

The Bridge Farm Romano-British Settlement:

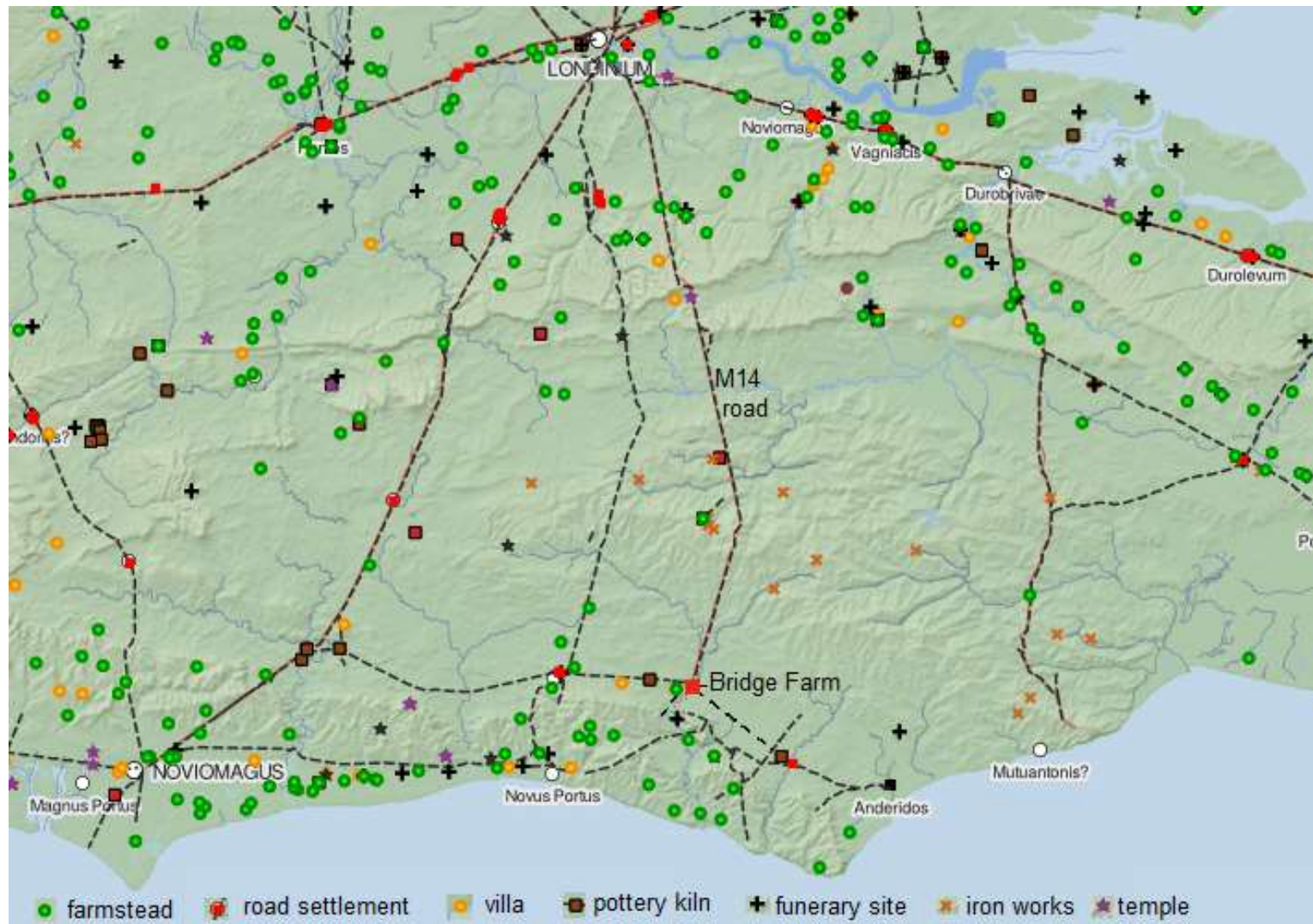
An introduction to the ongoing investigations of a 300 year Roman-period settlement in the Sussex Ouse Valley



The Bridge Farm site is just south of Barcombe Mills, 3.5k north of Lewes, in open farmland in a bend of the River Ouse



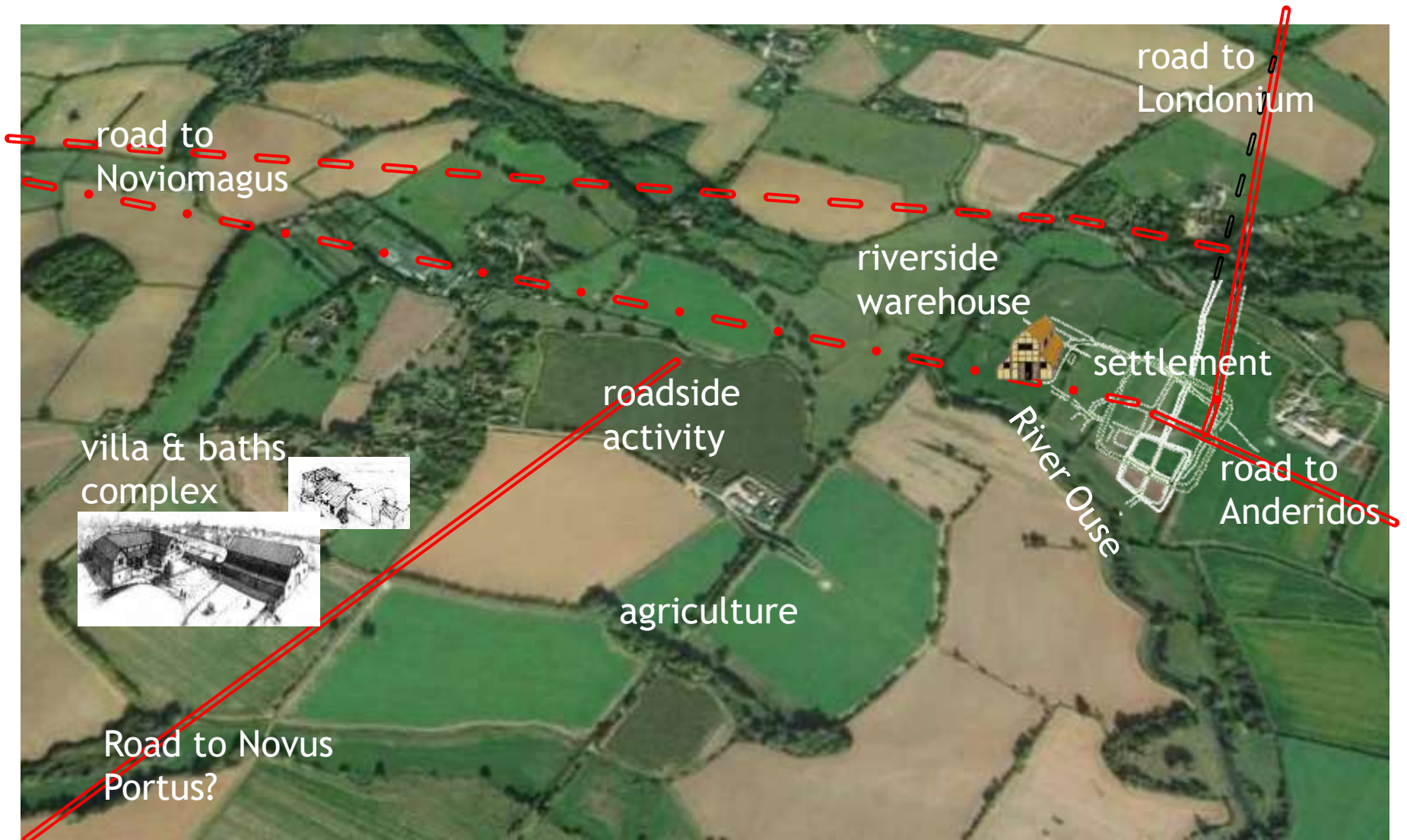
How does Bridge Farm fit into the Roman period context?



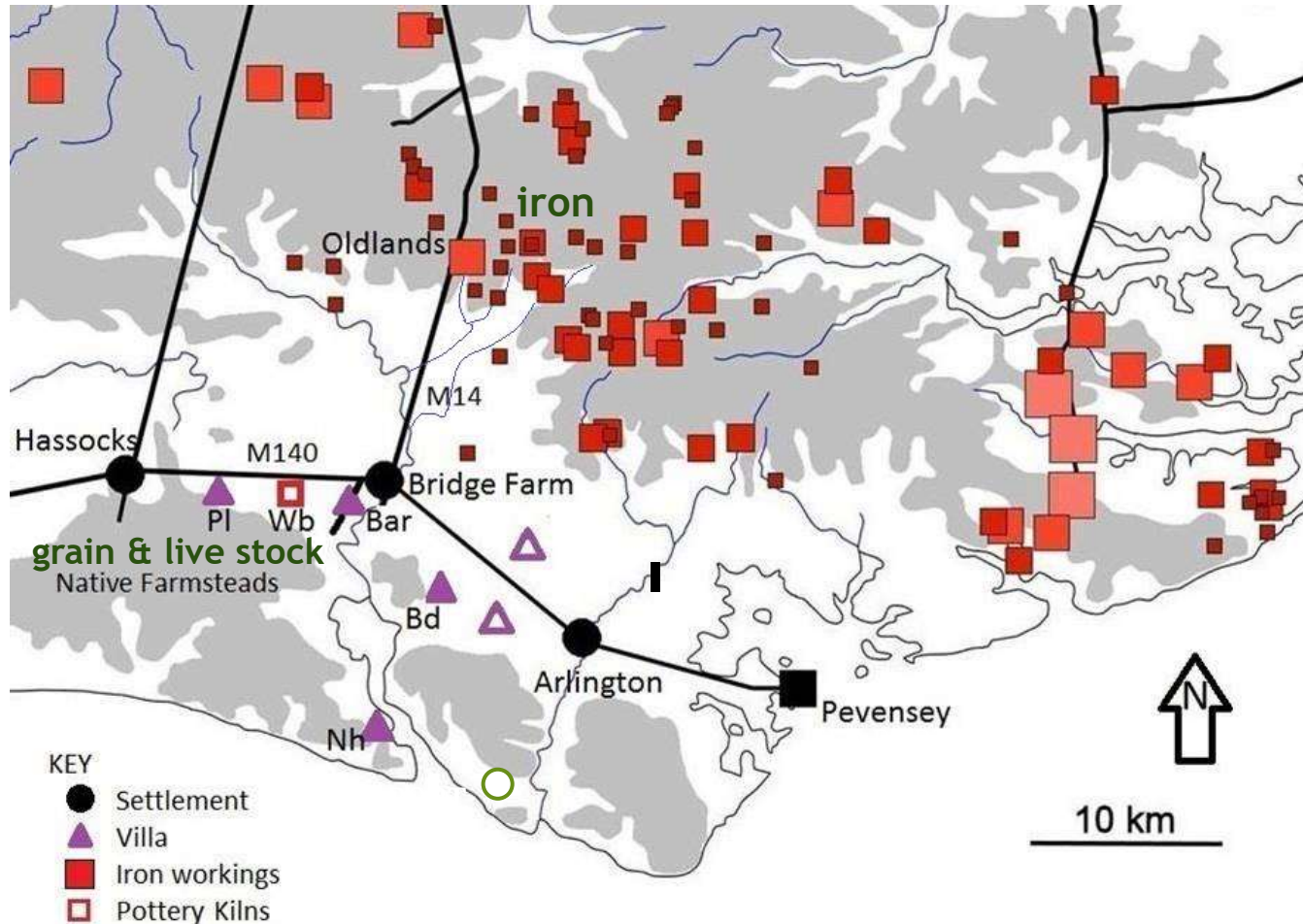
The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/romangl/map.html>

A villa complex with detached bathhouse on the west bank
Is it significant that the settlement at Bridge Farm is on the east bank?



A Romano-British site in an agricultural area but linked to Wealden iron and the Channel



Margary road numbers: M14 London-Lewes (Bridge Farm), M140 The Greensand Way
Abbreviations: Pl Plumpton, Wb Wickham Barn, Bar Barcombe, Bd Beddingham, Nh Newhaven

Roman roads and iron workings in the Weald (J. Hodgkinson 1999)

Estimated iron output from slag heap volume

- <100m³
- >100m³
- >1,000m³
- >10,000m³

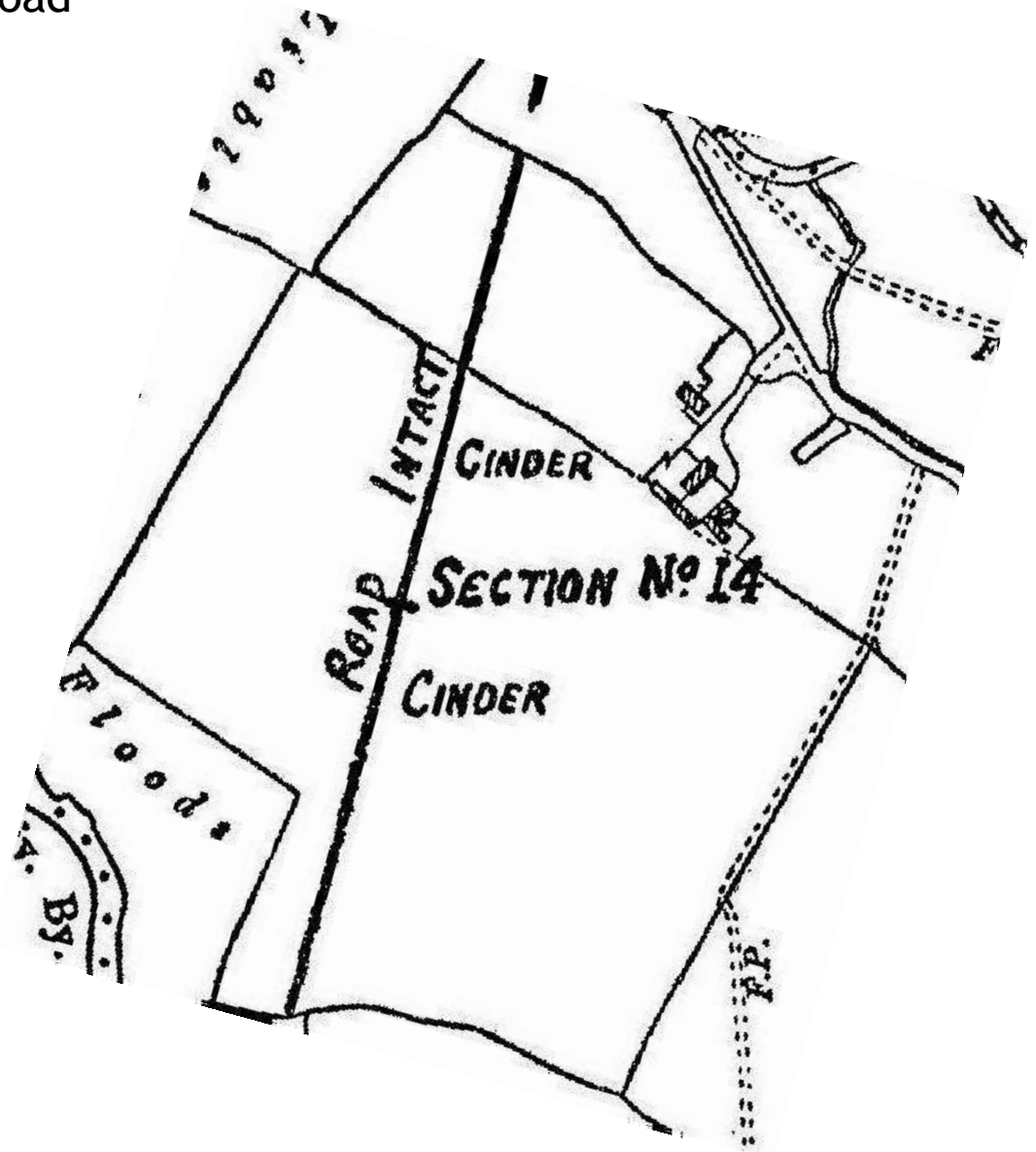
Agriculture

Grain was exported from Britain to the Continent in the 1st & 2nd but became crucially important at times in the late 3rd and the 4th centuries

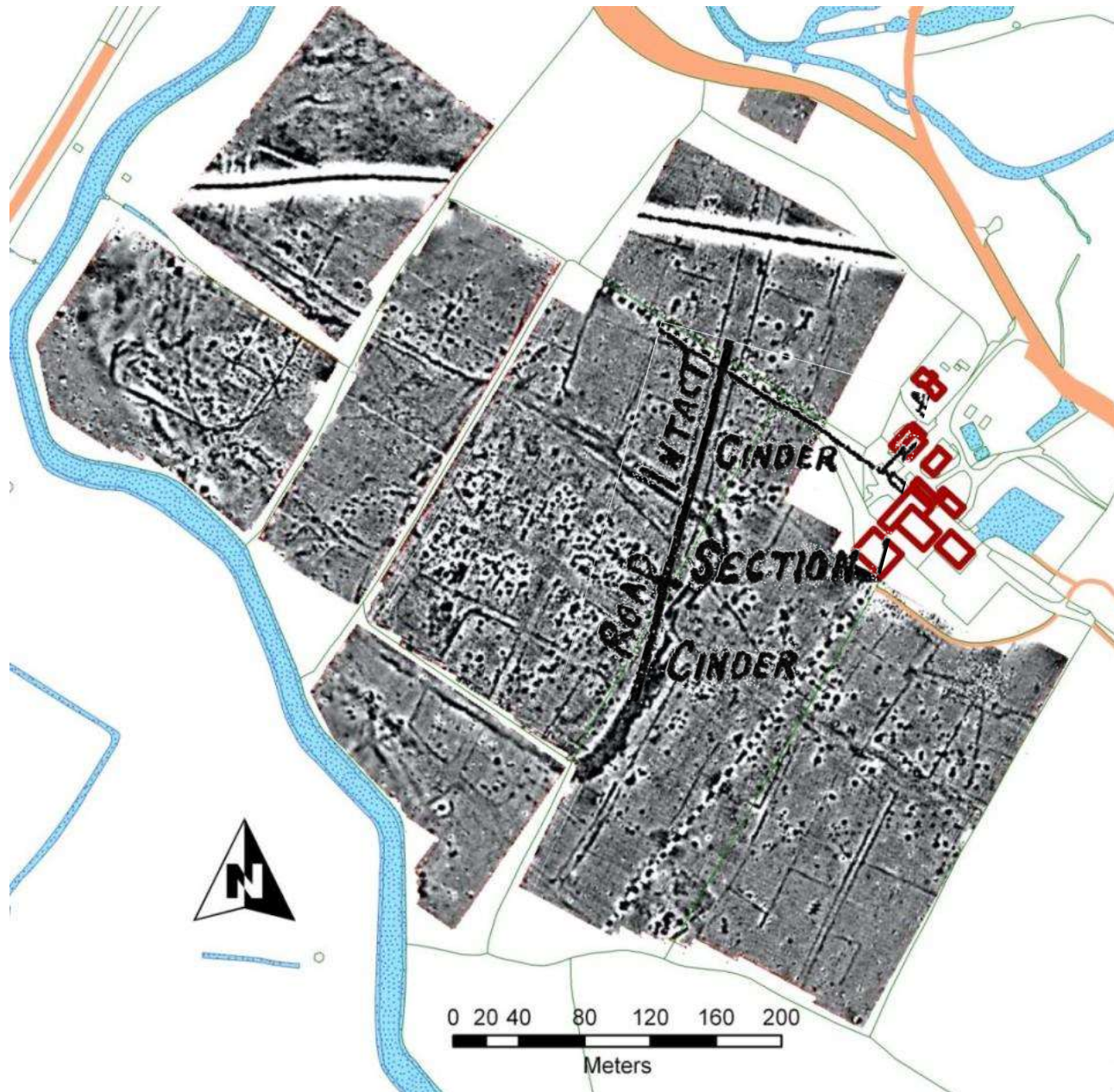
Ivan Margary's M14 road discovered in the 1930s runs from London to Bridge Farm

And in 2011 we located the road
by modern geophysics

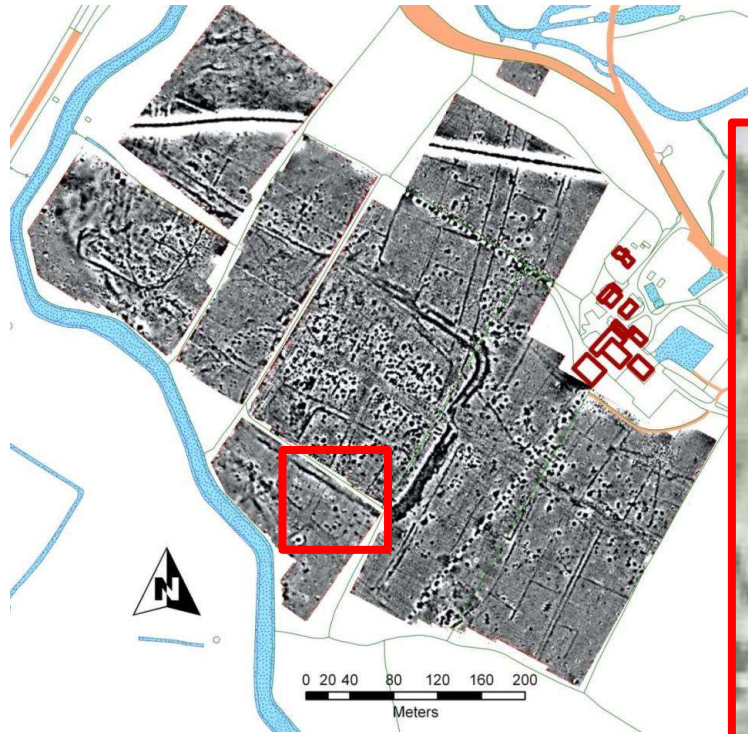
What would Ivan Margary
have given for a
magnetometer?



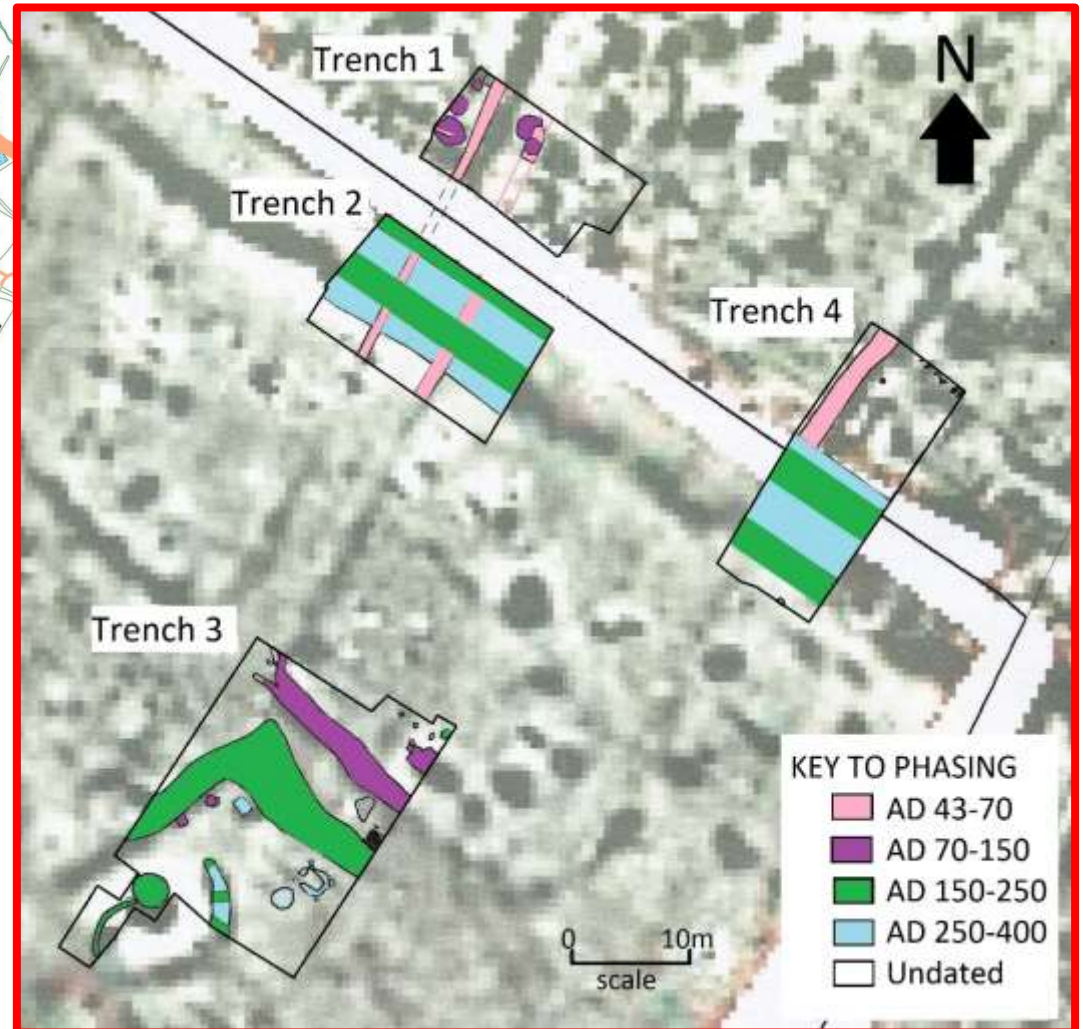
And in 2011 we located a whole lot more besides!



The 2013 community project funded by the HLF to investigate an area to the southeast of the main settlement



A large grant enabled us to open 4 trenches and encourage large numbers of local volunteers to take part

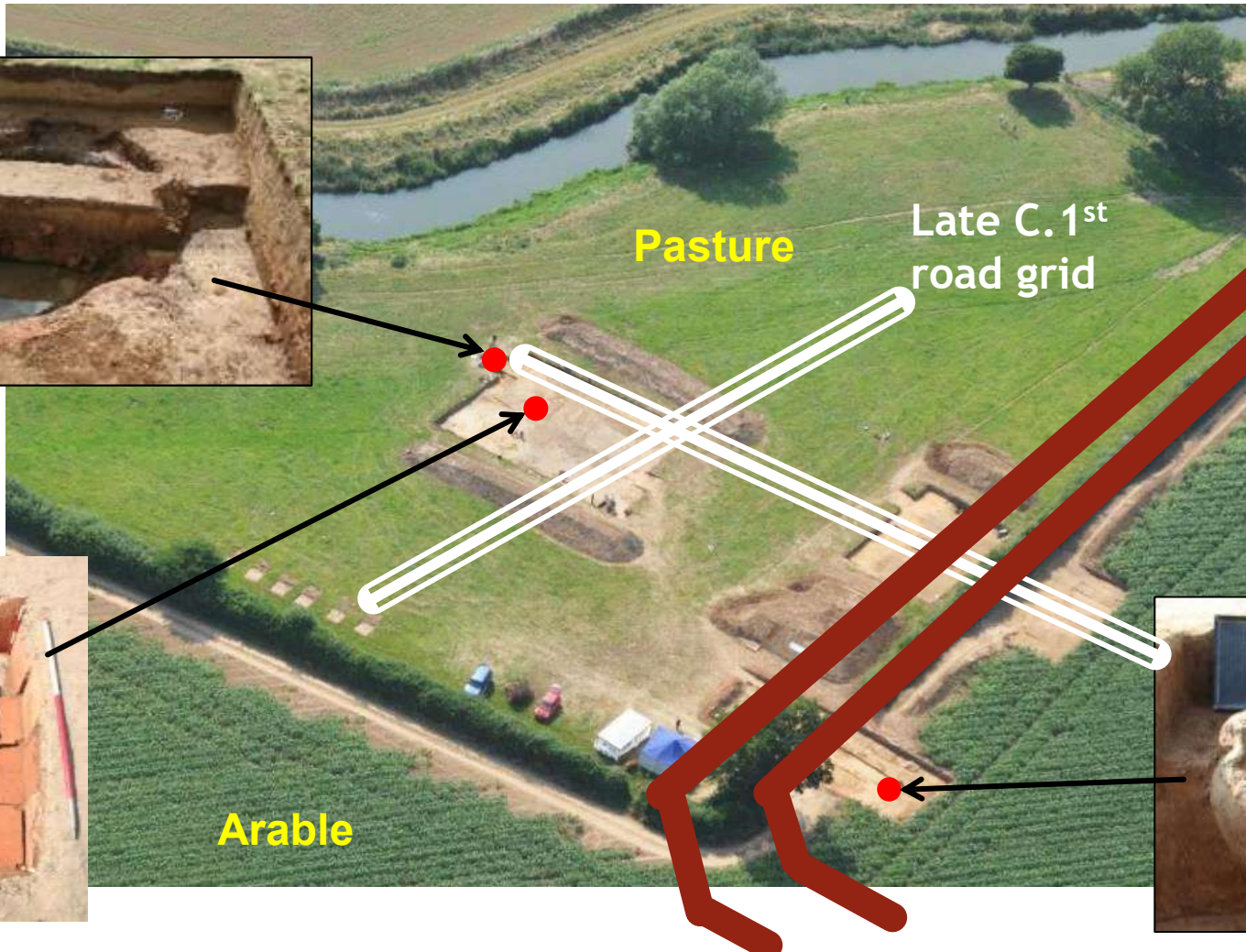


2013 EXCAVATIONS investigated the different phases of the features under the varying land uses of pasture and arable. This established a late 1st cent. settlement and late C.2nd defences

Burnt pit/
kiln?



C. 4th
tiled pit



Pasture

Late C.1st
road grid

Late C.2nd
enclosure
ditches

C.3rd
cremation

Arable



Geophys
image



2014

Trench 5
(unfunded)
to west of main
settlement to
look at a
possible
building;

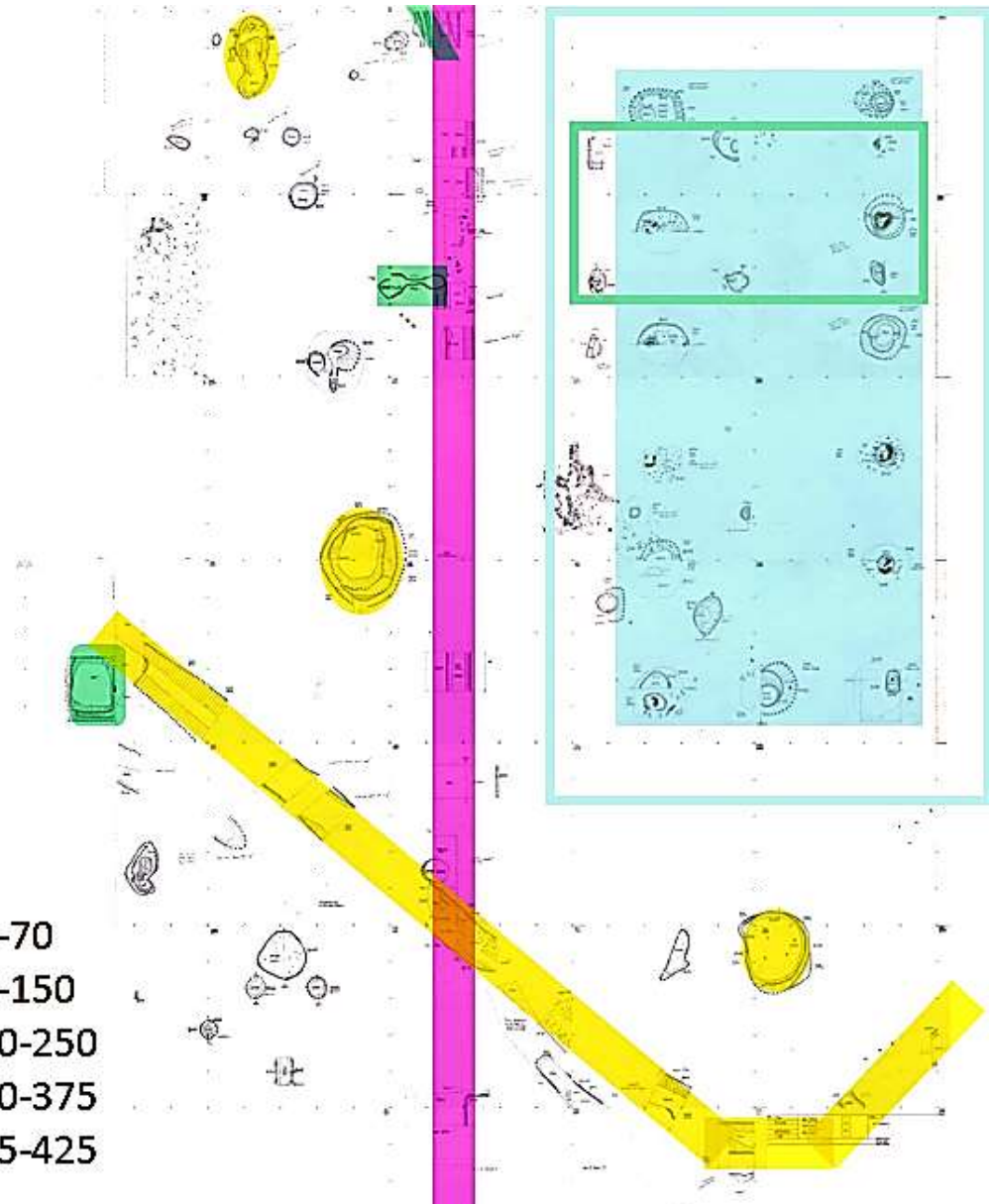
13 large postholes plus ditches and pits



A drone shot at the end of the excavation

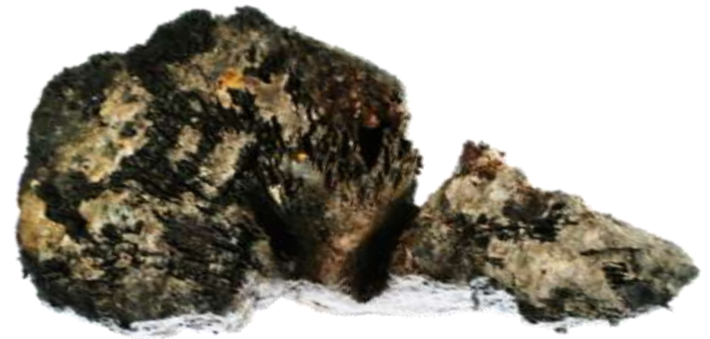
Site plan showing the main phases suggested from the pottery assessment

- AD 43-70
- AD 70-150
- AD 150-250
- AD 250-375
- AD 375-425



Finding what was at the bottom of the water-filled post-pipes

- ❑ All 13 1m dia. holes contained the base of a c. 400mm wide post
- ❑ But virtually no tile, brick or flint



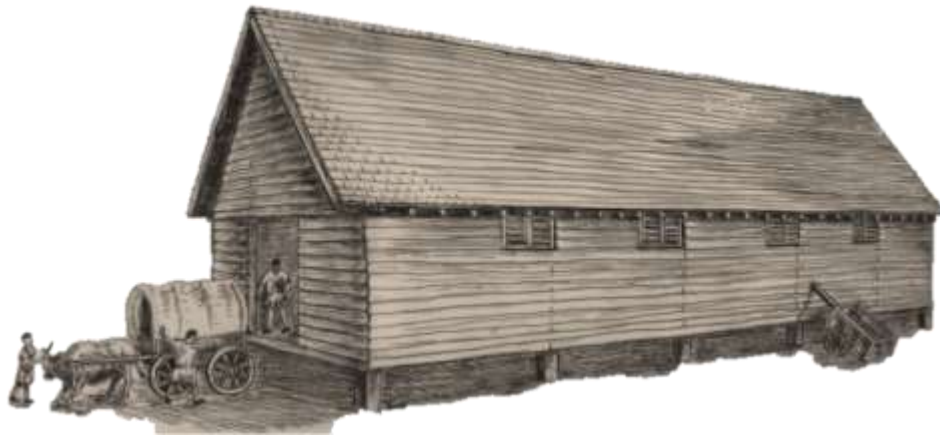
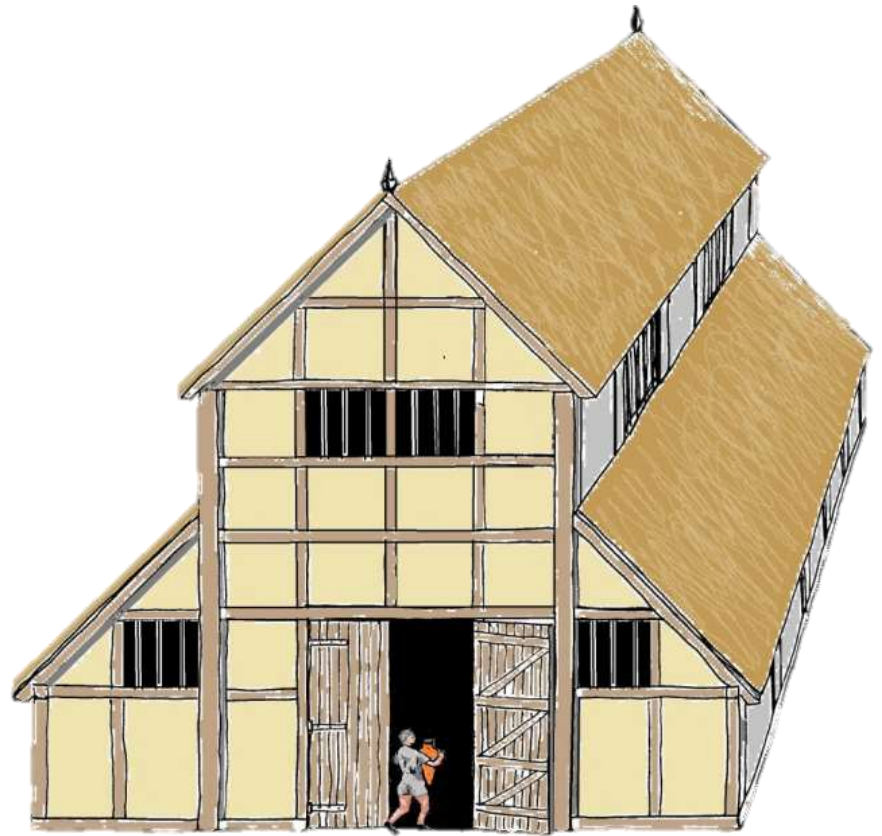
Underside of part of an extracted post base

A Timber frame rectangular building

Pottery analysis suggests
late 3rd century

Was it a thatched, wattle
& daub, 'aisled' barn?

(Millum 2017 based on the footprint of
the 13 posts & the Meonstoke
reconstruction by King 1996)



or
a plank walled, shingle
roofed warehouse?

(Millum 2014: after Lunt Granary
by Alan Sorrell)

Carved and prepared timbers were found below a post
(Rob Wallace holding one of the ogee carved timbers)



The removed timbers have been conserved by Department of Archaeology at Durham University



Carved timber SF578
from under PH9



Conservators
were:

Aja Cooper
Bibi Beekman
Ruth Watson



SF541
PH 9 post base remains



Carved timber
SF541
From under PH 9



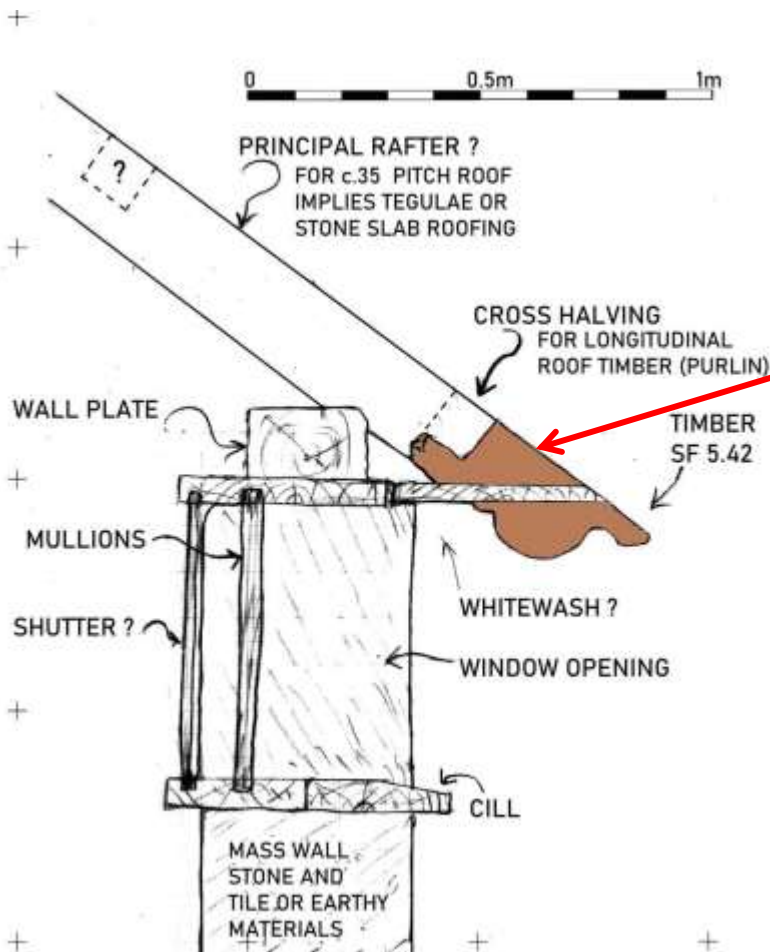
The rarest object so far found at Bridge Farm is this mid-Roman ogival carved beam which was possibly the eaves end of a principal rafter



It is so rare that we can only trace one other example in Britain and that came from Bridge Farm as well!



Being smaller this was possibly the end of one of the common rafters



Reconstruction by Dr Damian Goodburn

Forging and smelting hearths from Trench 5: offer later-phase links to the iron mines to the north!

Secondary
forging slag
found in
hearth



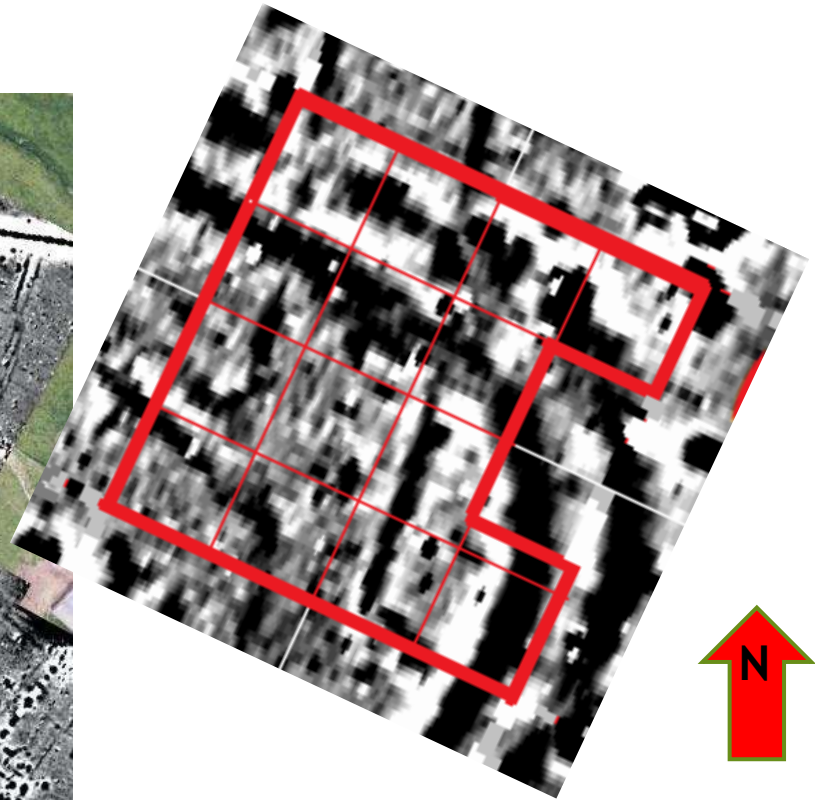
Local use?

Possible
iron-smelting
hearth/ oven



2015-17 Excavation

40m sq trench 6 over the intersection of the London road and the defensive ditches at the NE corner of the site



Trench 6
with 10m site grid
and indent for spoil heap

The late 2nd C. enclosure ditches and the London road

The aim was to confirm the phasing of the enclosure and the road



Both late 2nd century enclosure ditches were overlaid by remains of the road. The road was under a dark layer which contained late 3rd C coins e.g. Gallienus radiate AD 265-7.

Conclusion:
the road is 3rd century



A slot dug across both enclosure ditches revealed a slumped road layer of flint, gravel and sand overlying the main ditch fill

The 3rd century road just north of Margary's excavated Section 14



E-W slot across the road shows the remaining structure to be very similar to Margary's description from his section:

'Road buried under 12 inches of top soil. Metalling of flint, from large lumps to small chips... a very small amount of iron slag, 15 inches thick in the centre, width 21 ft...

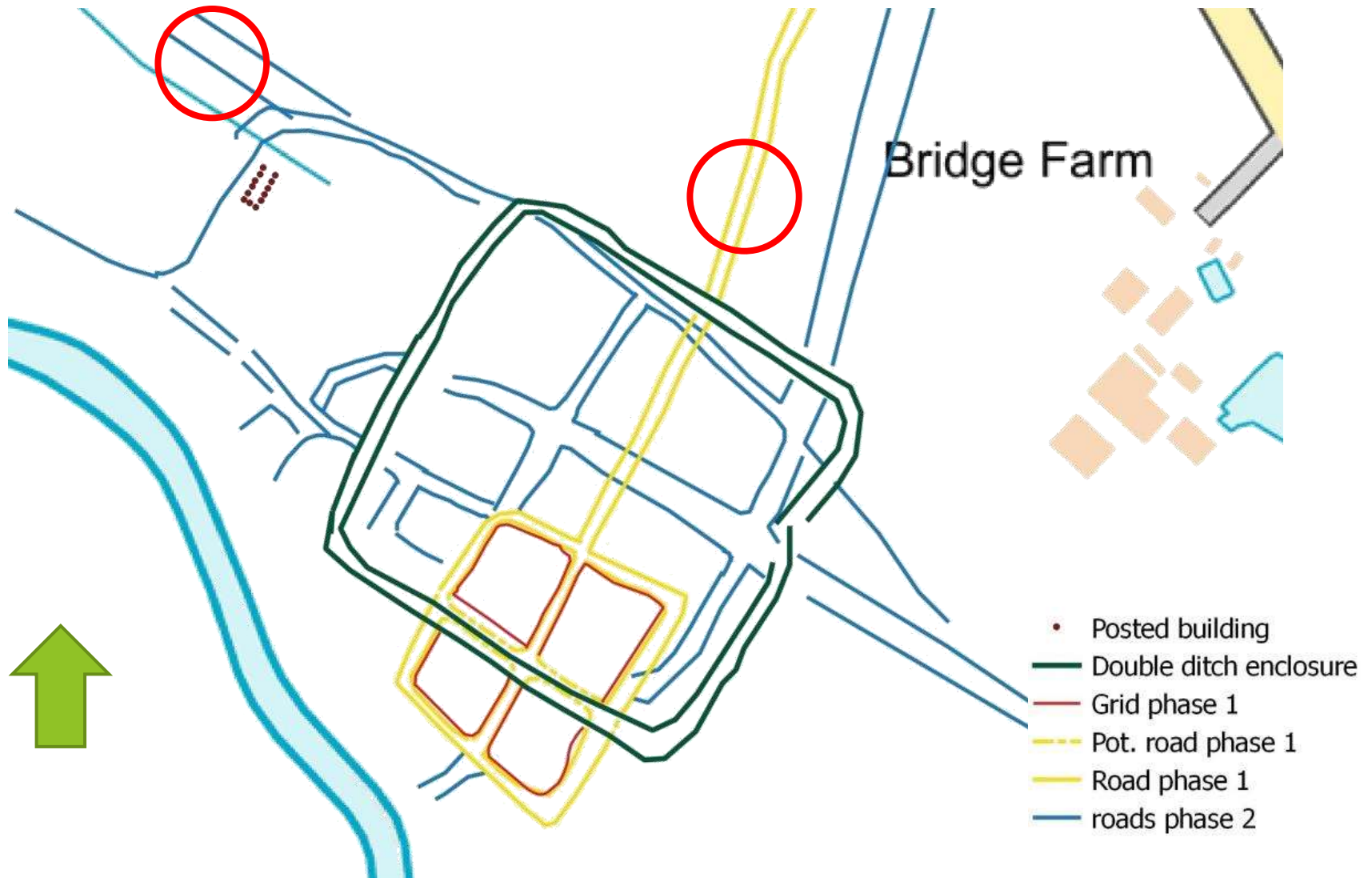




Trench 6 from above

Aerial drone
shot with main
features added
as CG shapes:
i.e.
roads,
roadside ditches,
other flint areas,
enclosure ditches,
large single pit,
series of deep pits
& the lined well

But is there a 1st century road running north from the centre of the settlement and is there a road running west, possibly to the Greensand Way ?
There so much more to discover on this regionally important site



Around the site we found a variety of large deep pits

Pit F25 seen as a dark ring in 2015; got squarer and ever deeper in 2016
With the sides stepped for safety it was finally fully recorded and excavated in
2017



Large AE coin from
primary fill
Context (6211)

British Oldbury type
glass bead dating to
c.100BC - 100AD
Context (6171)



Amphora rim with
handle fragment
Context (6171)



Complete small hand-made pot
Context (6187)

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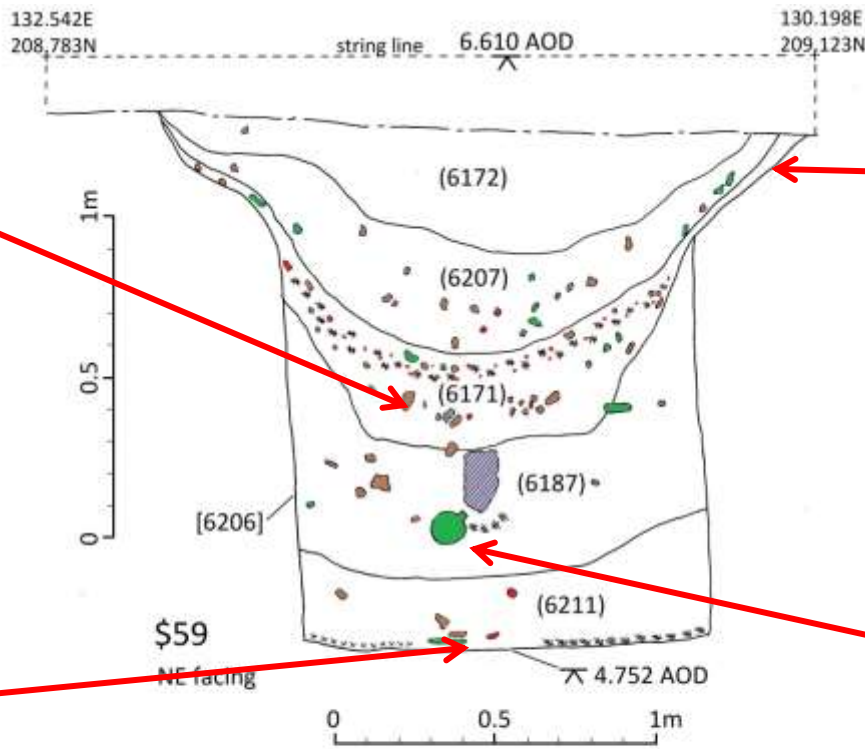
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Large AE coin
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KEY TO INCLUSIONS

pottery river flint cbm iron slag charcoal manganese

\$59 NORTH EAST FACING SECTION OF LARGE PIT F25
Trench 6, Bridge Farm Excavations 2017 (BF17)



Amphora rim with
handle fragment
Context (6171)



Complete small hand-
made pot Context (6187)

But no pit was as deep, as muddy, as frustrating or as impressive as the well

Found in August 2016



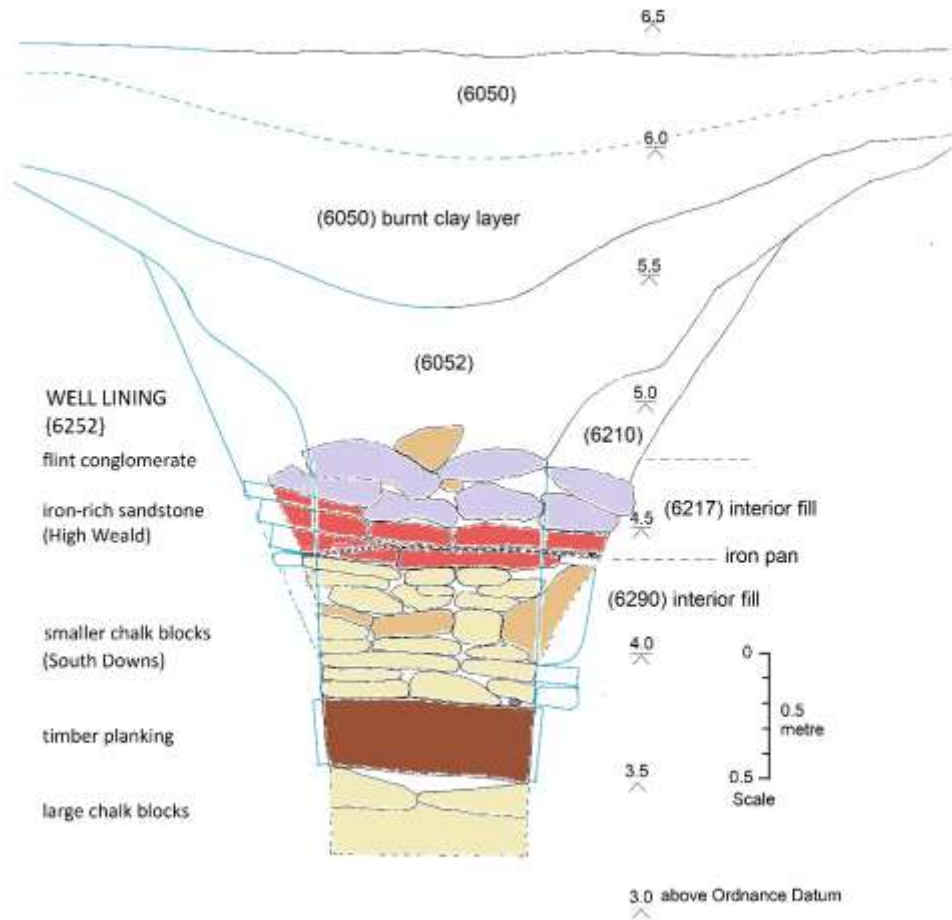
Covered and drowned in July 2017



Finally excavated in August 2017



The well was excavated down to a depth of 3m being 3.2m AOD and then fully recorded.



DRAWING OF WELL (BF16/17 - F26) COMBINING SECTIONS 56 & 75
Drawn by David Millum Date: 10/09/2017 Scale: from 1:10 originals



A few other 'Special Finds' from trench 6



Red jasper intaglio
Mid 2nd century

Gilded bronze
disk brooch



109mm bronze pin



Honorius
siliqua
AD 395-423



Hadrian (?) denarius
early 2nd century

Items not to scale



Terret Ring: part of
a draught harness

Bronze pin or
brooch?



Complete small
fibula brooch



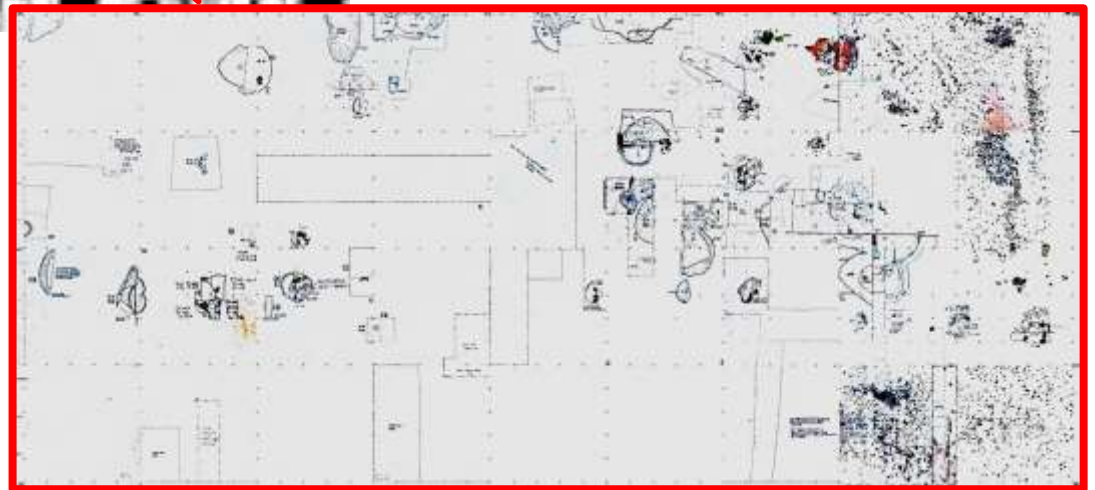
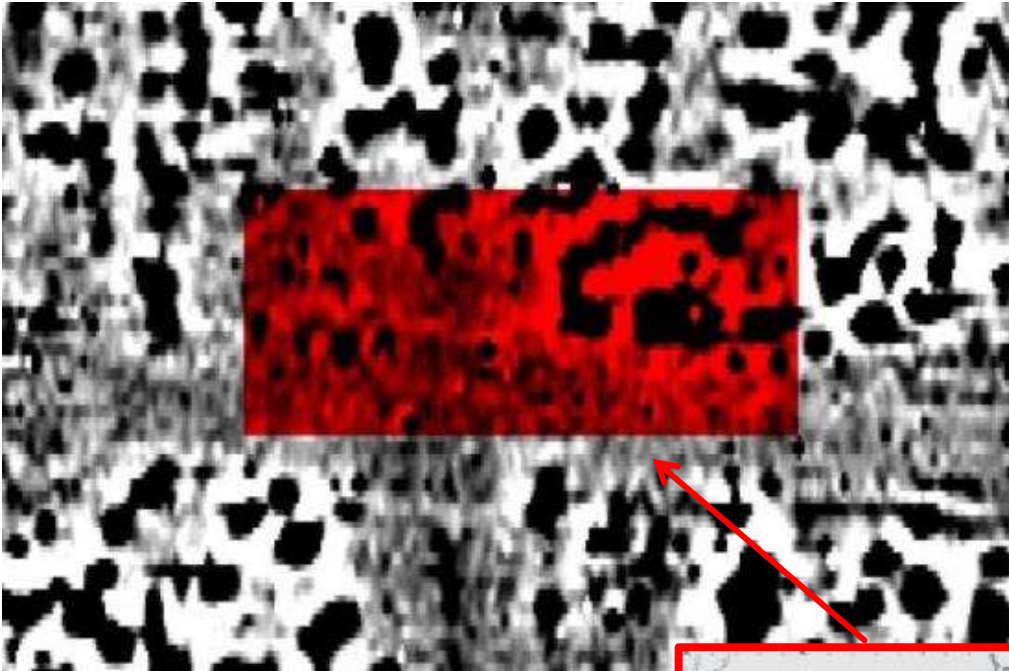
The pottery including some large coarse indented beakers:

possibly Wickham Barn from nearby East Chilton some 4k west along the Greensand Way (M140) or are they Bridge Farm ware?

Largish indented beakers in coarse grey fabric some only 4 sided and crudely formed



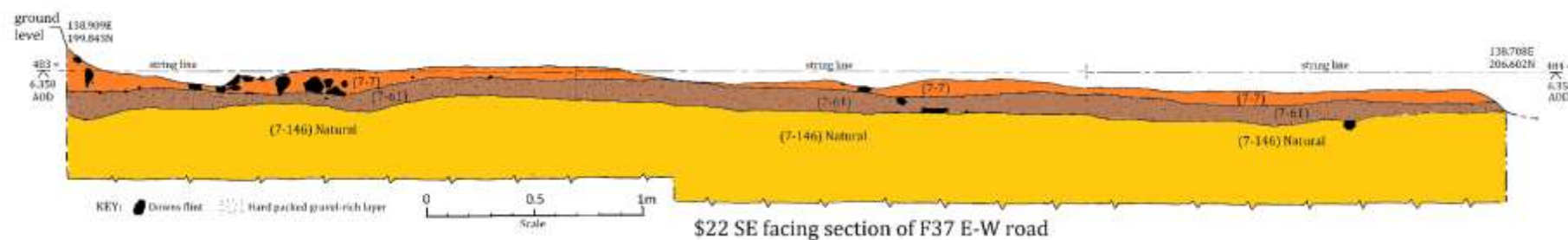
2018-22 Trench 7 over the centre of the settlement



F37 E-W road:

extremely shallow (only 200mm) so lucky to find anything remaining due to ploughing

Slot excavated 2018 then cut back and section drawn in 2019



Disturbed flint layer on a consolidated base found just 200mm (8") below field surface at the southern corner of the trench only - no road remains found further west

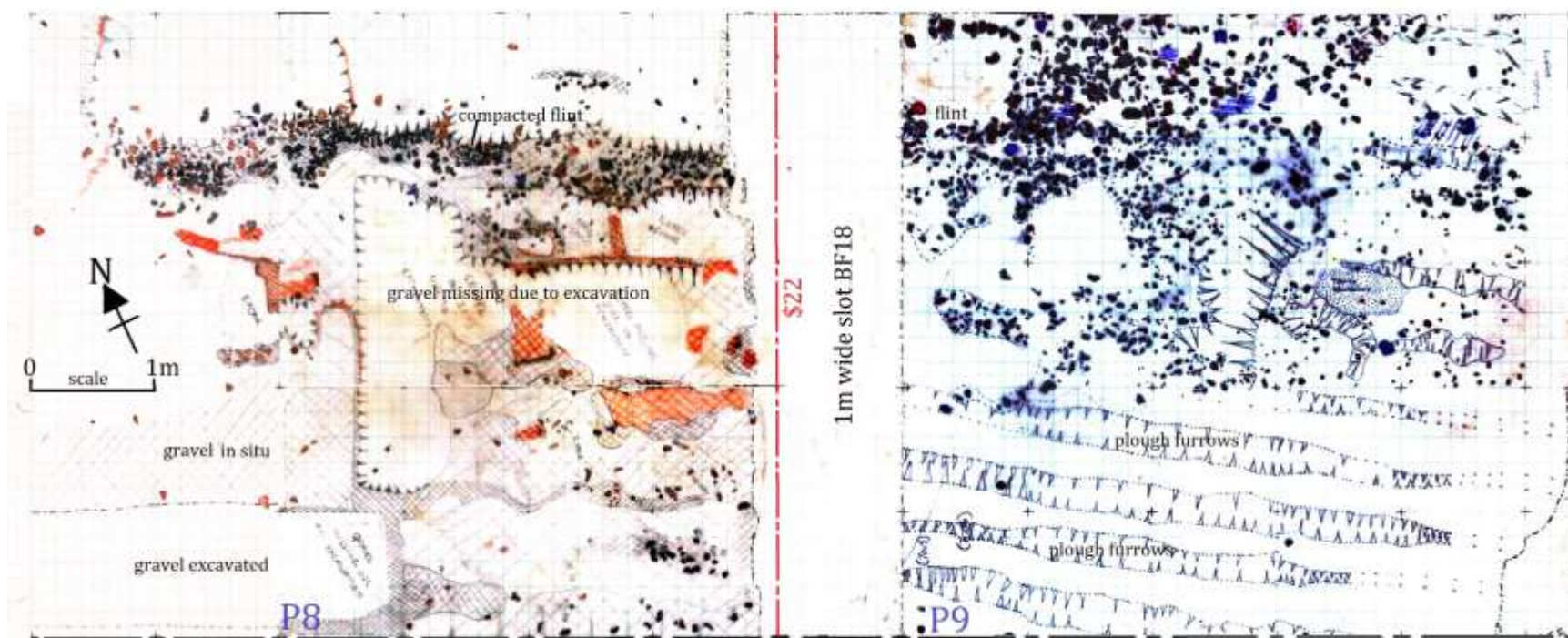


F37 E-W road: 2021

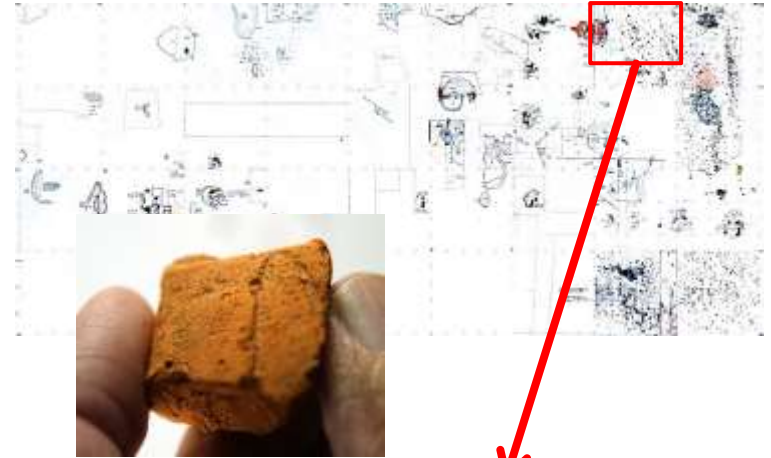
Obvious signs of ploughing in an SE-NW direction but a good indication of the northern edge of the cambered agger were observed and recorded.

Road structure of flint cobbles on very compacted 100mm sand/grit layer.

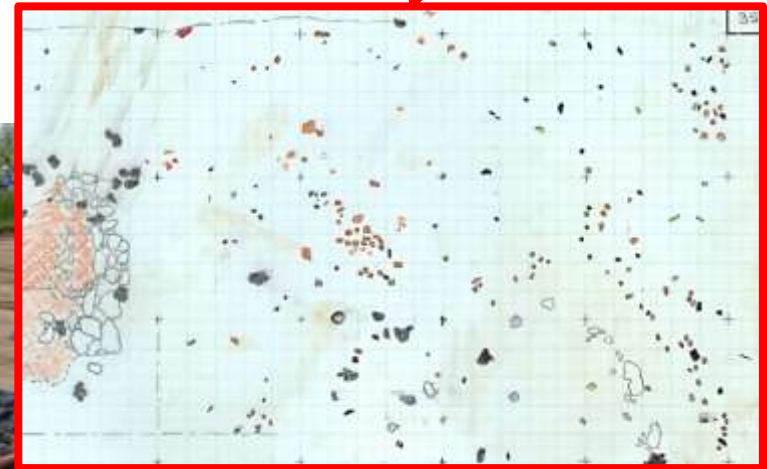
Finer red sand to the north possibly redeposited top surface of the road?



F50 east corner: A deposit of 3,600+ coarse tesserae



At c.20mm cubes: 2,500 needed for 1 sq.metre. A few black and white tesserae were also found.

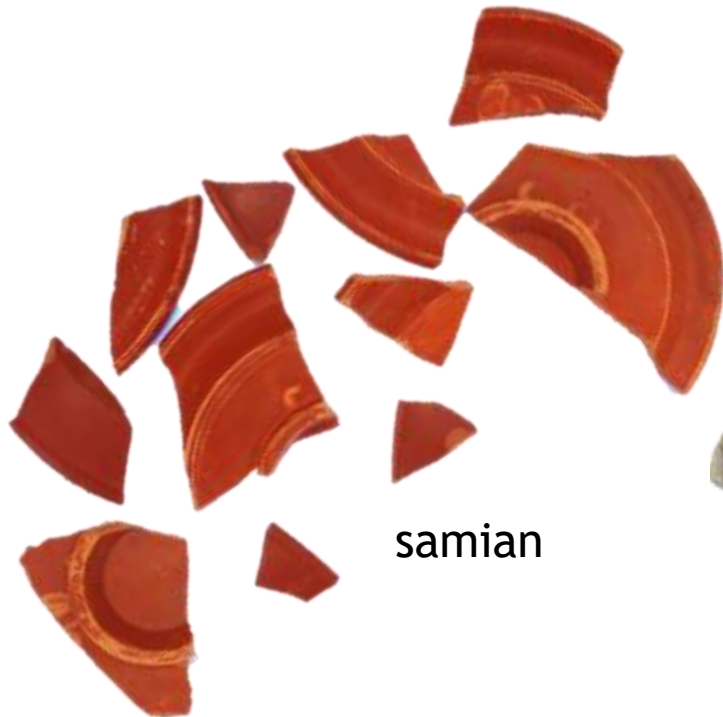


Groups of roughly cut 'tile' tesserae lay in the trench surface; but are they floor or manufacturing debris?

2018 east corner: A deposit of broken fineware



The 'dump' of 493 fine white-ware and samian pottery sherds: just some of the 58,000 sherds collected in 2018-22: washed, marked and recorded, ready for specialist analysis once Trench 7 is completed (probably end 2024) :



samian



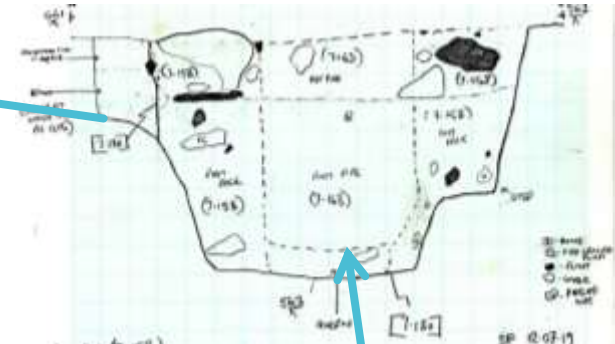
Nene Valley
or Rhenish?

A few lines of postholes

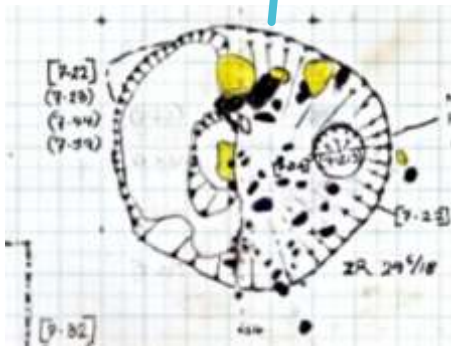
Whilst the postholes contain large packing stones and some seem to form lines we don't, as yet, have any clear buildings!



2 large postholes - a pair?



German lava stone quern used as packing



A perplexing plethora of pits



Whilst these pits have definite fills and contain Roman period artefacts they give no real clue to the purpose for which they were dug!

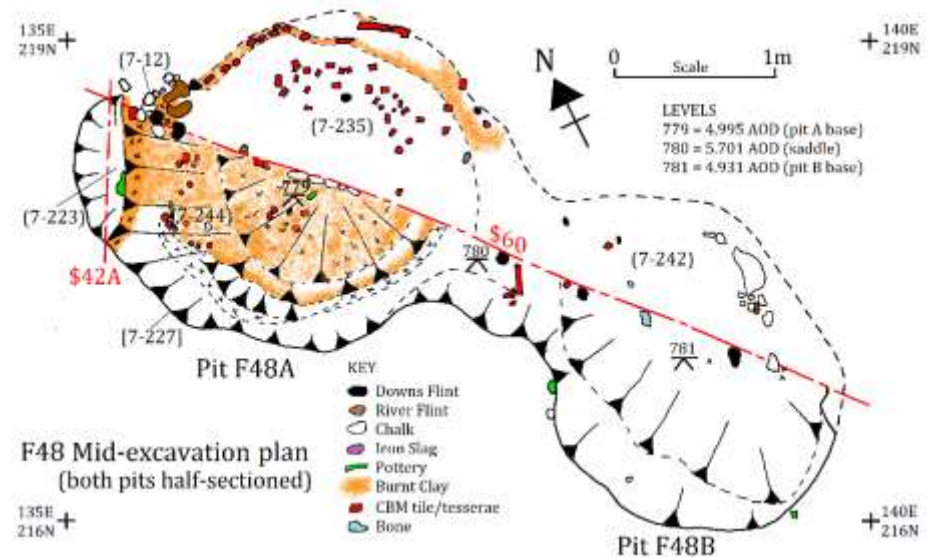
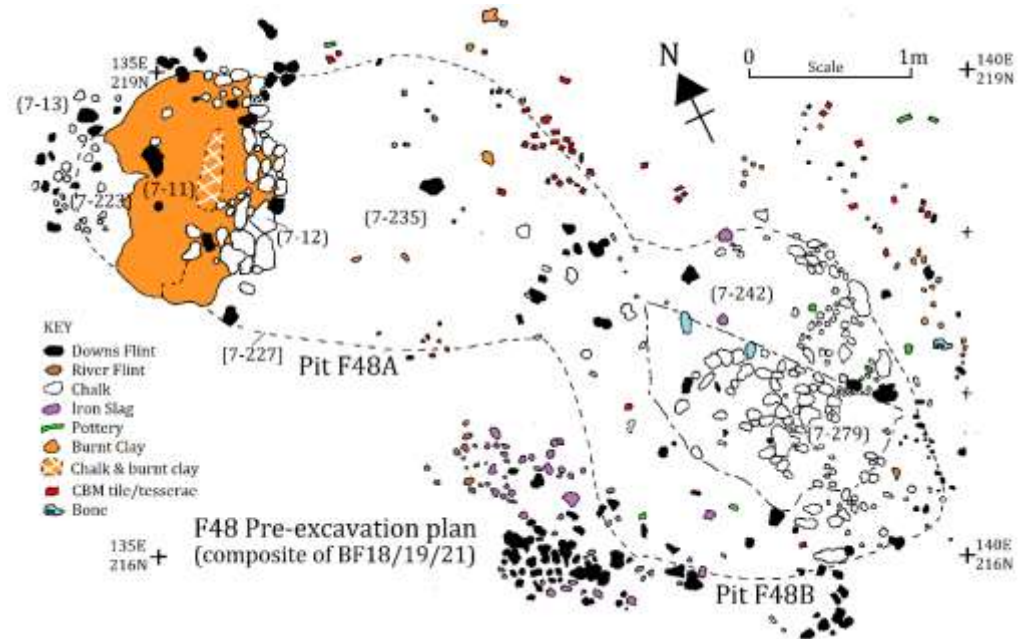


2021 F48 A&B NE corner:

At first a deposit of chalk and clay then a darker 'figure 8' area appears on surface. Which excavation reveals as two deep interconnecting pits!

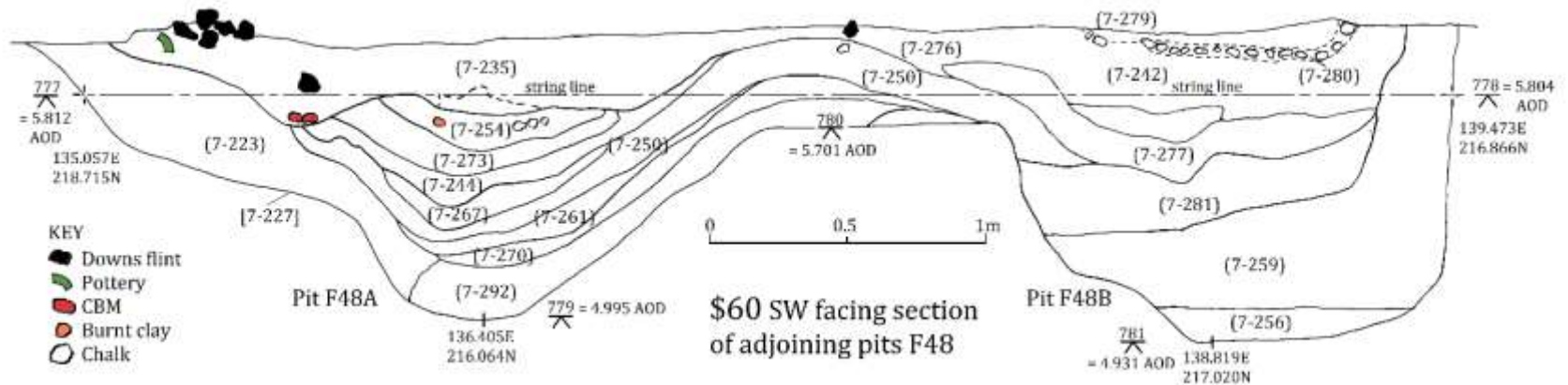
The NW pit (F48A) has multiple fills, the upper being full of tesserae suggesting that this might be a kiln used to manufacture them.

The SE pit (F48B) is possibly 2 separate features of a shallow kiln/stokehole cut into an earlier backfilled deep pit?



2021 F48 NE corner: the NW pit/kiln?

A 1:10 scale Section draw at this stage in case of damage during winter



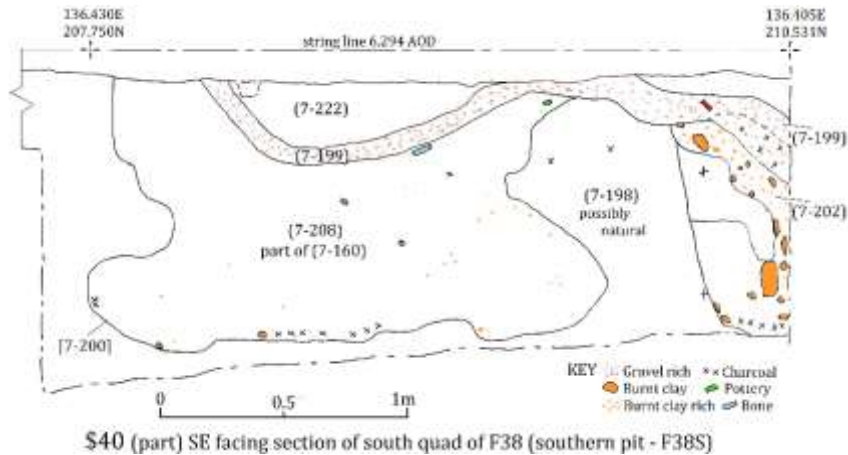
F48A showing its multiple fills



Rob explaining F48 on Open Day

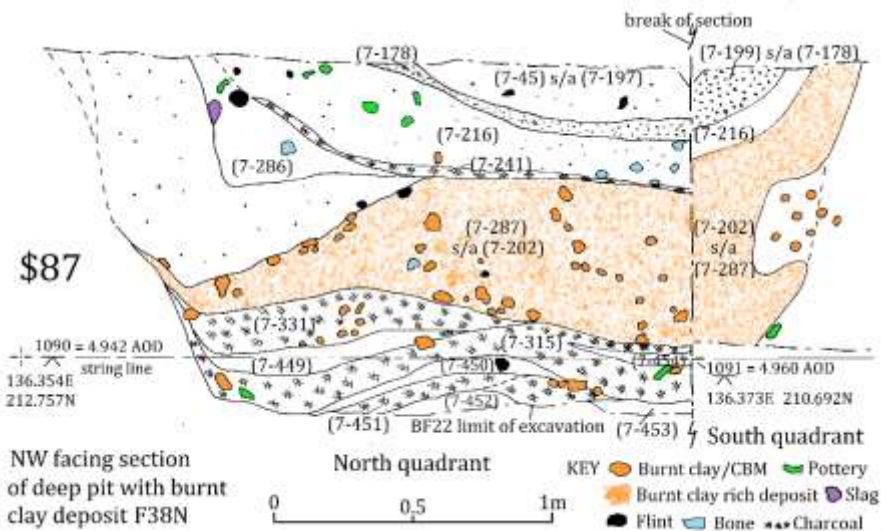


F38: 2 very large pits - another possible kiln?



Feature 38 discovered in 2019 lives on into 2022
Intense burning in a circular pit whilst the other
appears to be a rectilinear over 4m x 2m x 1m deep

Burnt clay in northern pit



The variety of finds was an aspect that seemed to interest the BBC team from '*Digging for Britain*' who came to site in July



Bridge Farm on TV
on Dec 4th

During 2019 we had been lent a camera and furry mike by the BBC to record the dig as it happened. Then on our last day a 2 man crew came to do some more filming. This was followed in September by Rob being asked down to Swindon for an interview with Alice Roberts.

Our finds unit have been kept pretty busy in 2018-22

with 58,250 sherds of pottery, 270 shards of glass, 4000 iron objects, 7400 pieces of bone: 146 items of non-ferrous metal, 3600 tesserae 437 'Special Finds' including glass, bronze jewellery plus other metal objects.

All items are cleaned, recorded and packaged, ready to be sent out for specialist analysis



Bridge Farm has produced over 98,000 sherds of pottery from 7 trenches dug so far!



Trench 7's pottery includes:

An almost complete cream mortarium:
suggesting Roman-style food preparation?



A varied selection of flask rims



Many of fineware
colour-coated beakers
Including 'hunt cups'

More Samian than in previous trenches

Most of the makers stamps are from Lezoux or Les Martres-de-Veyre in Central Gaul so probably imported in 2nd century



Graffiti



Dr.37
bowl
made
by Cettus
AD130-160.
Bacchus & Minerva



Dr 37
form bowls
with animal and
human decoration

Plain
beakers
& cups



makers mark
...ACOMIVS



Samian sherd
with flanged rim



The trench is also rich in jewellery and dress ornaments

i.e. 26 fibular brooches, 25 pins & 11 rings in bronze bone, jet/shale and even gold



Bronze pins



Flat-section gold ring



Jet and bone pins



2cm



2cm



5cm

We seem to specialise in hobnail shoe patterns!



A finely excavated pattern of hobnails ready for the protective covering of plaster of Paris

Nearly complete shoe pattern under fine tool excavation



A sawn of bucket acts as mould for the plaster cover . When dry the soil plinth is sawn through!

Metal detecting and excavation at Bridge Farm up to 2022 has produced 385 Roman coins dating over five centuries



88 BC
Q. Titius



c. AD 68
Galba



c. AD 137
Hadrian



AD 138-161
Antoninus Pius



AD 161-9
Lucius Verus



AD 146-173
Faustina Junior



c. AD 200
Septimius Severus



Pre AD 223
Julia Maesa



AD 238-244
Gordian II



AD 265-267
Gallienus



AD 268-270
Claudius II Gothicus



AD 270-273
Tetricus



AD 317
Crispus



AD 330-335
Constantinopolis



AD 335-341
Constantine II



c. AD 350
Magnentius



c. AD 375
Gratian



c. AD 395-402
Honorius

A varied assemblage helps build the socio-economic picture

Quern stones



Local stone
flint, chalk &
sandstone



Tile/brick



Iron production

Oak timbers, birch,
hazel and alder round-
wood



Glass
vessels



and
beads



British Pottery



Continental
Pottery



Lead
statera
weights



stylus



Dress
ornaments



Jewellery



Red jasper

Bridge Farm: A pivotal site accessible by roads by pack mules/horses, pedestrians, wagons, and ox carts; but also by river in boats to the coast & barges to the Weald!

Pottery and other smaller loads would go by pack mule but iron and grain needed wagons or barges and then further afield by boat



Oxen were the main draught animals
averaging 15 kilometres per day



Duncan-Jones (1982) used the Edict of
Diocletian (AD 301) to calculate that river
transport was 6 to 11 times cheaper than
road

Further details on the Bridge Farm Excavations

including a full summary of previous seasons
plus volunteering details - see our website
Excavations usually take place in June to early July
www.culverproject.co.uk

