

A NEW ROMAN SITE IN CHESHAM

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THE site under discussion was first noted in 1958 and since that time several discoveries have been made. Its investigation has been pursued as far as the buildings which cover the area allow. The site is situated in the south-west corner of Chesham in the centre of the Chess Valley (Fig. 1). The immediate setting of the site is well suited to Roman settlement. It lies on the gently rising ground above the tributary of the Chess which flows along Pednor Vale. Thus it has the benefits of a good water supply without incurring the risk of flooding.

The distribution of finds is easily seen on the map of the area (Fig. 2) and needs no explanation. The only finds which will be discussed in detail are those from Dawes Close and Rackleys, both of which sites yielded sufficient datable material to be of some use. The other sites produced only sherds which were not closely datable and which therefore are of interest only for their pattern of distribution.

The Dawes Close site was the first major discovery in the area. Altogether some four hundred and three sherds were found on this site by Mr. Arthur Stratford during the levelling operations prior to the building of the Old People's home. The operation unfortunately involved removing some two to three feet of soil from the area, and it is thus improbable that any traces of buildings will now be found. The fact that the builders noticed no structures, and that our friend Mr. Stratford observed none either, at once suggests that any building which stood on this site was of a rather flimsy nature, probably of wood. Mr. Stratford found a quantity of broken-up stamped clay flooring, of which one piece is still in our possession. This, too, suggests that the building was not a very substantial one. In Fig. 3 the most common and most informative of the rim sherds from the site are illustrated (Nos. 1-12).

1. Black slipped jar. Fine, pale fabric. Common 1st-2nd-century type.
2. Samian dish. Drag. 32. Cf. Oswald and Pryce, Plate LXVIII, No. 9. Probably made at Rheinzabern. Late 2nd-mid 3rd.
3. Jar of brown, gritty fabric. Cf. Hedgerly, Plate IX, No. 2. 2nd-3rd.
4. Large jar of dark grey, coarse fabric. Similar to last.
5. Ovoid cooking vessel with fat, rounded rim. Fine grey-white fabric. A long-lived form. *c.* A.D. 100-350. Common on the site.
6. A cooking vessel of deep brown, gritty fabric. Cf. Hambleden, Fig. 15, No. 133. *c.* mid-late 2nd to mid 3rd.
7. A reeded rim bowl. Buff, gritty fabric. Cf. R.P.K.C., Fig. 73, 3. Early 2nd. At Verulamium the type occurs in the late 2nd, but the best parallel is Hadrianic (Verulamium, Fig. 35, No. 71).

- 8. Reeded rim bowl. Dark grey, sandy fabric. Common 2nd-century type.
- 9. Large jar of fine red fabric with white slip. No close parallels but clearly a 3rd-century type.

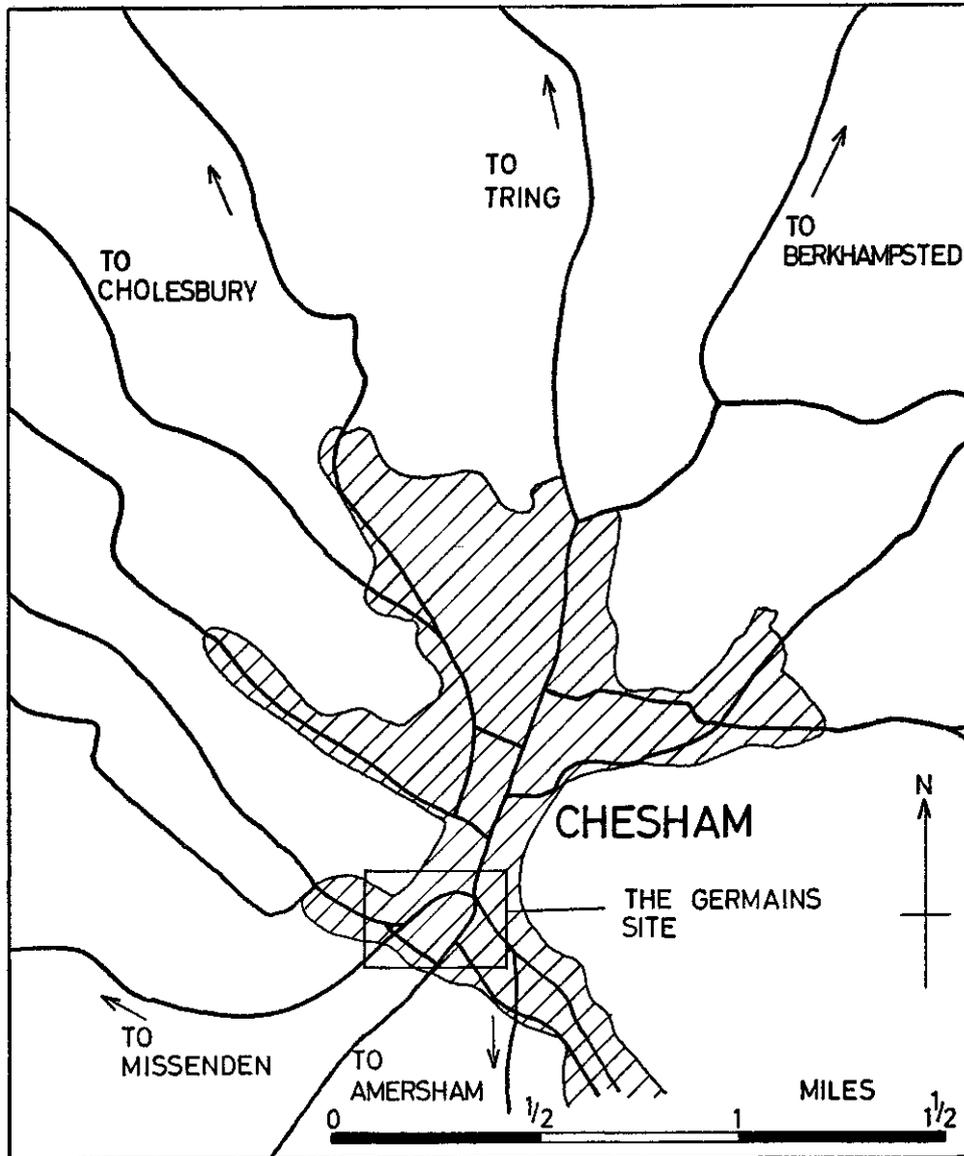


FIG. 1. The site.

- 10. Large cooking jar. Dark grey, coarse fabric with white slip. Cf. Jewry Wall, Fig. 52, 23 and 28. Early 4th.
- 11. Mortarium. Very pale grey, fine fabric. An early type, probably 2nd century.
- 12. Mortarium. Gritty, white fabric. No close parallels found, but part of the 4th-century group.

The Dawes Close site thus produced sherds spanning the period from early 2nd century to the early 4th.

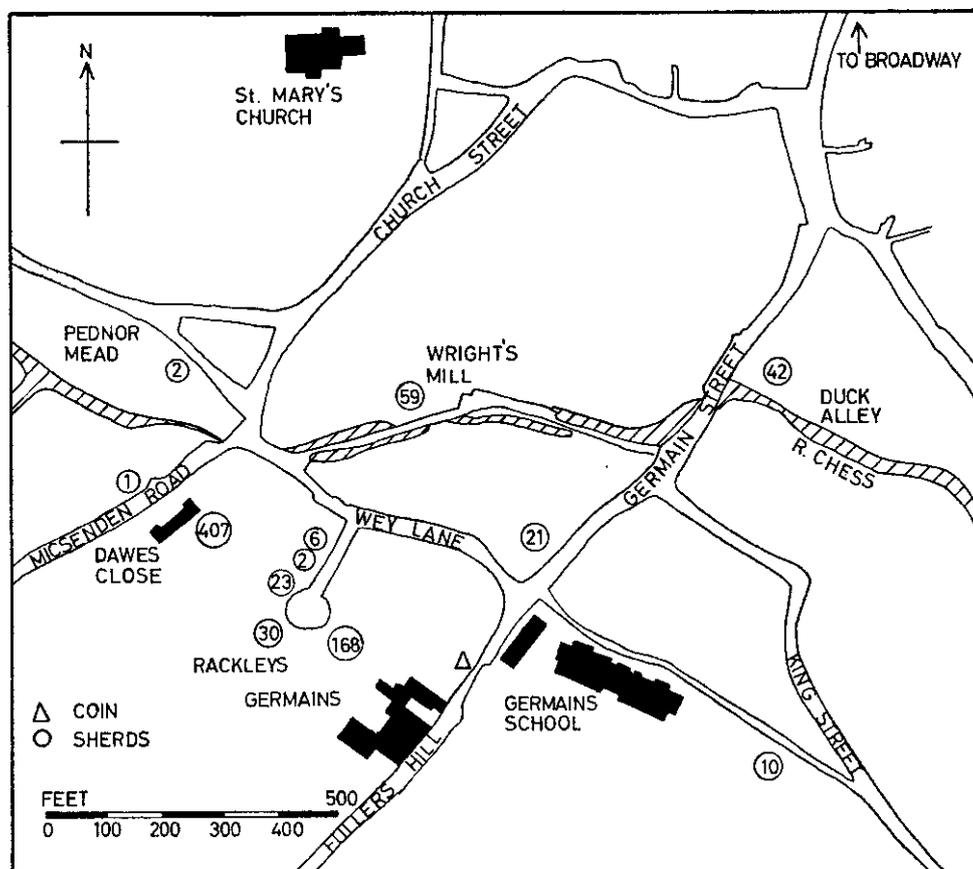


FIG. 2. Distribution of finds.

The second site, Rackley's, was discovered during the building of another house. It produced no evidence of a building at all, and had every appearance of being a rubbish pit, about thirty feet in diameter. We were able to recover only a small fraction of the material from it, the builders having disposed of the rest before they realised its value. The significant sherds from this pit are to be seen in Fig. 2, Nos. 13-25.

13. Open mouth cooking pot. Dark grey fabric, fine with small grit. An early type which lasts into the middle of the 2nd century. Cf. Colchester, Plate XXXIV, 22OB. 6.
14. Similar vessel to 13. It occurs in the Hedgerley kilns (Pl. IX) and also at Fulmer (Fig. 1, No. 8f). Late 1st or early 2nd.
15. Open-mouthed cooking vessel. Pale grey slip on brown fabric with some grit. Occurs at Hedgerley (p. 274), Fulmer (Fig. 2; 12 e, h). Probably A.D. 100-150, but found in 3rd-century deposits also.
16. Cooking vessel. Dark brown fabric, some grit. A common type, made at Hedgerley (p. 273, Type I) and Fulmer (Fig. 2, 12 e). 2nd cent.

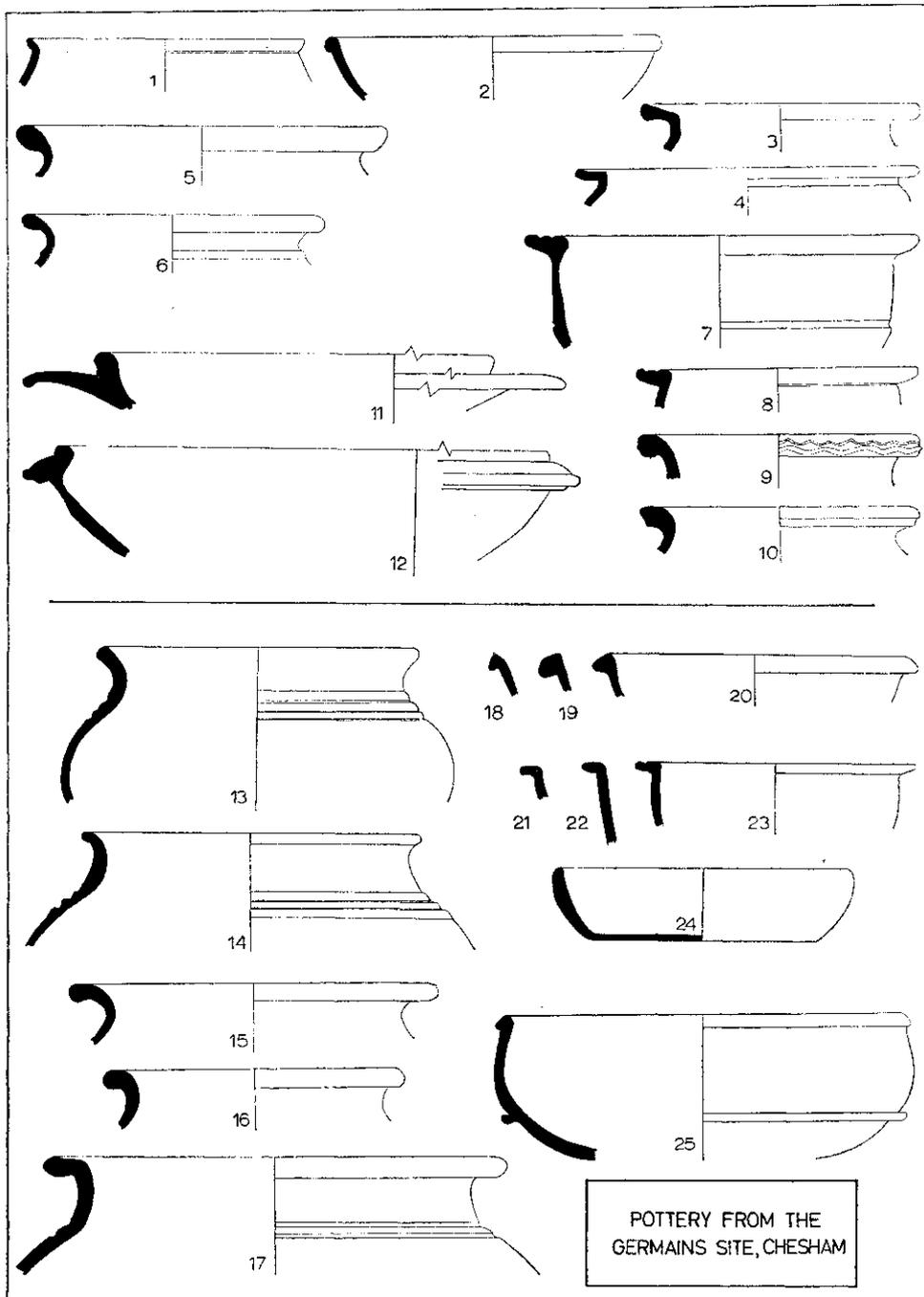


FIG. 3. ($\frac{1}{4}$, except no. 12, $\frac{1}{8}$).

17. Large storage jar. Pale buff fabric, traces of black slip. Cf. High Wycombe, Fig. 9, 29. Late 3rd-early 4th.
18. Dish in red orange fabric, little grit. Cf Colchester, Fig. 8c, No. 25. Late 1st-late 2nd.
19. Dish in dark brown fabric, black slip. Cf. as last; Fig. 67, No. 95. Late 1st-late 2nd.
20. Dish of fine, dark brown fabric, black slip. Similar to 18 and 19, made at Hedgerley (p. 276, type 8) and Fulmer (Fig. 1, No. 3d) as well as Colchester, Verulanium and Sandford. Late 1st-late 2nd.
21. Large bowl of very fine, pale grey fabric. Difficult to date but perhaps the best parallel is R.P.K.C., Fig. 100, No. 5, from Kiln 33. This is early 4th.
22. Dish of brown fabric with little grit. Made at Hedgerley (Nos. 6-8) and of Hadrianic-Antonine date.
23. Bowl of pale brown, gritty fabric. Not a type made at Hedgerley but found at Fulmer (Fig. 1, I.b). Early 2nd.
24. Pie-dish of grey fabric, badly water-worn. Probably burnished originally. Not closely datable. Very common on the site.
25. Samian bowl. Drag. Form 44. Antonine.

The Rackley site produced a total of 166 sherds, covering the period from the late 1st century to the early 4th. The vast majority of the material seems to be late 1st-mid 2nd and one wonders if the two isolated early 4th century sherds came from an area outside the pit, most of this group having been collected by the builders. The indications are that the pit may well have been dug in the mid 2nd century.

The only other find which need be mentioned is a coin of Lucius Verus (161-169) found in Mr. Greenoughs' garden.

As can be seen from Fig. 2, the sherds are spread over an area of some 440 yards east-west by 310 yards north-south. This includes two substantial groups across the river, where some areas have not yet been surveyed. We were at first inclined to think in terms of a single building situated at Dawes Close, but the wide area covered with sherds may well indicate that there were several buildings in the area, perhaps even a small settlement. This may seem a rather bold interpretation of the evidence, but it is put forward by us as a tentative theory. We might add to our list of finds some dozen Roman sherds found another quarter of a mile to the north of this site, in Chesham Broadway. The indications are that there was a substantial Romano-British occupation in the Germans area from the late 1st century to the early 4th. This is the same time-span as the occupation of the villa site at Latimer. There is some hope that small sites in the Germans area will come available for excavation in the near future. Meanwhile we may add a third Roman site to those already known in the lower reaches of the Chess Valley at Latimer and Sarrat.

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