

Assignment 3: Contextualising and Synthesising the Excavation at Tithe Barn Green

In 2015, an excavation was undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology in Monkerton, Devon (Good and Massey 2016). The excavation targeted archaeological features identified during preceding geophysical (Stratascan 2012) and trial-trenching (Joyce and Bateman 2012; Holt and Greateorex 2013) investigations. The excavation ultimately revealed a multi-phase site, with the principal phases of activity dating to the Bronze Age, Iron Age, and the 'transitional' or early Roman period. The post-excavation assessment report that concluded the project, despite the inherent interest of the remains encountered, did not contextualise the findings using the *South West England Research Framework* (SWERF). Nevertheless, the archaeological remains identified have the potential to contribute to a series of topics recognised within the research framework. The pertinent resource assessments (Holbrook *et al* 2021; Fitzpatrick *et al* 2021), research agenda (Bone *et al* 2021), and research strategy (Grove and Croft 2021) of the SWERF will be utilised here to contextualise and synthesise the archaeological remains.

The Bronze Age Remains

Evidence of Bronze Age activity comprised a single ring ditch (Fig.1 & 2), representing surviving remains of a round barrow (Good and Massey 2016). The deposits within the ring ditch were found to contain a relatively small assemblage of pottery, dating to the middle Bronze Age. No evidence of a primary burial was identified in association with the monument.

The archaeological remains are of significance, as noted within the SWERF, as they have the potential to further our understanding of social relations. The relevant research aims and themes related to the Bronze Age remains are detailed within Appendix 1.

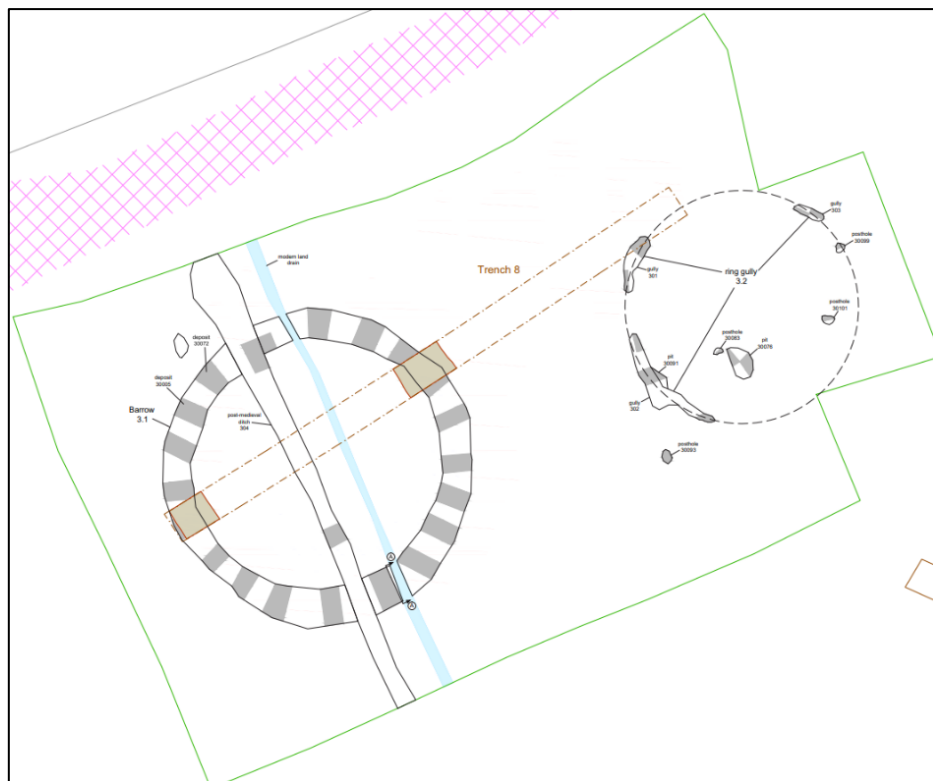


Fig.1: The Bronze Age barrow (left) and Iron Age ring gully (right) within excavation Area 3 (Good and Massey 2016)



Fig.2: West-facing view of the barrow (Good and Massey 2016)

As noted by Cooper (2016), Bronze Age round barrows are often spatially related to other features within the landscape, such as enclosures, trackways, unenclosed settlements, and cremation burials. When seen in isolation, the Monkerton barrow, which appeared not to be associated with any contemporary agricultural or occupational activity, could be seen as somewhat atypical. Indeed, it is only when viewed as part of a wider ceremonial landscape, containing clusters of monuments, can we begin to understand the Monkerton barrow. Prehistoric barrows are widespread throughout the landscape of Devon (Grinsell 1970; Grinsell 1978; Grinsell 1983), some of which are known to date to the middle Bronze Age (Fitzpatrick *et al* 2021).

The preceding geophysical survey and trial-trench evaluation identified a further ring ditch within the development site, some 145m to the south-west (Stratascan 2012; Joyce and Bateman 2012). The secondary barrow was situated on an equivalent topographical location, but did not yield any datable material evidence. Significantly, analysis of aerial photographs indicate that the two Monkerton barrows may be part of a cemetery, or of a wider ceremonial landscape (Exeter Archaeology 2011). To the east of the barrow, principally in the area of Clyst Honiton, a particular concentration of ring ditches and barrows are recorded (HER MDV38797; MDV59077; MDV52112; MDV112239; MDV124522; MDV124523; MDV124527), the closest of which being just 650m to the east (HER MDV124530; Salisbury and Shaw 2015). A small number are also known to the south and the west (HER MDV80641; MDV113532), though this relative paucity may be the result of the inability to conduct aerial photographic analysis or expansive excavations due to the level of urbanisation associated with Exeter. The presence of such a barrow landscape within the lower Exe Valley, within which Monkerton is situated, has been alluded to by Bayer (2011) (Fig.3). Bayer (2011) noted that the

barrows were *likely* of early Bronze age date, and that they shared the landscape with a concentration of Neolithic flint scatters and monuments.

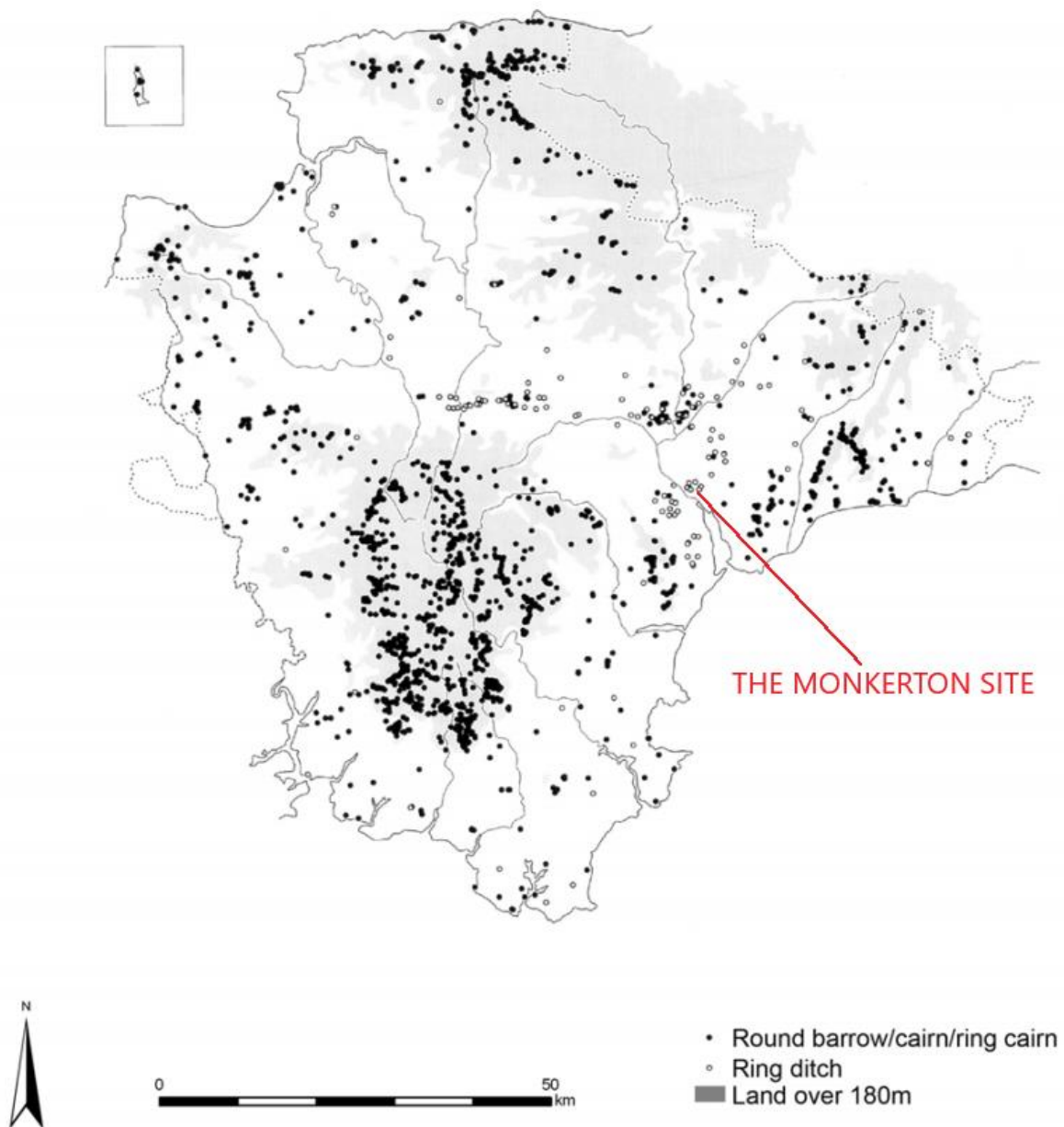


Fig.3: The distribution of barrows and ring ditches in Devon (Bayer 2011), annotation authors own.

The way in which this potential 'ceremonial centre', or cluster of monuments, emerged is however unclear. All the aforementioned ring ditches and barrows are hereto undated and were almost entirely identified by geophysical surveys and via analysis of aerial photographs. Round barrows, although often perceived as an archetypal Bronze Age monument, first appeared in the south-west during the early to mid Neolithic (Woodward 2000). The majority of securely dated barrows recorded in east and mid Devon, however, are of early Bronze Age date (Griffith and Quinnell 1999). Without the excavation of nearby monuments, creating any chronological development of the landscape is challenging due to the longevity of this monument. Nonetheless, it is plausible that the Monkerton monument is a late addition to an already existing ceremonial landscape; barrows in the region were

often constructed in proximity to existing barrow and cemetery groups (Hegarty *et al* 2019). The middle Bronze Age people that occupied this area did not inhabit an 'untouched' or 'empty' landscape, but lived within a landscape that contained meaningful ancient sites (Holtorf 1998). Two conspicuously sizable ring ditches (c.35m diameter), situated to the east (MDV38797; MDV59077), may attest to the emergence of the ceremonial landscape as their size is more comparable to barrows of Neolithic date (Hegarty *et al* 2019).

The multi-phased emergence of expansive 'barrow landscapes' has been demonstrated to span the Neolithic to Iron Age period throughout north-western Europe, with ranging interpretations of their developing communal function and collective perception (Cooper 2016; Holst *et al* 2013; Bourgeois 2013). Barrows are often interpreted as monuments that act as territorial markers, monumentalising boundaries between landscapes and territories of differing communities (Field 1998; Woodward and Woodward 1996; Watson 2001). Fitting the Monkerton barrow within this context is somewhat challenging however, as no contemporary physical boundary or occupational activity was found nearby; although, it is possible that such boundaries and activity remain *in situ* nearby. It is also plausible that the ridge upon which the barrow was situated, or indeed the nearby watercourse, acted as a communally significant natural boundary within the landscape. Regardless, the sheer amount of labour required to build the Monkerton barrow, and those in the surrounding landscape, would have undoubtedly been a communal effort (Bourgeois 2013). Such communal landscapes and communal projects would have been utilised to establish, reshape, or strengthen social relations between kin and disparate communities (Barret 1990; Giles 2007; Bourgeois 2013). The multitude of barrows scattered over the landscape surrounding Monkerton, many potentially pre-dating the Bronze Age, would have created a pervasive notion of long-lived communal presence; this memory, and created history, of the 'barrow landscape' would likely have been central to the creation of 'community' (Cohen 1985). The way in which this communal presence is legitimized in such ceremonial landscapes has been said to be effectuated by the interred ancestors associated with the barrows (Fokkens and Arnoldussen 2008). Although the Monkerton barrow was not associated with any human remains, this may be the result of truncation that likewise destroyed the accompanying mound. Notwithstanding, the majority of pottery sherds recovered from the barrow were urn-type vessels that may have represent disturbed cremation burials.

The spatial relationship between the Bronze Age barrow and the probable roundhouse of middle Iron Age date, represented by the ring gully, may further attest to notions of long-lived communal presence. The propinquity of the roundhouse is a further example of a phenomenon of Iron age settlements interacting with earlier prehistoric monuments (Bradley 2002), potentially continuing communal 'negotiations' with a ceremonial landscape.

The Transitional or Early Roman Remains

Within the southern part of the site, two potentially 'transitional' or Roman rectilinear enclosures were identified cutting a curvilinear enclosure of middle to late Iron Age date (Fig.4) (Good and Massey 2016). The apparent contemporaneousness of the two rectilinear enclosures, in addition to the possible sub-division of space and the probable driveway or trackway between them, is indicative of a complex farmstead (Rippon and Gould 2021). The archaeological remains are of significance, as noted within the SWERF, as they have the potential to improve our understanding of rural settlements in proximity to a military encampment during a period of transition. The relevant research aims and themes related to the Romano-British remains are detailed within Appendix 2.

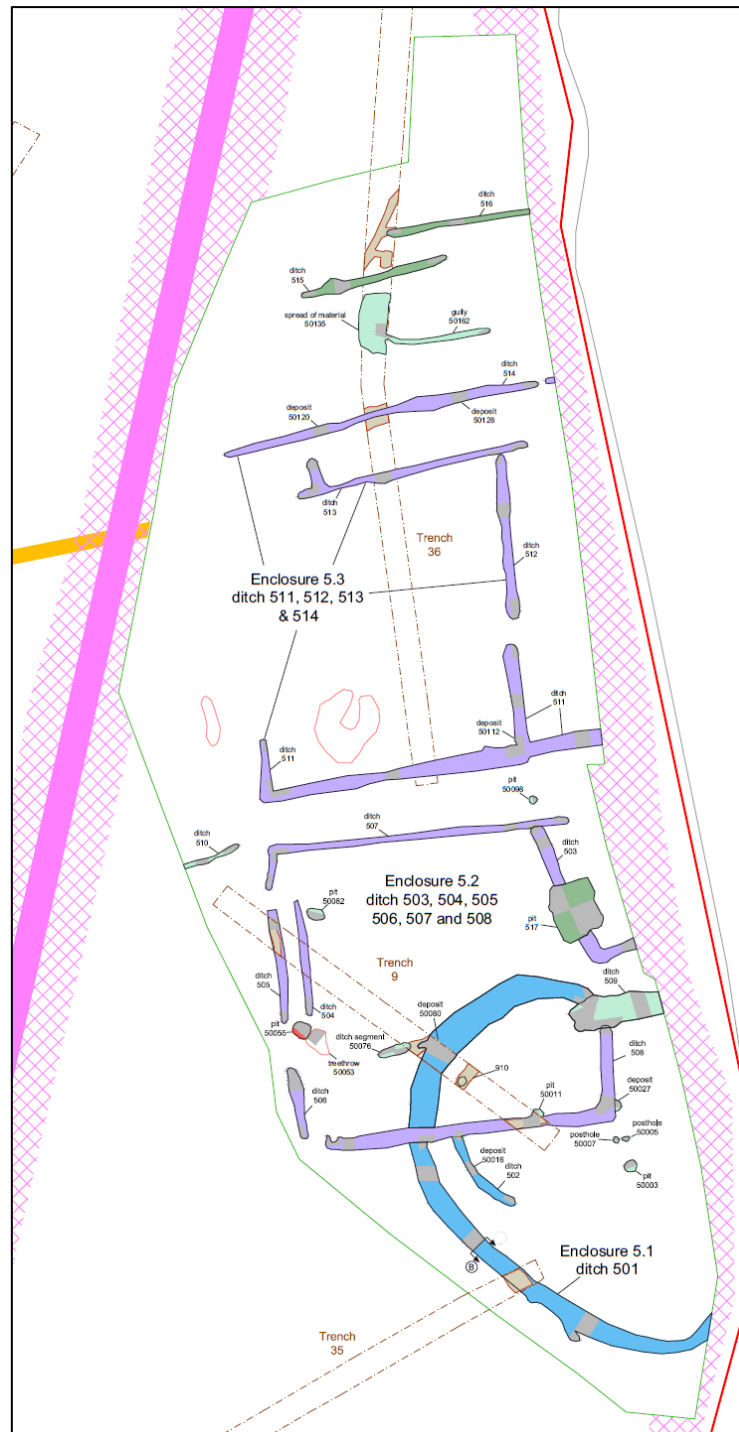


Fig.4: The transitional or early Roman features (green and purple) and middle Iron Age features (blue), within Area 5 (Good and Massey 2016)

Dating the two rectilinear enclosures is somewhat problematic, as the associated ceramic assemblage is indicative of a broad date range between the 1st and 2nd century AD (Good and Massey 2016). Moreover, the plainwares that make up the pottery assemblage recovered from the curvilinear enclosure were utilised well into the 1st century BC. As such, a relatively brief or non-existent hiatus may separate the two phases of field systems. The evident spatial relationship between the middle, or potentially late, Iron Age curvilinear enclosure and the transitional or early Roman enclosures may attest to both continuity and discontinuity. There appears to have been a deliberate superimposition

of a Romanised rectilinear enclosure; this may represent an attempt to impose a sense of continuity, while also delineating a discontinuity of social organisation. The construction of a new enclosure, at the expense of considerable resources and labour, intentionally reorganises divisions of space – altering the social structure and relations of the people with which they were associated (Bevan 1997). While this apparent ‘Romanisation’ is relatively difficult to discern within the South West region as a whole, the site is situated within the hinterland of the *civitas* capital of Exeter, which witnessed radical change in landscape character (Fyfe *et al* 2004).

The alteration of land division is particularly notable when considering the proximity of the *civitas* capital of Exeter, which originated as the 1st century AD fortress of *Isca*. The Second Augustan Legion was stationed at *Isca* from c.55 AD and ceased c.75 AD (Todd 2001). The establishment of the legionary fortress at *Isca* undoubtedly had a significant influence in the rural communities within its hinterland; the change in field system organisation at Monkerton is perhaps an expression of this influence. Indeed, the distribution of known multi-enclosure and rectilinear ‘complex farms’ in Devon – such as that identified at Monkerton – are entirely situated within the hinterland of Exeter, with a higher concentration in the more ‘Romanised’ east of the South-West peninsula (Fig.5) (Rippon and Gould 2021). Moreover, the distribution of rectilinear, square, and rectangular enclosures of early Roman date throughout Devon, as opposed to more ‘indigenous’ curvilinear enclosures, exhibit a clear concentration in the hinterlands of Exeter and other known military centres (Rippon and Gould 2021). Despite the relatively restricted insight afforded by the limited scope of the excavation at Monkerton, it is possible to hypothesise that the probably low-status indigenous settlement, expressed by the curvilinear enclosure, was superseded by a Romanesque complex rectilinear field system – a change that was likely dictated by the close proximity of an emerging military and urban centre, with its nearby emerging transport and commerce networks.



Fig.5: The distribution of complex farm settlements throughout the South-West; confirmed complex farms (left) and probable complex farms (right) (Rippon and Gould 2021)

Despite the extensive alteration of the landscape, there does not appear to have been a sweeping change in agricultural practice during the transition. While it is challenging to precisely characterise the farming economy associated with the enclosures, given the acidic nature of the soils and the quantities of animal bone recovered from their fill, it is probable that these areas were utilised for cattle rearing (Good and Massey 2016). This continuity is largely consistent with pollen analysis across the South West, which suggests that the character of the local vegetation remained relatively unchanged during the transition period – indicating a continuation of pastoral land utilisation (Fyfe *et al* 2004). The Monkerton enclosures therefore may further contribute to a body of evidence that

suggests imperial rule did not significantly transform the agricultural system in mid-Devon. Nevertheless, a pair of Roman quern stones were recovered during the excavation, a somewhat rare find in this area, in addition to charred cereal remains. One of the quern stones was “reminiscent of Iron Age types” (Good and Massey 2016), while the other was decidedly Romanesque. This may suggest that the agricultural utility of the area was more complex, potentially evidencing the suggestion of Fyfe *et al* (2004) that the Exe Valley landscape was also utilised for cereal cultivation for the military and urban centre at Exeter, in contrast to the predominantly pastoral nature of the rest of mid-Devon.

Conclusion

As noted within a review of research frameworks by Pye Tait (2014), the regional research frameworks provide a vital focus for research, but are not always actively utilised. The contextualisation of the later prehistoric and Roman remains at Monkerton, however, demonstrate that relatively small-scale investigations can help elucidate recognised gaps in our knowledge. The Bronze Age barrow, when viewed in a wider context, evidently has the potential to contribute to our understanding of ceremonial landscapes. Nonetheless, it is challenging to hereto contextualise the barrow – potentially as a late addition to the long-lived ceremonial landscape – without further investigation of monuments in the surrounding environs. The Roman remains, however, provide insights into agricultural and settlement change near a known military encampment during a key transitional period. Addressing the specific questions of the research frameworks using the remains at Monkerton, largely by contributing to a wider body of evidence for broader synthesis, has the potential to lead to new insights.

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Appendix 1

Relevant research aims detailed in Bone *et al* (2021):

1. Research Aim 54: Widen our understanding of Neolithic and Bronze Age mortuary practice.
 - a. 54b: All areas of the region contain monuments that challenge “conventional” categories and sequences. Rather than being relegated to the status of “oddities”, we should acknowledge and seek to better understand non-conventional monument forms.
 - b. 54d: How can the emergence of ceremonial centres (clusters of monuments) be understood?
 - c. 54j: Approaches to Bronze Age round barrow cemeteries as “communal monuments” potentially have much to offer.

Relevant strategic research themes detailed in Grove and Croft (2021):

1. Theme D: Social Identity and Change – Transition, Identity, Territories, Religion, Conflict and Death
 - a. “Priorities which are immediately applicable to the SW strategy include developing integrated approaches to prehistoric landscapes; improving understanding of the spatial, typological and chronological context of prehistoric sites and monuments.”

Appendix 2

Research aims detailed in Bone *et al* (2021):

1. Research Aim 10: Address our lack of understanding of key transitional periods.
2. Research Aim 29: Improve our understanding of non-villa Roman rural settlement.
 - a. 29a: Whilst work in the past has concentrated on villa buildings, developer funded work has made considerable advances in the study of non-villa rural settlement in certain parts of the region, such as the M4/M5 corridors, the Upper Thames valley and the outskirts of the Bristol conurbation. Elsewhere the record is very patchy and there has been little study of the environmental/economic data such as bones and seeds which ought to provide information on the agricultural base in different parts of the region
 - b. 29b: Some areas, such as West Dorset and North and West Devon, currently have very little evidence for settlement in the Roman period. This needs to be assessed by extensive field survey (such as the National Mapping Programme) and targeted excavation to test whether this is a reflection of a real absence or only a lack of archaeological work.
 - c. 29c: Apart from in these areas, the visibility of Roman sites should allow more geographical approaches to their study, such as the identification of differing settlement densities and types across the region (and perhaps beyond). This would provide a useful counterbalance to earlier studies of villa distributions and provide a greater understanding of the nature of the Roman countryside. Developer-funded work associated with linear schemes such as roads and pipelines provides raw data which requires further synthesis before it can be used to address such questions.
3. Research Aim 41: Assess the impact of the Roman empire on farming.
 - a. 41a: We still do not fully understand the effects of “Romanisation” on plant and animal use and cultivation methods or whether regional differences can be attributed to this or other factors.

4. Research Aim 50: Improve understanding of the effects of the Roman army on the local population.
 - a. The effects of the sudden presence (and then withdrawal) of the large 1st-century garrison in the southwest peninsula on the indigenous economy and settlement pattern is poorly understood. There is very little evidence for canabae and vici and what there is poorly understood (for instance the relationship between the apparent late Iron Age settlement and subsequent fortress at Kingsholm).

Relevant strategic research themes detailed in Grove and Croft (2021):

1. Theme D: Social Identity and Change – Transition, Identity, Territories, Religion, Conflict and Death.
 - a. “Roman – there is a lack of data with regard to the impact of the Roman army on local communities”.
2. Theme E: Economies and Subsistence – Trade, Agriculture ,Transport and Communication.
 - a. “The impact of the empire on farming is an under researched topic which could benefit greatly from using existing resources, notably museum collections, previous excavation reports and grey literature.”