



Keyston Field Walking

Report 2025

Archaeological Evaluation

By Robert Wishart

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Grid Ref: On Application

Site Code: KEY DM 25

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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.

For the first time in three years, we returned to the site in Keyston. Both it and our site in Covington have in the past produced a good quantity of finds. We are hoping to have an action-packed year in terms of Archaeology so as an early introduction we chose to field walk Denford Meadow, as soon as it became available, with a view to returning to the site in September to dig some trenches.

Once again, the group found a significant amount of pottery, and CBM such as daub and roof tiles – some of the pieces of daub were fairly large and there were two distinct colours an orange and a yellow suggesting more than one building. We do not seem to have any problems finding proof that humans had been there, except for the buildings themselves. Perhaps this year's finds will help us narrow our search for these buildings.

Introduction

Location and scope of work

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

Geology and topography

Denford Meadow lies to the north of Keyston close to the A14. The agricultural land is grade 2 (very good) quality. The soil is chalky boulder clay and has traditionally been used for arable agriculture mixed with some pastoral elements; subsoil is a clay and sand mixture.

Archaeological and historical background

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

Acknowledgements

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

Thank you one and all.

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

² CAM-BA13D6

Aims and Methodology

The main objectives of this field walk were:

- a. Identify where significant finds were being made with a view to putting in test pits.
- b. Enhance the archaeological skills that were introduced in 2022
- c. See if we can target key points without core technology – Magnetometry / Resistivity

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

Magnetometry results from Denford Meadow had been poor we do not know if this was because of the soil or our understanding of the machine. The number of items found clearly suggests that there is something on this site. By returning we are hoping to find hot spots that can be dug or deciding that we must use technology to identify where to dig our trenches.

The Covington and Keyston History Group took out insurance to cover all archaeological activities by its members and guests on land owned by a group member.

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

The following system of recording was used:

Site Code: KEY DM 25

Grid Layout: A1, A2, ... E5, E6

Results and Interpretation

Introduction

The grid was set out as thirty squares each of twenty square metres, the northern edge of the grid was assigned using the letters A-E and the western edge was given the numbers 1-6.

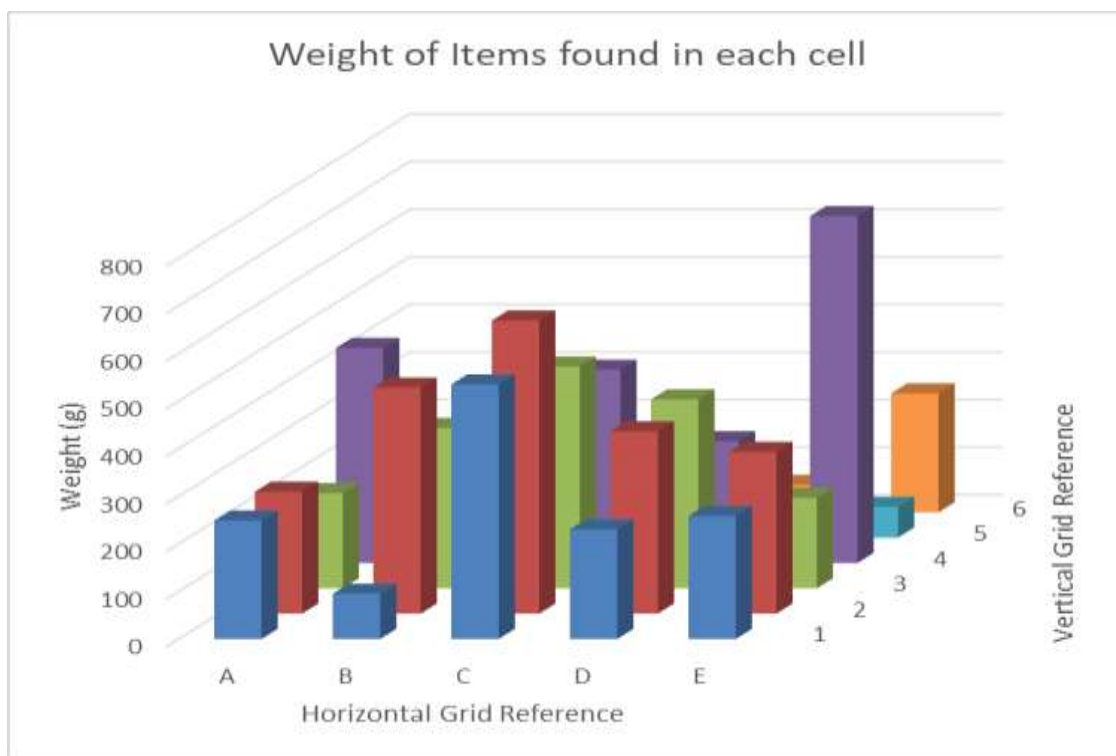
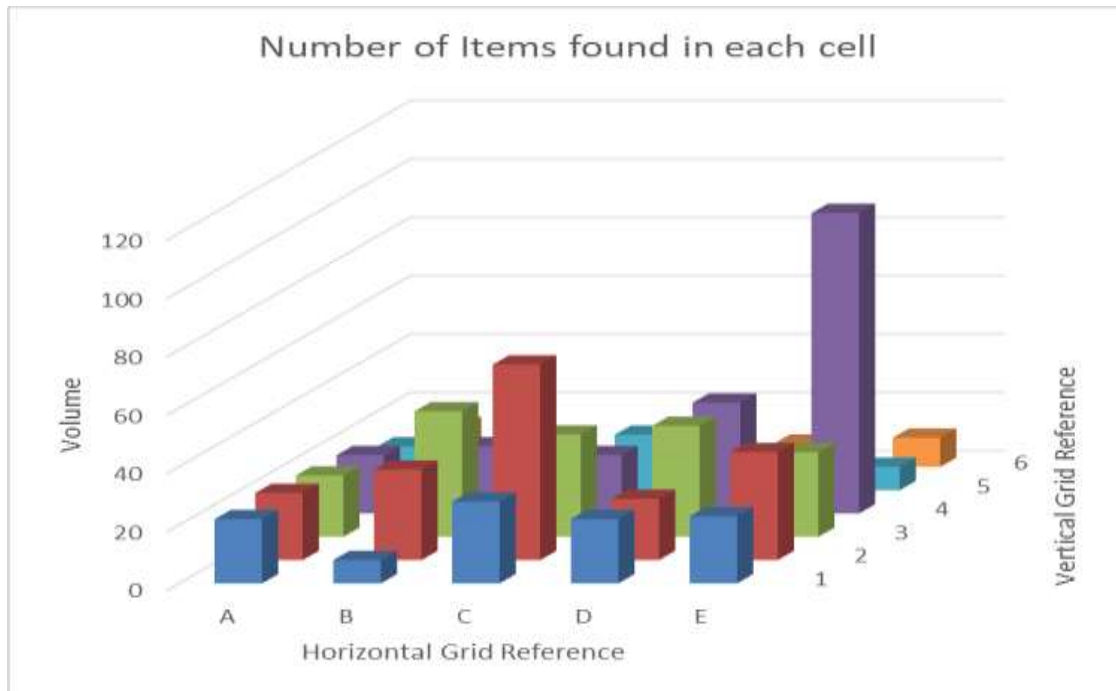
Field Walking

Field walking of the whole grid was completed over a single weekend. Again, resource was a key issue but we are planning to increase villagers' awareness of our group through a stall at the local village fete which will hopefully increase our membership.

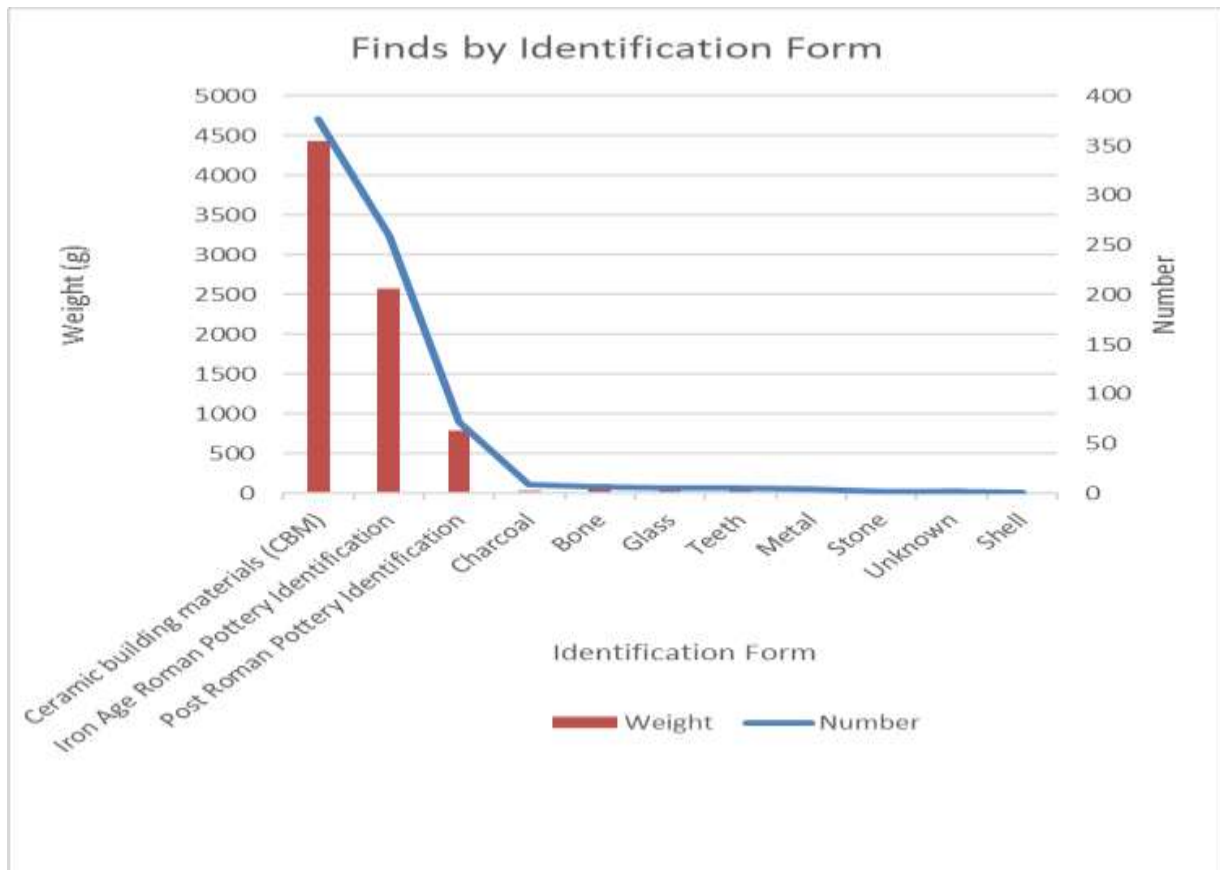
Finds Summary

During this year's Fieldwalking we picked up 744 items weighing 8.208kg which was very comparable with previous years activities

The finds were distributed as follows



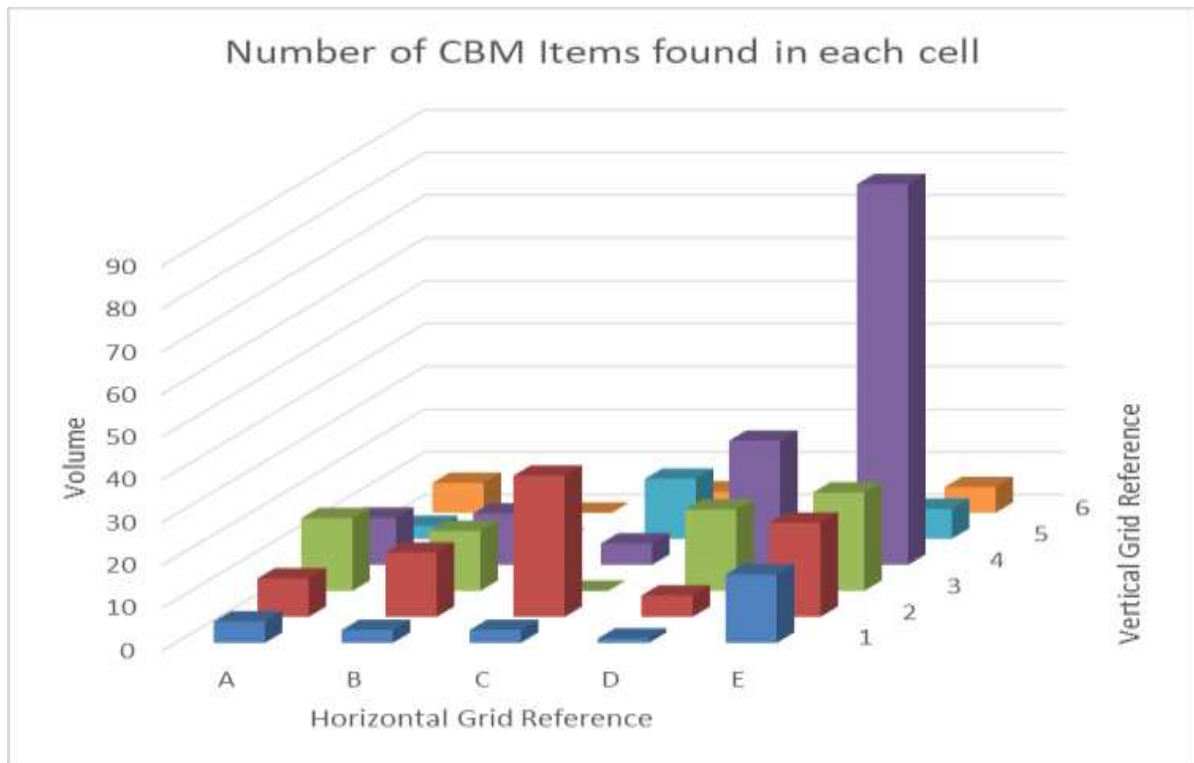
As can be seen there was a fairly even spread of finds with some peaks towards the centre and E4 very prominent in both number and weight.



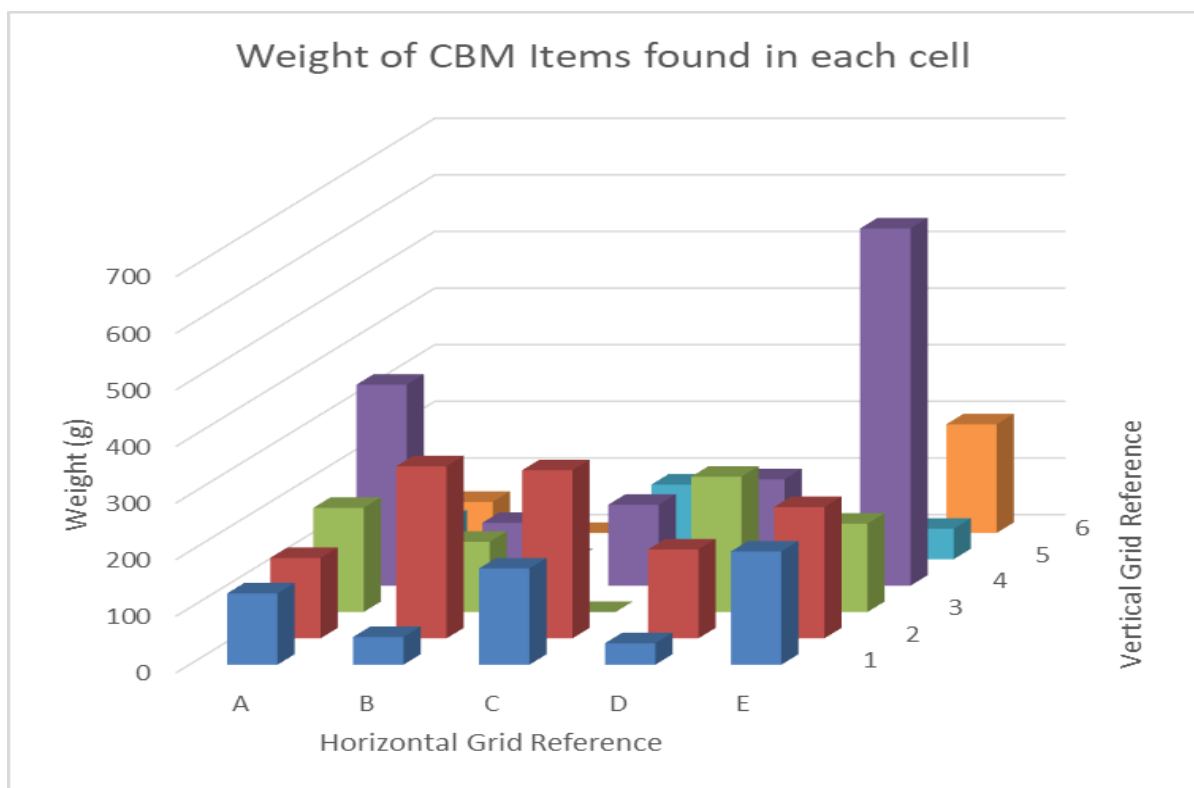
When we look at the type of item found, over half the items picked up were Ceramic Building Materials (CBM) suggesting that there must have been some sort of building on this site. Just over a third of the finds were of iron Age / Roman construction and roughly 10% were Post Roman finds.

Turning to the weight of the finds we see a very similar pattern (54%/31%/9.7%). If there was not a building on this site, why are we finding so much daub and tiles.

If we split the finds down starting with the Ceramic Building Materials we get a mixed response.

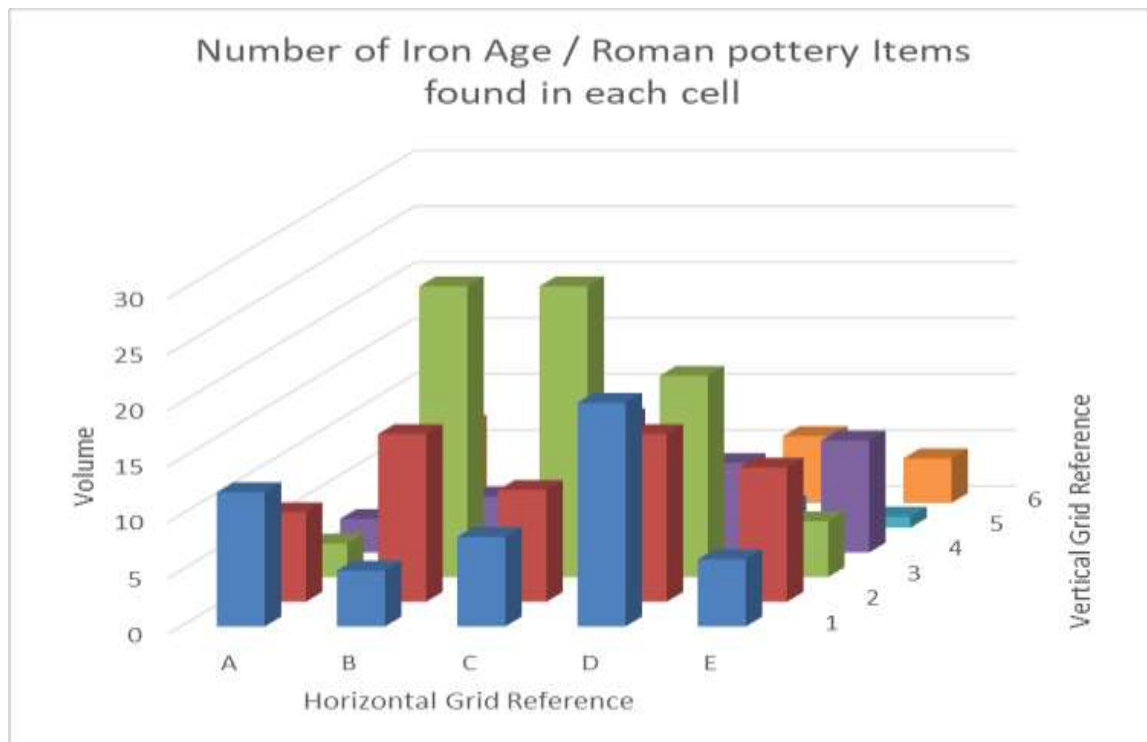


As can be seen a very significant proportion of the CBM was found in Cell E4 in fact almost a quarter of the CBM items came from this one cell. Column E had 43% of the CBM finds but when we look at the weight of the finds it is more evenly spread.

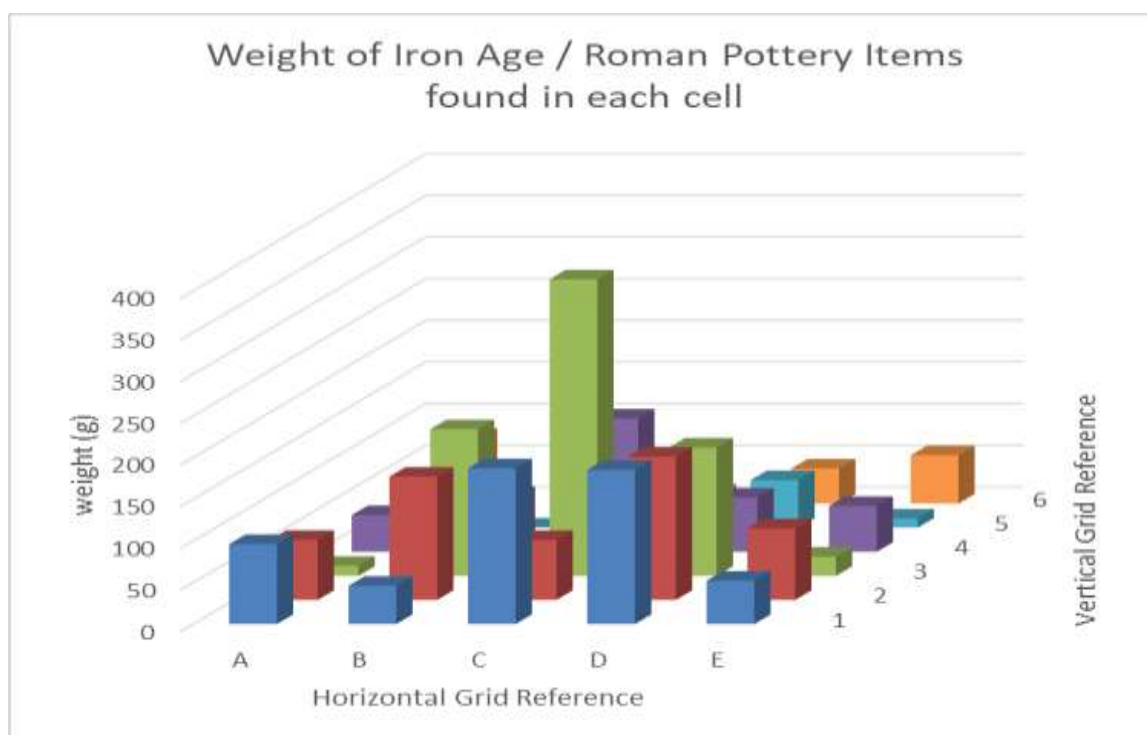


Does this mean that the larger pieces of CBM have been spread across the field by modern day tractors and farm machinery and that building was closer to column E or is there some other reason for the movement of the larger pieces.

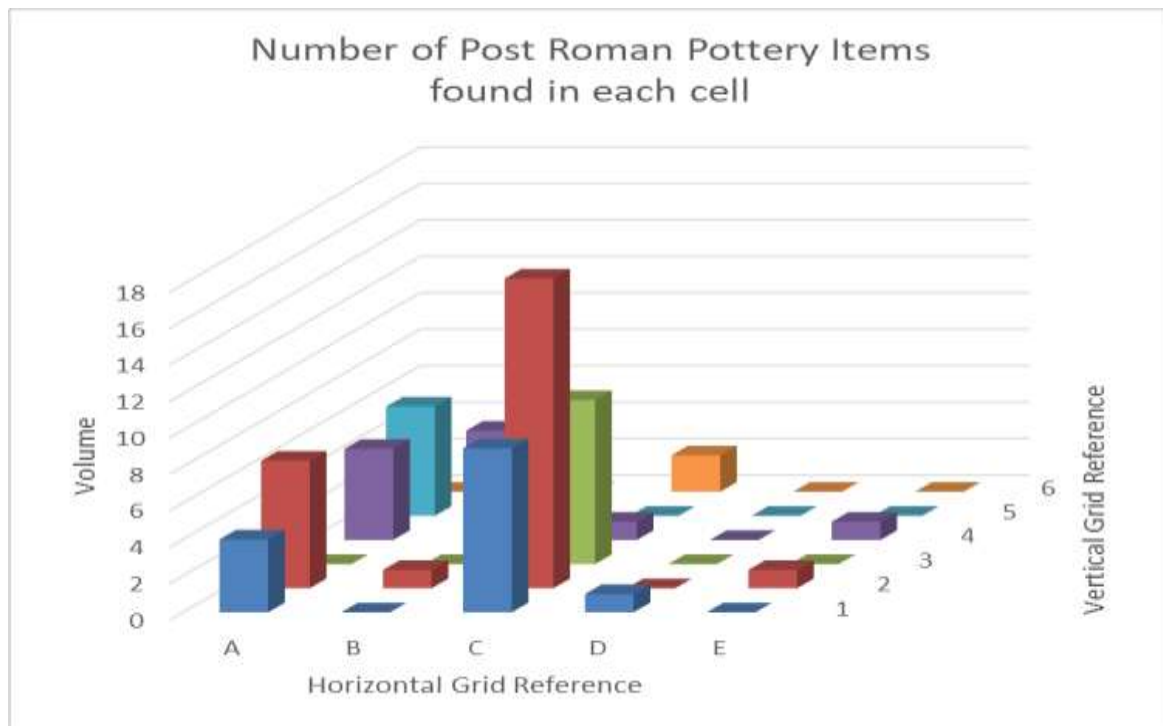
The second highest group of finds was Iron Age Roman Pottery the distribution of these finds was significantly different from the CBM items.



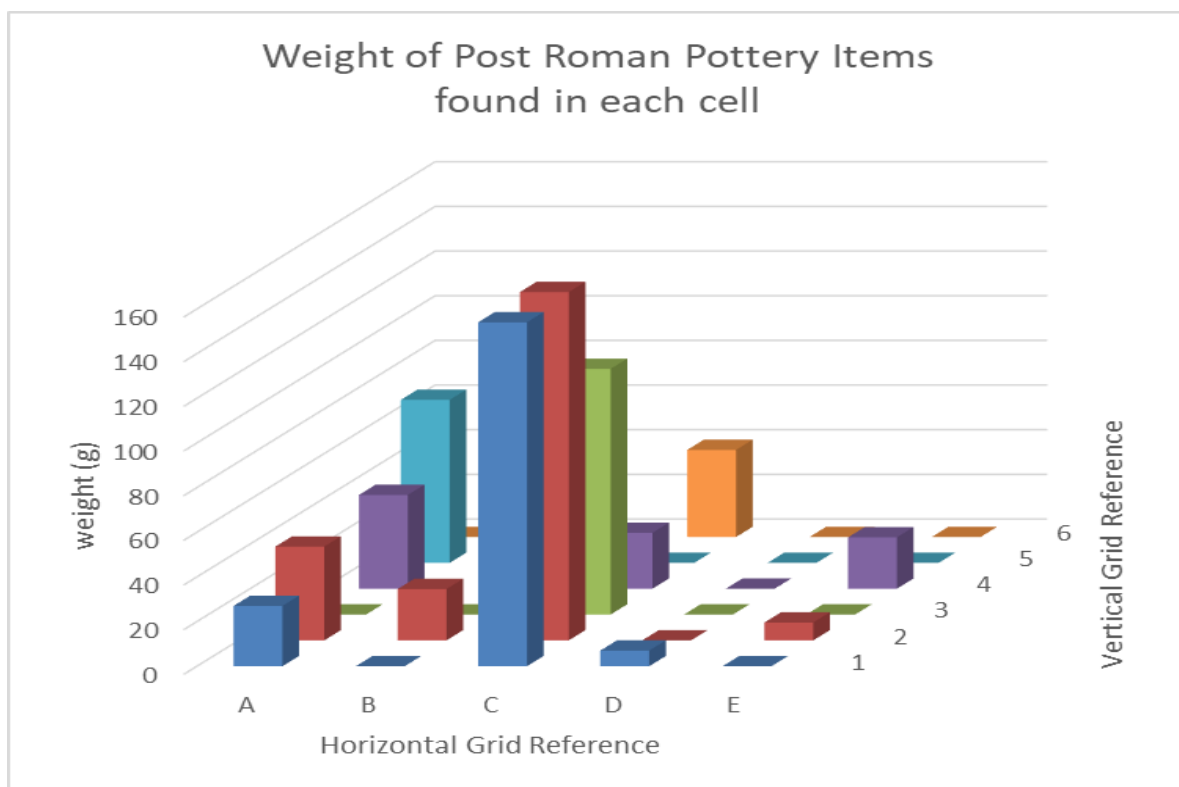
Items are much more prominent in the centre of the grid. Row 3 having the highest peaks given that most of the CBM items were found at the far end of grid (Column E) suggesting that any property was at that end. Is it possible that there is some sort of waste pit in the centre of the site hence these findings. The main argument against this is that if it was a rubbish pit we would have found more bones, yet across the whole site only 7 pieces of animal bone were discovered.



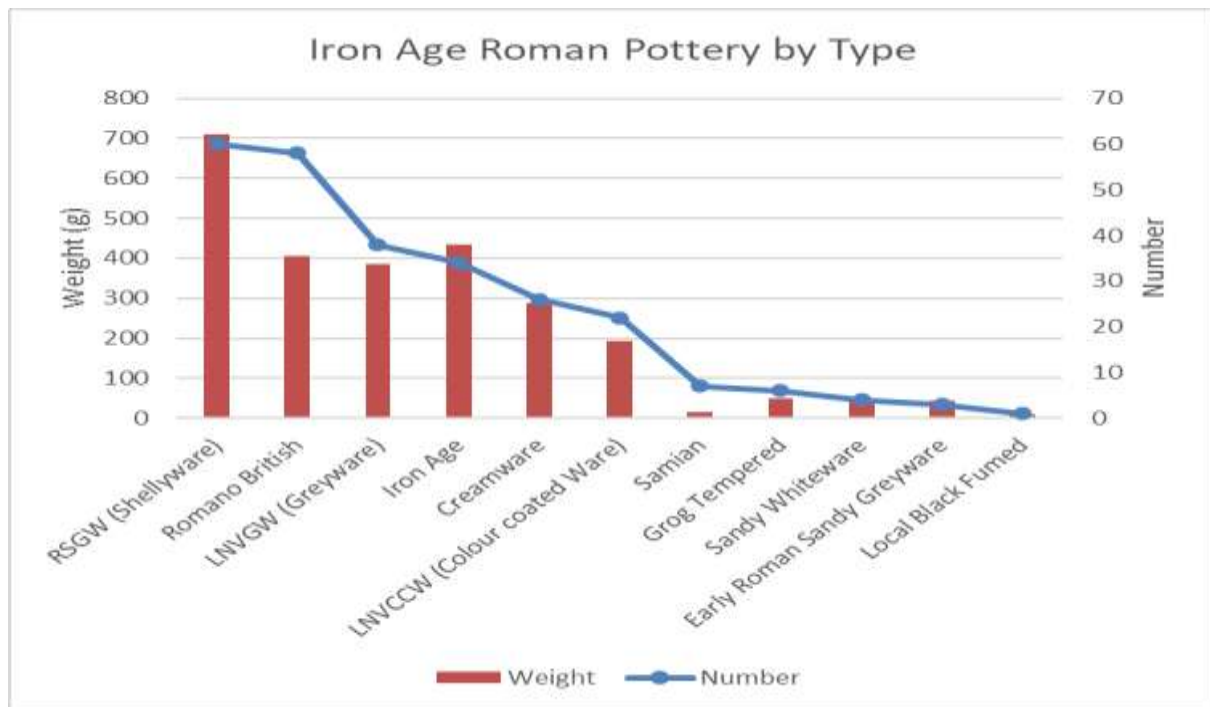
The third highest group of finds were of Post Roman Pottery – Yet again we see a different form of distribution.



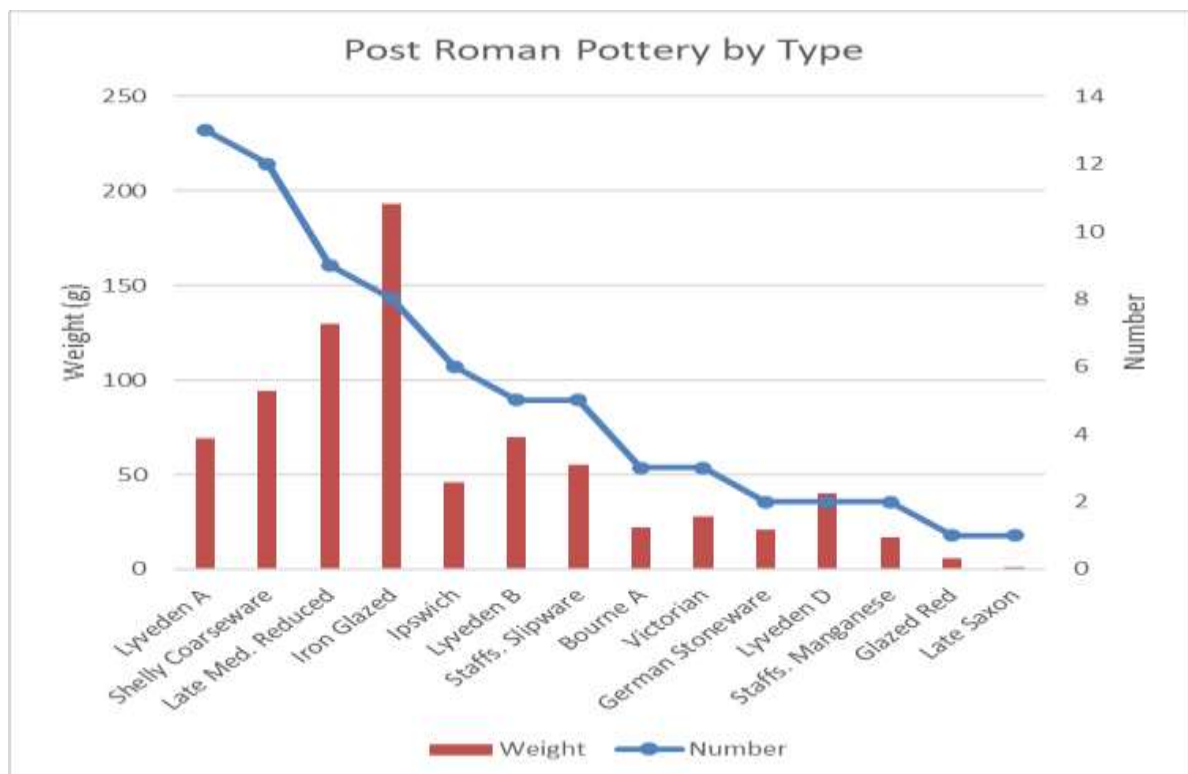
In this we have two main columns (A & C) the finds in column C tend to be towards the front of the grid and those in column A suggest something was happening on the left-hand side of the grid. Looking at the distribution by weight the larger pieces are coming from column C.



Looking deeper into the Iron Age / Roman Pottery finds we can see that RSGW (Shellyware) comes out on top this Roman Sandy Grey Ware has broken shells scattered through it. Interestingly it made up 23% of the finds by number and 27% by weight. Normally LNVGW comes out top but it only came third. Iron Age finds were fairly large pieces and we found a lot more Creamware than usual.



As for the Post Roman Pottery finds by quantity Lyveden A comes out top but although the number of Iron Glazed finds were much smaller the pieces found were much bigger. But as this only represented 10% of the finds we cannot tell much from the distribution.



To summarise our finds, there was a significant amount of Ceramic Building Materials (CBM) at the western end of the grid mainly in column E and in particular in cell E4. This raises the possibility that any building could be further to the west and we should increase the size of the grid. Iron Age and Roman pottery was mainly found in the centre of the grid and Post Roman pottery on the eastern side of the grid and in column C. RSGW (Shellyware) was the most prominent Roman Pottery find and Lyveden A the most prominent Post Roman although by weight this became Iron Glazed items.

Key Finds

Iron Age / Roman

As mentioned RSGW(Shellyware) has a large amount of shell pieces in the fabric. Whereas the Creamware is very white in this case part of a rim.



Post Roman

The two main finds were Lyveden A (recognizable by its ill-sorted moderate to dense limestone ooliths (small, round stones) which leave visible holes) and Iron Glazed in this case a Black Glaze



Metal

Although no metal detectors were used four metal items were still found lying on the surface



A5 – Metal Hook



B3 – Buckle Modern very rusty



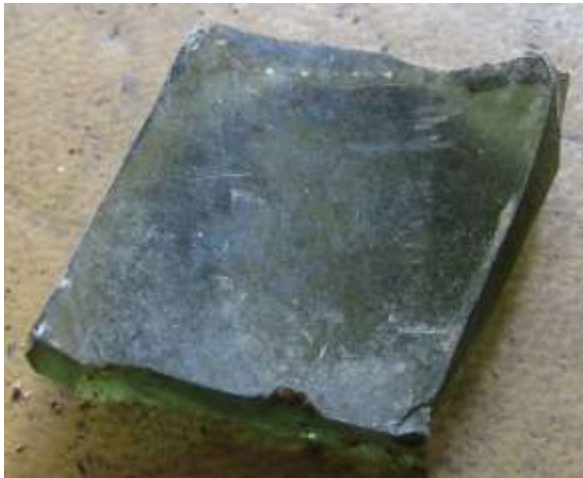
B3 – Handmade Nail possible Victorian



E4 – Iron Nail

Glass

Across the grid six pieces of glass were found. Glass is very difficult to date but weight and clarity can often help identify older items.



A4 - Curved piece of green Glass, Thin, Abraded



A5 - Flat clear thin glass



C2 - Base of an Unknown Roman Vessel



C2 - Green Glass



C6 - Modern Ornament



E2 - Very thin and light; Roman Glass; with bend

Stone

Two items at radically different ends of the time spectrum and with significantly different development structure were found during this year's search.

In cell B6 we found an ammonite, it was 4cm long and 1.9cm wide, and 1.6cm thick. This extinct shelled cephalopod is at least 66 million years old. But still has a very distinct shell pattern.



We also found a large piece of the stem of a clay pipe in cell A3. It 5.3cm long 0.7cm wide and 1cm diameter.



Clay pipes were prevalent in the 17th and 18th centuries they are very difficult to date particularly when all we have is the stem but it was probably dropped by a farmer when it broke whilst out in the field. The breaks at both ends are very clean.

Environmental Summary

This is the third time in the last three years that we have field walked this site and we are still finding significant quantities of pottery. The field is flat and good for farming so it would not be a surprise if there was a Roman farm stead. The amount of daub scattered across the site suggests there is some sort of building.

Discussions and Conclusions

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

1. We are still finding a large amount of pottery but this year the amount of daub and roof tiles points to a building of some sort at the western end of the grid possibly outside the grid.
2. The spread of the finds suggests there is something in the middle of the grid but it is not clear enough to just dig a trench and hope for the best.
3. The group's ability to identify pottery has improved although the Romano British group is growing as a default.
4. Although Creamware finds were larger than usual the weight of each find was small possibly meaning that these items had been broken into smaller pieces.
5. Very little animal bone was found whilst fieldwalking. If the pottery has come from a rubbish pit we would have expected more bone, why do we think this is?

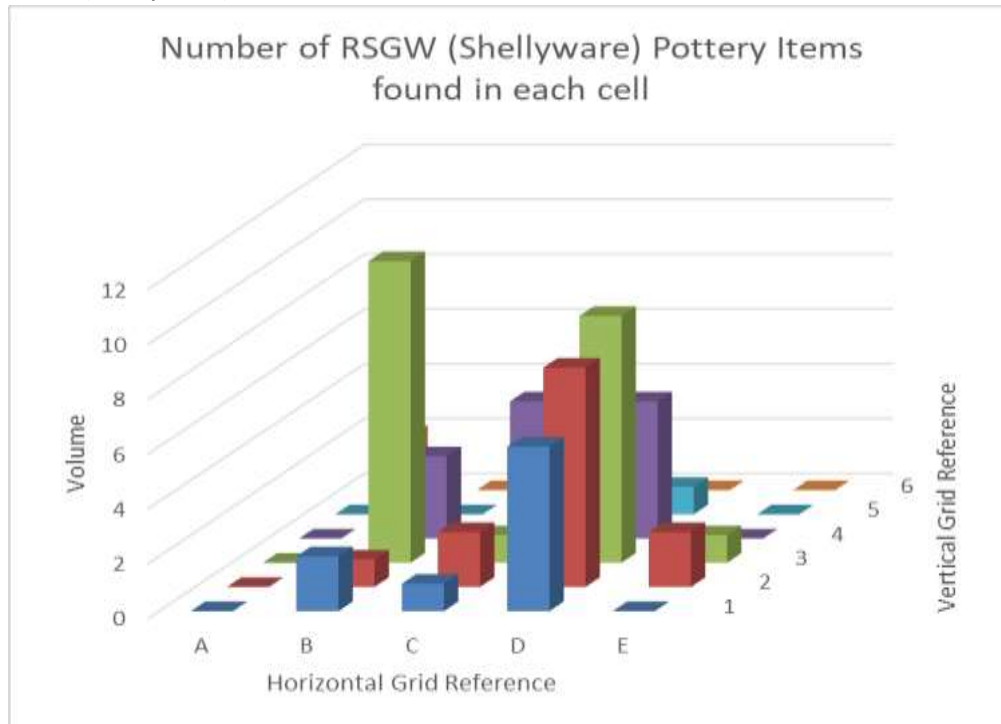
Recommendations

1. We need to apply technology to the site – Previous attempts may not have worked but there is something there.
2. Training on machinery (e.g. Magnetometry) is essential if we are to investigate this and other sites.
3. Can we increase the size of the grid as any building may be further to the west

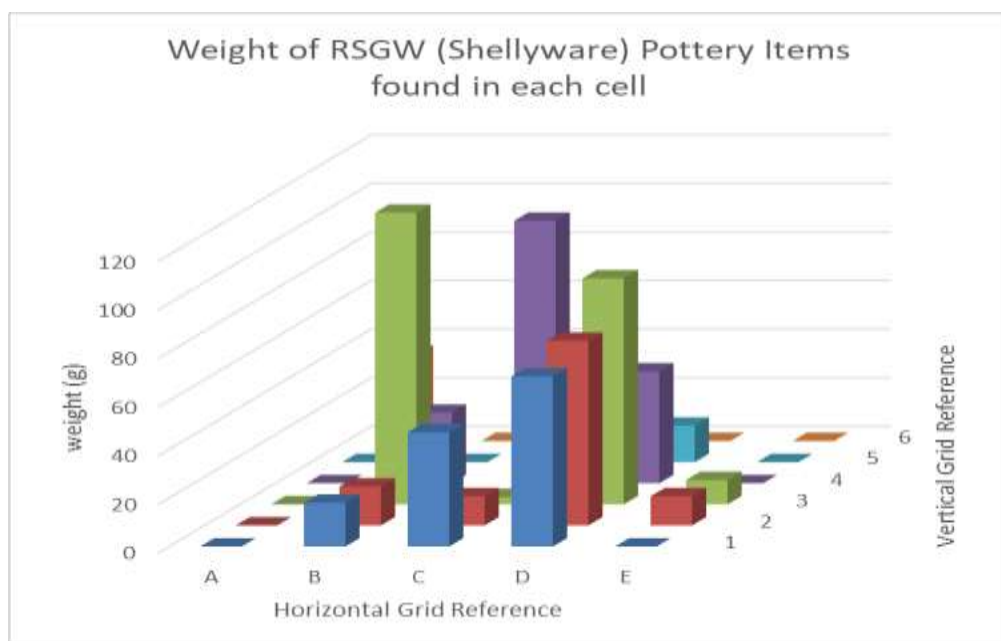
Appendix 1 – Detailed Finds Report

Delving a little deeper into the Iron Age Roman finds some of the biggest finds came from three groups

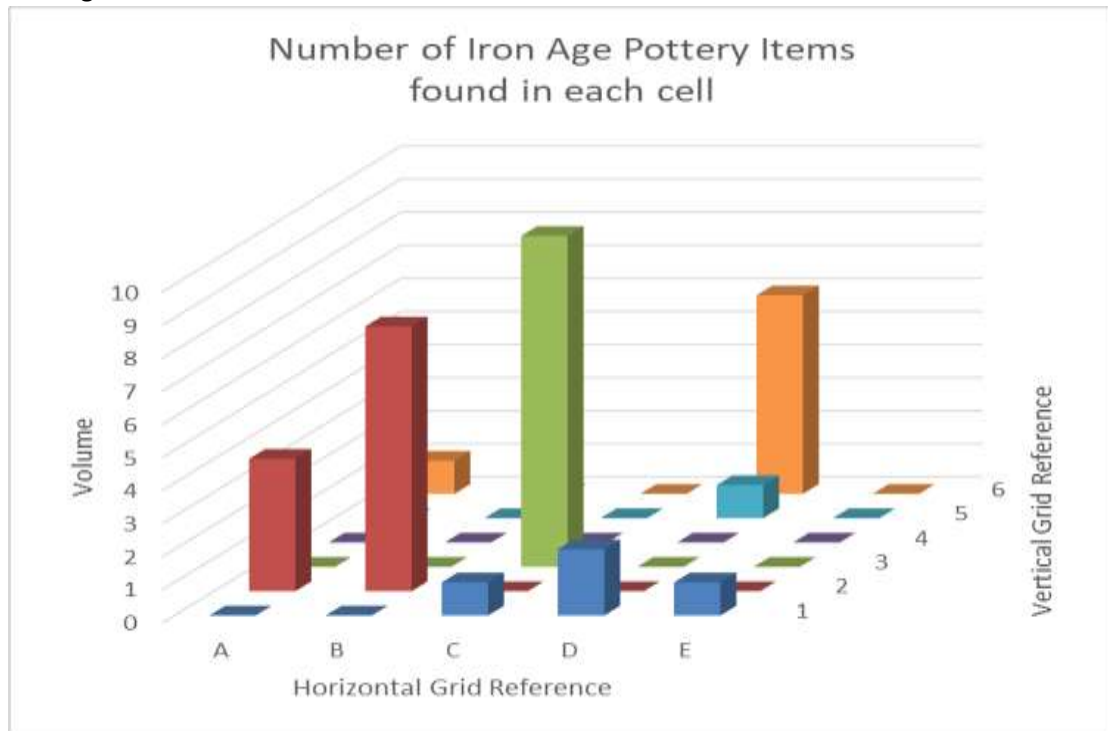
1. RSGW(Shellyware)



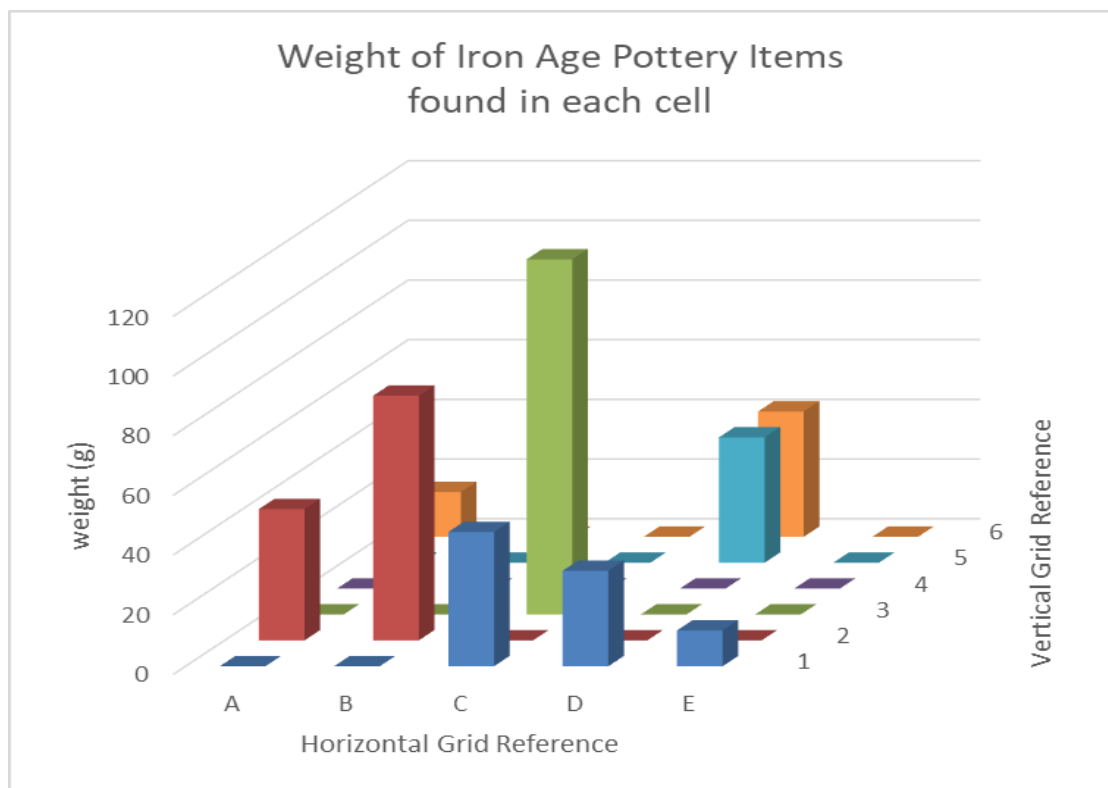
The majority of these finds were in the centre of the grid and the weight distribution shows a similar pattern.



2. Iron Age

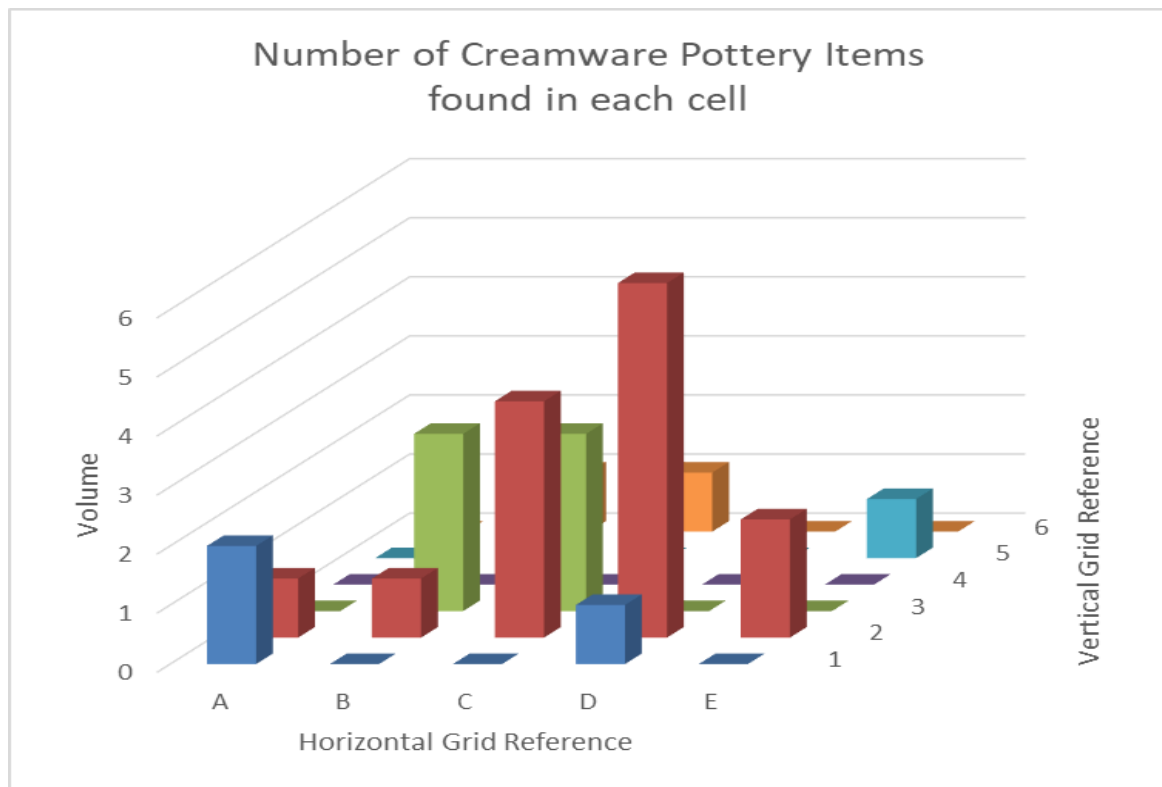


These finds were spread across the grid with the weight distribution showing a similar pattern therefore not as easily identifiable as the RSGW



3. Creamware

Although not found in significant numbers we did find more creamware than usual



Again, the distribution is towards the centre of the grid agreeing with the location suggested by RSGW. The weight graph suggests that some of the pieces found were quite small so may not be such a big anomaly

