

THE DUROTRIGES PROJECT 2017:
AN INTERIM STATEMENT

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Offprint from the
Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History & Archaeological Society

Volume 139

2018

Hon. Editor, Dr Paul Lashmar

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Introduction

Bournemouth University's Durotriges Project, which began in 2009 as a programme of archaeological fieldwork investigating native and Romano-British settlement across Dorset and central south-western Britain, reached the final stage of primary excavation in 2017. The project had originally been established to examine three major research strands, namely: the nature of Late Iron Age Durotrigian culture patterns; the transition from native Durotrigian occupation to a more securely 'Roman' form of settlement footprint; the possible survival of Romano-British patterns into the fifth century AD and beyond. An extensive programme of archaeological fieldwork has examined a variety of sites in the area of Winterborne Kingston, to the immediate east of Dorchester (Russell et al. 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017) whilst selective ongoing geophysical and aerial survey work has been targeting the hillforts, villas, banjo enclosures and other forms of rural settlement across Dorset (e.g. Stewart and Russell 2017).

All fieldwork undertaken as part of the Durotriges Project has been entirely funded and facilitated by the Department of Archaeology, Anthropology and Forensic Science in the Faculty of Science and Technology at Bournemouth University. Work on site was conducted throughout by University staff and students, members of the public participating on the 'Big Dig' archaeological field school, students and pupils from other universities, sixth form colleges and schools as well as local volunteers.

In 2017, the project continued and expanded into the fourth major stage of archaeological investigation at Winterborne Kingston, earlier phases of research having examined a Middle Iron Age banjo enclosure and a Later Iron Age Durotrigian cemetery (Russell et al. 2014), a Later Bronze Age settlement, a small Later Roman villa and a sub-Roman longhouse associated with a range of agricultural features and a small enclosed cemetery (Russell et al. 2015) and an extensive roundhouse settlement area of Mid-Late Iron Age date (Russell et al. 2016 and 2017). These

investigations, although successful in mapping and recording the nature and form of Later Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Later Roman and sub-Roman rural settlement, had not recorded much in the way of Later (pre-Roman) Iron Age or Early Roman activity other than burial. To this end, limited ground intervention commenced in 2017 to the immediate south-west of the area investigated during 2015-16, where a geophysical (fluxgate gradiometry) survey had revealed an area of potentially significant archaeological activity.

Within the area identified, two major feature-clusters were selected for more detailed examination (Fig. 1). In the southernmost portion of the field, a polygonal ditched enclosure was detected, apparently containing, and being surrounded by, multiple pits and areas of pyro-technological activity, suggesting a compact but densely occupied zone. At a distance of approximately 400 m upslope and to the north of this enclosure, a second cluster of features, comprising at least two linear ditch systems delineating the southern edge of a more dispersed area of pits and smaller features, was identified. In May 2017, three trenches were machine-excavated down to the top of the geological natural, one over the polygonal enclosure on clay-with-flint (Trench G) and two over the linear-ditch and pit cluster on chalk to the north (Trenches F and H).

2017 Season Results

Trench G revealed the remains of a Later Iron Age, Durotrigian farmstead, similar in form to examples previously excavated at Gussage All Saints (Wainwright 1979), Rotherley (Pitt Rivers 1888), Tollard Royal (Wainwright 1968), Tolpuddle Ball (Hearne and Birbeck 1999) and Woodcutts (Pitt Rivers 1887), which appears to have been occupied from the first century BC, until at least the mid first century AD. The occupation area was defined by a polygonal (elongated rhombus-shaped) enclosure, covering an area of 50 m x 30 m internally (Fig. 1 inset and 2) with a single, 2 m wide, south-east facing entranceway. The V-shaped enclosure ditch (Fig. 3) varied in depth between 0.4 m and 1.8 m and between 1.5 and 2 m

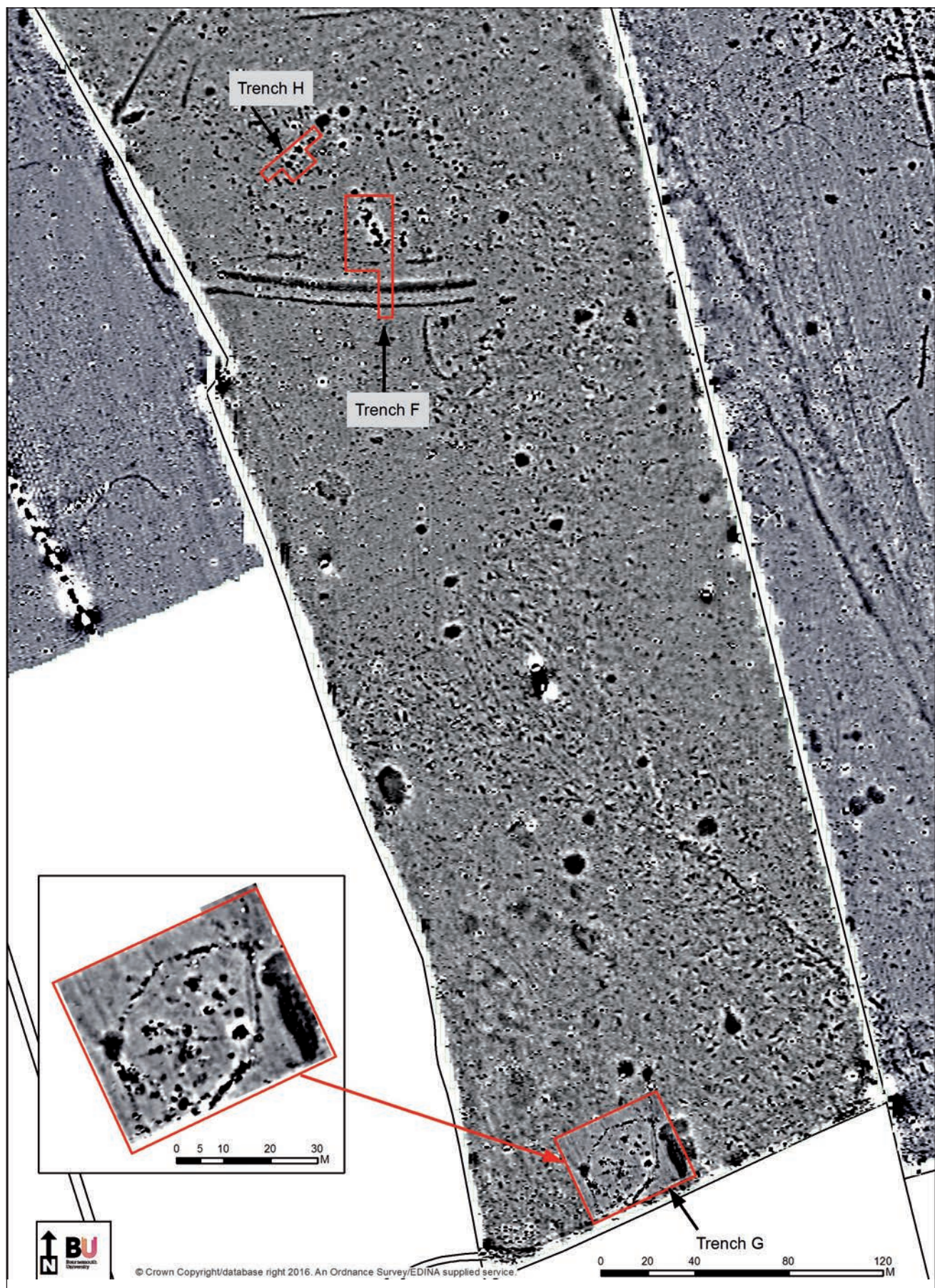


Figure 1: Winterborne Kingston - a fluxgate gradiometry plot of the 2017 area prior to excavation, with the position of trenches F, G and H marked. The dark lines indicate ditches, the smaller dark spots indicate quarries, pits and areas of burning activity (Bournemouth University).



Figure 2: An aerial photograph, looking north north-east, of Trench G, showing the ditches and pits of the Later Iron Age polygonal enclosure under investigation in July 2017 (Jo and Sue Crane).



Figure 3: A section excavated across the south-eastern segment of the Later Iron Age enclosure ditch (F1347) in Trench G, looking north-east, demonstrating a single backfilling event (Miles Russell).

in width. No trace of an earthen, and presumably internal, rampart survived. The enclosure partially overlay an earlier ditch, possibly part of a field-system or land boundary, of Later Bronze or Early Iron Age date.

Although a significant amount of domestic refuse was recovered from both within the enclosure and from the lower fills of the surrounding ditch, little definitive evidence of structural activity, such as postholes or timber slots, was observed from the interior. This apparent absence may be due to post-Roman agricultural attrition, ploughing having erased all but the most substantial of land cuts, or it may simply be that any potential buildings did not significantly penetrate the subsoil. Alternatively, it is possible, as the enclosure itself was constructed over a dense patch of clay-with-flint, that structural features remained largely indistinct at the time of the excavation in June and July of 2017. A comparatively large number of pit features were, however, detected from the interior of the enclosed space, eleven of which were fully or partially investigated, pit fill comprising, in the main, of charcoal, baked clay and other burnt material. Three infant burials, of possible Iron Age date, were also located within the upper fills of pit features. A large feature at the eastern edge of Trench G, which was only partially examined in 2017,

appears to represent a Medieval chalk quarry from the fourteenth-century jetton and fifteenth-century pottery found in its backfill.

Activity within the enclosure appears to have ended abruptly, evidence observed within recorded ditch fill (Fig. 3) suggesting that the earthworks had been deliberately levelled, ditches being backfilled with large amounts of cultural material, including a series of complete prehistoric pottery vessels (Fig. 4), at some point in the mid first century AD. This may suggest that the farmstead had been abandoned relatively suddenly, and the land subsequently cleared, in order to make way for more intensive forms of agricultural practice in the Early Roman period. Whether such a change was economically or politically driven, being akin to the later Highland clearances, or forced evictions of tenant farmers in nineteenth-century Scotland, is something which, it is hoped, further work in both the immediate area and also upon the artefactual material during the stages of post excavation, will clarify.

A single extended shroud burial, dating from the Later Roman period, was found at the north-eastern side of Trench G, cut into the fill of the Later Bronze or Early Iron Age ditch system that preceded the



Figure 4: One of a number of complete Later Iron Age jars being excavated from the western fill (F1258) of the Trench G enclosure ditch (Miles Russell).



Figure 5: A Later Roman hobnail boot inhumation (F1238) cut into the north-eastern side of the backfilled Later Bronze Age or Early Iron Age ditch cutting across Trench G (Miles Russell).

construction of the Iron Age polygonal enclosure (Fig. 5). Other than hobnails and iron boot fittings, there were no other surviving artefacts recovered from within the grave cut. Later Roman graves have been recorded across previous phases of the project, as apparently isolated deposits inserted into Bronze Age ditch features (Russell *et al.* 2017) and from within the area of the middle Iron Age banjo enclosure (Russell *et*

al. 2014) as well as from a small enclosed cemetery, to the north east of the Roman villa (Russell *et al.* 2015).

Additional trenches (F and H) dug 400 m to the north of the polygonal Iron Age enclosure exposed an area of Later-Bronze and Early Iron Age settlement dominated by a large number of cylindrical cuts (Figs. 6 and 7), 15 of which were either sampled or completely excavated. Where examined, the fill of



Figure 6: An aerial photograph, looking north, of Trench F in May 2017, immediately after machine excavation has exposed the various pits, ditches and other features. Note the very wide linear ditch (F7) cutting across the trench in the foreground (Jo and Sue Crane).



Figure 7: An aerial photograph, looking north-east, of the pit-features in Trench H immediately after machine excavation in May 2017 (Jo and Sue Crane).



Figure 8: A section through storage pit F62 in Trench F, looking south (Miles Russell).

these, which varied between 0.9 and 2.8 m in depth (Fig. 8), incorporated domestic midden waste whilst a few also contained copper and iron working debris. As has previously been noted across the project (Russell et al. 2014, 219), the term 'storage pit' is generally applied to such features although no definitive evidence as to the nature of material being stored has yet been recovered. Presumably, if intended as functional elements within a settlement, such cuts may originally have held dairy produce, in the manner of a cold store, or grain, each pit acting as a silo designed to contain the surplus produce of a single agricultural cycle. Five pits contained special deposits at their base, including a whale vertebra and other placed collections of semi-articulated animal bone (Fig. 9). Additional evidence, revealed during geophysical survey of the surrounding area, suggests



Figure 9: Mixed body parts of horse, cattle and sheep, including some partially articulated limbs, under excavation in the basal deposits of pit F124 in Trench F (Miles Russell).

the presence of further multiple clusters of prehistoric activity which, it is hoped, will be investigated in future seasons of the project.

The southern edge of the settlement was defined by a shallow, discontinuous linear ditch, which may originally have delimited the occupation area, and by an earlier, and far more substantial pair of V-shaped ditches. These two linear cuts measured 3.4m wide and 2.9 m deep (Fig. 10) and 1.2 m wide and 0.6m deep respectively and appear, on the geophysical plot, to run broadly parallel across the field for a distance of at least 140m, before the larger ditch turns and runs in a north-westerly direction (Fig. 1). Dating material from the lower levels of ditch fill comprised only small quantities of animal bone which have yet to provide radiocarbon determinations. The ditch features may originally have formed part of a Bronze Age linear boundary, akin to a cross-ridge dyke or ranch-boundary, effectively cutting across the plateau, defining, segregating and partially enclosing a specific area of pasture, agriculture and / or more intensive areas of settlement. Neither of the ditches appears to have been actively maintained into the Iron Age, although they presumably remained as prominent features in the farmscape.

Finds from the 2017 season significantly expand the timescale of activity recorded during the Durotriges Project across this south-east-facing hillside at Winterborne Kingston, from the upper Palaeolithic through to the Later Medieval period. All material has now been taken back to Bournemouth University for further analysis, and the site has been backfilled.



Figure 10: A section through the larger of the two linear ditches (F7) at the southern edge of Trench F, looking east (Miles Russell).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archaeological investigations were funded and resourced throughout by Bournemouth University. Special thanks must go to the landowner Rebecca Hill and her family for their considerable help and support throughout the project, to Jo and Sue Crane for their aerial photographs of the site before and under excavation, and Ian Darke and Clive Gibbs for their help in bringing the site to our attention from the identification of key surface concentrations of metalwork and other finds. Thank you also to those involved at all levels of site management, survey, post excavation management, trench direction and assistance especially Stacey Knowles, Jon Milward, Jonny Monteith, James Osborne and Mike Osborne (trench recording); Dean Burnard (equipment); Kelly Deacon-Smith, Rebecca Ellis, Julie Gill and Norman Stock (financial management and administrative support); Mark Maltby (faunal remains); Gabrielle Delbarre, Karina Gerdau-Radonic, Martin Smith and Nivien Speith (human remains); as well as all the supervisors, students and numerous field school participants, volunteers and visitors. The interpretation of the site has benefited from discussion with, and views of Tim Darvill, Bruce Eagles, John Gale, Martin Green, Ciorstaidh Hayward-Trevarthen, Iain Hewitt, Lillian Ladle, Claire Pinder and Clare Randall.

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