



AYLSHAM ROMAN PROJECT SEASON 1 – SUMMER 2016



Overview

In August 2016, the first excavation season of The Aylsham Roman Project was undertaken. An earlier evaluation of the site had defined the location of a probable Roman kiln and a number of associated features. The excavation area encompassed the kiln, associated features and other anomalies that were shown in the preceding geophysical survey.

The excavation was successful in locating and excavating two Roman kilns, the associated rake pits, a waste pit (probably used by the potters working on the kilns) and a number of smaller features possibly dating to earlier than the kilns.

Kiln 1

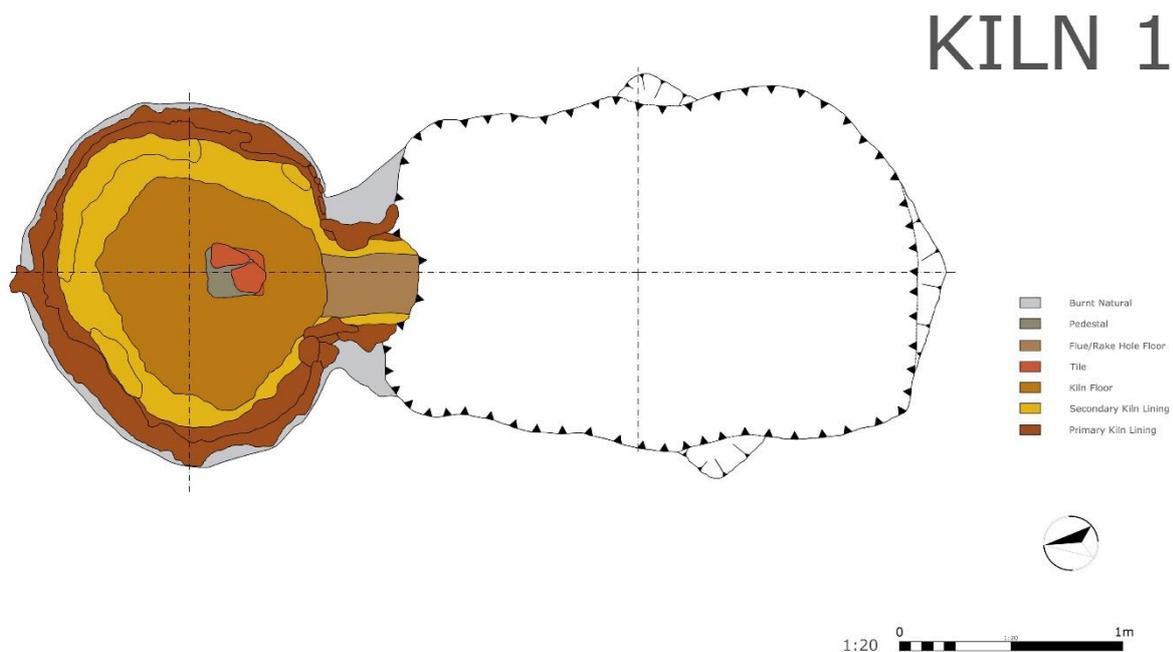
Kiln 1 was located in the north eastern end area of the excavation and was circular in plan. The kiln was semi-sunken and had a single flue. The clay kiln chamber was a permanent clay lining. One of the most interesting aspects of Kiln 1 is that it showed evidence of reuse. Currently at least two separate phases of use have been identified. The flue was re lined after the first firing. However the most interesting aspect of this kiln isn't wholly to do with the structure itself. The associated rake pit adjacent to the kiln contained approximately 5000 sherds of pottery as well as numerous pieces of kiln lining, construction material and debris. It appears that something went wrong in the final firing of the kiln which had caused a high

percentage of wasters within the kiln contents as well as possibly causing the kiln to collapse internally. Based on the evidence recovered during the excavation an explanation may be that the secondary floor surface of the kiln, collapsed, causing the contents of the kiln to spill over and break. This floor surface was still present along with the pedestal (central structural) pillar once the kiln was excavated. The clay lining of Kiln 1 has been left intact to allow us to come back in a future season and take samples for archeomagnetic dating. This will give us a working date range for the final firing of the kiln.

Based on all the evidence from the kiln and specialist input, the current date range for the feature is mid - 3rd to mid 4th century AD. Further analysis of the pottery will enable us to understand the methods the Romano-British were using in creating the pottery, as well as allowing us to create a type series for the site; this will be available for reference for all other sites in the area potentially allowing us to see the full limits of the dissemination of the pottery created at Aylsham.



A view into Kiln 1 showing the flue in the foreground, the collapsed floor surface and central pillar in the background.



Plan of Kiln 1 showing the kiln (on left) and the associated rake pit (right).

Kiln 2

Kiln 2 was located in the western portion of the site. The initial evidence for Kiln 2 was solely based on the results of the preceding geophysical survey which revealed a strong positive anomaly in this area of the site. After the initial site strip a small fragment of the outer structure was uncovered.

Similar to Kiln 1, Kiln 2 also had a substantial associated rake pit which contained a large amount of waste pottery. Originally it was believed that Kiln 2 was in a far more damaged condition than Kiln 1. However as excavation of the feature continued and as more of the structure was uncovered it was found that this was no longer the case. This kiln not only showed evidence of re lining (in the same way as Kiln 1) but as the firing chamber was excavated it became apparent that the kiln contained a raised perforated floor (which would effectively create a combustion chamber beneath the pottery being fired). While a perforated floor surface

uncommon in Roman kilns finding one so well preserved is, and Kiln 2 (which has been left with the floor intact) will give us an opportunity to study it's construction at a later date.



A view into Kiln 2 showing the perforated floor surface

These types of kilns were simple in their design. They would comprise a stoke pit in which fuel would be fed into a flue (which we can see in Kiln 1) and the hot gasses from the



fuel would rise through the central chamber, where the pottery would be stacked, in order to fire the clay, eventually escaping through the top of the kiln.

Kiln 2 still needs to be fully excavated. 25% of the main chamber still needs to be removed as well as 50% of the associated rake pit. This will be undertaken in future seasons.

Conclusion

The first season at the Aylsham Roman project has produced some fantastic results. The excavation of the kilns has shown there to be a tangible Romano-British presence in the area towards the end of the Roman occupation of Britain. The finds that have been recovered are all undergoing specialist analysis and will help us determine firm dating evidence for this seasons results as well as inform us going into the 2017 season.

Further Information:



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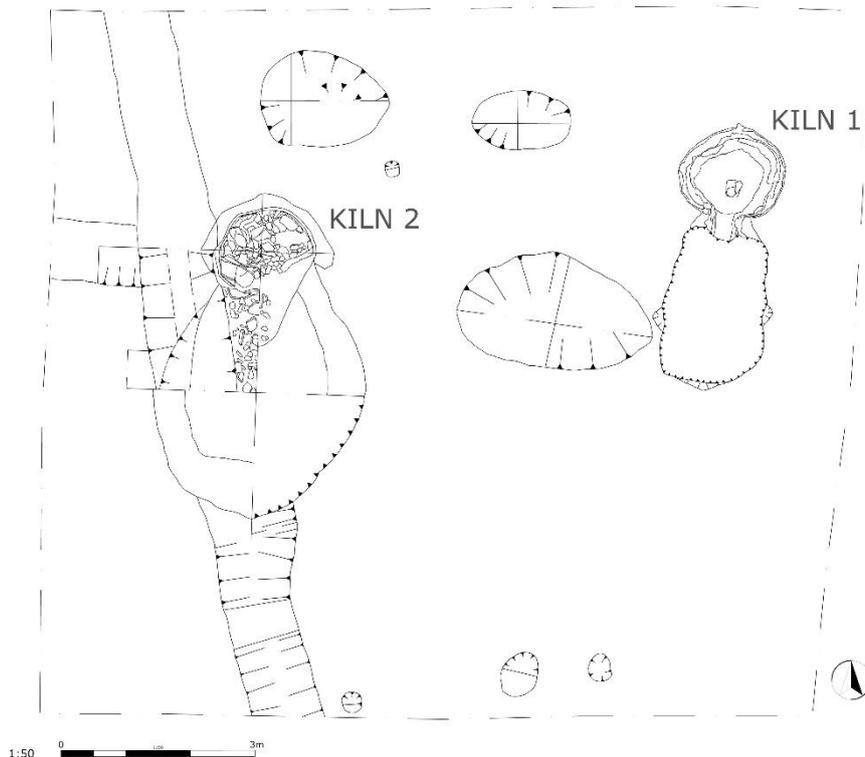
Aylsham Roman Project

www.aylshamromanproject.com



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Overall plan of the excavation area opened in the 2016 season.

By Martin Brook and Dan McConnell (Britannia Archaeology Ltd). Photographs by Britannia Archaeology Ltd & Kevin Myhill. ©Britannia Archaeology Ltd 2016 all rights reserved