Bulletin

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Cover: *Part of a Roman period mortarium, found at Gatehampton in 2019. Photo: © Mike Green.* *See article on page 9.*

Bulletin

SOAG

Contents

Chairman's Report

Dave Carless

Given at SOAG's Annual General Meeting on 28th April 2019

Founded in 1969 by Cynthia Graham Kerr, SOAG is now in its 50th year of archaeology in Oxfordshire and I am pleased to report that we are still going strong! 2018 was a very busy year for fieldwork with projects running at four locations (Ascott Park, Blewbury, High Wood, and Gatehampton – see notes below). Our project leaders and others continue to broadcast our achievements in lectures to other interested groups and national and regional publications.

The group's use of technology is growing and bringing new benefits. GIS (Geographical Information System) is increasingly being used by the group, led by the projects at High Wood, where it is used to record details of the excavations, and at Blewbury, where it is used for larger scale mapping of sites and features of archaeological interest around the village and surrounding area. We are also engaged with Ed Peveler of the "Beacons of the Past – Hillforts in the Chilterns Landscape" project which has provided several GIS training sessions, and which will soon provide new Lidar data relevant to some of our own work. We are also making good use of the total station kindly donated by Keith Lowndes for levelling work at Gatehampton, High Wood, and Ascott Park. Photographic recording of our work has been enhanced by Richard Miller's stunning 3D images of sites and finds.

Nancy Nichols, our Vice Chair, has again organised an excellent programme of events (see below), including numerous interesting lectures and site visits. Attendance at our meetings has been growing providing good opportunities for communications between members out of the fieldwork season.

Membership and Finance

Our core finances remain in reasonable balance (special thanks to our retiring Hon Treasurer, Kaz Greenham), augmented by a significant Gift Aid contribution (thanks to our retiring Hon. Secretary, Mike Vincent, for handling this).

Membership in 2018 grew by 9% to 145 members and was ahead of our budget assumptions. Our web site and the High Wood project in particular continue to attract new members. Linda Annan, our Membership Secretary, warmly welcomes all our new members and hopes to attract even more in 2019.

Publications and Communications

Mike Green has continued to be the focus of our routine communications with all of the group's members and beyond by and management of the web site, and by ad hoc email updates. In 2018 we produced seven editions of *SOAG Messenger* under the joint editorship of Mike Green and Nigel Peters. John Hefferan and Janet Eastment edited and produced our flagship annual report, *SOAG Bulletin*.

In addition we publish results of our research projects to a wider audience through the CBA South Midlands Archaeology annual report. We also give presentations to other archaeological organisations, thereby raising the profile of SOAG and our research work. Work also continues, under the leadership of Mike Green, on digitising and making available our written archive of past projects.

Fieldwork and Research

Under the leadership of our Vice President, Ian Clarke, in early 2018 SOAG secured permission from Oxfordshire County Council for the long-anticipated return to **Ascott Park**, Stadhampton, for a new excavation of the traditional site of the 17th century manor house, which burnt down in 1662 when nearing completion. The traditional site is marked by a large rectangular hollow (a cellar or basement) fronting a linear earth bank (a raised terrace). The principal aim of the excavation is to try to prove 'beyond reasonable doubt' that the 1662 house was built at the traditional site and that the archaeology of the hollow and bank is what remains of that house. The excavation is planned to take three years and the first dig was over ten days in July 2018 under the direction of Roelie Reed, backed up by Mike Vincent. Despite this coinciding with some of the hottest days of the year, significant heavy digging by the enthusiastic team ensured that good progress was made with recovering the ground plan of the house and terrace and establishing their structural relationships.

We also recovered prima facie evidence that the basement was vaulted, one of the most important elements of the research. The 2019 dig will again be over ten days, starting this time in late August.

At **Blewbury**, under the leadership of Lindsey Bedford and Dave Carless, we returned to the Manor for a short but intensive programme of test pitting, geophysical surveying and auger surveying. No new significant features were identified but we were able to make some progress in understanding features located in earlier work. In particular we found evidence to demonstrate that the moat, which at present has only three sides, had never had a fourth. A dark linear feature found on our 2014 geophysical survey was shown to be a former ditch containing demolition material. This may have been a long wall closing off the moated area.

Work at the **High Wood** Roman site led by Alan Hall (supported by Andrew Alum, Mike Vincent and more recently Stephanie Pollard) was designed to further examine the walls found previously. This had resolved into a range of rooms of probable 4th century AD date, which was found to continue to the east but the terminus probably lies under a public footpath and remains to be discovered. Underlying the eastern room was a furnace, which may have been associated with iron ore roasting, and appeared - from remaining post holes - to have been surmounted by a wooden structure.

The western extent of this range extends for at least 45metres, where a further room was excavated. This room was well built but showed no evidence of flooring. However, a substantial deposit of bloomery slag and evidence of nearby smithing was found at the lowest level. A western wall was found but a search for southern and eastern walls was fruitless although regular scatters of building material suggest they are present. We expect the complex to cover an area of 50m x 50m.

Work in 2019 is focussing on further exploration of the northern building range and continuing the search for the extent of the complex with a view to identifying the character of this building complex – which remains enigmatic.

At **Gatehampton** Roman Villa, SOAG's longest running project, led by our President, Hazel Williams, the focus of the excavation during 2018 was on the probability of a second bath house at the eastern end of the villa. A plunge pool and associated unheated cool room had already been excavated in 2017. Limited work during 2018 revealed two adjacent heated rooms with hypocausts, evident from small sondages into the floors of both rooms, that will need more investigation in 2019. Further excavation and recording in the workshop and cesspit areas resulted in the discovery of the corner of an earlier building under the eastern end of the villa. As a result of these new developments, the project continues in 2019 when the earlier building and other features beyond the eastern extent of the villa are being explored. The trench over the bath house is being extended to find the stoke room and other features.

Lectures, Events & Visits in 2018/19

Lecture Series

27 January 2018
Adam McBride (Oxford University)
The Origins of Wessex: Long Wittenham and the Context of Power

22 February 2018
Carl Champness (Oxford Archaeology)
Wallingford, Winterbrook: Excavations of a multi-period site with Prehistoric and Early Saxon settlement

22 March 2018
Dr David Bird (Retired County Archaeologist, Surrey)
Route of the Roman Invasion

27 September 2018
Dr. Simon Draper (Victoria County History)
Recent Research for the Victoria County History in Goring and Goring Heath parishes

25 October 2018
Dr. Peter Warry FSA
The evolution of Roman ceramic building material in southern England

22 November 2018
Michael Walsh (Cotswold Archaeology)
Excavations on the 17th century warship, 'The London'

24 January 2019
Martin Bridge (Oxford Dendrochronology Lab)
An Introduction to Dendrochronology (Tree-Ring Dating)

28 February 2019
David Sanchez (Thames Valley Archaeological Services)
Roman villa site in Tackley

28 March 2019
Dr Edward Peveler (Chilterns Conservation Board)
Beacons of the Past: Hillforts in the Chilterns Landscape

28 April 2019
50th Annual General Meeting and Review of SOAG Archaeology, followed by SOAG social

Events and Visits

17 July 2018
Visit to the last season of the excavations of Roman Dorchester-on-Thames

16 February 2018
Visit to the Oxford Radiocarbon Dating Unit (joint visit with BARG)

30 October 2018
Visit to The Berkshire Record Office– 'Peeling back the layers'. Hurst and Sindlesham (joint visit with BARG)

Reports and Articles

Gatehampton Farm Roman Villa Excavation

Report 2018-19

Hazel Williams, Derek Greenwood and Roelie Reed

Background

The excavation of the Gatehampton Roman villa is SOAG's longest running project and has included surveys of the landscape around the villa, the excavation since the early 1990s of most of the villa building and the participation of many hundreds of volunteers, many of them new to archaeology. The 3rd-4th century villa building is set within a farmstead that has fields marked by ditches and tracks, a corn drier, cobbled yards and a large enclosure ditch around the villa. The building is positioned on gravel deposits on the north bank of the River Thames, on a slightly sloping site with the Chilterns Hills rising to the north-east. The project was planned to close in 2017 but the discovery of a cess pit at the eastern end of the building and a second bath house has meant that it continued until 2019.

Introduction

At the beginning of 2018 the focus of the excavation was on the newly discovered bathhouse and on completing the area around the cess pit. A full account of the cess pit was included in the last *Bulletin 72*, 2018. Excavation of a second bath house began with the discovery of a small pool (13) in 2017, an adjacent cool room and two heated rooms in 2018. Trench 18 over the bath house was extended in 2019 to look for a possible stoke room.

In addition, investigation continues looking at features beyond the eastern end of the villa; the L shaped wall of an earlier building or enclosure discovered at the end of the excavation season in 2018 and a large clay lined pit.

The Trenches

At the start of the excavation in May 2018 there were two L shaped trenches on site; the larger connected Trenches 16 and 17 and the smaller Trench 18.

Due to the very dry conditions during the summer of 2018, only minor extensions were made to the existing trenches. Major changes to the trenches were left until the spring of 2019 when most of Trench 16, including the cess pit and adjacent long 'workshop' area was back filled. The remaining part of Trench 16 was then extended by two metres along the eastern side. Trench 18 remained open and was extended eastwards to join up with Trench 16.

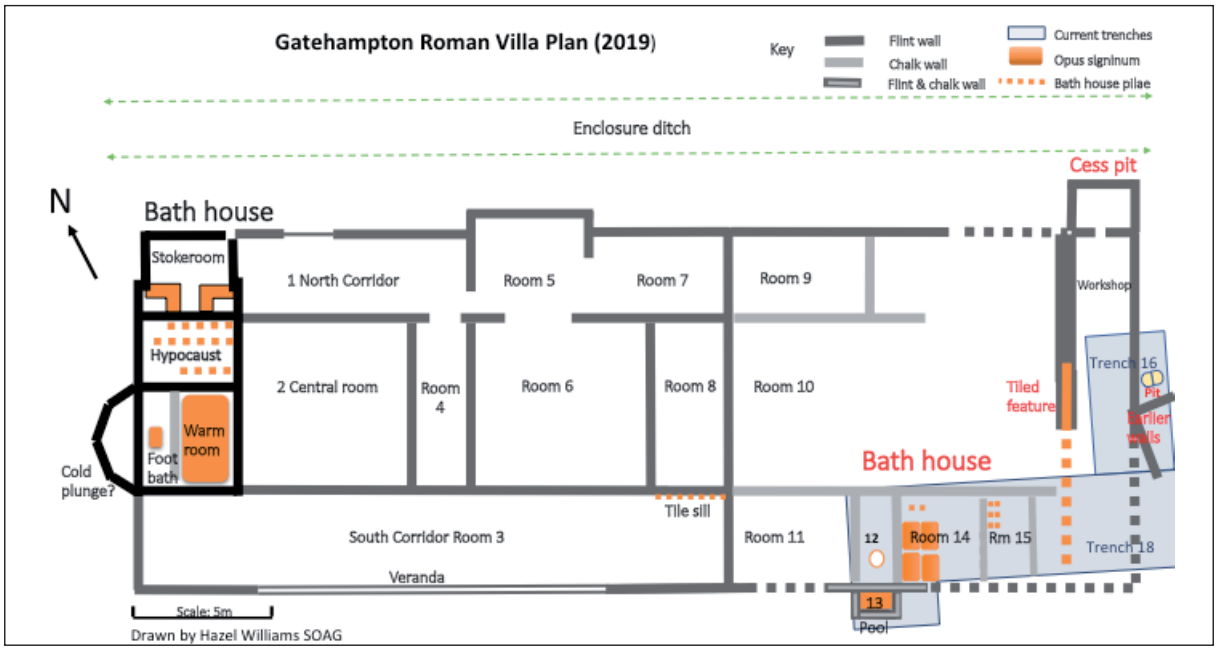

Fig. 1: Plan of site 2018-2019

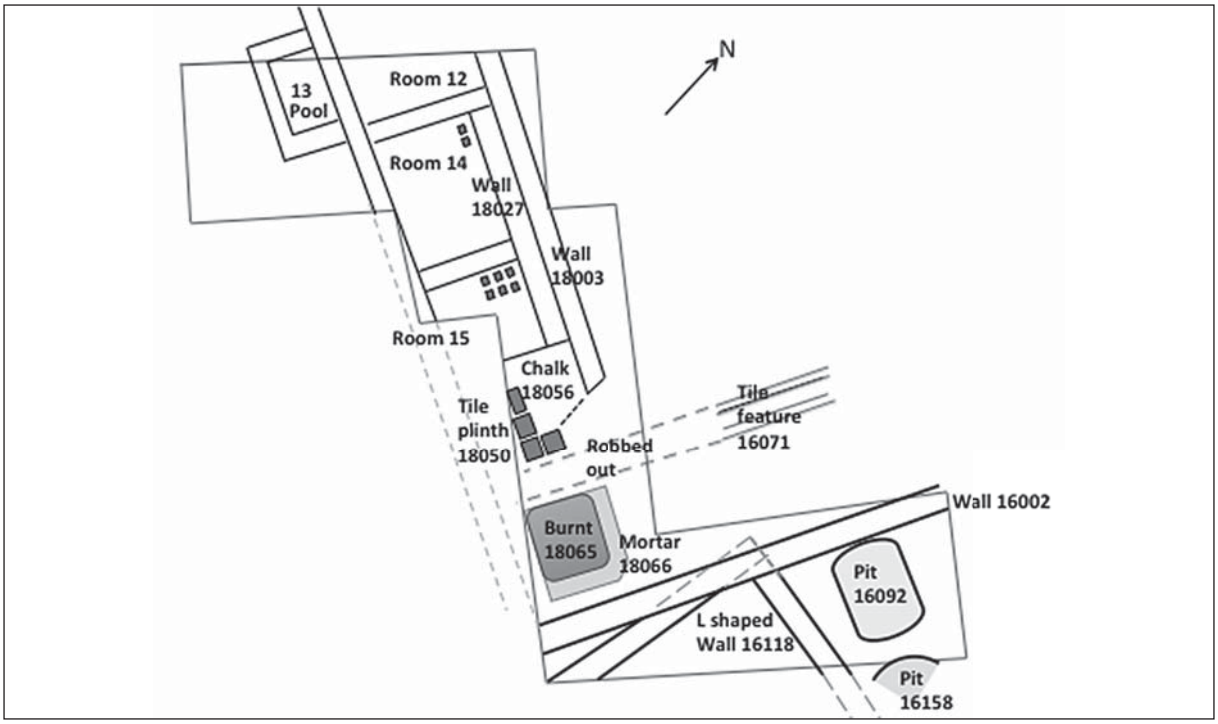

Fig. 2: Plan of trenches 2019

Trench 18

Pool 13

In 2017 the fill of the pool (13) was excavated and a lead drainage pipe was found in the centre of the southern side just above the tile base (*SOAG Bulletin* 72, 2018 pp 11). The pool projects beyond the outer southern wall line of the building and during 2018 the exterior area around the pool was excavated. It was clear that the pool drained to the outside of the building and the outer end of the drainage pipe that ran from the base of the pool to the outside, was found. Care was taken in the area outside the pool to retrieve any material that may have been washed out of the pipe but, in the event, there was nothing of significance. There was however a large quantity of pottery fragments in the deposit, over 40 including a few fine ware fragments. Alice Holt ware was well represented with 15 fragments including five bases and three rims. The small area excavated outside the pool was devoid of any features; the assumed surface contemporary with the pipe and pool barely discernible. The external end of the pipe does not protrude beyond the surrounding wall, it may well have been cut off as lead was likely to be re-used; it appears to have been fixed in place with *opus signinum* cement in a gap in the wall. It would make sense that the *opus signinum* cement used to line the pool, was also used to fill a gap left for the 70mm diameter pipe in what are quite roughly built walls around the pool.

Fig. 3: View of Room 12 (background) and pool (13)

Room 12

It is likely that the pool was accessed from within the building, from Room 12, an unheated cool room which has an *opus signinum* floor surface that would have been waterproof. The floor surface was repaired several times; the *opus signinum* was laid over a chalk floor base that had some patches of laid large terracotta *tesserae* within it. At a later stage part of the *opus signinum* surface at the northern end of the room was covered with more chalk.

Room 14

At the beginning of 2018 most of Room 14 had been cleared of demolition rubble; heavier chalk stones and mortar from the adjacent walls and, beneath that, lumps of *opus signinum* and tile from

the floor of the room. A single line of chalk stones set into the mortary layer was the only indication of a wall dividing Room 14 from Room 15 to the east. The floor of Room 14 was formed by a thick layer of *opus signinum*, up to 100mm thick, with a hard, smooth surface, light pinkish in colour. During 2018 75% of the surface was uncovered, the remaining section in the south east corner left unexcavated. The best-preserved area was the south west corner where several large slabs of the floor were found, measuring approximately 500mm by 300mm, tilted at a slight angle but otherwise still in place. One half metre square section of the floor has the imprint of nine small tiles in the surface. There are two small tiles in place in the north eastern corner of the room and this may indicate that the floor once had a tiled surface, or that there was a tiled area or feature in the centre of the room. The preservation of the *opus signinum* floor on the southern side of the room is remarkable and poses the question of whether there are voids beneath and some hypocaust *pilae* remaining in place under that area of the floor.

Fig. 4: Opus signinum floor slabs in Room 14 and pilae stack bottom left

The floor surface was more fragmented in the north western corner of the room so a small sondage was made into what was a demolition deposit of broken *opus signinum* slabs, degraded *opus signinum* and mortar with some fragments of painted plaster and a few tile fragments. This revealed part of the hypocaust in the form of one small 200mm square tile that was the base of a *pilae* stack at the bottom of the hypocaust and one pad of cement marking the position of a second one. Both were surrounded by a sooty deposit. Two fragments of box tile tubuli were found in the rubble but none in situ. On the eastern side of the room part of a mortar and tile plinth was found that may indicate the position of the channel for hot air to pass through from Room 15, this will become clear when the room is fully excavated during 2019.

Fig. 5: Small Find 602 Iron ladle

The iron ladle

In a small recess at the side of the plinth, an iron ladle was found. The ladle is made of iron, approximately 340mm long with a circular 'bowl' 70mm across and 35mm deep. The long handle is twisted for part of its length and there is a small hook at the end. This is not the first ladle to be found in the villa, a similar example was found in Room 10 during the excavation of Trench 3 in 1997 (*SOAG Bulletin* No. 53 1998, p13). That too was of iron, also with a twisted handle. The earlier ladle was discovered deliberately placed beneath a large flint stone and it appears that the recent one was also deliberately placed within a small recess. These were useful items and the material could have been re-cycled, so perhaps there is the possibility that they were deposited to mark the abandonment of the villa.

Fig. 6: View of Room 14 (left) with tile plinths and Room 15 (right) with pilae stacks

Room 15

Room 15 is divided from Room 14 by a sub-standard wall that abuts the inner chalk wall 18027. It consists of only one course of flints at floor level. Beneath the flints the wall has a rough mix of chalk, tile and flint, loosely mortared that may be packing, with chalk blocks on the Room 15 side and supported by the well-built plinth on the Room 14 side. A small area

of the floor of Room 15, approximately 700mm by 1200mm, was excavated in 2018 and further work is in progress in 2019. Like Room 14 the surface was a mix of *opus signinum* slabs, some up to 200mm by 300mm in size and 10mm thick; generally, more broken and displaced than seen in Room 14. Beneath the broken floor was a deep demolition layer, mostly of *opus signinum* and mortar, covering seven pilae stacks (and several more visible in the unexcavated baulk) and a sooty deposit at the base of the hypocaust. The best-preserved stack has five tiles still in situ. The *pilae* are the same size as those in Room 14 and with very similar spacing.

Fig. 7: The eastern extension of Trench 18. Pamela Parfitt working on the burnt deposits 18065 (background), the robbed area (centre) and the corner of Room 15 with Lindsey Bedford (right)

Excavation east of Room 15, in Trench 18 extension during 2019

The extended part of Trench 18 opened in 2019 runs east to west along the side of the adjacent Farm shop. In the middle of the trench is a large robbed out area (18062), a continuation of the robbed out southern section of the large tile feature [16071] excavated in Trench 16. Vestiges of the feature can be seen at the base of the robbed-out area; part of the small retaining walls of the tile channel and some of the distinctive pebbly concrete that formed the base under the tile layer. A substantial layer of tile and lumps of mortar deposited over the adjacent burnt area (18065) would seem to be debris flung over from the robbing of the feature. A tile 'plinth' [18050] can be seen to abut exactly the line of [16071] at a right angle and leads directly to the heated room 15; part of the distribution system of water and hot air around the bath house. Wall [18003] continues east with the eastern end truncated by the robbing out. Between the wall and the tile plinth is an area of chalk cobbles (18056) that consists of two layers of large chalk blocks neatly laid and probably originally mortared in place. These layers form the eastern end of Room 15 and join neatly with the inner chalk wall [18027]. Whether this area is simply infill between rooms or had another purpose such as a base for a tank, is not yet clear. The top layer of stones lies under what appears to be a later remodelling of the eastern end of wall [18003], with an extra course capped with greyish mortar that was also used to form the niches in Rooms 14 and 15. [18027] may have been inserted next to the existing wall [18003] to provide a deeper foundation for the hypocaust.

At the extreme eastern end of the trench, close to the exterior wall [16002], excavation of an area of burnt sooty deposits (16065) is in progress late in 2019. The layer is 200mm deep in places, with frequent pottery sherds, over a sloping mortar surface (18066). The area has similarities with the stoke-room in the western bath house; layers of sooty deposits with mortary lenses and plenty of pottery; the material may have come from a nearby furnace but that would have to have been closer to the heated rooms and seems unlikely to be located within the current trench.

Trench 16

New walls outside the building

In preparation for photographic recording of Trench 16 at the end of the 2018 season, Viv Greenwood cleared a small unexcavated area adjacent to the eastern wall of the building [16002]. Metres in, a totally unexpected find was made - a wall running laterally, 80 degrees from the existing building, eastward into the baulk. Previous geophysical surveys show that the wall continues for at least ten metres, as far as the drive into the parking area.

The 2019 excavation confirmed that the new wall [16118] was a well-constructed, substantial flint structure, about 60 cm across. A return wall was also discovered, running out from the same point in the eastern wall of the building southwards towards the Farm shop. This return is at an acute angle - about 10 degrees to the existing wall. Construction techniques are identical in both sections of wall, but more courses have been preserved in the latter.

Excavation revealed a clear butt joint between the main wall [16002] and the newly excavated wall [16118]. Flint courses in 16002 have also been laid ***over*** the top course of 16118. This demonstrates that the new wall forms the right-angled corner of an earlier structure that was in place before the eastern wall of the main building was constructed, perhaps the original building on the site? Or an earlier

enclosure? The walls differ slightly - in the main wall [16002] flints are mortared in all the way down to the base of the foundations; in the newly excavated wall [16118] the upper courses are mortared and the lower courses are packed with earth.

The deposits within the new wall are mainly the typical reddish-brown silt that has been found elsewhere on the site but here the deposit is deeper. Sondages cut through the silt to the natural show no signs of floors, CBM or any other finds, certainly nothing in the way of dateable material. This is in marked contrast to the numerous finds evident in the rest of the site. Quite why this is the case is not yet clear.

Clay pit outside the building

The extension of Trench 16 along the eastern side has allowed further investigation of a large clay lined pit (16092) outside the end wall [16002] of the building. The pit is approximately 2.30 metres long and 1.80 metres wide, with a U-shaped profile and rounded ends. The sides are lined with yellow clay up to 0.05m thick and the clay layer extends well beyond the edge of the pit on the eastern and southern sides. The western edge of the pit is more difficult to define as this area is heavily disturbed by tumble from nearby walls. It turned out that the pit contained nine layers of different fills. Work in progress late in 2019 on what was thought to be the base of the pit has shown that it may not be; it was much softer than the side lining, at least 0.30 metres thick containing large flints, floor tiles and other CBM, and also showed sign of burning.

Fig. 8: Clay lined pit (foreground) and L shaped walls outside eastern end of building. With Derek & Viv Greenwood and Roelie Reed

It is not certain what the pit was used for, but the clay lining would make it suitable for use as a water tank or cistern for example. Work in progress in the area around the pit has shown there is a second pit less than half a metre further east lined with chalk (16158)

Fig. 9: Fill of the clay lined pit

and signs of a much earlier small channel. There is another possible pit, also clay lined and cut into the clay from (16092), which needs further investigation.

Summary

Excavation of the eastern end of the villa building has produced a more complex picture of the development of that part of the villa than first expected. During construction, the end wall of the villa building was constructed over the corner of an earlier building or enclosure. Although superseded by the development of the villa, an earlier wall [16118] appears to have been still in place, separating the more industrial area of tanks and channels beyond the north-eastern corner of the building from an apparently little used area within the enclosure or building closer to the bath house.

The cess pit and bath house were both additions to the eastern end of the villa, although the dating of these developments is still not clear. Excavation during 2019 has confirmed that the large feature [16071] that was built within the existing north east corner of the building, although partially robbed out, did connect with the bath house, probably supporting tanks and a channel supplying water. Modifications were also made to the south side of the building when the heated rooms of the bath house were constructed. It is likely that the stoke room supplying heat to Rooms 14 and 15 is on the south side of the building,

probably projecting beyond the line of the exterior south wall, like the pool area (13). Unfortunately, that means it lies under a modern building. It is hoped that more evidence for the location of the stoke-room and the dating of the bath house may be found by the end of the excavation in 2019.

Fig. 10: Copper alloy ring with attachment and bone pin both found between the pit and the L shaped walls

So far there is no definitive dating for the construction of the eastern bath house, it was added to a part of the building that has the earliest dating on the site, the mid-late 3rd century. The western bath house appears to have been the culmination of the development of the western end of the building, but the eastern bath house and the cess pit too may have been constructed at the same time, part of a substantial up-grade of the building in a period of prosperity for the owners. There are of course similarities in the materials used for both bath houses and even the design; the use of bold red and yellow in the wall decoration for example. There is even a suggestion that the two bath houses provided separate facilities for men and women.

Acknowledgements

We are indebted to the owners of the site, Daisytown Ltd, for allowing us to excavate over so many years. In 2018 and 2019 this involved excavation of what are normally car park and access areas, with deep trenches very close to buildings. Nevertheless, the diggers have been made welcome as usual. Our special thanks to Bob and Liz Jones for their support and interest in the project and also to Robin Cloke. A smaller but dedicated team of diggers have worked very hard and with great skill in trenches that were quite deep in places, my thanks to them all. 2019 was planned to be the last season of excavation at the site; it has been said before, but this time it is likely that over 20 years of excavation at Gatehampton will come to a close.

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Excavations at High Wood, Harpsden, Oxfordshire

Interim Report 2019

Alan Hall

Background

Work on this site of Romano-British remains commenced with site examination 2014 and has been continued with annual campaigns of excavation.

The excavation site lies in mainly deciduous woodland on the Phillimore estate at an altitude of 92m and covers about 1 acre (0.4 hectares) with the core area at SU 75017951. The geology is Winter Hill Gravels with pockets of clay. The underlying chalk is at a depth of probably no more than 2m.

The mature beech and oak trees within the excavation area are seen to be 150-180 years old, thus indicating deliberate plantation of the area in the early 19th Century.

The site contains a saucer-shaped depression approximately 1 metre deep which encompasses the whole of the centre of the northern range of buildings. To the south, the east and the west, and at a higher level, the extent of the building complex is defined by ridges which contain building remains.

Interest in the site commenced in the late 1970s when the Henley Archaeological and History Group examined a mound lying nearby and to the north west of the site. This was found to contain substantial deposits from Roman-British building works.

This mound, the presence of a linear feature, thought to be a possible Roman Road and a dished depression, 1 metre deep, within the excavation site presented problems for which solutions can now be proposed.

Work in 2019 was designed to further explore the northern range of rooms revealed in 2016-2018 and to delineate the extent of the remains.

Fig. 1: Early Bronze Age Basket Ornament

Occupation Phases

Early Bronze Age

The Metal Detectorist find during test pitting in 2015 of a rare incomplete basket ornament of Early Bronze Age date, dating to the earliest phase of the Bronze Age, c. 2400-2200 BC ("Beaker" Period) (Wilkin, 2016), suggests a burial of this period in the very near vicinity. Regrettably, no such remains are evident (See Fig. 1)

Late Iron Age/Early Romano-British

The presence to the south, in a nearby field, of a possible enclosure of Iron Age date and artefacts of Late Pre-Roman Iron Age in waste pits underlying later Roman walls, has been noted previously (Hall, 2018,19-22).

Four post holes, in association with a furnace, underlay the floor of the of the northern range to the east (Hall 2018, 22) and work in 2019 recovered soil containing slag and evidence of smithing some 2m to the east of this feature. This deposit also underlay a small portion of the later concrete floor and appears to be associated with the furnace.

At the western end of the range, in Room 3 was a substantial deposit of slag and smithing spall was found at the lowest level in Room 3. It has been suggested that the slag is characteristic of bloomery operation in the Late Iron Age / Early Roman-British period (Allen, J.R.L pers. com.).

The discovery by Metal Detectorists of six unstratified LAI/ERB coins, of which two are gold staters, is remarkable (See Fig. 2). It is unlikely that high value

Fig. 2: Late Iron Age Coins from the Site

coins would be lost casually in any number and this may lend some credence to an enduring rumour, in Metal Detecting circles, of the illegal discovery and removal of a significant hoard of gold coins from this site in the 1970s.

The ADC3-C4 Buildings

The date of these buildings is derived from the characterisation of the lower cutaway inserts of the tegulae (roof tiles) which comprise Warry types 4 and 5 (AD160-260) and Warry types 1, 15 and 16 (AD 240>) (Warry, 2006, 137).

Throughout the excavations we have seen that the outer walls of the complex have remained intact and revealed a flat surface. However, the insides of the rooms – and to a lesser extent the areas immediately outside the walls – have contained substantial amounts of wall flints and Lydions (Flat bricks), approximately 20% of CBM by weight. It is thus probable that the walls originally contained a tile layer to support at least one further course of flints. It is supposed that these walls would have been surmounted by a timber frame with a wattle and daub infill and a tiled roof over.

Work in previous years had identified the north western corner of the complex and rooms at the western and eastern ends. This year trenches were sited to adjoin these in the central area and, although investigation was restricted by mature trees, it was possible to expose the extent of the remains at the western end which revealed a continuation of Room 3 with some damage to the outer wall but a complete truncation of the inner wall. Furthermore, although building rubble and CBM were present in abundance, an area in the south east of the room was completely devoid of such material which indicated a deliberate post-collapse clearance (See Fig. 3).

The dump of bloomery slag, some with convex bases, and containing smithing spall, which was seen in 2018 excavations (Hall, 2018, 21), was found to continue giving an overall area of.2.5m x 1.3m and, although there was no dateable stratigraphy, its position in a depression at the lowest level in the trench suggested that it might relate to the early metal working evidence seen underlying Room 2 (Hall, 2018, 20). As previously, there was no evidence of a metal working structure in Room 3.

The western end of Room 1 had also been entirely cleared of building remains with no trace remaining of an inner wall. This had been seen to the east in earlier investigations of this room where, a very solid, heavily concreted wall had been robbed away. The alignment of this wall from the last extant remains towards that remaining in Room 3 was clear and it was significant that the western section of the trench cut displayed no sign of wall remains or robber trench but showed an homogenous and undisturbed deposit of sandy soil. The implication is that the wall and building collapse rubble had been removed in early times.

Although it is not possible to be certain, the probability is that the collapsed building material here, and in Room 3, was removed and dumped nearby, probably in Roman times, thus probably giving rise to the nearby mound of such material, excavated by Henley Archaeological and Historical Group in the 1977 – 1983 (SOAG Bulletin 70. 23) and (Hall, 2018, 17).

Of significance, the mound contained 1016 pieces of painted wall plaster and, as only a mere handful of such material has been found elsewhere on the site, it is probable that there was a plastered room located in the area between Room 1 and Room 3 and that there may have been dividing walls of which no trace now remains.

Work in 2018 had revealed that the walls of the rooms both to the east and west had subsided towards the centre of the range by 8º from the west and 1º from the east and this continued in Room 3. Furthermore, towards the centre, the outer wall had slid on its foundation by 15cm to the south. It might be conjectured that this subsidence caused the abandonment and subsequent collapse of the building range.

The full extent of the northern range of buildings has now been revealed at 45m following the discovery of the eastern end. The north eastern corner has been completely robbed out but the terminus of the inner wall of Room 2 was present in Trench 10 with a fragmentary T-junction that provided an alignment for detection of an eastern wall to the enclosure (See Fig. 3).

Within the eastern end of Room 2 in Trench 10 we revealed a small fragment of the concrete floor which was seen to the west in earlier work. This overlay a pit which contained soil with a high metallic content and probably relates to the adjacent furnace.

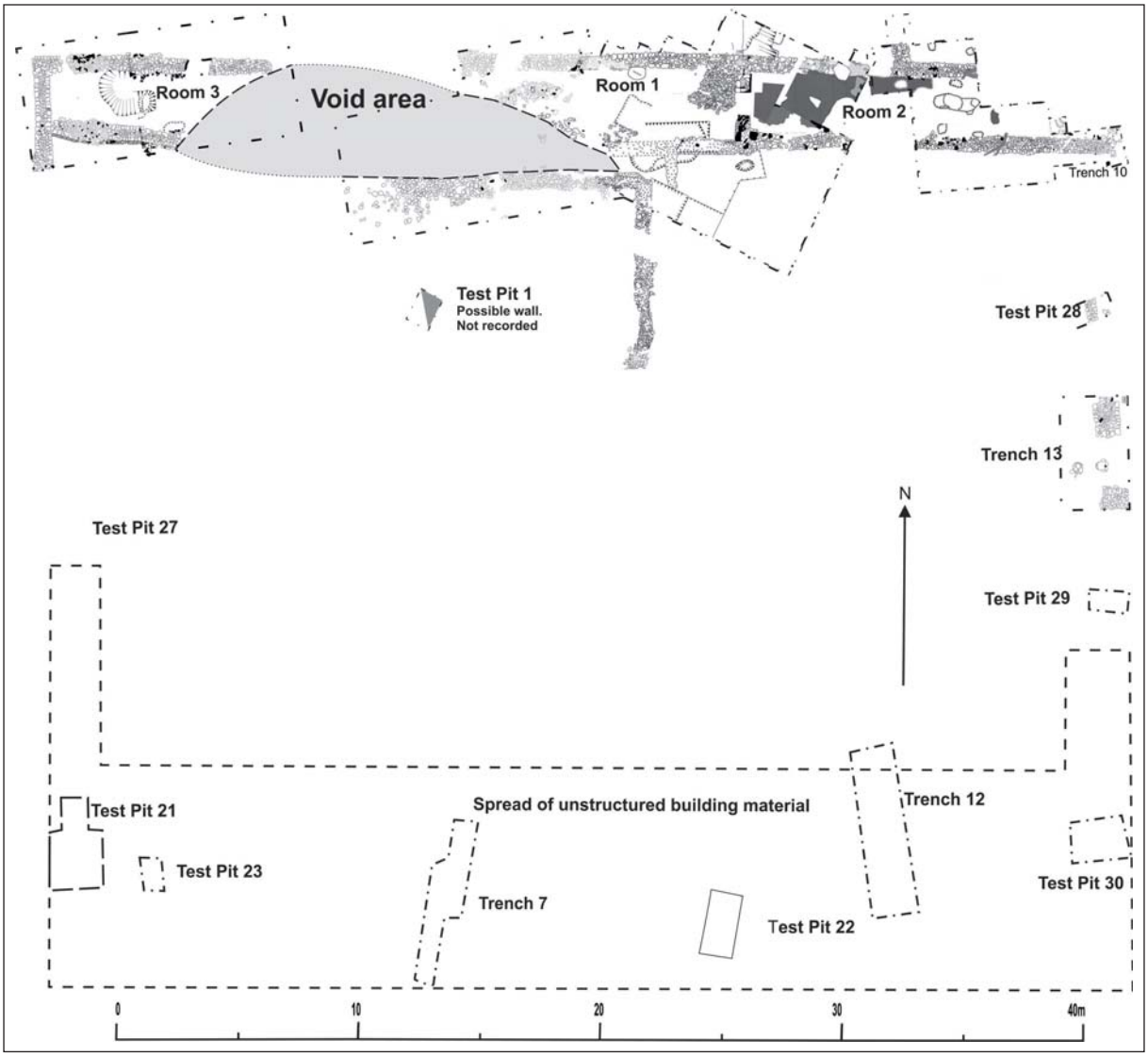


Fig. 3: Site Layout

The eastern wall contained a carefully constructed entrance 2.2m in width such that it measured 120cm across and projected as buttresses to both sides of the eastern wall which measured 60cm across. Excavation was limited by the presence of mature trees (See Fig. 4).

In the centre of the gateway, two post holes were revealed (one only showing in Fig. 4) and these would have restricted its use to pedestrian only access. This assumes that the post holes were contemporary with the gateway and, unfortunately, clear stratigraphic evidence was lacking. However, given the restrictive width of the entrance and the existence of these post holes, it seems probable that the ruinous southern range would have contained a more-substantial gateway.

A ridge, some 30cm high, runs across the southern aspect of the site. This has been excavated in 4 locations and was found to contain a similar ruination, spreading about 2m either side of the ridge, and without structural remains. Documentary research reveals that the area was devoted to managed beech wood and underwood at the time of the Harpsden-cum-Bolney 1842 Tithe Award and as coppice in a 1665 Lease (Lloyd, 2019, 4) and we have been unable to envisage by what agency this destruction was accomplished. (Historic ploughing methods would probably have been insufficiently forceful). The creation of the ridge may be attributable to the deliberate delineation of the southern boundary of the coppice.

The inner walls of the northern range did not show any returns to indicate ranges of rooms inside the eastern and western walls, even though sizeable amounts of roof tile were present throughout the enclosure suggesting less-substantial buildings – perhaps supported by posts. Future work will focus on searching for such structures.

Fig. 4: Trench 13, Eastern gateway

In summary, this complex of buildings can be seen to measure 45m x 40m. The rooms are not of high status with very little pottery of high quality, no evidence of heating systems, tessellated floors and the possibility of a wall-plastered room in one small area. This is a highly unusual complex and, considering the frequent finds of quern stones and the evidence of animal husbandry leads us to conclude that this was the operational centre of a substantial agricultural estate. There may well be a more-well-appointed residence in the vicinity. This could be the Villa excavated at Harpsden (Rivers-Moore,1951, 23-27) but it is equally likely that a villa lay nearby.

The Later (undated) Building

Excavations in 2016 exposed a wall running from a corner in the south northwards for some 6m. The wall was somewhat irregular in its construction but was strongly mortared and stood between 4 and 6 courses of flint high (Hall & Nicholls, 2016).

In 2017, the wall was discovered to the north for a further 1.5m to a corner which returned to the west and then had been robbed away to leave a basal course of flints only.

This wall has been shown to be part of a building of date later than the northern range of rooms and adjoining enclosure (Hall, 2018, 20) and was excavated in 2019 as a single basal course running west to a corner returning south showing a run of 10m (See Fig. 5)

Examination of photographs of Test Pits dug in 2015 revealed a possible part of this wall to the south in Test Pit 1 which implies a rectangular building of 7.5m x 10m.

A 2m x 1m quadrant of a pit was found within the northern wall and continuing into the baulk of the trench, and stratigraphically earlier than the building. It had been filled with wall flints but did contain one sherd of a Moselkeramik indented beaker from Trier which is dated to AD C2-3 and implies that the pit was related to the C3-4 Range of Buildings.

It is proposed to examine the western and southern aspects and the interior of this building in the next season.

Fig. 5: The basal northern course of the later wall

Finds

The following is a short summary of finds for the periods mentioned.

Coins

Over the period 2015-2019, a total of 122 coins were found. as analysed in the following table.

Date Range	No.
Later IA	5
19BC	1
41-50	1
48-64	1
65-67	2
69-71	4
C1	1
140-144	1
C2	2
222	1
253-255	1
270-296	22
260-296	6

Date Range	No.
C3	5
302-317	3
320-322	2
330-335	15
350-364	16
364-375	19
378-388	2
388-402	1
260-296	3
C4	7
C12-13	1
270-296	22
260-296	6

Of note is a gold quarter stater of Diat which was found in upcast from a modern pit within the area of the building complex and a gold "Selsey uniface" stater unstratified in Trench 13. Two silver coins of the same period were found in secure stratigraphic context thereby dating Pit 2.

A quarter medieval short cross silver coin dated AD1180-1247 was found in the topsoil of Trench 9 and is the sole example of a medieval coin found on the site.

The collection has been identified to show a distribution which, although too small a sample on which to base firm conclusions, is nevertheless broadly in line with the Portable Antiquities Scheme average for Romano-British occupation sites. However, at High Wood there is an absence of coinage in the 2nd century AD and a lower than average presence in the early 4th century AD.

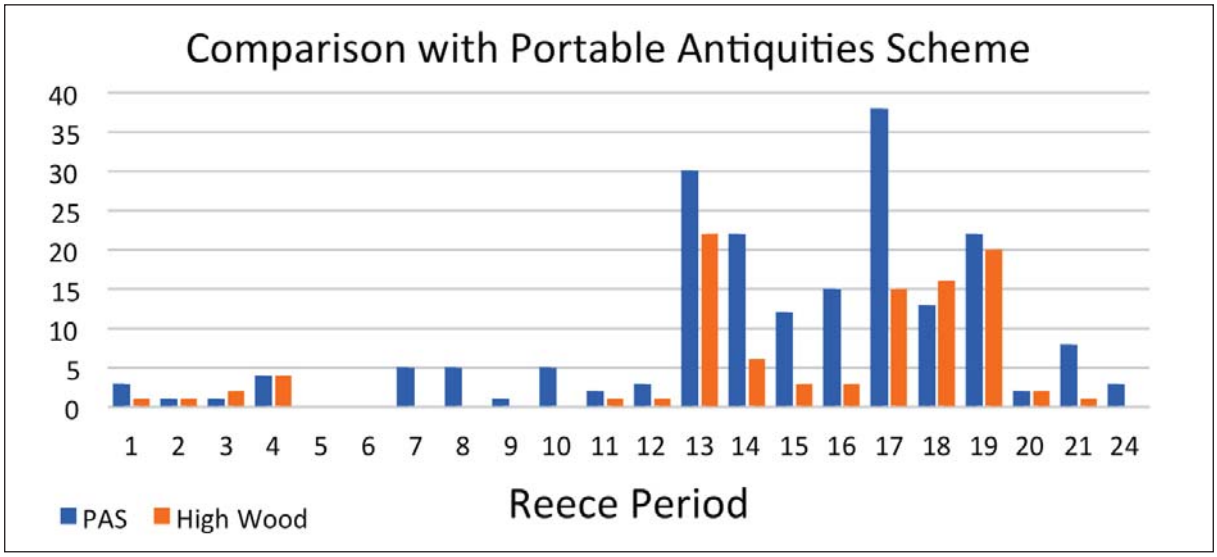
Pottery

From the 2015 to 2018 excavations we have recovered 14206 sherds of pottery, weighing in total 165 kilograms all of which has been classified using the Museum of London Archaeology (MOLA) coding system (MOLA 2014).

Analysis indicates occupation from the Late pre-Roman Iron Age throughout the Romano-British period as summarised below:

Pottery	Weight (grams)	%
Total Iron Age/ C1	1425	1
C1 - C2	9533	3.5
C2	1406	1
C1 - C3	724	0.5
C2 - C3	3543	2
C2 - C4	1415	1
C3 - C4	8233	3
C1 - C4	138356	88

Much of this was undateable small sherds of grey ware without evident rim form and which could be assigned only to the general (C1-C4) category. There was a variety of pottery fabrics present with only a small presence of imported wares in the early period.



PAS Data after Walton, P. in Moorhead, Sam "History of the Roman Coinage XIX" http://www.treasurehunting.co.uk/Sam-Moorhead-July-2011

The understanding of the sources of grey sandy wares is a problem ubiquitous to the study of pottery for the period and, as a generality, it has been conventional to emphasise the dominance of the Alice Holt potteries of the Hampshire/Surrey border. However, it has been possible to recognise a significant presence of sherds from the near locality at the supposed (but unexcavated) kiln site at Swan Wood, Nettlebed. As to the remaining grey wares, it is apparent that much may be from unidentified, local regional sources (Paul Booth, *pers. comm.*). Indeed, any kiln which reproduced the forms common to the period and had access to Gault clays together with the often-nearby Greensand might be indistinguishable from Alice Holt produce.

Similarly, sherds which were classified as "Highgate Wood Poppy Head Types" were similar in both form and fabric to the wares of those potteries, but it is possible that they may be of a more local and unsourced regional manufacture (Paul Booth, *pers. com.*).

Industry	Weight (grams)	%
Unsourced Grey Wares	149753	91
Possibly Swan Wood Grey Ware	850	0.6
Alice Holt, Farnham (later industry)	973	0.6
Highgate Wood Poppy Head Types	219	0.2
Black Burnished Style	778	0.5
Cologne	2	<1
Moselle	14	<1
Nene Valley Colour Coated	4	<1
Oxford Industry	2788	2
Samian	63	0.2
Unclassified	3255	2

Some 12.5% of sherds, by weight, had no identifiable form but, of the remainder, the majority comprised jars and bowls (83%) as follows:

Diagnostic sherds	Weight (grams)	% of Diagnosed
Flagons	705	<1
Jars	124580	75
Beakers and cups	1325	1
Bowls	12556	7.6
Dishes	4557	3
Mortaria	667	<1

Conclusions

The high ground of the western part of the Chiltern Hills holds few known remains of this period, the nearest known building lying at Harpsden (distance 1.25km) and which was not excavated or published to modern standards. The Hambleden Villa (distance 10km) lies on a valley floor and may not be comparable in terms of function with a hill-top site. A possible comparator may be a Roman building excavated at Bix, some 5.7km to the north-west and which has received private publication only (SOAG Bulletin 61, 2006).

Investigation of the site has revealed occupation dating from the late pre-Roman Iron Age and continuing throughout the Roman period. Results from excavation indicate the site of a substantial complex dated to AD C3-C4 which was probably constructed in timber with flint foundations.

The layout is unusual: it takes the form of a "villa" complex yet it is of low to middle status only without hypocaust, tessellated flooring or bath house. However, its size does indicate some importance and wealth within the locality. The bone assemblage and the multiplicity of quern stones found implies that this may have been the centre of a large agricultural holding, perhaps with a higher status residence somewhere nearby. There may be a linkage with such an establishment, with bath house, on the nearby Henley Golf Club - the former grounds of Harpsden Wood House. (Rivers-Moore, 1951)

Abandonment and collapse probably occurred as a result of subsidence towards the centre of the northern range.

The stratigraphy seen in this range of buildings indicates one phase of RB occupation only overlying the LIA/ERB contexts.

The evidence of historic clearance of debris from the collapse of these structures suggests that the nearby mound is comprised of materials from this area. Notably, the mound contains a significant amount of wall plaster which may have come from a room in this part of the range.

Areas of damage in opposite sections of the inner and outer walls in rooms 1 and 3 are not understood but may be the result of relatively recent "logging" operations within the wood.

Further work is required to investigate the possibility of other rooms adjacent to the eastern and western walls.

Fig, 6: Part of the team on the last day.

Within the enclosed area - and lying within a flat area of the central depression - lies a later rectangular building whose date and function is presently unknown. The clearance of debris from the earlier building would seem to be associated with this construction.

Expert reports on finds will continue to be commissioned in due course but, at this stage, spot-dating of pottery and coinage supports a date range for the site throughout the Late pre-Roman Iron Age and Romano-British periods.

The presence of Roman period chain mail and the point of a pilum is very unusual on a rural site. It could suggest occupation, at some stage, by a member, or former member, of the Roman military.

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High Wood: Some documentary research

Abigail Lloyd

New to the High Wood site this year, but often to be found in the Oxfordshire History Centre (the County Record Office), I carried out some documentary research into the site and its historical land use. The aim was to try to understand more about when the site, extensively disturbed, might have been so disturbed. Was it a case of 18th or 19th Century antiquarians or much earlier activity? The research is not exhaustive, more could be discovered. The emerging picture is not final, but no evidence of antiquarian awareness of or activity at the site was found. What follows is what did appear from the documents. Hopefully, the fuller context of the site is interesting and helpful, even if not all questions have been answered.

Early History: Place Names - Binfield and Bolney

There are clues to early land use in the place names of this area. Margaret Gelling, with Ann Cole, put forward the idea that 'feld' names, when coined in an early period, signified land that was unencumbered:

- Open land as opposed to wood land, which contains many natural barriers in the form of trees (this is the most common early sense of 'feld', and most appropriate to High Wood);
- Flat ground as opposed to hills (also appropriate, when referring to the flat plateaus on top of the Chilterns between the scarp and dip slopes);
- Land without building. ('Feld', by the mid 10th Century, meant ploughed arable land, of the communally farmed system. However, such land, in earlier Old English, was known as 'irthland or yrthland' not 'feld': literally, earth land, reflecting its ploughed up nature.) 'Feld' was used as a formative place name element by 730 A.D. (Gelling & Cole 2014: 269-274).

Cole studied the Chilterns, drawing attention to the small gathering of 'feld' names in the High Wood area: Binfield, Rotherfield, and Nuffield (Gelling & Cole 2014: 310-311; Hepple & Doggett 1994: 60). Binfield refers to a 'feld' of 'bent grass'. Rotherfield is a 'feld' for cattle (hrythe) to graze in. Nuffield is a 'feld' that is tough. As Cole points out, these descriptive terms for the various 'felds' fit the theory that this land was not initially arable, but rougher pasture land. Cole links Rotherfield to the etymology of Bolney. Bolney (in the oldest attestations of the name) meant bullocks' hythe; a landing place from the Thames for bullocks. Cole paints a picture of bullocks travelling from there, west, to pasture on the high open Chiltern plateaus (Gelling & Cole 2014: 307-9). The steeper dip and scarp slopes may well have been wooded, as they are today. Yet, it is still possible to see open spaces on the Chiltern plateaus. The land immediately north of High Wood has resonances of such space. There is a bridle–cum–restricted byway that proceeds from Bellehatch, at the northern boundary of High Wood, past Upper Bolney Farm, down the dip slope to Bolney Court and the presumed site of the hythe.

Early History: Binfield Hundred and the manors of Harpsden and Bolney

However suggestive the place name evidence might be, these names are not evidenced until after the Conquest. Precise boundaries remain opaque in documentary references until well into the medieval era. Modern Binfield may not have the same geographic extent as its historic counterpart. Binfield became the name of an administrative division - the Binfield Hundred. Yet, Binfield did not appear by name in Domesday. It is first attested in the Pipe Rolls from the 1170s onwards (Gelling 1953: 65). Harpsden and Bolney both sit within Binfield Hundred. They are both first attested in Domesday, as separate manors: Harpendene and Bollehede (Gelling 1953: 72-3; Domesday Book, 35, 26 & 59, 1). Neither entry makes any mention of mills. Harpsden is the northern manor and Bolney the southern, both running east-west in two very long, thin strips, fronting the Thames at their eastern extent, stretching into the Chiltern hills at their western. This is typical for the Chilterns. Thus, each parish contains waterfront, meadow, arable land, woodland and rougher pasture-cum-heath. The main settlement lay near the water, in fertile, flatter land, some distance from associated uplands: witness the location of Harpsden and Bolney Courts.

Bolney manor, the more valuable at Domesday, worth £8 to Harpsden's £6, declined. It had had its own church, located near Bolney Court, which ceased in 1454, when the joint parish of Harpsden-cum-Bolney was created. (The deed in Lincoln Registry, bringing this about, was discussed by Pearman in 1900.) In 1720 (nearly 300 years after disuse), there

were reports of the church turned into a dwelling house, near the Thames within the moat of lower Bolney House. The, then, rector, Miles Stapleton, was anxious to know how the property had been lost to the rectorial entitlement, and how it might be re-gained! (OHC PAR 124/17/MS/1) In 1586, Harpsden manor (also known as Harding) was the subject of a map, which showed that the land was by then divided up into small hedged enclosures, with intermittent parcels of woodland, not greatly dissimilar from today (OHC MSC/17/49). Bolney manor was not included within the map, although it had been joined to Harpsden for well over 100 years, but it seems likely that lands in Bolney manor were divided similarly: No enclosure occurred in the combined parish of Harpsden-cum-Bolney in the 18th or 19th Centuries, possibly because much of the land had already been enclosed in old enclosures. In the parish records for Harpsden–cum-Bolney, there is correspondence to and from the incumbents of the parish. Various rectors were interested in the history of the parish, for example, Rev'd. Francis Leighton in the mid 19th Century. There was discussion concerning the location of old Bolney Church and other church lands in Bolney manor, but no reference to High Wood and its history, nor any awareness of it as an ancient site. In contrast, the Roman villa site near Harpsden Wood was known to early antiquarians. Robert Plot mentioned it (Plot 1705: 10, 72).

Hundred courts are often said to have been held in the open air, near notable landmarks such as mounds, and often near boundaries, between parishes etc. - in neutral territory between centres of settlement. In the Binfield Hundred, quite a few lands were exempt from attending the court, since they belonged to the honours of Wallingford or Ewelme. Nevertheless, the courts took place, meeting, for example, 17 times in 1483-4, but declining by 1497-8, meeting only once (Pearman 1890: 15). It is not clear where exactly, but is usually presumed to have been on Binfield Heath ('Henley and the Chilterns', VCH 16; Gelling 1953: 65). The current parish of Binfield Heath is a recent creation, carved out of Shiplake parish (also within Binfield Hundred). High Wood lies on the historic boundary of Bolney and Shiplake parishes, close to the highest point of Binfield Heath. Evidence of perambulations of the bounds, following the southern boundary of High Wood, exist from at least 1663 (OHC PAR 124/1/R1/1, ff. 1v, 56v). High Wood has an (overgrown) mound. Some time before 1958, C.J.L. Barton, whilst pheasant shooting in High Wood, reported that he had spotted what he called a very overgrown possible tumulus, with fragments of pottery. It is not possible to say with certainty, but one wonders whether this was the mound (Ford 1958: 9). The age of this mound is key.

Henley Archaeological and Historical Group excavated the mound in the 1970s. Their records, analysed by Andrew Alum (to whom I am very grateful for sharing his work on this), indicate that the mound was made up of a dump of largely Roman material, with no pattern or structure to it. There was very little later material; no items, such as clay pipes or pottery, from the 16th to 19th centuries. If the mound is a spoil heap, corresponding to the disturbance of the High Wood site, this evidence supports the case that this was not antiquarian disturbance but earlier activity.

Other field names: Windmill Field and Coppice

Henley Archaeological and Historical Group initially believed that the mound was a windmill mound, which would explain the field name 'Windmill Field', used, in the parish tithe award, for land immediately in the vicinity of the mound. Yet, their records suggest that the mound was not purposively constructed as a windmill mound. David Nicholls (former director of the High Wood excavation) thought that secondary re-use of the mound for a windmill was also unlikely: There were no signs of posts, trestles or structures used to support different windmills.

Yet, there must be a reason for the windmill field name. Presumably, the land was named after a windmill because a windmill either did lie, or was thought to lie, in the vicinity. I was interested to find out how early the name was attested. The English Place Name Survey for Oxfordshire does not give any evidence. Documents from the mid 17th Century, in the Cooper and Caldecott (Henley based solicitors) archive, do - without any mention of an actual (operative or ruined) windmill. This archive dates from 1586 into the 19th Century. Relevant collections centre around the Elmes (1460-1663), Warner and Hodges (early 18th century – 1890s) families of Bolney Court, and the Hall family of Harpsden Court (1646 – 1855). The Elmes, subject to heavy delinquency fines, engaged in complex financial transactions with numerous parties, ultimately selling the Bolney estates, shortly after the end of the Civil War ('Harpsden', VCH 16). In the piecemeal dealings, Upper Bolney (site of High Wood) was dealt with separately from Lower Bolney. Incidentally, Windmill Field was farmed for much of the 18th Century by Harpsden Farm, and was only re-joined to Upper Bolney Farm in the 19th Century. This is a curious division given Windmill Field's location, so proximate to Upper Bolney Farm. Many of the references (in the Cooper and Caldecott archive and

other OHC documents) to Windmill Field and Windmill Coppice are set out in the Appendix to this article. The earliest of these is 1641.

As mentioned above, Domesday makes no mention of mills (wind or water) in the parish, albeit that is not necessarily conclusive. The manor of Bolney declined in the medieval period: a declining manor is not likely to be the scene of enlarged milling activity. Moreover, by the mid 17th Century, Windmill Field is surrounded by trees, save for a small area due south. The field would not have been an ideal site for a windmill, once tree cover surrounded it on numerous sides, as it would then have been blocked from nearly all wind directions, save a southerly (see the discussion below concerning the parcels of land within High Wood). Any operative windmill would need to have predated woodland. If there was no windmill in the area, it might be that the mound caused people to believe that there had been a windmill in the area, and name the field and coppice accordingly. If this were the case, since the field names exist by 1641, so must the mound, which further supports the idea that the mound does not represent post-medieval antiquarian spoil.

Parcels of land within High Wood

High Wood presents today as a monolithic parcel of wood (see Fig. 1).

In fact, historically, it was sub-divided into various oddly shaped parcels. Windmill Field was one of those parcels - a distinctive triangle. It was farmed, not wooded: see Fig. 2, 1 inch Ordnance Survey Old Series from 1830, in which the notable triangular cut-out shape of Windmill Field is visibly present.

Fig. 2: OS Old Series, reproduced in The Old Series Ordnance Survey Maps of England and Wales, Central England, Vol. IV, (1986), Harry Margary, Sheet 13,92

Fig. 1: Google Earth Pro, historical image from 2005.

The acreage of Windmill Field diminished slightly over time: see Appendix. The field was gradually subsumed into woodland at the edges. The final change from arable land to woodland (as it is today) may have taken place in 1851, when the entire Harpsden Court estate was sold. Windmill Field, with an a.r.p. of 10.1.39, is described as woodland in the sale catalogue (OHC ORO P/309/D/1). (On the other hand, the accompanying map depicts it as being unwooded.) It certainly had become wooded by the 1870s: The Ordnance Survey 6 inch map, surveyed 1878, published 1879, shows Windmill Field as wooded: see Fig. 3.

The Harpsden-cum-Bolney Tithe Map and Tithe Award from 1842 give excellent details concerning the different land use and ownership of the various parcels of High Wood. Fig. 4 shows my marking of Windmill Field and Coppice.

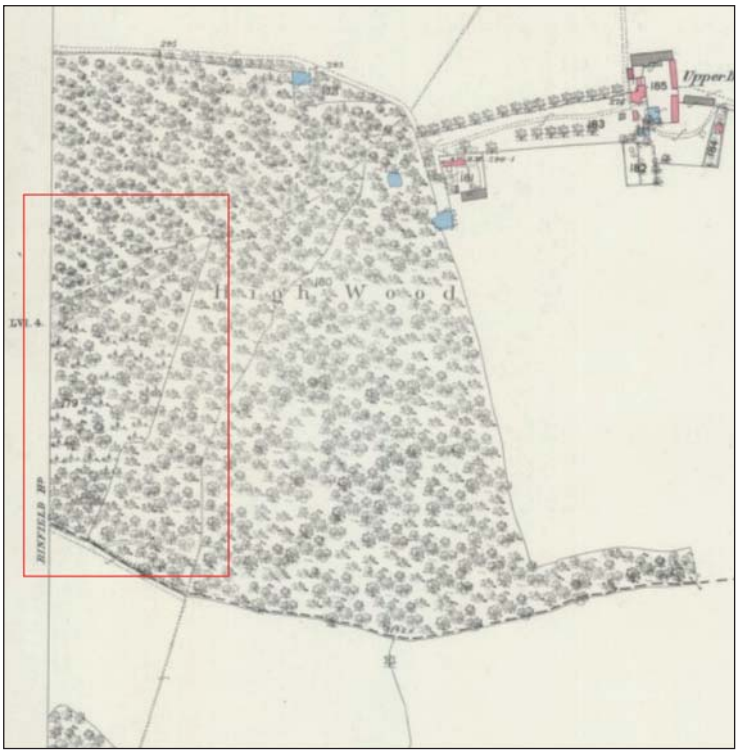

Fig. 3: Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland. https://maps.nls.uk/view/106018134

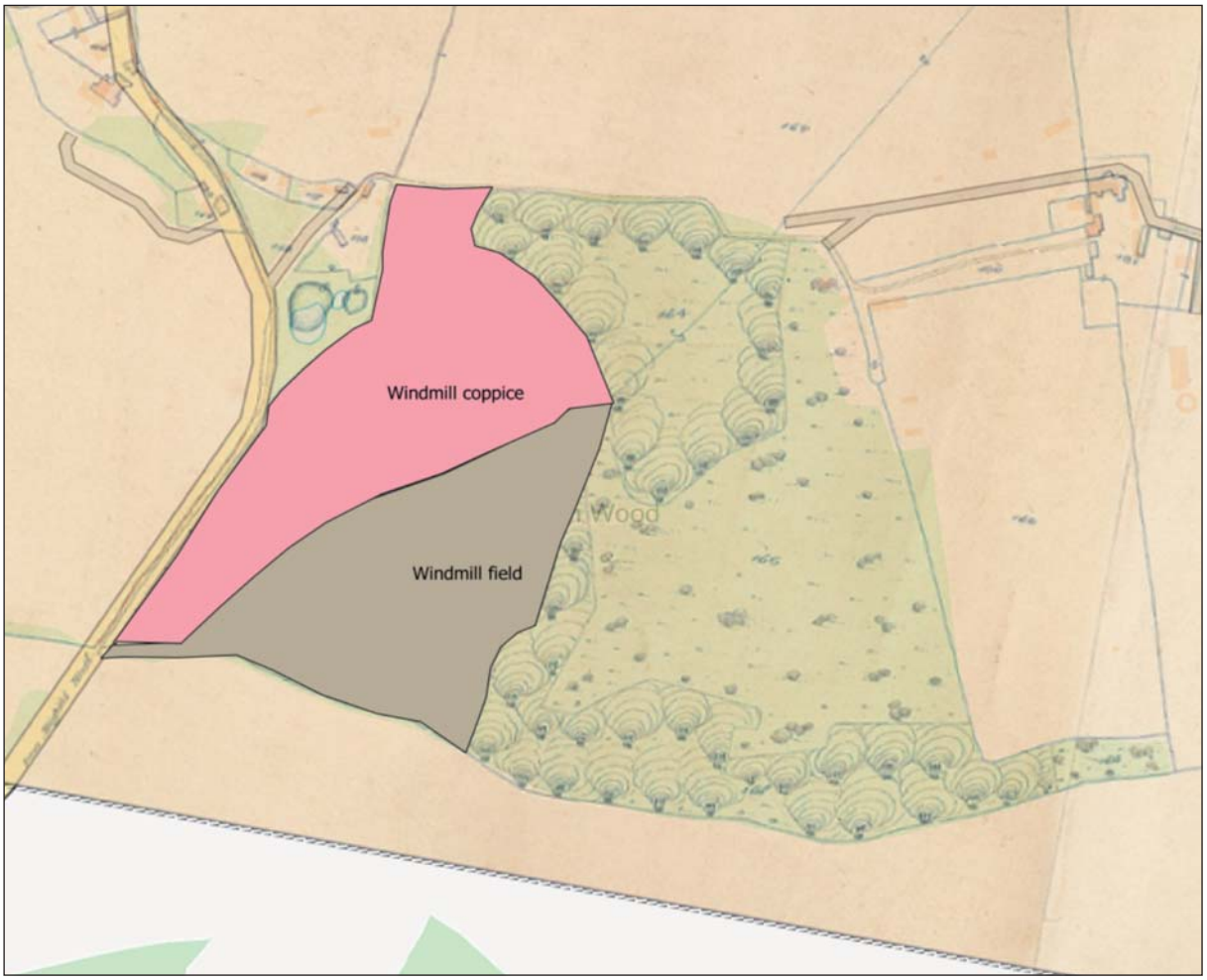

Fig. 4: Harpsden-cum-Bolney Tithe Map, 1842, OHC 203/M, altered in QGIS by A. Lloyd

The enclosure of land that I have marked as Windmill Coppice is in fact marked as 'Young Wood' (Plot 153) in the Tithe Award (OHC 203/A). However, its size, 11.3.24 a.r.p., is similar to the acreage, 11 acres, of Windmillfield Coppice in a 1665 lease for coppicing of hazel, willow, maple, ash and aspen under 1 year's growth, between Henry Hall of Harding Court (that is Harpsden Court) and Humphrey Robinson, hoopmaker of Shiplake, 'the 1665 Lease' (OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 35(5)). Moreover, units of acres, roods and perches were not standardised.

'Highwood Coppice' was, originally, used to refer to all the woodland surrounding Windmill Field: see the 1663 Sale in the Appendix, in which the name refers to 43 acres of land. This is not far off the total amount of woodland listed surrounding Windmill Field in the Tithe Award in 1842, which totals 47.3.7 a.r.p: see Appendix. Subsequently, it became a term for the smaller amount of woodland to the east of Windmill Field, see Fig. 5.

Highwood Coppice is mentioned in the 1665 Lease, with 25 acres. Robinson is permitted to coppice hazel, willow, maple, ash and aspen under 2 year's growth. The 1842 Tithe Award divides the coppice into two. One part is described as under wood (used for coppicing), hence subject to tithes (Plot 156. 16.3.22 a.r.p.). The other is beech wood, exempt from tithes accordingly, by immemorial custom (Plot 154. 8.3.9 a.r.p.). The Tithe Map uses differing, stylised graphics for beech and under wood. Together, the parts total 26.2.31 a.r.p., close to the size given 200 years earlier in the 1665 Lease. The other parts of what we now think of as High Wood were marked as Wood, being beechwood and exempt from tithe (Plot 157, 9.1.30 a.r.p.), and Wood, being underwood, tithed (Plot 158, 0.3.0 a.r.p.).

As time passed, the woods in this parish were used less for coppicing (by external specialists such as Robinson in 1665 or by local farmers), more for scenic woodland or hardwood. Timber had been a significant

Fig. 5: Harpsden-cum-Bolney Tithe Map, 1842, OHC 203/M, altered in QGIS by A. Lloyd.

part of the value of the Harpsden estate: In 1700, at the death of Henry Hall, it was worth £4-500 of a total value of £949 13s 7d for the whole estate (OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott 30 (14)). By the time of the Tithe Award, coppice wood made up 41.3.19 a.r.p. in the parish compared to 253.3.31 a.r.p. of beech wood. The parish did not become involved in the extensive 19th Century furniture-making found in other nearby Chiltern parishes ('Harpsden', VCH 16). High Wood fits that trend: Much of what Robinson coppiced in 1665 had been converted by 1842 to beech wood. By 1851, Highwood Coppice plots were described as being chiefly of thriving oak (OHC ORO P/309/D/1).

Boundaries within High Wood

The parcels of land, with differing land use, required boundaries between them. Coppices needed good protection from grazing. Coppiced trees were vulnerable, prior to re-growth. Boundaries could be as much as 3 to 4 metres wide and 1.5 meters high, topped by (wattle) fences (Preece 1990: 59). A 1664 lease (see Appendix) of Windmill Field contained obligations to repair and maintain the ditch and boundary between Windmill Field and Highwood Coppice. There is extant physical evidence at High Wood of a raised bank which follows the boundary between what was Windmill Field and Highwood Coppice. This bank kinks around the mound, suggesting that the mound existed prior to the creation of the bank. The characteristic kink in this boundary is present in early detailed maps, such as the OS 1830 Old Series: see Fig. 2. The mound must, therefore, pre-date 1830, at the very least. If the wood bank reflects a boundary dating back to the 1664 lease or before, it would suggest that the mound is earlier still than the 1830 map, further supporting the theory that the mound is not the result of 17th – 19th Century antiquarian activity at the site.

SOAG excavations have spanned both Highwood (underwood) (No. 156) and Wood (beechwood) (No. 157), as described in the Tithe Award. The boundary between the two enclosures, with different land use, ran through the middle of the excavated site. To date, nothing conclusive has been found in terms of the boundary or differing land use either side of it. Nevertheless, it is something to keep in mind for future work at the site.

Conclusion

The mound at High Wood appears to be composed of spoil from disturbance of the Roman remains. Excavations of the mound itself, documentary research, the kink in the field boundaries and the age of the Windmill field name all point to the mound being in existence by the 17th Century at the latest, ruling out subsequent antiquarian creation of the mound via activity at the Roman site. It is not clearly provable how much older the mound is. Nevertheless, the documentary and map evidence for the site, discussed in this article, adds, hopefully, to a fuller sense of the context in which SOAG excavations are taking place.

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Appendix: Windmill references (all spellings normalised)

Field Name	Date	Description of document	References to surrounding woodland	Area in acres, roods, perches	Use of land
Windmill Field	1641	Sale of Bolney between James Vickers and Humphrey Elmes: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27 (8).	There is a reference to land near Windmill Field amounting to 43 acres. However, large parts of it are illegible. The ink has gone on the fold of the parchment. It is likely to be Highwood Coppice – see entries below.	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	Feb 1650/1	Conveyance between James Vickers and Humphrey Elmes senior and junior: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27(10)	Woodground lying about Windmill Field (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	Feb 1650/1	Mortgage between James Vickers and Humphrey Elmes amongst others: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27(12)	Woodground lying about Windmill Field (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	August 1652	Lease for years in trust: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27 (16)	Woodground lying about Windmill Field (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	August 1652	Mortgage between Humphrey Elmes and James Dickens and others. OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27 (17)	Woodground lying about Windmill Field (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	September 1652	Conveyance of Bolney manor lands between Richard Andrews and Humphrey Elmes and others. OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27 (20)	Woodground lying about Windmill Field (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	July 1663	Sale of Bolney manor lands between Humphrey Elmes of Bolney Court and Henry Hall of Middle Temple (and others): OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 27 (23) and (24). 'The 1663 Sale'	Woodground lying in and about Windmill Field commonly called Highwood Coppice (43 acres).	16	Arable.
Windmill Field	June 1664	Lease for 21 years between Henry Hall of Harpsden Court and Robert Hutton, yeoman of Woodcott, South Stoke: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c. 35(4). 'The 1664 Lease'	Ditch, fence and boundary at Highwood Coppice has to be maintained. Mention of mounds but as part of formulaic sentence referring to bounds generally.	12	Farmed by Robert Hutton as part of Bolney Farm. Owned by Henry Hall.

Field Name	Date	Description of document	References to surrounding woodland	Area in acres, roods, perches	Use of land
Windmill Field	April 1788	Record of perambulation of parish bounds, ordered by Thomas Hall: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott c.31(6).	Arrive at the field, coming from the East, through the wood. This is the correct approach for a clockwise perambulation of Harpsden-cum-Bolney parish. The way south of High Wood is called the Pack and Prime Way. On modern maps such a named way features further north coming out of Henley.		
Windmill Field	1788	Survey of glebe land and other land in the parish: OHC PAR 124/10/E/1	Thomas Hall is listed as having 150 acres of woodland including coppice. Tithes to be paid on the part cut down at less than 20 years growth as and when cut. 20 acres underwood cut at 9 years growth. £8 an acre yield on average.	10	Oats. Part of Harpsden Farm. Owner Thomas Hall. Tenant Daniel Percy.
Windmill Field	1798	Survey of glebe land and other land in the parish: OHC PAR 124/10/E/1	Thomas Hall is listed as having 150 acres of woodland including coppice. Tithes to be paid on the part cut down at less than 20 years growth as and when cut. 20 acres underwood cut at 9 years growth. £8 an acre yield on average.	10	Wheat. Part of Harpsden Farm. Owner Thomas Hall. Tenant Daniel Percy.
Windmill Field	Feb 1825	Lease for years between the Halls, following Thomas Hall's death, and various executors/trustees. OHC MS dd. Cooper & Caldecott c. 35 (9).		10	Windmill Field, which had been part of Harpsden Farm, farmed by Daniel Piercy is to be let with Upper Browney [sic] farm to James Hall on trust for Owen Hall.
Windmill Field	1830	Perambulation of Shiplake Parish bounds: OHC PAR 234/10/E/5	Both Young Wood and Highwood are mentioned, in the correct locations when walking west to east from the road called then 'Henley Lane', traversing the northern Shiplake parish boundary (southern Harpsden-cum-Bolney boundary). This is the correct approach for a clockwise perambulation of Shiplake parish. A ditch is said to be on the south side of Highwood, which belongs to Mr Trimmer, owner of great Grove Lands. On the Shiplake Tithe Map and Award, OHC 341/A and M (1841) No. 263, it is clear that this was part of the large field now to the south of High Wood in the parish of Shiplake.		Belongs to Mrs Hall.
Windmill Field	June 1836	Lease for years between the Halls and the Workmans. OHC MS dd. Cooper & Caldecott c. 35 (12).		10	Windmill Field, which had been part of Harpsden Farm, farmed by Daniel Piercy is to be farmed with Upper Browney [sic] farm by the Workmans.

Field Name	Date	Description of document	References to surrounding woodland	Area in acres, roods, perches	Use of land
Windmill Field	1837	Perambulation starts at the gate of Windmill Field: OHC PAR 124/17/MS/2.	No mention of High Wood.		
Windmill Field	1842	Tithe Award: OHC 203/A	Young Wood (No. 153) Underwood liable to tithes, 11.3.24 a.r.p. High Wood (Nos. 154 and 156) Beechwood and underwood liable to tithes respectively, 8.3.9 and 16.3.22 a.r.p. respectively. Wood (Nos. 157 and 158) Beechwood and underwood liable to tithes respectively, 9.1.30 and 0.3.0 a.r.p. respectively.	10.1.39	Arable. Owned by Elizabeth Hall and farmed by William Henry Workman as part of Upper Bolney Farm.
Windmill Field	1851	No. 75 in sale catalogue, Harpsden Court Estate: OHC P/309/D/1	Young Wood (No. 74) (11.3.24 a.r.p.) Principally beech trees (a shift from the tithe description). Highwood (Nos. 76 & 77) (8.3.9 and 16.3.22 a.r.p.) Chiefly of thriving oak trees (a shift from the tithe description). Wood (No. 78) (9.1.30 a.r.p.) Underwood (No. 79) (0.3.0 a.r.p.)	10.1.39	Wood. William Workman still tenant at Upper Bolney Farm.
Windmillfield Coppice	June 1665	Lease for 21 years between Henry Hall of Harpsden Court and Humphrey Robinson of Shiplake, Hoopemaker. 'The 1665 Lease'.	Highwood Coppice: Ash, willow, maple, asp and hazel of no more than 2 year's growth. 25 acres.	11*	Ash, willow, maple, asp and hazel no more than 1 year's growth.
Young Wood Gate *(see explanation below concerning the name Young Wood being used for Windmillfield Coppice)*	Feb 1749/50	Perambulation of parish bounds: OHC MS dd. Cooper and Caldecott 30 (21)	The lane (west of High Wood) is referred to as Five String Lane. By 1830 it is Henley Lane: see above. The way south of High Wood is called the Pack and Prime Way. On modern maps such a named way features further north coming out of Henley. There is a lot of discussion about whether the parish bounds should be marked on the south of the ditch of the Way or the north. The former is strongly averred on the grounds that the Way/ its gates/ wood and timber alongside it, have always been maintained by the lords of the manor of Harpsden, not Shiplake.		

* (N.B. This is the coppice, not the field, so it does not alter the trend of Windmillfield itself diminishing in acreage.)

Excavations on the presumed site of a 17th century manor house at Ascott Park, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire

Interim report 2018-19

Ian Clarke & Roelie Reed

Introduction

A detailed introduction to the Ascott Park Project and summary of earlier work on the site appeared in *South Midlands Archaeology No 44 (2014)* and *SOAG Bulletin No 68 (2014)*; (Clarke 2014a & 2014b).

Ascott Park was once a country seat of the Dormer family who resided there for many generations. William Dormer (d.1683) commissioned a new manor house and extensive remodelling of the grounds sometime around 1660 but the house burnt down in 1662 when close to completion and was never occupied. Despite much recent research and fieldwork by and for the Oxfordshire Buildings Trust (OBT), culminating in an excavation in 2009 on the site that local tradition has long held to be that of the Dormer house, its location remains disputed and unconfirmed.

The 'traditional' site is marked by substantial earthworks [see Fig. 1] comprising a large rectangular hollow (a presumed cellar or basement) which fronts a linear earth bank (a presumed raised terrace) overlooking what were once formal garden terraces to the south. The hollow and bank are centrally placed on an axial alignment between a broad, tree-lined approach avenue to the north and the terraced gardens to the south – a formal layout in the Renaissance style that became fashionable for new builds in the 17th century. On the east side of the large hollow there is a smaller rectangular hollow that may represent an 'annexe' to the main building. Two earlier excavations on this site: the first by Oxfordshire Museum in 1969, directed by Susanna Everett (now Dr Susanna Wade-Martins) (Everett 1969) and one more recently in 2009 by Oxfordshire

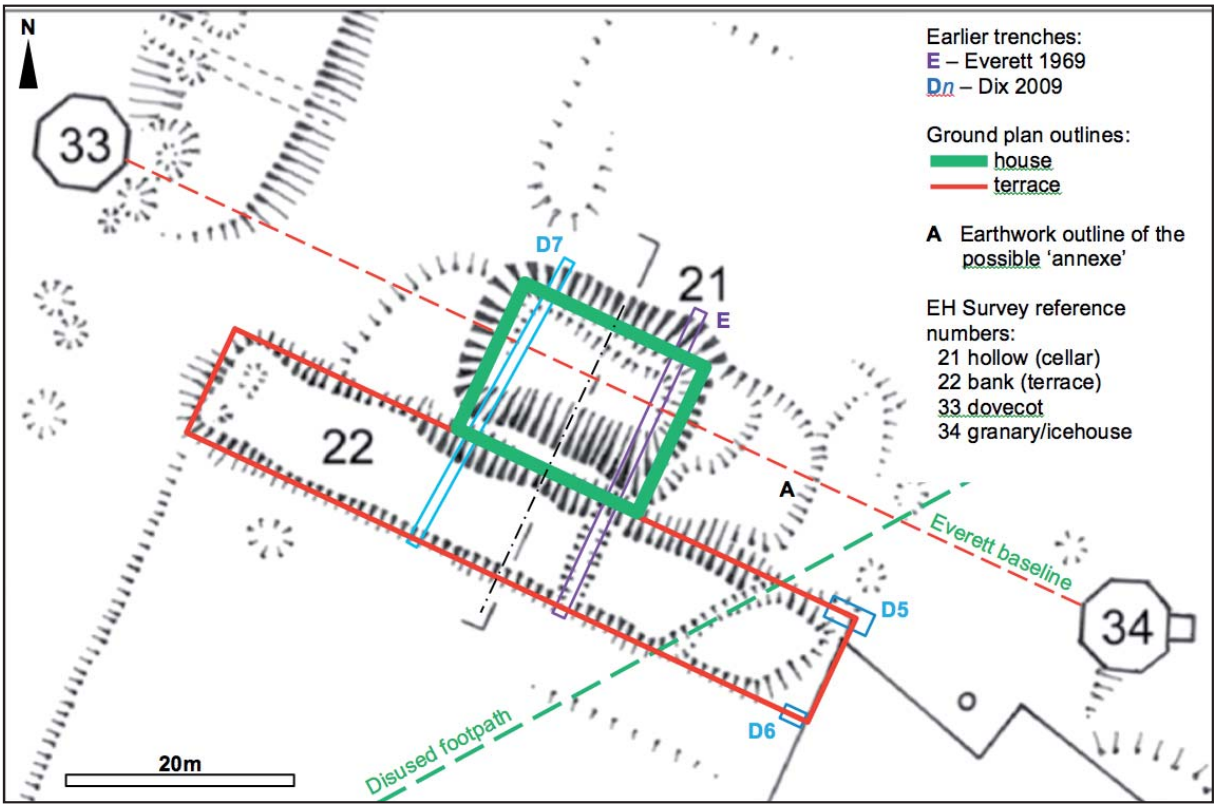

Fig. 1: Provisional ground plan of the house and terrace superimposed on the earthwork survey of the traditional 'hollow and bank' site.
Earthwork survey: Bowden & Rardin (2007, Fig 5 (part)), © Historic England

Buildings Trust, directed by Brian Dix (Dix 2012), both gave inconclusive results. However, a large-area geophysical survey by SOAG in 2013 concluded that the traditional site is still by far the most likely location (Clarke 2014a; Clarke & Latham 2015).

An alternative interpretation of the archaeology revealed by Everett and Dix was proposed that could reconcile their findings with this conclusion (Clarke 2014b). This alternative interpretation is based upon two premisses: (i) that the basement of the house was masonry vaulted and thus escaped destruction in the fire and (ii) that filling of the raised terrace was not completed until sometime after the fire, so the terrace contains evidence of that event and the subsequent clear up. If these prove to be correct, the difficulties Everett and Dix had in reaching a positive conclusion can be largely overcome.

In 2018 the Project Design for a new excavation by SOAG was approved by Oxfordshire County Council, the principal aim of which is to test the working hypothesis: that William Dormer's new house was built on the traditional site and that the archaeology of the hollow and bank is what remains of that house (Clarke & Reed 2018). The new excavation will build on the important earlier work of Everett and Dix.

The excavation is taking place over three years, 2018-20. Progress will be measured with reference to the Project Design, Section 5: Aims of the Excavation (ibid pp4-6). The detailed work required is separated into four areas under paras 5.3 – 5.6 of that document as follows:

5.3 Establishing the ground plan, etc.
5.4 Determining the construction of the basement
5.5 Re-examining the terrace fill
5.6 Additional areas of research (not having a direct bearing on the principal aim)

Work in 2018 was concentrated on 5.3 and 5.4 and this will also be the case in 2019. Work on 5.5 and 5.6 are scheduled for 2020.

This interim report primarily summarises the findings from the 2018 season and makes proposals for 2019. It is an expanded version of one completed earlier in the year for inclusion in South Midlands Archaeology No 49 (2019). However, due to an unexpected delay in finalising this issue of the SOAG Bulletin it has been possible to include some preliminary findings from the 2019 season where these extend or modify those of 2018. For clarity, these appear below in italics preceded by ***2019 Early Results***. The full interim report for 2019 will appear in 2020.

The Site Grid

SOAG uses a Total Station to digitally record spatial coordinates and these are normally geo-referenced to the British National Grid (BNG). However, for Ascott Park we elected to use a Site Grid (SG) aligned with a baseline between the facing corners of the dovecot and 'granary/icehouse', two octagonal buildings located either side of the hollow [See Fig. 1]. These buildings are 16th/17th century and Grade II listed. The length of this baseline is 92.1m and its orientation gives SG North 24.4° east of BNG North. The virtual SG was positioned so that the easternmost corner of the dovecot has coordinates E100/N330, which places the origin of the grid just outside the SW corner of the park. Chris Michel (formerly of the Ordnance Survey) resurveyed and corrected the coordinates of the corners of the dovecote and granary/icehouse and surveyed the reference points for the Total Station.

The selection of this baseline was not arbitrary. It was previously used by Everett in 1969 (hence we call it the Everett baseline) but more importantly the 2007 earthwork survey by English Heritage (now Historic England) strongly suggested that the alignment of the dovecot and granary/icehouse is square to the main axial alignment of the 17th century house and garden layout, although this was not highlighted in the body of their report (Bowden & Rardin 2007). The 2018 results confirm that this is indeed the case, with the surviving masonry of the terrace and house being closely aligned to the SG. The immediate availability of measurements aligned with the buildings is extremely helpful on site and significantly reduces analysis time.

Conversion between SG and BNG coordinate systems

The spatial coordinates at Ascott Park are referenced to the SG and recorded in an Excel database, ready for importing into QGIS software. The latter is the 'graphical information system' being adopted by SOAG, although its benefits for Ascott Park are yet to be fully demonstrated. In preparation for the 2019 season we recognised the desirability for quick and easy conversion from SG coordinates to BNG coordinates and vice versa. As both coordinate systems are two dimensional, a set of simple equations (planar trigonometric transformations) was derived so that the equivalent BNG coordinates are automatically calculated from the SG coordinates within the Excel database. The mathematical cumulative errors from doing this are very small and insignificant for archaeological purposes. Had we thought this through earlier we might have chosen

to record using BNG coordinates and carried out the conversion in the reverse direction to give the much desired SG coordinates.

Trench numbering

Brian Dix excavated a total of fourteen trenches at Ascott Park in 2009, although only four of them (Nos. 5, 6, 7 & 13) were on the house and terrace site. So to avoid any possible confusion in the future we chose to start our trench numbering at 21. Dix's Trench 13 was simply a continuation of Trench 6 westwards separated by a narrow baulk. His Trench 7 across the hollow and bank was laid out 'by eye' and is angled 5° east of SG North; Susanna Everett excavated a single trench in three stages across the hollow and bank square to her baseline, i.e. aligned to SG North. The locations of these two trenches are shown in Fig. 1.

Progress summary 2018

The work in 2018 was primarily focussed on recovering the ground plan of the terrace and house (including the possible 'annexe' on its east side) [See Fig. 1] and examining their structural relationships. We also hoped to begin to understand the constructional style of the basement. Progress in the first few days was slow as we had difficulty in relocating Susanna Everett's 1969 trench and were unable to find a key locational feature on the line of Brian Dix's 2009 Trench 7. These setbacks were eventually overcome and meanwhile the surviving masonry of well-constructed terrace retaining walls and the south wall of the house began to emerge from our new trenches.

The following is a summary of the key findings so far.

- The terrace retaining walls [See Fig. 2] are of brick on a limestone foundation (as previously found by Dix). The stone foundations appear to have survived largely undisturbed; significant brickwork remains along the east wall and northeast section of the north wall, and towards the west end of the south wall. The terrace overall width (north-south) is 10.1m (33ft or 2 poles) and the length (east-west) appears to be c.59.4m (c.195ft or just under 12 poles) giving a length/width ratio of very nearly 6:1. The retaining walls are confirmed as generally 1½ bricks thick (c.14in or 0.35m) in English bond on a c.18in (0.45m) wide limestone foundation.

2019 Early Results:

Excavation of the northwest corner of the terrace and further excavation of the south west corner showed that the west end retaining wall of the terrace has been robbed out completely. It was contiguous with the (robbed out) west garden wall and with another wall continuing northwards from the NW corner. The latter mirrors Dix's discovery in his Trench 5 at the northeast corner of the terrace (Dix 2012, PL.4) and suggests there were walled enclosures each side of the house. There is significant survival of brickwork at both ends of the northwest section of the north wall.

The survey results show that the terrace length was c.60m, very close to the predicted 198ft or 12 poles and confirming a length/width ratio of 6:1.

- The house wall [See Fig. 3] on the south side of the basement hollow (as previously found by Everett) is of rough-hewn, randomly-coursed limestone with a rubble core. It is 0.85m (2ft 9in) thick, well dressed on the inside but undressed on the outside facing the side of the hollow. A sketch of Everett's trench in the Oxfordshire HER suggests it survives towards its eastern end to an estimated height of 1.9 – 2.0m but this has not yet been confirmed. Her trench was relocated and reopened close to the wall but excavation was stopped at a depth of 1.2m below the top of the wall due to collapse of the lower courses, presumably from subsidence.

Fig. 2: The southwest terrace retaining wall on its stone foundation close to the SW corner

Fig. 3: The south house wall. The deep excavation is on the line of Everett's 1969 trench, the backfill of which can be seen in the section behind the wall

2019 Early Results:
Extension of the excavations westwards on the line of the south house wall showed that it survives to a similar level for around two thirds of its original length. The western one third has been robbed out, probably to the full depth of the wall although time constraints prevented absolute proof of that. These excavations reached a maximum depth on the line of Dix's Trench 7 at the limit of his excavation (a 'natural' sandy layer) which depth would give a surviving height for the wall of only about 1.3m. There is now reasonable doubt as to whether the wall does go to the depth recorded by Everett and this must be resolved in 2020.

- The unbroken inner face of the south house wall [See Fig. 4], the upper courses of which we exposed for just over half its length, shows no evidence of internal dividing walls. This provides prima facie evidence that the basement was vaulted with the springing being above the surviving masonry, although we cannot yet say what form the vaulting took.

2019 Early Results:
The extension of the excavation westwards over the two thirds of surviving masonry showed no evidence of dividing walls.

- Based on the evidence available so far, the house is a compact rectangle in plan, being a minimum of 18.3m (60ft) wide east-west (but possibly up to 18.9m (62ft)) and an estimated 15.0m (49ft) deep north-south. Both figures have yet to be confirmed and may increase. The west, north and east walls are almost certainly robbed out but we have not yet revealed their foundations.

Fig. 4: The unbroken inside face of the south house wall, looking east from the estimated mid-point

2019 Early Results:
The nominal width is confirmed as 18.3m (60ft) and, on the best evidence available, the nominal depth is 15.0m (49ft). These dimensions support a double pile house, 5 bays wide by 4 bays deep.

There is a distinct lack of evidence for the robbing out of the west and north walls to the depths so far excavated, this depth being that of Dix's 'natural' sandy layer. For the north wall, Dix's 'robber trench' is bounded to the north by a sand glacis with a slope of c.20°; a similar feature was found on the line of Everett's trench but without a corresponding 'robber trench'. The features are on the line of a clear linear anomaly in the resistivity geophysics but are hardly satisfactory to explain it. A further examination of the line of the north wall in 2020 seems likely.

The sand glacis outside the supposed line of the north wall requires explanation. Is this a re-deposited natural or is it a sloping cut made into a deep natural sand layer. Attempts were made to take hand borings outside the hollow but without success due to the dry conditions. We will try to obtain borings before the 2020 season but if this is not possible the natural layers will be examined by box section.

- The outside face of the south house wall is in line with the north terrace walls, not set back. The south house wall and northeast terrace wall foundations appear to be of integral construction. The northwest terrace wall foundation also shows evidence of probable integration with the south wall, although the latter has here been robbed out.

2019 Early Results:
The house wall and lower foundation courses for the NE terrace wall are of integral construction, the stonework being keyed together.

- The NE terrace retaining wall [See Fig. 5] extends right up to the end of the south house wall and is supported at this point on a deep foundation, the inner (north) face of which has been robbed out exposing a rough core. This foundation being also the retaining wall of the 'annexe' basement, the robbed-out face may possibly be from the demolition of a vault but more work is needed to be certain. If there was an annexed building it must

Fig. 5: The western end of the NE terrace retaining wall where it meets the south house wall

have been built behind the northeast terrace wall, i.e. set back from the line of the house. Equally, the 'annexe' may be an underground extension at cellar level only or even simply a sunken yard.

2019 Early Results:

This area was excavated to a greater depth which unexpectedly revealed a concrete floor 1.0m below the top of the terrace foundation. The floor wraps around the end of the house wall but extends beneath the surviving masonry of the partially robbed out terrace wall foundation. First thoughts were that the terrace wall was built on the floor (and so postdates it) but in building construction terms this is most unlikely. Suspicion surrounds the presence of clean builders' sand of a distinctive bright orange colour, quite alien to the site and very 'modern' in appearance, which appears to be beneath the concrete floor. So perhaps a more likely interpretation is that the floor is modern and was simply trowelled beneath the already robbed out foundation wall. This will be investigated further in 2020.

- A post-excavation effort finally located the elusive Dix feature, a '1.35m deep steep cut', on the line of his Trench 7, the latter being close to the western end of the house. This appears to be an original construction cut for the basement hollow. Unexpectedly, it proved to be aligned with the inner (north) face of the south wall, so any continuation of the south wall here on the same line must have been built at a higher level, which may explain why the western end of the wall has been robbed out.

2019 Early Results:

Investigation of the western end of the south wall showed that it had originally continued at full depth, not at a higher level, but has been robbed out for one third of its length. This event must have happened in modern times by quarrying straight down into the earth and rubble slope that had accumulated over time in the hollow on the north side of the bank. It appears that the stones once lifted had been cleaned up on site and the resulting debris of mortar and stone chippings were then dumped in the western end of the resulting deep trench. There they formed a compressed mass of dusty, loose material c.0.8m deep, level for about two metres then forming a natural slope eastwards to the bottom. The remainder of the trench was refilled with mixed gravelly soil and limestone fragments. It was the northern face of this mortar/stone deposit that Dix found, forming a ghost wall where the south wall had once been. The western end of it extended right up to the line of the NW terrace wall foundation, confirming the length of the south wall. Behind the deposit we found a part of the original cut made in the ground when the hollow was dug out.

Proposals for 2019

Our effort in 2019 will focus on completing the work of recovering the ground plan of the house, 'annexe' and terrace and in answering the various questions posed by the 2018 results. To achieve this, five of the 2018 trenches will be reopened and extended, and up to eight new trenches are proposed. The latter will be prioritised so that only those necessary and sufficient to achieve the aims are opened. As in 2018, some trenches will be little more than test pits to locate surviving masonry and obtain coordinates.

We will also progress the search for evidence of basement vaulting, although final confirmation of the style of such vaulting (possibly by a large open-area excavation of the basement floor) has been postponed to 2020. Re-examining the terrace fill by sectioning the earth bank is also scheduled for 2020.

Although the results of 2018 are encouraging, progress was slower than intended and consequently we missed some of our targets. This was in part due to the aforementioned difficulties with the Everett and Dix trenches but also due to the sheer scale of heavy digging required to remove significant depths of backfill and overburden. Although heavy digging is an expected part of excavation, the exceptionally hot and dry conditions of 2018 inevitably limited the time diggers could go on using heavy tools. For 2019 (as anticipated in the Project Design, para 6.3) a mechanical excavator will be employed to ensure that skilled digging resources are used more efficiently and that we are more likely to meet our targets.

Acknowledgements

Our sincere thanks go to: Oxfordshire County Council for permission to excavate on this enigmatic site in the delightful surroundings of Ascott Park and to Richard Oram of County Archaeological Services for approving the Project Design; to Oxfordshire Buildings trust for their continuing support and encouragement; to the many in the local community who have expressed their keenness to resolve the doubts raised by earlier researchers; to Jeremy Mogford the current tenant, Phil White of D'Oyleys Farm who looks after the Park for him and 'Ash' who skilfully operated his JCB to backfill the trenches so neatly; to Chris Michel who ensured our excavations and the emerging house plan are firmly 'on the map'; to the many volunteer diggers from SOAG and elsewhere who worked so incredibly hard in one of the hottest summers on record; to Keith Lowndes who doggedly manned the Total Station; to Andrew Allum for being on-call and for his behind the scenes efforts to drag the Project Director into the 21st century and make QGIS a success for SOAG; and finally to our very own Mike Vincent who looked after all things organisational in his usual quiet, unflustered and ultra-efficient way – to him we all owe so much.

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The animal bones from Bix and a possible Roman drove road

Janet Ridout Sharpe

Introduction

In 2006 David Nicholls published his preliminary account of the excavation of a Roman building at Bix (SU 7325 8530), some 4km north-west of Henley, that he directed in 1955-56 (Nicholls 2006). The finds recovered from that excavation are stored at the Oxfordshire Museum Resource Centre at Standlake. A more comprehensive multi-author report is planned, to which end the present author undertook the examination of the animal bone assemblage. This article presents the main findings and compares them with those from other contemporary sites in the area in an attempt to elucidate the nature of the building at Bix.

The animal bones

The bones, which were all collected by hand and therefore biased towards the larger and more recognisable elements, were in remarkably good condition suggesting that the site had remained relatively undisturbed until the ploughing episode that brought Romano-British material to light and prompted the excavation. Of the 268 bones, bone fragments and teeth present in the assemblage, 180 (67%) could be identified to species with certainty. In terms of weight, 5979g of a total 6250g (96%) were identified. The assemblage was dominated by domestic livestock: wild animals were represented only by red deer and a few wild birds. The domestic assemblage in turn was dominated by cattle, which accounted for nearly 70% of the livestock bones by number and nearly 90% by weight (Table 1).

Species	NISP		Weight	
	No.	%	g	%
Equids	3	1.80	271	4.81
Cattle	113	67.66	4904	87.06
Sheep	23	13.77	207	3.67
Pigs	25	14.97	240	4.26
Poultry	3	1.80	11	0.20
Total	**167**	**100**	**5633**	**100**

Table 1: Proportions of domestic livestock in the Bix bone assemblage (NISP = Number of Identified Specimens)

The equid bones could not be identified to species but were relatively small and could represent a small pony or perhaps even a donkey. A precedent for Romano-British donkeys in South Oxfordshire was set by a finding at Mount Farm, Berinsfield (Wilson and Allison 2010) but a positive identification at Bix cannot be made from the material available.

During the Roman period, cattle were typically slaughtered between the ages of 18 months and three years for meat production, or maintained to an older age for breeding and use as working animals before being culled once past their prime. The use of cattle for milk production is thought to have been of little importance in Roman Britain whereas the demand for draught cattle increased (Allen 2017). The age of cattle at slaughter can be estimated from the state of tooth eruption and wear and by the extent of epiphyseal fusion when the ends of long bones fuse onto the shafts. No neonates or very young animals were present in the assemblage, suggesting that cattle were not bred on the premises. Bearing in mind the age variation at which different cattle bones fuse and the dependence of tooth wear on diet and husbandry, the best that can be said for the Bix assemblage is that the cattle appear to represent a mixed age group with about half being immature animals and half older animals (Table 2). This contrasts with the norm for rural sites during the Roman period when adult cattle were better represented than immatures (Allen 2017); at High Wood, for example, most cattle were slaughtered after the age of 4-5 years (Ridout Sharpe 2017).

Age class	NISP	%
Juvenile (less than 1.5 years)	2	5
Immature (1.5-3.5 years)	16	40
Adult (more than 4 years)	17	42.5
Elderly (more than 8 years)	5	12.5
Total	**40**	**100**

Table 2: Age distribution of cattle at Bix based on the available data

The various body parts include the presence of waste elements such as the feet that carry little or no meat and suggest the cattle were slaughtered on site rather than being brought in from elsewhere as dressed carcasses. Relatively more waste elements than bones representing prime cuts of beef may suggest that carcasses were being processed here and the meat then exported. A remarkable feature of the cattle remains from Bix is their discrepancy in size (Fig.1). It is known that the size of cattle increased in Britain during the Roman period but the smaller tibia in Fig. 1 is comparable with the size of unimproved Iron Age cattle, whereas the larger tibia is within the range but exceeds the mean recorded for late Roman cattle from southern and eastern England (Allen 2017). It is possible that the size difference represents sexual dimorphism with small cows and large bulls, but it is also possible that different cattle breeds are represented. No obvious signs of pathology were detected in the cattle bones but a stray tooth exhibited transverse stress lines around the roots (Fig. 2) which are indicative of malnutrition or disease while the tooth was developing in the young animal.

Bones identified as sheep may include goat bones although no bones specific to goats were identified in the assemblage and goats were very much in the minority in Roman Britain (Maltby 2017). Sheep and pigs vied for a poor second place after cattle (Table 1). The age of the animals, where this could be estimated, shows the standard Roman pattern of slaughter of sheep aged 20 months to 4-5 years (Allen 2017), reflecting an economy based on wool and milk, and probably also the need for manure, rather than sheep meat. As with the cattle, the presence of waste elements suggests that sheep were slaughtered on site. The sheep bones were relatively small, corresponding to an unimproved Iron Age breed such as Soay or Shetland. Most of the pigs had been killed in their second year and none appear to have survived beyond three years, again following the known pattern of Romano-British exploitation (Allen 2017). As with the cattle and sheep, the wide range of body parts including waste elements suggests the pigs were slaughtered on site.

Other domestic animals included a small bantam-sized chicken and a large domestic goose. Two dog bones represent a large breed and were probably from hunting dogs as evidenced by the presence of red deer bones among the assemblage.

Fig. 1: Size difference in cattle expressed by distal tibiae (left and right sides respectively)

Fig. 2: Transverse stress lines around the roots of a cattle upper first molar

Discussion

The Romano-British building at Bix hardly merits the term ‘villa’. A modest construction some 26m x 13m in size, it originally boasted 3m-wide corridors along its east and south sides. The remainder included at least one small central room but whether there were further subdivisions was not ascertained. The shorter south corridor was closed off to form a room where metalworking was carried out during an earlier phase. Coin evidence suggests the building was in use from the late third until at least the late fourth century (Kendall 2006). During the later phase the south corridor room appears to have been used as a midden since most of the animal bones were found there.

The pottery and small finds from the building indicate its use as both a dwelling and a workshop. A partially tiled floor and traces of black and red painted wall plaster show that the occupants enjoyed a certain

degree of comfort and the pottery included some material rarely seen in low status rural assemblages (Booth 2006) suggesting access to imported vessels. The line of the Dorchester-on-Thames to Henley Roman road runs less than 100m to the south-west of the building (Malpas 1987) and this may have had some bearing on the economy and status of the site.

Then as now most cattle (which require more water than sheep) were raised on lush riverine pastures, whereas the higher ground was used for raising sheep. Across most of Britain in the later Roman period cattle increased in importance at the expense of sheep (Allen 2017) but this was not necessarily the case in the Chilterns and on the Downs where the development of the Romano-British textile industry ensured the continuing importance of sheep (Ridout Sharpe 2018a). Bix lies at an elevation of around 130m OD (Ordnance Datum) in the Chilterns on a south-east facing promontory between two valleys. Today there is no surface water; the water source in Roman times is unknown but this is not cattle-raising country. Nevertheless, cattle outnumbered sheep by five to one in the Bix assemblage.

Comparisons were sought with other contemporary sites at similar locations in the general area. Table 3 shows the numbers and proportions of cattle, sheep and pigs from third and fourth century contexts at Bix, High Wood, South Stoke, Maddle Farm and Castle Copse at Great Bedwyn. The High Wood site (Ridout Sharpe 2018b) is the nearest neighbour to Bix, lying about 6km to the south-south-east and similarly situated on a chalk promontory (bones recorded from pre-third century contexts have been removed from the totals in Table 3). Water is, and presumably was, more plentiful at High Wood which sits on a perched water table. The South Stoke site, consisting of a large quarry hollow and two large pits filled with bone waste, is situated at the edge of the Chilterns overlooking the Thames floodplain (Evans 2005). Maddle Farm is on the Berkshire Downs in an area cut by several dry valleys (Gaffney and Tingle 1989). Whereas Maddle Farm may be considered a modest villa, Castle Copse in contrast became wealthy in the third and fourth centuries. Here the chalk of the Marlborough Downs in north-eastern Wiltshire is capped by sands and clays of the Reading Beds and London Clay which provided good agricultural soils and a plentiful water supply above a perched water table: but even here sheep held their own with cattle (Payne 1997). The overwhelming predominance of cattle at Bix is an anomaly.

Of these five sites Bix is the only one in close proximity to a Roman road. It is possible that, in the later Roman period when there was a greater demand for beef, cattle were being driven along the road from Dorchester to Henley from where they may have proceeded to a possible downstream shipping point near Yewden villa at Hambleden (Eyers 2011) or continued via the road network to reach markets at St Albans, Staines or London. It is known that cattle were being driven over long distances during the Roman period. Using strontium isotope analysis, Minniti et al. (2014) were able to show that cattle from the rural Romano-British site at Owslebury in Hampshire, which is another downland site and close to the Roman road from Winchester to Portchester, originated from a variety of geographical areas including south-west, central and northern England, Wales and even Scotland and continental Europe.

Livestock	**Bix** 130m OD 3rd-4th C		**High Wood** 90m OD 4th C		**South Stoke** 60m OD 3rd-4th C		**Maddle Farm** 137-250m OD 3rd-4th C		**Castle Copse** 162m OD 3rd-4th C	
	NISP	**%**	**NISP**	**%**	**NISP**	**%**	**NISP**	**%**	**NISP**	**%**
Cattle	113	70.2	54	24.9	46	40.4	83		26	34.2
Sheep	23	14.3	110	50.7	55	48.2	244		27	35.5
Pigs	25	15.5	53	24.4	13	11.4			23	30.3
Total	161	100	217	100	114	100			76	100
Ratio Cattle:Sheep	**4.9:1**		**0.5:1**		**0.8:1**		**0.3:1**		**0.9:1**	

Table 3: Numbers and percentages of cattle, sheep and pigs, and the ratio of cattle to sheep at Bix compared with other sites from similar locations

The great discrepancy in size and the wide age range shown by the cattle bones from Bix might be explained by their having disparate origins. Bix may have functioned as a way-station along a Roman drove road where surplus stock and stragglers were culled: the stress lines on one of the cattle teeth shows that not all the animals were in peak condition. Despite the absence of surface water at Bix, the Dorchester to Henley road was well-placed to take advantage of water sources: cattle could have been watered at springs at Nettlebed 3.5km towards Dorchester, and at the Assendon Brook 1.5km towards Henley. The use of part of the building for metalworking during the third century also fits in with its role as a roadside establishment, with some evidence that the processing of cattle assumed greater importance during the fourth century when the mobility of cattle increased. The occupants of the Bix building may have been able to supplement their livelihood as farmers by taking advantage of the drove road, expressed by their ability to afford some of the exotic pottery that also travelled along it.

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  Karali, L. (1996) Marine invertebrates and Minoan art. In: Reese, D. S. (ed.) *Pleistocene and Holocene fauna of Crete*. Wisconsin, Prehistory Press. pp.413-419.
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Contact Details

SOAG Honorary Secretary, 21 Oakley Lane, Chinnor, Oxon OX39 4HT

Tel: 01844 352581 Email: secretary@soagarch.org.uk