

The Roman villa was discovered on what is now Ashted Common and is closely associated both with a sophisticated bathhouse and with a major site for the production of ceramic tiles that were widely used on other high status sites. The building was much altered over its lifetime and it is not always certain which parts are contemporary. The site lies on the London Clay and drainage was evidently a persistent problem. The viewpoint looks approximately north-west. (Drawing by Giles Pattison © Surrey County Archaeological Unit)

**Ashted Roman Villa**  
c. AD 150

Painted plaster from Six Bells, Farnham



As many sites were relatively early excavations, they are comparatively limited in the resources available at the time. However, re-assessment of some assemblages can prove useful and help to clarify discrepancies in their dating or provenance. A mixed assemblage of fragments of painted plaster, for instance, from the two villa sites excavated by A.W.G. Lowther – Ashted from 1924-9 and Six Bells in 1946-7 – have recently been able to be allocated to their respective sites through careful analysis of their decorative schemes and mortar backing.



Frensham miniature pots and tile kiln site from Ashted

With more scientific advances being developed every day, new techniques are able to be applied to Roman studies, including within the county. At Ashted villa, samples of fired clay tile had archaeo-magnetic dating applied to them in 2010 by a team from MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), showing the tile kiln's last firing to be AD 205-225. Miniature ceramic pots from the early Roman site at Frensham, excavated in 2000, underwent high-resolution geochemical analysis of their contents – revealing traces of cannabis, oil and beeswax – which support interpretation for ritual activity.

**The Roman period AD 43-410**

**Where can I discover more?**

Surrey does not have a wealth of standing Roman remains, unlike its surrounding counties, and most excavated sites are now re-buried with little to see on the ground. However, you can walk a stretch of Roman Stane Street at Mickleham Downs, and the reconstruction of a tile kiln in Reigate caves is available to view on special visits. The rural temple at Farley Heath also has some trace of its outline which can still be seen today.



Reigate Caves tile kiln (top) and Farley Heath temple (left)

**Some sources to learn more on Roman Surrey**

- Bird, D (2004) *Roman Surrey*
- Bird, D (2017) *Agriculture and Industry in South-Eastern Roman Britain*
- Smith, A et al. (2016) *New Visions of the Countryside of Roman Britain, Vol 1 The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*

**Other suggested resources**

- University of Reading's **The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain** ([archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/))
- Sussex Archaeological Society's **Romans in Sussex** ([romansinsussex.weebly.com](http://romansinsussex.weebly.com))
- University of Reading/Runnymede Trust's **Romans Revealed** ([www.romansrevealed.com](http://www.romansrevealed.com))
- Exploring Surrey's Past** ([exploringsurreypast.org.uk](http://exploringsurreypast.org.uk))

In addition to the Society's own handling collections and teaching resources, local loans boxes are available from many of the county's museums, as well as Surrey History Centre.

Roman exhibits can be viewed at local museums including Guildford and Kingston, and the Museum of London, London Mithraeum, Fishbourne Roman Palace, Portchester Roman Fort, Silchester and Reading Museum are also worth a visit, amongst several villa sites in the south-east.



“Promoting the study of archaeology and antiquities...and any other matters or things relating to the pre-history and history of the County.”

- *Articles of Association*  
Surrey Archaeological Society

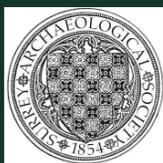
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**Roman Surrey**



Explore your local heritage and discover more about the origins of Surrey's earliest settlements

AD 450

TRANSITION

AD 410

LATER ROMAN EMPIRE

AD 192

EARLY ROMAN EMPIRE

AD 43

- AD410 Sacking of Rome by Visigoths and Britons told to 'look to their own defences' by Emperor Honorius
- AD402 End of imports of official coinage
- AD367 *Barbarica conspinitio* concerted attack on Britain
- AD320-360 Deposition of ritually 'killed' coins and jewellery at Kingston stream crossing
- AD326 No more coinage minted in Britain, which is now reliant on imports
- AD300-350 Surrey villas mostly abandoned
- AD314 Christianity made legal in the empire
- AD296 Short-lived empire of Carausius and Allectus brought to an end by imperial forces
- AD200-380 Major pottery production centre at Alice Holt/Farnham
- AD211 Britain divided into Britannia 'Superior' in the south and 'Inferior' in the north
- AD142 Work ordered to begin on Antonine Wall
- AD122 Construction of Hadrian's Wall begins
- AD100 Most of Roman roads in Britain complete
- AD90-150 Main period of Surrey villa building
- AD80-210 Major tile production centre at Ashted
- AD70 Roadside settlements begin to emerge as result of new trading patterns
- AD65-70 Building evidence at Staines, which followed Southwark as first towns in Surrey
- AD61 Revolt of Boudica, queen of Iceni
- AD50 Founding of London, later the capital, and construction of Stane Street

## The invasion and its aftermath

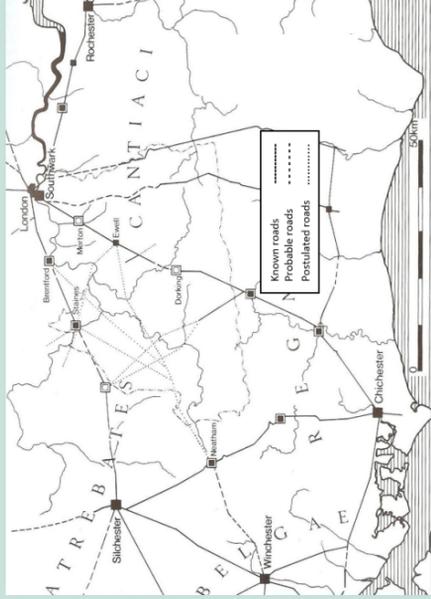
Although there is little evidence for a military presence in Roman Surrey following the invasion of Claudius in AD 43 (pictured in this silver *denarius* from Frensham), it is likely that campaign forces under future Emperor Vespasian crossed the county. In 1976-8, excavation at the site of the Petters Sports



Field, Egham (right) uncovered an early ditch and associated palisade, which – along with a bronze military harness mount of mid-1st century date – may indicate an early military post, possibly related to the aftermath of Boudica's revolt. (Photos: David Graham and David Bird)



## Roads and roadside settlements



Roman roads in Surrey are often postulated, but few other than Stane Street have been accurately plotted. However, excavations at the roadside settlement of Flexford from 2009-2015 found evidence of an east-west road which ran along the ridge to the north of the Hog's Back and may have connected Winchester to London. A trench placed across this metalled road showed it to be 12m wide – including the ditches either side – and in use from the 2nd to 5th century, as dated by late Roman coins such as this rare copper alloy nummus (right, struck between AD 408 and 423). (Map: David Bird; Photos: David Calow)



(Map: David Bird; Photos: David Calow)



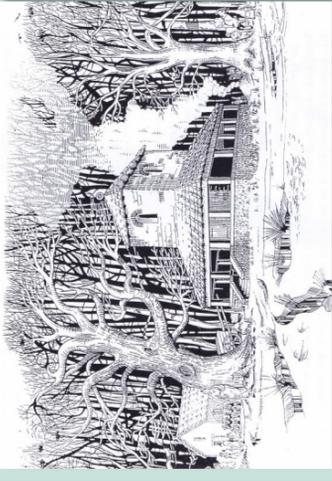
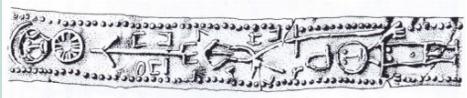
## Burials and beliefs

Although there are cremation vessels from a small number of early sites (see Alton on the Hampshire border, right), relatively few inhumations – the dominant later burial type – are known in Roman Surrey. Burials were often accompanied by grave goods – such as the Samian ware bowl (above) which furnished a burial from London Road, Staines – and situated outside of settlements, often lining the roadsides. At Beddington, coffins – one lead, one stone – were discovered near the church, and more recently two lead coffins were unearthed in a quarry near Bletchingley. (Photo: David Bird, David Graham; © Wessex Archaeology)



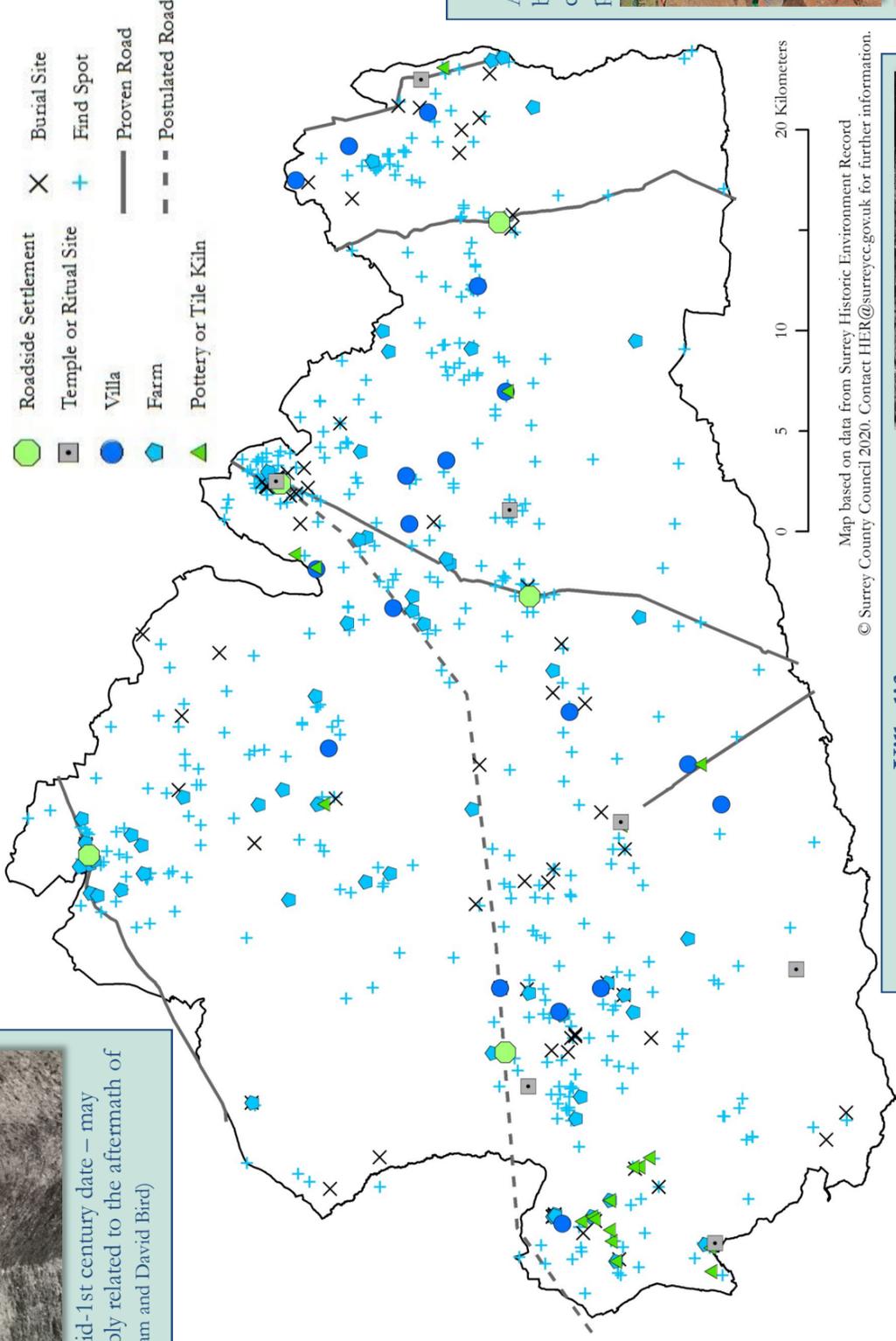
## Ritual ceremony

Characteristic 'Romano-Celtic' temple buildings are known at Wanborough (below), Tisbury and Farley Heath. Personal items were frequent offerings at these and other ritual sites – shoes, jewellery, weapons, coins, toilet articles and even special stones as at Ewell's ritual shafts – and head-dresses (above) and the bindings for other clearly ritual items, such as the sceptre from Farley Heath (right), also indicate the important ceremonial function these sites held. (Photo: David Bird; Drawings: David Williams)



## Industry and production

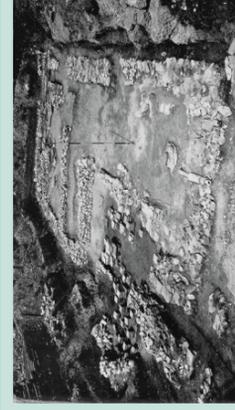
Although Roman Surrey lacks high quality iron ore or building stone, there is an abundance of woodland and clay beds, which resulted in its first major industry: pottery and tile-making. A number of kiln sites are known, including Dockenfield which produced mainly roofing tiles (left), whilst Ashted was a major industry producing all kinds of tiles including box-flues for heating systems (bottom left). The Alice Holt pottery industry manufactured coarse, grey kitchen ware from the 1st to 5th centuries which dominated the southeast markets, and though many kiln sites – such as Kingsley (bottom right) – are across the Hampshire border, a number are known around the Farnham area. (Photos: David Graham & David Bird)



## Villa life

Although there are as many as 30-40 villas suspected to have existed in Roman Surrey, these rural buildings were exceptional and often incorporated luxury features including under-floor heating, baths, mosaics and painted wall plaster. Most were excavated in the late 19th or first half

of the 20th century, such as the early 3rd to late 4th century house and bath complex at Six Bells (above) in Farnham, whose dig in 1946-7 involved German POWs. Abinger villa, well-known for its mosaic floor (left), was first dug in 1877 and re-excavated twice since the 1990s, with recent work indicating the site's multi-period activity. (Photo: AWG Lowther; Emma Corke)



## Metal Detecting

If undertaken responsibly, detecting can make important contributions to archaeological knowledge. Detectorists are reminded that it is illegal to trespass – remember all land has an owner! – and to record finds with their local Finds Liaison Officer and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. For more on the Code of Practice, see [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk).

