

ROMANO-BRITISH AND MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT AT WEARNE, HUISH EPISCOPI

BY R. H. LEECH

INTRODUCTION

In April 1975 trenches for a sewer pipe and an electricity cable cut through an area of known archaeological interest south of the hamlet of Wearne, Huish Episcopi, Somerset. The cutting of these trenches was watched by C. F. Clements, Dr. A. B. Ellison, R. H. Leech and Dr. A. J. Parker. Miss A. Adcock examined the small quantity of animal bone found. The help of M. Aston, D. Bromwich, H. Davies, Mr. Elston of Pound Farm, Mrs. E. McQueen, Mrs. D. Parker, the staff of Somerton Plant Hire and L. Taylor is gratefully acknowledged. The co-ordination of the watching and subsequent research was undertaken for the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset. The field records and finds are deposited in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton.

In February 1939 three skeletons at 0.60 metres (two feet) or less below the surface were discovered in building works immediately north of the Langport-Somerton road (Fig. 1). Their alignment was uncertain; one was of a child and the other two were adults, one with a faceted bronze finger ring (Anon, 1940, 19; Gray, 1942, 141-2). In 1946 L. W. Walrond observed 'building stone and roof and flue tiles, wall plaster, *tesserae*, Samian ware, and slingstones' (Anon, 1947, 173) in fields to the north of the burials; the exact find spots (OS cards ST42NE) are shown on the map. In 1970 air photographs taken at the writer's suggestion by J. Hampton of the National Monuments Record Air Photographs Unit (NMR OAP ST4227/1/3/5) revealed cropmarks of enclosures in the same area (Pl. 1).

The history of the present settlement at Wearne can be traced back to the 11th century when it was a small arable holding and the centre of the west part of Pitney Wearne Manor (Dunning, 1974, 1-13). Little is known about the development of the settlement except that the farm opposite the present Pound Farm was described as 'a capital message' in 1692, and was converted into a barn in the early 20th century (*ibid*). The 1799 and 1814 maps (S.R.O., DD/CC 7184; DD EV/34) show ten buildings in the vicinity of Pound Farm, all of which were demolished by the early 20th century; the map of Netherham Manor in 1779 shows only five of these (S.R.O., DD/MKG Box 4 High Ham 1779). Deep Dene cottage south of Pound Farm is not shown on any of these maps.

THE DESCRIPTION OF FEATURES CUT BY THE SEWER TRENCH

The following is a summary of the detailed descriptions made by various observers; all measurements along the trench are northwards from the centre of the manhole (MH 1B on Fig. 1). The sections between 92 m and 110 m were drawn at 1:20 and are deposited with the field records.

- 0-40 m not observed.
- 40-98 m no archaeological features; the subsoil was yellow gravel with occasional pockets of overlying orange-brown clay sealed by 0.50 m of heavy dark grey clayey ploughsoil (AJP).
- 98-99 m a drain lined and paved with stone blocks and laid in a trench cut 0.55 m into the gravel subsoil was intersected by the sewer trench. The walls of the drain stood five courses high and the fill was of dark rather humic clayey soil with flecks of mortar and charcoal. Sealed by the floor of the drain was a thin layer of brown clay from which came one sherd of Romano-British pottery. For 0.50 m to the S the gravel

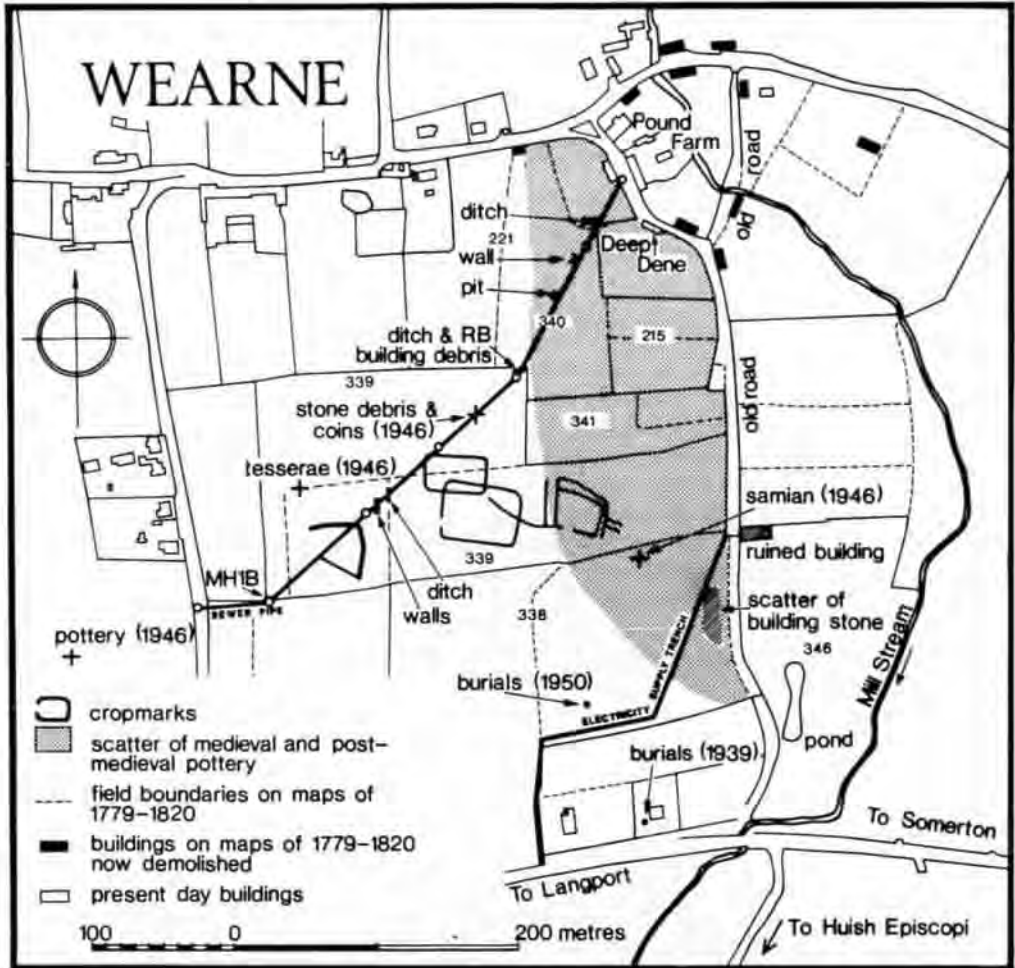


Fig. 1.

subsoil was sealed by a layer of dirty brown clay with much charcoal and 70-120 mm in depth. Sealing this was a layer of flat stones two to three courses deep (CFC, AJP).

- 100-101 m a shallow ditch c. 2 m wide and 0.30 m deep with a fill of indeterminate clay and some occupation material (CFC, AJP).
- 101.7-102.3 m a trench with a V shaped profile cut 0.30 m into the natural gravel and also into a layer of brown clayey soil on the NE; the fill was of large stone blocks, possibly a wall foundation (CFC, AJP).
- 102.3-103 m a layer of brown clayey soil sealing the natural gravel, cut by the ditch above and sealed by a rubble deposit (CFC, AJP).
- 103-104 m a wall of squared blocks c. 0.80 m wide, loosely mortared and standing four courses high; cleaning this feature produced part of an *imbrex* as well as white wall-plaster and pink mortar (CFC, AJP).
- 106-110 m a ditch 0.40 m wide and cut at least 2 m into the natural gravel; the fill was of soft brown clay with some stones (CFC, AJP).
- 110-236 m no archaeological features were observed (CFC).
- 236-238 m a ditch or pit cut 0.25 m into the light brown sandy natural subsoil and only clearly visible in the S side of the section; on the N side of



Plate 1. Cropmarks at Wearne, Huish Episcopi, June 16th 1970 (NMR ST 4227/5). *National Monuments Record Air Photograph: Crown Copyright.*

- the section the subsoil was sealed by a layer of large roughly-squared Lias blocks with one Hamstone block and some gravel in a matrix of very dark brown soil. Finds from this layer included two *tegulae*, some Romano-British pottery and bones of sheep (CFC, RHL).
- 238-259 m no archaeological features were observed. N of 259 m and as far as 386 m a strip 5.50 m wide was cleared to the surface of the subsoil on either side of the sewer trench; the latter here reached a depth of c. 4 m without shoring, which made drawing of the section an impossible task (RHL).
- 259-296 m no archaeological features were observed. At 296 m and N of the trench was a pit c. 4 m square with a dark fill; this was observed only in plan (RHL).
- 296-306 m no archaeological features were observed; at 306 m was the corner of the foundation of a rectangular building which extended NW of the cleared strip; the c. 0.60 m wide foundations were constructed of unmortared small Lias slabs laid in a shallow foundation trench (RHL).
- 308-357 m no archaeological features were observed; at 357 m a ditch c. 1 m wide with a fill of dark soil with small stones and some animal bones crossed the pipe trench in a NW/SE direction (RHL).
- 359 m a pit 2 m NW of the sewer trench, c. 0.80 m diameter and with a fill of loose brown soil, possibly of recent origin (RHL).
- 362-366 m a scatter of dark soil, roughly squared Lias blocks, burnt and unburnt Hamstone to the N of the pipe trench.

THE ELECTRICITY SUPPLY TRENCH

No archaeological features were observed in the sides of this trench (ABE, RHL).

FIELD SURVEY

East of the stream, fields 221, 340, 341, 339 and 338 had recently been ploughed and were systematically walked. Along the west slope leading down to the track running south from Pound Farm (Fig. 1) the soil was darker and some medieval and post-medieval pottery, fragments of quernstone and many roughly squared Lias blocks were found. On the east side of field 340 was a marked concentration of building stone. To the east of the track all the fields were under grass and the house platforms of several former buildings to the east of Pound Farm could be discerned. In the north-east corner of field 346 were the ruined north and west walls of a building still standing c. 2 m high; there were no window/door openings or chimney flues. It was probably a farm building, but is not shown on the maps of 1779 and 1814.

Mrs. Elstone of Pound Farm reported that burials in field 338 were noted as upstanding slabs when the field was ploughed; one was investigated by L. W. Walrond c. 1950 and found to be a Romano-British inhumation burial c. 0.40 m below the surface, containing a pair of bronze tweezers. The approximate position is shown on the map (Fig. 1).

THE POTTERY (Fig. 2)

The pottery was sorted into separate types and a detailed account of this is deposited with the finds in the County Museum, Taunton. The following is a summary of the results obtained.

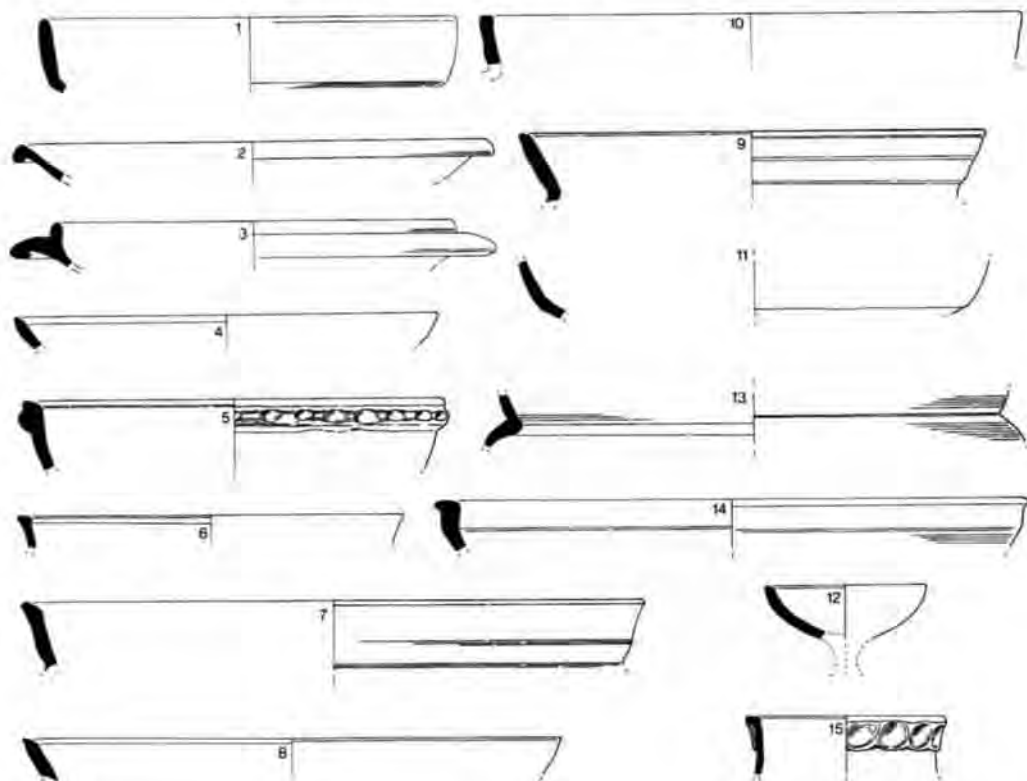


Fig. 2.

The Roman Pottery (illustrated sherds)

1. Dish, plain rim. Black burnished ware category 1 (Farrar, 1973). 3rd-4th centuries A.D. From the ditch 100-101 m N of MH 1B.
2. Bowl, bead rim. Oxidised surface and core, orange/red. Probably from kilns in the Oxford area (Young, 1973). Late 3rd to early 4th centuries A.D. Findspot as (1).
3. Mortarium, upstanding rim with hooked flange. Fabric as (2) but with traces of white colour coating. Probably c. A.D. 250-300. From between MH 1B and 100 m N of MH 1B. (Kindly examined by Mr. C. J. Young.)

Sherds not illustrated included 1 fragment of Samian, 7 sherds of black burnished ware and 6 sherds of other coarse fabrics. There were also five fragments of tile including an *imbrex* and *tegulae*.

The Medieval and Post-Medieval Pottery by T. Pearson

The medieval group is composed of both coarse and glazed wares which are comparable in some respects to the assemblages from Taunton (Pearson, forthcoming) and Ilchester (Leach, forthcoming). Common at both these sites are early medieval coarseware cookpots or storage vessels (4, 6-11 below). Evidence from Glastonbury (Rahtz, 1970 and 1974) and from a floodsealed deposit not later than c. 1350 at Benham's Garage, Taunton (Hunt and Pearson, 1974) indicates that these are of the 11th to the 14th centuries, and that, while crushed limestone tempered fabrics (as 4) occur in the 11th to 12th centuries, better made quartzitic tempered fabrics (similar to 6-11) are predominant in the later part of the period. The kiln sources for these

products are not known. Identified sources of the pottery from Wearne are Ham Green (Barton, 1963) and Donyatt (Coleman-Smith and Pearson, forthcoming); the majority of the post-medieval pottery is also from the latter.

4. (Fig. 2) Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, everted. Oxidised throughout, buff/orange. Crushed limestone and quartz/quartzite tempered fabric. 11th to 13th centuries. From sewer trench 200-400 N of MH 1B.
5. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd with applied and thumbled strip round rim. Reduced black throughout. Quartzitic sand tempered fabric. 13th to 14th centuries. From surface of field 221/340 N of sewer trench.
6. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, everted. Slightly oxidised surfaces, brown/buff with reduced grey core. 11th to 14th centuries. From surface of field 338.
7. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, everted. Oxidised external surface, grey/buff with reduced grey/black core and internal surface. Similar fabric to (6). 11th to 14th centuries. From surface of E side of field 338.
8. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, slightly everted. Oxidised external surface, grey/buff with reduced grey/black internal surface and core. Similar fabric to (6). 11th to 14th centuries. From sewer trench 240-400 m N of MH 1B.
9. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, slightly everted. Oxidised buff surfaces with reduced grey core. Similar fabric to (6). 11th to 14th centuries. From surface of field 338.
10. Cookpot or storage vessel, rim sherd, slightly everted. Oxidised external surfaces buff/orange in colour with reduced grey core. Similar fabric to (6). 11th to 14th centuries. From sewer trench 240-400 m N or MH 1B.
11. Cookpot or storage vessel, base sherd, sagging. Oxidised external surfaces orange/buff with reduced core. Similar fabric to (6). 11th to 14th centuries. From surface of E side of field 338.
12. Cresset lamp, rim and bowl sherd. Oxidised external surfaces buff/orange with reduced grey core. Sparse grog and quartz/quartzite tempered fabric with some isolated chert/flint flakes. Probably 14th century or later. From surface of field 340/215 S of sewer trench.
13. Cookpot or storage vessel, neck sherd. Oxidised external surfaces buff with reduced grey core. Similar fabric to (12). Probably 14th century or later. From sewer trench 240-400 m N of MH 1B.
14. Cookpot/bowl, rim sherd. Oxidised internally buff/orange and externally grey/light buff with reduced core grey. Glaze patches internally. Fabric slightly micaceous with some grog inclusions. 14th to 16th centuries. From surface of field 341.
15. Jug, rim sherd, with applied and thumbled strip around the rim under external dull green/brown lead glaze. Reduced blue/grey core with slightly oxidised buff surfaces. Donyatt ware, 14th century. From surface of E side of field 338.

Sherds not illustrated included glazed wares of the 11th to 18th centuries; one was from Ham Green and the majority were Donyatt products.

DISCUSSION

The walls noted at 98-104 m and at 236-238 m were probably of Romano-British date; the associated pottery was of the 3rd to 4th centuries A:D. These features are probably associated with the *tesserae*, stone debris and coins found in 1946. The 1946 pottery finds further to the east and west are less certainly connected with settlement in the immediate vicinity and could be the result of manuring. The enclosures observed as cropmarks are also possibly of Roman date; at Podimore near Ilchester similar enclosures are associated with an Iron Age and Romano-British settlement (Leech, 1975). The burials to the south-east may also be associated with the Roman

buildings; the electricity supply trench cut through the area between those found in 1939 and in c. 1950 but produced no evidence of further burials.

Plotting of the cropmarks showed that the corner of one enclosure was cut by the sewer pipe trench but was not recognized as such by the observers, possibly either because its fill was similar to the natural subsoil or possibly because of the oblique angle of the cut. The ditch cut at 106-110 m was not apparent as a cropmark.

The walls, building debris and pottery scatter of the 11th to 18th centuries found between 306 m and 359 m and to the south in the course of fieldwalking (Fig. 1) indicate that medieval settlement extended along the west side of the lane which formerly went from Pound Farm towards Huish Episcopi. The ruined building on the east side of the lane was possibly part of the same settlement. The continued movement and shrinkage of the former settlement is evidenced by the demolition of at least ten buildings around Pound Farm between 1779 and the early 20th century.

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Fig. 1 Archaeological features at Wearne. Field numbers are from the 2nd ed. O.S.1: 2500 plan LXXII.4.

Fig. 2. Roman, Medieval and Post-Medieval pottery from Wearne, Huish Episcopi.

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