

**CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK
Union Railways (South) Ltd**

Project Area 420

**THURNHAM ROMAN VILLA, THURNHAM, KENT
ARC THM 98**

**DETAILED ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS
INTERIM REPORT
FINAL**

Contract S/400/SP/0009 P482B

**Oxford Archaeological Unit
31st August 1999**

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**Oxford Archaeological Unit
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31st August 1999**

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Location and specification

- 1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited (URS) to undertake detailed archaeological investigation at the site of Thurnham Roman Villa to the south-west of Thurnham village, near Maidstone, Kent (Figure 1). This work formed part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of the construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL).
- 1.1.2 The main site occupied a strip of land *c.* 3 ha in extent (Figure 2), adjacent to the eastbound carriage of the M20, between Thurnham Lane and Honeyhills Wood (URL grid point 59960 37110 and NGR grid point TQ 79954 57111). Prior to the excavation the land was open pasture. A series of six trenches were also excavated inside Honeyhills Wood (ARCHHW99).
- 1.1.3 The majority of the site (*c.* 2.2 ha) was specified as strip, map and sample. The area of the Thurnham Roman Villa Scheduled Ancient Monument (*c.* 0.8 ha) and the trenches in Honeyhills Wood, were specified as detailed excavation. The excavations took place between 2nd November 1998 and 18th June 1999.

1.2 Geology and Topography

- 1.2.1 The site lies close to the foot of the North Downs, on Gault Clay with localised areas of Chalk Head. A variable drift deposit of yellowish brown silty clay and flints covered the solid geology to varying depths.
- 1.2.2 Much of the site occupied low-lying ground extending north-west from Thurnham Lane (69.60 m OD). At the mid-point of the site the ground rises to a plateau (76.50 m OD), upon which the villa complex is situated. The villa is partly enclosed to the north and west by Honeyhills Wood.

1.3 Background

- 1.3.1 Thurnham Roman Villa (SAM KE 299) is among the best-known villas in Kent, with a history of previous investigation by antiquarians and archaeologists. A large part of the site was destroyed by construction of the Maidstone by-pass (now the M20), following excavations in 1958. Most of the surviving portion of the scheduled area falls within the CTRL corridor. The project also affects the area immediately to the south of the medieval moated manor of Corbier Hall (SAM KE 309), although in this case the scheduled area lies outside the land take for the CTRL.
- 1.3.2 The villa was first ‘recorded’ in 1833 during preparation of the land for hop cultivation, when it was recorded that ‘the pavements and foundations of a considerable Roman mansion were uncovered’. Following the initial discovery the location was repeatedly mis-stated to such an extent that when a Roman building was encountered during 1932 it was at first thought to be a new find. Paul Ashbee carried out trench excavations in 1933 of what was realised to be the ‘Roman mansion’, revealing the line of several walls and remnants of *opus signinum* floors.
- 1.3.3 Further open area excavations were undertaken by Elizabeth Pirie at the southern end of the villa building in 1958 (Area A) in advance of construction for the Maidstone By-pass. Two main phases of construction were recorded, the later phase including the addition of three apses with *opus signinum* and sand floors. The

remains of a second, less substantial stone building were also discovered, c. 50 m to the south-east of the villa house (Area B).

- 1.3.4 The site of Corbier Hall, which lies immediately to the north of CTRL corridor, has also been the subject of 19th century antiquarian interest. In 1862 Sir George Hampson ‘laid bare what appears to have been the lower story of the hall of a mansion called Corbie’s Hall’. In addition to revealing the cellar a note was made of the considerable traces of a moat on one side and the presence of a small building, ‘probably a dovecote’, which was removed without record the previous year.
- 1.3.5 The evidence from these 19th and 20th century intrusions and excavations formed the basis of the CTRL Environmental Assessment for the Thurnham area. Aerial photographs were commissioned in 1990 as part of the assessment, amplifying the plan of the villa building examined in 1933. The presence of an adjacent aisled building and other potential features was confirmed by a geophysical survey of the villa area in 1995. A further geophysical survey was conducted on the site of Corbier Hall in 1996.
- 1.3.6 OAU undertook an evaluation of the site in late 1996. This exposed the wall footings of both the villa and the aisled building. Surviving stratigraphy was encountered in association with each building. No intact surfaces or floors were found, suggesting that these features have been plough-damaged in recent years. Adjacent trenches to the east also provided evidence of other structures with ditches, pits, cobbled spreads and building debris all present. The pottery was nearly all dateable to the 1st and 2nd century AD, with a pre-conquest element almost certainly present. No medieval remains were encountered to the south of Corbier Hall, although the line of the moat, which had been levelled in the 1950s, was revealed.
- 1.3.7 The *CTRL Assessment of Historic and Cultural Effects* (1994) identified a series of low earthworks in Honeyhills Wood. These were surveyed by the OAU in 1998, and were subject to trenching work in 1999, which ran concurrently with the main mitigation works on the adjacent villa site. The largely negative results of the trenching demonstrate that Roman occupation did not extend into Honeyhills Wood, and strongly suggest that the wood was in existence when the Iron Age settlement and later villa complex were established. The western boundary ditch of the settlement enclosure closely follows the modern edge of the woodland. The earthworks in the wood, which do not form a clear pattern, were very shallow and were not associated with subsoil features. Insufficient artefactual material was recovered to indicate their date of origin.

2 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

2.1 Site Summary (Figures 2 and 3)

2.1.1 The investigation uncovered evidence for a continuous sequence of late Iron Age and Roman occupation spanning the 1st century BC to the 4th century AD (c.100 BC – 350 AD), mostly concentrated within the Scheduled Ancient Monument boundary at the north-western end of the site. The few prehistoric features, and the medieval ditches and other outlying features associated with Corbier Hall, were scattered over the low-lying south-eastern part of the site.

Prehistoric

2.1.2 Evidence of the earliest activity on site was generally sparse and represented by few securely dated features. Of these, a large ramped waterhole, located 75 m west of Thurnham Lane, produced a large bronze needle and a small bronze rapier, dateable on stylistic grounds to the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1750 BC – 1150 BC). Several flint flakes and sherds of flint tempered pottery were recovered from the lower fills of the feature. A number of distinctive pits, filled with burnt flint and charcoal and scattered about the south-eastern end of the site, are potentially of later prehistoric origin, although this could not be proved conclusively. The remains of a cremation placed in a shallow pit and sealed by a medieval soil may also be of later prehistoric date.

2.1.3 Struck flint was present across the site, mainly as residual finds in later contexts or collected from the spoil heaps. In addition, a sparse scatter of *in situ* struck flint was present on the surface of the pre-Roman soil preserved beneath the villa layers.

Late Iron Age (c. 100 BC – 43 AD)

2.1.4 Otherwise, the earliest evidence for permanent occupation on the site comprised a sub-rectangular, pre-Roman Iron Age settlement enclosure, with traces of two penannular house gullies, one possible circular posthole building and two four-post structures. The enclosure was located adjacent to Honeyhills Wood and underlying the Roman villa complex. Occupation of the enclosure probably extended from c.100 - 50 BC into the early post-conquest period (c. 43 - 60 AD), and seems to have been immediately preceded by primary woodland clearance.

Early Roman (c. 43 AD – 100 AD)

2.1.5 A small ‘proto-villa’ house appears to have been constructed in two phases, probably shortly after the Roman conquest. Only the rear portion of the proto-villa foundations survived intact, preserved where a corridor of the later villa was built on top of it. Here beams were set within shallow foundation trenches defining three central rooms, with intact floor levels and wings at either end. Quantities of thin, painted plaster were recovered from the compacted silt and clay floor surfaces and the in-filled beam trench.

2.1.6 The proto-villa was built outside the western boundary of the Iron Age settlement, but followed the same alignment as the Iron Age enclosure ditch. Its construction resulted in a major remodelling of the site, including the replacement of some of the earlier boundary ditches, and an expansion of the main occupation area to the north-west. A new north-western boundary, consisting of a timber palisade or fence line and a substantial ditch, was established against the edge of Honeyhills Wood, (probably in the late 1st or 2nd century AD). Trenching inside the wood has revealed no evidence for Iron Age or Roman occupation, although a series of shallow earthworks are potentially of prehistoric date. This strongly supports the suggestion

that the wood is of ancient origin, and effectively defines the limits of the villa complex to the north and west. The south-eastern boundary ditch of the Iron Age enclosure was recut on a new line and continued in use as the boundary of the villa complex.

- 2.1.7 A possible temple structure, with shallow drystone foundations, was constructed on the south-east boundary of the enclosure, and may be contemporary with the proto-villa phase. The possible temple was first investigated during the 1958 excavations (Area B) and was then interpreted as a double-roomed ancillary building. The current excavations have clearly shown that these remains were part of a larger structure with an almost square plan.

Middle Roman (c. 100 AD – 250 AD)

- 2.1.8 Further development followed at the end of the 1st century AD with the construction of a larger, stone-built villa, directly behind the proto-villa. The proto-villa must have been demolished at that time or immediately thereafter. The foundations of the new building were constructed from ragstone blocks and flint nodules, packed in alternating layers with clay, and deepened where they crossed over the line of former ditches, to provide firm standing for a probable two-storey building. A wing was included in the primary construction at the northern end. A sunken oven in the south-western room represents the only internal feature associated with the primary structure.
- 2.1.9 The villa complex continued to develop in the early 2nd century AD. The main building was expanded by the successive addition of forward projecting wings and a corridor to the front. A large aisled building was constructed over the line of the now-defunct north-eastern Iron Age enclosure boundary and substantial fence-like boundaries were erected around the perimeter of the villa complex. A single child inhumation in a stone-lined grave, accompanied by two early 2nd century pottery vessels, was placed between the rear of the villa and the boundary line marking the edge of Honeyhills Wood.
- 2.1.10 The aisled building was supported on twelve massive postholes, with shallow flint nodule foundations for its outer walls. There was a room at the western end of the building, which had a neatly constructed oven at one end and a crushed tufa floor. A deposit of ash surrounded the oven and sealed the floor surface. A stone-lined well surrounded by a cobbled surface was located immediately to the north-west of the building.
- 2.1.11 A subsidiary area of early Roman activity was located at the foot of the slope to the south-east of the villa complex, outside the enclosed area. It may have been used for agricultural purposes since the 1st century AD. In the early 2nd century a large 14-post timber structure, probably an agricultural building, was constructed in this area. This had both interior and exterior rough cobbled surfaces, with drainage gullies around its perimeter and a central channel for draining the interior. At a later date this area included corndriers and a stone-lined well.
- 2.1.12 Access to the villa enclosure was firmly laid out by this time, by a cobbled trackway approaching from the east.
- 2.1.13 Structural additions to the villa continued later in the 2nd century AD, with a range of rooms added to the rear of the main building. The aisled building remained in use, as did the ‘temple’ structure, which required repairs to its interior surfacing. The fence line demarcating the south-eastern side of the villa complex was replaced by a similarly constructed fence, set 2 m further east and continuing past the end of the aisled building (posthole alignment 10980).

- 2.1.14 By the early 3rd century AD the main villa building had a fully developed winged corridor plan. A large room was added to the north-eastern end at this time, and the 1958 excavations indicate that the bath suite was attached to its south-western side at a similar date. The 14-post structure, outside the enclosed area to the south-east, was demolished and a corn-drier was built in its place, re-using tufa blocks.

Later Roman (c. 250 AD – 410 AD)

- 2.1.15 The final period of occupation on the site saw the decline of the villa complex in the later 3rd century. The temple structure was demolished or collapsed, in-filling ditch 12545 with *tegulae* and *imbrices*. The villa house saw changes in the character of occupation, as one of the central rooms was used intensively as an iron smithy, leaving behind the traces of metal-working hearths and associated debris. The 3rd century metal-working deposits lay directly upon the 1st century backfilling and levelling deposits. This may suggest that wooden plank floors were used during the primary occupation of the villa, thus explaining the lack of early floor or occupation deposits. Alternatively, any earlier occupation deposits and floor levels may have been cleared out when the smithy was established.
- 2.1.16 The aisled building also appears to have fallen out of use by the start of the 4th century, as sterile silts accumulated over the occupation deposits, and one of the stone-lined wells became silted to the extent that it would no longer have provided a usable water source. In spite of the decline, some attempt seems to have been made to maintain the well by the corndrier as a water source. The stone lining had a succession of stakes placed around its interior circumference, with organic material packed behind the stakes and into the stones in an attempt to prolong the life of the well. These are the latest recognisable Roman activities on site, although several coins of Constantine were present in the uppermost fills of defunct features, such as the silted well and soil layers, which attest to some level of 4th century activity that has not left recognisable archaeological features.

Post-Roman (410 AD – present)

- 2.1.17 Occupation ceased within the site limits until the late medieval period, with the foundation of Corbier Hall to the north-east of the site boundary. Related medieval activity was represented by scattered features consisting exclusively of postholes and gullies, in two discreet locations. Both may have represented structures, although the plans are uncertain. The moat itself failed to provide direct evidence of a medieval origin, and the upper part of the ditch contained modern material. The ditch must have been sporadically cleared, without leaving traces of recutting.
- 2.1.18 The medieval occupation had a short life span and no further activity is discernible until the establishment of a series of field boundaries and drainage ditches in the 19th century. These also defined the Corbier woodland, which formed a belt of trees across much of the site. The remaining woodland and boundaries, including the moat, were levelled in the mid-20th century.
- 2.1.19 The foundations of the villa and the aisled building were robbed of their stone throughout the 19th and early 20th century, when broken remains of the structure were used to create field drains. The standing remains of the walls were probably robbed much earlier, with some tufa blocks and Roman tile visible in the fabric of the nearby medieval church.

2.2 Periods Represented

Early prehistoric (Neolithic and Bronze Age c. 4000 – 1000 BC)

- 2.2.1 Prehistoric activity was poorly represented by cut features (see section 2.1.2) although a large waterhole was securely dated to the Middle Bronze Age (1750-1150 BC). Most evidence for the period was provided by a range of struck flint recovered from later contexts, spoil heaps and a sparse *in situ* scatter preserved beneath the villa deposits. Of these an Early Neolithic leaf shaped arrowhead (4000-3000 BC) represented the earliest identifiable tool.

Late Iron Age (c. 100 BC – 43 AD)

- 2.2.2 The late Iron Age was well represented at the north-western end of the site on the raised ground which subsequently provided the focus for the villa complex. This also marked the start of a continuous period of occupation extending through to the 4th century AD.
- 2.2.3 Primary activity consisted of tree clearance over the area of the plateau at the north-western end of the site. This was accompanied by settlement on the site in the Late Iron Age, with two phases of enclosure boundary evident. The final phase, which consisted of a large rectilinear ditched enclosure containing roundhouses and four-post structures, extended into the early Roman period.

Early Roman (43 AD – 100 AD)

- 2.2.4 The 1st century AD witnessed two major modifications that set the character of the settlement for the remaining Roman period (see above). The Iron Age enclosure was replaced by a larger enclosure, focussed on a proto-villa building and a possible temple, with further enlargements and alterations made to the enclosure boundaries.

Roman (100 AD – 410 AD)

- 2.2.5 Occupation of the villa continued throughout the 2nd and 3rd centuries and was represented by structural additions and alterations made to the fabric of the building. The large aisled building was also constructed early in this period, and the boundaries to the villa complex continued to be re-defined and altered during the early 2nd century. A functional ‘working area’, located outside the villa enclosure to the south-east, was in use throughout this period and a large post-built structure was replaced by a corndrier, probably in the 2nd century AD. The villa seems to be in decline by the later 3rd century, as a room in the main house was in use as a smithy at that time.
- 2.2.6 A single child inhumation in a stone-lined grave accompanied by two pottery vessels is also dated to the early 2nd century.
- 2.2.7 Fourth century occupation on the site seems to have been minimal and was not represented by new structures or features. However a number of coins of Constantine were recovered from the surface of redundant features and soil layers representing the final occupation on the site (a layer sealing the silted well to the north-west of the aisled building, and a soil deposit sealing the defunct corn-drier).

Late medieval (12th – 15th century)

- 2.2.8 Scattered medieval features were present in the area immediately south-west of Corbier Hall SAM. A small assemblage of medieval coarse ware was recovered

from several postholes and gullies suggesting peripheral activity to the moated manor. No medieval finds were recovered from the in-filled moat.

Post medieval and modern (after 1500 AD)

- 2.2.9 Post-medieval and modern features were present, mostly comprising field boundaries and land drains and also including a brick-built sheep-dip.

2.3 Feature Types

- 2.3.1 As may be expected of a large multi-period site, incorporating a villa complex, a wide variety of feature types were present. Simplified these can be categorised as:

- Ditches
- Structures – stone and posthole structures including related stratified levels
- Linear posthole alignments
- Wells and a waterhole
- Cobbled surfaces
- One infant inhumation grave
- Tree throw holes

Ditches

- 2.3.2 Ditched features varied greatly across the site in terms of form, function and date. The late Iron Age and Roman ditches are mostly related to successive phases of the settlement enclosure. The stratigraphic sequence of the ditches is extremely important for establishing a well-dated chronology for the site, particularly in cases where the enclosure ditches have been rapidly back-filled and covered by later buildings.

- 2.3.3 The later ditches are mostly agricultural boundaries and drainage features located in the low-lying south-eastern part of the site.

Structures

- 2.3.4 The earliest structures recognised are of late Iron Age date. They were poorly preserved and included shallow but well-defined penannular house gullies, with very few convincing associated postholes. Two four-post structures of the same phase were also recorded.

- 2.3.5 The proto-villa and temple were characterised by shallow, insubstantial foundations. The proto-villa itself was largely an above-ground structure with very shallow surviving beam slots. The floor levels were constructed directly onto the subsoil surface and were no greater than 0.05 m thick. The ‘temple’ had a slightly more solid construction, utilising ragstone as a foundation plinth for the building. However the foundations survived to a depth of only 0.2 m below the subsoil surface and were of drystone construction. Preservation was nevertheless comparatively good, with two courses surviving in places, and associated floor surfaces present across much of the building.

- 2.3.6 The villa house was of more substantial construction. The scale of the foundations for the earliest phase suggest that it may have been a two storey building. The ground was prepared by levelling the site with clay, paying particular attention to

back-filling the earlier ditches. The foundations were then constructed of alternating layers of ragstone blocks and flint nodules, packed with clay and extending to the full depth of any potential points of subsidence, including the Iron Age ditches. This seems to have been effective as there was no indication of subsidence in the masonry over these points. The walls generally survived to a single course above foundation level, where roughly faced ragstone blocks were mortar-bonded with a rubble core. Preservation was at its worst on the north-western side of the building, where coarsed stone was lacking. The later additions to the structure used similar techniques, but were of increasingly shallow depth.

- 2.3.7 The aisled building used a combination of postholes and stone walls. The postholes provided the main structural support of the building and this was reflected in their considerable size (surviving to c.1.5 m deep). The posts were firmly packed with ragstone blocks, flint nodules and clay. By comparison, the wall foundations were very shallow, consisting of flint nodules surviving to depth of 0.10 m. No coursed stone survived, although quantities of mortar and ragstone blocks were present in the robber trench back-fill. Stratified remains including a floor level were best preserved at the north-western end of the building.
- 2.3.8 The remaining structure, located outside the villa enclosure, was supported by 14 timber posts (six pairs of aisle posts with gable posts at either end). The postholes were packed with loose flint nodules and a floor level survived within the building.
- 2.3.9 In addition to the buildings, two further structures were present on the site. An above-ground stone-built corndrier survived to a maximum height of three courses. It was built on the site of the 14-post building, after its demolition. A small, modern brick-built sheep dip was located towards the south-eastern end of the site.

Linear Posthole Alignments

- 2.3.10 The posthole alignments representing fence lines or palisades were exclusively Roman in date and were utilised as boundaries or divisions around and within the villa enclosure. Preservation was generally good and almost all of these postholes contained ragstone packing and visible post-pipes.

Wells and the Waterhole

- 2.3.11 One of the few prehistoric features identified was a large ramped waterhole of Bronze Age date, at the south-eastern end of the site.
- 2.3.12 Two Roman wells were located within the limits of the site. One was associated with the 12-post aisled building and the other with the 14-post agricultural building. The latter was excavated to a depth of 3.7 m and the former to 1 m below surface level. Very well-preserved waterlogged remains were encountered below a depth of 1.5 m in the deeply excavated example.
- 2.3.13 The upper part of the well-shaft was lined with Ragstone to a depth of 3 m, at which point it was continued by a box frame construction made from re-used timbers. It was not possible to establish the full depth of the well or the box frame structure due to engineering restrictions. The well located to the west of the aisled building displayed the same Ragstone construction in the upper 1 m of excavation, although due to its position on the edge of the CTRL cutting it was not investigated further.

Cobbled Surfaces

- 2.3.14 Cobbled surfaces were encountered across the site. In each case rounded flint nodules compacted into a clayey base had been used to create a firm surface.

Functions of these varied from the trackway leading to the villa complex, hard standing around a well and interior surfaces.

Inhumation Grave

- 2.3.15 A single infant inhumation of the early 2nd century AD, was located to the north-western side of the villa building. The bones were well preserved and indicate that the infant was less than a year old when buried in a Ragstone-lined and capped grave, with two pottery vessels placed by the feet.

Tree throw holes

- 2.3.16 Tree throw holes, both pre-Roman and 1950s clearance of Corbier Hall woodland, created distinctive features across the site. The Late Iron Age clearance features were limited in extent to the plateau and slope at the north-western end of the site. They were characterised by an irregular surface plan and clayey fills, with occasional LIA sherds included. The modern clearance was limited to the low-lying area, respecting the recent ditched boundaries. The modern clearance features were characterised by dense charcoal inclusions.

2.4 Artefactual Remains

- 2.4.1 The quantity and quality of material is unexceptional compared with other contemporary villas in Kent. Nevertheless, a wide range of artefacts were recovered in good condition, spanning the period from the foundation of the site in the Late Iron Age, to the demise of the villa in the 3rd or 4th century AD.

Bronze Age metalwork

- 2.4.2 A large ramped waterhole, located 75 m west of Thurnham Lane, produced a large bronze needle and a small bronze rapier, dateable on stylistic grounds to the Middle Bronze Age. These objects are of intrinsic interest.

Flint

- 2.4.3 A moderate assemblage of prehistoric struck flints was recovered, although most pieces were residual in later contexts. The condition of the flint varied considerably and few tools were present, although a range of flint working products was represented including cores, flakes, blades, debitage and finished tools. A sparse flint scatter was noted on the surface of the pre-Roman soil level preserved beneath the villa deposits, although this material could well be residual and the lack of associated features or deposits limits its potential.

Pottery and Ceramic Building Material

- 2.4.4 The bulk of the artefacts recovered consisted of pottery and ceramic building material (CBM). Of this material, most of the CBM comprised Roman roof tiles from various phases of the villa, with very small quantities of late medieval and post-medieval tile present.
- 2.4.5 A large assemblage of pottery was recovered, spanning the Late Iron Age and Roman occupation of the site, but with the majority of groups assigned to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. The late Iron Age material is generally rather fragmentary and abraded, although the total quantity should be sufficient to establish the ceramic sequence of the Iron Age site. Further assessment may demonstrate whether this assemblage will provide sufficient information for meaningful comparison with other contemporary sites in the region (see 4.5).

2.4.6 The Roman assemblage was variable in its preservation, although several features provided good individual assemblages, covering the main phases of occupation. A relatively small quantity of imports, especially amphorae, was recognised during the excavation. This and other notable features of the pottery assemblage will be important for defining the position of the site in the settlement hierarchy and examining aspects such as regional trading contacts and the status of the villa throughout its occupation. Pottery clearly dateable to the 3rd - 4th century AD was scarce and rarely occurred in stratified contexts.

2.4.7 Only small quantities of medieval and later pottery were present. Despite this the medieval pottery assemblage is characterised by large, unbraded sherds, although the small size of the assemblage limits its potential.

Small Finds (metal objects, worked bone, glass, fired clay and worked stone)

2.4.8 The metal finds consisted mainly of iron and copper alloy objects with few identifiable lead objects encountered. Nails represent the majority of iron finds and were moderately well-preserved. The copper alloy finds included coins and personal items such as beads, pins, brooches, rings and well-preserved mirror fragments. Preservation of the coins varies, but the majority are readable. Most of the copper alloy objects fall within the period 43 – 410 AD, with the majority dating from the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. A single late Iron Age coin was also recovered.

2.4.9 Few worked bone objects were recovered. Those that were found were in good condition and included two small gaming pieces and several pins.

2.4.10 Most of the Roman glass fragments recovered were vessel sherds. They were in good condition and were recovered from a range of Roman feature types. The only other glass objects consisted of beads and a small gaming piece.

2.4.11 Fired clay objects were poorly represented. Only a single bead and two small spindlewhorls were found during the excavation.

2.4.12 Worked stone was almost exclusively represented by quern fragments. Hertfordshire Puddingstone, Lower Greensand and Niedermendig lava querns were all represented. This range is typical of early Roman assemblages in Kent. The lava querns were poorly preserved but the assemblage is otherwise in good condition

Slag and metal-working residue

2.4.13 Quantities of slag were recovered from Late Iron Age and early Roman contexts across the area of occupation. Those of Late Iron Age origin were all in redeposited contexts and offer little potential other than signifying some degree of iron working on the site. Slag is conspicuously absent from contexts associated with the 2nd century floruit of occupation. However, smithing waste was associated with the later phase of the villa, with particular concentrations occurring in one of the central villa rooms, associated with traces of hearths. Current evidence suggests that part of the villa house was converted into a smithy in the later 3rd century AD.

2.5 Palaeo-environmental and Economic Evidence

Animal Bone

2.5.1 The bone assemblage was extremely varied in its preservation and was generally highly fragmented. The overall potential of the assemblage is thought to be low to moderate. Study of the better preserved individual context groups may aid aspects of site interpretation, but is unlikely to provide a statistically reliable basis for reconstructing the pastoral economy of the site.

- 2.5.2 The quality and quantity of palaeo-environmental and economic remains varied greatly across the site. This was especially true of the bone remains, which were recognisable in some quantities on the surface of some features, but very often disintegrated upon removal. By contrast, deposits which contained quantities of charred material displayed good bone preservation, and the waterlogged remains from the excavated Roman well produced a particularly outstanding group.

Charred Plant Remains

- 2.5.3 Charred remains were well represented across the site. All of the feature types produced charred remains, with the major phase transitions being well represented. Most importantly, material was recovered that can be dated to the transition from the late Iron Age enclosure to the proto-villa phase, and from the proto-villa to the main villa phase. In each case the charred deposits were recovered from the enclosure ditches in the area of the villa house. The results are expected to be of considerable potential importance and reliability, both at site level and regionally, as most of the deposits were securely stratified and well dated.
- 2.5.4 There is considerable potential for establishing the character of occupation in particular buildings. An oven at the north-western end of the aisled building produced an outstanding assemblage of charred grain. The corndrier similarly had associated charred remains surviving. Deposits within the villa house were limited to a late 1st - early 2nd century AD sunken oven, and a charcoal layer relating to the late 3rd century AD metal-working area.

Waterlogged Remains

- 2.5.5 Excavated waterlogged remains were limited to a single timber and stone-lined well. Organic preservation in this feature was excellent, to the extent that moss retained its green colour upon initial exposure. Column samples and incremental samples were taken from the top of the waterlogged sequence to the excavated depth of 3.7 m. The visible organic remains (hazel, coppice oak, moss and ash seeds) suggest a managed woodland environment in close proximity to the well.
- 2.5.6 Overall the palaeo-environmental and economical remains offer good potential for examining the economic basis of the settlement, and the character of the immediately surrounding landscape.

3 FIELDWORK EVENT AIMS

- 3.1 The aims of the fieldwork event, as stated in the WSI were as follows:
- Recovery of the plan and a dated occupation sequence for all phases of the villa's development;
 - Examine the transition between the Iron Age and Romano- British periods, examining why the site developed into a villa;
 - Examine the decline of the villa and the reasons for it;
 - Establish the status, economic orientation and patterns of contact and trade of the settlement;
 - Recover artefact assemblages to elucidate the above;

- Elucidate the interaction with, and influence of, the villa with its hinterland and other rural settlements;
 - Compare with the cereal economy of the region and wider areas and investigate the apparent continuation of emmer wheat into the Iron Age;
 - Determine the contemporary local environment of the villa
- 3.2 A dated sequence of development has been provisionally established for the entire period of the villa's occupation. The major successive alterations and additions to the complex are stratigraphically linked and dated by ceramic or other artefactual evidence. However, the interpretation of the site is at present based on spot-dating of key contexts and a first stage of stratigraphic analysis. Assessment may require changes to both the dating and the sequence of development. The superimposition of most of the Romano-British buildings on top of the Iron Age and later enclosure ditches, should allow most of the main buildings to be linked within the overall stratigraphic sequence. The sequence of structural additions to the villa house during the second century AD proved more difficult to firmly establish and date, but this does not detract significantly from the reliability of the wider site chronology.
- 3.3 The specific reasons for the development of the site into a villa in the mid 1st century AD are currently unproven. There is excellent potential for shedding new light on this process, through comparative studies of economic, artefactual and environmental indicators from securely stratified deposits associated with the pre-Roman, proto-villa and main villa phases respectively. However, this question cannot be answered solely by reference to individual sites. Villas occur in significant clusters, nationally and regionally, and it is likely that their development was a response to specific social and economic stimuli that applied to whole regions. Their appearance should also be seen against the background of the contemporary development of urban centres.
- 3.4 Questions surrounding the decline of the villa must similarly await further research, but the potential for addressing the issue is high, particularly when the evidence is considered alongside the various contemporary sites excavated along the CTRL route. Again, the decline and abandonment of the villa has to be viewed in a regional context, in the light of mounting evidence for settlement retraction and dislocation over much of south-east England in the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. With notable exceptions, such as Lullingstone, there is little evidence for a late revival of the villa economy in Kent. If the pottery and coinage evidence from the CTRL project and elsewhere can be taken at face value, the picture of decline extends to other classes of site, including the small towns and low status rural settlements. This is in marked contrast to other regions, such as the south-west in Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, which show evidence for survival and occasional resurgence in the villas and towns, particularly in the early part of the 4th century.
- 3.5 The specific reasons for the abandonment of the Thurnham site may not be detectable by archaeological methods, but the best hope for understanding the process must lie in close analysis of the contexts which produced the small number of late Roman artefacts, along with any associated environmental evidence, and close comparison with those sites in the region that do have evidence for continued occupation and expansion into the 4th century AD (e.g. Lullingstone Villa). The conversion of one of the villa rooms into a smithy, apparently in the later 3rd century AD, strongly suggests a decline in the fortunes of the settlement by that time. The few finds of 4th century material, where they occur in stratified contexts, are found in the latest fills of defunct features, which suggests that by the early-mid-4th century at the latest, the site was no longer permanently occupied.

- 3.6 The recognition of status, economy and contact patterns is a matter for further research, which may be pursued along various lines of enquiry. The large pottery assemblage recovered is likely to be particularly important and requires assessment to determine the appropriate approach to further study (see 4.5).
- 3.7 The agrarian economic aspects of the site have been addressed by a substantial sampling programme. Assessment of the samples certainly has the potential to allow reconstruction of the general environment, identify the major crops and answer specific questions, such as the extent to which emmer continued in use into the Iron Age. The waterlogged assemblage in particular, may provide some insight into aspects of woodland management.
- 3.8 The spatial organisation of the site has been well established and indicates that specific zones were tied to specific functions, although the functions are not clear in all cases. The area of activity outside the enclosure seems to have been a working area associated particularly with crop-processing. By contrast, the identification of the square building as a temple or shrine is very far from certain.

4 SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL

- 4.1 The excavated evidence has high potential for addressing a number of aspects of the CTRL research strategy for the period ‘Towns and their rural landscapes’ (sub-period *c.* 100 BC – 410 AD). The site is located close to the south-eastern border of the North Downs landscape zone.
- 4.2 The greatest areas of potential lie in recording and understanding the transition from the late Iron Age to the early post conquest period, examining the mechanics of the Roman landscape in its fully developed form, and studying the decline of the villa in the 3rd century. The latter aspect may be compared with mounting evidence for widespread decline in rural settlement and towns in Kent, and elsewhere in south-east Britain, and contrasted with evidence for late recovery and development in other regions.
- 4.3 A considerable density and variety of sites occupied within the period 100 BC – 410 AD are recorded in the SMR records in the surrounding landscape. These include villas, low status rural settlements, small towns, temple sites and cemeteries. The CTRL project has produced a number of new Kentish sites of the same period, including a range of site types (one villa, one small town cemetery and parts of at least four rural settlements). The range of available comparative material should help to demonstrate the interaction of the villa with its hinterland and surrounding settlements, and provide a broad basis for studying the dramatic changes that took place before, during and immediately following the Roman period.
- 4.4 The archaeological evidence should not be divorced from the wider historical picture, which, in spite of its inadequacies, provides a crucial backdrop to the major regional trends visible in the archaeological record.
- 4.5 Several broadly contemporary pottery assemblages have been recovered from a range of site types excavated along the CTRL route. These include very large assemblages such as that from the Pepper Hill Roman cemetery, associated with Springhead Roman town, (*c.* 628 complete vessels of the 1st – 3rd century AD), through smaller assemblages from low status rural settlements at South of Snarkhurst Wood and Saltwood Tunnel, to very small assemblages from rural cremation cemeteries such as Boy’s Hall Moat. The assemblage from Thurnham Villa adds another important site type to the group. The CTRL project offers a

unique opportunity for a direct comparison between these assemblages. Variations and similarities in the date range, quality, quantity and sources of the Iron Age and Roman pottery from these very different sites, will offer the most direct insight available into the dramatic social and economic changes of the period.

- 4.6 There is excellent potential for reconstructing the arable economy of the site for the main phases of occupation, particularly considering the waterlogged organics preserved in the well next to the crop-processing area. Charred remains are well-represented across the site, and the deposits from the vicinity of the corn-drier should be particularly informative. The animal bone assemblage, on the other hand, appears to have fairly low potential, being comparatively small and highly fragmented.
- 4.7 The potential for reconstructing aspects of the local landscape setting is good. There is evidence that Honeyhills Wood is of ancient origin and would have enclosed the Iron Age enclosure and later villa complex on at least two sides. There are also indications of primary woodland clearance on the site in the late Iron Age, immediately preceding establishment of the settlement enclosure. The topographical position of the site may be compared with later settlement focii in Thurnham parish, including Corbier Hall and Court Farm, and with other villa sites in the region, which tend to cluster along the foot of the North Downs escarpment.

APPENDIX 1

ARCHIVE INDEX

ITEM	NUMBER OF ITEMS	NUMBER OF FRAGMENTS	CONDITION (No. of items) (W=washed; UW=unwashed; M=marked; P=processed; UP=unprocessed; D=digitised)
THURNHAM ROMAN VILLA (ARCTHM98)			
Contexts records	3450		
A1 plans	194		
A4 plans	47		
A1 sections	16		
A4 sections	670		
Small finds	1037		
Films (monochrome) S=slide; PR=print	72		
Films (Colour) S=slide; PR=print	72		
Flint (boxes)	5 size 3	Not available	In progress
Pottery (boxes)	16 size 1	Not available	In progress
Fired clay (boxes)	1 size 1	Not available	In progress
CBM (boxes)	Approx. 100 size 1	Not available	In progress
Stone (boxes)	16 size 2	Not available	In progress
Metalwork (boxes)	17 plastic size 8 1 plastic size 4	Not available	In progress
Glass (boxes)	See Misc.	Not available	In progress
Slag (boxes)	2 size 1 1 size 3	Not available	In progress
Human Bone (boxes)	1 size 2	Not available	In progress
Animal Bone (boxes)	8 size 1	Not available	In progress
Misc.	Incomplete	Not available	In progress
Soil samples (10L buckets)	585		UP
Soil Samples (No. contexts)	200		UP
Soil samples (pollen)	3		UP
Soil samples (hammerscale)	175		UP
Soil Samples (1 kg macros)	15		UP
Monolith/kubienna tins	1		UP
HONEYHILLS WOOD (ARCHHW98)			
pottery	1 size 5	2	W,M

Key to box sizes

Cardboard boxes

Size 1 = Bulk box	391mm x 238mm x 210mm
Size 2 = Half box	391mm x 238mm x 100mm
Size 3 = Quarter box	386mm x 108 mm x 100mm
Size 4 = Eighth box	213 mm x 102 mm x 80 mm
Size 5 = Sixteenth box	110mm x 88 mm x 60 mm
Size 6 = Skeleton box	600 mm x 241 mm x 225 mm

Plastic boxes

Size 4 = Small	(dimensions as size 4 cardboard)
Size 8 = Medium	260mm x 184mm x 108mm
Size 9 = Large	308mm x 216mm x 144mm

APPENDIX 2**SUMMARY REPORT****Thurnham Roman Villa, Thurnham, Kent (TQ 79954 57111)**

Between November 1998 and June 1999 Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited to excavate the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Thurnham Roman Villa (SAM KE 299), to the south-west of Thurnham village near Maidstone, Kent. This work, which was part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, revealed a continuous sequence of occupation spanning the Late Iron Age through to the early 4th century AD. Prehistoric remains were represented by a large ramped waterhole near Thurnham Lane, which produced a small Middle Bronze Age rapier. A sparse in situ flint scatter was preserved beneath the villa levels.

A large rectilinear ditched enclosure, containing one definite and two possible roundhouse and two 4-post structures was established in the late Iron Age, following clearance of woodland from the site. Remodelling during the early post-conquest period saw the enclosure levelled and replaced by a larger enclosure containing a proto-villa placed centrally and towards the rear. This building had a painted plaster interior and firm clay floor surfaces. A possible shrine or temple was added shortly afterwards, overlying the former enclosure ditch. Further development followed at the end of the 1st century AD with the construction of a stone two storey villa replacing the proto-villa. By the early 3rd century AD, following many structural additions, this had developed into a large winged corridor villa with a bath suite attached to its southern side (excavated in 1958). No in situ floor surfaces relating to the main villa phases were encountered although several opus signinum and sand floors were recorded in previous excavations.

The 'temple' structure remained in use throughout this period and was accompanied within the core of the estate enclosure by a large aisled building constructed early in the 2nd century AD. Massive wooden posts supported the central roof whilst shallow flint foundations supported the outer walls. A crushed tufa floor defined a room at the western end of the building, which had a neatly constructed oven at one end. Personal items such as pins, brooches, coins and fragments of mirror were all recovered from within this building. The boundary to the estate was redefined with successive fence lines around the villa and the aisled building replacing the earlier ditched boundaries.

Access to the villa enclosure was gained by a cobbled trackway approaching from the east, passing a large timber building located outside the enclosure boundary. This large 14-post structure, which probably had an agricultural role, had a number of surrounding and internal drains. It was demolished and replaced, by the 3rd century AD, with a stone-built corndrier. Two wells were investigated, one of which was excavated to a depth of 3.7 m without locating the bottom. Both were stone-lined at the top, and the lower portion of the deeply excavated example was supported by a timber box-frame.

Trenches excavated in Honeyhills wood, immediately adjacent to the villa complex, strongly suggest that the wood was present when the Iron Age settlement and later villa complex were established. The western boundary ditch of the settlement enclosure closely follows the modern edge of the woodland, and the trenching demonstrated that Roman occupation did not extend beyond that boundary. The earthworks in the wood, which do not form a clear pattern, were very shallow and were not associated with subsoil features. Insufficient artefactual material was recovered to indicate their date of origin.

The final occupation on the site saw the demise of the villa complex towards the end of the 3rd century AD and early into the 4th century. By this time the temple structure had already collapsed or been demolished, and the character of occupation in the main villa building had changed substantially (one of the central rooms was utilised extensively as an iron smithy). Several coins of Constantine were recovered, generally from the upper fills of defunct features, representing the latest evidence for Roman activity on the site of the villa.

Activity ceased on the site until the foundation of Corbier Hall in the 14th century AD. Associated postholes and gullies were located to the immediate south-east of the Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM KE 309) and the moat area, but all were peripheral in character. The most recent period of activity was represented by successive field boundaries and drainage ditches aligned along the length of the low lying ground. These were dated to the 19th and 20th century and associated with the expansion and subsequent clearance of Corbier Hall Wood.

APPENDIX 3

SMR SHEET

Site Name: Thurnham Roman Villa, Thurnham, Kent	
Summary: The investigation uncovered evidence for a continuous sequence of late Iron Age and Roman occupation spanning the 1 st century BC to the 4 th century AD. (c.100 BC – 350 AD), mostly concentrated within the Thurnham Villa scheduled ancient monument boundary (SAM KE 299), at the north-western end of the site. A few prehistoric features, and medieval ditches and other outlying features associated with Corbier Hall, were scattered over the low-lying south-eastern part of the site.	
District: Maidstone	Parish: Thurnham
Period(s):	
1. Middle Bronze Age	4. Medieval
2. Late Iron Age	5. Post-medieval/ modern
3. Romano-British	
NGR Easting: TQ 79954	NGR Northing: 57111
Type of Recording:	Evaluation Watching — Brief Field Walking
(Delete) Excavation	Geophysical Survey Measured Survey
Date of Recording: (From) 2/11/98	(To) 18/6/99
Unit Undertaking Recording: Oxford Archaeological Unit	
Summary of Fieldwork Results:	
<p>Between November 1998 and June 1999 Oxford Archaeological Unit was commissioned by Union Railways (South) Limited to excavate the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Thurnham Roman Villa (SAM KE 299), to the south-west of Thurnham village near Maidstone, Kent. This work, which was part of an extensive programme of archaeological investigation carried out in advance of construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, revealed a continuous sequence of occupation spanning the Late Iron Age through to the early 4th century AD. Prehistoric remains were represented by a large ramped waterhole near Thurnham Lane, which produced a small Middle Bronze Age rapier. A sparse <i>in situ</i> flint scatter was preserved beneath the villa levels.</p> <p>A large rectilinear ditched enclosure, containing one definite and two possible roundhouse and two 4-post structures was established in the late Iron Age, following clearance of woodland from the site. Remodelling during the early post-conquest period saw the enclosure levelled and replaced by a larger enclosure containing a proto-villa placed centrally and towards the rear. This building had a painted plaster interior and firm clay floor surfaces. A possible shrine or temple was added shortly afterwards, overlying the former enclosure ditch. Further development followed at the end of the 1st century AD with the construction of a stone two storey villa replacing the proto-villa. By the early 3rd century AD, following many structural additions, this had developed into a large winged corridor villa with a bath suite attached to its southern side (excavated in 1958). No <i>in situ</i> floor surfaces relating to the main villa phases were encountered although several <i>opus signinum</i> and sand floors were recorded in previous excavations.</p> <p>The ‘temple’ structure remained in use throughout this period and was accompanied within the core of the estate enclosure by a large aisled building constructed early in the 2nd century AD. Massive wooden posts supported the central roof whilst shallow flint foundations supported the outer walls. A crushed tufa floor defined a room at the western end of the building, which had a neatly constructed oven at one end. Personal items such as pins, brooches, coins and fragments of mirror were all recovered from</p>	

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Location of Archive / Finds:

Bibliography:

Summary Compiler: Stuart Foreman

Date: 29/7/99