

NORTH WEST CAMBRIDGE

ARCHAEOLOGY



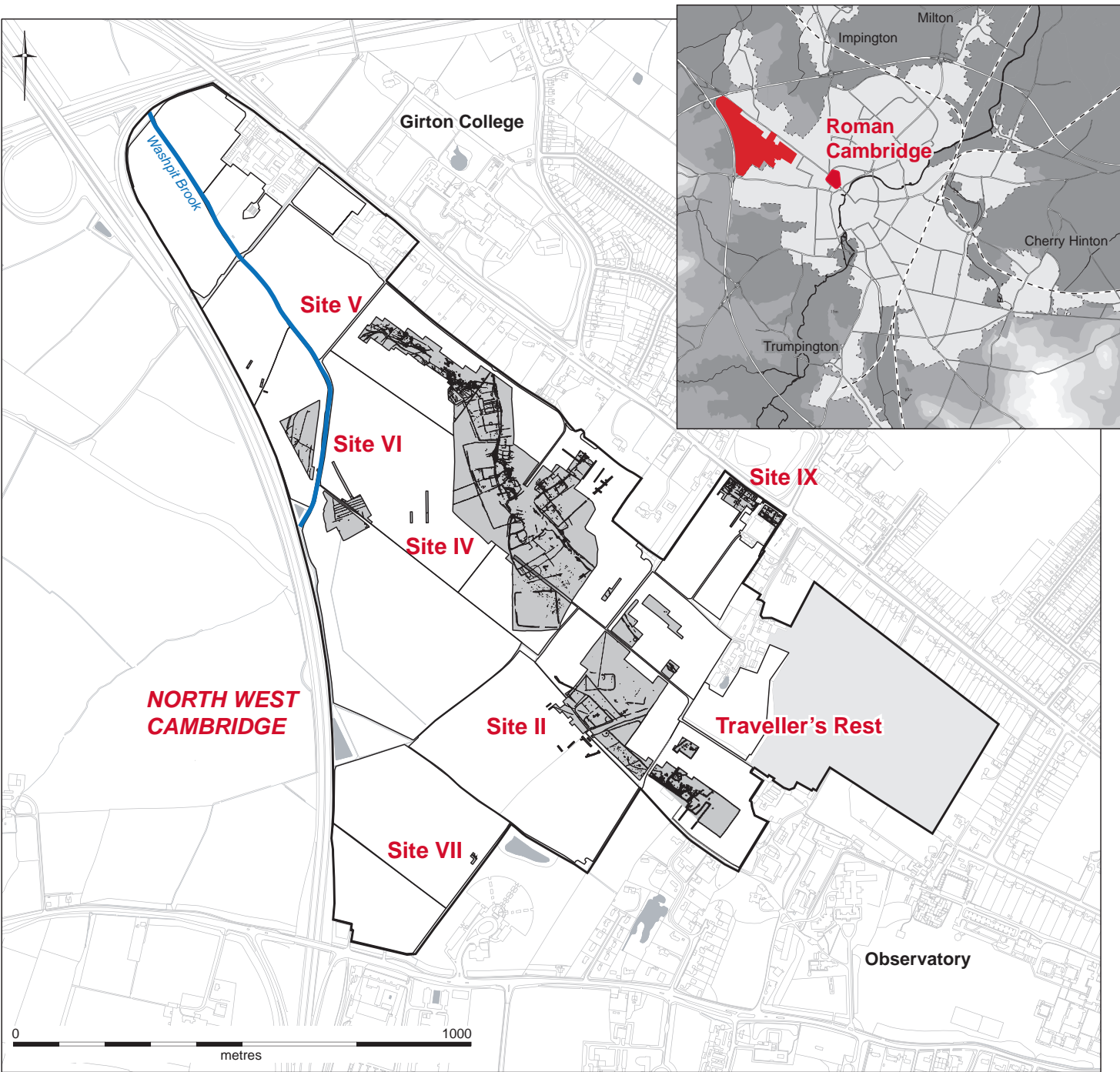
 NORTH WEST
CAMBRIDGE
DEVELOPMENT



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



CAMBRIDGE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT



Inlands and Hinterlands

Occurring over some 20ha and involving nine newly discovered sites, the excavations that accompanied the University's new campus development are by far the largest that have ever taken place within the city.

Distinguishing the sites involved nearly a decade's fieldwork beforehand and drew upon a battery of prospection techniques: fieldwalking collection, geophysical survey and, primarily, the digging of some 15km of trial-trenches on a statistical sampling grid.

The research directives that underpin the programme are two-fold. First, to model the colonization and early settlement-sequence of this inland locale (i.e. off-river valley) and, second, to detail the organisation of Roman Cambridge's western hinterland.

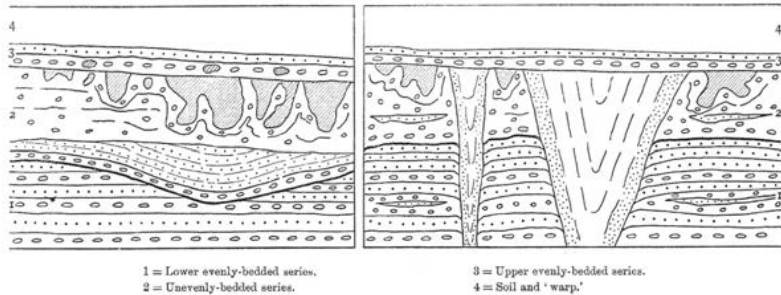
While sites also occur in the low heavy claylands that marks the area's southern side, most lay along the gravel ridge of its northern third. There, the prehistoric and dense Roman remains were almost continuous.

North West Cambridge is destined to become a busy and distinct place in its own right, and this is clearly something it had also been in the past.



Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU): Christopher Evans (text & design), Vicki Herring (graphics & design), Dave Webb (photography; aerial photography by Paul Bailey/Skyhigh). More information, including full site reports, is available at www-cau.arch.cam.ac.uk/NWC.htm.

Digging Time’s Arrow - Earlier Findings



Our fieldwork was framed, at either end of the ridge, by earlier findings. In the first decades of the last century, Prof. John Marr (living nearby on Huntingdon Road) recorded the deep sections exposed within the Traveller’s Rest Pit Quarry. As pictured here in the Sedgwick Museum, he and others (including Miles Burkitt of the University Museum) then collected great numbers of Palaeolithic flint tools from the cuttings and, in its time, it was among the most important ‘Early Man’ sites in Britain.

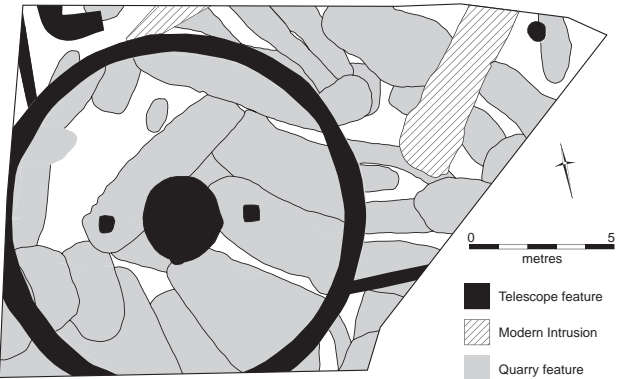
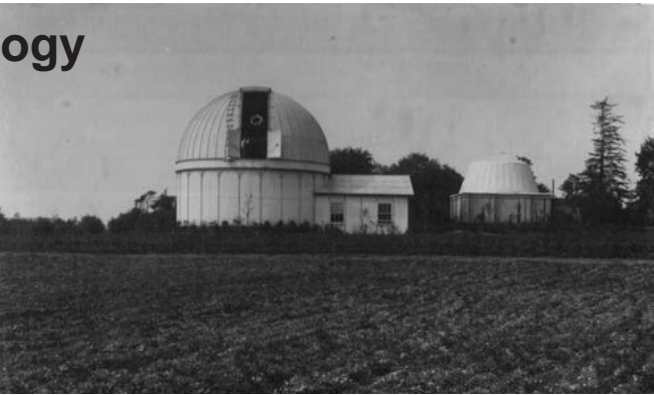
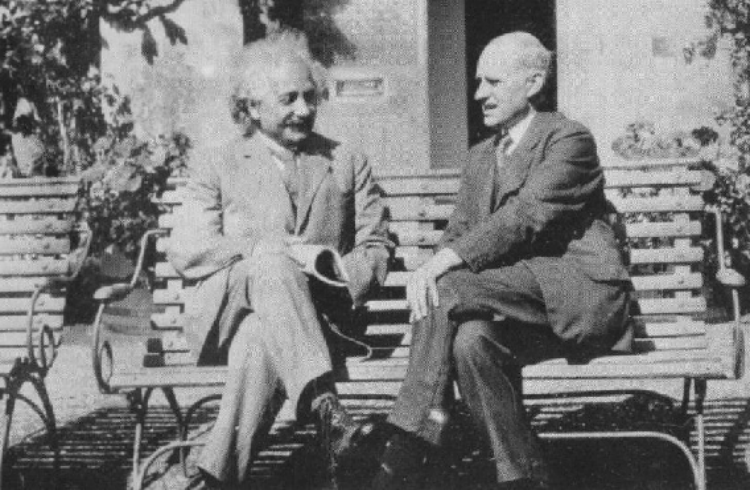
Earlier, in the course of mid 19th century quarrying there, rich Roman burials had been unearthed, including two in stone coffins, with one accompanied by fine imported glass vessels.

At the far, western end of ridge, in the last decades of that century a large Anglo-Saxon cemetery was excavated in the grounds of Girton College. Rather surprisingly, no contemporary settlement remains occurred within our excavations on the opposite side of the road. However, a few very rich Roman burials also present within that cemetery and there were pits with fragments of Roman sculptures, both of a lion and a man. These are rare and remarkable pieces, and probably once adorned either a mausoleum or a temple. Given the findings from our Site IV Roman settlement (opposite the College), the two were surely interconnected and, together, had been part of major Roman roadside settlement at Girton.

Eddington and Telescope Archaeology

The naming of the new campus settlement directly stems from the CAU’s 2010 investigations in the grounds of the University Observatory. There, digging a dense series of Late Medieval quarry pits (backfilled with Roman and Iron Age finds), this also exposed the circular foundations of the Newall Telescope that had been erected there in 1889. Earning the title of an ‘Imperial Philosophical Machine’, in its heyday it was actually the world’s largest telescope. (In 1955 it was dismantled and moved to Athens, where it still serves on Mount Penteli.)

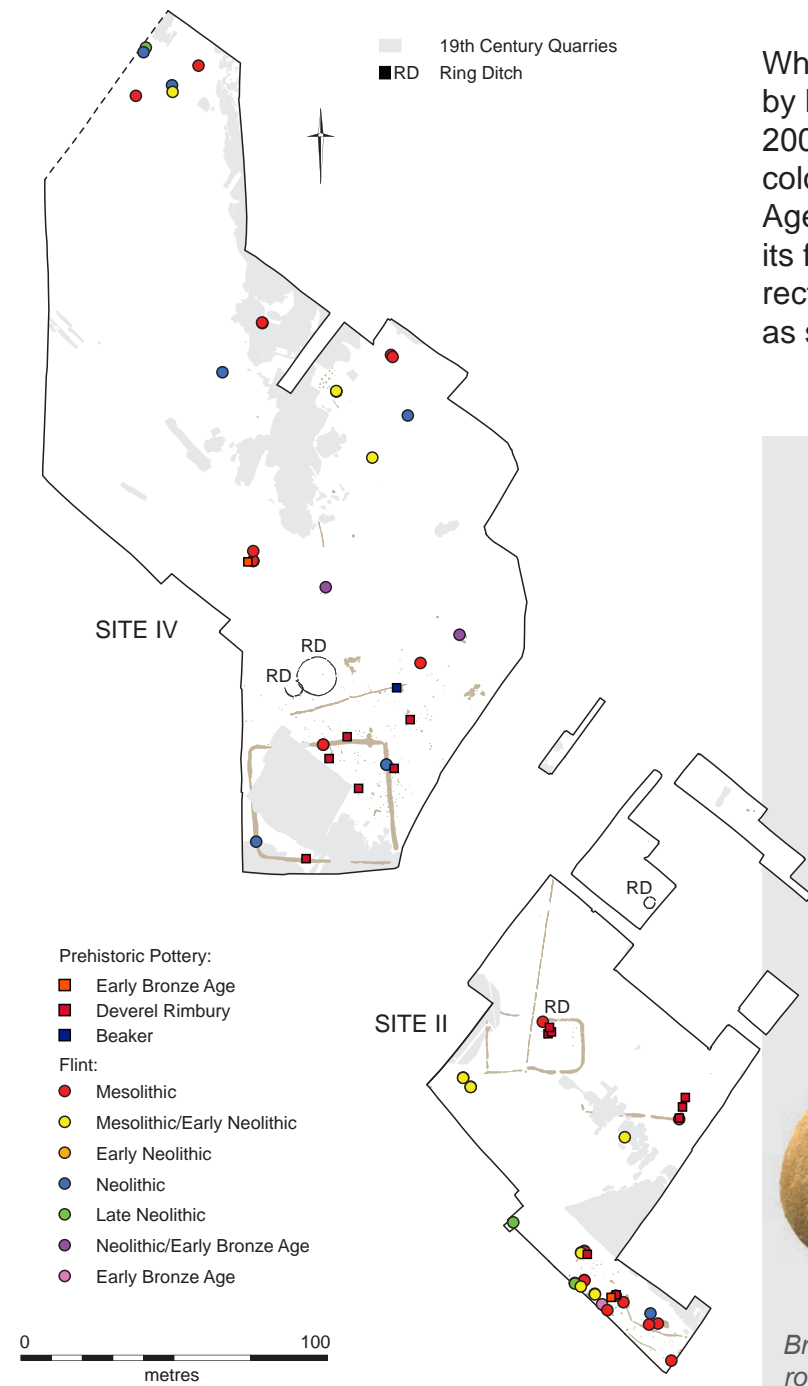
The Newall Telescope would have been used by both Professors George Darwin (Charles’ son) and, then, Arthur Eddington. Eddington had been the Observatory’s director since 1913. His greatest claim to fame was in 1919 when he recorded a solar eclipse from the Island of Principe, off West Africa, which was done to prove Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity. Entirely successful, the photograph below commemorates their eventual meeting at the Observatory, 11 years later (Eddington right).



Traveller’s Rest worked flint within the Sedgwick Museum (photograph, Dan Pemberton)

A ‘machine to see further’: 1934 photograph of the Newall Telescope, (top); below, plan and photograph of the 2010 excavations; left, Einstein and Eddington’s 1930 meeting at the University Observatory.

Prehistory - Staking Land



While earlier seeing camping/foraging stays by Mesolithic and Neolithic groups (c. 8000-2000BC), this landscape was only really first colonized and settled in the Middle Bronze Age (c. 1500-1200BC). By then cleared of its forest cover, they constructed a series of rectangular paddocks to pen their cattle. But, as shown here, they also raised a number of

low-mounded, circular-ring monuments to commemorate their dead (associated with cremated remains) and, in effect, to stake the land. That said, the area's usage then appears to have only been seasonal and largely pastoral.

There was continuous settlement throughout the later Bronze and Iron Ages. Marked by roundhouses, pit-wells and raised granary set-

tings, the area was occupied on a year-round basis by mixed farming communities. By the Late Iron Age (c. 100BC to AD 50) there were three separate farmsteads within the area and these holdings evidently continued into the Early Roman era. Certainly, since the mid second millennia BC until the end of the Roman era in Britain (c. AD 400), these were densely settled lands.

Site IV ring-ditches



Bronze Age finds (from top); flint arrowhead, bronze spear point and stone macehead



Roman Settlements

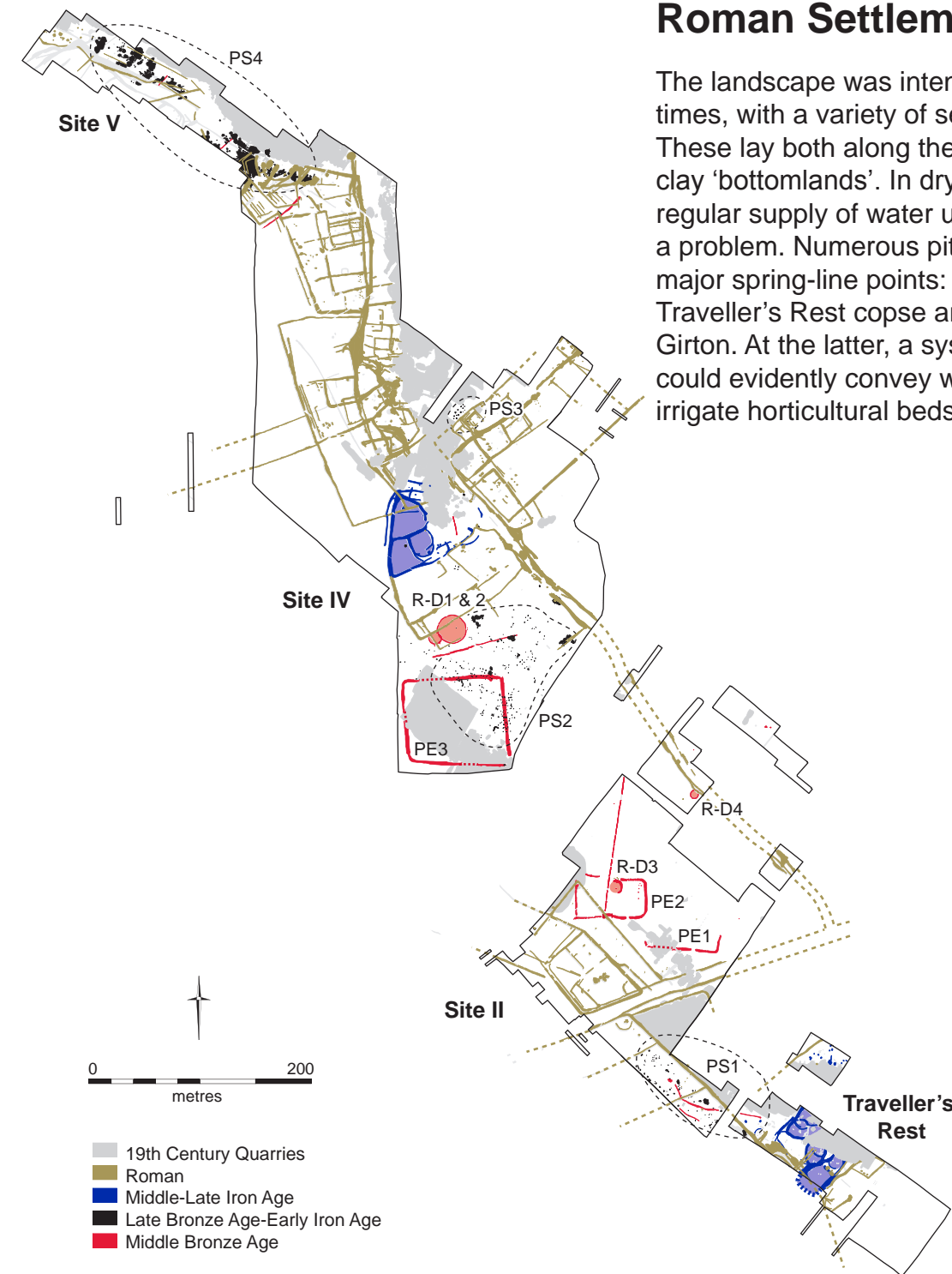
The landscape was intensely utilized in Roman times, with a variety of settlements present. These lay both along the ridge and down on the clay 'bottomlands'. In dry summer months the regular supply of water upon the ridge was clearly a problem. Numerous pit-wells had been sunk at major spring-line points: in the southeast by the Traveller's Rest copse and, in the north, opposite Girton. At the latter, a system of feeder ditches could evidently convey water from the wells to irrigate horticultural beds downslope.

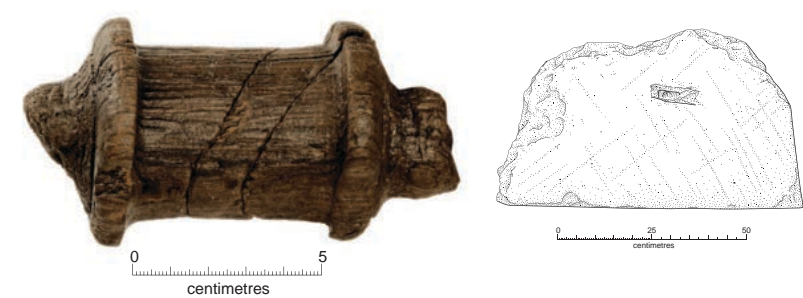
The landscape was organised around a network of roads; one ran along the ridge, with route of the Via Devana (to Godmanchester) lying just south of today's Huntingdon Road. Arranged around still another road in the south, our Site II amounted to something of a 'model' Roman farmstead and included a corn-drier. That farm appears to have gone out of use by the late 2nd–early 3rd century AD. The basis of the area's agricultural production may then have changed, being largely taken over by Site VII in the south. This location was only test-investigated, but by the quality of the finds and

building materials recovered (mosaic pieces and window glass, etc.) it certainly involved a high status residence and probably a villa.

Four cemeteries were associated with the ridge-top settlements. That at Site II only had cremations, with Site IV having three separate cemeteries: two of mixed burial rites and another with just inhumations (this change in burial practise occurring in the later 2nd century).

Roman and later Iron Age ditch systems at the Traveller's Rest Site



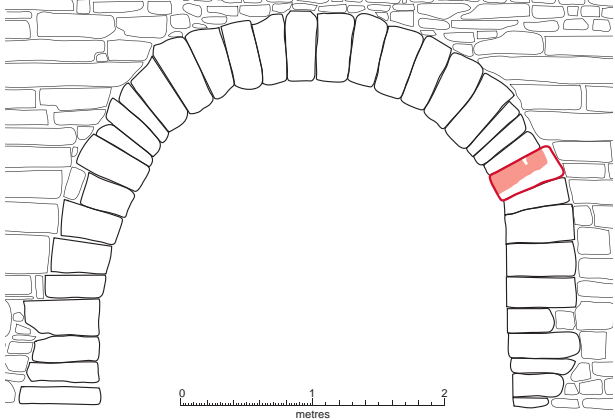


Cremation urn-group (top); clutch of coins found in a well – lost purse or hoard? (middle); lathe-turned furnishing (bottom)

Lasting until the end of the Roman era in Britain, Site IV was clearly a significant place in its own right and may well have been directly linked to Girton College’s Roman finds (burials and sculptures). Though its main buildings must lie under the modern Huntingdon Road-side frontage and could not be excavated by us (they were probably destroyed in 19th century quarrying), there were signs that this was settlement of considerable rank/status. Aside from mosaic fragments, it included some large building stones and even one from a massive arch (spanning 3m; below). Perhaps most telling, within the site’s waterlogged wells, which included a wealth of organic materials (e.g. worked wood and leather shoes), was a lathe-turned furnishing. Made of Mediterranean oak, this was probably from an imported chair.

A few items of Roman military equipment were also recovered. While likely to come from Roman Cambridge’s garrison, here they may have only occurred as scrap metal since ironworking was practised at Site IV in later Roman times.

Surprisingly in the light of Girton’s cemetery, no evidence whatsoever of Saxon occupation was forthcoming.



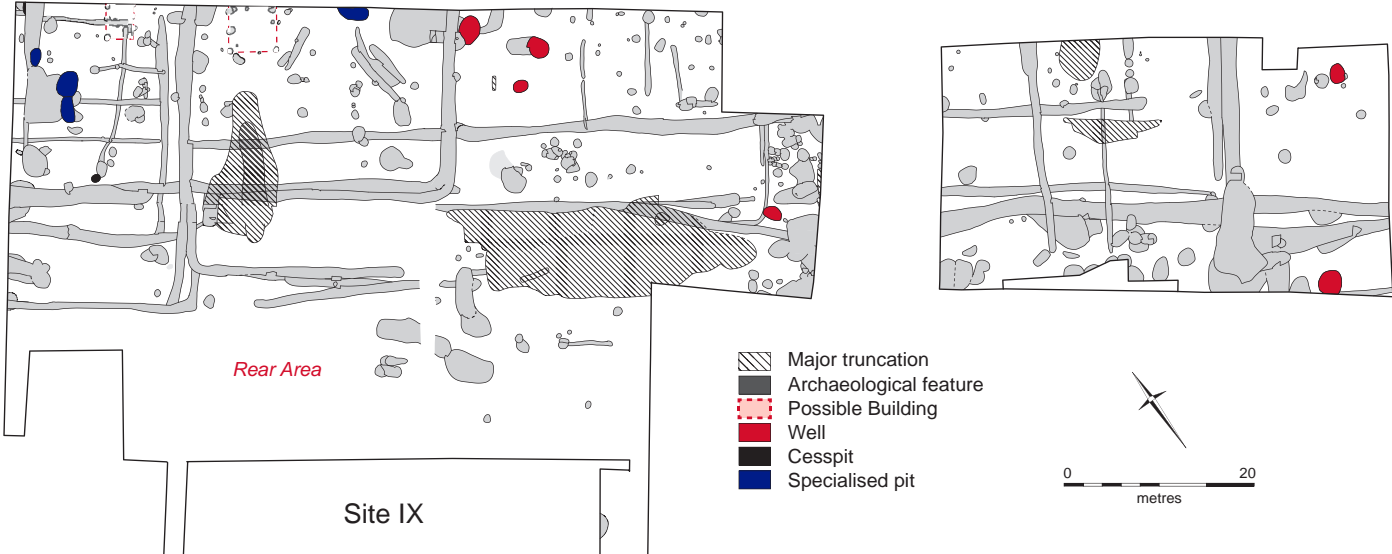
Tile-lined surface (with mosaic fragment) in base of a well (top, left) and, below, building materials recovered from Site VII; right, timber-lined well (top) with dowelled plank (middle) and, bottom, a leather shoe



Howes - A Medieval Travellers' Rest

Although known from documentary sources, the scale of the remains of the Medieval settlement of Howes – lying beside Huntingdon Road (and immediately east of the Travellers' Rest Pub) – exceeded all expectations. The artefacts coming from its dense network of ditches and pits were distinct on a number of accounts. Not only did horse remains dominate its animal bones, but there was a high frequency of mussel shells (as opposed to the usual oyster) and, atypical of the South Cambridgeshire Medieval rural settlements, its pottery featured Huntingdonshire Fen Sandy Wares.

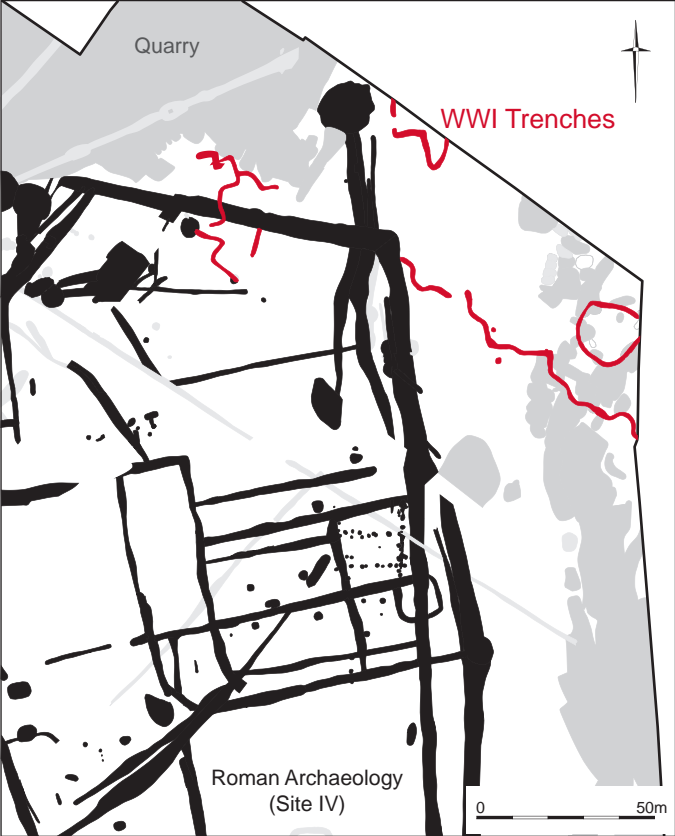
The very existence of Howes is unusual and key would seem to be its location. Straddling the parish boundaries of Girton, Impington and Cambridge St Giles, and lying just 1km out of town, it was probably the last stop for drovers delivering livestock to Cambridge's markets (and somewhere for both them and other travellers to overnight close to the town, but without having to pay its prices).



Cambridge At War

The western apex-end of our Site IV complex was found to be crossed by a series of narrow zigzagging trenches. Once dug, these evidently saw no use and clearly were wartime practice trenches. Unable to find any direct mention of them in the records, which World War did they related to?

There are, though, newspaper accounts of WWI troop exercises in vicinity. This attribution could be further confirmed by the photograph



here showing New Zealand officers of the time resting on the stoop of the 'Man Loaded with Mischief'. This was one of two Madingley Road pubs that lay on either side of the avenue leading up to the Observatory. Established in the mid 19th century to serve local farm labourers and quarry-men, on its demolition in the late 1950s its unusual pub-sign – a variation on Hogarth's Gin Alley and intended to warn of the evils of drink – was given to the Cambridge Folk Museum and where it still is displayed.



Public Initiatives

The programme included a major outreach component, involving regular site tours, a schools' visits week, a dedicated public-participant excavation and major open-day events (one with Roman re-enactors).

We shared the last stage of the excavations with our artists-in-residence, Karen Guthrie and Nina Pope (aka 'Somewhere'). With teams of volunteers, in a plot beside our Traveller's Rest Site, out of cob-mud they constructed an enormous model of the then future development's masterplan (below), which later was partially rebuilt in Kettle's Yard Gallery (lower right).



Mud houses reveal future of life in new city quarter

CHRIS HAVERGAL
Local government correspondent

A GIANT scale model of one of Cambridge's newest developments is taking shape – out of mud.

Artists have spent several weeks crafting the sculpture of the North West Cambridge scheme using earth dug out of the site between Maddingley Road and Huntingdon Road by archaeologists.

When it is complete, it will span 75m in length and stand about 1m tall.

The mud has been combined with straw to form a building material called cob, which is increasing in popularity – and can be used to build entire houses.

So far the artists have mapped out most of the development and built some replica houses plus key buildings including the primary school, hotel, residential, and office blocks.

Work, residents, and businesses have been taking shape. The development will look like – argued computer visualisation – a mix of styles. Residents to be Cambridgeshire public were always a point of interest to the public team was progress but it certainly felt of a different kind if you're relation-different and what like. I'm not saying that but it is – material that is here."

She added: "The main reason we came up with the idea is that we have been working in residency with the archaeology department and we were struck by the sensitivity archaeologists had in working with the soil, and the change in colour working out what had been. They said



BIZARRE: The giant model of the North West Cambridge development takes shape, built out of mud and straw at the site between Maddingley Road and Huntingdon Road.

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