

## Report on Stanchester: a Roman rural settlement *talk by Mark Peryer, BAHS on 13.02.24*

Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society has been actively investigating this site since 2014. It is situated approximately 1.5km from the road from Silchester to Winchester and close to ancient trackways, sitting on top of the Candover valley (near Basingstoke). The local geology is chalk underlying flint and clay. It is shown on an early map of 1588, held in the archives of Winchester College which once owned the site; and for many years it was 'mined' by local communities for building materials.

Some investigation of the site was made in 20<sup>th</sup> century by 'Mr Jackson', who discovered deposits of Roman ceramic building material (CBM) in Stanchester field, but the precise location is uncertain. The remains were described as 'rubble over a burnt floor surface, with brick dust'. One find was a coin of Carausius (3<sup>rd</sup> century 'usurper emperor' from Gaul).

Geophysical survey was undertaken in 2013 when it was hoped to find traces of a manor house. The results indicated walls possibly of flint, and postholes: a building ~10M sq with flint wall footings on three sides, an open side on the South and a floor of packed chalk – possibly a barn or cattle shelter. Excavations in 2016 (Trench A) found chalk clunch walls on three sides, above which the building was thought to be of timber construction. Remains of a chalk floor were found, and on the Southern side postholes for timber supports.

In Trench J (2019?) – scatters of Roman tile and flint were found, with underlying Iron Age features. No excavations took place in summer 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic, and during this time the team reviewed the pottery and aerial photos with the geophysics results, and realised the dig was not in the place where they thought it was.

They undertook a further geophysical survey in 2021, which revealed a rectangular building with 'corridor-type' walls. They placed three transverse trenches here and uncovered collapsed interior walls: an unbonded flint wall and a quantity of wall plaster, above a chalk surface (which would have had flooring material above this as an interior room). These results encouraged them to continue further resistivity surveys, investing in their own equipment.

In 2022 new excavations found an ancillary building, the line of the East wall indicated by parch marks (it was a long hot summer!) This appeared to be a long building, at one end revealing flint walls while the other end showed walls built of chalk. (*illustrated right*).



Excavations in 2023: Trench Q, overlying part of Trench P, revealed another building ~20M by 8M. It is thought these possibly represent two phases of building, and they plan to continue digging in the Southern and Central areas. Another feature discovered was a Well to the South, containing a top fill of rubble but still going down, also to be further explored.



In Trench R a brick built sunken feature was discovered, possibly a storage area. Among the fill were some large lumps of mortar attached to fragments of tile, which may represent mortar securing imbrex tiles with tegulae, to provide waterproofing for the roof (*illustrated left*).

### The Finds

#### Ceramic building material (CBM)

Limestone roof tiles and nails

Flue tiles – both of these suggest the presence of a bath house, not yet discovered.

Tegulae roof tiles, complete examples with semi-circular marking, possibly a maker's mark.

Typology of shaped corners may indicate dates of tegulae.

Imbrex tiles, including almost complete examples.

Painted wall plaster in red, yellow and green, suggesting a high status building.

#### Metalwork

Numerous hobnails, and footprint of hobnail sole on top of a wall (image of cast shown).

Numbers of coins have been reported over the years, and analysis of metal detector finds revealed: few 2<sup>nd</sup> century coins; mainly 3<sup>rd</sup> century; and a few from 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The local Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) is taking part in the dig.

#### Pottery (needs more work!)

Later forms of 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

Greywares of Alice Holt (nearby) and New Forest types.

Some Samian/finewares (ends 2<sup>nd</sup> century?)

### Future work

Mark showed a suggested site plan comprising a simple corridor building (villa?); the well to south of this; part of north walls of another building, with a ditch on three sides; and the shelter or barn on the north side, with the possible route of a path connecting to the villa. This is all part of a wider landscape of settlement which is yet to be explored!

In 2024 Mark said they are planning to dig 3-4 more trenches over about four weeks (likely two in July and two in August), and volunteers would be welcome to join them - but he recognised it's quite a long way to travel and a trek to the site. If any members want to get involved we could put people in touch with Mark Peryer if they wish to follow that up. For enquiries please use the SAS email address: [southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com](mailto:southamptonarchaeology@gmail.com).

*Report by Sarah Hanna, with thanks to Sue Davies for helpful comments (and apologies for errors).*