

# Silchester & its Environs



Excavation and Survey 2015

Michael Fulford, Catherine Barnett & Amanda Clarke



The Pond Farm trenches, with earthworks highlighted (photo Mark Houshold)



# The Silchester Environs Project

**Catherine Barnett, Olaf Bayer, Mark Bowden, David Field, Rob Fry, Nick Pankhurst, Dave Thornley, Krystyna Truscoe, Dan Wheeler & Helen Winton**

The Silchester Environs Project is an exciting new undertaking which aims to help us better understand the origins and wider human landscape of the Iron Age oppidum that underlies Calleva Atrebatum.

The use of desk based assessment, interpretation of aerial photos and lidar images, geophysical surveys and coring in combination on a landscape scale is a powerful tool to identify new sites and to help us better understand existing ones.

The team is exploring an area of about 100km<sup>2</sup> of the landscape around Silchester, examining prehistoric settlement patterns, activity and agriculture using a variety of techniques. The starting point has been a desk-based assessment, incorporating the Historic Environment Records, Portable Antiquity Scheme data, lidar, aerial photo, geological, topographic and OS mapping data into a project-wide geographical information system. This exercise has already identified a number of poorly understood or previously unknown sites, features and areas of interest worthy of further investigation. We have started to approach a small selection of these sites using geophysical surveys, earthwork surveys and coring exercises. The really interesting or enigmatic ones will also be investigated through excavation and we have already completed one season of digging, with trenches opened at Pond Farm Hillfort in the summer of 2015, described further below.

## Aerial Interpretation

Aerial photographs, both historic and modern, and lidar imagery are being systematically examined for the Silchester Environs Project area. So far, half of the area has been covered and archaeological monuments have been mapped for all periods from the Prehistoric through to the end of the Second World War. Close examination of aerial photographs of open and agricultural land can reveal cropmarks where the vegetation cover differs from its surroundings due to the presence of buried features such as ditches or walls. These cropmarks can change over time with weather conditions,

crop types and land management so photos of the same site over different years can be helpful. Lidar imaging allows us to see through heavy vegetation cover such as woodland to pick out detailed changes in topography on the ground which can include, for instance, the remains of ancient monuments, rivers and field systems. The remains of monuments surviving as very low earthworks in open ground can also be identified (Figs.1-2).

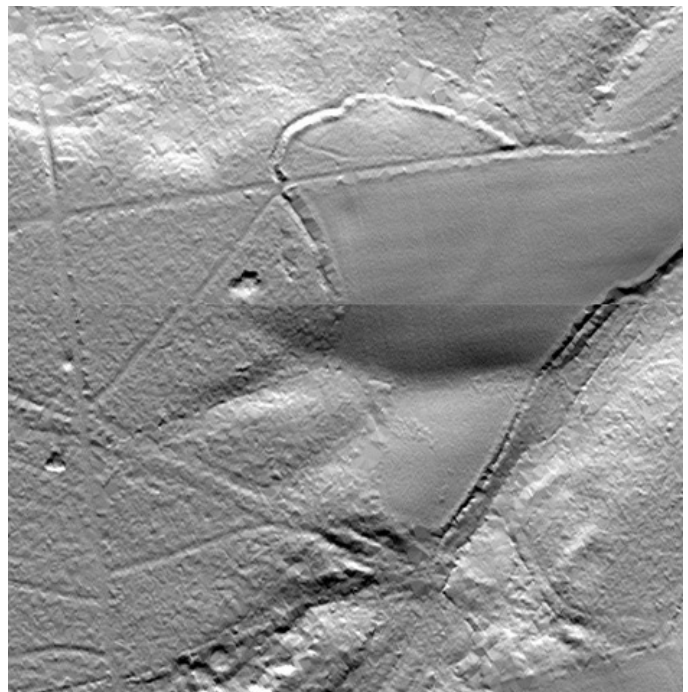


Figure 1 Lidar imaging from Benyon's Inclosure shows the surviving earthwork banks of the hillfort near Pond Farm within woodland, but also their continuation as a low earthwork bank in open ground to the SE. The bank of the Roman Road from Silchester to Speen runs to the south in a SE-NW direction.  
© University of Reading/ Environment Agency. Pond Farm Roman road

The survey has given us a greater understanding of the layout of the prehistoric and historic landscape as well as giving us our first targets for further investigations on the ground.

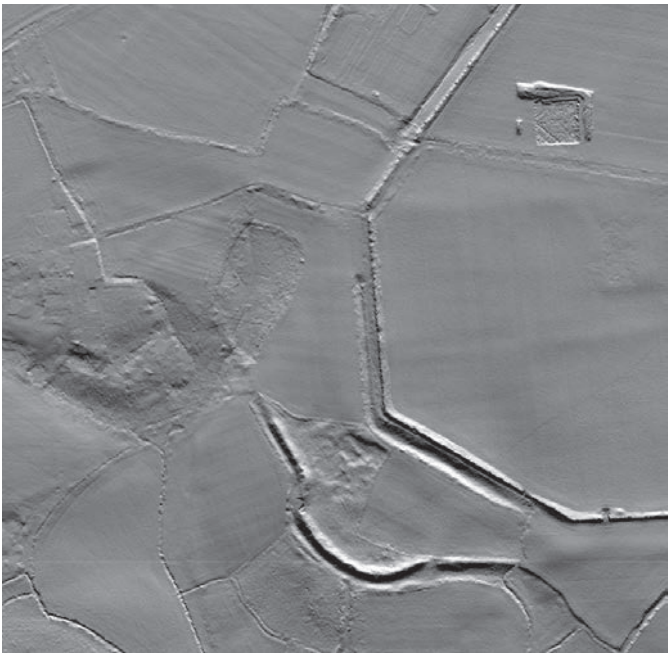


Figure 2 Earthworks at Rampier Copse seen on lidar imagery to the south-west of Calleva. © University of Reading/ Environment Agency.

It has recorded all the features associated with Silchester Roman town, but also an interesting pattern of later prehistoric settlement around it as well as earlier features within it. Settlements, often consisting of rectangular or circular enclosures, have been found as surviving earthworks within the woodlands and as cropmarks within farmland. Later features identified are the boundaries around medieval parks and the remains of several 19<sup>th</sup> century brickworks. World War II features include the RAF airfield at Aldermaston (and of the later Atomic Weapons Research Establishment), a prisoner-of-war camp between Beech Hill and Stratfield Mortimer and a large amount of dispersed munitions storage within the country parks and woodland.

Geophysical surveys

Non-intrusive surveys have been undertaken on >85ha of land so far as part of the project, some in areas where Iron Age finds have previously been made or adjacent to known monuments, others where the Lidar and aerial photo interpretation have shown cropmarks exist on the surface. Work by The University and also Historic England has included handheld, cart and towed Fluxgate Magnetometer, Caesium Vapour and Ground Penetrating Radar surveys around Little London, Latchmere Green, and The Frith, with high-

lights including clarification of the setting and termination of the Silchester Dykes and discovery of new probable buried enclosures, ditches and trackways near Latchmere Green (Figs.3-4).



Figure 3 Fluxgate gradiometer survey, Latchmere Green

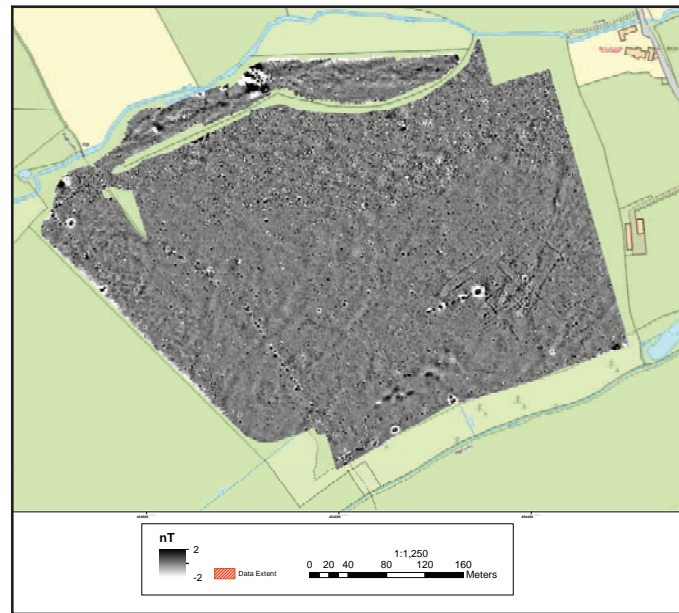


Figure 4 The results of magnetic survey at Nelson's Field: a Late Iron Age and Romano-British rural settlement



## Earthwork Walkovers and Surveys

Simply walking over an area using an expert archaeological eye can reveal traces of former features and monuments. Members of the project team and Historic England have been focussing on wooded areas around Silchester to help better understand what might be preserved. Fuller earthwork surveys are then employed on standing monuments of particular interest. Measured survey of Pond Farm Hillfort was undertaken in winter 2015-16; the results are shown in Figure 5. This has revealed nuances about its late prehistoric (Late Iron Age) construction, including the existence of a second previously unknown entrance coinciding with the modern trackway to the NE of the monument, reuse and modification of the main entrance in Roman or later times, construction of post-Medieval banks on top of the ramparts and that oddly, the original monument was actually unfinished in the SW corner. Earthwork surveys of the so-called Silchester Dykes (a series of long, linear bank-and-ditch monuments which seem to lead to the Late Iron Age oppidum at Silchester) and the outer earthworks at Silchester are planned for the coming winters, when ground cover is low.

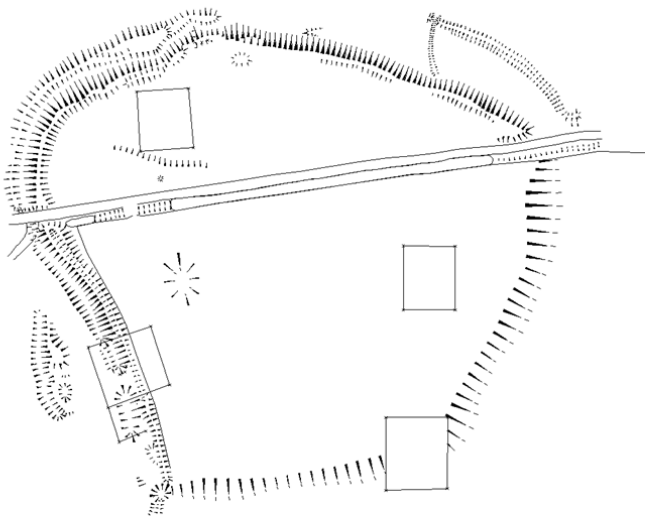


Figure 5 Earthwork survey of Pond Farm Hillfort by Mark Bowden and Olaf Bayer, Historic England



Figure 6a and 6b (above right) Pond Farm Hillfort, the monument interior and the bank

## Excavation and Coring at Pond Farm Hillfort

**Catherine Barnett, Nick Pankhurst & Dan Wheeler**

The initial findings from Environs led us to investigate Pond Farm Hillfort in more detail to answer questions on timing of construction and nature of its use.

Large-scale excavation has allowed us to date the monument to the Late Iron Age, contemporary with the Oppidum at Silchester but also demonstrate its reuse in the Roman and Early Medieval Periods, predominantly for stock management.



Pond Farm Hillfort within Benyon's Inclosure, Mortimer West End, was chosen as the first of our test sites for ground-truthing the findings of the preliminary Environs surveys. The site lies just 1.2km to the north west of *Calleva* at SU 62678 63078. It has long been suspected to be an Iron Age univallate hillfort and, as such, protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument. We wanted to find out what the site was used for and for how long and whether it preceded the *oppidum* or was in use at the same time. However, it had never been excavated or dated before and so, guided by the results of preliminary earthwork survey of the surviving standing parts of the monument, and geophysical survey on the levelled portion, and with the kind permission of the Englefield Estate and the tenant Dr Richard Massey, four 20 x 20 metre trenches were opened as shown (inside cover). In addition, more inaccessible or deep areas of the monument and on the slope and floodplain below the hilltop were drilled using a powered auger, allowing sediment sequences of up to five metres depth to be recovered as cores.

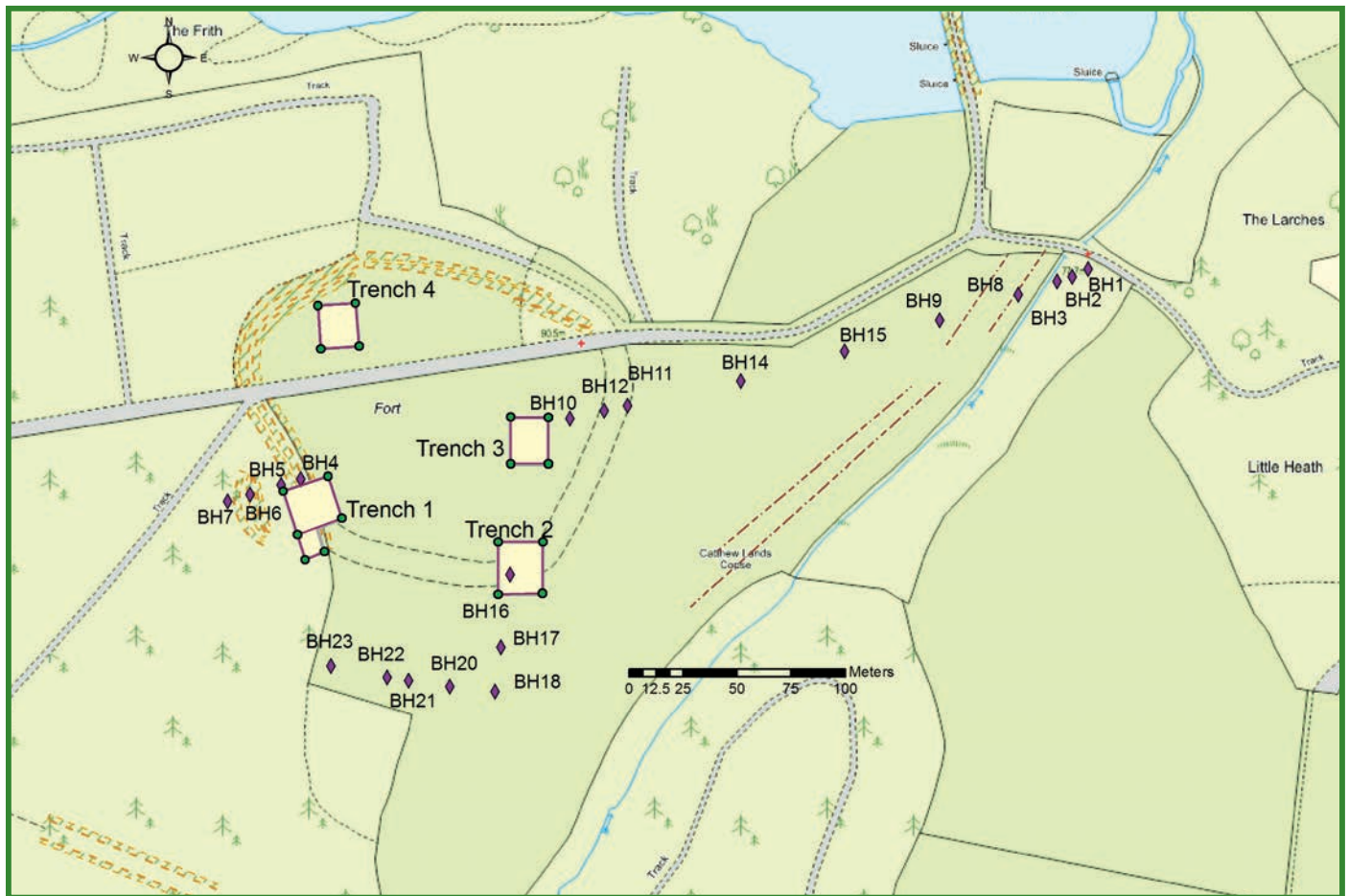


Figure 7 Map of Pond Farm Hillfort to show trench and core locations

## The Trenches

Each trench (inside front cover, and above) was aimed at characterising the hillfort in a different way. Trench 1 was located over the western part of the enclosure where a clear break in the extant ditch marked an entrance-way. Both the rampart and ditch survived well in this area and it was therefore a prime location to explore the origins of the hillfort, its construction and how access into the monument had developed over time. Trench 2 (Figure 8) was located over the southern defences where the rampart had long-since been levelled by ploughing and the ditch was only visible as a shallow earthwork. Excavation here revealed a small concentration of activity close to the periphery of the hillfort and showed that there was significant re-modelling of the ditch and bank in later periods. Two further trenches were located within the hillfort with the expectation of exposing areas of typical activity within the monument and provide a basic idea of function and date. Trench 3 was placed in the northwest corner of the monument and was targeted over a circular anomaly revealed in the geophysical survey. However, upon excavation this trench proved entirely void of any archaeological fea-

tures, the sub-surface shapes seen in survey caused by the gravel geology. Trench 4 was similarly placed over an area of geophysical interest, close to the eastern limit of the hillfort, but was also largely empty. The presence of only a few disparate posthole features within these two extensive trenches, rather than a concentrated focus of activity, leads to a larger question about the use of the hillfort and the reasons for its construction.



Figure 8 Working shot, Trench 2

## The Cores

A total of 21 sets of cores were taken on and around the monument by the Silchester Team and QUEST using a handheld, powered Cobra TT corer (Figure 9). These included ones through the standing bank,



encircling ditch and along transects from the top of the hillfort down the hill through increasingly deep colluvial deposits (redeposited eroded sediments destabilised by past tree clearance and agriculture) and across the now dominantly dry floodplain at the base of the hill. The depth through sediments of archaeological interest to the boundary with the underlying Silchester Gravel and London Clay geology varied but was up to three metres. The cores have provided us with continuous sequences of sediments which record both changes in landscape such as position and movement of rivers, build-up of colluvium, episodes of erosion, and also human activity, such as the method of construction of the hillfort bank and the dumping of waste fuel. They also contain remnant of past plants in the form of wood, charcoal, seeds and pollen which are helping us to reconstruct what the site and its locale was like before, during, and after use and how humans impacted on it.



Figure 9 Coring the rampart at Pond Farm

## What Have We Learnt About Pond Farm?

### Neolithic to Bronze Age activity and clearance for agriculture

The evidence for the earliest local activity comes from a series of cores taken at the base of hill just above the floodplain to the east of the hillfort. Detailed description revealed an old soil buried under a substantial layer of colluvium eroded from the upper slopes. Alder twigwood from that soil has been radiocarbon dated to the Later Neolithic at 2890-2660 cal BC (4179+/-26 BP, SUERC-65361). The deposits indicate that following

relative landscape stability under wooded conditions during early prehistory, deforestation and agriculture commenced at the end of the Neolithic or Beaker (earliest Bronze Age) periods, allowing soil erosion and hillwash down-slope during heavy rain events. This is further supported by evidence within the hillfort, where a number of tree throws were found in trenches 1 and 2, with two examples clearly earlier than the construction of the hillfort. [2003] and [2051] were both located underneath where the southern stretch of the rampart once sat and therefore must have pre-dated the cutting of the enclosure ditch and formation of the bank. We intend to identify the tree types represented in those features and to gain radiocarbon dates from them. Further evidence of possible early activity was seen in the form of charcoal and fire-cracked flint in core 18 in a dry valley below the hillfort and in Trench 4 where two concentrations of fire-cracked flint may have been the remnants of burnt mounds, another potential sign of Bronze Age presence.

### Construction and first use of the fortified monument in the Late Iron Age

It is clear therefore, that the site was already at least partially cleared and in use when the construction of the hillfort ditch and rampart, a major undertaking both in terms of time and labour, was begun. Although it is feasible they were not the first defences set out around the monument, they certainly represent a massive fortification of the enclosure. In its entirety, the defences were c.575m in length and encircled an area of 2.1 hectares. Three slots placed through the ditch in Trench 2 showed the impressive scale of the work, with cut [2049] measuring 6.3m wide and close to 2m in depth (Figure 10). The adjacent bank would have been formed partially from the upcast clays and Silchester Gravel cap, but, it is clear from coring the remaining standing bank, which today still rises some 2.5m over the filled in ditch, that additional local gravel was used to build it up in layers, with each dump compacted before laying the next. An old soil part way through the sequence indicates either an extended period of disuse and soil formation or deliberate digging and dumping of existing local soil between the layers of gravel. Potentially also topped with a fence, the ditch and rampart together would have formed a formidable boundary. Outside the main entrance is a second, smaller length of bank and ditch, clearly shown on the earthwork survey, which seems to have formed a further complex element of the entrance, restricting the size and direction of approach and further adding to the impressive nature of the monument.





Figure 10 One of three slots excavated through the hillfort ditch in the levelled portion of the monument



Figure 11 Excavation of the ditch terminus to show tip of flint nodules

The ditch appeared consistent in size and shape as it terminated on the southern side of the entrance in Trench 1. The lower fills of its terminus [1024] were typically sterile, redeposited gravel derived from the collapse of the rampart but overlying these was a substantial tip of large flint nodules (1022) that appeared to have slumped in from the exterior (Figure 11). These pieces of flint are not local to the site, being akin to those derived from Chalk geology eg on the Hampshire Downs to the south, and they numbered well over a hundred (Figure 12), providing evidence of a structure flanking the entrance - be it a defensive wall, metallised surface or supporting revetment, built using material transported for that purpose.



Figure 12 Flint nodules recovered from ditch terminus

Although the causewayed entrance to the hillfort was over 12m wide, access into and out of the monument would probably have been controlled and restricted by a gatehouse or similar wooden structure. Evidence for this was seen beneath the rampart in Trench 1, where a line of dark circles proved to be the remnants of large timbers that formed a palisade across the entrance-way (Figure 13). The outer rings of a piece of mature oak wood taken from within the foundation cut of the palisade [1070] has been radiocarbon dated to the (late) Middle-to-Late Iron Age date at 200-30 cal BC (2083  $\pm$  29 BP, SUERC-65355).



Figure 13 The entranceway showing line of the palisade, marked by darker postholes

A small concentration of Silchester ware pottery was found within the upper fill of an earlier tree throw-hollow [1007] close to the entrance in Trench 1. Birch charcoal from this same fill has been radiocarbon dated to 240-410 cal AD (1710  $\pm$  29 BP, SUERC-65356), this Late Roman result shows that there was continued activity at Pond Farm during the period of Roman-occupied *Calleva*.

Overall, the scarcity of material culture across the whole site is quite remarkable, with little evidence of any substantial occupation or domestic activity. The main evidence of use comes in the form of charcoal rather than artefacts and extensive analysis of the site indicates the artefactual evidence is not missing or eroded but was not deposited in large quantities during occupation. If the palisade was constructed, as we believe, at the same time as the fortification of the defences, the monument would be contemporary with, rather than a precursor to, the *oppidum* at *Calleva*. Therefore a lack of domestic focus here would not necessarily be surprising given the monument's close proximity to a large settlement to the east and the possibility, as indicated by the earthwork survey, that the defences were never entirely completed. We suspect instead that whatever the original plan during construction, the monument was used predominantly for livestock management, used repeatedly seasonally over



a long time to graze and protect these valuable assets, with temporary occupation and use of small shelters by the accompanying herders rather than any substantial long term settlement.

## Early Medieval Reuse of the Monument

Evidence of a phase of substantial, more recent reuse of the monument was found in Trench 2. A large deposit of wood charcoal (2053) dumped into a probable recut of the ditch indicates that there had been a significant re-cutting of the defences and clearance of secondary re-established tree cover to enable re-use of the monument (Figure 14). Identification of the tree and shrub types represented and further dating of the deposit is planned, but a single preliminary radiocarbon date on elm twig wood at 1.72m below ground/90.18mOD is of 610-680 cal AD (1377+/-29 BP, SUERC-65360), within the Early Medieval/ Early-to-Mid Saxon period. The lack of any associated material culture from this time indicates that it was again probably not used as a settlement but rather for seasonal grazing and agriculture. A circular pit [2014] in the north of Trench 2 and the area surrounding it was potentially used for charcoal production at this time (Figure 15). The pit had a thick clay-lining used for heat insulation and the upper fills were heavily scorched. Burnt material from within the pit had radiated out into the surrounding area and been trampled into a small hollowed-out depression that was probably a working area. The upper fills of the pit contained some post-Medieval finds but the chronology of initial use will be revealed by further radiocarbon dating.



Figure 14 Charcoal dump 2053 in Hillfort ditch c2029a



Figure 15 Pit 2014 shows in situ burning

## Post Medieval Period

Two curvilinear ditches in the north of the trench 2 pointed to further reuse of the area in the post-Medieval period. Both ditches contained a significant number of pieces of peg tile and were potentially contemporary with the use of the tile works near Kiln Pond to the northeast. The ditches respected each other and the longer of the two narrowed as it approached the enclosure ditch, signifying that it initially ran up and over an extant part of the rampart that has subsequently been destroyed. The position of both ditches may imply that they also reused part of the surviving enclosure ditch as their southern extent. The enclosure ditch at this point may have still been open and the addition of C-shaped (in plan) ditches could have created a series of agricultural plot or livestock enclosures. The find of a piece of inscribed roof tile in the top of the ditch displaying the date 1734 is an unusually helpful one in picking out more recent use of the site (Figure 16).



Figure 16 Tile inscribed with the date 1734

To summarise, artefacts proved sparse, including human or animal bone, but the few pieces of pottery found, coupled with the first batch of radiocarbon dates strongly suggest that the main monument was built and fortified in the Late Iron Age on a site already cleared and used for agriculture (probably pasture).

Importantly, the Late Iron Age date indicates it was contemporary with the oppidum, not a precursor to it. The lack of substantial internal structures, yet evidence of several phases of earthwork and ditch recutting, leads us to conclude that this was not a permanently settled site but instead one maintained and visited periodically over a long time, perhaps as part of a stock management system, with the huge defensive earthworks there to protect valuable livestock, quite at odds with the traditional view of a hillfort as a settled site heavily defended for its human inhabitants.

## Post Excavation Analyses and Future Plans

Further information on the nature of use of the site will now come from the post-excavation analysis and radiocarbon dating of environmental samples collected during the dig. Due perhaps in part to the acidic nature of the soils at the site, no shells or bone have been preserved at Pond Farm, apart from rare fragments of burnt bone. However, plant remains are plentiful and analysis is underway. This includes identification of the pollen from Iron Age and Early Medieval layers in the ditches and preserved in the deep waterlogged sequences in the floodplain to the east which will inform us on the wider landscape and whether there was any arable cultivation close by. Identification of the substantial wood charcoal assemblages and any associated seeds from features of all ages at the hillfort will provide information on the nature of the local landscape, how it was cleared, exploited and managed by people over the millennia and will provide further material for radiocarbon dating to refine the site interpretations presented.

The results of our earthwork and geophysical surveys, coring and excavation of 8% of the monument (excavation of 1747m<sup>2</sup> of the total monument area of c2.1ha), coupled with these detailed post-excavation analyses, have provided a far better understanding of the construction and use of the hillfort and its chronological relationship to other nearby foci of human activity including the *oppidum* at *Calleva*. The research aims we originally set have been fulfilled and there is no need to disturb the monument with further archaeological investigations. Following the analyses described, the full results will be passed to the Hampshire Historic Environment Record, Historic England and the land-owners to enable continued preservation and informed management of this wonderful site. Our findings will

ultimately also be published as a monograph along with other sites investigated as part of the Silchester Environs project.

## Acknowledgements Environs and Pond Farm

We thank the Calleva Foundation for their generous support, The Englefield Estate including the Benyon Family, Edward Crookes, Rich Edwards, Ian Langrish and the tenant farmer, Dr Richard Massey. Also, David Wilkinson (Asst. Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England), The Historic England Geophysics team, the staff of QUEST (University of Reading), Mr and Mrs Oli Lambert, John Cook, Desmond and Graham Best, Derek and Hilary Fawcett, Bill Macklin, John Stacey, The Kolosowski family, James Strang, The Hodge Family, Dr Jane Timby, Jenni Eaton and Rory Williams Burrell and the many wonderful staff, volunteers and students who work with us.





# Silchester Insula III

Amanda Clarke, Michael Fulford, Emma Durham & Jenni Eaton

The opening of a new trench at Insula III has allowed us to better understand the methods and findings of antiquarian excavations but also bring to light a series of new buildings and activities.

Of particular note are the finds of a blacksmith's shop, full of iron-working debris; a widespread Early Roman burning event; and the presence of thick late and post-Roman soils ("Dark Earths") which contain rare evidence of settlement continuing well beyond the 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD.

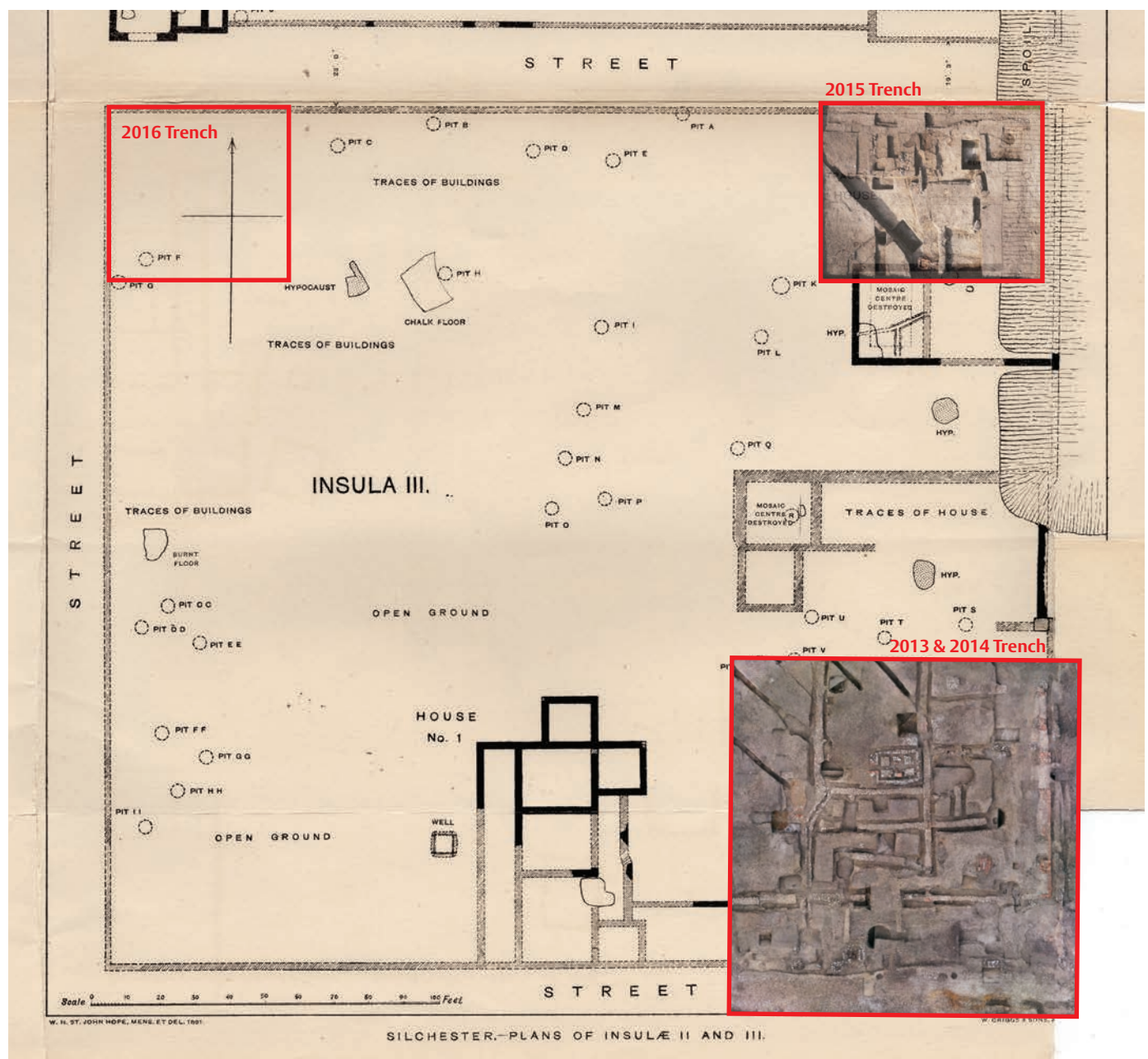


Figure 17 Insula III Society of Antiquaries' plan of 1891

A third season of excavation took place in Insula III over four weeks in August-September 2015. The aim was to explore further the extent of the large, later 1st century AD town-house which occupied the south-east corner of the insula and which we reinvestigated in 2013-14. The Society of Antiquaries' plan of the 1891 excavation indicated the probable continuation due north of one wall of the south-east building up to the north-east corner of the block (Figure 17). Here we investigated an area of 20m by 15m in order to verify whether the remains observed in 1891 were likely to be of the same build as the remains to the south. The main north-south street and the joining east-west street provided two of the limits of the trench, while the southern edge was determined by the north wall of the northernmost building identified along the north-south street in 1891. The western limit was arbitrary. Our methodology to ground truth the antiquarian findings was the same as in 2013-14, to locate and re-excavate the 1891 trenches with only minimal excavation of undisturbed contexts.

## The Intervention of 1891

When the Society of Antiquaries' excavated in 1891, the spoil heap from Joyce's excavation of the forum basilica extended across the main N-S street and onto the eastern edge of Insula III, thus inhibiting excavation of this strip and so preserving the stratigraphy intact below the ploughsoil. A carved pediment of Bath Stone was found resting on the edge of the Victorian trench (Figure 18). Rather than relating to Insula III, it had presumably slipped off the forum basilica spoil heap.



Figure 18 Carved pediment of Bath stone

The 1891 intervention in the north-east corner of Insula III was more intrusive than in the south-east. Two sub-rectangular trenches, the northern, 4m x 4.28m, the southern, at least 4m by 4.25m, its south-

ward extent continuing beyond our excavation, were dug down to a depth of about 0.6m immediately adjacent to the forum basilica spoil heap. The spoil from this work was probably dumped on the ground in between these 2 trenches, thus protecting the archaeology beneath. To the west a diagonal cut marked the edge of a north-west/south-east trial trench which clipped an oven structure (marked as 'hypocaust' on the plan of 1891), a trigger which probably accounted for the clearance of a larger, triangular-shaped area down to a depth of 0.85m. The spoil from this trench was almost certainly partly dumped on the area to the north, flanking the east-west street, which, apart from a narrow trench to define the edge of the east-west street, otherwise shows little or no sign of antiquarian disturbance. None of this antiquarian trenching reached deeper than contexts of late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century date (Figs. 19-20).

## The 2015 excavation

The main aim of the excavation was to remove the backfill from the excavations of 1891 to gain a better understanding of what had been found and, in particular, clarify the nature and context of the north-south wall foundation identified by the Victorians and shown on their plan, which aligns with a wall of the building in the SE corner of the insula. This was the *raison d'être* for investigating the NE corner of the insula in 2015. Identifying the antiquarian trenches was extremely difficult as their fills were almost indistinguishable from the uppermost, undisturbed stratigraphy of dark earths. In the event, removal of the backfill revealed the n-s wall to be no more than a narrow baulk of unexcavated soil between two of the 1891 trenches. The presence of some tiles laid flat, and flints, may account for the Victorians' misidentification of this baulk as a wall. The re-discovery of the 'hypocaust' confirmed that it was a keyhole-shaped oven made of re-used ceramic brick and tile. Though 'pedestalled' by the 1891 excavation and removed from its stratigraphic context, the material which had collapsed into the oven chamber itself had not been touched (see further, below). Cleaning of the sides of the Victorian trenches provided invaluable information about the stratigraphic sequence which was sampled for chemical and micromorphological analysis. No trace of any masonry structure was found within the 2015 trench.





Figure 19 2015 Excavation in progress: view across trench to south-east



Figure 20 Final photograph of 2015 excavation: Top: southern limit of excavation (note oven); bottom: east-west street; left: north-south street (photos Mark Household)



Excavation of undisturbed stratigraphy was limited to exploring a 4m wide strip parallel with the east-west street to a depth of about 0.4m below the plough-soil and to testing the full depth of the stratigraphic sequence with two small sondages which continued the Victorian excavation to the gravel subsoil.

## Principal Results:

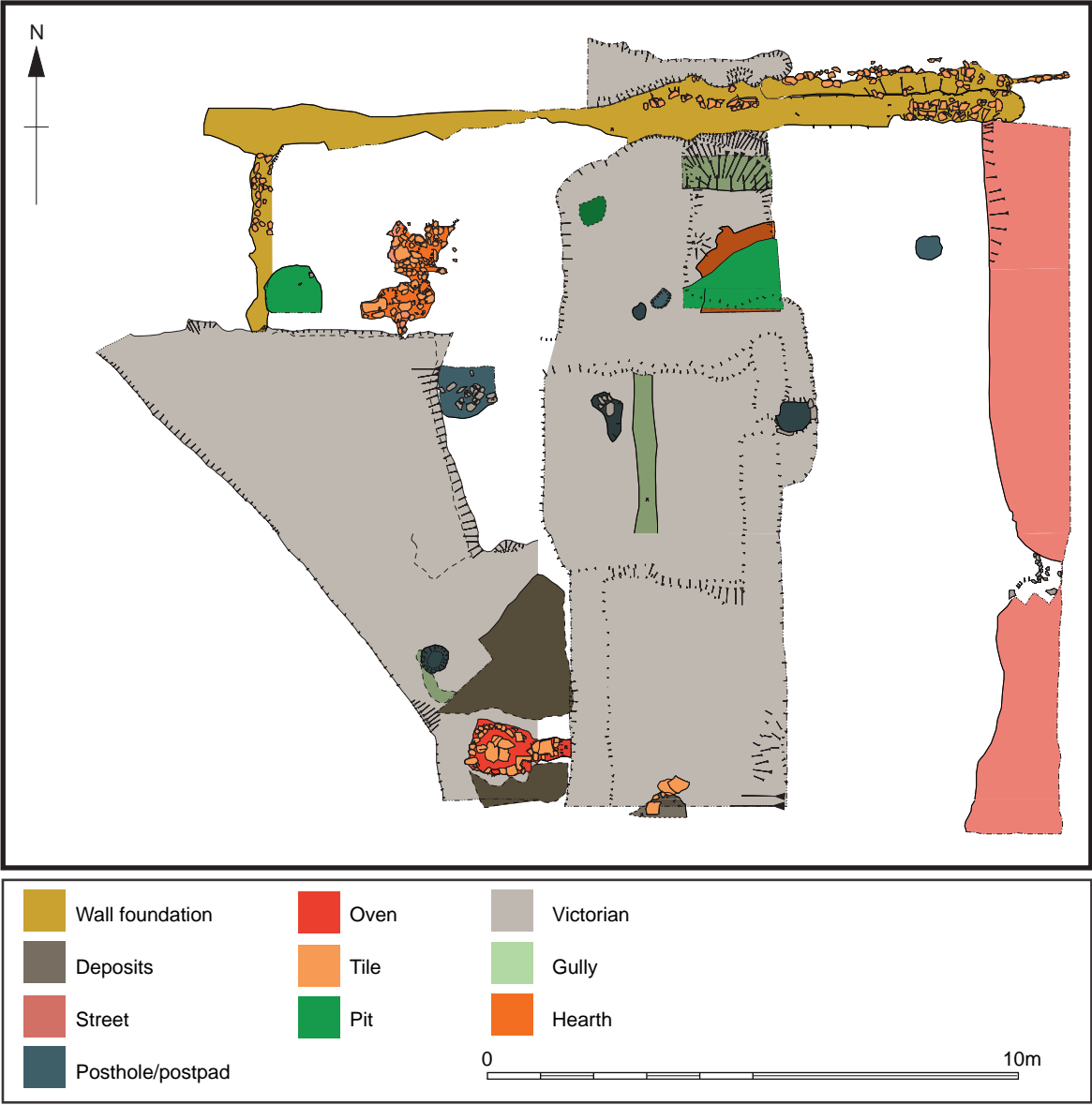


Figure 21 Multicontext plan



## Early Roman

Although the sondages revealed the potential of Insula III with the survival of stratigraphy from the late Iron Age onwards, significant early Roman discoveries were limited to what could be learned from the re-excavation of the 1891 trenches.

### A burnt horizon

Common to most sections was a lens of burnt material (context 31111) about 0.05m thick at a depth which would correspond with an approximate date around the mid-to-late 1st century AD. This recalls the evidence of burning found across the excavated area in Insula IX and associated with the end of the Claudio-Neronian (AD 43-70) occupation and of the burning down of the contemporary courtyard-building on the site of the forum basilica. Together these observations strengthen the evidence of a major fire across the town, whether accidental or somehow linked with the Boudiccan revolt.

### Infant burial

Remains of an infant were recovered from a shallow scoop of late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century date at the interface between the bottom of the Victorian trench and the undisturbed stratigraphy below and close to, but earlier than the oven structure towards the southern limit of the trench. The infant was found within a shallow gulley cut through an extensive cobble/gravel surface which marked the bottom of the Victorian excavation. Although set back some 11m from the street, it is not possible to say whether the burial was inside or outside a building.

### Blacksmiths workshop

The west-facing section of the northern Victorian trench revealed in profile a mass of hammerscale and other iron-working slags (Figure 22), the densest concentration yet to be revealed by any modern excavation at Silchester. A sample of 12kg of slag was recovered from this context. The position in the sequence suggests a late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century date. Positioned some 3m back from the east-west street front and c.0.3.5m west of the intersection of the N-S street, the discovery suggests a blacksmith's workshop at this important junction (Figure 23).



Figure 22a (above) Fuel ash and rubble slag, and figure 22b (below) smithing debris, all from the Blacksmith's workshop

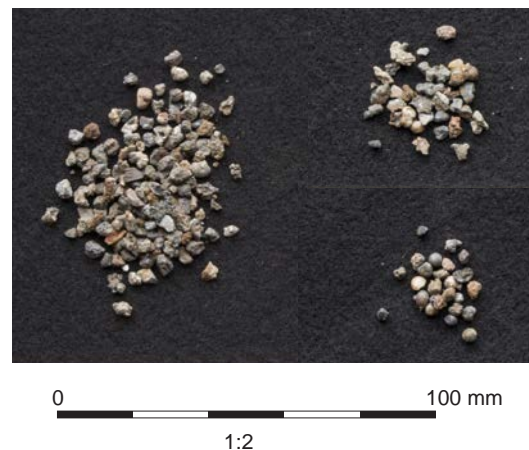


Figure 23 View to south-east across trench showing 2015 sondage





Figure 24 West facing section of sondage showing iron working

## Food outlet



Figure 25 Oven with collapsed superstructure in situ

To the south-west the keyhole-shaped oven was carefully cleaned to reveal its structure of re-used ceramic brick and tile (Figs. 25-26). This included removing collapsed material from the oven chamber. Its position in the stratigraphic sequence suggests a similar, late 1st/early 2nd century date to that of the smithing deposit to the north. No macroscopic evidence was found to indicate how it was used but it is assumed that it was for cooking or baking, with its flue oriented towards the N-S street, perhaps it serviced a food outlet fronting onto this street. It is set back about 7.85m from the N-S street and about 8.29m south of the smithing deposit.



Figure 26 Oven fully excavated: flue to the west; looking south



## Late Roman

Excavation of the dark earth deposits beneath the ploughsoil along the east-west street revealed traces of at least two phases of late Roman building. The remains of two phases of flint wall-footings, the later truncating the earlier, were found adjacent to the intersection with the N-S street where the spoil heap had protected them from excavation in 1891 (Figure 27).

### Shop frontage

To the west the combination of Victorian trenching to define the edge of the street and a late Roman drainage gully had truncated any further traces of these structures. 5.63m to the south of the wall footings three east-west-aligned post-pads, two comprising massive, irregular-shaped blocks of ferruginous conglomerate, resting on a gravelled surface, marked the southern limit of one or both phases of the building (Figure 28). Traces of a N-S aligned foundation, 13.7m west of the street corner, probably marks the western limit of the building. Together these components would suggest a single-storey, timber-framed building measuring 13.7m E-W by 8m N-S (although much of its southern limit has been cut away by the Victorians). Although the finds give no immediate clue as to the function(s) of the building in either of its phases, it is



Figure 27 Two phases of late Roman wall footings



Figure 28 Close-up of late Roman building (south at the top of the photo) (photo Mark Houshold)



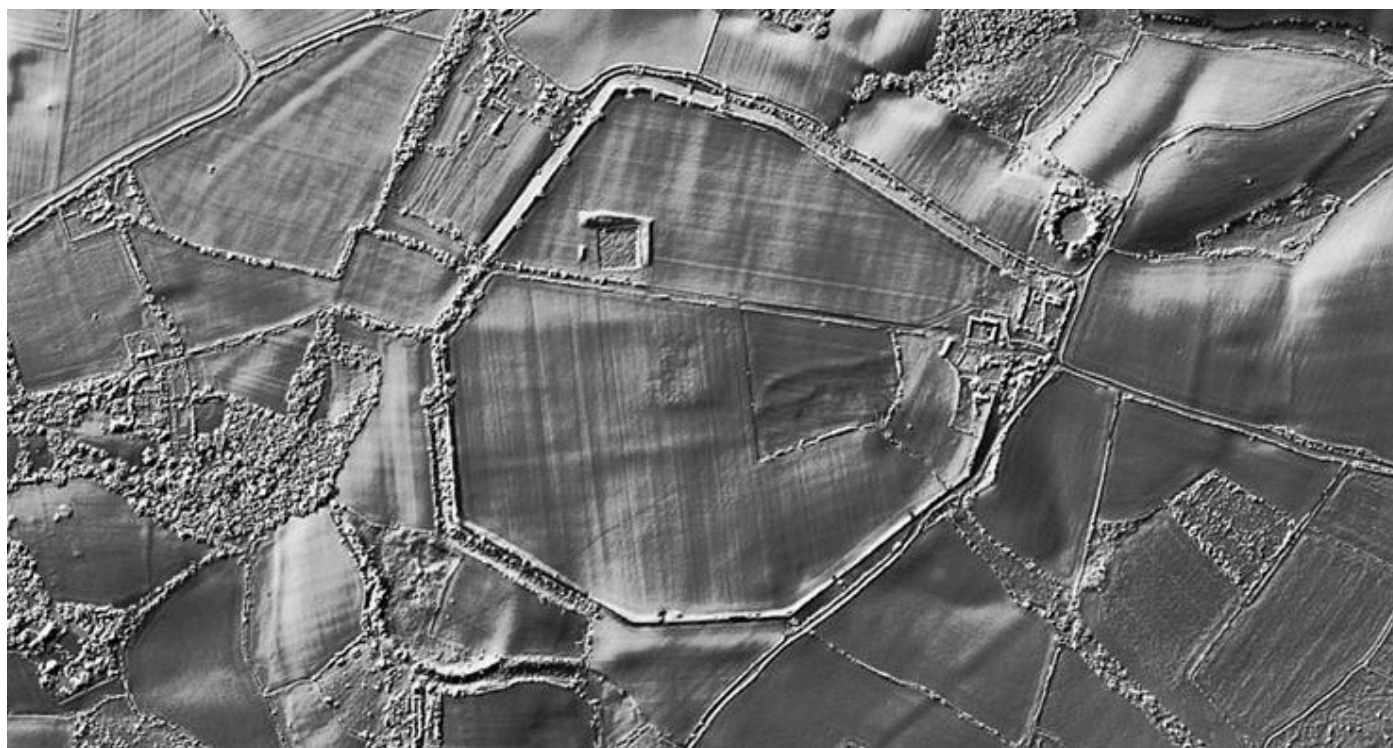
assumed, on analogy with the early Roman situation, to be some kind of commercial premise. The pottery and coins suggests a late 3<sup>rd</sup> century origin with continuity through to the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The discovery of late Roman shell-tempered ware, not normally dated before c.380, in a context sealed by the dark earths, suggests occupation continuing well after the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

## Conclusions

From our limited excavation it is clear that the occupation of the NE corner of Insula III, represented by a succession of timber-built commercial premises on the street frontages from the blacksmith's shop and food outlet of the late 1<sup>st</sup>/early 2<sup>nd</sup> century onwards, was very different from that in the SE. There was no trace of the continuation of the large town house from the SE, nor of any masonry structure. Just as the 'hypocaust' marked on the 1891 plan in the SE corner proved to be a simple hearth, so the 'hypocaust' found in 2015 proved to be a keyhole-shaped oven. Occupation in the NE corner continued well into the 5<sup>th</sup> century.



Insula III team photo



Lidar image of Silchester town © University of Reading/ Environment Agency



# Acknowledgements Insula III

We thank Hampshire County Council and David Wilkinson (Asst. Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England) for permissions to continue excavating in Insula III and we thank Silchester Friends, particularly John Cook, Amanda and Graham Hutton, Dr Peter Warry and Nick and Biddy West for their continuing, generous support which made this project possible.

We thank Jean Chapman for feeding all of us and Dr Lisa Lodwick, Rory Williams-Burrell, Mark Woolston Houshold, Dr Jane Timby, Rose Calis, Henrietta Longden, Edoardo Bedin, Hannah Barrett, Carolina Rangel del Lima, Adam Sutton and Sara Wilson for all their help in the field and in post-excavation. We thank, too, all student placements and trainees, and all the other wonderful volunteers who helped in the excavation.



A sunny day on Insula III



Rory Williams Burrell being observed whilst doing flotation on the environmental bulk samples  
Back cover photos (see over) Pond Farm - Aerial photo of trench 2 (Mark Houshold). Trench 1, recording the hillfort ditch, and a view of the excavated ditch slots





**i** For more information about Archaeology at the University of Reading, please contact:

**Mrs. M.D.McGuire**

School Undergraduate Administrator

[m.d.mcguire@reading.ac.uk](mailto:m.d.mcguire@reading.ac.uk)

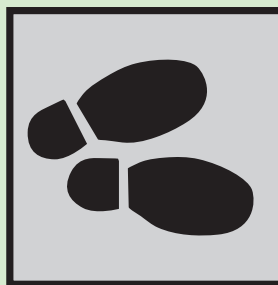
Tel +44 (0)118 378 8733

**General Office**

[archaeology@reading.ac.uk](mailto:archaeology@reading.ac.uk)

Tel +44 (0)118 378 8132

[www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology](http://www.reading.ac.uk/archaeology)



Explore the town using our iPhone app!  
Download from iTunes or through the  
App Store on your iPhone.  
Just search for Silchester.



[reading.ac.uk/silchester](http://reading.ac.uk/silchester)

[reading.ac.uk/silchester/Excavations/  
Sil-Environs-Iron-Age](http://reading.ac.uk/silchester/Excavations/Sil-Environs-Iron-Age)

Read our blog:

[blogs.reading.ac.uk/silchesterdig](http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/silchesterdig)

Follow us:

[Facebook/Silchester](https://www.facebook.com/Silchester)

[twitter.com/silchexcavation](https://twitter.com/silchexcavation)

[youtube.com/user/SHESvideo](https://www.youtube.com/user/SHESvideo)

Designed by Sarah Lambert Gates



**Hampshire**  
County Council