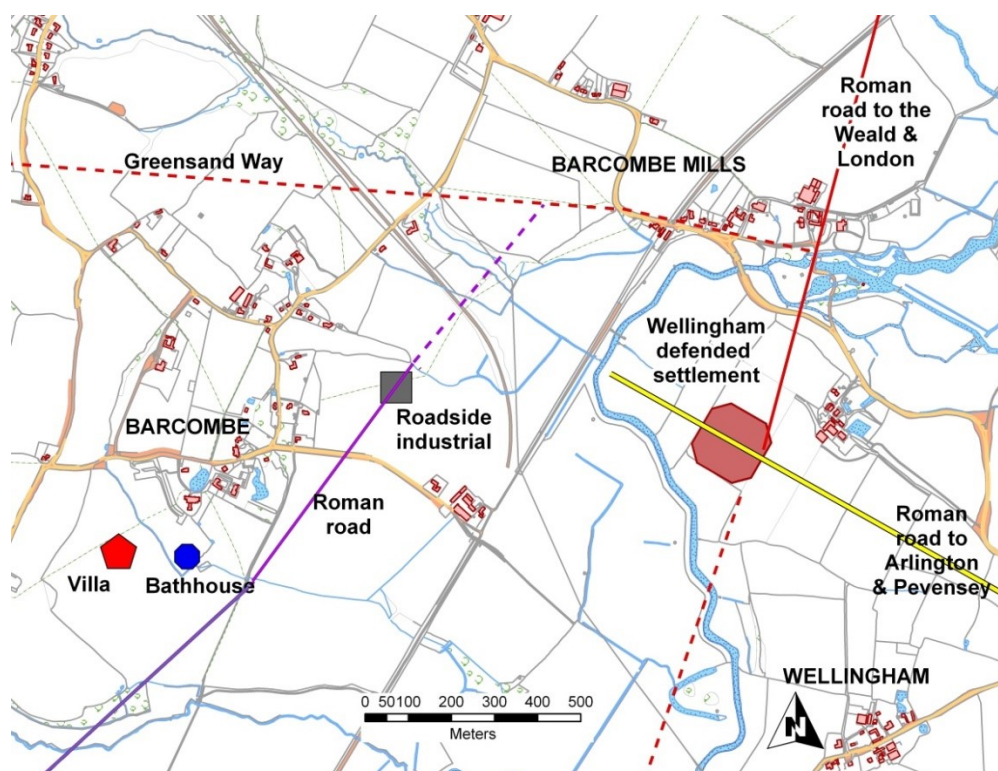


Roman roads and settlement at Bridge and Culver Farms, near Lewes, East Sussex; or what did Ivan Margary do for me?

David H Millum ACIfA - CAP Deputy Director

The main topic of this talk was the research undertaken over the last decade by the **Culver Archaeological Project (CAP)** in the Barcombe area just north of Lewes in East Sussex and how these recent discoveries owe a great debt to the work of Ivan Margary in the 1920s and 30s.



Map showing the main Roman sites and features in the Barcombe area

CAP was founded in 2005 by Robert Wallace to investigate the wider historic landscape surrounding the 3rd-4th century villa and bathhouse complex at Barcombe. In a paper in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* 74 on the London to Lewes Roman road (M14), Margary (1933, 32) suggests that it would have been more convenient to locate the road on the west bank rather than on the east, thus avoiding multiple crossings of the river. Margary seemingly never pursued this route but prompted by his suggestion CAP discovered a substantial Roman road to the west of the River Ouse at Culver Farm and undertook an extensive programme of geophysical surveys and targeted excavations over the next 7 years along the road's corridor, identifying several sites of roadside activity and tracing the roads alignment to the south of the villa heading towards the South Downs at Offham; the precise route suggested by Margary in 1933.



Section of road excavated in 2009

In 2011 CAP moved their investigations to **Bridge Farm** on the east bank of the river to locate the Roman London-Lewes road (Margary 14), where extensive geophysics undertaken by David Staveley led to the discovery of a substantial Romano-British settlement. Margary had discovered M14 in 1929 and subsequently excavated a section in the middle of the settlement without realizing its existence. This is completely understandable for without the great boon of geophysics this field had kept its secret well hidden. Margary was concerned about the lack of road evidence further down the field but then found a cinder layer near its southern edge on the direct line of the road. He therefore concluded that the road did continue to the south despite his misgivings. We can see on the geophysical survey image that he had probably located a smaller east west road, being part of the settlement and that M14 actually stops just south of his section at a junction with a road running east towards Arlington and Pevensey; a continuation of the west bound Greensand Way (M140).



The 2011 geophys results showing CAP's six excavation trenches

In 2012 CAP was awarded a Heritage Lottery grant which funded the 2013 excavations to the south of the settlement, comprising 4 trenches and involving the local community and schools, and funding full post-excavation analysis. In 2014 CAP undertook a self-funded excavation to the west of the main settlement over a rectangular Roman-period building of 13 large postholes and in 2015-16 excavated in the NE corner of the settlement at the intersection of the London road with the double-ditch enclosure.

So far these recent investigations have suggested the foundation of a planned open settlement in the late 1st century AD, its enclosure by a substantial double ditch in the late 2nd, and its reversion to a more open, possibly local industry-based community during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The London road entering the settlement at the NE corner is directly on the alignment proposed by Margary but appears to be 3rd century rather than 1st as it overlays the backfilled 2nd century enclosure ditches.

A section excavated across this road in the 2015/16 trench, just north of where we believe Margary excavated section 14, shows a very similar profile and construction of a modest flint and gravel base under a sand and iron slag surface to that detailed by him in his paper. However the road which he considered in isolation and as the prime feature of this area now has to be regarded as part of a much larger and significant Romano-British settlement with evidence of activity from the 3rd quarter of the 1st century until at least the end of the 4th and probably continuing in part well into the 5th.



The section across Margary's M14 road excavated in 2015 (joined photographs)

Bridge Farm was not a haphazard roadside settlement but a planned nucleus for the surrounding area and provides a pivotal hub for transport. The provision of a double ditched enclosure suggests that at one time the settlement had an official function or was considered strategically important. It appears to have been founded in the 1st century AD and parts show evidence of activity beyond the Roman occupation although presumably much diminished. There is evidence of onsite iron production confirming its close links to the iron production sites at the west of the Weald. Its location in the bend of the River Ouse, at the base of the London road and close to a major crossing point also seems significant and planned, offering waterborne transport south to the coast as well as land routes to the north, east and west and mirroring the location of some other important settlements in the region.

In preparing this talk the high importance and influence of Ivan Margary's work to the Culver Archaeological Project's research, and indeed to the lifetime interests of the writer, became increasingly apparent. In deed without Margary's pioneering work in the early 20th century CAP would never have found the Bridge Farm settlement or the substantial Roman road running down the western bank of the Ouse.

And that's thankfully what Ivan Margary did for me, the Culver Archaeological Project and the continuing research into Roman activity in the Sussex Ouse valley just north of Lewes.

For more information of the Bridge Farm excavations see Millum, D. (2014) *Bridge Farm 2011-2014: The excavation of a Romano-British riverside settlement* at <http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk> or go to our website; www.culverproject.co.uk.

References

Margary, I. D. 1933. A new Roman road to the coast. *Sussex Archaeological Collections* **74**, 16-43

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