

# IRON AGE OCCUPATION AT LONG CRENDON

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*In July 1984 further evidence of middle and late Iron Age occupation including hearths, pits, pottery and animal bone, as well as a substantial quantity of Roman pottery was discovered. Included in this report is a bone weaving comb found nearby.*

## *Introduction*

The village of Long Crendon is situated on a ridge of Portland limestone about 1 km north of the River Thames (Fig. 1). Similar limestone 'islands' in the Vale have been shown to be preferred for settlement in the past; excavations have revealed Iron Age settlement sites in Aylesbury (George Street: Allen and Dalwood 1983), Berton (Allen forthcoming) and Walton Court, Aylesbury (Farley *et al.* 1981). Other finds of mid Iron Age and Belgic pottery tend to be located on these areas of Portlandian material, which are higher and better drained than the surrounding clays and clearly suitable for occupation. However, the clays were not unoccupied during this period (Farley *et al.* 1984).

In the winter of 1978-9 the laying of a watermain to the east of Long Crendon revealed two groups of pottery, one consisting of Belgic and Romano-British sherds, the other mid Iron Age. Investigation by R. Cowell located several small archaeological features and confirmed the presence of mid Iron Age, late Iron Age and Roman activity in the area (Cowell 1978).

In July 1984 the watermain was extended northwards from the Long Crendon to Chearsley road, producing further evidence of the site and character of the settlement, which was recorded by Mike Farley and Andrew Pike. The majority of the finds are stored at the County Museum, Aylesbury (Acc. No. 389.1984), with the exception of some unstratified pottery in the possession of Mrs Parker-Smith of Long Crendon. The excavation archive is stored at the County Museum (CAS 5404).

## *The Site*

The extension of the watermain northwards from the 1978-9 site (SP 7006 0083 and SP 6900 0916) revealed further occupation from SP 6984 0921 to SP 6980 0929. Archaeological features were revealed in the pipe-trench for some 90 m northwards from the Long Crendon-Chearsley road. The extent of the occupation has been estimated as extending in a circle some 90 m in radius from where the pipeline crossed the road (Fig. 1). Recording conditions were far from ideal as the site and trench side were dry and dusty and the trench had been partly back-filled. However, the section could be examined where it was still exposed at the pipe joints, and finds were recovered.

The principal feature revealed in the section was 'an occupation layer' of dark loam containing flecks of charcoal and occasional burnt stones. The layer was up to 0.5 m deep at the southern end, petering out nearly 80 m away to the north. As the layer became thinner, the soil became less humic. This layer was sealed by a brown clay 0.2 to 0.4 m deep which was interpreted as the oxidised lower plough soil; on cursory examination it did not appear to contain any features or finds. Above this some 0.3 m of topsoil had been stripped prior to digging the pipe-trench.

Finds from the occupation layer included mid Iron Age and Belgic pottery, with sherds of Romano-British pottery towards the south of the site. The mid Iron Age pottery was concentrated towards the centre of the occupation layer between 30 m and 65 m north of the road. Little Belgic material was recovered from the

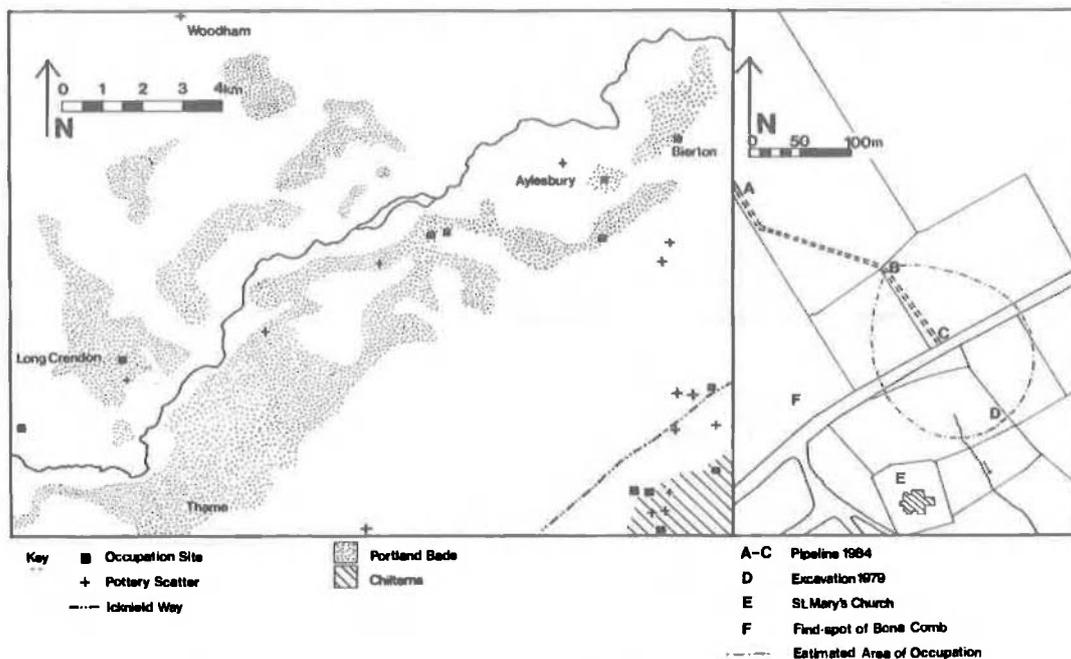


Fig. 1. Location of known Iron Age sites: location of the 1984 site in Long Crendon.

central area but some was found to the north and south of it. Associated with the occupation layer were several apparently contemporary features. However, the small quantity of pottery and the narrowness of the pipe-trench do not allow any definite conclusions to be drawn about any specific areas of occupation. The occupation layer at the southern end seems to have been protected from the effects of later agriculture which had truncated the northern end, by a deep build-up of soil above. This accumulation of soil could have been due to colluviation rather than to manuring which would probably have produced a more loamy soil. The soil creep could have been caused by ploughing on the slope above the site; however, this slope is not at all steep. The absence of any medieval pottery below the brown clay—with the exception of one small sherd which could be intrusive, and the presence of medieval pottery above the clay (some twenty-three sherds), suggest that this layer, covering the 'occupation layer', formed before the medieval period.

#### *The Mid Iron Age*

The mid Iron Age features consisted of a pit, a hearth and two other pits beneath the hearth. These features were at the northern end of the pottery scatter which extended 20 m further south. The pit (100) was dug 0.5 m into natural clay, the cut not being visible above natural, and was approximately 1 m in diameter (Fig. 2). However, much of the pit had been removed by the digging of the pipe-trench, leaving only a segment which was excavated by hand. The upper fill was indistinguishable from the 'occupation layer'. Below this was a brown sandy loam and at the bottom a darker silt; both lower fills contained charcoal and pottery which included mid Iron Age sherds, one of which joined with another rim sherd found 27 m away in the occupation layer (109). The pit seems to have been cylindrical and was probably used for grain storage, which is the commonly accepted interpretation for the majority of such pits in the mid Iron Age (Cunliffe 1978, 1984; Knight 1984). A sample

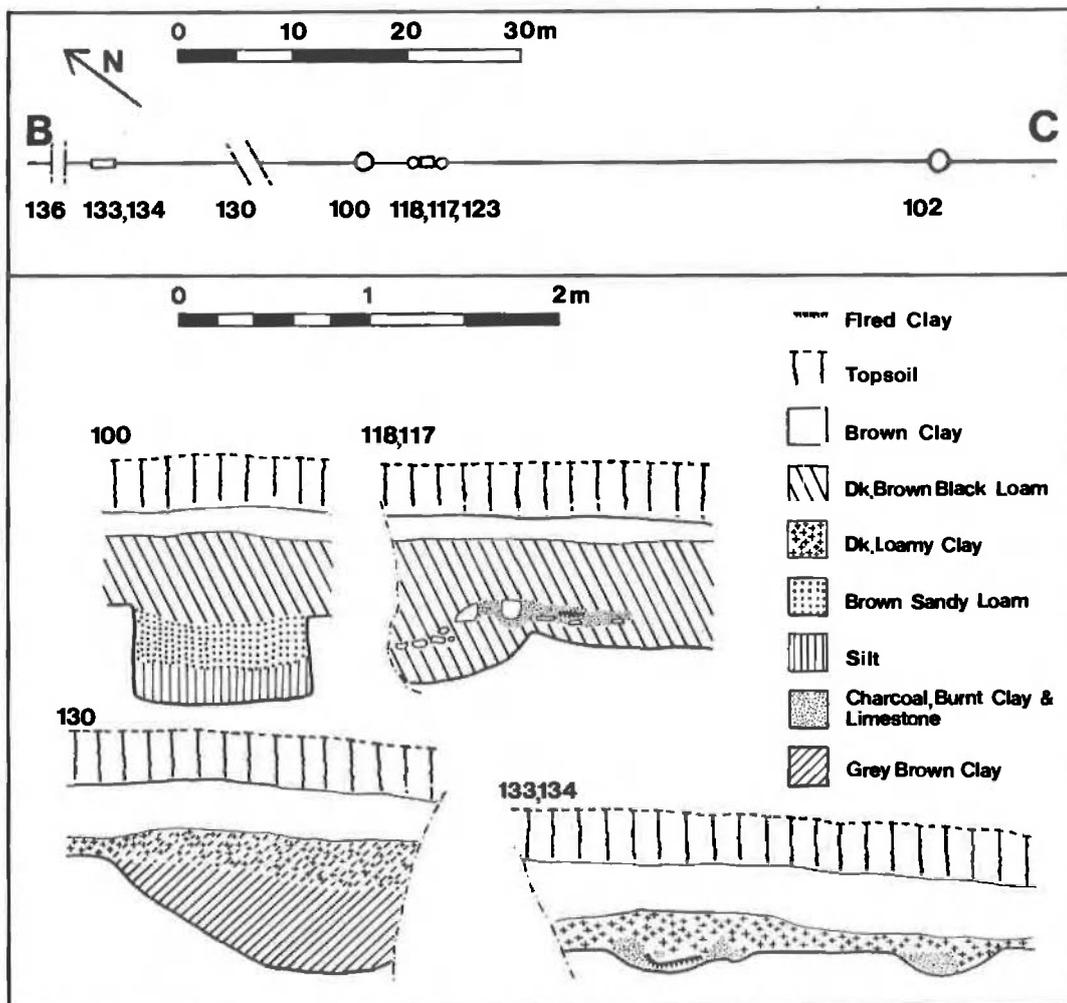


Fig. 2. Long Crendon: location of features on pipeline and sections of principal features.

taken from the fill of the pit is further discussed below.

The hearth and two further pits were situated 5 m to the south of pit 100. One pit (118) was sealed by the hearth; it was 0.4 m deep but its complete profile and diameter were obscured by the backfill of the pipe-trench (Fig. 2). Another pit (123) lay 1.8 m south and only the edge was visible above the spoil. Neither pit could be properly examined or excavated owing to backfilling of the pipe-trench. Between the two pits and partly over one of them (118) was

the hearth (117) (Fig. 2). The hearth consisted of pieces of burnt limestone with a horizontal band of fired clay 0.15 m long; the total length of the hearth was 0.9 m and the thickness 0.15 m. No datable material was recovered from this area and the features were left *in situ*; however, they were assumed to be mid Iron Age in date as no Belgic or Roman finds were recovered from the area. The hearth is of particular interest as they are uncommon and usually destroyed by later activity on site (Knight 1984).

### *The Late Iron Age*

The late Iron Age features revealed by the pipe-trench lay to the north of the mid Iron Age features and consisted of a ditch, an oven and possibly another ditch.

The larger ditch (130) was cut by the pipe-trench nearly 10 m north of the main mid Iron Age features; the southern edge was concealed by backfilling but it was observed in both sections and seemed to be running SW-NE. It was U-shaped with gently sloping sides cut 0.6 m into natural clay and probably 2-3 m in width although only 1.6 m were visible. The fill was a grey brown clay with limestone fragments and blended with the occupation layer above (Fig. 2). Three sherds of Belgic pottery were recovered from the fill and no mid Iron Age pottery; these sherds were unabraded and together with the absence of any later material suggest that this ditch is late Iron Age.

Remains of an oven and a hearth or ashpit were situated 10 m north of this ditch. The oven (133) consisted of a band of fired clay about 0.3 m in length, curving upwards at the north end, which was surrounded in section by burnt clay and stone fragments. A large sherd of Belgic pottery was found immediately above the oven and a loomweight fragment within it. Less than a metre south of the oven was a small hollow (134) 0.5 m across and 0.15 m deep, containing burnt clay and charcoal; this was either a hearth or an ashpit, associated with the oven.

Another ditch (136) ran roughly W-E some 5 m further north; it was cut 0.2 m deep into natural clay and was 1 m wide. No features were recorded to the north of this ditch and the 'occupation layer' petered out a few metres northwards.

At the south end of the pipe-trench, 10 m north of the road, one large pit (102) was revealed, appearing in the east section. It is not clear which period of occupation this feature belonged to, although it was presumably Roman or earlier. The occupation layer was recorded as continuing southwards beneath the roadway, to end somewhere between the road

and the site of the 1979 excavation; no further features were recorded in it. From the southern end of the site a considerable scatter of Roman pottery was also recorded (Fig. 5).

### *Summary*

The mid and late Iron Age occupation, based on the results from the digging of the watermain in 1978 and 1984, seems to extend from some 80 m south of the road to some 90 m north of it. At the south end on the lower edge of the Portland there is a spring, a common occurrence in such a situation, and at the north Gault clay covers the limestone. Features exposed by the trench were concentrated at the northern end, with the Belgic features separated from the mid Iron Age ones by a ditch (130). The distinction between the two phases may be shown by a change in the nature of the 'occupation layer' which the excavators noticed in this area without being aware of the possibility of there being two zones of different date. The transition from dark brown/black loam over the mid Iron Age area to dark brown loamy clay over the Belgic area unfortunately seems to have occurred at a part of the trench which had been backfilled. The Roman pottery evidence suggests the existence of a Romano-British site nearby.

### *The Mid to Late Iron Age Finds*

#### *The Mid Iron Age and Late Iron Age Pottery* (Fig. 3)

A total of 310 sherds of mid Iron Age and late Iron Age date weighing 2.7 kg were recovered, 100 (0.7 kg) from stratified contexts and 210 (2.0 kg) unstratified from spoil heaps.

#### *The Fabrics:*

The pottery was examined under a low-power microscope and six fabrics were distinguished in the assemblage.

- Fabric 1. Calcareous tempered, sometimes with sand and grog inclusions.
- Fabric 2. Grog and calcareous tempered with some sand.
- Fabric 3. Sand tempered, sometimes with grog or calcareous inclusions.
- Fabric 4. Calcareous tempered.

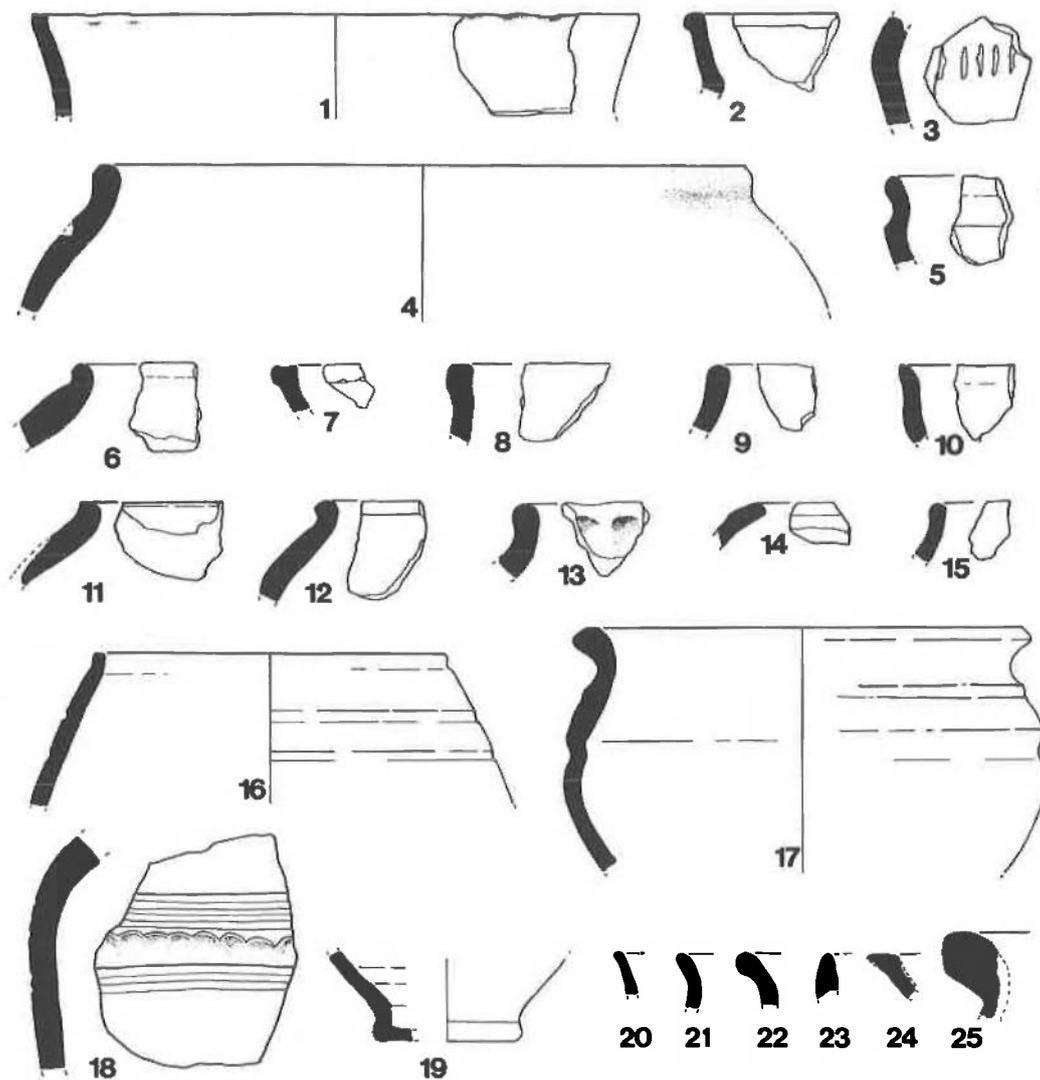


Fig. 3. Long Crendon: mid Iron Age and 'Belgic' pottery (1:3).

Fabric 5. Grog tempered.

Fabric 6. Vegetable tempered with few grog, sand and calcareous inclusions.

The two calcareous fabrics, 1 and 4, were distinguished by 4 having well-rounded inclusions whereas 1 had angular inclusions; fabrics 1, 2, and 3 tended to overlap where the variation in the quantity and size of the inclusions overlapped, but the majority of the sherds could be placed definitely in one category or other.

Fabric	Sherds	% of Total	Weight (g)	% of Total
1	65	21	558	21
2	28	9	238	9
3	91	29	589	22
4	4	1	16	<1
5	122	40	1105	48
6	1	<1	23	<1
Total	311	100	2735	100

Table 1. Iron Age Pottery Fabrics.

#### The Forms:

In the mid Iron Age assemblages both globular (which here includes ellipsoid and ovoid) and carinated/round shouldered vessels were certainly represented. However, profiles were not complete enough to allow a more precise identification of form (Knight 1984).

The term 'Belgic' pottery is used to describe wheel-thrown or turned pottery of Aylesford-Swarling type. Belgic forms consisted of beaded rims—probably from jars, beaker sherds and plain rounded rims.

#### Decoration:

Burnish was restricted to fabric 2 (21% of these sherds were burnished), fabric 3 (29%) and fabric 5 (15%). Decoration on the mid Iron Age pot was otherwise restricted to slightly incised horizontal grooves in the rim area and one example of vertical slash marks on the shoulder (Fig. 3).

The Belgic pottery was decorated with grooves, and combing, with one example of tooled decoration.

#### Discussion of the Pottery:

The mid Iron Age pottery assemblage is comparable to those from other sites in Buckinghamshire but has a number of significant differences. There is a complete absence of flint tempered wares which are common on mid Iron Age sites in the Chilterns, Aylesbury and Berton; in this respect the assemblage is more similar to that from Woodham some six miles to the north (Fig. 1). The globular forms with slightly beaded rims, sometimes everted, are found both in the upper Thames region and the Great Ouse and Nene basins. Knight gives this group (group 2) a very wide date range from 800 B.C. until the Belgic period, although Harding dates them from the mid fourth century B.C. until the Belgic period (Harding 1972).

Generally, assemblages in which globular forms predominate are later than assemblages with carination, which Knight dates from 800 to 300 B.C. only; this type of assemblage is Knight's group 1. The Long Crendon assem-

blage has characteristics of both group 1 and 2, and has affinities with the upper Thames and Great Ouse basins rather than the Chilterns. There are not sufficient sherds to give a date of any accuracy and no significant decoration; however, the presence of some group 1 sherds suggests that the site was occupied from before the end of the fourth century B.C.

There was some correspondence between form and fabric: the majority of the identifiable rims from globular forms were made of fabric 3 (sandy) whereas fabrics 1 and 2 consisted of forms which were classified in Knight's group 1. There is a possibility of there being two distinct periods of ceramic represented in the assemblage: group 1 which is largely made up of fabrics 1 and 2, and group 2 being largely made up of fabric 3; however, the evidence is tenuous.

Fabric 5 consisted entirely of Belgic pottery, both fine and coarse wares; Belgic wheel-thrown or turned pottery also occurred in fabric groups 1, 2, and 3, with the fabric generally being indistinguishable from the mid Iron Age fabrics.

The assemblage was generally similar to that recovered from the 1978-9 site but was more varied, both in fabric and form. The 1984 assemblage consisted of more calcareous and grog tempered sherds in proportion to sandy sherds and many more burnished sherds were recovered.

#### Catalogue of Iron Age Pottery (Fig. 3):

1. Unburnished, smoothed dark grey-black ext. and int. with brown core. Fab. 2 (115)
2. Partly burnished ext., with dark grey-black ext. and core with grey int. Fab. 2 (U/S)
3. Unburnished, vertical 'slash' marks on shoulder; buff ext., grey int. Fab. 1 (108)
4. Unburnished, orange to buff, dark grey-black core. Fab. 1 (100) (109) (U/S)
5. Unburnished, dark grey to orange ext., orange int. with dark grey-black core. Fab. 1 (126)
6. Unburnished, black ext., dark grey brown int. and core. Fab. 2 (126)
7. Unburnished, dark orange brown ext., dark grey int. and core. Fab. 2 (100)
8. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext. and int. with brown core. Fab. 2 (U/S)

9. Burnished, orange grey ext., grey int. with orange grey core. Fab. 3 (U/S)
10. Partly burnished ext., dark grey-brown ext., int. and core. Fab. 2 (U/S)
11. Burnished ext., dark grey-black ext. and int. with grey-brown core. Fab. 3 (116)
12. Burnished ext. and int., dark orange-brown ext., dark grey-black int. and core. Fab. 3 (109)
13. Unburnished with finger impressions below rim, dark orange-brown ext. and int., grey core. Fab. 1 (109)
14. Unburnished, grey-brown ext., grey-black int. and core. Fab. 3 (U/S)
15. Unburnished, dark grey-brown ext. and int. with dark grey black core. Fab. 1 (120)
16. Partly burnished ext. with incised grooves, buff ext., grey int. Wheel made. Fab. 5 (U/S)
17. Unburnished, buff. Wheel made. Fab. 5 (133)
18. Partly burnished ext., with incised grooves and decoration, buff. Wheel made. Fab. 5 (U/S)
19. Burnished ext, dark grey-black ext. and int. with grey black core. Wheel made. Fab. 3 (U/S)
20. Burnished ext., dark grey-black ext., int. and core. Wheel made. Fab. 3 (U/S)
21. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext., int. and core. Wheel made. Fab. 5 (U/S)
22. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext., int. and core. Wheel made. Fab. 2 (U/S)
23. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext., grey int. with pinkish grey core. Wheel made. Fab. 3 (U/S)
24. Burnished, dark grey-black ext. and int. with dark grey core. Wheel made. Fab. 3 (U/S)
25. Partly burnished ext., dark grey-black ext. and int. with grey-brown core. Fab. 5 (U/S)

Nos. 5-7 are from pit (100).

Nos. 9, 10, 14, 16, 18-25 are in the possession of Mrs Parker-Smith.

#### *The Fired Clay Objects (Fig. 4)*

In total 9 pieces of fired clay were recovered; 6 were from stratified contexts and 3 unstratified from the spoilheaps. Two fabrics were identified, one with predominately vegetable tempering, the other with sand tempering.

Only one object was immediately identifiable, a large fragment of triangular loomweight measuring 70 × 60 × 40 mm in an orange-red sandy fabric (Fig. 4.1). The hole in the loomweight had been formed by folding the clay around a rod or something similar. The loomweight had broken down the line of the fold leaving the hole exposed in section. The loomweight was closely associated with an oven (133) and a large sherd of Belgic pottery; triangular loomweights are well known in the mid Iron Age (Cunliffe 1984) and also occur in 'Belgic' contexts (Clifford 1961).

Other stratified finds included pieces of so-called 'Belgic brick'; the fabric contained vegetable tempering and fine calcareous matter. All the pieces were fragmentary, but one had two smoothed surfaces meeting at an angle of 100°; the angular corner suggested that it had been moulded rather than hand-formed. A much larger piece of 'brick' was recovered during the digging of the watermain in 1978. The function of such bricks is not known but there seems to be some connection with ovens and hearths (Allen forthcoming; Farley *et al.* 1981).

One piece of fired clay, unstratified from the spoil tips (Fig. 4.2) measuring 50 × 40 × 30 mm seems to be some type of mould or possibly a piece of saltmaking briquetage. It had two formed hollows and a smooth 'top' surface; other faces were rough and some fractured. Orange-red sandy fabric.

#### *The Bone Comb*

A bone comb found close to the present site on a previous occasion (Fig. 1) has been donated by Andrew and Stuart Donaldson to Bucks County Museum (Acc. No. 116.1984). The precise function of these combs is still disputed; see a recent discussion (Sellwood 1984). However, it is likely that they were used in the weaving process.

The comb (Fig. 4.3) measuring 80 × 30 × 10 mm was concavo-convex in section, with eight teeth, all broken just above the comb shaft. The decoration was incised and linear; the decoration of such combs is very varied and as yet no chronology has been established. The comb displayed a high degree of polish on the shaft, presumably due to wear and, on the back, cutting marks were visible where the bone had been shaped.

This weaving comb is only the second known from Buckinghamshire. The other was from a mid Iron Age and Belgic site at Stantonbury (Britnell 1972).

#### *The Environmental Evidence*

##### *The Animal Bone:*

Fifty animal bones or fragments of bones

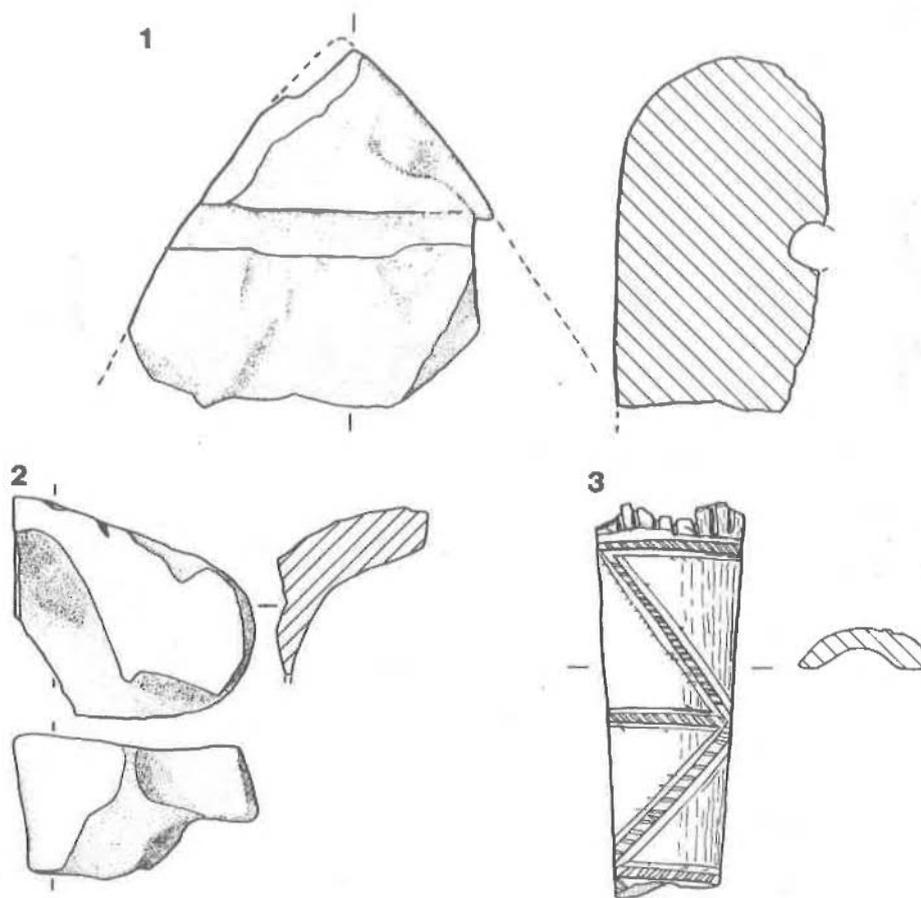


Fig. 4. Long Crendon: objects of clay and bone (2:3).

were recovered from stratified contexts and these were examined, identified and recorded by Gillian Jones.

From mid Iron Age contexts 2 cattle bones and 2 sheep bones were recovered. From occupation layers presumed to be mid Iron Age, 3 cattle bones, 8 sheep bones and 1 pig bone were recovered; one of the sheep bones was a jaw from an adult with the third molar fully in wear, and one of the cattle bones was from a mature animal (a lumbar vertebra with the epiphyses fully fused).

From late Iron Age contexts, one sheep bone and one cattle bone were recovered, the cattle bone being a maxilla (upper jaw) of a six-

month-old animal (using modern comparisons).

All identifiable bone fragments were from animals of a size consistent with the mid/late Iron Age period and the proportions of animal species present is, despite the small quantity of bones available for analysis, not inconsistent with this date. The minimum number of each species represented is 2 cattle, 2 sheep and 1 pig. The unidentifiable bone produced similar results, there being 16 unidentified cattle-size fragments and 15 sheep/pig-size fragments.

Some of the bone fragments showed signs of rodent gnawing, but no clear butchery marks were noticed.

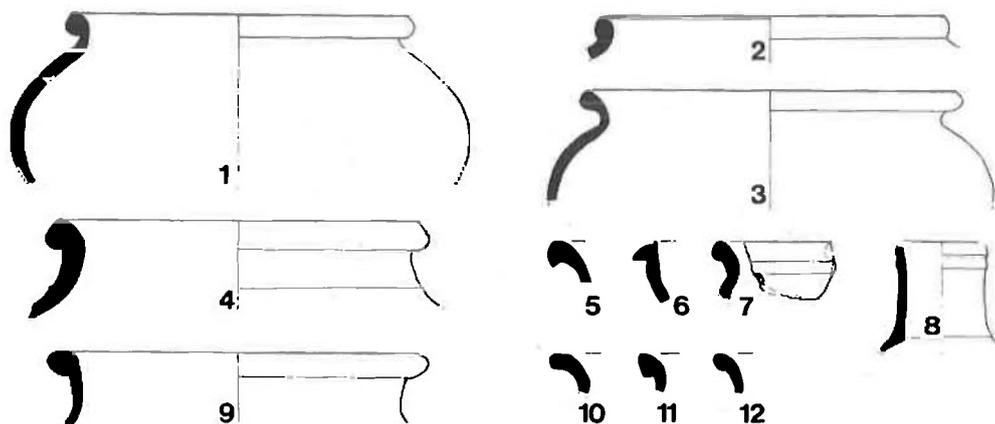


Fig. 5. Long Crendon: Romano-British pottery (1:4).

#### The Seeds from Pit 100:

The sample from pit 100, weighing 13 kg, was taken from context 126. The pit is thought to be mid Iron Age in date, based on pottery evidence and its location on the site.

The sample was floated and sieved, and the float and sieve residues collected. The seeds were examined and identified by Dr M. A. Robinson.

<i>Hordeum sp.</i>	(hulled barley)	1
<i>Hordeum sp.</i>	(barley, hulled or naked)	2
<i>Triticum sp.</i>	(wheat, variety unident.)	4
Other cereal grains	(not identifiable)	8
<i>Avena sp.</i>	(wild oats)	1
<i>Bromus sp.</i>	(brome grass)	1
<i>Rumex sp.</i>	(dock)	1
<i>Galium aperime</i>	(goose grass)	1
<i>Atriplex sp.</i>	(orache)	1
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	(fat hen)	1
<i>Chenopodiaceae</i> indet		4
cf. <i>Medicago</i> or	(medick or clover)	2
<i>Trifolium sp.</i>		
<i>Caryophyllaceae</i> indet		1
Unidentified seeds		2

Table 2. Carbonised seeds from pit 100 context 126.

The sample was not a rich one and the grains were very abraded, suggesting that they represent typical background debris on an occupation site of the mid Iron Age in this region, rather than evidence of any special

grain processing activity in the immediate vicinity. The sample is typical for the period and region and although the weeds are all associated with cereal cultivation, they do not give any indication whether the crops were grown on limestone or clay soil.

#### Other Finds

##### Flint

One piece of Mesolithic flint was recovered, confirming the possibility of a Mesolithic presence in the area, indicated by the find of a core in the 1979 excavation.

##### The Roman Pottery (Fig. 5)

154 sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered, weighing 1333 g. Only 11 sherds came from stratified contexts; the remaining 143 sherds were unstratified. The condition of the pottery was generally good and unabraded with several very large sherds.

##### Fabrics:

The fabrics were identified by Sarah Green as being of Oxfordshire type, with the exception of 2 sherds of samian. The assemblage included white-ware, red and white colour-coat, oxidised and reduced wares. As the majority of the pottery was unstratified and reflected a wide date range more detailed analysis was not undertaken.

### Chronology:

The assemblage has a date range from the first century through to the fourth century, although few pieces were accurately datable. First- and second-century sherds included one 'poppy head beaker' and three other beaker sherds, one neck sherd of a white-ware flagon and two samian sherds, one a rim of a Dr 33. Reduced 'grey' ware forms dated from the first to the fourth century, and included a number of Belgic type rims. Third- and fourth-century sherds included red and white colour-coat mortaria sherds and red colour-coat, including one rim sherd with part of a rosette below the rim (Young 1978), produced either at Rose Hill or Baldon, A.D. 325-400.

### Discussion:

The pottery evidence suggests Roman occupation or activity in the vicinity of the site, lasting throughout the Roman period. The good condition of the pottery was indicative of this. The assemblage is comparable to that recovered from Long Crendon in 1978-9 and is made up largely of local Oxfordshire pottery, although this site produced more early forms and a wider variety, probably due to a larger area being examined.

### Catalogue of Roman Pottery (Fig. 5):

1. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext., grey int. and core. Wheel made. Fab 5 (see Iron Age) (U/S)
2. Unburnished, dark grey-black ext., int. and core. Wheel made. Fab. 1 (see Iron Age) (U/S)
3. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. (Young Type 0.10) (U/S)
4. Oxidised light orange buff with grey core. (Young Type 0.10) (U/S)
5. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. (Young Type R.38) Diam. 24 cm (U/S)
6. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. Diam. uncertain. (U/S)
7. Red colour-coat with a rosette stamp, red ext., int. and core. (Young Type C78) (U/S)
8. White-ware flagon neck, cream white ext., int. and core. (U/S)
9. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. (Young Type R23) (U/S)
10. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. Diam. 20 cm. (U/S)
11. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. Diam. 18 cm. (U/S)
12. Reduced grey ext., int. and core. Diam. 14 cm. (U/S)

Nos. 3-12 in the possession of Mrs Parker-Smith.

### Acknowledgements

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