

Excavations at Sugworth Farm, Radley

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INTRODUCTION

DURING the construction of the Abingdon by-pass (A34) in April 1972, members of the Abingdon Archaeological Society located traces of Iron Age occupation in a drainage ditch cut by contractors on the east side of the road. No archaeological features had been found during the scraping of the road-line, but the relatively large quantities of pottery suggest that the nucleus of a more extensive settlement may lie to the south-east, towards Sugworth Farm. The opportunity was also taken to survey the extensive medieval earthworks to the south of Sugworth Farm.¹ No traces of medieval occupation were observed in the area of the new road.

I would like to thank Amey Roadstone Corporation for their cooperation, the members of Abingdon Archaeological Society who carried out most of the fieldwork during construction of the new road, Wendy Lee who drew the plans and pottery, Annie Lipson for help with preparation of the report, and Bob Wilson who identified the bone.

The Iron Age features located in the A34 construction works lie on a thin capping of unbedded glacial drift overlying Kimmeridge Clay. The site is on a practically flat-topped promontory 91.5 m. (300 feet) O.D., the highest point in the parish of Radley. The ground slopes away quite markedly to the north and north-east. A stream in the narrow valley immediately to the north separates the site from Bagley Wood, while Radley Large Wood lies 500 m. to the east. The present woodland on the surrounding heavy clays is principally the result of plantation in the past two hundred years, but the area is naturally suited to forest cover. Charters of 952 and 955 refer to *Bacganleah* and in the early 12th century the area is called *Silvas de Baccleia*.²

In such an area the cappings of glacial drift provide obvious foci for settlement. Sugworth is on the largest of these, but significantly another Iron Age and early Roman site is known on Hinksey Hill, also on one of the gravel islands.³ Few other traces of pre-Roman settlement have been found in the immediate area. The extensive private woodland has probably inhibited archaeological fieldwork, but the remaining areas of glacial drift on the Kimmeridge Claylands would probably repay observation. Intensive Iron Age occupation is now well known on the aerially photogenic gravel terraces two to three kilometres to the south-east at Radley,⁴ Goose Acre Farm and Barton Court Farm, Abingdon.⁵

¹ Forthcoming in *CBA Group 9 Annual Report* (1976).

² J. Stevenson (ed.), *Chronicon Monasterii de Abingdon* (1858), I, 126, 176; II, 113.

³ J. N. L. Myres, 'A Prehistoric Settlement on Hinksey Hill, near Oxford', *J. British Archaeol. Assoc.*, xxxv (1930), 360-76; the occupation dates to the early Iron Age with reoccupation in the early Roman period.

⁴ E. T. Leeds, 'An Iron Age Site at Radley, Berks.', *Antiq. J.*, xi (1931), 399-404.

⁵ D. Benson and D. Miles, *The Upper Thames Valley: An archaeological survey of the river gravels* (1974), Map 31.

The site known as Sugworth is at present occupied by a single farm, but surrounding it is an extensive complex of medieval earthworks, hollow-ways and ridge and furrow. The name itself is first recorded in Domesday Book as *Sugoarde*, 'Sugca's enclosure',⁶ not an ornithological name as in *Sugge* meaning a hedge sparrow.⁷ In 1086, four hides 'in Suggesturthe' belonging to Abingdon Abbey were held by a man called Warin for the service of half a knight's fee.⁸ A similar arrangement still existed in the mid 13th century when the estate was held by John de Chereburk and Thomas de Hynton.⁹ By 1316 the Abbot of Abingdon held Sugworth himself and six years after the Dissolution the estate was granted to Richard Snowe of Chicksands. Finally the manor of Sugworth was absorbed into that of Radley when it was purchased by William Stonehouse in 1614.

THE EXCAVATION (FIG. 1)

The cutting of the eastern drainage ditch of the A34 revealed the upper part of a ditch (AA). This ditch was traced for approximately 7.5 m. running east-west, before being obliterated by the cutting of the new road to the west, and disappearing into the adjacent field to the east. The length of ditch surviving between the eastern fenceline and the road cutting was excavated and the area around it cleared. Only two other features appeared (AB and AC). The former, a small pocket of brown sandy loam, on the line of the ditch, survived in the road cutting but was so divorced from any context as to be impossible to interpret. To the south a small oval feature (AC) with a similar fill to AB, survived to a depth of 0.15 m., with a U-shaped profile; it may perhaps have been part of a post-hole, and fragments of Iron Age pottery suggest that it was contemporary with the ditch.

Ditch AA

The ditch was approximately 1.2 m. wide and cut 1.1 m. into the subsoil. Its profile was uniform along the length that could be excavated, being a flattened U-shape with a distinct slot in the bottom. The upper fill (see FIG. 1, section, layer 3) consisted of yellow brown loamy sand and pebbles with some fragments of late Iron Age pottery. Beneath this was a continuous layer (5) of black material, 0.07 m. thick, with much charcoal and pottery. The bottom slot had a fill similar to layer 3 with some larger pebbles. No trace of post voids or stake-holes could be seen in the sections or in the base of the ditch. The position of the ditch along the northern margin of the drift capping might suggest that its function was to help drain a settlement site on the hilltop to the south. Although no other traces were seen in the roadway, the quantity of rubbish deposited in the ditch would seem to indicate occupation in the immediate vicinity. Unfortunately the field on the east and south-east side where any such settlement is likely to have been situated, has been badly damaged by piecemeal quarrying and dumping of Kimmeridge Clay during the A34 construction.

The pottery from the ditch can be matched in form and fabric at other local

⁶ M. Gelling, 'The Place Names of Berkshire', Part II, *English Place-Name Society*, L (1974), 456.

⁷ E. Pollard, M. D. Hooper and N. W. Moore, *Hedges*, The New Naturalist series, Vol. 58 (1974), 128.

⁸ *Chron. Mon. de Abingdon*, II, 4.

⁹ Victoria County History of Berkshire, I, 413.

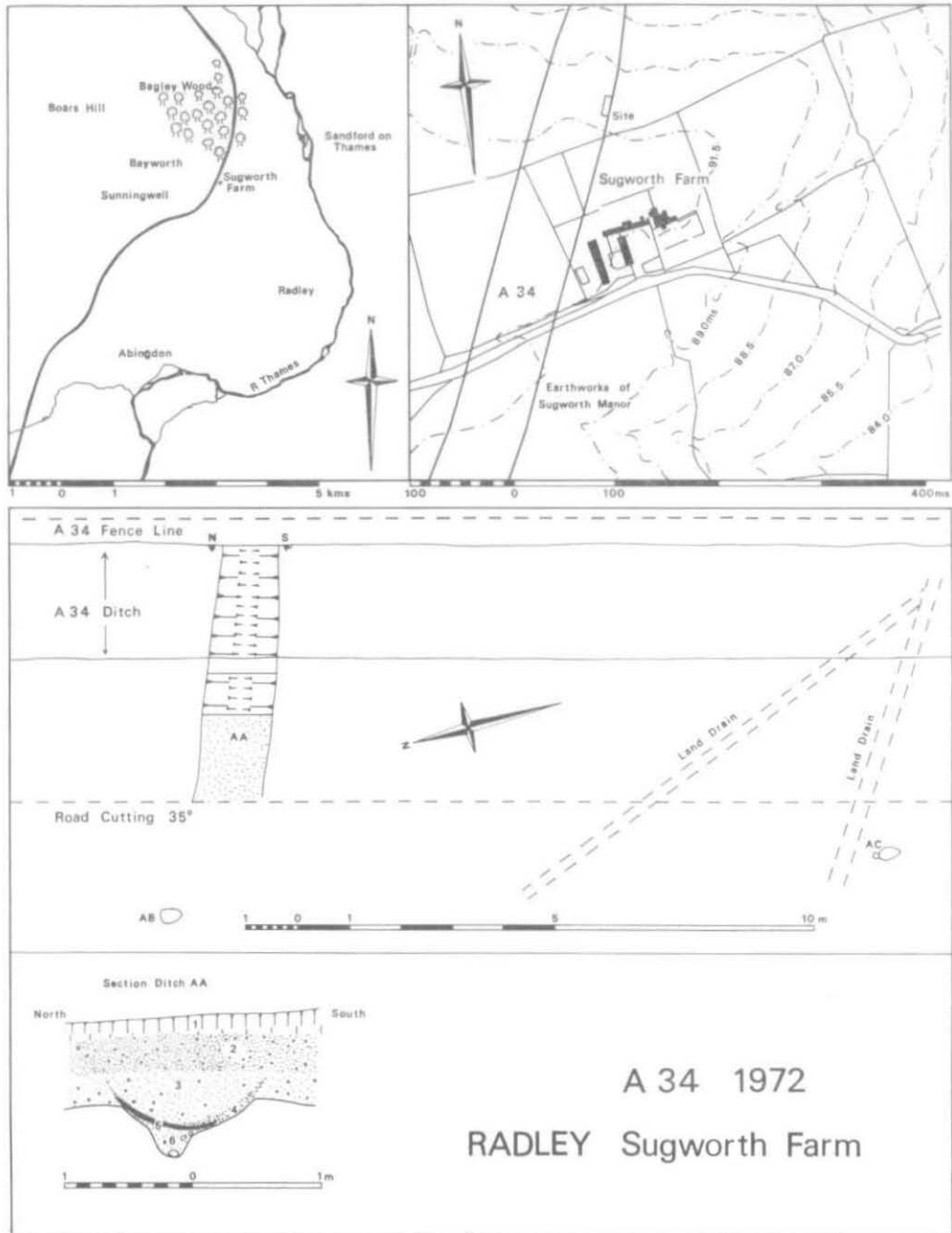


FIG. 1
Location Map and Site Plan.

sites and seems to fit into a late Iron Age context, say the first half of the first century A.D. The lack of Romanized wares or of earlier Iron Age types, suggests on the albeit flimsy evidence of this single feature, that the occupation on this part of the site was of limited duration. In view of the advantages of the site and continuous occupation since Saxon times, this may be a simplistic impression. The only other finds from the ditch were a single pig astragalus and several fragments of burnt antler tine of red deer.

THE POTTERY (FIGS. 2, 3)

The pottery listed here was all found in the short length of ditch (AA) excavated at Sugworth Farm. Unless otherwise stated the material came from the black, humic layer 5 (FIG. 1, Section). The colour descriptions refer to the Munsell Colour Code, and the parallels to forms are taken from D. W. Harding, *Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin* (1972) (hereafter Harding).

The Sugworth pottery shows little variation in fabric, consisting for the most part of hard wares with mixed inclusions of limestone and quartz derived from local sands. None of the vessels need have been manufactured outside the Upper Thames area. While many of the sherds show surface marks suggesting that the pots were smoothed while being turned, only a few were definitely wheel-thrown, while others were built up by hand. The necked bowls 2 and 3 (FIG. 2) are very similar in form but the first, with its plain base seems to have been hand made while the latter, with a foot ring, was wheel-thrown. It is questionable whether such technical differences can be said to have any chronological significance.

The range of vessel types at Sugworth is relatively restricted, consisting for the most part of necked bowls,¹⁰ some with cordons, bead rimmed bowls or jars and a couple of larger jars. A few sherds of butt-beater (FIG. 3, No. 15) are present but in a fabric which suggests that the type is locally made. The material indicates occupation of the site in the latest phase of the pre-Roman Iron Age, the first half of the 1st century A.D. These pottery types could well go on in use during the first decades following the Roman Conquest, and on the evidence of excavations at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, most certainly do.¹¹ The lack of any Romanized material, particularly the locally produced grey wares of Sandford, suggests that this particular feature (AA) was filled-up prior to or about the time of the Roman Conquest.

As Harding has emphasized, the Upper Thames area suffers from a lack of stratified Iron Age deposits, and those that we do have, at Linch Hill, Stanton Harcourt,¹² and Langford Down, Lechlade,¹³ are from the northern bank of the river. The necked bowl is the commonest vessel at both these sites and at Langford Down much of the assemblage is hand made. Harding sees these assemblages as representative of isolated and conservative communities, for although the pottery appears Belgicized, the variety of forms is limited. In contrast, Harding has postulated, on the basis of coin evidence, that the Vale of the White Horse/Corallian Ridge south and west of the river may have functioned as a Belgicized corridor providing communications between the east and west of the country. Certainly the limited evidence of the Sugworth pottery does not indicate any richer assemblage than that of Stanton Harcourt or Langford Down. The 'apparent paucity of settlement' south and west of the river pointed out by Harding is no longer the case.¹⁴ Recent excavations at Appleford, Ashville Trading Estate, Abingdon, and Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, have provided a large body of stratified late Iron Age material which should, in the near future, enable us to assess the interesting model proposed by Harding.

¹⁰ For a discussion of these vessels see Harding, 118, 120-1.

¹¹ Recent excavations there by the author.

¹² W. F. Grimes, 'Excavations at Stanton Harcourt, Oxon., 1940', *Oxoniensia*, VIII-IX (1943-4), 19-63.

¹³ A. Williams, 'Excavations at Langford Down, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, XI-XII (1946-7), 44-64.

¹⁴ Benson and Miles, *op. cit.* note 5, Maps 30-6.

Pottery Catalogue (FIGS. 2, 3)

1. Large jar in hard fabric with mixed limestone, flint and rounded quartz inclusions. Surface colour : dark reddish brown (5YR 3/2) ; interior : reddish brown (5YR 4/4). Similar form at Stanton Harcourt (Harding, Pl. 70 J). AA 5.
2. Necked bowl with plain base in hard fine sandy fabric ; small quartz grains inclusions ; reddish yellow (5YR 6/6). Surface marks of turning but not wheel thrown. AA 5.
3. Necked bowl with foot ring in hard fabric with mixed inclusions as in 1 ; black to greyish brown (10YR 5/2) ; wheel thrown. Paralleled at Charney Bassett (Harding, Pl. 69 C). AA 5.
4. Thin-walled necked bowl in soft fabric with dense mottling of limestone inclusions ; greyish-brown (10YR 5/2) to very pale brown (10YR 7/4) with darker patches. AA 3.
5. Small necked bowl in coarse fabric with large angular quartz and limestone inclusions. Black to reddish yellow (5YR 6/6). AA 3.
6. Necked bowl, sandy pitted fabric with dense mixed inclusions of limestone, rounded quartz and mica. Black-pinkish grey (7.5YR 6/2) surface ; interior grey (10YR 5/1). Short upright neck with neatly trimmed rim. Surface lines suggest wheel-throwing but interior marks show construction was by hand with separate attachment of rim. AA 5.
7. Necked bowl in fine fabric with limestone and some flint inclusions. Black smoothed outer surface and lighter interior. Paralleled at Stanton Harcourt (Harding, Pl. 69 H). AA 5.
8. Wide mouthed jar with thickened rim. Limestone inclusions. Smoothed outer surface. Grey. AA 3.
9. Bead rimmed bowl in coarse fabric with large (up to 2 mm.) limestone and quartz inclusions. Light brown (7.5YR 6/4) to grey. AA 5.

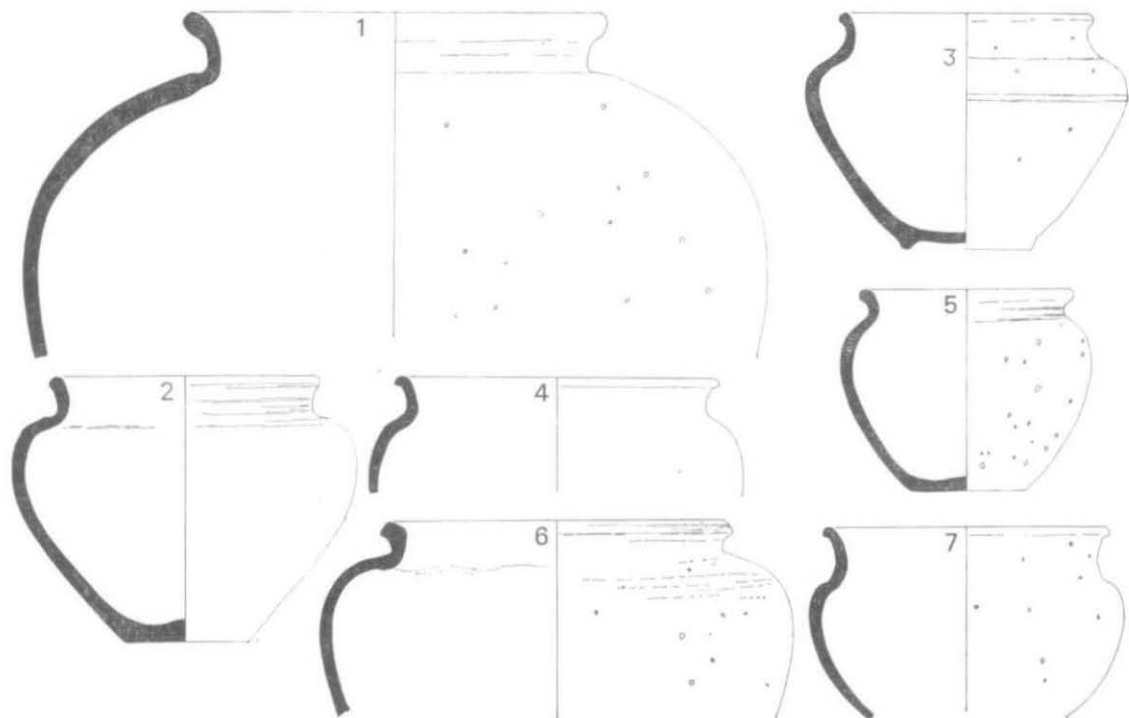


FIG. 2

The pottery (†).

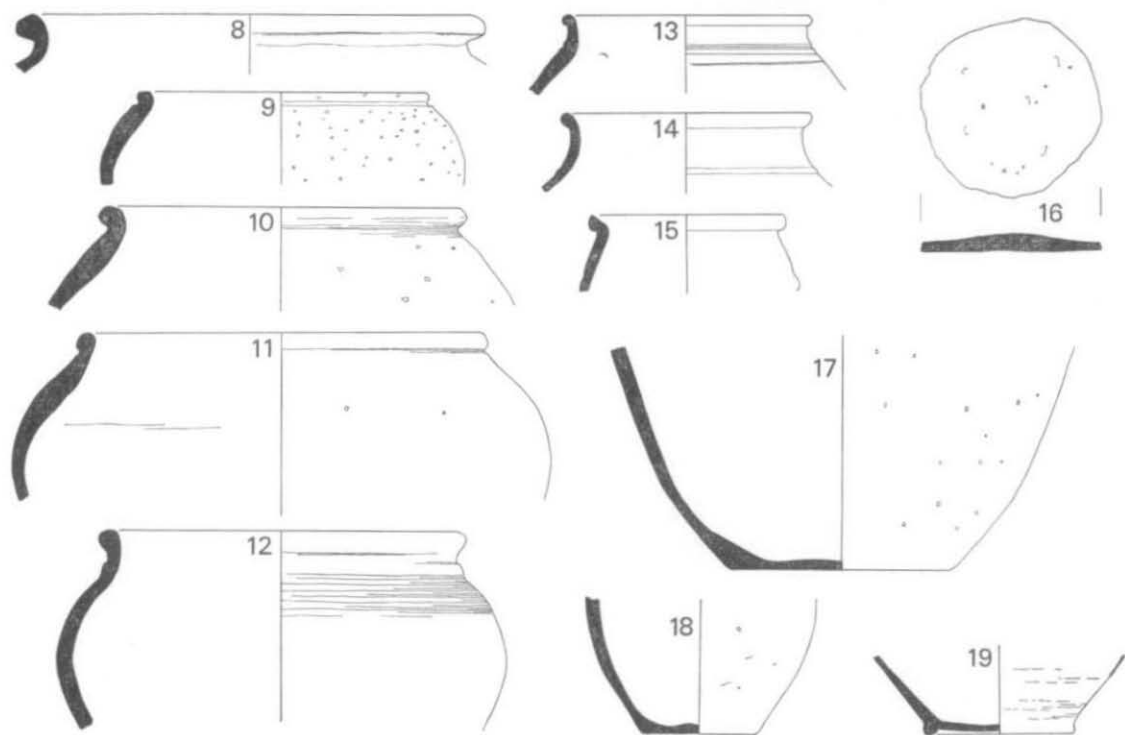


FIG. 3
The pottery (4).

10. Bead-rimmed bowl. Similar fabric to 9. AA 5.
 11. Bowl with flat bead-type rim in hard fabric with fine quartz inclusions. Unevenly fired with partly burnished exterior surface. Light red (10R 6/8) in patches but mainly 7.5YR 5/4 to dark grey. AA 3.
 12. Bowl in hard sandy fabric similar to 11. Smoothed surface. AA 3.
 13. Necked bowl in soft fabric with many inclusions of shelly limestone, angular and rounded quartz grits. Smoothed outer surface; dark grey 10YR 4/1 with lighter interior. AA 5.
 14. Necked bowl with cordons in fine, slightly sandy, micaceous fabric. Interior mottled with dark inclusions; outer surface yellowish red (5YR 5/8). AA 5.
 15. Butt-beaker in local soft fabric with some fine quartz grains and mica; yellowish red (5YR 5/6). AA 3.
 16. Pottery disc cut from a base in similar fabric to 17 and 18.
 17-18. Bases of jars or bowls in hard, micaceous fabric with many shelly limestone inclusions; pitted surface. Hand made with faint traces of combing on body of 17. AA 5.
 19. Base in fine, hard fabric with many rounded quartz grains. Black outer surface and light brownish grey (10YR 6/3) interior. Wheel-thrown. AA 5.

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