

Silchester & its Environs



Excavation and Survey 2016

Michael Fulford, Catherine Barnett & Amanda Clarke



PART I -The Silchester Environs Project 2016

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Prospective work in the form of aerial photo and lidar interpretation, large scale geophysical surveys, earthwork reconnaissance and coring has enabled us to get a big picture of prehistoric and later use of the landscape around Calleva and the underlying oppidum.

Excavations have taken place at Wood Farm, Brocas Land, and Windabout Copse during 2016. All are reported here along with the preliminary results from ongoing post-excavation analyses and radiocarbon dating.

Coring and excavation

Coring and excavation of three of the so-called Silchester Dykes, at Bridle's Copse, Little London, Wood Farm, Silchester, and at Brocas Lands near Mortimer, took place in May 2016. Much of the **post-excavation analysis** has been completed for these sites, including the successful radiocarbon dating of 21 samples, providing us with a picture of their construction, as reported below.

In August-September the Environs team headed to Windabout Copse, Mortimer. There they opened 10 evaluation trenches to investigate a series of crop-marks shown on drought-year aerial photos. The site proved very exciting indeed, as reported below, and has heightened our understanding of the type of activity happening in the Silchester landscape during the Iron Age. There was a great feeling of community on these digs, with invaluable help from volunteers as well as staff and students. Many people came to visit and enjoy the site findings including on the open day. The processing and analysis of samples and artefacts taken during those excavations are ongoing.

A tremendous amount of work has also taken place behind the scenes of these visible excavations. The results of the **interpretation of all aerial photographs and lidar data** for our study area of 143km² around Silchester has been fed into the Historic England National Mapping Programme (NMP) and the Hampshire and West Berkshire Historic Environments Records (HER), enhancing their archaeological planning resource. A large number of new sites have been found through this process with much more detail added to our understanding of other known sites. It is

this survey that brought us to Windabout Copse and the sites we intend to tackle in 2017. The completion of this work means it is timely to report the findings here in summary form. **Desk-based assessment** also continues in the form of studying the patterns of existing HER and Portable Antiquity Scheme (PAS) data and documentary research into the estate records of the Englefield and Wellington Estates.

Other non-intrusive fieldwork this year has included several large area **geophysical surveys** by the Historic England Geophysics team on behalf of the project as well as smaller area surveys by the project team. Challenging geologies and soils in the study area have meant they have varied their techniques and used multiple systems to get high precision results, including hand-held, cart and towed Fluxgate Magnetometer, Caesium Vapour and Ground Penetrating Radar surveys.

The **earthwork survey** of Pond Farm Hillfort, a site excavated by the team and reported in 2015, has been completed by the Historic England Survey team and ourselves. Walkover reconnaissance has also taken place and has now covered approximately 4/5^{ths} of the wooded parts of the study area, greatly adding to knowledge of standing monuments and other archaeological features such as field boundaries across the area.

Aerial photo and lidar interpretation survey

Krystyna Truscoe

671 new archaeological sites of all ages from mid prehistoric to WWII have been identified through the Environs aerial survey.

Highlights include the finding of hitherto unknown earthworks including extant prehistoric enclosures in Pamber Forest and a series of complex late prehistoric and Roman settlement areas in the Kennet Valley.

Introduction

The aerial photo and lidar survey has been completed this year, for a total area of 143 km² around Silchester. This is more extensive than the original study area (100 km²) in order to join up with the results of previous aerial survey work in the Thames Valley (Royal Commission on the Historic Monuments of England 1994) and the Hampshire aggregate-producing areas (Cornwall Council) and it provides a wider context for the project fieldwork. The survey incorporated all available aerial photographs held in the Historic England Archive, the Cambridge University Collection of Aerial Photography, Aerial Photography for Great Britain orthophotography, photos held by the two local authorities (West Berkshire and Hampshire) and online sources. Several visualisations were produced from Environment Agency lidar, which was available in both 1m resolution and 0.25m resolution, although only partial coverage was available for the latter. All visible archaeological features were transcribed from aerial photographs and lidar spanning the Neolithic to the 20th Century, including the Cold War, and records were made for each site in the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE).

Results of the Survey

Records for 671 new archaeological sites were created in the NRHE and 81 of the 267 existing records already covering the project area were amended, greatly adding to the archaeological knowledge of the wider environs of Silchester. The survey added information on the form and condition of previously known sites such as the Scheduled Monuments of Rampier Copse within the Silchester Scheduled area and the linear earthworks around it (Figure 1).

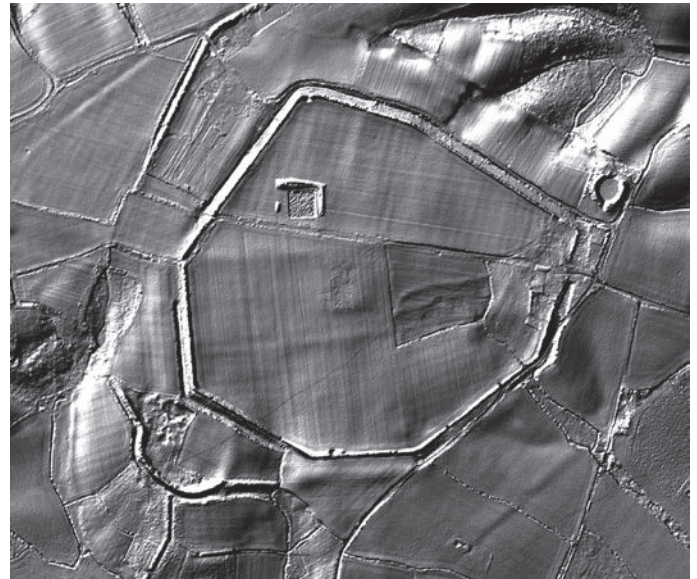


Figure 1 Silchester: an internal bank within Rampier Copse as visible on the lidar image to the south-west of the town (Hillshade model of lidar DTM). ©Environment Agency / University of Reading

Examination of recent photography meant that improved accuracy of mapping and greater detail could be added to previously identified sites, such as Windabout Copse, a target for excavation in 2016 (see Windabout Copse later in this report) and the multi-period sites on the Thames Gravels in the north of the survey area around Sulhamstead and Burghfield. The detailed mapping of sites on the Thames Gravels has



Figure 2 Possible Iron Age settlement to the north of the River Kennet, Sulhamstead
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Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

highlighted several new potential targets for excavation by the Silchester Environs team including a possible Iron Age riverside site to the north of Sulhamstead (Figure 2), formed of linked enclosures with hut circles within them; and a triple-ditched enclosure which is part of an extensive area of settlements and field boundaries to the north of Burghfield (Figure 3). A probable Roman road also runs through the Burghfield site, which is on the same alignment as a section discovered to the north of the project area during the Thames Valley National Mapping Programme survey (Figure 4). It is probably part of the road leading from Calleva to Verulamium, the route of which has long been disputed.

Limited evidence has been found for Neolithic activity in the project area from the aerial photo and lidar survey results alone, but new sites, rare for this region, have been identified.



Figure 3 Iron Age and Roman settlement to the north of Burghfield © Crown Copyright and Database Right [2016]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

The remains of a possible Neolithic burial, seen as the cropmark of a U-shaped ditch adjacent to what may be a mortuary enclosure from the same period (Figure 5) have been recorded. Several probable Bronze Age barrows have also been newly identified, including two seen as cropmarks to the north of Sulhamstead, and to the west of Bramley Frith wood; and a barrow surviving as an earthwork on lidar imagery within King's Hogsty Copse in Pamber Forest.

Several enclosures, which may be the remains of later prehistoric settlements, were identified on the lidar coverage of Pamber Forest (Figure 6).

The enclosures can still be seen faintly on the ground as low earthworks and are a remarkable discovery in an area where no previous evidence for early settlement

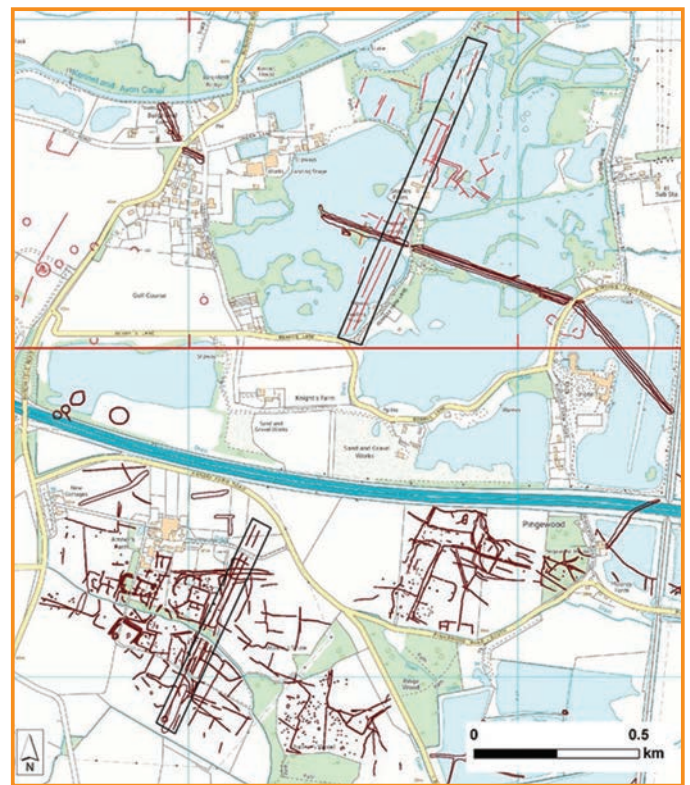


Figure 4 Two sections of the Roman road (within black rectangles) between Silchester and St Albans identified from the Thames Valley NMP and the current survey. © Crown Copyright and Database Right [2016]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

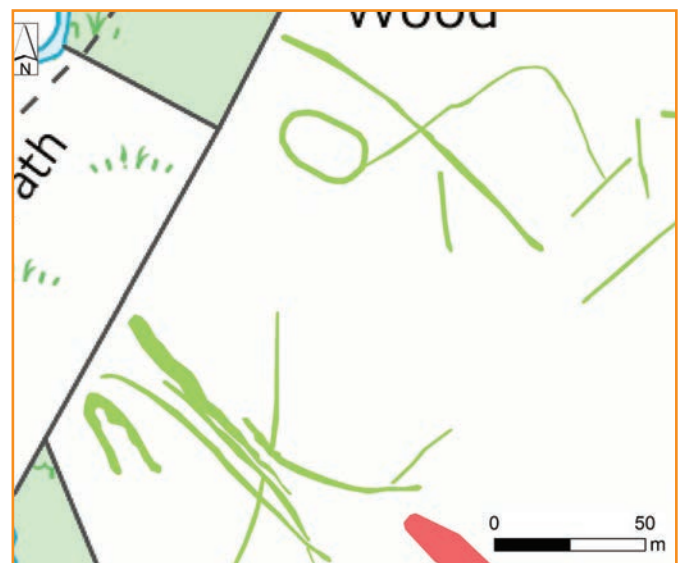


Figure 5 Two possible Neolithic barrows to the north-east of Ufton Green. The inverted U-shaped ditch and oval enclosure sit on the 60 m contour. © Crown Copyright and Database Right [2016]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

has been found. The status of this area, first as a Royal Forest and later as a protected woodland, may have aided the survival of these sites.

At the other end of the period covered, examination of historic aerial photographs has identified numerous World War II dispersed-ordnance storage sites within parks and woodland. The area between Reading and Basingstoke was a landscape of ordnance production and storage in wartime and the Ordnance Filling Factory at Burghfield and the Bramley Ordnance Storage site remain in use today. The historic photographs show that the system of ordnance storage was far more widespread and neat piles of munitions can be seen in Stratfield Saye Park, Beaurepaire Park and Morgaston Wood (Figure 7).

The records and mapping have now been transferred to the West Berkshire Historic Environment Record (271 records) and the Hampshire Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record (481 records) thereby increasing knowledge and the strength of their archaeological planning resource.

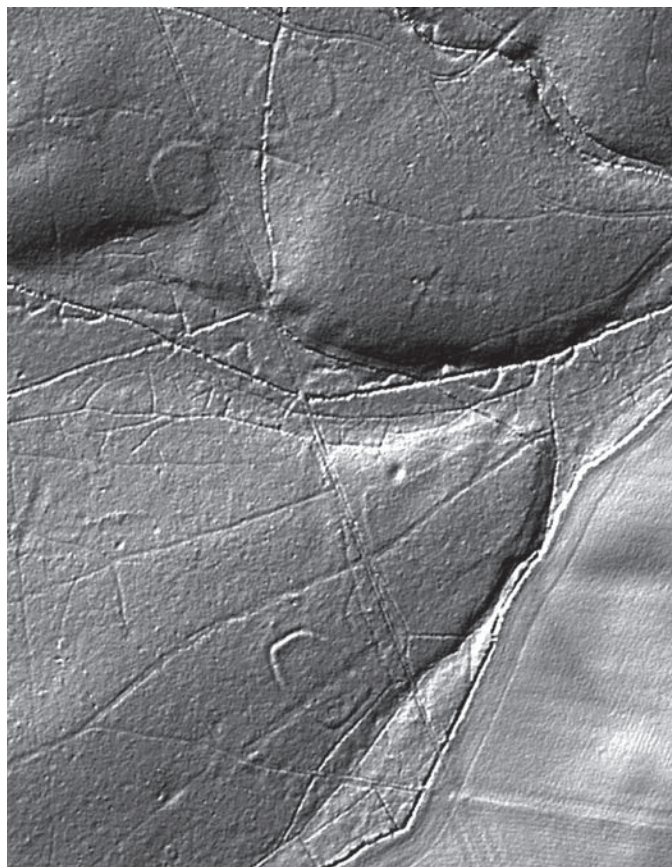
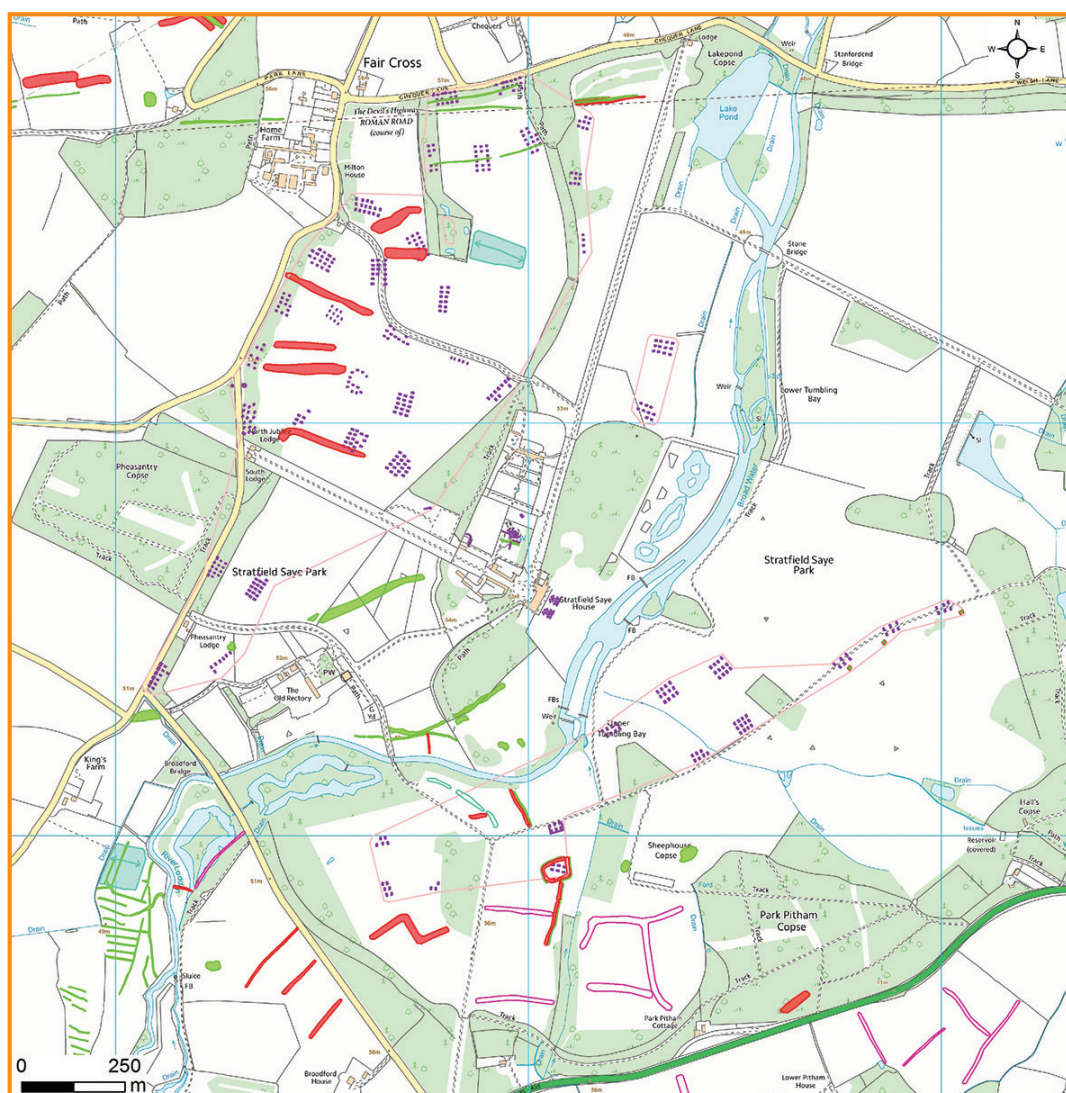


Figure 6 (above right)
Enclosures within
Pamber Forest (Hillshade
model of lidar DTM).
©Environment Agency /
University of Reading

Figure 7 Dispersed
ordnance (purple dots)
within Stratfield Saye
Park. An Iron Age en-
closure (at the bottom of the
picture) which was a low
earthwork in the Second
World War also appears
to have been used for
storage.



Excavation and Coring of the Silchester Linears

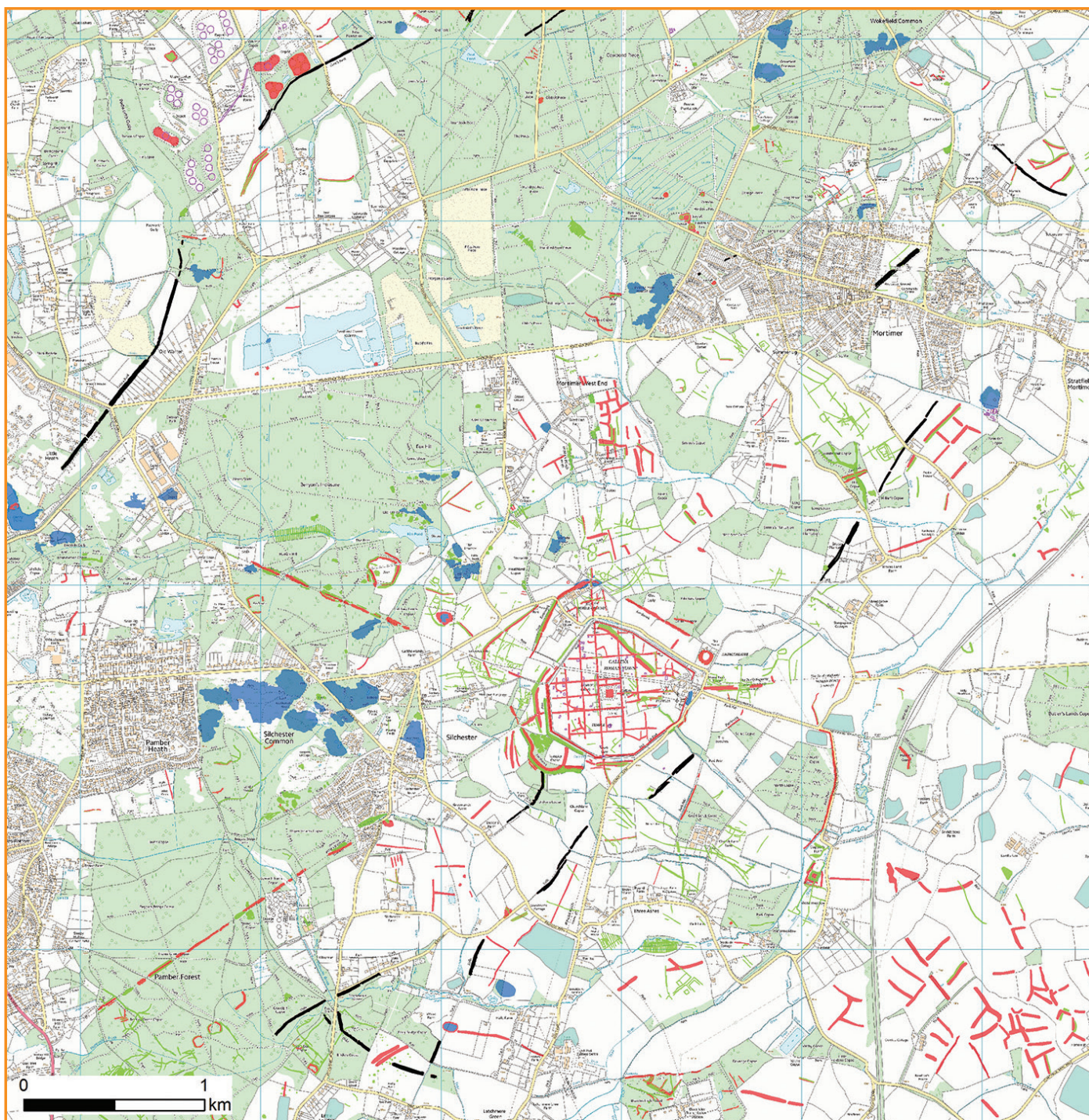
Catherine Barnett, Dan Wheeler & Nick Pankhurst

The Silchester Linears or Dykes are a series of enigmatic, upstanding linear bank and ditch monuments located within a 3km radius of the Late Iron Age oppidum and Roman town of Silchester.

Never previously investigated in modern times, we have now dated and contextualised three of these monuments

using a combination of techniques. They appear to have middle and late Iron Age origins. The reasons for their construction are open to debate but their imposition across already settled areas indicates a new and very visible structuring and territorial division of the landscape in late prehistory.

Figure 8 The Silchester Linears (in black)



The Silchester Linear

This group of features comprises a series of now discontinuous but long, linear, bank-and-ditch monuments that bisect the landscape. Several were already known, and indeed scheduled, prior to this survey; others had not previously been identified. Those still upstanding or clearly shown as cropmarks are highlighted in black on Figure 8. The monuments were previously poorly understood and in most cases undated, though assumed to have been built in the Iron Age. Three were chosen for investigation under the Environs project: The Little London Linear group, Brocas Lands and Wood Farm.

The Little London Linear

A group of three linear earthworks meet at the Silchester Brook within Bridle's Copse, south west of Silchester at SU 62397 60722 (Figure 9). They are all extant Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The section centred on SU 62512 60497 (List no. 1008728) is c. 300m long, and aligned from south-east to north-west, turning more directly northwards towards the northern end where the bank also becomes both wider and higher. The northern section of the earthwork consists of a 12m wide ditch with a bank up to 11m wide which rises up to 2.5m above the base of the ditch, 0.5m above ground level on its western side. The earthwork stops abruptly at the boundary of the wood and cannot be seen in the field immediately to the south-east; however, its continuation eastwards has since been traced using geophysical and cropmark surveys by Historic England and the University of Reading. Where extant, the preservation of the monument is good and the height difference between bank and ditch is substantial. It was decided to request consent for investigation by coring only rather than by excavation. The underlying geology is Palaeogene London Clay, and the earthwork lies just off an outcrop of the more recent Quaternary Silchester Gravels (BGS 2014).

Coring, post-excavation analysis and dating

Sleeved sequences of cores were taken under Scheduled Monument Consent in eight locations along two transects across the monument bank and ditch in May 2016 (Figure 9). This included five locations across the northern section (Transect 1, Figure 10) and three across the narrower, southern section (Transect 2, Figure 11). Their analysis indicates that the northern

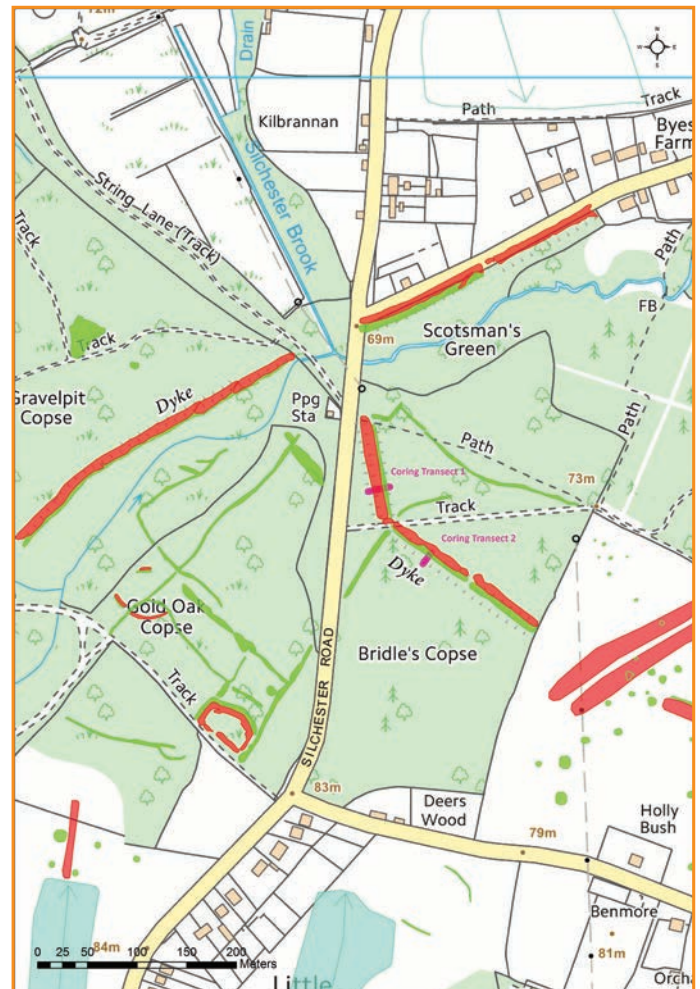


Figure 9 Map to show the Little London Linear



Figure 10 Transect 1 Little London Linear



Figure 11 Transect 2 Little London Linear

section includes a now 1.5m high bank, comprising a series of dumps of fine-grained material directly onto the top of the London Clay. No palaeosol (old soil) was found sealed by the dumps, suggesting turves were stripped off as part of the construction process. The dumps included fine, waterlain material dug out during creation of and cleaning of the ditch. The presence of charcoal within the sequence indicates burning or domestic activity in the vicinity during construction. Cores from the ditch show a maximum depth to its modern-filled surface of 1.77m. Above a primary fill of stony, sandy clay, which represents initial stabilisation of the ditch profile, the overlying deposits are alluvial in nature and indicate the presence of moving water within the ditch during its lifetime, decreasing up-profile to be replaced with slumps and colluvium; soil eroded and washed downhill due to clearance and agriculture in the area. An immature soil within a similar sequence on the counterscarp bank immediately to the east of the ditch included fire-cracked flint and charcoal, again demonstrating burning activity close by. A piece of birch charcoal from this layer has been dated to the middle Iron Age at 365-170 cal BC (SUERC-69367, 2183 \pm 29 BP), potentially dating the construction and certainly providing a *terminus post quem* for this element of the monument.



Figure 12 Coring the Little London Linear

Superficially, both on the ground and in lidar imagery, the southern section of the monument appears quite different to the northern. It changes direction and becomes thinner and straighter from that point. The monument is dominated by what appears to be a shallow ditch, reminiscent of a hollow way and the banks are inconsequential. Coring and dating this section (transect 2) has partially clarified its history. Cores through the ditch itself revealed a substantial body of waterlain/alluvial material over higher energy (likely Devensian age) fluvial gravels that cut the London Clay. Evidence of anthropogenic material comprising macrocharcoal and stones was found relatively high in the alluvial layers at 0.65-0.71m. It has been dated to the Late Iron Age at 105 cal BC-60 cal AD (SUERC-69368 2021 \pm 29 BP) indicating activity in the immediate area at that time, and if not residual, this would suggest the bulk of the underlying alluvial sequence is of Early-Mid Holocene age. However, a result on twigwood charcoal from the apparently equivalent layer in nearby core BH8b confuses the picture, being of Early Medieval date at 660-770 cal AD (SUERC-69369 1295 \pm 29), while a piece of willow/ poplar twigwood deeper in that sequence is modern, intrusive material presumably introduced from higher in the sequence during coring.

Overall the indication is that while this section of the

monument may share an Iron Age (middle/ late) origin with the northern section and was later modified, possibly in the Medieval period, it could have much later origins. If there was once an associated bank, it had been removed, the core through it containing only layers of colluvium over the same alluvial sequence observed within the ditch.

Brocas Lands Linear

A small, degraded section of linear earthwork, similar in form to the known scheduled ones, runs across Brocas Lands for c. 300m from SU65106 63028 to meet the West End Brook to the north-east at SU65310 63349 (Figure 13, Figure 14). It may also continue on the other side of stream, running for a further 600m along the same trajectory either side of Drury Lane, towards Turks Lane, Mortimer, and also to the south west, extending towards the amphitheatre. The ditch, and to a lesser degree the bank, of the excavated portion is visible on the ground as shown in Figure 14, and lies on gently sloping lowland now used for pasture but which has clearly been ploughed in the past. It is on bedrock of

London Clay (BGS 2014). The superficial similarity and orientation of the monument to the scheduled Silchester Dykes was of interest and a modest programme of coring coupled with opening of a single small trench was undertaken in May-June 2016 in order to recover material suitable to enable inter-site comparison (locations shown in Figure 13).

Excavation

A 25m long, 3m wide slot was placed across a representative portion of the earthwork, with the primary objective of retrieving dating evidence and samples from the lower deposits. The ditch was cut into the London Clay at 2.35m and was c. 4.8m wide. The base was not reached due to logistics and a high water table at 1.5m below ground, but the top of the primary fill was reached and the rest of the sequence examined through coring. A small charcoal-rich, burnt pit or tree bowl lay on the eastern end of the trench but its relationship with the now degraded bank remains unclear.

Both bank and ditch proved artefactually poor, with only occasional charcoal and a single worked flint which has proven to be undiagnostic late prehistoric (Bronze Age or Iron Age, Richard Bradley pers comm.). One possible episode of maintenance/ recutting was noted low in the cored sequence. Charred oak twigwood (*Quercus* sp.) from the upper portion of primary ditch fill (109) has been radiocarbon dated to the Middle Iron Age (400-205 cal BC, 2257 \pm 28 BP, SUERC 69389) and young hazel (*Corylus avellana*) roundwood charcoal from a bulk sample from the first secondary deposit (106) has been dated to the middle-late Iron Age (165 cal BC-25 cal AD, 2047 \pm 29 BP, SUERC 69388). By their nature, ditch fills and their contents are problematic to date, given that the contents have washed into or fallen in after the original cutting episode. The primary fill often originates from both stabilisation of the newly cut ditch sides (which may contain older material) and from the ground surface which contains evidence of contemporary activity. The secondary fill will tend to contain the latter once stabilisation has ended but there can still be material derived from different sources. The dates here provide a *terminus ante quem* for cutting and subsequent use. However, the correct stratigraphic ordering of the two dates and the short chronological divide between them does indicate that these are representative of activity contemporary to the monument's early use.

Coring, post-excavation analysis and dating

Cores were taken across the monument and at its potential junction with the floodplain of the now small meandering West End Brook to the northeast



Figure 13 Map to show location of cores and trenches at Brocas Lands



Figure 14 The Brocas Lands Linear

(Figure 13). The sequence within the area of excavation has been extended beneath that exposed by trenching across the monument: an archaeologically sterile, primary ditch-fill of redeposited London Clay immediately fills the cut into the bedrock at 2.35m. The rest of the ditch sequence (Figure 15) comprises a series of heavily pedogenically altered, iron-rich, silty clay and sandy secondary fills, the lower including deposits of slow-moving water and the upper layers seemingly dominated by the former (similar) bank deposits which had slumped/ been pushed back into the ditch, explaining its apparent reduction in height.

The ditch continues to have a similar form and depth up-slope of the excavation, though with decreasing influence of flowing water. Moving towards the floodplain, it becomes harder to trace until at 100m along transect 1 it blends into the edge of the former palaeochannel (Borehole 4), where edge and overbank alluvium overlie the London Clay above 1.99m. Over this lies true channel alluvium and fluvial gravel to 1.46m, showing the channel had shifted southwards before returning to its modern day position. Overlying these sediments are marshy, edge deposits, which are seemingly within the ditch itself at 1.46m, although no cut can be defined. The secondary ditch fills above are of overbank allu-



Figure 15 Sampling the monument ditch sequence at Brocas Lands

vium with small stones. The sequence is waterlogged and plant macrofossils have proved well preserved. They are dominated throughout the sequence by nettle (*Urtica dioica*), blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) and elder (*Sambucus nigra*) seeds with sedges (*Carex* sp.) and docks (*Rumex* sp.). Together they indicate a scrubby, disturbed damp-edge environment, one likely peripheral to arable agriculture or within a pastoral environment along the stream edge. Dating the sequence has proved problematic. A Late Roman date of 255-415 cal AD (1693 \pm 28 BP, SUERC-69392) has been returned on *Rubus fruticosus* and *Carpinus betulus* seeds at 1.62-1.66m within the former palaeochannel sequence, but unidentified woody stems x2 at 1.94-1.95m have dated to the Tudor-Post-Medieval period at 1445-1635 cal AD (363 \pm 29 BP, SUERC-69390). The two dates are clearly in conflict, either the Roman material is reworked or the deeper, Tudor plant material is intrusive. Further dates are therefore being sought before any further palaeoenvironmental analyses are considered here.

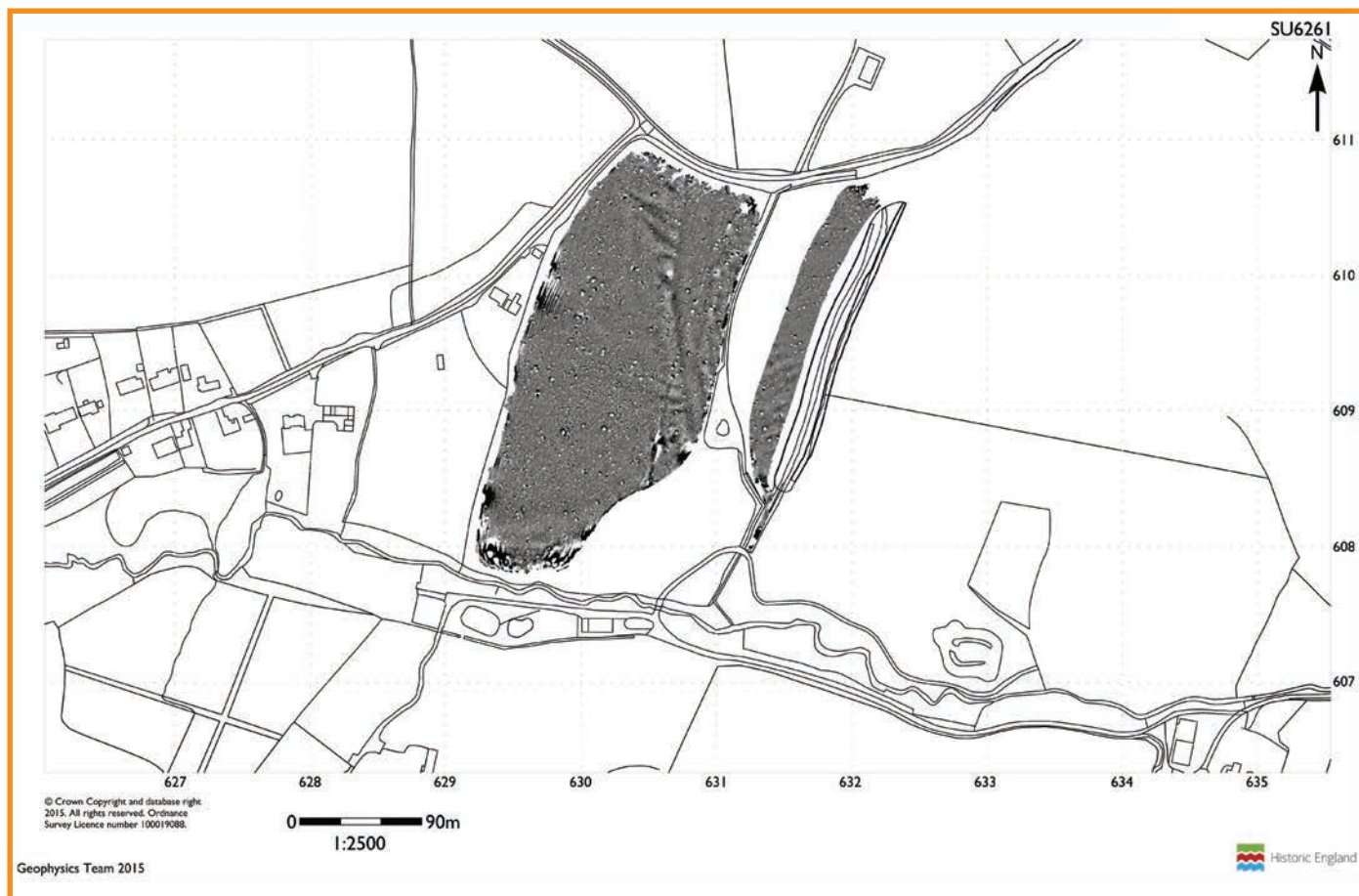


Figure 16 Results of the geophysical survey at Wood Farm

Wood Farm Linear

The tree-covered central length of a scheduled linear earthwork between Churchlane Copse and Early Bridge Copse, south of Silchester, Hampshire (list no. 1011956), runs along the edge of pasture land at Wood Farm, Ash Lane SU 63190 60945. It occurs at the break of slope on an outcrop of Palaeogene London Clay (BGS 2014) overlooking a small canalised stream, 70m to the west, a tributary of the Silchester Brook. The extant section is c.215m long, is up to 22 wide and the bank rises up to 1.2m above ground level to the west and 2m above the base of the ditch. No evidence of date existed prior to our excavation but it had been assumed to be late prehistoric on the basis of form and relationship with further sections which merge with the outer earthworks of *Calleva* at Rampier Copse.

Preliminary surveys and coring

Preliminary earthwork reconnaissance of the standing monument by David Field and Mark Bowden of Historic England was followed by caesium vapour magnetometer geophysical survey, undertaken by the Historic England geophysics team between the monument and stream (Figure 16). The latter indicated the potential for a series of former river channels (palaeochannels) to exist close

to the monument, of interest because associated alluvial and marsh sediments often contain a vegetation and climate record of past landscapes.

Coring was undertaken in May 2016 to recover floodplain sequences on both sides of the brook as well as across the monument, the latter in order to gauge depths and nature of the sediments in order to guide the planned excavation. Two cores were successfully recovered from the monument and a further eight outside the scheduled area, forming a linear transect across the monument down into the floodplain, as marked on Figure 17.

Cores from the edge of the monument show that the colluvial wedge on which it was built, thinned considerably, with only a shallow, c.0.3m depth of drift deposit over the weathered London Clay top. Moving down onto the floodplain however (Bh 6-9), the sequence deepened once more, with colluvial deposits intercalating with alluvial ones above 1m, and alluvial deposits dominating beneath that at up to 3.09m below ground level. The floodplain sequences include channel-edge and overbank deposits in boreholes while Bh 8 was of a deep channel deposit, which included alluvium to 3m and fluvial gravels at depths of 0.84-1.25m. The former channel was larger than the small canalised one seen today and had meandered across the relatively wide



Figure 17 Location Map Wood Farm

floodplain over time. The sequences were waterlogged, with good preservation of organic matter including wood, sedges and reeds. Thick stases were absent, with no substantial peat bodies, although ephemeral and sometimes truncated stases have allowed the sequences to be dated. These have proved to long post-date the monument, with the long, edge sequence of Bh7 yielding four Early Medieval dates on young waterlogged wood between 770-965 cal AD (1176+/-29 BP, SUERC-69387 at 2.01m) and 965-1040 cal AD (92.7%) (1092+/-29BP, SUERC-69382 at 1.69-1.72m).



Figure 18 The bank prior to excavation, with the upper layers seemingly levelled out

Excavation

Excavation at Wood Farm began in May 2016, with the intention of characterising the earthwork and retrieving artefactual and environmental evidence that could be used to date its construction, use and subsequent abandonment (Figure 18). A 4m wide slot was put across both the bank and ditch, staggered at the mid-point but positioned to give a continuous section through both sequences (Figure 19). Overall, the trench was 21m long, including a short extension past the bank towards the flood plain and was stepped inwards to avoid collapse. Potential locations for the trench were limited by tree cover and heavy undergrowth but the particular stretch chosen was open and the bank had a prominent flattened top, suggesting it had been subject to a later modification. The excavation revealed four phases of activity:

Pre-earthwork activity and first construction

The earliest evidence of activity in the area was within a body of colluvium underlying the bank, the remains



Figure 19 Excavation underway at Wood Farm

of a cultivated soil washed downhill during heavy rain. It had a maximum age of Late Iron Age at 100 cal BC-60 cal AD (*Salix/Populus* sp. charcoal 2017 \pm 29 BP, SUERC-69380). No stable landsurface was identified on its top; any turves present were cut and removed during preliminary engineering of the monument. A thin pale lens of white sand (119), which seems to represent a short-lived rainwash event, overlay the colluvial wedge (Figure 20). The layer contained a relatively large and well preserved charcoal assemblage, dating both to the time of monument construction during the Late Iron Age to earliest Roman period at 50 cal BC-70 cal AD (Pomoideae charcoal, 1993 \pm 29 BP, SUERC-69377) and to earlier, early Iron Age activity at 795-540 cal BC (*Quercus* roundwood charcoal, 2515 \pm 28 BP, SUERC-69376), the material transported from upslope in hillwash. Two dates on charcoal from the basal dump of the bank context 107 with overlapping calibrated date ranges further support first construction in the late Iron Age with a date of 170 cal BC-5 cal AD (*Ilex aquifolium* charcoal 2063 \pm 28 BP, SUERC-69371) and 115 cal BC-55 cal AD (Pomoideae charcoal 2026 \pm 29 BP, SUERC-69372). The radiocarbon dates are supported by the find of a



Figure 20 Ephemeral white sand overlying pre-earthwork colluvium

number of pieces of late Iron Age Silchester ware pottery sealed underneath the bank. The act of construction of a large linear monument, which would have effectively divided the landscape here, and within the context of active occupation, is of particular note.

The ditch and bank

The ditch (Figure 21) was found to be approximately 7m wide and 2.22m deep from the modern ground surface. The base of the ditch could be seen as generally flat, with convex sides of approximately 45 degrees. Sediment analysis indicates that a water-sorted silty clay, primary fill with faint laminae filled the cut. There may therefore have been seasonal flow of water within the ditch at this point, if not standing water. A middle Iron



Figure 21 The ditch at Wood Farm



Figure 22 The bank at Wood Farm

Age radiocarbon date was obtained from a large piece of *Corylus avellana* roundwood (360-175 cal BC, 2186 \pm 28 BP, SUERC-69378) from the primary fill, context 115. It relates to earlier occupation, having been washed into the base of the ditch. The upcast from the digging of the ditch - first colluvium, then reworked London Clay as a greater depth was reached - was used in the construction of the bank (Figure 22) - creating two distinct mounded deposits.

Use and disuse

Following the initial rapid input of material into the wet base from the ditch sides as the profile stabilised, secondary fills within the ditch were the result of slow infilling of the feature during its lifetime, combined with the gradual erosion of the bank as the linear began to fall out of use and was no longer maintained. The ditch dried out and a series of colluvial fills began to dominate above 1.55m. No clear recuts were present in the main ditch sequence.

A small shale spindle-whorl (Figure 23) was discovered within one of the lower ditch fills (context 118) and therefore represents activity close-by, either just before monument construction (arising from the Iron Age colluvium) or during its early use (direct deposition in the Late Iron Age).



Figure 23 Shale spindle-whorl

The repeated presence and thickness of colluvium, and indeed the evidence of the short-lived event immediately under the bank, do suggest the monument lay in an unstable landscape, one that had been deforested and probably used for agriculture during the Iron Age, making it prone to erosion and soil movement. Clearly monument construction also took place in the context of earlier and indeed contemporary occupation from early to late Iron Age in the immediate (upslope) area.

Later reuse

The earthwork showed signs of later reuse of both the ditch and bank. A small recut into the upper fills of the ditch, measuring approximately 1.6m wide and 0.8m deep, contained a dark organic-rich fill. This most likely represents a recent or late post-Medieval drainage channel added to aid irrigation of the surrounding fields. On top of the bank, and beneath the loose modern topsoil, was a short stretch of laid gravel with a seemingly metallised surface. Although patchy, this appears to be evidence of the bank being reused as a pathway or track and may explain the flattened nature of the top of the earthwork. However, the proximity of this layer to the surface along with a number of finds, such as an iron horseshoe, associated with the deposit suggest that it may be a much later alteration. If the earthwork was deliberately modified to be used as a trackway it seems likely that it this happened during post-Medieval times. There is therefore no clear evidence of the bank or ditch being used as a routeway during the Iron Age or Roman period, its unusual form appears to relate to later modification of the top as discussed.

What have we learned about the Silchester Dykes so far?

A combination of radiocarbon dates with the recovery of dateable Iron Age pottery gives a date for construction of the Wood Farm linear around the end of the 1st century BC/ beginning of the 1st century AD, contemporary with the beginning of occupation of Calleva from c. 20BC. The dating of the Bridle's Copse and Brocas Lands linears is less clear, with radiocarbon dates only obtained from ditch fills and bank layers laid down subsequent to the first construction of the banks. OSL dating was also considered for the latter but suitable bank base deposits were absent. For the northern section of the Bridle's Copse linear and for Brocas Lands, the dates point to the Middle Iron Age for their construction and this is supported to a degree by their stratigraphic context. However, as we have shown at Wood Farm, it is possible for earlier material to become incorporated into ditch fills. The southern section of the Bridle's Copse linear, which differs in character from that of the northern but is continuous with it, seems likely to represent a later modification of a pre-existing Iron Age Dyke, but we cannot rule out an early Medieval date for its construction. Given that it was cut into an earlier palaeochannel and continued to contain flowing water, its relationship with water is strong. The linears at Wood Farm and Brocas Lands too run very close to floodplains, in the case of the latter linking with the channel itself. The purpose(s) of the linears remains unclear but at Wood Farm we have demonstrated that the monument divides already occupied land. At Bridle's Copse and Brocas Lands the dated materials also indicate middle and later Iron Age activity close by.

Excavation of an Iron Age settlement and burial at Windabout Copse

Dan Wheeler & Nick Pankhurst

Evaluation of a series of cropmarks found in aerial survey has led to the discovery of an important new Iron Age site near Mortimer.

An early and late Iron Age settlement complex there is overlooked by a late Iron Age mortuary enclosure on the hilltop, the resting place of a high status individual, cremated and interred in a chambered grave with imported vessels from Northern France.

Introduction to the site

In the summer of 2016, the Environs team turned their attention to the arable land north and east of Windabout Copse, just south of Mortimer. There, a complex of cropmarks had been identified during the aerial interpretation survey, having appeared on photographs taken during a single, drought year, but which has not been visible since. Some marks were believed to relate to later features including the parish boundary, but the shapes of others also suggested a prehistoric presence (Figure 24). Several small evaluation trenches were dug and have revealed remains of exceptional quality and importance. A square anomaly within a D-shaped enclosure to the north of the complex proved to be a chambered cremation-burial, while a settlement enclosure with internal building was found to the south.

The Excavation

The northern enclosure – Trenches 9 and 10

The smaller, northern enclosure appeared in the cropmarks as D-shaped, with a possible entrance-way on the northern side extending c. 200m to the south-east. Trenches 9 and 10 were placed across the enclosure to characterise its date, form and function. Trench 9 was T-shaped, c.50m by 30m with each end of the trench reaching the enclosure ditch on the north-east, south-east and south-west sides and expanding over a significant circular feature. Trench 10 was L-shaped and measured 11m x 16m. It was placed over the northern side of the enclosure where a gap in the ditch suggested a potential entranceway (Figure 25).

A late Iron Age chambered cremation grave

The circular feature shown in the cropmarks proved to be the most significant element within Trench 9. During excavation, it resolved into a square-cut early first century AD, chambered grave containing cremated bone, eight complete vessels and a capping of charred oak planks. The grave measured 1.78m by 2.28m and was 0.88m deep. The base of the chamber was flat with a small, straight-sided trench cut around the outside edge (Figure 26). This was consistently 0.2m wide and between 0.1-0.15m in depth. It probably acted as a small foundation cut to support the base of vertically-set planks, forming shuttering to support the sides of the grave.



Figure 24 Map of Windabout to show cropmarks (green negative, red positive features) and archaeological trenches (pink). Probable post medieval field boundaries are shown in grey. ©Crown Copyright and Database Right [2016]. Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence)

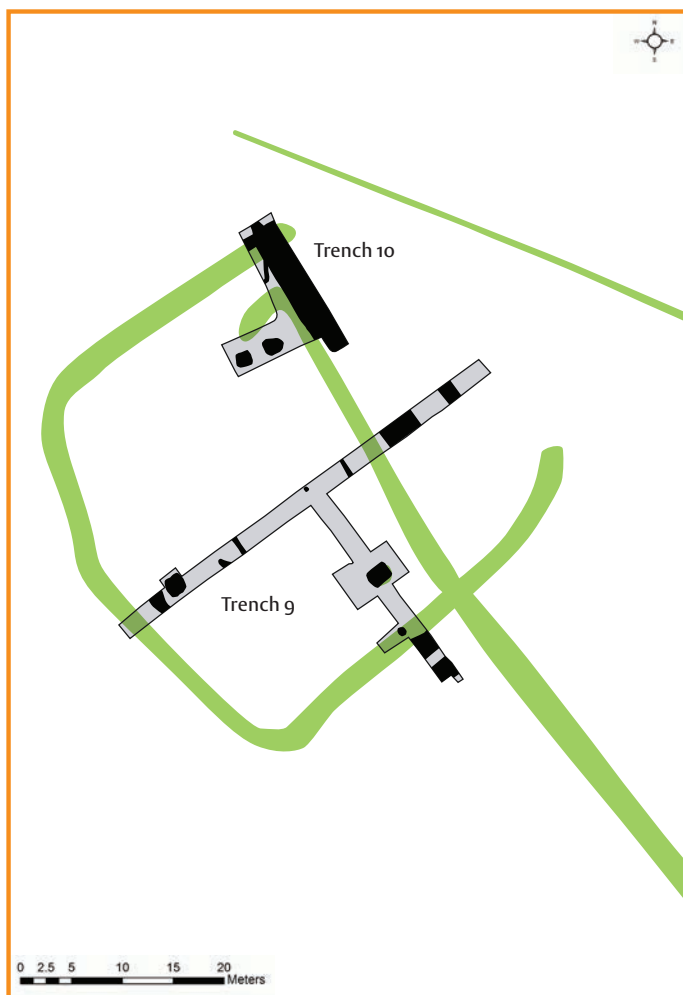


Figure 25 Plan of northern enclosure and trenches

appeared trampled and mixed, indicating that people moved in and out of it while the grave was open.

The pottery vessels

The vessels (Figure 27) were arranged in three distinct clusters in the southern half of the trench. Tucked into the corner were four stacked platters of 0.16m to 0.20m in diameter, two were imported from Northern France, of Gallo-Belgic terra nigra type, whilst the other two were locally made imitations. The two imported vessels were considerably more fragmentary than the others and one had a significant piece missing. This piece was found approximately a metre away to the south-east,



Figure 27 The Windabout cremation burial showing cremated bone surrounded by Late Iron Age cups and platters and one of the copper alloy rings



Figure 26 The cut of the chambered grave showing the gully around the base



Figure 28 Imported Terra Nigra drinking cup with maker's stamp on the base

Burnt human bone lay in the south-western corner of the grave. The individual was surrounded by eight pottery vessels, comprising six platters and two drinking cups, all complete, but now slightly fragmented, some upside down. These may have originally contained food and drink for the deceased. Four copper-alloy rings found in the fill are from a wooden box, which probably contained the cremated bone. The base of the grave

suggesting that the platters may have been broken prior to their deposition in the grave or may have been dropped in or fallen with the collapse of the chambered roof. To the south, two further platters of c.0.17m in diameter sat directly on top of one another. Both were made of a similar, local, red coarse-ware and the lower of the two was upside down. Slightly to the east were two small, upturned, imported Gallo-Belgic drink-

ing cups positioned closely together. The northern of the two was of Gallo-Belgic terra rubra and measured 0.08m in diameter; the southern was of Gallo-Belgic terra nigra style, 0.09m in diameter and with a maker's stamp on the inside base (Figure 28). All date to the early 1st century AD. Despite the fragmentation, all vessels were in a good enough state of preservation to be lifted in their entirety.

Copper alloy rings

The four copper alloy rings were found spread across the floor of the chamber, one being adjacent to the vessels. Each ring had a small iron attachment such as for fixing to a wooden box. A small lead rivet with a domed copper-alloy boss which lay near one of the rings may have been used to decorate the box. The rings were not arranged in any obvious way - perhaps indicating that the box may have been placed on or near the roof of the grave and later fallen into the chamber. Alternatively they may have been part of the pyre furniture charred with the body upon the pyre and then deposited into the grave along with the cremated ash and bone.

The charred oak planks

Overlying the vessels was a layer of fine silt within which was a total of seventeen separate pieces of oak timber, (Figure 29). Each timber was completely charred and therefore well preserved but extremely fragile. Five of the timbers were more substantial than the others, with the largest measuring 0.81m by 0.22m. These five had been cut tangentially and converted into even-sized planks of around 1-2cm in thickness (post-charring dimension, they would have been thicker when first cut). Three of the planks were aligned parallel with the shorter axis of the chamber, with the other two perpendicular to these along the north-western and south-eastern sides.



Figure 29 Charred timbers capping the cremation grave

Two interpretations present themselves. The planks may represent the roof of the chambered grave which was deliberately burnt *in situ* at the time of interment or later, after reopening of the grave for some purpose, and had collapsed in to the chamber. Alternatively, it may be these planks had formed a part of the funeral pyre platform not entirely consumed during cremation.

Grave robbing

The absence of finds from the northern half of the grave and the position of the grave goods, some up-turned, in the southern half suggest the possibility that the grave was robbed, perhaps not long after the burial, with valuable grave goods removed from the northern half of the grave.

Amphora

Approximately 5m to the south-east of the cremation burial, immediately below the plough soil, lay the large sherds of the body of an early 1st century AD wine amphora imported from southern Spain. It seems likely that the vessel originally sat or lay on the original ground surface. It was missing neck, handle and base. Its placement in such close proximity to the cremation grave suggests it was contemporary and may be one of a number of satellite offerings placed around the chamber. The presence of an imported amphora at this early date again emphasises the importance and high status of the individual.

The funerary enclosure

Initial interpretation of the funerary enclosure based on aerial photographs and geophysics suggested that it was a roughly D-shaped with a ditch continuing onwards from the straight side and running approximately 200m to the south-east. However, trenches 9 and 10 showed that the enclosure continued northeastwards, being square in shape with rounded corners. The enclosure



Figure 30 The funerary enclosure ditch at Windabout

ditch was seen four times within trenches 9 and 10 -- once on each of its four sides. It maintained a consistent U-shaped profile, Figure 30, and was between 1.52m and 1.7m in width and 0.72 and 0.78m depth, apart from on the south-western side, where it was considerably shallower. From the cropmark interpretation, this side of the enclosure appeared slightly more bowed than those to the north and south and the ditch here seemed to narrow and taper slightly. This may have been a suitable location for an access-way into the enclosure.

Boundary ditch

The preliminary cropmark and geophysics-based interpretation of the site suggested that there may have been an entrance-way on the northern side of the funerary enclosure. Instead of this, however, a substantial boundary ditch running NW-SE across much of Trench 10 was revealed. The long ditch was significantly larger and later in date than the enclosure, cutting through it. The ditch was V-shaped in profile with straight sides and a slightly rounded and tapered base (Figure 31). At its largest it was 3.7m wide and 1.2m deep. One of the



Figure 31 The large V-shaped boundary ditch at Windabout

fills of the ditch within trench 10 contained a substantial amount of charcoal. Analysis of this deposit may indicate whether it is a dump of pyre material, or the remains of domestic or clearance activity. Based on the cropmarks it could be that this was actually a boundary ditch which was part of a wider field system spread along the top of the brow of the hill.

Gullies

A number of gullies were seen within the enclosure suggesting potential internal divisions. Across Trench 9, two gullies ran NW-SE approximately 12m apart. Each was parallel with the outer ditch suggesting that the pair may have been part of a smaller, internal enclosure within. Such an enclosure may have even extended far

enough south-eastwards to include the chambered cremation burial.

The southern settlement enclosure

The cropmark and geophysics-based interpretation of the southern area showed a complex series of concentric, sub-rectangular, enclosures ditches with a number of potential internal features (Figure 32). A distinct,

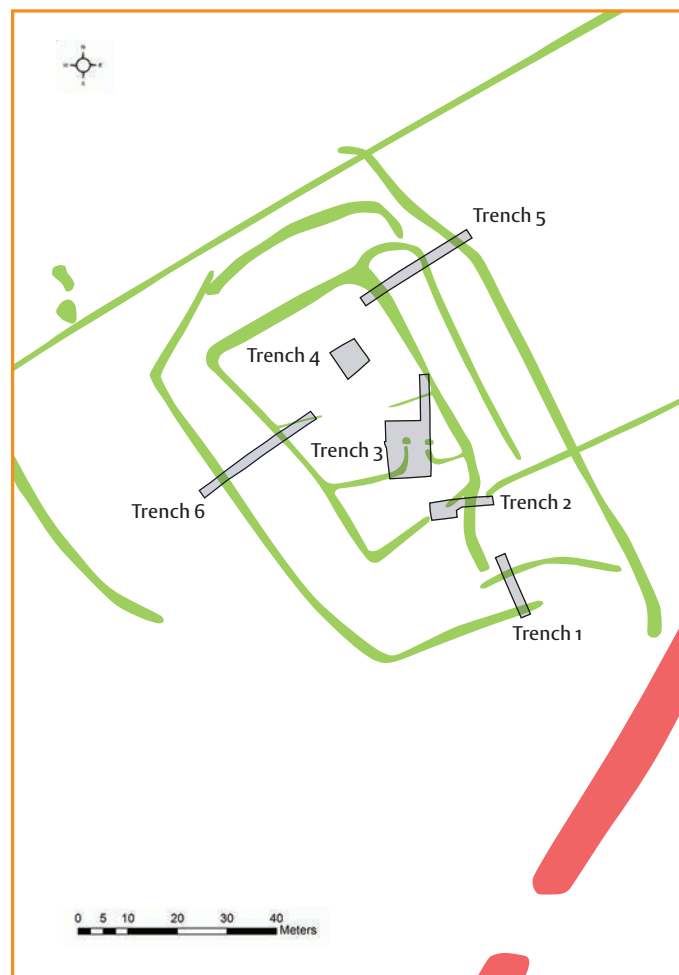


Figure 32 Plan of the southern enclosures with trench layout

complete inner ditch was marked by an entrance-way to the south with a further funnelled entrance within that. The surrounding outer ditch was more segmented and appeared to open out on the southern side. A third ditch ran parallel along the eastern side. Trenches were located to characterise and date the complex.

Trench 4

Trench 4 (Figure 33) was placed in the seemingly blank, northern central area within the inner enclosure. Measuring approximately 5.5m by 6.5m, the trench was initially thought to be devoid of any archaeological features and was left open for a number of rainless weeks. A later reassessment after a wet weekend led to the

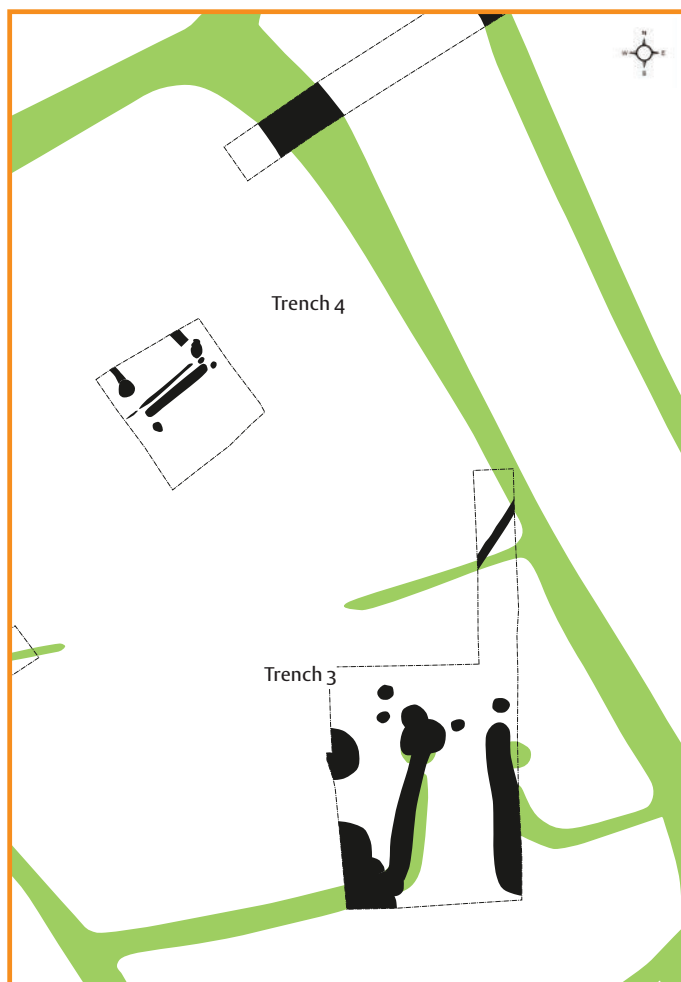


Figure 33 Plan of trenches 3 and 4

insertion of an arbitrary slot against the south-western side of the trench which revealed a series of beam slots (Figure 34) and post holes that undoubtedly formed the supporting frame for part of a rectangular timber building. The largest of the beam slots ran NE-SW across the trench for approximately 3.75m with a narrower, parallel example on its north-western side. At each end, a similar beam slot ran off at ninety degrees towards the north-west before disappearing under the edge of the trench. A number of post holes were also seen along the



Figure 34 Parallel beam slots of timber building in trench 4

same alignment with a particular concentration at the corners where the beam slots met. Due to the small size of this trench and the lack of any obvious associated surfaces, it was difficult to determine if this arrangement represented part of a small free-standing building or internal divisions within a larger structure. If this were the gable end of a small structure then it may well have had its door on this, south-eastern side facing towards the entrance-way to the enclosure. It seems more likely however that these beam slots are part of a larger, multi-phased building which would require further excavation to understand it better.

Trench 3

Trench 3 (Figure 33) was targeted over what appeared to be a secondary entrance-way within the internal enclosure ditch. Approximately 10m inside from the main entrance lay two additional inner ditches funnelled inwards to create a restricted passageway, apparently to control access into and out of the central area. This arrangement may have had a ceremonial or more functional purpose, such as the restriction of livestock movement. Midway along the eastern ditch was a small pit cut into the upper fill. This contained pottery sherds and a large piece of broken saddle-quern of sarsen (Figure 35). This may have been an offering deposited deliberately in this location because it was a place of significance. This interpretation is strengthened by the discovery of a possible gate structure comprising two large postholes flanking the mouth of the funnelled corridor and a smaller, central one, the arrangement of which would have restricted and channelled movement into the inner area. Trench 3 also contained a number of large circular pits of around 2-2.5m in diameter and 0.6-0.8m depth.



Figure 35 The saddle quern

Enclosure ditches

Trenches 1, 2, 5 and 6 were aimed at characterising and dating the ditches enclosing the southern settlement. In most instances the features interpreted from the geophysics and cropmarks correlated with what was found in the ground. Trench 1 revealed the outer ditch and part of a short trackway leading from the enclosure complex towards a feature that seems, from the aerial photos, to represent an extension of the Brocas Lands linear. Trench 2 showed the inner ditch terminating to form the eastern side of the main entrance-way into the centre of the settlement. Trench 5 also uncovered the inner ditch as well as a smaller intermediate earthwork and a much larger outer boundary that was possibly later reused as part of a wider field system – potentially contemporary with the V-shaped example seen within trenches 9 and 10 of the northern enclosure.

Trench 6



Figure 36 Half-sectioned kiln and pit in Trench 6

Trench 6 exposed the outer ditch as well as an unexpected, narrower one in the middle of the trench. However, it was the eastern end of the trench that provided evidence of activity within the settlement itself. The inner enclosure ditch here was packed with a large dump of burnt material and pottery (Figure 36). Adjacent and to the east of the ditch was a small oven, oval in plan and measuring 0.9m by 0.56m with a depth of 0.24m. It was characterised by a baked-clay lining which was visible on the sides and base of the structure with the remains of what was presumably a collapsed domed roof. A slight depression on the western side may have served as the opening or possibly the flue.

Conclusions

Together the grave and its contents suggest an individual of high status, very probably with close connections to Iron Age *Calleva*, was interred at Windabout. This is believed to be the first burial of its kind found in

England south of the Thames. Other, similar chambered cremation burials have been found to the north and east associated with the oppida of Verulamium (St Albans) and Camulodunum (Colchester), but this tradition of chambered burial begins in the Iron Age of northern France and ties to that area have been highlighted by the origins of the vessels.

The grave and surrounding ditched-enclosure lie in a prominent position on the brow of a hill, and would have been highly visible from the settlement enclosure identified down the hill to the south. Preliminary assessment of the artefacts from the settlement enclosure ditches indicate initial use in the early Iron Age, perhaps from about 800BC, with re-use and re-cutting in the Late Iron Age. Several features were identified in the small portion of the enclosure which was excavated, including a substantial timber-post entranceway flanked by deep pits, beam slots with a series of post-holes, defining part of a building, and a small, clay-lined oven.

Although clearly of great interest in its own right, perhaps the true importance of this discovery is that it lies in an area previously perceived as being devoid of late prehistoric activity, despite being close to Late Iron Age *Calleva*, and that it has been found through the systematic application of non-intrusive prospective techniques. This demonstrates the potential of the wider surroundings to tell us far more about later prehistoric life and landscape in the area than we know at present.

PART II The Silchester Town Life Project Insula III 2016

Michael Fulford, Amanda Clarke, Emma Durham and Jenni Eaton

2016 was our fourth and final season of excavation in Insula III. Our discoveries now suggest that the early Roman palatial building in the SE corner with its colonnade fronting the north-south street was abandoned even before its footprint and foundations were completed.

The instability of the ground discouraged further major early Roman building projects in Insula III. The remains of buildings in which we do have confidence all belong to the later Roman period. We discovered two, perhaps three new late Roman buildings in 2016.

Introduction

A fourth season of excavation took place in Insula III over three weeks in August-September 2016. Our first two seasons in 2013-14 had investigated building remains in the south-east corner of the block which the Society of Antiquaries had first discovered in 1891 and interpreted as a bath house (Figure 37). In separating out elements which belonged to different periods, it became clear to us that, rather than a bath house, the principal remains were part of a large, late 1st century AD Roman town house fronted by a colonnade along the north-south street and, perhaps, also, along the east-west street;

wall alignments suggested the building continued further to the north and west. The excavations planned for 2015 and 2016 aimed to determine whether in fact the building originally extended to occupy the whole-insula. We first explored the north-east corner of the block, where a possible wall alignment on the 1891 plan suggested a connection back to the south-east building. This proved not to be the case and no trace was found of any remains which could be linked with the SE building, leaving 2016 for the exploration of the north-west corner (Trench 1), where the Society of Antiquaries' excavation appeared to have found no remains other than a few pits and 'traces of buildings'.

In the light of the negative results in the north-east

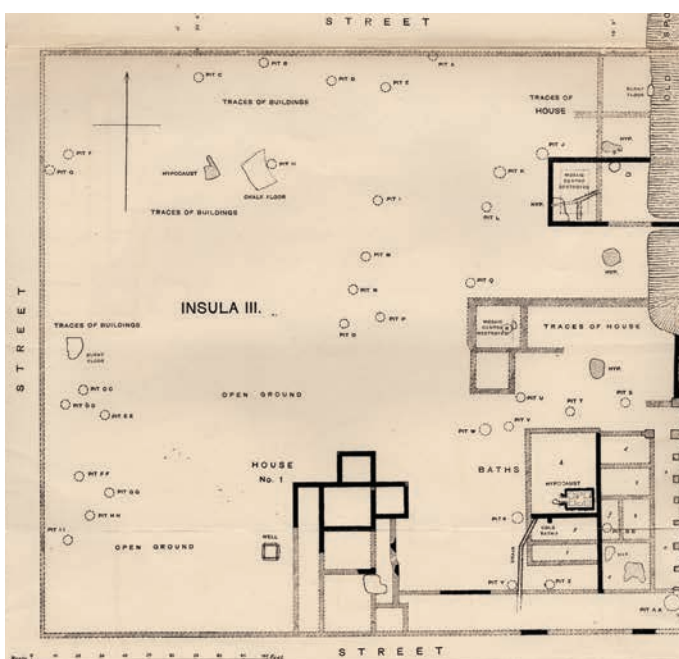


Figure 37 Insula III Society of Antiquaries' plan

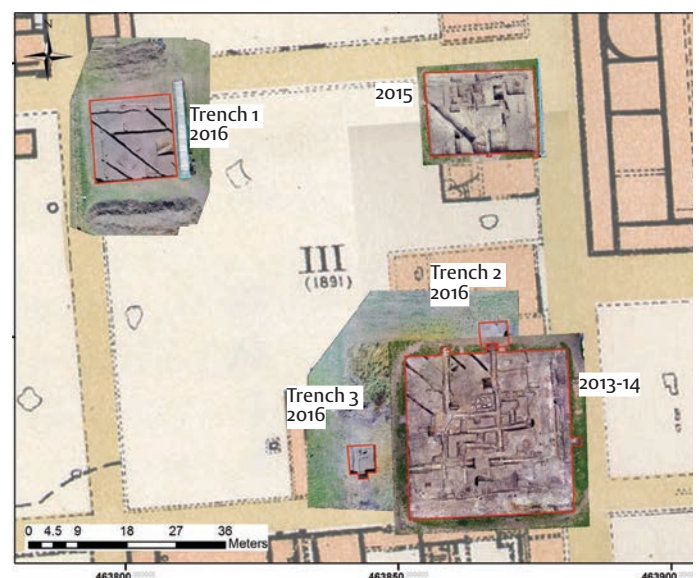


Figure 38 Insula III Trench locations 2013-16

corner in 2015 permission was granted in 2016 to take the investigation back to the SE corner to determine whether the building extended any further than as depicted on the plan of 1891. One small trench (2) was opened immediately to the north of the north edge of the 2013-14 trench to establish whether there was any trace of a continuation northwards, while a second (3), on the western side, explored the course of the wall foundation running parallel with the east-west street and its relationship with a further set of foundations to the west which it appeared to join (Figure 38).

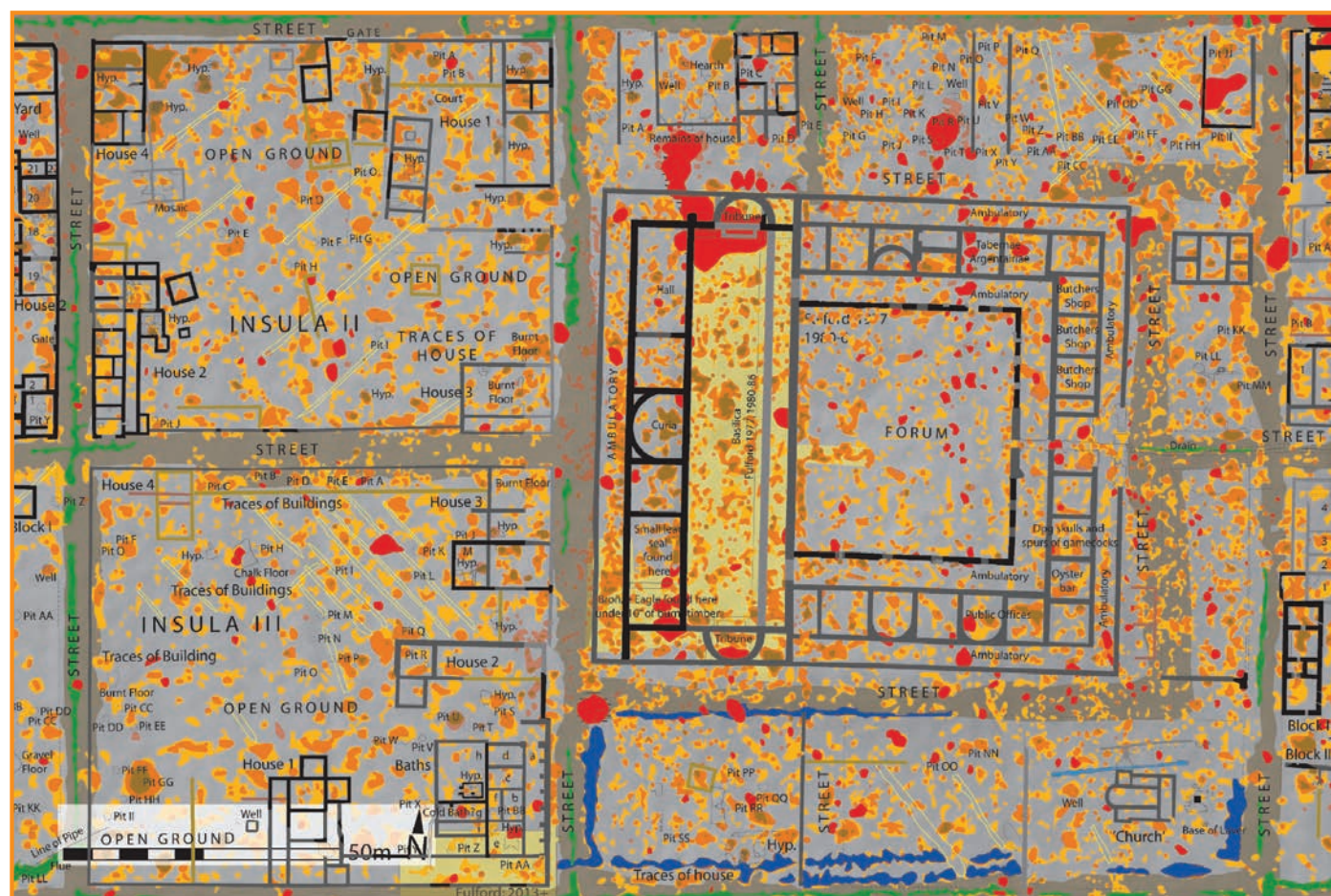
Geophysical survey

In addition to the magnetometry survey of the whole insula undertaken by Creighton and Fry* (2016, 99 – 100, Figs 5.28-5.30), Rob Fry and Dave Thornley carried out a ground-penetrating radar survey of the area to be excavated. The two methods strongly indicated that our 2016 main trench (1) would straddle part of a north-south-aligned building, while the magnetometry also indicated a further structure running east-west across the insula parallel with and a few metres to the south of the east-west street (Figure 39)

Figure 39 Interpretive plan of Insula III (Creighton and Fry 2016, Fig 5.30). ©Society for Promotion of Roman Studies

Methodology

Our methodology for all three trenches in 2016 was the same as that for the previous three seasons in Insula III: removal of the ploughsoil by machine and clean the underlying deposits to reveal antiquarian interventions, including the reported excavations of 1891, and the latest undisturbed Roman (or post-Roman) archaeology. The objective was to gain the maximum amount of information from the re-excavation of the Victorian trenches, resorting to only very limited excavation of undisturbed deposits to secure dating evidence. Thus, excavation of the antiquarian trenches was followed by that of a small sondage (Slot 1) in Trench 1 to the geological subsoil to establish the chronology of the undisturbed stratigraphic sequence (Figure 41). In addition, some of the latest surviving, dark earth deposits were explored as had been done in 2015.



The Excavation

The Victorian Excavations

Trench 1

The main trench, Trench 1, measured 15m x 15m and was located in the far north-west corner of the block; its northern and western limits were defined by the east-west street and the north-south street; its eastern and southern limits were arbitrary.

Cleaning of the deposits beneath the ploughsoil rapidly revealed three or four phases of linear features, two or three of which could be interpreted as antiquarian trenching, while the other corresponded to the footprint of the north-south-aligned building indicated by the geophysics. Running along the edge of the east-west street was a shallow trench (32026/32014), c.1.3m wide and 0.2m deep, with ragged edges and probably a continuation of that found in 2015 in the NE corner of the insula. From it, but with an indeterminate relationship to it, ran one of four trenches, each c. 0.5m wide, all aligned diagonally north-west to south-east, more or less evenly spaced, across the trench. Dug to a depth of between c.0.5m and 0.78m, they did not reach the geological subsoil but stopped at a substantial deposit of clay. They can be identified with confidence as the trial trenches of the Society of Antiquaries' excavation of Insula III in 1891, similar to those found in the SE of the insula in 2013-14 and, previously, in Insula IX. These trenches cut a further east-west and a north-south-aligned trench, the former with a spur running north to the edge of the east-west street, c. 0.57m wide and dug to a depth of c. 0.7m (Figure 40, Figure 41). These features were distinguished by a more clayey fill than the diagonal trenches, but the course of the north-south trench was harder to define, its edges blurring with possibly (and so earlier) disturbed soil along the west side of the trench. The east-west trench corresponds with the feature identified by the magnetometry which was traced over 50m to the east, almost to the north-east corner of the block, making it at least 70m in length altogether.

Apart from being earlier than 1891, there was no independent evidence of date, but the character of the earlier phase of trenching does recall similar trenches aligned parallel with and at right angles to the line of the east-west street discovered in the north-east corner of Insula IX. After some debate these were interpreted as late Roman construction trenches for timber buildings but, with hindsight, they can now be seen to be located in the small area of Insula IX investigated by Revd

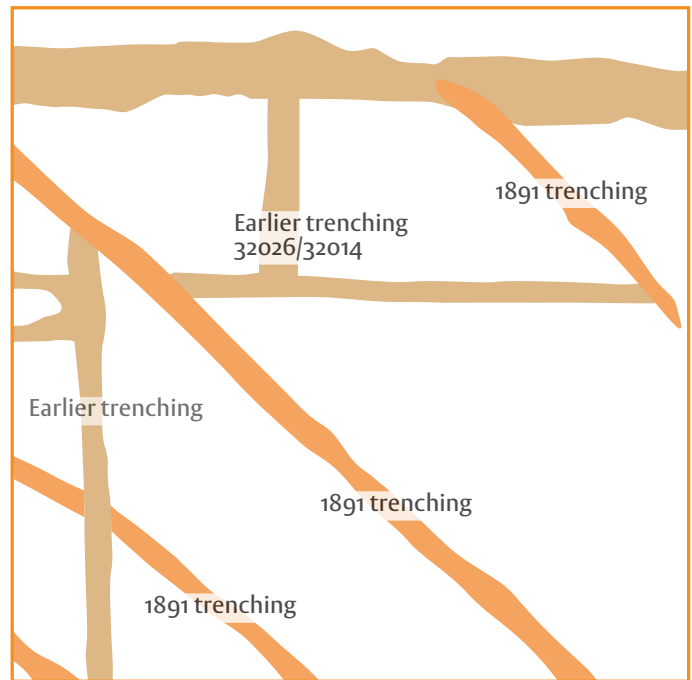


Figure 40 Plan of Victorian trenches

Joyce in the 1860s and can reasonably be attributed to him. With the evidence from Insula III, where, as well as demonstrating their relationship with the 1891 trenching, we have identified a length of trench too great to be interpreted as the beamslot of a timber building, the two sets of trenching in Insulas III and IX strongly point to an association with the Revd Joyce. Between the excavations of Joyce, trenching parallel to the streets, and those of the Society of Antiquaries, with trenches diagonal to the street grid, we can see the development of a more efficient method of trial trenching to locate rectangular buildings expected to be found within a regular, rectangular grid-system than that of trench-

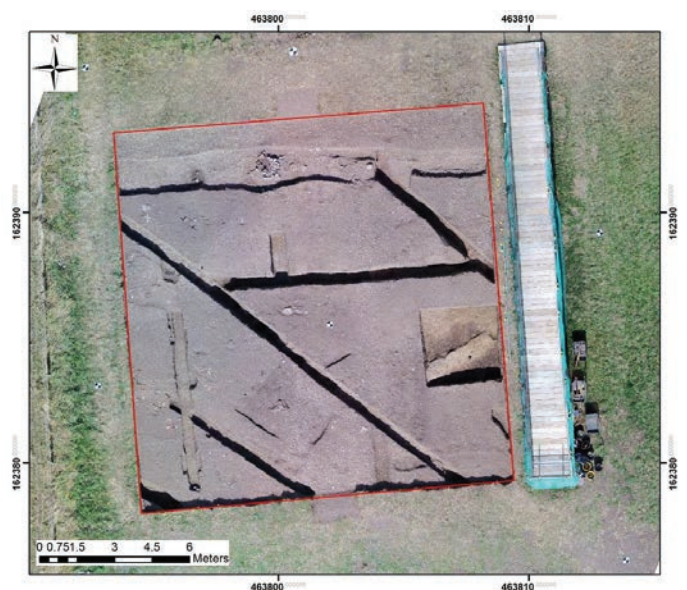


Figure 41 Insula III: Trench 1 showing the Victorian trenching and the location of Slot 1 in the east of the trench

ing parallel to and at right angles to the streets and the buildings aligned with them.

Trenches 2 and 3

Trenches 2 and 3 (Figure 42) each measured 5m x 4.5m and they were both positioned to answer questions about the extent of the late 1st century AD building found in the south-east corner of the insula in 2013 and 2014.

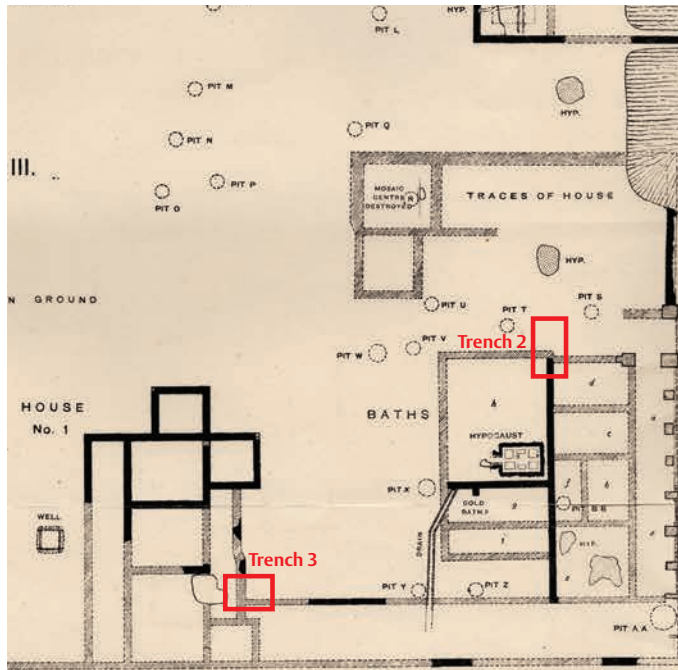


Figure 42 Insula III: Location of trenches 2 and 3

Trench 2

Trench 2 was located at the northern edge of the 2013-14 excavation at the end of a north-south wall foundation aligned with similar possible remains in the north-east corner of the block which the 2015 excavation has shown not to have existed. The purpose of Trench 2 was to establish whether there was any northward continuation of this wall. Remains of two Society of Antiquaries' trial trenches (0.4m wide and c.1m deep) cutting diagonally north-west/south-east across the trench were found, while a further, east-west trench formed the southern end of the trench. The latter showed no trace of any foundations, either of the east-west wall which had been projected as forming the northern limit of the remains found in 1891, or any trace of a continuation northwards of the north-south wall re-located in 2013-14.

Trench 3

Trench 3 was located at the western edge of the 2013-14 excavation to test the relationship of the east-west

wall foundation with the building to the west which it appeared to join. Removal of the ploughsoil revealed the remains of the trench dug in 1891 to follow the direction westwards of the east-west wall foundations re-located in 2013 and which formed the southern limit of the SE building. There was no trace of any wall foundations at the base of this trench and therefore no relationship with the (late Roman) north-south wall foundations which the Antiquaries had believed it joined. This observation allowed the western group of wall foundations (House No. 1) to be seen as a separate entity, a building in its own right. Further, shallow, Victorian trenching defined the gravel foundations of this (late Roman) building.

The Roman Archaeology

Trench 1

Early Roman

Cleaning of the sides of the Victorian trenching revealed evidence of dumped deposits of clay and gravel including stratigraphy slumping into deep-cut pits or wells beneath the latest surviving Roman stratigraphy. Both phases of trenching had cut through the gravel foundations of the building identified from the geophysical surveys, but neither revealed any trace of early, stone-footed foundations such as those found in the SE corner of the insula.

To understand the chronology of the early Roman sequence, a 3 m square slot was excavated down to natural deposits, at a depth of c. 96.2m OD, approximately 1m below the base of the plough soil. Within this slot the survival of stratigraphy from the early Roman period emphasised the potential of Insula III to provide new knowledge about the early Roman town, but the small area limited any real understanding in 2016. Natural deposits consisted of a mixed orange-brown sandy gravel, and formed into a natural raised linear feature. Overlying the natural and creating a level surface for subsequent occupation, was a loose dark brown grey sandy gravel with some silty patches (32102). Cut into this were 2 postholes, and a small patch of burnt clay overlay it. The only find was 1 piece of pottery from (32102).

The earliest Roman activity identified within Slot 1 consisted of dumped deposits of yellow clay up to 0.3m in thickness (32042, 32057, 32125), interpreted as make-ups to consolidate the pre-Roman and earliest Roman ground surface. Similar clay deposits, visible in the

sides of the Victorian trenches, extended across the entire area of Trench 1 and created a made-up surface to a height of no more than 0.8m above the underlying gravels. Associated with clay context 32042 in Slot 1 were three small pits. The fill of one of these pits contained SF1461, part of a pottery vessel. These clay deposits in the north-west corner of the insula recall those which made up the ground for the building in the south-east corner, also observed in Trench 3. The pottery from the contexts sealed by the clay in Slot 1 dates to the 1st century AD.

A gravel surface (32076, 32029, 32031, 32035) covered the clay deposits in Slot 1, but was also identified over the entire trench, being particularly noticeable in the south-west corner. These gravels were cut into by the foundation trenches for the late Roman building identified here. The pottery from these contexts dates to the 2nd century AD and provides a *terminus post quem* for the building.

Late Roman

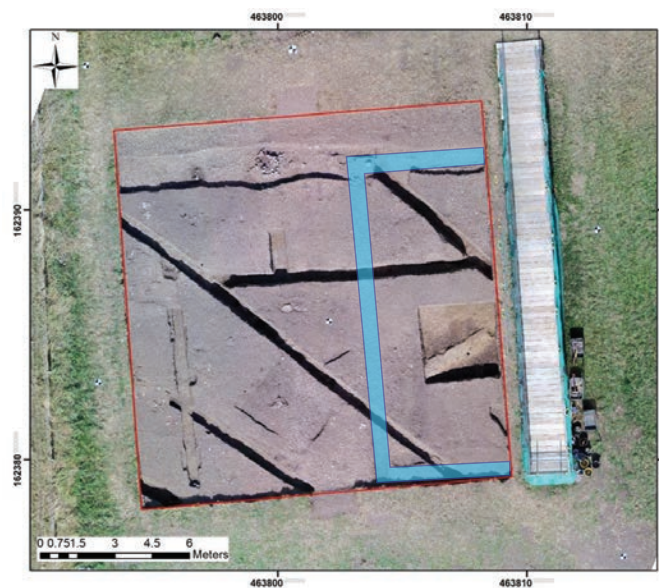


Figure 43 Trench 1: Late Roman foundation trenches outlined in blue

Cut into the gravels which formed the latest surviving Roman stratigraphy across much of the excavated area were the gravel-filled foundation trenches of a substantial Roman building, dug to a width of c. 0.7m and a depth of c. 0.6m below the surviving late Roman ground surface (Figure 43, Figure 44). The Antiquaries had not recognised these foundation trenches for what they were, and therefore this late Roman building in the north-west of Insula III represents a new discovery for the insula and for Silchester. The building measured c. 15m north-south; the western, northern

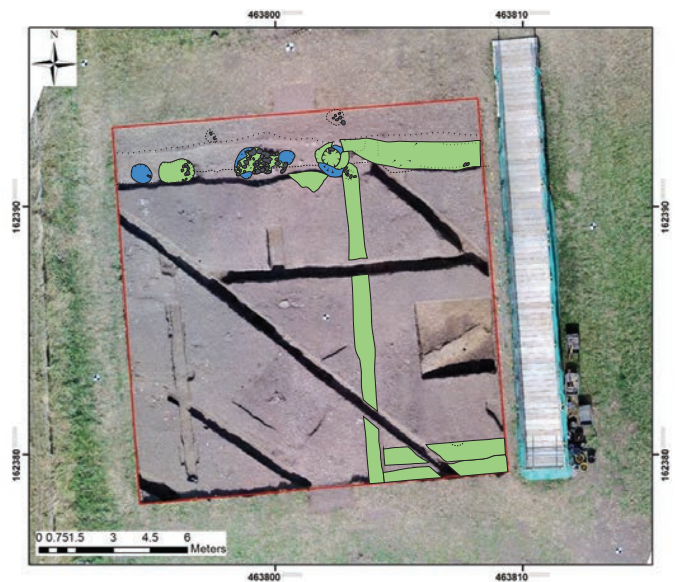


Figure 44 Trench 1: Late Roman building and intercutting postholes along east-west street frontage

and southern wall foundation trenches were located within our excavation trench, but the eastern wall lay outside of the excavation. The magnetometry gives a width to the building of c. 7m, but no trace was found of the internal sub-division of the building suggested by that survey. A shallow (0.2m deep) east-west trench (32037/32036) just inside the southern wall of the building may represent a repair or modification. Ploughing had removed any occupation or floor surface associated with the building; only the gravel make-ups described above survived. We assume that the building was timber framed and rested on the gravel foundations.

Along the east-west street, forming the northern limit of the trench, several intercutting postholes were identified which extended the line of the north wall of the late Roman building west 8.5m towards the junction of the streets. Indeed, the easternmost posthole cut through the north-west corner of the building. A small patch of clay flooring was revealed overlying the gravels just to the west of the N-S wall foundation. These street-fronting postholes were packed with flints and had been re-cut several times. It is likely that they or their latest phases had cut through the latest street surface, but the antiquarian trenching defining the edge of the street had removed all Roman stratigraphy here. We interpret these postholes as representing either a fence line or the frontage of a second, late Roman, timber-framed building occupying the north-west corner of the block. If these post-holes do represent the frontage of a building, it was not possible to trace its extent southwards or identify any associated occupation, apart from clay flooring 34031.

Dark earth deposits

Later than and abutting this late Roman building were substantial spreads of dark earth deposits (32011, 32012, 32019, 32021), cut through by a number of small pits and other features. These dark soils were sampled, and a small area in the centre of the trench was part-excavated to obtain dating information. Material recovered from the dark earths included four coins, a shale bracelet and a number of copper alloy items including a toilet instrument, a bracelet and a brooch.

Trench 2

The earliest horizon, visible in the sides of the two diagonal, Victorian trenches and in the sides of two possible Roman cuts, is a substantial burnt deposit (33017), of possible later 1st century AD date. The only structural remains identified were of a beam slot running east-west, cutting into the burnt deposit. Later than or, perhaps, associated with this 'structure' were three phases of metalled yard-surface of unknown date. The eastern side of the trench revealed deposits slumping into a pit or well.

Trench 3

Revealed at the base and along the southern side of the east-west Victorian trench described above was a substantial dumped deposit of clay, similar to that found in Trench 1 and in the 2013-14 excavations in the SE corner of the block. More importantly, the trench revealed part of the east-facing frontage of a late Roman cottage which could be seen to be a distinct entity, completely unrelated to the early Roman SE building. It was constructed on gravel-filled foundations (0.9 m wide and 0.46 m deep) similar to those found in Trench 1 and in Insula IX, including remains of an overlying course of flints. With its corridor linking two projecting rooms on its east-facing side, the plan is very similar to that of the building fronting on to the north-south street and occupying the mid-point of the east side of Insula III (Figure 37, Figure 39). It is also a close parallel to late Roman Building 5 in Insula IX. Other cottages, similar in plan, can also be seen elsewhere across the plan of the Roman town.

Conclusions

The excavation of three trenches during 2016 revealed a well-preserved sequence from early Roman through to late or post Roman, similar to that found elsewhere in the insula. The principal findings are that:

Dumps of clay and gravel to consolidate and make up the ground, and similar to those found in the SE, were found in the NW corner of Insula III in Trench 1. Unlike in the SE, there was no evidence in the NW corner of any foundations cut into them. One implication of the introduction of this material is that the underlying ground surface with the evidence of pits and wells associated with the late Iron Age and earliest Roman occupation was not sufficiently stable to build on.

The late 1st century, SE 'building' was found not to extend beyond the limits mapped by the Society of Antiquaries in 1891 and as re-defined in 2013-14. The plan of their remains make little sense, giving the appearance of an unfinished project - an abandoned building, perhaps, or probably, because of the instability of the ground.

Two, possibly three, new late Roman buildings have been identified; one or two in Trench 1 in the NW corner, the third, partly recognised in 1891 and located in the middle of the south side of the insula, but now with a separate identity, by disassociation from the SE 'building'.

Two, possibly three, phases of antiquarian trenching have been identified in Trench 1. The latest, diagonal trenching, can confidently be associated with the Society of Antiquaries' excavation of the insula in 1891. These can be seen to cut trenching parallel or at right angles to the streets and arguably to be associated with the Revd Joyce. Trenching to define the edge of the east-west street cannot yet be dated.

*Creighton, J and Fry, R., *Silchester: Changing Visions of a Roman Town*, London, 2016

Acknowledgements

Insula III

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Silchester Environs Project

The Silchester Environs project continues to take a truly multi-faceted approach and draws on the involvement of a great number of people. The project is led by Prof. Michael Fulford and managed by Catherine Barnett. The coring was undertaken by Kev Williams of QUEST, Rory Williams-Burrell and the authors. The excavation teams were led by Dan Wheeler and Nick Pankhurst, and comprised an excellent team of staff, students and volunteers. Geophysical survey was undertaken by Andy Payne, Paul and Neil Linford of the Historic England Geophysics team and Rob Fry and Dave Thornley of the University of Reading. Earthwork reconnaissance and survey was by Dave Field, Mark Bowden, Olaf Bayer and Jenni Eaton. We benefit from a highly successful partnership with members of Historic England, including Helen Winton (Aerial Investigation and Mapping Manager), Mark Bowden (Assessment Team West Manager), and the Geophysics team. Rory Williams-Burrell and Jenni Eaton processed and extracted the samples, Jane Timby examined the pottery, Lisa Lodwick identified the plant macrofossil remains, Catherine Barnett identified the wood charcoal and carried out sedimentary analysis. The radiocarbon dating programme was undertaken at the Southern Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC); we would like to thank Prof. Gordon Cook there for his advice.

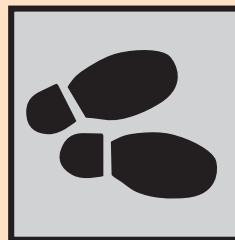
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Figure 45 The Insula III team

Designed by Sarah Lambert Gates



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