

**A Roman site at Frensham Manor
(centred SU 8396 4045)**



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Summary

Trial trenching in fields at Frensham Manor in 2001 located a Roman occupation site which survives below plough soil level and would appear to represent the remains of a small farmstead dating from the late 1st to the 3rd centuries AD. Finds of redeposited fragments of highly fired clay flooring point to the presence of a kiln in the immediate vicinity and metal detector finds from adjacent fields are indicative of further Roman activity in the area. These latter finds may in some way relate to the 1st–2nd century ritual site located at the western edge of Frensham Common, as the deposits of coins and other objects associated with the ritual site extend into the south-east corner of Frensham Manor (fig 1, Area 2). It is therefore not inconceivable that further evidence for ritual activity may remain to be discovered elsewhere on Frensham Manor.

Introduction

Fieldwalking in 1979 located a concentration of late 1st–3rd century Roman pottery together with the occasional fragment of tile in a ploughed field on Frensham Manor (fig 1, Area 3). Subsequently, uncontrolled metal detecting by a treasure hunting club in the early 1980s is reported to have recovered large numbers of Iron Age and Roman coins as well as iron slag and bronze axes (including a miniature example) from the fields on Frensham Manor (Graham 1986). An infra-red aerial photograph taken in 1984 appeared to show a line of ditches forming an enclosure around the hilltop (Graham 1986). Following the discovery of a large ritual deposit of Iron Age and Roman coins, miniature pots and other objects on Frensham Common in the late 1990s (Graham 2000 and in prep), the authors arranged for a geophysical survey to be carried out by Southampton University in Area 1 (fig 1, B; appendix 1). This appeared to confirm the presence of the ditches indicated in the aerial photograph and also apparently located a square building, more or less at the apex of the hill. It seemed at least possible, particularly in light of the finds of ritual material close by, that these features were the remains of a Romano-Celtic temple set within a *temenos* boundary. As a result, a programme of trial trenching was organised with the help of volunteers in May 2001 in an attempt to establish the nature of the features on the hilltop.

Topography and geology

Frensham Manor occupies the high ground (*c* 80m OD) along the ridge which rises to the north-west of Frensham Common and Frensham Great Pond. It is sited approximately 4.5 miles south of Farnham on the western edge of Surrey (fig 1, A). Both Frensham Common and Frensham Manor lie on the poor acidic sands of the Folkestone Beds, part of the cretaceous deposits of the Lower Greensand series. The soils of Frensham Manor are, however, slightly more fertile than those of the common and, as a consequence, have been continuously cultivated at least since the early medieval period and, on current evidence, were also used for agriculture in the early Roman period and in all probability from much earlier still (Branch *et al* 2002).

The Excavations

A series of trenches was opened along the line of the possible enclosure ditches and on the site of the apparent square building in Area 1 (fig 1, C). In the event, no evidence whatever was recovered for any archaeological activity and certainly not for the existence of structures or ditches in this area. The only features revealed within the trenches were a series of clay-

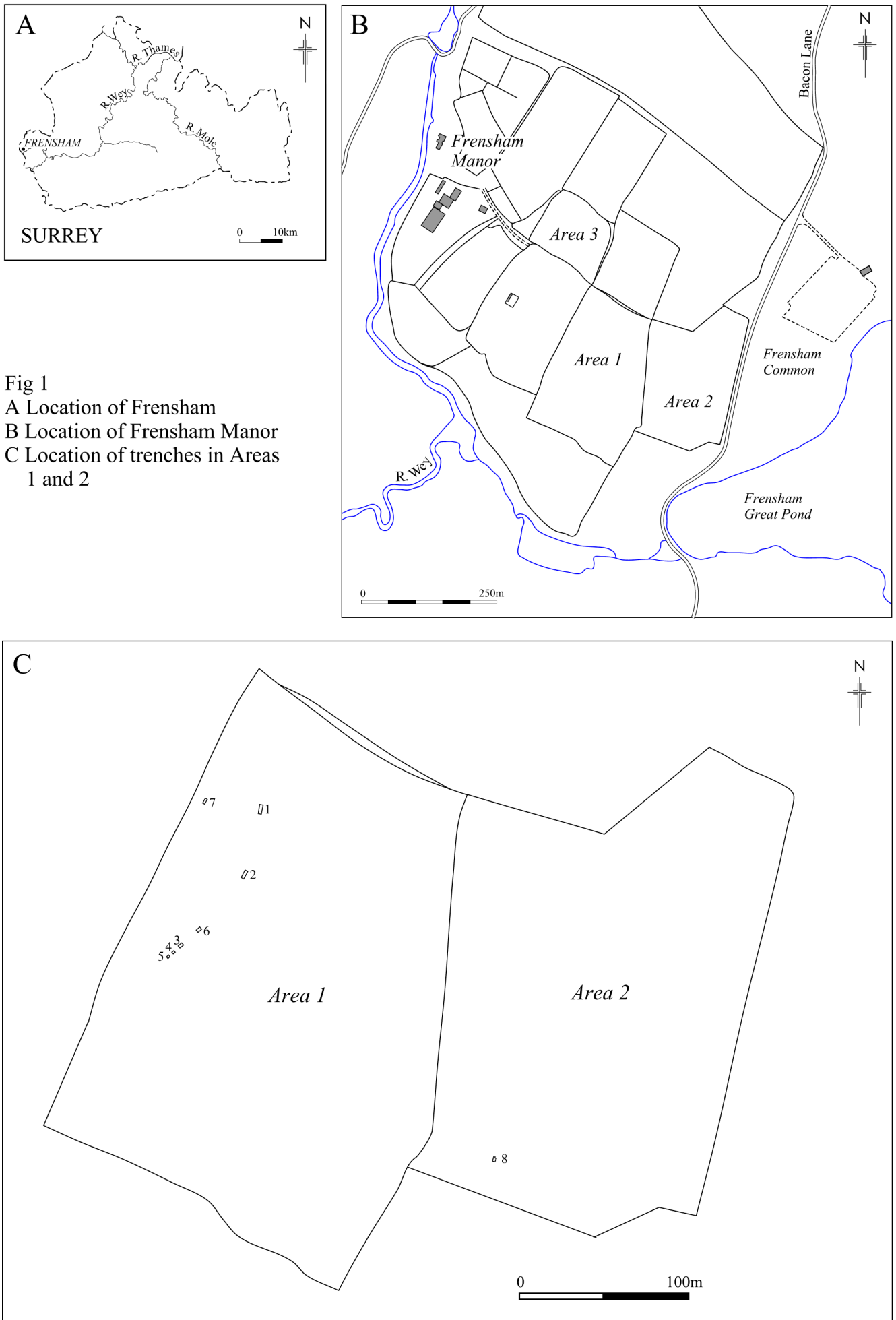


Fig 1
 A Location of Frensham
 B Location of Frensham Manor
 C Location of trenches in Areas
 1 and 2

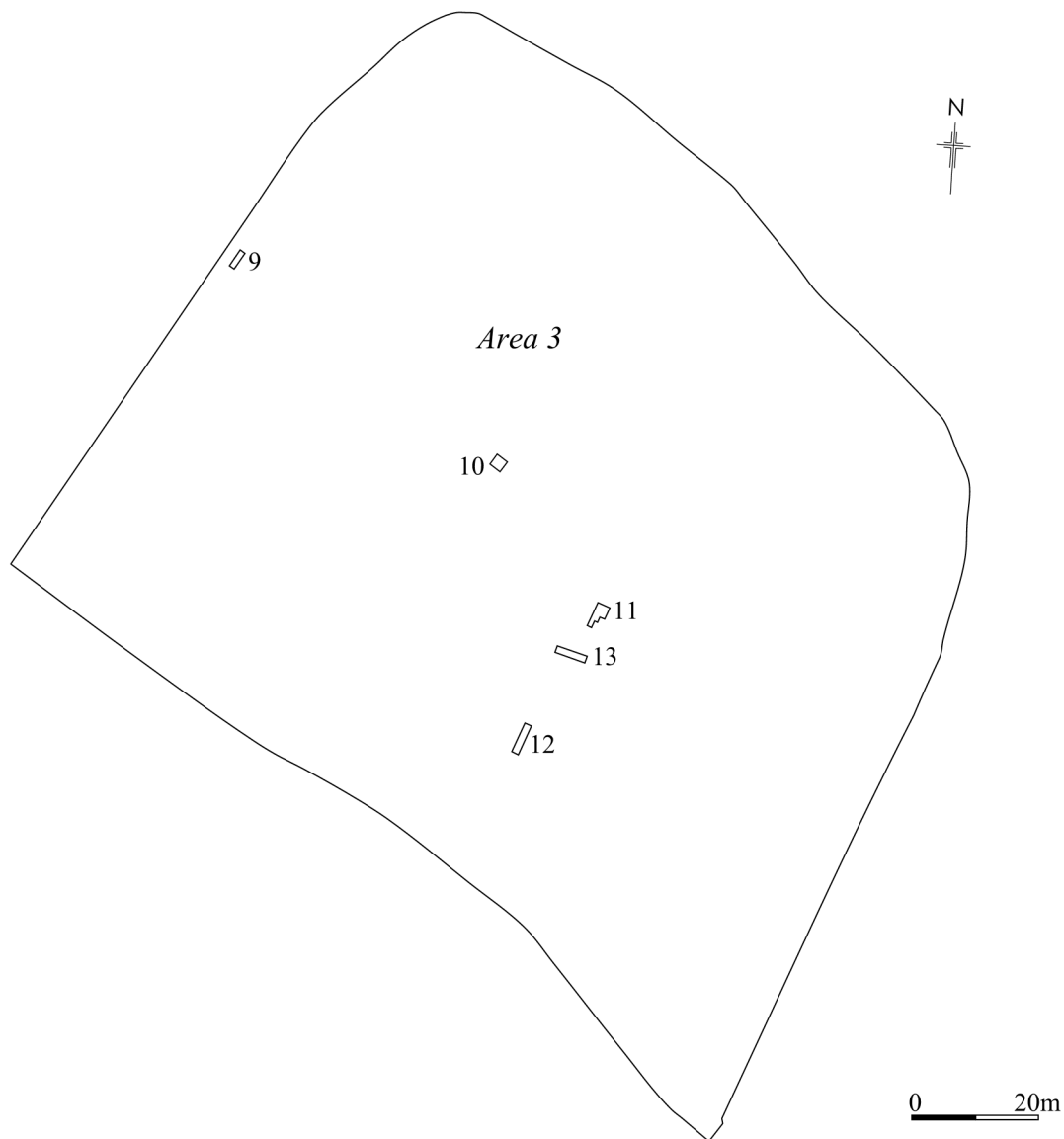


Fig 2 Location of trenches in Area 3

pipe tile drains and plough marks of recent date (figs 3 and 4). This result came as a considerable surprise to all concerned and it is hard to understand what phenomenon produced the features on the aerial photograph, particularly since the existence of the features appeared to have been confirmed by the results of the geophysical survey (appendix 1).

A single trench (8) was opened in Area 2 (figs 1 and 5) on the site of a slight platform cut into the hill slope at this point. Apart from a plough mark, the only feature revealed in the trench was a compacted layer of chalk. It is thought likely that this is of relatively modern date and either represents the remains of a deposit of chalk for liming the fields or possibly the base for a structure of some sort, although no postholes were noted within the area exposed.

Following these negative results, it was decided to take the opportunity to examine the previously recorded Roman site in the adjacent Area 3 (fig 2) to clarify whether any occupation had actually occurred on the hilltop. In the event, these trenches revealed a concentration of Roman occupation activity particularly in the area of trenches 11 and 12 (figs 6 and 7). While ploughing has badly damaged the site a series of possible surfaces and truncated ditches remain intact below plough

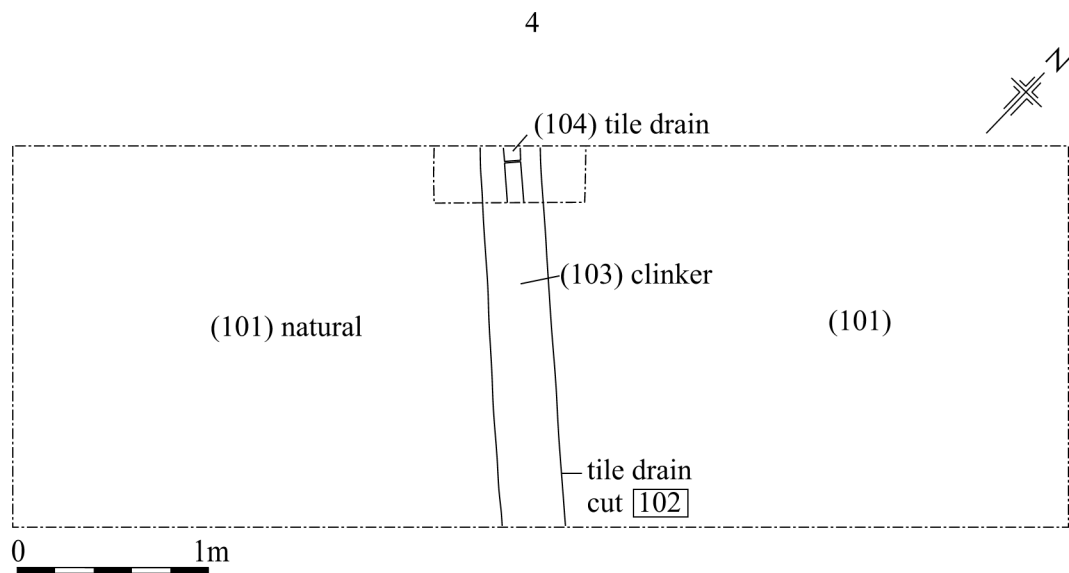


Fig 3 Area 1: plan of trench 1

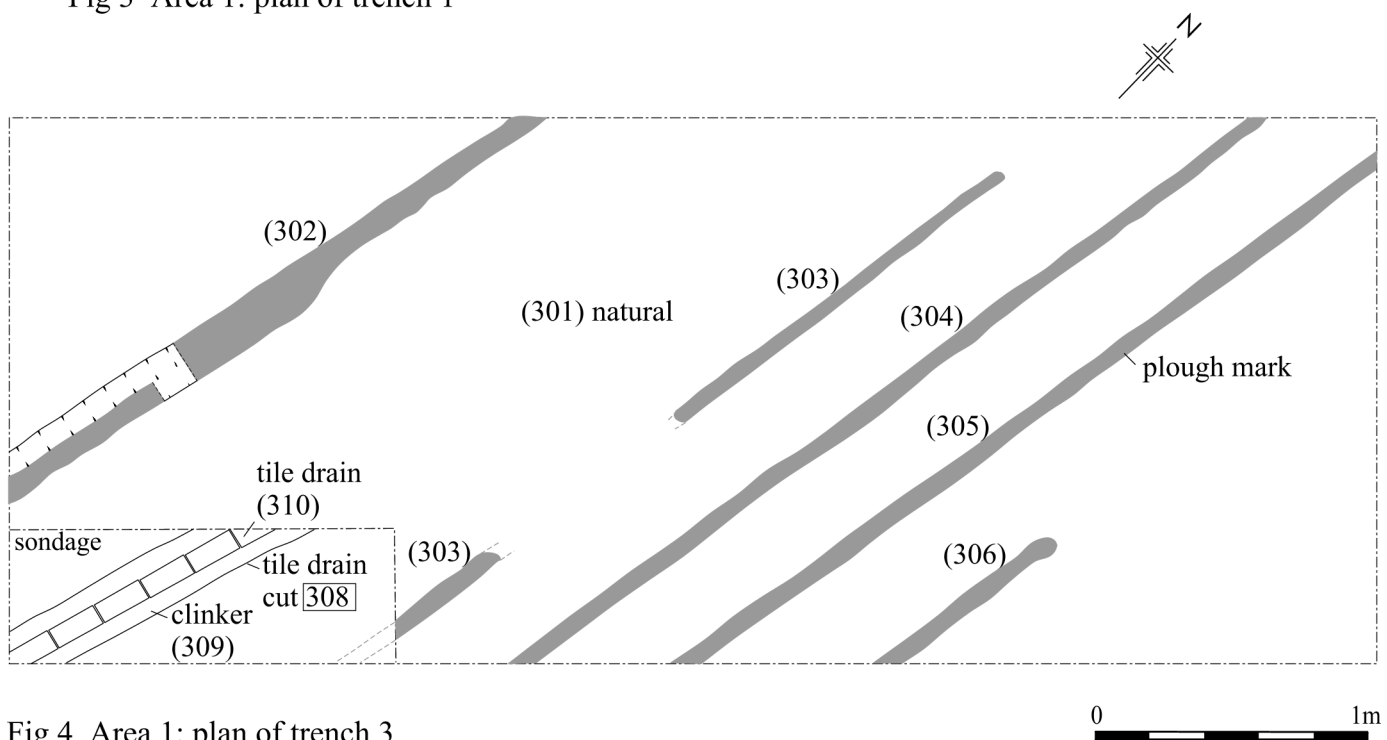


Fig 4 Area 1: plan of trench 3

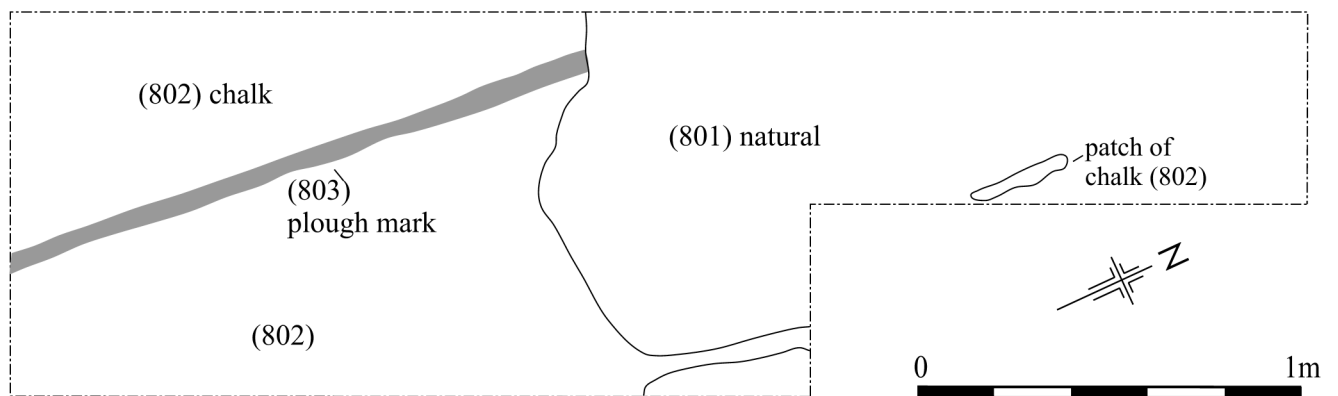


Fig 5 Area 2: plan of trench 8

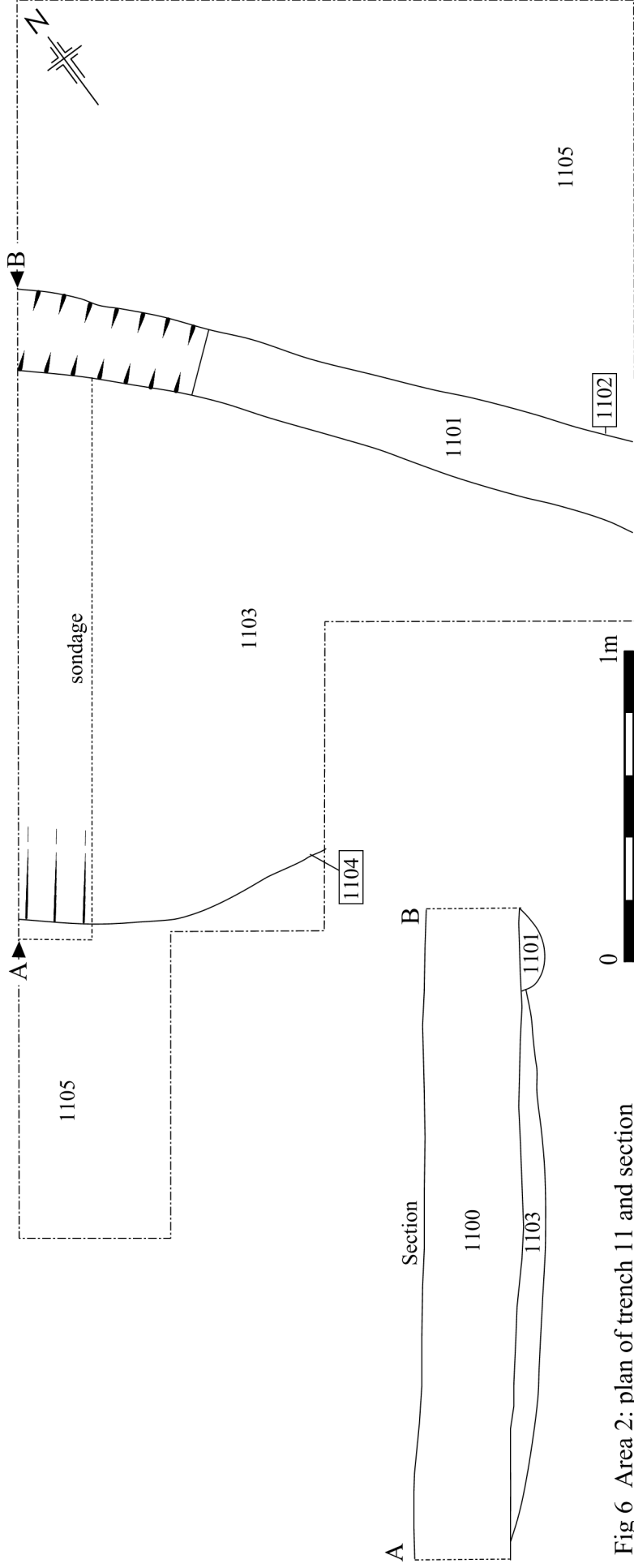


Fig 6 Area 2: plan of trench 11 and section

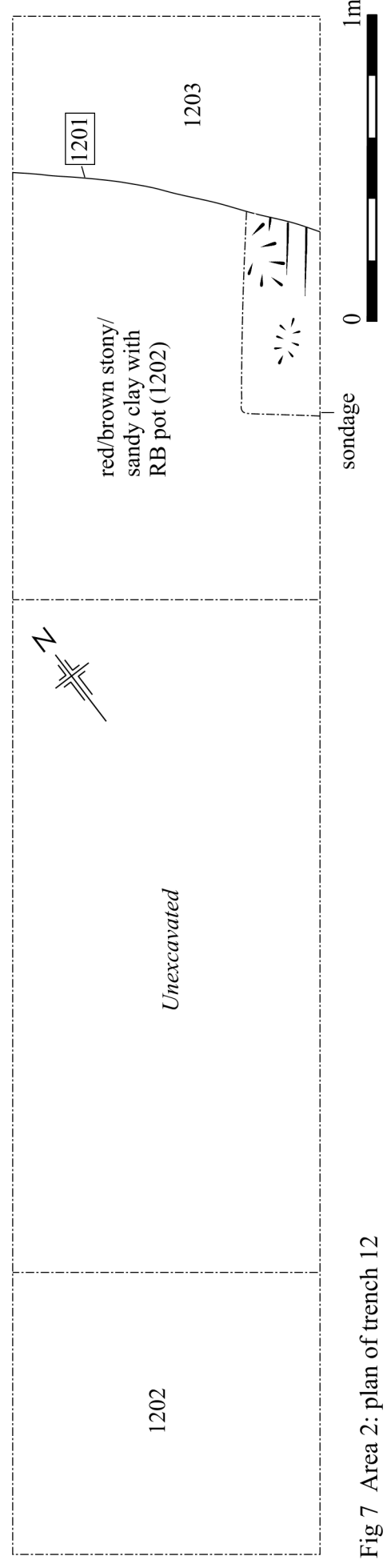


Fig 7 Area 2: plan of trench 12



Fig 8 Photograph of fragments of kiln floor from trench 11 showing the impressions left by burnt-out withies.

soil at an average depth of 28cm below the ground surface. These yielded pottery dating from the late 1st–early 3rd centuries AD (appendix 2) and one badly corroded (Roman) coin was recovered *c* 20m to the west of trench 13, but was unidentifiable (Ian Leins, British Museum, pers comm). A number of fragments of highly fired clay with holes left by burnt-out withies (fig 8) were also found scattered within trench 11. These were redeposited but would appear to have originated from the floor of a kiln (cf Butler & Lyne 2001, pl 18, 20, 22; Chris Butler, pers comm), presumably somewhere in the vicinity.

Discussion

Given the limited nature of the trenching it was not possible to establish the exact nature of the occupation or to expose any stratigraphic relationship between excavated features. It nevertheless seems likely that the site is that of a small farmstead dating to the first half of the Roman period with some evidence for the presence of a kiln close by.

Information from metal detectorists who operated in the area in the early 1980s seems to indicate the existence of two further concentrations of Roman material in the fields to the north-east of Area 3. These apparently produced large numbers of Roman coins of the 3rd and 4th centuries and it may be that rather than being domestic in nature these discoveries relate to a successor religious site to the 1st–2nd century ritual deposits on Frensham Common. This hypothesis can however only be tested by further work.

The finds and archive have been deposited in the Museum of Farnham (acc no A002.30).

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Appendix 1

Geophysical survey, by Jason Lucas

The geophysical survey at Frensham Manor (SU 8440) was conducted on 10th and 11th February 2001. Although not terribly cold, rain was steady on the 10th, but cleared somewhat on the 11th. The field was completely waterlogged, with standing water in many places, sometimes reaching depths just above the top of Wellington boots, roughly 35–40cm, especially near the western field boundary, although the shift from clay to sandier soils towards the eastern edge of the field allowed for better drainage. The data was collected using a GeoScan FM 36 gradiometer, and processed in GeoPlot 3.0. An arbitrary grid was established and David Graham recorded the topographic data using a total station. Grids were 30m square, and geophysical data were collected at a 0.5m sampling interval with a 1m traverse interval.

The ferruginous geology of the area created a large amount of interference, evident in the indistinct nature of the results. A set of undulating geologic features can be seen in the geophysics results, running roughly west to east (fig 9). The wire fence and standing water along the western edge of the field also masked any other features in the region, both geological and archaeological. The fence appears on the map as alternating patches of white and black.

Despite these problems, some archaeological features were detected. The largest of these is a pair of linear features running parallel to the field boundary. These are interpreted as relatively recent (ie, definitively post-Roman) agricultural features. The other most prominent feature is a set of parallel lines located near the northern extents of the survey. These correspond well with the location of the ditch visible on aerial photographs and are interpreted as the edges of this ditch. The only other large feature of non-agricultural origin is a faint rectilinear outline in the south-western quarter of the survey area. It is possible that this is the rectilinear feature that appears on aerial photographs of the site, although it is not in the estimated position.

There are several smaller, point features representing small amounts of metal near the surface. Generally, these are due to recent agricultural activity. However, the anomaly located near 130, 200 measures approximately 4m in diameter, and probably represents a large amount of metal, or perhaps the site of intense burning; note that the deposit is not necessarily as large as the anomaly. A few other point anomalies are also present and, although not as large as the previous, could also represent appreciable quantities of metal or areas of burning.

Although some promising results have been obtained, the geology of the area interferes with the magnetic anomalies of archaeological importance. The watery conditions of the field probably created additional interference. Given the geological problems, resistivity survey is recommended in promising areas, once the field surface has dried sufficiently, though still wet enough to allow sufficient electrical contact. It is also recommended to attempt further gradiometer survey at this point, covering at least part of the original survey, if only to determine the extent of interference due to surface water.

Many thanks to the crew who assisted in the collection of the data and suffered the whims of February in Surrey: Chris Duke, Paul Johnson, Siân Lane and Marcy Rockman.

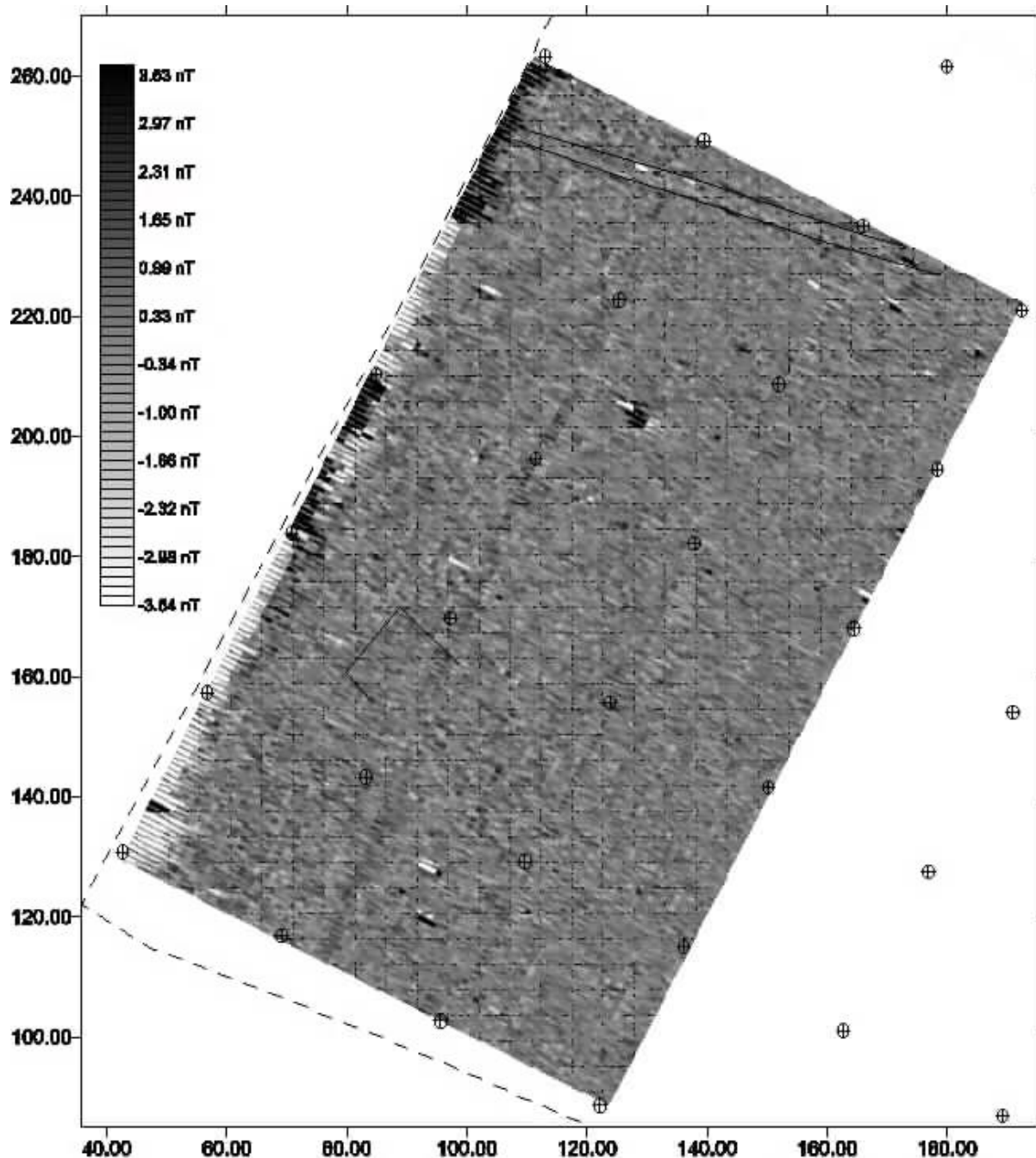


Fig 9 The geophysical results. The field boundary is indicated by a dashed line, while the archaeological features are indicated by heavy lines. Grid pegs are indicated by crossed circles.

Appendix 2

Ceramic finds, with comments by Malcolm Lyne

Trench 10:

Context 1000

Pottery fragments too small to date.

RB pot – 4 fragments, 12g

RB tile – 2 fragments, 22g

PM tile – 9 fragments, 120g

Trench 11:

Context 1100

Late 1st century/2nd century AD plus one early 3rd century large rim. Nothing in the assemblage is later than AD 250. The floor of the oven at Wickham Barn, East Sussex, was made of clay on wicker work and appears very similar to the fragments found at Frensham (Butler & Lyne 2001).

RB pot – many fragments, 1250g

RB tile – 24 fragments, 370g

kiln floor? – 6 fragments, 304g

daub? – 4 fragments, 16g

PM tile – 2 fragments, 62g

Context 1101

Late 1st century/2nd century AD plus a little early 3rd century pottery.

RB pot – 4 fragments, 266g

kiln floor? – 1 fragment, 176g

Context 1103

Late 1st/2nd century AD. Date ca. AD 70 to no later than AD 200.

RB pot – 195 fragments, 1346g

RB tile – 3 fragments, 64g

kiln floor? – 7 fragments, 216g

daub? – 13 fragments, 100g

Trench 12:

Context 1202

Pottery fragments too small to date.

RB pot – 3 fragments, 16g

PM tile – 1 fragment, 32g

Appendix 3

List of contexts

(Note only contexts yielding archaeological material are listed)

Site code FM01

Context

- 1000 Plough soil
- 1001 Top of natural
- 1002 Tree-throw hole?
- 1100 Plough soil
- 1101 Fill of 1102
- 1102 Modern cut
- 1103 Fill of RB ditch/pit
- 1104 Cut of RB ditch or pit
- 1105 Top of natural/possibly utilized as RB surface
- 1200 Plough soil
- 1201 Cut of possible ditch/pit
- 1202 Fill of possible RB ditch/pit
- 1203 Top of natural