

DISCOVERY OF ROMAN REMAINS AT MAIDSTONE ROAD, CHATHAM

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INTRODUCTION

Building work in the basements of nos. 158 and 160 Maidstone Road, Chatham, brought to light Roman pottery and animal bones (Fig. 1). The owner of no. 158, Mr J. Cheeseman, reported the finds to Mr M. Moad, curator of Rochester Museum, who in turn contacted myself. On the 17th August, 1988, I visited the site (N.G.R. TQ 7548 6635) along with Mr A.C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., and there arranged for excavation prior to further building work.

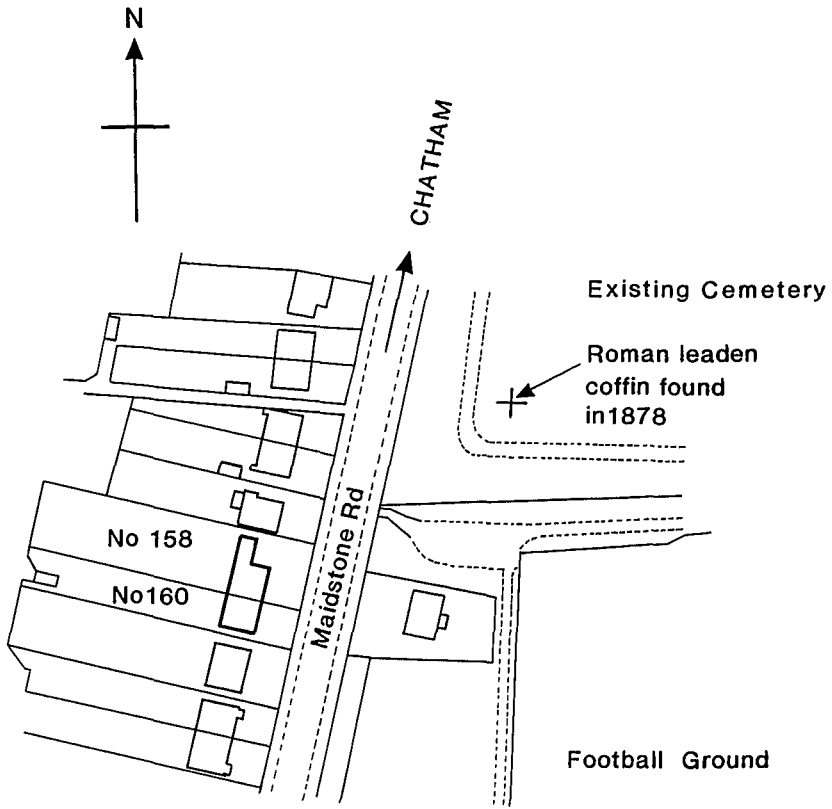
Across the road, which possibly existed in the Roman period, is the present cemetery, where in 1878 grave-diggers uncovered a Roman leaden coffin.¹ To the rear of the houses the gardens form the eastern side of a shallow valley.

EXCAVATIONS

The excavations exposed two ditches, cut into the natural chalk, which ran parallel beneath the houses (Figs. 2 and 3; also Plate I). The northerly ditch was partly dug away before recovered bone and pottery disclosed the site's archaeological significance. On our first visit, bone and pottery were found in the surface layer of the southerly ditch. It is likely, that the top levels of the ditches were dug into with the construction of the houses around 1911.

A building foundation trench dug in the garden of no. 160 cut through a ditch; bone, oyster shell and pottery showed in the section. This ditch is probably a continuation of the southerly ditch revealed in the basement of no. 160. To achieve alignment the ditch must turn in this vicinity.

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, xiii (1880), 168-9; lxxviii (1954), 42; *VCH (Kent)*, iii (1932), 149.



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Orig. Scale 1:1250

Fig. 1. Location of nos. 158 and 160 Maidstone Road, Chatham.

Recovered from the fill of both ditches, were sherds of Roman pottery, iron nails, oyster shells and animal bones (see Appendix A), along with a droplet of blue glass from the northerly ditch.

POTTERY

From the recovered sherds it was possible to identify vessel forms and the temper where used. Nine vessels were partly reconstructed, five from the northerly ditch fill and four from the southerly. To obtain the date and place of production reference was made to J. Mona-

ghan, *Upchurch and Thameside Roman Pottery*.² Samples were also studied by staff at the museums of London and Rochester.

Description of illustrated pottery (Fig. 4)

Vessel (a): Bead-rimmed jar, from the southerly ditch; grey-brown surface, dark-grey core, orange inner surface, soft, hackly fabric, with sand, flint and some shell; slight horizontal combing, hand-made. Probably Cooling, c. A.D. 50–70.

Vessel (b): Jar with sharply everted rim, from the southerly ditch; orange with dark-grey patches surface, dark-grey core, soft, laminar fabric with abundant shell; stabbed holes above horizontal groove, hand-made. Probably Cliffe, c. A.D. 50/100–150.

Vessel (c): Lid, from the northerly ditch; grey with orange patches surface, dark-grey core, fairly hard, hackly fabric, with abundant sand, a little shell and flint; slight horizontal combing. Probably Cliffe, c. A.D. 50–150.

Vessel (d): Faceted jar, from the northerly ditch; orange with grey patches surface, core as surface, fairly hard, hackly fabric, with sand, plus a small amount of crushed pot; horizontal combing, hand-made. Likely Cooling (possibly Cliffe), c. A.D. 50–70.

Vessel (e): Platter with foot-ring and beaded rim, from northerly ditch; pale orange-pink surface, core as surface (light-grey at thicker part of base section), hard, fabric fractures clean, no added temper; burnished, wheel thrown. Probably Upchurch, c. A.D. 43–120/140.

Vessel (f): Platter with foot-ring and beaded rim, from the northerly ditch; grey-pink surface, dark grey core, hard, fabric fractures clean, no added temper; slipped grey-pink, wheel thrown. Probably Cliffe, c. A.D. 43–120.

Vessel (g): Neck of flagon with triple ribbed handle, from the southerly ditch; brown surface, orange-pink core (grey at thicker section where neck joins body), orange-pink inner surface, hard, fabric fractures finely irregular, no added temper; slipped white (mainly worn away), wheel made. Upchurch, c. A.D. 45/50–70/80.

Vessel (h): Flagon base, from the northerly ditch; orange-pink surface, orange-pink core grey at centre, hard, fabric fractures clean, no added temper; slipped white, wheel made. Upchurch, c. A.D. 45/50–70/80.

Vessel (j): Base and rim of wide mouthed jar, from the southerly ditch; orange-brown surface, core as surface, soft, fabric fractures clean, no added temper; burnished, wheel thrown.

² J. Monaghan, *Upchurch and Thameside Roman Pottery*, BAR 173, Oxford, 1987.

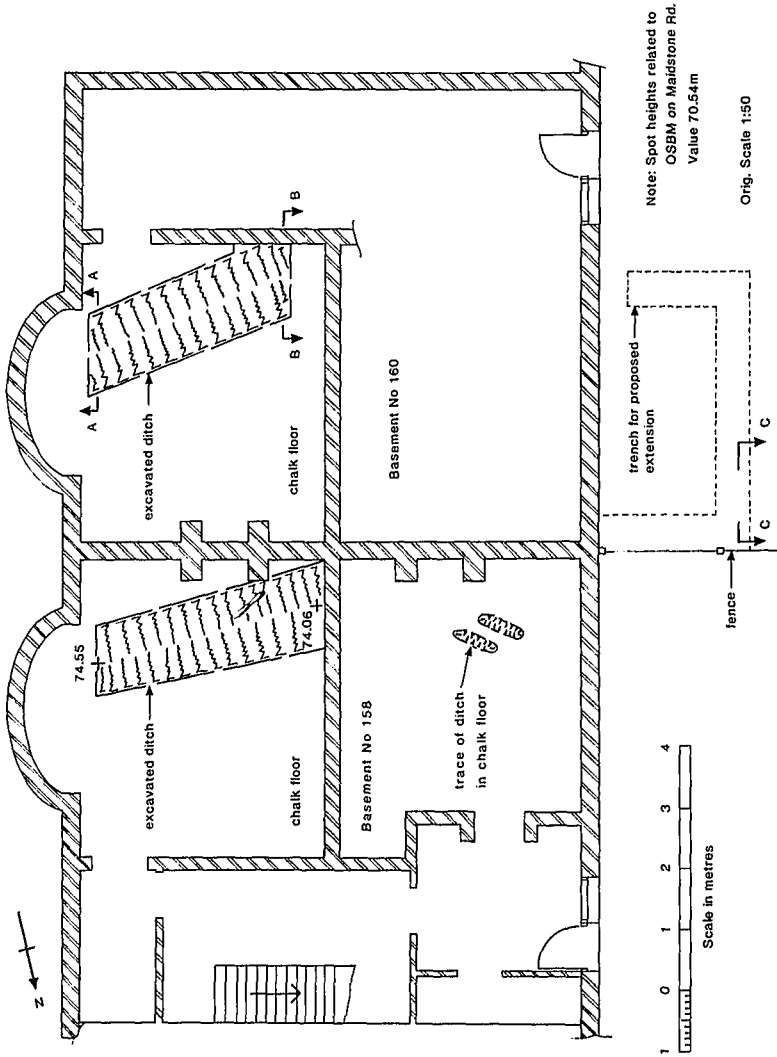


Fig. 2. Plan of ditches.

ROMAN REMAINS AT CHATHAM

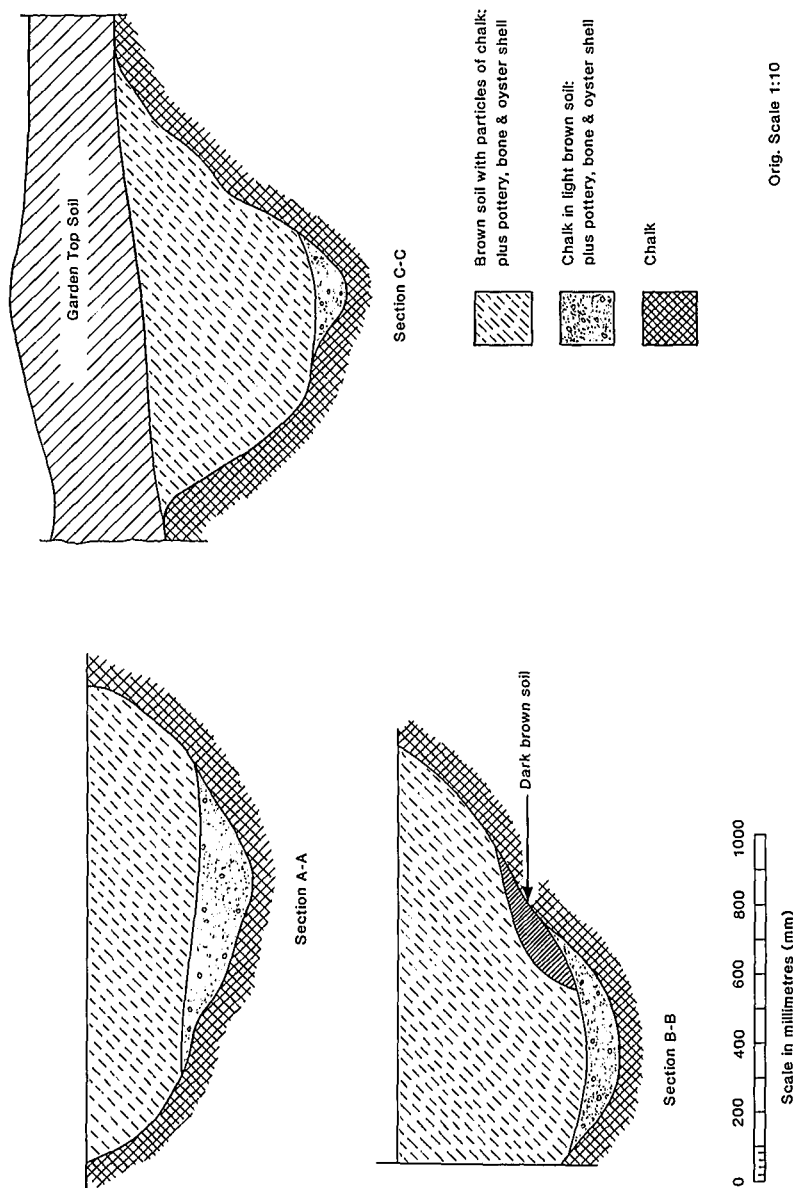


Fig. 3. Ditch sections.

Other identifiable sherds were as follows:

- (i) Fragment of a small samian cup. Lower wall and base sherd. Dr. 27g. First century A.D.
- (ii) Rim and body sherd of storage jar. Roll rimmed north Kent shell-tempered ware. 40–150 A.D.
- (iii) Handle fragment of a flagon. Triple-ribbed burnt Hoo-type fabric. First century A.D.
- (iv) Nineteen sherds of north Kent grey ware.
- (v) Sherd of Romano-British form, based on Continental *terra nigra* dish shape. Pre-Flavian.
- (vi) Light brown fragment; Romano-British version of imported butt beaker form. Pre-Flavian.
- (vii) Five fragments of hand-made pottery, which seem to be of Late Iron Age date (c. first century B.C.–first century A.D.). Similar material has been excavated from sites at Crayford, and Shepperton, Surrey.
- (viii) Several pieces of burnt daub. Insufficient evidence in this group to determine whether from a kiln or other structure.

The above report has shown, along with the examination of smaller sherds, that the pottery is of mainly coarse ware and from the local central north Kent industries. Of a notably higher quality are the white-slipped flagons and the platters with beaded rims.

LEADEN COFFIN

Two pieces of the coffin are in the possession of Rochester Museum, one a fragment of the lid, the other seemingly a fragment of a corner. At the time of discovery, it was reported that the lid was decorated at one end with a scallop-shell enclosed within a triangle. The triangle formed by lines of small raised blocks. This line style also decorating the edges of the lid.

The lid fragment shown here (Fig. 5) has a corroded shell in one corner and three lines of bead-and-reel type mouldings that do not lie quite parallel. With such a small fragment, it is difficult to see how the decorative mouldings relate to the earlier description.

However, a similar type of bead-and-reel moulding adorns a child's leaden coffin found at Holborough, near Snodland. This complete example has been dated to the first half of the third century.

ROMAN REMAINS AT CHATHAM

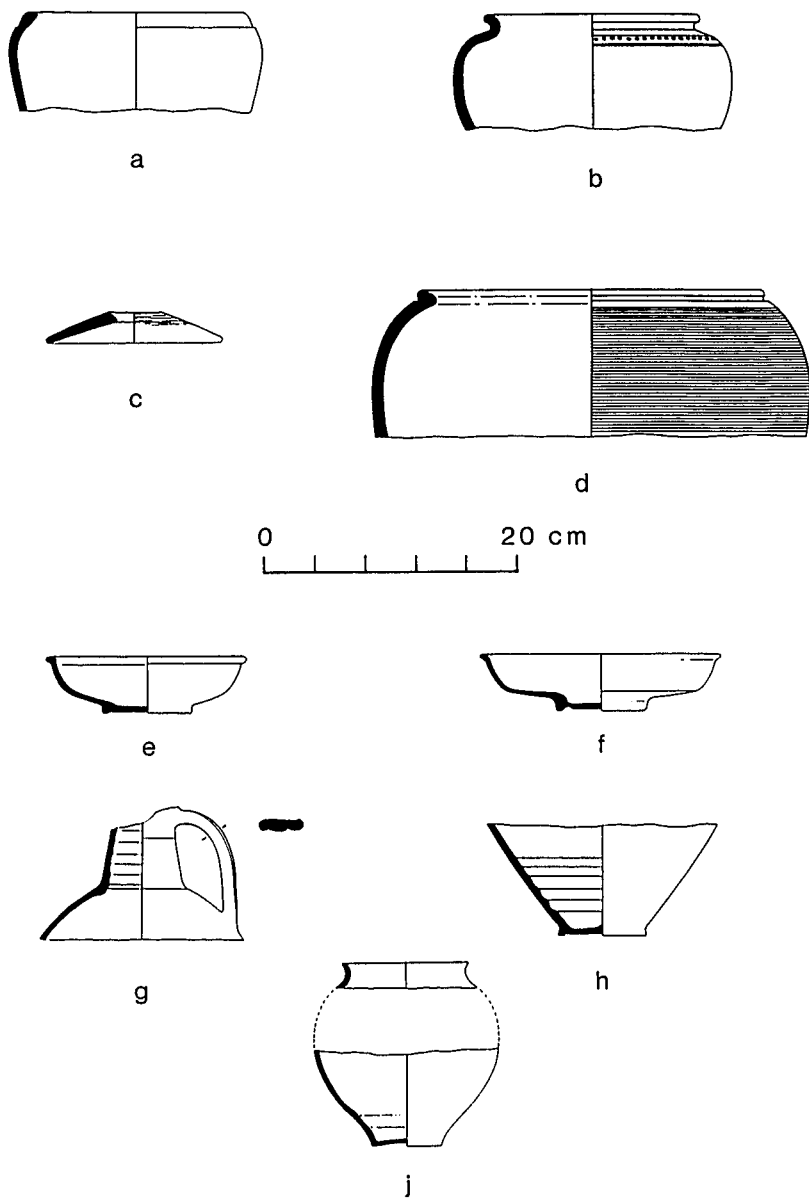


Fig. 4. Coarse ware pottery.

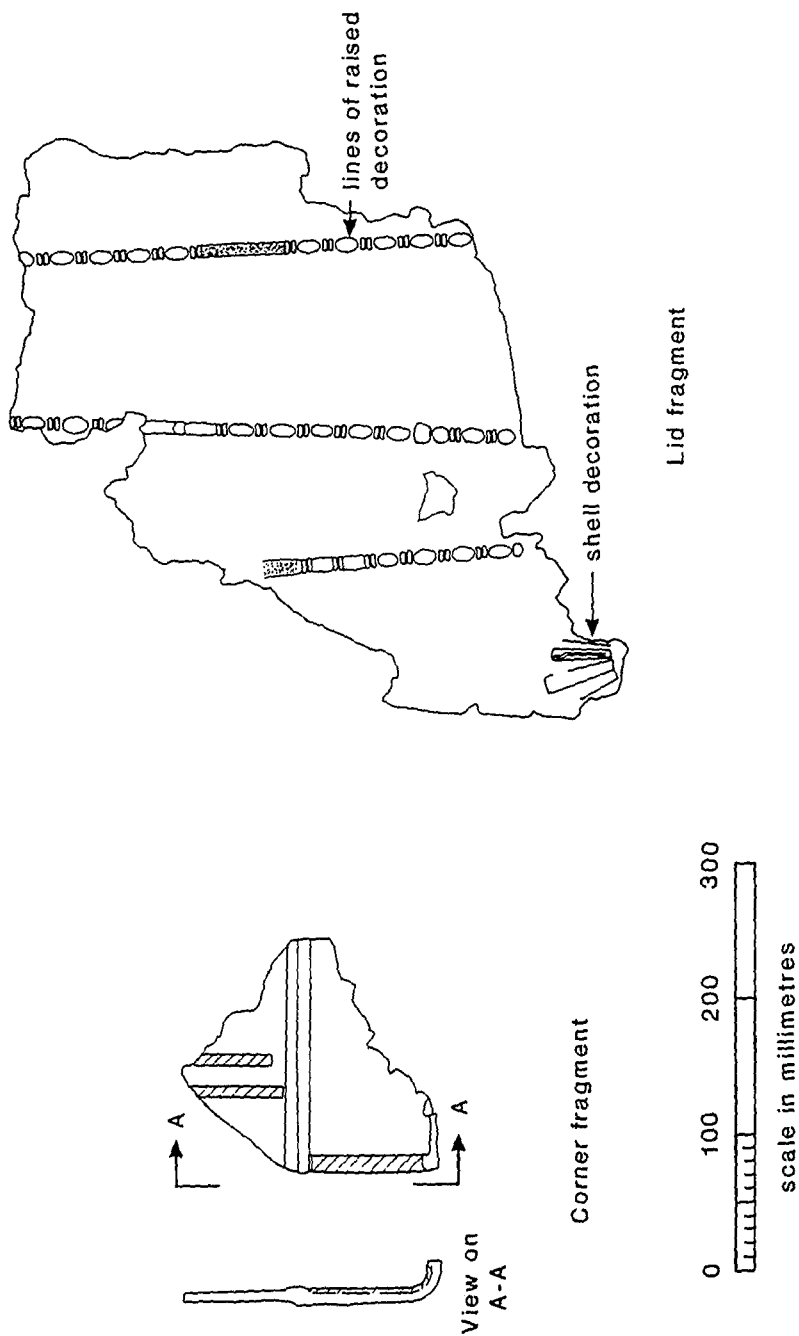


Fig. 5. Two fragments from the leaden coffin.

SITE ASSESSMENT

Identifiable pottery from both ditches ranges in time from the closing years of the Iron Age to the mid-second century A.D., suggesting they are contemporary. While it was not possible to establish the date when the ditches were opened, the pottery indicates that they were backfilled in the second half of the second century A.D. The nearby leaden coffin is likely to be of third- or fourth-century date. Therefore, it appears that Romano-British activity here spanned a good length of the Roman period.

A fair proportion of the sherds matched to form parts of various vessels indicating that jars, platters, dishes and flagons were used nearby. However, little building material was found apart from one piece of shaped stone.

Whilst constructing terraces and a car-park in the garden of no. 158, prior to the work in the basement, Mr J. Cheeseman came across ditches containing animal bones and quantities of flint fragments. From the area no pottery was recovered, except for one copper alloy coin of possibly second century A.D. date.

CONCLUSION

The only evidence of the ditch at the rear of no. 158, is a trace of the ditch bottom revealed in the chalk floor (Fig. 2). The ditches in the garden and the recorded section in the garden of no. 160 suggest that they both turn slightly at this point from an east-west direction to south-east-north-west. The purpose of the ditches remains conjectural, but as they are parallel and apart it seems not unlikely that they were drainage ditches on either side of a track-way, which was destroyed when the area was levelled for building in 1911.

In summary, the evidence of household pottery and the general butchery waste and shell-fish, point to Roman occupation from the first century A.D. onwards.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Mr J. Cheeseman for his prompt action in reporting the site; also for the help he gave with the excavation. Likewise, Mr T. Daley for allowing us to excavate the southerly ditch. Also Mr A.C. Harrison for the advice and help given, along with Terry Smith who assisted with the excavations.

Further, I thank Albert Daniels for his study and report of the

D. BACCHUS

animal bones. My thanks also to Linda Green, Christine Jones and Marion Webster for identification of the pottery samples. For help with the leaden coffin I thank Doreen Edwards.

Finally, I am grateful to Dr J.P Hayes for his reconstruction of the pottery and the checking of the fabric temper.

APPENDIX A

Report on bones from Roman ditches at nos. 158 and 160 Maidstone Road, Chatham.

List of identifiable bones from northerly ditch (no. 158):

| Bos (cattle) | | Sus (pig) |
|-------------------|---|-----------|
| mandible | 2 | 1 |
| Mandible (female) | | 4 |
| metatarsus | | |
| humerus | 1 | |
| scapula | 4 | |
| illium | 1 | |
| metatarsus (left) | 1 | |
| calcaneus | 1 | |
| rib | 2 | |
| tooth in mandible | 1 | |
| acetabulum | 1 | |

All these bones are general butchery waste.

List of identifiable bones from the southerly ditch (no 160).

Bos (cattle)

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| femur | 3 proximals LH 2 distals 1LH 1RH |
| tibia | 4 RH 2 LH |
| humerus | 3 LH 3 RH |
| radius | 3 LH 1 RH |
| ulna | 2 LH 1 RH |
| metatarsus | 1 |
| astragalus | 1 pair 1 odd |
| calcaneus | 3 same hand |
| pelvis (acetabulum) | 1 LH different animals 1 RH |
| vertebra | 2 axis 1 atlas |

ROMAN REMAINS AT CHATHAM

| | | | |
|--|---|--------------|-------------------|
| mandible | | | 1 RH |
| | | | 1 pair (juvenile) |
| scapula | | | 1 |
| part of skull, eye socket and a horn core. | | | |
| Equus (horse) | | Ovis (sheep) | |
| molar | 4 | pelvis | a pair |
| | | tibia | 2 both same hand |
| | | radius | 1 |

From this list it can be seen the bones represent a minimum of two sheep, four cattle and one horse.



Southerly ditch looking west.