

AN INTERIM REPORT ON THE EXCAVATIONS AT WILBEES FARM, ARLINGTON.

Introduction

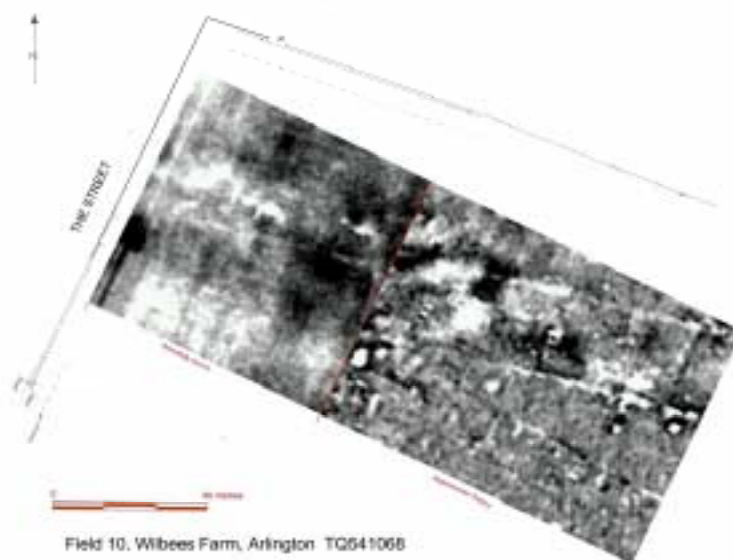
Fieldwork comprising of geophysical survey, fieldwalking and excavation has been carried out between 2003 and 2008 on land at Wilbees Farm, Arlington. This work carried out by volunteers from Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society has established that a large and important roadside settlement existed here in the Roman period. The main site is situated on one of a number of low Weald Clay ridges adjacent to the River Cuckmere Valley and due south of the medieval village of Arlington. To the east lies Arlington Reservoir which was constructed in the late 1960s by diverting the course of the river. Prior to the project, there had been a number of findings in the area, including a rescue excavation of a small area of Romano-British features during the construction of the Arlington reservoir and an unpublished excavation of a Roman masonry building. The local landowner has also collected a vast quantity of Roman artefacts. Ivan Margary's pioneering work on Roman roads in Sussex has also established that a road linking the port and fortress at Pevensey with the Ouse Valley crossed the River Cuckmere at this point.

THE FIELDWORK

Following the reporting of the finding of quantities of Romano-British artefacts by metal detectorists, to the Archaeology Team at East Sussex County Council, an investigation project was set up, initially by the Mid Sussex Field Archaeology Team and later expanded to include members of the Eastbourne Natural History and Archaeological Society and The Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society, under the direction of the author.

Fieldwalking and geophysical survey quickly established an area of activity in what has been named 'Field 10'. This work was followed by a series of evaluation excavations over a number of seasons, which identified a wide flint metalled surface with associated side ditches, a number of linear ditches and clusters of post holes.

In 2006 & 2007 larger scale excavation took place, which confirmed that the metalled surface was a Roman road, bounded by wide deep side ditches. Joining these side ditches at right angles were a number of probable property boundaries or enclosure ditches, one of which contained a series of large post holes provisionally interpreted as a wooden building. The finding



of the road was a surprise, as Margary had plotted it running a rather erratic course 150 metres south of the site.

Vast quantities of bloomery slag and fired clay, suggests that iron smelting had taken place nearby and in 2007 a trench across the southern road ditch and close to a small circular geophysical anomaly recovered a very large quantity of this material, suggesting that the anomaly is a bloomery furnace. It is planned to excavate this feature this summer.

Excavations have also taken place in a number of other fields on the farm, these have confirmed the 'new' alignment of the road and located one of the cemetery sites associated with the settlement. This cemetery site, 900 metres to the east of the main site and adjacent to the Roman road contains an unusual, well constructed flint structure, or base, 6 metres by 5 metres in area and 0.5 metres thick, currently postulated as a shrine or mausoleum. To the north of this structure 5 badly ploughed Romano-British cremation burials have been excavated and it is likely that the continuing excavation of this field will identify more.



THE FINDS

The excavations have recovered a very large quantity of finds, mainly comprising of pottery sherds, but also including Roman coins, Roman glass and iron objects including a spearhead.

Although the pottery is presently being catalogued, an initial assessment shows that c. 60% of the assemblage comprises of locally produced fabrics, predominately grog tempered East Sussex Ware and sand tempered wares. The remainder of the assemblage comprises of imported wares, including British wares such as Nene Valley colour coated wares, New Forest indented beakers and south-east grey wares. Samian, Eastern Gaulish and Trier wares provide evidence of European trade links. The large quantity of drinking vessels recovered is a surprise, possibly suggesting the settlement contained an inn and certainly highlighting the high status nature of the settlement. Although masonry buildings have not yet been identified on the main site, their presence nearby is suggested by a quantity of roof, floor and box flue tiles recovered.

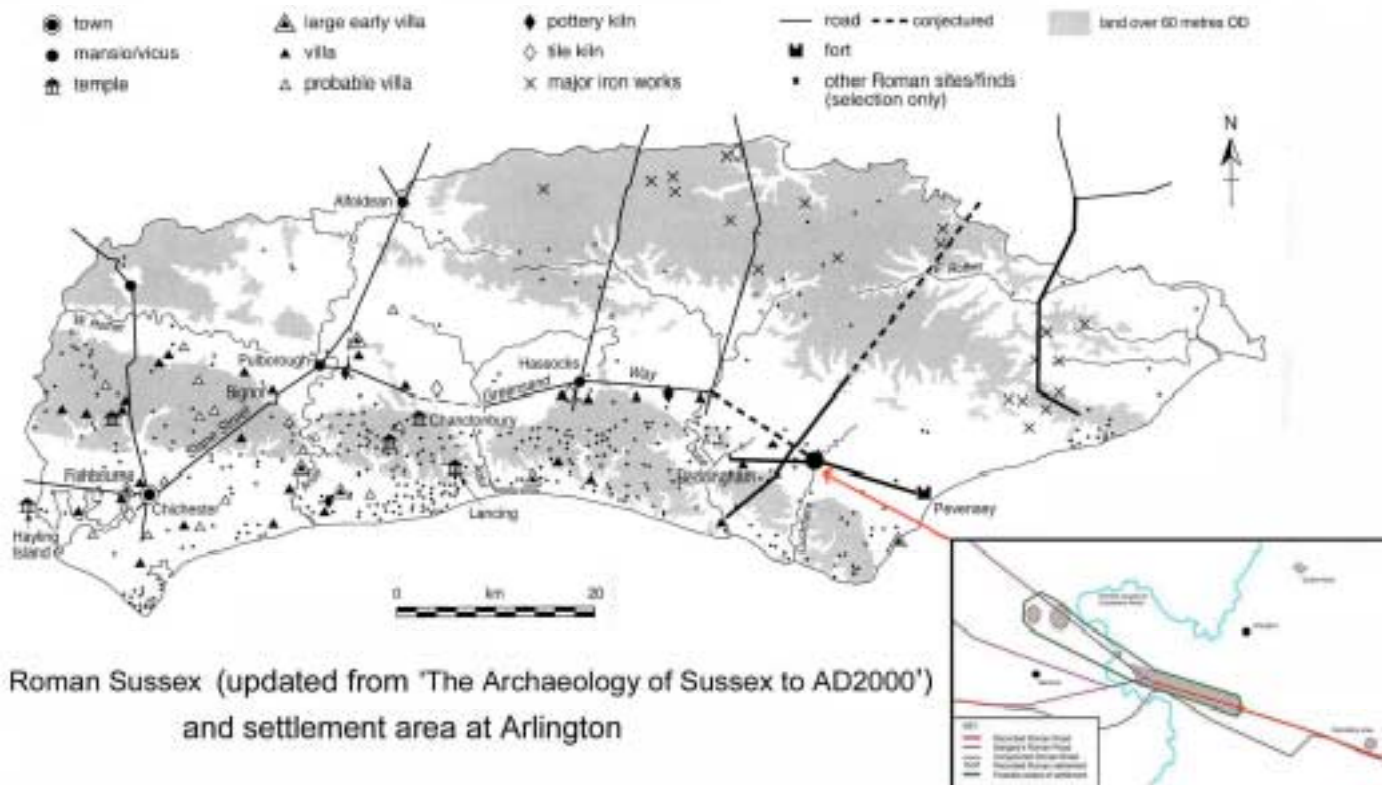


CONCLUSIONS

The initial post excavation assessment suggests that the road was constructed in the early 1st century and that a settlement and industrial areas quickly formed along its sides. Analysis of pre-project finds suggests it formed both sides of the river crossing and contained at least one masonry building. The site is likely to have acted as the main market/administrative centre for the area and its postulated size, c. 35 hectares, places it in the Roman small town category. The settlement appears to have gone into decline, possibly being totally abandoned in the late third

century. The Roman fortress of *Anderitum* at Pevensey was constructed in the late 3rd century and it is likely that this became the main administrative and market centre for the area, thus making the Arlington settlement redundant.

The map below shows the site at Arlington in the larger Roman context in Sussex.



We would like to take this opportunity to thank the BHAS for the grant towards excavation costs, without which the excavations would have been on a much smaller scale. We must also thank all the volunteers from BHAS who have taken part in this project, sometimes in adverse weather conditions, but without whose support this regionally important site would not have been investigated.

Greg Chuter, Assistant County Archaeologist, East Sussex County Council. April 2008
 Bob Washington
 Steve Corbett