

The Durotriges Project Phase

Three: an interim statement

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INTRODUCTION

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

In 2015, Bournemouth University's Durotriges Project entered the third major stage of archaeological excavation at Winterborne Kingston near Bere Regis in Dorset. Primary fieldwork had focused upon an Early Iron Age banjo enclosure and a Later Iron Age Durotrigian cemetery (Russell *et al.* 2014) whilst phase two of the project investigated a Later Bronze Age settlement, a small, stone-built Roman villa and a sub-Roman longhouse with associated agricultural features and cemetery (Russell *et al.* 2015). These phases, 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 failed to locate much in

the way of Later Iron Age Durotrigian activity, other than burial. To this end, phase three of survey and ground intervention commenced in 2015 in an area to the immediate south east of the banjo and villa, where aerial photography undertaken in 2012 suggested significant archaeological settlement evidence.

RESULTS

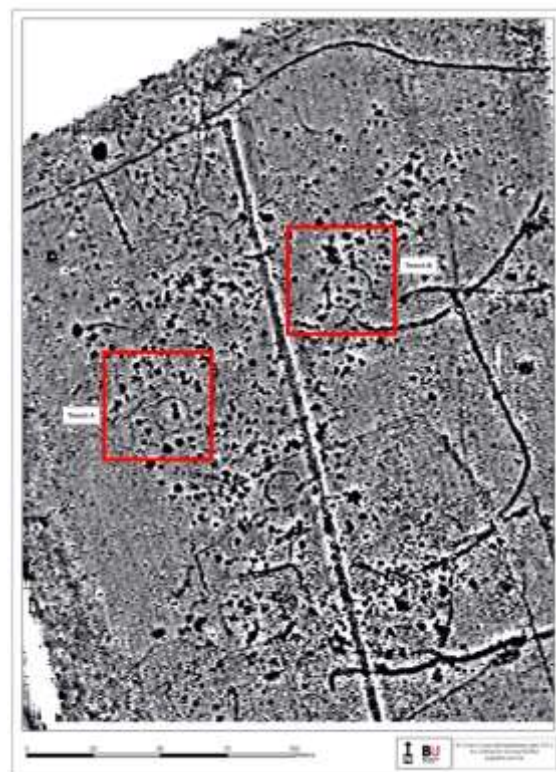


Figure 1: Winterborne Kingston - a fluxgate gradiometry plot of the settlement area prior to excavation (position of trenches marked) conducted by Dave Stewart for Bournemouth University in 2015. The dark lines indicate ditches and ring-gullies, the smaller dark spots indicate pits, while the larger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

Geophysical survey (magnetometry), conducted in spring 2015, across the area of activity identified from the air, confirmed the presence of a large number of pits, gullies and ditches spreading over 4 hectares (Figure 1). Within this broad area, at least seventeen possible roundhouse gullies, measuring between 10 and 15m in diameter, were observed, together with larger and more irregular shaped *maculae*, possibly

representing zones of agricultural or other forms of activity. Two particular areas within the survey, both measuring 20 x 20m, were selected for limited ground intervention. Trench A was positioned in order to expose and record two potential roundhouses, the outer walls of which appeared to overlap, together with twenty two pits and a series of small ditches and other activity areas. Trench B was designed to examine a large and distinct round house (measuring 15m in diameter), surrounded by a series of substantial ditches and at least fifteen pits and other areas of possible industrial, craft or agricultural activity.

The excavation revealed that the area under examination (Figures 2 and 3) had originally been far more densely occupied than previously thought, parts of at least sixteen discrete roundhouses being located, thirteen more than the geophysical survey had identified. It is not known at this stage whether all the gullies recorded represented 'houses' in the conventional sense, as opposed to lesser structures or areas of defined or enclosed activity, nor whether they were occupied at the same time. Where gaps in the gully circuit were identified, these faced in a south-easterly direction, (towards the midwinter sunrise?), away from the prevailing wind, in the manner of many other later prehistoric roundhouses recorded from across Dorset, Hampshire and the central south west and east (e.g. Guilbert 1975; Oswald 1997; Sharples 2010, 197-201). Despite the uncertainties regarding date, phasing and internal form taken, it is clear that the number and density of structural remains recorded within the two trenches suggests a significant period of occupation, one that seems all the more unusual in that it does not appear to have been fully enclosed nor defined by a rampart and ditch in the form of a hillfort, oppidum or other enlarged farming community. All of the ring gullies enclosed large pits that appear to be

contemporary with the building, although few traces of other internal structuration, such as postholes for the ringbeam, partition walls or lesser forms of furniture, were recorded. It is possible, of course, that such features have been removed through subsequent agricultural attrition.



Figure 2: An aerial photograph, looking west, showing the two main areas of archaeological investigation in 2015. Trench A is in the background and Trench B in the foreground (Jo and Sue Crane).



Figure 3: Trench B, looking due south, under excavation in 2015, showing a variety of storage pits and quarry pits together with the foundations of two Iron Age roundhouses (Miles Russell)

In total, eighteen cylindrical pits, measuring between 0.5 and 2.5m in depth, were fully examined within the two trenches, some of which were backfilled shortly after they went out of use and some allowed to weather for a period of time before being backfilled (Figures 4 and 5). As has already been noticed (Cunliffe 1992), especially with regard to the examination of features within the Winterborne Kingston banjo enclosure

(Russell et al 2014, 219), the term 'storage pit' is traditionally applied to such features when discussed in the archaeological literature, although no definitive evidence as to the nature of storage has yet been found. Presumably, if purely functional in purpose, the pits 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 or silo storing the surplus produce of a single agricultural cycle. A frequent form of pit combination similar to ones found at Gussage (Wainwright 1979) comprising a larger pit and a smaller shallower pit directly adjoining, was observed in both trenches.



Figure 4: Iron Age storage pit 512 after excavation and clearance. An example of an unweathered pit backfilled immediately after it went out of use. Scale divisions 0.5m (Robin Dumbreck)



Figure 5: Iron Age storage pit 559 after excavation and clearance, an example of a weathered pit. Scale divisions 0.5m (Robin Dumbreck)

At the point of disuse, the majority of pits, where bottomed in the course of the 2015 excavation, were found to have contained a special, placed deposit. The nature of placed deposits varied from pit to pit, one comprising the fully articulated remains of a dog, whilst others contained deposits of triangular, baked

clay loomweights, quern stones, upended and perforated pots or the inverted skulls of cow or horse and in one case an articulated horse forelimb extended with cow bone and an associated cow rib. Three of the pits within trench A appear to have received secondary deposits placed on top of weathering cone fills, presumably at some significant time after formal pit abandonment. One deposit comprised the articulated remains of a sheep, set down with the skull of a cow placed directly against its posterior (Figure 6), a second consisted of the fully articulated remains of three pigs, presumably all killed together and buried within pit fill as an offering (Figure 7). After these placed deposits were put in either at the bottom or in the mid-fill the pits they were then sealed by fully backfilling the pit in one operation.



Figure 6: A deposit comprising the articulated remains of a sheep, set down with the skull of a cow recovered from mid-fill of Iron Age storage pit 049. Scale major divisions 10cm (Robin Dumbreck).



Figure 7: A deposit comprising the articulated remains of three pigs, recovered from the mid-fill of Iron Age storage pit 073. Scale major divisions 10cm (Robin Dumbreck).

Beyond the area of the roundhouse ring-gullies recorded, at least seven areas of quarrying and additional activity were

examined, three areas within trench B being closely associated with charcoal, backed clay, iron slag and a small number of copper alloy droplets. It is probable, therefore, that external activities including Iron metallurgy and the reworking of bronze were conducted here. Other activities may have included food processing and the manufacture of pottery and other ceramics. A date range for settlement, in the absence of radiocarbon determinations, is provided by the artefactual assemblage which indicates activity between c200 – 50 BC. Further work is being planned for the second part of phase 3 in order to clarify the extent, nature and chronology of the prehistoric community revealed at Winterborne Kingston.

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