south-west region there was a considerable degree of continuity at agricultural settlements into the Roman period (Hingley 1989, 55–74). That there may have been a later break in settlement at Maidenbrook is

suggested by the changeover between Phase 2, suggested by pottery and other finds belonging to the late Iron Age/1st–2nd centuries AD, and Phase 3, which is dated to the later 3rd and 4th centuries. However, this apparent discontinuity may be due simply to the present lack of knowledge concerning the make-up of 3rd century pottery assemblages in the region, particularly those dominated by local wares, or to local occupation mobility.

Finds of a few sherds of Romano-British pottery and a complex of ditches probably of this period at nearby Nerrols Farm to the north may relate this area to the Maidenbrook site and may represent outfield activity relating to the main settlement. Across the river, on the southern bank of the Tone, rescue excavation and recording along the A38/M5 link road uncovered evidence for Iron Age/Romano-British occupation at Alvins Orchard and one or two other find spots; these sites may also be part of a more extensive contemporary Iron Age/Romano-British rural landscape in the Tone Valley, exemplified by the settlement/farmstead at Maidenbrook.

A study of the broader Romano-British south-west, undertaken by Roger Leech, suggested that there was a discontinuity in the degree of Romanization detectable on sites of the period to the west and to the east of the River Parrett (Leech 1982), with the western sites displaying lesser, and in many cases no, manifestations of cultural change as reflected in the need to acquire Roman goods, and to adopt Roman styles and habits. Maidenbrook Farm, a west of Parrett site, has a pottery assemblage dominated by local wares, suggesting, as Ellis argued on a similar basis for Norton Fitzwarren, that 'there was little trade contact with other parts of the province' (Ellis 1989, 69); however, considering the nature and function of the areas excavated at Maidenbrook Farm, it is perhaps surprising that in Phase 2 there are found a few coins, part of a jet pin, and a fragment of tile, and in Phase 3 a jet pin, a shale bracelet, iron nails, fragments of ceramic tile (including a portion of an imbrex), stone roof tiles and fragments of glass vessels (including pieces from a flask or jug and a beaker or cup). These finds suggest that there was the desire and opportunity on the part of the inhabitants of the Maidenbrook farmstead or settlement to acquire some trappings of *Romanitas*, a situation more complex than that proposed in the Leech model and perhaps a reflection of the status of the site at Maidenbrook Farm.

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