

Valens. AD364–78. *Æ* 3 of Arles or Lyons. *Rev* SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE, Victory.

Iron (fig 8)

- 6 L-shaped lift-key with three teeth. The lower part of the shank is circular in section; the upper is square and has been drawn out and turned over at the end to create a suspension loop. From trench II, context 23.

Such keys are frequently found on Roman sites, and usually have between two and four teeth; the variant with two is the commonest. An example with three teeth from Colchester is published by Crummy (1983, 125) who, along with Frere (1972, 181), provides a brief discussion.

- 7 Small 'ox-goad' with a shallow one-turn spiral terminating in a short point. Overlying pit 3, context 24, in trench II.

Although conventionally regarded as cattle prods, an alternative use as simple dip pens for writing has been suggested. A well-preserved example from the praetorium kitchen at Chesterholm (Vindolanda) found with a number of writing tablets, for instance, bore traces of ink at the foot of its short ash shaft (Birley 1999, 28–9, no 3613).

'Ox-goads' are not uncommon finds on Roman sites including urban centres such as Londinium (Angela Wardle, pers comm). Examples from Ewell include one from Purberry Shot (Lowther 1946–7, fig 12, no 3) and a second from Hatch Furlong.

Other iron objects (not illustrated)

A number of other iron objects, not illustrated here, were recovered during the excavations, the majority from trench I, the fill of the Roman ditch or gully, context 7:

Nails In addition to the four nails found with the cremation burial over pit 2 (see below), 41 nails were recovered, three from the 'Roman levels' over pit 1, context 19, and 38 from trench I. Only 14 were complete: two from pit 1, context 19 and 12 from trench I; lengths varied between 110mm and 32mm. The vast majority belong to Manning's type I (1972, 186), with square heads and square-sectioned shanks.

Studs In addition to nails, 41 small domed studs 15–20mm in length were recovered from trench I. The majority had been bent at right angles.

Elsewhere these have been plausibly identified as sandal studs or hobnails (eg O'Connell & Bird 1994, fig 36, nos 21–2). Large numbers of similar studs were recovered from Roman metal surfaces and associated features during excavations in St Mary's Churchyard, Ewell (Pemberton 1973, 20–1).

WORKED BONE (fig 8)

- 8 In addition to the bone gaming counters considered separately below, a bone gouge was recovered from pit 2, context 32, layer 11, but was subsequently lost. (A rim sherd of necked/cordoned jar in a SAND/GROG fabric (fig 6, no 24) is marked '100in just below bone implement'.) Tom Walls (pers comm) described the gouge as 'identical' to those manufactured on sheep metacarpals from Maiden Castle illustrated by Wheeler (1943, plate 34), on which the drawing (fig 8, no 8) is based.

Sellwood (1984, 385–7) summarized the evidence relating to the possible uses to which bone gouges could have been put, based on morphology and wear patterns. In noting the diversity of form, she identified three possible functions: as pin-beaters in the weaving process, as weaving shuttles or for hide dressing.

POTTERY GRAFFITI (fig 8)

- 9 Part of the base of a sandy OXID vessel with, presumably, a cross scratched on it to denote ownership. Unstratified within trench II.
- 10 Complete base of a reduced SAND jar(?) (similar to AHFA fabric) with a cross lightly and inexpertly scratched on it. Unstratified within trench II.

FIRED CLAY

A number of pieces of fired clay were recovered during the excavations, including a single small scrap of briquetage, a simple figurine, part of a clay ring, a pottery 'burnisher' and a number of fragments of triangular loomweights. Several large fragments of chalky daub, one with distinctive angular wattle impressions, were also recovered from pit 2.

Briquetage (fig 9)

- 1 A single small fragment belonging to the rim of a thin-walled open vessel was recovered from the basal fill of pit 2 along with several other pieces of fired clay. It has an under-fired fine sandy vegetable-tempered fabric, weighs 2.55g, and is quite unlike anything else found on the site. It is here interpreted as a piece of briquetage. Briquetage comprises ceramic equipment believed to have been used to extract salt from sea water.

A bi-modal size grouping of briquetage vessels has been noted elsewhere (eg Bradley 1992, 36–8), with large thick-walled troughs and evaporating pans in the coastal localities and small thin-walled vessels on inland settlement sites. With a wall thickness of only 6mm, the fragment from The Looe falls within the second category. While it is often assumed that these thin-walled vessels were used to transport the salt in cakes, Barford (1995, 672) has suggested that the vessels were actually broken off near

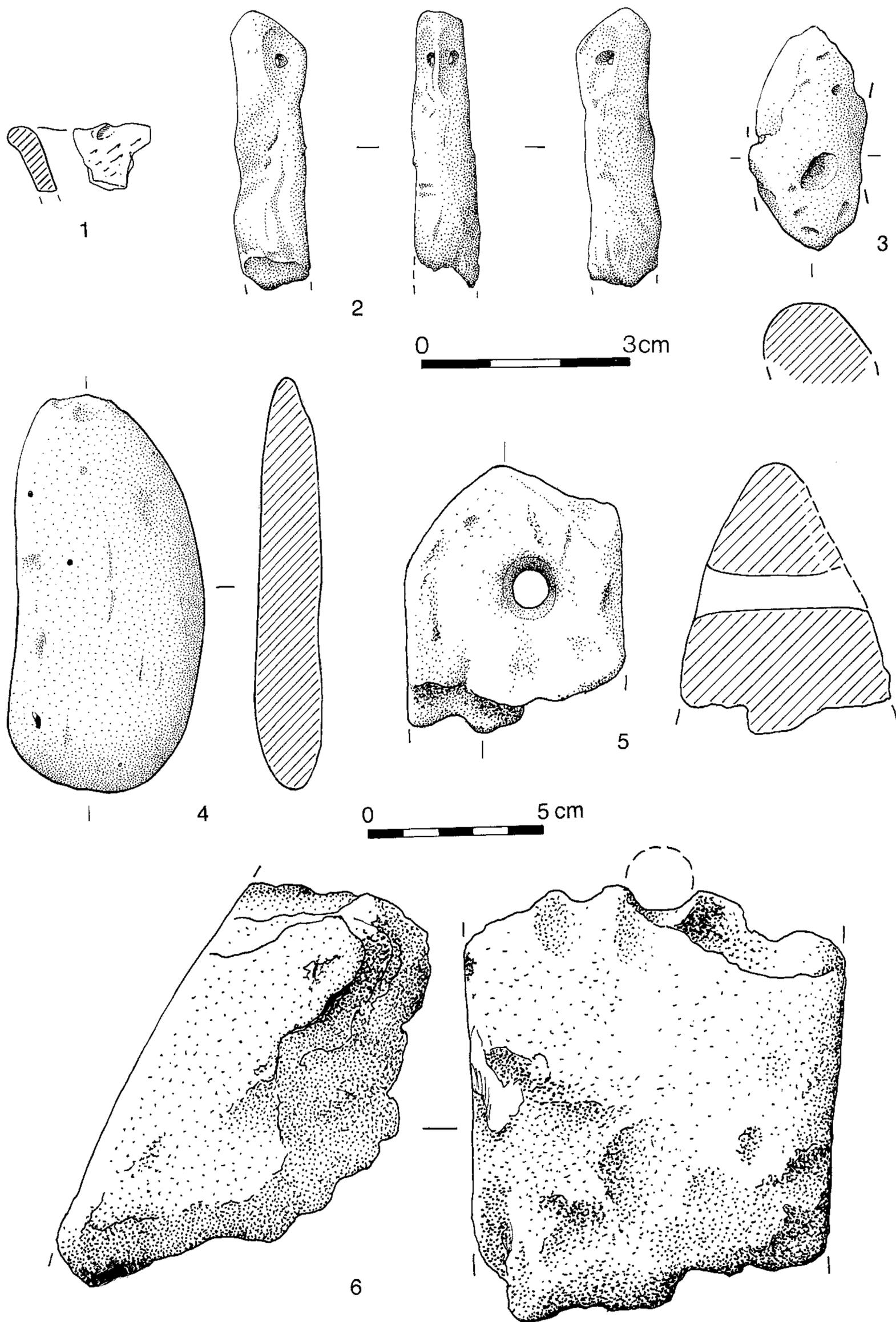


Fig 9 The Looe: fired clay objects

the production sites and that sherds were only accidentally included in consignments of salt transported by other means, eg sacks or purpose-made pottery vessels (Green 1980b, 65). The nearest known salterns to The Looe are in the estuaries of the Thames and Medway. Though not well dated, they may have been in operation from the second half of the 1st century BC to the end of the 1st century AD (Champion & Overy 1989, 39).

Careful examination of recently excavated MPRIA and LPRIA site assemblages from the county has, somewhat surprisingly, failed to produce any fragments of briquetage (Phil Jones, pers comm). A few scraps from Franks' Sandpit, Betchworth apart (David Williams, pers comm) therefore, there is as yet nothing to compare with the quantities obtained from sites in Kent, of which that at Lower Warbank, Keston is the nearest (Philp *et al* 1991, 205–6; there referred to as 'Chaff-Tempered ware').

Figurine (fig 9)

- 2 A small fired clay zoomorphic figurine, unstratified within pit 2, context 32 in trench IIa. It has bird-like features (? owl), and a surviving length of 41mm. It has been simply modelled by pinching the end of a small roll of clay between finger and thumb; the eyes were fashioned by pushing a hollow straw or grass stem into the unbaked clay. Crudely wedged fabric, similar to that of the loomweights (see below) and presumably, like them, made on site.

Spacer ring (fig 9)

- 3 Small segment of fired clay ring of plano-convex section, 67mm in length, surviving thickness 24mm, weighing 30g. From the upper levels of pit 2, context 32 in trench IIa (marked P2 25in). When complete the ring would have been some 110–20mm in diameter. It is carefully made, with a flattened facet on its upper face, and a marked concave moulding on its inner edge.

Similar objects from Lower Warbank, Keston were there interpreted as early Roman stacking spacers from pottery kilns (Philp *et al* 1991, 151, 153–4).

Pottery burnisher (fig 9)

- 4 Smooth, kidney-shaped lump of soapy, fired clay, 110mm in length and 55mm in width, weighing 160g. Unstratified within trench II.

Interpreted here as a burnishing tool, perhaps for pottery.

Loomweights (fig 9)

Fourteen fragments of triangular loomweight were found, together with several shapeless lumps of fired

clay of loomweight-type fabric. The majority come from pits 1 and 2, contexts 19 and 32 (table 3, M3).

Triangular loomweights with perforations through each corner are the most common Iron Age type, and appear to carry over into the early Roman period (O'Connell & Bird 1994, 130). Whether they were actually used to maintain the tension of warp threads on upright looms as usually assumed is currently a matter of debate. Poole (1995, 285–6) for example prefers to regard them as oven bricks.

On the face of it, local corroboration for this suggestion is provided by the discovery of some sixteen triangular loomweights on St Martha's Hill outside Guildford in 1933. These had been used (or perhaps more likely re-used) as voussoirs to construct the vault of a horizontal flue leading to a small charcoal-filled circular oven (Lowther 1935).

- 5 Corner of burnt triangular loomweight 60mm in width, with neat circular perforation 10mm in diameter, weight 190g. Roughly wedged, worn fabric. Pit 1, context 19.
- 6 Fragment belonging to a large triangular loomweight 100mm in width, with traces of one circular perforation 15mm in diameter, weight 930g. Roughly wedged fabric with occasional large burnt flint inclusion (visible example 30mm in length), fired brick red. Pit 1, context 19.

Ceramic building material

Sixteen fragments of Roman ceramic building material weighing 2.66kg were recovered from the gully, context 7, in trench I; a further eight fragments weighing 0.81kg were recovered from trench II. They included fragments of tegulae, brick and combed flue tile.

CHALK (fig 10)

- 1 Chalk spindle-whorl measuring 63 x 58mm and 15mm thick with an off-centre hourglass perforation. Weight 50g. There are traces of tool marks on one flat face. From pit 1, context 19, layer 5. A second example was recovered by Tom Walls from the fill of a large shaft in the fields of Priest Hill Farm (fig 13, inset).

More or less well-made chalk spindlewhorls have been recovered in some numbers on chalkland sites such as Danebury (Cunliffe 1984, 422–5) though whether the cruder examples such as that from The Looe could have functioned effectively as spindlewhorls remains a moot point. Locally, examples have been recorded from West Clandon (Frere 1944, 55) and, further afield, from Farningham Hill (Philp 1984, 35–6) and Lower Warbank, Keston (Philp *et al* 1991, 161 nos 43–4). Surprisingly, no chalk examples were recovered from Hawk's Hill, Leatherhead.

- 2 Triangular-shaped chalk object 15–18mm thick and with sides 55–60mm in length. Weight 35g. From pit 2, context 32, layer 8? If intended as a

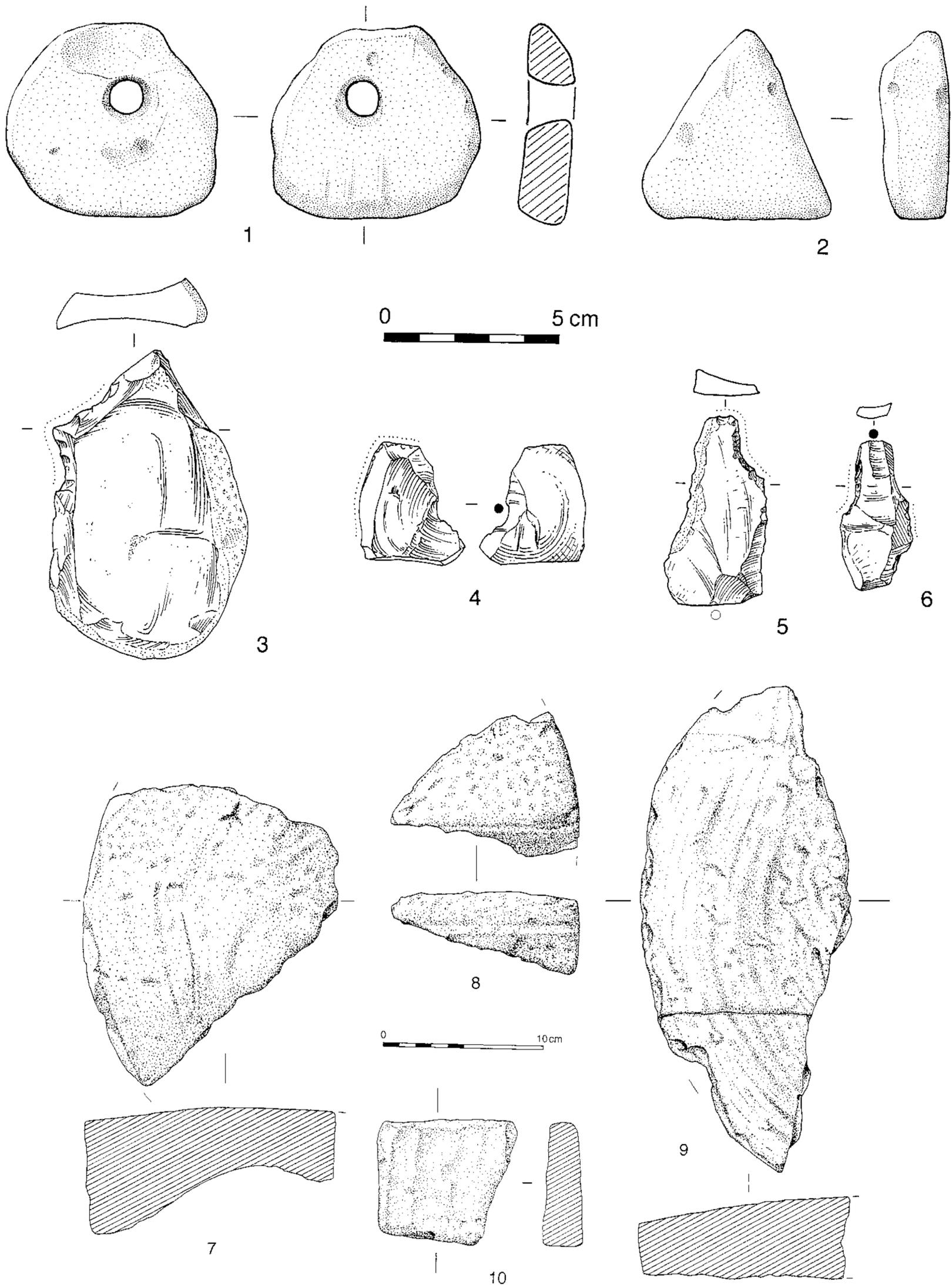


Fig 10 The Looe: objects of chalk, struck flint, quern stones and whetstone

miniature copy of a triangular loomweight, it lacks the usual perforations.

Not illustrated Sub-rectangular slab of chalk measuring 150 x 100mm and 30mm thick, weight 455g, with two parallel elliptical hollows cut

into the smoother of its two faces. The larger of these is 65mm in length, 20mm wide and 7.5mm deep; the smaller is 35mm long, 20mm wide and 5mm deep. From pit 1, context 19, layer 10.

From the published description, a somewhat similar (though circular) chalk object was recovered from Hawk's Hill, Leatherhead, and was there interpreted as a pot lid or chopping block (Hastings 1965, 12).

STRUCK FLINT (fig 10)

Twenty pieces of struck flint survive from The Looe, all but two of which come from trench II (table 4, M3). One unstratified convex scraper from the latter area apart, no recognizable implements are present, although a number of pieces from pits 1 and 3 bear traces of notching and other miscellaneous alteration.

The raw material is widely available locally, and comprises in the main a cherty grey or grey-brown flint with white to grey-brown cortex. The condition of the collection is generally fresh, although a thick white surface patina has developed on several pieces.

The low flaking angles, wide striking platforms and terminal hinge fractures visible on a number of the pieces are indicative of ill-controlled and presumably late prehistoric knapping techniques. This, together with the opportunistic approach to notching and 'retouch' (and the recovery of a number of pieces from the two storage pits), makes it tempting to suggest that some at least are contemporary with the backfilling of the pits and therefore of LPRIA/RIA date. Though still contentious, the possibility of continued exploitation of flint for specific tasks (such as scraping and boring) in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age is currently under review (eg Young & Humphrey 1999).

- 3 Crude awl worked on the edge of a large fragment of cortical, thermally-fractured cobble of light grey flint. Marked 'Black silt 46in 6, Lodge Lawn', pit 1.
- 4 Small squat flake of glossy, translucent grey-brown flint, with traces of utilization along its distal edge. Marked '57in Black silt, Lodge Lawn 6', pit 1.
- 5 Distal end of a robust narrow flake/blade of translucent mottled grey-brown flint, with traces of semi-abrupt retouch at the tip. A patch of pale cortex provides a comfortable pressure point. Marked '50in 4', pit 1.
- 6 Narrow flake/blade of mottled grey flint terminating in a hinge fracture, with traces of semi-abrupt retouch adjacent to the striking platform. Marked 'P3'.

WORKED STONE (fig 10)

Quern stones

In all, twelve pieces of rotary quern weighing 7.48kg were recovered, together with a few small fragments likely to have belonged to querns. Of the twelve pieces, seven were recovered from pit 1 (mainly layer 8), two from pit 2 and three from pit 3.

Petrological identification of the quern stones was hampered by their generally weathered and burnt condition, but Richenda Goffin and Susan Pringle

suggest (pers comm) that all are 'probably Wealden'. They include several examples of glauconitic sandstones similar to 'hassock' from the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand in the Maidstone area (eg Gallois 1965, 31 2) and others that resemble 'decayed ragstones', probably also Kentish.

Quern stones of Wealden origin are very common on Surrey sites of the Iron Age and Roman periods (eg Hanworth & Tomalin 1977, 81-5; Thompson 1979, 269, 291-3, 315; Clarke & Nichols 1960, 65-70) and clearly formed part of an important industry, the organization of which remains obscure. West Surrey sites appear to have been supplied by quarries in the Lodsworth area of West Sussex, whose products have yet to be identified east of the river Wey (Peacock 1987, fig 7). Most of the pieces from The Looe can probably be sourced to the Hythe Beds in Kent, an outcrop of Lower Greensand that extends westwards as far as Sevenoaks. No quarry sites of LPRIA or early Roman date have been identified in the area, owing perhaps to later large-scale exploitation linked to the supply of building stone for the walls of Londinium (Marsden 1994, 80-4).

- 7 Fragment of a lower stone 38cm in diameter, re-used as a mortar, weight 1.745kg. Adjacent to pit 3, trench II. Glauconitic sandstone, Lower Greensand, similar to 'hassock' sandstone.
- 8 Fragment of an upper stone with part of the seating for a handle, weight 375g. From layer 5 in pit 1, trench II. Probably greensand.
- 9 Two conjoining fragments from a lower stone 40cm in diameter, weight 2.185kg. Over layer 13 in pit 2, trench IIa. Fine grained glauconitic sandstone, not dissimilar to 'hassock' sandstone.

Whetstones

Three whetstones weighing 0.8kg were recovered from pit 3. Two from the upper fills appear to have utilized fragments of greensand; the third comprises a fragment of ferruginous sandstone or carstone derived from the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand (eg Gallois 1965, 34).

- 10 Whetstone worked on a fragment of carstone, weight 285g. From pit 3, depth 89 inches (2.25m) (base of layer 8?).

ANIMAL BONE, by Pat Nicolaysen

Of the considerable quantity of animal bones recovered from the site between 1946 and 1949, only a very small number now survive. Most of the animal bones were discarded after having been identified by Judith King at the British Museum, Natural History in 1949 (Tom Walls, pers comm). She sent typewritten lists of identified bones from pits 2 and 3 to Tom Walls; these lists are with the site archive, and will be summarized in tabular form in the second part of this report. The first part of the report deals with the surviving bones actually examined by the writer.

Surviving animal bones

Fifty identifiable animal bones, teeth in jaws and loose teeth, including three bones from the cremation in a jar over context 35 have been examined by the writer. A further 54 fragments, most of which can be assigned to horse/cow size or pig/sheep/goat size groups bring the total of surviving bones to 104. The distribution of identifiable species by context is shown in table 5 (M4).

This surviving assemblage is too small to attempt to indicate any minimum numbers of individuals. It can only be said that one individual of each species listed was represented, ie horse, cow, pig, goat, sheep and dog. Butchery/chop marks were present on some cow, pig and sheep/goat bones, and two fragments of the latter bore cut marks. There was scanty evidence of gnawing by carnivores. The minimum number of identifiable bone elements is shown in table 6 (M4).

Pit 1

Bones of horse, cow, pig, goat and sheep/goat were recovered, including horse phalanges and a loose tooth; two cow mandible fragments, one with teeth, and some loose teeth; a pig mandible with teeth sockets (this bone bore a cut mark); two skull fragments of goat, and a carpal bone and a vertebral fragment of sheep or goat.

The three horse phalanges may have come from the same animal, as the bones fit together exactly, as does a horse metacarpal marked 'Pit 1 u/s'. This may be evidence for the use of the animal's hide for tanning; in this process the feet were sometimes detached from the hide only after the animal was skinned (Serjeantson 1989, 136-7). However, there are no cut marks on any of these four foot bones. The horse's age at death was at least twelve to fifteen months, as fusion on all four bones was complete.

Pit 2

Surviving bones from this pit were those of dog, scapula and limb bones from a foetal/neonatal animal, and one adult tooth; pig, scapula and mandible with teeth, both from an adult animal — the mandible bore chop marks; cow, adult metacarpal with chop marks; and a number of sheep/goat bones, several with chop marks. A rib fragment and two astragali (right and left) had been burnt; of four metapodials two had chop marks and one had also been burnt.

Pit 3

Here the surviving bones were fewer. They comprised a pig femur from a foetal/neonatal animal

and a juvenile pig mandible with deciduous teeth; there were also several sheep/goat bones, including a humerus and two tibiae, all three with chop marks. One of the tibiae was from a juvenile animal. There were nine sheep/goat metapodials; the three metacarpals were all from juvenile animals, as was one of the metatarsals. Five out of the nine had chop marks. There were also a few pig/sheep/goat fragments with chop marks.

Bones listed in 1949

The species listed from pits 2 and 3 by Judith King included horse, cow, pig, goat, sheep and dog. Small animal bones were also found, scattered across the floor of pit 2 — rat, vole, water vole, stoat and shrew, together with those of frog and bird. The presence of these latter bones may indicate that the pit remained open for a short while before being backfilled.

Some of the listed bones represent partially articulated almost complete carcasses, which raises the question of 'placed deposition' for ritual purposes; this applies particularly to the dogs from pit 2 and to the cattle and dog in pit 3. The species and anatomical elements present in pits 2 and 3 are shown in tables 7 (M5) and 8 (M6) respectively.

THE ANIMAL CREMATION

The pottery vessel (fig 11, no 2)

Complete, necked 'figure-7' cordoned jar with a rounded shoulder in a grey SAND fabric, not dissimilar in form to products from the Alice Holt area (AHSU).

While the dating of this vessel is probably little different from that of the AHSU vessel (fig 6, no 34) discussed in relation to the GROG jar containing the human cremation (see above), it is likely to be stratigraphically later in The Looe sequence. A slightly later, 2nd century, date is therefore appropriate for its deposition.

The cremated bone, by Pat Nicolaysen

The animal cremation from context 35 is a token deposit only and contained three sheep/goat limb bone fragments, of humerus, radius and ulna, all with chop marks. There were also eight fragments of sheep/goat size bones and 50 to 60 very small burnt bone fragments mixed with soil and dust. This deposit has not been included in any bone count from pit 2.

THE HUMAN CREMATION

The pottery vessel (fig 11, no 1)

Complete, wide-mouthed and round shouldered necked jar in a GROG fabric. Hand-made but wheel finished, with a random lattice decoration of burnished lines below the shoulder.

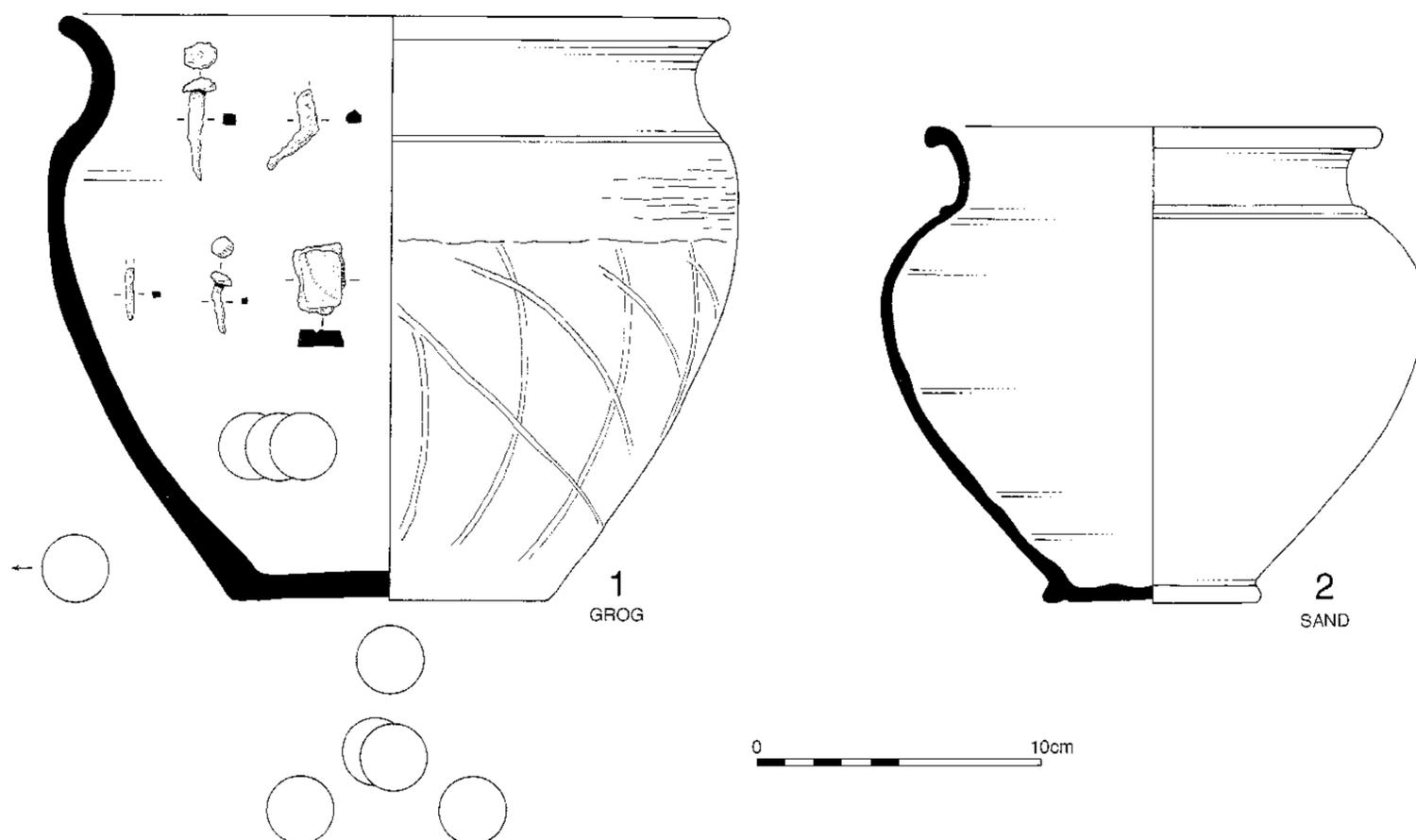


Fig 11 The Looe: GROG jar over pit 2 containing human cremation burial and SAND jar over context 35 containing burnt sheep/goat bone

The dating of the vessel relies on the dating of the pottery recovered from layers 3–5, into which it had been inserted. However, much of this latter group is grog-loaded and similarly difficult to date with precision, although it does include a sherd of an AHSU necked cordoned jar (fig 6, no 34; Lyne & Jefferies 1979, Class 1) which, in London, would be dated AD50–160 (Davies *et al* 1994, 97–8; Louise Rayner, pers comm). As the other vessels in the group tend to support an earlier rather than later date within this range, a late 1st or perhaps early 2nd century date would seem appropriate for the insertion of the cremation.

Cremated human bone

Rosemary Powers of the Sub-Department of Anthropology at the Natural History Museum examined the bone fragments (weight 290g) in 1976 and reported as follows:

The human cremation, accompanied by bone counters, was contained in a grog-ware jar; it is that of a young adult, probably male. Recognizable bone fragments include the second vertebra (axis), part of the distal femur with open epiphysis, and part of the ilium, with an unfused iliac crest. Some long bone fragments show open epiphyses; parts of the skull vault include a fragment of the inner table of the frontal bone on the midline, showing that a sinus was present. This is the basis of sexing it as a male.

Other finds

In addition to the cremated human bone, and the gaming counters discussed below, the burial urn contained four small iron nails and a rectangular potsherd from the base of a jar of reduced SAND fabric — the latter conceivably functioning as a further gaming counter. Two of the four nails are complete (round heads/square-sectioned shanks; Manning 1972, 186, type I) and two are missing their heads. None of these objects had passed through the cremation pyre. A crushed dog skeleton 2 feet (61cm) away may also have been associated with it (table 7, M5).

The bone gaming counters (fig 12)

The burial was accompanied by nine unburnt circular bone gaming counters with lathe-turned concentric rings around a central chuck mark on their obverse faces (Kenyon 1948, 266, type B), the latter probably representing the internal surfaces of the original bone (MacGregor 1985, 133). The rectilinear bevelled edges visible on the reverse side of a number of the pieces (eg A, B, E and H) indicate that they had probably been cut from the robust long bones of cattle or horse (MacGregor 1976, 4). Close inspection revealed that the plain reverse faces bore faint traces of scratched graffiti in the form of numerals and/or letters.

Three counters were found in the burial urn along with the cremated bone, the nails and the rectangular potsherd. Five others lay face down beneath the vessel, with the ninth some 2 feet (61.5cm) away to the west. Three of the five beneath the vessel were arranged in a triangular formation around the other two, which were placed one on top of the other (fig 11).

There are some clues to identify the relative positions of individual counters. We can be clear, for instance, that counter I was that located 25 inches (63.5cm) to the west as it is so marked. Moreover, counters A and B, with their six concentric rings, must be those placed face down one on top of the other in the triangular arrangement beneath the vessel, as Tom Walls' notes state that these central counters each had 'seven concentric rings, counting the central point as one ring'. Furthermore, as the three surrounding pieces each had 'five rings' (again counting the central point as one ring), counter G with seven rings (eight by Tom Walls' reckoning) must be one of the three found within the vessel.

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| <p>A Crisply turned counter, diameter 23mm, thickness 3mm. Obverse: six concentric rings. Reverse: V. The reverse face has suffered much surface damage, and also bears traces of a bevel on one edge, the remains of the original curving surface of the long bone from which it was cut (Frere & Tomlin 1991, 2440.190).</p> <p>B Crisply turned counter, diameter 21mm, thickness 4mm. Obverse: six concentric rings. Reverse: RIIMI X V; perhaps <i>remi(ttam) (denarios?) quinque</i> 'I will repay five (denarii?)' (?). In addition to the inscription, the reverse face also bears traces of a bevel similar to that on counter A (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.107).</p> <p>C Crisply turned counter, diameter 23mm, thickness 3.5mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: (first hand) AVV; (second hand) RIIM LB VX; perhaps <i>rem(ittam) l(i)b(enter) quinque denarios</i> 'I will gladly repay five denarii' (?) (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.20).</p> <p>D Crisply turned counter, diameter 21mm, thickness 3.5mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: RIIM LB; perhaps <i>rem(ittam) l(i)b(enter)</i> 'I will repay gladly' (?) (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.108).</p> | <p>E Crisply turned counter, diameter 22.5mm, thickness 3.5mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: RIIM L VX; perhaps <i>rem(ittam) l(i)b(enter) quinque (denarios)</i> 'I will gladly repay five (denarii)' (?) (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.109). The reverse face also bears traces of a bevel similar to that on counters A and B.</p> <p>F Poorly turned counter, diameter 20mm, thickness 4mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: XV RI[.]M; perhaps <i>ixv rem(ittam)</i> 'I will repay five denarii' (?) (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.188).</p> <p>G Lightly turned counter, diameter 23mm, thickness 3.5mm. Obverse: seven concentric rings. Reverse: RIIMI; perhaps <i>remi(ttam)</i> 'I will repay' (?) (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.110).</p> <p>H Poorly turned counter, diameter 21.5mm, thickness 3mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: VV; perhaps 'five' (twice); alternatively, M could be read (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.189). The reverse face also bears traces of a bevel similar to that on counters A, B and E.</p> <p>I Crisply turned counter, diameter 21mm, thickness 4mm. Obverse: four concentric rings. Reverse: VX with other marks (<i>ibid</i>, 2440.335).</p> |
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The likely significance of the graffiti has been discussed by Tomlin (Frere & Tomlin 1991). Briefly stated, the expansion *rem(ittam) l(i)b(enter)* ('I will gladly repay') is conjectural only, and RIIM and RIIMI could equally well be understood as Rem(i) and Remi, '(property) of Remus', a personal name attested in Gaul (Roger Tomlin, pers comm). Of the two explanations, Tomlin inclines to the latter. Moreover, although the graffito V~~X~~ or ~~XV~~ could be read as 'five *denarii*', he notes that six-pointed stars are common identification marks on pottery vessels (Frere & Tomlin 1991, 105–6, 112), and need not necessarily represent an abbreviation for '*denarii*'.

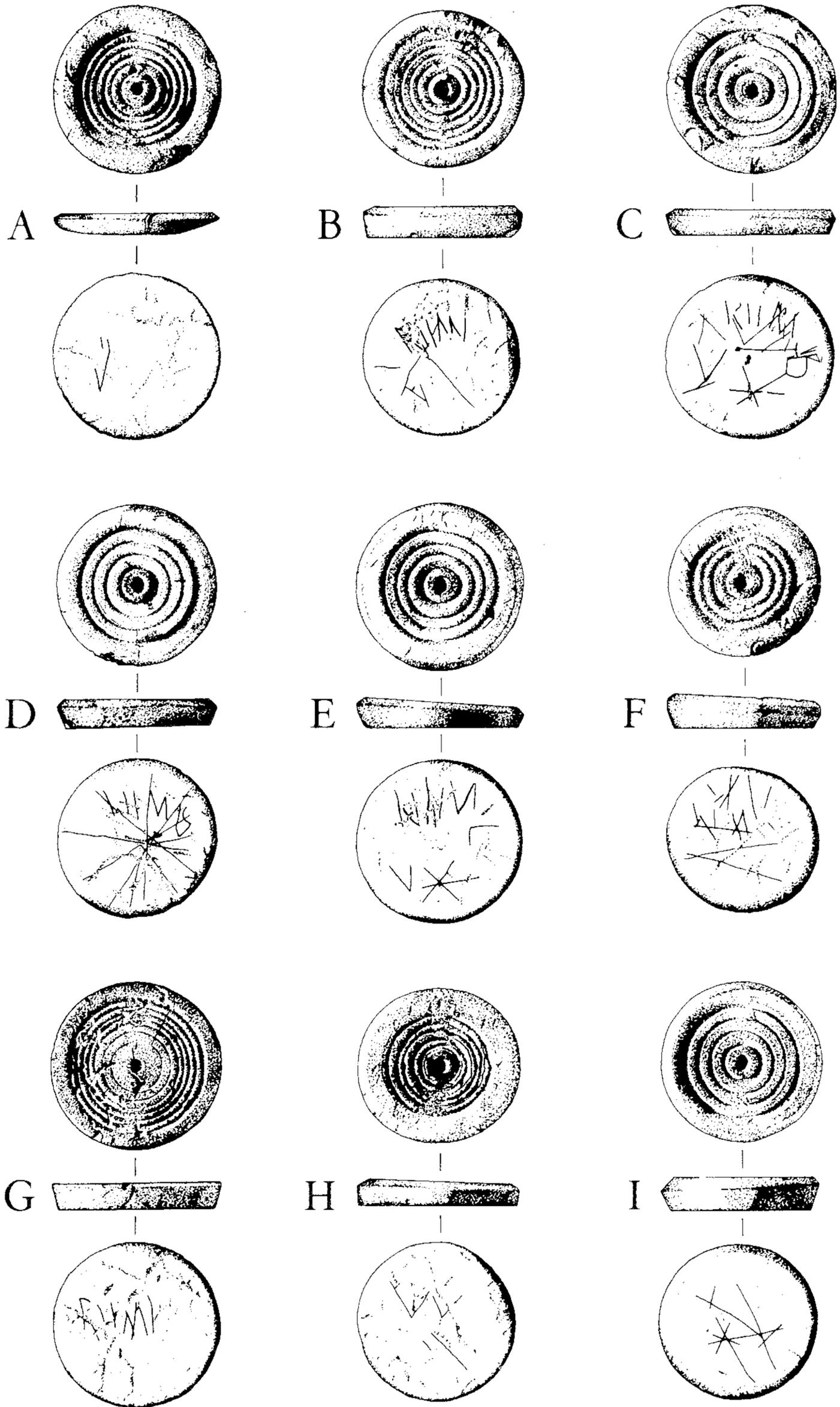


Fig 12 The Looe: bone gaming counters (Scale 1:1)

Problems of the graffiti aside, counters of bone, glass and pottery are common finds on Roman sites, and may have been used in calculation (as true counters), as gambling tokens, or as gaming pieces in board games — of which there seem to have been three main types. Games of alignment included *terni lapilli* and *merels/Nine Men's Morris*; race games comprised *duodecim scripta* or *tabula*, controlled by dice; and war games included *ludus latruncularum* (eg Austin 1934; Murray 1952; Bell 1960, 30–5, 84–7; MacGregor 1976, 3–4; Turner 1979, 76–9). It is possible that the singular arrangement of the counters below The Looe urn represents a move or final position in a game of alignment, culminating in the surrounding and capture of the two central pieces. A board game seemingly interrupted after the two opposing players had each completed their first move has been identified in a mid-1st century grave at the Stanway site outside Colchester (Crummy 1997, 68–9; Nina Crummy, pers comm).

The popularity of such games and gaming may explain the not infrequent inclusion of sets of counters in graves throughout the Roman occupation and beyond (Philpott 1991, 185–6). Groups of counters have also been recovered from non-funerary contexts on a number of Roman urban and military sites, most notably the hoards from Corbridge (Allason-Jones & Bishop 1988, 82) and Ravenglass, the latter comprising 126 pieces (119 bone and seven glass) presumably representing multiple sets (Potter 1979, 75–87). The magnificent set of 24 glass counters from a grave at Welwyn, dated *c* 10BC (Stead 1967), stands at the head of the British sequence. Somewhat atypical, in that it appears to divide into four teams of six conical counters, the burial with which it is associated is clearly prestigious and male — as are a majority of the burials furnished with gaming sets (table 9). In the absence of other pottery, glass or metal grave goods, the burial from The Looe falls within a restricted group of simpler, and often rural interments.

Moreover, the present group is also one of the smallest, even counting the rectangular sherd found in the cremation vessel as a tenth piece. With the exception of the ten glass counters from another rural burial at Old Newton, Suffolk and the fourteen surviving bone counters from a child's cremation at Elms Farm, Heybridge (Philpott 1991, 185; Atkinson & Preston 1999, 28), the other British grave sets contain between 18 and 46 pieces (table 9). There are several explanations that might account for this disparity. Firstly, it is possible that other scattered pieces remain undiscovered beyond the excavated area; secondly, that the counters represent one 'team' from a larger set (compare for instance the two teams of nine from Grange Road, Winchester — Biddle 1967, 243); or thirdly, that the counters are individual gambling tokens and not part of a gaming set at all.

Most inscribed sets seem to come from urban or military contexts, where a correspondingly higher degree of literacy might be expected. The Looe is once again atypical in such company, although its proximity to the roadside settlement at Ewell, and to Stane Street itself, 800m or so to the west, may be significant. Sets of inscribed bone counters have been recovered from urban contexts at either end of Stane Street: from two burials in the St Pancras cemetery at Chichester (Down & Rule 1971, 83, 88, fig 5.15) and, within the north-eastern corner of historic Surrey, from the floor of a late 1st or early 2nd century circular building at Topping's Wharf, Southwark (Sheldon 1974, 100, fig 47). In addition, another, uninscribed, set of 26 bone counters was found with a cremation burial in the Old Kent Road in 1838 (Ralph Jackson, pers comm).

Gaming sets associated with burials and also from non-funerary contexts (tables 9–10)

This does not pretend to be an exhaustive list, but simply aims to allow The Looe gaming counters to be seen in their wider British context. Burials containing single counters have not been sought out and no attempt has been made to collate the copious continental evidence, though various writers allude to it (eg Clarke 1979; Millett 1986). The following information has been tabulated: site name; number of counters recovered; type of counters (G = glass, C = chalk, B = bone, P = pottery); context (C = cremation, I =

inhumation; (m) = male, (f) = female, (c) = child); date of burial (E = early, M = middle, L = late); main reference.

TABLE 9 Gaming sets associated with burials

Site	No	Type	Context	Date	Main reference
Welwyn	24	G	C (m)	10BC	Stead 1967, 14–19
King Harry Lane, St Albans, grave 249	21	B	C	AD1–40	Stead & Rigby 1989, 108 & fig 137
Stanway, Colchester	20	G	C (m)	AD40–50	Crummy 1993
Stanway, Colchester	26	G	C (m?)	AD40–50	Crummy 1997, 68–9
Alton, Hants	19	G	C (m?)	AD45–65	Millett 1986, 43, 53–6
Litton Cheney, Dorset	20	C/P	I (m)	M1	Bailey 1967, 156–9
St Martin's-le-Grand, London	?	B	C	?M1	RCHME 1928, 154
Mansell Street, London	24	G	I	AD40–80	Barber & Bowsler 2000, 135–6, 193–5
King Harry Lane, St Albans	22	G	C (m)	AD80–90	Niblett 1990, 412–13
Grange Road, Winchester	18	G	C (f?)	AD85–95	Biddle 1967, 243
The Looe, Ewell	10	B/P	C (m)	L1/E2	present account
Old Kent Road, London	26	B	C	L1/E2	Ralph Jackson, pers comm
Old Newton, Suffolk	10	G	C	L1/2	Philpott 1991, 185
Colchester, Joslin grave group 81a–b/94	24	G	C	E/M2	May 1930, 275
Elsenham, Essex	19	G/B	C	M2	Catherine Johns, pers comm
Ospringe, Kent	24	G/B	C	L2	Whiting 1925, 95
Trentholme Drive, York	46	B	C (m)	L2	Wenham 1968, 97
St Pancras, Chichester, grave 250	25/6	B	C	AD150–200	Down & Rule 1971, 83 & fig 5.15
Elms Farm, Heybridge	14	B	C (c)	2	Atkinson & Preston 1999, 28
Victoria Road, Winchester, grave 408	29	B	C	L2/E3	Crummy <i>et al</i> forthcoming
St Pancras, Chichester, grave 66	23	B	C	3	Down & Rule 1971, 83 & fig 5.15
Holgate Bridge, York	20+	B	I (c)	?3/4	RCHME 1962, 101
Lullingstone, Kent	30	G	I (m)	L3/4	Meates 1987, 123–5, 139–42
Lankhills, Winchester, grave 51	26	G	I	L4	Clarke 1979, 251–4

TABLE 10 Gaming counters from non-funerary contexts

Site	No	Type	Context	Date	Main reference
Skeleton Green, Herts	4	B	Well	10BC–AD20	Partridge 1981, 61 & fig 26
Tooley Street, Southwark	12	B	Floor	L1/E2	Sheldon 1974, 100 & fig 47
Caerleon	28	B/G	Drain	L1/E2	Zienkiewicz 1986, 155–6, 202–7
Castleford	18	B/G	Floor	AD85–150	Cool & Philo 1998, 362
Brecon Gaer	8	B	Drain	E2	Wheeler 1926, 120
Corbridge	54	G	Box	E2	Allason-Jones & Bishop 1988, 82
Caerleon	40	B/G	Drain	L2/E3	Zienkiewicz 1986, 155–6, 202–7
Ravenglass	126	B/G	Floor	L2/E3	Potter 1979, 75–87
Church Street, York	45	B/G/P	Sewer	L2/E3	MacGregor 1976, 2–4, 21–2
Corbridge	20	B	Road	?	Frere & Tomlin 1991, 2440, 35–6
Balkerne Gate, Colchester	12	B	Pit	1/4	Crummy 1983, 91, nos 2242–53

A number of points can be briefly noted from the tables. In terms of their distribution, it is noticeable that gaming sets placed in graves tend to occur south of York; those from non-funerary contexts tend to be from urban or military sites. The latter include groups of counters recovered from sewers or drains, particularly those connected with bath-houses where gaming was likely to have been popular.

Many of the gaming sets belong within the first half of the Roman period. These include several groups which pre-date the Roman conquest (eg Welwyn, Skeleton Green and perhaps King Harry Lane, St Albans) where the counters are of conical or pegged type. A