

# EXCAVATIONS AT THE WIEND, WIGAN 1982-4

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## INTRODUCTION

Excavations at The Wiend, Wigan (SD 5833 0565) were conducted by a team funded by the Manpower Services Commission under the direction of GMAU. Four trenches were excavated over a period of twelve months in 1982-3, and a further trench in 1984 after demolition of the surrounding buildings (Fig 1).

The trenches were situated on and about the crest of the low hill rising above the River Douglas which formed the centre of Roman and Medieval Wigan. It was hoped therefore that excavations in the area would produce evidence of both periods. Trench 1 was opened first but was located almost

entirely within a recent cellar. Trenches 2, 3, 4 and 5 were all more or less truncated at their northern up-slope ends, although deposits survived to some depth at the southern down-slopes ends. The evidence suggests, therefore, a general tendency for the destruction of deposits on the hill-summit, but with a down-slope overburden up to 2m deep preserving earlier stratigraphy, and providing some scope for future fieldwork. The present report is an interim summary, pending full publication.

Two main periods of occupation prior to the 18th century were represented: the first relating to the Roman period, the second to the medieval. For both periods the excavations produced the first archaeo-

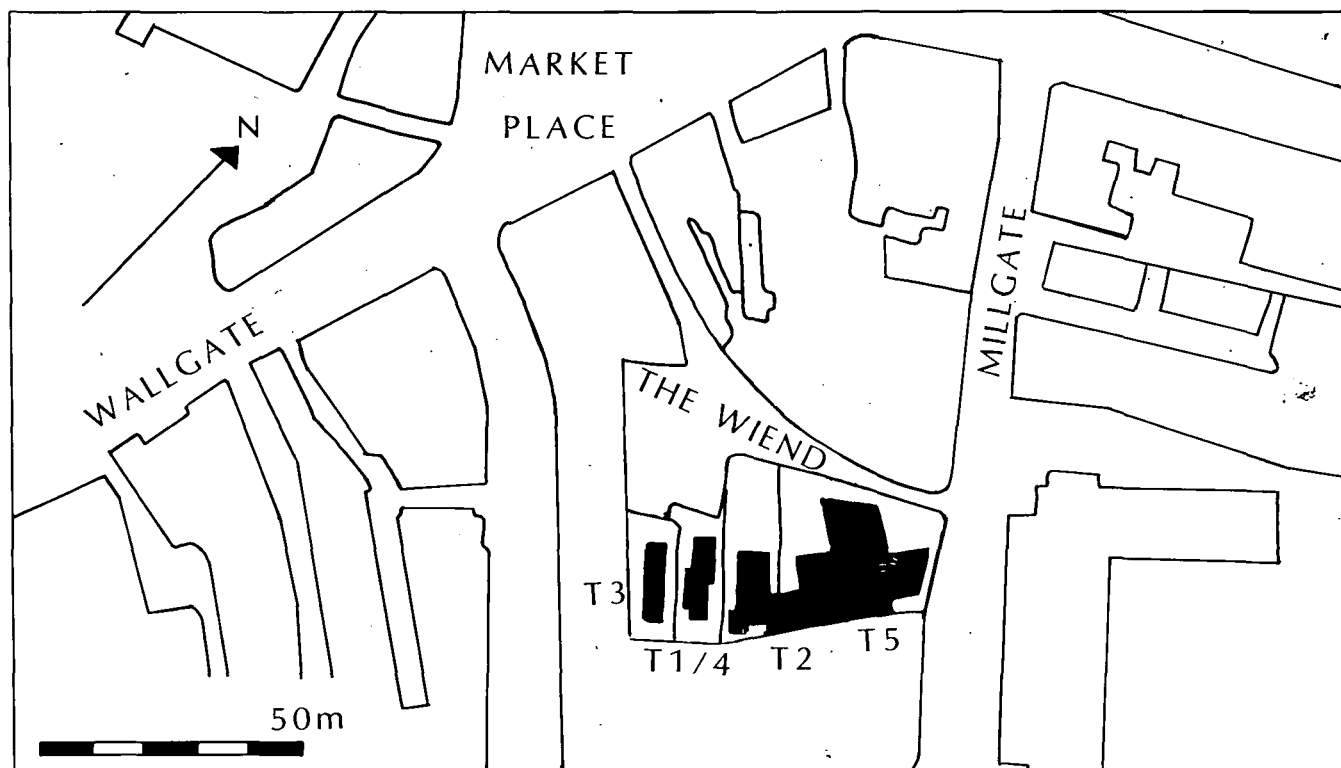


Fig 1 The Wiend : location plan

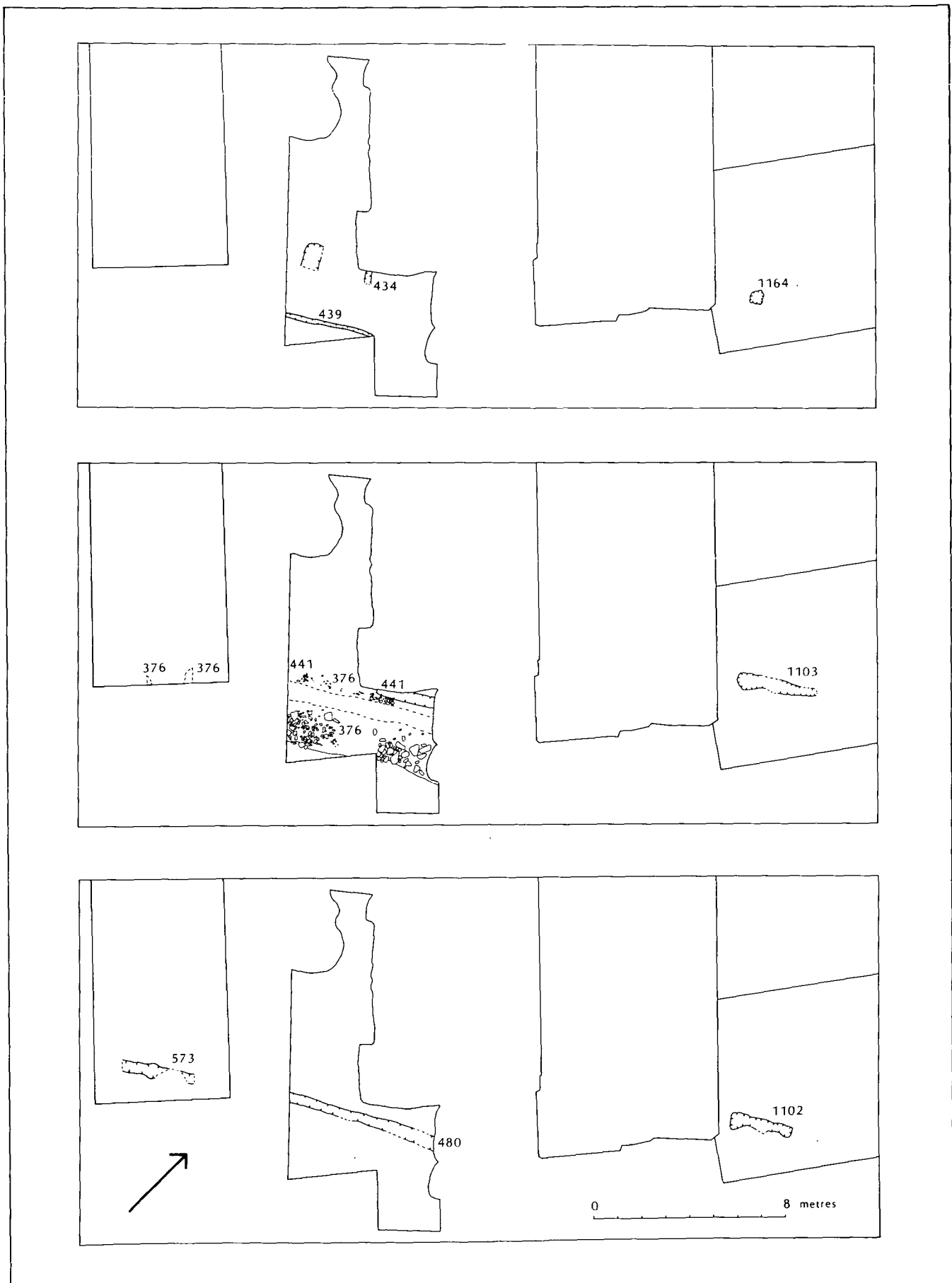


Fig 2 The Wiend : Roman phase I (top), IIA (centre) and IIB (bottom)

logical evidence ever recovered from the town.

### Phase I (Fig 2)

Little evidence for phase I was recovered, though a vertically-sided slot 439, c250mm wide by 100mm deep, was recorded running 4m south-west to north-east across trench 4. Two more substantial slots, 280mm wide by 230mm deep (434) and 750mm wide by 430mm deep (468), ran at right-angles to 439, and an isolated post-hole in trench 5 (1164) appeared to be of the same phase.

The differing sizes of the slots, and the lack of direct association between them, make any attempt at precise interpretation impossible, though some form of early structure on a south-west/north-east alignment would appear to be represented. Pottery from these deposits on initial examination give a date range of cAD70-120.

### Phase II

Within the second phase of development it was possible to distinguish three distinct sub-phases. For stratigraphical reasons most features were assigned to the last sub-phase, though many could have occurred within any of the three.

In phase IIA (Fig 2) a rough cobbled surface 376 was laid down, surviving in trenches 3 and 4. Made of gravel and cobbles in a sand matrix, it would seem to represent an outside surface, probably a road on a south-west/north-east alignment. Associated with it and parallel to its edge was a vertically-sided slot 441, 340mm deep and 550mm wide, whose size suggested the wall of a timber building fronting onto the 'road'.

Phase IIB and IIC followed swiftly upon one another and appear to represent parts of a single development. Firstly, in phase IIB (Fig 2), slot 441 was replaced by another slot 480/573 visible in trenches 3 and 4, serving probably as a foundation-trench. This slot, 450mm deep and tapering from 500mm to 340mm wide, was aligned as 441 but 300mm to the south-east, thereby cutting into the cobbled surface of the 'road'.

In phase IIC (Fig 3), slot 480/573 was expanded to a width of 690mm, though only 300mm deep. A series of post-holes, 170mm square and 150mm deep, was then inserted into the step thus formed on the north-west side of the slot. Parallel to 480, and 8.5m to the north-west, another slot 401 of similar dimensions was observed. Though much truncated by later activity it would appear to represent the foundation-trench for the north-west wall of the same building. A further slot 443, parallel to and midway between 480 and 401 was much shallower, being 500mm wide but only 120mm deep. This feature was associated with other equally-shallow slots running at right-angles to it and on either side. These features occurred in trenches 3 and 4, and together with 443, probably represent slots for floor-joists. In trench 5 two vertically-sided slots 1102 and 1103, up to 500mm deep and 500mm wide, were uncovered for a length over 3m. These were parallel to 480 but offset to the north-west. It is possible that 1103 represented a phase IIA beam-slot, with 1102 being the phase IIB rebuilding

(cutting post-hole 1164). Unfortunately very little stratification survives in the area to confirm or refute this interpretation, and only their south-west/north-east alignment ties them to the features of trenches 1-4.

Phases IIB and IIC appear to represent a large structure or series of structures, rebuilt in IIB when the cobbled surface went out of use, and modified or repaired in IIC, when it had dimensions of at least 8.5m by 24m. The lack of finds and destruction-debris from the structures would suggest their having been deliberately dismantled, and what pottery was recovered (dating from the late 1st to the early 2nd centuries AD) came mainly from neutral spreads of debris assigned stratigraphically to this phase. Some near-complete vessels however, were recovered from the fill of slot 1102.

### PHASE III

Phase III can be divided into three sub-phases and, though IIIA and IIIB were found only in trench 3 it is reasonable to suppose that, like IIIC, they were originally represented in all the trenches.

Phases IIIA and IIIC consisted of dumps of sandy material with occasional tile and daub fragments, and appear to be the remains of the clearing and levelling of the site after the phase II buildings were dismantled. Phase IIB, sandwiched between IIA and IIC, consisted of a single post-hole, 300mm square and 80mm deep, together with a patch of scorched clay and charcoal fragments (650mm across, though truncated by modern intrusions). This phase appears to be the remains of a hearth and temporary structure used during the dismantling of the phase II buildings. Finds from the phase, including a blue glass melon bead, date to the late 1st or early 2nd centuries AD.

### Phase IV (Fig 3)

Phase IV may be divided into two sub-phases, IVA and IVB, though in certain instances it was stratigraphically impossible to determine to which phase a feature belonged. In these cases the feature was assigned to the later sub-phase, IVB.

In trench 2, phase IVA was represented by a slot 244, 750mm wide and 300mm deep. In trench 3 another slot 536, 450mm wide and 90mm deep, ran north-west/south-east. These appear to represent new construction or reconstruction on the line of the phase II buildings: in one case a beam-slot and in the other a joist-slot. This would imply some element of continuity rather than complete abandonment, since at least some evidence of the original alignment must have survived at this stage.

In trenches 2 and 3, spreads of scorched clay with charcoal inclusions were also revealed. Severely truncated in places, they varied from 850mm to 1.7m in diameter, and in one case 567 occurred in a stratified layer. These, together with a spread of charcoal 1.2m across in trench 4 appear to represent a period of industrial activity. The scorched clay-areas all contained quantities of iron slag and cannel coal, and appear to have been hearths, while 569 seems to represent a pit used for some industrial process. It seems likely that some form

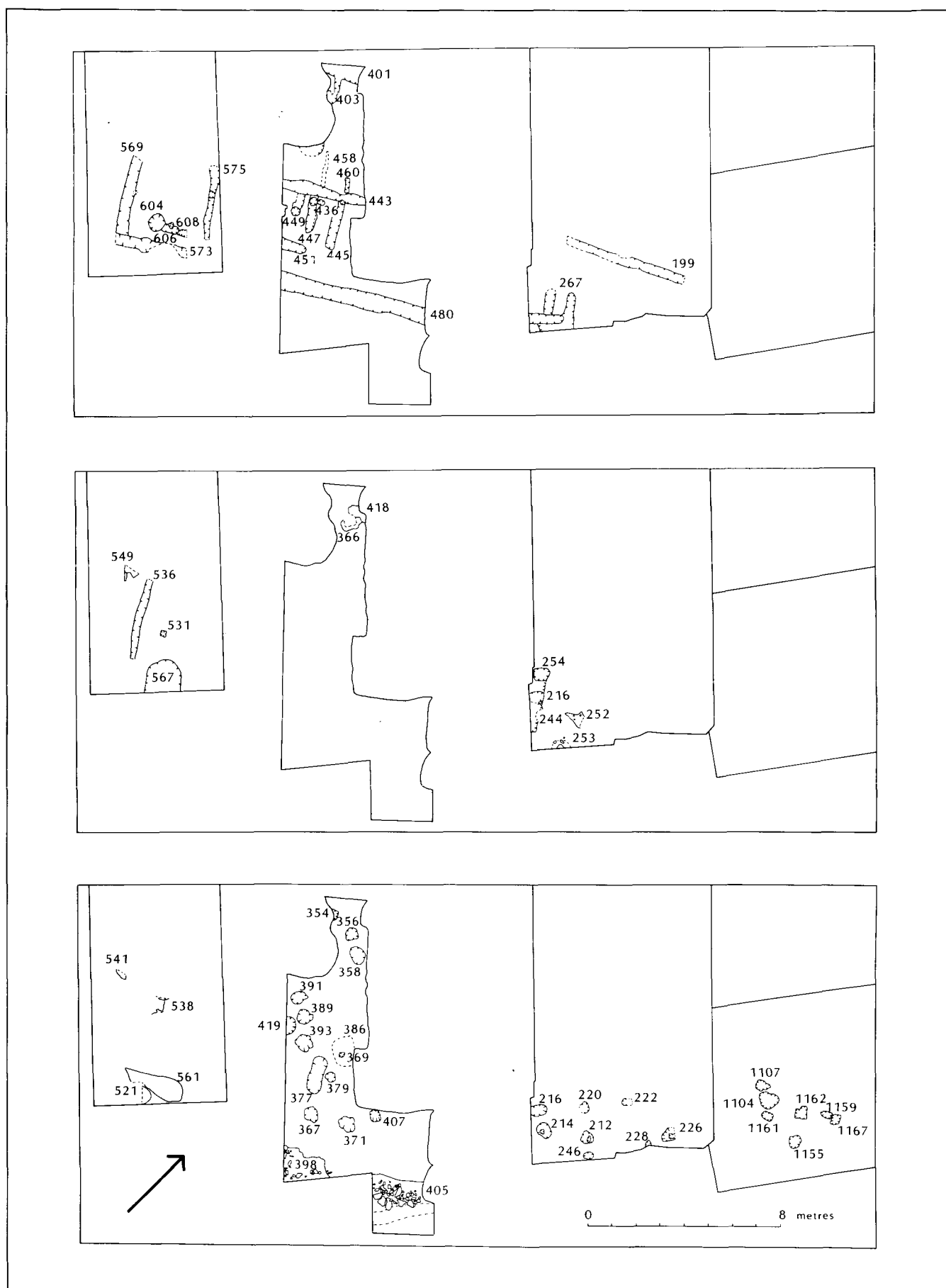


Fig 3 The Wiend : Roman phase IIC (top), IVA (centre) and IVB (bottom)

of metalworking took place on site, and although no occupation layers or related stratigraphy survive, and the 'hearths' do not always respect earlier structural features, the south-west/north-east alignment is still preserved. Only a few sherds of coarseware were recovered from this sub-phase and no dating could therefore be attempted.

Phase IVB was represented by various features, including post-holes, pits and clay spreads which, whilst being suggestive of occupation, could not be given a structural framework owing to their lack of associated occupation layers and apparently-random distribution pattern. In trench 2, numerous post-holes containing stone packing were revealed. These varied from 150mm to 600mm wide, and from 220mm to 400mm deep, and probably represented a structure or structures on the same south-west/north-east alignment noted in earlier phases.

Trench 3 contained four spreads of scorched clay, each with charcoal inclusions and incorporating flat stones, and varying from 500mm to 750mm in diameter. In addition a large pit 561, 2.5m long by 1m wide and 81mm deep, was assigned to this phase.

In trench 4, three areas 386, 398 and 405, similar to the scorched clay areas in trench 3 were uncovered, measuring up to 2.8m across. A large number of post-holes were also recorded, varying in width from 220mm to 850mm, and in depth from 150mm to 300mm. Owing to lack of stratification, it is possible that these post-holes could be assigned to IVA.

The clay spreads appear to be the remains of small hearths 508, 521, 538, 541, 386 or larger hearths 398, 405, all of which (as in the IVA spreads) contained quantities of iron slag, cannel coal and charcoal. In the case of 398 and 405, much larger quantities of such material were recovered.

In trench 5 a number of post-holes, similar to those described above, were excavated. They varied from 400mm to 900mm in width and from 140mm to 400mm in depth, and could be assigned to either IVA or IVB. Certain of the post-holes were cut into the phase II beam-slots or were aligned with them, and may be the result of a rebuilding (or re-use of certain elements) of the phase II building. Once again this cannot be proved owing to a lack of stratification.

As in IVA in IVB, industrial activity must have been carried out using iron ore, cannel coal and wood or charcoal, although here the size of certain of the hearths suggests a much larger scale of operation. Sherds of coarseware, tile fragments and daub were excavated from most of the features of IVB, whilst some Samian Ware was recovered from the larger hearths. A date not later than the mid 2nd century AD is therefore suggested for this sub-phase.

## PERIOD 2

Period 2 was the period of medieval occupation. The only surviving feature of interest was a timber-lined well or cistern 1151 (Fig 4). This consisted of a circular pit over 2m in diameter and 3m deep, cut into the natural sand and clay, into which a

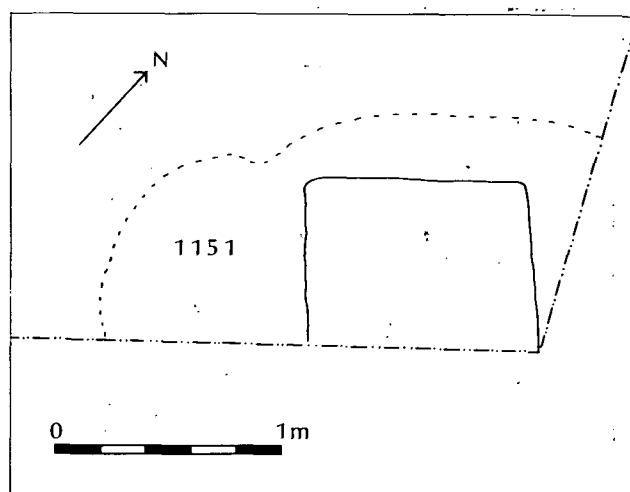


Fig 4 The Wiend : medieval well or cistern

square timber framework had been inserted. Four vertical posts, 100mm square in section and with sharp, fire-hardened tips (Fig 5), were driven into the subsoil to form a 1m square. These retained a wall of planks, 1m by 180mm and 20mm thick, laid horizontally. All the timber used was oak, and it is hoped that this will provide a dendrochronology date. Three virtually complete earthenware vessels (and fragments of several others) recovered from primary fill suggest a date somewhere around the mid 13th century for the use of the cistern.

After the cistern went out of use, the entire site was covered by a single layer, although this was much disturbed by later intrusions. Although it contained a certain amount of slag and some abraded pottery of medieval and Roman date, no significant quantity of demolition rubble was recorded. The layer appears to represent a garden or ploughsoil, developed from the later middle ages through to at least the 17th century. Very substantial post-medieval features were excavated throughout the site, but are not included in the present report.

## DISCUSSION

Evidence for the first occupation on the site is too limited for conclusions to be drawn. However, the second phase of occupation revealed substantial structures and cobbled surfaces. The structures of Phase II appear to have had a relatively short life-span, and were replaced in rapid succession, possibly implying a flimsy construction. However, the evidence suggests that they were in fact large timber structures (8m wide by up to 20m long), with large sill- or sleeper-beams (c500mm square), and floors supported by less substantial joists. The implication of this apparent contradiction is that the structures were erected for a specific purpose, and subsequently dismantled when that purpose had been fulfilled. The evidence of the pottery assemblage, and the deliberate dismantling of a viable building strongly suggest military activity.

Although only longitudinal features without return walls were observed, there was sufficient evidence to believe that the structures represented were of a common Roman type. This consisted of a building 2-3 times as long as it was broad, with an open end or loading-bay door, and occasionally with small

rooms at the opposite end. Similar structures have been observed at Corbridge on the Red House site (Hanson et al 1979) where they appear to have formed part of an Antonine supply-base. These structures were comparatively short-lived, and appear to have been associated with a particular phase of the Roman advance into Caledonia. Their overall dimensions (6-11 by 15m) accord with those found at Wigan. At Walton-le-Dale, similar structures of comparable date were uncovered. Their overall dimensions (7m by 21m) were again roughly similar to the examples at Corbridge and Wigan. The buildings at Walton-le-Dale showed signs that some sort of industrial activity was being carried out within them, though no evidence of such activity was stratigraphically-linked with the structures at Corbridge or Wigan.

In London, examples of this type of structure, dating from the 2nd century AD and constructed in brick, have been excavated along the Roman waterfront (Bateman and Milne 1983), while the well-known Severan marble plan of the city of Rome (Rickman 1971, 108-21) shows entire areas of such buildings, in one case clearly labelled *Horrea Lolliana*. In this context 'horrea' should perhaps be translated as storehouse or warehouse. These horrea can be compared with those found in Roman forts, usually identified as 'granaries'. The latter are much more substantial, and represent permanent storage points, whereas the structures discussed here should perhaps be considered trans-shipment points, or distribution depots. The implications of such structures at Wigan are either that a local product was collected there for onward transportation, or that a product transported from elsewhere was transferred there from one form of transport to another such as from water to land transport, or from bulk carriage to local distribution.

No accurate date could be established for these structures, and so it is impossible to link them with known historical events. Nevertheless the general date-range of the pottery suggests that the structures may be associated with the extension of direct Roman control under Agricola, and possibly with the consolidation of military power in the north by his successors during the late 1st and early 2nd centuries AD.

In Phase III it appears that the site was temporarily abandoned and the Phase II buildings deliberately dismantled. No evidence of organic material was observed in any of the slots, and the associated occupation surfaces were destroyed or removed prior to abandonment. The limited amount of destruction-debris, and the ephemeral features associated with this phase suggest a period of little activity.

Phase IV saw the site being used for some type of industrial process, at first on a small and then on a large scale, with some kind of structure remaining in use throughout. The smaller hearths, which appear to have been little more than fireplaces, may have been used for welding or for repair and maintenance smithing. The larger hearths, with flat stones incorporated into clay bases, seem to be the remains of bloomery furnaces. It is likely that these would have been bowl furnaces, as they are generally small and indicative of low-level tech-



Plate 1 The Wiend : medieval well

nology (Cleere 1972, 11). However, not enough of the furnaces or their superstructure survived to determine whether they were domed or shaft furnaces, and whether there was provision for slag-tapping. As a result, it is impossible at this stage to determine the function of the industrial phase. No material datable to later than the mid 2nd century was recovered from this phase, although chance finds of the later Roman period have been found in the Wigan area (Chapter 3). In addition, similar sites to the north at Walton-le-Dale and to the south at Wilderspool (Thompson 1965) have yielded material of late Roman date. The later history of Roman Wigan remains an unknown quantity.

#### APPENDIX: THE POTTERY: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

by F Jolley

##### Roman (Fig 6)

The Roman material appears very similar to that from the Northgate site, Manchester: the majority being of late 1st and 2nd century date. A high proportion of the assemblage is of orange- and buff-coloured Severn Valley-type Ware, with a smaller percentage of Samian Black-Burnished, Grey and cream-coloured wares. There is a high number of linkages among the assemblage, indicating a relatively low number of vessels. The quantity and type of sherds recovered suggests a typical military site, with a relatively short period of occupation. The main forms present are narrow-

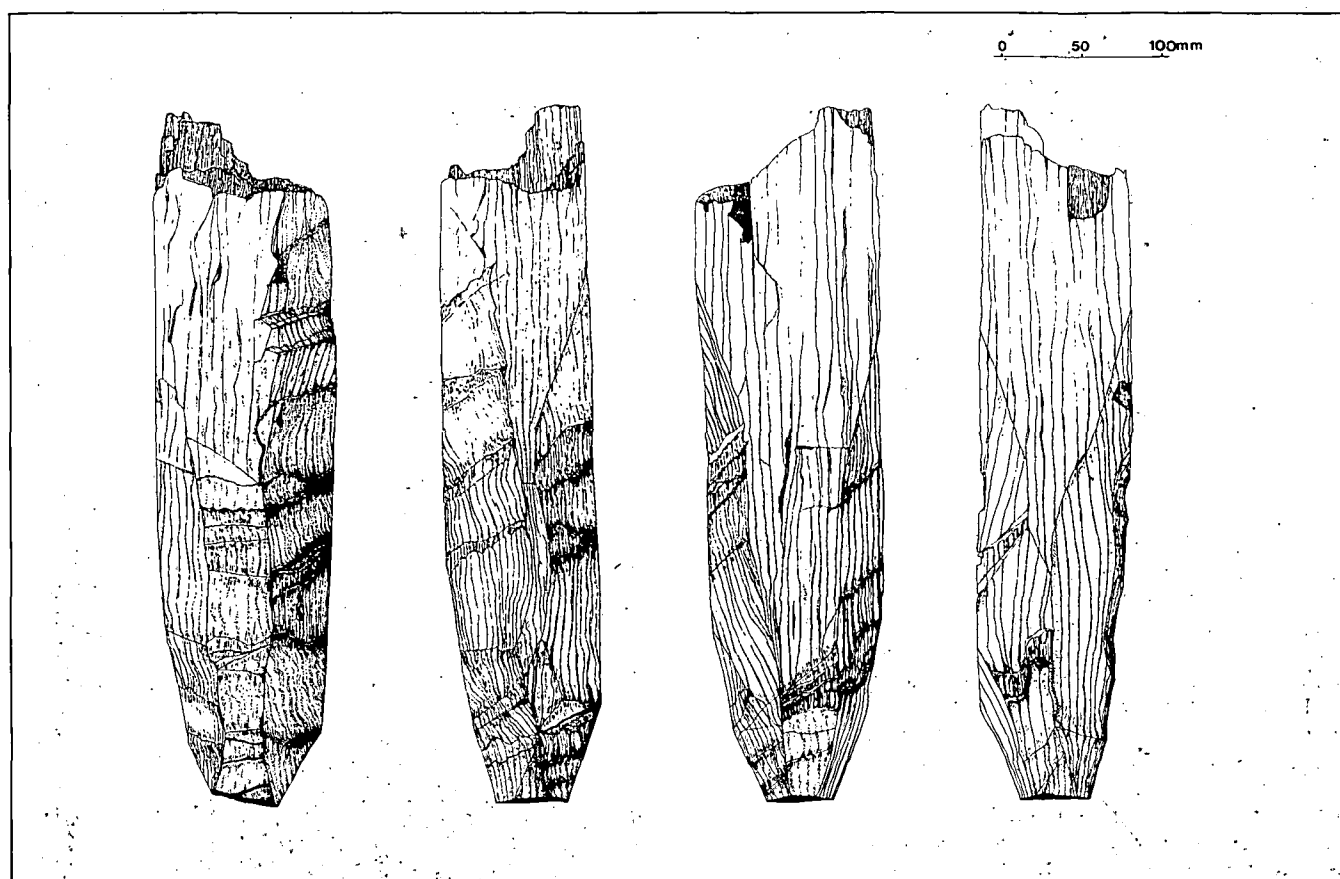


Fig 5 The Wiend : timber posts from the medieval well

necked storage jars, flagons and wide-mouthed jars, with small quantities of amphorae and mortaria. Box- and roof-tile occurs throughout the deposits. No 14 is suggestive of kiln-furniture, which may indicate a kiln in the vicinity of the site. All vessels illustrated are from context 1102, except No 13, which is from context 1148.

- 1 Jar, orange-buff fabric with grey core.
- 2 Jar, as 1.
- 3 Jar, as 1.
- 4 Jar, as 1.
- 5 Wide-mouthed jar, orange fabric with traces of cream slip; evidence of handle which has broken off.
- 6 Jar, fabric as 5.
- 7 Bowl, orange sandy fabric.
- 8 Flagon, orange sandy fabric with traces of cream slip.
- 9 Small flagon/flask, orange fabric with brown slip.
- 10 Flagon, fabric as 8.
- 11 Small flagon/jar, fabric as 5.
- 12 Flagon/jar handle, fabric as 8.

- 13 Mortarium, soft orange fabric, few inclusions; damaged illegible rim-stamp.
- 14 ? Kiln furniture in orange fabric.

Not illustrated:

Samian Ware: 1 rim, 7 base, 45 body sherds; the majority are small undecorated sherds, though there is one large decorated sherd each of rim, base and body.

Black-Burnished Ware: 8 rim, 5 base, 65 body sherds; one body sherd decorated with lattice design.

Grey ware: 8 rim, 4 base, 52 body sherds.

Cream-coloured Ware: 5 rim, 1 base, 30 body sherds.

Orange-buff fabric: 53 rim, 39 base, 609 body sherds; varying in shade and hardness, in part due to acid subsoil; approximately 50% could be classified as soft, 10% had a grey core, less than 10% had a cream or brown slip.

Coarse, hard gritty fabric: 17 rim, 3 base, 93 body sherds; varying in colour.

Medieval (Fig 7)

The medieval pottery appears to date from no earlier than the 13th century. The main forms represented are jugs and drinking vessels, examples of which were found at the bottom of the timber-lined well or cistern (1151). All vessels illustrated are from context 1151.

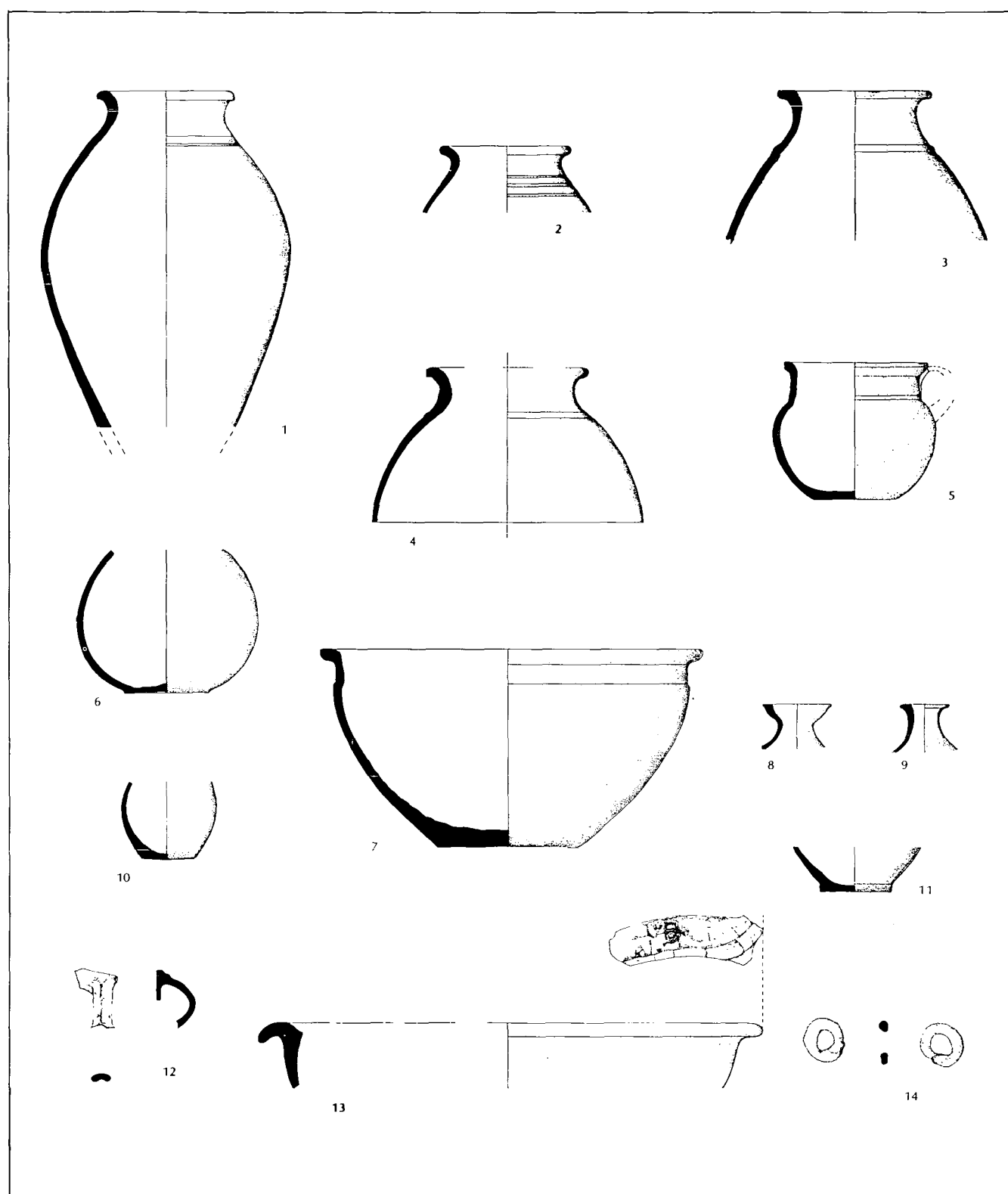


Fig 6 The Wiend : Roman pottery

- 21 Jug, orange fabric with grey core; exterior patches of green glaze on upper body and shoulder, horizontal incised bands on shoulder.
- 22 Jug, orange-buff fabric; grey interior with orange patches; exterior green glaze on upper body, horizontal bands of rouletting on shoulder.

- 23 Cooking pot, buff fabric with grey core; traces of indeterminate glaze on exterior.

Not illustrated:

- 27 rim, 17 base, 3 handle, 358 body sherds; almost all in a hard orange-buff fabric with a grey core; some with exterior pale green glaze and a few with incised decoration; probably



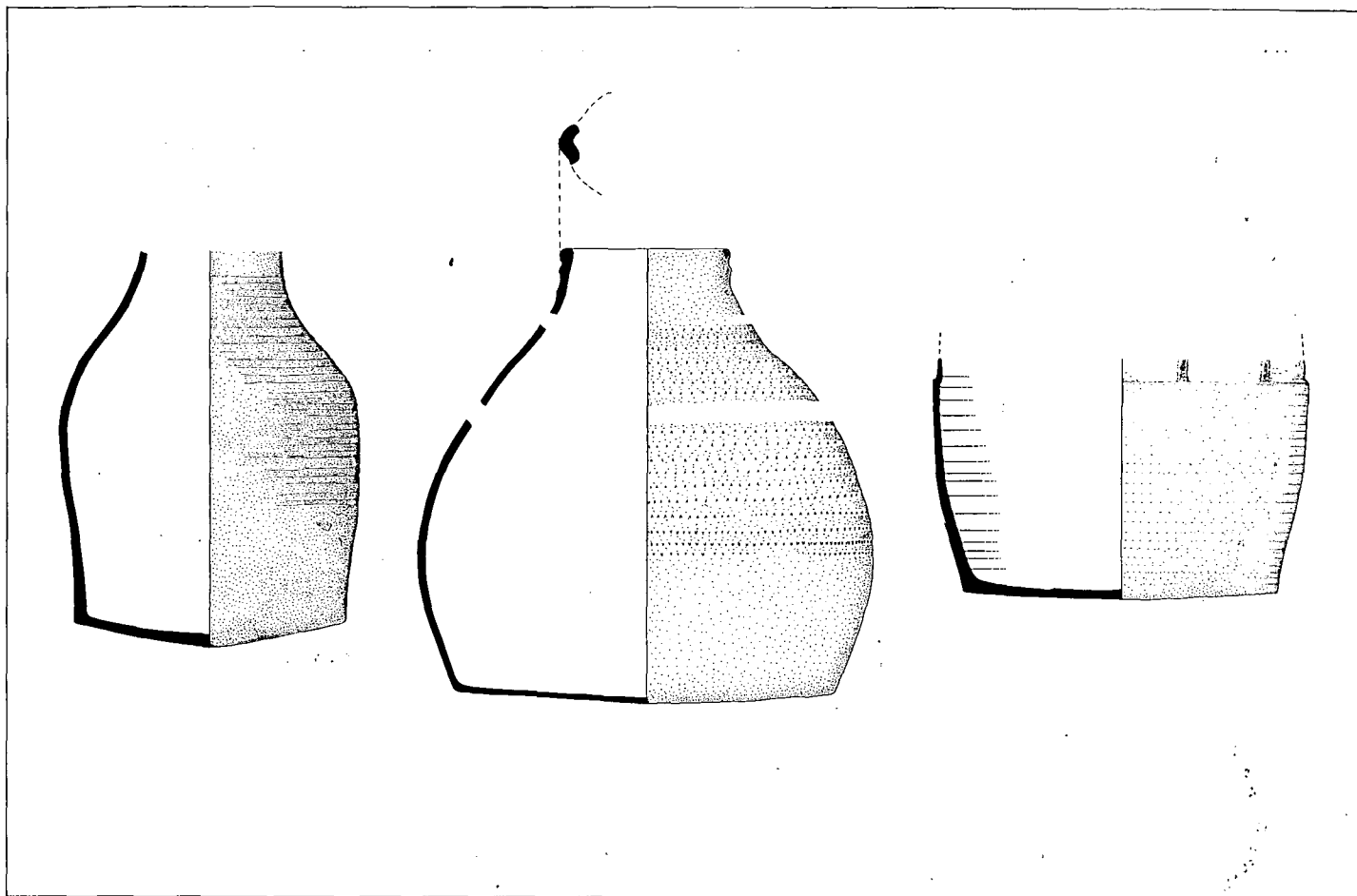


Fig 7 The Wiend : medieval pottery

represent a very small number of jugs and kitchen vessels.

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