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Recent investigations on the site of the Roman buildings at White Beech, Chiddingfold

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with a contribution by
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This report summarises the results of a series of archaeological investigations carried out between 2002 and 2010 on the site of the Roman buildings at White Beech, Chiddingfold. These involved a programme of fieldwalking, topographical and geophysical surveys and two phases of trial trenching, all with the objective of locating and establishing the state of preservation of the Roman buildings first recorded in the late 19th century. The location of the buildings was established, but these appear to have been almost totally robbed out in the 19th century – the site having subsequently been deep ploughed, with the result that, at least in the areas examined, no footings remain. However, magnetometry and trenching have shown the presence on the hilltop of a Late Iron Age enclosure as a precursor to the Roman buildings, and other work has produced evidence for the existence of a substantial Roman timber structure, possibly a building, slightly to the east of, and probably earlier than, the main building complex.

Introduction

In 1883, ploughing in High Riddings field, White Beech, Chiddingfold (figs 1–3) disturbed masonry walls, which the farmer thought were the footings of a demolished barn. However, the local clergyman, the Rev T S Cooper, recognised some of the finds as Roman and a series of excavations was organised, initially under Ralph Neville but subsequently directed by Cooper himself. This work resulted in the production of a plan and interpretation of the buildings, neither of which were published at the time, but which were subsequently given, together with the finds, to the Surrey Archaeological Society and are currently stored in Guildford Museum.

Marian and John Gower collated the available information and published a report on the site in 1984, to which the reader is referred for the full account of the findings (Cooper *et al* 1984). Apart from the occasional episode of looting, nothing further is known to have occurred on the site until 2002, when the field was visited by the authors as part of the Society's Monuments Monitoring Programme and at the suggestion of Dr David Bird. It was immediately obvious that a band of Roman roof tile and tesserae that lay across the centre of the recently ploughed field might give an indication of the exact position of the Roman buildings, which was not clear from Cooper's notes. This led to a gridded fieldwalking survey and subsequently to trial trenching on an outlying concentration of tesserae, magnetometer and resistivity surveys, and a final programme of trial trenching over the likely site of the buildings. The site is a Scheduled Monument (Surrey no 135) and all work was carried out with the permission of the Secretary of State at the DCMS and that of the landowner. The site archive has been deposited at Guildford Museum (acc no AS 24235).

Topography

High Riddings field (*c* SU 9789 3610) is sited at the top of a hill with an east–west alignment, capped with river gravels (Head) and with a maximum height of *c* 70m OD. The hill slopes relatively steeply to the north, less so to the west and south, and gently to the east (fig 2). The site, subject to vegetation, commands extensive views in all directions and is within clear sight of Hascombe hillfort, about 4km to the north-east (fig 1a). The surrounding geology is

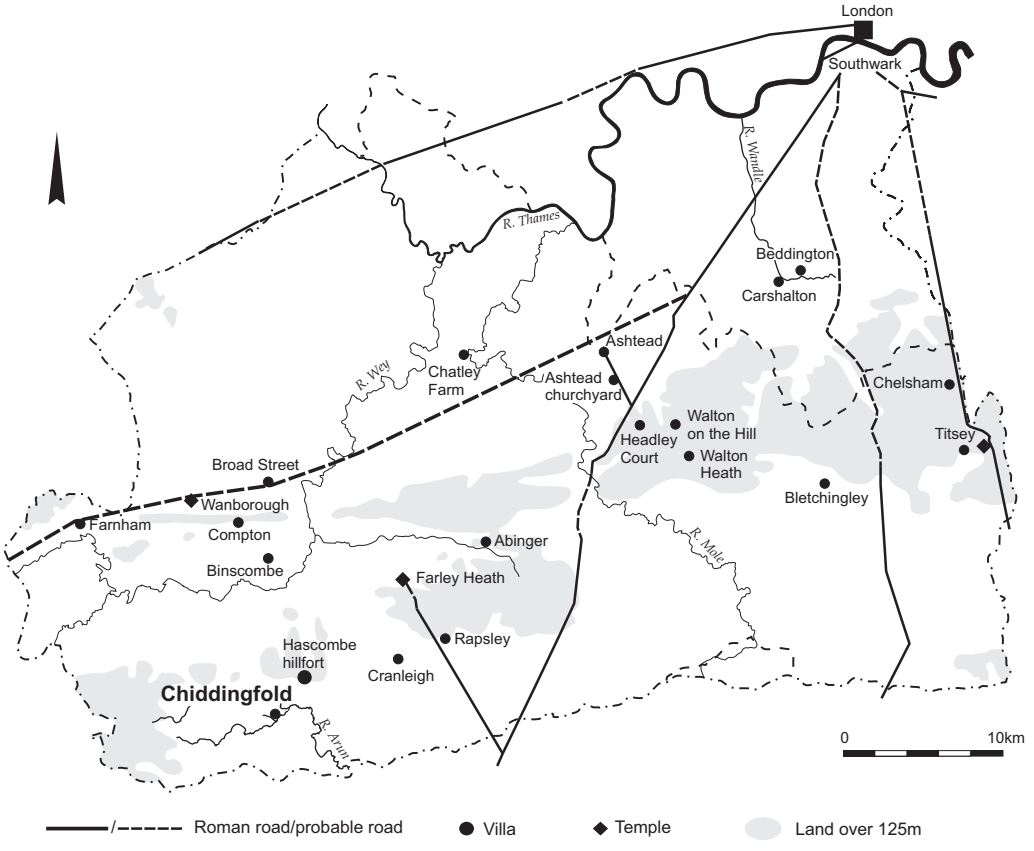

Fig 1a Chiddingfold: location plan showing the site in relation to other major Roman buildings and the road system. (© Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

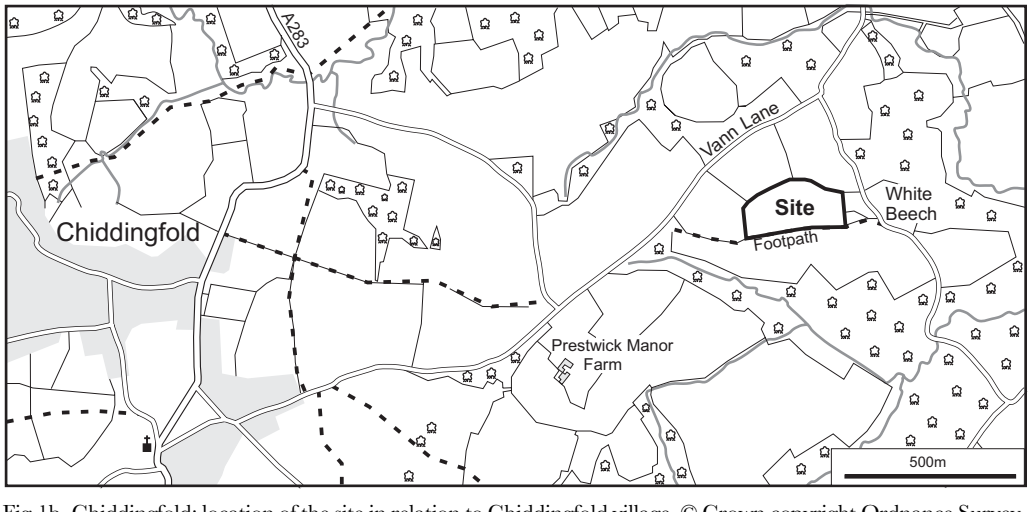

Fig 1b Chiddingfold: location of the site in relation to Chiddingfold village. © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey. All rights reserved)

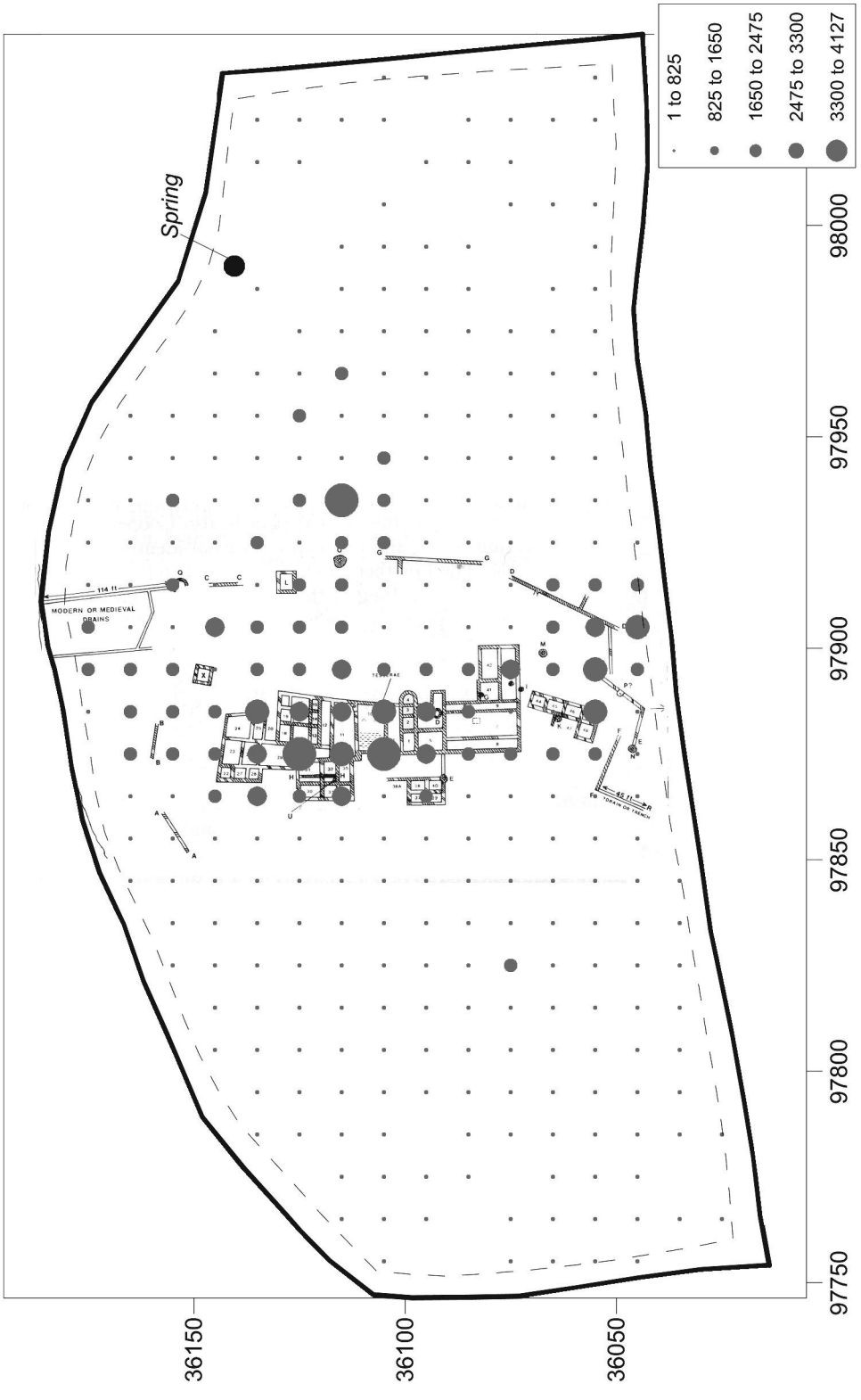

Fig 2 Chiddingfold. Plot of the ceramic building material (in grams) found during fieldwalking in 2002 and suggested best fit of Cooper's plan of the buildings.

Wealden Clay and the field is an isolated patch of better soil within the Weald itself. No other Roman sites have been recorded in the immediate vicinity (fig 1a) and no roads of the period are known to have served the area, although there would have been some form of access at the time.

The fieldwalking 2002 (based on Howe *et al* 2002)

The programme of fieldwalking was carried out in the late summer of 2002 following ploughing, harrowing and planting. Conditions were dry but not unfavourable for the collection of material. The field was divided into a series of 10m squares as sub-divisions of the OS 100m grid, using a total station, and these were marked by ranging poles and canes. Each square was given a unique reference number and allocated to an individual volunteer, whose name was recorded and who walked the square in a consistent number of parallel lines in alternate directions. All material was collected and removed to a processing point, where it was recorded, before being returned to the square from which it had come. In all, a total of 343 whole or partial squares were examined. The materials collected were divided into flintwork, burnt flint, prehistoric pottery, Roman ceramic building material – with tesserae recorded separately – Roman pottery, probable Roman building stone, Roman plaster and post-medieval pottery (no medieval pottery was found). The plot of Roman ceramic building material is shown in figure 2 and the other plots can be found in the supplement (see *Endnote*).

A general background scatter of prehistoric flintwork was recovered, with a particular concentration being noted in the south-west corner of the field at the highest point of the hill. This scatter consisted mainly of debitage, but included scrapers, points and cores and corresponded to the highest concentration of burnt flint. A few items were retained for identification, but the majority of the flints were returned to their point of origin. While not being a major occupation site, these finds point to the intermittent use of the hilltop over a long period from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age.

Prehistoric pottery, which was present in small amounts, was largely restricted to particular points around the hilltop. Following the magnetometer survey in 2008, it subsequently became apparent that these concentrations lay over the ditches of an Iron Age enclosure and the pottery had probably been brought to the surface from trenches dug by Neville and Cooper in the 19th century.

Virtually all the Roman material lay in a north–south band across the middle of the field (eg fig 2 for ceramic building material). This coincided with a terrace that was just visible, cut into the eastern slope of the hill, and had been recorded during the topographical survey. The only slight exception to this was a scatter of tesserae slightly to the east and downhill of the main deposits. No Roman metalwork was recovered, although more recently a badly worn *as* of the 1st or 2nd century has been recovered from the field. The Roman pottery survived as small abraded sherds, mostly of 3rd and 4th century date, with only the very occasional sherd of fine ware being recorded.

As a result of the fieldwalking it seemed likely, indeed almost certain, that the position of the Roman buildings was marked by the band of tile and other material and that they had been built along the terrace that was still visible. This fitted well with the dimensions given on Cooper's plan and seemed a logical choice of site, lying as it did just to the east of and below the crest of the hill. The only question was the extent to which the 19th century excavations had affected the distribution of the Roman material and, in particular, whether the outlying concentration of tesserae, downslope from the main band of material, was the result of Victorian activity or whether it originated from an unrecorded outlying Roman building.

First phase of trial trenching, 2005

In an attempt to resolve this question, a small team from the Society spent two days at the end of August 2005 opening six small trial trenches over the relevant area (fig 3, nos 1–6;

fig 4). All the trenches produced tesserae from within the overlying plough-soil, but most were otherwise completely devoid of finds below this level. A layer of what appeared to be hardpan was encountered at an average depth of 45cm.

However, one trench (fig 3, no 3; fig 4) was more productive in that it revealed, at a depth of 45cm and sealed beneath a completely sterile layer of hillwash (301), a stone-packed postpit (303) with an internal posthole *c* 45–50cm in diameter x *c* 45cm deep (fig 4, section). The backfill of the posthole (304) contained yet more tesserae, a fragment of *imbrex* and three sherds of greyware – one of which was typically Roman, possibly from a small beaker – while the other two were of much cruder sand-tempered ware and might have been either residual prehistoric or post-Roman in date. The postpit itself lay embedded in the edge of a layer of flints (302), which almost certainly represents the remains of a floor, though whether internal or external remains uncertain. The thickness of the flint layer is unknown as it was not sectioned. There is a slight possibility that the probable hardpan layer and occasional scatter of small flints found in several of the other trenches at a similar depth might also represent a working surface, but the complete lack of finds makes this uncertain.

The general conclusion is that the scatter of tesserae visible on the surface does not relate to the posthole or to any building at this position. The fact that the tesserae are, with the exception of the backfill of the posthole, restricted to the plough-soil (300), probably indicates that they were redeposited during the 19th century excavations. Indeed, Cooper mentions discovering 'red tesserae almost by the spade-full' at the north end of his wall GG, which should lie close to and just west of the 2005 trenches (Cooper *et al* 1984, 63). So, while not related to the underlying building, this concentration of tesserae does tend to confirm the likely position of the main building, based on Cooper's references to his tessellated pavement.

While too much should not be made of the discovery of a single postpit, it does seem likely that it indicates the presence of a timber building of some substance, together with its associated flint floor. This may possibly have been part of an aisled barn, familiar from a number of other Roman sites, but the position here is distinctly odd, being only about 30m from the centre of the eastern face of the main complex. The tesserae and *imbrex* in the backfill, taken together with the pottery, perhaps indicate that the structure represented by the postpit was not contemporary with the main site. It was presumably either already demolished or was in the process of being demolished when the tessellated pavement was being laid or, perhaps less likely, was later in date and connected with a phase of demolition of the main building. In either event, fourteen tesserae had found their way into the empty posthole following the removal of the post that had stood there.

The final trench (fig 3, no 6), the westernmost and therefore nearest to the main Roman buildings, revealed a layer of probable building rubble associated with a few sherds of Roman pottery. The trench was not far from a feature (O) recorded as a 'tank' in the earlier excavations (Cooper *et al* 1984, 72); this would again seem to confirm that the position of the Roman buildings indicated by the 2002 survey is broadly correct. The trench also indicates that the Roman levels here lie well below the plough-soil and are not, at least at this point, being affected by ploughing.

The geophysical surveys, 2004 and 2008

A geophysical survey using a resistivity meter was undertaken in 2004 over the presumed site of the Roman buildings in the hope of locating the wall plan. However, this revealed no features whatsoever, though the conditions were dry at the time. A later survey in wetter conditions proved similarly negative, and seemed to indicate that there was a problem with resistivity on the gravels or that all assumptions as to the position of the building were wrong or, finally, that no remains survived intact.

In 2008 a further survey, this time with a magnetometer, was carried out with a similar aim to that of the previous surveys.

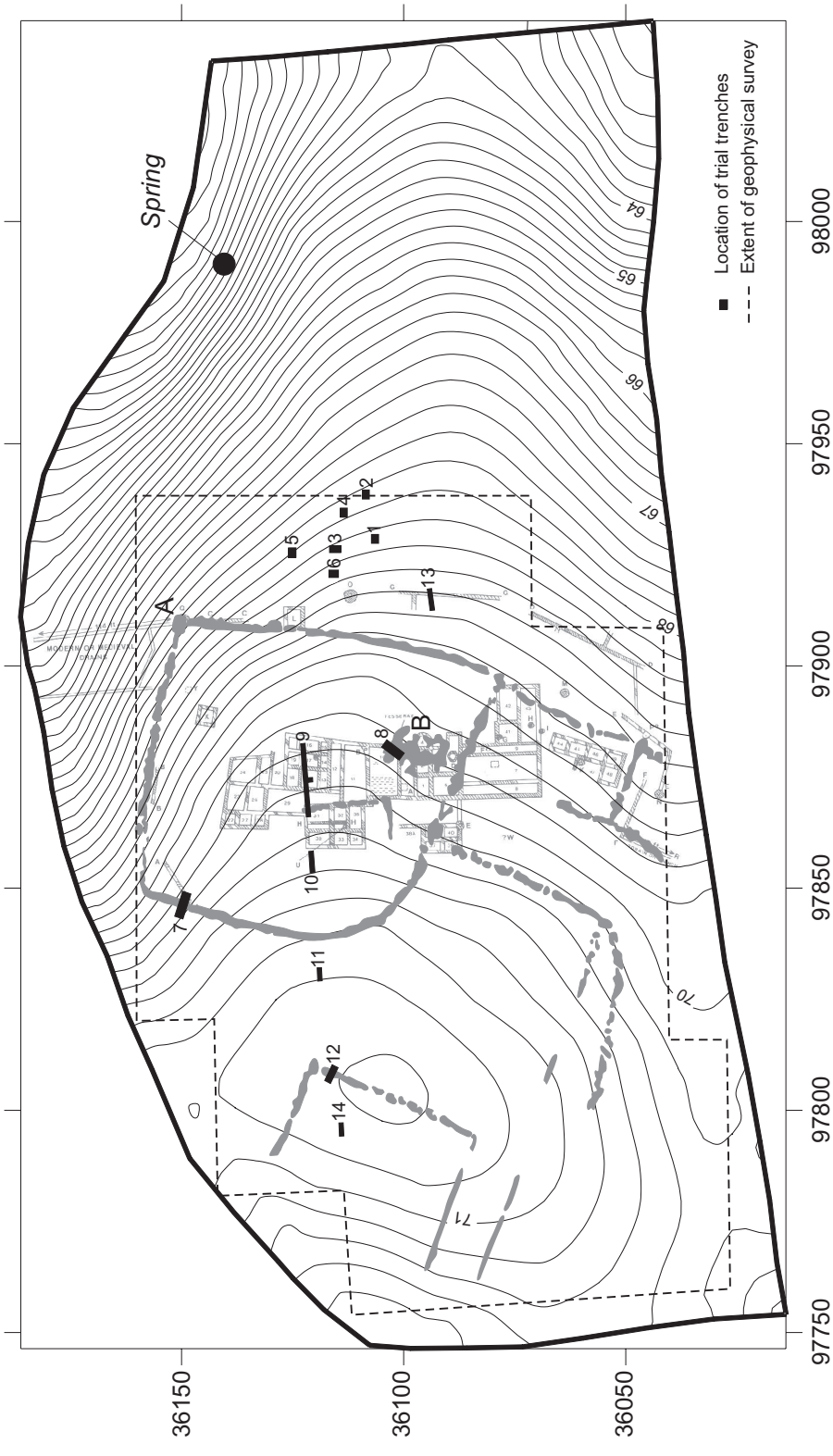

Fig 3 Chiddingfold. Results of the magnetometer survey and location of trenches on suggested position of Roman buildings (plan from Cooper *et al* 1984).

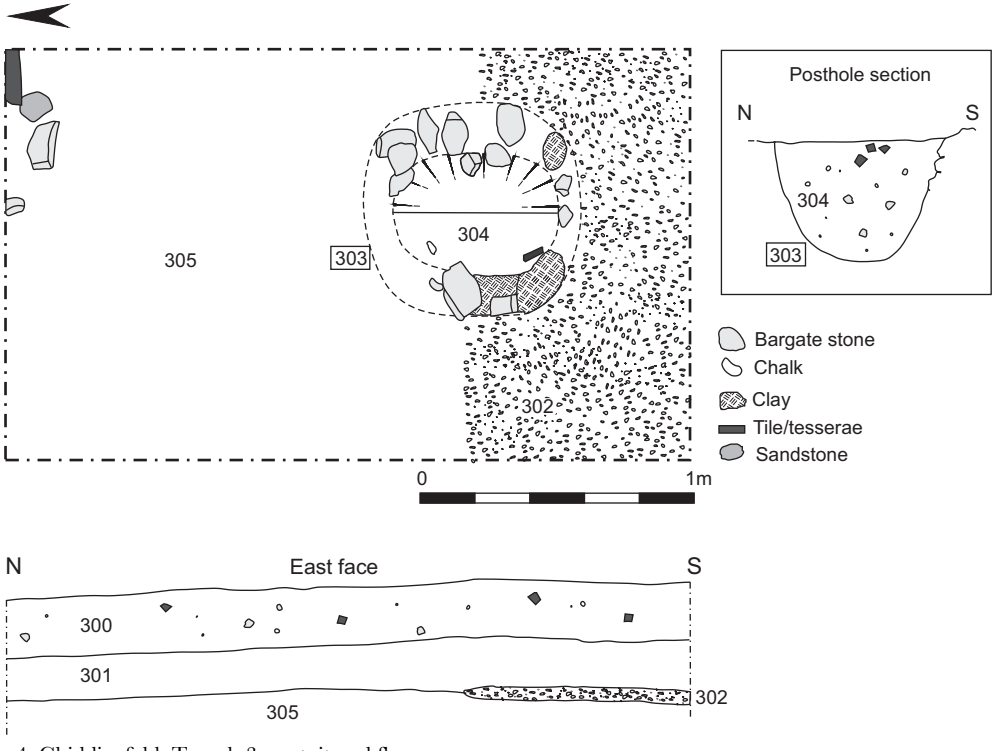

Fig 4 Chiddingfold. Trench 3: postpit and floor.

METHOD

For the purposes of the geophysical survey, a grid of 30m squares was laid out and surveyed using a Geoscan FM256 fluxgate gradiometer at 1m traverse intervals with a 0.25m sampling interval and zig-zag traverses. This was linked to datum points remaining from previous work on the site. The survey data were processed using Geoplot 3.0 software. The area was generally magnetically quiet; however, the exposed nature of the site and the strong gusting winds and rain during the survey affected the quality of the results. This meant that the data had to be rectified using zero mean traverse and a low-pass filter, and the results then interpolated to 0.25m resolution across the traverses.

RESULTS

The site is unusual in that, in this case, excavation (in the 19th century) preceded the geophysical survey rather than the more usual order of events. This has allowed elements of the survey to be interpreted in the light of Cooper's excavation plan and notes.

The main feature revealed by the survey is the *c* 70 x 70m D-shaped enclosure (fig 3), which partially surrounds and underlies the site of the later Roman buildings. Curving south-west from the D-shaped enclosure and turning west is a second linear feature, which appears to be paralleled to the south-east, for part of its length, by a further linear feature. Although rather wide, this is probably a trackway leading to the enclosure with at least two rectangular enclosures lying immediately to the south-east. The ditched enclosure is now known, as a result of trenching in 2010 (see below), to be of Late Iron Age date. A further straight-sided enclosure was also found at the top of the hill at the west end of the field and again this is now known to be 2nd century in date and may be contemporary with the probable timber building mentioned above.

Within the D-shaped enclosure are two straight linear features forming a right angle, with the longer side more or less in alignment with the long axis of the main Roman building. At the time of the survey it was uncertain whether these related to the building or to some other feature, but they now seem likely to be the surviving sections of a robber trench (see below).

A stretch of ditch (fig 3, A) showed a high response, indicative of heating, and it is interesting that this appears to lie close to 'circular structure Q' (Cooper *et al* 1984, 71), a feature found in the 19th century excavations and which the excavator thought to 'have been a furnace'. He goes on to say 'The earth here was very black, and for a distance of upwards of 12 feet on the west side'. Equally, the area of high magnetic response (fig 3, B) lies close to an area of the buildings identified by Cooper as having a furnace and hypocaust. The shape of the response, having a central 'spine' with four cross 'bars', may possibly be the result of the physical layout of such a heating system, although it would seem rather large. The highest magnetic responses came from either end of the northernmost cross 'bar' and could represent the original furnaces.

The separate and differently aligned suite of rooms to the south of the main Roman building, labelled 44–48 on Cooper's plan, appears to lie neatly within one of the rectangular enclosures and it may be that, rather than a coincidence, this is the earliest Roman stone building on the site and utilised a pre-existing enclosure.

A public footpath runs along the southern edge of the field and has cut a deep groove into this section of the slope of the hill. It has often been claimed that this path is of great antiquity, and it may be worth noting that since it appears to cut through the southernmost rectangular enclosure it is likely to post-date that enclosure – giving some idea of an earliest possible date for the path, ie that its origin is in the post-Roman period.

Second phase of trial trenching, 2010

Following the magnetometer survey, it was decided to section the ditches of both the D-shaped enclosure (fig 3, no 7) and the straight-sided enclosure (fig 3, no 12) in order to date the two features. It was also decided to open a third trench across one part of the magnetic anomaly that possibly marked the site of the hypocaust (fig 3, no 8). In the event, following the uncertain results from the latter trench, a further series of trenches (nos 9–11 and 14, with 13 as an outlier to the east) were opened in a line across the presumed site of the main building in an attempt to finally establish its position and state of preservation.

TRENCH 7

This 6 x 2m trench (figs 3 and 5) was positioned over a north-west section of the enclosure ditch (702), the top of which was encountered immediately below the plough-soil level (fig 5, 700) at a depth of 27cm. The ditch itself was V-shaped in section, being 2.2m wide and cut 72cm into the natural gravel, having originally been somewhere in excess of 1m deep. A number of fill layers were recorded, several of which contained pottery. In particular, context 703 (fig 5, section) yielded large conjoining fragments of three pots (fig 9 and pottery report, below), which had apparently been thrown into the ditch as rubbish while a possible recut of the ditch was being backfilled (703, 706). Context 703 also contained Roman tile, burnt daub and one fragment of burnt bone. Contexts 704 and 705 are probably the secondary fills of the first ditch cut and they contained very similar pottery to 703 and 706. Unfortunately, the primary fill (707) of the main ditch did not produce any finds, but it is nevertheless clear that the enclosure is Late Iron Age in date and the ditch was being backfilled during the early Roman period. On either side of the ditch the upper surface of the natural gravel (701) showed grooves from deep ploughing, which was also evident elsewhere in this part of the site.

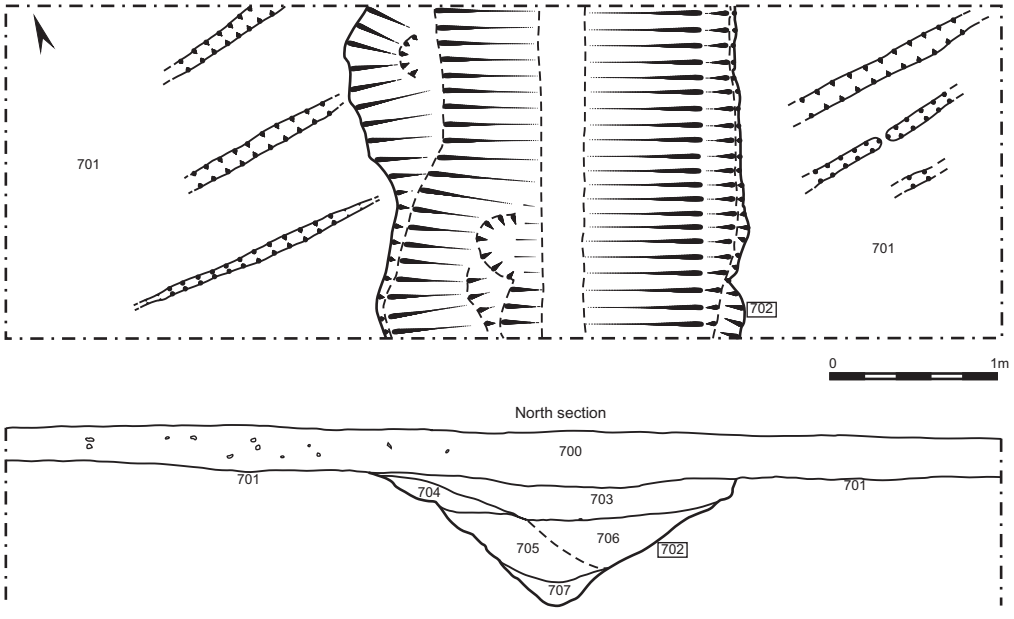

Fig 5 Chiddingfold. Plan and section of trench 7. Plan shows plough grooves in natural (Head).

TRENCH 8

This 5 x 2m trench (fig 3) was located across the potential 'firebox' end of the odd-shaped magnetic anomaly (potentially the hypocaust) revealed by the earlier geophysical survey. The trench (fig 6) showed that under the plough-soil (800) the natural gravel (801) had been cut by a large and, at least at this point, straight-sided, pit (802). At the south end of the trench this was tested to a depth of 1.4m from the ground surface, at which point the underlying natural gravel, slightly pinkish/red in colour, was encountered – presumably having been subjected to heat. The pit had been backfilled with a dark soil that contained quantities of *tegulae*, lumps of stone, occasional potsherds and ash spread throughout the fill. However, several pieces of clay pipe stem were also found in the fill and it therefore seems very likely that if this had been the site of the hypocaust mentioned by Cooper, it had been completely removed after 1883 (Cooper *et al* 1984, 64).

TRENCH 9

Following the failure to confirm the position of Cooper's hypocaust with absolute certainty, a further trench (fig 3) was opened across the presumed line of the main Roman building in an attempt to find any surviving walls that could be related to the 19th century plans. The trench was 17m long x 1m wide and showed, beneath the plough-soil, the base of three possible robber trenches (fig 7: 903, 907 and 909). These, particularly 907 and 909, were very shallow, hardly penetrating the natural gravel, while 903 survived to a depth of about 10cm. The fill (904) of 903 consisted of a mix of soil with tile and mortar, but contained no surviving walling. The fills (908 and 910) of the other two cuts merely contained a few flecks of tile and mortar. The westernmost robber trench (903) coincided with an L-shaped linear feature on the magnetometer survey (fig 3) and must be part of the same feature. Unfortunately, these probable robber trenches could not be made to fit with any of the walls shown on Cooper's plan. Otherwise, the trench showed a number of animal burrows, but also a possible stakehole (902) and a small pit (905) containing a little ash and tile (906).

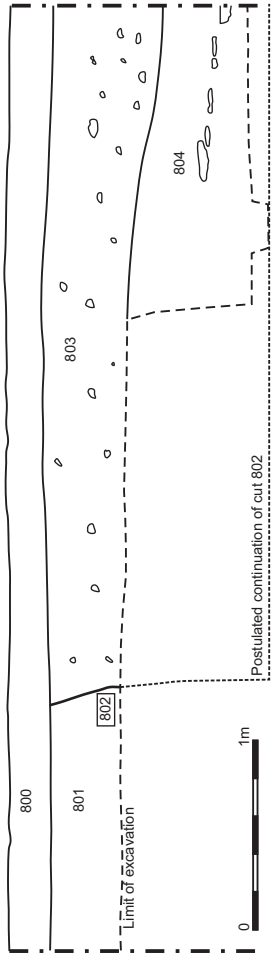

Fig 6 Chiddingfold. Trench 8 east section.

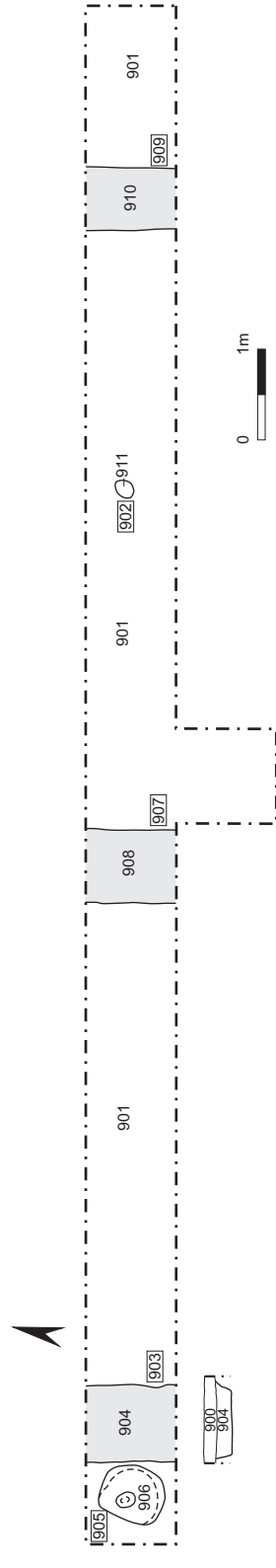

Fig 7 Chiddingfold. Trench 9 plan and context 903 section. Possible robber trenches in grey tone.

TRENCHES 10 AND 11

These trenches, 5 x 1m and 3 x 1m respectively (fig 3), contained no features whatsoever and merely produced a very slight scatter of Roman material from the overlying plough-soil.

TRENCH 12

This trench, 4 x 1.5m, was positioned at the north-east corner of the straight-sided enclosure (fig 3) and exposed the top of the ditch fill beneath 24cm of plough-soil – the latter being thinner at the top of the hill than further down the slope. The ditch was U-shaped in section (fig 8), about 80cm wide and cut 40cm into the natural gravel. The primary fill (1204) contained ash and a few sherds of pottery, while the main fill (1203) had a mix of tile and pottery. The enclosure, on the basis of the pottery dating, seems to belong to the early Roman period and to have been backfilled by the late 2nd or early 3rd centuries AD (see *The pottery*, below).

TRENCH 13

This trench, 5 x 1m, was positioned over the likely line of the boundary wall shown on Cooper's plan (fig 3) in the hope that the deeper topsoil at this point in the field would have protected any surviving Roman walling. Unfortunately, no features were encountered and the underlying gravel appeared to be completely undisturbed.

TRENCH 14

This trench, 3 x 1m, was located within the straight-sided enclosure (fig 3) but it failed to reveal any features and produced only two pieces of roof tile. There is therefore no evidence for the existence of a tile-roofed building at the top of the hill.

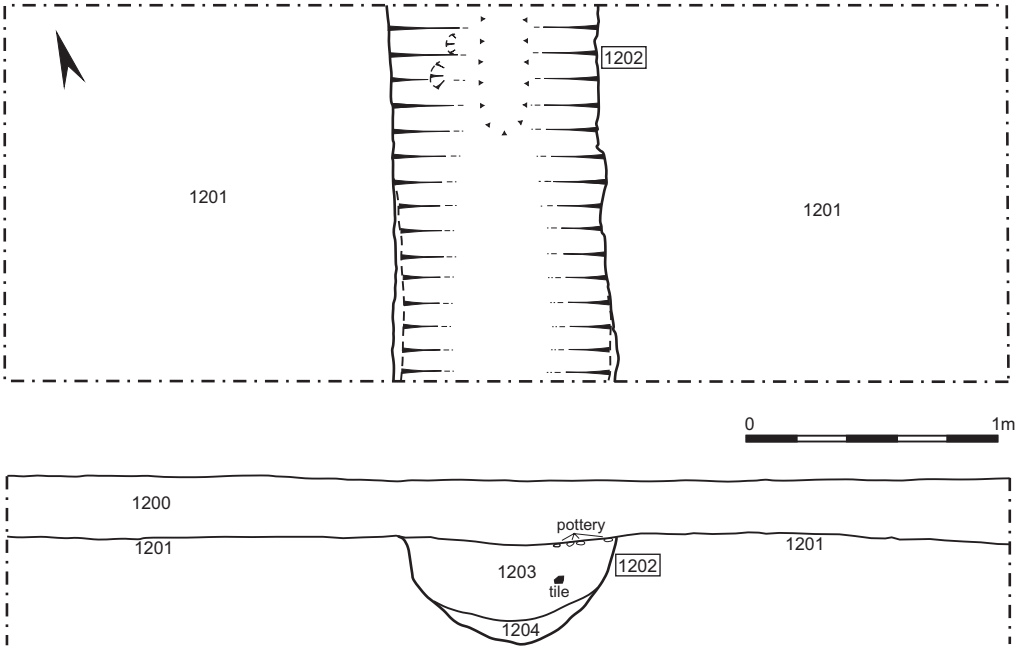

Fig 8 Chiddingfold. Trench 12 plan and south section.

The pottery, by Phil Jones

Of the 309 sherds (2.9kg) recovered from the 2010 excavations, 217 (2.3kg) are from the 703–706 contexts and of late 1st century date, and 92 (0.55kg) from 1203/4 probably belonged to the late 2nd or 3rd century.

Most of the pottery of both phases of occupation is dominated by greyware of Alice Holt/Farnham (AH/F) type (fabrics 3A and 3B and their variants), which accounts for between 91 and 93% (count and weight) of the site assemblage. Of these, fabric 3A has 'standard'-sized quartz grains *c* 0.2–0.8mm across, 3A finer and 3A finest are self-explanatory, and 3B has much coarser grains *c* 0.5–1.5mm across.

Four of the 283 'sherds' (2.7kg) of the 703–706 contexts, however, are represented by many joining pieces (each counted as one) from a bead-rimmed jar (Lyne & Jefferies 1979 (hereafter L&J), Class 4) in 3A fabric (from the top of 703), a cordon-necked jar (L&J Class 1) and a Surrey bowl (L&J Class 5) in 3A fabric (from 703) and the base of another jar (in 3A finer also from 703). The 703–6 contexts also contain the rims of another five bead-rimmed jars, another Surrey bowl, another cordon-necked jar as well as several neck sherds from others, the rim of a cordon-necked flagon (L&J Class 8) and the neck of another, and the rim of an everted-rimmed jar. A base sherd may be from a platter.

The later AH/F greyware from 1203/4 includes the rims of up to six everted-rimmed jars (L&J Class 3B), three bead-rimmed bowls (L&J Class 5A), a simple-walled bowl (L&J Class 6), a funnel-necked beaker, a beaker with a short-everted rim and a beaded rim from a possible narrow-necked flask (L&J Class 8). Another vessel represented by several sherds is an odd bowl form with a flange-beaded rim and a rounded body carination.

Other 'romanised' greywares are represented by four sherds from a wheel-thrown vessel in a predominantly sandy fabric with moderate amounts of glauconite (703 and 706), and a shoulder of a cordon-necked jar in a sandy fabric that also includes moderate amounts of iron mineral inclusions (703).

The only 'romanised' fineware is represented by four pieces from context 1203, probably from the same vessel, in a creamware fabric that still bears traces of an original red slip. The source is unknown, but is unlikely to be the New Forest manufactories.

Another 20 sherds (93g), all from the 703–6 contexts, belong to 'native' traditions of predominantly grog or calcined flint-gritted fabrics, a few of which may pre-date the 'romanised' types, although most were probably contemporary with them during the later 1st century.

Seventeen sherds (80g), predominantly tempered with grog, include the rims of three hand-made bead-rimmed jars from context 703 in the most common fabric that also includes moderate amounts of sand. All could be of early Roman date, but some may be Late pre-Roman Iron Age.

The three sherds of flint-tempered types include the everted rim of a jar (from 703), but there is no certainty that any of them belong to the Roman period and they may represent prehistoric occupation, perhaps in the Bronze Age.

CONTEXT FINDS ASSEMBLAGES

703: 142 sherds (1.8kg), of which between 86 and 94% (weight and count) are of Alice Holt/Farnham types. The other twenty sherds are of 'native' fabrics, most commonly predominantly tempered with grog, and among which are the rims of three hand-made bead-rimmed jars. One of the two flinty sherds is the everted rim of a jar.

The pot assemblage includes the only sherd of 3Bcalc fabric, with abundant very coarse quartz sand and sparse calcined flint inclusions. The type is common in early Roman deposits recently excavated at Runfold, where it may have been made, most usually into storage jars. Its variant without flint, 3B, is represented by nine sherds, and it, too, is well represented at Runfold.

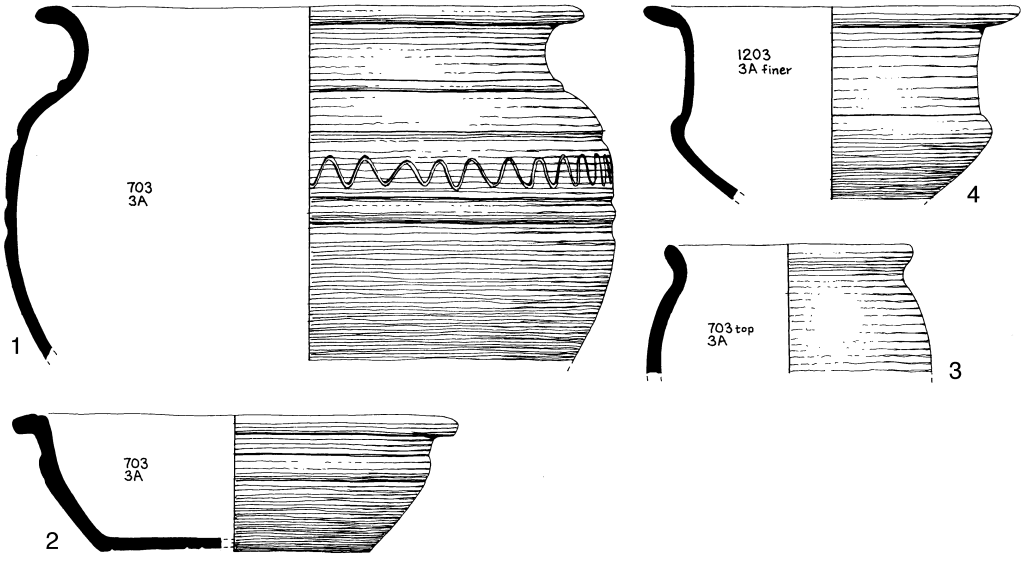

Fig 9 Chiddingfold. Pottery from trench 7, context 703 and trench 12, context 1203 (scale 1:3)

The most common AH/F fabric is 3A, with 'standard'-sized grains of sand (*c* 0.2–0.8mm), and represented by 39 sherds (0.37kg) in addition to several joining fragments from a cordon-necked jar, a Surrey bowl and a bead-rimmed jar. The first of these, in an oxidised fabric, has a bead-terminated rim, a plain shoulder panel delineated by the neck cordon and a deep shoulder groove, with a panel below decorated with an incised wavy line and delineated below that with another cordon (fig 9, no 1). The Surrey bowl, in a black reduced body, has more of an off-set than the standard body cordon, and only a vestigial lid-seating groove. The underside has a perimeter groove and two concentric grooves closer to the centre of the base (fig 9, no 2). The bead-rimmed jar is in a grey fabric and is from the top of 703 (fig 9, no 3). Among the other sherds of 3A is part of the neck and cordon from a cordon-necked flagon.

Sherds of the 3A fine fabric are almost as common as those of 3A, and include the rims of another bead-rimmed jar, but with a shoulder groove, the everted rim of another jar and part of the base of another jar. Even finer 3A sherds are uncommon, but include a base plate that may be from a platter.

Other manufactories may have supplied two more coarseware vessels represented in the 703 assemblage. They include part of a cordon-necked jar in a sandy fabric that also includes many iron mineral inclusions, and three sherds from another vessel in a sandy fabric characterised by moderate amounts of glauconite ooids.

704: Single small fragment (1g) of Roman 3A greyware.

705: 23 sherds (0.18kg) of AH/F greyware, including the rim, neck and handle spring of a cordon-necked flagon, and two from the neck and shoulders of cordon-necked jars.

706: Finds include a pottery assemblage of 51 sherds (0.36kg), of which all but six are of early Roman AH/F fabrics. Among these are the rims of three bead-rimmed jars, a Surrey bowl and a cordon-necked jar. Another Roman sherd is in the sand and glauconitic fabric also represented in context 703.

Sherds of 'native' wares include one of a sand- and flint-tempered fabric that may be prehistoric, and there are also four sherds, possibly from the same vessel, in a grog- and sand-tempered fabric.

1203: The pottery assemblage is of 87 sherds (0.5kg), all of mid-Roman AH/F types, except for four small sherds from a single vessel in a fine buff ware with traces of an original red slip. The greyware sherds include the rims of up to five everted-rimmed jars of L&J Class 3B, three bead-rimmed bowls, a simple hemispherical bowl, an everted-rimmed beaker and a bipartite funnel-necked bowl with a rounded body carination (fig 9, no 4).

1204: Five sherds (49g) of AH/F greyware, including the rims of a jar, a possible bead-rimmed flask and a funnel-necked beaker.

The distribution of pottery by fabrics, numbers of sherds and weight is shown in table 1 (see *Endnote*).

Discussion

It would seem from the results of the several phases of work on the site that little or nothing survives intact of the extensive, complex and unusual Roman building excavated by Cooper in the 19th century. Cooper mentions in his notes that the farmer had already removed much of the Roman walling in one part of the site, as it was impeding the movement of agricultural implements. It therefore seem highly likely that, following the conclusion of Cooper's excavation, the rest of the stonework was removed as well, with the result that there is now virtually nothing left of the buildings other than a scatter of material in the plough-soil. All the evidence points to the buildings having been in the approximate position shown on the accompanying plan (fig 3). It also seems likely that the hard underlying gravel meant that there had been no need for deep footings in the first place and that the Roman walling was fairly shallow and therefore vulnerable to later disturbance. It was unfortunate that the positions of the probable robber trenches could not be related to any of the walling shown on Cooper's plan, which might have finally confirmed the original position of the buildings. Perhaps the 19th century plans are not entirely accurate, and it is certainly the case that Cooper's notes do not always agree with his plans. It is, however, always possible that some of the outlying walls and features that Cooper found to the east, and downslope of, the main complex, still survive under the deeper accumulation of topsoil. These did not show on any of the geophysical surveys, or in the fieldwalking so, given the difficulties in interpreting Cooper's plans and the negative results from trench 13 (see above), it would require extensive trenching to establish whether any masonry survives in this area.

Despite the lack of success in finding surviving walling, a basic phasing for the site can now be put forward with some confidence. Apart from the intermittent use of the hill in the prehistoric period, the first intensive occupation seems to take place in the Late Iron Age with the construction of the D-shaped enclosure and its associated approach trackway and subsidiary paddocks. While no evidence was found for occupation of the enclosure in the form of postholes or pits, these may well have been destroyed during the terracing work for the construction of the later Roman buildings. In any event, the area examined in 2010 was very limited and it seems likely that the hilltop was the site of an enclosed farmstead at this period.

The pottery evidence indicates that the Iron Age ditches were being backfilled in the early Roman period, perhaps to make way for the straight-sided enclosure and the possible timber building. Equally, the curving Iron Age access track seems to have been replaced by a straighter one, as shown on the magnetometer survey, though this line was not trenched and the dating has not therefore been established. Certainly the enclosure and possibly the timber structure were going out of use in the late 2nd/early 3rd century – perhaps to be replaced by the large complex of stone buildings excavated by Cooper. These, from the pottery, date from the 3rd and 4th centuries and must have involved several phases of construction, as Cooper himself acknowledged. At its height, the complex was the largest building yet known from Surrey and does not seem to conform to the normal design expected of a villa. The unusual layout and the existence of a variety of stone-lined tanks and other features have led

to the suggestion (Bird 2002) that the complex was not a villa but was religious in purpose. A spring emerges downslope on the north side of the field, but no trace of any Roman material was found in its vicinity, so it seems unlikely to have formed any part of the use of the site. However, there is always the possibility that the spring outlet has moved over time and might originally have been connected to one of Cooper's stone tanks.

Be that as it may, the buildings went out of use at the end of the Roman period and, so far as the evidence of the fieldwalking can be relied on, no further detectable activity occurred on the site until the 17th or 18th centuries, when the very light scatter of pottery perhaps indicates manuring of the field.

Ploughing in the 19th century and Neville's and Cooper's excavations – commendable for the time – represent the next major phase of activity on the hilltop, to be followed just over a century later by the much smaller project described here. At the time of writing, High Riddings field is being placed under grass as part of a Higher Level Stewardship scheme, so the ghosts of past occupants of the site can again rest in peace for the foreseeable future.

Endnote

The figures and table listed below are available on the Archaeology Data Service website (http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/surreyac/contents.cfm?vol=96). Copies of this material will also be deposited with the Society's library, Guildford. Photocopies can also be supplied by post – enquiries should be addressed to the Hon Editors, Surrey Archaeological Society, Castle Arch, Guildford GU1 3SX.

Fieldwalking distribution plots of: worked flint; burnt flint; prehistoric pottery; Roman pottery; probable Roman building stone; Roman plaster; post-medieval pottery and clay tobacco pipe.

Table 1 Distribution of pottery.

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