



Covington Dig Report 2024

Archaeological Evaluation

By Robert Wishart

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Date of Works: September 2024

Grid Ref: On Application

Site Code: COV GLB1 24

Receiving Body: Bottom Farm, Covington

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Date: 27th March 2024

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Date: 27th March 2024

Signed:

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Contents

Summary.....	4
Introduction	5
Location and scope of work	5
Geology and topography	5
Archaeological and historical background	5
Acknowledgements	5
Aims and Methodology	6
Results and Interpretation	7
Introduction	7
Field Walking / Metal Detection	7
Trenches.....	7
Finds Summary	8
Key Finds	14
Environmental Summary	18
Discussions and Conclusions.....	18
Recommendations.....	19
Appendices.....	20
Appendix 1 – Magnetometer	20
Appendix 2 – Finds Reports.....	21
Field Walking	21
Trenches.....	23
Appendix 3 – Trench Photographs	28

Summary

The Covington and Keyston History Group (CKHG) was established in 2022 to provide residents of both villages with a vehicle through which they could explore the history of their villages using a variety of methods, including archaeology.

The group's second attempt at an archaeological dig had taken place in Covington in 2023 again it proved to be a big learning opportunity for all involved. But due to crop rotation setting up a grid and field walking had proved extremely difficult. So, in 2024 we decided to return to Glebe 1 in Covington, focussing more on field walking and hopefully digging our trenches in more appropriate areas.

Back in 2014 there had been a major archaeological dig in Covington that covered most of the village. Magnetometry had been used over almost all of the village and test pits dug to examine what was there. Although the magnetometry had been applied to the field Glebe 1 in the north of the village only a few test pits had been dug in the area and nothing significant had been found. That was prior to the group returning to the field in 2023 when a number of items were found. Once again, we would make use of this Magnetometry results.

Last year's dig had identified that the starting point used was about a meter out so we adjusted this year's grid to account for that. We used a Garmin GPS machine to help us identify where to set up our trenches but unfortunately either it was mis-calibrated or we were not using it properly, but the end result was that the trench sites were not dug where we had planned them to be. Locations in this report have been identified using Apple Maps (see Appendix 1) and they show where we actually dug rather than what was planned.

Once again, the group found a significant amount of pottery and animal bones, both very good indications of habitation. We do not seem to have any problems finding proof that humans had been there, except for the buildings they lived in.

Introduction

Location and scope of work

Covington and Keyston are both small villages on the Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire borders. Covington has approximately 40 houses and 80 residents, whilst Keyston is slightly larger with approximately 70 houses and 200 residents. Both parishes have 12th/13th Century churches and benefit from having village halls. There are 3.7 miles between the two villages.

Geology and topography

Glebe 1 lies to the north of Covington on Mickle Hill Road that joins the two villages and sits opposite David Lockhart Machinery. The agricultural land is grade2 (very good) quality. The soil is chalky boulder clay and has traditionally been used for arable agriculture mixed with some pastoral elements; subsoil is a clay and sand mixture.

Archaeological and historical background

The two villages have existed for a long time, each appears in the Domesday Book on its own accord and research suggests they were even older. In Keyston a Neolithic greenstone axe was found and is now stored in the British Museum¹ also Roman and Iron Age ditch enclosures have been identified. Whilst in Covington a Bronze Age tanged and barbed flint arrowhead² has reputedly been found, and previous archaeology has identified both Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and Medieval sites.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank T Brown & Son (Covington) Ltd and Richard Brown for letting us conduct the dig on their land, David Lockhart for digging out the trenches, Robert McLaren for setting up the grid, and to everyone who took part in any or all events - excavation, pot washing, item identification. We could not have done this without you.

Thank you one and all.

¹ The Ancient Stone Implements, Weapons and Ornaments, of Great Britain by John Evans

² CAM-BA13D6

Aims and Methodology

The main objectives of this dig were the same as the previous year:

- a. Investigate some of the anomalies highlighted by the 2014 Magnetometry
- b. Enhance the archaeological skills that were introduced in 2022
- c. Obtain an understanding of what had existed in Glebe 1 field

As already mentioned, field walking and digging precise locations were to be the main activities.

Having set up the grid all cells were walked and items recovered.

The next phase was to dig four trenches based on interesting items on the magnetometry results. It was also decided to dig a trench based on where most of the finds were being discovered to try and find the waste pit

The Covington and Keyston History Group took out insurance to cover all archaeological activities by its members and guests on land owned by a group member. It was a condition of the insurance that no pit would be more than 1 metre deep.

All finds were carefully placed in labelled bags which were washed at a later date.

Unfortunately, this year's activities were curtailed by the weather and we had to stop digging due to the amount of rain that fell on the field. This meant that neither contexts nor section drawing could not be produced. But we hope to resolve these issues when we return to the trenches that have not been filled in, later in 2025.

The following system of recording was used:

Site Code:	COV GLB1 24
Grid Layout:	A1, A2, ... G5, G6
Trench number:	Trench 1, Trench 2, Trench 3, Trench 4, Trench 5
Location subtext:	Eastern End, Western End, Northern End etc

Results and Interpretation

Introduction

As this was the group's third attempt at archaeology, we are gaining experience as to what works and what does not. Using a digger to create the trenches is a massive saving as it gives us direct access to locations of interest and means we do not waste effort manually digging a test pit.

The grid was set out as forty-two squares each of twenty square metres, the northern edge of the grid was assigned using the letters A-G and the eastern edge was given the numbers 1-6.

By far the biggest problem was the rain we had only just completed the fieldwalking and dug the trenches when it became a big issue. The water filled the pits and the field was drenched it then continued to rain non stop for days meaning we had to eventually abandon the dig without completing many of the core archaeological activities. This report is really only partially completed as we need to return to the site and finish what we started.

Field Walking / Metal Detection

The crop that had prevented fieldwalking on Glebe 1 last year had been harvested and the grid set out as described above. Resource was our main issue this year, we did complete the fieldwalking, but were only able to conduct metal detection on a single cell (F3) which produced only nails. We need to investigate how we can attract more youthful participants to our digs.

Trenches

Four of the trenches were dug based on what proved to be flawed GPS data. Luckily all four were positioned close to areas that proved interesting.

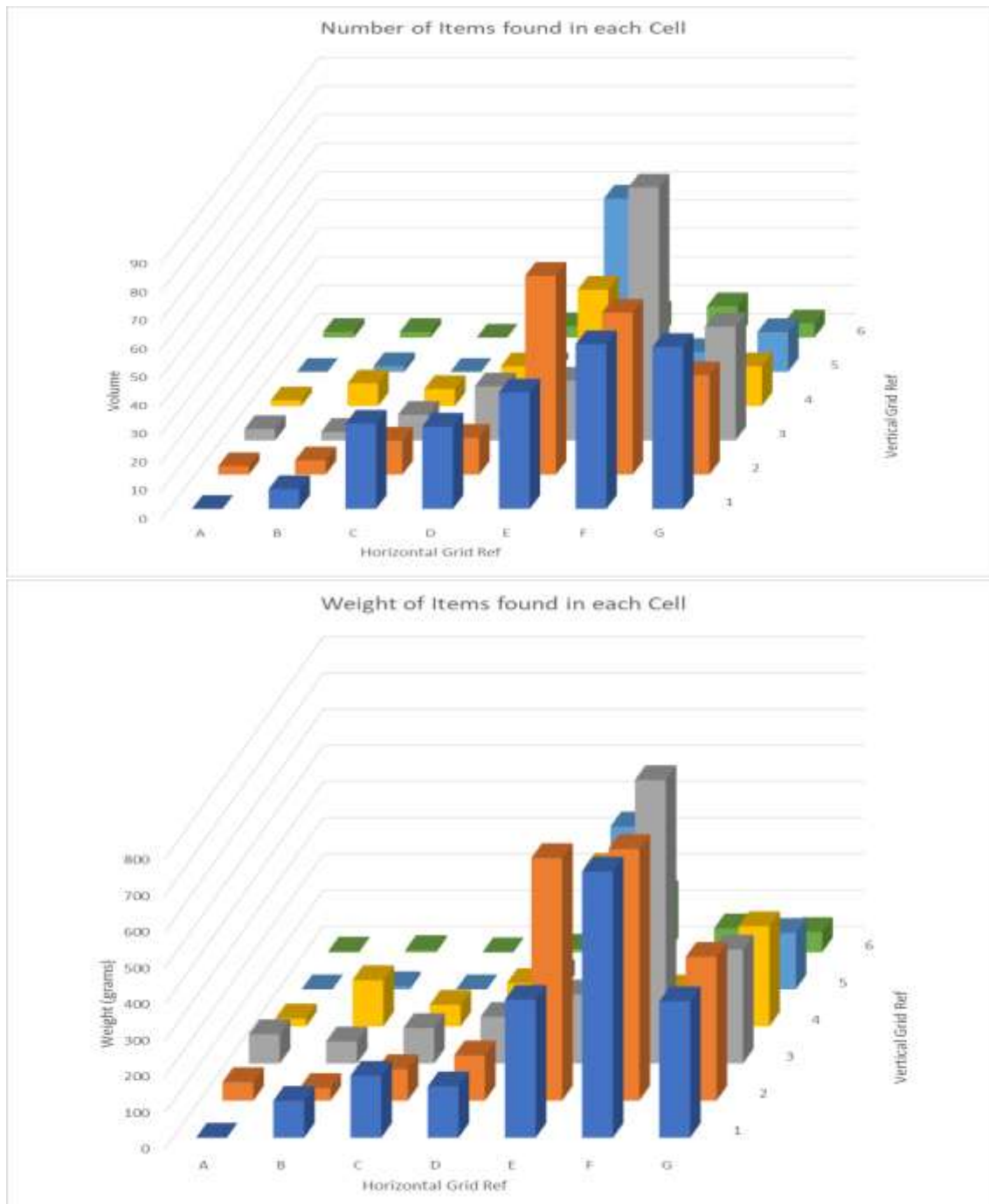
The fifth trench was positioned based on the quantity of items found by the fieldwalking. Again, we were very lucky as although the majority of fieldwalking finds were of Roman origin, the fifth trench was almost exclusively Iron Age.

Having recorded what, we could of the trenches, two of them were refilled and with the farmer's permission we left the rest to dry out in the hope of returning to them in 2025.

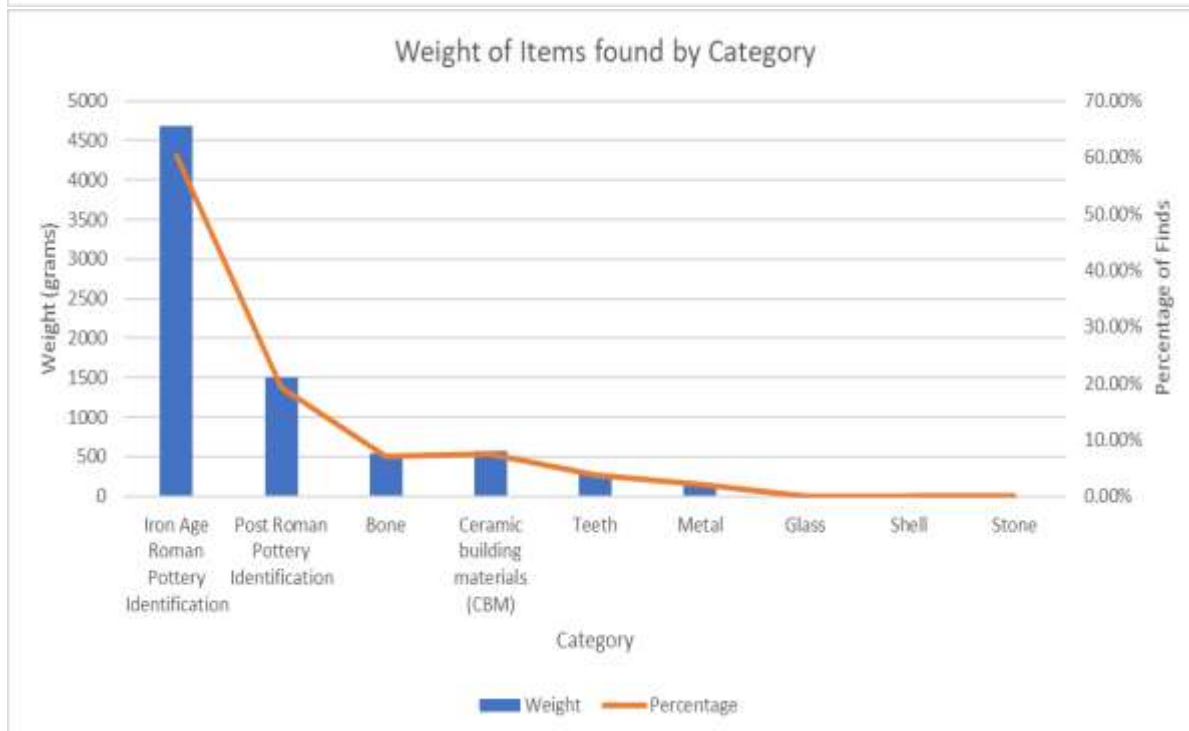
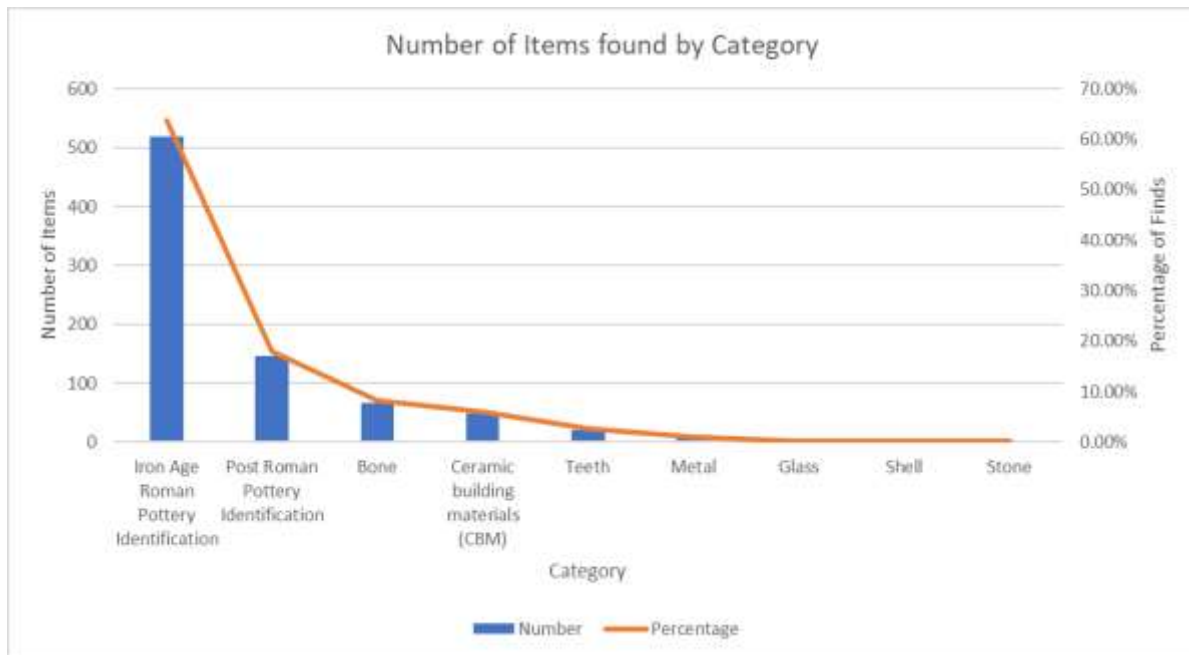
Finds Summary

With the Fieldwalking we picked up 818 items weighing 7.776kg and from the trenches we recovered 868 items weighing a total of 10.064kg giving us a grand total of 1,686 items weighing 17.84kg

The Fieldwalking was distributed as follows

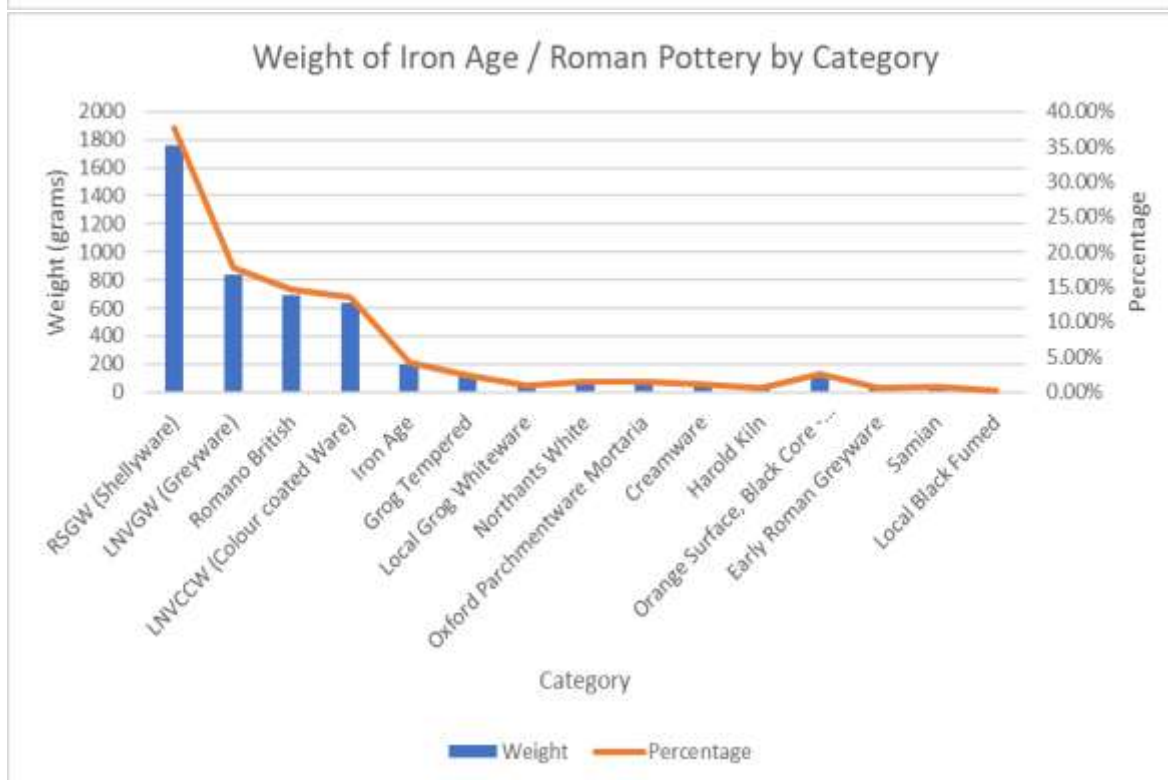
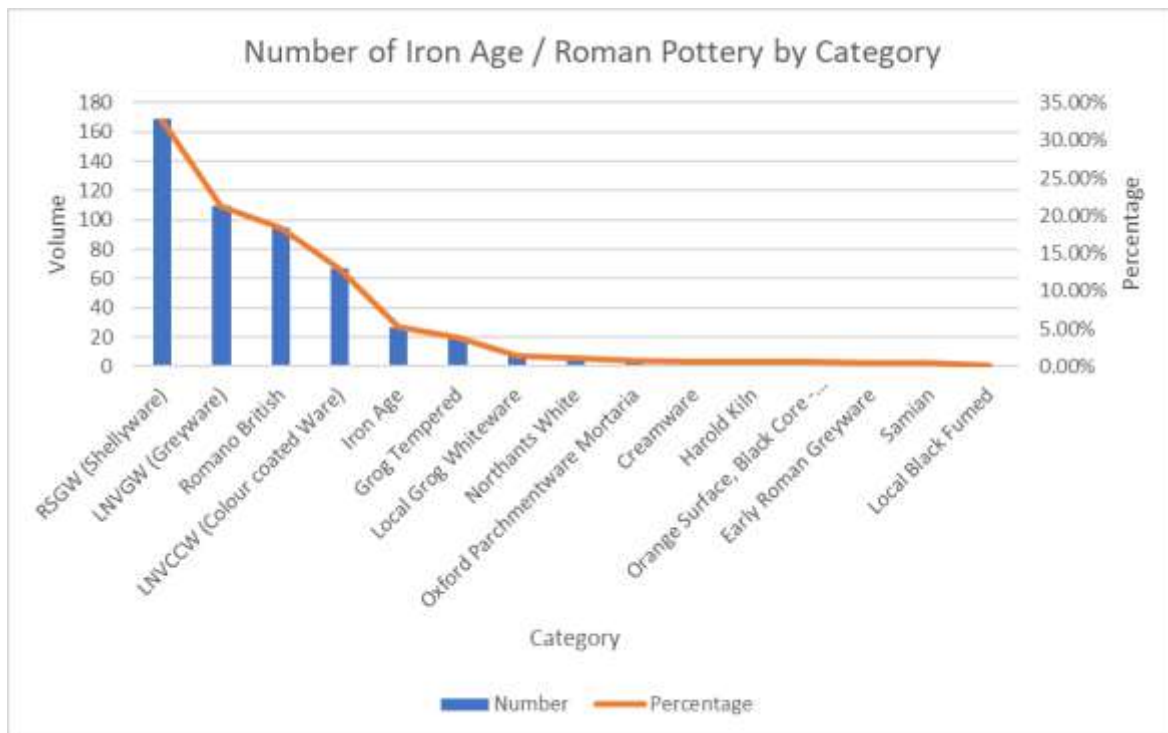


With the majority of finds coming from D1 to G4 or the eastern end of the grid.



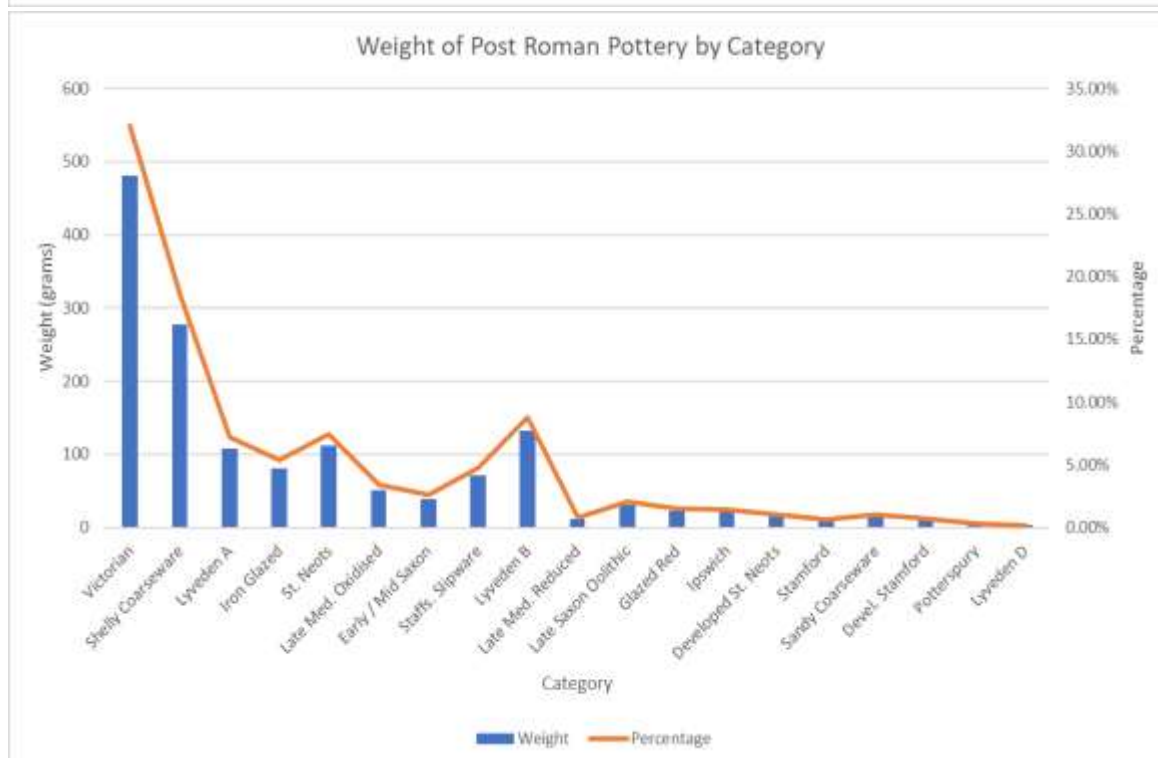
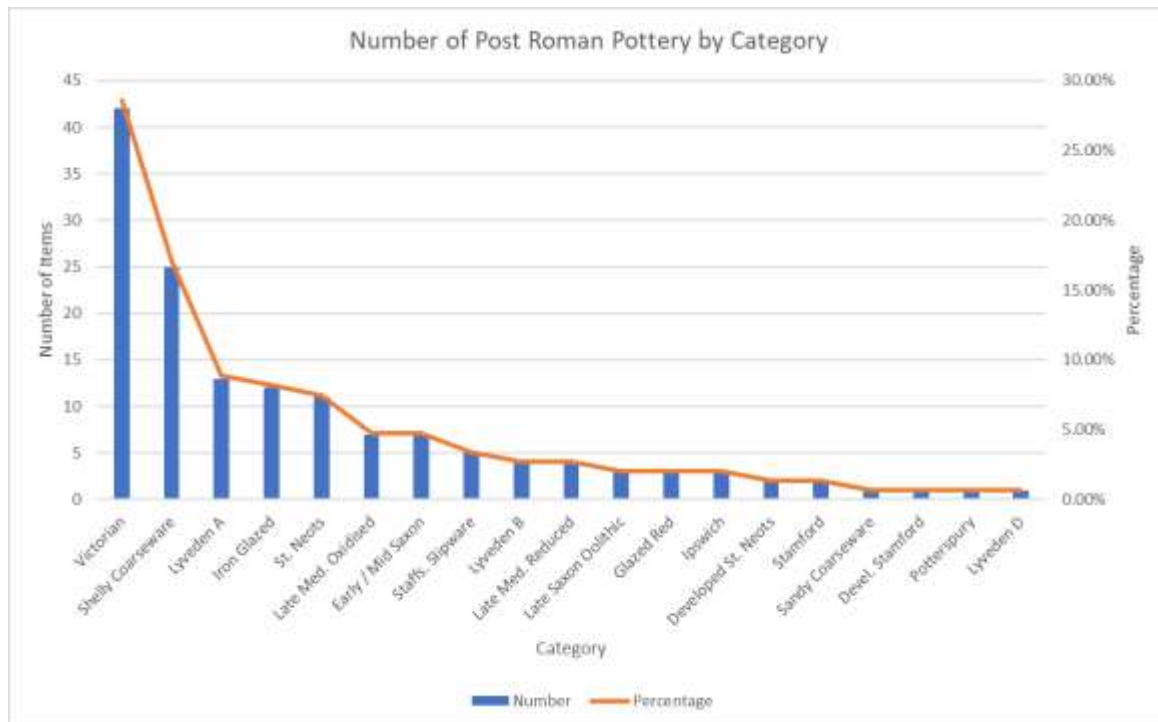
When we look at the type of item found we see that 64% of them fall into the Iron Age / Roman period with the weight of the items found having a very similar distribution.

When we split the Iron Age Roman finds down further, we see that the most prevalent find was RSGW (Shellyware) roughly 1/3 of the finds in both number and weight.

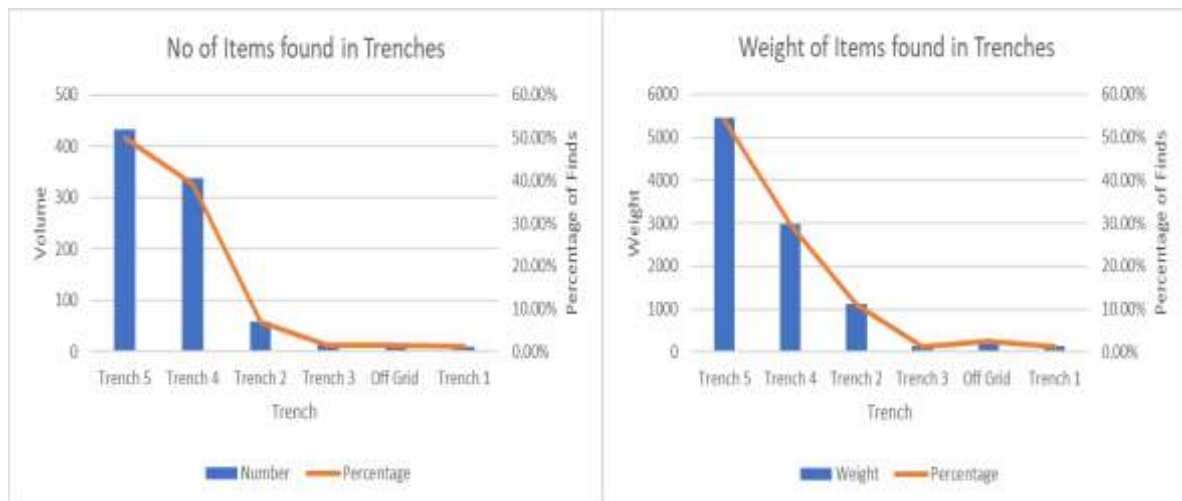


Followed by LNVGW(Greyware) roughly 20% of the finds

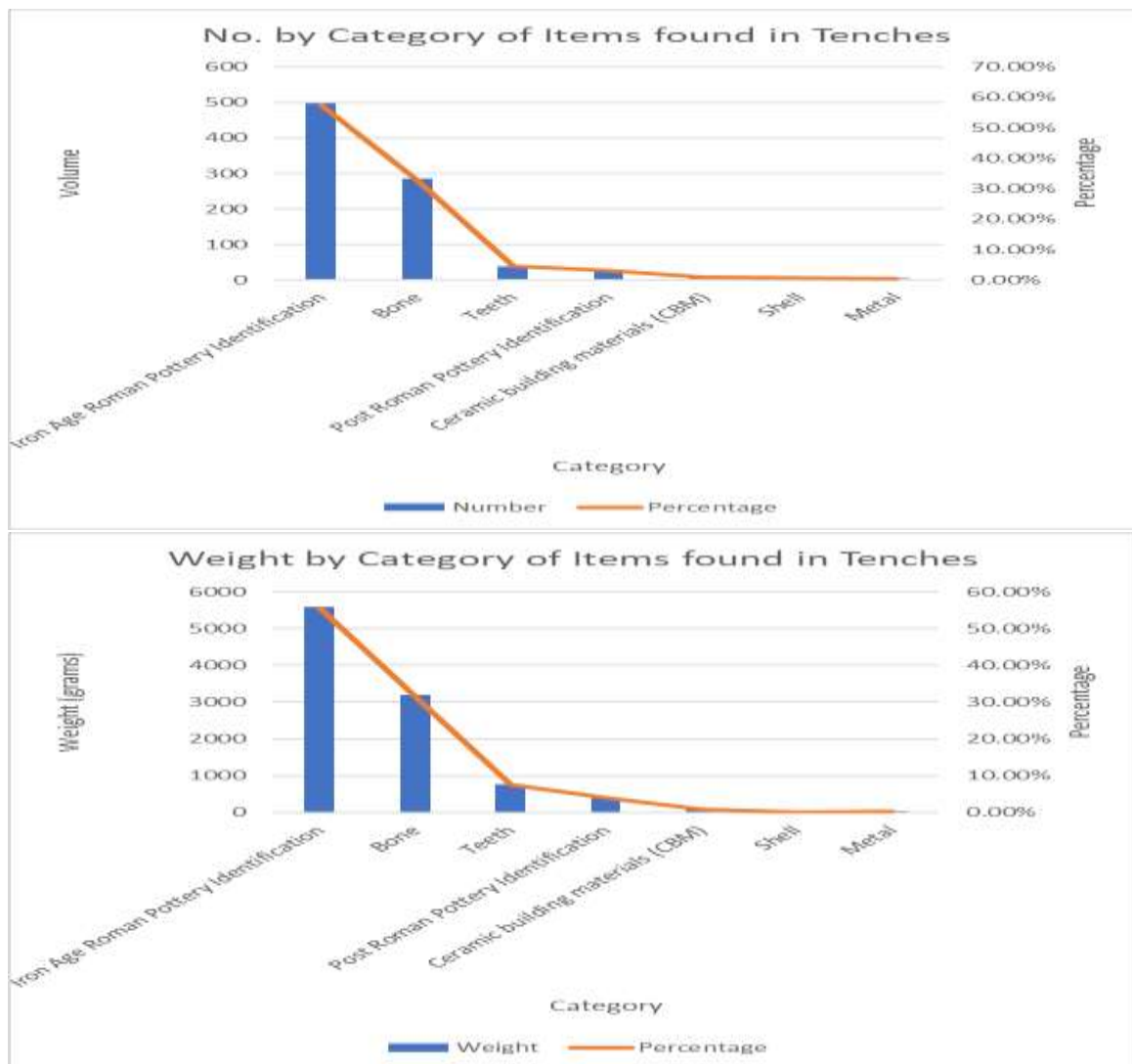
The majority of the post Roman finds proved to be of Victorian origin (30%) but this may not be that reliable, as it is believed that a recent fertilizer purchase that was spread over the field may have contained a large amount of waste pottery and tiles that will have contaminated the finds.



As for the trenches the vast majority of finds (88.9%) came from Trenches 4 and 5



Analysis of the trenches pointed to Trench 5 being Iron Age whereas the finds from the other four were more from the Roman period.



As with the field walking the majority of the finds were Iron Age Roman (57%) but of course the digging uncovered significantly more animal bones (33%)

Because Trench 5 was such a major contributor to the trench finds it is not surprising that when we breakdown the Iron Age Roman section we find that a large proportion of it is made up of Iron Age material (38% of the volume and 46% of the weight)

Post Roman finds from the trenches only represent 3% of the items recovered but interestingly there was only a single piece of Victorian pottery recovered suggesting that the assumption that the field walking Post Roman finds had been corrupted was correct.

Key Finds

Interestingly in the four trenches (1-4) we found pieces of Samian ware in each of them



These two pieces were from bases of bowls and were very similar in design



There was also a piece of pottery which had a design upon it which we were not sure was supposed to be a bird or a bee

Another interesting find came from fieldwalking - grid cell F2 – this was part of a handle from an amphora



Trench 2 also produced this dramatic find – a lid belonging to a pot it has a round handle on top that could be used to lift it from the pot.

With any archaeology one of the hardest things to do is assign a date to activities, in most cases this is based upon a coin found at the site, last year the grog found was believed to be from Constantius Gallus (326-354). This year we found an item that proved to be considerably older pushing the Roman occupation of this site back another 150 – 200 years. The key find was the base of a Samian vase, with the makers stamp on it. This item was found in the most Northernly pit of Trench 4.



We asked experts from Oxford Archaeology to identify the maker and they concluded that it was a potter called Antiquus, using his 2a die — [A]NTICVI. He was known to be working in Lezoux in France. Other stamped material from this potter have previously been found in Cambridge and its surrounding area, it was dated 155-190AD.

One of the best finds from the middle pit within Trench 5 was a large Iron Age pot

it consisted of 79 pieces and weighed 598 grams. Like a jigsaw without a picture to follow putting it back together would prove tricky



But that was not the only nearly complete pot that was found, in the southern end of Trench 5 we also found another pot this time made up of 16 pieces and weighing 289 grams. From the pieces that can be easily put back together we can see that the rim was 14cm in diameter and the base had a 10cm diameter. Although neither was completely circular



It also had some sort of design around the main part of the pot.

Environmental Summary

Back in 2014 archaeologists had named the area Roman Site N, so no Roman finds would have been disappointing. The analysis agrees with the site's name, as most of the pottery finds were of Roman origins the best item being a piece of Samian ware that could be dated. The Iron Age finds from trench 5 were excellently preserved and we may have two complete pots. A large amount of animal bone also came out of trench 5. We still have some hope that we have finally come across a building with the discovery of what might be a wall. The amount of pottery, animal bone found does point to a settlement. There was a distinct lack of CBM (daub and brick) so if there had been any housing it was likely made of wood, unless the wall proves otherwise.

Discussions and Conclusions

There were a few key points that came out of this year's dig.

1. Every trench in this area of the field comes across something of interest suggesting that if we could get our targeting correct there may be some exceptional items still to be found.
2. Using a digger to create a large trench really helped. It provided quick and easy access to points of interest.
3. The group's ability to identify pottery has improved although the Romano British group is growing as a default.
4. The field walking suggests that the majority of the finds are to the East of the field - Should we consider moving the grid say 60 meters to the East. Although we do not have Magnetometry perhaps the quantity of finds will still be there.
5. Is it worth trying to piece together some of the iron age pots that we have found – Are there archaeological teams that could help with that.

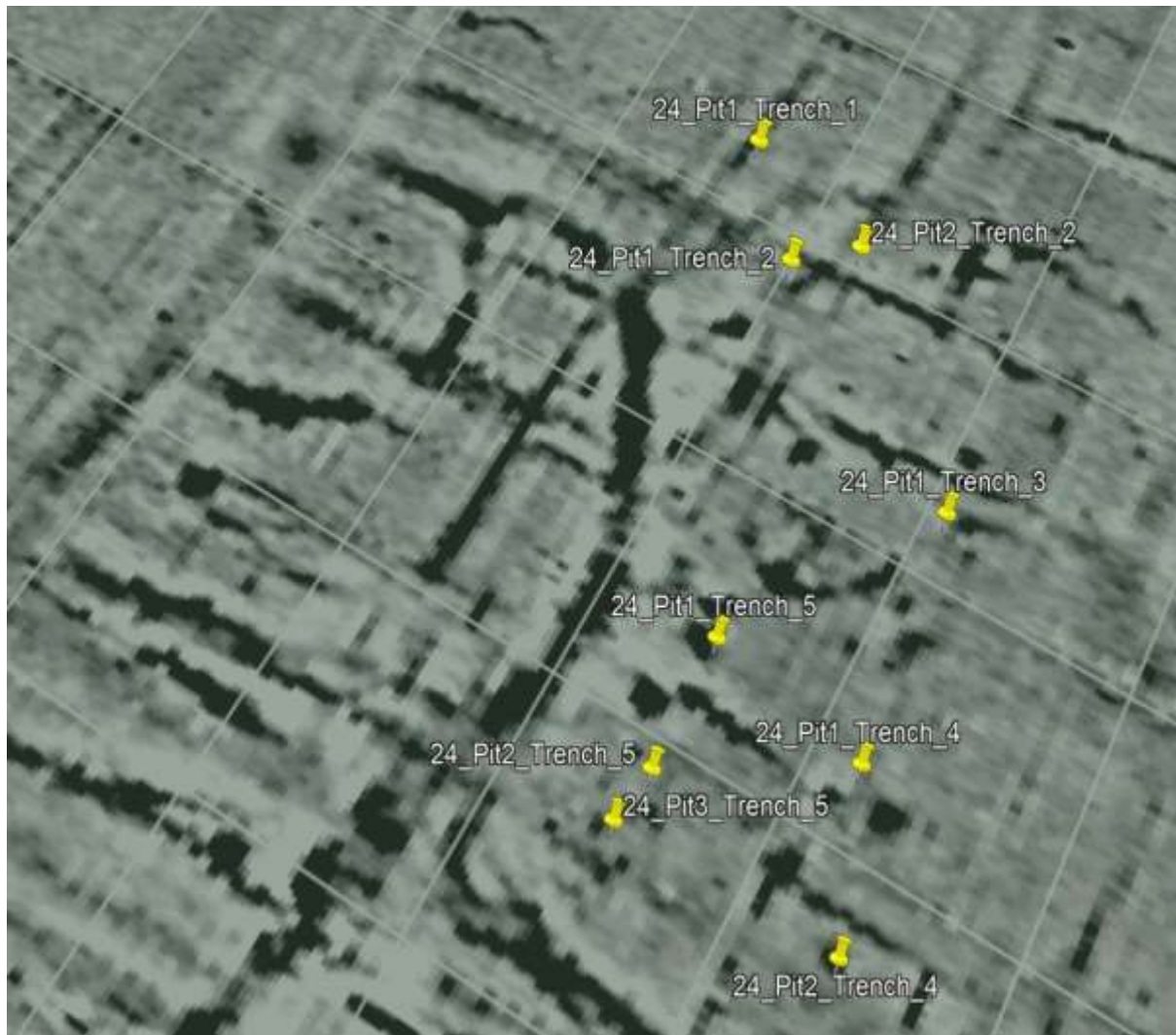
Recommendations

1. We need to return to the open trenches and finish what we started.
2. In particular we need to work out if we have found a wall and if so, does it belong to a building or some other sort of feature e.g. an animal pen
3. As a group we know what bone looks like but we do not know which part of the animal it came from (nor the type of animal) – To aid identification we should either obtain group training or get technical support
4. Training on machinery (e.g. Magnetometry) is essential if we are to investigate other sites.
5. A recent presentation on flint suggested we should mark the location of any flint finds but as almost everything we find tends to be natural and not worked this might be a step to far perhaps we should only record flint that may have been worked
6. We need younger participants.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Magnetometer

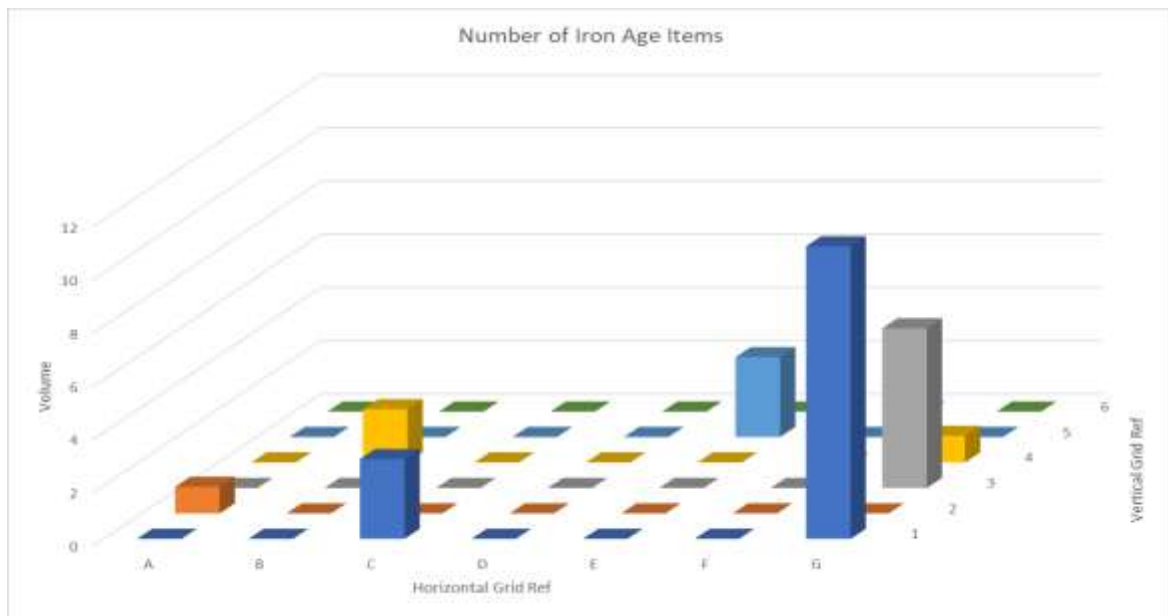
The following map shows the location of the trenches plotted on the 2012 Magnetometry. Although the trenches may look like they were deliberately placed there to hit certain anomalies they were in fact somewhere between 1 and two meters south of where we had hoped to place them. Except for trench 5 which was placed based on finds.



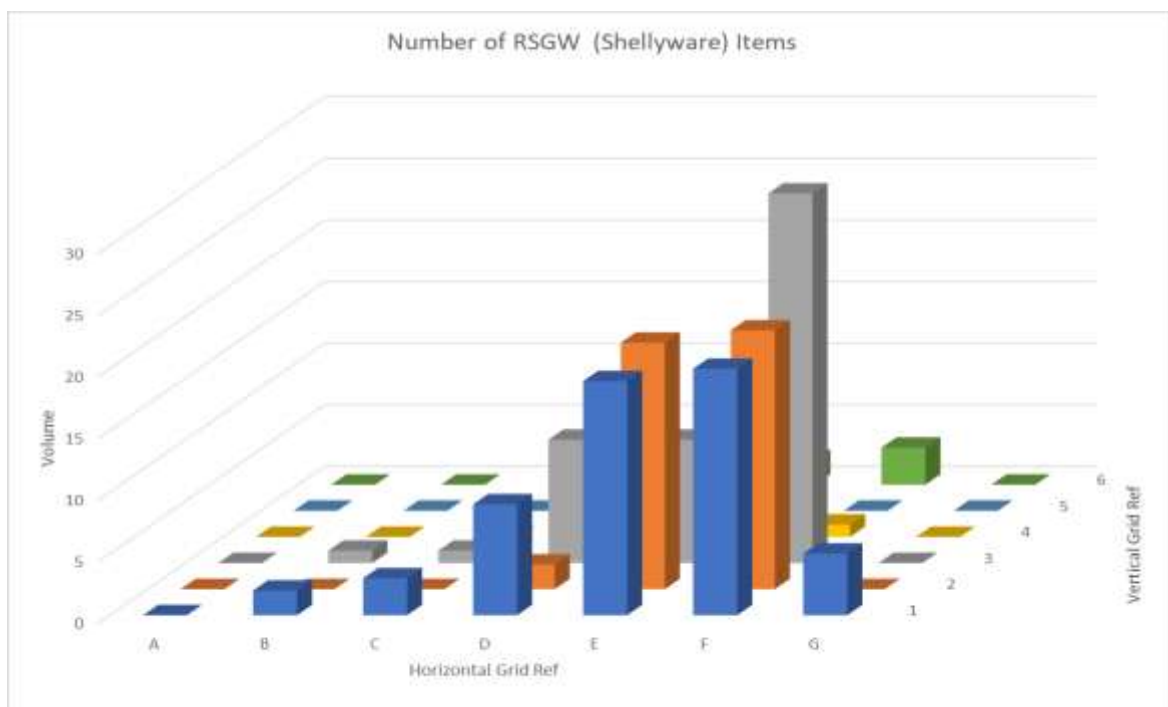
Appendix 2 – Finds Reports

Field Walking

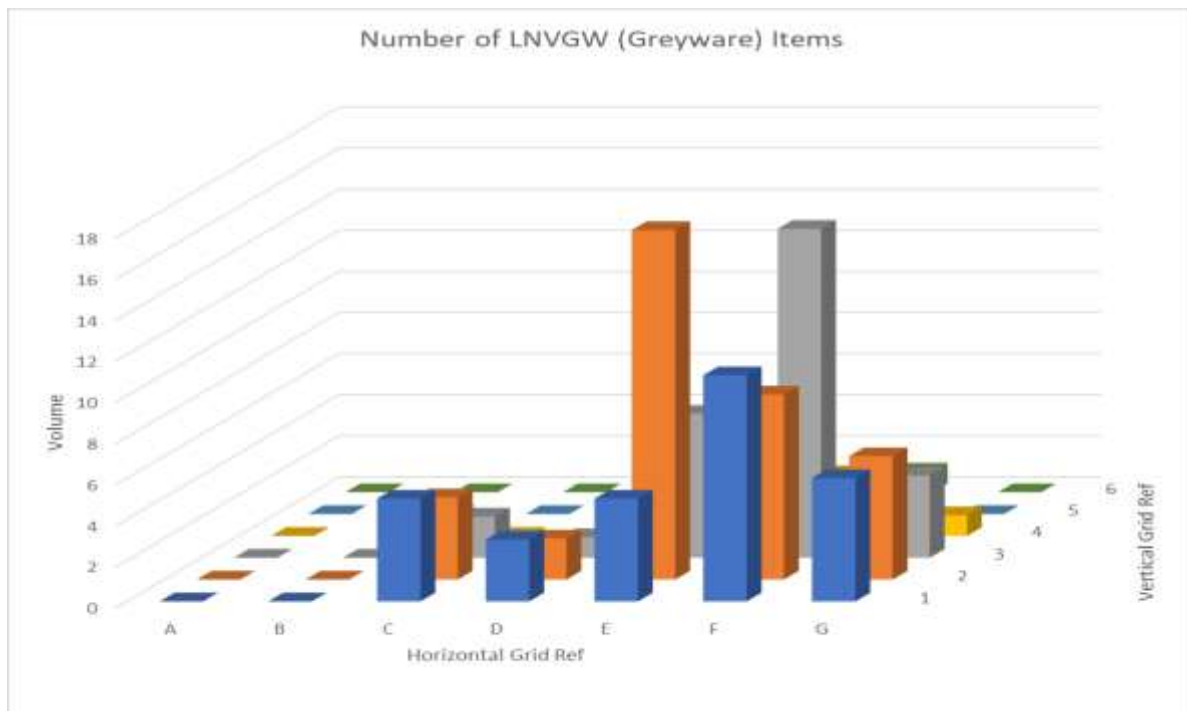
Very few of the items found via the fieldwalking were from the Iron Age but where we did find them, they were at the bottom left-hand corner of the grid (G1) near where trench 5 was dug.



Of much more interest was the RSGW (Shellyware) finds as mentioned they represented about 1/3 of all the Iron Age Roman finds. It is worth comparing it to the Iron Age finds which were almost all in the 'G' column. These finds are slightly to the left in columns 'E' and 'F'.

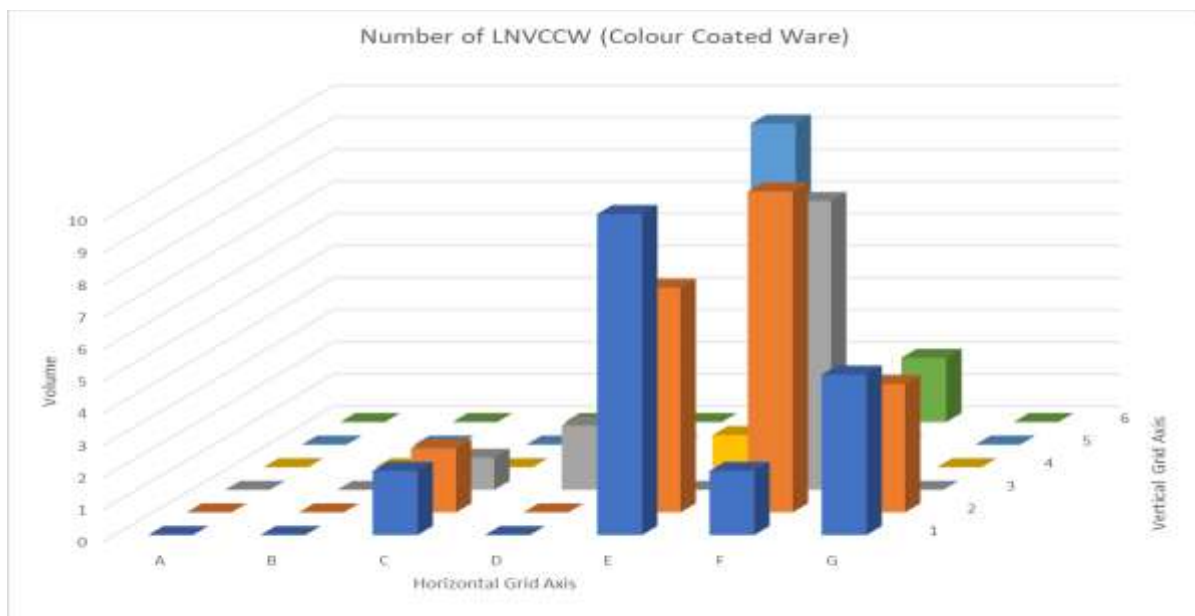


The second biggest find was of Lower Nene Valley Greyware which represented approximately 20% of the Iron Age Roman finds



Although these finds have a footprint similar to RSGW they have a wider spread and are not so concentrated although they are still mainly in 'E' and 'F'

The two pieces of Samian ware found during fieldwalking came from cells F3 and G2 again at the far end of the grid.



The Colour Coated Ware distribution was again slightly different but close enough to suggest the same source. Due to Victorian pottery skewing the Post Roman fieldwalking finds we have not reproduced any detailed graphs for the Post Roman finds.

Trenches

Trench 1

Location: On Application

This trench did not produce many finds. In total only 10 items weighing 132g this included 1 piece of bone and a canine tooth.

There were five pieces of Iron Age / Roman material all of different types

Grog Tempered 25g, Iron Age 14g, Late Saxon Oolitic 3g, RSGW (Shellyware) 35g, Samian 11g – The Samian ware having come from the base of a pot.

And three Post Roman finds again all different

Early / Mid Saxon 11g, Late Med. Oxidised 8g, Lyveden A 22g

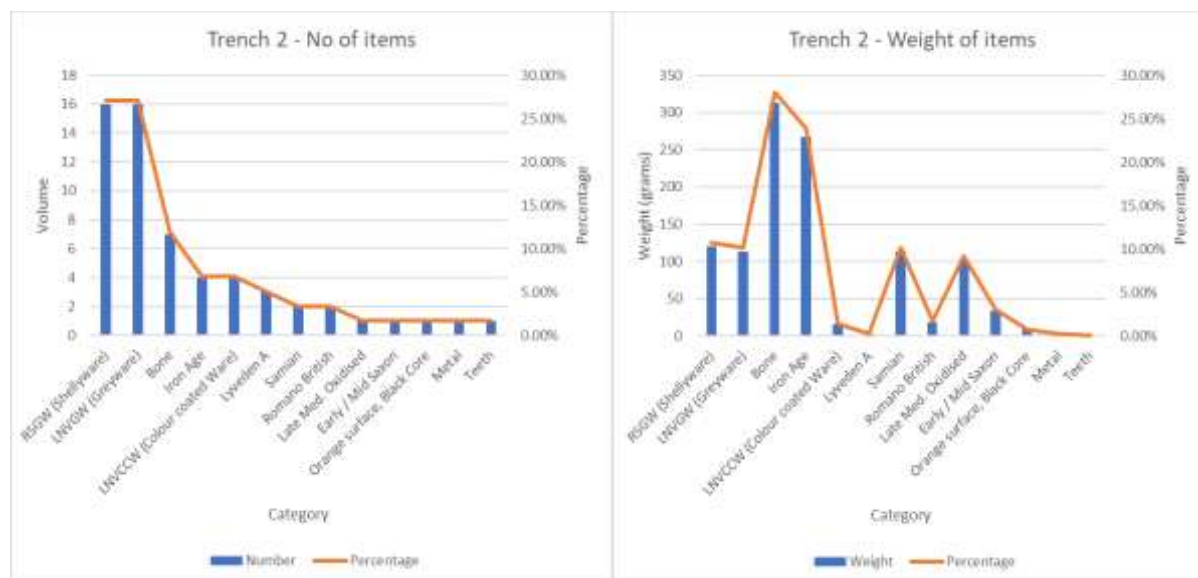
Although the wide range of finds is interesting this was not the most successful trench and was quickly closed down.

Trench 2

Location Pit1: On Application

Location Pit2: On Application

Trench 2 had the third highest number of finds (59, 1.116kg) as with most of the pits the majority of finds were either Roman / Bone or Iron Age



The size of the bones and Iron Age items found weighing significantly more than the Local Roman pottery. It is likely that this trench is more like Trench 4 than Trench 5

Trench 3

Location: On Application

Like trench 1 not much was found in trench 3 in total we recovered 14 items weighing 128g, once again it contained a piece of bone (12g) and a tooth (7g - possibly from a boar)

11 items from Iron Age / Roman period

Creamware 2 – 10g, Iron Age 2 – 22g, LNVCCW 5 – 21g, Romano British 1 – 6g, Samian 1 – 49g (Once again this was the base of a pot)

Finally, there was a piece of Victorian pottery weighing just a gram.

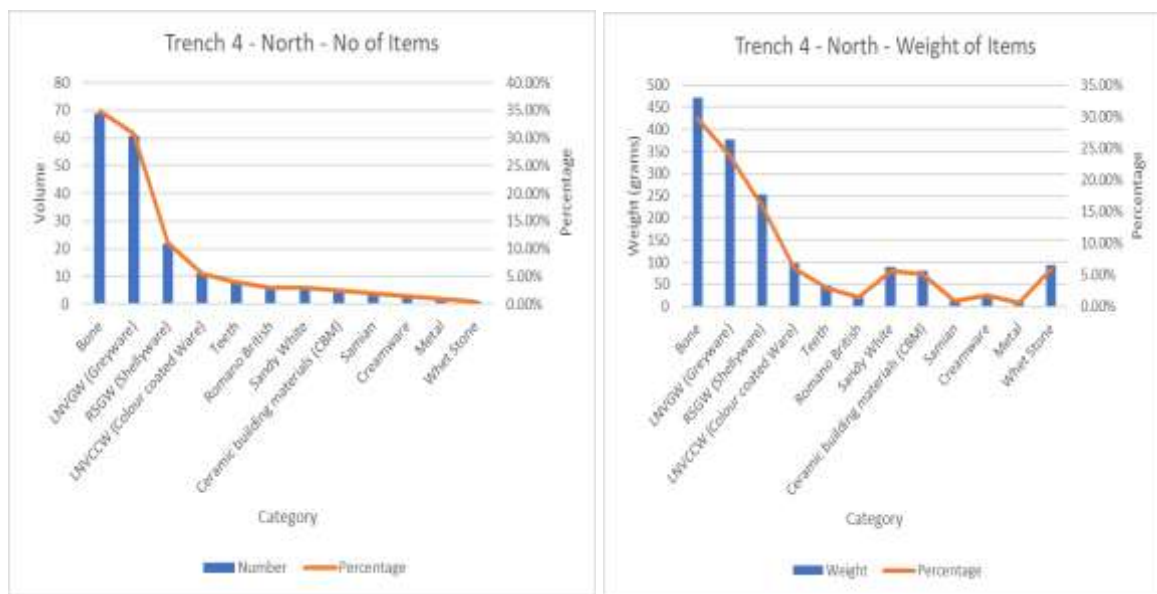
This trench was closed down.

Trench 4

Location North: On Application

Location South: On Application

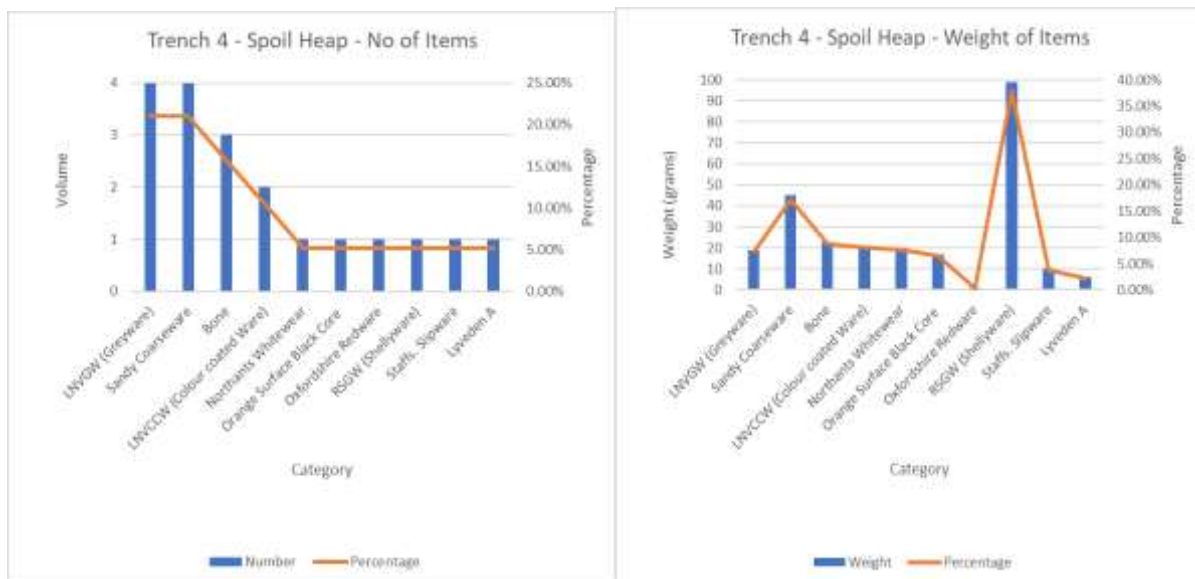
Trench 4 produced mainly Roman pottery and pieces of bone. In the northern pit there were just short of 200 items mainly Lower Nene Valley items



The southern pit produced the only piece of post roman pottery but was once again predominately Roman and pieces of animal bone.



Several items were also recovered from the spoil heap belonging to this trench



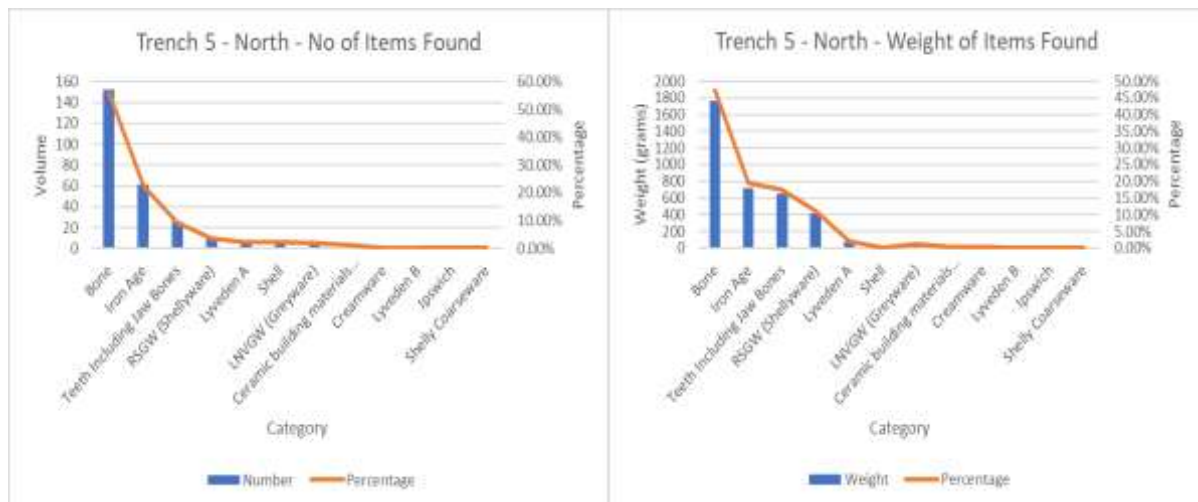
Trench 5

Location North: On Application

Location Middle: On Application

Location South: On Application

Although we opened three different pits in trench 5, they all proved fairly similar. This trench had come across the Iron Age part of the site consisting of mainly Iron Age pottery and Animal Bones



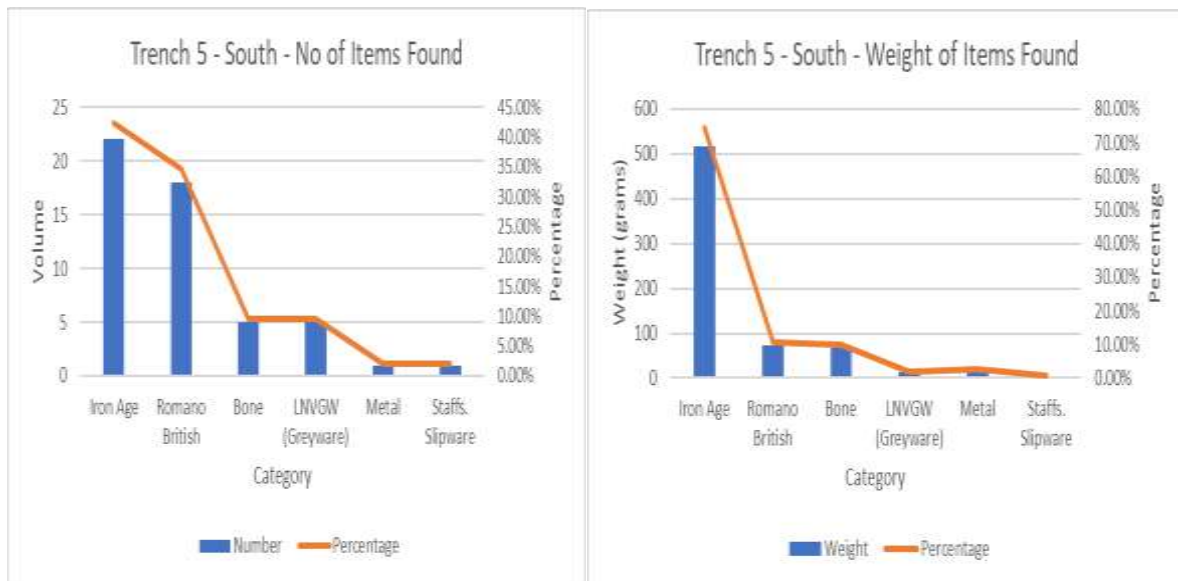
At the northern end of the trench the most prevalent find was animal bone making up 65% of the finds. Iron Age pottery making up another 22%

The Middle pit was almost exclusively Iron Age pottery making up 85% of the finds



With animal bone making up most of the rest

By the time we reach the south of the trench, Iron Age pottery is still the main finds at 42.31% but the second highest finds are now Romano British pottery or unknown Roman pots which now make up 34% of the finds. But if we look at it in terms of weight 74.53% of the found items were Iron Age



So, I think we can say for certain that Trench 5 is from the Iron Age part of the settlement and that it is likely that the animal bones are from the same period and come from rubbish pits.

Off Grid Finds

Although not a trench these finds do not fit with the grid section as they were not found in the grid. As people were on the site i.e. parking their cars these items were picked up as they walked to the grid.

In total 13 items were picked up outside the grid weighing 262g. One animal tooth from a bovine weighing 46g and one piece of Staffordshire slipware also weighing 46g.

The other 11 items were Roman / Iron Age

Iron Age - 1, 49g. LNVCCW (Colour Coated Ware) – 3, 31g, LNVGW (Greyware) - 4, 41g, Romano British – 2, 15g, RSGW (Shellyware) – 1, 34g

Either these items were pushed off land upon which we placed the grid or there is also something worth investigating closer to the ditch.

Appendix 3 – Trench Photographs

Trench 1 – Looking East



Trench 1 – looking West



Trench 1 was dug in an East/West direction and was supposed to have been at the junction of what looked like two roads, unfortunately as later analysis showed it had been placed significantly south of where we hoped to dig. The main point of interest was towards the west end of the trench as shown in the next photograph.



Trench 2 – Looking East



Trench 2 – Western end



Trench 2 was also in an East/West direction it was supposed to cut through a rectangular feature on the magnetometry but was again too far south. There were two main points of interest in this Trench which may have been associated with the feature. By the time these photographs were taken the rains had come and as you can see the dig had been flooded.



Trench 3 – Looking East



Trench 3 – Looking West



Trench 3 was once again dug in an East/West direction to try and locate what looked like a straight wall but was once again wide of the mark. The pit itself was located on the site of a black mark on the magnetometry.



Trench 4 – Looking South



Trench 4 – Looking North



In Trench 4 was dug North/South and most of the activity was towards the Northern End. It was in the most northerly pit that we may finally have come across a wall. Magnetometry for this location suggests it is near the edge of a faint rectangular object. Luckily we have a photograph before and after the rain arrived. Which clearly shows a cluster of stones.



The second pit in this trench looks to be centered on a black point on the Magnetometry in the centre of a rectangular highlight



Trench 5 - Looking North



Trench 5 was dug in a North/South direction it was dug over the area with most finds primarily targeting and waste pits that might have been present to see what might be found in them.



This Trench proved to be very rewarding as a significant number of our finds were recovered from these three pits

