

Archaeology in the surrounds of Bittesby House



View of Bittesby House c1920s

Bittesby House and grounds

The earliest part of Bittesby House, the East Wing, dates to the mid-18th century and it is thought that this building was occupied by the tenant farmer of the time. By 1842 the estate had been developed considerably and the landowner lived at Bittesby House which is known to have had outbuildings and yards, as well as gardens, pleasure grounds, fishponds, arable fields, meadows, and an orchard. The total landholding for the estate is given as 1,417 acres, over 1,000 football fields in size!



Bittesby House today, looking north-east

Smaller houses were built around the estate for the staff who maintained the grounds. Bittesby Lodge was built next to the driveway which led to the main house from Watling Street (the current A5), and a series of cottages were built to the north-east of the main house. The Lodge was first shown on the 1860s edition of the Ordnance Survey Map, and the cottages were first depicted on the 1887 edition.

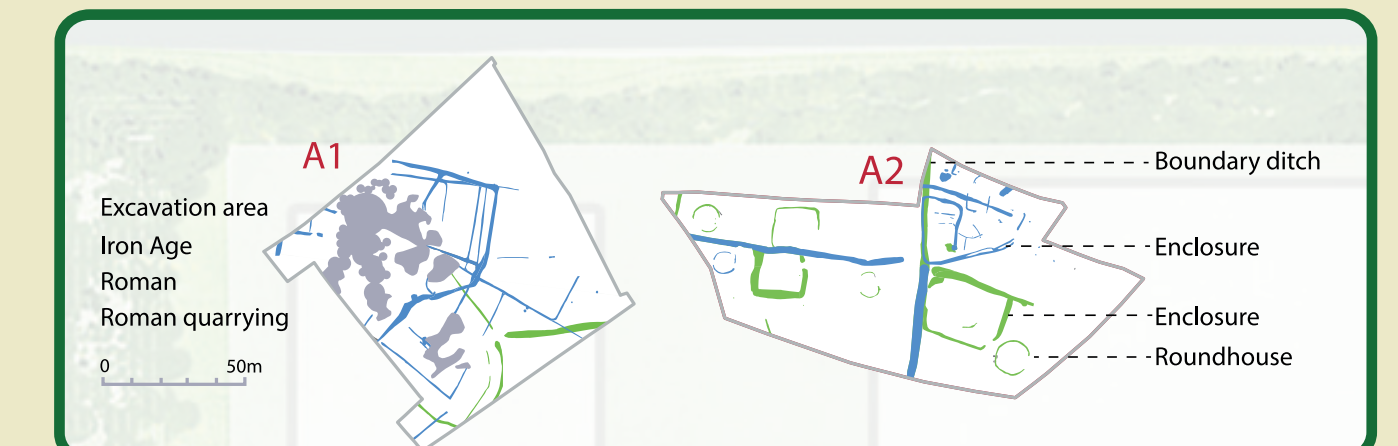
Bittesby House was photographed in the 1920s. Sales details of the time show us that the house had grown significantly and contained two servants' rooms, with separate staircase and a large dairy.

Iron Age and Roman farming

Two farmsteads were excavated in 2020, located close to this board. The farmsteads were occupied from the Late Iron Age into the later Roman period. Each farmstead consisted of a large wooden roundhouse and would have been surrounded by a network of fields and ditches. The farmers would have grown crops including barley and spelt while also raising sheep and cows. The farmsteads were built adjacent to the A5, Roman Watling Street.



Drone picture of Roman site, area A1 (in foreground), with the Iron Age trackway and later Roman Watling Street (A5 road) to its west side



The main 'trunk' roads in Britain were originally constructed by the Roman army. Responsibility for their maintenance rested with designated imperial officials (curatores viarum), though the cost would probably have been borne by the local civitas (county) authorities whose territory the road crossed. In the late Roman period large parts of area 1 was covered in large quarry pits, many of which destroyed the earlier field boundaries. It's likely that the pits were dug to supply sand for this maintained paved roadway.



Almost complete Roman grey ware bowl found in a boundary ditch in area A1



Decorated Samian sherd depicting a man in dancing pose



Likely issued July to December AD 71, the obverse side (left) depicts a laureate bust of Vespasian. The reverse (right) depicts four priestly implements: simpulum, aspergillum, jug and lituus.

Trajan Danube victory issue c AD 107. The obverse side (left) shows a laureate bust of Trajan. On the reverse (right) is a depiction of a personification of the Danube leaning on rocks with a cloak billowing around the head and a hand resting on a rudder.

The obverse side (left) shows a laureate bust of Sabina, wife of Hadrian, who died in AD 137. Sabina is shown diademed and draped with her hair in a plaited coil on her head.

Nine silver coins were found in the backfill of several of the quarry pits within the A1 settlement area. The coins dated to between 32-31 BC and AD 128-139. It is extremely unusual to find so many silver coins from such a small farmstead, with each coin representing nearly two weeks' pay for a Roman soldier. It is possible that these coins and additional metal objects were buried as an offering to the Gods at a roadside shrine, which was later destroyed by quarrying. The excavations also produced a fragment of rare Kapitan II amphora - which was probably made in the Aegean and used to transport wine, olive oil or fish sauce.

