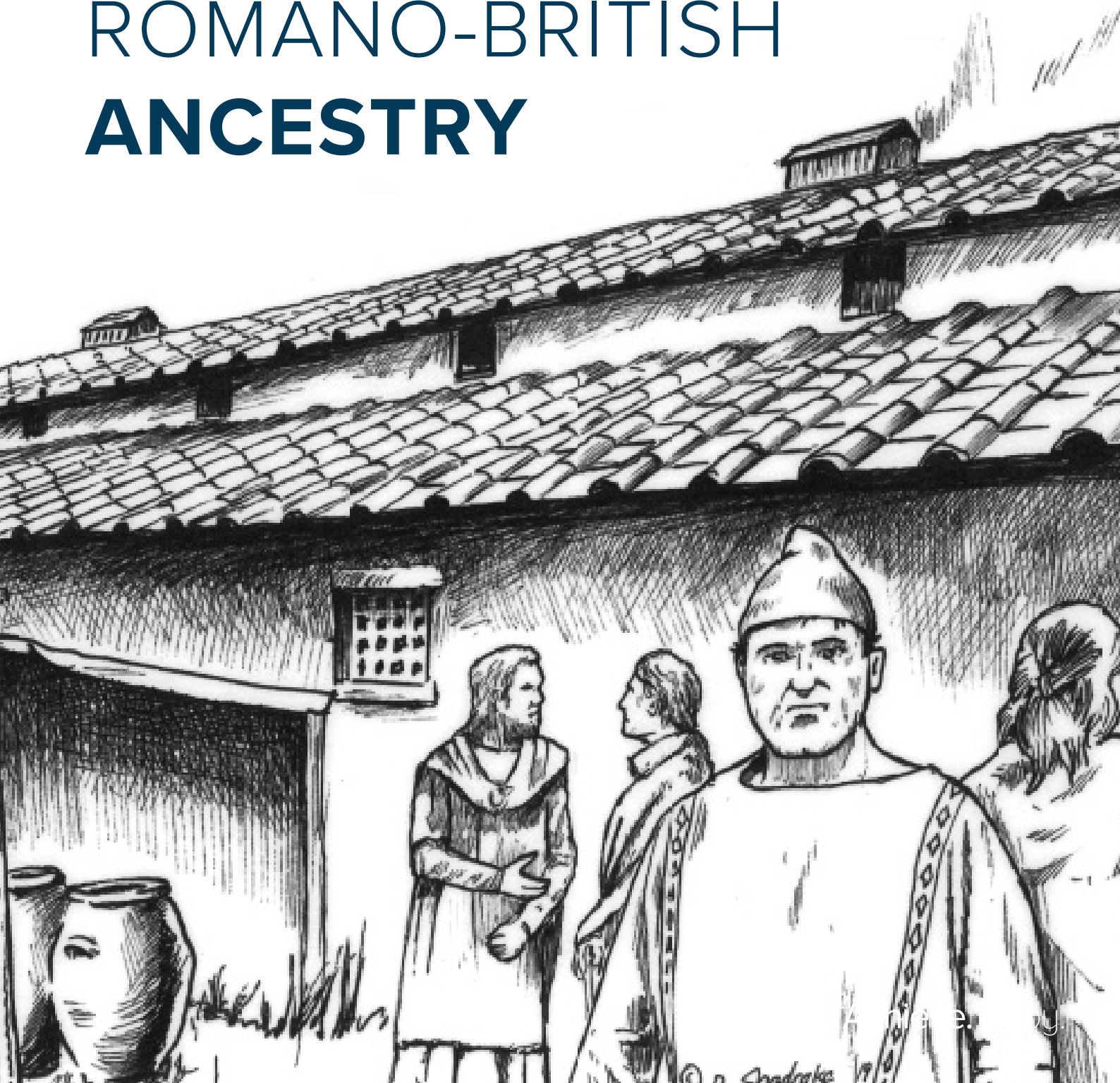




King's High
School

OUR ROMANO-BRITISH **ANCESTRY**



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Excavation and exploration



During the building of our new school, Archaeology Warwickshire were commissioned to carry out a survey of the new site. Whilst digging the end of the last trench, a previously undiscovered section of wall was revealed. As the excavation continued, it became clear that they had in fact discovered a sizeable building from the Roman period.

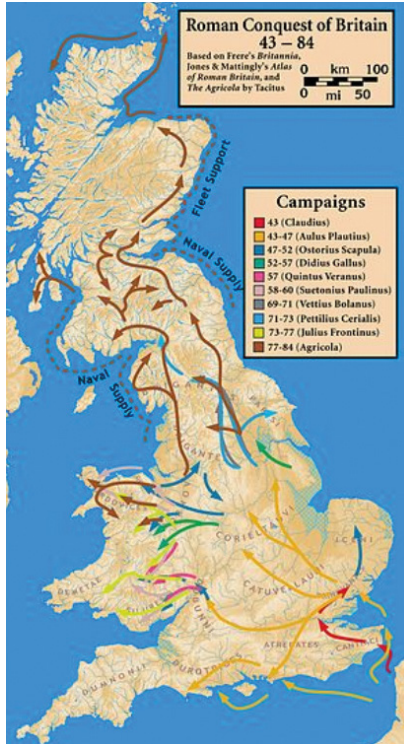
Although there had been one or two isolated Roman finds in the area, nothing of this scale had been discovered before. Warwick's history had traditionally started with Aethelflaed's creation of a fortified settlement on the banks of the Avon in 914 to defend against Viking attacks. The discovery of this building has therefore given the early history of Warwick another chapter.

Over the course of the last four years staff and students of King's High School have worked with Archaeology Warwickshire to try to gain an understanding of the surprising heritage of our new site, and indeed our town. In 2019, a group of students were among the first to fully investigate the finds with the help of Caroline Rann, Senior Archaeologist at Archaeology Warwickshire, Paul Booth of Oxford Archaeology and Prof. Alison Cooley of the University of Warwick. Since then, the building has been the source of inspiration for a poetry workshop, history lessons and an art competition. While there remain many more questions than answers, we hope that what follows gives you an insight into what lies beneath our feet and provides a glimpse of what was on our school site almost 2000 years ago.

ROMAN BUILDING STUDY DAY



Roman Britain: conquest and culture



(c) Roman.Britain.campaigns.43.to.84.jpg notuncurious
(CC BY SA 3.0)

The Roman Invasion

The Roman invasion of Britain began in 43AD under the Emperor Claudius. Over the next two decades the Roman Army gradually moved north, establishing Roman rule. The revolt of Boudicca put a temporary halt to the Roman advances but by the 2nd Century AD Roman rule over England and Wales was well-established.

For the Britons living in the West Midlands, including those on our site, this must have been a frightening time. Although away from the direct lines of invasion, the period has been described by Dr Roger White as one of 'drama and decisions' for the people of this area. With forts being established nearby and the creation of Roman roads such as the Fosse Way, it seems likely that the people living on our site would have been keenly aware of the invasion.

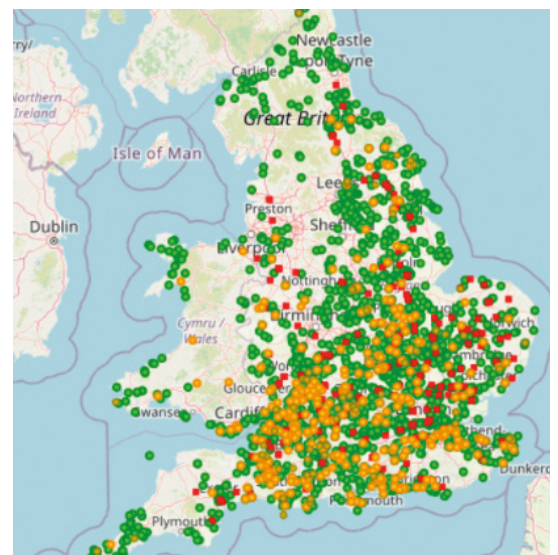
However, after a generation or two of military activity, it seems a more settled and peaceful occupation emerged.

Creation of a Romano-British culture

Although the period is known as 'Roman Britain', the country did not change overnight. Indeed, life in many rural areas may well have continued relatively unchanged. Despite our visions of the grandeur and glory of the Roman Empire, the likelihood is that Britain contained a mixture of Celtic and Roman traditions, customs and practices.

Archaeological finds suggest that the Roman presence was more heavily concentrated in southern, central and eastern parts of England. Warwickshire, in the West Midlands, sits on the edge of this leading to the question of how significant was the Roman presence in this region and therefore, how 'Roman' were the people living on our site?

RESEARCHED BY:
LAURA
BAWDEN
GENEVIEVE
SHRIMPTON



Map displaying excavated rural Roman sites and roadside settlements taken from the Archaeological Data Service - The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain

(C) Martyn, Allen, Nathan Blick, Tom Brindle, Tim Evans, Michael Fulford, Neil Holbrook, Lisa Lodwick, Julian D Richards, Alex Smith (2018) The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource [data-set]. York: Archaeology Data Service [distributor] <https://doi.org/10.5284/1030449>

Romano-British Warwickshire

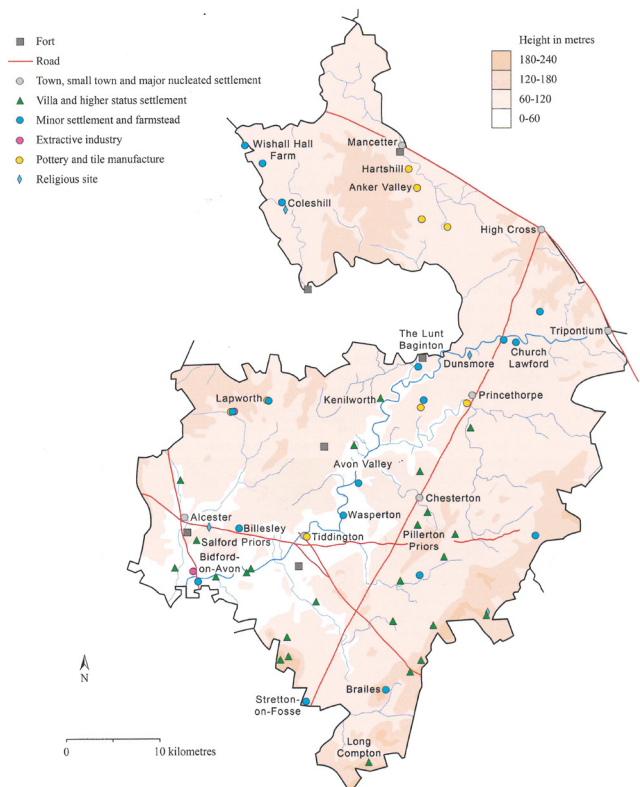
Although relatively little was known of Romano-British Warwick until the discovery of our building, there was clearly a Roman presence within Warwickshire leading us to question how the people who lived on our site might have been connected to other settlements within the area.

The River Avon

Our building was built on the banks of the River Avon. Other settlements have been discovered a short distance down river at Wasperton and Tiddington. There is also some evidence of a settlement at Barford. Wasperton appears to have been quite a low status farmstead, whereas Tiddington was a little more developed with pottery kilns being discovered. Upriver there is evidence of Romano-British settlements off Glasshouse Lane in Kenilworth. Although there are reports of a possible Roman Villa here we could find no recorded evidence of this. This raises the question of whether the River Avon was used for transporting goods and how closely the people who lived here were connected to the settlements along the river.

Military Presence

There was certainly a military presence in the area. Lunt Fort, near Coventry was built shortly after Boudicca's rebellion around AD 60. We know that our site was occupied at this time so may have been affected by the military presence in the area. Forts were established elsewhere in the region. Alcester was around 15 miles to the South-East of our site. Although this started out as a fort it became the most important town in what we now know as Warwickshire. Another fort was established to the north at Mancetter. Mancetter also became an important industrial centre with over 50 pottery kilns having been discovered and a glass furnace. We know that some of the pottery used in our building came from Mancetter, including a piece of Mortaria.



Map of Warwickshire in the Roman Period (Drawn by Lou Baglass) (c) Clash of Cultures? The Romano-British period in the West Midlands. (Oxbow Books 2018)

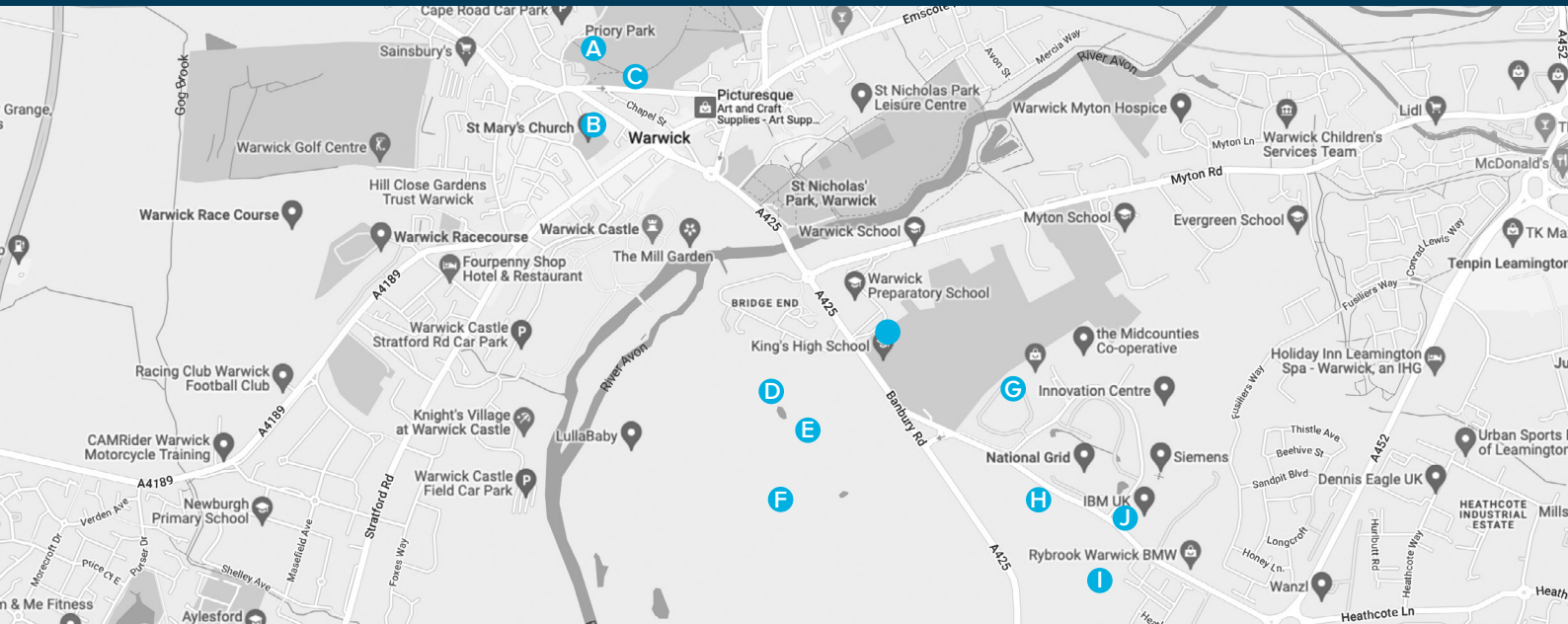
The Fosse Way

'According to Alexander Smith "While it remains uncertain how extensively the major rivers were used as navigable highways, it was the Roman road system that formed the main communication network within the new province"

The Fosse Way was a major Roman road which linked Exeter in the South West, to Lincoln in the North East. It is still an important road and passes within five miles of King's High. Settlements developed along the route including the nearby settlement of Chesterton. Chesterton lies less than 6 miles to the East of our site. A defended settlement, it would have been an important trading post and it is quite possible that produce from our site was brought here to be sold.

Other nearby finds

A number of Roman artefacts have been discovered in and around Warwick, all neighbouring the site of the Roman Barn. Coins, pottery and fittings amongst other relics have been uncovered during building work, archaeological digs and even by the general public. The map below illustrates the three key areas closest to the Roman building (RB) where artefacts have been found:



A: This burial site was uncovered here during the making of an ornamental garden south of The Priory House in the 19th century. There were several bodies discovered which were badly decomposed and were found to be 0.6m from the surface. Roman pottery, including Samian Ware was also discovered on the grounds, accompanied by a pair of bronze tweezers and a number of skulls. Although these items may not come directly from the burials, which are thought to be of monastic origin, they were uncovered in a very similar area.

B: During an excavation at a site 100m west of East Gate Warwick, a pit was discovered. Sealed under medieval deposits, a single shard of Roman pottery was uncovered.

C: Remains of cremation were discovered in former sandstone quarries. Pieces of burned bone mixed with ashes and charcoal were found deposited in alcoves in the rock; alongside this, a number of urns were uncovered. Bigger holes were seen to have been hollowed out, containing ashes and pottery. One of these holes was identified to contain the only remaining cremation and was measured to be 0.5m to 0.9m deep. This was filled with burnt material surrounding a grey, Roman pot.

D: In 1995, a bronze fitting was uncovered along with a Roman coin of Constantine I (Roman emperor from 306 to 337 AD) in the Castle Park grounds.

E: A Roman coin dating to the 3rd century was discovered by metal detectorists. The findings of Roman coins in an area so close to our site, where no coins were found, may suggest the presence of a circulation of currency in the area.

F: A fragment of a Roman brooch, dated to the 1st century, was uncovered in 1998 from a sewer trench.

G: At this site, three shards of grey ware (common Roman pottery), dated to the 2nd century, were discovered.

H: In 1990, a 4th century Roman coin was found south of Warwick Technology Park.

I: A number of coins, ranging from the 1st to the 4th century, were uncovered by metal detectorists. Also, at a similar spot, two shards of locally made Roman grey ware were found.

J: In 1995, a Roman coin was discovered in the area of Gallows Hill.

RESEARCHED BY:
CHARLOTTE ALLEN
ALICE HAMPTON
LAUREN DANELS

Tour of the Excavation

The remains of two buildings were discovered on our site. The first was a timber construction with two lines of pillars running through the building. This was seemingly replaced by a larger building with a sandstone foundation. This structure can be observed by the red and green highlighted area in the diagram below.

This second building was around 28 metres long by 14.5 metres wide. It was also supported by two lines of pillars down the centre of the building, resulting in a large aisled building. While aisled buildings on this scale were relatively common in Roman Britain, the size of this building in particular is considerably above average for this region.

Within the building itself, there are some interesting details. The back of the building appears to have been divided up with pieces of plaster which may suggest that these may have made up the living quarters. An entrance towards the rear of the building appears to have been added later (highlighted in blue). A central area (highlighted in red) appears to have been used for cooking, especially as animal bones were found in the vicinity.

Perhaps the most noteworthy discoveries were that of the two kilns. One is a T-shaped kiln used for drying corn (highlighted in yellow). This was built into the structure itself which increases the possibility that it may have been used to create a drying floor. The other was a kiln used to make tiles.



(c) Spooky Nook Creative Ltd - have asked for permission

In addition to these structural finds, a considerable amount of pottery was discovered throughout the site. The vast majority of the pottery was local 'grey ware' (cheap and plentiful) however there were some interesting pieces of more decorative pottery or 'fine ware'.

Finally, there were other small finds which give us some clues as to what and who were here. Shards of window glass were discovered, along with a needle and a small piece of mirror. A large iron ring which despite our initial thought that it might be an indication of slavery was probably the centre of a wagon wheel or a bucket. Finally there was a piece of carved stone which looks as if it was an altar.



(c) Images from Archaeology Warwickshire



(c) Images from Archaeology Warwickshire





(c) Image from Archaeology Warwickshire numbered sections added

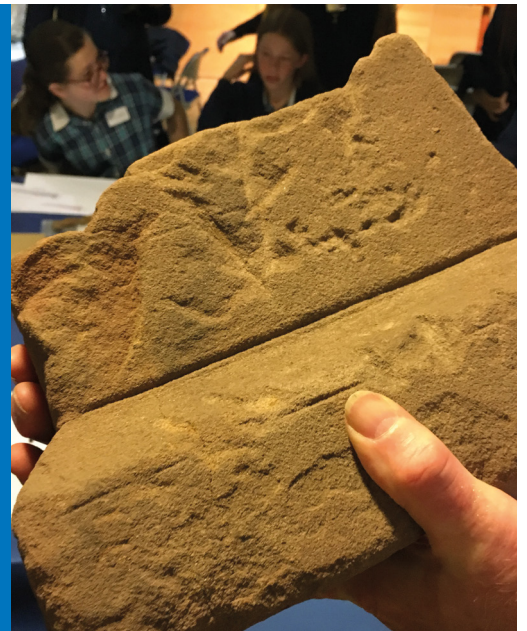
1. The site of the original timber post building. Thought to have been built around 70AD this was replaced by the larger, stone foundation building.
2. These are the walls of the building. They are roughly 28 metres long and 14 metres wide. The stone used to build this was red sandstone which is usually seen towards Coventry and Kenilworth.
3. The two sets of posts running down the middle of the building means that it would have had aisles, similar to the inside of a church. The stone used to build the pillars was of Warwick green stone (used to build the castle).
4. This T-shaped corn drier would have created a heated floor so that corn could be spread on the floor and dried before being stored.
5. This was probably a tile kiln, used to produce the tiles needed to roof buildings. However it is slightly surprising though very few pieces of roof tile have been discovered on the site.
6. This is the entrance to the building. a narrow corridor has been built at a later date.
7. The altar stone was discovered here. It was up against the wall of the building.
8. There was a pit here in which animal bones were discovered.
9. Pottery appears to have been deliberately buried in a ditch which ran along the line of the back wall of the original timber building. Deliberate burials like this are known as structured deposits and are thought to have been part of religious practices. This may have been part of a ceremonial process of closing off the old building.
10. There was evidence of a hearth in this area including charcoal.
11. The building was clearly adapted over the years. This part of the building appears to have been divided off. Plaster was discovered here which suggests that people lived in this part of the building.
12. The wall at the back of the building appears to have been deliberately knocked down at some point and covered over. There was also a row of white stones deliberately placed along this back wall which again suggests religious activity.
13. Window glass was found here.
14. A well was discovered in this area.
15. This area clearly had a hard surface, suggesting that it was possibly a road or a track. It is also possible that there were other buildings here.
16. There were lots of ditches and field markings in the area around the building.
17. Further finds were discovered under the St Nicholas building (like a piece of amphorae and a bronze age cremation urn).

Key finds

There were a number of finds which give us some clues as to the purpose of the building and the lives of those who lived there.

The Altar Stone

This was perhaps the most unusual find, located against the side of the building; this suggests that there was some sort of shrine within the building. While this is quite common in villas it is very rare in a simple farmhouse. Altars were used to exchange offerings for the Gods in order for their services. Whilst some lead rolls were found on our site which we speculated may have been curse tablets, it is more likely that they were simply used for building or weighing rather than religious purposes. However, there were other finds which indicated religious activity. At the back of the barn a wall was knocked down and white stones were placed deliberately along the foundations. There is also evidence of 'structured deposits' around the building. This is where pottery has been deliberately buried, possibly as an offering. For more information on religion in Romano-British society, please see page 17.



The Mirror

A fragment of mirror was discovered which is an indication of wealth, as well as suggesting that the inhabitants of the building were interested in appearance. It also shows a link to the wider trade routes of the Roman Empire as these were not produced locally. It is fascinating to think about the faces that last looked into this mirror almost two thousand years ago.

The Needle

A large needle was found in the building. It tells us a bit about the kinds of activities which would have taken place within the building. It is about four and a half inches long so it is too long for fine work suggesting that it was either used for stitching up sacks or rough cloth. This could give us some clues about the type of clothing people would have worn. It is likely that people of a lower class would have worn simple tunics of quite rough material – not the togas and dresses we might associate with Rome!



ALTAR
RESEARCHED BY:
JESS
WORTH

During the excavation some interesting structures and building materials were uncovered. These have provided further clues about the nature of the building and the people who lived there. However, they have also raised plenty of new questions.

The Corn Dryer

This T-Shaped corn dryer was found within the footprint of the building. It was used to create a corn drying floor in the corner of the building. Corn dryers such as these are quite common in rural buildings of this period.



The Tile Kiln

There was a lot of debate about what this structure was. It was just outside the building and could have been either another corn dryer or a tile kiln. It is most likely that it is a tile kiln, which suggests that the building itself would have had a tiled roof. It is, however, surprising that very few tiles have remained. This might suggest that the tile kiln was used to make tiles for another building nearby. This could point towards there being a villa nearby.

Window Glass

This type of window glass is called cast matte glossy glass. It is made by pouring and rolling the panes over a flat, usually wooden, mould with a layer of sand. Then it is ground or polished on one side. This gives the glass a different texture on each side, the polished side is "glossy" and smooth whilst the other is "matte" and rough. Glass was made using a different technique from the late 3rd century onwards, therefore suggesting that this glass was made before then.

There were four pieces of glass found, we fitted three together however the fourth piece of glass was a little lighter in colour and didn't fit with the other three pieces. This may be because of where it came from in the building or due to how the window was made. The discovery of these pieces of window glass near the Roman building leads us to question the original idea that the building is a barn. The find suggests that the function of the building could be more domestic or that the social status of the occupants could be higher than it was first thought.



**WINDOW GLASS
RESEARCHED BY:
AMY
POWER
EMILIE
LINFOOT**

Key finds: The pottery

A huge amount of pottery was found on the site. The majority of it was local 'greyware' which is typical of a site of this nature. However, there were one or two pieces which were particularly interesting.



Grey Ware

During our archaeology workshop we worked with Paul Booth, an expert on Roman Warwickshire to try to identify where the pottery had come from. We had to look at the colour of the surface, how fine the 'fabric' of the pottery was, and whether it was decorated. This gave us clues as to the age and origin of the pottery.

Grey ware was by far the most common form of pottery found at the site. It appears that a lot of it was produced locally, however some of it certainly came from further afield. There was some pottery from Oxfordshire, the Severn Valley and some black burnished ware from Dorset.

Mortaria

Several pieces of mortaria were discovered. A mortarium was a wide shallow bowl with grits embedded in the base and a spout. This was used for grinding and mixing food so gives us an insight into the cooking practices of the people who lived here. The pieces we found were made in Mancetter in the north of Warwickshire in the late second century AD. We know this because of the distinctive grits.



Samian Ware

There were one or two pieces of finer Samian ware. This was imported pottery and would be used for serving food rather than cooking it and usually indicates a higher status. One piece contained a potter's mark leading to the possibility that its origins can be traced.

RESEARCHED BY:
LAUREN
DANIEL
CHARLOTTE
ALLEN

What was the purpose of the building?

This building is constructed in a style typically associated with Roman Britain. As archeologists started uncovering the barn-like structure, one of the main topics of discourse was surrounding the purpose of this building. Was it a stand-alone structure or was it merely one building that was part of a villa complex?



Possibility One A Roman Barn

The most common suggestion is that this building was originally a barn; this is due to the presence of the T-shaped corn drier and the discovery of animal bones that have been found on the site. However, traces of plaster have also been found inside it – on the only part of wall which survived at a reasonable height – suggesting that it may have also contained living quarters. There are also remnants of window glass, which would seem irregular and overly luxurious for a place solely used for food storage and could similarly indicate that this building was potentially used with the intention of living inside it.

Possibility Two Part of a villa complex

Some argue that this could have been part of a villa estate with other buildings located nearby. In other areas of the country, there are similar aisled-buildings that are known to have formed part of larger villas in places as in Crookhorn (Hampshire). While this is certainly a possibility, it is perhaps surprising that no other significant Roman discoveries have been made during the many building projects in the area, therefore further implying that this was the only building at the location.

Possibility Three A farmstead

Others argue that perhaps this was an isolated farmstead with the building being used to store grain and other produce but also having living quarters at the back. This would also help to explain the presence of an altar, an oven and the amount of pottery discovered. The presence of field markings could perhaps indicate a family growing in wealth under Roman rule.

**RESEARCHED BY:
MAUD
BEIDAS**

How did the site develop?

The site had clearly been used for agriculture before the arrival of the Romans. Iron Age roundhouses were discovered under the new 4G pitch and there were well-established field patterns surrounding our building. Archaeologist, Caroline Rann described the building as ‘sitting in an Iron Age Landscape’.

Although it started as an Iron age settlement, it is clear that the site developed throughout the Roman period. Firstly, there was a timber building which was replaced by the larger stone-built building. The building was made of local stone with the aisle posts made of green Warwickshire stone and the foundations for the walls being made of the red sandstone found in Kenilworth. This type of aisled building was not uncommon during the Romano-British period. Joan Alcock describes aisled farmhouses as ‘rectangular buildings with interior divided by posts into a nave and aisles. Both could be partitioned off to make separate rooms, divided by doors and curtains.’ This description of an aisled farmhouse is close to the description of the building we had found at our school.

There was a corn drier, which would have created a drying floor suggesting that the main purpose of the building was to do with the storage of corn. Other finds also point to this, for example the needle was probably used for sacks of corn. However, it is also clear that other activity was going on. The tile kiln shows that the site was also being used for building materials.

Trade

The inhabitants of the site seemed to become wealthier during the period so they must have been connected to trade. The pottery also suggests this. The pottery mainly came from north of here, particularly Leicestershire and Mancetter, however there was also pottery from Dorset, Oxfordshire and even Spain or France. One possibility is that they supplied the army with grain. During the conquest of Britain, supplies for the army came from abroad, however, later on in the history of Roman Britain, the army was increasingly supplied by local areas. It is possible that they took goods to market through river transportation, however, it is more likely that roads were used. Smith states that ‘The great majority of both farmsteads (77%) and villas (89%) in this region lie within 5 km of the road system.’ and our site is quite close to the Fosse Way. To reach there it is likely that the people living on our site used tracks often following routes established centuries before. Many army supplies as well as goods that were traded in towns would have started their journey on ancient tracks before reaching the major roads.’

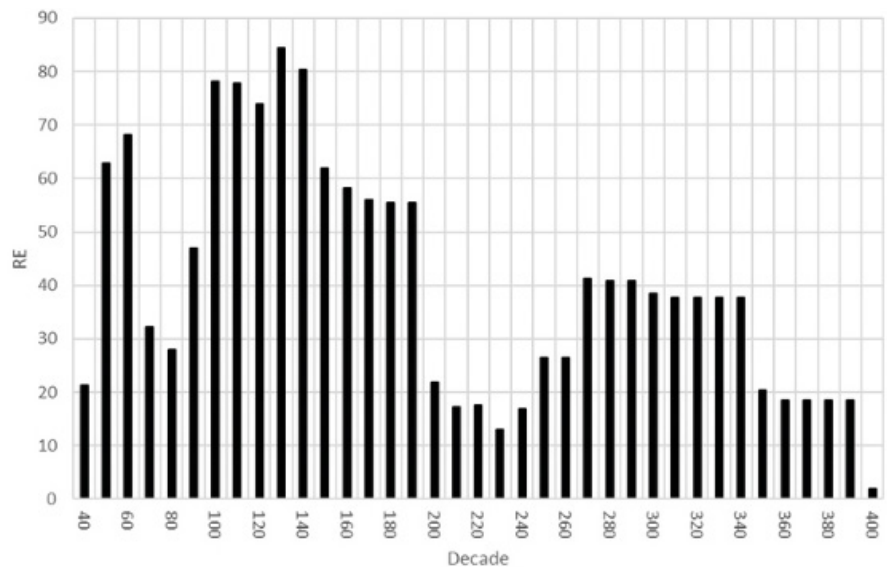


Fig 1. A graph showing the date distribution of the pottery finds on our site.

(c) Jerry Evans 2022

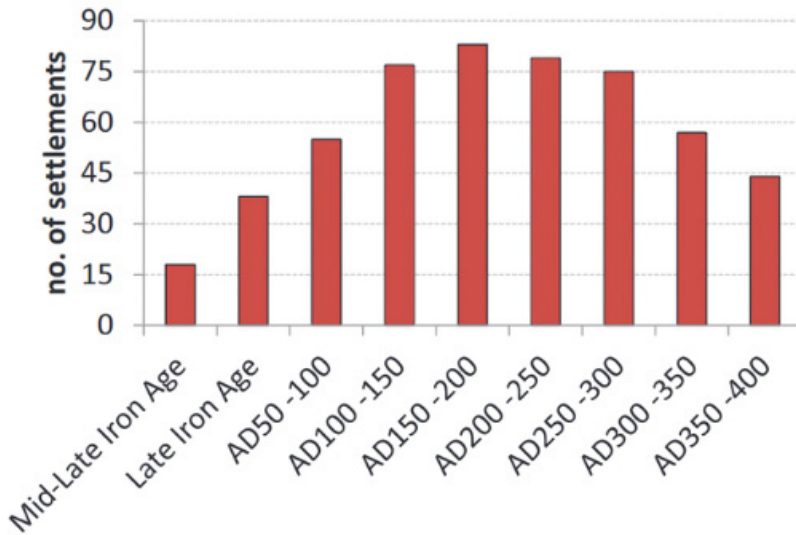


Fig. 2. Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the Central Belt region
Reproduced with permission of the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies from Smith et al New Visions of The Countryside of Roman Britain vol 1 - The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain (2016)

Quotes are taken from Smith The Central Belt From New Visions of The Countryside of Roman Britain vol 1

Decline

The pottery suggests that the settlement fell out of use in the mid fourth century. This is consistent with settlement patterns for the area. (see fig 1 and 2) It is not clear why this happened but the breakdown of the Roman system and the disruption to trade may have meant that settlements such as this were no longer economically viable. 'Those villas that were successful farms had depended on being able to sell their produce, and as the cash-based economy gradually declined towards the end of the Roman period, the market for the products of villa estates suffered.'

RESEARCHED BY:
ROSIE
BROOKER
NEHA
NEIL



An interview with Caroline Rann?



Caroline Rann is the Archeological Projects Manager at Archeology Warwickshire and was key in organising the excavation of this site. We asked her a few questions about her interest in the site and gained an insight from a professional archeologist.

Did anything surprise you about this find?

I was mostly surprised that such a large building had gone unnoticed for so long. We found that the cable for the floodlights on the Sports Pitches missed the end of the building by a matter of centimetres!

Which artefact interested you the most?

My personal interest is in quernstones so I was happy that we found some examples. They are useful indicators of trade because the stone used to make them can be provenanced. For example the ones from the site are made from Millstone Grit so we know that they came from the Peak District. Everything we found told us a little bit about

the people who lived there. Tangible connections like this are one of the most rewarding aspects of archaeology.

How likely was it that there would be anything on the site before you started to excavate?

By the time we started our excavations we had done some trial trenches so we were pretty hopeful that we had a building and that it would be Roman. Before we did the trial trenches we expected to find field systems or something relating to the agricultural use of the area.

Why do you think this find is so important?

The most important aspects of any archaeological dig are the glimpses we get into the lives of ordinary people. Not the people who are written about in history but the general population. The early Roman period in Britain is one that can tell us a lot about the nature of the conquest and what happened to the people who were here before. This site tells us about Warwick and how it developed as well as Warwickshire and how it was connected to Roman Britain.

Have you got any main theories surrounding the building's purpose or the people that might have lived there?

My main theory is that it was used as a granary and that the people who lived there were connected to the main villa but were not the rich owners.

At what point did you think you were on to something significant?

As the building was uncovered by the machine we were very sure that something that substantial, made in stone, was going to be significant.



Who lived there? Wider Context

Religion

Britain has always been a place where gods and religions have been imported and adapted, which also occurred in Romano-British culture; many cults were Celtic in origin, but were transformed due to the conflation of Celtic and Roman ideas. A key characteristic of the Romano-British Pagan cult was the contract; the dedicator requests a service from a god or goddess in exchange for offerings at an altar, which could be almost anywhere sacred, including water shrines, temples, or isolated open-air shrines. There is even evidence of these vows in the curse tablets found in Bath. Although rituals could be made at any time, many were performed according to an annual Roman cycle of special occasions. There are clear signs of religious activity in our building with the altar, the placement of a row of white stones, and structured deposits.

Romano-British Women

Roman women were considered inferior to men. While upper-class boys would have gone to school, girls were expected to learn how to run a household and be a mother, although wealthy girls may have had a male tutor so they could be educated from home. Although the upper-class would have had servants and slaves to run the household and cook, the primary role of women was still that of having and raising children, despite their luxurious lifestyle. Very little is known about lower status women. In a setting such as ours, it is likely that they would have played a major role in the running of the household and the farmland. The presence of the hearth, the needle and the loom weights can give some hints as to the kinds of activities which took place within our building.



Clothing

Celtic dress, especially that of the wealthy, was very colourful and decorative, compared to the more sober appearance of Romans. While Celtic people were influenced by these new Roman fashion trends, the Celtic love of bright colours did not disappear. However, it is likely that the people living in our building wore simple, rough clothing, not the togas and robes that spring to mind when we think of the Roman period. The most common material used during this period was wool. The fact that no jewellery was found and the only needle was quite large suggests that the clothing may have been quite plain. However, the fact that a shard of mirror was found suggests that there was some care taken over appearance.

RESEARCHED BY:
EMMA
WILLIAMS
ANNABEL
LEDGARD
JESS
WORTH
ADI
CHALLAPALLI

Who lived there? Romans or Celts?

Although the identities of the settlement inhabitants remain a mystery, there is much we can infer from the evidence collected from the site about their status and origin.

Celts

There is an earlier timber building beneath the Roman building. There is the possibility that there were completely different sets of inhabitants altogether at different points, whether Celtic or Roman. This could suggest that the earlier building was previously inhabited by another set of people, potentially of Celtic origin.

Perhaps the lack of currency found on the site could indicate that the inhabitants didn't use Roman currency or at least were not familiar with it, suggesting that they were Celtic.

Romans

Wells were an important part of Roman life as a water supply for farms and villas, and tended to be more in use after 160 AD. The presence of a well on the site, which was likely to have been installed after the building of the settlement, could therefore indicate a Roman influence.

Although the settlement is not necessarily part of a villa complex, there may still be a connection. The shape and key features of the building suggests that Roman influence had certainly spread throughout the area, and therefore may have influenced the inhabitants of the settlement in some way.

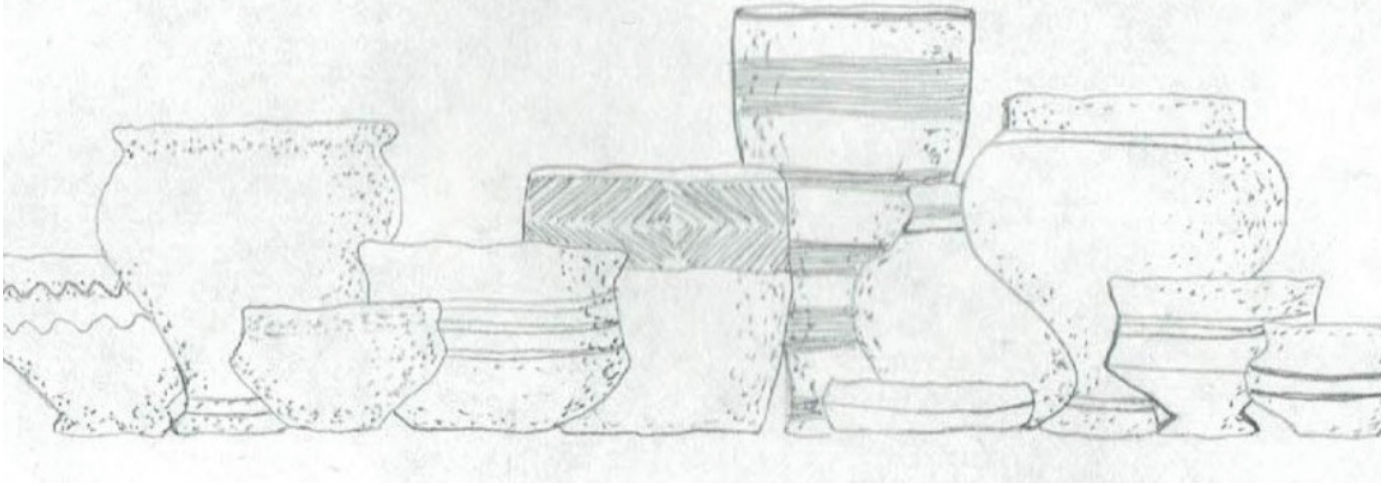
What are believed to be corn driers were discovered at the settlement. They are a typically Roman feature in this area as part of Roman large-scale corn production, which provides yet another example of the influence of the Romans.

There is a lot of ambiguity surrounding the identity of the inhabitants, or even if there were different sets in different periods of the settlement's history. While they may have been British, rather than hailing from Rome itself, the influence of Roman culture, practices and architecture are undeniable, and the settlement provides a perfect example of how Roman influence changed Britain over time. Therefore, separating the inhabitants into either Celtic or Roman may be counterproductive; instead, perhaps we should consider Romano-British culture as a unique and separate creation of cultural syncretism.



RESEARCHED BY:
EMMA
WILLIAMS
ANNABEL
LEDGARD
ADI
CHALLAPALLI

Who lived there? Rich or Poor?



Rich

The first indication of wealth is the size of the barn. This would have been a large, imposing building and larger than the typical aisled buildings found in this area. While there appears to be a lack of possessions in the barn, a rusted iron artefact could indicate otherwise. The artefact resembles a Roman-style key, which suggests that valuables could have been stored somewhere on the site. The other hint at wealth is the presence of window glass. This would suggest that at some stage the inhabitants or owners of the building were quite wealthy.

Despite the large amount of cheaper pottery found, a shard of Samian pottery was also found. This is more expensive pottery from abroad, possibly from Italy or France, which could indicate that the inhabitants were wealthy.

The barn is located near to the River Avon and the Fosse Way, making it perfectly located for trade. In addition, rich Romans lived away from cities to avoid noises and smells, which mirrors the location of this site.

Poor

Most of the pottery is cheap, locally sourced greyware, which would have been widespread across the Roman Empire and dates from 70 AD

Unusually, no coins were found. While this could suggest lower status, other factors make this is unlikely. Furthermore, the abundance of pottery could imply that pottery, not coins, were used to trade, so the absence of money does not necessarily indicate a lack of wealth.

One explanation for the lack of coins is that the inhabitants fled, taking their money and valuables with them. This could be explained by the unrest in the Roman Empire, especially as the settlement fell out of use in around 350 AD. However, there is evidence that livestock died in a pen, contradicting this interpretation. Livestock, as well as land and farm supplies, suggest the inhabitants had some wealth, as livestock could have been purchased for slaughtering or other luxuries that the animals could provide.

From the size and location of the barn, the Samian pottery, and the presence of livestock, it is possible that the inhabitants of the barn had some wealth. Although the lack of coins is unusual, there may be another explanation for their absence apart from low status. A final possibility is that the building was owned by a wealthy citizen but inhabited by poor farmers or even slaves.

RESEARCHED BY:
EMMA
WILLIAMS
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LEDGARD

Who lived there? An interpretation

Immediately after our study day in June 2019, some of our students wrote up their findings. Here are the thoughts of Emma Cooley who was in Year 12.

A few metres from the Roman building, there is a pit filled with animal bones, which appears to have served as a place in which to deposit rubbish. This indicates that whoever lived here may have had access to animal products and it would be interesting to discover what type of animal bones these were, as further research is carried out.

Decomposition of bones such as these depends on several factors, such as: exposure to the air; acidity of the soil; humidity; the role of insects; and temperature. Indeed, soil conditions greatly affect decomposition. If conditions are humid, bones can decay quickly, but if dry they can endure for hundreds of years. Interestingly, the soil in this area is fairly humid and acidic. It could be logically concluded, therefore, that the animal bones found should have decayed long ago. However, the presence of a ditch close to the pit has had an interesting effect on the soil. As the ditch is located beneath the water table, the soil near the pit has become waterlogged and thus hindered the process of decomposition through a limited supply of oxygen. Thus, animal bones remained in the soil.

This opens up a number of possibilities regarding the lack of human bones found at this site. These bones may have since decayed or alternatively they may have been buried elsewhere, further away from the barn. This is possibly the more likely option as it would be a little peculiar to bury humans near to animals, and perhaps there is a burial ground further away from the building.

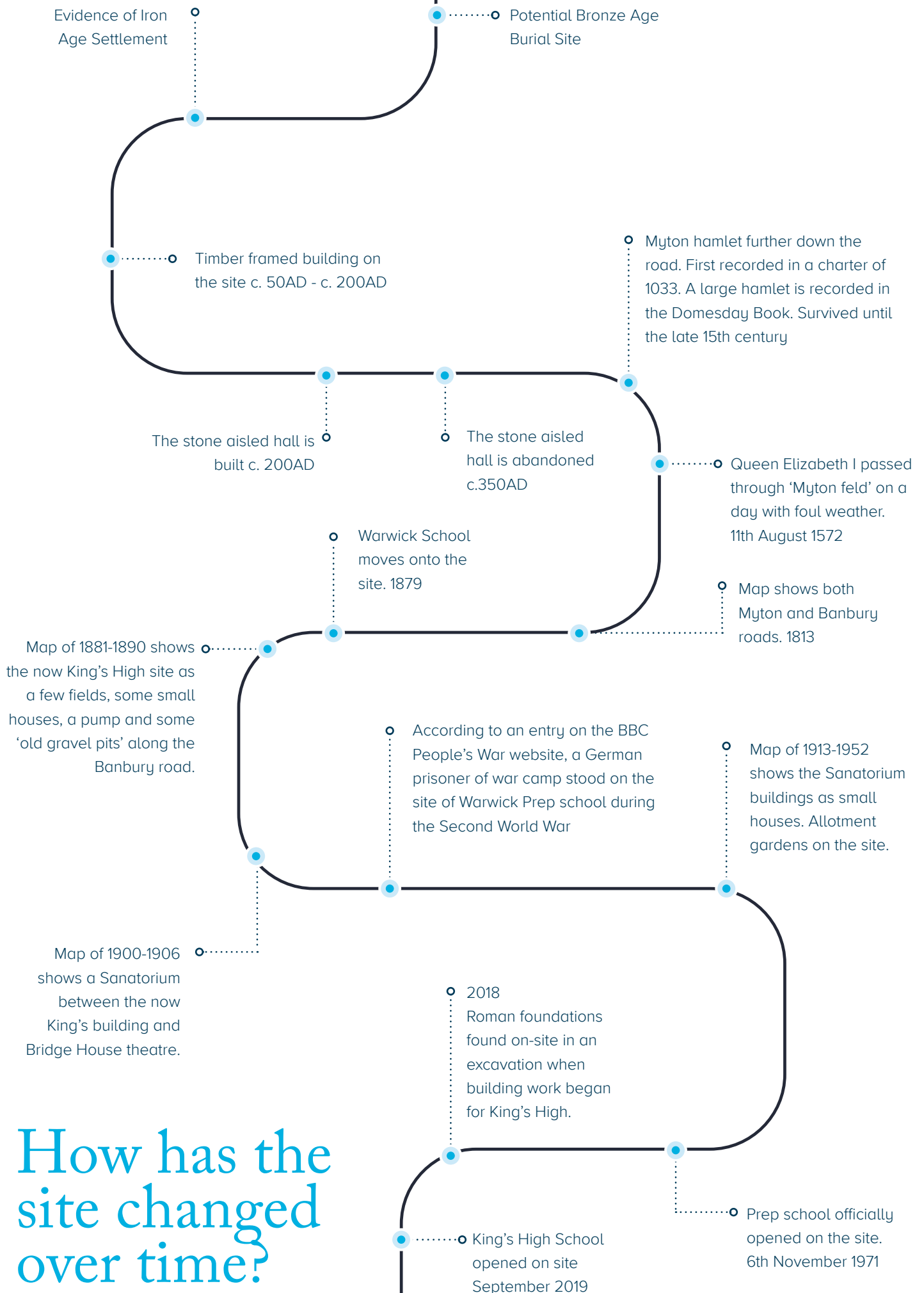
This building is constructed in a style typical to Roman Britain. Animal bones have been found inside it and the most frequent suggestion is that it was a barn. However, traces of plaster have also been found inside it – on the only part of wall which survived to a reasonable height, which suggests that it may have contained living quarters. There are also remnants of window glass, which would seem irregular for a place of food storage and – again – indicate potential living quarters, rather than the simple function as a barn.

Of the many pieces of pottery found here, there have been no discoveries of any decorative pots (except for one single shard). Indeed, by far the most common type of pottery found here is so-called 'greyware', of which the material originates locally – from Wappenbury. This suggests that the inhabitants may not have been particularly wealthy. On the other hand, another factor to consider is the highly unusual and conspicuous absence of any coins, despite a thorough search which the archaeological team made with a metal detector. As well as this, there is also an interesting lack of valuable objects. This may indicate either a coin hoard elsewhere in the area or possibly that the inhabitants fled, taking valuables with them.

Another factor which might contradict the idea that these inhabitants had few valuable possessions is a very rusted iron artefact. This artefact greatly resembles a Roman-style key, which indicates that there may have been things on this site which were considered valuable by its inhabitants. Whether they were materially or sentimentally valuable is uncertain.

Another element of interest is the altar (to unknown gods) which has also been found on the site. This is very rare, as only 4% of agricultural settlements contained shrines. This presence of a shrine could indicate that the inhabitants were particularly pious, or perhaps even that they wished the gods to protect whatever they considered valuable enough to warrant a key. Unfortunately, this is all purely speculation and we will probably never know, but it is these gaps of knowledge which make the past so interesting to think about.

By Emma Cooley.



How has the site changed over time?

Interpretations from students

During their Year 7 history lessons, students have been given the chance to consider the evidence we know about the barn and reach their own conclusions.

Overall, I think that the Roman building that was found on the Kings High foundation was a slave house. It was built by a rich merchant and the house was used for slaves to eat, sleep and work. I know this because in recent discoveries it has been told that the house was 28m long by 14.5m wide. The house was huge and only someone wealthy could produce such a large building. In my opinion I think that a slave house would be a suitable explanation to all the findings because in the text it says the majority of pottery that was found was from a poorer quality, no coins were found which suggest that the slaves were very scarce in wealth. No bracelets, rings and bangles were found which gives us an image that the slaves worked hard or lacked in abundance of money. I think that the slaves worked on harvesting corn because in research two kilns were found, one inside the building, one outside and they were used for hard and drying crops. The slaves also worked on making clothing for themselves because they were so poor. I know this because loom weights were found which were used for spinning cloth and a needle was discovered and it was used for sewing ~~rather~~ rather than a hairpin. In conclusion I think that a rich merchant created the house and slaves worked there due to different facts.

This is a wonderful, thoughtful response Annie. You have clearly thought carefully about the evidence and links and used this to reach your conclusion. Well done!

The Roman Building that was found on this site I believe it could be:

- A slavery quater as items that were found were quite poor and random. There was an extra building found next to it and clay ovens that could have been used to make presents for the family. They also found a needle which could have been used to create or fix clothing items. However they did find a key and why would you have a key if there was nothing expensive to hide.
- It could have also been a merchant/s living in there as there were things you would use to make items with such as: needles, clay ovens, alter and other items. So this would suggest they were merchants. Possibly religious with an alter as well.
- Overall I think it is most likely to be a merchant that is religious making items and selling them. My thoughts sway here because they would be making expensive things so there would be need for a key.

A really thoughtful answer Mae. Good to see lots of references to the smaller finds.

The building found could've been many things had many different uses but we could never know for sure what the use would be as it was used so long ago. It could've been used as farm land since it was a big area it could have been used to grow crops. They found a kiln was also found used to dry corn. This could've been used to dry corn for either eat or sell. If this area was used as farm land that could mean there were farmers living in the area. It could be that the people living there were growing and selling crops for a living. The pottery found could suggest that they were rich but not insanely rich. There were a few bits of nice pottery but most of it was cheaper.

This is excellent Rhia. A very sensible suggestion + firmly based on the evidence!

It is possible that the building was used as part of a villa. It could've been the servants quarters as only a small section was bedding. The building could've been a kitchen (as there were pottery plates there) or a pottery making area (as there was a kiln). The building also could've housed some important things because a key was found and might've been used to lock the door to prevent robbery. To add to that the people living inside might've been religious because an altar was found and there were pillars inside (which might've been put there as a reference to a temple). Expanding on that thought, it could've just been a temple. The people living inside the house might've been a normal family who weren't rich but weren't poor either. This can be suggested by the fact that there were a few bits of Samian pottery (which were quite pricey), but most of it was cheaper. There was no money found which may mean that the people who lived inside monitored what they spent and didn't lose any.

Well done Jessica. This is a really thoughtful answer based clearly on the evidence!

Poetry inspired by the building

Poetry Workshop

In March 2020 Gregory Leadbetter led a poetry workshop which combined looking at the archaeological finds and exploring different types of poetry. The students were particularly taken with fragment poetry based on the remnants of the writing of the Greek poet, Sappho. Here are some of the poems which came out of the workshop.

Fragment

Will they remember us
once our bones crumble into plaster,
our war cries fade to background chatter,
our laughter, relics stacked away to rust?
Will we be scrubbed away and lost,
eroded down to characters,
fables soaked through eras like water
smoothing splintered glass

or will they burn our letters,
stoke our words to char like blisters,
each forbidden oath hacked out and cauterised
as they tear our lives to tatters
and re-stamp their myths in alabaster
with all but fragments robbed by time

By Genevieve Shrimpton Year 13

Such as The Romans

How sublimely serendipitous was the shovel that stopped
There, on the bricks of a bygone building?
Buried beneath what in semblance seemed a field
Lied remembrance of a past long forgotten.
It's rare that I think that, and more often I should.
For I stand on such ground as the Romans once stood.

I inhale the same air through the same human nose -
That they breathed through all those millenniums ago.
I regard the same sky, the same soil, the same grass.
And the line starts to blur between present and past.

Lost are the names and the stories and faces,
Scarcely recalled through their tie to a place in
the earth that preserved them;
As earth often does.
And preserve them far longer
These words, I hope, should.

For when I am long gone,
Will my memory survive?
Or will I be a being to oblivion consigned?
Will our new Roman Barn become memory or stand,
Erect as it is on the same level land?

For, if Kings does not keep,
And rather is kept as a secret of sorts –
Uncovered by the happiest of accidents.
When they dissect each crevice and cranny and nook,
And record all their findings in history books.
Will they know that beneath what beneath them they found,
Was a whole other culture sequestered in ground?

Well, if time does choose someday – to bury our world,
I pray that this poem it somehow conserves.
That the readers of future may know well and good;
That this was such ground as the Romans once stood.

By Rose Agnew 10W

Roman Fragment

the building
width [] river,
tile kiln,
similarity []
[] same
day,
different [] way.

Molly Horton, 8F



Poetry inspired by the building

Sediments

Thick with earth's blood. Succulent with strata. Soaked
with years of sweat and dew.

Imagine, do –

a sediment where every footprint stayed, fungoid
in the soil, herbaceous in its bacciferous growth.

Imagine, do –

which feet have trodden this ground,
which souls have feared, which eyes have seen, which
lives have lived where I now sit and ponder?

Where I wander, and speculate, let my inspirations ferment –
where I now trample soil made rich by the bones
and the rot of ancient men –

where I am now, and say: what power in time is there
that makes the lives of men, which so engrave our earth,
as mystifying as the pebble engraved by the sea? What might
is there that makes nature as unknown to man as his fellow man?

Imagine, do –

with the flow of time, our neighbours' lives become
ground for our neighbours' kin to stand upon.
With the flow of time, the sea erodes the imperfections
of the pebble smooth and round, telling the tale
of its wearing away in elegiac softness.

A mirror – what faces?

A key – what treasures?

A life – what lives?

Such things time steals from us, such things the sea erodes,
what things the soil hides from us.

Imagine, do –

on those trodden sediments, were you to trace your footsteps,
where would they go, which grave would they lead to?

What secrets are there that curiosity cannot reveal?

What mysteries not under wax and seal?

Rosie Brooker, 9G

Altar

] silently
] buried
 in the ground in the hands of god almighty
] bones
] broken
]
]
]
] altar
] broken like twigs broken by toddlers
] centre of religion
 it is [] centre of life

]
]
] mystery
] findings
] fragments
] awe- [] detail
] sandstone
] depths of inspiration
] partition
]
] wealth
]
]
] lead rolls
]
] lost but
 found
]
] diminutive fragments
] trade
 but not wealthy
]
] happened?
]
] gods watch from the heavens
]
] them in themselves
]
]
] bones buried
] find more?
] knows?
] searching
]

Jess Worth, 9G

The absence of clues

] the absence of clues
] ancestry
] similar
]
] followed unknowingly
] years over
] seemingly simple nature
] worn away
]
] they found their hiding
]
] they didn't want us to

Laura Barnes, 12G

Mirror me

with an opening line from Gregory Leadbetter
 The brain is a pattern-finding organ
 deciphering the conundrums of history.
 Mirrors found in subterranean depths,
 clinging to a perplexing past of mysterious means.
 Tall and mysterious, he stares into gold and emerald fields,
 the smell of drying corn on his destitute clothing.
 Further down the bends of time, the wealth of his family grew:
 greyware and Samian bought for perennial use, and now
 in a modern dawn we stand in his tattered shoes
 deciphering the place he once called home.

Hope Brotherhood, 9G

'As the Romans'

Liz Middleton was commissioned to produce a piece of artwork to commemorate the presence on our site. *As the Romans* was unveiled in 2022 and adorns the side of our reception which stands on the site of the Roman stone building.

Liz Middleton explains the origins and development of this stunning piece of art.



What excited you most about the project?

What was exciting was the idea of making a connection between two things that were familiar and inspiring to me; the effervescent spirit of King's, which I had come to know through the commission of the school's landmark sculpture, and the spirit of the Romans. Through my study of art and stone carving, I knew some ideas and skills of the Romans are unsurpassed even today so there would be lots of creative avenues to explore.

Did the fact that so little is known about the building and the people living there make designing a memorial harder?

Actually, my impression was that we knew rather a lot. From the Archaeology Warwickshire workshop I joined we were able to hold pieces of the pots they used, a key, a needle, an altar. We were able to connect to the people living there through these objects in quite a tangible and direct way. I also wanted the work to be less about facts and more about their presence being somehow inspiring to the students as they walked over the barn foundations each day. By contemplating this ancient life beneath our feet we

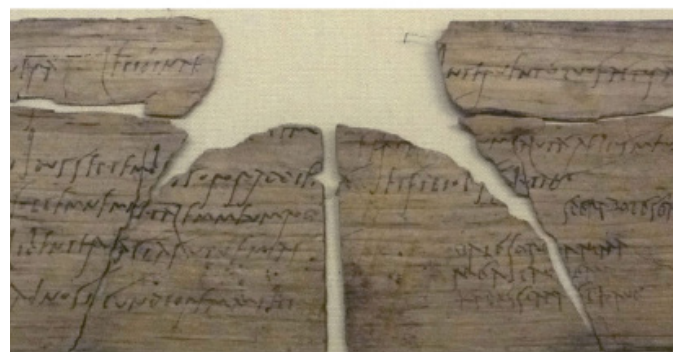
might be reminded how fleeting life is, and how important it is to put things into perspective and make the most of each day's opportunities.

Where did the inspiration for the design come from?

A key inspirational moment for me was touching those small archaeological finds and how holding a needle that someone held and used almost two thousand years ago can dissolve that time between us. Somehow our hands touch and I loved that intimate connection. Similarly, tablets found at Vinolanda near Hadrian's wall that are handwritten with a reed pen and carbon ink from around the same time the people were living in the King's barn, also conveyed to me that immediacy and closeness. I was inspired to use the artform of letters and writing for this reason, and also because the Romans invented the Latin capital letters we use today and were exceptional scribes.

How did you settle on the final wording and design?

The words are from student Rose Agnew's poem "As The Romans". I felt her poem really captured the specificity of the moment of the building's discovery and made a vivid connection between the school today and its ancient inhabitants. I selected a font that was evocative of the Roman ink and reed handwriting and imitates their joined-



Vindolanda Tablet

(C) Creative Commons Fae https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vindolanda_tablet_291.jpg

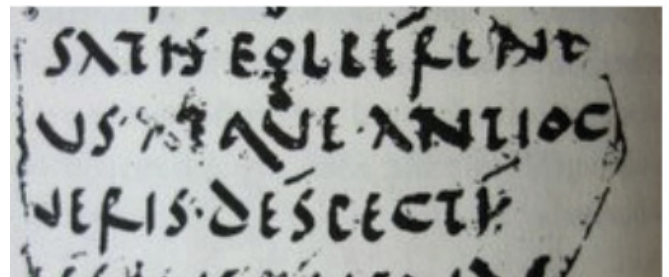
WHEN THEY DISSECT EACH CREVICE
AND CRANNY AND NOOK
AND RECORD ALL THEIR FINDINGS IN HISTORY BOOKS
WILL THEY KNOW THAT BENEATH
WHAT BENEATH THEM THEY FOUND
WAS A WHOLE OTHER CULTURE SEQUESTERED IN GROUND?
THE READERS OF THE FUTURE MAY KNOW WELL AND GOOD
THAT THIS WAS SUCH GROUND
AS THE ROMANS ONCE STOOD

up capital letter forms (known as 'uncial') from manuscripts from the 1st to 2nd century.

The layout was inspired by an image I found of a 2nd century wax and stylus tablet of a child's homework, practising letter writing on ruled lines just like we do today. I felt it was another connection through time and also saw fluid handwriting marks on ruled lines as a metaphor for the creativity and expression of a child supported by the stability of the school.

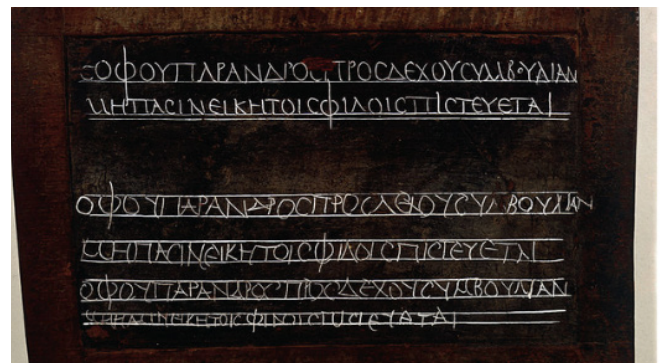
What was the biggest challenge you faced in realising the design?

I suppose the biggest challenge in any project like this is drawing together the different threads of inspiration and information to take the project on its journey from first thoughts to reality. There are often lots of different people involved with different roles and requirements, lots of different options of what and how it could be and it all needs to be balanced and negotiated to ensure it works technically, financially and most importantly conceptually and visually. But in a way, this challenge is the best bit!



De Bellis Macedonia

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Wax writing tablet 2nd century

(C) Creative Commons [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wax_writing_tablet_\(2nd_C\)_-_BL_Add_MS_34186.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wax_writing_tablet_(2nd_C)_-_BL_Add_MS_34186.jpg)

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