The Roman Rural Settlement Project
Preliminary results from the West Midlands

Dr Tom Brindle
The West Midlands dataset

- 231 records of LIA/Roman sites
- 6.5% of Jeremy Taylor’s total of 3562 rural sites for the region, based on sites recorded on HERs
- Compares with 20.5% of Taylor’s sites in the South East, 16.5% in the East, and 15% in the East Midlands
Distribution of sites by county

Number of records per county

- Worcestershire: 67
- Warwickshire: 66
- Shropshire: 31
- Herefordshire: 30
- Staffordshire: 30
- West Midlands: 7

% of records per county

- Worcestershire: 29%
- Warwickshire: 29%
- Shropshire: 13%
- Herefordshire: 13%
- Staffordshire: 13%
- West Midlands: 3%
Kernel density plot of excavated Roman rural sites in the West Midlands

- Clear bias towards the major river valleys
- Also clusters in the vicinity of Wroxeter, Wall (M6 Toll route), Tiddington and Droitwich
- How much is bias towards areas in which excavation has taken place, rather than the real settlement pattern?
Distribution of West Midlands RRSP sites

Distribution of Romano-British sites in Jeremy Taylor’s Atlas of Roman rural settlement in England (based on HER data)
Distribution of excavated Roman rural settlements in relation to built up areas

Density of excavated Roman rural sites by area of county

- Worcestershire
- Warwickshire
- Herefordshire
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire
- West Midlands

Density of NMR archaeological investigations

- West Midlands
- Worcestershire
- Warwickshire
- Herefordshire
- Staffordshire
- Shropshire

NMR data kindly provided by Tim Evans of ADS
Kernel density of excavated Roman rural sites

Kernel density of NMR excavations
• Distribution of late Iron Age and Roman finds recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (yellow dots)

• Considerably more widespread than the excavated evidence
Types of archaeological intervention

Overall proportions of types of investigation in the region

- Excavation: 70%
- Evaluation: 19%
- Watching brief: 8%
- Field survey: 2%
- Geophysics: 1%

Type of investigation by county (%)

- Herefordshire
- Shropshire
- Staffordshire
- Warwickshire
- West Midlands
- Worcestershire

Legend:
- Excavation
- Evaluation
- Watching brief
- Field survey
- Geophysics
The impact of development-led archaeology on excavated Roman rural settlements in the West Midlands.
1/3 of the sites on the database represented by grey lit. reports only. i.e. have not been published elsewhere.
108.7 hectares excavated with evidence for Roman rural settlement (where area of excavation is known = 75%)

Compares to 1000.6 hectares in the South-East = 1/9\textsuperscript{th} of the area excavated in the SE

* Note a 68km long (approx. 200ha) Network Archaeology pipeline watching brief through Staffordshire resulted in only two sites on the database – a poorly preserved cremation, and a group of pits. Indication of genuinely low levels of settlement.
Roman rural site-types in the region – 211 distinct sites

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<th>Main category</th>
<th>Site type</th>
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Inter-regional statistics

Proportion of farms, villas and nucleated settlements in the regions analysed so far (proportion of all sites)

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<th>Region</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Farms</th>
<th>Villas</th>
<th>Nucleated settlements</th>
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<td>West Midlands</td>
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Farm Chronology

Number of farms in use (n=118)

% Date of establishment for farmsteads (n=87)

34% of farms in use during Late Iron Age (8% with clear establishment dates in LIA)

48% of farms established c. AD 50-150

Peak in number of active farms in 2nd century AD
Continuity, Abandonment and Transformation

% Date of abandonment for farmsteads as a proportion of all farms in use in each phase

- 80% of LIA farms continued unchanged to AD 100
- 17% of LIA farms abandoned in the 1st century AD
- 3% of LIA farms transformed in the 1st century AD
Settlement Morphology

Sharpstones Hill Site E/Meole Brace, Shropshire

Enclosed Farm
North of Langley Mill, West Midlands

Saxon's Lode Farm, Ripple, Worcestershire
Example of plan from a pipeline excavation (Elms Farm, Beckford, Worcestershire – Cotswold Archaeology)
Frequency of farmstead sites in the West Midlands by settlement form

Number of farms classified by settlement form = 57 (total number 121)

Unenclosed/open sites almost certainly vastly underrepresented as they are very hard to recognise – require large areas of excavation. Many unclassified sites perhaps of unenclosed form

Note that some sites have multiple settlement forms due to morphological transformation over time
Long-term trends in settlement morphology

- An increase in complex farms and a decrease in enclosed farms from the late Iron Age to the mid-2nd century AD
- Broadly similar frequencies of complex and enclosed farms between c. AD 150 and 300
- From late 3rd century both enclosed and complex farms decline in numbers
Settlement Transformation North of Langley Mill, Staffs.

- Unenclosed settlement in the mid-Iron Age, followed by a further mid-late-Iron Age enclosure containing multiple roundhouses.
- Contraction of activity in late 1st-2nd centuries.
- Extensive reoccupation from mid-1st to mid 2nd century, with construction of multiple enclosures.
• Up to three separate domestic sites occupied in the 1st century AD.
• Abandoned and replaced by field systems and trackways from 2nd century AD.
• During mid-late 2nd century, a new field system is created and the focus shifts to the south, where a sequence of masonry buildings are constructed during the 3rd-4th centuries, including a building with a bath suite
• Changes at all sites possibly part of a wider pattern of landscape change from 2nd century, reflecting separate farms which become part of a probable villa estate.
• Start dates available for 11 of 18 villas in the region (61%)
• Most constructed in 2\textsuperscript{nd} to 3\textsuperscript{rd} centuries
• Many villas develop out of previously occupied settlements
• 4\textsuperscript{th} century is the period during which most villas were in use
Villa construction dates
(where villa date known)

- AD 100
- AD 150
- AD 175
- AD 200
- AD 250
- AD 275
Settlement development at Magna Castra Farm, Herefordshire

**Mid-Iron Age enclosed settlement**

**Late 1\textsuperscript{st} century AD**
- Peripheral activity continued

**Mid-2\textsuperscript{nd} century, two rectangular buildings, one aisled**

**c. AD 200, construction of winged corridor villa**

**Early 4\textsuperscript{th} century elaboration of villa**
Distribution of non-villa farms with rectangular buildings

- Overwhelming bias towards south and east of region
- Most unclassified, but 3 (21%) were complex farms
- No enclosed farms produced masonry buildings
Pottery Production

- 13 (6%) sites classified as pottery production sites
- A further 8 sites produced kilns
- Major industries represented
  - Mancetter/Hartshill
  - Severn Valley Ware
Iron Production

• Major Iron Production predominantly associated with nucleated sites
• Tiddington (small-town)
• Ariconium (small-town)
• Meole Brace (village)

• (and of course Worcester)

• Tiddington, Ariconium, Meole Brace also produced pottery
Salt Production

- Droitwich the only example in the region
- Distribution pattern of briquetage a further reminder that the north west of the region has a distinct identity to the south and east
Coinage

Presence of coins up to AD 260

Presence of coins post-AD 260
Distribution of coinage in the West Midlands
Conclusions

• Very uneven distribution of settlement evidence – as far as we can tell, that distribution seems to be more or less real – two zones within the region. One that is characterised by many features common to the south-east of the country (rectangular and masonry buildings, wider coin use, more complex farms), the other more similar to the pattern seen in Wales and the north.

• The 2nd century in many ways is the period where things change dramatically in the region – start getting construction of villas (though in small numbers), more rectangular buildings, masonry buildings, complex farms.

• BUT this is very much biased towards the south-east of the region. We do not see the same evidence for this in the north and west of the region, at least not in the countryside.

• By the late 3rd century there seems to be a pattern of settlement decline at rural settlements – earlier than seen in the other regions analysed so far – a key regional characteristic

• Clear impact of developer-funded archaeology in the region
The impact of development-led archaeology on excavated Roman rural settlements in the West Midlands