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Archaeology of the Ouse Valley, Sussex, to AD 1500

A tribute to Dudley Moore and Archaeology at Sussex University CCE

Edited by

Dudley Moore[†]

Michael J. Allen

David Rudling

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Dedicated to:

Dudley Moore†
(22 April 1952 – 28 January 2016)
University of Sussex alumnus, co-founder and chairman of the
Sussex University Archaeological Society

and

Archaeology at the Centre for Continuing Education, University of Sussex

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8. Impact of Rome

David Rudling

This review of the main Romano-British remains that have been discovered in the Sussex Ouse valley provides a micro-study of settlement types, land-use, and changes over time at the eastern end of the territory of the *Regni*, a tribal grouping with its *civitas* capital at Chichester. Some settlements on the adjacent Downs show considerable elements of continuity, with the probability at Bishopstone of continuous occupation from the Late Iron Age and the possibility of unbroken continuity into the Early Saxon period. Elsewhere several of the villa settlements, such as those at Barcombe and at Beddingham, developed from more humble origins on sites established just before or soon after the Roman Conquest. None of the villas, however, were still flourishing by the end of the 4th century, by which time occupation, if it continued at all, was fairly minimal. Occupation at more nucleated settlements, such as those at Bridge Farm or Seaford, may also have ended or declined by the end of the 4th century. The presence and ultimate loss of the iron-working establishments at the northern end of the valley may have had a major impact on many of the settlements to the south, which had probably previously relied upon the iron-works as markets for their agricultural produce and other goods and services. Indeed, some of the villa-owners may have been directly involved in the iron industry (Best 2015). The apparent ending of villas and various other types of site in the valley before the end of the 4th century is considered alongside the evidence for Early Saxon occupation and burials.

The arrival of the Romans in South-East Britain in AD 43 resulted in dramatic changes to the social and economic environments, and these changes together with major developments in technology make the Roman occupation of Britain one of the most distinctive and dynamic periods in our history. For most of the last century archaeologists used Haverfield's (1912) concept of 'Romanisation', coming from a background of nationalism and imperialism, to explain the introduction to, and local adoption of, various elements of 'Roman culture' in this island. In more recent years, however, there has been a widespread questioning of the usefulness of the concept of 'Romanisation' and the development of various new theoretical approaches (Gardner 2013). Significantly, there has been a shift by many scholars in terms of viewing the archaeological record from the perspective of the indigenous Britons, rather than that of the 'invaders'/colonisers, and an asking of 'How Roman was Roman Britain?'. Thus many archaeologists today are interested in assessing the impact of Rome, rather than simply regarding Britain as a colony of Rome (Rudling 2015). In addition, researchers are increasingly looking for local variability of cultural practices and of social identities, both within the province of *Britannia* generally, but also with respect to tribal sub-divisions such as the individual *civitates*. At a more local level micro-studies of smaller areas, such as the Sussex Ouse river valley, enable comparisons to be made between sites of various types in a defined area and for the results of such studies to then be compared with either those derived from other micro-studies or significantly larger but less intense projects.

During the last 40 years the Sussex Ouse valley has been the location of a large number of archaeological investigations of Roman-period rural settlements: farmsteads, villas, more nucleated communities, as well as field-systems, iron-works, and other features of Romano-British landscapes, such as roads. The published results of such work will be reviewed in order to consider the impact of Rome after AD 43, as well as to investigate aspects of continuity or discontinuity of settlement in the valley during the Roman and sub-Roman periods.

The Ouse valley

The Ouse valley as defined here consists of the water catchment areas adjacent to the Ouse and its tributaries (Figure 8.1). Although most of the Ouse valley follows a roughly north-south route in East Sussex, cutting through the South Downs at Lewes, it originates to the north-west, at Slaugham in West Sussex. At Isfield a major tributary, the Uck, branches off to the north-east. Other significant tributaries include Glynde Reach which flows from the north-east through a gap in the Downs between Mount Caburn and Beddingham Hill to the south, and the Bevern Stream, a branch to the west of the Ouse which is fed by streams which flow near a villa at Plumpton (some 7km to the west of the Ouse) and also a pottery production site at Chiltington. The main north-south stretch of the Ouse provides a transect across the main geological zones of East Sussex, starting in the south with the chalk Downs and progressing northwards across the Gault Clay, the Lower Greensand, the Weald Clay and the Tunbridge Wells Sand. During the medieval period the river joined the sea at Seaford, but today joins it at Newhaven via a humanly created channel (Figure 11.6; Robinson 1999, 9; map d).

For further information about contacts between the inhabitants of Sussex (i.e. including the Ouse valley) with

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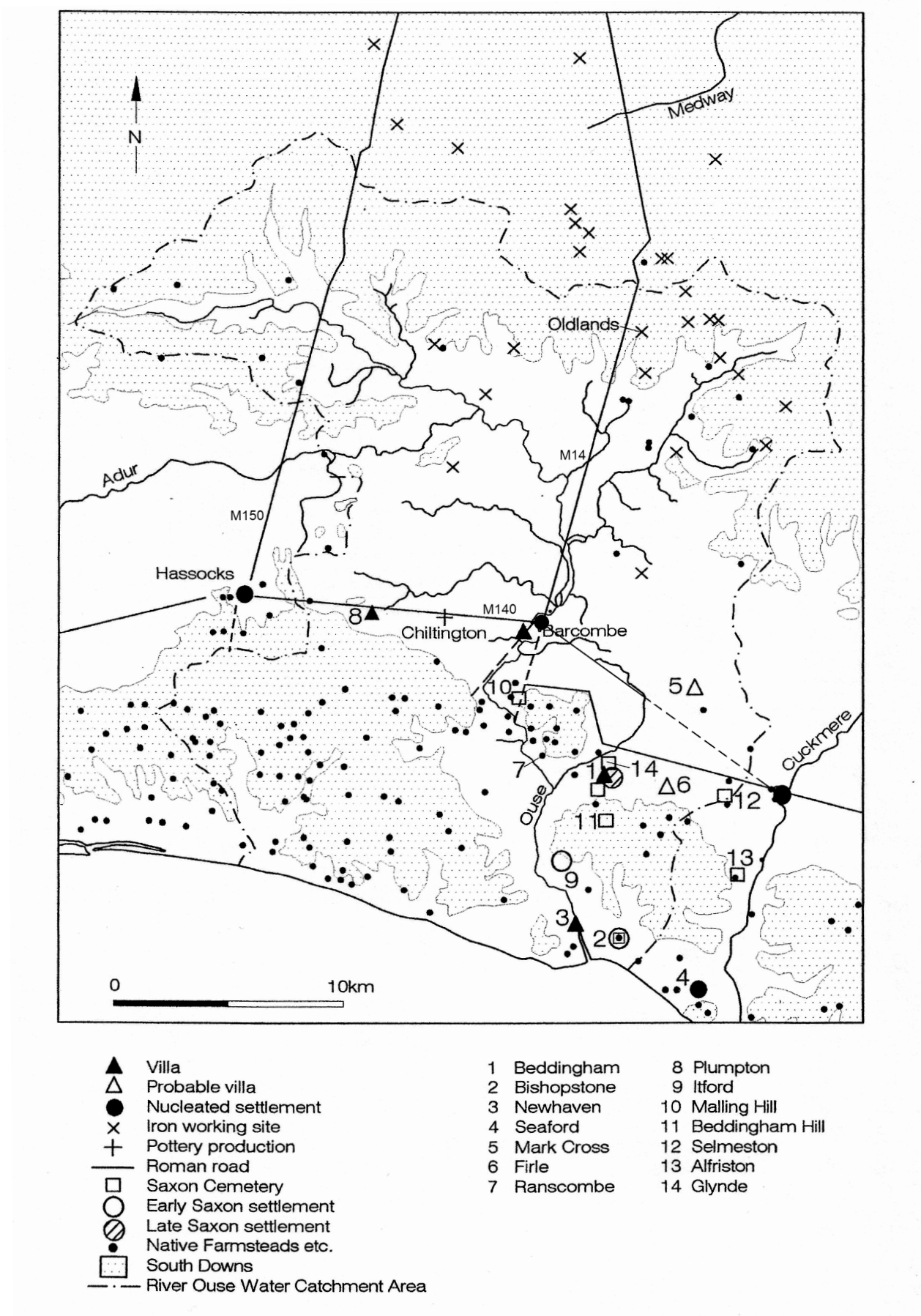

FIGURE 8.1: DISTRIBUTION MAP OF VARIOUS ROMAN-PERIOD SITES IN OR NEAR THE WATER CATCHMENT AREA OF THE RIVER OUSE (DRAWN BY JANE RUSSELL).

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the Roman world before AD 43, the Roman Conquest, the client-kingdom of Togidubnus, the establishment of the Roman *civitas* of the *Regni* after the ending of the kingdom due to the death or retirement of Togidubnus (no successor king is recorded), and the later background history of Roman-period Sussex, the reader is referred to: Cunliffe (1973), Drewett *et al*. (1988, Chapter 6); Rudling (2003a; 2008); Russell (2006) and Rudling and Russell (2015).

Roads and road-side nucleated settlements

Very important features of the Roman landscape in the Ouse valley were parts of two major roads. One of these, the 'London-Lewes Way' (Margary Road 14: M14) (Margary 1965, 124-164; 1967, 59-62) heads north-north east from Barcombe Mills towards London. Its southernmost destination has until very recently been uncertain. However, as a result of extensive geophysical survey work by the Culver Archaeological Project and David Staveley, it is now thought that the road ends at a newly discovered nucleated settlement at Bridge Farm, Upper Wellingham (Figure 8.2 and see below), where it meets the east-west orientated Greensand Way - itself another major Roman road (M 140) (Margary 1965, 165-184; 1967, 68-70) which connects the Barcombe area in the east with Hardham in West Sussex. As its name implies, this road follows for much of its route an outcrop of the Lower Greensand. Ongoing work by Staveley and others has recently confirmed that the Greensand Way continues eastwards beyond Bridge Farm and via Laughton Place joins up with the Arlington to Pevensey road (M142) (Margary 1965, 186-193; 1967, 71; Staveley forthcoming). It is not surprising that a nucleated settlement developed at the intersection of these two major Roman roads, especially as the adjacent river Ouse is both tidal and navigable at this point and thus provided the settlement with another important transport route. The combination of the now London-Barcombe road and then the possibility of onwards transportation southwards to the sea and beyond by boat would have been very important for the iron industry, but also perhaps for other industries such as timber and charcoal. Similarly, the availability of water transport at this point along the now extended Greensand Way would also have been of benefit for the movement of produce from the farmsteads and villas to both the east and west of Bridge Farm. It remains uncertain as to whether any road on the east side of the Ouse led southwards from Bridge Farm towards South Malling and Cliffe where Margary postulated there might have been a river crossing.

The settlement at Bridge Farm was probably one of a number of such nucleated sites spaced at fairly regular intervals along the east-west Greensand Way. Thus some 13km to the west was a large cemetery (and therefore presumably also a large settlement) at Hassocks, this site also being located where the Greensand Way formed a junction with an important north-south road, in this case the so called 'London-Brighton [actually Hassocks] road' (M150) (Lyne 1994). Further west is a postulated settlement at Small Dole, and beyond this the fortified camp at Hardham. Similarly, to the east of Bridge Farm at Arlington near the river Cuckmere the remains of extensive roadside settlement, including a masonry building, are suggestive of another nucleated centre (Staveley forthcoming). Yet further to the east the road terminated at the fort at Pevensey.

An example of a local access road linked to the Greensand Way was discovered in 2005 as a result of fieldwalking and trial trenching by Rob Wallace as part of the Barcombe/Culver archaeology project (Rudling *et al*. 2010, 26-7). This road, which was well constructed and had flint metalling, provided access to and from both the Barcombe villa and the nearby bathhouse. At various points along the route of this branch road are traces of roadside settlement and industrial activity. Such settlements and activity may be associated with the Barcombe villa estate. Another discovery along this road is a silver *siliqua* of Honorius minted at Milan *c*. AD 395-402. This coin, and also another of Honorius found at Bridge Farm in 2015 (Millum 2015, 7), are currently the latest dateable Roman finds from the Barcombe area. Beyond the villa and bathhouse to the south-west, the road may have continued to Offham, thus providing access to the Downs (Millum 2014a). It is likely that other such north-south access roads also provided routes to/from the Greensand Way.

The nucleated settlement at Bridge Farm, Upper Wellingham

As noted above, geophysical survey (magnetometery) at Bridge Farm, Upper Wellingham, revealed a previously unrecorded Roman-period settlement at the intersection of two major Roman roads (M14 and M140) and adjacent to the river Ouse (Millum 2013, fig. 1; Staveley forthcoming; Fig. 8.2). An extensive open settlement pattern is interrupted by a double-ditched enclosure, thus demonstrating that this site was of more than one phase. Initial excavation work in 2013 by the Culver Archaeological Project investigated some of the large enclosure ditches which were found to cut the smaller roadside ditches of the open settlement. The excavations also examined an area containing traces of industrial activity (Wallace 2014). An unexpected find was a human cremation in an urn 'within an upper context' inside the enclosure (Millum and Wallace 2013, 5). In 2014 excavations at Bridge Farm exposed another area of the site and focussed on a large (20m long) structure comprising 13 one metre wide postholes. The postholes, which averaged a metre in depth, proved to be of great importance as they contained the *in situ* remains of waterlogged posts and in one case a waterlogged moulded timber architectural fragment which had apparently been

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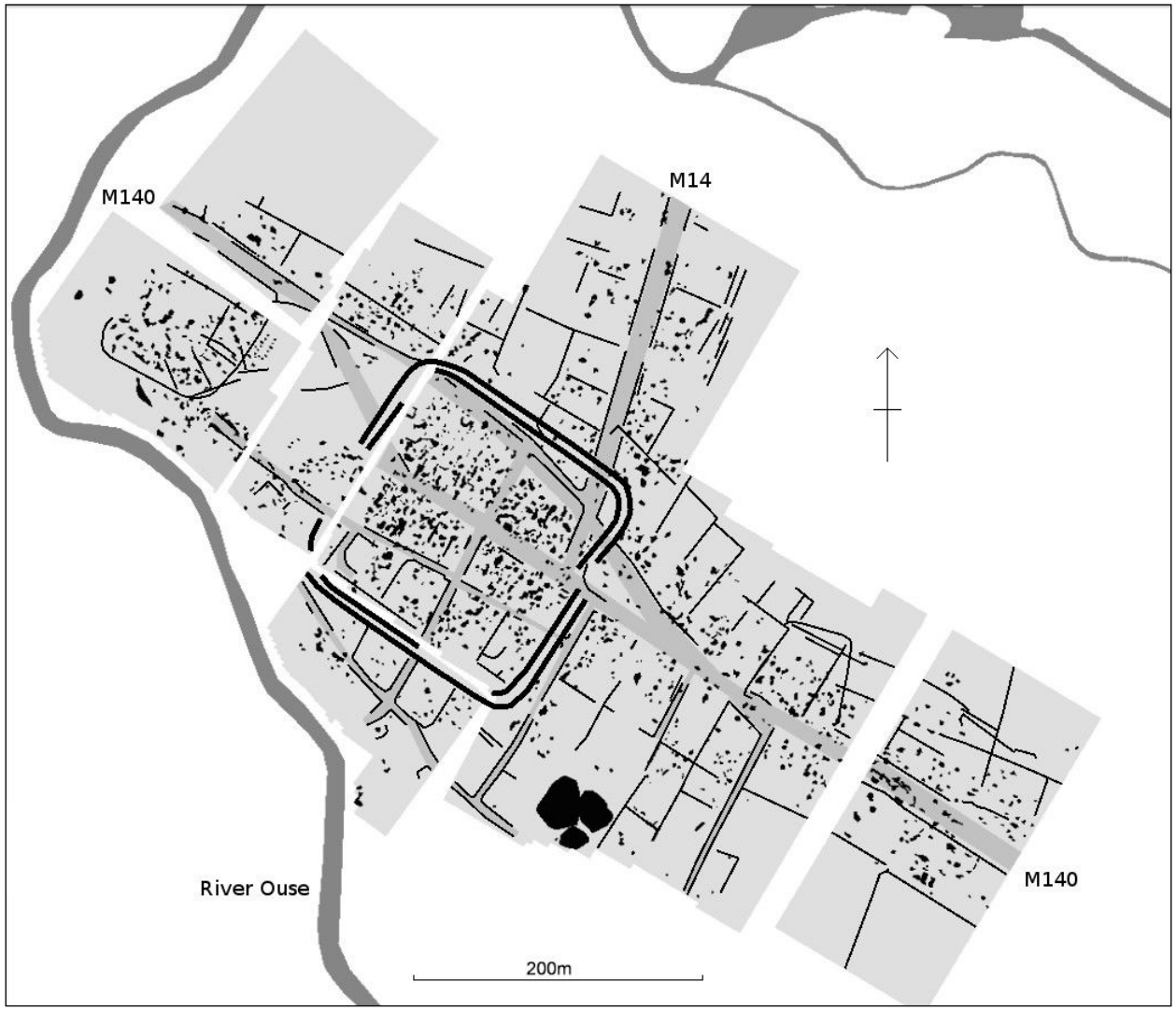

Figure 8.2: Bridge Farm, Upper Wellingham: Roman-period roadside settlement (produced by David Staveley).

used as a post-pad. Other discoveries in 2014 included: ditches, pits, hearths, postholes and two shallow wells, one of which yielded further examples of waterlogged wood (Millum 2014b).

Further excavations in 2015 concentrated upon the intersection of the double enclosure ditches with the pair of roadside ditches which continue northwards from the north-east corner of the enclosed settlement (Millum 2015). Traces of flint metalling were discovered and interpreted as further remains of the London bound road. Of great interest is the fact that this road surface appears to date to after the two late 2nd-century enclosure ditches were refilled. If so, Millum suggests that this stretch of road surface might be associated with access to the eastern road to Pevensey. Sections across the enclosure ditches again revealed 'their military-like' V-shape precision' (Millum 2015, 7), this suggesting an official purpose, perhaps associated with storing official supplies and/or tax collecting. Mid-late 3rd-century dating evidence from above the road metalling found in 2015 suggests that the underlying double-ditched enclosure was only in use for a short period.

Prior to the discovery of the site by archaeologists, a local metal detectorist, David Cunningham, had for many years been searching various fields on Bridge Farm (including those containing the settlement site) and had found a large number of coins and other artefacts. The range of coins found start with some Roman Republican (i.e. pre-Conquest) silver *denarii* and also some Late Iron Age coins. It ends with a silver *silqua* of Gratian minted at Thessalonica in AD 375-8 (Millum 2013, fig 3). Other detector finds included a number of biconical-shaped lead weights for use with steelyard weighing scales. Such finds may indicate commercial and/or administrative activity (Booth *et al*. 2008, 154, 392). Other finds, especially coins and pottery, recovered during a surface artefact collecting survey and the initial excavations, plus the detector finds, suggest that occupation at Bridge Farm spans the period early post-Conquest to late 4th century.

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Millum (2013, 58) has suggested that the settlement at Bridge Farm may have been similar to that at Westhawk Farm, near Ashford in Kent, which was also established on an important road junction (Booth *et al*. 2008). At Westhawk, which has been extensively excavated, the economic functions have been interpreted as being mainly based on farming and local market services, with perhaps an administrative role in the trade of iron. A major difference between the two sites, however, is the erection of defences at Bridge Farm. Probably dating to the late 2nd century, the double-ditched enclosure may have been thought necessary due to the site's proximity to a navigable river and the threat, real or perceived, of coastal raiding. Alternatively the defences at Bridge Farm, and those of similar date at various towns in south-eastern Britain, may have been related to more wide-ranging problems, such as a period of civil unrest or disease (Rudling and Russell 2015, 158).

A nucleated settlement at Seaford

At Seaford an early cemetery (Price 1882; Winbolt 1935, 65) may have been associated with a nucleated settlement of some importance, perhaps a port, and in 1934 an area of at least three acres of settlement activity was discovered some 500m to the west of the cemetery (Smith 1939). Pottery finds from a watching brief undertaken in 1935 during house and road construction work span the second half of the 1st century to the late 3rd or early 4th century. From elsewhere in Seaford, however, the discovery of two coins hints at later activity within the area. One of the coins, a gold solidus of Constantius II (AD 337-361), was found during trenching in *c.* 1892 (Griffith 1892). The other coin, a gold solidus of Valentinian I (AD 364-375), was found at the 'water's edge' in *c.* 1847 (*Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 2, 1847, 344). Smith (1939, 304) notes that other finds from the development site in 1935 included a 'fair quantity' of medieval pottery sherds. In medieval times, when Seaford was at the mouth of the Ouse, it functioned as the port which served the region's administrative centre at Lewes.

A Roman-period (?) barrow cemetery at Lewes

At Lewes, which in late Saxon and Norman times became a strategically important 'gap town' where the Ouse breaches the Downs (Rudling 1983, 45), the discovery of various Roman finds and burials (including a possible barrow cemetery) does not necessarily indicate that this location was the site of a nucleated settlement. Although several excavations within the town have yielded small quantities of residual Roman finds (examples being two pieces of *tegula* tile and one fragment of box-flue tile from Friars Walk (Russell 1990, 154), most of our evidence for Roman Lewes has been assembled by John Bleach (1997; Rudling 2008, 121) following a study of historical sources (e.g. old newspapers) concerning earlier discoveries. Bleach's work has revealed a number of 'forgotten' finds of Roman date including coins, burials, 'urns' and animal bones. Bleach (1997, 132-133) concludes that these and other Roman finds from Lewes indicate 'Roman and possibly earlier activity on the promontory and its western approaches'. However, Bleach suggests that much of this activity 'appears to have been of a ritual nature, and… that there were a number of mounds, at least two of which were barrows, ranged along the north-west edge of the promontory'. Although most of the finds noted by Bleach probably date to the early Roman period, four of five Roman coins found in a garden on the south side of Rotten Row have been dated by the Sussex Archaeological Society to the early 4th century (*c.* AD 317-337). Roman-period ritual activity other than burials in the Ouse valley includes the small shrine at Beddingham (see below), the finding of examples of 'special' or 'structured' deposits of animal bones and artefacts at both the Beddingham and Barcombe villas, and a possible continuation of the practice of making 'structured deposits' in pits on Mount Caburn (Rudling 2008, 118 and 124-127; Hamilton 1998, 33).

Roman-period Industries in the Ouse valley

The main industries that we have archaeological evidence for in the Ouse valley are farming and iron working. Of these farming is likely to have been the most important occupation within our study area. Thus areas of lower lying land would have been suitable for agriculture, whilst the water-meadows adjacent to the Ouse and its tributaries would have been ideal for the raising of cattle. In contrast, the waterless Downs would have been suitable for both sheep rearing and some agriculture. The evidence for farming comprises animal bones and plant remains at various settlement sites, and traces of field systems and environmental evidence as at Bishopstone (Bell 1977, 251-275) where the main agricultural crop was spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta* L.), with six-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare* L.) as a secondary crop. The large scale and intensity of agriculture undertaken in the valley may be indicated by the discovery of corn-drying ovens at both Bishopstone (Rookery Hill) and at Ranscombe Hill (see below). A possible related industry might have been water powered milling, this being an activity which is well attested in the valley during medieval and post-medieval times and survives today in the place names 'Barcombe Mills' and 'Tidemills'.

The four iron working sites closest to the Ouse, at Freshfield Brickworks, Coleham, Grange Corner and North Chailey appear to be south-western outliers of a major concentration of High Weald ironworking sites, such as Oldlands and Crabtree Farm, which would have been served by the London-Barcombe road (Cleere and Crossley 1995, 57-88 and fig. 19).

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At least some of these sites had been established by the 1st century AD, with others starting in the 2nd or early 3rd centuries. At North Chailey, for instance, investigations at a site associated with ironworking, and in the vicinity of other iron workings, have yielded pottery that indicates occupation/activity during the 2nd to mid-3rd centuries (Chris Butler and Malcolm Lyne pers. comm.).

By the mid-3rd century operations at many of the Sussex iron working sites had ceased, an exception being the extensive site at Oldlands (close to the London-Barcombe road) which is thought to have still been in use at the end of the 3rd century. By the end of the 4th century it seems that all (or most) of the ironworks had closed and the labour force moved out leaving perhaps much of the Wealden forests deserted. Subsequently, during the Early Anglo-Saxon period the potential of Wealden iron-ore resources 'appears to have been unrecognised, or perhaps ignored' (Cleere and Crossley 1995, 85).

The remains of another local industry, pottery manufacture, have been found about 100m to the south of the Greensand Way at Wickham Barn, Chiltington. Two pottery kilns were excavated and their products were found to indicate a strong New Forest influence; and perhaps a migrant New Forest potter (Butler and Lyne 2001). Although archaeo-magnetic dating of the kilns proved unsuccessful, Lyne was able by seriation of the pottery assemblage and comparisons with dateable products from the New Forest kilns of Hampshire, to provide a date range for the site of *c.* AD 250-270 to *c*. AD 300-350+. With regard to the end of pottery production at the site, Lyne states that this is likely to have occurred during the mid-4th century, as post AD 370 pottery assemblages recovered from occupation sites in the vicinity include either none or very few Wickham Barn sherds.

Other important Roman-period industries in the Ouse valley probably included timber/woodland management and charcoal making in the Weald, stone quarrying/ procurement on the Downs and in the Weald (note the use of flint, chalk, Sussex marble and ironstone as building materials at the Beddingham, Barcombe and Plumpton villas and at the Barcombe 'isolated' bathhouse); fishing (both freshwater and marine as evidenced by the bones of: perch, Atlantic salmon or sea trout, shad or twaite shad, herring, conger eel, cod, mackerel, sea bream, mullet, brill or turbot, plaice/ flounder and other small flatfish at Beddingham villa (W. Van Neer *et al*: unpubl. specialists' report, 'The fresh and salted fish remains') and by a fish-hook and the bones of a meagre and a ? mackerel found at Bishopstone: Bell 1977, 131: 27 and fig. 63: 27, 284-5); marine mollusc procurement (including perhaps oyster farming), and probably salt making.

Villas

Six known or probable villa sites have been investigated in the Ouse valley water catchment area. Each of these sites will be considered with regard to what is known about their dating and developmental histories. For discussions about Sussex villas in general (see Rudling 1998 and 2003a).

Newhaven villa

Rescue excavations undertaken during the early 1970s in the town centre of Newhaven about 1.3km upstream from the Roman and modern mouths of the Ouse (Robinson 1999, 9 plan d), revealed traces of a Romano-British settlement bounded by a ditch (Bell 1976). Parts of five wooden and stone buildings were discovered; dating evidence indicating a start in the second half of the 1st century and ending in the Late Antonine period when the whole site was systematically levelled prior to its abandonment. Since the demolition horizons contained painted wall plaster, *opus signinum*, box-flue tiles, window glass and abundant building stone, the excavator concluded that the buildings were probably the outbuildings, including a possible granary, of a small early villa (Figure 8.3). Bell further suggested that the three excavated sites were located on a clay-with-flints deposit overlying a chalk terrace beside open water of the former Ouse estuary. Support for a potentially very early date for this villa comes from Black (1987, 155) who has identified a minimum of ten pieces of 'thin-walled' box-flue tiles among the unpublished excavation finds in Brighton Museum. Black suggests that these tiles may have been used with 'half-box' tiles (which he dates to before *c.* AD 75-80) or with *parietales* and ceramic spacers. On the basis of the presence at Newhaven of another type of flue-tile (this time roller-stamped) which dates to the late first or early 2nd century, Black also suggests that the baths at the villa 'had been modified after their original construction'. Such a postulated phase of modifications thus potentially fits with the excavator's own dating (first half of the 2nd century) for a second phase of occupation and building activity generally at the site (Bell 1976, 250).

Bell notes that part of this Roman-period settlement may have been first found in 1852, perhaps further uphill. The 19th century discoveries (now unlocated), however, which comprised traces of Roman masonry and tiles (including box-flue tiles which may have been a variety of 'half-box' type: Black 1987, 155), were in an 'upland meadow' and perhaps represent a second Roman-period stone building in the parish (Spurrell 1852; Bell 1976, 234).

Although Bell's excavations yielded a few sherds of 3rd-century pottery, nothing was found to indicate continuity of site use into the 4th century. The reasons for this villa's relatively early demise by *c.* AD 200 are unknown, but could include the threat or perceived threat

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Figure 8.3: Newhaven villa, Site 1: Structure V from the south, with part of the north wall removed. Scale: 2m (photo: Brenda Westley).

of coastal raiding (Rudling 2003a, 121, 124). It is also possible that occupation had moved to a new location, perhaps the now lost site recorded by Spurrell (1852), where finds included two radiate coins, one of Gallienus (AD 259-68), the other of Claudius II (AD 268-70), but even here nothing was found that can be attributed to the 4th century. It is worth noting, however, that a lack of late Romano-British pottery has also been observed for the Newhaven Castle Hill site (Bell 1976, 286). Although Bell's villa excavations yielded 'a few rather doubtful small sherds' of pottery of possible Saxon date, the stratigraphy and medieval finds indicate that the investigated sites 'were within one of the intensely cultivated fields [of the medieval settlement and its possible Saxon predecessor] of Meeching', the parish church of which (St. Michael's) is located *c*. 500m to the west on a hillside (Bell 1976, 299).

The discovery of an early and possibly elaborate villa at Newhaven is very interesting as the other 'Early' Sussex villas are generally relatively large and luxurious and sometimes, as at Fishbourne, Pulborough and Southwick, of Mediterranean- rather than north Gallic-type (Rudling 2003a, 118; Rudling and Leigh 2013, 37-39). The buildings at some of these sites share similarities in elements of design, construction and decoration, and some probably involved the same architects and craftsmen. Ownership of such a villa might have included the native aristocracy, which was left in peace to develop in the strongly philo-Roman atmosphere generated by the client kingdom of Togidubnus (Cunliffe 1973, 79). The building of such rural houses in Sussex so soon after AD 43 may have been due to a competitive desire by the local elite to display their status in a new, 'Romanised' way (Millett 1990, 94). The wide distribution of the large early villas in Sussex may be significant, each being located on a distinct block of land which might 'represent the territory over which the [indigenous] land-owning aristocracy held control (Cunliffe 1973, 79 and fig. 132). The importance after the Conquest of access to maritime and/or riverine transportation may be significant, with early villas located at Eastbourne, Newhaven, perhaps Brighton (Springfield Road), Southwick, Angmering, Arundel and Fishbourne.

Beddingham villa

During 1986 aerial reconnaissance revealed a previously unrecorded Roman-period villa near the foot of the north scarp of the Downs at Beddingham. Subsequent survey and excavation investigated the main residential building and sampled adjacent buildings and areas within the villa's two-phase ditched enclosure (Rudling 1997; 1998, 52-59; 2003b; Figure 8.4). Evidence was revealed for multi-period usage of the site from the Mesolithic to the post-medieval period, with the oldest settlement evidence dating to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age. Settlement at the site may then have been abandoned until the end of the Late Iron Age or the beginning of the Roman period, when a two-phase timber round 'house' was constructed (Rudling 1997; Figure 8.5). In the Flavian period a rectangular range of five rooms with mortared flint foundations was constructed adjacent to the round 'house', and this formed the core of subsequent phases of construction/modification to this main domestic structure. Such modifications included the adding and abandonment of a suite of baths, which in *c.* AD 270 was

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overlain by a new range of rooms (Figure 8.6). The final development of the building, which is not securely dated, was the adding of a curiously shaped veranda with chalk foundations which involves an irregular curved section. This curved section of wall overlies the northern part of the 1st-century timber round 'house' and it is suggested that the shape of the irregular section of foundations was designed to respect the location (real or tradition) of the former ring-post structure (Figure 8.5). If this theory is correct, these chalk footings are an extremely important indication of continuity of ownership throughout a long period of the Roman occupation of Britain.

The dating of the final phase of occupation of the winged corridor villa is based mainly on pottery evidence (Lyne: unpubl. Roman and Saxon pottery report). Deposits within the new north range (i.e. the rooms above the infilled baths) yielded pottery dating to the period *c*. AD 270-350 and with an absence of late 4th-century forms. Similarly, the fill of an oven in the front corridor also dates to *c.* AD 270-350, whilst a large oven or kiln in one of the main rooms is of similar or 3rd-century date. In addition, the upper two fills of a well which is located near the winged building also date to the late 3rd/early 4th centuries. This well, the only one to be found at Beddingham, was probably carefully located some five metres behind the winged house in order to provide water for both domestic and bathing requirements. Its infilling/abandonment may thus have coincided with when the adjacent building went out of use for domestic purposes.

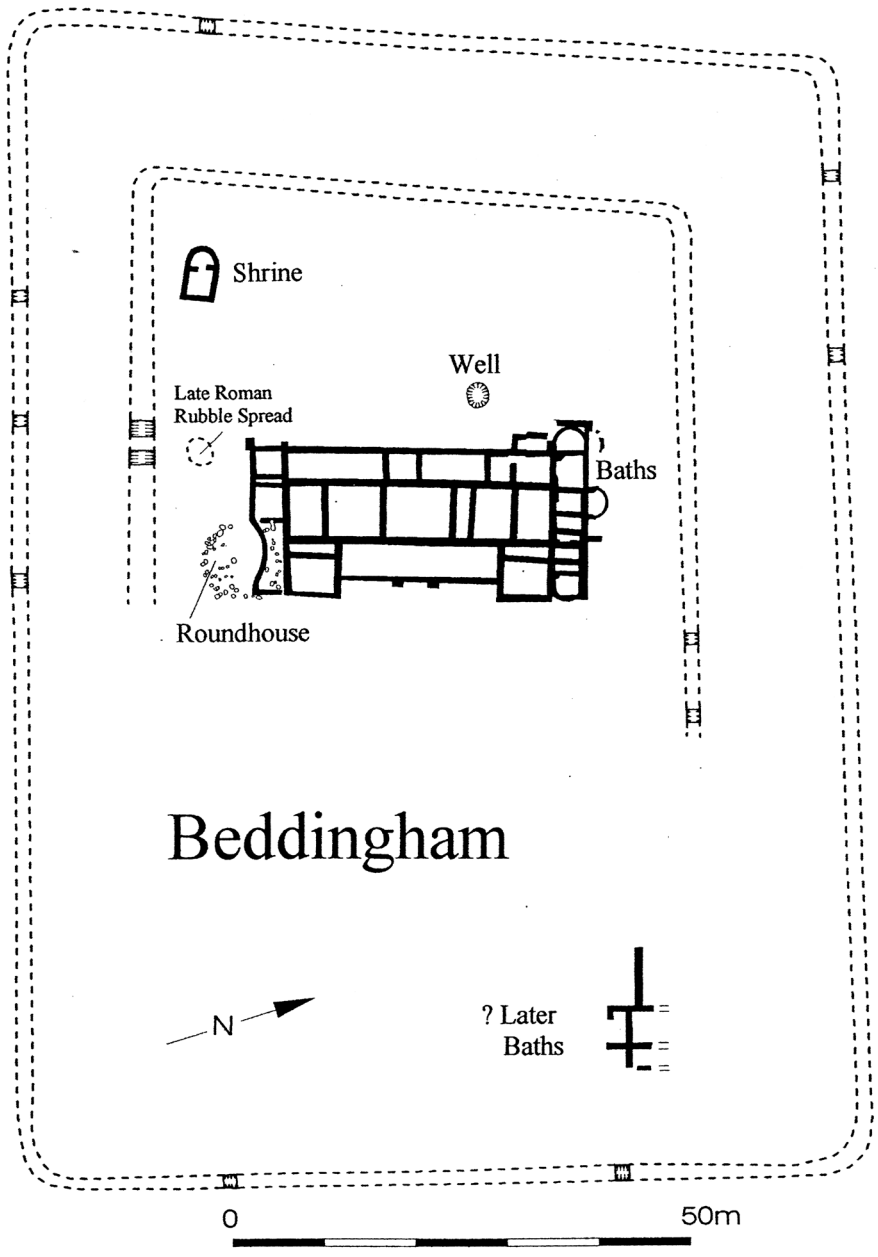

FIGURE 8.4: PLAN OF THE BEDDINGHAM VILLA WITH ITS TWO PHASES OF ENCLOSURE DITCH. THE OUTER AND LATER ENCLOSURE DATES TO THE MID-2ND CENTURY (DRAWN BY JANE RUSSELL).

The demise of both the winged building and nearby well at Beddingham was not, however, the end of occupation/activity at this site. Thus just to the south of the south-west corner of the winged building (and to the west of the site of the original timber round 'house') an area of rubble with much rubbish may have been hard-standing for a small building (Figure 8.4). Whilst most of the pottery associated with the rubble spread is 3rd-century in date, there are some late 4th-century sherds, including a Hadham kilns red-ware bowl, a hook rim from the Harrold kilns in Bedfordshire, an East Sussex Ware copy of a Mayen Ware dish of Gose's form 474 (i.e. *c.* AD 350-420) and an Oxfordshire white ware *mortarium* of type M23 (i.e. *c*. AD 350-400+). In addition, Lyne's study of the pottery from the plough soil above the villa, which is nearly a quarter of all the recovered pottery from the site, shows that definite post-AD 330 sherds amount (by weight) to only 1.1% of this assemblage. This suggests that there was either very limited occupation of the villa during the late 4th century (perhaps continuing no later than the end of the third quarter), or limited use of pottery by the inhabitants.

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Figure 8.5: The Beddingham villa: the two-phased timber 'roundhouse' and the southern masonry foundations of the villa, scales: 2m (photo: David Rudling).

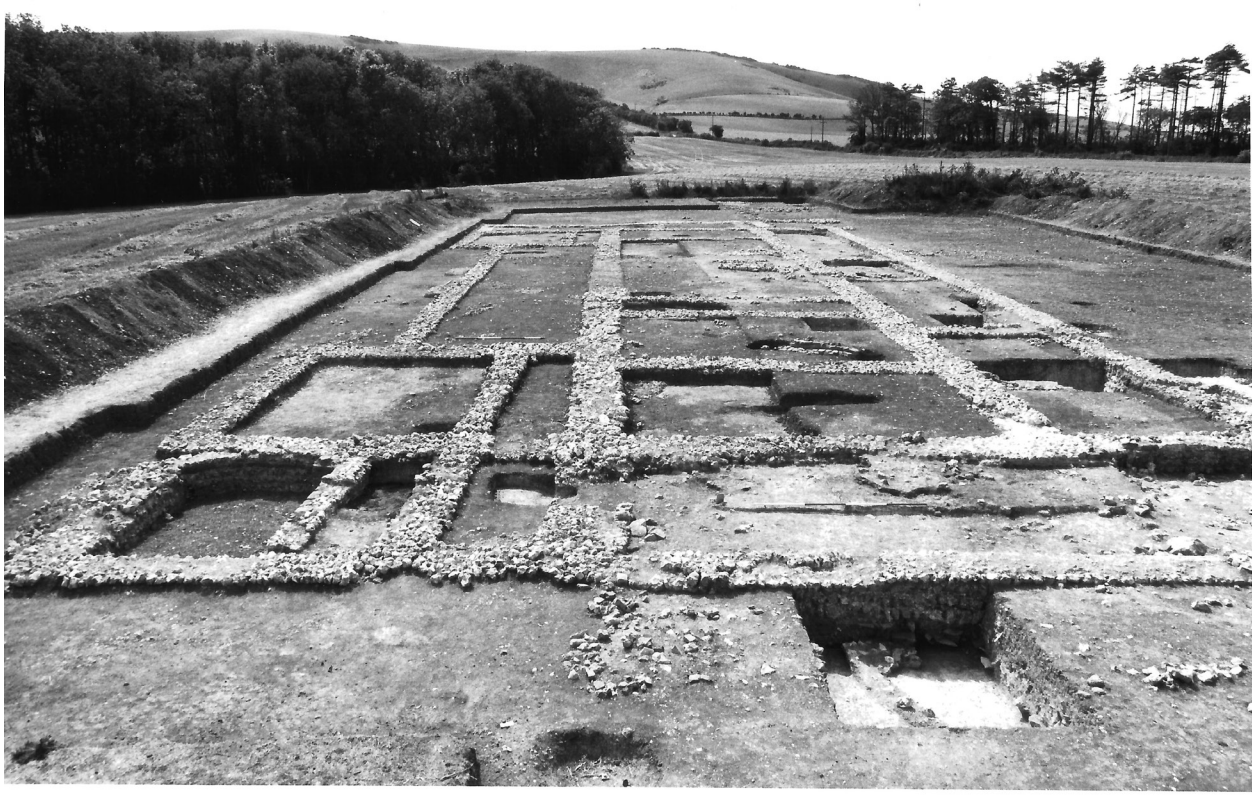

Figure 8.6: Beddingham villa viewed from the north, scale: 2m (photo: David Rudling).

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Sixteen metres to the north-west of the rubble spread referred to above was a small, three-phase masonry Romano-British shrine (Rudling 1997; Figure 8.7). The final phase of activity within the shrine consisted of the filling of a circular cut feature at the western/apsidal end (Figures 8.4 and 8.7). The dark fill (648) of this feature yielded sherds of Saxon pottery dated to the late 4th or early 5th century. The Saxon vessels are in two fabrics: a course black sandy ware and a fine-sanded polished black ware. They include the base of a pedestal bowl; a body sherd from a rusticated vessel with random stabbing; an everted rim; the base from a jar with twin vertical grooves flanked by vertical rows of dimples; three body sherds decorated by pairs of vertical grooves separated by rows of dimples and a pedestal-based necked bowl with a carinated girth decorated with vertically slashed faceting (Rudling 1998, fig. 9; 2-7). Context 648 also yielded a number of Roman sherds, including a large and unabraded piece from a Pevensey Ware bowl dated to *c.* AD 350/370-400+. There is thus the possibility that at least some of the late 4th-century Roman pottery, which is later than the main villa building occupation, could be contemporary with some of the Saxon pottery. In addition, the two Saxon bowls with pedestal feet (*standfussgefassen*) are types which disappeared from the Saxon pottery repertoire during the mid-5th century.

Additional sherds of late Roman and early Saxon pottery were found in several features and deposits near the Roman shrine and to the west of the main villa building. These various pottery finds represent late Romano-British or early Saxon activity, perhaps 'squatter' occupation, in at least part of the former villa enclosure, but not in the main building itself.

Other as yet unexcavated parts of the villa complex may also contain evidence for late Romano-British or Saxon activity. The people involved in such activity may have been associated with the nearby 'Drayton Field' Saxon inhumation cemetery (Welch 1983, 396). This burial ground was probably first discovered in *c.*1800 when six skeletons (of which five were male) were found in a ploughed field in Beddingham parish. The associated finds included: two (?iron) swords, an (?iron) knife, beads, a buckle and fragments of a stone bracelet (*Archaeologia* 14 (1803), 273). An unpublished manuscript of *c.* 1800 may also refer to these or subsequent excavations and states that skeletons and an (?iron) spearhead were found. This document provides better locational information than the other primary account (see above) and states that the finds were made in 'Drayton Field'. Whilst such a name is not listed in the Tithe Apportionment, 'Great Drayton' field lies

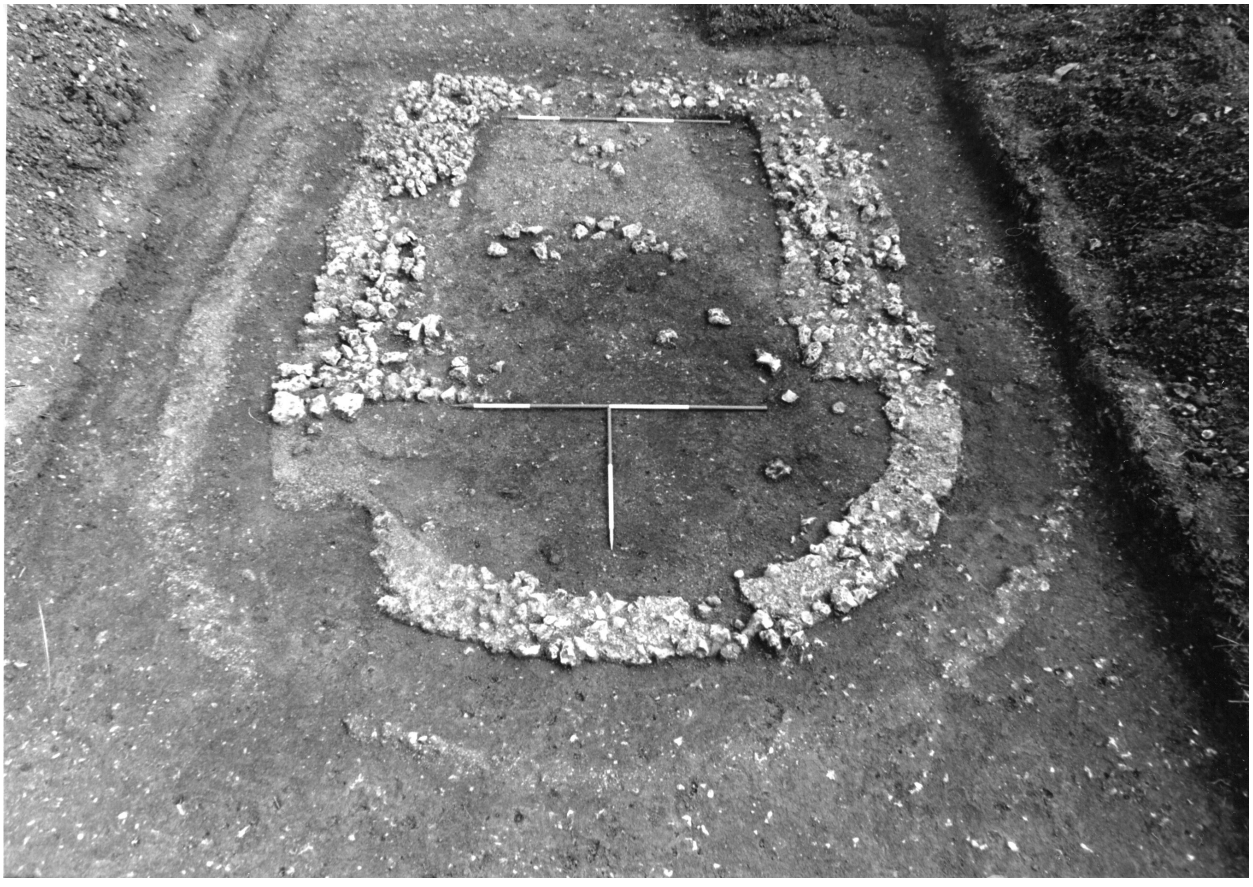

Figure 8.7: Beddingham villa: the Roman-period shrine. The darker area within the building contained both late Roman and early Saxon pottery, scales: 2m (photo: David Rudling).

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only some 200m west of the villa. Although two metal detecting surveys have failed to locate any further traces of Saxon burials in what was Great Drayton field, the late Mr. John Monnington, the farmer at Preston Court Farm during the excavation project, had in his possession an iron spearhead which had been recovered from this field some years earlier. This find is of Swanton's type H2 and dates to the 5th or 6th century (Swanton 1974, 18-20). Its discovery probably confirms the general location of the Saxon cemetery, which unfortunately remains poorly understood in terms of its extent, nature and date range.

Other Early Saxon burials in the vicinity of Beddingham villa include an inhumation cemetery of primary or secondary burials in barrows on Beddingham Hill (i.e. on the Downs to the south of the villa), an inhumation cemetery at Balcombe Pit, Glynde, to the north (Welch 1983, 395-401), and a mixed inhumation and cremation cemetery on a prominent rise overlooking Glynde Reach to the north-west. The finds associated with the burials on Beddingham Hill include a copper-alloy buckle of late Roman type and dated to the late 4th or early 5th century, and a disc brooch which Welch assigned to the late 5th or early 6th century. Overall Welch suggested that these burials date to *c.* AD 500. At the Balcombe Pit site various skeletons which had been orientated west-east with the head at the west end, were discovered during 19th century quarrying for chalk. Associated finds included iron knives, pottery, glass vessels and a (?) calf skull. Three of the skeletons were in coffins. A 20th century discovery at this site had a wooden box containing grain placed under the skull. This burial was thought by Welch to be probably of Roman rather than Saxon date. If this theory is correct, the cemetery may have begun in the Roman period and continued in use into the Saxon period. The third cemetery, which was found in 2008, has only been partially investigated by archaeologists. The excavated remains comprised three inhumation burials, two possible cremations and grave goods which indicate a date range of mid-5th to mid-6th century (Beesley 2009). It can be seen from the examples discussed above that the locating of early Saxon cemeteries might help in the identification of late Romano-British inhumation cemeteries which are otherwise unknown in the Ouse valley.

Given the proximity of Preston Court farmhouse, with just one small field separating it from the Beddingham villa to its south, and in contrast to the situation at the Barcombe villa site (see below), it is surprising that the villa wall foundations at Beddingham do not show more signs of stone robbing. The fate of the above ground fabrics of the winged house, shrine and other buildings at Beddingham is unknown. Were they systematically levelled and materials salvaged for reuse elsewhere? Or were they abandoned and left to fall down, perhaps with salvaging of selected materials such as roofing tiles and lead fittings? Whilst uncertainty remains, historical sources (i.e. some of the field names of the area) indicate that the villa (-site) was perceptible during the Saxon period. Richard Coates (1990) has studied the field names and notes that on a map of 1785 the field in which the villa was subsequently discovered was called Stone Burgh. He suggests that the burgh element could date back to Saxon times and refer to a substantial masonry building. Other relevant local place names considered by Coates include various names (e.g. Comps Farm; Great Comps and Comps Wish) which contain the Old English word comps, a borrowing from the Latin campus, which Gelling (1988, 74-8) believes to denote 'land on the edge of a villa estate' – perhaps neglected arable land where the villa itself had been abandoned by the Saxon period. As the word comp went out of use at an early stage in the history of English, its usage for various place names at Beddingham indicates that the villa was perceptible 'to the Saxons in some form, physical or administrative' (Coates 1990, 6-9).

Field survey in the vicinity of the Beddingham villa has mainly consisted of metal detecting, including an extensive metal detector rally in 2005 monitored by the archaeology section of East Sussex County Council (Greg Chuter pers. comm.). These activities have revealed a large concentration of Iron Age and Roman material in a field to the south-west of the villa site. In contrast to the villa, this site (the 'Furlongs') would appear to have been occupied in the Late Iron Age as attested by finds of both Mid- and Late Iron Age pottery, a Class 1 potin coin and, perhaps, a Roman Republican denarius of Paulus Lepidus (*c.* 60 BC) which is in excellent condition. The Romano-British period is represented by pottery, metalwork and some 200 coins, most of which date to the late 3rd or early 4th centuries, but also include three bronze issues of Valens (AD 364-378). The lack of significant quantities of Roman tile may indicate the absence at this site of 'Romanised' buildings. The relationship of this site to the nearby villa is unknown, but given the small amount of Late Iron Age material found at the villa it is possible that it was the ancestral farmstead for both sites and then continued in use as a satellite farmstead after the initial stages of villa development at the other site. It was perhaps abandoned in the mid- to late 4th century, probably after the main building at the villa had already gone out of use. Possibly future excavations at this site, as at the villa, might reveal evidence for some late 4th/early 5th century activity/occupation, and thus provide a second possible settlement for some of the people who may have been buried at the nearby 'Drayton Field' cemetery.

A probable villa at Firle

Three kilometres to the east of the Beddingham villa, at Firle, metal detecting, 'rapid fieldwalking', a geophysical survey and evaluation trenches located a previously unrecorded Iron Age and Romano-British

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settlement within a large rectilinear enclosure (Chuter 2005). The resistivity survey and trial trenching revealed evidence for a substantial timber-framed building which the excavator suggests is 'stylistically similar to a proto-villa'. As with the Beddingham villa, this site lies at the base of the scarp foot of the Downs on a thick deposit of colluvial hill wash. The Firle site lies adjacent to Compton Wood, with here the place name word Compton being derived from the Old English cumb tũn or valley (combe) farmstead (Glover 1975, 39).

Pottery sherds from the various surveys and excavations include examples representing the Late Bronze Age/ Iron Age, Roman, Early Saxon and medieval periods. Of particular interest are ten sherds of early Saxon pottery which Chuter (2005, 15) says are 'identical to Bishopstone Anglo-Saxon fabric 1 (Bell 1977, 227) and therefore of a 5th-7th century date'. Although nine of these sherds were surface finds, the tenth piece was recovered from Trench 1 in the vicinity of the postulated Roman building.

Other finds included large quantities of Roman 'brick/ tile', metalwork and eight Roman coins, most of which date to the late 3rd and 4th centuries, with the most recent dateable examples being two coins attributable to the House of Constantine (i.e. early 4th century). The finds of metalwork include one definite and one possible copper-alloy Anglo-Saxon brooch. The first object is a 6th century gilded button brooch with stylised Woden decoration. The other is a probable Anglo-Saxon plate brooch. The significance of the early Saxon brooches and pottery at this site is, however, uncertain and Chuter (pers. comm.) is of the opinion that with regard to the brooches 'they are casual losses as there is a general scatter of this type of artefact around Firle'. Alternatively the brooches and pottery may provide evidence for a continuation of occupation/activity at the site into the Early Saxon period.

A probable villa at Mark Cross, Laughton

Fieldwalking 4.3km north north-east of the Firle villa, at Mark Cross, Laughton on the boundary of the Greensand and the Gault Clay, revealed a large spread of Roman material. This location is also a place noted by the farmer for the presence of a 'solid flint area', which might indicate the presence of structural remains (Masefield and Machling 1993, 1). A soil resistivity survey of part of the field located two main areas of high resistance, one of which is considered to be rectangular in shape 'with square wings protruding [to the east] from both the north and south ends' (Masefield and Machling 1993, 4). The southern end of this anomaly coincides with the area of the field with the highest concentrations of surface Roman material, including much tile (*imbrex*; *tegulae*; flat and box-flue types) and *tesserae*, and the anomaly is thus likely to be a Roman building with flint foundations – probably an east-facing winged villa.

All the pottery from this site was assessed by Malcolm Lyne. He concluded that the Roman-period sherds 'indicate occupation of the site from at least the end of the 2nd to the end of the 4th century' (Masefield and Machling 1993, Appendix 1). Lyne was also able to identify four sherds of early-mid Saxon pottery, two pieces being assigned to the 5th-6th centuries, whilst two other examples, which may be slightly later in date, were recovered from the site of the Roman building and may thus indicate possible 'squatter' occupation.

Barcombe villa and bathhouse

A programme of research and training investigations began at Barcombe in 1999. This parish lies to the north of the Downs and to the west of the Ouse (Figure 8.1). The two investigated sites are located to the south-west of the intersection at Bridge Farm of the Greensand Way and the London-Barcombe Way, close to the newly discovered Barcombe-Offham Roman road (see above), and near, and adjacent to, (respectively), St. Mary's Church.

The villa site has a very prominent setting and provides views across the Ouse valley to the Downs. Fieldwalking, geophysical survey and excavations have revealed evidence for multi-period activity on the site (Figure 8.8), including: a Bronze Age ring ditch, traces of a Bronze Age field system; four Late Iron Age and Romano-British timber roundhouses within a ditched enclosure (Figure 8.9a); a 'proto-villa' with masonry foundations (Building 1) (Figure 8.9b) which was replaced by a winged corridor building (2) (Figure 8.9c); a small bath house; a large aisled building (3) (Figure 8.9c); a well; enclosure walls; a large hall building (4) with small flanking rooms at its southern end which lies outside the main courtyard complex, and various pits, ditches and postholes (all Romano-British); later Saxon pits, postholes and a sunken-featured building; and medieval robber trenches and ditches (Rudling 2003a, 119-121; 2003b, 12-15; Rudling and Butler 2002; 2004; Rudling *et al*. 2010, 22-26). The name of the field in which the villa is located is Dunstalls Field, Dunstalls being derived from the Old English tūn-stall meaning the site (or place) of a farm (Smith 1956, 198) (see also Coates 2002).

Romano-British occupation at the site, which includes all or some of the four roundhouses, spans the first to fourth centuries. By the end of the 3rd century the principal elements of the villa as revealed by excavation comprised the winged corridor house, the aisled building and the hall building outside the courtyard complex. The first two of these buildings formed much of the northern and eastern sides respectively of the courtyard and were joined by a boundary wall. Such walling also occurs along the southern side of the courtyard but is separated from the aisled building by a large entrance into the villa complex. Dating evidence associated with the aisled building, which is thought to have been built

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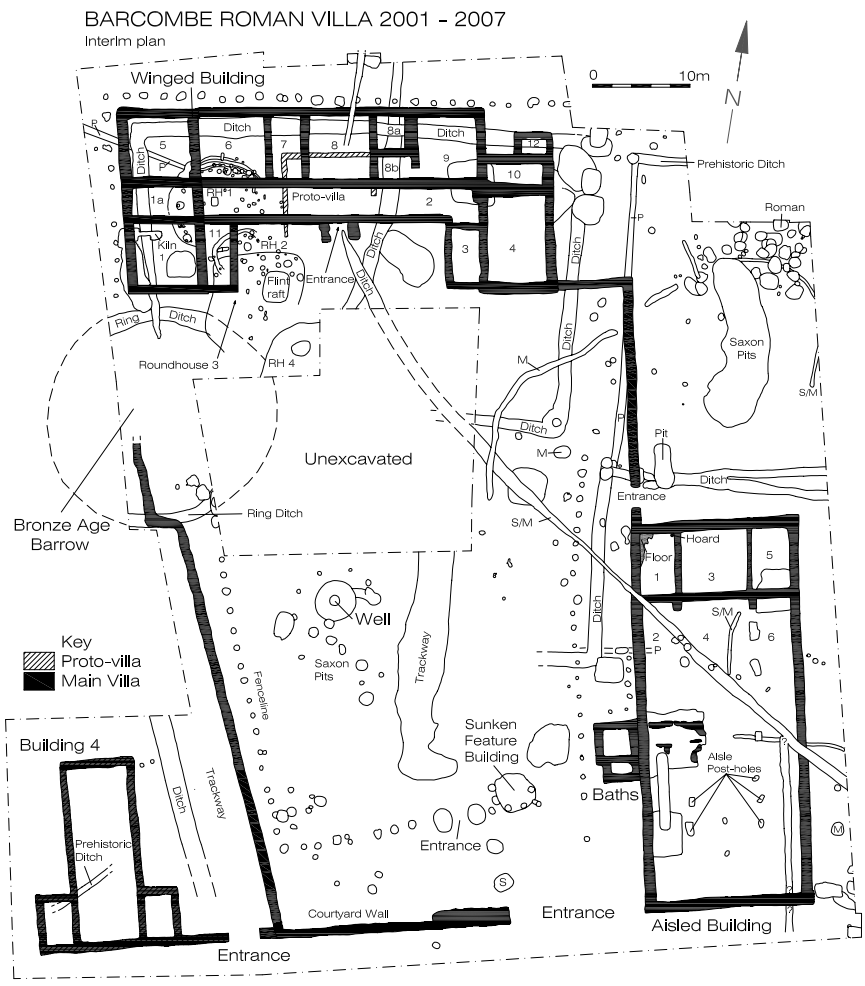

Figure 8.8: Barcombe villa: Interim multi-period plan (drawn by Jane Russell).

after the construction of the winged building, includes a small dispersed hoard of late 3rd century radiate coins, ending with an issue of Tacitus (AD 275-6). These coins may have been either a 'rite of commencement' (i.e. a foundation deposit) or a money hoard buried below the floor of one of the three rooms at the northern end of the building. The other coin finds from the villa site in general show an absence of coins dating to the mid- to late 4th century. Such evidence may indicate that the main phase of Romano-British occupation at the site ended *c.* AD 300–330. Analysis by Malcolm Lyne (pers. comm.) of the pottery finds suggests the presence of large quantities of 3rd century pottery and considerably smaller quantities of 4th century material, examples of which include a product of the Overwey kilns in Surrey which is likely to be post AD 330 and possibly as late as AD 370+. Lyne concludes that the winged house may have gone out of use by the early 4th century, whilst occupation may have continued for longer in the aisled building. It is thus possible that after the higher status winged-corridor house went out of use, perhaps as a result of the villa now having a non-resident owner, farm workers continued to live and work in other parts of the villa complex, such as the aisled building.

The nature and precise dating of the end of Romano-British occupation at the Barcombe villa site are unknown but, in contrast to the villa at Beddingham, that at Barcombe has not yielded any early Saxon finds. Excavations at this site have, however, revealed a number of features, mainly pits but also some postholes, which are provisionally dated to the mid–late Saxon period. A large concentration of such pits was found in the north-east corner of the trench, to the north of the aisled building and to the east of the winged building. Finds associated with these pits include pottery, animal bones, a bun-shaped ceramic loom weight and iron slag. Of possibly earlier date is a line of three postholes and a pit in the area between the small western wing room and the main entrance to the house. These four features, and the as yet undated sunken-featured building to the south, may be evidence for limited middle Saxon 'squatter' occupation amongst the ruins of the villa complex, whilst the other pits and finds indicate larger areas of later Saxon settlement and industrial activity further away from the remains of the two main Roman-period masonry buildings.

The second Roman-period site that has been investigated at Barcombe is a large three-phased bathhouse complex in Church Field, adjacent to St. Mary's Church (Rudling *et al*. 2010, 27; Millum *et al*. 2013). This 'isolated' bathing complex is surrounded on three sides by ditches which were used for draining both ground and waste water away from the baths and towards a large palaeo-channel which is located at the south-west corner of the field. This former channel, which may have provided a link by water with the Ouse, is today marked by a small stream running along the western boundary of the field. Dating evidence from the baths site mainly spans the 3rd-4th centuries and includes a piece of roller-stamped (die 9) box-flue tile, pottery and coins. It is possible that by the end of the 3rd century the baths and its southern ditch had gone out of use and some of its rooms used for new purposes. Activity at this site, however, continued into the late 4th century. Although the relationship between this 'isolated' bathhouse and the nearby villa is uncertain, the baths may have served the needs of the inhabitants at

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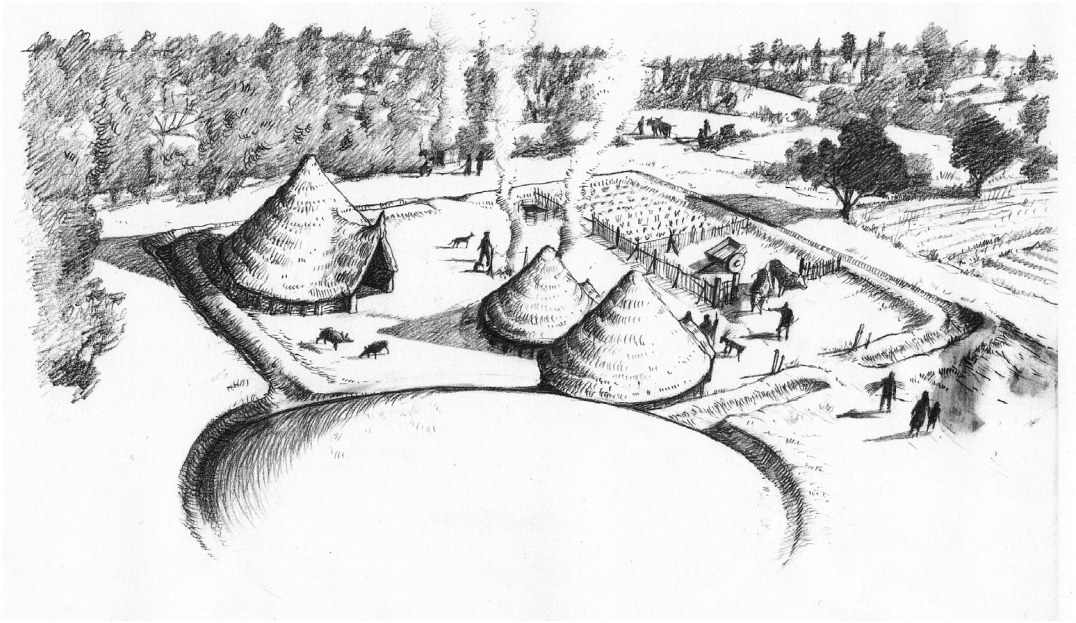

Figure 8.9a: Barcombe: c. AD 40-50: The ditched enclosure with roundhouses. Remains of a Bronze Age round barrow in the foreground (drawing by Andy Gammon).

Figure 8.9b: Barcombe: c. AD 150: The fenced enclosure with the proto-villa and a roundhouse (drawing by Andy Gammon).

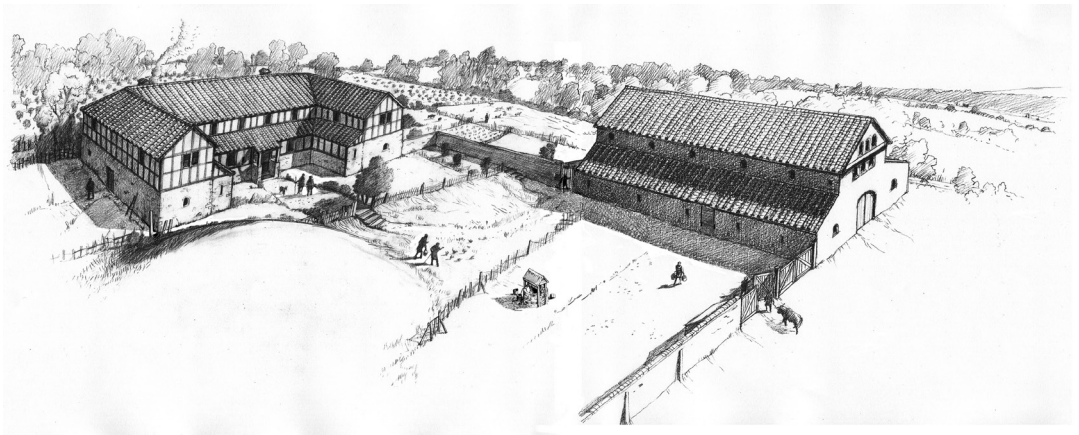

Figure 8.9c: Barcombe: c. AD 250: The winged-corridor villa and aisled building (drawing by Andy Gammon).

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the villa and perhaps also others from elsewhere on the villa estate. Alternatively, or in addition, they may have served the inhabitants of, and visitors to, the nucleated settlement at Bridge Farm, the site being accessible by road and probably also by water.

Malcolm Lyne, who has examined all the Roman-period pottery from the Barcombe bathhouse site, has also identified two sherds of early Saxon pottery; one, from the surface of the demolition debris within the bathhouse, is a piece from a *buckelurne* with rosette stamps and vertical rouletted bands and dates to *c.* AD 450-550. Lyne (pers. comm.) suggests that this sherd hints at the possibility that an early Saxon cremation had been interred in or near the ruins of the bathhouse and had subsequently been disturbed by ploughing or stone-robbing activities.

A third possible Roman-period site at Barcombe is the location of St. Mary's Church. It is interesting to note that the fabric of the existing church, which dates from Norman times but was extensively renovated and altered in 1879, bears no obvious evidence, such as fragments of Roman tile or carved stone, for the reuse of building materials (other than probably flints) from either of the nearby Romano-British sites. However, an archaeological evaluation undertaken in advance of an application for planning permission for the construction of an extension on the south side of the church, revealed a small quantity of Roman tile, including fragments of examples of floor tiles, *imbrex, tegulae*, box-flue tiles and *tesserae* (Meaton 2004). Unfortunately all of these finds were 'residual in much later contexts' and generally the assessment excavations did not go below post-medieval deposits to the natural subsoil where earlier features may have been revealed. It is therefore possible that some, or all, of the recovered Roman tile from St. Mary's churchyard may relate to Roman-period remains that existed on the church/churchyard site. It is thought that this place was also the site of a Saxon church. It is perhaps possible that this area was also the site of a Roman-period building/s, perhaps given its more elevated location, a mausoleum or temple/shrine. Such a building/s may have been the reason for the siting of the Saxon and Norman churches.

The Plumpton villa

At Plumpton, to the north of the Downs and the Gault Clay, and some 700m to the south of the Greensand Way, is the site of a small villa (Allen 1984; Allen and Seager-Smith 1987; Rudling 2014a). The site has been investigated by three separate phases of systematic fieldwalking, two programmes of geophysical survey and excavations in 2014 and 2015. Surface indications and the results of the geophysical surveys and excavations have revealed a south facing winged corridor building orientated slightly north-west/south-east. As revealed in 2015, the eastern wing room had an apsidal southern wall, and the room to its north contained either a corn-drying oven or a form of channelled hypocaust (Rudling 2016). The discovery of box-flue tiles also indicates that the villa possessed at least one hypocaust heating system and perhaps a bath-suite. Finds of red tile *tesserae*, some smaller mosaic cubes, and painted wall plaster provide some information about internal decorations.

The most recent geophysical surveys revealed that the villa house was located within a large ditched enclosure, and probably comprised at least two phases of construction (Butler and Staveley 2014). Outside the enclosure was evidence for a number of trackways and a field system, all probably associated with the villa complex. Although dating evidence (principally pottery sherds) from the first surface artefact collecting survey indicated occupation of the villa in the 2nd and 3rd centuries but not the 4th century, a second survey undertaken by David Dunkin of University College London in 1996 recovered three coins, including a commemorative issue of Helena (mother of Constantine the Great) which is dated to *c.* AD 337-340. Subsequent coin finds during the excavations of 2014 and 2015 have included further examples of 4th century date, the youngest being a bronze issue of Magnentius minted at Trier *c.* AD 350-353. The writer plans to undertake a detailed study of all the retained finds from this villa and such work may reveal other evidence for 4th century or later activity at this site. The recent fieldwork at Plumpton is associated with a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement which is aimed to protect the full extent of the villa complex.

The non-villa Farmsteads

The majority of the Roman-period settlements in the southern part of the Ouse valley are downland farmsteads (Figure 8.1). Two have been partly excavated using modern methods.

Bishopstone (Rookery Hill)

The multi-period site at Rookery Hill, Bishopstone has yielded evidence for settlement throughout the Roman period and on into early Saxon times. The site, which is located on a hilltop which overlooks both the English Channel and the mouth of the Ouse, was also used during the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age periods (Bell 1977). A Late Iron Age unenclosed phase of occupation was followed early in the Roman period by the creation of a rectangular ditched and banked enclosure (Figure 8.10). By the late-2nd century the enclosure ditch had silted up, and during the following century activity at the site seems to have occurred at a significantly reduced level compared with the early Roman period. During the 4th century, however, and especially in its second half, there was once again more extensive activity as represented by pits, postholes and a corn-drying oven

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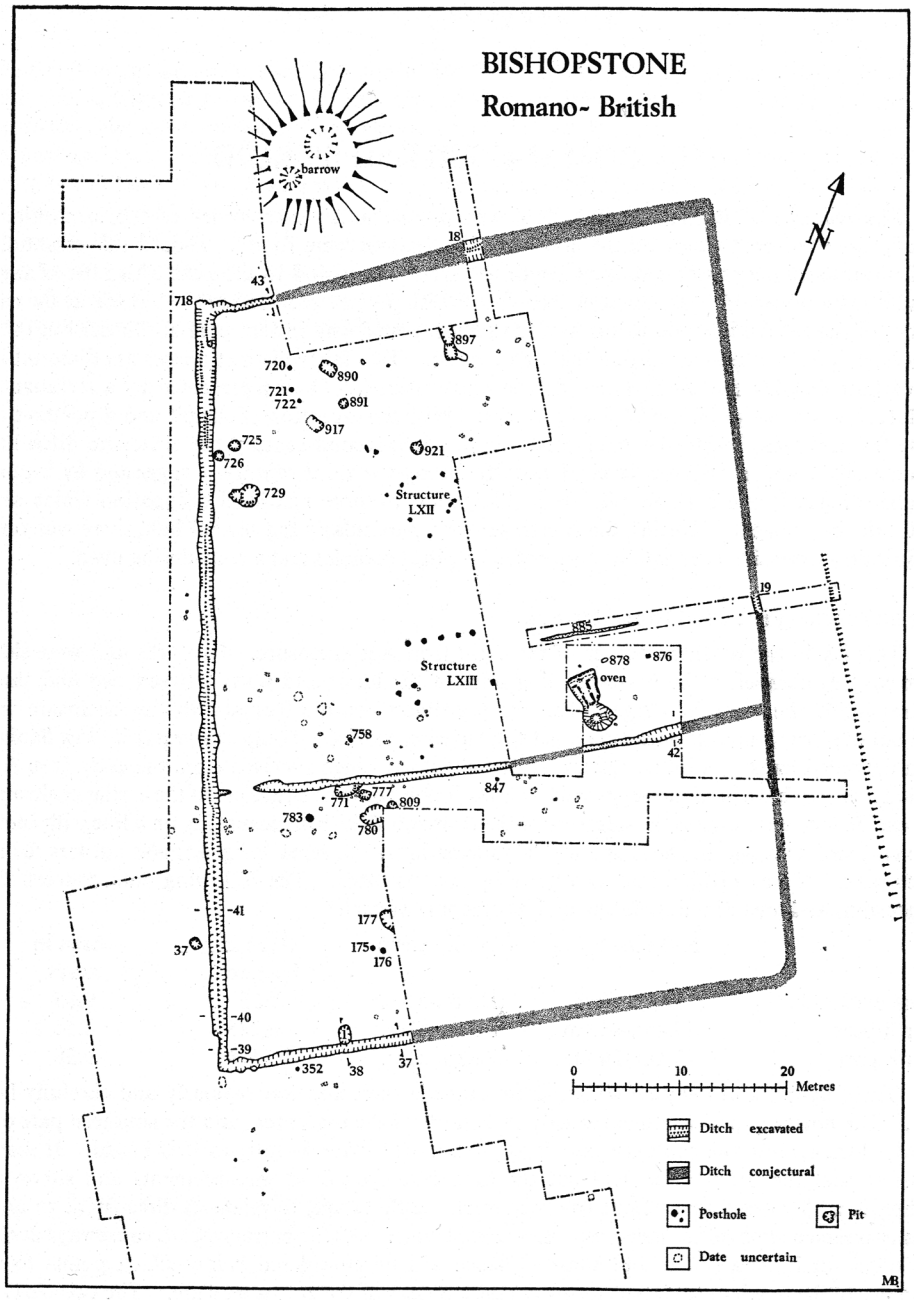

FIGURE 8.10: BISHOPSTONE: GENERAL PLAN OF THE ROMAN-PERIOD ENCLOSURE (BELL 1977, FIG. 87, REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE SUSSEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY).

(Bell 1977, 139). Whilst the latest coin from the site is a possible issue of Gratian (AD 367-378), the large pottery assemblage includes the latest recognisable Roman products from this area, including Pevensey Ware which may have continued to be produced into the 5th century (Fulford 1973, 44). Bell (1977, 188) suggests that Romano-British activity at Bishopstone appears to have continued after the large corn-drying oven had gone out of use and been dismantled in order to remove the potentially useful flooring stones.

Although the absence of any recognisable domestic buildings dating to the Roman period may be a sampling matter (only some 50% of the enclosure was excavated), it may also be due to the methods of construction used for such buildings, perhaps the use of cob or timber-framing, which may not leave any trace in the archaeological record. The author has recently discussed this issue with regard to another East Sussex downland farmstead on Bullock Down, Beachy Head (Rudling 2014b, 67). At Bullock Down the choice not to build even a modest Romanised house, such as the rectangular buildings found on the Downs at Park Brow in West Sussex (Wolseley and Smith 1927, 8), was apparently not due to poverty, the site having yielded unexpected indications of portable wealth. It is also worth noting that at least one of the earlier investigated Roman-period farmstead sites in the Ouse valley, at Highdole Hill, near Telscombe, provided evidence in the form of 'shallow circular depressions varying from 20ft. to 50ft. in diameter' which indicated the former presence of dwellings (Holleyman 1936, 202-3), although with the exception of two slightly deeper depressions, one of which 'may have served as a socket for a central post', no postholes or other features were discovered.

It is not known whether there was continuity or a hiatus in occupation/activity at Bishopstone between the phase of late Romano-British and early Saxon settlement (Bell 1977, 238). The area of Saxon occupation, however, is much larger than the late Roman settlement and it covered both the Roman enclosure and some of the adjacent fields, with little respect being shown for the previous features on the site. The Saxon settlement, which Bell (1977, 193) estimates to have covered some three hectares, consisted of rectangular post-built hall structures, sunken featured buildings (SFBs), fence lines and an adjacent and contemporary cemetery. Unfortunately that part of the settlement and all of the

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cemetery which were excavated by David Thompson remain unpublished, but Martin Bell was able from the results of his own fieldwork and what is known about Thompson's finds to suggest that the Saxon settlement at Rookery Hill dates to the 5th and 6th centuries, with the cemetery perhaps starting as early as *c.* AD 400 (Bell 1977, 238). At some time in the 6th century or perhaps later, the Saxon settlement on Rookery Hill was deserted – probably in order to establish a settlement in the valley to the east. This new valley-slope settlement, which is the site of the parish church of St. Andrew and a modern village, has been the subject of a research project (Thomas 2010).

Ranscombe Hill

The only other 'modern' excavation of a Romano-British non-villa farmstead in the Ouse valley is that which was partially investigated on Ranscombe Hill, South Malling, in advance of road construction (Bedwin 1978). The site was situated on a small south-facing spur of Lower Chalk, with a view across the Ouse floodplain and only some 620m from the course of the modern river. The features found included two ditches, a circular hearth and a corn-drying oven. Dating evidence indicates that occupation at the site started in the 1st century and continued until the late 4th/early 5th century when, as at Bishopstone, the corn-drier was deliberately infilled. Chris Green (1978, 252) who reported on the Roman pottery finds from both sites makes the interesting suggestion that the infilling of the corn-drying ovens at both Ranscombe and Bishopstone might be part of a more extensive occurrence of 'deliberate site levelling, rather than gradual abandonment and decay'. In addition, Green notes an absence at Ranscombe Hill of any early Saxon pottery.

Thus at two non-villa farmsteads in the Ouse valley late 20th-century fieldwork has revealed evidence for late 4th/early 5th century occupation and the possible deliberate in-filling of corn-driers at this time. At Bishopstone for certain, there is evidence for early Saxon occupation/activity on the site of the former Romano-British settlement.

Discussion

This review of Romano-British settlements and land-use in the Ouse valley has involved a variety of settlement types (native farmsteads, villas, and nucleated settlements) and land-uses (stone quarrying, mineral extraction, iron-works, forestry/coppicing, pottery production, arable cultivation and crop processing, animal husbandry, fishing, transportation by roads and waterways, and burial grounds/ritual locations).

With the possible exception of the early villa at Newhaven, which may have been built on a 'new' site for strategic transportation/communications reasons, the other villas (with the possible exception of that at Plumpton) in our study area may all have developed out of native farms, a pattern which is normal for many areas of Sussex and elsewhere in Britain (Applebaum 1966, 99; Rudling 1998, 50). This was certainly the case at both Beddingham and Barcombe where evidence has been found at each site for 'Iron Age type' timber roundhouses preceding the construction of the first buildings with masonry foundations. Whilst the Newhaven villa had gone out of use (or been moved to a new location) by the mid- to late 3rd century, this was the time of intense activity at both Barcombe and Beddingham. Subsequently at the end of the 3rd century/early 4th century, the principal buildings (i.e. winged corridor houses) at both of these villas went out of use, with just a few traces of later activity (perhaps 'squatter' occupation or demolition/salvage works) being recovered from in, or adjacent to, these structures. At both villas, however, there is also some limited evidence for 4th century activity elsewhere within the villa complex, but unfortunately the extent and nature of such activity is not clear. At Beddingham this later activity includes the late 4th/early 5th century 'squatter' occupation in the former shrine building by people (Romano-British or Saxon) with access to both late Romano-British and early Saxon types of pottery. Yet at neither site can continuity of occupation be demonstrated from the demise of the main house to the end of the 4th/early 5th century. At Barcombe the bathhouse site in Church Field yielded better evidence than that obtained from the nearby villa for continuity of occupation throughout the 4th century. At Plumpton, where there seems to be little if any evidence for occupation during the 1st century, the villa may have been started on a 'new' site during the 2nd century. Occupation of the site continued until the mid- 4th century. In the absence of large-scale excavations at the Firle and Mark Cross villas, the final stages of occupation at these sites are even more uncertain. If continuity of occupation did occur at some or all of the Ouse valley villas, however, possibly the owners ceased to reside at these sites which were perhaps now run by bailiffs or tenants, or maybe there were now new resident owners who could not afford, or did not want, the elaborate and expensive standards of living accommodation as in the past. Hence the abandonment of certain former domestic buildings; a fate that was not necessarily also shared at this time by all the other buildings.

We should perhaps note that elsewhere in Sussex, as in the Chilgrove valley and at Bignor in the Arun valley, some villa settlements continued to develop and expand during the early- and mid-4th century (Down 1979; Rudling 1998, 59-63; Rudling 2003a, 121-22; Rudling and Russell 2015). Thus any conclusions made here based upon Ouse valley Romano-British settlement histories are likely to be very localised. Similar studies based upon other valleys or areas (e.g. the West Sussex

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coastal plain) are therefore needed in order to investigate the variability of changes over time within a *civitas* or tribal region.

Despite the apparent evidence for considerably reduced domestic activity at all the Ouse valley villa settlements, there is no evidence to indicate whether there was any corresponding decline in the size or nature of the associated villa estates. Might not such estates, perhaps with absentee owners, have continued to function into the late 4th or 5th century? If not, why and how did things change? Perhaps at this time this area was, as Welch (1971, 232) hypothesised, free of a villa system and thus suitable for ceding by treaty to Saxon settlers/ mercenaries? The very limited evidence for early Saxon activity at the various Ouse valley villa settlements, of which that from Beddingham is the most substantial, fits the general pattern for Saxon use of Roman sites in Sussex and Surrey, but not that for Kent where reoccupation of ruinous Roman sites may reflect a 'conscious attitude' (Drewett *et al*. 1988, 272).

Turning to the other types of Roman period settlement within the Ouse valley, I have noted the abandonment by the end of the 3rd century of most of the iron works, including the important site of Oldlands. The reasons for the end of the Wealden iron industry may have included: attacks from channel pirates; the silting up of river estuaries; and changes to both the economy and society during the 4th century (Cleere and Crossley 1995, 85). Somewhat surprisingly, during the Saxon period (and then only the later part), the Weald's still rich iron ore deposits were apparently only exploited on a small scale (Hodgkinson 2008, fig. 14; 35-6). The demise of the Roman iron working sites in the Ouse valley may in turn have had an adverse effect upon the area's agricultural villas, especially so if the iron works had previously provided markets for villa products or perhaps in some cases important revenues if they had formed parts of villa estates (Best 2015).

Elsewhere, activity at Seaford, probably one of the two largest settlements in the Ouse valley, seems to have continued into the 4th century, but perhaps at a much reduced level. At the other large nucleated site, that recently discovered at Bridge Farm, dating evidence for the final phases of occupation/activity is also uncertain, but use of this site could have continued into the mid- to late- 4th century (N.B. coins recovered during excavations in 2015 include one issued by Honorius: Millum 2015, 7). In comparison, some of the non-villa agricultural settlements within the valley, as at Bishopstone and Ranscombe Hill, and elsewhere in the region (e.g. at Bullock Down and at Burgess Hill: Rudling 1982; Sawyer 1999), show signs of increased activity in the second half of the 4th century. Could it be that some of these sites, many of which have yielded evidence for Late Iron Age/early Romano-British occupation, had periods of reduced activity during the 2nd and 3rd centuries when the villa settlements were developing and thriving? (I will return to such matters below). And later, upon the decline in the fortunes of the villas, did some of these old sites gain a renewed importance? In addition, in the late Roman period some of these non-villa sites may now have become more ideally located for settlement/agriculture (e.g. by being on higher ground or further inland) with regard to such problems (real or feared) as coastal/riverine raiding, the requisitioning (as opposed to contract purchase) of supplies by the military (e.g. the fort at Pevensey) and possibly flooding/sea level rises and alluviation (Dark and Dark 1997, 21-26) which may have occurred at sites such as Seaford, Newhaven and Bridge Farm, and at various water meadows in the valley. It is at one of the non-villa farmsteads, Bishopstone, that we have our best evidence from the valley for possible (but not certain) continuity of occupation during the transition to the Saxon period.

The relationship between villas and non-villa farmsteads in any micro-study of Romano-British rural settlements is of importance, and with regard to the Ouse valley Ernest Black (pers. comm.) has suggested to me that the presence of at least one early villa, that at Newhaven, may provide clues to what was happening later. Such a villa may have had a locally large but compact estate. If a number of farmsteads were dependencies of this (and perhaps other) large estates, the break-up of these estates, as may have happened at Newhaven by *c.* AD 200 (see above), could have resulted in a mixed pattern of different sized units, some perhaps paying rent to absentee landlords whilst others may have become owned and worked by former tenants. The growing prosperity of some of these units may have resulted in the emergence of villas such as Barcombe and Plumpton. In contrast, Beddingham villa which dates to the Flavian period, could conceivably have been a larger tenant-farm or perhaps part of a large estate gifted to a junior branch of the family or to a favoured dependent.

Ernest Black has also suggested to me that the occurrence of aisled buildings (as at Baracombe and at Bignor) may represent some sort of concentration of agricultural dependents at villas. If so this may have had an impact on the surrounding settlement pattern. Thus if such workers had families, where and how were these accommodated? Possibly some such families lived on nearby sites (see above the non-villa settlement (the 'Furlongs') which was located to the south-west of the Beddingham villa), whilst others may have been further away, such as on the Downs. Although the accommodation of some of the postulated agricultural workers in aisled buildings may have only been a seasonal thing, any such practices may help to explain the lower density of occupation/activity noted above at some non-villa sites, as at Bishopstone, during the floruit of the villas.

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Generally there is a dearth of Roman-period burials in the Ouse valley, the main exceptions being the cremation cemetery at Seaford, the possible barrow cemetery and other burials at Lewes, and the remains of seven infants at Beddingham villa. However, one other discovery, at Asham, near Rodmell, may be important and perhaps provides a clue regarding the types of locations chosen in the countryside for human burials. The find at Asham comprised four Late Iron Age/early Romano-British cremation urns buried in a lynchet (Curwen and Curwen 1936). These graves may thus indicate that one type of favoured place for burial were the boundaries of fields. As elsewhere in the countryside of Roman-period Sussex, the lack of late inhumation cemeteries or individual graves in the Ouse valley is noticeable, and thus the common procedures followed at this location and at this time for the disposal of the dead are uncertain. As noted above, some late Roman-period burials may have been found on early Saxon cemetery sites in the valley. If so, these inhumation graves provide evidence for some continuity of burial ground locations.

Prior to the fieldwork of the last four decades discussed above, a major research issue affecting the Ouse valley and the area between it and the River Cuckmere to the east had been the observation made by the late Martin Welch in the early 1970s that, with the exceptions of the early cemetery at Seaford and a large number of unexcavated native settlements, the area between the rivers Ouse and Cuckmere 'is blank on the [Ordnance Survey] Romano-British map' (Welch 1971, 232). In contrast Welch noted that this 'zone' contains a concentration of 5th century Saxon settlement as represented by cemeteries at Malling Hill, Beddingham Hill, Selmeston and Alfriston, and the cemetery and settlement at Rookery Hill, Bishopstone. He went on to suggest that the area between the two rivers, 'lacking…any villa buildings and lying distant from the main villa estates', may have been ceded by treaty by the land-owning Romano-British aristocracy to Saxon settlers/mercenaries. Although Welch's settlement by treaty theory received initial enthusiasm (Cunliffe 1973, 132-135), subsequent discoveries in the Ouse valley of evidence for villas at Newhaven, Beddingham, Barcombe and Plumpton (and also probable but unexcavated villas at Mark Cross and Firle) challenged an important assumption of the theory, i.e. the absence of villas. However, the reasoning behind the treaty/enclave theory for the Ouse/Cuckmere zone could still be valid if the villa and nucleated settlement sites prove to have been abandoned or significantly in decline before, or during, the late 4th century.

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