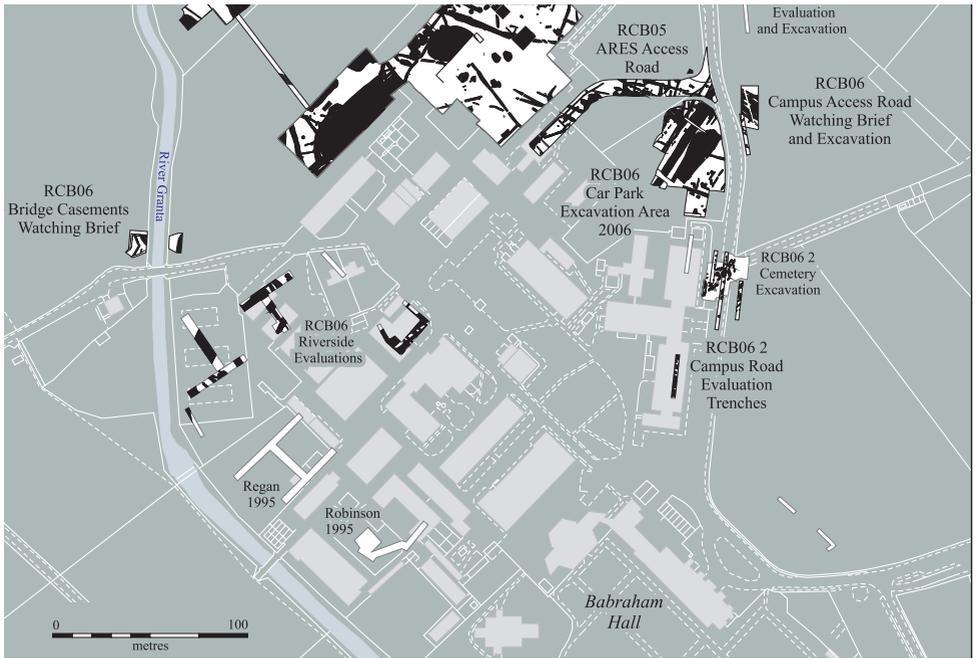




The Babraham Institute
Archaeology



Today's Babraham is built on history. Thousands were born here, grew up here, raised a family here and died here. The archaeological work done has recovered just some of the remains of their lives; the traces of houses, animals, people, pieces of the tools they used and other simple everyday items. These artifacts help build a picture of life in a previously unknown Babraham.



Roman Archaeology

During the archaeological excavations of Babraham a plethora of Roman evidence was found on site including pottery, metalwork, agricultural remains and a small Roman cemetery. The cemetery was cramped and contained 36 graves accounting for possibly 42 individuals and these span from the late 1st Century to the early 4th.

There was evidence for families buried together; for example, three individuals showed evidence of common genetic traits (the presence of metopic structures in the skull) and a possible husband and wife burial was located outside the cemetery.



The burials were not rich but neither were they poor. The richest burial was of an adult female, who was buried with a jet bead necklace (below right), a shale bracelet (below left) and copper earrings.





Five decapitated bodies were found although four (possibly all five) were decapitated post-mortem. It is unclear why they were decapitated; it could have been a justice act but since many were post mortem decapitations, more likely than that it was a religious act. In some of the decapitation burials pottery grave goods replaced the position of the head, which was placed beside the feet (above).

The number of cremations here is low compared with the majority of other British sites but in the local area there are a few other sites where just a few cremations have been discovered. At this site there were found to be six cremations around a centrally placed cremation; this has parallels to other nearby sites, for example a site south of Babraham where 29 graves nucleate around one centrally placed cremation. This may suggest some form of burial mound at Babraham which has long since been ploughed away.



Roman Coinage

An abundance of Roman coinage has been found on site, charting the era of occupation of Babraham from the 1st Century to the 4th Century. Among the coins were four with the image of Magnentius. This makes them very rare because they could only have been made between 350 and 353 AD.

Magnentius (right) was a Roman army commander in the mid 4th Century AD. When in 350 AD the army was angered by the Emperor Constans, Magnentius was declared Emperor and Constans was murdered later that year.

Magnentius 'ruled' until 353 AD (although after defeat in Italy in 351AD many soldiers returned to the Loyalist cause) when he was defeated by Constans' brother Constantinus II at Mons Seleucus and then committed suicide.

Constantinus purged Magnentius's followers and so these coins may have been discarded to avoid punishment.



Later Archaeology

It wasn't just the Romans who lived here. The Saxons who came after them left their own remains. A building known as a Sunken Featured Building was located on the Babraham site; the name refers to the building's construction. Two posts were sunken into the ground, these formed the basis of the building's structure holding up the roof at both ends. The building's purpose is unknown, although it is presumed to be a workshop because of its small size and the contents found within.



Finds included 13 vessels of pottery (among some older Roman tile and pot), 339 bone fragments (with some butchering evidence on them), a polished bone spindle whorl (an item used in the spinning of wool), a knife blade fragment and a fragment of an early Anglo Saxon gilded copper alloy square headed brooch (510 - 550 AD) (above).

This Livery button features an animal of some kind. It would be worn most likely on a lapel. It is presumed to be from around the 17th to early 19th Century, although precise dating is as yet not possible.



The Church of St Peter's

The Church of St Peter's is probably Saxon although the current building is later (12th Century and onwards). The spire is said to be of a style that is added on to an existing building so it is therefore prudent to assume that an earlier church of either wood or stone existed on the site. Perhaps a church of the same name from even earlier was in the vicinity, regarded as the same church but in different positions within the area behind the hall.

Alric the priest is mentioned in the Domesday book and must have had a place from which to preach, St Peter's being the most likely candidate. The Saxon/ Medieval village is said to lie to the east of St Peter's. The proximity of the church to the supposed location of the original village makes sense, as a church is one of the central buildings in most rural villages throughout English history.



Aerial photograph of the church and the rear of the house 1955

The Church remained a vital part of Babraham long after the village was moved, important both to the Lord of the Manor and the ordinary parishioners. The Church is to this day a piece of living archaeology, continuing the purpose for which it was built in the 12th Century.



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www.babraham.ac.uk Tel: +44(0)1223 496000