

Hall Farm, Orton Longueville

By Donald Mackreth

The site at Hall Farm (TL 176956) was first identified in 1964 and was excavated in succeeding years by the Peterborough Museum Society Archaeological Field Section under the late Mr G. F. Dakin. Further work on the east end of the site was done in 1971 under Mr G. B. Dannell, Mr A. Challands and Dr J. P. Wild. This work revealed parts of a large Roman farmstead, which has now been stripped and is being excavated in advance of the Fletton Parkway, which will skirt Orton Township.

The main use of the site seems to begin towards the end of the third century A.D., with extensive alterations in the mid fourth century. The plan of the farm is of a large partially walled yard. Around its margin, and starting at the east end on the north side, lie a barn, a yard, a rectangular building, another yard and then another building lying athwart the boundary wall, all others being behind it. In the middle of the west side is a large barn with a walled courtyard to its north which has another building along its north side. On the south, the courtyard wall forms the back of a third barn which, at the moment, seems to terminate the southern range. It is the west barn that was excavated by Mr Dakin and the east by Mr Dannell, Mr Challands and Dr Wild.

Of interest is the continued occurrence of Saxon pottery first identified by Mr Dakin. He found it in ditches attached to part of the site which he excavated, but no buildings were recognised. The recent excavations have located Saxon buildings, pits and hearths as well as ditches. These are at the east end of the farmyard and, at present, seem to fill in the Roman plan. It is certain that some of the Roman ditches were re-dug after they had accumulated some Saxon pottery and it seems more likely that the first Saxon occupants of the site were familiar with Roman pottery. It is too early yet to be sure how the Saxon occupation fits in with the Roman farm.

The economy of the farm seems to have been mixed. The first main late period appears to be characterised by a corral and a pond, and there is a high cattle content in the bone collection in both main periods. However, the barns of both the first and second late periods were fitted with corn dryers and the presence of mill-stone fragments on the site suggests that corn production was not of minor proportions.

The excavation still continues and it is hoped that a fuller account and plan will appear in *Durobrivae* 3.

An Intaglio from Hall Farm

By Martin Henig

The stone (fig 9) is a red jasper, with a flat upper surface (dimensions 16 x 13 x 3mm). It is in excellent condition apart from some chipping around the edges and is very highly polished except within the cut area.

The intaglio presents the device of *Cupid* seated on a light, two wheeled cart (*cupium*) and driving the pony within the traces towards the left (to the right on an impression taken from the gem). He holds the reins, attached directly to the bit, in one hand and a whip in the other hand; one of the pony's forelegs is raised high and the animal is evidently trotting forward at some speed.

A similar intaglio, also in red jasper, is published by A. Furtwängler, *Beschreibung der Geschnittenen Steine im Antiquarium, Königliche Museen zu Berlin*, 1896, Nr. 8445, while a paste gem depicting a countryman in a similar pony-trap has actually been found at Wall, Staffordshire (information from Mr A. A. Round — for the type see F. Henkel, *Die römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande*, 1913, Nr. 438 from Cologne). These paste intagli are of a type datable to the third century A.D., but although our gem and the one in Berlin could be as late as this, they might have been cut in Antonine times, when the glyptic workshops were particularly flourishing and red jasper had assumed pre-eminence as the commonest stone employed.



Fig 9 The intaglio from Hall Farm

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Excavation of the Roman farmstead at Hall Farm (TL 176956) (*Durobrivae* 2, 1974, 19) has finished. The remains were principally ditches and fragmentary buildings and the area excavated was about 4 acres. The site was badly damaged by mediaeval ridge and furrow, and modern ploughing had flattened the ridges and begun to remove the small amount of stratigraphy which had been preserved under them. This was a major disadvantage, but the total plan of the site could be recovered without too much distortion.

Unfortunately it is not possible to produce a single plan showing all periods: there are too many of them. The layout of the late Roman farm is of buildings loosely arranged on three sides of a rectangle, with the east side being open. The longest range of buildings was on the north. At the east end there was an aisled barn (22 metres by 10.5 metres) separated from the next square building (21 metres by 24.5 metres) by a small yard 12 metres wide. The next two buildings were narrow (17.5 metres by 9 metres; 37 metres by 11 metres). They ranged down the side of the yard and butted against a building (24.5 metres by 8.5 metres) north of a walled yard (25 metres by 37 metres), itself attached to a large aisled barn (25 metres by 13 metres) at the south end of the west range. From here a courtyard wall continued 13.5 metres to a corner where it turned east for 27.5 metres and joined the back wall of the only building found on the south side of the site, another aisled barn (21.5 metres by 11 metres).

It seems clear that the site was deliberately placed on the line where a water table broke out as one or more springs and ran away downhill to the north. The eastern part of the site seems to have been concerned both with animals and with corn. From the north a large droveway entered the main farm and led into a series of enclosures associated with ponds. The arrangement of the enclosures and some entrances to them suggest animal control, the animals themselves being kept mainly out in the watered fields to the north. The east barn, however, was sited at the end of a track leading into the farm from the south. The track was narrow and would only have taken a cart or pack animals. The only corn-dryers found were in the three versions of the east barn. It was also from this end of the site that millstone fragments were

recovered. Presumably the major arable area of the farm was on the better drained land to the south, lying on the slowly rising slope.

These arrangements belong to the major re-organisation of the farm which probably took place in the latter part of the third century. There were few buildings at first, but as the farm prospered others were added until there was an almost continuous range along the north side of the main yard. The closing of the driveway does not necessarily imply that animal husbandry became less important; there were indications that the enclosures were re-sited outside the north range, but the stripped area did not extend far enough to make this entirely clear.

The area of the earliest occupation lay mainly outside the stripped area to the north-west. It was here that any Iron-Age occupation should have been located. It was from this area that the material of the later first century A.D. came.

No satisfactory traces of buildings earlier than those belonging to the late farm were located; but it is clear that there was at least one substantial timber building belonging to the second century, possibly demolished in the third to make way for the new developments. Fragments of its daub with a fine plaster finish were found in the deliberately filled ditches under the west barn and its courtyard to the north. It is clear, however, that the emphasis of second-century occupation had moved east to the west part of the stripped site and that the farm which we uncovered almost completely belonged essentially to the fourth century.

The almost complete absence of floor levels in any of the buildings makes identification of their functions difficult. The corn-dryers in the successive versions of the east barn would seem to indicate that in all three periods there the barn was given over to work concerned with corn. Of the other two barns, little can be said.

The other buildings which made up the north range also present problems. A roughly square structure (21 metres by 24.5 metres), which had a double portal leading in from the main yard, had evidently been floored. The rubbish suggests that there was some form of domestic occupation in it but, embarrassingly, there was no evidence for roof supports. The building next on the west, which was not wide enough to warrant internal roof supports, contained three carefully prepared rectangular pads (a fourth one could have been swept away by a furrow), which were in line, but not on the central axis of the building. It is possible to reconstruct this as a mill-house, but the evidence is entirely circumstantial.

No mention has been made of the living accommodation; for none was certainly identified, and, with the exception of the rubbish from the large square building, none can properly be deduced. The best preserved barn was on the south and this had a small room attached to its west end; unfortunately most of it had been ploughed away by a mediaeval furrow.

The date for the end of the Roman occupation is difficult. The coin sequence ends with Arcadius and the latest pottery assemblages are virtual repeats of the late corn-dryer filling and the barn destruction deposit at Great Casterton. It seems clear that the Roman occupation should be taken into the fifth century; but it also seems clear that by this time the farm, while the area of the lands under its control was not necessarily contracting, was either being run down (the east barn was greatly reduced and other buildings were being cut by late features) or was actually falling into disuse.

The relationship of the early fifth-century Saxon occupation on the site with these late phases is reasonably clear in physical terms; but what part the Saxons had in the apparent reduction of the scale of the farm buildings is almost certainly beyond reasonable argument. The Saxon occupation outlasted any Romanised presence, but seems not to last itself beyond the early years of the sixth century. This will be dealt with in *Durobrivae 5*, with an overall plan of the late Roman and Saxon features.

Orton Hall Farm – the Saxon Connection

by Donald Mackreth

There was a time when it was thought that Saxons shunned Roman buildings as works of evil forces. This view was to a large extent based upon the apparent lack of Saxon finds on late Roman sites. In recent years knowledge of Saxon domestic pottery has greatly increased and many late Roman sites with a Saxon presence are now known. Besides Orton Hall Farm there are at least four others in the Peterborough neighbourhood. Nevertheless, at Hall Farm it was a surprise to find not only the pottery, but also pits, hearths and post-holes belonging to pagan Saxons.

The plan in fig. 11 shows the whole of the excavated site, with features of all periods (*Durobrivae* 4, 1976, 24f.). The Saxon presence was found mainly on the east. There was a house (a) and traces of two others in the same enclosure. The enclosure ditch had been recut by the Saxons for their own use after the original Roman one had already received some Saxon pottery. The only *Grubenhaus*, or sunken floored hut, was found nearby (b). The main Saxon occupation was most probably on the south side of the site (c) where a Frisian barred comb and a wrist clasp were found as well as early Saxon pottery. Other Saxon features (d and e) occupied the west side of the site. Feature d. has a plan which is normally interpreted as a granary, while e. seems to have been a Saxon hut floor. At f. the Roman building had been replaced by one on wooden posts, which may be of Saxon date; but there was certain Saxon occupation further north (g). On the north side of the site (h) was a Saxon well with a fence near it.

From this brief description it can be seen that the Roman farm itself was largely left alone; yet it is inconceivable that it should not have been used. The answer may be that there was an agreed relationship between the earliest Saxons on the site and the local Romans. It is clear that there should have been some overlap with the Romans; for their pottery on the site carried on into the fifth century, while the Saxons seem to have been there almost from the beginning of the same century. The fifth-century barred comb has already been mentioned, but with it was found an early Saxon biconical pot in what seems to be a Romanising fabric as well as a piece of a Saxon mortarium. This, and some other pottery, suggests that the Saxons were familiar with Roman pottery still in use and were also familiar with the use of the characteristically Roman vessel, the mortarium.

The Saxon presence on the site seems to have come to an end at the end of the fifth century or in the early years of the sixth. From then on the site lay abandoned until discovered by Mr Hunting and his plough.

It has been fashionable for some years to call any such early Saxons mercenaries, *foederati* or *laeti*, quite often mixing the terms. *Foederati* were usually groups of men banded together as a fighting unit, while *laeti* were barbarian family groups, managed by Roman officers and given land in return for allowing their sons to be taken into the army as enforced recruits. In neither of these cases are the Saxons likely to have maintained sufficient social cohesion to have made their own pottery, and thin-section work on the pottery from Orton Hall Farm, and other sites in the East Midlands, suggests that some of it was made just outside Leicester.

In the late fourth and in the fifth century groups of tribes were allowed to settle inside the Empire in areas under the control of their native leaders. In the fifth century, certainly, they were settled under a convention known as *hospitalitas*, 'hospitality'. This usually applied to soldiers being billeted upon civilians. By extension, the system was used for land allotment to barbarian groups. They were given a set share of a Roman property, and this usually meant farm-buildings and implements and not just land. Under such circumstances it is possible that, after the formal break between Britain and the central government in A.D. 410, the British decided to seek protection through *hospitalitas*, offering land in return for defence.

Quite possibly, the myth of Hengist and Horsa may hide a much more realistic arrangement like this. In the event the Romano-British failed to keep hold of what is now England and the Saxons were not interested in the internal problems and history of Roman Britain.



Fig 11 Plan of the Roman and Saxon site at Hall Farm, Orton Longueville