The Bridge Farm Romano-British Settlement:
A perspective on the ongoing investigations of a 300 year Roman-period settlement in the Ouse Valley
The Bridge Farm site is just south of Barcombe Mills, 3.5k north of Lewes, in open farmland in a bend of the River Ouse.
How does Bridge Farm fit into the Roman period context?

The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/map.html
A villa complex with detached bathhouse on the west bank.
Is it significant that the settlement at Bridge Farm is on the east bank?
A Romano-British site in an agricultural area but linked to Wealden iron and the Channel

Estimated iron output from slag heap volume
- <100m$^3$
- >100m$^3$
- >1,000m$^3$
- >10,000m$^3$

Agriculture
Grain was exported from Britain to the Continent in the 1$^{st}$ & 2$^{nd}$ but became crucially important at times in the late 3$^{rd}$ and the 4$^{th}$ centuries

Roman roads and iron workings in the Weald (J. Hodgkinson 1999)
Roman roads from the ‘modern technique’ of ‘air photography’

In 1929 Ivan D Margary commissioned Aerofilms Ltd (founded 1919) to carry out an ‘air photography’ survey of parts of the Ashdown Forest. From the results he was able to trace the ‘unmistakable’ Roman form of a road running across the ridge between Duddleswell and Hartfield. He had discovered a Roman road, running from London through the Weald iron workings and heading towards Lewes (see yellow arrows).

He published his findings in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 73 & 74 (1932/33).
Margary’s M14 road runs through to Bridge Farm
And in 2011 we located the road by geophysics and a lot more besides!

What would Ivan Margary have given for a magnetometer?
Margary’s M14 road runs through to Bridge Farm
And in 2011 we located the road by geophysics and a lot more besides!
The 2013 community project funded by the HLF to investigate an area to the southeast of the main settlement.
2013 EXCAVATIONS investigated the different phases of the features under the varying land uses of pasture and arable. This established a late 1\textsuperscript{st} cent. settlement and late C.2\textsuperscript{nd} defences.
2014
Trench 5 *(unfunded)*
to west of main settlement to look at a possible building;
13 large postholes plus ditches and pits

A drone shot at the end of the excavation

Site plan showing the main phases suggested from the pottery assessment
Finding what was at the bottom of the water-filled post-pipes

- All 13 1m dia. holes contained the base of a c. 400mm dia. post
- But virtually no tile, brick or flint

Underside of part of an extracted post base
A Timber frame rectangular building
Pottery analysis suggests late 3rd century

Was it a thatched, wattle & daub, ‘aisled’ barn?
(Millum 2017 based on the footprint of the 13 posts & the Meonstoke reconstruction by King 1996)

or

a plank walled, shingle roofed warehouse?
(Millum 2014: after Lunt Granary by Alan Sorrell)
Carved and prepared timbers were found below a post
(Rob Wallace holding one of the ogee carved timbers)
The removed timbers have been conserved by Department of Archaeology at Durham University.

Conservators were:
Aja Cooper
Bibi Beekman
Ruth Watson

Carved timber SF578 from under PH9

Carved timber SF541 From under PH 9

SF541
PH 9 post base remains
The rarest object so far found at Bridge Farm is this mid-Roman ogival carved beam which was possibly the eaves end of a principal rafter.

It is so rare that we can only trace one other example in Briton and that came from Bridge Farm as well!

Reconstruction by Dr Damian Goodburn

Being smaller this was possibly the end of a one of the common rafters
Forging and smelting hearths from Trench 5: offer later-phase links to the iron mines to the north!

Secondary forging slag found in hearth

Local use?

Possible iron-smelting hearth/oven
2015-17 Excavation
40m sq trench 6 over the intersection of the London road and the defensive ditches at the NE corner of the site

Trench 6 with 10m site grid and indent for spoil heap
The late 2\textsuperscript{nd} C. enclosure ditches and the London road
The aim was to confirm the phasing of the enclosure and the road

Both late 2\textsuperscript{nd} century enclosure ditches were overlaid by remains of the road. The road was under a dark layer which contained late 3\textsuperscript{rd} C coins e.g. Gallienus radiate AD 265-7.

Conclusion: the road is 3\textsuperscript{rd} century

A slot dug across both enclosure ditches revealed a slumped road layer of flint, gravel and sand overlying the main ditch fill.
E-W slot across the road shows the remaining structure to be very similar to Margary’s description from his section:

‘Road buried under 12 inches of top soil. Metalling of flint, from large lumps to small chips… a very small amount of iron slag, 15 inches thick in the centre, width 21 ft…

The 3rd century road just north of Margary’s Section 14
We are not hard task masters but when we say plan the road we do mean every single flint and piece of slag!
Wiki looks on whilst Beata and Angela (CCCU u/grads) happily draught away
Aerial drone shot with main features added as CG shapes: i.e. roads, roadside ditches, other flint areas, enclosure ditches, large single pit, series of deep pits & the lined well.
But is there a 1\textsuperscript{st} century road running north from the centre of the settlement and is there a road running west, possibly to the Greensand Way? There so much more to discover on this regionally important site.
Around the site we found a variety of large deep pits

Pit F25 seen as a dark ring in 2015; got squarer and ever deeper in 2016
With the sides stepped for safety it was finally fully recorded and excavated in 2017

- British Oldbury type glass bead dating to c.100BC – 100AD
  Context (6171)
- Complete small hand-made pot
  Context (6187)
- Amphora rim with handle fragment
  Context (6171)
- Large AE coin from primary fill
  Context (6211)
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KEY TO INCLUSIONS
- pottery
- river flint
- cm
- iron slag
- charcoal
- manganese

$59 NORTH EAST FACING SECTION OF LARGE PIT F25
Trench 6, Bridge Farm Excavations 2017 (BF17)
But no pit was as deep, as muddy, as frustrating or as impressive as the well

Found in August 2016

Covered and drowned in July 2017
Finally excavated in August 2017
The well was excavated down to a depth of 3m being 3.2m AOD and then fully recorded.
A few other ‘Special Finds’ from trench 6

Red jasper intaglio
Mid 2nd century

Gilded bronze disk brooch

109mm bronze pin

Honorius siliqua
AD 395-423

Hadrian (?) denarius
early 2nd century

Terret Ring: part of a draught harness

Items not to scale

Bronze pin or brooch?

Complete small fibula brooch
The pottery including some large coarse indented beakers:
possibly Wickham Barn from nearby East Chiltington some 4k west along the Greensand Way (M140) or are they Bridge Farm ware?

Largish indented beakers in coarse grey fabric some only 4 sided and crudely formed
2018-19 Trench 7 over the centre of the settlement
2019 east corner: A deposit of over 850 coarse tesserae

Groups of roughly cut ‘tile’ tesserae lay in the trench surface; but are they floor or manufacturing debris?

+/-20mm cubes of tile: so 850 would cover 0.34 sq.m
2018 east corner: ephemeral features so carefully does it!

Not too dramatic on the trench surface but could it be an interesting feature?

Hearth surrounded by chalk! Lime burning or foundation? Process or structure?
2018 east corner: A deposit of broken fine ware

The ‘dump’ of fine white-ware and samian pottery sherds: just some of the 28,000 sherds collected in 2018-19: washed, marked and recorded, ready for specialist analysis once Trench 7 is completed (probably end 2020):

Nene Valley or Rhenish?
 Whilst the postholes contain large packing stones and some seem to form lines we don’t, as yet, have any clear buildings!

2 large postholes – a pair?

German lava stone quern used as packing
A perplexing plethora of pits

Whilst these pits have definite fills and contain Roman period artefacts, they give no real clue to the purpose for which they were dug!
The variety of finds was an aspect that seemed to interest the BBC team from ‘Digging for Britain’ who came to site in July.

Throughout 2019 we had been lent a camera and furry mike by the BBC to record the dig as it happened. Then on our last day a 2 man crew came to do some more filming.

This was followed in September by Rob being asked down to Swindon for an interview with Alice Roberts.

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Our finds unit have been kept pretty busy in 2018/19!

with 28,500 sherds of pottery, 128 shards of glass, 1665 iron objects, 3360 pieces of bone: 103 items of non-ferrous metal, 850 tesserae

188 ‘Special Finds’ including glass, bronze jewellery plus other metal objects.

All items are cleaned, recorded and packaged, ready to be sent out for specialist analysis.

Bridge Farm has produced over 70,000 sherds of pottery from 7 trenches dug so far!

Oh! and SF109 a trigger from a toy gun!
Trench 7’s pottery included:

- A small bowl
- An almost complete cream mortaria: suggesting Roman-style food preparation?
- This basic pot was found sitting upright but on careful cleaning only contained soil: not a cremation!
- Black base with stamps
- Flask rim
More Samian than in previous trenches

Most of the makers stamps are from Lezoux or Les Martres-de-Veyre in Central Gaul so probably imported in 2\textsuperscript{nd} century

- Graffiti
- Samian sherd with flanged rim
- Plain beakers & cups
- Makers mark …ACOMIVS
- Dr. 37 bowl made by Cettus AD130-160. Bacchus & Minerva
- Dr 37 form bowls with animal and human decoration
The trench is also rich in jewellery and dress ornaments
i.e. 19 fibular brooches, 10 pins & 10 rings
mainly bronze but some bone, jet/shale and gold
We seem to specialise in hobnail shoe patterns!

A finely excavated pattern of hobnails ready for the protective covering of plaster of Paris.

Nearly complete shoe pattern under fine tool excavation.

A sawn of bucket acts as mould for the plaster cover. When dry the soil plinth is sawn through!
Metal detecting and excavation at Bridge Farm up to 2019 has produced 355 Roman coins dating over five centuries.
A varied assemblage helps build the socio-economic picture

- Quern stones
- Local stone flint, chalk & sandstone
- Iron production waste
- Oak timbers, birch, hazel and alder round-wood
- Glass vessels and beads
- Tile/brick
- Continental Pottery
- British Pottery
- Lead statera weights
- Jewellery
- Red jasper
- Stylus
- Dress ornaments
Bridge Farm: A pivotal site accessible on roads by pack mules/horses, pedestrians, wagons, and ox carts; but also by the river in boats to the coast & barges to the Weald!

Pottery and other smaller loads would go by pack horse/mule but iron and grain needed wagons or barges and then boats to venture further afield.

Oxen were the main draught animals averaging 15 kilometres per day.

Duncan-Jones (1982) used the Edict of Diocletian (AD 301) to calculate that river transport was 6 to11 times cheaper than road.