

LATE IRON AGE EARLY ROMAN TRANSITION IN THE CHILTERN. WHAT DITCHES CAN TELL US

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Excavation of ditches during 2009 and 2010 at two locations about 11km apart and each associated with nearby Romano-British villa sites, uncovered considerable quantities of dumped pottery sherds. Detailed assessment of the pottery has thrown light on the early occupation of the two sites. One ditch, in a field near to the river Chess at Sarratt Bottom, had been backfilled with pot and flints immediately after its construction. Excavation here yielded Late Iron Age pot types with just a few pieces new to the period, pointing to early occupation of the site by a non-Romanised farming community. People here were living in a relatively simple manner but having occasional contact, directly or via intermediaries, with potteries in Verulamium and Oxford. The second ditch, in a woodland on hillside slope overlooking Little Missenden and the river Misbourne, also had been backfilled with pot and flints, but in this case probably many years after construction. Here the recovered pottery dates from mid 1st century BC to early 2nd century AD with examples of forms in the native tradition alongside non-local wares, imports from Gaul and fine-ware copies of Roman vessels. The pottery assemblage points to the nearby presence of a high-class farmstead/villa working large areas of the landscape and which benefited from a network of contacts bringing in items from major centres in the south-east England and from abroad.

INTRODUCTION

There is a body of evidence for Late Iron Age to early Roman occupation north of the Chiltern Hills in the Aylesbury plain which is most often associated with easy access to water and good agricultural land (Kidd 2010). However, examples of occupation within the Chilterns are relatively infrequent: these include the Roman villa at Latimer in the Chess Valley, where the remains of a late Iron Age timber structure and Belgic pottery were uncovered (Branigan 1971), evidence of late Iron Age occupation at Yewden Roman villa, Hambleton (Cocks 1921; Eysers 2011), and Cobbler's Hill, Great Missenden where domestic finds, building debris and iron slag characteristic of the Iron Age and early Roman period were found in a garden (Bucks Historic Environment Record ref 0100500000). This paper explores how careful examination of features other than buildings, in this case ditches and their contents, can provide not

only evidence of local occupation but also the day-to-day activities of local inhabitants.

During 2009 and 2010 archaeological investigations being carried out at two locations in the Chiltern Hills (Fig. 1) led to the discovery of the ditches described in this paper. One was uncovered during investigation of the Roman villa site at Sarratt Bottom (NGR TQ026991) and the other during exploration of a linear earthwork at Coleman's Wood (NGR SU912947), Holmer Green. These sites are roughly 11km apart and although Coleman's Wood is at some distance both are within easy reach of a river, the Chess and Misbourne respectively.

Coleman's Wood Ditch

Coleman's Wood lies on a hill (c.160m ASL) above Little Missenden and near to Holmer Green. A number of earthworks have been identified within the wood: the most significant of these is rectilinear structure with an external ditch, significant

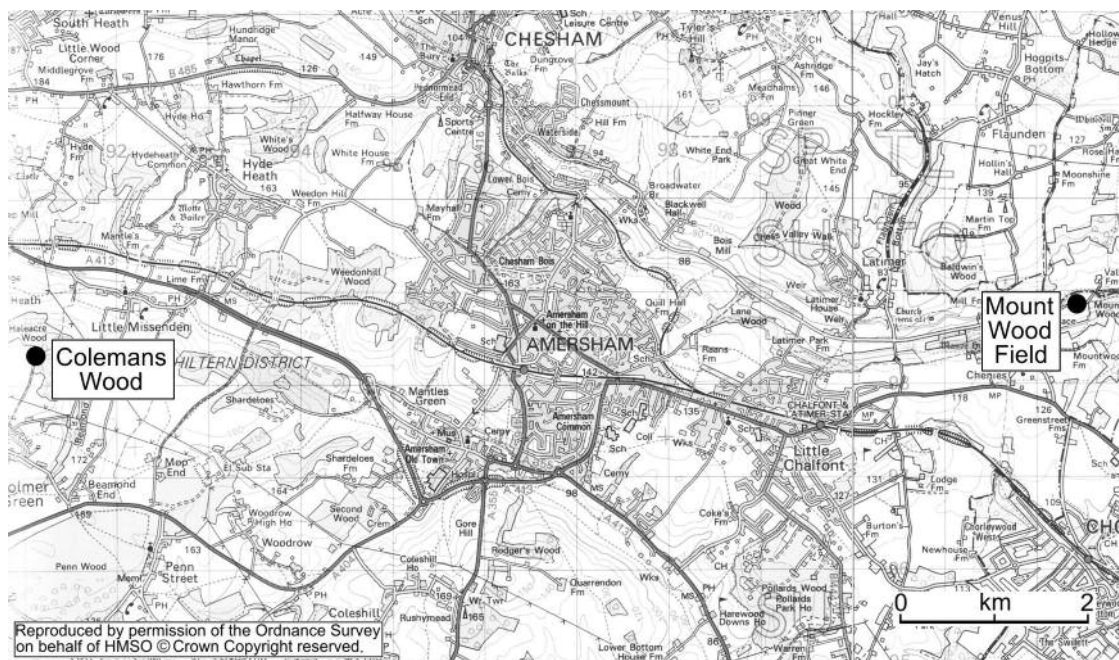


FIGURE 1 Approximate locations of Coleman's Wood and Mount Wood Field

bank and a ramped entrance, described and recorded in 1982 as “moated” enclosure with a tentative post-medieval date (HER 0520500000). Various small-scale excavations and surveys of this feature have revealed scant evidence which neither supports or undermines this date (McLain-Smith & Riches 2008). In 2009 our focus moved to a conspicuous earthwork bank lying *c.*37m east of the enclosure and which is currently discernible along a *c.*30m stretch. The bank stands in places to around 0.5m above the present land surface and runs northwest-southeast along the top of a northeast facing slope. Excavation across this feature identified a single substantial ditch on the northeastern side which ran the full length of the bank as judged from exposure of a 2.5m length in Trench 7 and a 1.0m length in a second trench (Trench 8) some distance away. The profiles and nature of the fill were identical in both trenches.

The fully excavated section is shown in Fig. 2 with contexts numbered. The original ditch cut had been made into the natural clay to give a roughly V shaped cross-section, about 75cm deep with a slightly rounded bottom. The top fill layer (001) comprised clayey organic silt, probably deriving

from a mix of bank make-up slippage and woodland deposits; beneath this was a narrow layer of dark brown deposit with flints and some pebbles (002). The underlying, major fill layer (003) comprised dark grey clayey silts with occasional regular cavities caused by deposition of a mixture of large angular flints and un-weathered pot sherds. The latter were largely domestic, ranging in date from the late Iron Age to the early 2nd century, and are described in detail in the following section.

Traces of other banks lie within 50 metres of this feature. One of these runs roughly at right angles to the bank and ditch described above and in the direction of the ‘moated’ enclosure. Although poorly defined in places, excavation either side of this bank found an associated shallow ditch, lying to the northwest of the bank, with no evidence of deliberate filling.

Mount Wood Field Ditch

The Roman villa site at Valley Farm, Sarratt was recognised in the early 20th century when an apsed building was uncovered by the landowner and his farmer (Anderson 1909). The surrounding fields have been the focus of CVAHS research for many

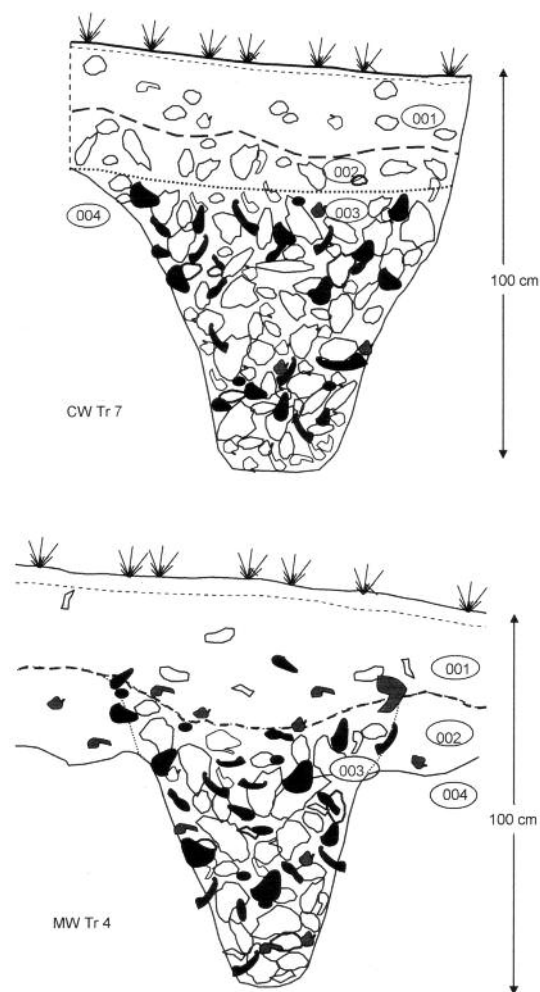


FIGURE 2 Sections of Coleman's Wood (CW Tr 7) and Mount Wood Field (MW Tr 4) ditches showing approximate distribution of flint (outlined) and pot (black). Contexts numbers referred to in the text are shown

years, leading to the excavation of a Romano-British corn drier (Dunnett 1987), a rectilinear earthwork perhaps dating to the Late Iron Age (Gover 2006) and large quantities of Romano-British building material including roof and hypocaust tiles and pottery, together with metal tools, coins and other household items (Edwards, Gover & Wells 2009). The density, distribution and dates of such materials indicate the long-term presence of a relatively high-status villa. In 2010–11

the Society carried out geophysical surveys and excavations in a field adjacent to Mount Wood on the south of the river Chess, opposite areas where the main Romano-British occupation site is thought to lie (Edwards, Gover & Wells 2012).

Mount Wood Field slopes significantly upwards from the river valley bottom towards woodland on the field's crest. Exploration of a linear resistivity anomaly lying low on the field slope, close to a boggy area, led to the excavation of a ditch, which like the Coleman's Wood ditch was V-shaped in cross-section and about 75cm deep (Fig. 2). Below the turf/topsoil lay c.35cm depth of dark orange-brown clay rich loam with a scatter of flints (001): in some parts of the trench this overlaid the ditch fill (003). The ditch was cut through a layer of clayey silt with flints (002) into the natural clay (004). It appears that later disturbance of the upper layers, most likely by ploughing, led to mixing between context 002 and the ditch fill (003). The latter comprised dark brown humic soil packed with flints and large unweathered pot sherds with voids between and scatters of charcoal.

The flint and pot fill of the ditch maintains open cavities in the soil and allows drainage, and the ditch appears to have been backfilled soon after it was dug. The position of this feature in the lowest part of the field and in an area with *Juncus effusus* (common rush) growing in large clumps strongly suggested that this was constructed as a drainage ditch.

POTTERY DESCRIPTION

The pottery from both trenches was recorded by fabric type, form, degree of abrasion and decoration. The pottery types and abbreviations are summarised in Table 1. Rim diameters and eves (*i.e.* percentage of the surviving circumference) were also measured with the latter shown as pie charts in Figs 3 and 4. The ditch in Coleman's Wood yielded a total of 852 sherds weighing 13.1kg while the Mount Wood Field ditch fill yielded 627 sherds weighing 8.5kg (Tables 2 & 3). In the latter case the ditch fill is considered separately from contexts 000, 001 and 002 which lay above and around the top of the ditch cut (Fig. 2) which between them yielded 422 sherds weighing c.3kg (Table 4). It seems likely that these levels were disturbed and mixed by ploughing.

TABLE 1 Pottery ware types and abbreviations used in the text

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Ware type</i>
GSJ	grogged storage jar
SJ	storage ware
BW	burnished ware
LGW	local grogged ware
GW	grey ware
LOW	local orange ware
VER	Ver(ulamium) ware
MIC	micaceous ware
CTW	chaff tempered ware
FTW	flint tempered ware
HED	Hedgerley ware
HIG	Highgate ware
HAD	Hadham ware
AMP	amphora
OX	Oxford ware
CC	colour coated ware
SAM	samian ware

TABLE 2 Details of the Mount Wood Field and Coleman's Wood trenches along with summary details of recovered pottery. * total pot number and weight, all contexts included

	<i>Mount Wood</i>	<i>Coleman's Wood</i>
Shape of cross section	V with flat base	V with flat base
Depth ditch cut to base	c.75cm	c.75cm
Length of section	3m	c.3m
Retrieved sherds: number	627 (1049)*	852
Retrieved sherds: weight	8.5 (11.57)*kg	13.13kg
Estimate of vessel number	40	100
Fabric type number	10	16

Many of the sherds from both ditch fills were large and unabraded with no signs of post-depositional disturbance. Careful sorting and reassembly found numbers of sherds deriving from the same vessels allowing some partial refitting. The Coleman's Wood sherds were all of a relatively early date, pre-conquest to early 2nd century AD,

but the Mount Wood Field ditch-fill pottery had a narrower date range from pre-conquest to mid 1st century AD, with a high proportion of hand-made ware. Counts of rim sherds suggested that at Coleman's Wood these represented deposition of c.100 different vessels while at Mount Wood Field they represented c.40 vessels (Table 2).

TABLE 3 Numbers and weights of pot recovered from Mount Wood Field (Ctx 003) and Coleman's Wood trenches presented by ware type

<i>ware type</i>	<i>Coleman's Wood</i>			<i>Mount Wood Field Ctx 003</i>		
	<i>no</i>	<i>wt</i>	<i>% wt</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>wt</i>	<i>% wt</i>
GSJ	316	7140	54.4	232	4389	51.4
SJ	4	50	0.4			
BW	103	1185	9.0	13	215	2.5
LGW	31	250	1.9	307	3294	38.6
GW	31	244	1.9	55	468	5.5
LOW	43	405	3.1	4	47	0.6
VER	111	581	4.4	7	15	0.2
FGW	24	130	1.0	2	10	0.1
MIC	13	250	1.9			
CTW	18	215	1.6			
FTW	97	1650	12.6			
HED	37	410	3.1	1	39	0.5
HIG	9	250	1.9			
HAD	10	20	0.2			
AMP	1	300	2.3			
OX	3	50	0.4	5	55	0.6
SAM				1	1	0.0
Total	852	13130		627	8533	

TABLE 4 Pottery recovered from the uppermost contexts of the Mount Wood Field trench. Worn Samian ware fragments found in contexts 1 and 2 are likely to represent later discard and plough scattering, associated with the nearby Roman villa.

<i>MWF ware type</i>	<i>Ctx 0</i>		<i>Ctx 1</i>		<i>Ctx 2</i>	
	<i>no</i>	<i>wt</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>wt</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>wt</i>
GSJ	10	100	28	305	19	150
BW					4	35
LGW	27	275	63	480	96	835
GW	42	215	17	140	7	25
LOW	31	185	30	130	5	15
VER			3	15	2	5
FGW	4	15	19	45		
HED					3	25
OX						
SAM	2	16	1	1		
CC	4	15	5	10		
Totals	120	821	166	1126	136	1090

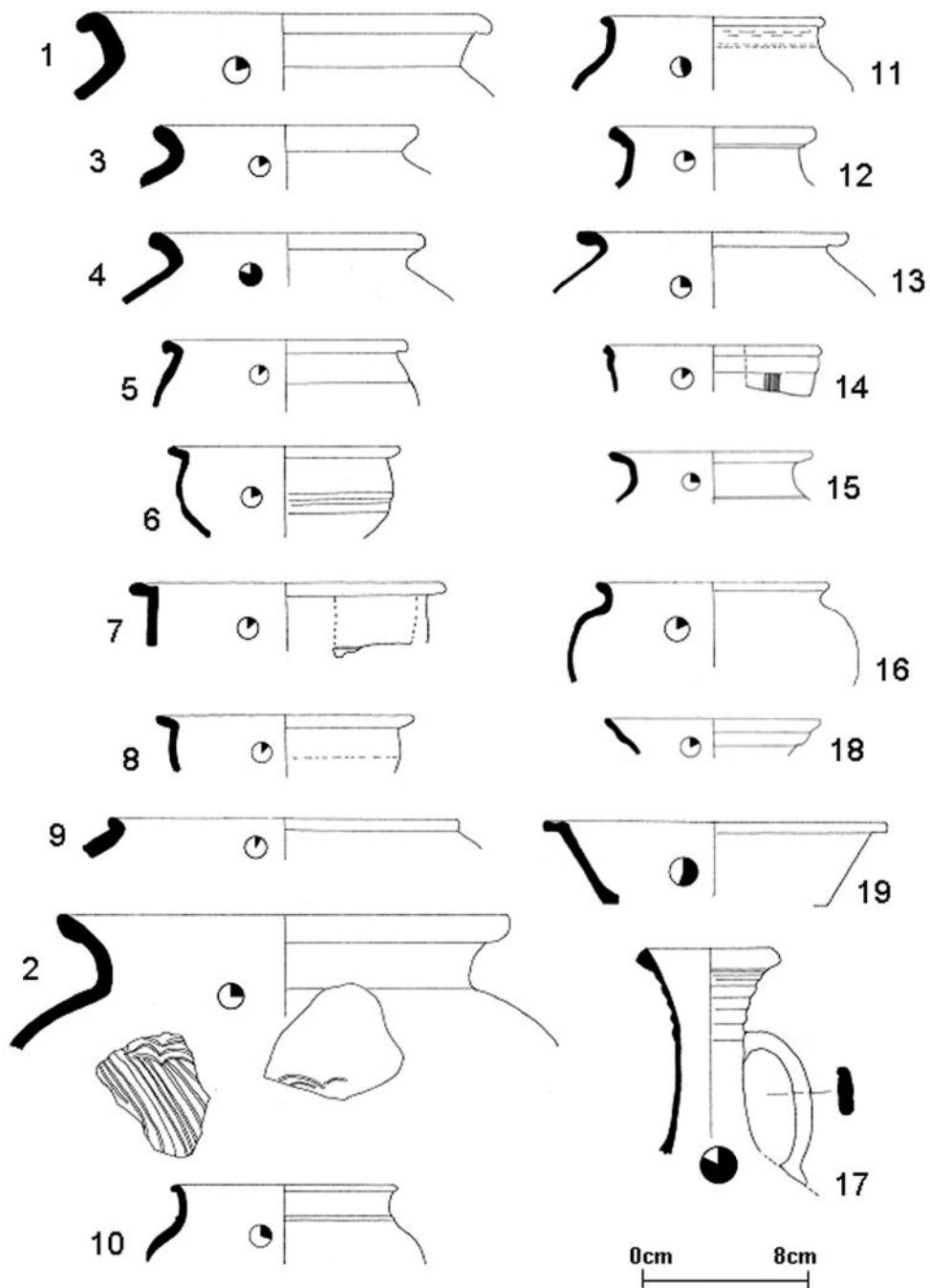


FIGURE 3 Pot recovered from the Coleman's Wood ditch with pie charts showing percentage of circumference (eave) which had survived

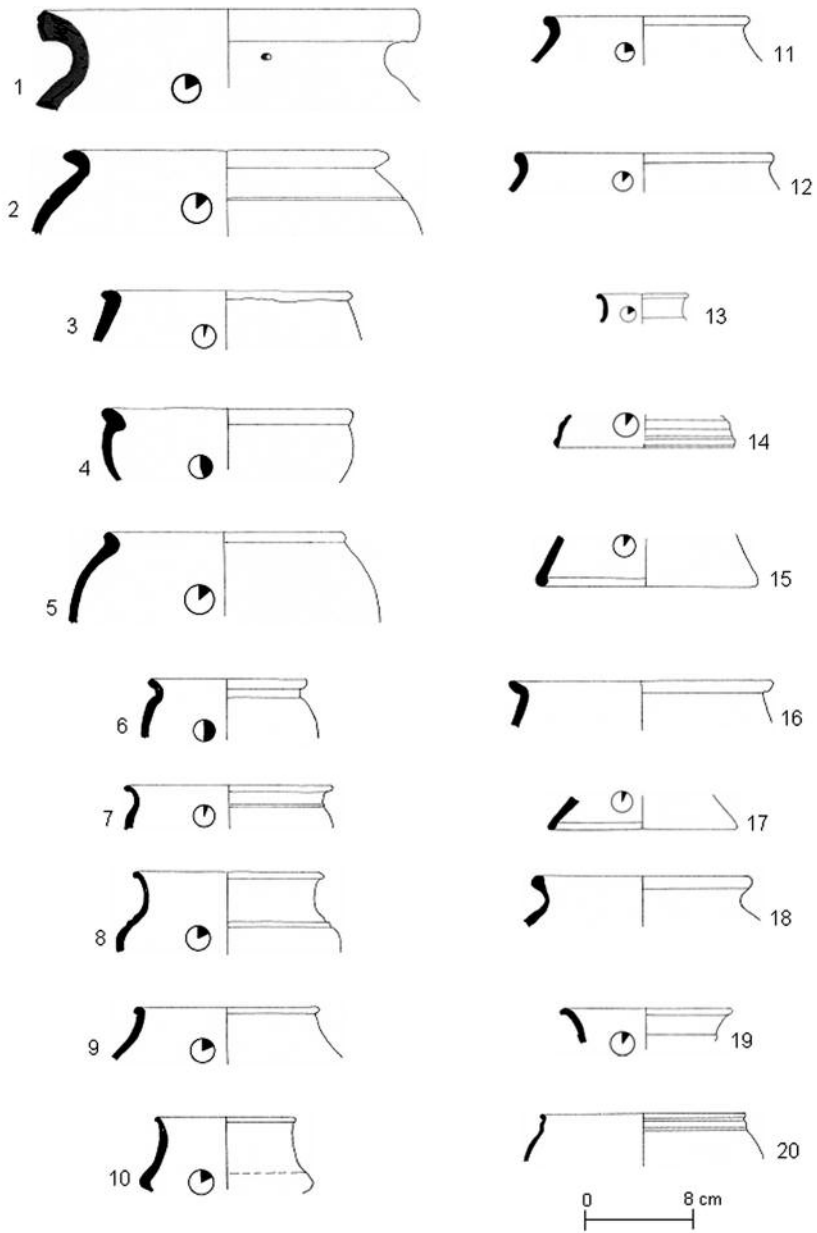


FIGURE 4 Pot recovered from the Mount Wood Field ditch with pie charts showing percentage of circumference (eve) which had survived



FIGURE 5 Photographs of pot recovered from the Coleman's Wood trench. **A.** Fragment of jar with combed pattern dating 1st century AD. **B.** A jar of the Late Iron Age grog tempered tradition with holes pierced through base, perhaps used for cheese-making



FIGURE 6 Photographs of pot recovered from the Mount Wood Field trench. **A.** Fragment of jar with combed pattern dating mid 1st century AD. **B.** Bead rimmed jar fragments



FIGURE 7 Mortarium rim sherd from the Coleman's Wood trench with illiterate maker's stamp dated 100-180 AD and probably made at the Ashurst Clinic Site, Littlemore, Oxford

Fabric and Form

Grogged storage jars [GSJ]. The pottery in both ditches was of a rural, domestic nature with grogged storage jars the most common form and comprising, in both cases, about 50% by weight. These jars were largely made of an oxidised fabric, heavily grogged, with limestone inclusions and a combed decoration, dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD (Figs 3.1, 3.2: 4.1; 5A). Such jars are common in South-East England and a near-intact example with the characteristic combed pattern is on display in Luton Museum. A rim sherd of this type from Mount Wood Field ditch is shown in Fig. 4.1. In this case a hole has been bored at an angle through the neck so that string or fine rope could be threaded through, perhaps for attaching a lid. Some jars in this category were made of an oxidised fabric with flint inclusions and others were black with sand, flint and chaff tempering; examples of the latter were found amongst the Coleman's Wood assemblage (Figs 3.3, 3.4). Some of the black jar fragments from Mount Wood Field ditch were heavily fired with a more deeply combed pattern one of which dated to the Late Iron Age (Fig. 6A).

Local grogged ware [LGW]. Locally made grogged pottery was the second most abundant form in the Mount Wood Field assemblage, comprising 39% by weight. This form was rela-

tively scarce in the Coleman's Wood assemblage, making up only 2% by weight. There were two main ceramic types of local grogged ware; the first group were wheel-made and generally finer than the second group which were hand-made, relatively coarse wares.

The first group included jars and bowls dating from late 1st to 2nd century AD. Examples of these in a black fabric with sand inclusions were found in the Coleman's Wood assemblage (Figs 4.4 to 4.8). The Mount Wood Field examples, which had fewer inclusions, included finely-made bead rim jars; Fig. 4.6 shows such a fragment comprising c.50% of a jar rim. This ceramic group also included both oxidised and reduced cordoned jars with colours ranging from red through buff to grey and black; these were possibly produced in Verulamium (Thompson 1982). Several had pronounced cordons dating them to the period spanning the late 1st century BC to early 1st century AD (Figs 4.7 & 4.8). Also included in this category were carinated cups (Fig. 4.10) and bowls in a smooth oxidised fabric together with jars (Figs 4.11 to 4.13) and lids (Figs 4.14 & 4.15).

The second hand-made group included black-bodied jar fragments with flint inclusions from Mount Wood Field, and sherds of bead rim jars from both Coleman's Wood (Fig. 3.9) and Mount

Wood Field (Figs 4.3 to 4.5) all dating to the Late Iron Age. Over a hundred sherds of this type were amongst the local grogged ware recovered from the Mount Wood Field ditch fill.

Burnished ware [BW]. This wheel-made pottery with a smooth burnished surface was a fine black grog-tempered fabric, somewhat more common in the Coleman's Wood assemblage than in that from Mount Wood Field, 9% and 3% by weight respectively.

The Coleman's Wood material included jars dating from late 1st century BC to 1st century AD; those with a pronounced cordon, perhaps dating earlier in the range (Fig. 3.10). A finely made, thin-walled, jar where the cordon had almost disappeared (Fig. 3.11) dated to the final phase of the Late Iron Age grog tempered tradition, either immediately pre- or post- conquest. A jar base in the same fabric, which may be part of the same vessel, had three holes pierced through the base after firing, suggesting a vessel used for cheese making.

Amongst the Mount Wood Field examples there were sherds from jar bodies (Fig. 4.16), lids (Fig. 4.17) and an almost complete base of a jar.

Other Local Wares

Several other local wares were encountered, but all were considerably less frequent than those types described above. Amongst these were grey wares (GW) which included sherds of jars (Fig. 4.19) and lids in a hard grey sandy fabric from the Mount Wood Field ditch (and local orange ware (LOW) which occurred infrequently in both ditches. Both assemblages included jar sherds of a hard sandy fabric with a rough surface, which might have been produced at Hedgerley near Gerrards Cross in Buckinghamshire (Fig. 3.13). Four sherds from Mount Wood Field derived from a large jar decorated with horizontal grooves and vertical markings: of these, one piece had been reduced externally to a grey colour (Fig. 4.18), while the remainder were reduced externally to black. Examples of chaff-tempered ware [CTW] and flint-tempered ware [FTW] were encountered only in the Coleman's Wood assemblage. The latter included jars in a reduced grogged fabric (Fig. 3.12) and four sherds were recovered from a very coarse flint and calcite gritted jar with inclusions up to 4mm in size. This jar had a slashed beaded rim with a hackly feel. It was probably made by

hand or on a slow wheel in Late Iron Age style but is thought to be of post-conquest date.

Non-Local Wares

Various diverse Verulamium (VER) region wares made up 4% of the Coleman's Wood assemblage including a white ware jar sherd (Fig. 3.15), fragments of a grey ware jar (Fig. 3.16) and a flagon (Fig. 3.17). Rim sherds from jars in a white sandy fabric reduced to grey with a partial red slip were also present. Other forms of VER wares included those of white fabric with white slip, and fine red ware forms some with iron oxide grits such as the flagon shown in Fig. 4.18. In contrast only seven sherds of Verulamium region ware were recovered from the Mount Wood Field trench.

Fine grey ware [FGW] was also more common in the Coleman's Wood assemblage than in that from Mount Wood Field, and notably included 24 body sherds of a carinated bowl with two rows of zigzag pattern above the carination, created using a soft pointed instrument. This bowl is thought to be a copy of a Samian bowl type DR 29 and was made in Britain. Only two fine grey ware rim sherds were recovered from Mount Wood Field but one of these was from a finely made, grey fabric, jar with a white slip (Fig. 4.20).

Oxford ware [OX] was more or less equally common in both trenches, with some special finds such as a mortarium rim sherd with an illiterate maker's stamp, dated AD 100–180 from Coleman's Wood (Fig. 7): this item is likely to have been made at the Ashurst Clinic Site, Littlemore, Oxford (Young 1977). The Coleman's Wood ditch also yielded two sherds of a girth beaker with evidence of a black slip, possibly made in Oxford in the 1st century AD and stamped with sets of parallel vertical lines (Fig. 3.14). Only five sherds of Oxford ware were recovered from the Mount Wood Field ditch. These included part of a beaker in a fine grey fabric, oxidised on the outside and decorated with black slip and rows of rouletting, which appeared to be a copy of an imported 'thumb-print' beaker.

Hadham and Highgate wares were in low numbers and only recovered from the Coleman's Wood ditch. The latter were all of a hard grey fabric with a white slip and probably derived from a large cordoned jar. Imported wares were also restricted to Coleman's Wood and included sherds of a micaceous ware [MIC] bowl, imitating a bronze vessel

(Fig. 3.19) from Central Gaul, and dating from late 1st century BC to early 2nd century AD. Part of a Dressel 20 amphora handle was also recovered.

Pottery fragments illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 are listed below:

Coleman's Wood (Fig. 3)

- 1-2. Grogged Storage jar [GSJ], oxidised with limestone inclusions.
3. GSJ reduced, black.
4. GSJ reduced, black with sand and flint inclusions, indications of chaff tempering.
5. Local Grogged Ware [LGW] jar, possible with a cordon, reduced, black.
- 6 & 8. LGW carinated bowl, buff, reduced, black external surface, sand inclusions.
7. LGW carinated bowl, reduced, black, sand inclusions.
9. LGW jar, beaded rim, reduced core, oxidised internal and external surfaces.
10. Burnished Ware [BW] cordoned jar, buff, reduced, black external surface.
11. BW cordoned jar, buff, reduced, black internal and external surfaces.
12. Flint tempered Ware [FTW] jar, grey, reduced, grogged.
13. Hedgerley Ware [HED] jar, sandy, hard, rough surface.
14. Fine Grey Ware [FGW] girth beaker 1st century AD, decorated with groups of parallel lines, traces of black slip.
15. Ver Region White Ware [VERWH] jar, white, very hard, sand inclusions.
16. Ver Region Grey Ware [VERRE] jar, grey, reduced, hard, sand inclusions.
17. VERRE trumpet-shaped flagon with handle, buff, dated late 1st to 2nd century AD
18. VER Fine Red Ware flagon. iron oxide grit inclusions.
19. Micaceous Ware [MIC] shallow bowl, orange, fine, oxidised, 13 sherds.

Mount Wood Field (context 003) (Fig. 4)

1. Grogged Storage jar [GSJ], rim sherd, pink, heavily grogged, hole bored at an angle through the neck of the pot.
2. GSJ buff, partly reduced, late Iron Age.
- 3-6. Local Grogged Ware, [LGW] Jar, bead rim, hand-made, very coarse, reduced, Late Iron Age.
7. LGW Cordoned jar, grey, wheel made.

8. LGW Cordoned jar, partly reduced, black exterior.
9. LGW Cordoned jar, buff, exterior partly blackened.
10. LGW Carinated cup, core reduced, exterior oxidised.
11. LGW Jar, buff, oxidised.
12. LGW Jar, buff body
13. LGW Small jar, buff, exterior reduced to grey.
14. LGW Lid, reduced
15. LGW Lid, buff, exterior reduced to grey, sand inclusions.
16. [BW] jar, black
17. [BW] lid, reduced core oxidised exterior
18. Hedgerley Ware [HED], large jar, orange, reduced on outside to grey, hard, sandy, rough.
19. Grey Ware [GW], jar, hard, sandy.
20. GW jar, finely made, grey with white slip.

DISCUSSION

The dating and characterisation of the Mount Wood Field trench and its fill was not unexpected, since it is situated in an area where several Late Iron Age/Romano British features have been uncovered and investigated. However, it is of considerable interest that the Coleman's Wood ditch and bank proved to be of Late Iron Age/Romano British origin since finds made over the years have hinted at a nearby settlement, perhaps close to Little Missenden, which lies in the valley below. For example, Roman tiles are incorporated into the walls of the parish church, a late second-century coin was found in the vicinity of Town Farm (HER 0144900001: Branigan 1967), pottery has been picked up during field-walking nearby (HER 0508300004) and a second-century lamp found buried in a local cottage garden (HER 0527500000). During the last three years a metal detecting survey led to the recovery of several Roman coins and a bronze pin; all these finds lay within a 50m² area not far from the Coleman's Wood ditch and included two silver *denarii* dating to 19 BC and 80 BC and two undated worn copper alloy *denarii* (King, McLain-Smith & Riches 2010). These are interesting finds which point to significant Romano-British activity in this area.

While the size and shape of the two ditches discussed here are similar, their function was clearly different. The Coleman's Wood ditch and associated bank were placed relatively high up on a

hillside overlooking the fields alongside the Misbourne river c.1km to the north-east. The structure of the bank and ditch and its position are characteristic of a Late Iron Age location boundary (Kidd 2007) but further investigation may eventually show it to be part of some more complex structure since other fainter banks lay nearby. The Mount Wood Field ditch, dug into solid clay, positioned towards the bottom of a significant field slope, lies within 100m of the river Chess. This feature, which has the same depth and profile as the Coleman's Wood ditch, is not associated with a bank and is only a few metres long. Its function was most likely that of a drain, diverting excess water from the field slope into the lowest part of the field where the land is still marshy.

The homogeneity of the fill make-up along each ditch indicates that backfilling with large flints and broken pot was achieved in one operation and over a relatively short time. It seems reasonable to suggest that the Coleman's Wood ditch was backfilled when its function became redundant and/or when this area was overtaken by the need for more agricultural land. This pattern of keeping ditches clean, visible and functional for a considerable period and then deliberately backfilling them has been noted in the Verulamium area (Thompson 2005). In contrast at Mount Wood Field the flint and pot fill was essential to the ditch's function as a drain and would have been added immediately as part of the ditch construction. The pot fill found in the ditch could have been carried from a dump near to the farmstead/villa on the opposite side of the river, or there may have been dumps in Mount Wood Field. Other features containing discarded pot, quern stones and other household items have been excavated from the same field (Edwards, Gover & Wells 2012).

At Valley Farm the relatively limited range of fabric types provided evidence of continued production of Late Iron Age pot types into the mid 1st century, but included pot forms and fabrics relatively new to that period. These finds importantly also allow the conclusion that at this time a non-Romanised farm and community of people were living in a relatively simple manner in the immediate area. They used mainly native wares including a number of hand-made pots, and were making contact with traders bringing in a few more sophisticated pots from Verulamium and Oxford.

The Coleman's Wood pottery dates from the mid

1st century BC to the early 2nd century AD. It illustrates a period of transition which included a broad range of forms of a domestic nature and strong native tradition together with non-local wares and imports. These latter included amphorae, mica-dusted vessels which at this period were probably imported from Gaul, and some high-status fine wares made in Britain but copied from Roman forms. The pottery assemblage points to the nearby presence of a high class farmstead. The observation that various pot types showed no time-line stratigraphy within the ditch fill suggests that broken/discarded pot is likely to have been accumulated on a dump site over some years, perhaps as many as 60 years, before being used as backfill. The damage involved in transferring dumped pot from one location to another would explain the incidence of unworn clean breaks evident on some pot. At present the evidence for Iron Age/Roman habitation in or near to Coleman's Wood, and a possible source of this domestic waste is nebulous. The exact position of the Roman settlement associated with Little Missenden is not yet known but the preference for valley bottoms near to rivers is well recognised. However settlement on higher ground is not out of the question, so for example around Milton Keynes, an area which has been intensively studied, Roman settlements have been identified at 90-118m elevation and at 1-2km from a river (Zeepvat & Radford 2010).

When first established, the Romano-British settlements associated with Coleman's Wood and Mount Wood Field lay within the dominion of the *Catuvellauni*, who became subject to Rome after the invasion of AD 43. There had been a general pro-Roman interaction prior to this time, marked by a trade in wine and luxuries from the continent, and in subsequent years villa sites were established, often developing from Iron Age farmsteads. As is clear from the comparison of two examples discussed in this paper, the subsequent flourishing of such settlements was reflected in the diversification in the quality of domestic items through imitation by local potteries and intensified trading with sites like St Albans, Colchester and Silchester which were receiving large quantities Roman goods.

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