



June update

Excavation summary

We now have all of the detailed information back from the finds specialists and are working on the final report. In the meantime, here are the dig summaries we've written for the on-site information boards.

Prehistoric origins

Excavation revealed a cluster of pits and ditches from the Iron Age, over 2000 years ago and before the Roman army arrived in Britain. The largest ditch seems to have been an enclosure about 20m wide – just large enough to fit one roundhouse inside. It contained fragile pottery from the Middle Iron Age (400 – 100 BC).

It's possible that this settlement was used for hundreds of years, as Early Iron Age pottery (800 – 400 BC) was also found. This is fairly rare and has so far only been found in south Worcestershire. Throughout the Iron Age more settlements became surrounded by ditches, perhaps to protect them or more clearly mark their boundaries. A similar pattern of change may have happened here too.

One of the pits contained a horse leg and the bones suggest that this forelimb was buried whole. Animal limbs, rather than just individual bones, are sometimes found in Iron Age pits and it's likely that these had a special, possibly ritual, meaning.



Geophysical survey (probable archaeology in red) with the location of Trenches 4 & 5

Roman farmstead

The excavation explored just one of the archaeological hotspots across the slopes overlooking the river. Roman ditches and pits were revealed. No buildings were found, but roof tile fragments hint at a large building close by. In some ways, this settlement seems like a typical Roman farmstead. But in other ways it doesn't – an oddly high proportion of the pots are drinking vessels and a fragment of expensive window glass were found.

Yes – glass windows were available in Roman times! Only if you had lots of money though. This is just the 3rd site in Worcestershire where Roman window glass has been found. One of the other sites is in Offenham, just over the river, so perhaps it was a case of keeping up with the neighbours?

When?

Finds from the excavation date throughout the Roman era (AD 43 – 410). However, this settlement was in its heyday around AD 120 – 200 and used until around AD 300. We know that another hotspot of archaeology – closer to the River Avon (and with its own panel) – was an earlier, Iron Age, settlement. The remaining hotspots may also be of different dates; the result of a small community building new homes across the centuries.

A day in the life

Children running about, wood smoke drifting through the air and the river glinting in the sunshine: the sights and sounds of a Roman settlement here almost 2000 years ago. What was daily life like for those who once called this place home?

Weaving

A never-ending task in many prehistoric and Roman households was spinning and weaving to make cloth for clothes. Excavations here found several loom weights – large, roughly fired lumps of clay used to weigh down threads on a loom for weaving fabric.



Clay loom weight being photographed in Trench 3.

Farming

Animal bones of cows, sheep or goats, a few pigs and possibly a chicken have been found. At least some of these animals lived to be older adults, so were probably kept for their milk or wool. There were also horses or donkeys and evidence of dogs (including gnawing on other bones). Was this a mixed farm? A few wheat grains turned up too – these could have been bought from another farm or grown here.

Metalworking?

Hot, heavy work shaping metal is not a typical farm activity. However, the excavation in 2022 found a few small – and unusual – signs of metalworking: an iron chisel in a style used to cut hot metal and a fragment of what appears to be hearth lining.



Photo of an iron chisel, possibly for metalworking.

Human nature

Since 800 BC, the start of the Iron Age, so much has changed – people’s beliefs, way of life, culture and society. Yet, people in the past were still humans just like you and I: they had loved ones, enjoyed having fun, had their own taste in clothes and food, got grumpy sometimes and had happy days. They were just as intelligent as us, with the same range of human emotions, hopes, fears and personal quirks.

Here are some particularly special archaeological finds that reach across time and allow us to touch the lives of an individual. We may not know their name, but they also have a connection to this land and their own stories to tell.

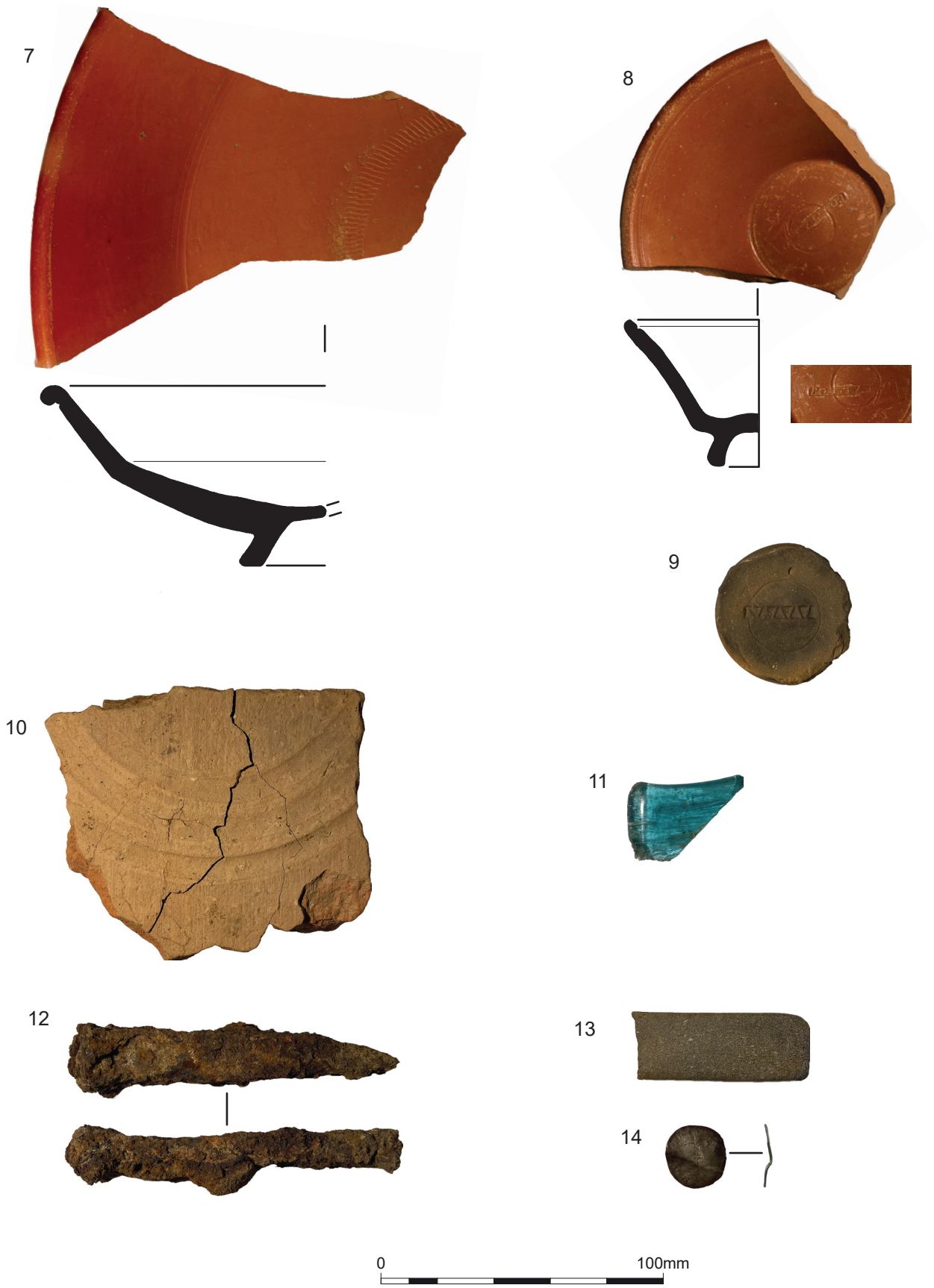
Fingerprints wiped across a Roman roof tile – decoration, a maker’s mark or something else? (Item 10 in picture below)

Boot, shoe or sandal: what did this Roman hobnail come from and who wore it?

Does an Elizabethan love story lie behind this silver coin? Given as love tokens, silver coins bent into an S shape were common during the late 16th and 17th centuries. It’s intriguing to wonder how it ended up here. (Item 14 in picture below)

Hints of the beliefs, traditions or superstitions of people who once lived here can be seen in a cow skull buried at end of a ditch and horse forelimb buried in a pit. These practices were common during the Iron Age, so it is interesting that the cow skull was placed on top of Roman pot sherds – a sign of someone holding on to older ways?

An illiterate potter? This Roman pot base has tried to copy the maker’s stamps used on Samian ware pottery imported from Gaul (France). Instead of their name, just a row of triangles is used, suggesting that the potter couldn’t read or write. (Item 9 in picture below)



Pottery (nos. 7–9), roof tile (no.10), glass (no.11), iron tool (no.12), whetstone (no.13), silver love token (no.14)

Figure 12