Roadside Settlement, Small Town, or Something Else? Exploring the Nature of the Settlement at Bridge Farm, Sussex in the Roman Period



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Front Cover:

Figure 1. A zoomorphic enamel brooch found at Bridge Farm.

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1. Introduction

Currently, the Romano-British settlement at Bridge Farm, East Sussex is classified as a 'roadside settlement' (Allen *et al* 2016). However, assessment of the evidence recovered from 8 years of excavation and geophysical survey indicate that the site does not clearly conform with the usual characteristics of this category.

Therefore, this dissertation will examine the characteristics of the settlements internal morphology and economic functions to undertake a comparative analysis, comparing its features to those of previously defined rural Roman sites within Britain with the aim of clarifying the settlements type, but also to suggest an interpretation for its function.



Figure 2. Location of the Bridge Farm Site within East Sussex. Map data ©d-maps.com

1.1 Bridge Farm Site

The site is located within intensively farmed fields which make up the working farm, 'Bridge Farm' which gives its name to the settlement found there. This agricultural land is located within a bend in the river Ouse which lies c.450m to the south of Barcombe Mills, c.1.3km east of Barcombe and c.4.5km north of Lewes in East Sussex. The site is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 543200 114400 (Figure 2) (Wallace 2014, 1; Millum 2022, 7). The settlement was discovered by chance in 2011 after the Culver Archaeological Project (CAP), alongside David Staveley, undertook magnetometry survey of Ivan Margary's London to 'Lewes' Road, henceforth M14, revealing a considerable quantity of archaeology beneath the ground (Millum 2013, 53; Rudling 2016, 75) (Figure 3)

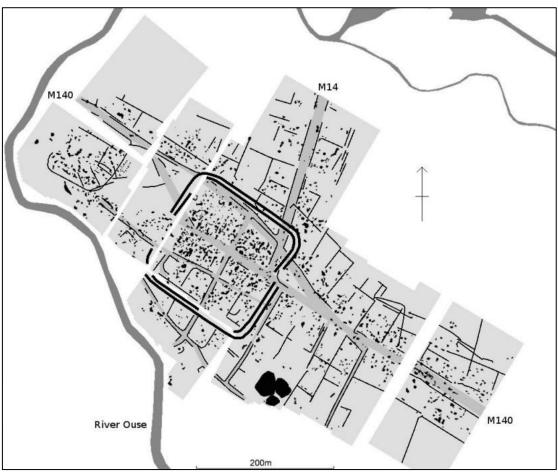


Figure 3. Illustration of the geophysical results from the 2011 magnetometry survey completed by CAP and produced by David Staveley (From Rudling 2016, figure 8.2).

The site has been subject to annual excavations between 2013 and 2022 (excluding 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic) which has provided evidence to support the original

interpretations that what was uncovered below the ground is a previously unidentified Romano-British settlement (Millum 2022, 6).

Bridge Farm is a part of a wider Romano-British landscape (figure 4). In 1999 a large multiperiod Romano villa complex was discovered in 'Dunstalls Field' on Culver Farm on the western side of the river (see figure 4) (Rudling and Butler 2002; Rudling and Butler 2004; Gammon *et* al 2008; Ruddling *et al* 2010). Later, in 2008, excavations began at a Roman bathhouse in 'Church Field' (see figure 4) which were believed to have been a detached part of the Roman villa complex (Millum *et al* 2013; Rudling 2016).

Not only does the previously mentioned M14 road (Margary 1933) pass through and near the site, but there are a further three roads in close proximity. There is one which heads east, directly from the settlement through Arlington and terminating at Pevensey (*Anderida*) (Wallace 2022, 238). Another, the 'Greensand Way' (M140) which heads west either from the settlement or just across the river to the north, terminating at Hardham (Margary 1967, 68-70; Millum 2008). Finally, a road which runs on the west bank of the Ouse 'Stroude Street' which runs on a north-west/south-east axis from the Greensand Way down to Lewes (Millum 2016; Wallace 2022, 229-236; Millum and Wallace 2022).

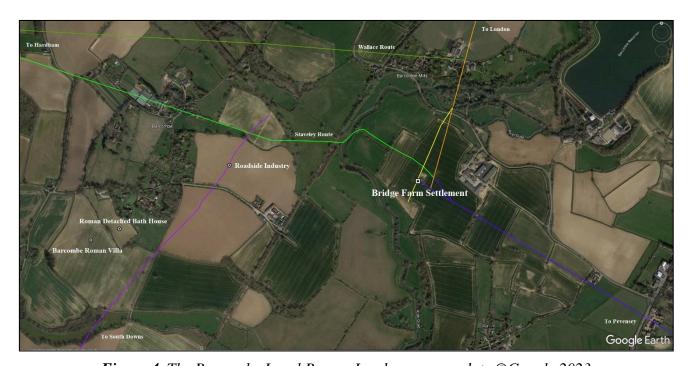


Figure 4. The Barcombe Local Roman Landscape, map data ©Google 2023

Yellow/Orange: The original and later M14 'London Road', Blue: The Route of the M142 'Pevensey Road', Greens:

The two proposed routes for the M140 'Greensand Way', Purple: The recently uncovered 'Stroude Street', where it

goes is currently unknown.

2. Literature Review

Following the marking of modern Roman British studies by Haverfield's (1912) seminal work The Romanization of Roman Britain, the earliest 20th century studies on the countryside of Roman Britain and its rural settlements were focused on the scope and character of Roman influence highlighted by the creation of a clear separation between the north and west 'uplands' occupied by the military and the south and east 'lowlands' occupied by civilians based on levels of 'Romanization' (Haverfield 1912, 24). This emphasis on 'Romanization' led to a hyper fixation on both the elite and the lowlands of Roman Britain with a central focus on villas which was a continuation of the 'villa-hysteria' of the 19th century, seeing roughly 500 such structures identified by the mid 1930's (Haverfield 1912, 46; Collingwood and Myres 1936, 209 - 217; Rivet 1958, 103 - 105). Despite understanding that the majority of the Romano-British population would have lived within rural settlements and not villas (Collingwood and Myres 1936, 221), there was a noticeable lack of enthusiasm for undertaking research into 'native' settlements due to their apparent lack of clear Roman influence with the rounded structures commonly found within Romano-British sites being seen as signs of barbarism and savagery of those who were "unable to keep straight" unlike the tidy right angles and squares of "the simplest civilisations" such as the Romans (Haverfield 1913, 5).

The isolated study of the Roman villa dominated rural studies throughout the 1960's and into the late 1970's (see Rivet 1969; Todd 1978 for examples). It was in 1965, however, that a landmark conference on 'Rural Settlement in Roman Britain' (Thomas 1966) was held which strayed from the traditional approach of focusing on the villa. The conference hosted many papers all highlighting aspects of rural Roman Britain which had not been addressed before, emphasising the diversity of the settlement of the countryside. This resulted in more work being undertaken into 'native settlements' such as that of Collingwood and Richmond (1969), Frere (1987) and Burnham and Wacher (1990) which through analysing certain characteristics of different Roman rural settlements such as internal morphology, location, and function were able to conceptualise different typologies such as the 'roadside settlement' and 'small town'. This new interest into the Romano-British countryside only grew with the increase in rescue archaeology and the intensification of survey throughout the 1970's and 80's as crucial region-wide studies took place into landscapes such as the Fenlands (Hall and

Coles 1994, 105-121), the Salisbury Plain (McOmish *et al* 2002) and the Thames Valley (Booth *et al* 2007).

Furthermore, the crucial implementation of PPG 16 in 1990 and the development of commercial archaeology saw the number of recorded Roman rural sites dramatically surge leading to a total of 27,902 rural settlement recorded nation-wide (Taylor 2007, 21). However, this flood of new archaeological evidence and new recorded sites in quick succession saw the study became convoluted with different typologies and definitions with no real attempt at producing an atlas of sites until the work of Jeremy Taylor (2007) which drew upon all of the archaeological evidence up until 2003 such as crop/soil marks, earthworks, artefact scatters and excavation to characterise, map and assess rural Roman Britain. The most recent work is *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* (Smith *et al* 2016) which synthesized all Roman rural sites which have been confirmed via excavation, developing the characterisations of Taylor (2007, 18-22) taking in account size, settlement morphology, material culture, local context and architectural differences (Smith *et al* 2016, 18). This information was then transformed into an online resource and map for access by the public (Allen *et al* 2016).

Sussex has been subject to much study within the Roman period due to its important role in the province (Rudling 2003; Russel 2006) including much of the Wealden iron industry (Cleer and Crossley 1995; Hodgkinson 2008), major Roman roads (Margary 1967, 34-81; Vincent 2000), magnificent villas such as Fishbourne and Bignor (Cunliffe 1998; Rudling and Russell 2015) and important towns and forts such as Chichester (Noviomagus Reginorum) and Pevensey (Anderitum) (Down 1988; Fulford and Rippon 2011). The Rural Settlement at Bridge Farm has been subject to 8 years of excavation as of March 2023. Several excavation reports have been written but not published by site director Rob Wallace (2014) and ex-deputy site director David Millum (2021a; 2021b; 2022). The settlement has also been featured in other, published works regarding the wider study of Romano-British rural settlement appearing in Rudling's synthesis of Roman rural activity within the Ouse River Valley (Rudling 2016) as well as having appeared in many important conferences such as the Roadside Settlements in Roman Britain and Beyond and the Roman Roads Research Association conferences in 2016 which brought about the understanding that the site was not a typical rural settlement containing a multitude of puzzling aspects regarding its characterisation (Millum 2022, 82-83).

3. Context and Background

As previously mentioned, the settlement at Bridge Farm was occupied for the majority, if not all, of the Roman period in Britain. Excavations across 8 years and 7 trenches (see figure 5) have uncovered distinct settlement patterns across the site which have been analysed and developed into five phases which will be used throughout this study.

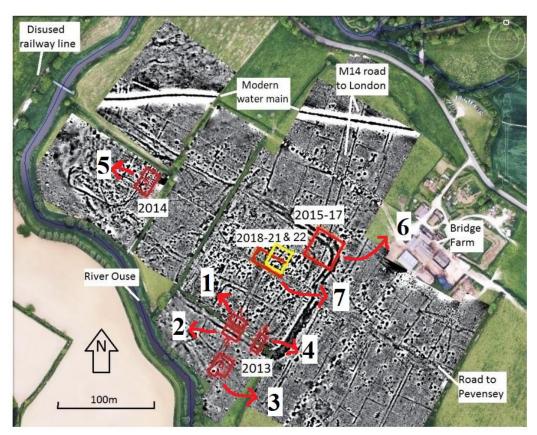


Figure 5. A map showing the location of the 7 trenches excavated since 2013 (adapted from Wallace and Millum 2023)

Phase 1 (43 – 70 CE) represents the original foundation of the settlement and the very earliest of Roman activity on the site.

Phase 2 (70 - 200 CE) represents the first stage of what is a very organised growth seen within the settlement. It appears it is this time when the site developed the majority of its formal infrastructure before it became enclosed.

Phase 3 (200 – 300 CE) represents the brief time in which Bridge Farm become a defended settlement, surrounded by a bivallate enclosure with indications of posts.

Phase 4 (300 - 410 CE) represents a distinct period of change within the settlement. The enclosure ditches are backfilled, and expansion outwards begins in a very disorganised manner before we see an eventual decline of the central areas of the site.

Phase 5 (5th Century / Post Roman) represents the small amount of activity that can be traced after large amounts of the site are abandoned and the existing populations slowly declines.

3.1. Pre-Roman (Pre 43 CE)

Excavations at Bridge Farm have not provided enough evidence to suggest prehistoric settlement on the site at any time. Artefacts from the Mesolithic through to the Iron Age including worked flints, bronze arrowheads and coins have been recovered however none *in situ* and of a level of serious note (Wallace 2014, 4; Millum 2021a, 38; Millum 2021b, 23).



Figure 6. A depiction of the Roman activity of 'Phase 1' in red overlaying the geophysics results of the site. Map data ©Google 2023

A: Possible temporary construction camps, **B**: A possible port, **C**: The grid road system of the first Roman inhabitation of the site, **D**: the presumed route of the original London Road (M14), **E1/2**: Two of the possible routes for the Pevensey Road (M142), **F1/2**: Two of the possible routes for the Greensand Way (M140).

3.2. Phase 1 (43 – 70 CE)

The earliest Roman activity on the site may be represented by a singular feature, marked **A** on figure 6 which has been interpreted as a temporary Roman road construction camp due to

its morphology and location. This suggested enclosures are univallate with missing sides which are common characteristics of Roman road construction camps (Staveley 2021, 69-70). Moreso, the roads around and within Bridge Farm are made primarily from flints (Millum 2008, 6; Millum 2016, 14; Millum 2021, 28; Millum 2022, 107). Although the South Downs has an abundance of its own flint deposits (Jones and Robins 1999) it would have been significantly more efficient for large quantities of flint to be brought to the site itself which would explain construction camp **A**'s location at the bend and tidal reach of the river Ouse and proximity to a possible port marked **B** (Staveley 2021, 67-70; Wallace 2022, 237). Analysis of pottery recovered from excavations in 2014 of camp **A**'s eastern most ditch dated the enclosure to later 1st to early 2nd century (Millum 2021a, 16) suggesting this enclosure may have been continuously occupied during the early phases.

The partial grid street system found in the SW of the site, marked \mathbb{C} , is the earliest evidence available for settlement on the site (Millum 2022 32-33). Four trenches were excavated in 2013 (see figure 5) which provided verification of Roman activity spanning 5 centuries. Pottery analysis of evidence retrieved from slots dug into the roadside ditches gave back a date of 43 - 70 CE (Wallace 2014 5-6; Millum and Wallace 2017, 85). It is therefore likely that this grid system represents the foundational point of the settlement at Bridge Farm and that it was established most likely between the years of 43 - 70 CE, but certainly prior to the end of the 1^{st} century (Millum and Wallace 2017, 92).

It is highly inconceivable that a seemingly official settlement like at Bridge Farm would not be accessible by road (pers. comm. D. Millum 2023) and therefore it is no surprise that two, possibly three major Roman roads pass through the site. The settlements early date suggests it was likely founded contemporary to the construction of the major roads which pass through. These roads were the M14 (**D**), M142 (**E1/2**), and, if evidence can prove it passes through the settlement and not north as is also believed (Wallace 2022, 238), the M140 (**F1/2**). The geophysical results show two potential routes for the M140-M142 connection but neither have yet to have provided conclusive evidence as to which may have been used during the different phases. Being constructed at the same time as the roads, being directly connected to the M14, which passes through the iron sites in the weald, and being located next to a navigable river suggests that there was likely an element of planning to Bridge Farms placement with it also possibly playing a role in the planning of the local infrastructure as a whole (Millum 2022, 122).



Figure 7. A depiction of the Roman activity of 'Phase 2' in cyan overlaying the geophysics results of the site. Map data ©Google 2023

A: The presumed route of the expanded M14 road.

3.3. <u>Phase 2 (70 – 200 CE)</u>

Phase 2 is marked by the first expansion of the settlement at Bridge Farm. It saw an organised growth take place spreading north of the original 1st century grid. It was most likely during this time that the site saw its infrastructure largely formalised with its internal street morphology laid out. Pottery analysis of ceramics taken from the roadside ditches excavated in 2013 and between 2015 – 2017 provided dating evidence for the years 70 – 150 CE (Lyne 2014, 2; Lyne 2022, 3-8). Firstly, this shows us that the street grid set up in the mid-late 1st century continued to be in use into the 2nd century and secondly, it reinforces the idea that the streets which appear on the geophysics results around the original settlement where likely constructed during this first stage of growth within the late 1st – late 2nd centuries (Wallace 2014, 7; Millum 2022, 33). Finally, excavations of the roadside ditches of the M14 road in trench 6 provided 2nd century evidence suggesting there may have been a road located there, marked **A** on figure 7, constructed early in the settlements life in order to deal with an increasing amount of iron being transported south from the Weald (Millum 2021b, 23-24).

Roman activity has been traced site wide for this phase implying the settlement was experiences a continuous use and growth. Excavations again in 2013 and between 2015 and 2017 uncovered a plethora of pits and a number of post holes. Although their purposes are unknown to us, it is known that they date to between 70 and 150 CE thanks to the analysis of pottery taken from the excavations (Wallace 2014, 7-8; Millum and Wallace 2017, 93; Millum 2021b, 25). Moreso, evidence from excavations in 2014 revealed that the ditch, which was previously interpreted as a construction camp, may have been recut within phase 2 with pottery analysis suggesting this took place within the early 2nd century (Millum 2021a, 16; Lyne 2022, 5). Also in this western part of the settlement was the discovery of a banjohearth which resembles the shape of small iron smelting hearths further adding to the evidence for the occupation of this area (Millum 2021a, 38-39).

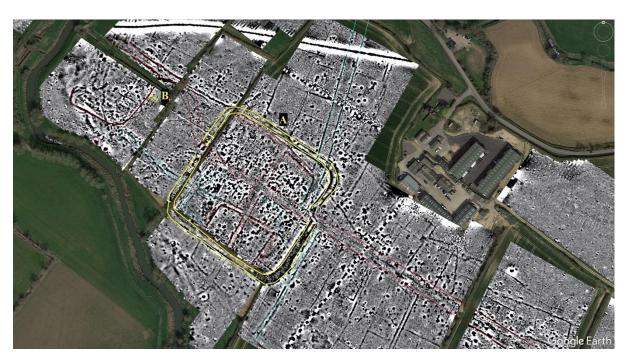


Figure 8. A depiction of the Roman activity of 'Phase 3' in yellow overlaying the geophysics results of the site. Map data ©Google 2023

A: The bivallate earthwork enclosure, B: The small 6-post structure.

3.4. Phase 3 (200 – 300 CE)

Phase 3 at Bridge Farm is solely characterised by the construction and incorporation of the double ditched enclosure, marked **A** on figure 8, which seemingly surrounded the central portion of the site, cutting directly through the centre of the original 1st century settlement. Clearly visible on the geophysical results, both the exterior and interior ditches have been

subject to excavation in 2013 and between 2015 – 2017 (Wallace 2014, 8; Millum and Wallace 2017, 83; Millum 2021b, 6). Initial interpretations after the earliest work on the site dated the construction of the enclosure to the mid-late 2nd century (Lyne 2014, 54; Millum and Wallace 2017, 93; Millum 2022, 33) however as following excavations were completed, the most recent analysis of pottery recovered from the better-preserved areas of the enclosure ditches in trench 6 (see figure 5) concluded that they instead most likely dated to the early 3rd century (Lyne 2022, 13). Additionally, it is highly probable that these defensive ditches were only maintained for a short period of time, possibly only decades. Not only is this evident through pottery analysis (Lyne 2022, 13) but also through the excavation of the most recent M14 road which overlays the backfilled ditches and itself is dated to the mid-late 3rd century (Millum 2021b, 28; Lyne 2022, 19; Millum 2022, 100).

It is unknown exactly why the double ditched enclosure was constructed at Bridge Farm, however its distinctive military like 'V' shape combined with possible traces of posts and a respective bank suggest that they may have been built for a defensive purpose (Millum 2015, 7; Millum and Wallace 2017, 93). Other Roman rural settlements in the south-east of Britain, such as Alfoldean (Luke and Wells 2000, 95-96) and Neatham (Millet and Graham 1986, 157-158) also have enclosures added to the existing settlements during this time all with a similar and uniform nature implying that these developments were dug to a specific standard, perhaps under official supervision or by an official working party (Rudling 2016, 76; Millum 2022, 123).

Roman activity on the site during this phase continued as before with a potential increase of activity in the western part of the settlement closer to the bank of the river Ouse. Again, a number of ambiguous pits both shallow and deep appear throughout the settlement (Wallace 2014, 10-11) but interestingly, alongside these features is a potential 6 post building, marked **B** located just outside of the 'defensive' enclosure to the west (Millum 2021a, 17). What exactly the purpose of this building was is unknown, but what is clear is that this smaller structure was demolished not long after its construction to make way for a larger 13 post building later in the 3rd century (Millum 2021a, 17-18).



Figure 9. A depiction of the Roman activity of 'Phase 4' in pink overlaying the geophysics results of the site. Map data ©Google 2023

A: The presumed route of the 3rd century M14 road, B: The large 13-post 'barn', C: The large tile kiln.

3.5. Phase 4 (300 – 410 CE)

Phase 4 represents the remaining life of the settlement at Bridge Farm from the backfilling of the enclosure ditches up until the withdrawal from Britannia by the Roman authorities. As previously mentioned, excavations in 2015 surprisingly uncovered that the suggested M14 road, marked **A** on figure 9, laid above the backfilled ditches (Millum 2022, 26-27). Evidence from above the road metalling dated to the mid-late 3rd century showing that the enclosure was out of use by this point and had only existed for a very short period of time (Rudling 2016, 76; Lyne 2022, 13; Millum 2022, 100).

Although it will be discussed in greater detail further in this study (see section 5), it is important to note that during this phase Bridge Farm saw a major shift in functionality. Excavations in 2014 revealed a large 13 post building, marked **B**, which has been interpreted as a storage barn. This suggests that during this phase the site moved away from its previous role in potentially processing and working the iron from the now closing Wealden iron sites into a largely agricultural role (Smith *et al* 2017, 138; Millum 2022, 124). Also dated to this phase is a possible tile kiln, marked **C**, found in 2013 (Wallace 2014, 14).

Phase 4 represents the final stages of the settlements life. Throughout the middle to later 4th century, Britannia succumbed to internal strife and civil war leaving its internal security inadequate, its garrison reduced in strength and numbers and an increasingly problematic northern frontier resulting in the province potentially being viewed as merely an over extension (Jones 1998, 246). It's fate, however, was sealed on the 31st of December 405/6 CE when a conglomerate of barbarian Alans, Vandals and Suebians crossed the Rhine River marking the beginning of the invasion of Gaul (Jones 1998, 246-247; Kulikowski 2000, 331). This resulted in the gradual withdrawal of Roman authority within Britannia and naturally, the gradual abandonment of Romano-British sites, especially those with a seemingly official function. Bridge Farm matches this evidence with the central parts of the settlement having been abandoned first and throughout the end of the 4th and early 5th centuries this departure continued (Millum 2022, 6).



Figure 10. A depiction of the Roman activity of 'Phase 5' in green overlaying the geophysics results of the site. Map data ©Google 2023

A: The 5th century obliquely orientated ditches.

3.6. Phase 5 (5th Century CE / 'Post Roman')

Phase 5 represents the post-Roman activity found on the site. The term 'post-Roman' has been specifically used as the evidence suggests it is activity of the very last inhabitants of the settlement before its complete abandonment and not that of an Anglo-Saxon takeover of the site. It is represented by the obliquely oriented ditches in trench 5, marked **A** on figure 10, (Millum 2021a, 42) which after being dated via pottery analysis to a late 4th century date still remaining in use well into the 5th century (Lyne 2022, 23-25).

3.7. Medieval and Beyond

No early medieval features or any beyond the Roman period in Britain have thus far been uncovered at Bridge Farm. The only evidence comes in the form of pottery sherds, noticeably a cluster found when excavating the 3rd century M14 road between 2015 – 2017 suggesting it may have remained in use after the Roman period (Millum 2021b, 28).

4. <u>Internal Morphology</u>

In the case of Roman rural settlement studies and for this study, the internal morphology of a site refers to its internal street layout, the inclusion of any fortifications or earthworks and its structural diversity (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 15-32).

4.1. Internal Street Layout

There are many different internal street layouts when analysing Roman settlements, especially those found in a rural setting with different levels of development taking place at different times within a site's life. Bridge Farm, for example, has a well-defined and clearly planned internal street morphology consisting of roads and trackways forming organised grids which have developed and branched off the major Roman roads which pass through the site. This level of planning seems to be in use until the later stages of the settlement's life when it appears the organisation breaks down and we see a more natural and organic development of the settlement with frontages and plots of land growing directly off the major

Roman roads (see figure 3 for reference). However, these layouts can be somewhat narrowed-down, being categorised into three broader terms. These include the 'ribbon development', the well planned 'grid system', and the slightly less organised 'independent street layout'.

The first category to examine is the 'ribbon development'. This type of layout is commonly attributed to the 'roadside settlement' and refers to a pattern of development where frontages and plots can be viewed being directly attached to a major Roman road highlighting the importance of the infrastructure in the settlement's growth (Smith et al 2016, 38; Millum 2022, 83). An excellent example of rural site showing off a very distinct ribbon development is Westhawk Farm in Ashford, Kent. Discovered in 1996 after extensive geophysical survey by the Geophysical Surveys of Bradford (GSB 1997a; 1997b; 1998), Westhawk Farm is one of only eight rural settlements within southern Britain to have evidence of pre-Roman activity in the form of an Iron Age cemetery including a high-status burial and saw Romano-British activity until the mid-late 4th century (Booth et al 2008, 388-389; Smith et al 2016, 98). Although having been interpreted as a 'small town' by Booth et al (2008, 389-390), much like Bridge Farm, it has been assigned as a roadside settlement under *The Rural Settlement of* Roman Britain Project (Allen et al 2016; Smith et al 2016, 38). It was a multifunctional site with traces of agricultural production, trading, and iron production, likely connecting it to the Wealden Iron site which were located near to the settlement (Paynter 2007, 30; Booth et al. 2008, 381-384). Importantly, geophysical survey and excavations at Westhawk Farm revealed a site with a very distinct ribbon development consisting of small, interconnected plots of land, likely representing separate properties attached to the western side of the M130 'Canterbury Road' (Margary 1967, 47-48) and an irregular and uneven spread of features to the east (Booth et al 2008, 389-390; Smith et al 2016, 38; Figure 11).



Figure 11. A geophysical survey plan of the settlement at Westhawk Farm (from Booth et al 2008, figure 1.6).

This type of street development implies a lack of coordination and organisation as the site takes advantage of the pre-placed infrastructure, using it to attach plots of land and other features too. Although Bridge Farm is also found at the site of two or three major Roman roads, its internal morphology does not match the characteristic ribbon development. This is because the site has its own independent street layout beyond the roads which grew as the settlement itself expanded in an organised and very stereotypically Roman partial grid formation.

When discussing Roman rural settlements, mention of a highly organised, gridded internal street layout similar to the likes of the cities or *civitates* such as Colchester (*Camulodunum*) and Canterbury (*Durovernum Cantiacorum*) is an uncommon occurrence (Faulkner 2007, 91; Weekes and Darkes 2021). It is not however, unseen as is visible within a handful of the upper echelon of Roman 'small towns' (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 27). A small town is an umbrella term for a number of rural sites which inhibit signs of urban development split into multiple different categories based on internal morphology and function (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 6). Interestingly, similar to roadside settlements, the majority of small towns follow a linear ribbon development such as the mile long linear settlement at Wall, Staffordshire (*Letocetum*) (Gould 1963, 14-15; Oswald 1968, 39-41) and the settlement

developed on Ermine Street found at Hibaldstow, Lincolnshire (Whitwell 1995, 98; Allen 2000, 2-3). As mentioned however, there are some small towns which displays a well organised 'grid system' for the development of their street layout. One example is the settlement at Alchester, Oxfordshire. This 'minor small town' lies just south of a strategically important Roman crossroad of the north-south running M160 road between Dorchester on Thames and Towcester (*Lactodurum*) (Margary 1967, 162-165) and Akeman Street which ran east-west between Circncester (Corinium Dubunnorum) and St. Albans (Verulamium). The street layout developed off the roads which passed through the settlement with the crossroad forming the main grid with a further grid having been recorded at the southern extend of the site (Wilson 1975, 11; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 97; Figure 12). Another example is Ilchester, Somerset (Lindinis). This is a large and extremely well-developed site with several complex features, primarily the set of street grids which formed the earliest stage of the settlement's life along the 'Fosse Way' (Leach 1982; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 62-70; Figure 13). The complete opposite to the unorganised and haphazard ribbon development, the grid layout implies a large degree of planning. Moreso, it may support the theory for a settlement's position to be pre-meditated, as to build such uniquely Roman style street plans within such strategically important locations whether within the provincial infrastructure as in Alchester, or geographical as in Ilchester's position on the high ground of a floodplain. Aspects of this planning can be seen at Bridge Farm, especially similar to Ilchester as a seemingly pre-considered grid street system was constructed as the early foundation of the settlement in a strategically valuable position, both geographically with tidal reach of the river Ouse, but also within the local infrastructure being placed at the end of a long road connecting the settlement to the vast iron production sites of the Weald (Millum 2022, 121).

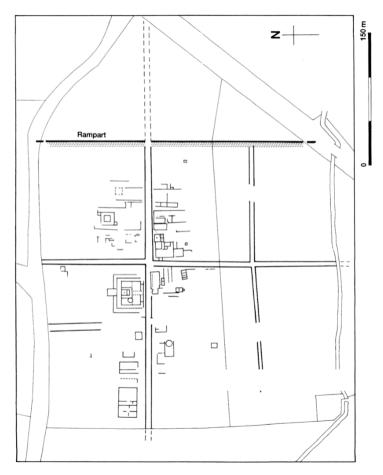
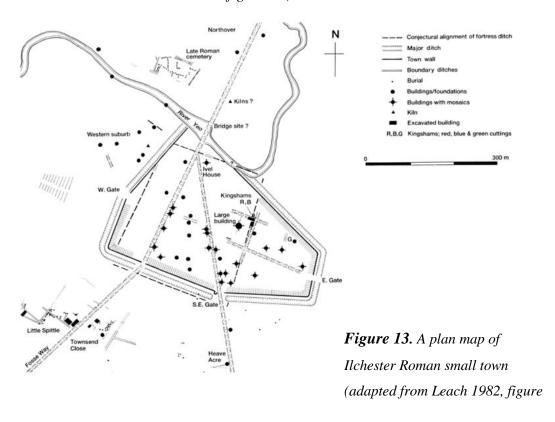


Figure 12. A plan map of Alchester Roman small town (from Burnham and Wacher 1990, figure 24).



Finally, is the matter of those rural settlements with what can be described as an 'independent street layout'. These are the settlements which maintain their own set of streets and trackways but not those to the level of grid systems. When assessing sites with an independent street layout, a prime example is the settlement of Shapwick (*Vindocladia*). After aerial photography in 1976 revealed a possible Roman fort, geophysical survey and excavations took place which uncovered the remains of Roman buildings and an obvious arrangement of a small but complex street system forming the main infrastructure of a rural settlement (Field 1976, 280-283; Papworth 1990, 117; 1991, 172; 1994, 131-132; Figure 14). The settlement at Shapwick seems to be similarly dated to Bridge Farm, with small levels of Iron Age activity also (Papworth 1997, 358). The two sites are very comparable with similar internal street layouts consisting of passageways which have branched off the M4e Dorchester (*Durnovaria*) to Old Sarum (*Sorviodunum*) road (Margary 1967, 108-110) which made up the axis for the settlement.

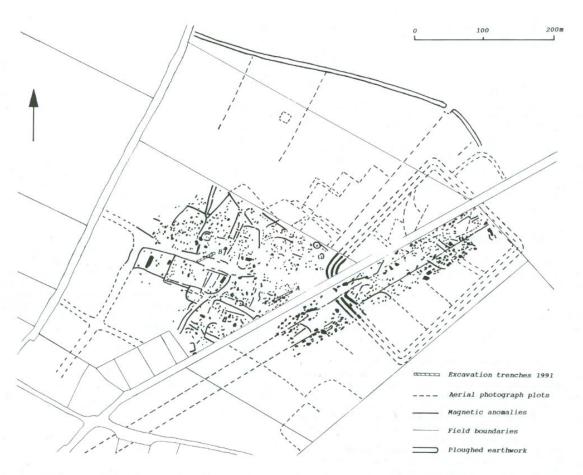


Figure 14. A map of Shapwick Roman settlement showing the results of magnetometry and features which appeared in aerial photography (from Papworth 1994, figure 4).

4.2. <u>Earthwork Enclosures</u>

The settlement at Bridge Farm is one of several Roman rural sites which seem to have developed short lived earthworks constructed within the late 2nd – early 3rd centuries (Frere 1986, xvi; Black 1995, 61). The exact purpose of and reasoning for the construction of these enclosures is still a topic of heavy debate with still no wholly satisfactory answer. Some suggestions include a perceived external threat such as an invasion or piracy from Germanic tribes and others more focused on civil unrest which may have endangered the security of Britannia's crucial infrastructure such as a potential internal revolt or an outbreak of disease of disease like the Antonine Plague which possibly had a profound impact on the rural economy (Woodfield 1995; Rudling and Russel 2015, 158; Millum 2022, 35-36). One thing that is almost certain however, is that for a settlement to have procured such 'fortifications' it seems to have to have held some sort of an official role. This is evident when examining the earthwork enclosures of various other rural settlements such as Alfoldean, Neatham, Hardham and Iping.

All of these sites possess extremely similar features. The morphology of the defences consists of a set of complex earthworks consisting of a pair of ditches and a bank in a rectilinear shape (Margary 1953, 1-3; Millet and Graham 1986, 157; Luke and Wells 2000, 80; Payne 2001, 4-5; figure 15). In terms of the size of the earthworks, assuming all measurements are of the exterior, Iping and Alfoldean maintain the smallest enclosures at roughly 0.9ha (Historic England 1997; Luke and Wells 2000, 95) with Hardham following at around 1.7ha (Winbolt 1927, 89; Payne 2001, 8-9) and finally Neatham at 2.5ha (Millet and Graham 1986, 157). Each of the enclosures found at these settlements are bisected by major Roman roads with the M155 Chichester (*Noviomagus Regnorum*) – Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*) road passing through both Neatham and Iping (Margary 1967, 78-80), and 'Stane Street' passing through both Alfoldean and Hardham (Margary 1967, 64-68).

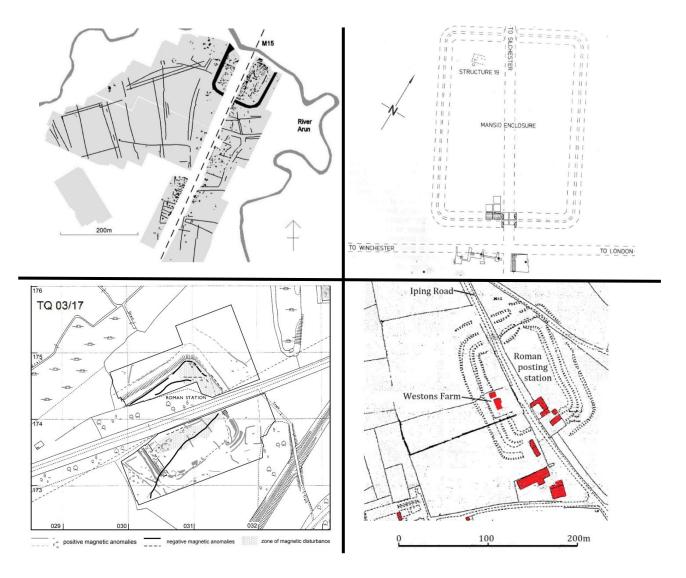


Figure 15. Examples of the earthworks found at a few Roman rural settlements in SE Britain. Running clockwise starting from top right: Neatham (from Millet and Graham 1987, figure 101), Iping (from Best 2021, figure 6), Hardham (from Payne 2001, figure 7), and Alfoldean (from Best 2021, figure 10).

When simply examining the geophysical results for Bridge Farm (see figure 3), the similarities between the earthworks found here and those previously discussed are immediately noticeable. The enclosure also consists of a pair of parallel ditches, likely with an accompanying bank and traces of possible posts (Millum and Wallace 2017, 93). Measuring the extents of the defences based on the geophysical results sizes them at around 3.3ha, significantly larger than some of the smaller sites such as Iping and Alfoldean. Procuring a neatly constructed, military-style set of earthworks suggests a site must have had

some form of official purpose or at the very least played an important enough role in the local area for it to have been granted these fortifications under an official sanction (Millum 2015 7; Rudling 2016, 76).

4.3. Structural Diversity

When assessing the structural diversity of a Roman settlement, what is looked for is evidence for 'specialist buildings'. These structures are those of an urban characteristic which serve a specific function (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 15-23). Examples of these specialist functions are religious buildings and industrial structures, including metal working or agricultural production. Furthermore, it is one of the most important aspects for attempting to classify a settlement and to understand its function.

For instance, the sites where little to no structural diversity is found are most commonly roadside settlements and typically, those which are located a short distance from a neighbouring small town. An example of this, is the site found at Little Waltham, Essex. The settlement sits at a position where the M300 Chelmsford – Great Chesterford road and the M33a Chelmsford – Ixworth road join as one before heading into Chelmsford itself (Margary 1967, 251-252; 255-257). The site comprised of activity surround the junction holding to a ribbon development form, with land usage being seen in the form of frontages and individual plots of land. Evidence for buildings was uncovered during excavations in the 1960's and 70's however proved inconclusive for specialist function (Drury 1978, 134-136). It also lies only a short distance to both the small towns of Chelmsford and Heybridge meaning the site never truly developed past the stage of a small roadside settlement (Rodwell 1975, figure 8; Drury 1978, 134).

However, sites such as small towns and more specialised rural nuclear settlements have a much clearer and complex structural diversity. Examples of these specialised sites include the religious settlement at Springhead, Kent (*Vagniacis*) in which excavations of several temples, a shop, a bakery, and multiple large cemeteries all centred around springs, streams and marshes, showed a small town which had developed off a possibly pre-Roman religious sanctuary (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 192-198; Wessex Archaeology 1997; Biddulph and Booth 2006). Another example of a specialised site characterised by its structural evidence is the highly industrial settlement located at Little Chester (*Derbentione*). Excavations here

revealed the remains of workshops linked to several kilns and hearths suggesting the small town developed as large-scale iron and pottery production site within the local area (Brassington 1971; 1980; Dool 1986; Burnham and Wacher 1990, 222-225).

Excavations at Bridge Farm are yet to have uncovered much evidence for structural diversity, and for all accounts many structures at all. Thus far, however, it should not be taken as a sign for a lack of such complexity as, with many sites, at Bridge Farm only a fraction of the overall settlement has been explored archaeologically. There has, however, been one, possibly two structures discovered in excavations during the 2014 season. A large 13 post aisled building, and perhaps an earlier 6 post building underneath it, which has been interpreted as a storage warehouse (Millum 2021a, 39-41; figure 16). Being dated to the late 3rd century it would not be a stretch to imagine the construction of such a large warehouse structure may link to the increase in importance of agricultural production in Britannia from the late 3rd into the 4th century as is suggested by the historical literature (Wallace and Millum 2023)

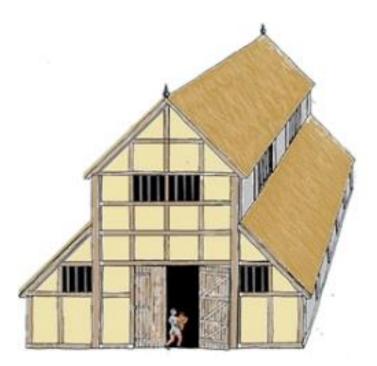


Figure 16. An artist's interpretation of the large 13 post building excavated at Bridge Farm in 2014 (from Millum 2021a, figure 30).

5. Function and Economy

Understanding a sites function is crucially important when attempting to classify it. Rural settlements can be multi-functional with said functions ranging from official, administrative duties such as tax collection or a role within the *cursus publicus*, to economic functions such as industrial or agricultural production and marketplace activities, to more specialised roles such as religious centres or spa towns (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 4-6; Smith *et al* 2016, 43)

5.1. The Cursus Publicus

The role of the *cursus publicus* in attempting to define a Roman settlement greatly relates to the previously mentioned earthwork enclosures. The *cursus publicus* is the Roman government supervised, and authorised courier/road system found throughout the empire (Chevallier 1976, 185-189; Black 1995, 1-2; Jongman 2003, 324). Roads within the Roman Empire were essential for the division, controlling and administration of conquered territory (Purcell 1990, 12-14), an importance which is seen through the strategically planned road networks of the different provinces expanding from a single hub such as Lyon (Lugdunum) in Gaul (Drinkwater 1983, 124-126) and in the case of Britannia, London (Londinium) (Black 1995, 14). By analysing two of the most relevant Roman road books, the Bordeaux Itinerary, and the Antonine Itinerary (Cuntz 1929), we can begin to understand the workings of the cursus publicus. The road books, which seem to have been designed to assist travellers in planning their journeys, inform us of a few different 'levels' of facilities provided in settlements along Roman roads. These are the mansio and civitates which likely maintained a similar function and the *mutatio* and *vicus* (Black 1995, 12-13). *Mansiones* are stopping points for official travellers where they would have been able to rest for the night before continuing with their journey. It is important to note that stops defined as civitas or civitates would have likely had a mansio of their own and therefore match the function (Black 1995, 12). Finally, a *mutatio* is simply a point to change or repair your means of transport along your journey and a vicus simply seems to refer to a settlement with no purpose built mansio available (Black 1995, 12-13).

When we map the sites mentioned in section 4.2 (Alfoldean, Hardham, Iping and Neatham), we can clearly begin to see a pattern (see figure 17). For instance, on Stane Street which

connected London and Chichester we have Alfoldean and Hardham which sit approximately 12 Roman miles between one another. The distance between Alfoldean and the settlement prior, Dorking (O'Connell 1980, 50) is 11.5 miles and the distance between Hardham, and the termination point of the road, Chichester is 15 miles (Margary 1967, 66; Black 1995, 15). Measuring the distance between Neatham and Iping, and Iping and Chichester gives us a distance of roughly 13 and 11 miles respectively. This even distribution of these settlements along major Roman roads suggests that they played a role in the *cursus publicus* likely acting as *mansiones* and *mutationes*. This is further reinforced by archaeological excavations at sites like Alfoldean and Neatham which produced evidence of structures such as a bathhouse and traces of substantial buildings, arrangements which are characteristic of *mansio* sites (Millet and Graham 1986, 151-153; Black 1987, 120-123) and the existence of the earthwork enclosures which were very likely constructed to provide security for the infrastructure and defend important *mansio* and *mutatio* sites during a time of great stress within the Roman Empire.

When we use this strategy to analyse the settlement at Bridge Farm, we immediately begin to see similarities (also see figure 17). When mapping the site, we can see that the site forms one of several settlements, evenly distributed along the Greensand Way and its possible extension eastward toward Pevensey, sitting roughly 8 miles from Hassocks to the west (Lyne 1994) and Arlington to the east (Chuter 2007; Millum 2022. 36). Interestingly, there also seems to be a pattern of river crossings with Arlington, Bridge Farm, Steyning and Hardham all sitting on a river (Staveley 2022, 72). Archaeological evidence from Bridge Farm is yet to have provided any structural evidence for a *mansio*, however has shown the existence of a double ditched fieldwork enclosure which further suggests the site definitely had an official part to play and was likely a crucial element for the planning of early Roman infrastructure in the area. Moreover, it is possible Bridge Farm wasn't a *mansio* posting station at all, and instead acted as a *mutatio* with accommodation for official and important guests instead being held at the closely located Barcombe Villa with its large, detached bathhouse (Black 1995, 86; Millum 2022, 36).

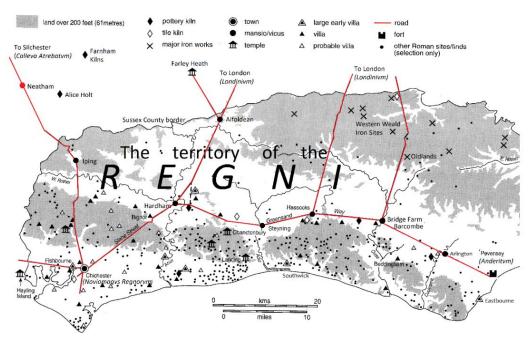


Figure 17. A map showing the distance between the previously discussed Roman settlements (from Rudling 2017, figure 5.1).

5.2. Economic Function

Although some sites maintained very specialised and specific functions such as the large religious towns like the previously mentioned Springhead and spa or 'resort' towns such as Bath (*Aquae Sulis*), the vast majority of Roman rural settlements instead had important economic functions (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 43). Economic functions themselves further split into subcategories including industrial, agricultural and trade or local administration. Often, most sites are extremely multifunctional, usually dipping in and out of different roles throughout their lives (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 44)

Industrial production is visible in many Roman settlements. Evidence in the form of structures, archaeological features and artefacts can be studied together to form a detailed understanding of the type of industrial activities which would have taken place on a site. Two examples of industrial sites are the small towns of Droitwich and Middlewich which are both aptly named *Salinae* within the Ravenna Cosmography (Schnetz 1940, 106.31; 106.46). The name, *Salinae*, roughly translates to 'salt-works' or 'salt-pits' suggesting the main industrial function of the sites was salt production. At Droitwich, excavations revealed a vast quantity of briquetage, very coarse ceramic pottery used in the salt production process (Harding 2013, 73), were uncovered alongside oval ovens, clay lined pits and preserved, halved wooden

barrels all located beside salt springs (Barefield 1976; 1977; Sawle 1978). Likewise, Middlewich provided similar evidence such as large amounts of briquetage, but also large industrial 'complexes' consisting of strip buildings, structures often associated with workshops and stores, with brine tanks and iron-working furnaces behind them surrounded by a system of ditches (Thompson 1965, 91-97; Bestwick 1974, 30; Bestwick 1975 66-70; Garner 2005, 21-23). Collecting all this evidence and combining it with other useful factors such as topography and placenames gives us an obvious look into what a settlement would have produced and can be easily replicated with, for example, studying pottery or tile production sites by examining workshops, kilns, the quantity of pottery and any wasters (Knowles 1977, 216-220; Green 1977, 93) or iron production sites by analysing furnaces, mining pits, ore and waste materials like charcoal and slag (Charlton 1961, 32-38).

Agricultural production is discovered similarly to industrial production, however with the addition of examining large-scale field systems, faunal remains and investigating pollen, seed and other plant remains (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 43-45). Returning to the settlement at Westhawk Farm we can see a lot of this evidence come into fruition. For instance, it is clear that stock raising, and pastoral farming were taking place at the site, but this was not interpreted through the recovery of faunal remains, for the conditions resulted in a complete breakdown of such ecofacts, but instead through the study of pollen and insect remains from two waterholes and also from the presence of a large field system. Moreso, Arable agriculture was also indicated by the range of crop and plant remains such as pollen and charred seeds. Finally, much like with detecting an industrial activity, the existence of small granary structures as well as farming related artefacts like a spade iron and fragments of millstones further amplified the complexity of agricultural production at this rural settlement (Booth *et al* 2008, 381-382).

Finally, is the matter of interpreting official administrative activities as well as other trade and marketplace behaviour. Once again, Westhawk Farm provides an excellent example of archaeological evidence which may have attested to a local administrative role with the uncovering of a large quantity of measuring and weighing equipment. It has been suggested by Booth *et al* (2008, 382) that this may have had something to do with the collection of goods and products for trade or perhaps a more administrative role such as the collection of taxes or perhaps goods for the *Annona Militaris*. Within cities, trade and commerce commonly took place within buildings such as the forum or *macellum*. However, within rural

settlements, comparisons to structures like these are somewhat hard to come by (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 49). Some courtyard buildings found in larger small towns, such as in Water Newton, Cambridgeshire (*Durobrivae*) and the unfinished Building XI at Corbridge, Northumberland (*Coria*), have been interpreted as possible marketplace structures, however the evidence from these sites are yet to have provided enough evidence for this to be an accurate suggestion (Mackreth 1979). More likely, however, trading and commerce took place outside, whether down side streets, outside public buildings or just located in a central plot of land within a settlement where temporary stalls and tables were erected as is common within modern settlements today (Burnham and Wacher 1990, 49-50). Areas where occasional markets and fairs were held can be mapped by attempting to find remains of temporary stalls or tables or by mapping where larger quantities of coins can be seen together. Whilst temporary structures naturally leave only an ephemeral trace of their existence, evidence for these open-air marketplaces within rural settlements, primarily small towns do exist, such as the open area of metalling alongside the north-south road within Dorchester-on-Thames and the gravel areas surrounding the temple at Wycomb which when excavated provided an abundance of roughly 1100 coins (Lawrence 1864, 422-425; Wilson and Wright 1965 210-211).

Bridge Farm is a prime example of a multifunctional rural settlement matching many small towns throughout Britain. In terms of industrial function, Bridge Farm provided a plethora of perplexing and ambiguous pits, however some have been identified to suggest they played a role in industrial activity. Examples of these include iron working hearths and forges, a possible tile kiln and the artefacts to support including a number of slag, tiles, and tile wasters (Barber 2014; Wallace 2014, 14; Barber 2020, 30-31; Millum 2021a, 16; 20; Millum 2021b, 7). Evidence also exists for signs of agricultural production. Firstly, is the large 13 post structure uncovered in trench 4 (see figure 6) which has been interpreted as a storage building which may have been used as a barn to store agricultural exports during the late 3rd century and onwards (Millum 2021a, 39-41). More direct evidence comes from across the site in the form of quern stones (Millum 2022, 33), the remains of cattle, sheep and pigs (Robertson 2013, 23; Williams 2018, 119), the clear presence of a surrounding field plan (see figure 3) and plant remain analysis which, although sparse, provided new information on what sort of crops may have been grown in the region, namely spelt. Interestingly, the samples from 2014 showed a lack of chaff suggesting perhaps that agricultural produce may have been arriving to at least one area of the site fully processed (Allen 2013, 8-9; Allen and Gray 2021, 36-37).

Finally, Bridge Farm provided an indication that it maintained a small administrative position as well as likely held marketplace activity within its lifetime. Like at Westhawk Farm, the discovery of a number of biconical lead weights were discovered on the site which, when combined with the finding of the multiple styli found begin to suggest an administrative role (Booth *et al* 2008, 382; Millum 2022, 34). Moreso, Bridge Farm's position at a crossroad between important Roman roads plus its location at the tidal reach of a navigable river lays the framework for a site of importance for the distribution and trade of products. This becomes evident when analysing the settlement in more detail with wheel ruts found in the early grid street layout suggesting a large sum of use by carts and wagons (Wallace 2014, 12), a large number of imported fineware ceramics (Lyne 2014, 5; Millum 2022, 120) and possible marketplaces themselves located at a triangular open area directly to the east of the earthwork enclosure or potentially in the north-east of the settlement where a large distribution of coins was uncovered in 2015 (Millum 2021a, 38; Millum 2022, 33).

6. Discussion

After discussing the different characteristics of rural settlement classifications, an overall view of Bridge Farm can begin to emerge. Although the site is relatively new and has yet to have been excavated to a large extent providing only a limited amount of evidence, it has become clear that the Romano-British settlement represents a large and complex rural site with industrial, agricultural, and administrative functions.

6.1. Findings

The settlement at Bridge Farm is characterised by a uniquely complex overall internal morphology consisting of its own independent street layout comprising of a partial grid system and other internal streets and trackways which developed off the Roman roads which passed through the site. Furthermore, it displays evidence for a set of two ditches forming a bivallate earthwork enclosure, externally measuring 3.3ha located within the centre of the settlement. It seems likely that these earthwork fortifications were constructed in the early 3rd century and surrounded the sites official contribution to the *cursus publicus* likely in the form of a *mutatio* or, although chances are low, a possibly undiscovered or destroyed *mansio*

complex. Apart from the role the settlement served within the provincial infrastructure, Bridge Farm also maintained multiple economic functions which likely changed throughout its life. These functions include iron and later tile production as well as an agricultural production which likely increased in importance as time passed and the nearby Wealden iron sites ceased production. On top of this, the site very possibly saw market activities take place made visible by the amount of coinage and two possible marketplace areas within the settlement. Additionally, it appears it had a small or local administrative role, perhaps earlier in its life being focused on processing iron products arriving on the M14 London Road from the large Wealden iron sites before loading them onto the river and sending them elsewhere before transitioning later into a more government-like role, dealing with the collection of taxes or other goods for the *Annona Militaris* with the closure of the iron sites within the Weald. The settlement naturally declined with the withdrawal of Roman authority in Britannia from the end of the 4th century as parts are slowly abandoned with only a brief period of post-Roman activity before its complete desertion by the mid-5th century CE.

6.2. Roadside Settlement, Small Town, or Something Else?

This study has clearly shown that the rural settlement at Bridge Farm does not match the characteristics, and therefore cannot be classified, as a roadside settlement. A typical roadside settlement is organic and haphazard in design, usually sprouting alongside an existing major Roman road naturally, maintaining a 'ribbon' development pattern with frontages and plots attached to the road which the site lays on (Allen et al 2016, 38-39; Millum 2022, 83). Moreso, Bridge Farm cannot begin to be considered as a village as it exists alongside multiple roads. It therefore seems reasonable that, based on its complex internal morphology and number of somewhat official functions, the settlement should fall under the umbrella term of a small town. As previously mentioned in section 4.1, small towns are split into further sub-categories including possible cities, minor towns, specialised religious and industrial sites and minor defended or undefended settlements (Burnham and Wacher 1990). As of yet, defining in detail according to this set of subcategories does not seem responsible as the small town at Bridge Farm has only been subject to limited excavation relative to its size. As time progresses and the annual excavation run by CAP continue, more evidence will be uncovered, perhaps shining the light on the settlements enigmatic lack of structural diversity allowing for a more refined interpretation into the settlement's classification in the future. Not only is this important for the site itself that more research is completed, but for the

wider field of Roman rural studies in Britain as well, for Bridge Farm presents a uniquely well-preserved rural site with the potential to help greatly forward out understanding of a relatively newly expanded field of study.

7. Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to reassess the definition for and explore the function of the Romano-British rural settlement at Bridge Farm by undertaking a comparative analysis of previously classified sites. This stems from recent evidence suggesting it does not fit the characteristics of its current definition as a roadside settlement. After discussing and comparing the varying features of internal morphology and functionality at sites with different rural classifications the conclusions made were that the settlement at Bridge Farm was a large, multi-functional small town likely with an official and planned foundation. Excavation at this site have only relatively recently commenced and thus it will benefit greatly from further work which would expand upon the currently limited evidence allowing for a more refined interpretation of the settlement's classification.

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Figure 2: Map data taken from d-maps.com. Available at: https://d-maps.com/ (Accessed 04th March 2023).

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Figure 4: Map data taken from Google Earth. ©Google 2023.

Figure 5: Adapted from Wallace, R., and Millum, D. (2023). *Bridge Farm 2018-2022: A Puzzling Plethora of Pits, Postholes and Pottery*. Talk given to the Sussex Archaeological Society.

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Figure 15: Clockwise, Starting from the top right:

- From Millett, M., & Graham, D. (1986). Excavations on the Romano-British small town at Neatham, Hampshire, 1969-1979. Farnham: Hampshire Field Club.
- From Best, A. (2021). The Use and Development During the Roman Period of Defended Sites in the Territory of the Regni in South East England. Unpublished Report.
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