

Medieval and later settlement around Chassenon (Charente), France: fieldwork in 2012

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This report provides an update on the second season of fieldwork on medieval and later settlement in the environs of *Cassinomagus*, one of the largest and best preserved Roman rural sanctuaries in western France. A note on the first season's work along with further information on the background and context of the project appeared in *MSR* 26 (Turner and Webster 2011a). Our work forms a small component of a *projet collectif de recherche* (PCR) involving over 10 teams, and coordinated by Gabriel Rocque, Sandra Sicard and the Conseil Général de la Charente (see <http://www.cassinomagus.fr/>). As in 2011, we used 1m² test pits to search for evidence of earlier occupation, a method that is otherwise untested in currently inhabited settlements in France. More detailed reports on our work to date are deposited in the archive of the Conseil Général's research centre at Chassenon (Turner and Webster 2011b; Turner *et al.* 2012).

In summer 2012 our fieldwork focussed on three settlements in the commune of Chassenon, namely Villegoueix and Champonger (where we also did fieldwork in 2011) and Château de la Brousse. At Villegoueix, we added just one test-pit in the centre of the village to the four excavated in 2011 (in parcel no. 841). Many sherds of post-medieval pottery and glass

were deposited in contexts above a likely well that could not be excavated below a depth of *c.* 1.2 m for safety reasons.

Champonger

Champonger is a small hamlet located on an east–west road 300 m to the west of the Château de la Brousse and 1.2 km south of the Roman sanctuary at *Cassinomagus*. The modern road from Chassenon comes in to the hamlet from the north, but this was built in the mid-20th century. Previously, the road into the hamlet met to the *chemin de Chabanais* *c.* 275 m to the west. In the early 19th century, there were no large buildings in the village on the plots to the south of the road, though the plots themselves are depicted on the cadastral map of 1833 (available online via: <http://www.archives16.fr/>). Furthermore, most of the buildings in the hamlet appear have been altered substantially since this time with the exceptions of the large house and barn on its eastern edge, and the well-house and its washing pool (Turner and Webster 2011a, 63–5).

At Champonger our team excavated eight test-pits in August 2012 (Fig. 1; test-pits 1–5 were excavated in 2011). Two test-pits, 6 and 7, were located behind



Figure 1 Champonger: location of test-pits.

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Figure 2 Test-pit excavation in 2012: parcel 327 at Champonger, looking east towards the small château at la Brousse.

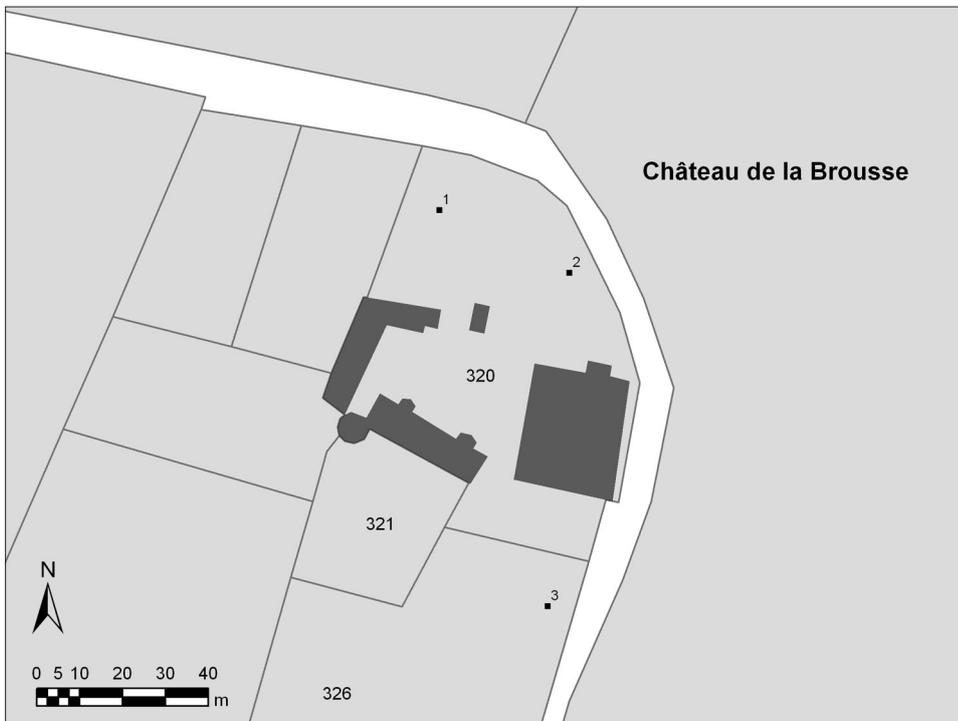


Figure 3 Château de la Brousse: location of test pits.

the houses of the northern row in parcel 403. One was located in parcel 410, south of the road (9). Two were located approximately mid-way between the northern and southern edges of each of the parcels numbered 411 (10) and 415 (11). Three (8, 12, 13) were located in the north-west corner of parcel 327, near to an apparent earthwork thought to represent the former eastern extent of the village (Fig. 2).

The key results of the fieldwork at Champonger can be summarised as follows:

- A significant amount of medieval pottery was recovered indicating occupation across the site during throughout the Middle Ages, with the greatest

concentration of finds south of the road in test-pits 9, 10 and 11.

- Roman finds in the western part of the village (near the well) also suggest settlement during the Roman period, both north and south of the road.
- Test-pits located downhill and towards the back of the plots south of the road – where the soil tended to be deeper – produced better results.

Château de la Brousse

The Château de la Brousse is first recorded in the documentary sources in 1291 (Berland 1993: 41–2). It is a small rural manor house whose standing fabric

mostly dates to the 16th and 17th centuries. The house is surrounded by outbuildings which are mainly 17th century and later in date, though fragments of the medieval courtyard may be preserved in later buildings. One medieval tower is incorporated into the south-west corner of the house, and the remains of another are visible half way along the south facade. Historic map evidence (e.g. the 1833 cadastral map) shows this second tower was still standing in the early 19th century. Limited excavations in advance of building work in 2010 produced Roman and medieval ceramics (Rocque 2010).

We excavated three test-pits at la Brousse in 2012, two in the gardens to the north of the house and one to the south-east (Fig. 3). Finds included fragments of Roman and medieval brick, tile and pottery. The majority of the pottery sherds recovered were Roman and medieval, including late-medieval green-glazed Saintonge ware. Several sherds of possible early medieval date hint at the chance that occupation here pre-dates the first documentary record of the site and that it could have continued from the Roman period into the Middle Ages.

Conclusion

The fieldwork undertaken in 2012 reinforced the conclusions of the 2011 season. We showed again that test pit excavation can be used successfully in the study area to identify concentrations of ceramics and indeed archaeological features. Evidence of occupation in the Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods was recovered from the hamlets of Villegoueix, Champonger, Longeas and Château de la Brousse. Areas with deeper soil, often towards the back of occupation plots in the centre of historic villages, seem to preserve a greater variety and quantity of ceramic evidence.

Overall the historic settlements of Villegoueix, la Brousse and Champonger produced most evidence for

medieval occupation. This has included parts of standing buildings, archaeological features, and dense scatters of medieval ceramics. Re-used Roman building materials were also identified in a number of historic buildings, particularly small, dressed blocks of Chassenon impactite from the Roman complex at *Cassinomagus*.

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