Sapperton: An Interim Report

B. B. Simmons

INTRODUCTION
Activity in the Roman period has long been suspected at Sapperton. The finding of Roman coins was first recorded in 1821 and since then various people have investigated the area, the most notable probably being C. W. Phillips and Mrs. E. H. Rudkin. The site itself is marked on Ordnance Survey maps and is also shown on the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain. J. B. Whitwell refers to Roman buildings at Sapperton and postulates the thought that there could have been a walled town in the area. Whilst this is a tantalising assumption, there is no proof for a town, walled or otherwise at present. Only time will show whether Whitwell is correct in his idea.

The site of the Roman buildings (see Site Plan, Fig. 1) lies alongside a Roman road known now as Long Hollow, which leaves Ermine Street south of Ancaster and joins Marcham Lane north of Bourne. A field to the east of the one in which the Roman buildings lie is still called Hanby Street Field by the locals and is almost proof itself of the existence of a Roman road. The field to the north of the site is called 'George's Hills and Holes' and the field of the site is 'Parson's Close'.

The geology of the area is predominantly limestone but about half a mile to the north-east there is to be found iron limestone, a significant factor when considering the economy of the Roman settlement here. Undoubtedly building stone was freely available locally and there are the remains of many small quarries close by. Probably the field name 'George's Hills and Holes' recalls quarrying activity on a small scale. Practically all extant buildings in the neighbourhood are built from limestone and possibly part of the Roman material was later re-used in some of these buildings.

In recent years some members of the Car Dyke Research Group have taken an interest in the Sapperton area. Work on the Car Dyke between Bourne and the River Slea has revealed several new road crossings in addition to those already noted in The Fenland in Roman Times. All these roads run in an east-west direction and seem at present to connect lowlands of the fens (and presumably the known Roman sites in the fen) with the higher lands to the west. Along the line of Long Hollow are the known Roman sites of Stainfield, Keisby, Sapperton, Haceby, Aunsby and Ancaster. Other sites away from this line could also be significant and for example the Roman activity in Osbournby should not be ignored. As yet (January 1974), although no positive connection can be claimed, the pottery evidence has some tenuous significance, particularly a large vessel with a frilled neck (see drawing). This type of pot, known hitherto only from surface finds, is recorded by the Car Dyke Research Group from Helpingham Fen, Horbling Fen, Osbournby, Heckington, and Sapperton. Frilled ware is known to have been made in Lincoln at Swanpool and is dated to the fourth century A.D. However the frilled ware vessels found at the sites mentioned above bear no resemblance in fabric or method of decoration to those from the kiln site at Swanpool and it is thought that there is possibly a kiln site or sites around the area of the fen-edge. This reasoning is enhanced by the finding of a few sherds of over-fired and misfired pottery from Horbling. As yet these half dozen or so fragments are poor proof of a kiln but it is worth recording that they exist and incidentally on the road from Horbling Fen to Sapperton.

The excavation at Sapperton is necessary if for no other reasons than those stated above. But new factors within the past two years prompted rapid action. There is no doubt that metal detectors are here to stay and whilst these machines in most hands are merely toys and do no damage archaeologically, very occasionally sites are interfered with to the detriment of the archaeologist. Most if not all metal detectors only penetrate a few inches, thick or four at the best, and operators generally accept this fact. Unfortunately at Sapperton at least four people are known to walk over the fields regularly with their machines and one of these was encouraged enough by his results to dig a trench ten feet long, three feet wide and three feet deep, which followed for part of its length a Roman wall. In the last three months over two hundred holes, from the small 'rabbit scratches' type to quite sizeable excavations have been counted. This must constitute a threat.

The other threat to the site is even greater but more legitimate. Each year the farmer has been in the habit of removing from the field the stone which turned up in ploughing. Several cartloads have been dumped at a time. The result has been to lower the level of the topsoil in those areas where the stone occurs and because it is here where the remains of the stone buildings are, the plough year by year removes the stonework from its original position. A cursory examination of the excavation so far reveals the consequence of this action; in places the topsoil is barely five inches above some of the walls and several of the laid stones bear the tell-tale V-shaped mark of the ploughshare.

SURFACE SURVEY
During the winter of 1972/73 a complete survey of the fields on both sides of Long Hollow was made. Aerial photographs available to the Car Dyke Research Group were singularly unrewarding. Some slight crop marks were noted on the east side of Long Hollow, but the ploughed field here yielded only a few Roman potsherds. There is no doubt that the major activity is in the field known as 'Parson's Close'. There are several surface indications of Roman occupation here, the main one covering about ten acres (see Fig. 1) and associated with a raised platform. The surface finds are mainly pottery, coins, tiles, dressed stone, areas of ploughed-out mortar, and an occasional tessera. Some iron slag has also been noted in this locality. The western edge of the area is bounded for part of its way by a double ditch with a thin tongue of land between the ditches, a most curious feature. This anomaly is quite ancient and is recorded in the Enclosure Award Map. It must therefore pre-date the enclosures; how much previously it is difficult to decide but almost certainly it was not included in the original open field system.

Immediately to the north of the ten acre platform there is a small area of iron slag and Roman pottery which covers about 25 metres diameter. To the east of here and following the line of Long Hollow there is an acre or so of pottery scatter, dressed stone, coins and ploughed-out mortar. It is in this vicinity where most of the box tiles are to be found on the field.

THE EXCAVATION
It was between the iron slag area and the platform that the wall was found by the metal detector operator in the previous year (1972). In fact as far as it was possible to judge the wall was on the extreme north-western edge of this raised area. If, therefore, a trench was opened up here the least we would find would be the previously discovered wall. Also we would be able to work gradually southwards along the platform, going from the known to the unknown.
For these two reasons it was decided to open up an initial area of twenty metres by six metres, later extended southwards by three and a half metres and at the end of December 1973 by another twenty seven metres to the south again. The area twenty metres by nine and a half metres is reported here. (See Fig. 2).

Immediately below the topsoil at no more than five to seven inches there was a layer of heavy stone rubble, with very little tile. At this depth several features were recognised. A pitched stone wall in the north-west section of the trench was perhaps the most obvious of the constructional details. (Feature 1). To the north of this was a short wall (Feature 6) not parallel with the pitched stone. The pitched stones had themselves been laid through an earlier stone structure (Feature 14) which appeared to be well made rubble foundation from a previous wall. The pitched stones were so close to the surface that almost certainly the next ploughing would have destroyed them; in fact many of the stones were loose and the recent plough marks can quite easily be seen on some of the stones.

On the south side of the trench there is another stone wall (Feature 7) parallel to, but not necessarily associated with the pitched stone footings. At least one course of flat laid stone is in position on feature 7 and the footings to this structure are not yet revealed. It is thus difficult to say at this stage whether the construction of the wall is similar to
SAPPERTON ROMAN BUILDINGS

Fig. 2
feature 1. At the western end of the flat stone wall there is an area of burning (Feature 8); red calcined limestone being noticeable and to the east of the burning there occurs an area within the wall of very worn stone reminiscent of a threshold. The level of this wall generally is two or three centimetres lower than the pitched stone wall. So far no floor has been found and possibly all traces have been removed by the plough.

There is, however, a suggestion that only earth floors were used and the whole area contained by the two walls was for industrial use. In the western end of the trench a sub-circular patch of very large stones was noticed amongst the general stony rubble below the ploughed soil. The large stone in-fill cut through a thin mortar layer associated with feature 7 and must therefore clearly post-date the wall. Feature 3 was emptied and found to be a well-constructed pit or large post hole, one metre or so deep, which had been backfilled with large stones and other smaller debris including some fragments of Iron Age rouletted ware and Roman pottery.

There is at least one other pit or post hole now appearing on the site (Feature 11), which also has two layers in association; red burnt clay and yellow clay. This pit has not yet been excavated.

Further to the east of the excavation occur three more walls, features 2, 5 and 12. These walls are of similar construction, being made of flat laid stone. All three are more or less at right angles to the two parallel walls and the rubble footings (Feature 14) probably cut features 2 and 12. Feature 5 has been extended westwards at some later time by a cruder addition for about one metre. To the east of feature 5 there is a concrete area (Feature 4) made up of small gravel and mortar. Beyond this the mortar is extended by a layer of heavier rammed pebbles also bonded by a material but clearly of a different build. Overlying this latter layer is an area of dark grey/black loamy organic material and to the north of it is a gully coming from the east side of feature 13. Feature 15 is a small area of hard-packed gravel, possibly concrete originally but subsequently weathered. The gully then divided one area of cobbling from another area of packed cobbles, which is laid in brown loam and is not homogeneous in construction but suggests several different builds or repairs, possibly a road surface. The gully consists of brown/black loam and is clearly discernible from its surroundings. It is from above the cobbled surface that the bulk of the coins came (see coin report) and this layer too had insubstantial potsherds and bones. At the time of writing this area has not been completely excavated.

In this general locality there are lumps of green clay (Feature 9) above a layer of black, ashy clay (Feature 10). These two layers together with the red and yellow clay adjoining feature 11 are suggestive of industrial activity, particularly as some worked iron (an iron ring and iron nails) has been found close by.

POTTERY

R. Hilary Healey

There are four main types of pottery from the area marked 'pond or pot hole' on plan: grey wares, sandy textured grey-brown wares, calcite gritted wares and colour coated wares. The grey wares constitute the largest of these groups and in spite of some variation in texture and colour, form a fairly homogeneous collection and could quite easily originate from a single source.

The industry colours have been classified according to the Pottery Colour Chart prepared by the Study Group for Romano-British Coarse Pottery, although in a few instances the appropriate colour was not exactly matched and the nearest tone has been substituted.

The following works are referred to in the text:


Grey Wares

The following small and medium sized jars, nos. 1-8, are all of a similar smooth texture, the surfaces Neutral 4 and core Neutral 7.

1. Jar Diam. 9 cm.
2. Jar Diam. 12 cm.

Nos. 1-3 are very close in type to small jars in Swannpool group C, notably C 20 and C 30. These jars may have shoulders which are greater or lesser in diameter than the rim of the jar.

4. Jar Diam. 16 cm.
5. Jar with slightly mottled colourings on surface. Diam. 21 cm.
6. Jar Diam. 17 cm.
7. Jar Diam. 17 cm. This could be the rim of a carinated vessel.
8. Jar Diam. 19 cm.

Larger Jars in more variable fabrics:

15. Jar surface Green/Brown A4, core Neutral 7. Diam. 36 cm. This form is similar to Swannpool D99 although larger and lacking the neck.
19. Plain dish. Surface Neutral 5, core Neutral 7. Diam. 17 cm. This form is close to the decorated Gillam 329 and a similar vessel (although decorated also) was found during excavations on the Lincoln Colonia rampart (Lincoln, 1955-58, no. 34). It is possibly a product of the Lincoln Racecourse kiln (A Romano-
Nos. 20 and 21 are both Swanpool type C41.

Grey-brown Sandy-textured Wares


Fig. 3 The Roman Pottery from the Pond or Pit Hole
C4 Minim

VRBS ROMA (330-7)

Obv illeg.

Rev Wolf and twins

C4 Minim

Obv head right

Rev victory adv. left

CONSTANTIVS II as Caesar

Obv FL ( ) INTIVS NOB C

Rev GLORIA EXERCITVS (RITUS

C4 Minim

Obv )AUG Head right

Rev Figure left

C4 imitation (minim)

Obv )YS PF AUG

Rev figure left

CONSTANTIVS II (337-61)

Obv ( ) - TIVS PF AUG

Rev SALUS R(EP)VBCLAE

MM PI

URBS Roma (330-7)

Obv URBS-ROM(A

Rev Wolf and twins

MM ( )

THEODOSIUS I (379-95)

Obv DN THEO ( 

Rev VICTORIA AVGgg

MM Arles

TCON 388-92

LRBC 565

House of Valentinian

Rev (GLORIA ROMANORUM)

Emperor stg. looking left

Constantinian

Obv head right

Rev GLORIA EXERCITVS

2 standards 350-5

C3 radiate

? C4 Minim or barbarous radiate

Small fragment of coin perhaps C4

? Theodosius

Rev Victory dragging captive

C4 Minim

C4 Minim. Thick flan

C4 Minim

C4 Minim

Obv ? Theodosius I

Rev Victory walking left

Fragment of C4 minim

Fragment of a coin

? date

CONSTANTINE II as Caesar

Obv CONSTANTINUS IVN NOB C

Rev GLORIA EXERCITVS

1 standard

MM Lyons 336

UPL(G) RIC 276

B. B. SIMMONS

Calcite Gritted Ware

These sherds appear to be all in the same fabric.

25 Jar surface Neutral 2, core Neutral 4 to Neutral 5. Diam. 19 cm.

26 Jar surface Neutral 2, core Neutral 4 to Neutral 5. Diam. 20 cm.

27 Jar surface Brown A2 to Neutral 2, core Green/ Brown A4. Diam. 16 cm. For similar shape see Gillam 115 and Lincoln 1959-56 no. 36.

Colour Coated Wares


All the colour coated wares, nos. 28 - 34, are typical of the products of Nene Valley kilns and their parallels can be found illustrated in B. R. Hartley, Notes on the Roman Pottery Industry in the Nene Valley (Peterborough Museum, 1960) 24, fig. 4.

Dating

The colour coated wares should belong to the second half of the third century at the latest. (Hartley, 1960, above). The Swanspool kiln referred to has been dated between A.D. 280 and A.D. 350 with the latter the more likely date as the kiln was producing mortars of a late 4th century type.

COINS

J. Marjoram

All the coins reported on here are from the area marked ‘pond or pot hole’ at the eastern end of the excavation. This layer was the organic infill of a long period of settling as might occur in a deep pot hole over a road surface. Immediately beneath the organic fill was a layer of very poor cobbling.

The dating of the coins 3rd - 4th century would agree with the dating of the pottery from the same layer — see Pottery Report.

8/24 ? Valens — fragment of coin

Obv ?DN VAL ( 

Rev GL)ORIA ROMANORUM
Mooney drew the pottery and Miss Healey wrote the pottery notes. Both Miss C. Mahany and Mr. J. Wacher gave advice and practical help whenever necessary. Lastly I should like to thank Mr. J. Marjoram for cleaning and identifying the coins.

Footnotes
1. *Lincs. Notes and Queries* No. 84 Vol. V.
5. British Steel Corporation — unpublished bore hole report (information from Mr. J. Dixie).
17. Information from Mr. P. Hardon, Car Dyke Research Group.
19. Aerial photograph No. 7544.
20. Tithe Award map for Parish of Sapperton.
21. Enclosures Award Maps for Sapperton and Great Humby (information from Mr. P. Hardon).
22. See Plan.

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Book Review

**HEDGES** by E. Pollard, M. D. Hooper and N. W. Moore, 256 pp., illus., Collins, 1974, 23.50.

Hedges were made by men and any aspect of man's activity is our concern as historians. In a rural county such as Lincolnshire 'Hedgerows and History' is an important topic and this book can be of great help to us in furthering and improving our work on this topic. Ever since the publication in 1971 of *Hedges and Local History* (published for the Standing Conference for Local History at the high price of 50p for 36 pages), those of us who were interested and excited by Dr. Max Hooper's technique of hedge dating have awaited a more complete book on hedges. This is it.

The book is in five parts — History, Flora, Fauna, the Farmer's Hedge, and Synopsis — and the local historian may be tempted to skip parts two and three. This would be stupid; all parts are relevant to our studies and part two includes the valuable Chapter 7 on 'Dating a Hedge'.

We can accept the authors' statement on their formula for hedge-dating. This represents the way in which the number of species in a thirty yard stretch of hedge varies with the age of the hedge:

'Age of hedge = (110 x number of species) + 30 years.'

In their words '... the formula ... works sufficiently well to provide a useful extra tool in the study of the countryside, assuming, as with all sources of evidence, it is treated with caution and not used as an immutable universal law.' (p.88). With this extra tool our studies can be advanced with great profit.

The book contains twenty relevant plates and many tables and diagrams.

REX C. RUSSELL

BARTON-ON-HUMBER