

THE DUROTRIGES PROJECT 2016:
AN INTERIM STATEMENT

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Introduction

Bournemouth University's Durotriges Project began in 2009 as a programme of archaeological fieldwork designed to investigate native and Roman settlement across Dorset and central south-western Britain. The project contains three major research strands: to examine the transition from 'Durotrigian' (native) occupation to a more securely 'Roman' form of settlement footprint; the nature of Durotrigian culture patterns and their survival into the Roman period; the extent of Romano-British cultural influence into the fifth and sixth centuries AD (the sub- and post-Roman period). All fieldwork undertaken as part of this project forms the core of undergraduate archaeological training at Bournemouth University, and is entirely funded and facilitated by the Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and Forensic Science in the Faculty of Science and Technology. From the very beginning fieldwork has been conducted by university staff and students as well as members of the public participating on the Durotriges Big Dig field school, students and pupils from other universities, sixth form colleges and schools as well as local volunteers.

In 2016, the project continued and expanded the third major stage of archaeological investigation at Winterborne Kingston, near Bere Regis in Dorset. Primary fieldwork had earlier focused upon an Iron Age banjo enclosure and a Later Iron Age Durotrigian cemetery (Russell *et al.* 2014) whilst phase two of the project had examined a Later Bronze Age settlement, a small, stone-built Roman villa and a sub-Roman longhouse associated with a range of agricultural features, including corn drying/malting ovens and a small enclosed cemetery (Russell *et al.* 2015). These phases of excavation, although successful in mapping and recording the nature and form of Later Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Later Roman and sub-Roman rural settlement, had largely failed to locate or record much in the way of Later Iron Age activity other than burials. To this end, phase three of the survey and ground intervention commenced in 2015 to the south-east of the banjo enclosure and villa, where aerial

photographs, taken in the spring of 2012, revealed an area of significant archaeological activity.

Within the area identified, geophysical survey (fluxgate gradiometry) further indicated the presence of a series of roundhouse gullies, measuring on average between 10 and 15m in diameter, together with linear ditches and possible pits. Two areas were selected for limited ground intervention in 2015, both subsequently revealing parts of a densely occupied zone with at least sixteen roundhouses, all dating to the mid Iron Age, being located (Russell *et al.* 2016). The number and density of structural remains suggested a significant period of occupation, one that seemed all the more unusual in that it did not appear to have been defined by an enclosure ditch or boundary.

In an attempt to better define the extent and form of prehistoric occupation at Winterborne Kingston two additional areas, to the immediate south of those examined in 2015, were excavated in June and July 2016 (Fig. 1). These excavations targeted in particular the chronology and phasing of Iron Age roundhouses, the full extent and nature of additional agricultural and industrial activities and the possible form taken by identified ditch-systems, some of which may have originally formed the limit to occupation.

2016 season results

Seven ditch systems were exposed and investigated within the two transects (identified as trenches D and E: Fig. 2), five of which proved to be Later Bronze Age, the remaining two being Later and sub-Roman in date. The Bronze Age systems may originally have been constructed as forms of linear boundary, such as cross-ridge dykes, cutting across the plateau, defining and segregating zones of pasture/agriculture and more intensive areas of settlement, further controlling access by means of structured points of entrance. None of the ditches identified either had their origins in the Iron Age or appeared to have been actively maintained during this later period. That the Bronze Age ditch systems were still visible in the Iron Age, being only partially backfilled at this time, is apparent

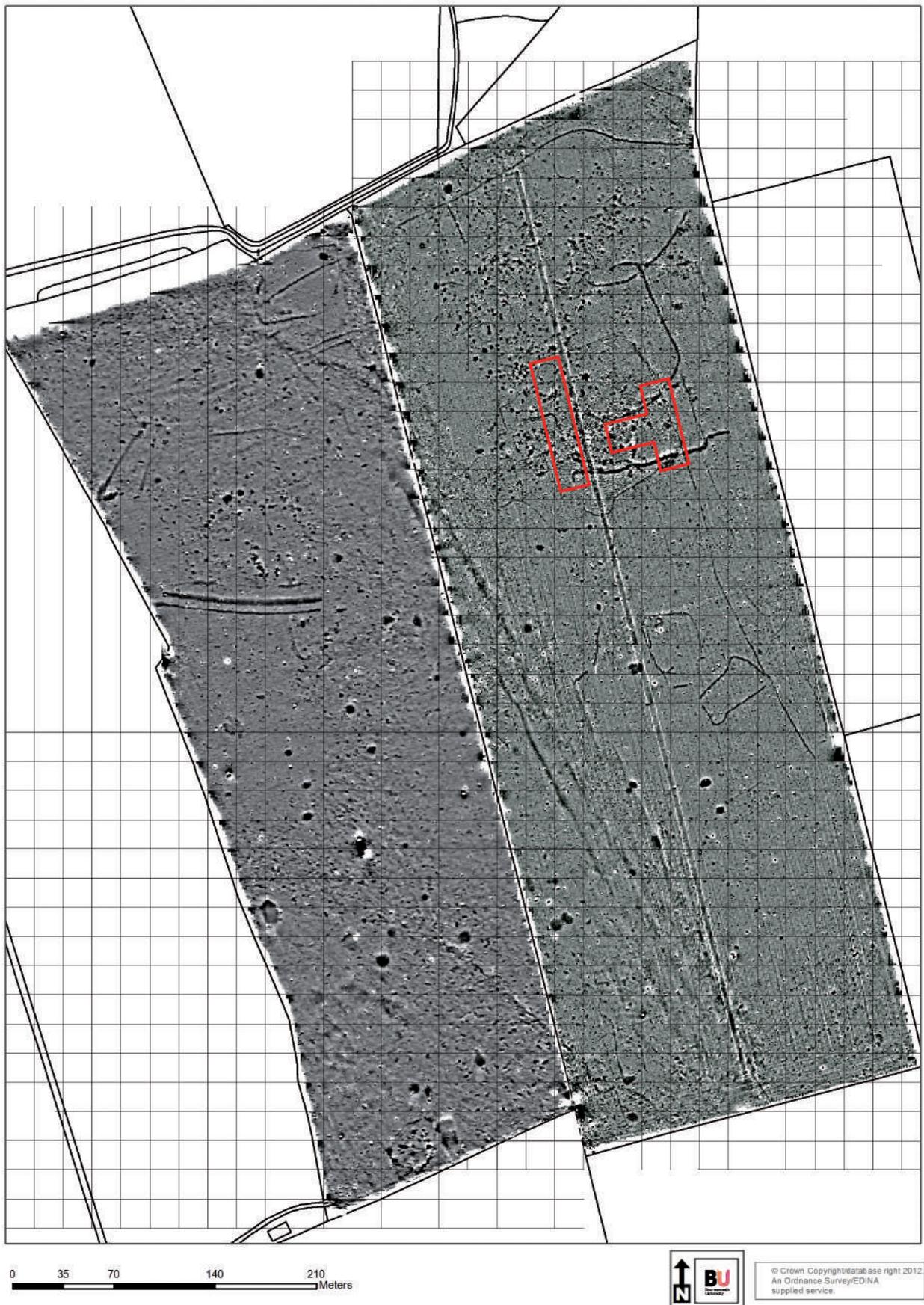


Figure 1: Winterborne Kingston - a fluxgate gradiometry plot of the settlement area prior to excavation (position of trenches D and E marked) conducted by Dave Stewart for Bournemouth University in 2015. The dark lines indicate ditches and ring-gullies, the smaller dark spots indicate pits, while the larger maculae are quarry pits (Bournemouth University)



Figure 2: An aerial photograph, looking west north-west, showing the two main areas of archaeological investigation in 2016. Trench D is in the foreground and Trench E in the background (Jo and Sue Crane)

from the number of burials from this later period that were placed within and around them (Fig. 3).

A series of seven adult bodies, male and female had been laid down within shallow, oval graves. These broadly conformed to the distinctive style of Durotrigian burial (Papworth 2008, 82-6), skeletons lying predominantly on their right side with their heads to the east, facing north, legs flexed in foetal positions (Figs 4 and 5). The grave goods identified comprised two Black Burnished Ware pots placed in the vicinity of the head and shoulders, one of these being a locally produced example of a Gallo-Belgic type butt beaker, a large drinking vessel of a type manufactured more commonly in the early half of the first century AD (Fig. 6). Unusually, in two cases, pairs of burials were set directly one above the other. These later internments appear to have been intentionally placed over the previous occupants as the earlier burials were not disturbed in any way by the later burials.

The process of feature targeting, Later Iron Age and Early Roman burials being deliberately placed within the partially backfilled remains of long-abandoned monuments, has been noted already at the Early Iron Age banjo enclosure excavated at Winterborne Kingston, to the north-west of the present site, between

2009 and 2011. Here, at some point between AD 20 and AD 90, the interior area of the enclosure gave way to organised forms of burial, a series of sixteen bodies being recovered archaeologically (Russell *et al.* 2014). Such deposition, with burials set down inside and close to the entranceway of a long defunct monument, also occurred at Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, 357-58) and Spettisbury Rings (alternatively known as Crawford Castle: Akerman 1859, 188; Gresham 1939), hillforts which appear to have been largely abandoned by the start of the first century BC (cf. Sharples 1991, 116). Perhaps the appropriation of disused hillforts, banjo enclosures and Later Bronze Age boundary ditches for burial was a major defining element of Durotrigian culture, such groups rewriting the significance and meaning of earlier monuments, claiming them as their own.

One Middle Iron Age roundhouse, the outer limit of which was defined by a shallow gully, of similar size and orientation to those uncovered in the previous year, was revealed in 2016 as were the partial remains of a sequence of at least two post-built Later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age roundhouses. Fourteen cylindrical pits, measuring between 0.6 and 2.5 m in depth were also excavated. As has been noted (previously Russell



Figure 3: The excavation of two Later Iron Age (Durotrigian) crouched burials set down within the fill of a Later Bronze Age ditch (feature 782) in Trench E (Miles Russell)



Figure 4: A formal, Durotrigian style crouched burial from Trench E (feature 787) dating to the mid early first century AD (Miles Russell)



Figure 5: A formal, Durotrigian style crouched burial from Trench D (feature 348) dating to the late first century BC or early first century AD (Miles Russell)



Figure 6: A locally-manufactured Gallo-Belgic style butt beaker of the early half of the 1st century AD from a Durotrigian style grave (feature 966) in Trench E (Miles Russell)



Figure 7: Mixed body parts of horse, cattle and sheep, including some partially articulated limbs and feet, from the basal deposits of an Iron Age pit (feature 039) in Trench D (Miles Russell)



Figure 8: Two articulated horse torsos from the basal deposits of an Iron Age pit (feature 749) in Trench E (Miles Russell)

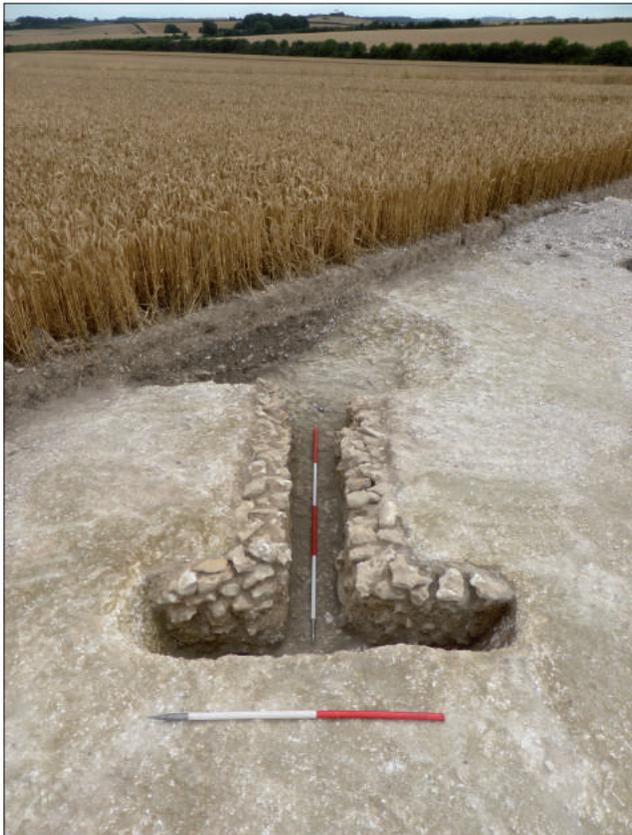


Figure 9: A Late or sub-Roman T-shaped corn-drying / malting oven from Trench D, looking south east. Scale divisions 0.5 m (Miles Russell)

et al. 2014, 219), the term ‘storage pit’ is usually applied to such features although no definitive evidence as to the nature of storage has been found. Presumably, if intended as functional elements within the settlement area, such pits may have held dairy produce, in the manner of a cold store, or grain, each pit acting as a silo containing the surplus produce of a single agricultural cycle. The majority of pits examined in 2016 contained a combination of Iron Age domestic refuse together with more formally-placed deposits of animal bone (Fig. 7). The animal bone deposits, although broadly similar to those uncovered in all previous seasons of work at Winterborne Kingston, included some new variants such as the deposition of two articulated horse torsos (Fig. 8).

An area of late-, or post-Roman farming settlement, comprising at least five sunken feature style terraces, possibly representing small-scale buildings or areas of agricultural activity, such as threshing floors, were also examined (Fig. 9) together with associated corn-drying or malting ovens, and at least one extended coffin burial, dating from c. AD 300-450. This zone of later Roman settlement complements the areas of sub and post-Roman activity examined in all previous phases of excavation at Winterborne Kingston (Russell *et al.* 2014; 2015; 2016).

Settlements and water supply

One aspect of the prehistoric and Roman occupation that has yet to be fully resolved is the extent to which the settlements were sustainable in terms of access to water supply. No evidence of water harvesting systems has been recovered in the course of the project, although this does not rule out the possibility of the collection of rainwater from roof tops which might have satisfied demand for part of each year. Rainwater supply is subject to annual seasonal fluctuations and for permanent settlement to be viable, a more reliable water source would have been vital. Much of the settlement evidence from the site is situated within 200 m – 300 m south and east of Peat Hill, an eminence that is capped by a Bronze Age tumulus (SY 851 996) at 120 m OD, the summit of which is a useful reference point from which to map potential water supply options. The most obvious source for the regular supply of water would be the so-called River Winterborne that runs in a valley 1 km downslope of Peat Hill. Such a distance inevitably poses some obvious logistical difficulties, a problem further compounded by the fact that the river (or more correctly stream) is today largely dry throughout the summer months (hence ‘winter’ borne: Mills 1998a, 156-57, and 1998b 384). Contamination from riverside settlement and animal grazing is an additional disadvantage if water from rivers and streams is used for human consumption.

Freshwater springs presumably would have provided a more satisfactory source of water.

Modern maps show two springs (or ‘wells’) within easy reach of the settlement sites identified during the course of the project. Using the Peat Hill tumulus as a reference point, the springs are situated just beyond and north-west of the parish boundary with Winterborne Whitechurch, the first being 320 m north-north-west (SY 850 999); the second spring being 847 m to the west-south-west at East Farm Dairy House (SY 843 994). This second spring is accompanied by a pumping house indicating that as a water source it has viability as a modern resource. Arguably, it is these springs, and perhaps others yet undetected, that made human settlement possible across all of the Durotriges Project sites.

Further work is being planned for phase 4 in fields to the immediate west of the site excavated between 2015 and 2016, in order to further clarify the extent, nature and chronology of the prehistoric, Roman and post Roman settlement activity at Winterborne Kingston.

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