

# ◆ The 2013 excavations of the Romano-British settlement at Bridge Farm, Wellingham

AN INTERIM SUMMARY

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*This paper summarises the work undertaken in 2013 at the site of the 1st- to 4th-century AD Romano-British settlement at Bridge Farm, Wellingham by the Culver Archaeological Project. It locates the four open-area trenches dug, and details some of the more significant features and artefacts found during this National Lottery-funded, community project. It is not intended as a full site report of all the fieldwork. While some initial interpretation of the most significant features has been included, this does not constitute a final considered appraisal of a project which still requires many years of research to allow deeper understanding. Future results and analysis from other areas of the site will necessitate a series of subsequent papers and eventually a substantial monograph. However, this paper will acquaint readers with the importance of this site at an early stage and lead researchers towards sources of more detailed information.*

## INTRODUCTION

**S**ussex Archaeological Collections **151** included a paper (Millum 2013) announcing the discovery of a multi-phase, Romano-British settlement with a bivallate enclosure at Bridge Farm (TQ 432145), just to the south of Barcombe Mills, during a geophysical survey of a field. The survey was originally intended to locate Margary's London–Lewes road (Margary 1933, 26–28), but also revealed a sizeable riverside settlement at, or near, the junction of roads heading north, east and west. The results provided evidence to suggest that the London–Lewes road terminated at Bridge Farm. The paper set the site in its local Roman landscape, with the Barcombe villa complex, detached bathhouse and the recently discovered road running down the western bank of the Ouse (Fig. 1) (see also Rudling 2016, 75–77; 84–87).

Further geophysical surveys by the Culver Archaeological Project (CAP) and David Staveley, using twin-pole fluxgate magnetometers, have confirmed the route of the road on the west bank, well to the south of Barcombe villa and bathhouse (Millum 2014), and extended the roadside features of the Bridge Farm settlement over several fields to the east (Staveley 2014). With the help of the Ringmer Roman Studies Group, Staveley has also

confirmed the route of this eastern road beyond Laughton Place (Staveley 2012) and established a very strong argument for its continuation to join with the road discovered at Wilbees Farm, Arlington (Chuter 2008) and thus on to Pevensey (Fig. 2).

The route of the road heading west of the settlement, and the location and type of river crossing, are still unresolved; surveying has been hampered by the disturbance caused by the development of Barcombe Mills to the north and the two Victorian railway lines running just to the west of the river, plus the substantial works undertaken to the river banks during the 20th century. Investigation is ongoing to see if discrete features might be extrapolated to at least produce a firm hypothesis for the western route and its association with the Greensand Way (see Fig. 1 and below).

The Bridge Farm settlement is in a location that offered excellent communication to other known Romano-British sites in the area (Fig. 2). The large iron workings of the Weald were situated just to the north with major sites, such as Oldlands, located adjacent to the road heading out of the settlement towards London. The Greensand Way, which headed west from Barcombe to join Stane Street at Hardham, and thus on to Chichester (Margary 1973, 68–70), provided access to the local pottery

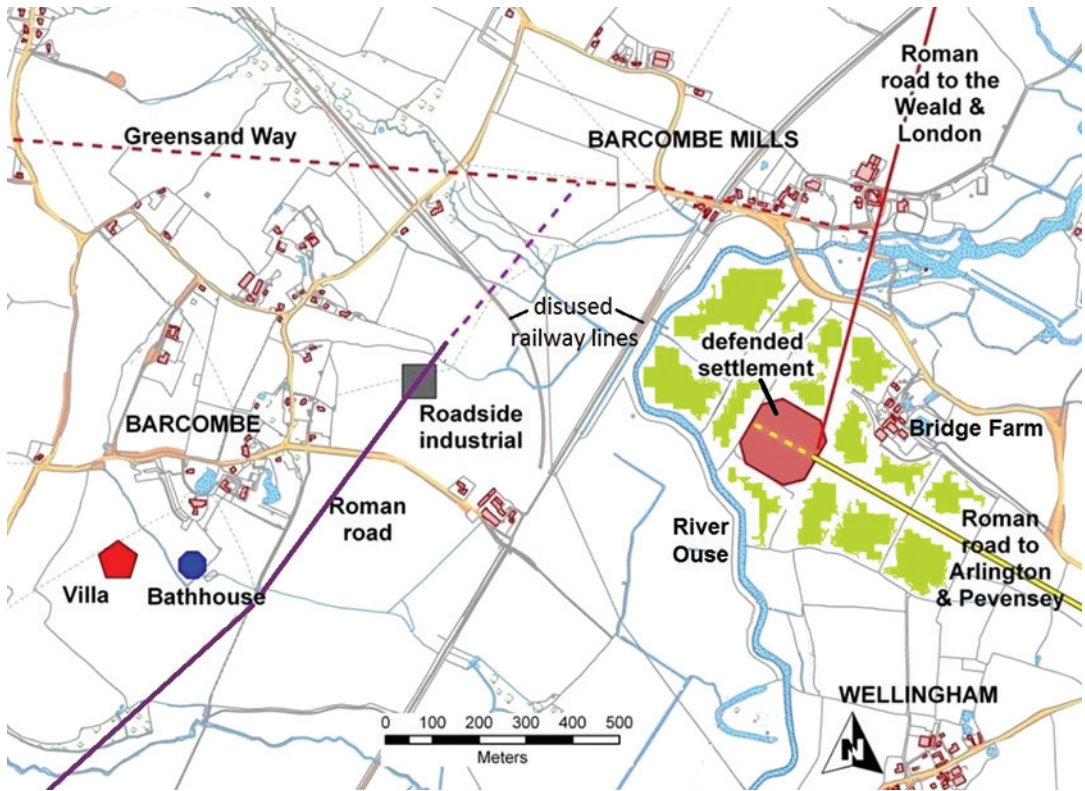


Fig. 1. The location of the Bridge Farm settlement with respect to other local Roman period features. Dashed lines indicate unproven road alignments.

at Wickham Barn, Chiltington and, together with the road east to Pevensey, several villas and settlements. The river gave access to the coast and possibly limited access to some of the iron works in the Weald, while the road on the west bank potentially gave access to the South Downs and a host of scattered native farmsteads.

From 2012 CAP moved its centre of investigations from the road on the west bank and its roadside industrial activity on Culver Farm, Barcombe (Millum and Wallace 2012), to the settlement site on the east bank at Bridge Farm, Wellingham (Millum 2017). Late in 2012, the project received a substantial grant from the National Lottery, via the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), which enabled a large community excavation of four open-area trenches for the 2013 season (Fig. 3) and the hiring of a commercial contractor, AOC Archaeology Group, to assist with the management of the project.

As with all successful HLF-funded projects, there was a strong element of community engagement,

including the participation of five local schools. The project succeeded in attracting 180 volunteers, producing over 1,000 working days on the site, offered 24 free fieldwork courses, attended by 120 participants, and attracted 400 visitors on organised tours of the excavations, including Sussex Archaeological Society members. Importantly, the funding also enabled all post-excavation work to be undertaken within the year, including specialist assessments of all recovered artefacts and environmental samples, with a full practical report (Wallace 2014) being written and distributed by early 2014. The latter is available in the Sussex Archaeological Society's library at Barbican House, Lewes, or from the project website ([www.culverproject.co.uk](http://www.culverproject.co.uk)).

#### THE 2013 EXCAVATIONS

The excavations targeted an area to the southern edge of the enclosure (Fig. 4), mainly within a small

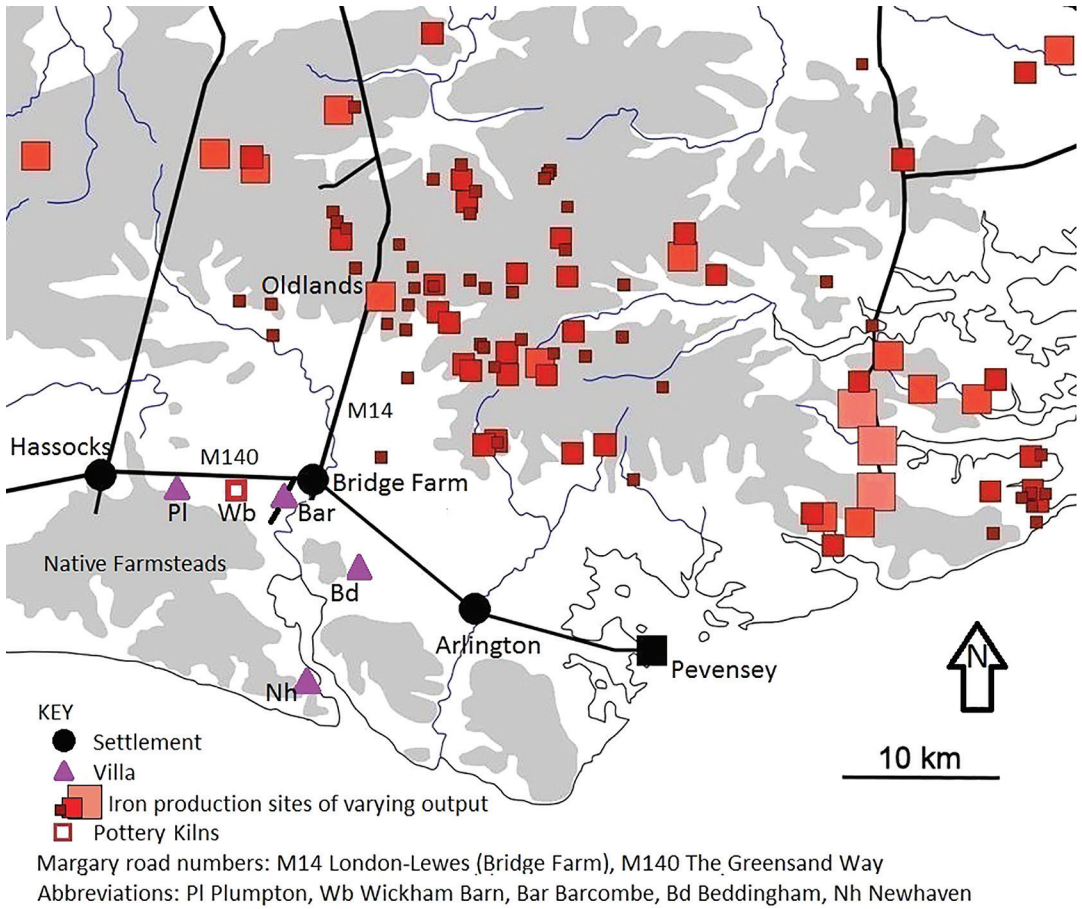


Fig. 2. Map locating Bridge Farm in its wider Roman period context (after Bourne, fig. 16, Hodgkinson 2008).

meadow that abuts the river, but with trench 1, the most northerly, completely within the adjacent arable field. As this was the first year of excavation on this site, one aim was to discover if there was any appreciable difference in preservation between the land that was laid to permanent pasture and the areas that had been ploughed and planted for several centuries. It soon became apparent that, while there were areas of deeper topsoil formed within the arable field, this had not greatly varied the preservation of the archaeology from that under pasture. The sandy-silt soil was inherently inclined to fairly deep and rapid pedogenesis, resulting in many of the upper features being incorporated into the profile of brown earth, leaving some later Roman artefacts ‘floating’ in the developed topsoil (Allen 2013).

Excavation was further complicated by the effects of regular winter flooding and a fluctuating groundwater table which resulted in post-depositional gleying and the formation of an iron-rich hardpan within the deeper features. This hard layer had to be broken through in order to expose what was often the most significant area. While causing some confusion in the excavation, this natural process effectively sealed the lower contexts which led to organic preservation in some of the deeper features. Another important objective was to establish the sequence of the grid-style settlement to the bivallate enclosure, recover dating evidence to validate the sequence and possibly establish dates of construction and, or, backfilling.

During the week prior to start of community involvement, the topsoil was removed from all

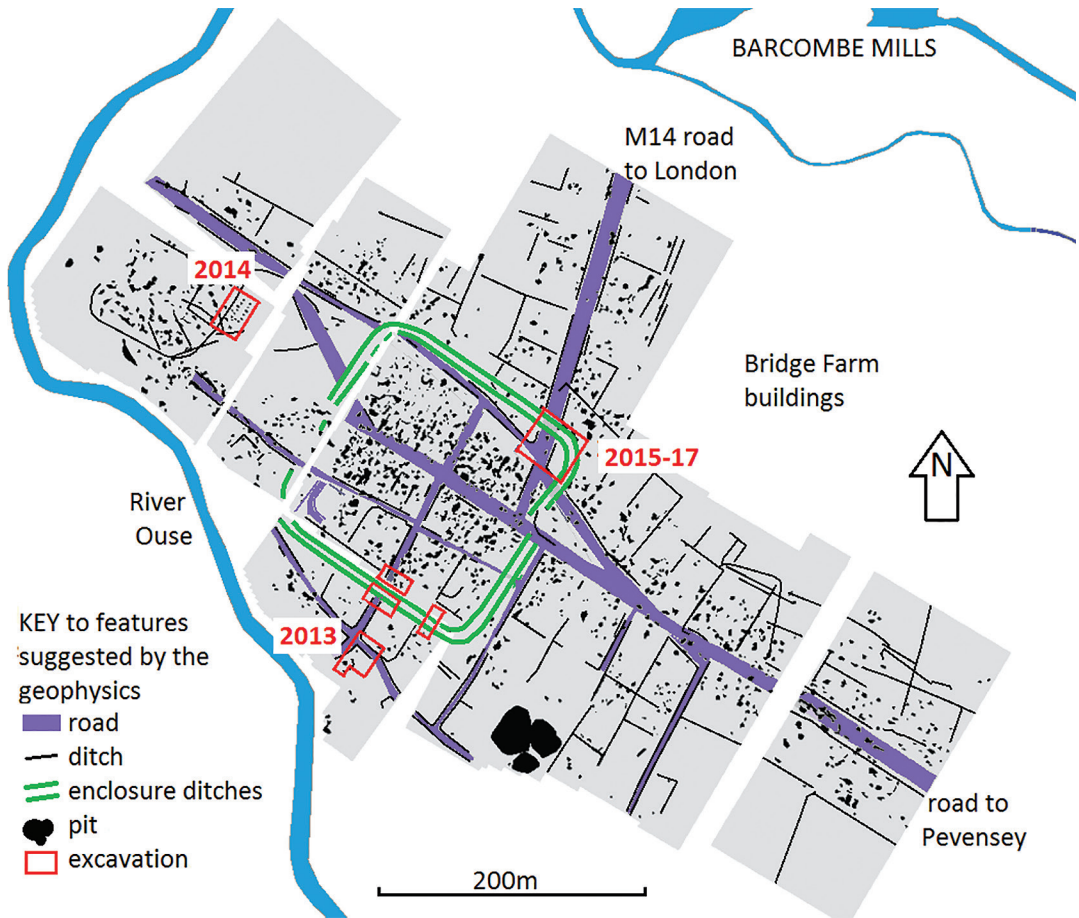


Fig. 3. A conjectural plan of the site layout showing the areas excavated in 2013 (after Staveley, fig. 8.2, Rudling 2016).

four trenches by mechanical digger, under the supervision of AOC Site Manager, Catherine Edwards, and CAP Deputy Director, David Millum.

#### TRENCH 1: TQ 43091437

This trench, a 20m by 10m open-area excavation (Fig. 5), located in the arable field, targeted the roadside ditches forming part of the open settlement inside the bivallate enclosure. The earliest dateable feature was an east-west ditch terminus, or linear pit, [1025] that was truncated by the western baulk of the trench. It contained 156 sherds of pottery which included fragments of a pre-Flavian Dr 33 cup of around AD 43–70, a Terra-Nigra platter of around AD 43–70, an Atrebatian ‘overlap’ jar from Chichester of around AD 43–60, and seven sherds

of a reeded-rim bowl of Fishbourne type 89 (Fig. 6) dated to around AD 50–80 (Lyne 2014).

The overlying pit [1024] had 98 sherds dated to AD 43–150, suggesting that this could be either a separate later feature or the secondary fill related to the lower context [1025]. Pottery from the primary fill of the truncated eastern roadside ditch [1044] was dated to AD 43–70 and the western roadside ditch [1006/1022], running parallel at nine metres distance, had 152 sherds that could be dated as between AD 70–150. However, an absence of Gallo-Belgic imports and the very early East Sussex Ware jars, with eyebrow motifs, from these assemblages suggest that they could all fall within the AD 70–100 phase (Lyne 2014).

The evidence from trench 1 established a 1st-century AD origin for the open settlement and this

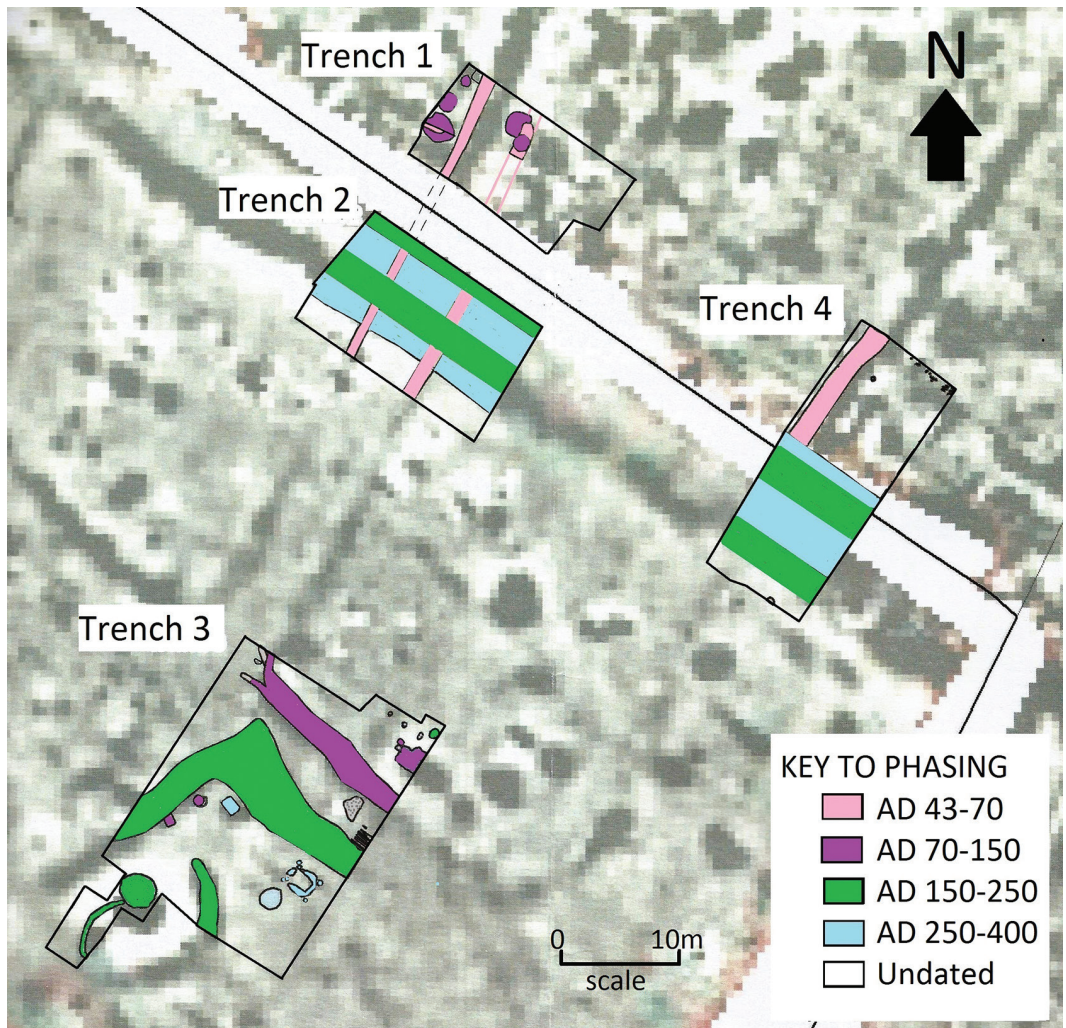


Fig. 4. The four phased trench plans overlaid on the 2011 geophysical survey results (after AOC Archaeology 2014).

date is also proposed for the roadside ditches in the other trenches, although continued road use through the 300 years of activity on the site blurs positive dating in some areas, due to later intrusions.

#### **TRENCH 2: TQ 43081436**

An open-area excavation of 20m by 15m was located in the grass meadow immediately south of trench 1 to target the intersection of the roadside ditches and the outer enclosure ditch (Fig. 7). The location of the outer enclosure ditch running through the centre of the trench became clear from the moment the overburden was removed, but the roadside ditches

were more ephemeral, especially the western ditch. Three slots were dug across the outer enclosure ditch [2003, 2016 and 2026], one in the centre of the trench and one at each end, adjacent to the baulks. In each case a well-dug, V-shaped ditch was revealed in the lower contexts and the centre slot was continued north to locate the southern edge of the inner ditch [2035]. This inner ditch followed the line of the modern hedge between the two fields and therefore could only be more fully investigated in trench 4.

Each of the baulk-edge slots across the enclosure ditch contained a large post-hole more than 500mm

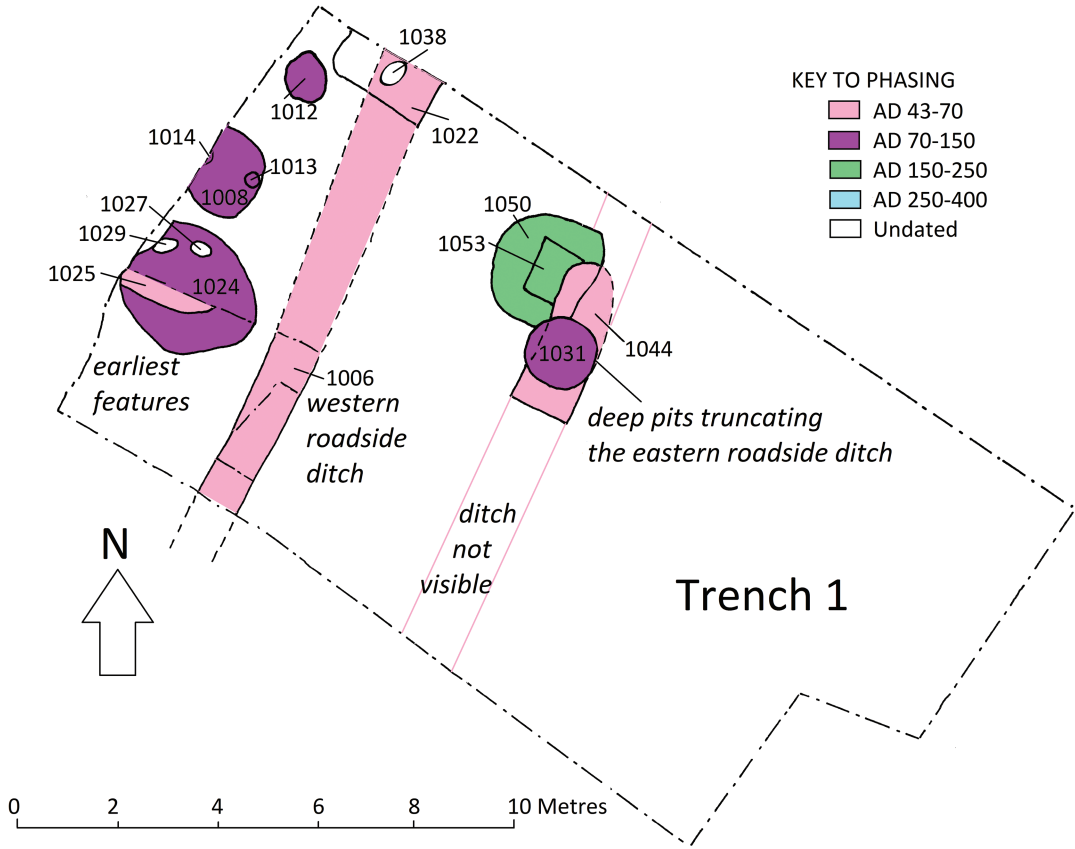


Fig. 5. Plan showing interpreted phases of the main features in trench 1 (after AOC Archaeology 2014).



Fig. 6. Fishbourne type 89 bowl rim (AOC Archaeology).

in diameter [2017 and 2032]. The post-hole in the western baulk slot [2017] was located in the

base of the ditch and contained a small pottery assemblage dating to around AD 300. The post-hole in the eastern baulk slot [2032] was located close to the southern edge of the ditch and was packed with ceramic building material from the 1st to 2nd century, including a nearly whole Brodrribb type 1, T-shaped, solid voussoir, 265mm wide and 65–70mm thick, the length being incomplete (Fig. 8). Normally such tiles were only used to form arches and ceiling ribs in fairly prestigious buildings (Barber 2014a; Brodrribb 1987, fig. 19).

The eastern roadside ditch [2007] was uncovered at the southern baulk of trench 2 and followed towards the enclosure ditch. A slot was excavated at the baulk revealing only one fill (2006). A box section at the interface of the two ditches revealed that the enclosure ditch [2016] cut the roadside ditch [2007] and established the phasing of these two features. Although the roadside ditch fill (2006)

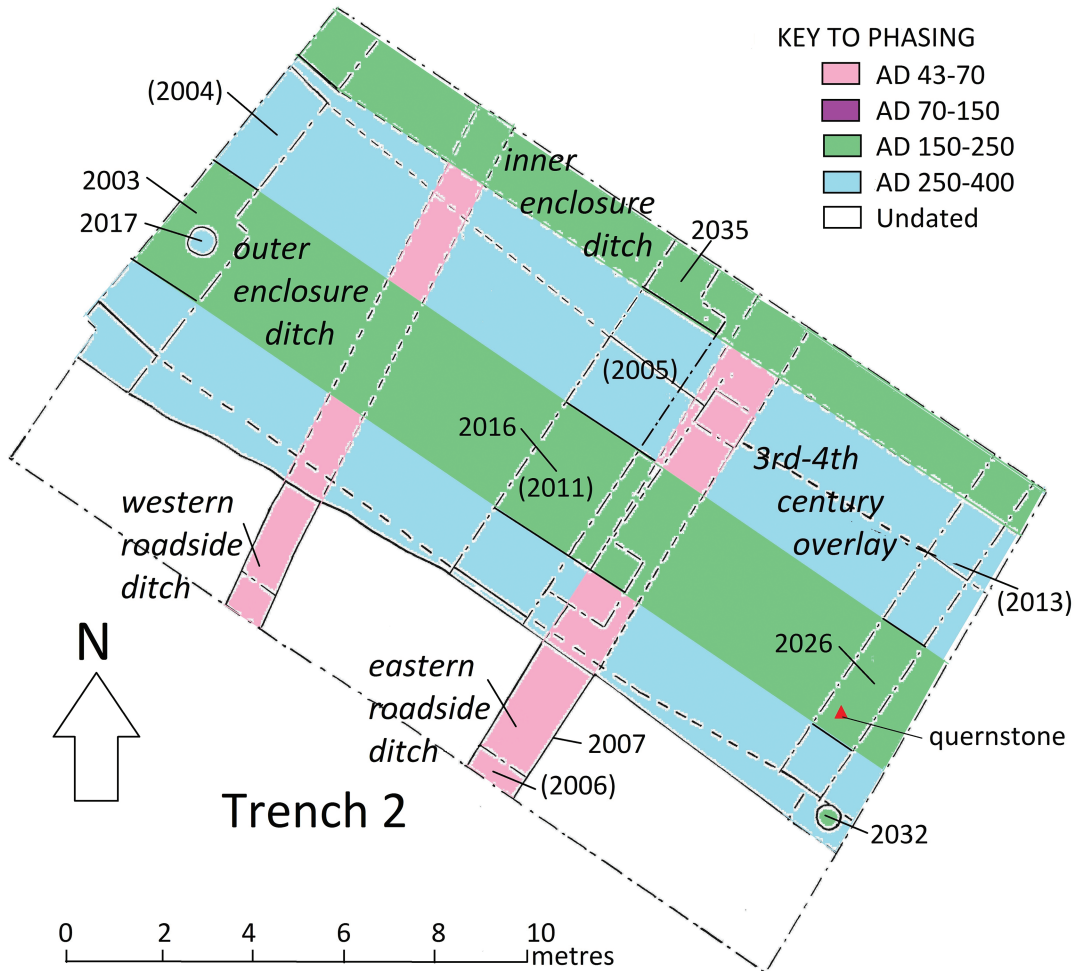


Fig. 7. Plan showing interpreted phases of the main features in trench 2 (after AOC Archaeology 2014).

did not provide any dateable evidence, it was clearly a continuation of the ditch sectioned in trenches 1 and 3 that were dated to the late 1st century (Fig. 4). Dating evidence from the enclosure ditch sections was also scarce and the date of this feature was primarily established in trench 4.

While the pottery recovered from the trenches failed to positively confirm the dating of the two ditch systems, the trench did contain other significant finds, including a nearly whole rotary lower hand quernstone of Lodsworth type, 360mm in diameter, made of West Sussex Lower Greensand (Fig. 9), plus another lower stone fragment (Barber 2014b), both from the southern face of the outer enclosure ditch [2026]. Most of the pottery from the

trench came from the dark layer above the enclosure ditches and dated from around AD 250–400.

Trench 2 established that the outer enclosure ditch cut, and therefore came after, the eastern roadside ditch which forms part of the gridded road system of the open settlement. Pottery contained in the dark fill overlaying the enclosure ditches suggests that they were backfilled by the beginning of the 4th century and possibly substantially earlier.

#### **TRENCH 3: TQ 43071431**

This was an open-area excavation of 25m by 20m, plus a 10m by 4m hand-dug extension over a very bold circular anomaly on its southern edge, totalling 540 square metres. It was situated to the south of



Fig. 8. T-shaped, solid voussoir tile (CAP archive).



Fig. 9. Lodsworth lower hand quernstone, 400mm scale (CAP archive).

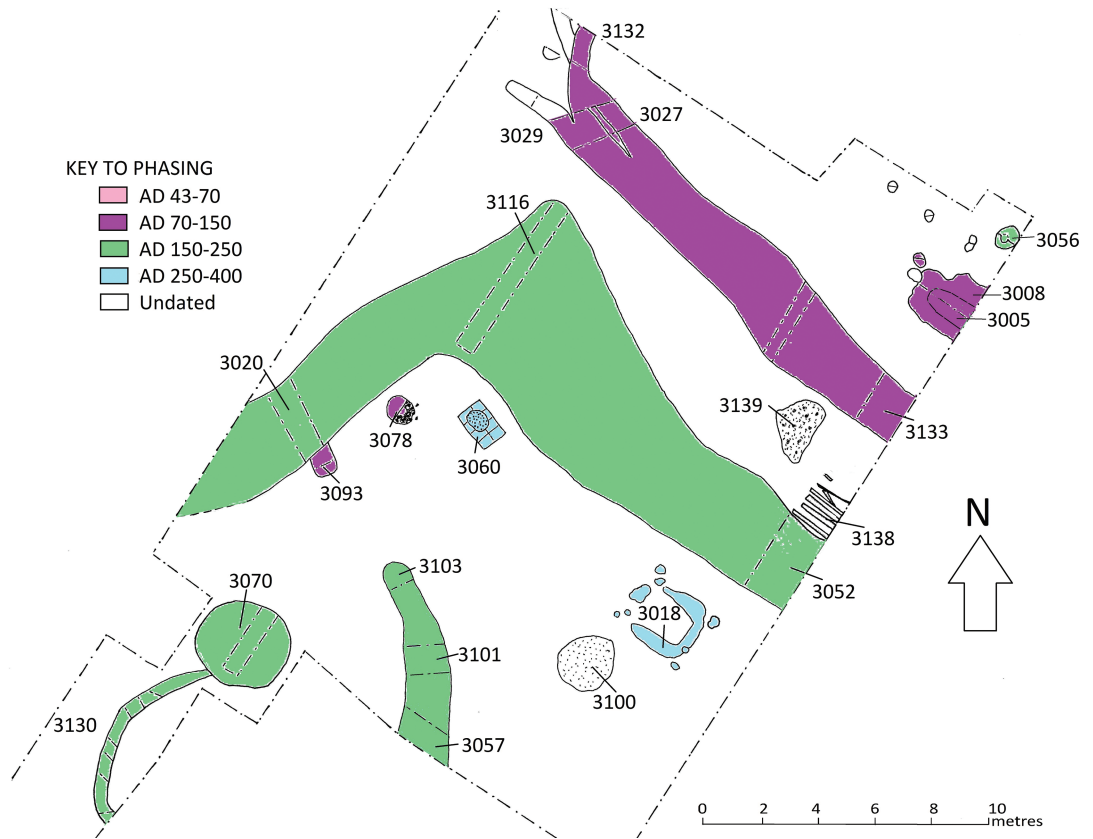


Fig. 10. Plan showing interpreted phases of the main features in trench 3 (after AOC Archaeology 2014).



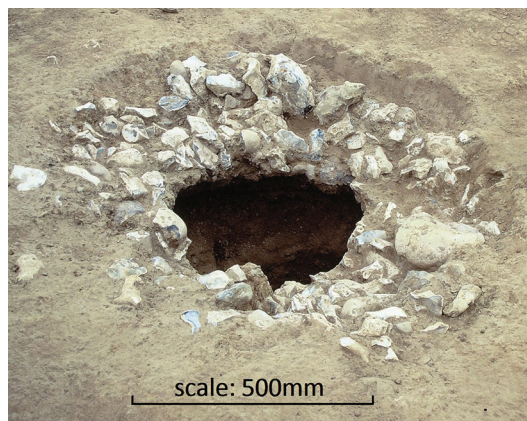


Fig. 11. Flint packed post-hole/pit [3078] (CAP archive).

the other trenches, fully within the meadow and close to the current bank of the River Ouse (Fig. 10).

Excavation revealed the roadside ditches of two adjoining roads, with a small area of wheel-ruts [3138] and flint road metalling [3139] on the eastward-heading road, plus a series of features suggesting an area of light industrial/commercial activity. Two, flint-packed post-holes or pits [3078 and 3093], one metre in diameter, adjacent to the southern-most roadside ditch (contexts [3020] and [3116] on Fig. 10) were dated to the late 1st-century phase as they predated a later layer (Fig. 11). Although this ditch contained pottery dated to AD 200–400, suggesting that it was dug in the early 3rd century, it is likely to have been a recut of a 1st century AD feature.

In the northeast corner of the trench, a series of six smaller post-holes (0.3m diameter average) were grouped adjacent to pit [3008], which had three recorded fills containing flint, bone, tile and pottery, the latter being dated from the late 1st to mid-2nd century. In the southeast corner, seven small post-holes and an internal gully [3018] formed a possible rectangular structure of 3m by 2.3m, with pottery evidence dating from AD 200–400. Immediately to the southwest of this was a sub-circular shallow depression [3100] filled with a thin charcoal and ash spread (3083) and capped by a thin layer of clay (3082).

To the west was a small rectangular trench/pit [3060] (Fig. 12), measuring 1.6m by 1m and 0.4m deep, completely lined with standard *tegula* roofing tiles. A removed sample was 467mm long



Fig. 12. Tile-lined pit [3060], 1m and 500mm scales (CAP archive).

by 330mm wide and 21mm thick, with a 5mm nail hole near its upper edge. The *tegulae* appeared unmortared, with just a dark-brown, loose soil used as backfilling against the vertical cut of the trench sides. Inside the tiled basin was a large deposit of *opus caementicium* (Roman cement). It is unclear whether this was just surplus material, dumped after the basin was redundant, or was intended to form an internal rendering which, for some unknown reason, was not completed. If used unlined, then the basin would have to have been either for dry material, or possibly for draining or wet rinsing, as the joints between the tiles made the structure porous. While pottery sherds from within the fill of this feature were dated as post-AD 270, they were heavily abraded, suggesting that the basin was in use after this date.

To the southwestern edge of the trench an extension was dug by hand to reveal a large ovoid pit [3070] measuring 3.2m by 2.8m and 0.9m deep. The pit had gradually sloping sides and a concave base, and the edges of the cut showed the black and red colouring of intense heating (Fig. 13). A 300mm

wide, 500mm deep gully [3130] curved off to the south and appears on the geophysical image to join with a 1–2m wide ditch [3057, 3101 and 3103] that curves around the eastern side of the pit and may form part of a circling ditch.

The large pit had no datable material in its fills, although the gully and ditch both contained pottery dated to AD 70–200 and AD 200–400. These features also contained a high density of ceramic building materials including brick, *imbrex*, *tegula* and box-flue fragments, plus a notable quantity of burnt clay from hearth or kiln linings. Elements of the tile recovered show evidence of both under- and over-firing, with some surface vitrification suggesting that they could be from seconds or wasters. While it was not possible to firmly identify the process being undertaken in this area, the presence of these substandard ceramic items could be interpreted as potentially arising from local small-scale tile production, suggesting that the adjacent pit may have been the base of a clamp-style kiln.

#### TRENCH 4: TQ 43121434

An open-area excavation of 25m by 10m, located across the boundary between the arable field and

the meadow, provided the only opportunity to excavate both enclosure ditches [4008 and 4015] within a single slot (section 10; Figs 14 and 15). The positioning of this trench was predetermined by a large gap in the boundary hedge, rather than the geophysical survey results. Although the outer enclosure ditch was not as clear here as it was in trench 2, this trench provided the only possible slot across the inner ditch [4015].

The excavation also revealed another of the roadside ditches from the open settlement [4027/9] (Fig. 14), which has also been assigned to the late 1st-century phase, and was cut by the inner enclosure ditch [4015], giving further evidence for sequencing these features. At the northern end of the trench was a small spread of cobble-size, downland flints which lay directly on the natural horizon. These could only have arrived by human intervention and could be the remnants of a structure.

The hand-dug slot through the inner enclosure ditch [4015] gave measurements of 2.7m wide by 0.82m deep, with sloping sides and a tapering, V-shaped base (Fig. 15). Four fills were recorded within the backfill (4016–19), with the lowest fill (4016) likely to be the natural silting of the ditch whilst in use. The remaining fills may include the



Fig. 13. Pit [3070] during excavation showing black and red colouring from intense heat, 1m scale (CAP archive).

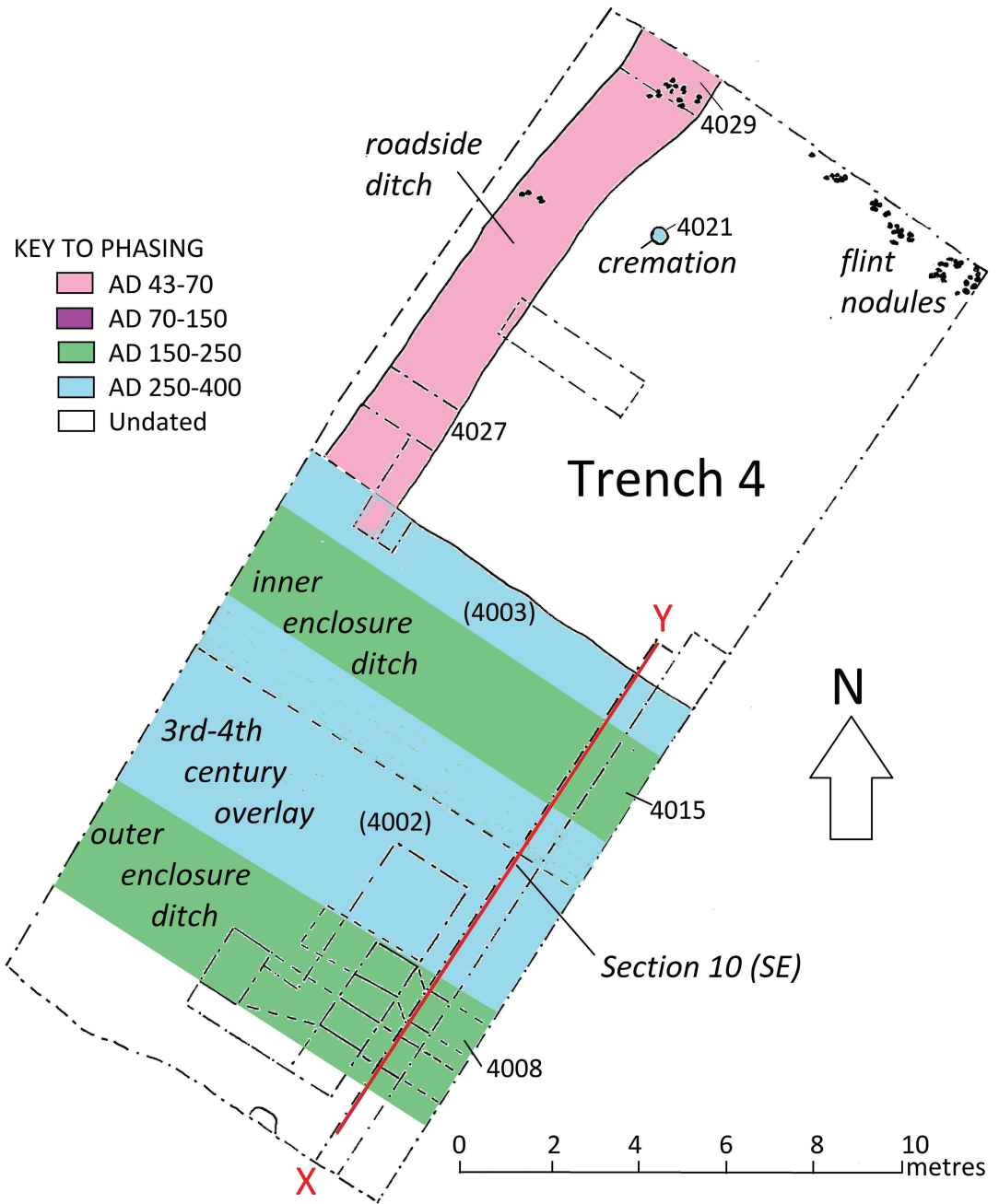


Fig. 14. Phase plan of main features of trench 4 showing line X-Y of Section 10 (after AOC Archaeology 2014).

remains of a defensive bank. No dateable finds were recovered, with the only inclusions noted being natural riverine flints. The outer ditch [4008]

also had sloping sides and a V-shaped base and was potentially truncated on its inner flank. This section contained three fills (4005-7) and the

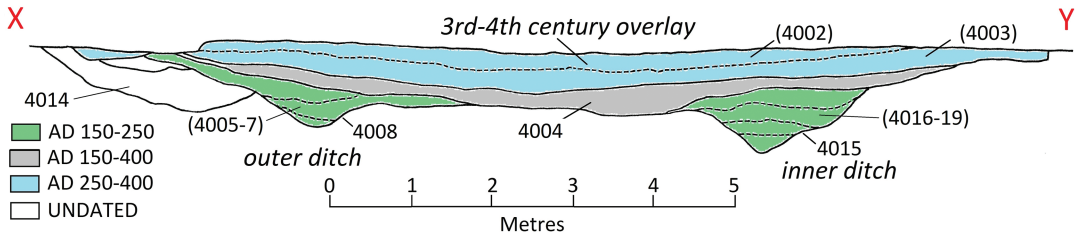


Fig. 15. Interpreted phases in Section 10 across the two enclosure ditches in trench 4 (after AOC Archaeology 2014).

finds recovered included pottery datable to AD 200–300, a large fragment of a silver denarius of Severus Alexander from about AD 222–228 (Rudling 2014), iron slag, animal bone, a large iron nail, glass fragments and burnt flint, as well as residual prehistoric worked flint. A perceived cut [4014] underlying the southwestern edge of the ditch was subsequently deemed to be geological.

Located within the northern half of trench 4 was a single vessel within an undistinguished cut [4021] (Fig. 14). The vessel, which was substantially intact (Fig. 16), was removed whole for later internal investigation and was subsequently identified as a jar dating to the 3rd century (Lyne 2014). The fill of the vessel (4010) contained 625g of compacted, burnt human bone fragments. The identified skeletal elements included six tooth roots and parts of the skull, humeri, ulnae, radii, femora, tibiae, fibulae, ribs, sacrum and various vertebrae. All the identifiable bones were fully formed and are likely to represent a single adult (Ives 2014). The cremation was positioned adjacent to the roadside ditch, but came from a higher layer, suggesting that this area

may have become external to the main settlement after the enclosure ditches were backfilled. This evidence may possibly explain the location of this cremation within the formerly enclosed area.

#### ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

The earliest finds recovered at Bridge Farm in 2013 date to prehistoric times and comprise an assemblage of residual, or derived, worked flints in Roman and later contexts. The pieces date to the mesolithic and late neolithic periods and include bladelets, cores, scrapers and flakes, plus two Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowheads. The presence of a significant assemblage of worked flint from the mesolithic period points to the possibility of a mesolithic campsite located on the slightly higher ground adjacent to the river. The arrow heads suggest that hunting was still being practiced along the riverside during the later neolithic and Bronze Age, but it is also likely that field systems and settlement may have been located close by during this later period (Butler 2014).

The earliest Roman phase covers the years AD 43–70. Based on the dating of pottery from several slots excavated in the roadside ditches it is to this period that the foundation of the settlement has been allocated. However, it is within the scope of the evidence found that this event could have occurred at any time before the end of the 1st century AD. This early settlement was based around a grid-style road system (see Fig. 3), with remains in the south of the site indicating that the roads had roughly metalled surfaces; evidence of wheel-ruts suggests the use of wagons. Little other early settlement activity was recorded in the excavated area, suggesting that the nucleus of the early settlement was probably located elsewhere on the site. The only evidence from the Iron Age comprised ten abraded pottery sherds, probably derived from field marling prior



Fig. 16. Third-century cremation urn during excavation. Scales: 10mm and 100mm divisions. (CAP archive).

to the establishment of the settlement (Lyne 2014).

The main features that can be dated to the next phase, AD 70–150, are a series of large pits (see Figs 5 and 10), some with post-holes adjacent or located within the base. Although the function of these pits remains unclear, their presence indicates continued activity within this southern area of the settlement and perhaps the first indication that the earlier road system was becoming encroached upon, as some of the pits lie close to the roadside ditches.

During the following phase, covering the years AD 150–250, the two large enclosure ditches were installed around the edge of the settlement, potentially cutting off sections of the earlier road system. This indicates a large-scale replanning and, possibly, some changes in the use of this area. The reason for installing the ditches is unclear; however, their shape, and the indication of posts and possibly an ancillary bank, suggest they were defensive. This is likely to be due to a real or perceived threat to the region, as similar enclosures are seen across the southeast of Britain at this time on a range of settlement types. These sites include *mansiones* such as the one at Afoldean in West Sussex, enclosing 0.9 ha (Luke and Wells 2000, 95), rural nucleated settlements of 2.5 ha, such as Bridge Farm itself and Neatham in Hampshire (Millett and Graham 1986, 157–8), and small towns such as Kelvedon and Chelmsford in Essex, where up to 5 ha were enclosed (Rodwell 1988, 135). Black (1995, 60) admits that this singularly Romano-British phenomenon ‘involves a very complex series of issues’ on which no firm consensus has been reached.

The situation is further complicated by the variation in how much of the settlement was included in the enclosure at different sites and the fact that some seemingly official sites received no obvious defences at all (Black 1995, 62). The late 2nd century was a time of open hostilities on the continent and in the north and west of Britain (Frere 1967, 162; Salway 1993, 155–6) which could have prompted concerted proactive measures. There is, however, evidence for more regionally-centred unrest, with both the destruction, especially by fire, of villa buildings, and the number of Late Antonine coin hoards of the 170s and 180s found in the area (Rudling and Russell 2015, 158). That many of these defences were short-lived is somewhat perplexing, given the later increase in coastal raiding, especially as many sites, including Bridge Farm, were located on navigable rivers.

A more cynical interpretation might propose that enclosures that imposed a measure of control on strategic transport hubs could be very beneficial to the tax-collecting authorities in a time of extensive military campaigns. This region-wide undertaking, involving a significant number of settlements (Frere 1984, 68), suggests that the enclosure of Bridge Farm was part of a centrally-orchestrated policy, rather than a purely local initiative. The deep pits cut into the earlier roadside ditches recorded in trench 1 may indicate the possible disuse, or neglect, of the potentially truncated, internal roads during this period of enclosure.

The final Roman phase covers the years from AD 250 to 400. The enclosure ditches appear to have been backfilled with soil from the adjacent bank during the 3rd century, as indicated by the dates of finds recovered from the ditch fills. The roadside ditches, and therefore the roads, south of the enclosure still appear to be in use, with late finds recovered from the section heading down to the southwest corner of the site, suggesting a degree of maintenance throughout the occupation of the area. Maintaining transport links to this apparent industrial area of the site would have been important to sustain production and trade. Dating the deep fire-pit/possible kiln [3070], or indeed definitively establishing its purpose, has proved problematic due to the lack of finds within the backfill of the feature. As English Heritage no longer offers archaeomagnetic sampling and dating, several commercial contractors were approached, but none seemed interested in taking on such a relatively small contract. It was therefore decided to leave *in situ* the central baulk running through the feature, so that this would be available for sampling at a later date, should this prove desirable.

However, the surrounding gully/flue [3130] and ditch [3057–3103], if those features are considered integral with the pit [3070], would suggest a probable 3rd-century date, possibly continuing into the 4th century if the use is linked with the adjacent tile-lined pit and small post-structure. If the deep fire-pit was part of a clamp tile kiln, its presence would indicate that the settlement was potentially manufacturing, as well as trading. Further excavation of this area of the site might clarify this situation and, if so, whether this represented a commercial enterprise or just a localised craft activity.

The presence of a solitary cremation burial within a 3rd-century vessel is also intriguing, as Roman burial practice forbade post-neonatal internments within a settlement, and raises questions on whether this area was still in use at the time of the interment.

The metalwork assemblage from the site is considered to hold a mixed potential for further analysis (Barber 2014c). The Roman metalwork assemblage relates directly to the activity associated with the excavated features and has the potential to shed some light on the activities and social make-up of the inhabitants of the site. Despite the somewhat limited nature of the material recovered in 2013, the assemblage relates to several topics: construction, lead-working (including repair work), dress, potential literacy and fishing. These can be amalgamated with the small assemblage from the metal detecting survey of 2012 to increase the sample size, and adds trading to the list of activities (Millum 2013). There are also a notable number of iron items yet to be satisfactorily categorised, due to extensive corrosion products obscuring their form. Following conservation, these pieces could produce evidence of tools and other diagnostic artefacts and shed further light on other crafts and industries being practiced at the site.

The Roman ceramic building material assemblage is of interest as it directly relates to the main phases of activity at the site. Most of the finds consist of amorphous pieces of burnt clay and tile fragments, undiagnostic in form, which hold little potential for further analysis. However, there are sufficient larger diagnostic pieces, some of which appear to be from wasters or seconds, to add some substance to the hypothesis of on-site tile manufacture. The assemblage may therefore help clarify the products of such an industry, both in fabric, form and finish. Further stratigraphic and distributional analysis offers some potential to strengthen the hypothesis that certain fabrics were made on site, and these can be compared with the fabrics from the nearby Culver Farm and Barcombe villa excavations to begin to resolve whether the Bridge Farm site was a possible tile source for the area. The presence of a spindle whorl, quernstones and a briquetage fragment (from salt production) also offer evidence for some of the other activities being undertaken in the vicinity.

The results from this first year's excavation can only be fully interpreted as the finds assemblage

and site data grow, with further excavation and research across the whole site over future years, but the 2013 excavations have delivered valuable information about this southern area of the site and some indications for the site in general. The basic chronology of the main features has been established using the recovered Roman pottery assemblage which, when combined with finds from future excavations, may have the potential to determine the economic status and cultural associations of the settlement's occupants. The combined material could then be usefully compared with ceramics from previous excavations in the local area, such as the Barcombe villa and bathhouse complex, and from sites further afield, to evaluate the importance of the site within its local and regional context.

Future study of evidence from across the Bridge Farm site will indicate the nature of activities undertaken, with any spatial variation indicating differences within specific areas and periods. Some variations are already becoming apparent when comparing the results from the excavated areas of 2014 and 2015–17 (Millum 2017, 36, 44, 47 and 57) to those of 2013 (*see* Fig. 3 for trench locations). The scarcity of iron manufacturing waste, from other than the disturbed upper layers of the 2013 trenches, is in marked contrast to the abundance of such material from the other excavated areas. This difference assists in resolving the enigmatic industrial features in trench 3, by dismissing iron smelting and forging from the range of possible activities in the southern area, given the obvious evidence left by these processes in other areas of the settlement.

## CONCLUSION

When Ivan Margary excavated a section across the London road at Bridge Farm (Margary 1933, 26–28), he did so without the benefit of geophysics and therefore was unaware of the surrounding settlement, or that the road he sought terminated just beyond his excavation. However, without his pioneering work the Bridge Farm settlement may not have been discovered.

The excavations of 2013 achieved a core objective by establishing a late 1st-century AD date for the planned settlement grid which predated by a century the installation of the bivallate enclosure. The excavated features and artefacts recovered

support a multi-phased interpretation of Romano-British activity, lasting for over three centuries, which included an industrial element providing at least local commerce and manufacturing (Millum 2013, 58).

The choice of a location so close to the river suggests the importance of access to that waterway as a means of transport to the coast and possibly Gaul, providing an integrated system with the roads to the north, east and west (Rudling 2016, 75). Shepherd Frere (1986, xvi), in his foreword to the report of the defended site at Neatham, in Hampshire, suggests that these late 2nd-century, short-lived, earthwork defences show that a site had 'some special feature of an official character', implying government action and centralised decision making, rather than the spontaneous actions of local people. Applying these observations to Bridge Farm strongly supports the hypothesis that the foundation of the settlement was not the product of haphazard roadside spread, but a planned development in a carefully chosen riverside location.

The community aspect of this HLF-funded project was also of prime importance. It offered many new volunteers the opportunity to be introduced to the techniques of practical field archaeology and raised awareness among the public, as well as the archaeological establishment, of a regionally important site in a location previously known only for its Roman road. Frere (1986, xv)

indicated that these larger nucleated settlements were a category of which little was known and, 30 years on, a recent comprehensive survey into rural settlement in Roman Britain has found this still to be true, despite their clear importance to the understanding of the wider Romano-British rural economy (Allen and Smith 2016, 37).

The new findings add emphasis to the importance of the discovery of this defended Romano-British settlement and the knowledge that will be gained from the programme of research and excavation due to take place over future years. The initial stages of this project have already promoted further investigation across the region for comparable sites in similar locations (David Staveley pers. comm.). It is even possible that this discovery may herald a new chapter in the search for the less elite factions of Romano-British society in Sussex and across the South-East.

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#### ADS SUPPLEMENT

A copy of the full practical excavation report (Wallace 2014) can be found on the ADS website at <http://archaeologyataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/sac/>. (Follow the link to Sussex Archaeological Collections Volume 155).

The excavation archive is currently held at the CAP headquarters at Bridge Farm.