

# The story so far

After three years of excavation it is now possible to identify several distinct phases of occupation on this site, from prehistoric to post-Roman.

## Prehistoric

The earliest archaeological finds from the site are examples of humanly struck flint. These include a well-preserved Palaeolithic Acheulian pointed hand axe and a Mesolithic tranchet adze. Some flintwork and sherds of pottery dated to the **Bronze Age** (c2000BC) have been discovered in the ring ditch. The mound inside the ditch, now ploughed flat, must have been a sizeable feature and, if still largely intact in Roman times, could explain why the villa builders avoided laying foundations in this area.

## Late Iron Age/Romano-British roundhouses

(c.AD40-140) Evidence of human occupation comes from the discovery of post holes and gulleys: the remains of late Iron Age type timber roundhouses (**R1-4**) within a rectangular ditched enclosure, and **R5** on the other side of the courtyard wall.

## Masonry building 1

(mid-late 2nd C) By the mid to late second century (c.AD150-200), roundhouses **R3-4** and possibly **R1**, had gone out of use and been replaced by a simple rectangular building with narrow flint footings. Possibly built before the enclosure ditch was filled in, it seems to be placed in alignment within it. Soon after, the ditch itself was replaced by a fence leaving post holes to the north and west.

## The winged corridor villa building 2

(c.AD200-300) In the early to mid-third century, the first masonry building was replaced by a much larger winged corridor villa. This had more substantial foundations than its predecessor, but has suffered badly from stone robbing - the flint foundations were dug out in the medieval period leaving re-filled trenches ('robber trenches'), where the walls once were. The villa consisted of at least 15 rooms including corridors, and main entrance porch. Although no floor levels have survived, small white, red and grey cubes point to mosaics having once existed in rooms **1** and **8**.

## Masonry building 3

(contemporary with building 2) Excavations in 2003 concentrated upon features to the south-east of the villa where chalk foundations for a courtyard wall and masonry were revealed. Its precise function is not clear, but with at least some tessellated floors and well constructed foundations it seems to have been of a high status contemporary with the main villa.

## Late and Post-Roman activity

(**Sx** and **Med**) (c300AD on) The abandonment of the Romano-British villa complex is thought to have occurred around AD300 perhaps due to the real or perceived threat of Saxon pirates raiding the south coast. No further occupation is apparent until the late Saxon period when evidence of squatter occupation is suggested by the discovery of a large cess-pit and some post-holes near the villa, and a large depression near roundhouse (**R5**).

Over the centuries the timber and tiles must have been taken for reuse elsewhere, but there is evidence that the masonry structure survived to the Medieval period, c. 12th C. It was then that the villa walls were 'robbed' to provide flints for local buildings, including probably the nearby church of St. Mary. The trenches were subsequently filled in with re-deposited material. The remains of the ground floor level were eventually almost completely ploughed out by later farming leaving only a scatter of tile on the field surface.

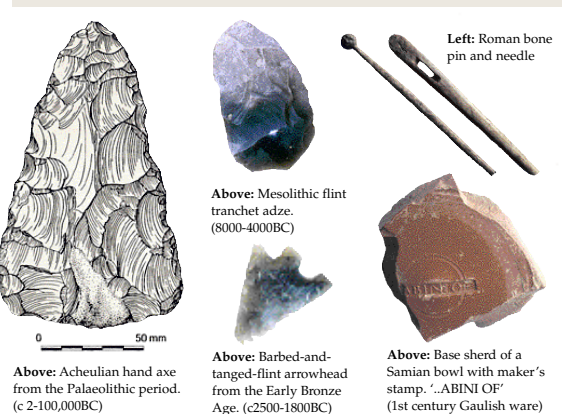
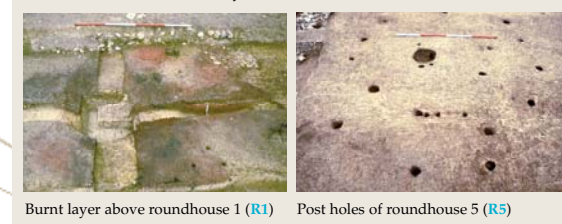
# Plan of the excavations 2001-2003

Winged Corridor Villa, building 2 (Cross-hatched area)



## The Roundhouses

Two main phases of roundhouses have been identified. **R3** and **R4** are the earliest, possibly early 1st C. Roundhouses **R1** and **R2** are Romano-British (after AD43). Archaeomagnetic dating of burnt clay above **R1** is dated to c.AD140-200. If so, **R1** is the youngest roundhouse in Sussex and would indicate that this building tradition continued for a long period after the Conquest. Roundhouse **R5** may also be post-Conquest. It could have been deliberately sited to screen it from view behind the wall. Maybe it was for servants, slaves or animals.



Sherds of pottery of north Kent type found in an oven dated to the early first century AD may indicate the earliest occupation

Enclosure ditch Dating evidence for the enclosure includes pottery finds from the ditch showing this feature was being infilled during the late first and early second centuries  
A number of large pits of uncertain function could have been cess pits serving the small room **12**, which might have been the villa's lavatory



Above: A complete coarseware jar approx 200cm high, found in a pit and probably a termination deposit



Left: Iron key (Roman). Could this be the key to the villa's front door?



Above: A pit with two dog burials was sealed by mortared flints perhaps a rite of termination (Roman period, AD200-300)



Above: Large fragment of a Samian bowl (type: Dr. 37) c. 150AD



Above: Dog burial possibly Romano-British or Saxon

Courtyard wall

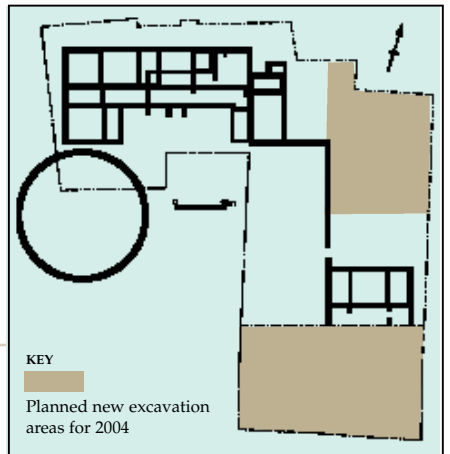
Med

Med

Adjacent to the north-west corner of building 3 was an earlier clay oven

Enclosure ditch

Masonry Building 3



KEY  
Planned new excavation areas for 2004



Above: Roman roof tile (tegula). Note the dog's paw imprint and human hob-nailed sandal imprint made before firing

Below: This Roman shoe has disintegrated leaving the hobnails in their original pattern in the ground



Masonry Building 3 is about 17m wide, has two small rooms, **1&5**, and one large room **3** at its northern end and seems to be located within a second enclosure ditch. To the south, continuing into the area to be investigated in 2004, is a large room **4** with possible side aisles **2 & 6**. Other dating material from this area includes pottery sherds which have been dated to the late third or early fourth centuries

Approximately 120 late 3rd century Roman antoniniani coins were found in room **1**. Although disturbed by ploughing and stone robbing these may be the remnants of a votive foundation deposit or a money hoard buried beneath a floor

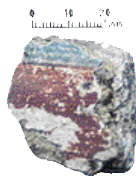
Below: The excavations have yielded a number of Roman coins including this silver denarius of emperor Trajan (c.98-117)



Left: The discovery of well preserved areas of in-situ red tesserae flooring in room **1** of masonry building 3 and the recovery of large numbers of loose tesserae suggest that this building was of a higher status than was anticipated (Roman period c. AD200-300)

Below: Finds of painted wall plaster indicate other aspects of interior decoration

Right: Rim and neck of a Roman glass flask





## Roundhouse to villa

There seems to be evidence of continuous occupation at Barcombe, possibly by descendants of a single group or family over several generations from at least the early 1st C. AD. Increased romanisation and wealth in the 1st and 2nd centuries could have allowed the inhabitants to progress from living in a roundhouse to a more substantial and opulent masonry villa. This 'single group' theory could explain why the roundhouses, ditches and masonry structures overlay and align with each other on the same plot, and why the integrity of the Bronze Age barrow was preserved.

It is possible that many of the villas in Sussex were developed in this way by what might be called a tribal\* aristocracy. With a network of non-villa farms occupied by less wealthy families linked to the villas by tribal bonds or tenancy arrangements, Barcombe villa could have been a local centre, encouraging romanised patterns of food production and trade.

\* *The Atrebatas were the local tribe of Iron Age Britons in Sussex.*

Below: How the settlement might have looked throughout these various stages of development.



Illustrations by Andy Gammon, Lewes 2004

## You too can be involved

Now that you have seen 'Time Team' and 'Meet the Ancestors' why not study archaeology in greater depth? At the Barcombe site there is a range of training courses and volunteer opportunities for students as well as members of the public who would like to get involved in archaeological excavation. The courses allow you to gain greater understanding of the techniques used to excavate a site including surveying, geophysics, hands-on digging and processing of finds. Some of the courses can also provide academic credits which can be carried forward towards certificate status should anyone wish to progress further in their studies.

### Training courses and volunteering

The Barcombe Villa Project is organised jointly by the University College London Field Archaeology Unit (UCL FAU) and the local Mid-Sussex Field Archaeological Team (MSFAT).

Contacts: Jane Brooks at FAU on 01273 845497  
www.archaeologyse.co.uk  
www.msfat.com.barcombe\_roman\_villa.html

### Other courses

In addition to organising the annual Sussex Archaeological Symposium, the Centre for Continuing Education (CCE), at the University of Sussex also runs a wide range of part-time archaeological courses throughout Sussex:

Short open courses  
Various study tours in Britain and overseas  
Certificate in Practical Archaeology  
Certificate in Archaeology  
Diploma in Archaeology  
BA in Landscape Studies (Archaeology)  
BA in Geography and Archaeology  
and MPhil and PhD degrees

For further information contact: 01273 877888  
or visit the web site: www.sussex.ac.uk/cce

### Site tours (by MSFAT)

Throughout the 2004 digging season (to 8th August) hourly tours will take place at weekends from 10am to 4pm with the exception of 1pm. Just turn up and contact the site supervisor.

**This leaflet is sponsored by:** Scantech Litho Printers Heathfield and CCE at the University of Sussex, with donations from: Mr and Mrs Carlton, Dr B. O. Shorthouse and Mr K. Fuller.

The producers acknowledge the support of David Rudling of CCE, Chris Butler of MSFAT and the Volunteers In Action Programme at the University of Sussex.

This leaflet is produced as a community action project through the Volunteers in Action scheme. It was undertaken by students on the Certificate of Practical Archaeology at CCE, Andy Gammon, Clive Shorthouse and Richard Howell. It is designed to bring greater awareness and understanding to local people of the archaeological research that is being carried out at Barcombe.

US  
University of Sussex

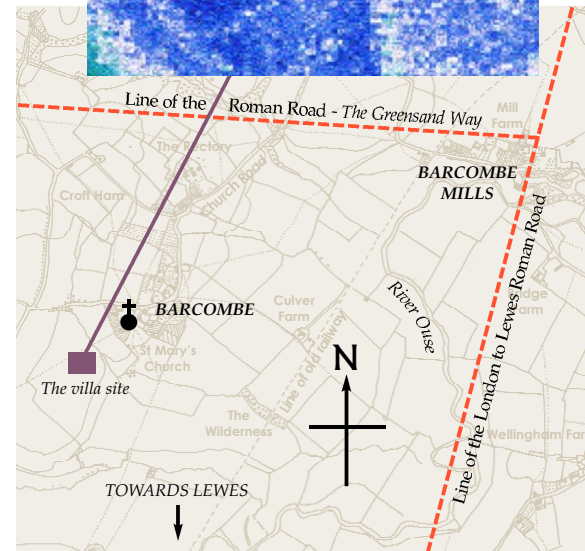
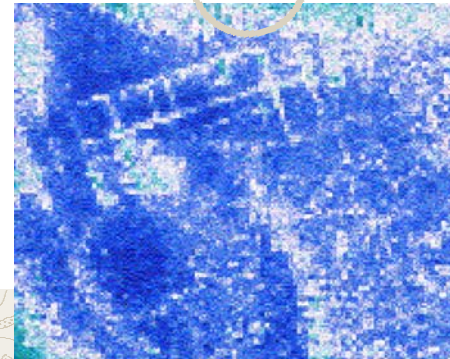
SUSSEX PAST

Scantech  
LITHOGRAPHIC PRINTERS

Printed by Scantech Litho, Heathfield, 2004

# Barcombe Roman Villa

The unmistakable shape of a Roman villa detected beneath the ground by a geophysical survey plot



In 2001 a major new archaeological research, rescue and training project started in a field at Barcombe, East Sussex, made necessary by the gradual destruction of the site by annual ploughing. The fieldwork which has taken place since 2001 has revealed important evidence concerning the romanization of a late Iron Age/early Romano-British farmstead. These investigations at Barcombe add to earlier research at Beddingham and Bignor into Roman villa development in Sussex.

Roman finds had been noted at Barcombe since the early 1990s. It was not until 1999, when an evaluation survey was carried out, that it was possible to confirm the presence of a Roman villa and associated additional buildings on the site. A geophysical soil resistivity survey done at this time was able to 'see' beneath the ground and detect the 'robbed out' foundation trenches. The survey plot (left) clearly shows the shape of a typical Romano-British winged corridor villa approximately 45 metres long and 20 metres wide. More masonry structures to the south-east are clearly visible, and the large circular feature to the south-west has been shown to be the remains of a 20m diameter ring ditch which once surrounded a Bronze Age burial mound.

The villa is orientated slightly north-east to south-west and would have allowed the inhabitants a view across the Ouse valley towards the South Downs. Its location close to a tidal River Ouse and a junction between two Roman roads, the Greensand Way and the London to Lewes road, made it well-placed for trade and communications with market centres such as Chichester (Noviomagus), London (Londinium) and the minor urban settlement at Hassocks.

A view looking south-east shows the excavation in progress on the Barcombe villa site.

