CAP CULVER ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT

Three articles about fieldwork results from Culver Farm 2007-13 that appeared in Sussex Past & Present.

1. Culver: an intriguing first 7 years

From 2005 to 2011 the Culver Archaeological Project (CAP), under director Rob Wallace, has been investigating the historical environment of the Upper Ouse Valley in the parishes of Barcombe and Ringmer. In 2005 Rob had discovered a substantial Roman road running to the east of the Barcombe villa complex, heading north east through the fields of Culver Farm, where CAP's subsequent fieldwork has been undertaken (Fig 1).

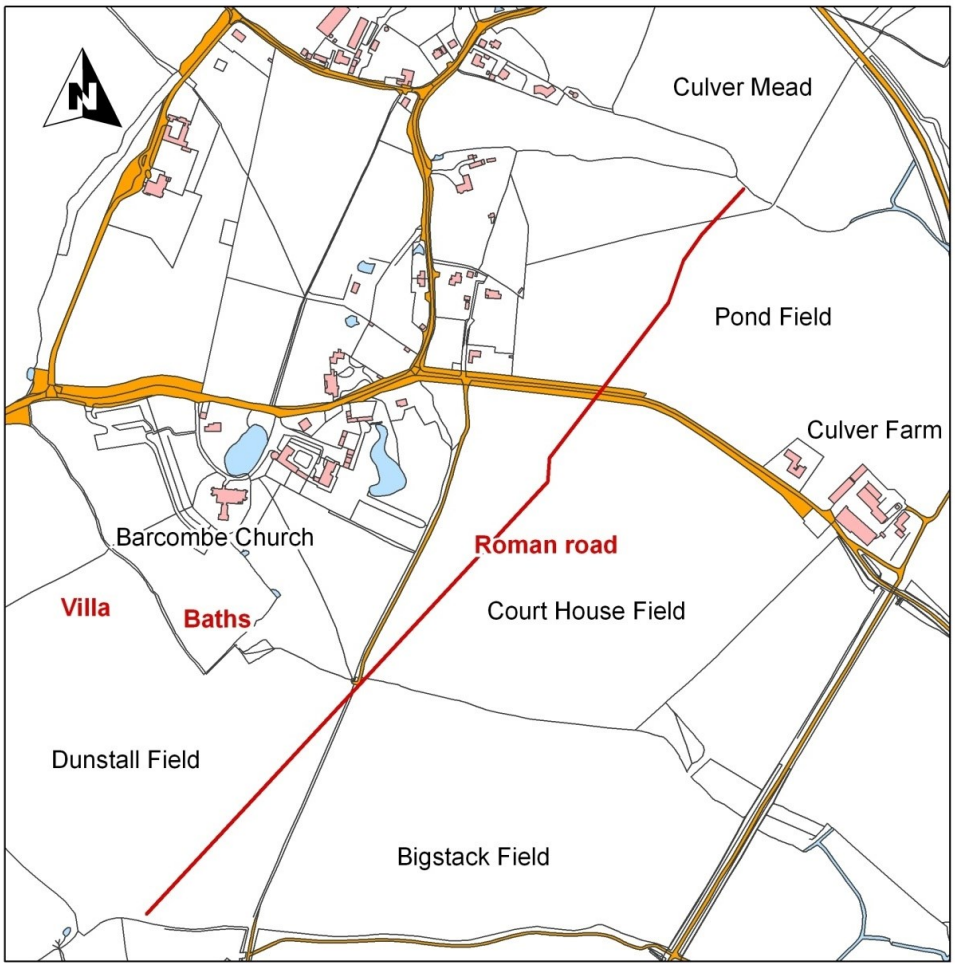

Fig. 1 Map of Culver Farm showing the main features and field locations

In 2005-6 a series of evaluation trenches were dug in Pond Field and its northern neighbour Culver Mead which established the existence and bearing of the road as well as showing roadside activity. In 2007 a larger open area excavation in Pond Field exposed 20m of the road together with an area each side which showed clearly the substantial nature of the road and the intensity of the roadside industrial activity. This area was targeted again in 2010.

In 2009 the main emphasis moved to the south west, to Court House Field, where 50m of closely packed flint road foundations some 400mm deep were uncovered (Fig 2). The area chosen was over a discernible kink in the road noticed from the previous year's geophysics results. Whilst a fine section of road was exposed and recorded the reason for the changes of direction was not altogether clear, although a series of crossing palæo-channels might have made this area unstable.

Fig 2. The section of Roman road exposed in 2009

Seven years digging had produced over 6000 sherds of pottery that needed specialist analysis and reporting. A substantial Margary Grant from the Sussex Archaeological Society (SAS), plus a smaller sum from the University of Sussex Archaeology Society (USAS), allowed the project to employ Malcolm Lyne to undertake the analysis. Malcolm was the ideal choice as an acknowledged expert on Roman pottery in the area he could coordinate the Culver assemblage with that of his own classification of pottery fabrics for the Barcombe villa.

He concluded that nearly all the Roman pottery from Culver was of 3rd to early 4th century date. Over 93 % of the sherds came from the excavations in Pond Field with only 382 from Culver Mead and just 19 from the excavation in Court House Field, which unlike the fields to the north showed no road side settlement. 71 different fabrics were present, 29 coarse, 34 fine, 5 mortaria and 3 of amphora.

The trenches in Culver Mead in 2006 had revealed 3 water-logged timbers that were radiocarbon dated to *c.* cal AD240-430 and Malcolm's report similarly confirms the pottery assemblage to AD250-400. He also highlights a fragment of a lamp or chimney similar to an example from the triangular temple at Verulamium (Lyne 2012).

The bulk of the Pond Field assemblages were of handmade local East Sussex Wares with the largest derivable amount coming from the nearby Wickham Barn kilns. Other British coarsewares were represented including Alice Holt greyware. The finewares included fragments of beakers in Colchester colour-coat, Oxford red colour-coat, Lower Nene Valley and New Forest. The Samian included both Central and Eastern Gaulish products (Lyne 2012).

Fig 3. Moselkeramik carafe rim from Arlon

One of the most interesting sherds was part of the rim of a late 3rd century carafe in a metallic black colour-coat ware from the Arlon kilns in Lorraine Belge (Fig 3); a very unusual product to find anywhere in Britain (Lyne 2012).

Whilst the road undoubtedly had a far longer period of use, as indicated by the Flavius Honorius silver Siliqua of AD395-402 (Fig 4) found in the corner of Court House Field, the main period of roadside activity in Pond Field would seem to fall into the later 3rd to early 4th century. This presumes that the Samian and some other finer wares were already old, possibly handed-down, items and date from prior to the period of lower class working activity at the site. Two exceptions would seem to be a small pit by the north-west baulk of the excavation which contained an assemblage of 34 sherds dated to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries and a clay lined pit, also located to the west of the road, which contained pottery dating to mid or even later 4th century. A subsequent magnetometer survey has revealed interesting anomalies to the west of these features which deserve further investigation.

Fig 4. Scan of the Flavius Honorius silver Siliqua (D. Millum)

An important aspect of the investigations undertaken by CAP has been the use of geophysical surveys both using electrical resistance and magnetic variation techniques to produce images of the subterranean features. These have been particularly useful in tracing the route of the Roman road and suggesting areas of roadside activity. Major surveys in 2008 and 2011 have highlighted some interesting areas for future excavation as well as suggesting that not all Roman roads are perfectly straight (Fig 5).

A great deal of interpretation is still needed to integrate this new information into the excavation reports which are currently under production but the financial assistance of SAS & USAS has allowed an early completion of these documents to become a real possibility.

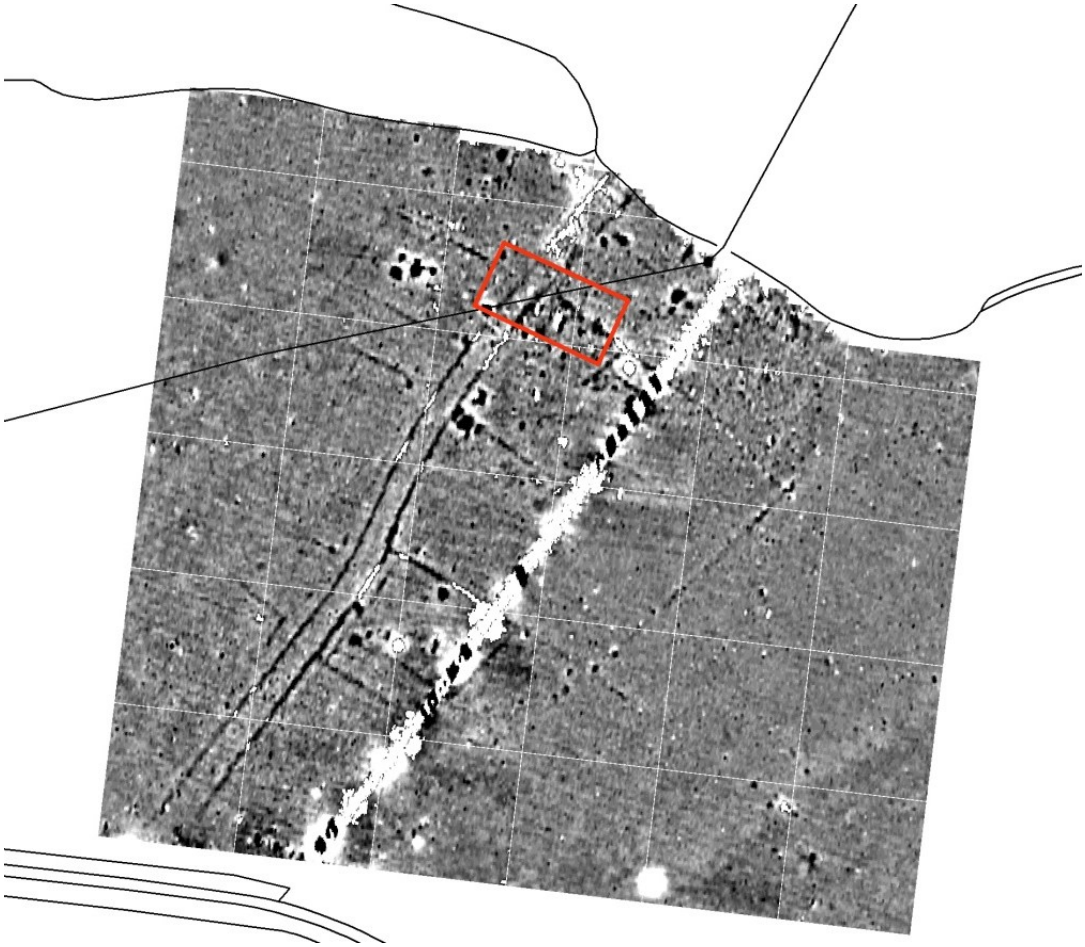

Fig 5. Magnetometer survey results from Pond Field (D. Staveley, 2011)

David Millum, Deputy Director of the Culver Archaeological Project

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2. Interesting Romano-British lamp and footwear unearthed at Culver Farm, Barcombe during 2010

***Figure 1**: The 'ladle-like' iron object found in Pond Field, Culver Farm, Barcombe (photograph taken after handle sections had been disturbed).*

***Figure 2:** The iron oil-lamp found in Brighton in 1962 (Brighton Museum).*

For over five years the Culver Archaeological Project, under its director Rob Wallace, has been investigating the wider archaeological landscape surrounding the Roman villa estate at Barcombe. After concentrating on exposing a 40m section of previously unknown Roman road in Courthouse Field during 2009, attention shifted in 2010 to a 40 x 20m open area excavation in Pond Field. This concentrated on an area of industrial pits and ditches to the south side of the road where a 1m slot approximately 0.5m below current ground level uncovered a corroded iron artefact with a 100mm diameter bowl at one end of a dog-legged bar. The item was fractured into three pieces and had a large headed rivet/bolt adjacent (Figure 1).

At first it was thought to be some form of ladle used for light industrial purposes such as heating softer metals such as lead. However a lecture by David Rudling on Romano-British burials at the University of Sussex Archaeological Society presented an alternative solution. In showing artefacts discovered in burial sites David used a picture of the oil-lamp and hanger (Figure 2) found in a grave group close to the Roman Villa site at Springfield Road, Brighton in 1962 (Dudley 1981 p.87). A subsequent meeting between Rob Wallace and David Rudling, at which the corroded Culver object was inspected more closely, confirmed the probability of the lamp diagnosis.

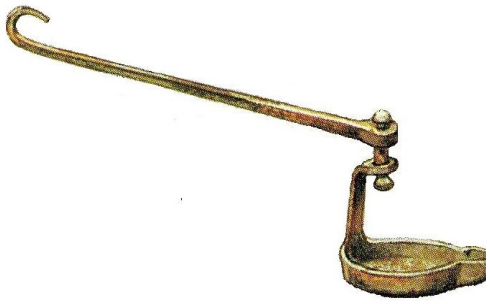

Figure 3: *An illustration of the Corbridge 'cruise' lamp by Peter Connolly showing a strangely inflexible joint between the lamp and its hanger.*

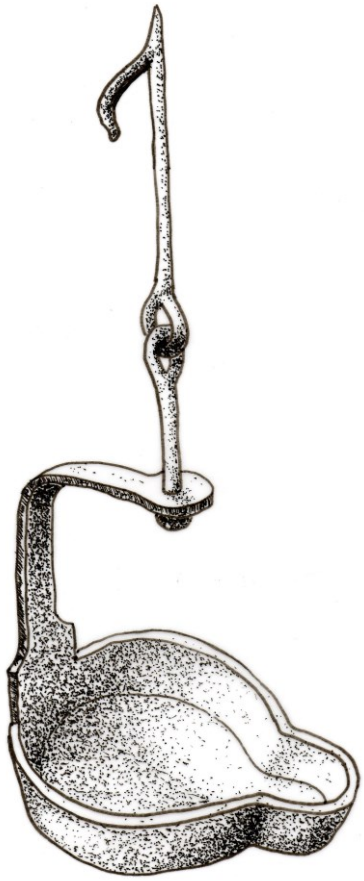

Figure 4: *Roman hanging oil lamp as it was most probably configured and used (Millum after Allen, 1888 p.89)*

Roman period iron lamps and hangers appear not to be as common in Britain's archaeological record as one might expect although this may be a reflection on the ease of reusing everyday iron objects as a raw material rather than denoting an original scarcity. The British Museum holds iron lamps from Wittenham Hill and Bayford Orchard with a lamp hanger from Water Newton, all of which have clear illustrations obtainable via their website (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/)

Similar iron hangers have been noted on lamps from Newstead, London, Gadebridge Park, the Bartlow Hills, Caistor-by-Norwich, Guilden Morden, Girton, Baldock, and Zugmantel (Manning, 1985). Another example forms part of the 'Corbridge hoard' excavated in 1964 from an early 2nd century fort underlying the central administrative buildings of the Roman town. The 'hoard' consists of a leather-covered wood chest containing a variety of armour, tools and other everyday objects including a 'cruise lamp' (Figure 3). The illustration, shown above, of this lamp shows a curiously inflexible connection between the lamp and its hanger which may not reflect the original configuration. These simple open reservoir lamps function best when designed to hang freely from a point over the centre of gravity of the bowl (Allen, 1888, p.87) (Figure 4).

These simple, locally produced lamps with a soft wick laid into the oil and protruding at the front had a long and widespread history all over Europe and the Mediterranean and were still utilised in the Shetlands in a developed double-shell variety, known locally as a kollie, a word of Norse origin, up to the middle of the 19th century (Goudie 1888).

The Culver lamp is currently due to be x-rayed and conserved which will hopefully show the individual parts more clearly and allows a definite interpretation to be reached.

Whilst the Culver Archaeological Project has become well known for exposing the superb section of Roman road to the east of the Barcombe bath-house it is the smaller, everyday, finds that are now causing interest.

The 2010 excavation also produced the remains of a Romano boot (Figure 4) from the base of a ditch filled with dark charcoal-rich soil containing a quantity of various sherds of Romano pottery both course and fine. The impression of the sole was left by the pattern of over 100 hob nails and as the sole appears to have been totally covered the whole boot must have had in excess of 120 nails. The nail pattern was removed intact for further study using a protective mould of plaster of Paris. Several other lesser groups of nails have also been observed on the site.

For further details of this project, including how to get involved, see the project's website: www.culverproject.co.uk.

David H Millum, MA, site supervisor 2007-10

Figure 4: *Hob-nail pattern forming the greater part of a Romano boot sole dug from a finds-rich ditch at Pond Filed, Culver Farm, Barcombe (2010)*

References

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3. *Tracing the Culver Roman road: geophysics at Cowlease Farm, Barcombe, East Sussex in 2013*

Culver Archaeological Project (CAP) organised a series of geophysical surveys in the late summer of 2013 using the magnetometer (MAG) kindly lent to the project by AOC Archaeology (Fig 1). Various volunteers from the summer kindly turned out in all weather conditions to help lay out the grids and lines and some were even able to take control of the MAG, although this did mean getting metal free which was often harder than it seemed.

Fig 1. Stuart with MAG in torrential rain

Fig 2. The road in Court House Field

At Cowlease, the farm to the south of Culver, CAP wanted to continue to trace the 'Culver' Roman road towards Offham. The road when excavated in Court House Field in 2009 proved to be far more substantial than had been expected with a large Downland flint layer over 400mm thick suggesting that this was far more than just an estate road to the Barcombe villa (Fig 2). The work this autumn has established the slightly curving course of the road in a field called Northend, two fields south of the villa. As with the roads at Bridge Farm the MAG results only show the ditches (Fig 3). Whilst a resistivity survey (RES) might show the road surface the aim was to cover as much of the road route as possible and MAG is a lot quicker than RES. The results also show some other parallel ditches further away from the road which have been interpreted as Roman period field boundaries.

This work has allowed the route of the road to be plotted from Pond Field to Northend (red line on figure 4) and project its course further south (dotted red line) (Fig 4), a route that is now on the agenda for further geophysics subject to landowner's permission. The survey was curtailed by a field fire which destroyed the grid by burning the marker canes before the whole field could be completed but the main aim of tracing the road across the field had been achieved.

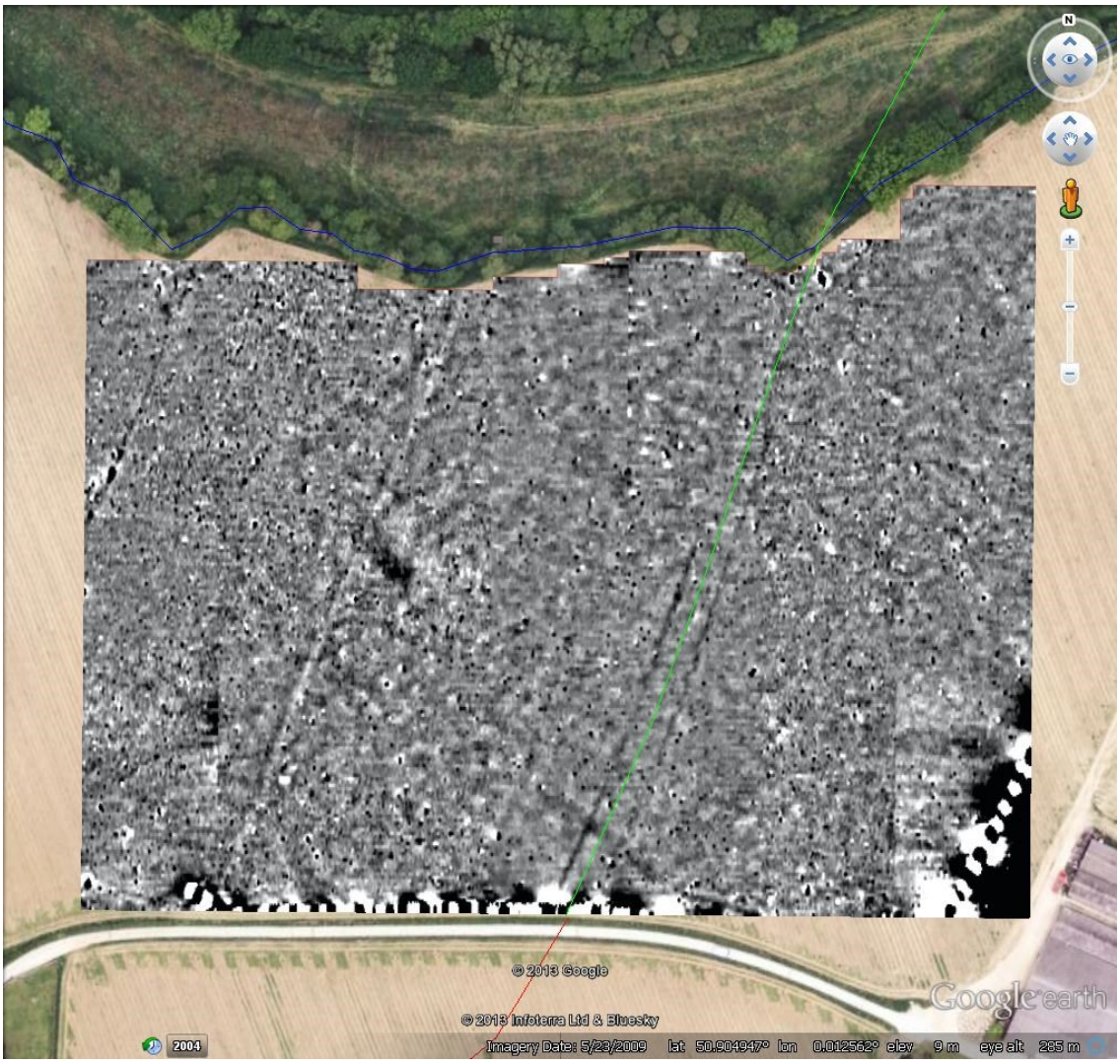

Fig 3. The geophys results from Northend, Cowlease (D. Staveley 2013)

Fig 4. Route of Stroude Street from current evidence with dotted projection to south