



Covington Dig Report 2024

Addendum

Archaeological Evaluation

By Robert Wishart

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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.

Our Covington dig in September 2024 came to an abrupt end when we had a large downpour of rain which resulted in our trenches being flooded and brought that year's activity to a quick and unsatisfactory halt.

Due to what had already been discovered in trenches 4 and 5 it was agreed that they would be left open over the winter and we would return to them in the summer of 2025 to see if we could derive anything more substantial about what they contained.

In this report we intend to complete the analysis started in 2024 and provide a comprehensive report of our findings.

To get a true picture you should also read the 2024 report beforehand

Due to previous problems with our GPS system, we decided that this year's location data would be created using an iPhone positioning system. This can be up to a metre out but still provided a more accurate assignment.

Results and Interpretation

Trenches

Both Trenches 4 and 5 were dug in a North / South direction and run almost parallel to each other

Trench 4

One of the main reasons for returning to the trenches dug in 2024 was to see if we had found a stone wall in the northern pit in trench 4. When we left the site a number of aligned stones had been found but no pattern had been discerned.



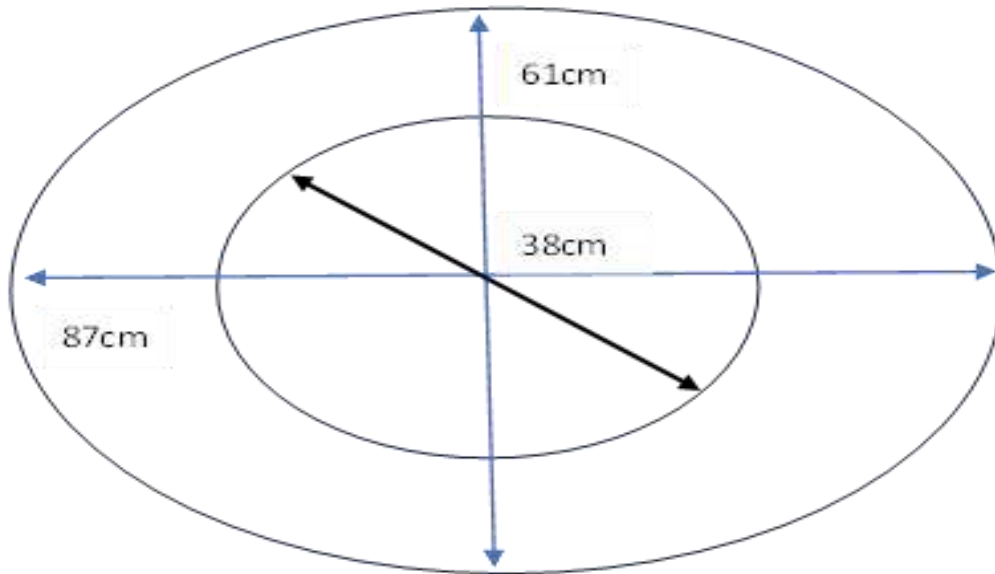
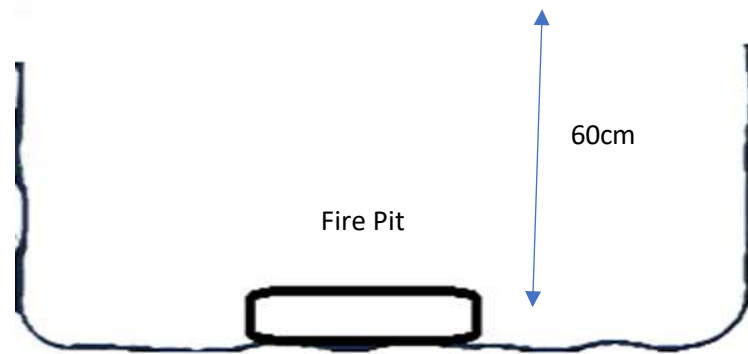
As we started to clean up the site it became clear very early on that we had not discovered a wall. There was not enough material and as we examined more of the surrounding area, the expected corner did not materialise and the stones only seemed to be in the one location.

It soon became clear that what we had found was an in-ground stone fire pit. The centre of which is marked in black on the second version of the photograph.



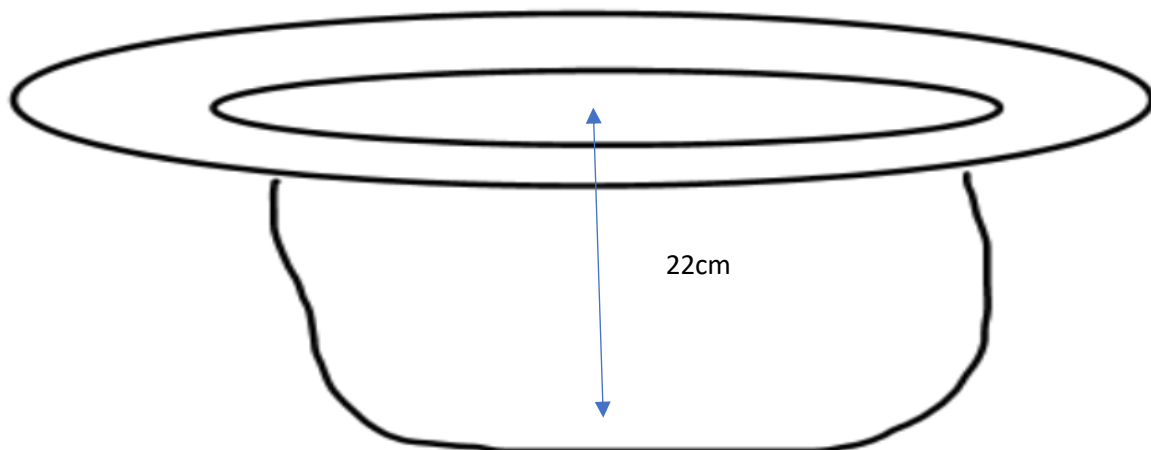
Historically in-ground stone fire pits (or fire holes) were simple, dug-out depressions in the earth, often lined with stones to contain the fire, and were used for warmth, cooking, and protection.

The fire pit was at a depth of 60cm at the northern end of Trench 4. Although some of the stones had come loose the design was very clear.



Looking down on the pit it was not completely circular with the outer rim being made up of stones of various sizes but none of them were particularly large.

As for the depth of the inner circle the centre was found to be 22cm deep.



The one thing that did stand out was that the stones were not blackened having been close to a fire, so it suggests that the fire pit was used for a very short time.

As for dating the find, naturally a group of stones placed in a circular pattern could have been done at any point. So, we will have to rely on the objects found in the vicinity to make any estimate.

But there were still some concerns as there seemed to be more stones in the pit suggesting there was more to it than just a fire pit. We decided to remove the stones and see what lay below them



The different colours of the stones suggest that they were deliberately chosen and placed in this area, there was a real mix with orange and grey stones that must have been brought together rather than occurring naturally.

The sheer quantity of stones means that there must have been something there but the vast majority of them were small stone that can easily fit in someone's hand and are unlikely to form part of a wall, so in truth we are not really any further forward. Yes, the fire pit did exist and when we removed the stones, we did find a piece of marked Samian ware below it (see key finds section) but as to the true function of the area we are still not sure of its purpose.

The total length of trench 4 was 1,311cm or just over 13m the location data was as follows: -

Southern End	On Application
Pit 1	On Application
Extension 1	On Application
Clearing 1	On Application
Pit 2	On Application
Extension 2	On Application
Northern End	On Application

Although there was a minimum depth that covered the entire trench the two main pits were dug with similar dimensions

Following documenting the trench it was formally shut down and filled in.

Trench 5

We quickly decided that there was not a lot to be gleamed from trench 5. It was clear that some of the oldest finds were coming from this trench but it was obvious that Trench 4 had to be the focus we therefore chose to clean up this trench and shut it down as we had done with trenches 2 and 3.

The total length of trench 5 was 1,598cm or just short of 16m the location data was as follows: -

Southern End	On Application
Pit 1	On Application
Extension 1	On Application
Clearing 1	On Application
Pit 2	On Application
Extension 2	On Application
Clearing 2	On Application
Pit 3	On Application
Extension 1	On Application
Northern End	On Application

Finds Summary

One of the key findings during the 2024 excavations was the discovery of most of the pieces of an iron age pot.



One member Ron Grasmeyer took it upon himself to rebuild the pot as much as he could. It was a bit like building a jigsaw without a picture nor all of the pieces but from this activity Ron managed to obtain the main dimensions of the pot.

Through measurement: -

Outside diameter of top rim = 97mm

Outside diameter of neck at top = 76mm

Outside diameter of base = 75mm

Chord length of middle section = 128mm

Segment perimeter of middle section = 150mm

By calculation: -

Outside diameter of middle section = 150mm

Overall height = 130 + 13 + 10 = 153mm

Ron is still working on the pot and although he will never be able to complete it, we hope to have something that can be displayed.

Turning to this year's finds: Teeth/bone dominate volume in Trenches 2-3 (80-81%), but pottery often heavier.

Iron Age/Roman pottery is prevalent (e.g., RSGW, LNVGW, LNVCCW), with challenges in identification leading to many "Romano-British" or unknown.

White pottery (especially Creamware) found in all trenches—unusual, possibly indicating local preference.

But Iron Age finds suggest older site history.

Fire pit in Trench 4 indicates activity, with links to charcoal and clinker.

Minimal Post-Roman Pottery finds overall.

Difficulty identifying pottery, especially small pieces; some heavy unidentified segments.

Key Finds

Possibly some of the most important finds we have ever made were these pieces of what looked like beaker pottery. On one side there are several rim lines and it even showed some signs of burning. The markings on them have been marked by a cord or a toothed tool pressed into the wet clay. As they were very straight it was probably done with some item a bit like a comb as the spaces between them were very equidistant



The inside was smoother but showed signs of inclusions



In terms of its size

Weight: 153g

Length: 12cm

Width: 9cm

Depth: 1.5cm

It was found in the Northern pit of Trench 5

Then shortly after we found a second smaller piece that again had striation marks

This time it was found in the Northern pit of Trench 4 (what we are calling the fire pit)



It had a similar design with the rimmed lines but was a slightly different colour so was probably not part of the same pot.

In terms of its size

Weight: 36g

Length: 5cm

Width: 4cm

Depth: 1.2cm

Then we found yet another piece of pottery with a similar design in Trench 5 this time its dimensions were

Weight: 17g
Length: 2.5cm
Width: 3.5cm
Depth: 0.8cm



Once again, this fragment had the distinctive stripes and inclusions associated with beaker pottery but did not have the same depth or structure as the previous two finds

We took all three items to Oxford Archaeology for an Archaeologist to look at them. Nick Gilmour compared our finds with some Beaker Pottery he had available. He felt that all three pieces were too thick to be Beaker – He liked the striation and the inclusions but the colour was wrong and he felt the lines on the largest piece went North South rather than East West. The lines on Beaker pots go East West as the pots were fairly large and this gave people an easy grip which would not be the case with North South lines. So it was with some disappointment that he said that they were Iron Age roughly 300 – 400 BC

But we should not really be disappointed as they are still the oldest pieces of pottery we have ever found and push the date people were living in Covington back at least another 200 years

Another important find was from trench 4 this was a piece of Samian ware which had the makers mark stamped upon it



Again we approached Oxford Archaeology who provided the following definition

AVENTINIM. Made by the potter Aventinus, who was active c. AD 150-170 at Lezoux (C. Gaul).

"It is a cup, Dragendorff 33, with anepigraphic graffito on the outside base, abrasion all over due to soil conditions, use-wear signs on the foot ring, carination, and also internally which may be as a result of stirring."

The cup fragment was fairly small only 7 cm high and 5cm wide weighing just 29g. The base was 1.5cm deep. The item was found above the stones (fire pit) in trench 4.

Unfortunately, as it was being removed a fragment fell off the cup



It slots nicely back in place with the cup. Weighing just 9g it is 5.5cm tall and 3.6cm wide and is only 0.4 cm thick



We returned to Oxford Archaeology to see if they thought the scratches on the bottom of cup meant anything. Their expert replied –

"Very interesting! Well, it's possible to make an 'A' out of the scratches, but my guess is that the graffiti is anepigraphic, as suggested. I think what the scratches are meant to represent is a complex 'X' symbol. I tend to think that such graffiti are wheel symbols, with the lines representing the spokes of a wheel and the footring representing the wheel rim. Possibly a good luck symbol (wheel of fortune)."

So possibly anyone drinking from this cup would have been granted some form of good luck.

The next item we have included was an animal tooth. This seemed unusual as it was a very long canine. A domestic cat has canines that have about 1cm above the gum and roughly twice that below the gum. In this case the canine tooth is 2cm above the gum so probably had another 4cm below the gum before it was broken.



The total length of the find is 2.6cm and it is 0.3cm wide. A tooth this length would have to have come from a larger animal such as a large dog or wolf but the width suggested a much smaller animal. Again, Oxford Archaeology came to our rescue and identified it as a piglet's tooth.

The last of our key finds is a stone



One of the stones removed from the northern pit in Trench 4 looked like it could have come from a colonnade. It has a flat base and weighs just over 11 kg. It is 20cm long with a 17cm diameter at the base and 23cm diameter at the top. It was the cylindrical shape of this object that really caught the eye as if it had been chiselled into this shape.

Discussions and Conclusions

Once again there were a few key points that came out of this year's dig.

- The Fire Pit showed little sign of use.
- Around the Fire Pit there were a lot of coloured stones that could not possibly have been in situ. They must have been brought to the site on purpose
- We discovered a column shaped item that had a flat base. Could this have been used to display a deity?
- Could these points mean that the pit had some form of religious connotation?
- The Iron Age pots found in the trenches were dated 300 - 400 BC. This means that people were living in Covington 2,400 years ago.
- Stamped Samian ware provided an excellent way of dating our Roman Finds

Recommendations

It has in the past been recommended that we do not pick up small items as they are difficult to identify. This has once again proved to be the case but by having a catch all category such as Romano British we can retain these finds and just occasionally we find something exceptional so it is suggested we continue to pick up small items during a dig if not when fieldwalking.

The Iron Age finds suggest that we may have an even older site than expected in Covington. Is it worth commissioning some more magnetometry in areas which have not been already covered?

When we do find items that we think are special, we need to be more proactive in recording their exact location. We could plant a flag which could be used at a later date to get the GPS co-ordinates.

If we decide to leave our trenches open, we need to ensure we document them before they become overgrown with weeds as this makes the report look messy and difficult to measure.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Trench Photographs



Trench 4 – Looking North



Trench 4 – Looking South

As can be seen by the time we got around to recording the trenches mother nature had started to reclaim them and the weeds were quickly filling in the gaps



Trench 4 – Pit 1 – Northern End



Trench 4 – Pit 2 – Southern End

Both pits have a shallow and deep end at roughly the same depth (Pit 1 (60cm & 80cm), Pit 2 (63cm & 75cm) the maximum depth in each pit being well below the 1m maximum required by our insurance policy.



Trench 5 – Looking North



Trench 5 – Looking South

As can be seen the weeds are much more prominent in the southern end of the trench as digging finished there earlier.



Trench 5 – Pit 1



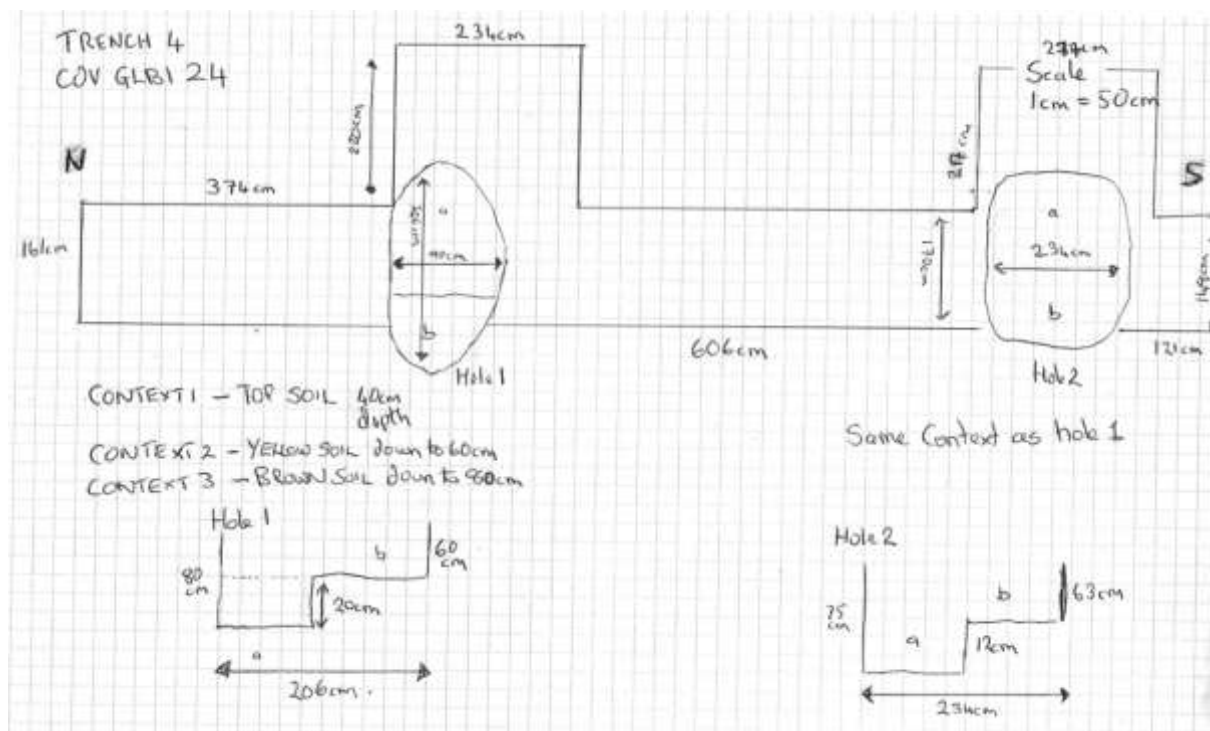
Trench 5 – Pit 2



The biggest Pit (Pit 3) was at the Northern end of the trench and it had a raised extension to the East

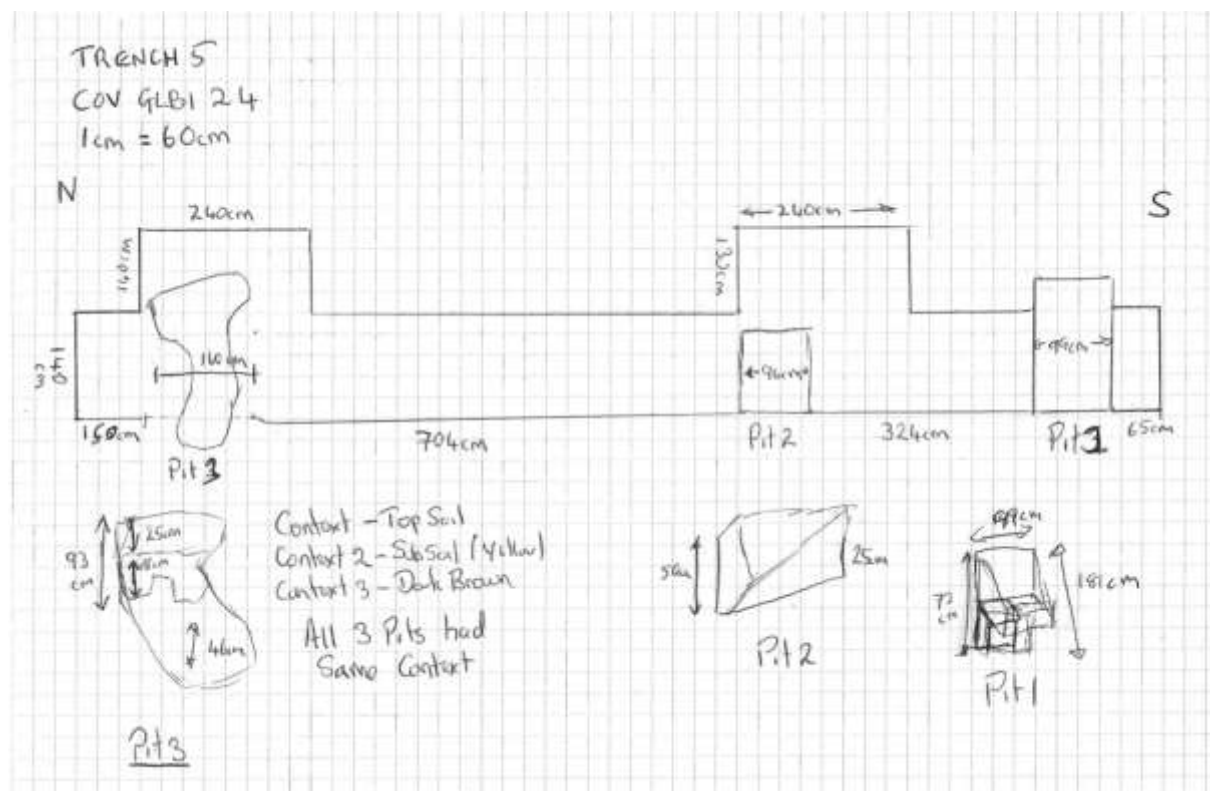
Appendix 2 – Context Graphs

Trench 4



Note – Hole 1 in the above diagram is Pit 1 in the photographs, likewise Hole 2 is Pit 2

Trench 5

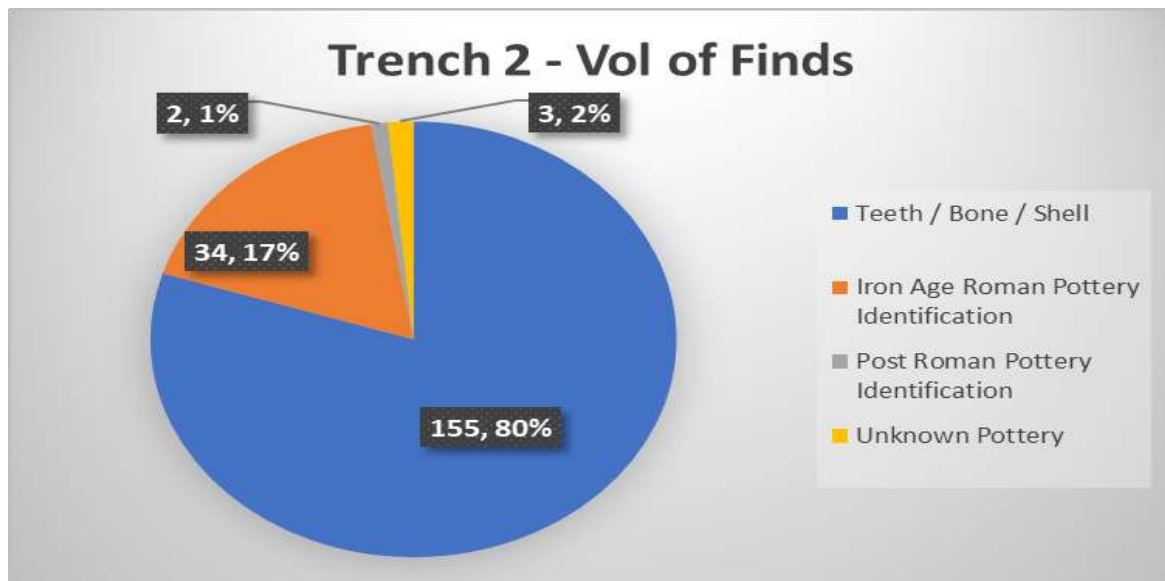


Appendix 3 – Finds Report

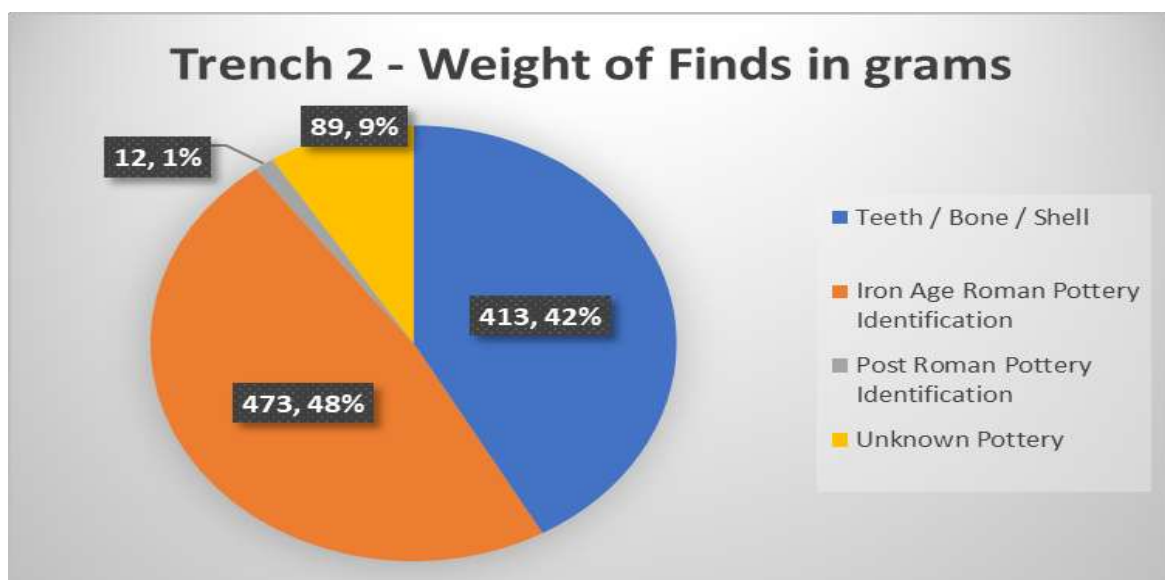
Although this report is about Trenches 4 and 5 there were some items recovered from Trenches 2 & 3 before they were filled in so we will include those findings here.

Trench 2

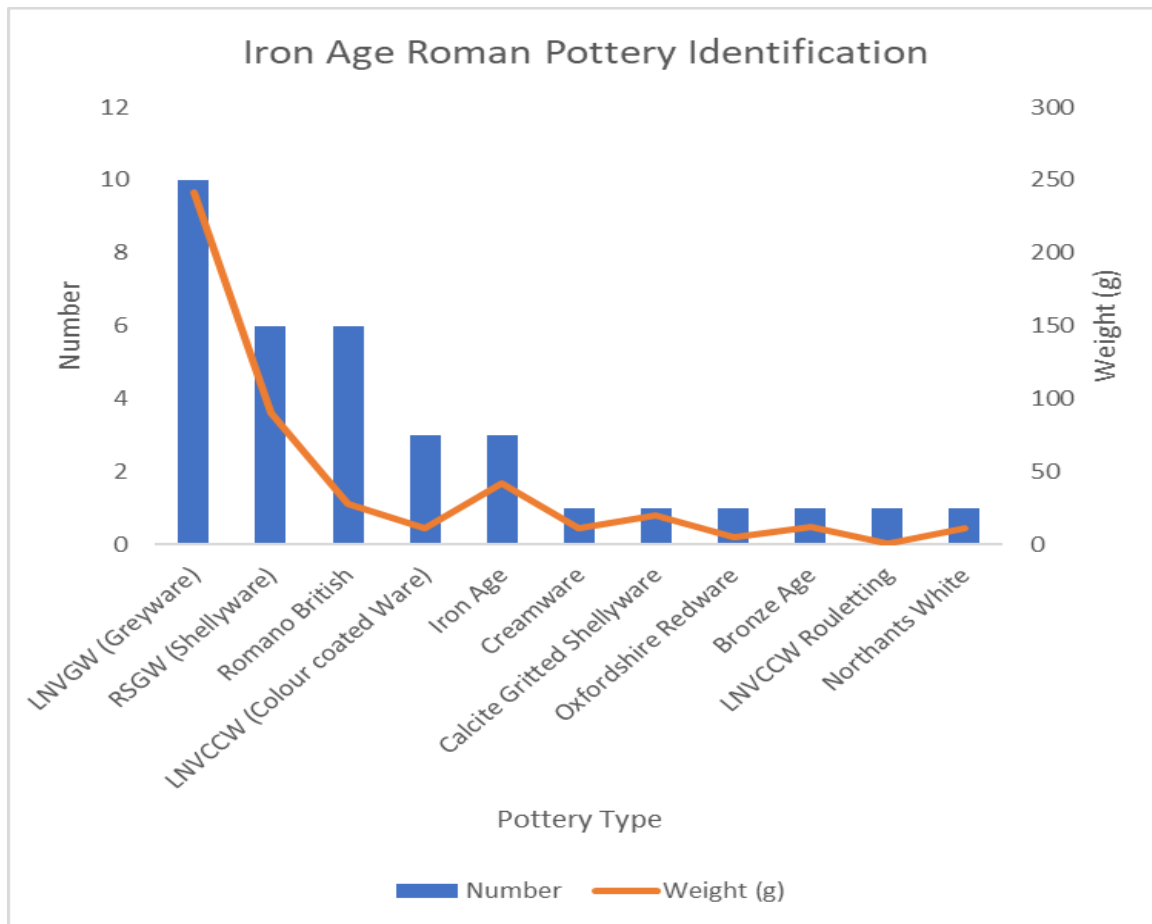
Of the 194 items recovered from Trench 2, 80% of them were Teeth and Bone and only 20% were pottery. The total weight was just short of 1kg. With the bones coming from a number of different animals (44 identified as belonging to a horse)



But in terms of weight the pottery found was much heavier as can be seen 68% of the weight came from pots.



The second biggest group is Iron Age Roman Pottery. Whilst only 34 items they do make up 48% of the weight when we break this down to the individual type of pottery.

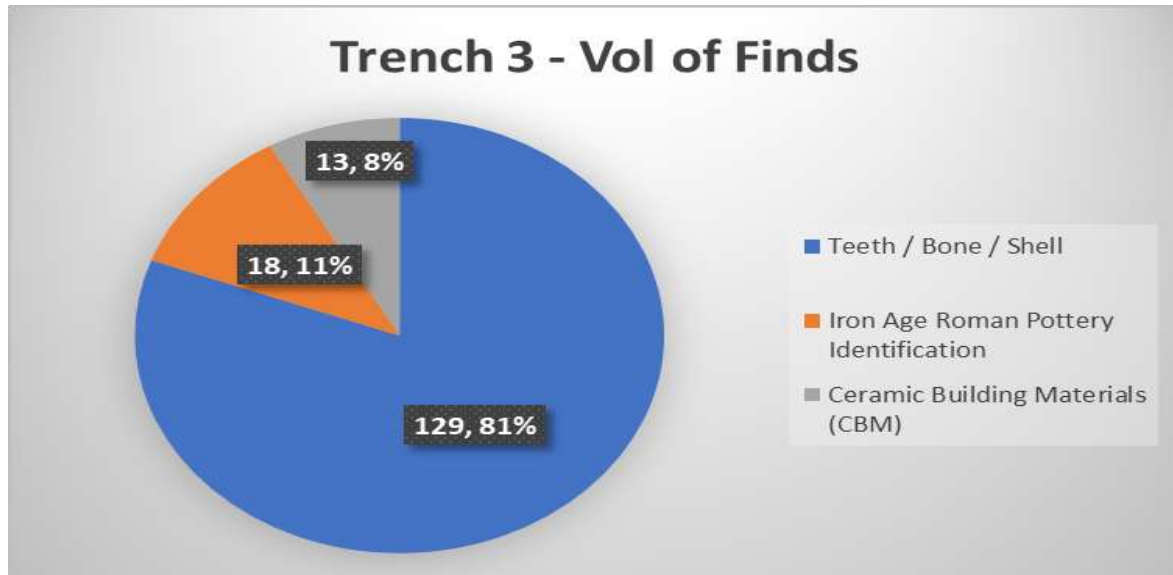


We find that the majority of finds are LNVGW(Greyware) in terms of both volume and weight but it is interesting that both Iron Age and Bronze Age pottery is associated with this trench.

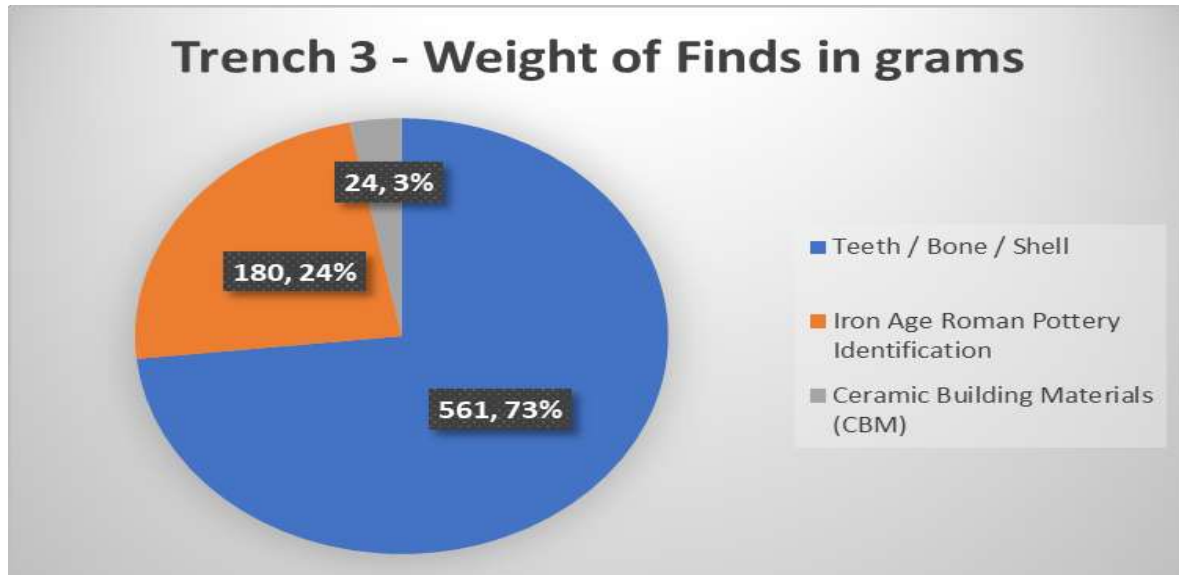
Three items were defined as unknown pottery and two others as Post Roman Pottery (Early/Mid Saxon & Late Med. Oxidised) but neither of these particularly impacted the result.

Trench 3

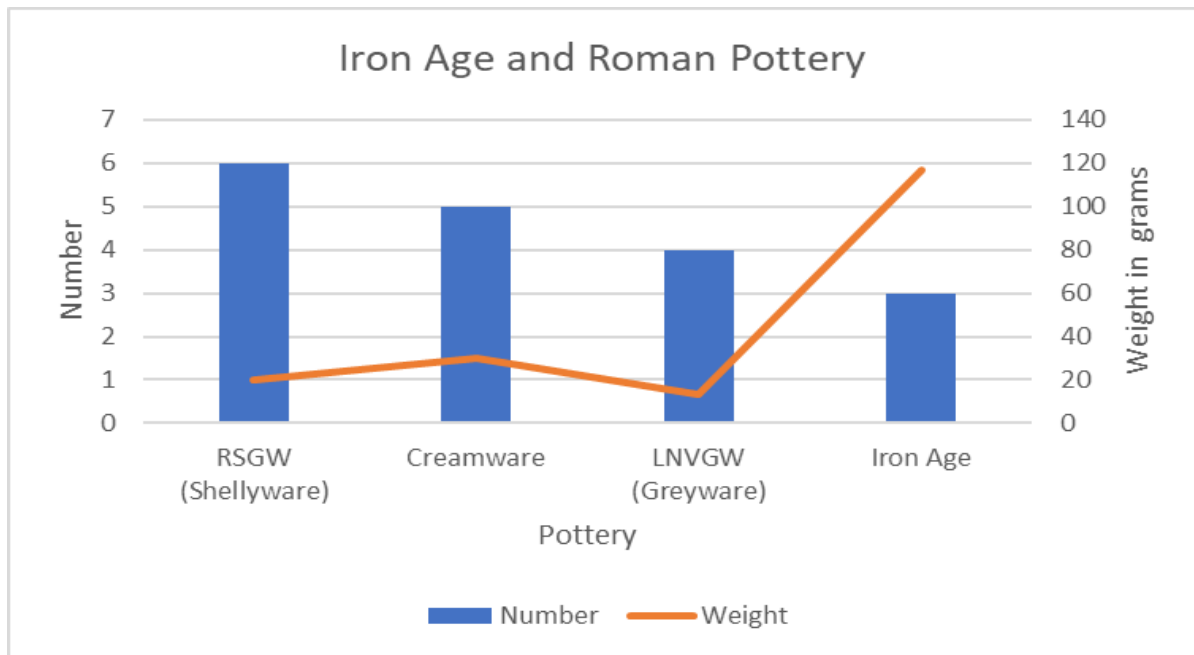
There were 160 items recovered from Trench 3, Once again 81% of them were Teeth and Bone, mainly animal bone, most of the teeth coming from sheep and goat although there was one large bovine tooth. Total weight from Trench 3 was nearly ¾ kg.



In a similar pattern as that seen from Trench 2, we find that the pottery takes up a bigger percentage of the weight but this time it is nowhere near as pronounced. We also see that the pieces of CBM are fairly small as they only take up 24 grams.

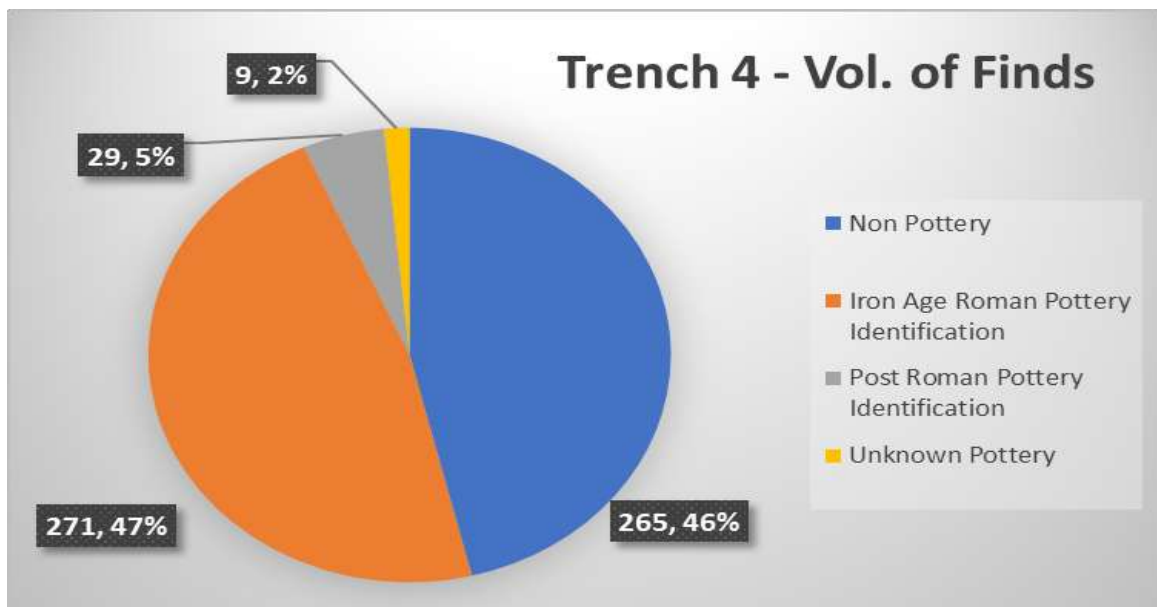


Although only 18 pieces of pottery were found it is still worth showing a graph of there distribution as there are a couple of key points that come out of it. Five pieces of Creamware was found and although only a single piece was found in Trench 2, as will become clear later, white coloured pottery could be found in all trenches. The other point of interest was the weight of the Iron Age finds, this along the older items found in trench 2 may suggest an older history to the whole site.

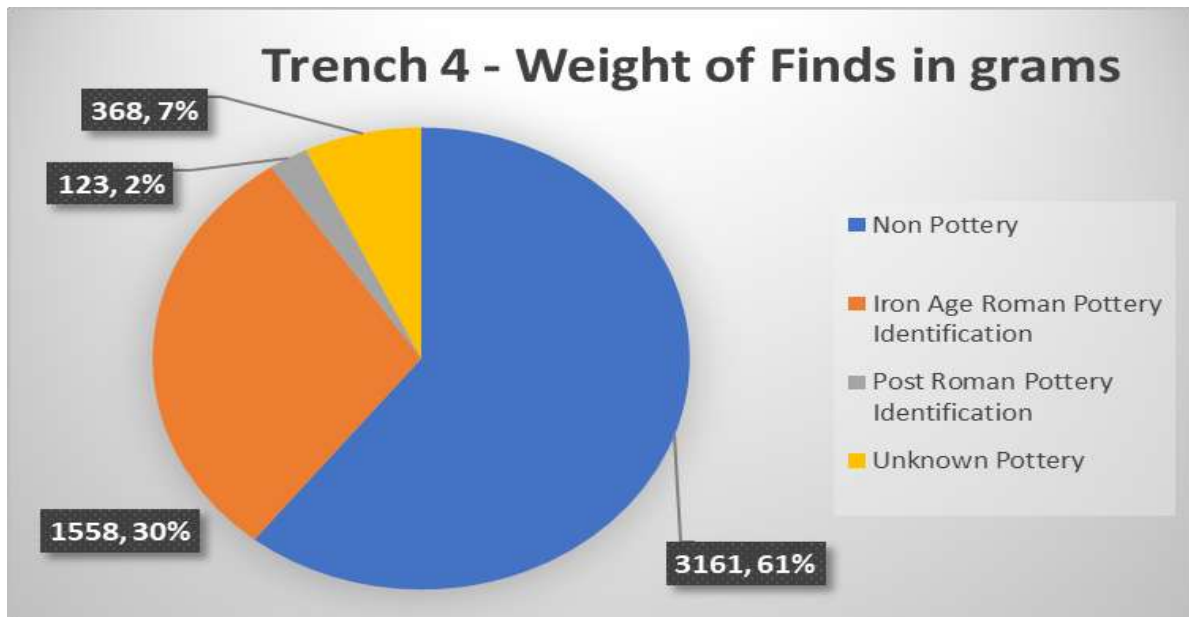


Trench 4

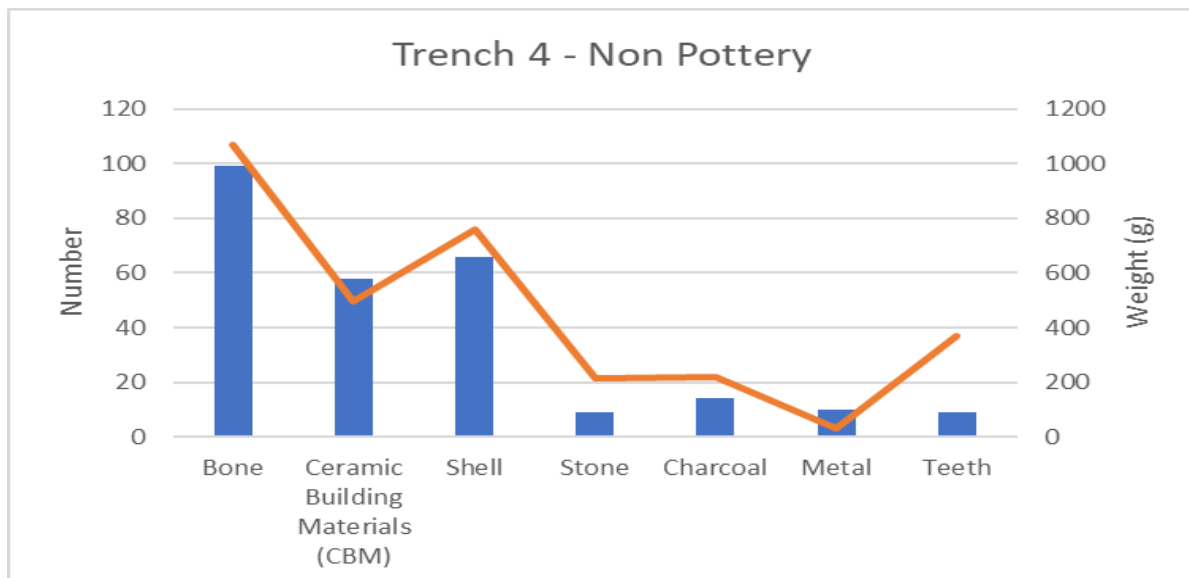
Most of our attention focussed on Trench 4 with the find bags being split into four areas Fire Pit, North, South, and Trench 4. Most of the finds were in the northern end of the trench so we could really just have two groups North and South. But to be consistent I will keep the four groups. That said I will start by joining all the finds together looking at everything found within the trench.



There is a very even split between Non-Pottery Items and Iron Age / Roman Pottery. Very little post Roman pottery was found. In terms of weight the largest pieces come from the non-pottery section.



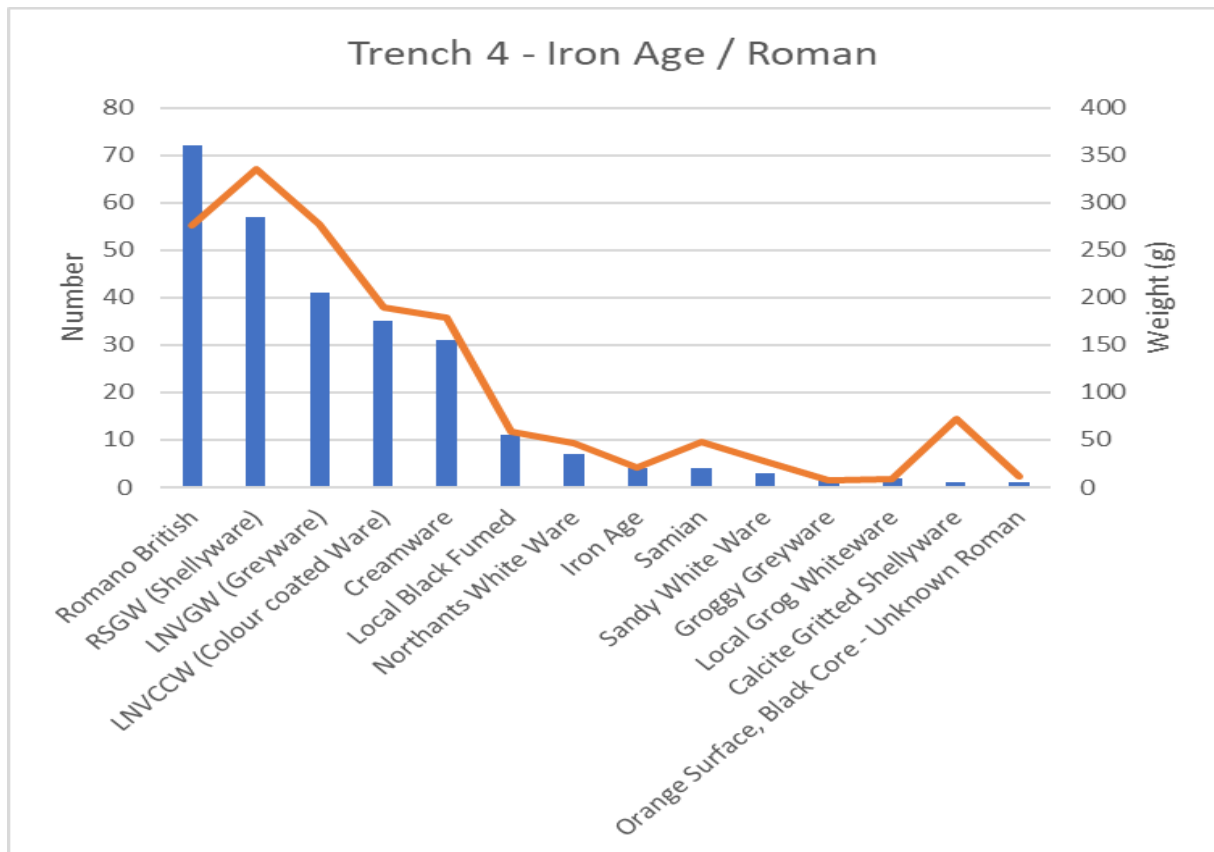
When the non-pottery section is broken down



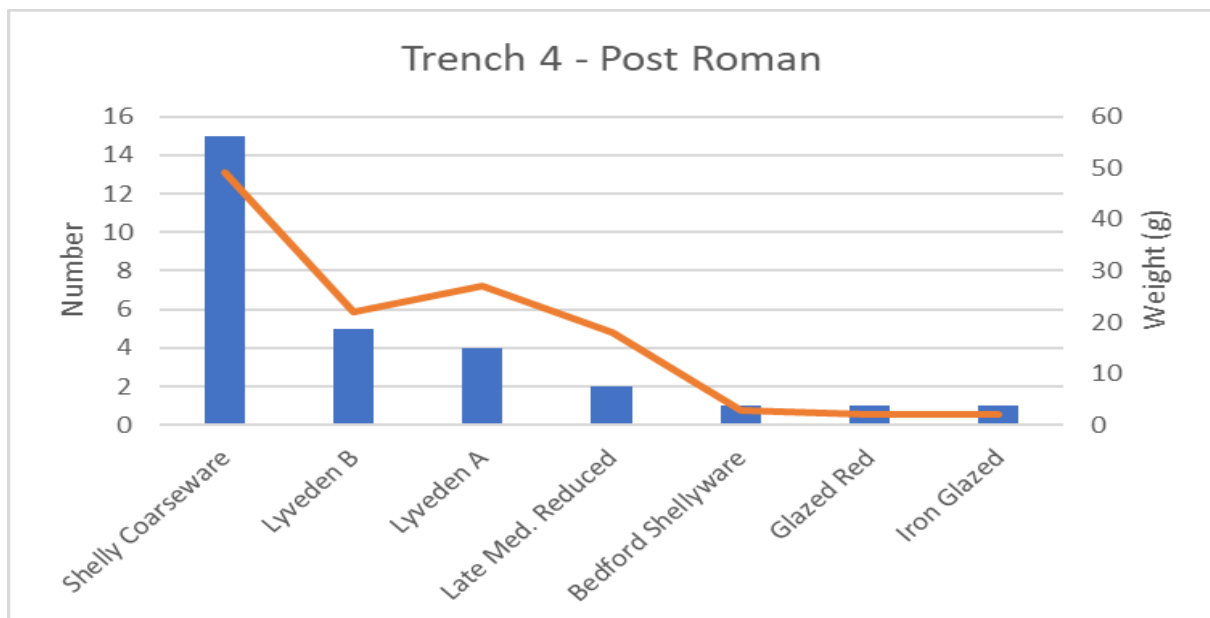
It is primarily made up of bone each piece having an average weight of around 10 grams. Followed by around 60 pieces each of CBM and Shell also weighing on average around 10 grams each for items of shell in particular this seems extremely heavy.

Moving on to the Iron Age / Roman pottery it is disappointing to see that the biggest group is Romano British which suggest that we are either finding it harder to identify the pottery we find or we are spending less time trying to identify it. I could see this being the case if we had a large number of small finds but this group is the second highest in terms of weight.

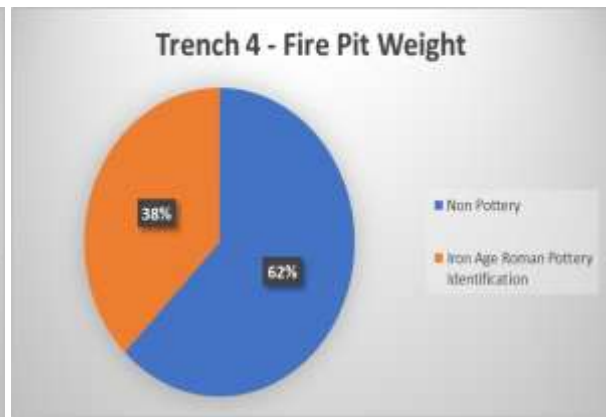
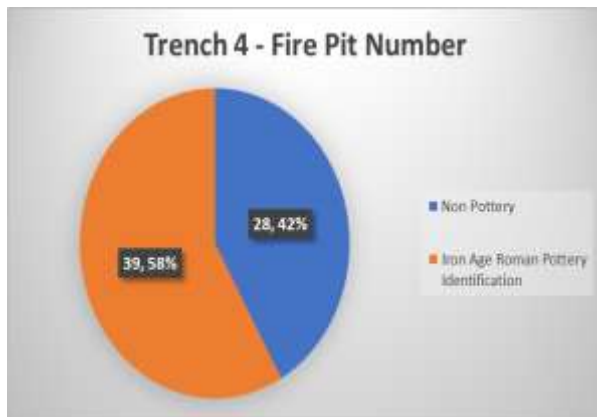
Next, we have the usual suspects (RSGW, LNVGW, LNVCCW) but I think one of the more interesting finds is the amount of Creamware which comes fifth but when we look at some of the smaller finds such as Northants White Ware, Sandy White Ware, Local Grog Whiteware there is a preponderance of white coloured pottery. We have not seen this on any other dig.



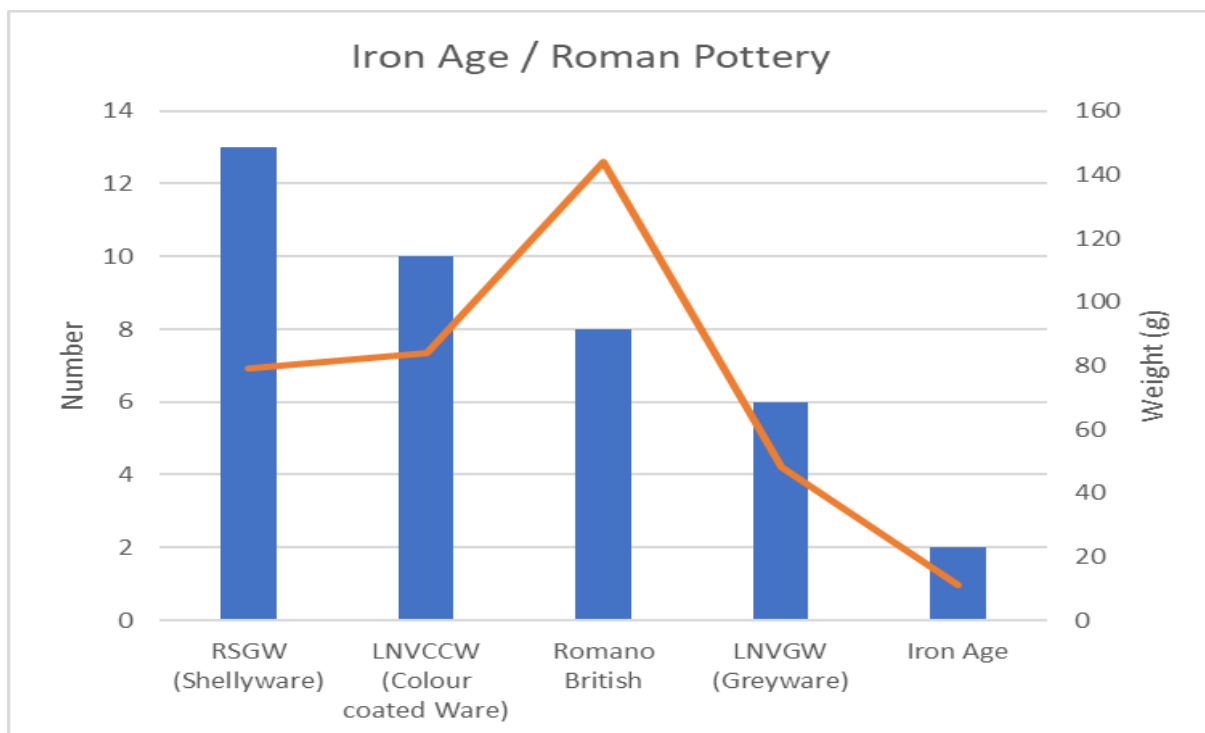
As mentioned, we recovered very little Post Roman pottery but where we did it tended to be Shelly Coarseware.



Moving on to the different elements of the trench – starting with the Fire Pit its self – There were 67 items recovered from the pit weighing just short of 1kg. Roughly 1/3 of the weight came from bone fragments including two large cow bones, and two large horse bones. Whilst another 15% was Ceramic Building Material including clinker which tied in nicely with the fire pit idea. We also found two large teeth, thought to belong to a horse, that weighed 88 grams.



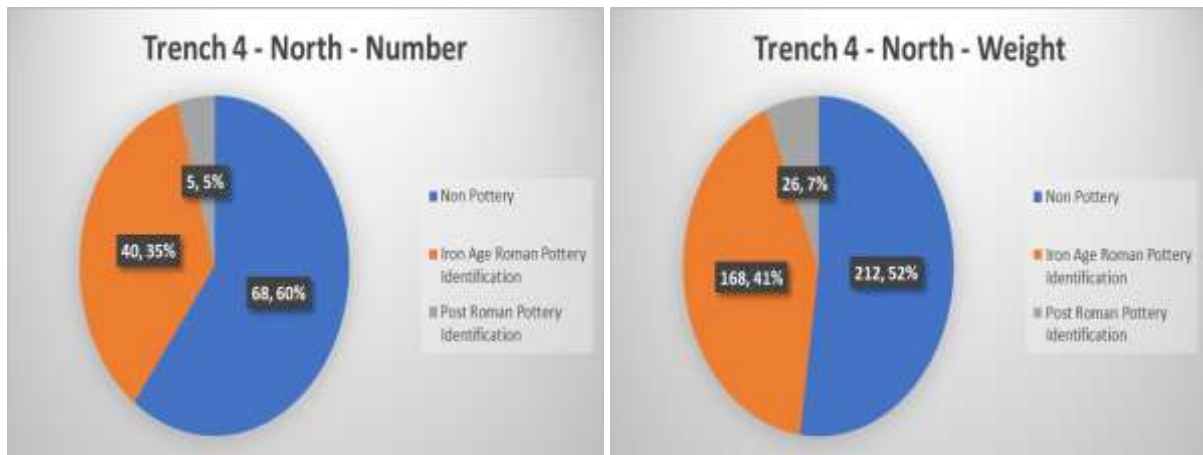
The majority of the pottery finds were RSGW (Shellyware) but the eight pieces classified as Romano British were by far the biggest in terms of weight coming in at an average of 18 grams each so there must have been at least one large unidentified segment.



There were no post roman pottery finds in the fire pit.

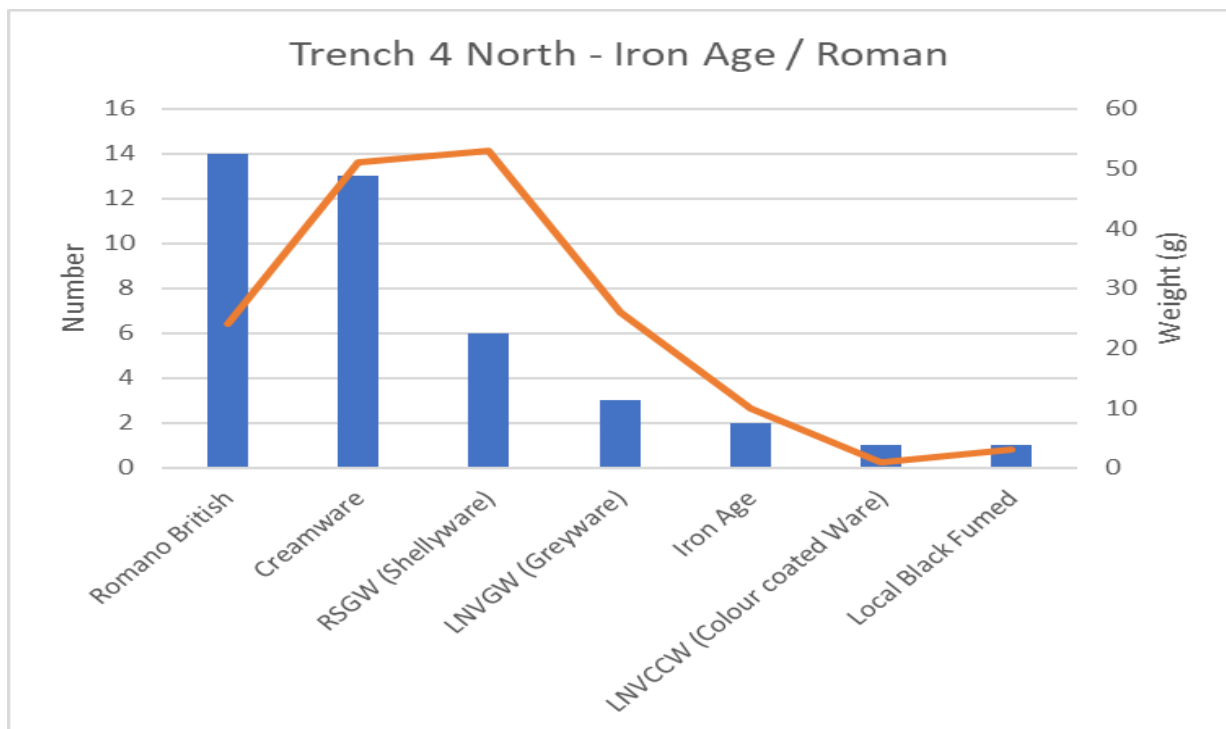
Moving on to the bags marked Trench 4 – North

Once again, the results are dominated by non-pottery the vast majority of the items being pieces of bone (42, 62%) there were no specific animal bones it was just defined as various animals. This was followed by Stone and Charcoal – The Stone items included flint scrapers and the fact that charcoal was found links these finds to the fire pit in the north of this trench.



Although the amount of pottery found was not significant, the items found were slightly larger than the non-pottery items.

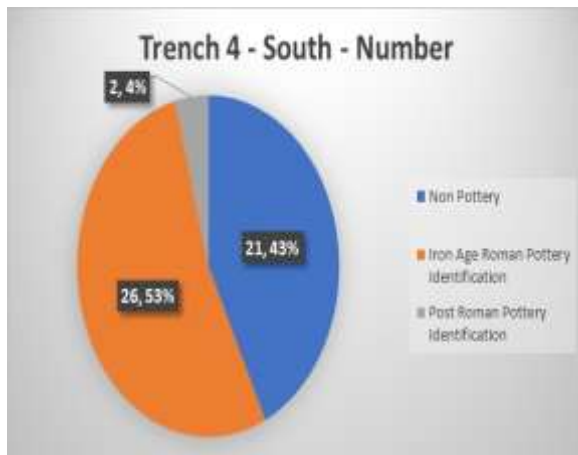
When we break it down Romano British comes out on top but not in terms of weight so these items were fairly small. Interesting if we put them to one side the next biggest is Creamware these finds have already been commented upon as being unusual.



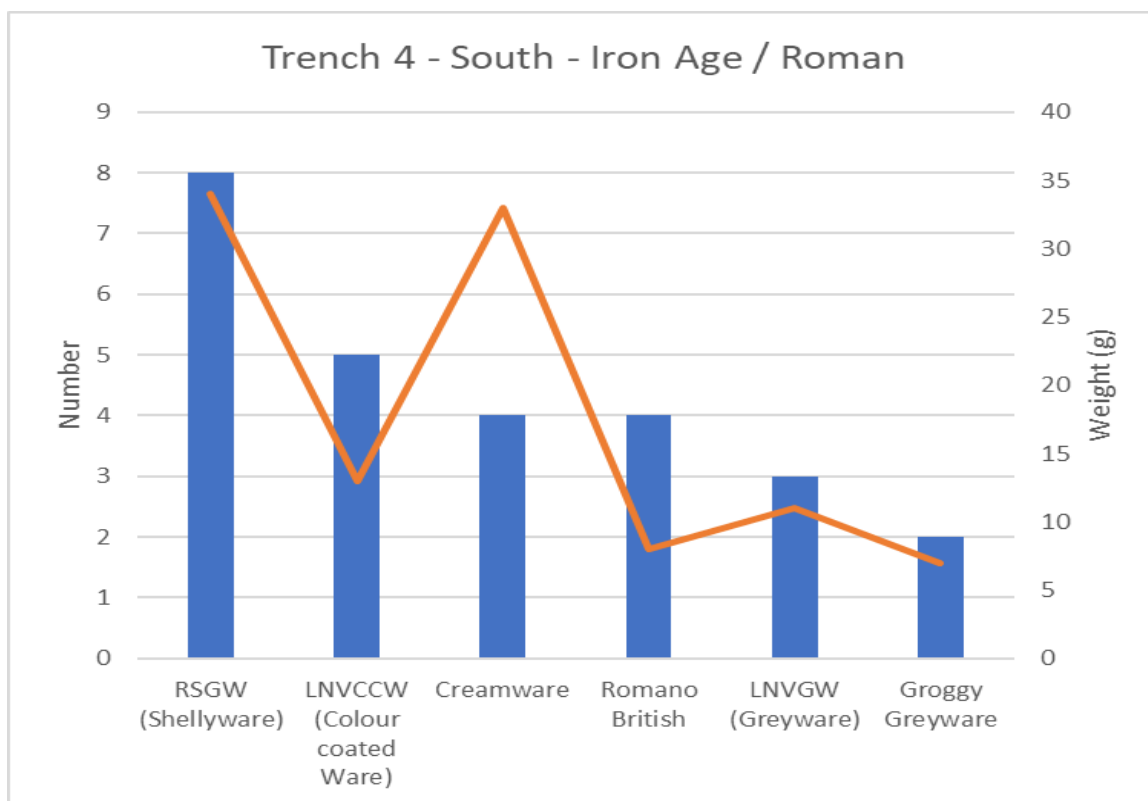
There were also five pieces of Post Roman pottery found, three were Lyveden A, and two pieces of Shelly Coarseware but once again the Post Roman finds were insignificant.

The next set of bags were identified as Trench 4 – South

Again, we do not have a large number of finds, most of the non-pottery finds are once again animal bones with a couple of teeth from unknown animals. Overall, in terms of weight just 0.25 kg of items were recovered.



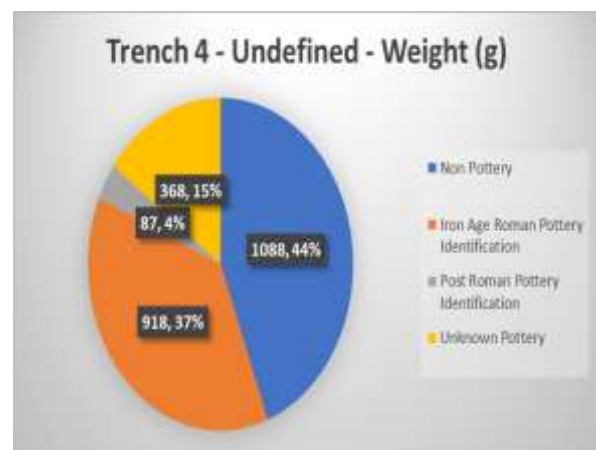
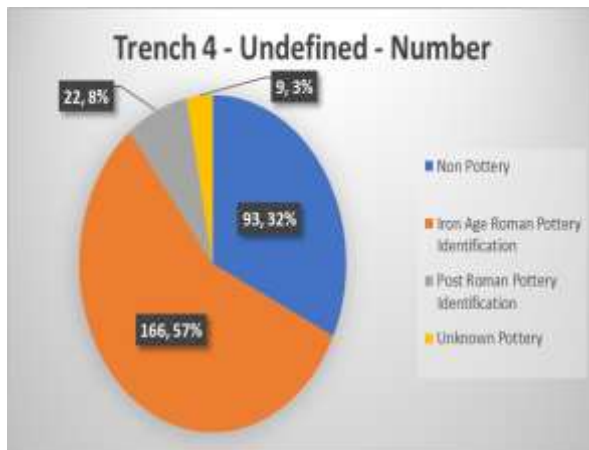
The split of Roman Age pottery is much more like that we have found in previous digs with RSGW (Shellyware) and LNVCCW (Colour Coated Ware) to the foremost but once again we find a number of Creamware items.



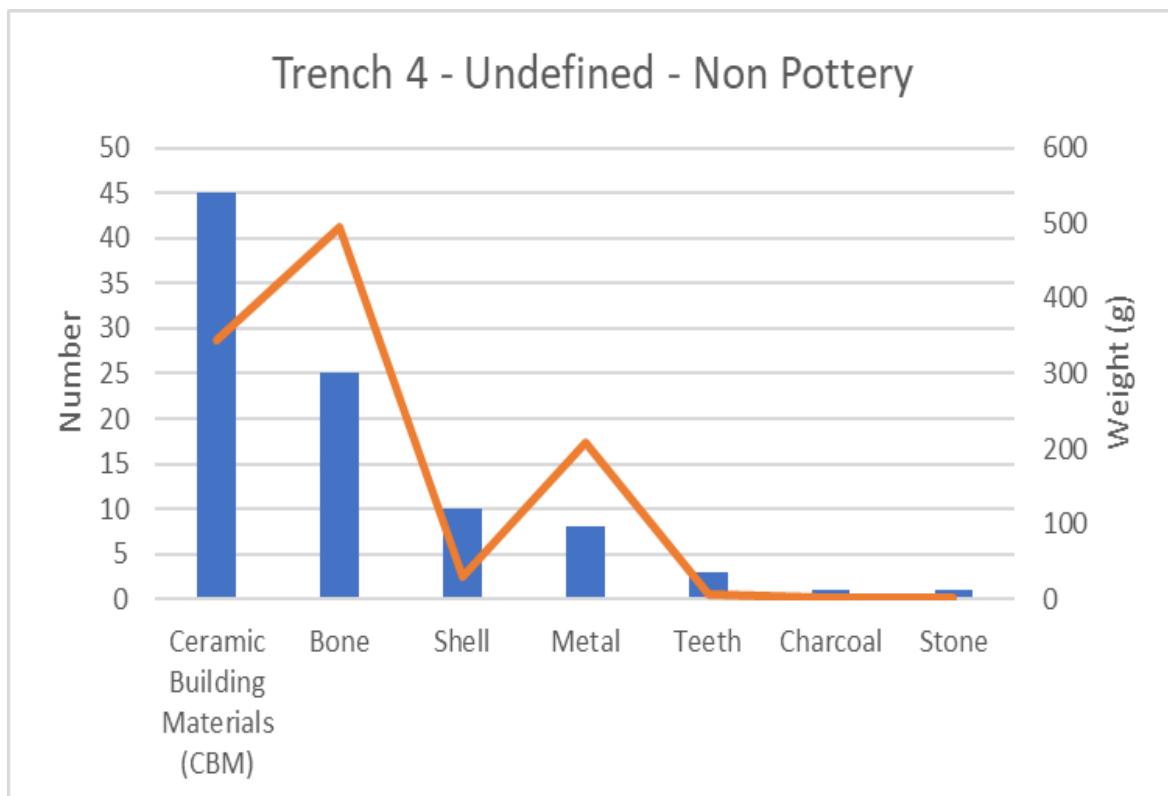
There were also two pieces of Post Roman pottery Lyveden A and Bedford Shellyware but no significant finds.

The last set of bags were labelled just Trench 4, as we could not tell which area of the trench they came from, I have called them Trench 4 – Undefined.

This group contained around half of the items found in Trench 4 mostly roman pottery and a third of the finds being non-pottery.

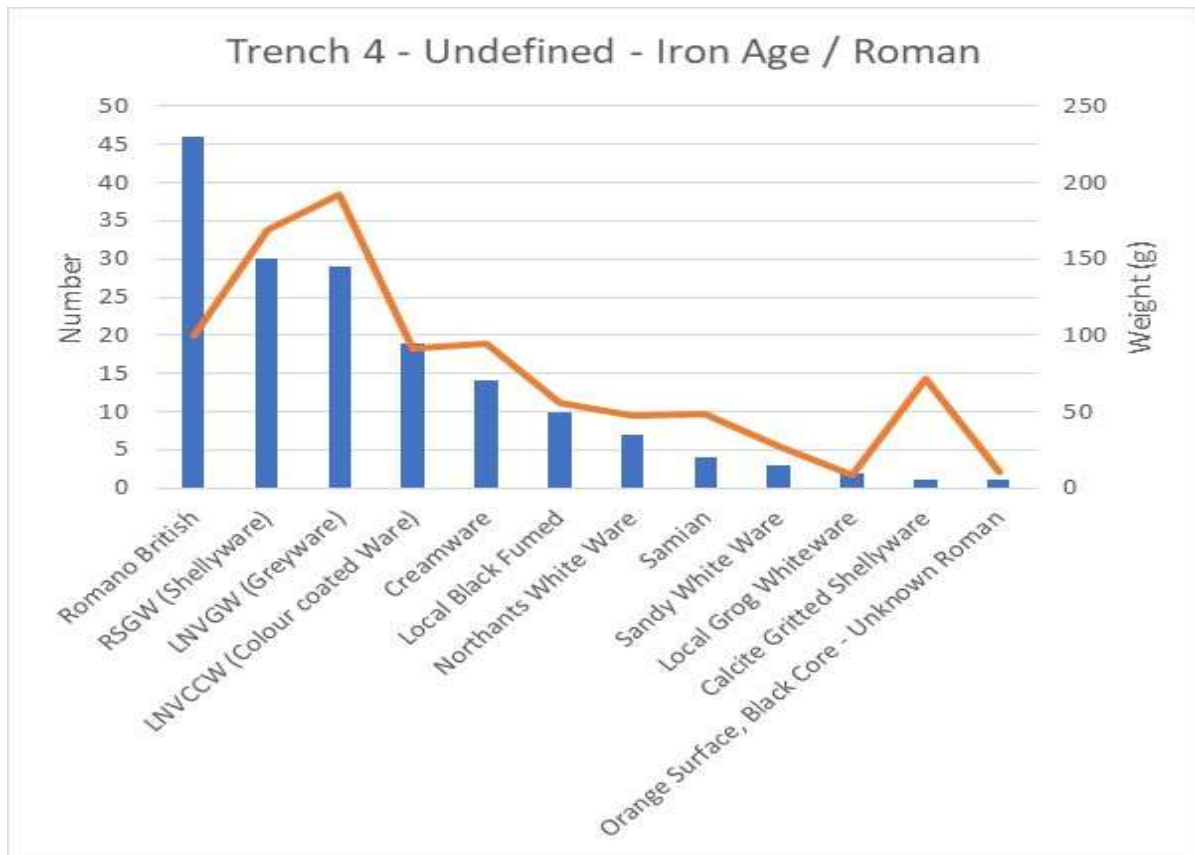


Interestingly the biggest group of non-pottery was Ceramic Building Materials, up until now we had not really found any evidence of a building in Trench 4. It would have been good to have known where these were found, were they in the north of the trench near the fire pit?

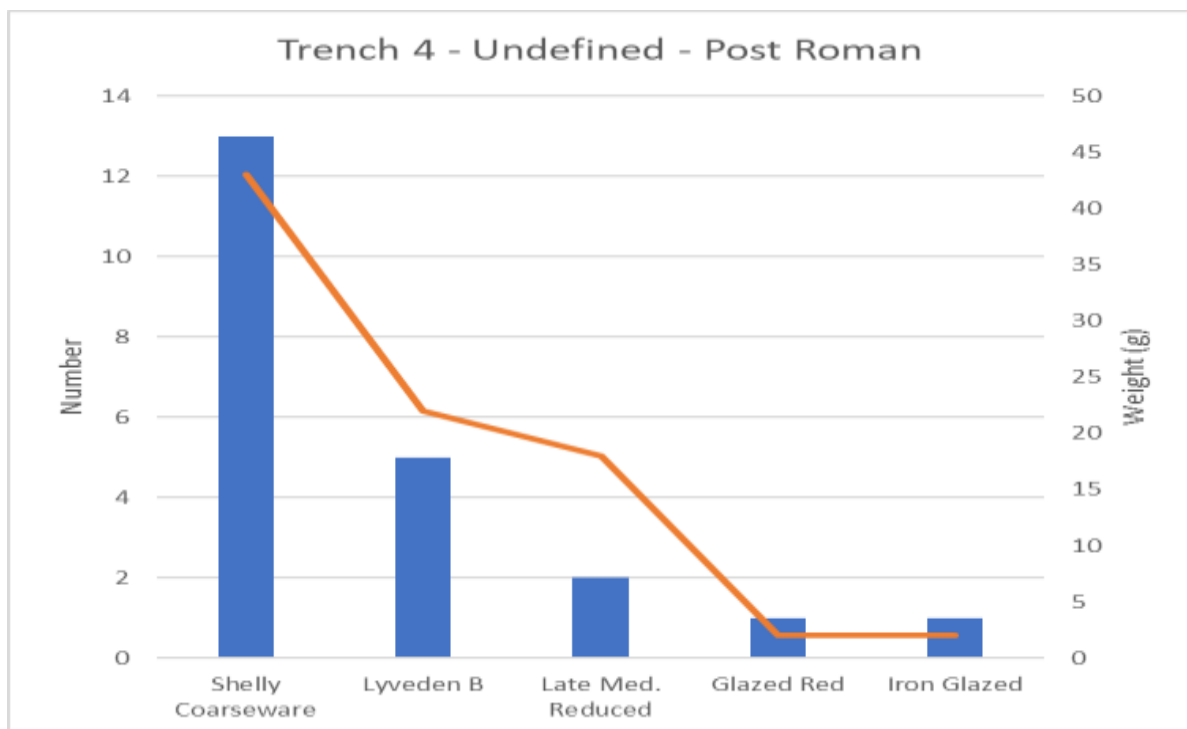


These bags produced most of the Romano British finds: they are smaller than other finds averaging just 2g each so the size of the find probably made it extremely difficult to identify.

After that we have the usual set of suspects with RSGW (Shellyware) leading the way.

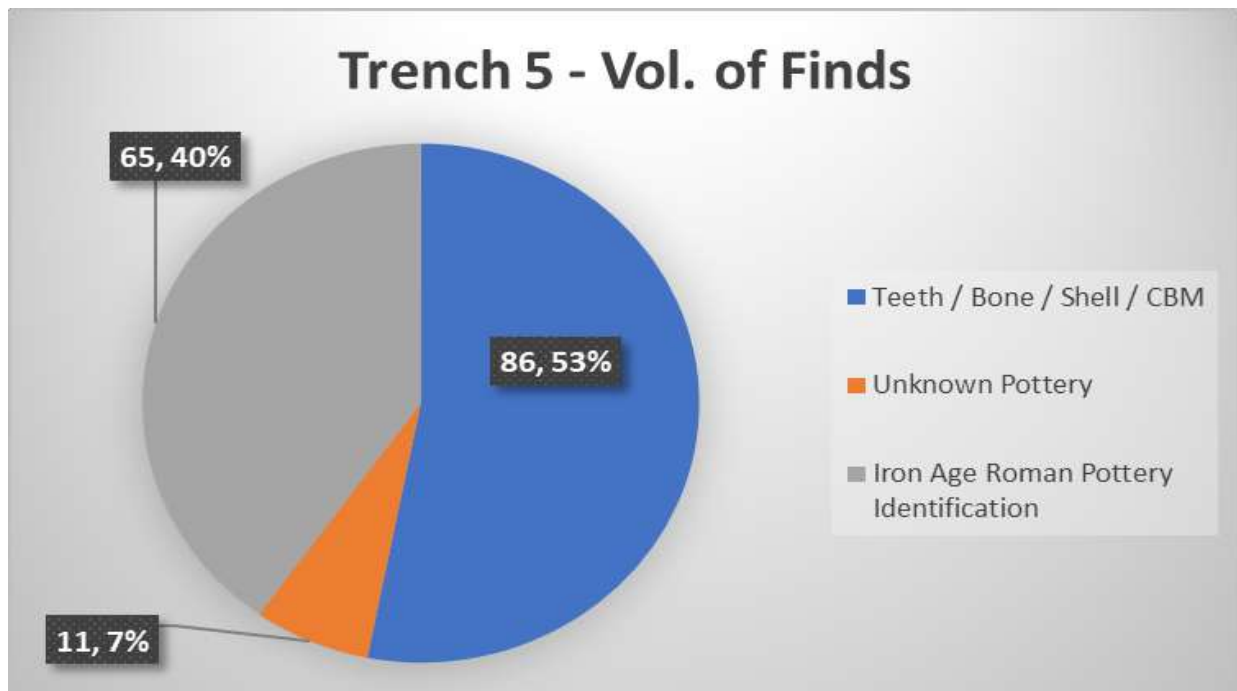


75% of the Post Roman pottery finds came from these bags and as can be seen from the graph most of them were Shelly Coarseware in terms of both number and weight.

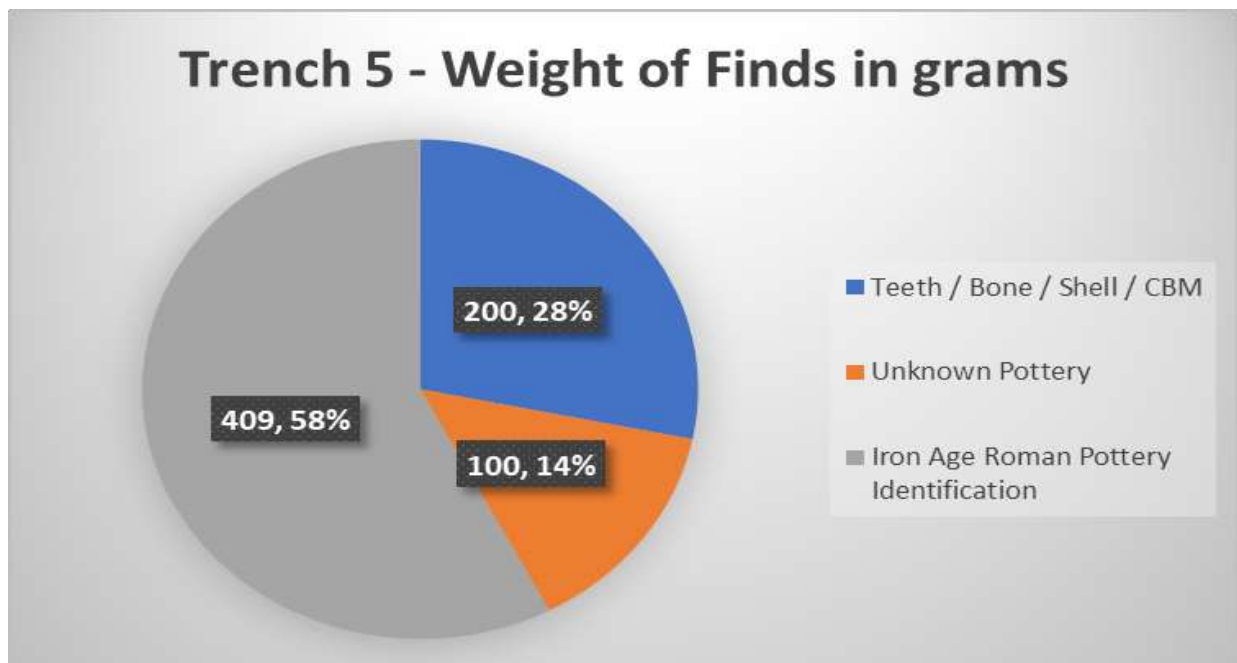


Trench 5

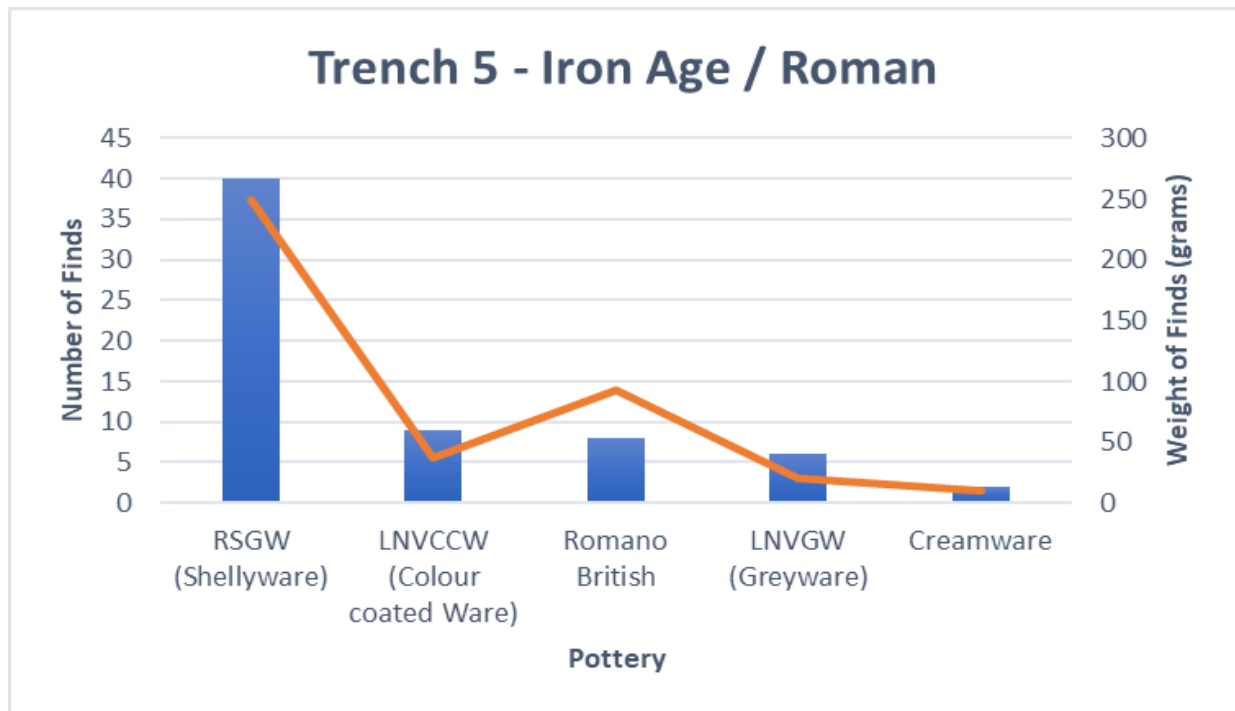
The main focus of this year's activity was in Trench 4 but we still recovered 162 items weighing 709 grams from Trench 5 very similar to what was obtained from Trench 3



But we found a lot more pottery and a reduced amount of CBM. The identification of the type of pottery also proved harder as 11 items were recorded as being unknown. The teeth we found came from a number of different animals Dog, Pig and Cows but were not very heavy.



Pottery finds were more prominent than the Teeth Bone etc taking up 72% of the weight of the items found whereas in Trench 3 it was the other way round. Once again, the pottery was deemed to be Iron Age / Roman with nothing found to be post Roman.



The majority of the finds being RSGW (Shellyware) but again we recovered some Creamware. Although we have in the past found Creamware and other white coloured pottery the fact that we have found it in all of the trenches is unusual, perhaps the people living here had a particular liking for white pottery.