ROMAN FINDS AT HOLY TRINITY CHURCHYARD, DARTFORD

GREG PRIESTLEY-BELL AND LUKE BARBER

Archaeology South-East was commissioned to undertake an archaeological excavation on land to the north of Holy Trinity Church, Dartford (Fig. 1.). The Church is situated to the east of the modern town centre, immediately to the west of the River Darent. According to the BGS 1:50 000 map the underlying geology at the site consists of alluvium.

Planning permission was granted for an extension to the Church Hall in 1994. As construction would necessitate groundworks in the area, and possible disturbance of buried archaeological remains, provision was made for an archaeological evaluation. This, undertaken in 1995, revealed seven undisturbed human skeletons and evidence of at least fourteen disturbed burials, all of seventeenth- to early nineteenth-century date. The burials overlay an occupation deposit containing early Roman pottery encountered at a depth of c.1.8m below the present ground surface (Kirk 1995).

As a result it was decided further archaeological investigations would be required at the site prior to the onset of construction works. It was agreed that the Roman deposits were to form the main focus of the work and that only limited recording would be undertaken on the post-medieval burials.

However, due to a misunderstanding by the developer a significant part of the site had been excavated and cleared of burials prior to the onset of archaeological work. This had resulted in the removal of virtually all of the burials as well as some truncation of the underlying Roman deposits. After consultations with the developers and KCC, it was decided to excavate the surviving remains. The on-site work was directed by Greg Priestley-Bell (Priestley-Bell et. al. 1996).

The site lies immediately to the north of the projected course of Roman Watling Street which probably runs directly under the main body of the church. Numerous Roman remains have been found in the
vicinity of the church. Other recorded Roman discoveries from the town, including building foundations, numerous coins and pottery (both local and imported) suggest that an important Roman settlement existed in the area (Detsicas 1983, 80; Hutchings 2001). Much of the material has been dated to the first century suggesting an early foundation at the crossing point of Watling Street over the River Darent.

The church is recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086, its tower dating from before the Conquest. However, the main body of the church dates to the fourteenth century and lies to the south of the original tower. The extension to the church and the diversion of the road around it explains the 'kink' in the otherwise straight Watling Street/modern High Street (Fig. 1B). A graveyard once existed to the south of the church, but was removed with part of the west nave to enable road widening. A probably slightly later graveyard was located to the north of the church in the area to be developed. The last burial is thought to have occurred towards the end of the eighteenth century (John Gilbert, Church Historian, pers. comm.)

The site was cleared by hand of loose soil that had accumulated during shoring work following the machine excavation. The shoring effectively prevented the sections of the excavated trench (Fig. 1C) from being archaeologically recorded and as such the deposits removed prior to archaeological excavation were correlated with those studied during the evaluation. The section from the evaluation (see Fig. 1C, S1 and Fig. 3, S1) is deemed representative of the site’s stratigraphy.

All remaining skeletons were assigned an individual skeleton number and briefly recorded before lifting. The position and orientation of the burials were planned before lifting (Fig. 2). The skeletal numbering, which was separate from the general context numbering system, began at eight, taking into account the seven skeletons recovered during the evaluation.

A section of the northern baulk of the excavation was cleaned and a test-pit sunk into the gravels at this point to facilitate the study of these deposits (Fig. 2B: GSF section).

Following the completion of the main archaeological excavation, the site was visited a number of times in order to inspect further deep groundworks within the previously excavated area and other groundworks in the vicinity of the trench. These visits produced more artefacts but little new data regarding the development of the site.
Fig. 2  Trench Plans (Cemetery and Pre-Cemetery).
EXCAVATION RESULTS

Pre-cemetery [Roman levels]

The underlying stratum [Context 11, Figs 2B and 3, S1] consisted of light to medium grey coarse sand with 80 per cent flint gravel 5-100mm. This body of material, which was reached at c. 3.65m OD, was examined by C. Pine of GSF (UCL) in order to clarify its origin. The upper 450mm of the gravels was studied along with 650mm of soil deposits (corresponding roughly with Contexts 9 and 10, see below) which lay above. The top of the examined sectioned was at 4.2m OD. A full geoarchaeological report is housed with the archive.

The soil deposits (corresponding with Contexts 9 and 10) showed extensive signs of having been reworked both by the inclusion of foreign material/artefacts and the soil structure. It is possible they represent buried soils; however, the degree of later disturbance was such that this could not be ascertained. The composition of the underlying gravel and the nature of its contact with Context 10, strongly suggested that it represents a naturally lain body of alluvial sands and gravels rather than a dump deposit.

A discontinuous layer [Context 10, S1], consisting of dark grey brown sandy silt with 1 per cent flint pebbles (10-80mm) with occasional charcoal flecks was located resting directly on the natural gravels. The full extent of this layer was not ascertained as after the initial machining it only survived in a few places. The best preservation of this deposit was found were it occupied a few natural hollows/undulations in the gravels. The layer was shown to be some 200mm thick from the results of the evaluation and although disturbed by burials and thus including some intrusive material, it produced a quantity of late first- to mid second-century pottery. It is likely therefore that this layer represents the remains of a badly disturbed Roman soil horizon.

Resting directly above this was a further similar layer [Context 9, Fig. 3, S1]. This consisted of a dark grey brown sandy silt with 0.5 per cent sub-rounded and sub-angular flint pebbles (10-40mm), 1 per cent chalk fragments and occasional shell. None of this layer survived for detailed study during the main excavation and it was recorded only during the evaluation. Its similarity to Context 10 is such that the two are likely to be closely related. For example, they could represent a contemporary topsoil/subsoil division.

A 1m wide ditch [Context 18, Figs 2B and 3, S2 and 3], in excess of 10m in length, and with a maximum surviving depth of 300mm ran N-S across the trench. The degree of truncation, whether ancient or more recent, and therefore original depth of this ditch is uncertain.
Although it appeared to lie to the west of Context 10 the degree of truncation or removal of [10] to the west could not be ascertained. As a result the stratigraphic relationship between the two contexts remains unknown. The ditch fill [Context 19], a very dark grey sandy silt with 5 per cent flint pebbles (5-50mm), contained a small assemblage of late first- to early second-century pottery.

The Cemetery

Four levels of burials (A-D) were located during the archaeological investigations (the level antefixes the skeleton number on Fig. 2A). These were located at approximate depths of 1.10m (level A), 1.60m (level B), and 2.00m (level C/D) below the existing ground surface. Before the main archaeological excavation began all the level A and most of the level B burials had been removed across the whole site. In limited areas of the excavation all level C and D had also been removed down to the natural gravel level. The excavation was therefore concentrated on the surviving lower level of burials (C/D) only. The main burial horizons were located in a thick mixed deposit of medium grey sandy silt (Context 7, Fig. 3, S1).

A total of 47 articulated burials were recorded as well as a brick built vault/crypt of probable eighteenth-century date. Details of this structure, which did not contain any in situ burials, are housed with the archive. The lower levels of burials were densely packed together with some intercutting apparent (Fig. 2A). Gaps on the plan correspond with areas already excavated down to the gravels before archaeological work began. Most of the skeletons were incomplete and in poor condition. None of the excavated burials could be accurately dated based on the available stratigraphic and artefactual data. No burials could be even tentatively assigned to the medieval period and it is likely, based on the coffin furniture recovered, they are all of the post-medieval period. As a result of this, and due to the poor condition and incomplete nature of the skeletal sample, no detailed osteoarchaeological work was undertaken on the remains. Full details of the cemetery are housed with the archive.

Above Context 7 were a series of modern layers and disturbances (Fig. 3 S1, Contexts 1-6 and 12). These were recorded during the initial evaluation and details are housed with the archive.
THE FINDS

The Pottery by Luke Barber, incorporating comments by Malcolm Lyne

The excavations at the site yielded 717 sherds of pottery weighing 5,296g. This assemblage is from eight individually numbered contexts although they only really represent three main stratigraphic units. These consist of the ditch fill [Context 19], the truncated Romano-British layer [Context 10 and probably Context 9 noted in the assessment] and the burial soil [variously divided into Contexts 7, 13, 17 and 23]. For the purposes of this report the quantification has grouped the burial soil contexts together as they represent a single large mixed group.

Most of the pottery is of a generally small size and many pieces show signs of abrasion. The extent of disturbance on the site, mainly through grave-digging activity, has meant that most contexts cannot be viewed as sealed deposits. Even the Romano-British ditch showed evidence of intrusive material. This, combined with the difficulty in telling Fabrics 3 and M3 apart without diagnostic features, suggests that the ditch fill (Context 19) must be treated with caution. As the group is small and contains some contamination it was decided to look at the Romano-British material from the site as a whole. Some comparison with the assemblage from [19] is warranted to ascertain if the unstratified material accurately reflects that from the ditch. The main aims of the present report are to give an indication of the range of fabrics and forms present on the site as well as an overall date range for the occupation activity (see also Discussion below).

The pottery was divided subjectively into fabric groups based on a visual examination of the inclusions, colouring and the manufacturing technology of the sherds. Fabric quantification by sherd count and weight were done for the Romano-British material only. A breakdown of the pottery by fabric and context is given in Table 1. The full figures are with the archive. All percentages quoted in this report are for sherd weight and have been calculated using Fabric Groups 1 to 18 only. The following fabric groups were identified:

1. Moderate shell temper (24% of total Romano-British assemblage by weight)

   A hand-made medium fired fabric, tempered with moderate shell to 4mm, sparse fine sand and rare iron oxide inclusions to 3mm. Colours are variable ranging from black to dull orange brown throughout. Recognised forms include bead-rimmed jars, some with a lid seating. No decoration was apparent on any of the sherds. This fabric has Iron Age origins but the present assemblage is likely to span the period first to mid second century. Such wares are known to have been produced around the Higham Marshes. Catalogue nos 1 and 8.

2. Profuse shell temper (1.8%)

   Only four sherds of this medium to hard-fired fabric are present. Tempering consists of abundant shell to 4mm with rare fine sand. Colours are
TABLE 1. POTTERY SUMMARY BY SHERD COUNT/WEIGHT

<table>
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<th>Fabric</th>
<th>Unstrat.</th>
<th>Cxt 7/23</th>
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<th>Cxt 10</th>
<th>Cxt 19</th>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4/93</td>
<td>4/93</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3/28</td>
<td>21/212</td>
<td>2/31</td>
<td>10/203</td>
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<td>1/9</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>3/16</td>
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<td>15/171</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3/22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
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<td>3/38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>250/1829</td>
<td>4/44</td>
<td>219/1939</td>
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usually dull orange brown throughout. No forms are recognisable, however, the sherd s present appear to be from crude hand-made vessels. It is likely this fabric is from briquetage.

3. Sand and shell temper (10.3%)

A hand-made medium to high-fired fabric, tempered with moderate shell to 4mm and moderate to abundant fine to medium sand. Iron oxide inclusions to 4mm are very occasionally present. Colours are variable but generally consist of grey cores and dull orange brown surfaces. Recognised forms include beaker-rimmed jars, some with a lid seating, and bowls. This is a problematic fabric in that some featureless bodysherds are virtually impossible to tell from the sand and shell tempered wares of the thirteenth century.

4. Shell, sand and iron oxide temper (1.1%)

A hand-made low to medium-fired fabric tempered with moderate shell to 2mm, sparse fine sand and sparse to moderate iron oxides to 1mm. Core colours are usually grey, with buff or dull brown surfaces. The only
recognisable forms were bowls and jars. Little decoration is evident with the exception of a single cordon.

5. *Medium sand with sparse shell inclusions* (12.2%)

A relatively hard-fired fabric tempered with moderate to abundant medium sand. Sparse inclusions of shell to 2mm are present along with sparse iron oxides and quartz grits to 1mm. Colours are usually dark grey to black throughout although some dull orange brown examples are present. Little decoration is apparent although some horizontal rilling is present on some surfaces. Forms include bead rim and everted rim jars as well as bowls. A late first- to early second-century fabric of probable N.W. Kentish origin. Catalogue no. 10.

6. *Medium sandy greywares* (5.1%)

A medium to hard-fired wheel-thrown fabric tempered with moderate to abundant medium sand with occasional larger quartz or flint inclusion to 1mm. Colours range through various shades of grey. Decoration consists of a few cordons. Recognised forms include bowls and jars. A second-century date seems likely. Catalogue no. 9.

7. *Medium sandy blackwares* (5.8%)

This fabric is similar to Fabric 6 except for some rare inclusions of shell and chalk. Colours are usually black throughout. Decoration is rare but includes cordons, incised lines or rilling. Recognised forms include jars (some bead rimmed) and bowls. A late first- to mid second-century date seems likely. Catalogue no. 2.

8. *Medium sandy pink/off-whitewares* (8.9%)

This medium to hard-fired wheel-thrown fabric is tempered with moderate medium sand with very occasional grog inclusions to 0.5mm. Colours are usually off-white or pale pink throughout. The only decoration noted is in the form of some external rilling. Forms include flagons and reeded-rimmed bowls. Some of this group is likely to be from Verulamium. Late first to mid second century. Catalogue no. 4.

9. *Grog tempered* (7.3%)

Relatively few sherds of this hand-made low-fired fabric are present. Tempering consists of moderate to abundant sub-angular grey/black grog to 3mm. Colours are variable but generally greys and browns are the most common. Decoration is rare but some burnishing is apparent and one sherd has an applied shoulder cordon decorated with incised lines. No forms were recognisable. Late first century.
10. Reduced Upchurch-type ware (8.5%)

This fine silty, powdery fabric is well represented in the assemblage. Few inclusions are visible although some sherds have rare fine sand and mica. Colours range from light to dark grey/black. Decoration consists of applied pellets and rouletting. Forms include Poppyhead beakers, biconical beakers, bowls and small jars. Late first to mid second century. Catalogue no. 7.

11. Oxidised Upchurch-type/London ware (3.7%)

This fabric is similar to Fabric 10, although some sherds exhibit occasional grog inclusions to 1mm. Colours are usually dull orange throughout. Decoration includes incised lines and rouletting. Forms include small jars, bowls and beakers. Catalogue no. 3.

12. Samian (5.8%)

Virtually all of the Samian from the site is of South Gaulish origin. One Central Gaulish sherd is present [Context 19] along with a few abraded sherds that could originate from either source. South Gaulish Samian was located in most contexts (see table). Forms include Dr. 27 (12 sherds), Dr. 18 (8), Dr. 35/36 (2), Dr. 29/37 (1), Dr. 37 (1) and D. 67 (1). Only two decorated sherds are present (Dr. 29/37) but are too abraded to be diagnostic of workshop. In addition the remains of two maker’s stamps are present. The first is from a Dr.18 (unstratified) and reads VI[ ]V. This is probably VIRTIV dated to between 65-80 AD (Dannell 1971, 315, No. 94). The other stamp fragment (Context 13) is too incomplete to provenance. It appears to read J[M[.

13. Fine sand cream coloured fabric (0.7%)

This fine medium to hard-fired wheel-thrown fabric is tempered with sparse to moderate fine sand. Some rare dull orange grog and chalk inclusions to 1mm are present. Colours are usually off-white/cream or pale orange. No decoration is apparent and the only form recognised is of a thin-walled beaker. Possibly a late first-century Eccles fabric.

14. Fine sand reduced ware. (1.2%)

This is a small and slightly mixed group of fine sand tempered wares similar to those of Fabric 13. The sherds in this group, however, are all reduced. Colours range from grey to black although some sherds have a dull red core. Decoration includes burnishing and applied pellets. Forms are usually thin-walled types and include Poppyhead beakers and small jars. Thameside and Hardham products are likely to fall within this group. Late first to second century.
15. *Mortaria and amphorae* (0.9%)

Only three sherds fall within this group. One is from a sparse fine sand tempered cream mortarium with rose and grey quartz grits. Possibly an Oxford product (unstratified). The remaining two pieces, both from [Context 19], consist of another mortarium in an orange fabric, again possibly from the Oxford industry, and a body sherd from a Dr. 20 (?) amphora.

16. *Colour-coated wares* (0.7%)

Only a few abraded sherds are present in this group. The majority are in a dull orange fine fabric under a dull brown or brown-red colour-coat. Some have rouletted decoration. The majority of these sherds are likely to come from late second-century Colchester beakers. One sherd of Nene Valley beaker is also present [Context 7].

17. *Oxidised fine sand with some mica* (0.6%)

This is a distinctive fabric, tempered with abundant fine sand, giving a slightly rough feel; some mica and rare grog to 1mm. Colours range from brick red to dull orange. Three sherd of this fabric are present in the assemblage, possibly all from the same vessel (Contexts 10, 19 and 23). The sherds are heavily decorated with incised lines (horizontal and oblique) and intricate stamping in the form of circles, etc. London type stamped ware: London sub-group 2c (Rodwell 1978). Late first-early second-century. Catalogue nos 5 and 6.

18. *Hoo-type ware* (1.4%)

A low to medium-fired silty ware with sparse to moderate dull red/orange grog inclusions to 1mm. Colours consist of light grey cores with dull red or orange surfaces. Some internal surfaces are a light purple grey. The only forms recognised consist of flagons with a white external slip. Late first to second century.

Medieval and Post-medieval

**M1. Oxidised fine sandy ware**

This group largely consists of jugs of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date. Decoration consists of external green glaze, sometimes over a white slip.

**M2. Coarse sand temper**

Sparse to moderate ill-sorted medium to coarse milky quartz sand with rare shell inclusions to 1mm. No recognised forms but cooking pots are likely. Twelfth to thirteenth century.
M3. Sand and shell temper

This fabric is virtually indistinguishable from Fabric 3 without diagnostic sherds and it is likely that there has been mixing between the two. One medieval bowl is present. Thirteenth to fourteenth century.

Only a small assemblage of late pottery was recovered from the site. These include various earthenwares and stonewares spanning the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Full details are housed with the archive.

Catalogue (Fig. 4)

Context 10

1. Large bead-rimmed jar. Fabric 1.

Fig. 4 Roman Pottery.
5. Decorated body sherd with stamped circles and incised lines. Fabric 17.

Context 19

6. Decorated body sherd with stamped pattern and circles. From same vessel as no.5. Fabric 17.

Context 7/23


The Coin Find by David Rudling

With the exception of a number of illegible eighteenth/nineteenth-century copper alloy coins or tokens (details are housed with the archive) the only coin found during the excavations was an AE as of Domitian (AD 81-96). The obverse legend is illegible but the reverse reads MONETA (AVGVST). This coin was located during the evaluation (Context 10).

Metalwork by Luke Barber

The excavations on the site produced 639 pieces of metalwork from nine different contexts. The majority of this is ironwork (495 pieces), all of which is heavily corroded. No stratified Romano-British metalwork was located and indeed no unstratified diagnostic pieces are present. Virtually all of the metalwork is from contexts disturbed by grave-digging activity. This mixed assemblage primarily consists of post-medieval coffin furniture. Some material may be medieval but this is uncertain. A full report on this metalwork forms part of the archive.

Ceramic Building Material by Luke Barber

The excavations produced a total of 47 pieces of ceramic building material weighing 864g. The vast majority of this came from unstratified or unsealed contexts. Eight fragments of Romano-British tile in a fine sand-tempered fabric with grog inclusions were recovered from [Context 19]. All these pieces were too small to be diagnostic of form. The only pieces of Romano-British tile diagnostic of form were two tegula fragments (unstratified and Context 7). Eighteen fragments of medieval and post-medieval tile are present. These consist of fragments of peg tile and brown glazed floor tile. All are from contexts disturbed by grave-digging.
Animal Bone *Lucy Sibun*

Animal bone was recovered from seven contexts: four dating to the cemetery/burial soil [7, 15, 17, 23], two Romano-British [10, 19], and one unstratified. A total of 95 animal bone fragments were collected. The cemetery contexts contained 45 animal bone fragments comprising cow, sheep/goat, pig and small mammal. These have been identified and listed for the archive.

The Romano-British ditch fill contained 23 bone fragments. Unfortunately, due to their small and fragmentary nature only four were identifiable to species and skeletal element. The identified bones represented a minimum of two cattle and one sheep/goat. Neither butchery marks nor weathering were apparent on any of the bone fragments. The lack of evidence for butchery is not conclusive as it is possible, given the fragmentary nature of the bone, that marks would not have survived well enough to be recognisable. The negative evidence for weathering, however, would suggest that the bone was buried soon after disposal.

Plant Remains by *Pat Hinton*

A 25lt soil sample was taken from the Roman ditch fill [Context 19]. This was flotated through 500 and 250 micron sieves in order to extract plant remains. The small amount of floated material contained very few charred remains but a larger number of uncharred, and therefore probably more recent, seeds.

**Charred Seeds**

*Triticum cf aestivum* s.l. (bread wheat) 1
*Triticum* sp. (indet. wheats) 2
*Hordeum cf vulgare* (hulled barley) 1
*Agrostemma githago* L. (corn cockle) 1
*Vicia/Lathyrus* sp. (vetch or vetcling) 1

Of the charred seeds only the bread wheat and barley grains are more or less intact and the short, almost square, form of the wheat is comparable to *Triticum compactum* (club wheat). The other wheat grains are two (non-matching) longitudinal halves. The corn cockle is represented by only a fragment of its testa but the conspicuous tubercles are unmistakable, and the vetch is merely a fragment of a cotyledon from a seed which would probably have been c.3mm in diameter. Both could be cornfield weeds.

**Uncharred Seeds**

*Sambucus nigra* (elder) c.200
*Stachys palustris* L. (marsh woundwort) 1
*Pedicularis cf palustris* (marsh lousewort) 1
*Taraxacum* sp. (dandelion) 1

These seeds are dry, brittle, flattened, often split and the embryos have not survived. It is obvious that they are not recent but their age is doubtful. As the
sample came from a ditch the seeds may have remained in wet conditions for a time which would have postponed their decay. The woundwort and lousewort suggest damp surroundings.

Although there is no reason why the charred seeds should not be from the first- to second-century AD the wheat and the corn cockle are somehow more suggestive of a later period. The low seed density in this 25lt sample suggests that the charred seeds are merely chance inclusions of burned crop processing debris.

The uncharred seeds may well derive from plants growing by the ditch side. In addition to a few root fragments the sample also includes snail shells and worm cocoons which indicate at least some soil disturbance and therefore the possibility of contamination from later periods.

DISCUSSION

The only evidence of prehistoric activity at the site consisted of four undiagnostic pieces of worked flint. These were all residual and details are housed with the archive. No worked flint was noted in the gravel itself. This negligible number of pieces suggests that no intense prehistoric activity took place within the immediate area of the site.

The general date range of the Romano-British pottery from the site spans the period between AD 70 to 150. Those falling outside this bracket mainly consist of late pieces such as the probable Oxford mortaria and some of the colour-coated wares. The assemblage from the burial soil (Context 7/23) closely matches the one from the ditch fill [Context 19] in the percentages of different fabrics. Exceptions to this, however, include the possible briquefago (Fabric 2) which was only found in the ditch; Fabric 18 which was not present in the ditch at all; and Samian ware. The latter, although present in the ditch, was only so in small quantities. This is likely to be at least partly due to differential collection of this highly visible fabric compared to the coarsewares in the unstratified/burial deposits. The ditch itself is likely to have been infilled in the late first to early second century. However, some reworking of the ditch fill is likely and this would explain the few intrusive later sherds. Whether this reworking took place solely in the post-Roman period, or whether some took place in the late Roman period cannot be ascertained.

The presence of the few sherds of late Roman pottery is enigmatic. The main occupation activity is certainly of the mid first to mid second century and accounts for virtually all of the Romano-British ceramics. The presence of the later sherds indicates activity was still occurring in the vicinity but on a lesser scale. It is possible that the focus of settlement shifted further away from the excavation area at this time or that rubbish disposal was not taking place where it had
been previously. The absence of coarseware sherds in the small late assemblage is odd. However, this may be more due to a lack of diagnostic pieces rather than reflecting an abnormal assemblage. A larger, less abraded group of pottery would be needed from the site to address this problem.

The first- to second-century assemblage includes a wide range of coarseware and fineware fabrics. Most of these are of a Kentish origin and as such would be readily available to the site. Further reaching contacts are indicated however, by the presence of the Verulanium and Colchester fabrics. Samian is present in reasonable quantities, too. However, being situated close to a main Roman road would facilitate the acquisition of more exotic goods. The presence of briquetage on the site is interesting in that much salt-working is known to have been taking place in the Kent Marshes at this time. The limited quantity found during the excavation however, would suggest the settlement was a consumer rather than a producer.

The quantity of pottery of the first and second centuries suggests the presence of a close-by settlement even though no features definitely associated with such a site fell within the excavated area. The exact nature of the two Roman soil layers [Contexts 9 and 10] is uncertain. It is possible the upper [9] was an old topsoil to the lower [10] subsoil. Whether these were ever subjected to arable cultivation is uncertain due to later disturbance; however, the proximity of the river, and thus danger of flooding, may have deterred arable activity. The density of pottery in these layers is relatively high and as such it could be argued represents manuring of arable land even though the river valley soils are likely to have been naturally fertile. However, although many of the sherds are small and abraded many are not. This combined with the high quantities suggest the material may be the result of secondary rubbish disposal from a nearby site onto the floodplain, much of which may have been pasture. The abraded nature of many of the pottery sherds may therefore be due to periodic agitation by floodwaters.

The Roman ditch is somewhat enigmatic. The relationship to the soil layers 9 and 10 could not be established, however, if the ditch cut these, which seems likely, then its original depth must have been at least in the region of a metre. A number of functions may be suggested for this feature. The most likely is that the ditch was related to drainage in some way. Whether this was associated with a field and thus also served a boundary function, too, is not certain. The fact that the ditch runs toward Watling street at right angles means that a further benefit obtained from this feature would be the aiding of road drainage around the crossing point. Although no noticeable slope was present on the base of the ditch to suggest drainage direction this is
not deemed important as the natural gravel exposed in the cut would act as a good soakaway. The other possibility is that the ditch formed one side of an enclosure, perhaps associated with a settlement. Which side of the ditch would have been on the inside of the enclosure is difficult to say; however, due to the proximity of the river, the western side seems more likely.

Too little was uncovered during the present excavation to draw firm conclusions regarding the nature of Roman occupation. However, a few observations can be made. The occupation in the vicinity of the excavation trench was mainly of an early date although some later activity is also attested by a few sherds of pottery. This date corresponds well with the early date of Watling Street and its river crossing at this point. The presence of roofing tile, even if in small quantities, hints at a building in the area. The pottery is mainly of Kentish origin although more exotic pieces are also present. The presence of the road, combined with small-scale river transport, would have facilitated the easy acquisition of rich goods. The presence of briquetage is interesting. It is unlikely that salt was produced at the site but it could easily have been supplied by road or water from the north Kent Marshes. The limited evidence regarding the site’s economy indicates mixed agriculture. Whether this was an activity carried out from the settlement itself or produce was brought in from surrounding agricultural estates cannot be ascertained at present.

It is quite clear that a potentially substantial settlement existed at Dartford during the early Roman period. This is borne out by numerous finds around the town, particularly in the vicinity of the river crossing. Most of these are chance finds or small excavations and as such no settlement morphology has been established in which the present findings can be placed. Larger scale excavations will be needed in the area in order to start forming a settlement plan and functional hypothesis.

With the exception of a few pottery sherds and tile fragments no evidence of medieval activity was located within the trench despite its proximity to the church. It can only be concluded that either this area was left as open space or archaeological evidence of any activities has been totally removed by later grave-digging. The sparsity of medieval building materials and artefacts in general would support the former suggestion although it is always possible that some of the earliest burials within the excavation are of this early date.

The vast majority of the burials, if not all of them, appeared to date to the post-medieval period. The density of burials appeared to be great and the intercutting of graves was frequent as a result. This would suggest that in the probable 400 years the cemetery here was in
use grave markers were either not used regularly or frequently removed/displaced.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY