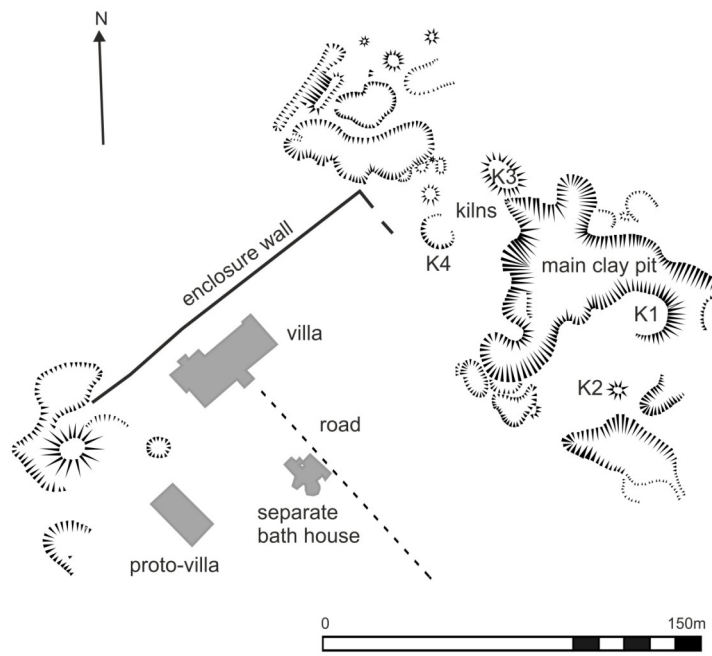
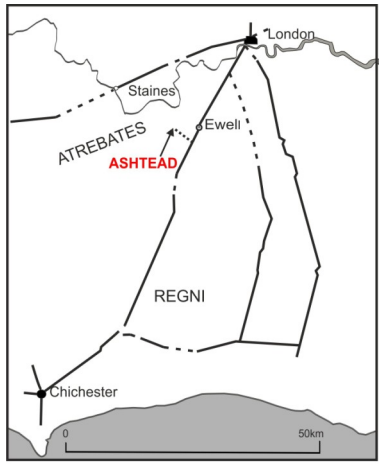


ASHTEAD COMMON, SURREY, ENGLAND: ROMAN TILEWORKS



A Roman villa, separate bath house and evidence for tile manufacture were found on Ashtead Common in the 1920s. Starting in 2006 a Surrey Archaeological Society project is re-assessing the earlier discoveries and carrying out further work (fig.1). The nearby earthwork has been shown to be prehistoric, with a second phase of use in the mid 1st century AD. A later 1st century proto-villa has been found nearby. A timber structure preceded the previously-known villa, which was probably in existence across the 2nd century. Around AD200 it was rebuilt at a higher level with an elaborate drainage system and an apparently unique plan.



Fig.3

The tiliary lay beyond an enclosure wall. The size of the main clay pit and finds from the site show that there was large-scale production of tiles of many different types. These included box tiles, some of which had patterns made by a roller stamp, a technique mostly confined to SE England. Six patterns were used at Ashtead, one with well-produced lettering around a finely-realised dog and a stag (fig.2). The letters are usually interpreted as G(aius) I(ulius) S(...) and I(ulius) V(...) FE(cit). Various aspects of the site suggest a military veteran owner at some point in the 2nd century. They include a circular *laconicum* in the bath house, a face pot (fig.3) from a deep pit near the recently-discovered tile kilns and more than one *tazza*.



Fig.2

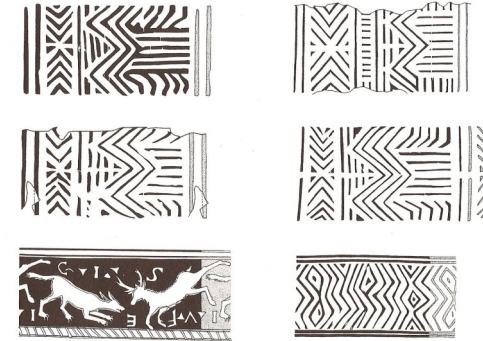


Fig.4

The site is a National Nature Reserve. This factor, dense woodland and the difficult clay subsoil impose major constraints on archaeological work. In the 1960s, when the site was more open, postulated kiln locations were surveyed (K on the plan). These are probably waster heaps but near K3 a large two-period Roman tile kiln was found recently. The first kiln was set into a rectangular pit with outer walls constructed of tile fragments. It had eight inclined side flues and was probably in use for a lengthy period, having several interleaved layers of charcoal and red clay in the central flue whose walls were extensively heat-damaged (figs.6 & 8). This kiln was then demolished to about the level of the springing of the arches across the central flue and a new kiln was built with central flue walls raised on top of the old ones. The remains of the side chambers were packed with clean yellow clay on which tiles made a base for free-standing walls forming the sides of eight new inclined flues (fig.7). Archaeomagnetic dating indicates that the last firing took place between AD205 and 215. Raising of the level of both kiln and villa may indicate a period of unusually wet weather, perhaps a factor in the abandonment of the site probably in the early 3rd century.



Fig.5a



Fig.5b

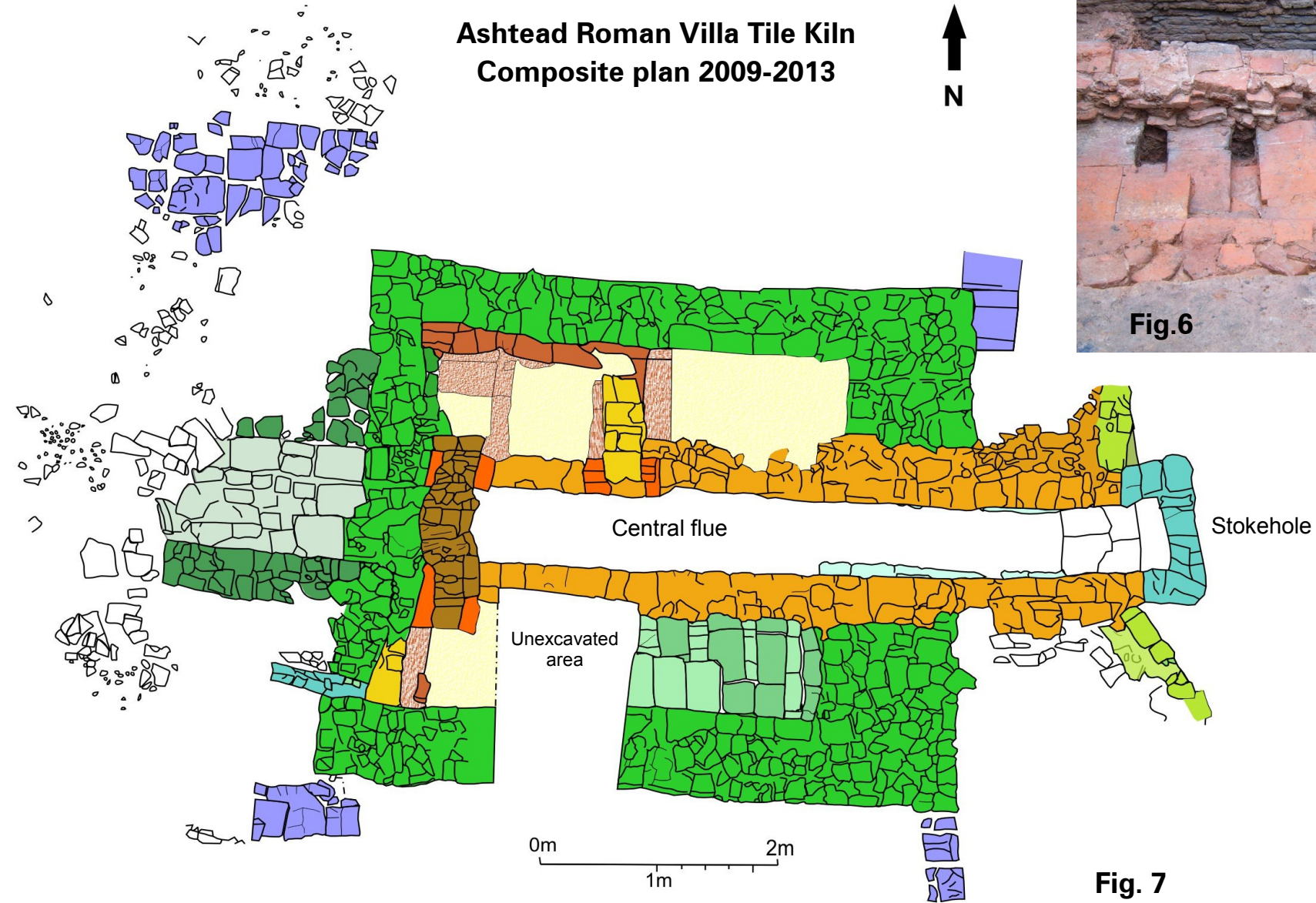


Fig.7

EARLY KILN FEATURES	
[Light Green]	Truncated flue wall
[Green]	Kiln walls
[Light Green]	Cross flues
[Light Green]	Cross flue walls
[Light Green]	Retaining walls
[Light Green]	Walls to rear of kiln
[Light Green]	Paving to rear of kiln
[Light Green]	Air control features
[Light Green]	Possible post pads
LATER KILN FEATURES	
[Orange]	Main flue walls
[Orange]	Cross flues
[Orange]	Cross flue walls
[Orange]	Collapsed flue arch
[Orange]	Degraded tile
[Orange]	Clay infill



Fig.6



Fig.8

A structure at the stokehole end of the first period central flue probably survived because of the raising of the kiln (fig.4). The flue was blocked by *tegulae* stacked on end to continue the line of the flue walls and then turn inwards, leaving a small central gap bridged by another tile. This was presumably intended to control the air flow once the desired firing temperature had been reached. At one of the back corners of the kiln a line of *imbrices*, burnt on the inside, was found laid through the wall (fig.5a/b.). It was apparently a small vent intended to draw the heat through the kiln to its very back corners. A tiled approach to the back of the kiln was presumably used for loading and unloading (fig.9). It is possible that tiles laid flat outside each corner of the kiln served to support large posts for a cover structure.

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Fig.9