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THE ROMAN SHRINE AT WESTHAWK FARM, ASHFORD: A PRELIMINARY ACCOUNT

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One of the most remarkable discoveries made in the 1998-9 excavations at Westhawk Farm, Ashford, was that of a probable Roman shrine. A small-scale plan of this structure has appeared in a recent summary account of the site (Booth and Lawrence 2000, 480) but it seemed appropriate to present more detailed information in advance of full publication of the excavations. The writer is therefore very grateful for the invitation to contribute to this volume in memory of Alec Detsicas, for many years a fellow member of the Study Group for Roman Pottery.

The Roman roadside settlement of Westhawk Farm, Kingsnorth, Ashford, Kent, lies some 3km south-south-west of the centre of Ashford, with its centre at NGR TR 000399. It lies along the NE-SW aligned edge of a slight plateau of Wealden Clay, and also extends down its south-eastern side towards the Whitewater Dyke, a tributary stream of the Great Stour. The underlying geology is capped with acidic silty clays.

The settlement is situated at an important Roman road junction, where the road (Margary 131) from Dover and Lympne, the latter about 13km distant to the south-east, meets the WSW-ENE aligned route (Margary 130) from the Weald to Canterbury, which is some 25km away. The latter road (hereafter 'the Canterbury road') formed the principal axis of the Roman settlement.

There was no detailed knowledge of the site prior to evaluation work carried out in advance of a proposed housing development. Following an extensive geophysical survey carried out by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford, and trenching by the Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit (Philp 1998), an area of some 6 hectares, located mostly in the south-west part of the settlement, was excavated by the Oxford Archaeological Unit in 1998 and 1999 (Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of Kent County Council, with funding provided principally by the developers, Wilcon Homes.

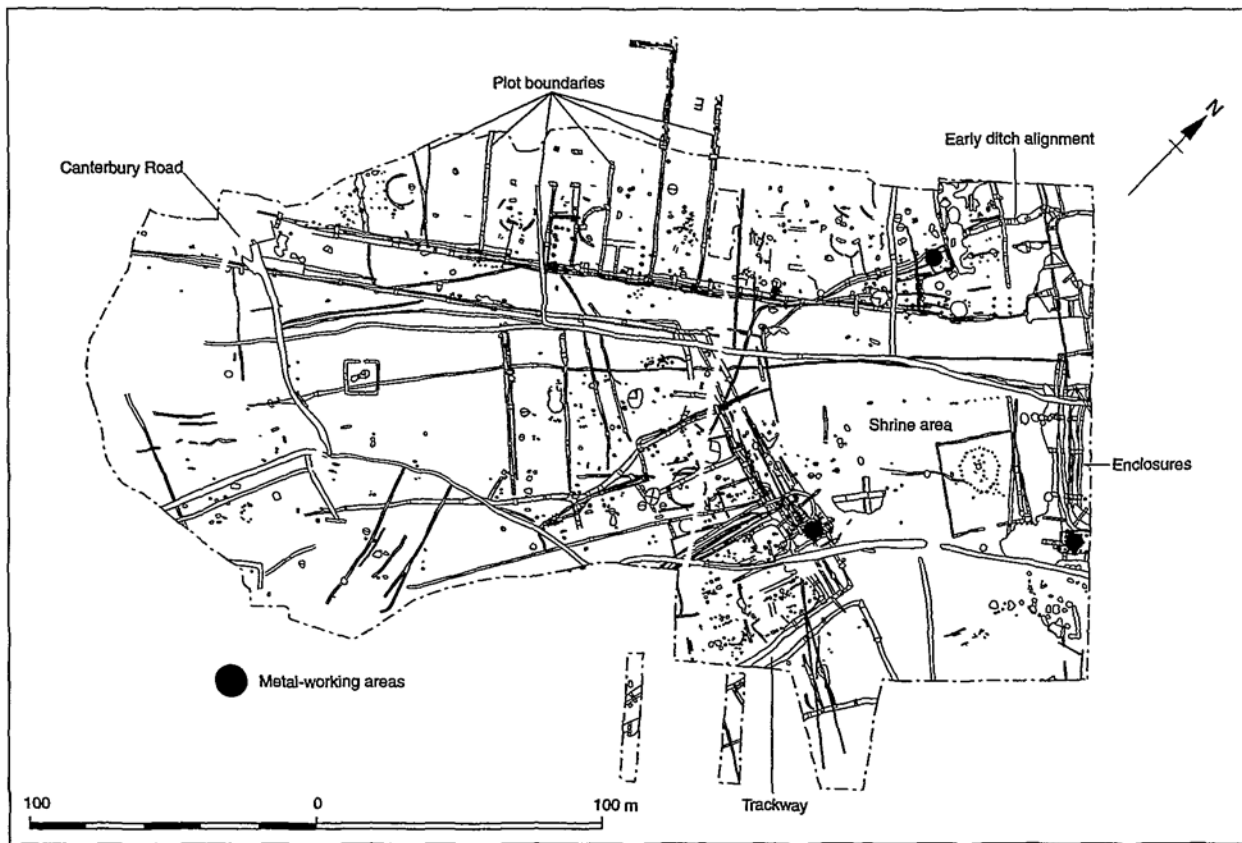


Fig. 1 Westhawk Farm, main area of 1998-9 excavations.

THE ROMAN SETTLEMENT

The archaeology of the excavated part of the site consists largely of cut features, vertical stratigraphy having been almost entirely removed by post-Roman ploughing. The layout of the Roman settlement, while clearly not static, was based essentially on the road alignments, though aspects of a regular plan related to the Canterbury road may not have begun to develop much before the AD 70s. In its early phases the south-western limit of the settlement on the north-west side of the road may have been roughly at the point where the Canterbury road bends slightly within the excavated area. Just south of this bend (which lies right at the north-east margin of the excavated area) an early ditch diverged from the north-west roadside ditch. This was probably the same feature as a ditch seen further north as the major boundary on this side of the settlement, set back some 40m from the road and parallel to it. The early ditch was subsequently cut by other ditches defining roughly rectangular plots set at right angles to the road line. Additional rectilinear plots were later established further south on the same side of the road, though their boundaries may not have been formalised before the mid second century.

On the south-east side of the Canterbury road the settlement layout was generally less regular. At the southern end of the site some boundaries were probably established in the pre-Flavian period, broadly contemporary with the early ditch on the other side of the road and on a related alignment. One of the most important of these features was a WNW-ESE alignment, which defined the southern edge of an open area within which the shrine was situated (Fig. 2). While subsequent versions of this boundary were relocated slightly further north the integrity of this area was never significantly compromised during the life of the settlement. As well as fronting onto the Canterbury road the area was entered from the south by a well-defined ditched trackway. The north-east side of the open area was defined by a series of enclosures (or, less likely, trackway ditches), the earliest component of which is dated *c.* AD 70-150. These enclosures are poorly understood since only their south-west sides lay within the excavated area. A building sited above the south-east corner of these enclosures in the second half of the second century was associated with intensive iron working, an activity also identified north-west of the Canterbury road. Elsewhere, however, the economic basis of the settlement is less clear. Structures were of timber throughout and included a significant number of circular buildings. The scale of activity within the excavated area seems to have declined very considerably by about the mid third century AD and only a tiny handful of features can be

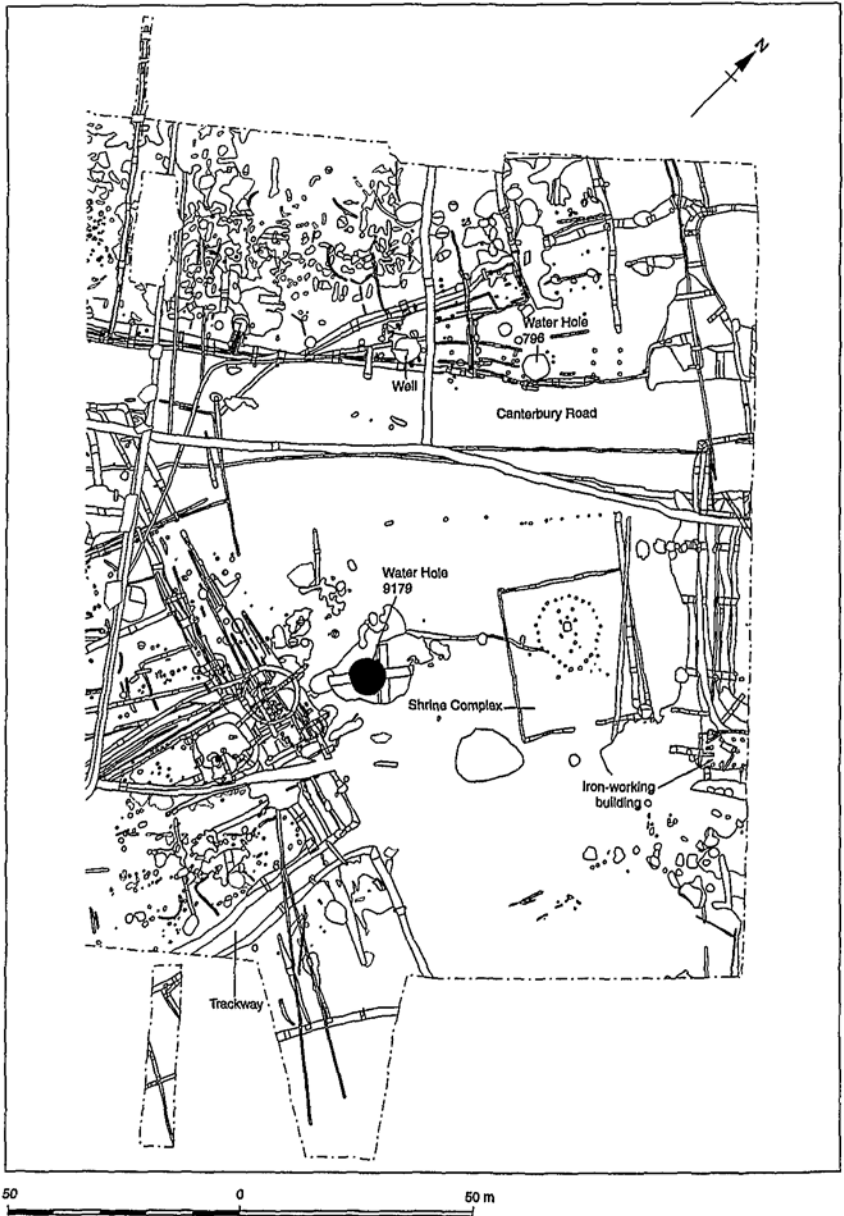


Fig. 2 North-east end of the main 1998-9 excavations showing the shrine area and related features.

assigned to the fourth century. Metal detector finds suggest that in the focal area of the settlement, around the junction of the two principal roads, there was more extensive fourth-century activity, but even here fourth-century coins (almost entirely absent from the excavated areas of the site) were less common than those of earlier date.

THE 'SHRINE' AREA

The open area within which the 'shrine' lay (Fig. 2) was irregular in plan. In its most constricted (latest) form it occupied about 95m of frontage on the south-east side of the Canterbury road, from which it was separated only by a shallow roadside gully which may not have been dug before the third century. Further south-east the area was some 70m across between the end of the southward-running trackway and the iron-working building mentioned above. The south-easterly limit of the open area is unknown. It was either never formally defined, or lay beyond the limit of excavation, or was ephemeral in character. In the second of these instances the minimum NW-SE dimension was *c.* 112m.

A large well or water-hole lay towards the south-west side of the open area and the 'shrine' itself was situated towards the north-east side of the area. It was set within a rectilinear ditched enclosure, *c.* 27 x 30m (Fig. 3), which had a single entrance in the middle of one of the short sides facing south-east. Situated axially within the enclosure was a slightly irregular polygonal post-built structure *c.* 13.5m wide and 16m long. An inner, possibly rectilinear, arrangement of post-holes surrounded a central pit, probably the setting for a very large post, and further scattered postholes lay both inside and outside the polygonal structure.

The north-east side of the rectilinear enclosure was subsequently replaced with a more substantial ditch on a slightly different alignment. This feature, *c.* 42m long, terminated further north-west than its predecessor, some 13m short of the roadside gully, and a row of postholes extended south-westwards from this point, at right angles to the alignment of the ditch, for a distance of *c.* 20m. This reworking of the north-east side of the rectilinear enclosure is the only point in the whole complex at which a significant stratigraphic sequence can be observed (with the exception of a pit which cut the east corner of the rectilinear enclosure, and might perhaps have been associated with the recut ditch). All the other component features of the shrine complex are therefore isolated and their relative chronology is unknown, in stratigraphic terms at least. Both the rectilinear enclosure

and one of the postholes of the polygonal structure cut a linear gully (1820), but this is assigned to a prehistoric (perhaps Middle Bronze Age) field system and thus does not provide a useful *terminus post quem* for the shrine complex. There is a little artefactual material from some of the features, but this rarely gives close dating, as will be seen. The complex is therefore divided into components which are assessed separately before an attempt is made to reconstruct the overall development sequence of this part of the site.

The rectilinear enclosure (Context Group No. 70)

This measured *c.* 27m (north-east - south-west) by 30.5-31m (north-west - south-east) internally and was an almost exact rectangle. The ditch ranged from as little as 0.4m across to *c.* 1.2m at the eastern corner, though typically it was *c.* 0.65-0.7m wide. It was broadest in the vicinity of the east and south corners, i.e. at the downhill corners of the enclosure. One effect of this variation in width is that in plan the outer edge of the south-east facing (entrance) side was slightly concave, though it is unlikely that this would have been apparent from the ground. The depth and profile of the ditch were also variable. The depth ranged from as little as 0.1m up to 0.5m at the east corner, with an average depth of 0.25m across 16 sections. The profile was generally rounded but was occasionally more V-shaped, and was fairly flat-bottomed at the south-west entrance terminal. The entrance into the enclosure was 4.8m wide and not quite centrally placed in the south-east side. Both terminals of the entrance were well defined in plan but that to the south-west (cut 413) was less than half the depth of the corresponding one to the north-east (cut 423), though why is unknown.

Dating

A first-second century coin (SF21) was recovered from the single fill of cut 184 on the south-west side of the enclosure. Pottery was recovered from nine fill deposits at various points around the enclosure ditch, but this material totalled a mere 24, mainly abraded, sherds. For the most part the sherds were undiagnostic, grog-tempered pieces and could only be assigned a general date range of AD 43-200. The only more closely datable piece was a fragment of a South Gaulish samian form 18/31, assignable to the late first-early second century, from the primary fill in cut 89 at the south corner of the enclosure. This might suggest that the ditch was filling up in the first half of the second century and therefore that it was already in existence by *c.* AD 100.

Polygonal structure (Context Group No. 80)

This was originally seen as a slightly irregular octagonal structure, arranged symmetrically about the central long axis of the rectilinear enclosure. Closer inspection suggests that the structure is in fact nine-sided, counting the entrance as one side. (The other eight sides are marked i-viii on Fig. 3.) It consists entirely of settings for vertical posts, each 'side' having four posts (including the end posts, which are shared with adjacent sides), except for that on the south-west side of the presumed entrance (side 8), which had six, and the narrow entrance itself. Measured from centre to centre of their component post-holes the lengths of the sides are quite consistent, being (anti-clockwise from the north-east side of the entrance - side 1) approximately 5.3m, 5.1m, 5.2m, 5.8m, 5.8m, 5.2m, 5.2m and 7.8m. The south-east facing entrance posts were *c.* 1.9m apart, from centre to centre of their pits. The extra length of the two sides (4 and 5) furthest from the entrance may have been deliberate, and overall the structure seems to have been quite carefully planned, which makes the anomalous length of side 8 the more puzzling. It may be noted, however, that the length of this side is exactly one and a half times that of the typical side length of 5.2m, so although it is anomalous the length may still have been of particular significance rather than resulting from an error in layout of the structure.

The corner post positions are slightly emphasised in some cases, with slightly larger post pits, the principal exception being at the angle of sides 1 and 2. Apart from this, the emphasis of some of the corner posts, the general consistency of the side lengths and the even, though sometimes slightly off-line, spacing of the intervening posts, suggest that the corner posts were probably put in place first. There is no evidence, however, that these posts were set deeper than the rest. Overall the postholes ranged from 0.05-0.26m deep, with an average depth of 0.15m. These figures exclude the two 'entrance' postholes, which were 0.46 and 0.5m deep. With the possible exception of post-hole 333, at the angle of sides 1 and 2, these were the only postholes with evidence for post pipes, 0.2-0.3m across.

Dating

The small quantity of pottery from the postholes, for the most part abraded and probably residual, consisted largely of fragments of grog-tempered fabrics. Fill 166 of the south-west entrance posthole 192 contained eleven somewhat fresher sherds, including a fragment from an East Sussex Ware straight-sided dish dated *c.* AD 150-250. This context, however, is the upper part of the post pipe within post pit 192, and pottery presumably only accumulated here after the post had decayed or been removed.

Central pit (Feature 415)

This was a substantial, rectangular pit with maximum dimensions of 1.97m x 1.47m x 0.85m deep, aligned on the central long axis of the rectilinear enclosure and roughly centrally placed within the polygonal structure. The pit was steep sided (except on the north-west side) and flat bottomed. Towards the south-east side at the base of the pit was a sub-rectangular patch of dark grey clay silt (461), c. 0.6m x 0.6m which produced a single coin (SF80), two iron nail fragments and a small amount of pottery. This lay below a roughly conical deposit of greyish brown clay silt (417), both 461 and 417 being surrounded by the main fill of the pit (416), a yellowish brown clay silt with some gravel. Context 461 produced a charred nut shell of *pinus pinea* (stone pine), a (probably) non-native tree species commonly associated with temple sites in a Romano-British context.

It seems most likely that the pit originally held a large post, perhaps as much as 0.6m. across. Fill 416 would have been the original packing around the post, while 461 represented either the products of decay at its very bottom or material introduced into the hole when the post was removed. The profile of fill 417 strongly suggests that it is the backfill of the void formed by deliberate removal of a post or similar object.

Dating

The probable post-packing 416 produced seven small sherds of undiagnostic pottery assigned to the first or second centuries and two coins, one also of a general first-second century date (SF91) and one (SF95) probably of Trajan (AD 98-117). Context 461 at the base of the putative post position also produced a single first-second century coin (SF80) and a larger group of pottery (fifty-eight (small) sherds, including one in a fabric dated AD 270-400), while the post void fill 417 contained another first-second century coin (SF89), a fourth-century glass vessel base and pottery including sherds of an Overwey rilled jar dated after AD 330. Overall, the evidence suggests that the feature was dug at some point in the early second century (or just possibly later) and contained a large post which was removed probably not before the end of the third century and perhaps after AD 330, assuming that the hole left by the removed post was filled fairly rapidly, whether deliberately or by natural agencies.

Internal postholes (part of Context Group No. 80)

Twelve small pits or (more likely) postholes lay within the polygonal

structure, two of them in positions which suggest that they were replacements for adjacent posts. There is no other indication of relative phasing - they may have been contemporary or of several distinct phases, nor is there any suggestion that they can be grouped on the basis of their depths - these ranged from 0.1m. to 0.36m (average 0.19m) but with no pattern discernible in the variation. The most economical interpretation, however, would see most of the postholes forming two NW-SE aligned rows, one on each side of the central pit. The north-east row could have comprised (from the north-west end) postholes 146, 566, 148 and 443 and the south-west row postholes 141, 633/631, 568/571 and (less likely) 204. The centre-to-centre spacings of the first three posts in each row are 2.6m for the first pair and 3m for the second, while the two rows are consistently 3m apart. Whether the rows extended further south-eastwards than postholes 148 and 568/571 is uncertain, although the alignment and spacing of 443 makes it an acceptable continuation of the north-east row. Posthole 204 to the south, however, is quite irregularly placed in relation to the south-west row. This posthole, and 131 on the north-west side of the central pit, both lie close to but not exactly upon the central axis of the complex.

Alternative interpretations of the layout of the posts are of course possible. The four posts surrounding the central pit, all 3m apart, could for example be seen as a single unit distinct from other arrangements. There is no certainty here.

Dating

Only two postholes in this group produced any pottery. 141 at the west end of the group contained a single tiny grog-tempered fragment for which close dating is impossible. Feature 421, however, in a position which does not fit easily into any of the alignments discussed above, contained three sherds including another Overwey fragment dated after AD 330. Since there was only a single fill in the feature, however, it is impossible to determine if this indicates the terminus post quem for erection or removal of a potential post.

External postholes (part of Context Group No. 80)

A further seven small pits or postholes were located within the rectangular enclosure outside the polygonal structure, two to the south and five to the east of the structure. These varied in size and depth (the latter ranging from 0.08-0.25m). Three of them (postholes 434, 425 and 438) perhaps formed a line at right angles to side 1 of the polygonal structure, but otherwise there is no clearly discernible pattern in their arrangement.

Dating

The fill of posthole 425 contained six very small sherds dated to the mid-late first century AD.

Second phase boundary and related features (Context Group No. 970 etc)

The north-east side of the rectilinear enclosure was cut by a larger ditch (970) on a similar alignment. To the east this feature terminated just short of the east corner of the enclosure, which was cut by a subcircular pit (Context Group No. 1260), 2.2m across and 0.95m deep. Ditch 970, which was up to 1.5m wide and 0.35m deep, extended c. 12m north-west of the rectilinear enclosure to another terminus, whence a row of postholes (Context Group No. 1070) ran in a south-westerly direction for a distance of just over 20m, with possible outliers further south-west on approximately the same line (Fig. 2). Two further postholes (157, succeeded by 155) cut the fill of the rectilinear enclosure at its west corner.

Dating

Both ditch 970 and pit 1260 produced small amounts of late second to early third-century pottery. None of the other features was dated by artefacts, except that fill 1132 of posthole 1130, one of the components of Context Group 1070, contained a small assemblage of prehistoric sherds which were presumably residual.

Well/water-hole (Context Group No. 9179)

This feature was situated some 25m south-west of the rectilinear enclosure ditch, towards the south-west side of the open area within which the shrine lay. It consisted of a vertical-sided circular shaft approximately 8m in diameter, broadening at the top to a shallow ovoid shaped depression some 17.50 x 13m, with a depth of 0.30m. Owing to its size this feature was partly excavated by machine, and the lower deposits were only investigated using an auger, which indicated a probable minimum depth of 6.3m, though it is not absolutely certain that the lowest deposits encountered were fills.

Finds were recovered from fills in the uppermost 2m of the feature. They included waterlogged wood, consisting of part of a small oak tree trunk set upright against one side of the feature and a number of oak planks, not apparently forming any *in situ* structure, as well as small quantities of pottery and occasional other objects.

Dating

The pottery and other material is consistent in indicating a second-century date for fills in the upper part of the sequence.

SEQUENCE AND CHRONOLOGY

The lack of precision in the dating evidence makes establishment of the chronology of the shrine complex very difficult. Moreover, with one exception it is not possible to demonstrate any phasing within the complex. Most of its components could have been erected in a single construction phase, but a gradual elaboration of the complex by the piecemeal addition of these components is also possible. There is thus, on present evidence, no single 'correct' interpretation of the sequence of the components or of their structural relationships through time. It is noticeable, however, that the plan of the shrine complex exhibits considerable regularity around its central north-west to south-east axis – based on the alignment of the rectilinear enclosure. While this is not conclusive it is certainly consistent with the possibility that most of the components of the shrine complex were planned from the start to comprise a single entity.

This admittedly subjective judgement makes the most economical use of the evidence of the plan. The dating evidence, as far as it goes, is potentially compatible with this interpretation. Where present, the dating evidence from all the primary elements of the complex is of the first-second centuries. It is particularly unfortunate that most of the coins associated with the complex cannot be dated closely. All are very poorly preserved and most can only be assigned to the first-second centuries on the basis of their modules. However, out of some 215 coins from the 1998-9 excavations assignable to the first-early third centuries only 6 can be positively identified as of first-century AD date. On this basis it may be more likely that the imprecisely dated pieces from the shrine complex are of second-century rather than earlier date, though the argument has to be used with caution. The single coin (SF95) from the material packing the central post feature is consistent with this since it can almost certainly be assigned to Trajan, thus providing an early second century *terminus post quem* for the central feature. The South Gaulish samian sherd from the rectilinear enclosure gives a late first-early second century *terminus post quem* for the primary fill of the ditch at that point, though much depends on how long the ditch was kept clean before silts began to accumulate within it. On balance, a construction date in the first half of the second century AD is perhaps most likely for the shrine complex, though both earlier or later dates would be possible if its components were not all of exactly the same phase.

The space within which the shrine lay was already at least partly defined by boundaries (on the south-west side) in the first phase of the settlement, dated roughly AD 43-70, though definition of the

north-east side may have come later. It is possible, therefore, that this area was intended and set aside from the beginning for a special purpose, in this case religious. This suggestion is supported by the absence of earlier features beneath or in the vicinity of the shrine complex although, as already discussed, one or more components of the latter could perhaps have predated the others and been established early on in the life of the settlement.

NATURE OF STRUCTURES AND PARALLELS

Reconstruction of the structures comprising the shrine complex is inevitably speculative. If all the principal components located within the rectilinear enclosure had been contemporary they could still be seen either as elements of a single structure, or as related but independent. The central pit seems to have held a very large upright post. This could have been a structural component within a roofed building, but its size, particularly when contrasted with that of the other postholes, suggests that it was distinct from them. A large free-standing post could have been surrounded simply by other posts, or by screens based on the posthole features, or by a partly roofed structure with the polygonal sides as its external walls and the inner ends of radiating roof timbers supported on the internal postholes.

Close comparanda for such an ensemble are scarce, though loose parallels extend as far back as the early second-century BC phase at Gournay-sur-Aronde, where a large pit probably surrounded by an arrangement of posts (rather than a roofed structure) lay within a ditched enclosure (Brunaux *et al.* 1985; Derks 1998, 170-175 for reassessment of the sequence). In Britain, individual aspects find parallels at a number of sites. Very large posts, for example, have been noted in association with temple complexes at Ivy Chimneys (Witham) and Chelmsford, both in Essex, at Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead, Herts and perhaps at Uley (Glos). Only at Uley was the possible post directly associated with a structural feature (together identified as structure XVI). The ensemble consisted of a large pit within a 'simple arrangement of separate postholes forming an 8.20m square' (Woodward and Leach 1993, 308). This is assigned to Phase 2, dated early-mid first century AD, but the pit (F19), which may have existed earlier in Phase 1 (and by implication possibly even have been as early as Neolithic in date) remained a central feature in subsequent stone temples up to the mid fourth century. The contents of the pit are uncertain, however, and it may have held a stone or a tree rather than a post.

At Ivy Chimneys, Chelmsford and Wood Lane End the posts appear to have been at some distance from related structures. In the first case a substantial single post (F1977) stood some little distance in front (i.e. east) of the temple structure almost on its central axis. The post pit was sub-rectangular, 1.5 x 1.2 x 0.95m deep, and the post pipe indicated a timber 0.3m in diameter (Turner 1999, 40). The feature was assigned to Phase 4, dated to the late third century. At Chelmsford the comparable feature was rather earlier in date. At the temple complex in the north-east part of the town post pit 193, some 1.67 x at least 1.52 x c. 1.0m deep and containing a post pipe 0.43m in diameter, was probably associated with a period IV.3 (late first century AD) gravel surface, on which was a scatter of votive objects (Wickenden 1992, 19-20). The pit lay outside (east of) a possibly associated enclosure, but insufficient was excavated for it to be possible to say if there were other associated features further to the east. At Wood Lane End two posts were recorded, standing to one side of the central (south-east facing) axis of the sanctuary complex. The larger of these was about 0.6m across set in a pit 2 x 1.5 x 1.3m deep (Neal 1984, 205-6). The feature was not dated but the site appears to have ceased to function as a religious complex by the end of the second century AD (*ibid.*, 208).

A further example of a very large free-standing post, but here not obviously in a religious structural context, is found associated with gravelled (perhaps 'market place') surfaces at Alcester, Warwickshire (Cracknell 1989, 30). Free-standing stone columns, as opposed to posts, also occur, and fragments of one were found within the temple complex at Springhead (Blagg 1980). This was probably an example of a Jupiter column, although Blagg (*ibid.*, 229), while quoting British comparisons, was cautious about the specific identification. Jupiter columns are much more common in the continental north-west provinces, particularly in the Germanies, than in Britain (Bauchhenß and Noelke 1981). Free-standing wooden posts have sometimes been linked to the Jupiter column tradition (e.g. Turner and Wymer 1987, 55-57), though Green (1999, 256-7) rejects a definite association. (It may be noted that Turner and Wymer's discussion of Jupiter columns was in the context of the deliberate association of Palaeolithic axes with the Ivy Chimneys temple complex. Palaeolithic flint, including at least three hand-axes and fragments probably of a further two, were found at Westhawk Farm, but at present there is no clear indication that their occurrence was anything other than fortuitous.)

Polygonal shrine or temple structures are of course well known in Britain and beyond, but the majority of such structures in Britain are

octagonal, mostly of concentric plan, and are generally stone-founded and of later Roman date (e.g. Lewis 1966, 170-171 (Caerwent, Pagans Hill and Weycock, though for this last see also Muckelroy 1976, 180); Wickenden 1992, 36-43 (Chelmsford); Frere 1989, 308 (19-25 Old Bailey, London); Wedlake 1982, 36-54 (Nettleton), amongst other examples). These structures only provide general parallels for the Westhawk Farm shrine and are not considered in detail here, though the Chelmsford example is of interest for its occurrence on the site where a large free-standing post was noted in an earlier phase (see above). The Westhawk Farm structure stands out in terms of its combination of slightly irregular polygonal form, posthole construction and relatively early (perhaps early-mid second century) date.

A few polygonal shrines or temples with more than eight sides are known in Britain. Again the majority are stone-founded, though concentric walls are rare. These include the somewhat irregular (probably twelve-sided) Temple II at Brigstock, Northants, dated to the late third-fourth century (Lewis 1966, 80, 188). At Godmanchester the last of a series of three temples of Abandinus, lying west of the *mansio*, was polygonal in form and probably nine-sided (counting the entrance as one side, as at Westhawk), but the excavated plan is incomplete. Masonry footings for some of the walls were thought possibly to represent remodelling (Green 1986, 34), implying that the structure could originally have been of timber. Internal features included a tank and a subsequent well, both approximately central. To one side of these was a 'massive post, possibly one of a pair free-standing within the cella' (*ibid.*). The date of the structure is uncertain. Its predecessor is thought to have survived 'until the end of the third century when the mansio complex was burnt' (*ibid.*, 33), but the nature of the association is unclear. Equally a coin of AD 270 from a robber trench in the polygonal shrine does not (*pace* Green) provide a *terminus post quem* for its construction (*ibid.*), though pottery from the foundation trenches is dated early-mid fourth century.

A stone founded structure at Chanctonbury Ring, Sussex may also have been nine-sided (Frere 1992, 305-6, with figure). Here, however, there was an east-facing entrance chamber, apparently with a tessellated floor – a notable development of the kind of porch feature occasionally seen in octagonal and on other temple buildings. The date of this structure is unclear, but while first-fourth century material has been recovered from the site it is suggested in the discussion of the adjacent, typical double square temple building that first-second century pottery and coins are more common and that this may be the date of that structure (Bedwin 1980, 188). Whether or not

this would apply to the polygonal structure as well is uncertain, but a relative dearth of fourth-century coins is notable at Chanctonbury, as at Westhawk Farm.

Earlier than all these is a probable shrine at Haddenham, Cambs, overlying a Bronze Age barrow. The first phase, dated late first or early second century, consisted of an octagonal shallow gravel foundation, about 8m across, with an eastern porch approached by a ditched path, the whole being set within a roughly rectangular ditched enclosure surrounding the earlier barrow. The ditches were recut probably in the third century and by the early fourth century a new shrine - a simple rectangle of posts open to the north and surrounded by a post fence - lay just north of the first phase structure (Frere 1984, 298; Evans and Hodder 1984, 33-34). There is no break in the ditch, which is linked to other ditches at the south end of the site, one of which runs out of the excavated area to the south. These features perhaps carried water, but in any case must presumably have been bridged for access.

None of these sites provides precise parallels for the Westhawk Farm complex, one feature of which is the relative unambiguity of the plan, though not of its chronology or reconstruction. The general morphological characteristics of the site, however, leave little doubt as to its broad interpretation. The rectangular ditched enclosure is of a type often found with religious or ceremonial associations, though with considerable variation in size. At one end of the scale are sites such as Folly Lane, *Verulamium*, enclosing almost 2ha with a very substantial ditch (Niblett 1999, 17), while at the other end at Haddenham the enclosure ditch had maximum internal dimensions of c. 38 x 34m, similar in size to the Westhawk enclosure though a little less regular and with a larger ditch. A further parallel is found on the Westhampnett Bypass (W. Sussex), where a small enclosure c. 19m square internally with a single ESE facing entrance is plausibly seen as having a religious function. Rows of posts set some 2m inside the ditches form a square 'structure', strongly reminiscent of the Uley feature discussed above, but larger, and quite possibly not roofed. (The writer is grateful to Andrew Fitzpatrick of Wessex Archaeology for information about this site in advance of publication.) Other rectilinear timber shrines of Iron Age date incorporate both linear and discrete cut features, the former in some cases possibly wall trenches rather than boundary or enclosure features, as perhaps at Stansted, Essex (Frere 1988, 460; Brooks 1989). The well-known Heathrow 'temple' also falls loosely into this category (Grimes and Close-Brooks 1993, 312-318, 333-338), though here it is more generally accepted that the structure was probably roofed, notwithstanding that

there are still uncertainties regarding the relationship of the inner and outer 'walls' (Derks 1997, 179) and also the chronology (cf. Millett 1995, 98).

A closer parallel to Westhawk Farm in terms of the general character of its layout is found in the late Iron Age-earliest Roman phase of the Hayling Island temple. Here the temple structure was circular and defined by a gully, but its symmetrical placement within a rectilinear enclosure is reminiscent of the Westhawk Farm plan (King and Soffe 1991).

Polygonal features are also found as enclosures, rather than structures, at a number of temple or shrine sites, though they are apparently more common on the continent than in Britain. An example at Colchester, associated with 'Temple IV' – was perhaps ten-sided including the south-east facing entrance, though it is unclear whether the ditched enclosure was really polygonal rather than sub-oval (Hull 1958, 238-9). A first or second century date seems likely.

The polygonal form of the Westhawk Farm structure is therefore characteristic of numerous Romano-Celtic temples and related features, though not exactly matched by any one and not paralleled by any pre-Roman examples in Britain. Its posthole construction is still a notable characteristic. Other polygonal timber shrines may have been obliterated by later stone structures or, in the case of early excavations, not been recognised. The large free-standing post can be seen in the context of other such features, though these generally occur within temple precincts rather than as the central component of a structural complex.

THE NATURE OF THE CULT

One of the most striking characteristics of the Westhawk Farm shrine complex is the absence of obvious votive material. The only location in the site where such material seems to be clearly present is a water-hole or well situated on the north-west side of the Canterbury road opposite the shrine complex and some 45m from the rectangular enclosure (Fig. 2). The alignment of this feature almost on the central axis of the shrine complex is notable, but may be fortuitous, though some connection between the two is possible. The contents of the feature have not yet been analysed in detail, but they include some 74 coins (out of a total of 227 from the whole site) with a date range from late first to early fourth century, but with a majority of second-century pieces. The quantity of coins here relative to the total

assemblage strongly suggests that these represent votive material. It is also notable that this feature, like the central post pit within the shrine, is one of a tiny handful from the site from which fourth century material has been recovered. The relatively large quantities of finds of all types from this feature contrast with the comparative dearth of material from a nearby well in an exactly similar roadside location just 25m to the south-west. The contrasting assemblages may be explained in terms of different ranges of activity in adjacent property units, but they recall the suggestion of Poulton and Scott that paired wells in some sites may reflect 'practical' and 'religious' sides of daily life (Poulton and Scott 1993, 124-127).

In the shrine area it is possible that factors of poor preservation, and particularly truncation of deposits by ploughing, were responsible for removal of some deposits and features which once contained votive material, and the five coins from the shrine and rectilinear enclosure may perhaps represent all that survives of objects originally from such contexts. Nevertheless a dearth of potential votive objects from the topsoil or from any adjacent part of the site tends to suggest that the cult practised here was not one in which the deposition of votive objects played an important part – an almost total absence of 'artefacts characteristic of a ritual function' is also noted, for example in the early Roman temple complex at Heybridge, Essex (Atkinson and Preston 1998, 98-100). Indeed 'votive-rich' cults may have been less universal than one might think, though they are highly visible in the archaeological record. However, the presence of two coins in the packing material around the central post, unlikely to be casual losses, might indicate that some potentially votive material was already present in this part of the site. This could suggest that some (perhaps low-level) deposition of offerings was practised, and moreover that such practice was already observed before the excavation of the central feature of the shrine – which may have implications for the phasing of the complex overall.

Further evidence for the cult comes from the botanical remains. Charred plant remains from the central posthole included a fragment of nut shell of *pinus pinea*, a species which is often associated with temple sites (Kislev 1988), including (indirectly) Springhead (Campbell 1998, 37) and possibly the temple-mausoleum at Lullingstone (Doherty 1987), though a culinary use has been suggested for the examples from Kentish sites (Campbell 1998, 37). *Pinus pinea* is also attested in funerary contexts, for example in Southwark (Giorgi 2000, with a brief list of other occurrences of the species in London). Overall, however, a direct association of *pinus pinea* with temples is clear in at least some Romano-British instances and at Westhawk

Farm its only occurrence is in such a context. Another unique occurrence within the site, this time in the pollen record, is of abundant traces of spruce from the large water-hole lying within the open area south-west of the shrine. Once thought to be found only in Pleistocene deposits prior to reintroduction in the late medieval or early post-medieval period, spruce has now been recognised at a number of early Roman sites in eastern England, including in a potential religious context at Godmanchester (P. Wiltshire pers. comm.). It is possible that it was valued for the same sort of characteristics as *pinus pinea*, perhaps particularly, in the present context, its aromatic properties. The localised occurrence of spruce pollen in a single water-hole might suggest the presence of no more than a single tree, significantly located in the open area adjacent to the shrine complex.

Neither spruce nor *pinus pinea* is found at sites clearly linked with a single deity – associations of *pinus pinea* include Mithras at London. At *Verulamium*, Wheeler used the presence of *pinus pinea* to argue that the triangular temple was probably associated with Cybele (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936, 119-120), but the association was based on literary evidence and not on any other supporting archaeological data. Without such evidence there is no certainty as to the nature of the cult at Westhawk Farm.

Other aspects of the complex which may shed light on the nature of the cult include the alignment of the structures, which face south-east, notably not quite at right angles to either alignment of the Canterbury road. This alignment gives a view downslope across the valley, but it also approximates to midwinter sunrise. This is a particularly common alignment for roundhouses in the Iron Age, in such a variety of contexts and locations to suggest strongly that the orientation is not conditioned solely by environmental factors (Oswald 1997). Interestingly, a majority of Middle and Late Iron Age 'shrines' tend to face east rather than south-east (*ibid.*, 92), though a significant number are orientated south-east. This trend continues in the Roman period, with a majority of temple buildings in Britain (Lewis 1966, 32) and in Gaul (Fauduet 1993, 113) facing east. It may be noted that of the polygonal structures mentioned above Godmanchester faced south-east and Chelmsford east-south-east, while all the rest faced more or less due east. In the case of the Westhawk Farm shrine the south-east facing alignment was clearly important enough to override the consideration that visitors approaching the shrine from the Canterbury road, surely the normal method of access, were presented with a rear view of the complex rather than its façade.

THE PLACE OF THE SHRINE COMPLEX IN THE SETTLEMENT

The shrine complex occupied an area at some distance from the focal road junction within the settlement, but which was nevertheless apparently demarcated from an early stage in the development of the site, almost certainly in the pre-Flavian period. The first structural development of the shrine area may not have taken place before the early second century, but in the meantime it is possible that religious functions were carried out in the large open space within which the shrine was set and it is likely that such activities continued here after the shrine was constructed. It is unclear if the very large well or waterhole on the south-western side of the open area is relevant in this context since the lower fills are not dated. The uppermost fills, the only ones to produce reasonable quantities of dating material, were of the later second century or later. A similarly large feature adjacent to the major cemetery at Pepper Hill, Springhead, may perhaps have been of pre-Roman origin. Apart (perhaps) from the occurrence of cypress pollen (see above), however, there was nothing in the fills of the Westhawk Farm feature to suggest a particular function, either in the context of the shrine complex or of the adjacent settlement. While a function as a ritual shaft is possible, for example, the feature was substantially wider than the shafts identified at Keston, which ranged from c. 1.2m to c. 4.5m in diameter (Philp *et al.* 1999, 20), nor was there any evidence for special deposits of the type encountered at Keston, though given the incomplete excavation of the feature such an absence cannot be conclusive. A source of water within a temple context would have been important for a variety of ritual and other purposes, however, even if it was not in itself a focus of devotion (Derks 1998, 207-208). It is likely, therefore, that this feature had a significant role in the ceremonial use of the area, and it is possible that that may originally have preceded the construction of the shrine complex itself, but this is speculative.

Once in place the structural components may have survived for a considerable period. The north-east side of the rectilinear enclosure was replaced by a more substantial ditch, probably in the late second or early third century, but this reworking, associated with a new fence line, only affected two sides of the original enclosure. The scale of the latter was such, however, that without regular cleaning it would have silted up quite rapidly, and it is quite possible that it was only open for a fairly short space of time. The redefinition of the rectilinear enclosure may have served, in particular, to emphasise the distinction between the shrine area and the contemporaneous iron

working located close by to the east. Structures and enclosures located south-west of the open area seem to have belonged principally to agricultural units.

The central post, at least, probably remained standing for some 200 years and perhaps even more. It is unclear if this was an isolated feature by the time that it was dug out (probably after *c.* AD 330) or whether elements of the polygonal structure also survived until this time. Contemporaneous activity elsewhere within the excavated (south-western) part of the settlement was almost non-existent by this time, so it is probably significant that one of the very few features to contain material unequivocally assignable to the early fourth century was the likely votive well on the opposite side of the Canterbury road from the shrine complex. The reasons for the considerable contraction of the occupied area of the settlement, probably from the early-mid third century onwards, are still unknown, but there are slight indications from surface finds that later Roman activity concentrated to the north-east in the area of the focal road junction within the settlement. Despite the apparent demise of immediately adjacent activity, however, some continuity of ceremonial function for the shrine complex, at least into the early fourth century, seems possible, and perhaps likely. Nevertheless, although the shrine complex appears long lived it never underwent any kind of architectural elaboration – in the sense of replacement of any of its components with stone structures – though such a development is characteristic of a significant number of Romano-Celtic temple sites even in the early Roman period (*cf.* King 1990, 232). The significance of this lack of development remains to be established.

Unfortunately the archaeological evidence does not allow us to distinguish between several interpretative possibilities relating to the final removal of the large post, including: that this represented recycling of a valuable structural resource, that it related to a ritual of termination of use of the shrine, or that it was an act of deliberate desecration of a pagan site on the part of a local Christian community.

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