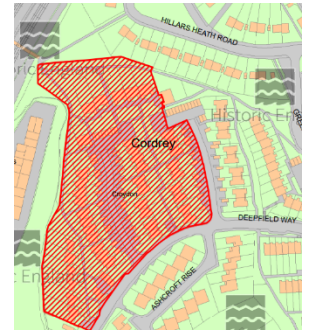


Manning and Bray in their *History of Surrey* [1805 vol 11 p 448] recorded that traces of ditches were seen in the face of the then new Stoats Nest Quarry. And more than 150 years later, whilst Waters were carrying out building work in the vicinity in 1968, Mr John Lindsay, a Bourne Society member, recorded sections of ditches after they had appeared in a drainage trench immediately above the face of the quarry.

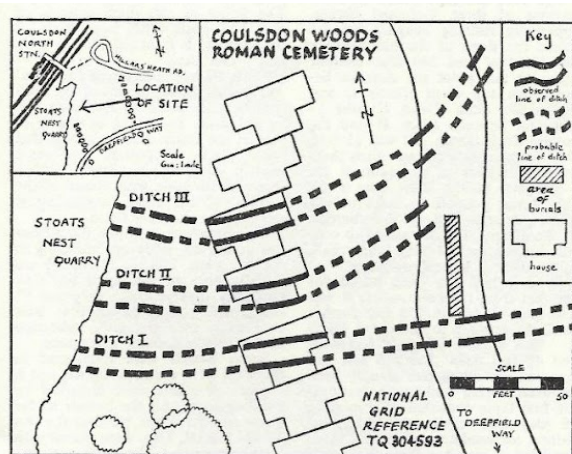
The site was on a north-facing chalk slope [1 in 10] on a ridge immediately to the north-east of Farthing Down and bounded by the former Stoats Nest Quarry, Hillars Heath Road and what is now Deepfield Way. The following year, on the evening of Monday 9th June 1969, Mr Lindsay was measuring a second drainage trench 125 feet to the east on the Waters housing development above the former Coulsdon North Station when further traces of the ditches were seen and human bones discovered, including the top of a cranium on the spoil left by a mechanical excavator. Later he returned with a police officer and together they discovered in a trench a complete skull with a mandible retaining most of its teeth



Map Historic England

. After a promptly obtained coroner's report had confirmed that the bones were ancient, Waters permitted the Bourne Society to carry out an emergency excavation and offered every possible help and cooperation. Mr Roger Thomas organised a team of young diggers, and between 12th and 15th June they discovered that two Iron Age ditches of circa 100BC ran along the contours of the chalk slope. The ditches had been V-sectioned and sharply cut into the chalk, but had gradually been filled with soil washed down from above.

After patient vigilance over many months Mr Lindsay came across the Roman cemetery of Coulsdon Woods. Seven burials were discovered in the sides of a drainage trench and a number of others were disturbed by building work. They were between three and four feet deep and faced north-east. Unfortunately, all had been disturbed by the mechanical digger and the bones were in a poor state of preservation because of the permeable effect of the chalk which causes bones to deteriorate.



Map Bourne society

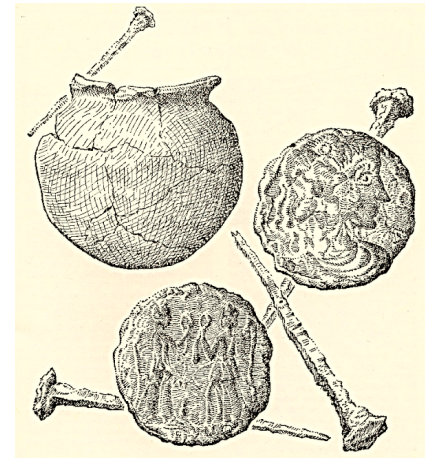
Grave 1 contained the bones of a young adult. Three large iron nails were found, one on each side of the skull and one beneath the right shoulder. The lower leg and foot bones had been removed by the mechanical excavator. Grave 2 contained the bones of an adult person. Only the arm, leg bones and the skull remained and these were fragmentary. Small fragments of wood were also found around the bones. Grave 3 also contained the bones of an adult person. There were also fragmentary and nails were found to the left and right of the skull close to the upper arm bones and close to the ankles. The position of the nails gave a coffin width of about two feet. In Grave 6 the bones were again fragmentary and, following a consultant dentist's report, the lower jawbone was estimated to be of a person between 23 and 25 years.

In the upper ditch, above the accumulated layer of soil, pieces of Romano-British pottery were found dating from the 1st century AD. This pottery consisted of native-made cooking pots and a few pieces of imitation Samian ware. No pottery was found in the lower ditch, but there were signs of a retaining wall on the inner side.

However, it was possible to find small fragments of wood around the bones together with large iron nails which had secured the coffins. No grave goods were found with the burials, but a fourth century coin of Constantius II dating to before the reform of the currency in 345 AD was found close to the jawbone of one of them. It was therefore likely that the burial with the coin dated from circa 360AD. The nails were all similar in size and type, the heads were roughly circular, about one inch in diameter with a roughly tapering rectangular shank about 4.5 inches long. Examination of the nails by Mr R Merrifield, assistant director of the Guildhall Museum, established them as likely to be late Roman of the second half of the 4th century rather than Saxon.

It is therefore possible that these were Christian burials of the late Roman period. This was interesting since it had previously been accepted that there was no Romano-British occupation of the area later than the 2nd century. Earlier excavations had revealed traces of Roman-British and Saxon occupation of Farthing Down, but this was the first time that they had been carried out on the ridge to the north-east which was hitherto assumed to have been uninhabited.

The excavations demonstrated that the occupation of the ridge at Coulsdon Woods was contemporaneous with the Celtic field system on Farthing Down; it may have been a domestic site of the people who used the field system. The ditches were cut during the Iron Age for defensive purposes, and as Roman influence was used there was no need for a system of defences and the ditches were allowed to fill with debris.



Picture Bourne Society

There had hitherto been no evidence of previous occupation of the Farthing Down area during the late Roman period, but these excavations showed that the area was inhabited until the end of the Roman period. Later air photography suggests that three other local early settlements await further investigation.