

## Pickwick Farm, Dundry, Somerset

O.S. 6 in. to 1 mile 56 N.E.    NGR. ST 593661

By

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With a note on the Iron Age Pottery by A. M. ApSimon

### SUMMARY

This is an account of a small excavation at a settlement site indicated by a sunken road, house platforms and a paved spring pool. The excavations showed that there had been two major periods of occupation, Iron Age to Romano-British and Mediaeval to c. 1850\*. The finds have been deposited in the City Museum at Bristol.

### *The Site*

When trial excavations (Rahtz and Barton, 1963) were made at Maes Knoll Camp (NGR. ST 6066) Mr. P. A. Rahtz drew my attention to a group of raised platforms 400 yd. west of The Tump of the camp. The site (*Fig. 11*) lies on the south-facing slope of the eastern spur of Dundry Hill just below the 500 ft. level, which bounds the summit plateau at this end of the hill. The site is on Jurassic Oolitic Limestone.

In 1958 the visible remains comprised the ruins of a stone building, which was subsequently destroyed and the material taken to New Model Farm (ST 592652), the foundations of a stone building complex to the south, one small and three large platforms, a paved and walled spring, a road system and traces of a field system (*Fig. 11, C*).

The original approach to the site was *via* a roadway made of pitched stones branching off from the main ridgeway (*Fig. 11, B*). This branch road is no longer in use but can be picked out either as a crop mark or as a stoney line when the ground is ploughed just east of the existing hedge. At the edge of the plateau the road takes a curved course down the steep slope and crosses the ledge on which the site lies from N.W. to S.E. It turns again in the middle of the site to run down hill, S.W., in the direction of New Model Farm (1850). It can be traced west of these buildings and it continues down to join the main modern road to Norton Malreward.

The pitched-stone road seems to be of considerable antiquity. The field system butts on to it and there are three branches of the road within the settlement area (*Fig. 11, C*). These branches seem to be associated with the houses, the spring and the eastern group of fields.

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\* It had been intended to excavate the site fully but the small band of volunteer diggers were unable to keep pace with the repeated interference with the site by hooligans from the nearby housing estate. The Excavation had perforce to be abandoned.

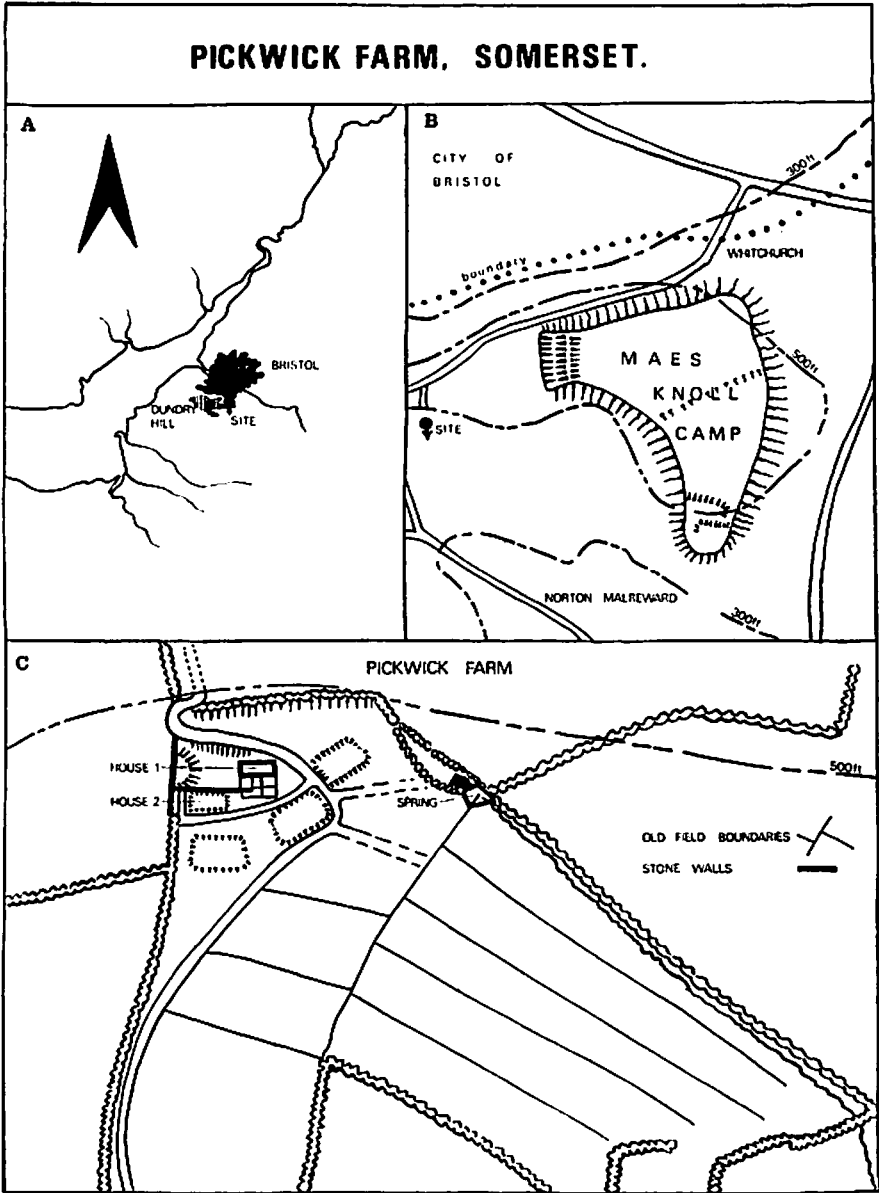


Fig. 11. Location Maps. Based on Ordnance Survey. Crown copyright reserved.

The spring rises from a quarried face in the Oolitic Limestone scarp. Its flow and temperature, ( $53^{\circ}\text{F}$ ), are constant. The water is trapped in two pools, one of which is paved to serve as a watering place for cattle.

The overflow runs down in a narrow gully, which seems to have been used as a boundary line by the settlers as the southern group of field boundaries are parallel to it. The walls round the spring show many phases of alteration; the western edge of the second pool has a double wall, which looks old and which may be the end wall of a building.

The platforms vary in size and form. Of the large ones, some 30 x 60 ft., the most easterly is a prominent feature standing 6 ft. high along its southern edge. One small platform, House 2, lies at the western edge of the site and south of a wide stone wall footing in which are growing four mature chestnut trees. This wall connects with another which forms the western boundary of the domestic settlement and seals a triangular area bounded by the road system. Within this is House 1.

### *The Excavations*

A series of trenches were cut to test the antiquity of House 1, House 2 and the east platform.

### *House 1 (Figs. 11 and 12)*

This was a roughly rectangular heap of stones covered with trees. When the stone tumble had been removed a rectangular building 33 x 14 ft. was seen. The standing walling was observed to be of two periods. The N.E. and E. walls and the western half of the building had been put on to a short section of the south wall.

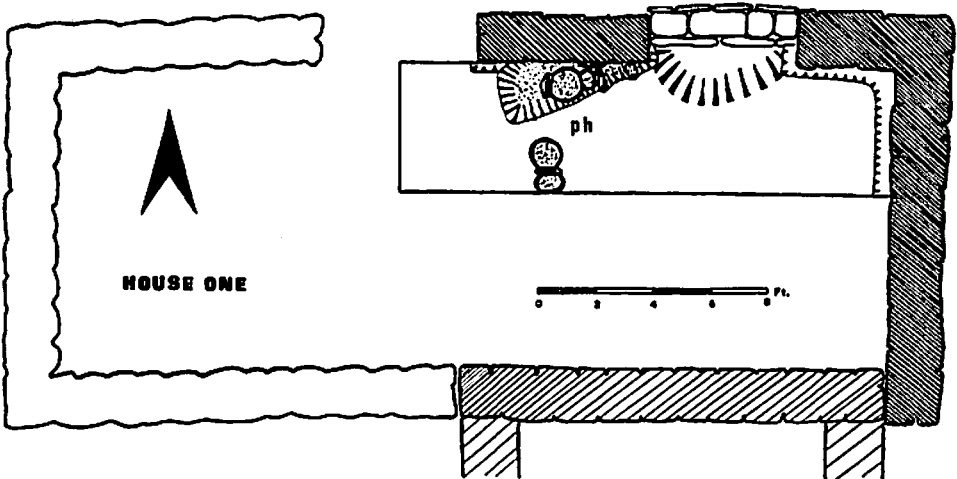


Fig. 12.

Inside the house the first level below the tumble was a spread of roof tiles, laths, and roof timbers; these lay on a fine cobbled floor of small pieces of limestone. On this floor were coins and pottery dateable to the early 19 C. The N.E. quarter of the room (*Fig. 12*) was then sampled.

Below the cobbling was a thick black layer which rested directly on the clean, yellowish natural surface of the Oolitic Limestone. In the upper levels of this layer were sherds of 17 C. and early 18 C. coarse pottery. Spread throughout it were pieces of burnt daub, sherds of mediaeval pottery of 13 C. and 15 C. date, Romano-British pottery of every date including a piece of a Samian bowl and sherds of Iron Age pottery. The dominant pottery was 17 C. and early 18 C. and the footing trench for the N.E. wall had cut into this layer.

In one area there was a trench under the black layer. It was set slightly askew so as to pass under the wall. The trench had been cut down into the natural soil. In the trench were two postholes and their associated packing stones. The filling of this trench was very dark and included much charcoal. Fragments of daub, teeth of a pig and a horse and eleven potsherds were in this filling. Five of the sherds were similar to those from House 2, pit 2. Two others were of black burnished ware. At right angles to the trench were two joined postholes divided by a stone packing piece.

The eastern portion of the south wall was sampled by a small cutting. It had a different composition from the other walls being constructed of re-used stone blocks, 36 x 18 in., approximately. The wall had no footing trench and the two connecting walls running south showed that the east wall of House 1 was the end (north), wall of another building. Re-used stone blocks of similar size occur at other places on the site.

#### *House 2 (Figs. 11, 13 and 14)*

It stands under the line of chestnut trees at the edge of a steep slope. Its platform, more than the others, was favoured by the cattle to the detriment of its floor levels. The house measured 30 x 20 ft. and it has on its east side a ditch. It comprises a levelled platform with a shelving north bank and a small bank at its south edge. The inturned bank on the east side was quite small whereas that on the west was very pronounced. The area was sampled by two trenches each 4 ft. wide running N-S and E-W (*Fig. 13*).

At the north end of the N-S trench it was found that a large oval posthole had been cut into the bank and a post inserted at once. The rest of the hole was packed with clean red clay. Between the clay and the bottom of the pit was a large worked flint (*Fig. 15; 1*). At the south end

of the trench were three postholes. One was set in a rough sleeper trench. Just south of this was a pair of postholes (which had been damaged when the sleeper trench was dug). Their fill differed from that of the trench and its posthole.

The west edge of the building was defined by a dry-stone wall, which had been built into a dirty floor layer, which continued beyond the wall to the west. The east edge had no distinguishing feature save the small bank.

Beyond the area covered by the west wall and its tumble the platform floor had been trodden into a thick layer of humus. This contained pottery of Iron Age, Romano-British, Mediaeval and post-Mediaeval periods. The bulk of the pottery was of late 17 C. and early 18 C. date. A stone spindle whorl of perhaps Romano-British type was found (*Fig. 15; 7*). That part of the floor area protected by the east wall and its tumble contained fragments of a triangular loom weight of Iron Age type, Romano-British pottery of 2 C. and 4 C. date and Mediaeval sherds. The walling itself contained much pottery in its construction: 4 C. Romano-British and fourteen fragments of Ham Green "B" ware (14 C.). (*Fig. 16; 8 and 9*)

West of the wall and between it and the field boundary was a N-S depression. When this was excavated it was seen to be a ditch, which went down through two distinct layers. The ditch had become silted, filled and overgrown with turf. Below the turf were sherds of 17 C and 19 C. pottery. The dirty fill contained Mediaeval and some greatly abraded Romano-British pottery. The bottom layer was an orange coloured clay in which were several sherds of unabraded Iron Age pottery.

In the centre of the platform two pits and a posthole were found. Pit 1 (*Fig. 14*) was large and bag shaped being 7 ft. across and 6 ft. deep. The filling was made up of several layers. Layer 1 consisted of small stones presumably gathered from the local surface. It lay on 2, a thin compact layer of black earth in which was a clay sling pellet (*Fig. 15; 4*). Below, 3, were massive boulders, some weighing over 1 cwt. each. Between the boulders was loose earth and small stones, a fragment of iron slag, charcoal and three sherds of Iron Age pottery. Next came a black band, 4, of trodden earth containing charcoal and two sherds of Iron Age Pottery. This covered layer 5 which was a slightly conical heap of fresh hewn stone with a matrix of yellow clay. The bottom of the pit was lined with a layer, 6, of clean, sandy, yellow clay.

Pit 2 was oval in plan and shallow. It was filled with dirty yellow clay in which were sherds of Iron Age Pottery (*Fig. 16; 1-7*). In it also were a bone weaving comb and a flint blade (*Fig. 15; 3 and 5*).

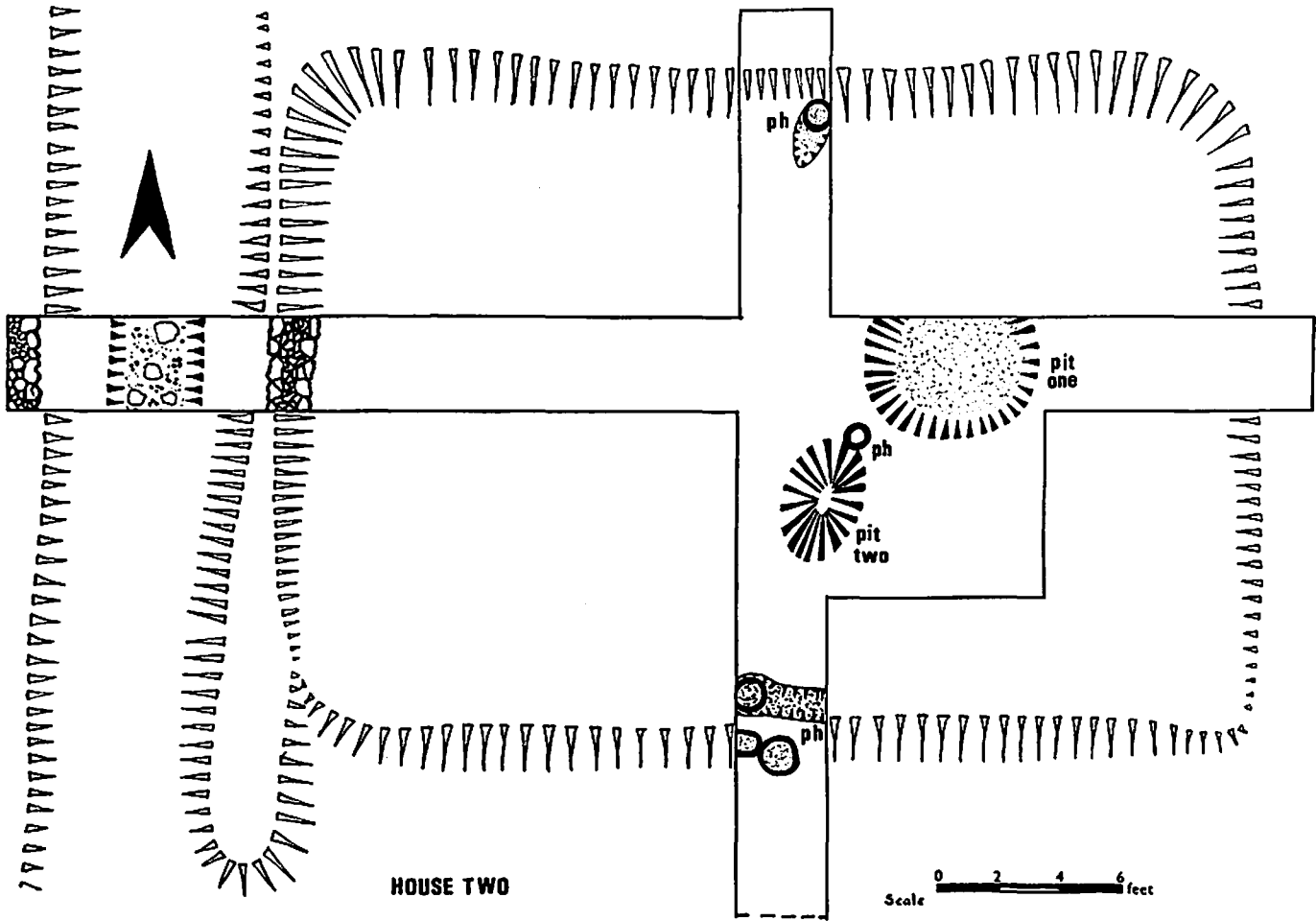


Fig. 13.

*East Platform*

The southern edge of this was trenched and amidst the tumble of re-used stone debris a quantity of pottery *c.* 1780–1850 was found. It was possible that there was a pit here.

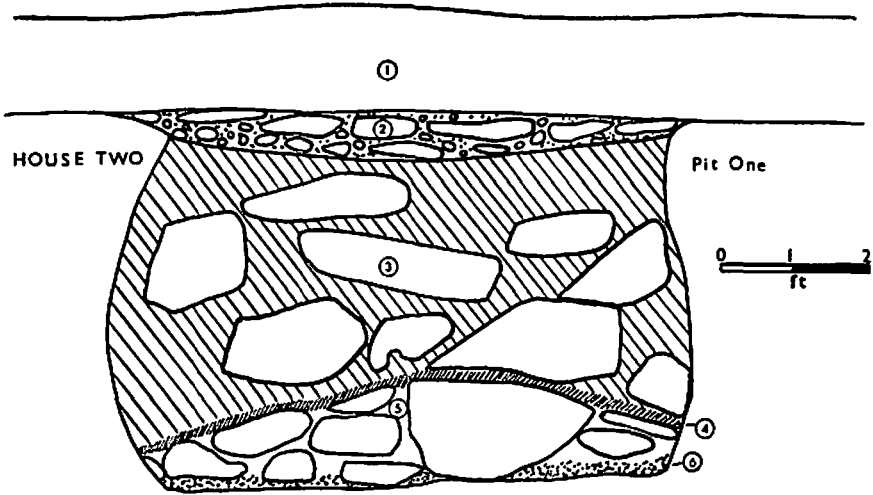


Fig. 14.

### DISCUSSION

The earliest phase for the site must be the work done in levelling the platforms to receive the houses to be built upon them. The extent of the excavations was limited and it is not possible to say if all the main platforms were contemporary or not. The platforms of houses—1 and 2 would, from the evidence the house floors yielded, seem to have been more or less contemporary. But much more important than this is the rectangular shape of the platforms suggesting strongly that the actual houses were rectangular or square in plan and not round. The presence of postholes and daub indicate wooden houses with wattle and daub walls. The date of the foundation would, from the pottery found, seem to have been in the Iron Age but not necessarily earlier than about 3 C. B.C. On the evidence cited by ApSimon (below, p. 110) the foundation date could be nearer 300 than 200 B.C.

*House 1*

The earliest phase was a building supported by posts, some of which were set in a sleeper trench of straight form to the limit of exposure. There were other posts not set in a sleeper trench but it is not certain that

they were contemporary. The evidence from House 2 suggests that the sleeper trench and its posts were later than the other postholes. The finds associated with the postholes and with their levels show that the original foundation is dateable to the Iron Age but relatively late in that period.

The sequence of the later construction and use is not clear. The cobbled floor associated with the N.E. wall is dated by the coins and pottery to the early 19 C. or a little later. The footing trench of the N-E wall had in it predominantly late 17 C. to early 19 C. pottery and this can be allowed to date the wall. The cobbled floor is later still as it is dated to early 19 C. by the coins and pottery found on it.

### *House 2*

The excavations here were on a very limited scale. They left many questions unanswered but they did yield important information. It seems very likely that the house was raised on posts along the north and south sides. The earliest postholes were those at the south end of the N-S trench. These antedate the postholes in the sleeper trench as this trench cut the edges of the other holes but they may still have all been in use together. However the layout of the trench and its holes alone suggest a floor plan of rectangular or square shape. The centrally placed post-hole was at the edge of pit 2 but could not be dated.

Pit 1 has been described. The top layer of filling had been placed, it seemed, to level up the hole to the floor level of the house. This floor did not cut any edge of the filling of the pit so it can be argued that the pit was dug from the house floor after the house had been built. The purpose for which the pit was made could not be determined; the black trodden-down mass of layer 3 could not be explained nor the lower filling. One is almost reduced to calling it a ritual pit as a cloak to one's ignorance of its purpose.

The west wall overlay, and its base trench cut down into, the house floor which is dated by the objects found in it as being Iron Age in date so the wall is a later structure. It is tentatively dated by the latest material in it—Ham Green "B" ware—to the 14 C. The other pottery was Romano-British of 4 C. As similar pottery covering a range of 2 C. to 4 C. and a loom weight of Iron Age type was found in the floor it would seem that the occupation had probably been continuous.

The finds from pit 2 date it as an Iron Age feature. The purpose it served is unknown.

The N-S depression west of the platform was originally thought to have been a field path deeply worn down. However it is 3 ft. wide and quite deep and had on its clean bottom unabraded Iron Age pottery so its



maximum depth corresponds to the earliest phase of development of the site. There is no evidence of earlier use when the path could have been worn down. So it must be concluded that this was a deliberately dug ditch, which was cut as part of the original layout of the platform in the first phase of occupation. Its purpose may have been that of a drainage ditch.

### CONCLUSIONS

The site faces south and is served by a perennial spring. Its natural advantages were an attraction to would-be settlers and the site was first occupied and was undefended in Iron Age times. The report by Mr. A. M. ApSimon on the pottery from pit 2 in House 2 indicates primary settlement in Iron Age 'A'. The beginning could be nearer 300 B.C. than 200 B.C.

At that time the platforms for houses 1 and 2 and, presumably, the east and other platforms were levelled and houses built. Houses 1 and 2 were of wooden post construction and probably had wattle and daub walls. It is very probable, as the platforms are rectangular and the sleeper trenches straight, that the house plans were rectangular or square and not round. The shape has not been conclusively proved by the limited excavations made.

The occupation probably continued without interruption until 5th century A.D. After that there is a gap in the ceramic sequence until 12th C. The occupation then appears to have been continuous up till 1850 when the farm was removed to the New Model Farm at the base of the hill. Gaps such as this in the occupation are known from similar sites elsewhere.

The field and road systems are related to the house platforms and to the artificially controlled spring. The relative ages of these amongst themselves and to the site as a whole has not been elucidated.

A complete study of this interesting site and its relationships to the Iron Age/Wansdyke camp of Maesknoll nearby is highly desirable.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author is very grateful to Mr. Hassell of New Model Farm, Norton-Malreward, for permission to excavate at this site and for hospitality. He is also grateful to those who assisted him at this excavation and who persevered for so long against the vandalism that was perpetrated.

Mr. A. M. ApSimon has reported on the pottery from pit 2 in House 2. For this vital report the author is very grateful.

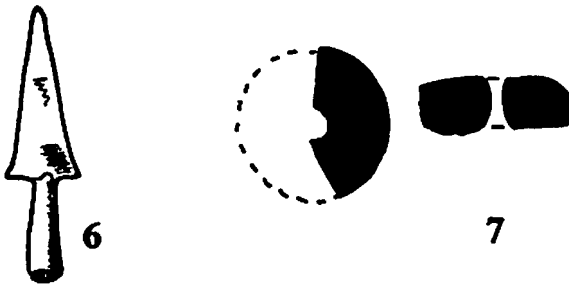
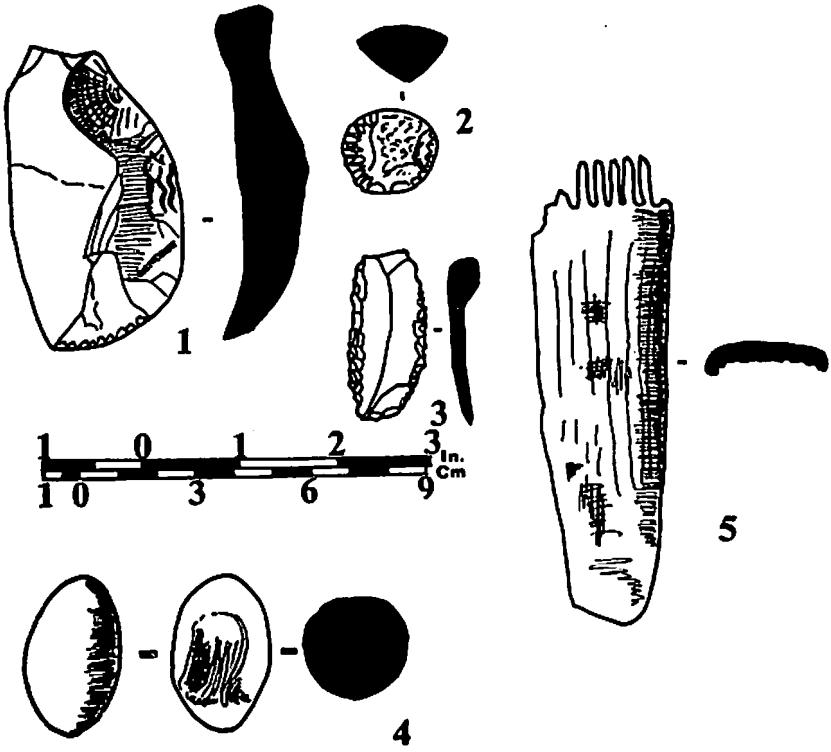


Fig. 15.

## THE FINDS

Only the important finds have been selected for detailed description and illustration where necessary. All the Iron Age material is illustrated.

The Romano-British items include examples of coarse wares of 1st C. A.D. with examples of Samian ware of the 2nd C. and later. There is a small collection of metallic blue ware of mid-late 4th C. They are similar to those from the Star Roman Villa (Barton, 1964, *Fig. 13*, 33-40).

*Dark Ages. No finds*

For the Mediaeval period only a few items are illustrated. The pottery found has a long range in time from 12th C. to 1850 A.D. Finds dateable to late 16th to early 17th C. are noticeably few in quantity suggesting that there may have been a break in the occupation.

Iron Age (*Fig. 15*)*House 2*

1. Large struck flint flake with secondary working on front edge. Posthole in N. side.
2. Small thumb scraper of flint with steeply flaked sides. Under west wall.
3. Small flint blade with secondary flaking along both sides and one end. Possibly an end scraper.
4. Small ovoid fired-clay sling slug with finger wipe mark: made in soft fabric. Pit 1 sealed under layer 1.
5. Bone comb from a bone of *Bos. sp.* Evidence for eight teeth. Highly polished on smooth side.

*House 2. Pit 2**Fig. 16.*

1. Fragment of a rim with a buff finish. Reduced fabric.
2. Fragment from the rim of a vessel in a dark grey fabric with a black burnished finish. Fabric contains minute calcareous inclusions.
3. Fragment of a rim in a dark grey fabric with small calcite inclusions.
4. Fragment from the base of a large vessel. Buff fabric with a high proportion of some miscaceous temper which gives a glittering appearance to the finish.
5. Fragments of one complete vessel, coil built on knuckle flattened base. Soft, reduced fabric, completely free of tempering, outside mildly oxidized to a muddy buff finish.
6. Fragment from the upper part of a bucket-shaped vessel. Fabric similar to 5. The exterior had been wiped with grass.
7. Fragment of a ringfoot base in a thick reduced fabric containing a high proportion of large calcite grits.

*Comments upon the Iron Age Pottery from House 2, pit 2*

A. M. APSIMON, M.A.

The complete pot, *Fig. 16; 5*, can be compared with the cooking pots from Chew Park (ST 570593) in the Chew Valley\*. Nos. 1 and 3

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\* Report on the M.O.W. Excavations, 1953-5 in the Chew Valley. Forthcoming.

appear to be related to shouldered jars of the type illustrated in the report on the pottery from Pagan's Hill (ApSimon, Rahtz and Harris, 1958, *Fig.* 24; 34. The Pagan's Hill pottery includes haematite coated bowls of an early type found at the Wiltshire site of All Cannings Cross (Cunnington, 1923) and appears to be related to the first Iron Age phase of the Chew Valley Lake sites, though perhaps a little earlier than this. The Chew Park parallels to No. 10 belong to the second phase in the Chew Valley.

The scarcity of associated objects which are themselves securely dated makes the dating of Iron Age pottery a difficult exercise. None of the comparative material, to which reference is made above, is closely dateable and the only local association here is from a pit in Blaise Castle Camp. This group (Brown and Rahtz, 1959, *Fig.* 37; 1-8), which includes types related to those from Pagan's Hill, was associated with two La Tène I brooches of a type found in the earliest graves in the Swiss cemetery of Munsingen (Hodson, 1964). In default of evidence to show that this particular type of brooch survived later in England than in Switzerland, the Blaise group may be dated later than 450 and probably earlier than about 350 B.C. The Pickwick Farm site is probably younger than this, the effective later limit of date being at present provided by the appearance in North Somerset of decorated pottery of Glastonbury type, as at Little Solsbury (Dowden, 1962). The only dateable objects in this connection are the brooches from Read's Cavern (Langford, 1922), which are probably not older than the first century B.C.

*Mediaeval and Post-Mediaeval (Fig. 16)*

8. Handle in Ham Green "B" fabric (Barton, 1963) with a twisted coil inset onto the recess of the outside of the handle. This is not a typical form of decoration although the handle section fabric and rouletting decoration are typical. 14th C. House 2.
9. Fragment from the shoulder of a vessel in Ham Green "A" fabric decorated with rouletting. Late 13th C. House 2, under west wall.
10. Fragment from the rim of a dish in a hard untempered fabric decorated on the outside with white slip on a black, reduced, unglazed body. House 1.
11. Fragment from the side of a large bowl in fabric and treatment similar to No. 3, with a panel of white slip on the side. East platform from the probable pit.

Fragments 10 and 11 are of considerable interest as they fall into the class of "White, painted wares", which can be dated to the period A.D. 1450-1550. This type of decoration is seen on vessels with a distribution along the south-east coasts from Norfolk to the Solent, including London. Each area has its own design, West Sussex has a wavy loop pattern round the neck of the vessels. A kiln for producing these wares was found at St. Germain's, Cornwall (unpublished). The designs were similar to the West Sussex types. The St. Germain's examples are remarkably similar to those from Pickwick Farm. The panel painted subject is not typical. Such wares do not occur in the large collection of post-Mediaeval wares found in Bristol, so their source may be Cornish or perhaps from some local kiln not yet identified.

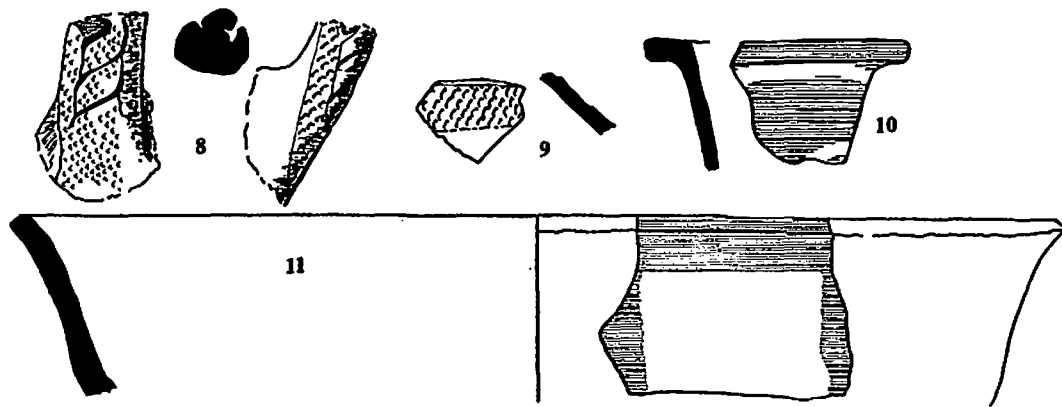
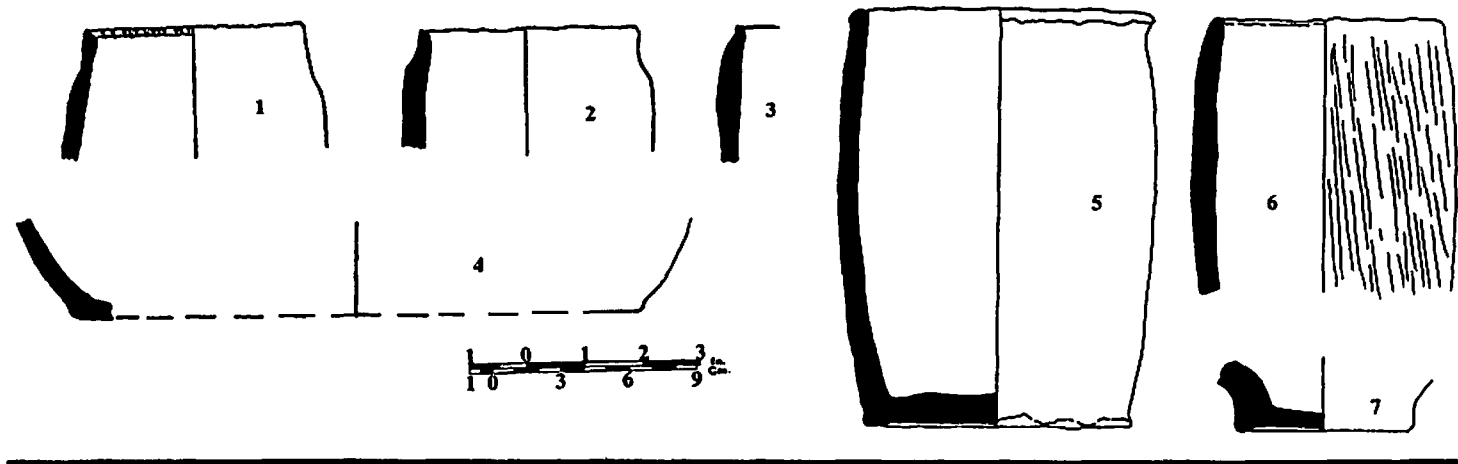


Fig. 16.

*Fig. 15.*

6. Arrow head of iron with hollow shank, c.f. London Museums Cat. No. 2, 13th C. House 2, under west wall.
7. Spindle whorl. Pennant sandstone. The dating of this is uncertain. House 2, under west wall.

Not figured. Horseshoe. London Museums Cat. No. 2. Type 3, 12th C. House 2, under west wall.

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