

# The Durotriges Project, Phase One: an interim statement

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## Introduction

In 2009, Bournemouth University set up the Durotriges Project, a programme of archaeological fieldwork designed to investigate the nature of native and Roman interaction in Dorset and central south-west Britain. The project was intended as an opportunity to move away from hillforts, a type of archaeological monument that has dominated the literature of the period, to see whether an examination of more open rural settlements could shed light on the nature of later Iron Age tribal society. It was also felt important to assess how, if at all, Iron Age cultural traits survived following the Roman invasion of Britain in AD 43.

Of all the Iron Age tribal groupings identified from later prehistoric Britain, the Durotriges are arguably the most archaeologically distinct. Roughly occupying an area that equates with modern Dorset, together with areas of southern Wiltshire and south-eastern Somerset (Gale 2003, 125-26), the pottery, coinage and burial practices of the Durotriges, combined with their use of elaborately defended hillfort enclosures, clearly marks them out from their contemporary neighbouring tribes, especially the Atrebates and the Belgae, to the east, and the Dumnonii and Dobunni, to the west and north. Elements of Durotrigian life have been much studied in recent years. Martin Papworth in particular has created a more balanced and objective understanding of the cultural 'footprint' of the tribe (Papworth 2008; 2011), helping to move archaeological understanding away from more evocative, archaeo-historical accounts such as those deriving from Mortimer Wheeler's fieldwork on Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943).

A series of potential sites were identified for investigation for phase one of the Durotriges Project, using a combination of the National Monument and county-based Heritage Environment Record, together with a new series of aerial, geophysical and metal detecting surveys.

## Phase One: Winterborne Kingston

The first site archaeologically investigated lay at North West Farm, Winterborne Kingston, to the north of Bere Regis. The area of archaeological investigation had first been brought to the attention

of Bournemouth University by the landowner, Rebecca Hill, who had observed archaeological material, including late Iron Age and early Roman pottery, across a number of ploughed fields. Two metal detectorists, Ian Darke and Clive Gibbs, had furthermore extensively surveyed the land, locating, amongst other things, a discrete cluster of later Iron Age and Roman domestic metalwork.

A geophysical survey conducted by John Gale and students from Bournemouth University in 2007, within the area identified by Darke and Gibbs, detected the presence of what appeared to be a large number of pits set within a broadly oval enclosure with antenna ditches linking it to a possible droveway and an outlying network of coaxial fields (Fig. 1).

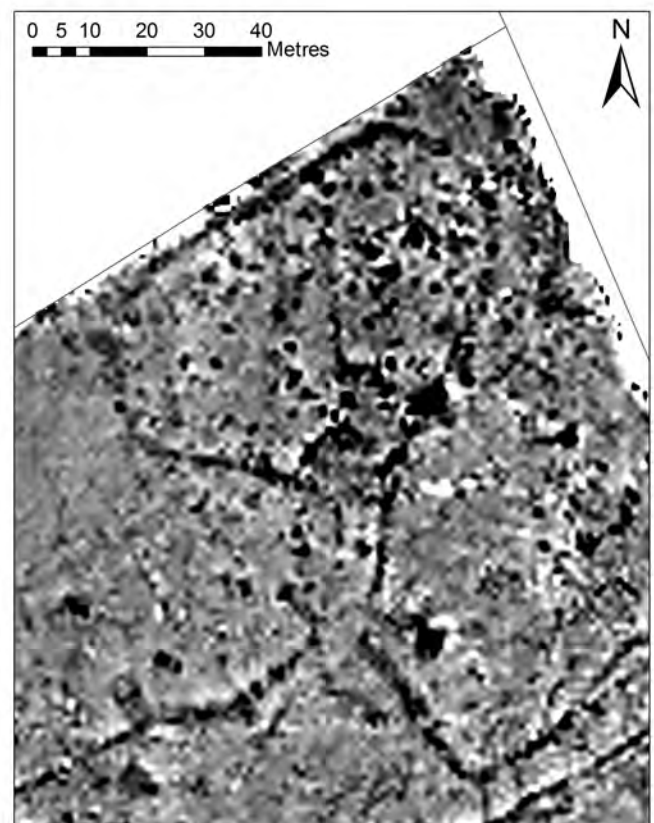


Figure 1: Winterborne Kingston: a magnetic plot of the banjo enclosure conducted by Bournemouth University in 2007. The dark lines indicate ditches of the enclosure which is attached by a narrow entrance at the south to an open area and droveway entering from the east. The small dark spots found mainly within the enclosure indicate pits, while the larger maculae are building platforms working hollows or grain driers. Watching range -5 to +5 nT (Bournemouth University).

This enclosure looked, to all intents and purposes, like a category of late prehistoric monument known as a 'banjo' enclosure.

Banjo enclosures represent a distinctive class of site comprising an oval or sub-circular area bounded by a v-shaped ditch and an external bank, the whole usually being connected to a wider system of fields, paddocks and droveways by an elongated and slightly funnelled entrance passage (Wainwright 1979; Perry 1986; Fasham 1987; McOmish 2011). Together these systems seem to have provided a moderate degree of security and land definition rather than being wholly military or defensive. Rarely is any banjo enclosure found in isolation, sites often clustering within broadly interconnected groups of two, three or more (Bowen 1990, 322; McOmish 2011, 4). First thought to represent stock corrals or animal enclosures, banjos have, on excavation, invariably revealed traces of elite settlement, high status goods and manufacturing activity as well as more 'normal' forms of production and consumption. Dating evidence suggests a broad range of construction and use of such sites between around 400 BC and the mid first century AD. Identification and categorisation of banjos began in the late 1960s, around 250 sites being known across the British Isles today (McOmish 2011, 2).

The Winterborne Kingston banjo was, at the time of its discovery, the most westerly identified example in the British Isles (Gale 2003, 125-29). Lying at the easternmost margins of the Durotrigian hillfort zone, it appeared to form part of a much more extensive

complex of enclosures and droveways situated on a south-east facing hill slope. Surface artefacts generated during earlier metal detector sweeps and a more focused field-walking survey, suggested a broad range of activity from the second century BC to at least the third century AD. Finds included many fragments of locally produced Black Burnished Ware, pieces of late republican Roman amphorae and a small number of Durotrigian staters and later Roman coins. This appeared in essence to indicate a transitional site that was ideal for the project, occupation beginning before the arrival of Rome and apparently continuing for many centuries afterwards.

Excavation of the banjo enclosure began in May 2009, the fifth and final season coming to an end in July 2013. The fieldwork, which formed the core of undergraduate archaeological training, was entirely funded and facilitated by Bournemouth University, work being conducted throughout by a combination of archaeological students, field school participants and local volunteers.

## Results

This interim report focuses upon the mid to late Iron Age phases of the Winterborne Kingston site. Just over 40% of the banjo ditch was sample excavated between 2009 and 2013, the interior of the enclosure being totally cleared. An attempt was made to fully examine all features revealed during the course of this excavation (Fig. 2).

Little was found in the basal fill of the banjo



*Figure 2 The interior of the Winterborne Kingston banjo enclosure under excavation in 2011 looking north through the entranceway to the interior (Adam Stanford, Aerial Cam).:*

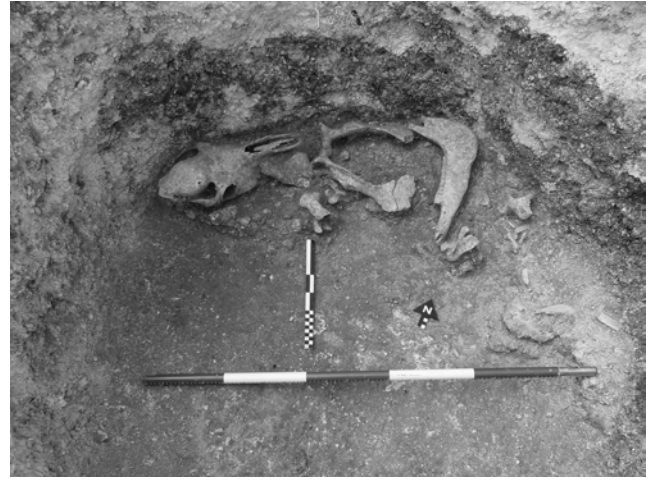




*Figure 3: The fully articulated remains of a dog with disarticulated cow and horse bone, from the basal levels of an Iron Age pit (F3051) excavated in 2013 (Miles Russell).*

enclosure ditch, bone and charcoal providing a radiocarbon date (at 95% confidence) of 360-88 BC (UBA-18459), suggesting that the slow accumulation of ditch soils could have begun in the early half of the fourth century BC. The funnelled entrance passage, which seems to have been part of the primary design of the enclosure network, rather than representing a later addition, modification or elaboration, contained at least six horse skulls, all missing their mandibles, from the mid to upper fill. It is possible that the entrance approach to the Winterborne Kingston banjo had originally been decorated with multiple horse heads and that these had quietly rotted, before falling, or being discretely placed as part of an offering, within ditch fill.

Traces of at least four circular house structures, measuring between 10 m and 12.5 m in diameter, defined by ring gullies and irregular settings of internal posts, were identified at the northern, highest point of the banjo interior. All houses appeared to have faced in a southerly direction, towards the banjo enclosure entranceway. It could not be determined whether the houses were all contemporary, as none were stratigraphically related, or whether they represented the movement of a single domestic unit at the back of the banjo enclosure, four times over a relatively lengthy period of time. What few finds were associated with the buildings suggested widespread use of locally manufactured pottery, with the occasional fragment of amphora, indicating a very low level of interaction with the Mediterranean, probably via Poole harbour to the south or Hengistbury Head to the south-east. The remains of chicken and small 'lap' dog were also found within the faunal assemblage, some of the earliest indications of these, then rather



*Figure 4: The basal level of an Iron Age pit (F10103) containing the disarticulated remains of cow and horse (Miles Russell).*

exotic, imports to be found in Britain.

The interior of the banjo was dominated by pits, cylindrical shafts varying from 1.5 and 3 m in diameter and between 1 and 3 m in depth, of which 63 were fully investigated. The term 'storage pit' is traditionally applied to such features in the archaeological literature, although no definitive evidence as to the nature of storage practise was found in this instance. Presumably, if purely functional in purpose, the pits at Winterborne Kingston may have been designed to hold a particular type of foodstuff (such as dairy produce) in the manner of a cold store, or grain, with perhaps each pit storing the surplus produce of a single agricultural cycle.

At the point of disuse, the majority of pits (57 of the 63) were found to have originally contained a special, placed deposit. The nature of placed deposits varied from pit to pit, three comprising fully articulated remains of dogs (Fig. 3) whilst others contained more simple deposits of spindle whorls, quern stones or upended, perforated pots. Samples taken from two of the canine burials have been submitted to radiocarbon dating, one from the base of pit F5012 providing a date (at 95% confidence) of 200 BC – AD 26 (UBA-20617), the second, from the base of pit F6042 providing a date (at 95% confidence) of 41 BC – AD 88 (UBA-20618). Both dogs would appear to have been deposited at some time after the main phase of banjo enclosure use, but presumably whilst the enclosure circuit itself remained visible within the landscape.

The basal levels of seven pits contained the disarticulated remains of cattle and horse in which composite animals had been created from the deliberate reassembly of cow and horse bone (Fig. 4). In one case

a fully articulated but decapitated horse buried in a pit had its missing head replaced with a cow skull. Precise meaning behind such clustering, reordering and reorganisation of bone material is unclear, although it may conceivably have had something to do with the desire to preserve and build upon the fertility of the herd: cows for meat, milk, cheese and leather, horses for transportation and herding / hunting activity.

One rather spectacular discovery comprised the remains of a fully articulated skeleton of an adult male, apparently dating, from the associated pottery assemblage, to the early first century BC, lying face down over a major deposit of disarticulated cow and horse bone (Fig. 5). The body appears to have been rolled on top of the bone group in a fleshed state, possibly indicating human sacrifice. Examples of violent death and sacrifice are becoming ever more frequent within the archaeological record of later Iron Age Britain (Craig, Knusel and Carr 2005; Joy 2009; Redfern 2011, 113-15), suggesting the intensification of both martial and extreme religious activity during the period. However, no evidence of violent or sudden death was apparent in the body as recovered, although it should be borne in mind that most causes of death leave no obvious sign on the skeleton. The bone assemblage beneath the man, comprising a mix of horse and cow remains, appears to have lost its flesh prior to entering the pit, being ordered into rough anatomical order, with components of the head set down at the northern end and the feet to the south.

It is possible that the individual placed upon this bone deposit was a burial in the more conventional sense. However, given the awkward position of this

man lying face down and apparently lacking deliberate arrangement of the body it is perhaps far more likely that his body was itself part of this placed deposit just as significant, in the mind of the depositors, as the dog, horse/cow composites and other artefact groupings.

From around 100 BC, during the latter years of banjo enclosure use, further human bodies were introduced to the mid fill of eight freshly disused pits (Figure 6). These deposits have the appearance of more formal burials, and are usually found lying on their back or in loosely crouched positions on their right side, invariably associated with items that can be interpreted as grave goods, such as complete later Iron Age pottery vessels or decorated bone weaving combs.

Finally, between around AD 20 and AD 90, at a time when the banjo enclosure appears to have been going out of general use, the interior gave way to more prominent, organised forms of burial, a series of sixteen bodies, male and female, being laid down within shallow, oval graves (Fig. 7). These can best be defined as Durotrigian burials, conforming to the formal, distinctive style of wider tribal deposition (Papworth 2008, 82-6), bodies lying predominantly on their right side, heads to the east, facing north, legs flexed in foetal positions (Figs 7 and 8). Grave goods, where identified, comprised Black Burnished Ware pots placed in the vicinity of the head and shoulders, or the occasional joint of pork or beef. Many had a single bronze fibulae brooch often located around the back, at or close to the head, which may indicate that the remains were originally wrapped in a shroud or placed in a bag pinned together at the top.



Figure 5: The fully articulated skeleton of an adult male, close to the base of an Iron Age pit (F5059) dating to the early 1st century BC, lying face down over a major deposit of disarticulated cow and horse bone (Miles Russell).



Figure 6: A formal burial deposit of an adult female set down within the upper fill of a disused Iron Age pit (F413) excavated in 2012 (Miles Russell).



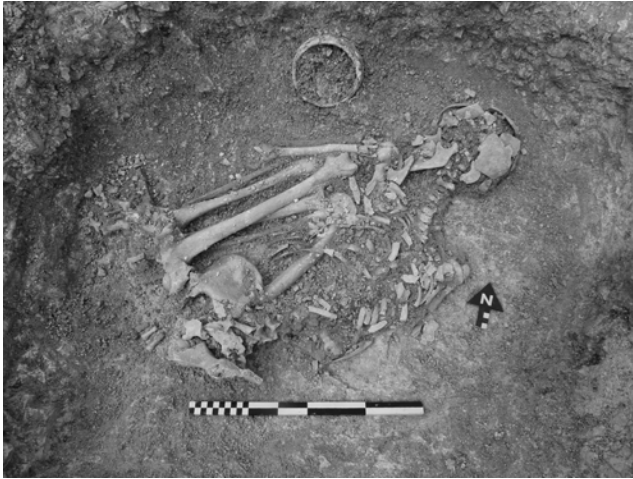


Figure 7: A formal, Durotrigian style crouched burial (feature 10007) dating to the mid 1st century AD (Miles Russell).

Information recovered from Phase One of the Durotriges Project at Winterborne Kingston is adding to the developing picture of the Durotriges as a discrete and culturally distinct tribal group occupying the pre Roman Iron Age. Phase two of the project will target further non-hillfort enclosure sites as well as examining rural settlements of the third, fourth and fifth centuries AD, especially villa and non-villa landscapes, in order to establish whether the cultural traits of the Durotriges continued on into the Roman period and beyond.

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