

The Durotriges Project, Phase Two: an interim statement

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Introduction

In 2009, Bournemouth University established the Durotriges Project, a programme of archaeological fieldwork designed to investigate the nature of native and Roman interaction in Dorset and central south-western Britain. The project had three stated research aims, namely, to investigate the transition from 'Durotrigian' (native) occupation to a more securely 'Roman' settlement footprint; the possible survival of native culture patterns into the Roman period; the extent and nature of both native and Roman influences beyond the fourth and into the fifth century AD. The fieldwork, which formed the core of undergraduate archaeological training, was entirely funded and facilitated by the Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and Forensic Science in the Faculty of Science and Technology at Bournemouth University, work being conducted throughout by a combination of archaeological staff, students, field school participants and local volunteers.

The results derived from Phase One of the project, the excavation of an Early Iron Age banjo enclosure with associated settlement and Later Iron Age (Durotrigian) cemetery, at Winterborne Kingston near Bere Regis between 2009 and 2012, were reported on as an interim statement in volume 135 of the Dorset Proceedings (Russell et al 2014). This interim report focuses upon Phase Two: the Roman and sub Roman aspects of the site investigated between summer 2013 and the end of July 2014.

Phase Two: Winterborne Kingston

Further areas identified as being of archaeological interest at Winterborne Kingston were investigated to the immediate south and east of the excavated Early Iron Age banjo enclosure in 2013. Previous excavation and a survey across the banjo enclosure had revealed areas of Late Iron Age burial but no evidence for contemporary or later settlement. Small amounts of Roman ceramic and stone building material had, however, been identified from features at the eastern margins of the investigation area and further examination here in 2013 revealed the footings of a small rectangular stone-built Roman structure. To

the south and west of this building, identified here as a small villa, further evidence for late or sub Roman agricultural, industrial and settlement activity was recorded.

In 2014, following the backfill of all earlier trenches, excavation centred upon two sites in the adjoining field to the immediate east of the banjo and villa, where geophysical survey had identified additional enclosures together with a series of interconnected ditches, pits and other features. These were investigated in the hope of further resolving the nature of settlement, burial and cultural change in the Later Iron Age and Roman period.

Results

The rectangular masonry building revealed in 2013 comprised at least four discrete rooms, covering an area of 340 m². Although the basic shape of the structure, chronological development and major structural phases were clear enough, room form and function were difficult to interpret given the significant amount of damage sustained to archaeological deposits from post abandonment stone robbing, secondary industrial activity and later agricultural attrition.

The structure appeared to have begun life around AD 320 as a simple rectangular building, measuring 15 x 5 m internally, with a single entrance to the south-south-west. The footings to this new build comprised roughly faced flint nodules set in a mortar matrix. Sometime around AD 350, two new rooms, measuring 4 x 3.5 m and 4 x 3 m internally, were added to the front of the building at either side of the main entrance, whilst a 5.5 x 2.5 m room was added to the rear. The earliest rectangular building, now at the centre of the developing house, appears to have been further subdivided by a series of timber internal partitions at this time. A final phase of structural modification, possibly due to subsidence caused by the collapse of buried Iron Age features, including part of the eastern edge of the banjo enclosure ditch beneath the building, comprised the alteration of the northern room at the rear into a more substantially walled space (Fig 1).

No floor levels were found in the course of villa excavation. The lack of tesserae from both topsoil and the fills of surrounding features suggests that the villa

did not possess a mosaic or tessellated pavements, although the discovery of rectangular Kimeridge shale tiles and large Purbeck limestone slabs across the site may indicate original floor material. Small pieces of painted wall plaster, found predominantly within the north facing room at the rear of the building, suggest some degree of internal high-status decoration. The building, although small, is interpreted as a simple hall or cottage house style villa (Smith 1997, 23-35; Perring 2002, 72-4) with the northern room, added to the back and modified through the life of the structure as a *triclinium* or dining room, akin to those of more elaborate rural Roman 'power houses' such as Clear Cupboard and Great Witcombe in Gloucestershire (Gascoigne 1969; Clifford 1954). A 3 m deep sub rectangular shaft with a mortared flint edging (the remains of a superstructure or surrounding wall) was located at the south-eastern corner of the building and is interpreted here as a potential latrine pit. It was filled with primary deposits of organic, phosphate rich silt and chalky rubble containing a number of decorated bone hairpins, smashed pottery vessels, a complete chicken skeleton and fragments of vessel glass.

The final phase of activity at the villa comprised the insertion of two small ovens, a furnace and a possible kiln directly into three of the main occupation rooms in the last decade of the fourth century AD. These agricultural and industrial features were composed predominantly of flint, worked stone and roofing tile, all cannibalised from the superstructure of the villa (Fig. 2) which in turn implies that the building was, by this time, no longer viable.

Surrounding the villa were seven sub rectangular and sub oval terraces or 'sunken features', measuring an average 10 x 7 m. The dark earth fill of these features, which comprised a grey, worm sorted loam, contained material quarried or reused from the villa and it is suggested that they originally represented houses or activity areas for those engaged in maintaining an agricultural existence following the demise of the more Romanised house. Four of the seven features produced significant quantities of a distinctive ceramic, known as South-East Dorset Orange Wiped Ware (SEDOWW), whose main period of manufacture and use has convincingly been dated to between AD 330 – 450 (Gerrard 2010, 306-8). As well as being a diagnostic artefact of the late or sub Roman period, SEDOWW is also closely associated with a type of sunken feature structure found in the Dorchester area

and sometimes referred to as being of 'Poundbury Type' (Sparey-Green 1987, 63; 1996, 130; Smith *et al.* 1997, 219; Gerrard 2010, 306). Such features seem to represent a late-Roman or Romano-British form of structure akin to the Germanic *Grubenhäus* recorded from Anglo Saxon areas of eastern England in the fifth century (Tipper 2006).

Few of the 'sunken feature' cuts recorded at Winterborne Kingston possessed clear indications of internal structuration, although the largest (Fig. 3), a roughly north – south aligned rectangular cut measuring 13 x 5.5 m, did contain internal postholes, timber wall-slots one of which indicated an internal partition dividing off the northern third of the house, a central area of friable chalk (possibly the original hearth) and a post-built entrance which faced due south. This particular feature, the fill of which contained small amounts of late Roman metalwork and sherds of SEDOWW, may originally have functioned as a late-fourth or early-fifth-century communal timber long house or hall possibly with a suspended floor.

Four agricultural features, including at least three corn driers or malting ovens used in the process of brewing beer, lay to the immediate north of the long house. The best preserved, an H-shaped flint and cob walled corn drying oven (Fig. 4), was built from material which included fragments of mortared stone, painted wall plaster and ceramic floor and stone roof tile, all reused from the villa to the east. The degree of burning on the base of the flue indicates it was probably not in use for a very long period of time before being filled with midden material in the early to mid fifth century.

In 2014, investigation of sub surface archaeology shifted to an area to the east of the Roman villa, concentrating upon a number of linear-ditch features identified by geophysical survey. Trench 2 revealed a series of boundary ditches, some established in the later Bronze Age, some from the middle and late Iron Age and some from the Roman period, the latter filled with deposits related to fourth-century industrial processes associated with the villa and surrounding settlement area.

Trench 1 revealed further evidence of an area of later Bronze Age settlement activity set within a ditched enclosure which comprised at least two circular post-built structures with evidence of hearths, and a series of shallow pits. A roughly square area, measuring 10 x 11 m internally, bounded by a small flat-bottomed

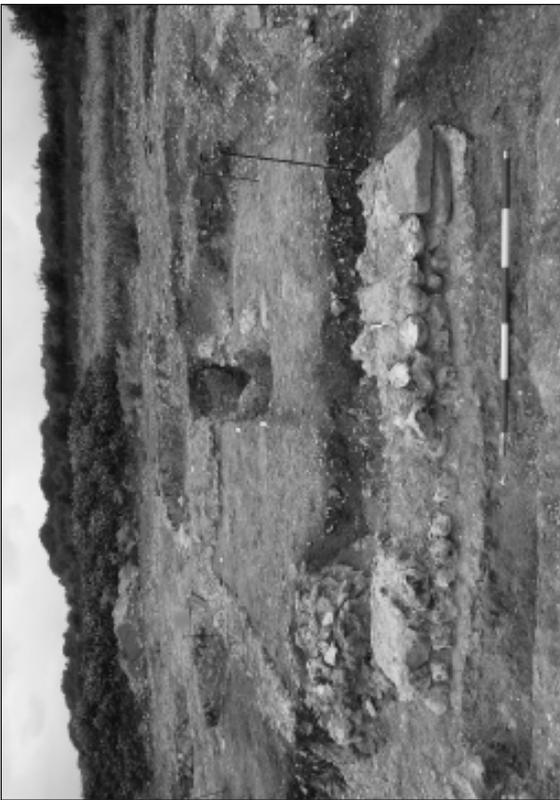


Figure 1: The footings to the northern room (the possible triclinium) of the mid-fourth-century Winterborne Kingston villa, with the robbed out walls of the villa building beyond, looking north-west (Miles Russell).



Figure 2: A carved Roman 'dwarf' column cannibalised from the fourth-century villa and reused as part of the flue of a late or sub Roman kiln (Miles Russell).



Figure 3: The late or sub Roman long house under excavation in 2013, looking south (Miles Russell).



Figure 4: The late- or sub-Roman H-shaped corn drier/ malting oven, built using stone and tile material recycled from the villa, looking north from the stoking chamber and flue (Miles Russell).



Figure 5: The late- or sub-Roman square enclosure / barrow of Trench 1, with its five central graves, under excavation in 2014. The linear ditch to the right of shot is part of a larger later Bronze Age settlement enclosure (Miles Russell).



Figure 6: The five graves at the centre of the small late- or sub-Roman cemetery under excavation in 2014, looking west (Miles Russell).

V-shaped late Roman ditch (Fig. 5) lay to the south of (outside) the later Bronze Age settlement. Five, roughly east – west aligned graves were identified within the space defined by the ditch. Each grave contained an extended inhumation, lying on their back with their heads to the east (Fig. 6). The burials comprised two mature adult males, two mature adult females and an elderly female whilst the disturbed remains of at least two neonates were also found in the fill of the

surrounding ditch. The adult burials had all originally been placed in coffins, iron coffin-nails surrounding the bodies. Few grave goods were identified, the two males had been buried with hob-nailed boots, the three females with small spindle whorls. One of the adult females had also been laid to rest with a heavily abraded, stamp-impressed colour coated New Forest Ware bowl (Fig. 7), manufactured sometime in the mid to late fourth century. The nature of the burial rite and



Figure 7: A formal, extended inhumation of an adult female from the late- or sub-Roman cemetery. The outline of the coffin, together with coffin nails, is evident around the body whilst a small spindle whorl has been placed by the head and a late-fourth-century stamp impressed New Forest Ware bowl is by the feet (Miles Russell).

small number of grave goods suggests that the burials belonged to the later Roman period, at a time when there was limited access to prestige goods, the highly worn nature of the single datable artefact, the New Forrest Ware bowl, perhaps further indicating a date as late as the early years of the fifth century AD.

Information recovered from Phase Two of the Durotriges Project at Winterborne Kingston is adding to the developing picture of the Durotrigian *civitas* in the final phases of Roman cultural life during the fourth and fifth centuries AD. Phase Three of the project will target additional late- or sub-Roman activity together with an area of more clearly defined late Iron Age Durotrigian settlement, in order to further clarify the Iron Age / Roman and Roman / post Roman transition in this part of Dorset.

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