

SERF Research Agenda conference discussion points for the Roman period

These are the headings from the Resource Assessment; there are of course many issues arising for each section but as time is limited only a few are selected. Some of the headings therefore have nothing against them, although the gaps are mostly covered by the more detailed look at rural settlement that follows. Much of what follows springs from comments by members of the Roman period Group, who are hereby acknowledged (the debt will be made clear in the Research Agenda document).

- Introduction: much less known about the Roman period than often supposed, so need for reassessment
- Transition from preceding period: much current discussion
- Documentary history: not as well understood as once was; can now be undervalued
- Political and administrative context: artefact studies – or lucky finds (writing tablets, inscriptions)
- Landscape and environment: need ways of studying landscapes away from the gravels or (open) chalklands and much, much more environmental evidence
- Settlement evidence: for towns, perhaps no more of the big areas we need, so how proceed? But above all we must tackle rural settlement.
- Architecture and buildings: cannot rely on old plans
- Defence: ‘Saxon Shore’ fort purpose?
- Communications: complete the main road network; gather all vehicle evidence
- Economy: artefacts and environmental
- Technology
- Art and craft
- Monuments
- Belief and ritual: wider area of ritual sites; non-temple ritual sites (PAS); placed deposits
- Funerary practice: reconstructing the entire funerary sequence: what happens before, during and after
- Diet: artefact studies and environmental evidence
- Social structure and identities
- Regionality: artefact studies
- The South East in its wider context: greater thought to real comparisons
- Transition to succeeding period (the legacy): a key area in Britain: how can we bridge the gap?
- Research methods: especially need reassessment; more and better artefact studies – but how do we support the specialists?; environmental evidence; more survey especially for landscape away from gravels (and to some extent chalk); means of concentrating on non-villa rural settlement

Above all, rural settlement:

- Clarification of the characteristics of the lesser nucleated settlements, and hence of their role in relationship to surrounding rural settlements

- Characterisation of non-villa settlement: in terms of:
 - Chronological range
 - Real numbers and densities
 - Overall morphology – enclosed and non-enclosed – is this a critical distinction?
 - Structures
 - Agricultural economy – structural aspects; animal and plant remains
 - The uses of woodland

- Broad chronological patterns

- The relationship of villa and non-villa settlements to each other and to the landscape, in a number of ways:
 - The physical layout of the landscape
 - Does absence of villas relate to soil type? Are there genuine empty spaces?
 - Land tenure
 - Other social characteristics
 - What is the relationship between society and environment?