

**Submission for the  
2013  
DORSET ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARD**

**DRUCE FARM ROMAN VILLA  
ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT**

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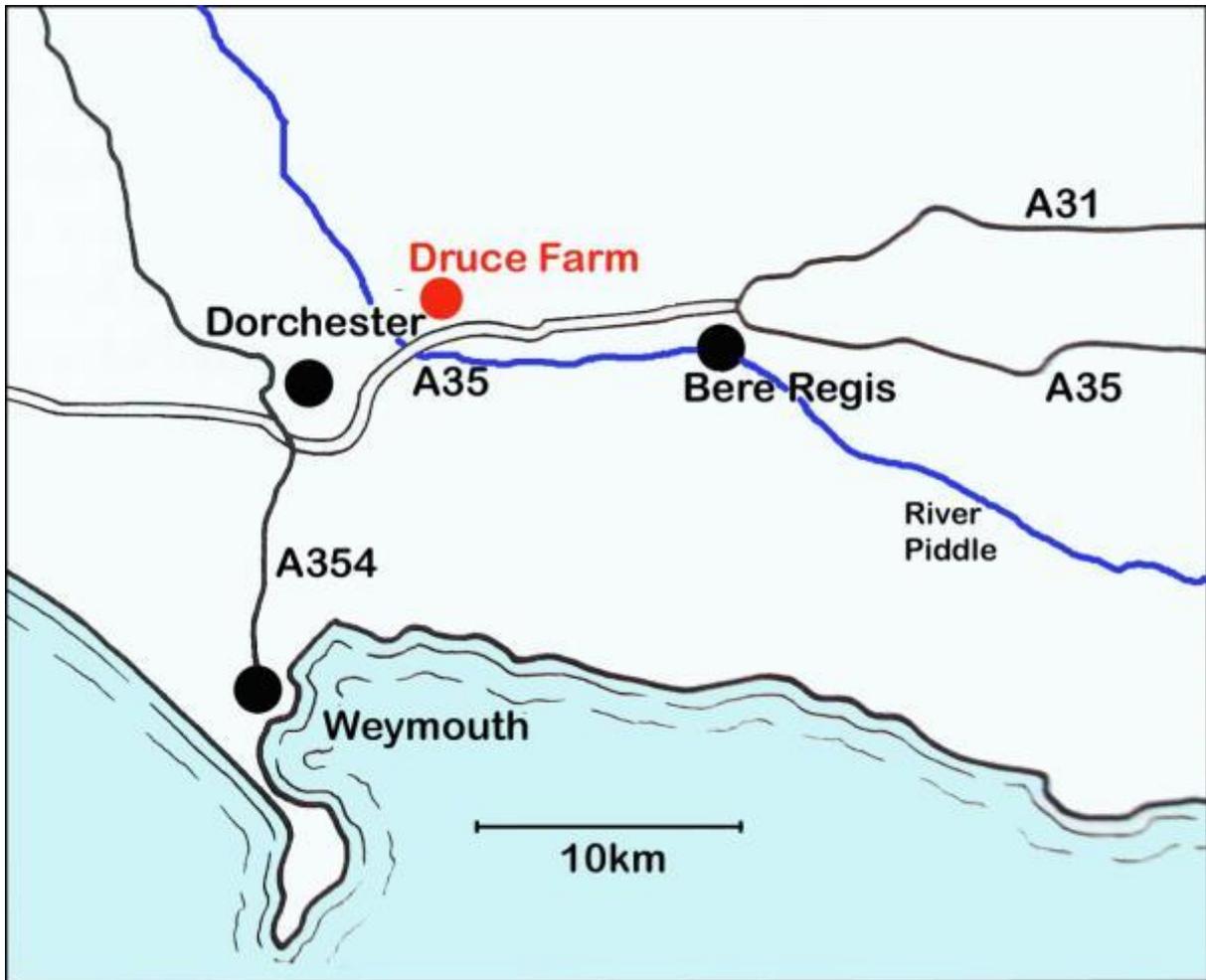
on behalf of



**EAST DORSET ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY**

**July 2013**

## Site Location



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## **1. Introduction**

This report has been prepared as a submission for the Dorset Archaeological Award for 2013. It describes the exploratory evaluation of a site that is now known to contain a Roman Villa of local and regional significance. At least one room contains an intact mosaic pavement. The Druce Farm Roman Villa Archaeology Project is currently still involved in field work. Further investigations are likely to continue in 2014.

The work has been progressed through the co-operation and commitment of people from local archaeology societies both in the county and beyond, and has benefitted from the advice and input of professional colleagues.

Whilst this is a voluntary project run by amateurs, it is committed to the application of the highest archaeological standards and fully understands the need for timely publication of the results.

### **1.1. Background**

The local farming community had suspected for some time that putative Roman settlement remains were located at the western end of 'Lower Limepits' field at Druce Farm. The field surface was littered with ceramic and stone building debris. During the early 2000s the Stour Valley Metal Detectorists, with permission of the landowner Mrs Ann Ridout, worked in this area and located coins and metalwork spanning the Roman period.

Encouraged by these findings Mrs Ridout contacted Lilian Ladle regarding an evaluation of the site. Field walking in 2010 by a group of East Dorset Antiquarian Society members produced a range of building materials, including stone and ceramic roof tiles, knapped building flint nodules, tesserae and Roman pottery. Due to the excessive amount of material lying on the surface of the field, it was thought that extensive ploughing must have damaged any surviving below-ground remains.

In 2011, Hannah Simpson, a Bournemouth University MA student undertook a geophysical survey using magnetometry and earth resistivity; this multi-technique strategy was employed to locate any buildings and associated features. The plot successfully located the positions of three ranges of buildings situated on the west, north and east of a central courtyard and also revealed associated enclosure ditches, trackways and field systems, some of which pre-date the villa and some which are contemporary with it. Towards the end of 2012 Dave Stewart of EDAS undertook a further geophysical survey using magnetometry, to include the complete extent of the ditches around the villa.

## **1.2. Rationale**

The landowner was keen to find out exactly what remains survived in Lower Limepits field in so that a decision regarding the future agricultural use and management of the land could be taken. In order to do this, an evaluation was planned to determine the extent of the buildings and the levels of preservation, in particular of any walls and floors and to determine approximate dates for the use and abandonment of the buildings.

## **1.3. Archaeological Standards**

The excavation was conducted using practises and guidelines issued by the Institute for Archaeologists with a full paper record, plans and photographs.

## **1.4. Landscape**

The site is 200 metres to the north of the River Piddle which runs in a westerly direction into Poole Harbour at Wareham. The villa sits on a gentle south facing slope of chalk bedrock with a veneer of clay with flints that has been covered by a layer of river gravel deposited by melt water floods during the last Ice Age. To the east of the site is a shallow dry valley that runs towards the river. There is a spring line just above the valley bottom. The land is now used mainly for arable farming. The local fields are surrounded by long established substantial hedgerows. To the north of the field is a deep chalk pit of unknown age. On the undulating chalklands further north there are numerous signs of prehistoric activity with burial mounds, field systems and settlements. Three kilometres to the south is the Roman Road linking Dorchester (Durnovaria) to Badbury Rings (Vindocladia) and beyond. Immediately across the river is Waterston Manor House built on a Saxon site mentioned in the Domesday Book. Along the river valley are water meadows and watercress beds typical of chalk streams. Slightly to the east and towards Druce Farm is a disused water mill.

## **2. Archaeological Evaluation**

### **2.1. Phase-1: September and October 2012**

An east-west trench 60m long and 1.5m wide (Trench 2) was sited, using the geophysical survey, on the southern edge of the northern range of buildings. This revealed chalk-cut ditches approximately 50m apart at either end of the trench. The ditches were 2.5m wide and 1m deep (cut from the Roman ground surface).

A similar ditch was located in a 15m north-south trench (Trench 1). It was apparent that spoil from the ditch-cutting episodes, of which there were at least two, had been dumped on the outside of the ditches. The fills contained large quantities of building debris consisting of knapped flint nodules, stone and ceramic roof tile fragments, mortar, painted plaster, animal bone and pottery, mostly 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century Black

## Magnetometry Survey with Trenches



**Key:** — 2012 Trenches  
— 2013 Trenches

**Scale:** 0 10 20  
metres

Burnished Ware. At least two sherds of Dorset Orange Wiped Ware type, including a perforated wall sherd and a 'pie-crust rim' were recorded, as were sherds of New Forest and Oxfordshire pottery. A complete copper alloy bulbous-headed pin and a shaped bone counter were also noted.

Just inside the eastern edge of the western ditch, and approximately 0.15m below the present ground surface, fragmentary remains of three types of walling survived. An east-west orientated wall was 5.8m long and consisted of small flints in a consolidated mortar and chalk matrix measuring 0.70m wide; it was possibly the base for a flimsier superstructure. A second east west wall of mortared flints was only 1m long but was significant in that a coin of Gratian (AD 367-83) was found at its base. Five sections of north-south orientated walls were also recorded. Three of these were of mortared flints, measuring 0.50m, 0.45m and 0.30m wide respectively. Two further walls were of roughly nested large flint nodules with no mortar measuring 0.20m wide.

Relatively large amounts of mortar and painted wall plaster were recovered from cleaned areas between three of the walls. Colours used included shades of cream, red, blue and green and patterning included faux marble and lines. Although no flooring was found *in situ*, ceramic, stone and mudstone tesserae in a variety of sizes implies that at least one mosaic floor with borders and motifs had been laid. Quantities of opus signinum were also recorded.

Beyond these walls and extending eastwards for a further 20m, were very large deposits of building material, including some complete limestone roof tiles which had probably slipped off the roof. On top of this was an accumulation of building debris comprising mostly flint nodules. This derived from the northern range of the villa, being either collapse or demolition material. Compacted gravel appeared to define the northern edge of a possible courtyard area.

A metal detector survey recorded nine coins, the earliest being a silver denarius of Vespasian and the latest were bronze issues of the Late Empire.

## **2.2. Phase-2: April to July 2013**

After considering the 2012 results it was decided to continue work in order to evaluate the preservation of, in particular, walls and floors in all three ranges of buildings and to determine approximate dates for their use and abandonment. The following is an interim summary of field results as work is currently still on-going. Trenches were located over the three sets of buildings; these all encompassed the large enclosure ditches. Roman building remains were uncovered, but sections of the ditches were excavated.

### **i). Western Range**

Three trenches (Trenches 8, 9 and 10) through this range have located a north-south orientated building comprising a series of at least two rooms, one deep. The lower courses of wall survived, but there was no evidence of intact flooring. Iron-working

debris and ceramic tesserae fragments imply a probable 'industrial' use for this part of the villa. Collapsed roof and wall covered the remains.

### **ii). Eastern Range**

Two trenches (Trenches 5 and 6) over this range revealed a considerable part of an *in-situ* collapsed wall comprising flint nodules embedded in mortar. Putlog holes (for original wooden plank scaffolding) were filled with ceramic roof tile. A rare feature was a band of blue slate tiles which were either a decorative element of the wall or the roof. A very large stone plinth had once supported a substantial squared, upright timber. It is likely that the structure was an aisled building; the pottery sequence implies a long period of use. A Test pit in the north-west corner of the northernmost trench revealed a complex series of events, including demolition and burning followed by rebuilding.

### **iii). Northern Range**

The single 'L-shaped' trench (Trench 5) was set out to follow and understand the series of 'rooms' located in 2012. When a mosaic floor was encountered, the trench was extended (on the advice of Mr Bryn Walters) to uncover the entire floor. The room measured 5.4m by 4.4m and had well-constructed walls on three sides, the fourth wall, on the south was not so well-preserved, probably around the entrance to the room. Two masonry fragments were located here; the base and lower part of a broken column in limestone and a small piece of architrave in Ham Hill stone.

## **3. Site Features**

### **3.1. Mosaic pavements**

The intact mosaic comprises a simple geometric design of two meandering lines following a right angled concentric path, crossing at the centre forming an inverted swastika, in blue lias and white limestone tesserae. The borders consist of larger limestone tesserae with random red ceramic pieces. The western part of the mosaic had been repaired several times during the life of the villa. Mr Anthony Beeson described it as an elegant mosaic and of a style often found in Roman Villas in the vicinity of Ilchester, and he praised the high standard of craftsmanship. He suggested that the damage was consistent with the presence of a moveable piece of heavy furniture, such as a bed or sofa. A terracotta filet divided the wall from the floor. A burnt area in the north-east corner of the room yielded a coin dating to the late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps pointing to occupation after the villa itself had gone out of use.

Part of a second pavement has been revealed, unfortunately, this has been badly damaged by ploughing. Surviving fragments suggest a polychrome geometric pattern in red, white, blue and brown.

### **3.2. Abandonment sequence**

Abandonment followed as evidenced by scattered 'owl pellets' containing very large quantities of small mammal and amphibian bone. Part of a burnt beam lay on the

mosaic, probably a part of a roof timber. The room was covered by large fragments of limestone roof tiles, including many complete tiles with iron nails in-situ; this layer is consistent with the collapse of the roof. On top of the tiles was a deep layer of mortar, painted wall plaster and building flints representing the collapse of the walls of the room. The painted plaster fragments are either plain or geometric designs of coloured lines. At least ten colours are present including black, shades of green, yellow and red and very rare blue.

In order to understand the relationship between the walls uncovered in 2012 and the room with the mosaic, the overburden between the two trenches was cleared and in doing this a second mosaic, probably from an adjoining corridor has been uncovered. Further walls define other rooms to the north, south and west. The make-up of the walls suggests several phases of building.

### **3.3. The Enclosure Ditches**

Large, deep ditches enclose the villa complex. Excavations through six segments of the ditches have confirmed a sequence of cutting, infilling and re-cutting throughout the Roman period. All segments were all extremely finds-rich.

## **4. Finds**

### **4.1. Prehistoric Activity**

Large quantities of flintwork from the Mesolithic, Early and Middle Bronze Age imply a long period of use of the site. Small quantities of pottery have also been noted.

### **4.2. Roman Period**

Many classes of finds have been recorded. The coin evidence supports activity throughout the Roman period. The pottery finds are extensive with locally-made Poole Harbour Black Burnished Ware vessels the most numerous, but other production sites include the New Forest, Oxfordshire and the Nene Valley. Pottery from Germany, France and Italy has also been recorded. In the first instance these two classes of finds will be used to give a broad dating outline for the use of the villa complex. Four spindle whorls (Black Burnished Ware) have been recorded.

Fragments of both window and vessel glass are present. A very rare piece of 'snake-pattern' drinking vessel glass implies high-status activity. The metalwork includes copper alloy hair pins, a leather working needle and a silver ring with a (broken) blue glass intaglio. There are very large quantities of ironwork, most of which are nails, but other items are present. Fragments of shale are present and a single spindle whorl fashioned from a lathe core has been recorded. One bone hair pin was noted.

Large quantities of animal bone have been found, particularly in the ditch fillings, most of this was butchered bone from cattle sheep and pigs. Other mammal bones including,

dog were present, as were very small numbers of human infant bone. Fish bone was recorded and other marine resources were oysters, limpets and whelks.

#### **4. Future work**

In the immediate future, the trenches will be back-filled. Advice has been taken on how to cover the mosaics and walls. In the autumn, a programme of finds analysis will be undertaken and the results will be prepared for publication.

In 2014 fieldwork will consist of looking at the wider landscape both by geophysical prospecting and by further excavation through the boundary ditches of the villa complex.

#### **5. Communication Plan**

##### **5.1. Publications**

On completion of Phase-1 in 2012 an excavation report was submitted and included in the annual Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society 2012. A second report covering the 2013 findings will be submitted for the 2013 edition

Mr Bryn Walters (Director of the ARA) and Mr Luigi Thompson have recently spent some time on the site. Mr Thompson took a comprehensive series of overhead pictures which will form a photo-mosaic from which he will paint and reconstruct the mosaic. Mr Anthony Beeson has professionally recorded the mosaic and details of the excavation will be reported in the journal of the Association for Roman Archaeology. The mosaic will be included in the corpus of Roman Mosaics

Short reports have been included in the monthly EDAS Newsletter and one will be prepared for the CBA Wessex Newsletter.

##### **5.2. Open Day**

An Open Day was held on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013 and the site was visited by in excess of 300 people, despite intense heat and the mile walk from the car park. In addition to visitors from the local Puddletown community, the guests included members of archaeology societies such as EDAS, Somerset and Camerton, Shaftesbury Archaeology Society, Wareham & District Archaeology & Local History Society, Dorset Diggers and the Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society, as well as guests invited by the landowners.

During the current phase of work, the site has been visited by groups of students from Bournemouth University and a succession of professional and amateur archaeologists with an interest in Roman sites and Dorset Archaeology.

### 5.3. Presentations

Already a number of presentations have been booked. An illustrated lecture will describe this important site to groups and communities in Dorset and beyond.

## 6. Acknowledgements

Thanks are extended to the land owner Mrs Ridout for unlimited access to the site, for the use of an ancient Land Rover for transportation to and from the site, and for storage facilities.

We also thank Mr Bernard Cox the tenant farmer who cleared the top soil from all the trenches and who managed to cultivate round the excavation and the enthusiastic support of Mr Rupert Edwards the Land Agent.

The work was undertaken by a core team of volunteers comprising mainly EDAS members and friends from various other societies, see Appendix 1, under the direction of Lilian Ladle MBE

A number of experts have visited the site and all have been willing to offer their encouragement and been enthusiastic in their support of the approach taken and the manner the work has been undertaken, these include:

Mr Bryn Walters (ARA)  
Mr Luigi Thompson (ARA)  
Mr Anthony Beeson (ARA)  
Mr Grahame Soffe (ARA)  
Prof. Tony King (University of Winchester)  
Dr Paul Cheetham (Bournemouth University)  
Dr Miles Russell (Bournemouth University)  
Dr Clare Randall  
Dr Malcolm Lyne  
Dr Martin Papworth (National Trust)  
Ms Nancy Grace (National Trust)  
Mr Mark Corney  
Dr Stephen Cosh  
Dr David Neal

## Appendix–1: The Volunteers

	NAME	EDAS	W & D	DNHAS	B&C	SSARG	SV	ARA
1	Lilian Ladle	X	X	X				X
2	Andrew Morgan	X		X				
3	Janet Bartlet	X		X				
4	Sue Cullinane	X	X					
5	Bryan Popple	X	X	X				
6	Len Norris	X						
7	Pam Norris	X						
8	Carol O’Hara	X						
9	Mike Ladle	X	X	X				
10	John Bithell			X				X
11	Paul Dibben	X						
12	Claire Cullinane	X						
13	Vanessa Joseph	X						
14	Heather Tidball	X						
15	Sarah Marshall	X						
16	Laureen Pierce	X						
17	Dave Greenhalf		X					
18	Naomi Gibson							
19	John Singleton		X	X				
20	Millie Goswell			X				
21	Steve Morris	X	X					
22	Anita Hicks	X						
23	John Oswin			X	X			
24	Gillian Vickery			X	X			
25	Peter Walker	X						X
26	Phil D’Eath	X						
27	Jack Parsons	X						
28	Maureen Putnam		X	X				
29	Selina Moore							
30	Sandy Lovelock		X					
31	Francesca Radcliffe			X				
32	Geoff Taylor	X						
33	Mike Grimsdale							
34	Jeremy Hooker			X				
35	Bill Nicholls						X	
36	Dave Greenslade						X	
37	Gill Broadbent	X						
38	Barry Coleman							
39	Barbara Milburn	X						
40	Jo Crane	X						
41	Sue Newman	X						
42	Graham Hall							
43	Katy Cullinane							
44	Audrey Rogers							
45	Neil Tinkley					X		
46	Peter Wright					X		
47	Nigel Harvey					X		
48	Doug Gurzjinski					X		

**EDAS** – East Dorset Antiquarian Society; **DNHAS** – Dorset Natural History and Archaeology Society; **W&D** - Wareham and District Archaeology and Local History Group; **B & C** – Bath and Camerton Archaeology Society; **SSARG** – South Somerset Archaeological Research Group; **SV** – Stour Valley Metal Detectorists; **ARA** – Association for Roman Archaeology.

## Appendix-2 : Images from the site



**Image-1:** Geophysical survey conducted by Dave Stewart, December 2012



**Image-2:** Preparation of Trench 9 in the western range of buildings, April 2013.



**Image-3:** Trench 6: section through the eastern enclosure ditch



**Image-4:** Trench 5: Monumental 'plinth' comprising at least six blocks of tooled limestone masonry against the outer walls of Rooms 1 and 2. Function as yet not understood.



**Image-5:** Trench 5: Layer overlying the mosaic consisting of limestone roof tiles, part of a limestone column, and a fragment of decorative architrave all lying in wall mortar.



**Image-6:** Trench 5 in the northern range: uncovering the mosaic pavement in Room 1, Room 2 to the left



**Image-7:** Trench 5: The mosaic floor in Room 1 – possibly a bedroom



**Image-8:** Trench 5: The mosaic floor in Room 1



**Image-9:** Bone hair pin with a conical head from the fill of the western ditch



**Image-10:** Black Burnished ware 'dog dish' with large and unusual lead 'pot-mend' from the fill of the eastern ditch



**Image-11:** Rim fragment with pie-crust decoration from a large Dorset Orange Wiped Ware vessel dating to the late 4<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, from the fill of the eastern ditch.



**Image-12:** Fragment of Samian pottery decorated with a horse head, unstratified from the upper layer of Trench 6.



**Image-13:** Silver denarius of Vespasian (78 AD), obverse, the earliest dated Roman coin found in the vicinity of the western range of buildings. (Metal-detected find).



**Image-14:** Silver finger ring with 'humped' shoulders and remnants of a blue glass intaglio dating to the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD from the fill of the western ditch.



**Image-15:** Bronze leather-working needle from the fill of the western ditch



**Image-16:** Bulbous-headed bronze hair pin from the fill of the western ditch



**Image-17:** Very rare fragment of 'snake-thread' glass from an extremely thin-walled drinking vessel dating to the 2nd/3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD. This high-status glass was manufactured near Cologne and is not often found in Britain.



**Image-18:** Fragments of painted wall plaster from Room 1 displaying the painted surfaces and reed impressions on the back.



**Image-19:** Post excavation starts on site.



**Image-20:** Open Day, Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2013 when nearly 300 visitors came to look at the site (note the column fragment is still in place).



**Image-21:** October 2012, Trench 2: north-south and east-west orientated walls of flint and mortar.



**Image-22:** Trench 9: flint wall courses with a tile layer



**Image-23:** Trench 6: the *in-situ* fallen wall of the aisled building (eastern range). The square limestone plinth supported a large upright roof timber



**Image-24:** Trench 5: Room 2 with a layer of fallen limestone roof tiles



**Image-25:** Trench 5: Luigi Thompson (ARA) taking site photos preparatory to making a painting of the pavement.



**Image-26:** June 2013, John Oswin (Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society/DNH&AS) conducting a contour survey of the villa