Beyond the Pale: grey literature as a method of publication
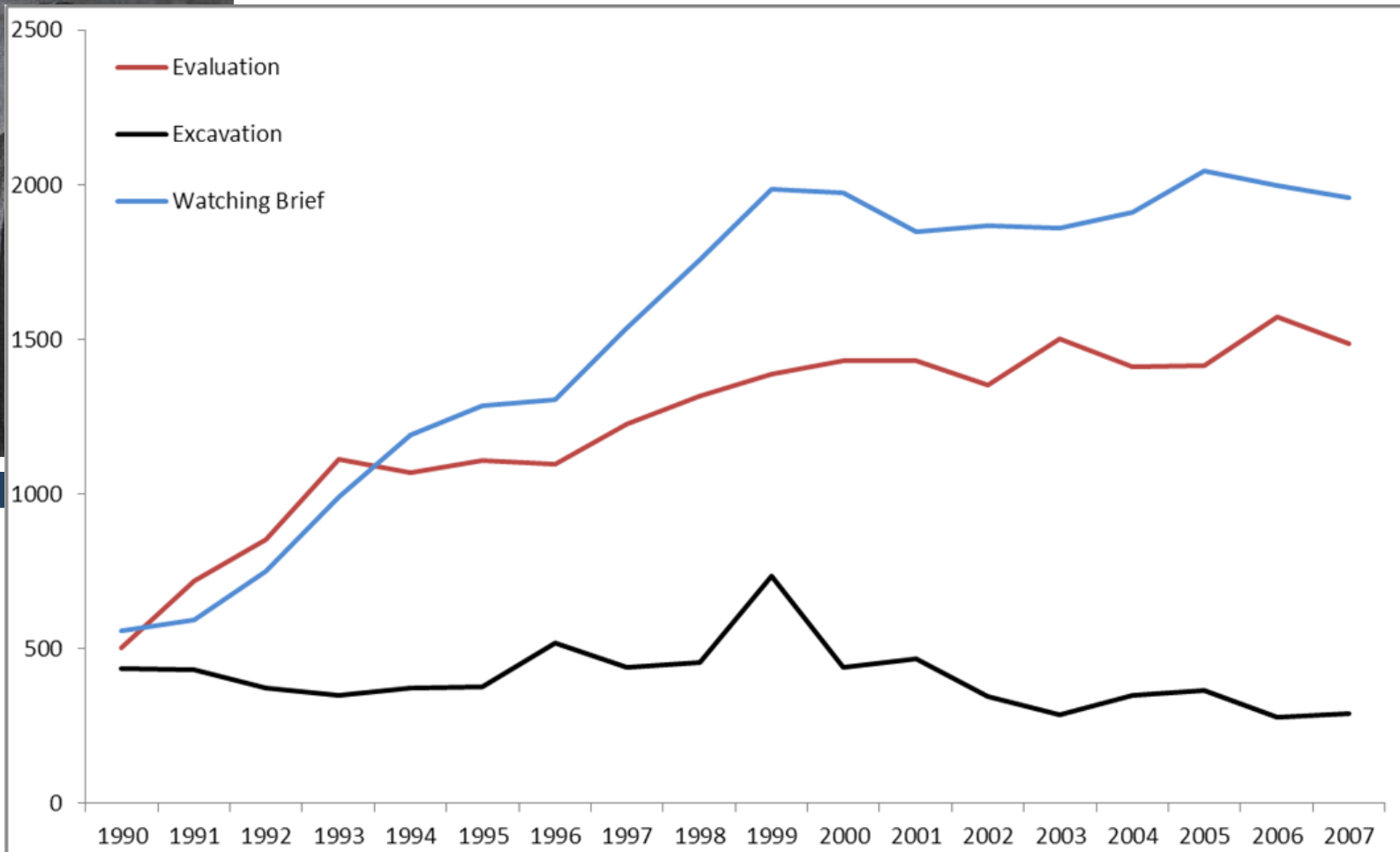
Tim Evans, Archaeology Data Service
Dept. of Archaeology, University of York
01-09-2016

Introduction

- A (very) quick overview of grey literature
- Case studies in archaeological publication
- The potential of an Open Access approach

- A mix of my own PhD research
- Ongoing projects at the ADS:
  - OASIS and the Rural Settlement of Roman Britain
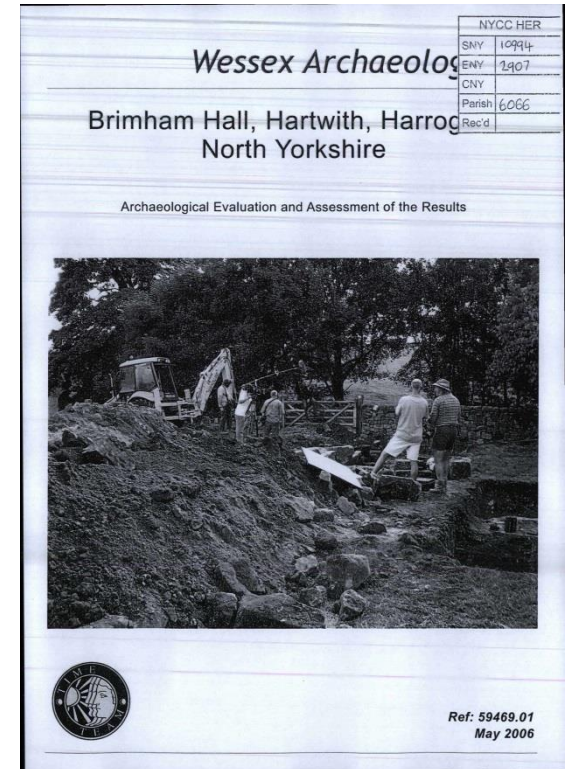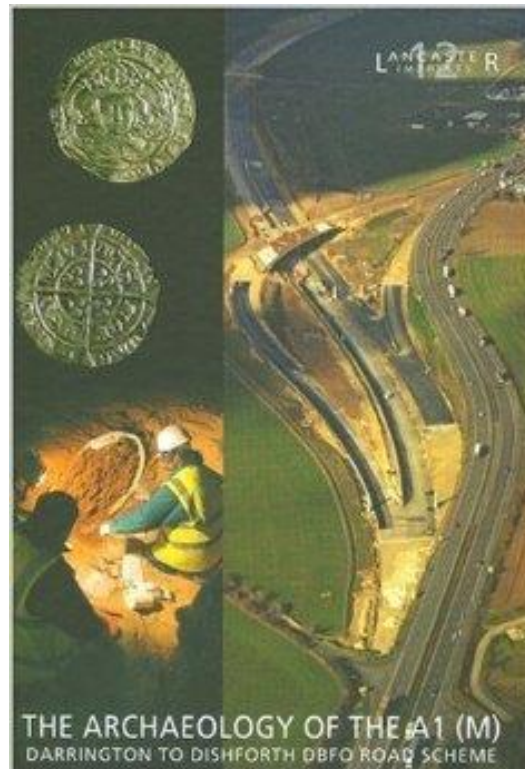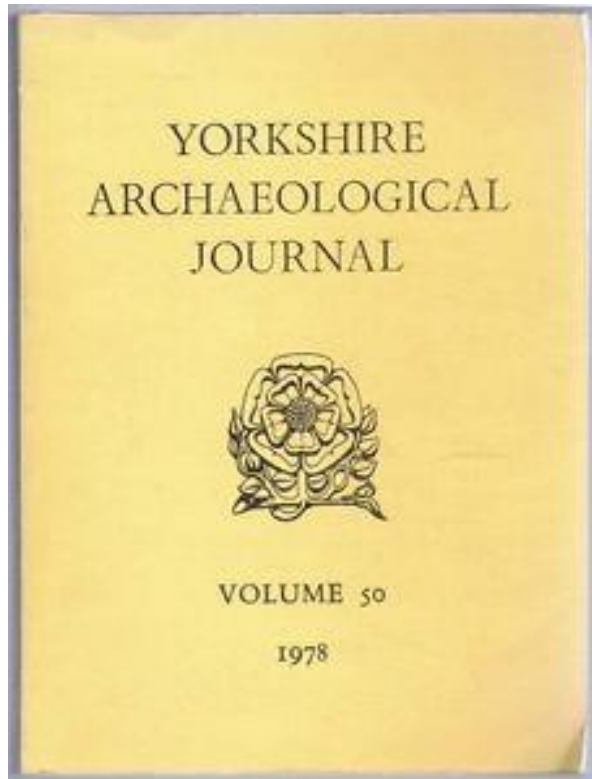- Note: based on data from England

Rise in work

Data from the Historic England Excavation Index
http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/304/

Publication crisis

YORKSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

VOLUME 50

1978

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE A1 (M)
DARRINGTON TO DISHFORTH DBFO ROAD SCHEME

NYCC HER
SNY 10994
ENY 2907
CNY
Parish 6066
Rec'd

Wessex Archaeolog

Brimham Hall, Hartwith, Harrog
North Yorkshire

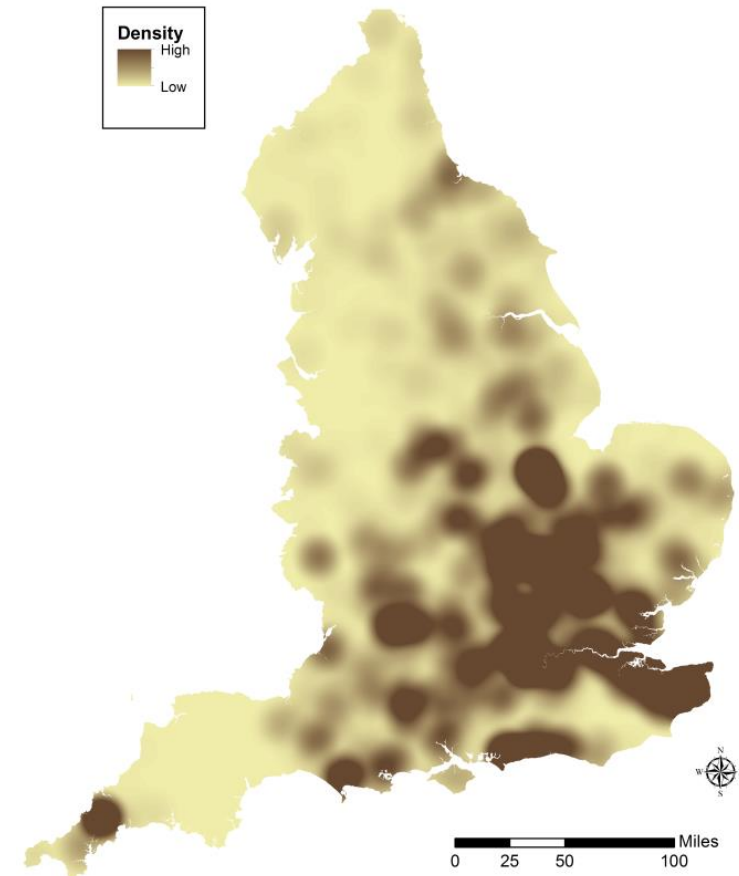Archaeological Evaluation and Assessment of the Results

Ref: 59469.01
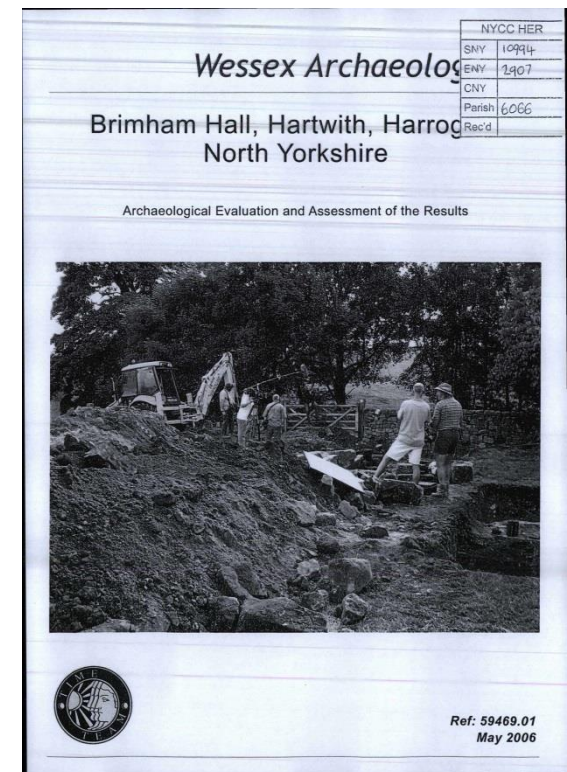May 2006

Consequences/current thought

- Currently in an age of advanced data re-use.

- Post-PPG16: Drowning in Data?

- Unknown unknowns

PPG16 investigations used by the Prehistory of Britain and Ireland project
[Data from doi:10.5284/1028304]

- A problem (for academics at least)
  - Inaccessible
    - Available in hard-copy only
  - Poor quality
    - Lack of interpretation
    - Lack of information (plans)

Wessex Archaeology

Brimham Hall, Hartwith, Harrogate
North Yorkshire

Archaeological Evaluation and Assessment of the Results

Ref: 59469.01
May 2006

Attitudes to 'grey literature'

"…stands for manifold document types produced on all levels of government, academics, business and industry in print and electronic formats that are protected by intellectual property rights, of sufficient quality to be collected and preserved by library holdings or institutional repositories, but not controlled by commercial publishers i.e., where publishing is not the primary activity of the producing body"
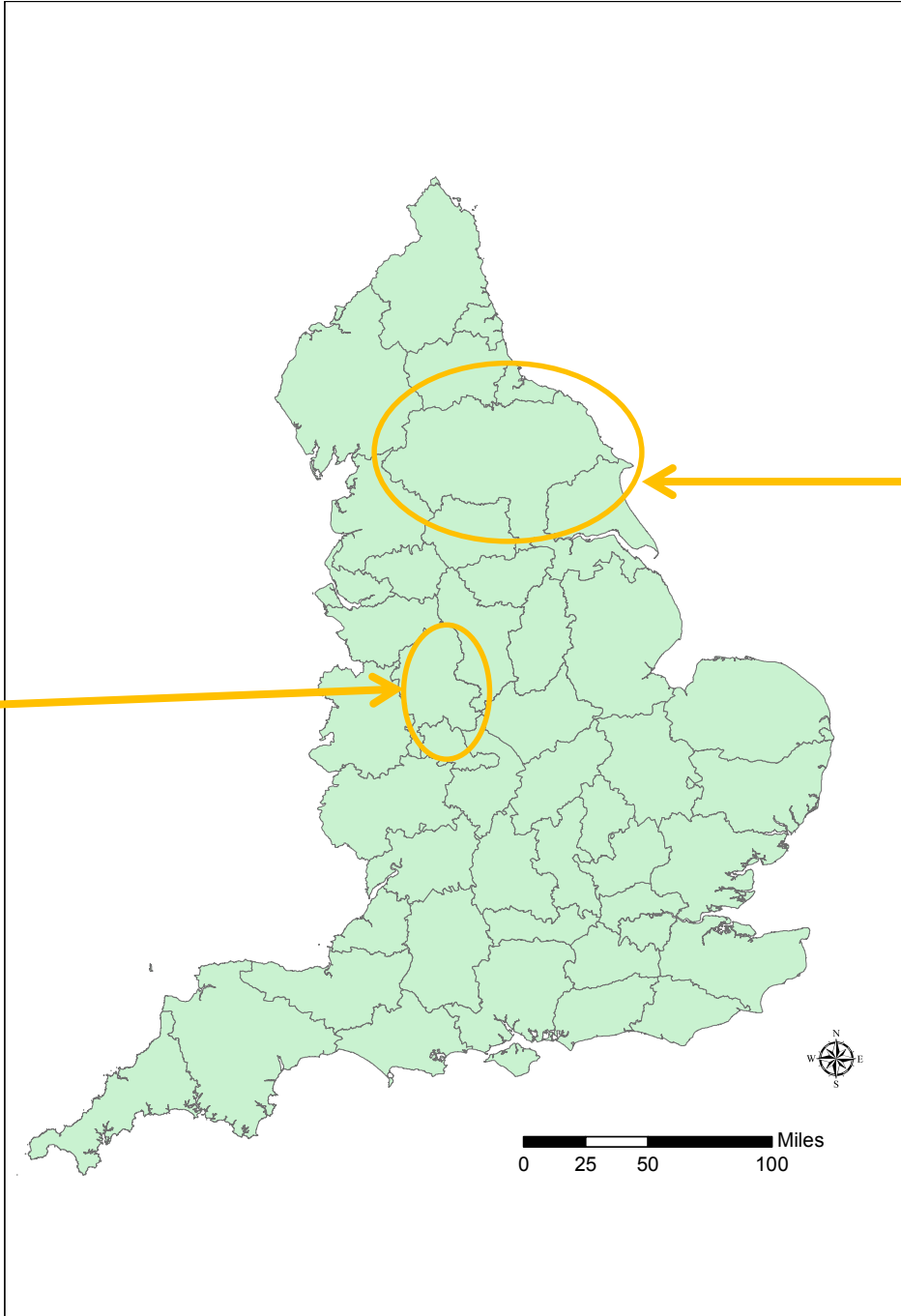
- How much grey literature is there relative to traditional published material (and wholly unpublished works)?

- Why does it exist?

- Is it all bad?

Case studies

North Yorkshire

Staffordshire
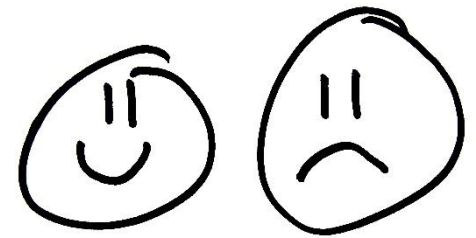
Definitive record of excavations + outputs
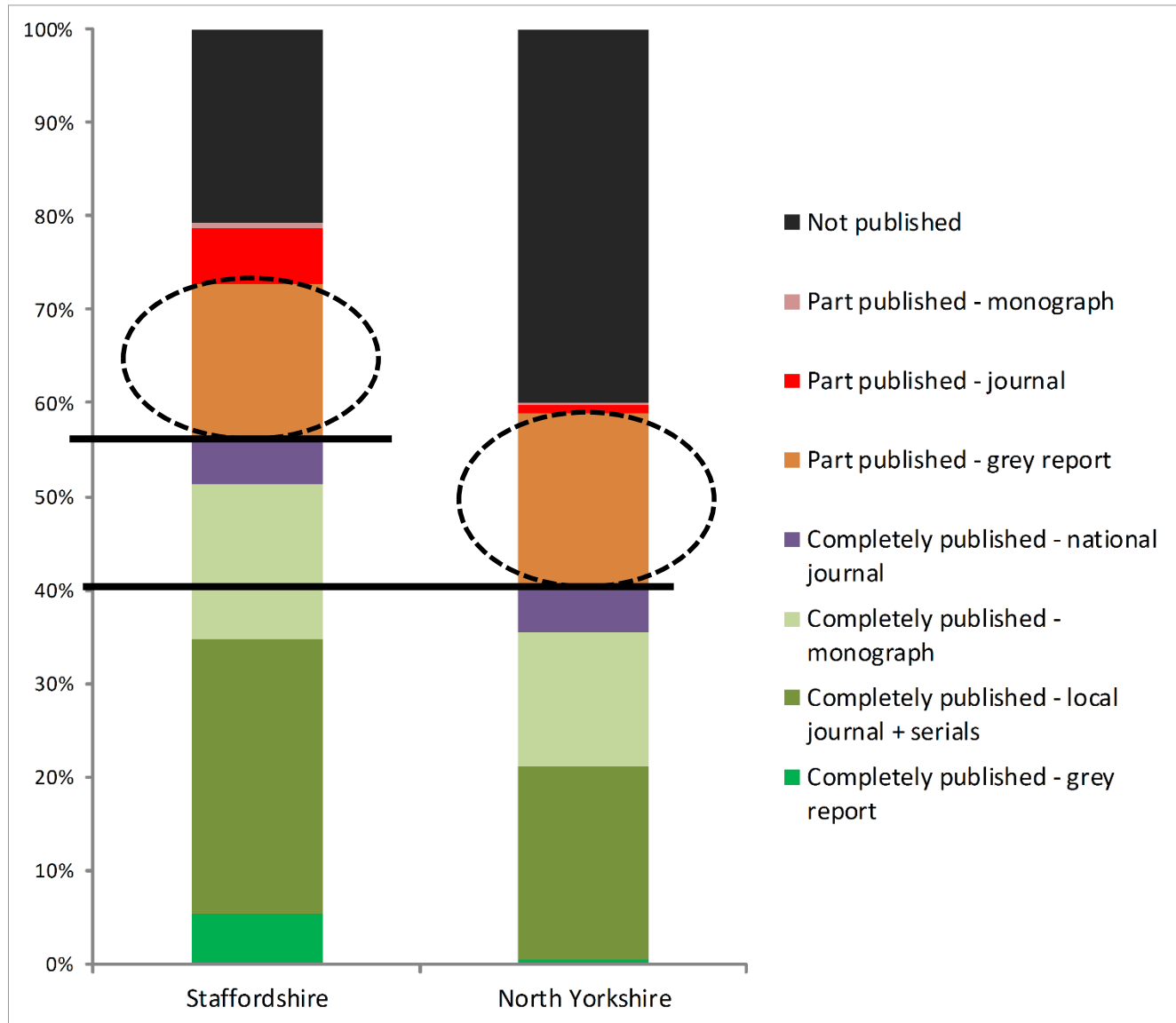
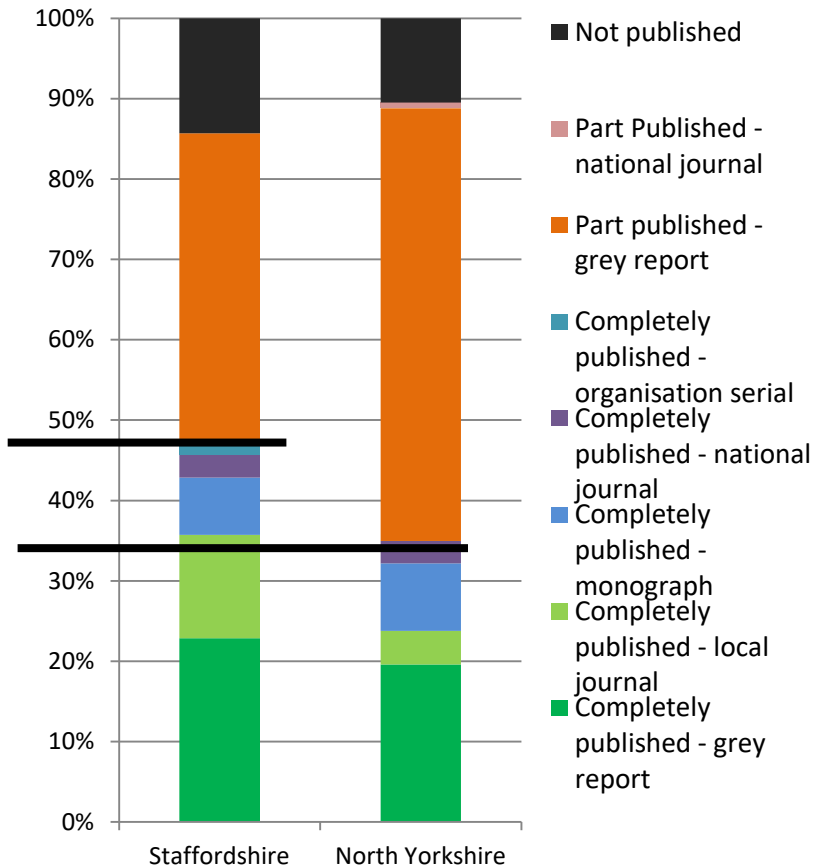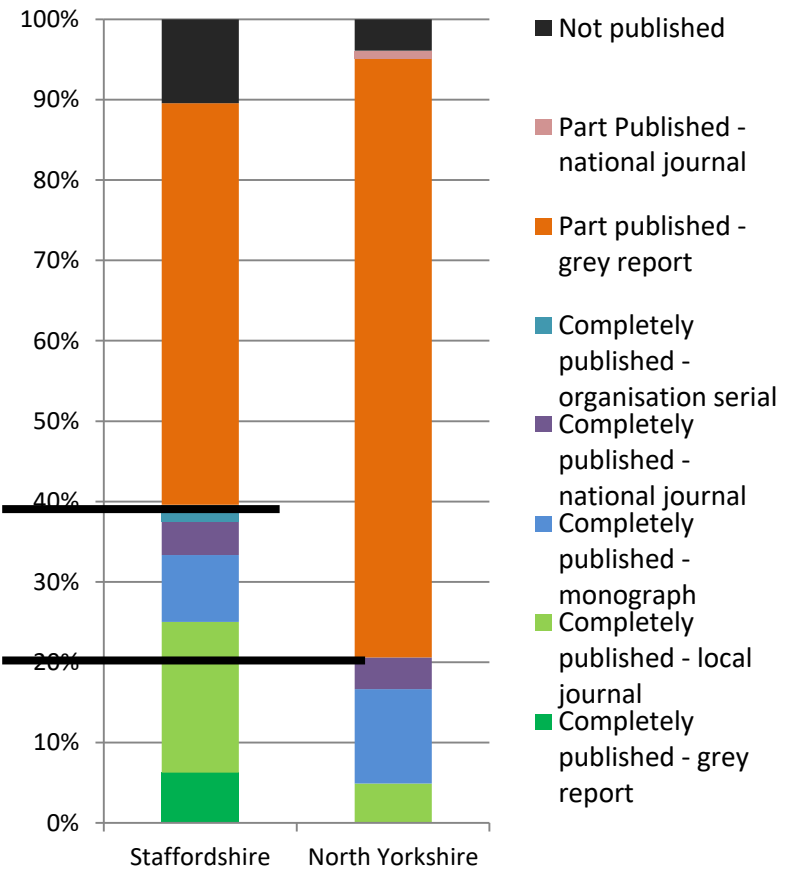*Excavation*   *Output*   *Quality*

What's published?

Fate of planning-led events

All recorded events

**Just excavations of regional or national significance**

Why is there so much grey literature

- Evaluations very rarely have recourse to further publication
- Smaller excavations are **often deemed to be adequately served** by a (grey) report only
- Personal/organisational – mistakes, disaster etc
- Local curators can have difficulties in enforcing post-excavation recommendations
- Money (or lack of)!
- Not accepted by local journals

Is it a bad thing?

Represents an increase in works reaching some form of written output

Staffordshire

North Yorkshire
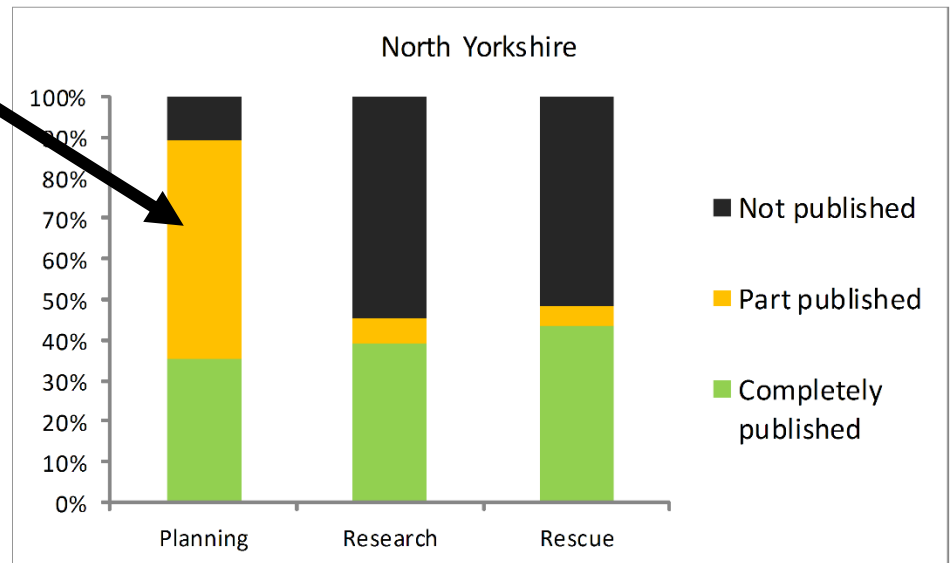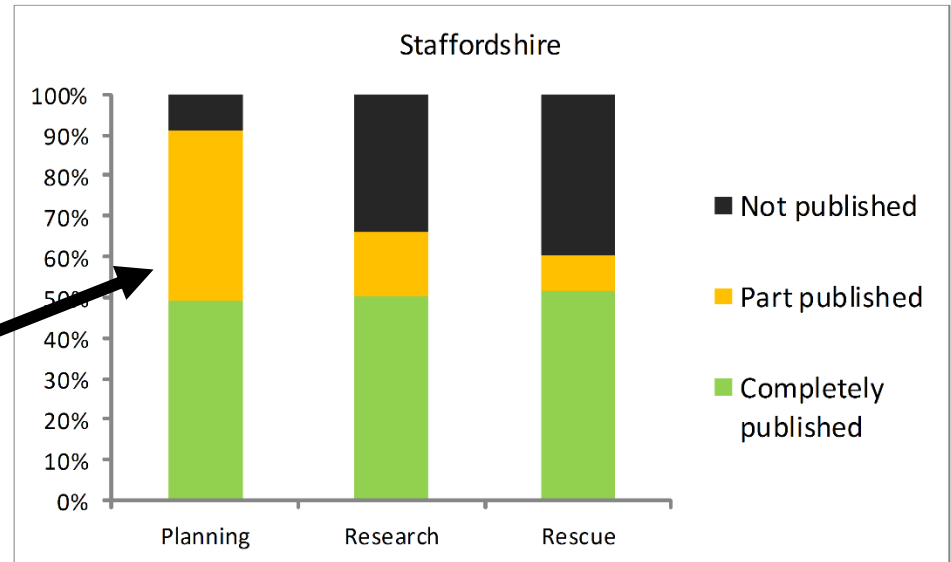
Content of 'grey literature'

Staffordshire
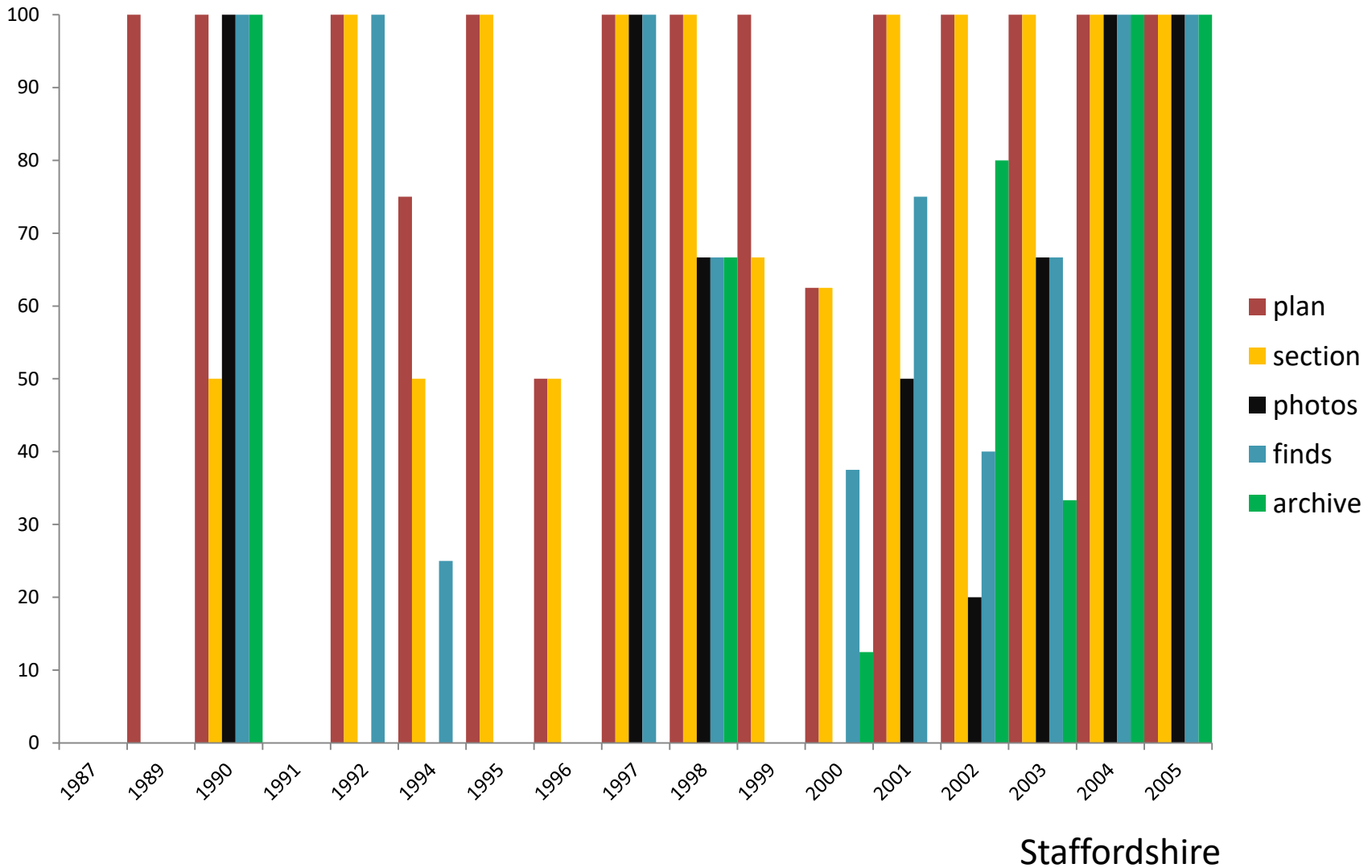
- Is it even possible to publish everything in the traditional manner?

- Should we refine what it is to be published?

- Publication by wider synthesis rather than at a site-level?

- Increased (and pragmatic) emphasis on grey literature (including stop calling it that!)

Open Access

OASIS

Reports released into ADS library via OASIS (England)

In academic practice

The Leverhulme Trust

Historic England

University of **Reading**

Cotswold Archaeology

doi:10.5284/1030449

The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource
Martyn Allen, Nathan Blick, Tom Brindle, Tim Evans, Michael Fulford, Neil Holbrook, Julian D Richards, Alex Smith, 2015
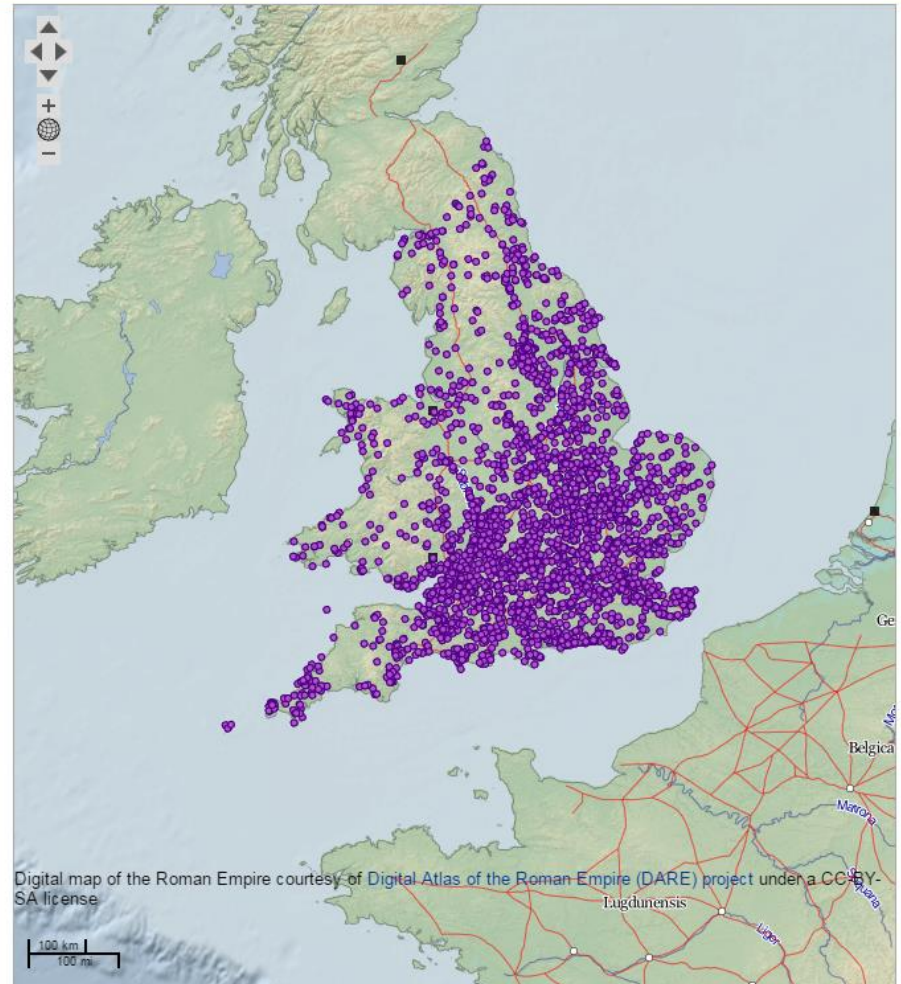
Home   Map

About this map:

This map displays layers from the project database, which can be viewed against a range of baseline datasets. The layers also include Roman roads and settlements derived from Historic England NRHE dataset held by the ADS. In addition, the data from Stage 1 of the Assessing The Research Potential of Grey Literature in the study of Roman England project 10.5284/1000418 is also included.

Tips:

- Click on the ⊕ icon to return to the original extent
- Click on a point to view name and to link to the full record
- To zoom in on a specific area: hold down the left-mouse button and the SHIFT key, and draw a rectangle using your mouse
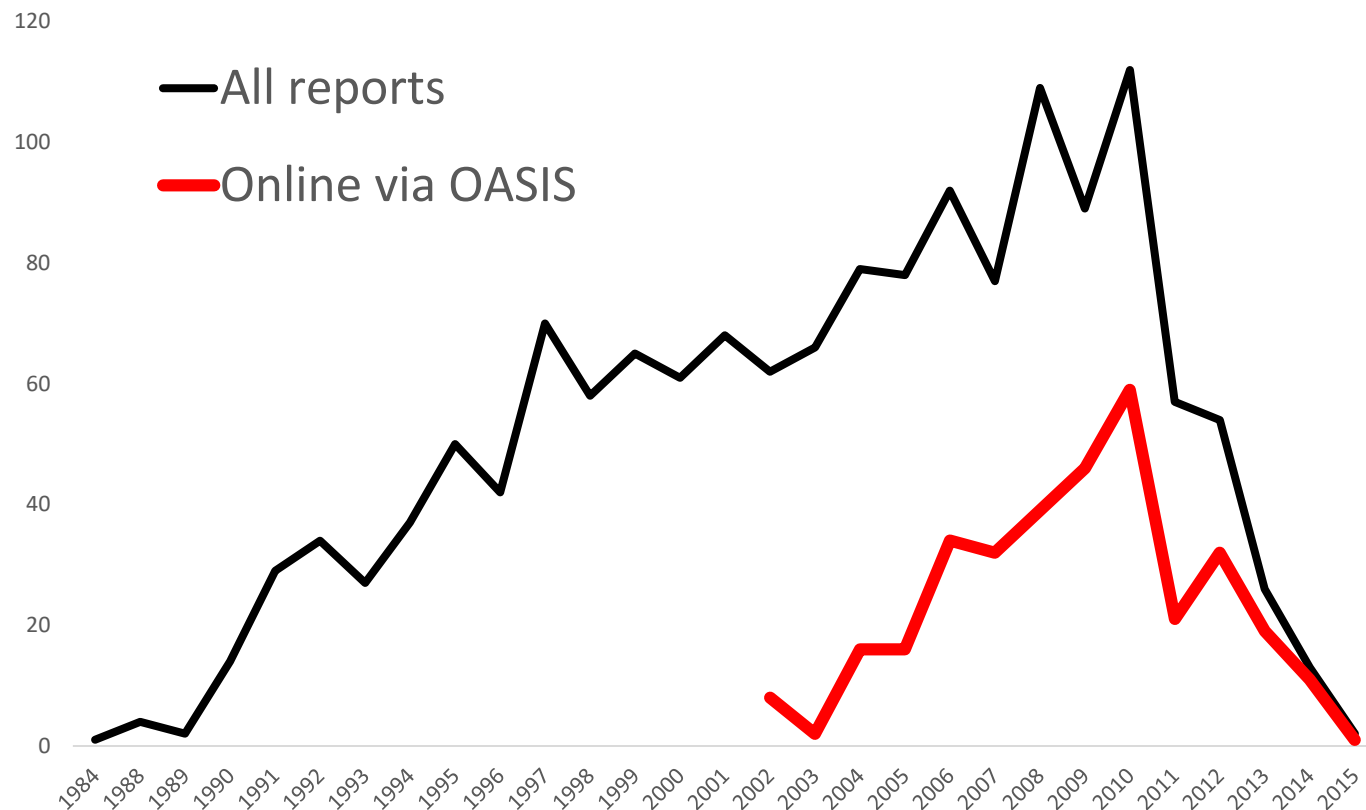
Digital map of the Roman Empire courtesy of Digital Atlas of the Roman Empire (DARE) project under a CC-BY-SA license
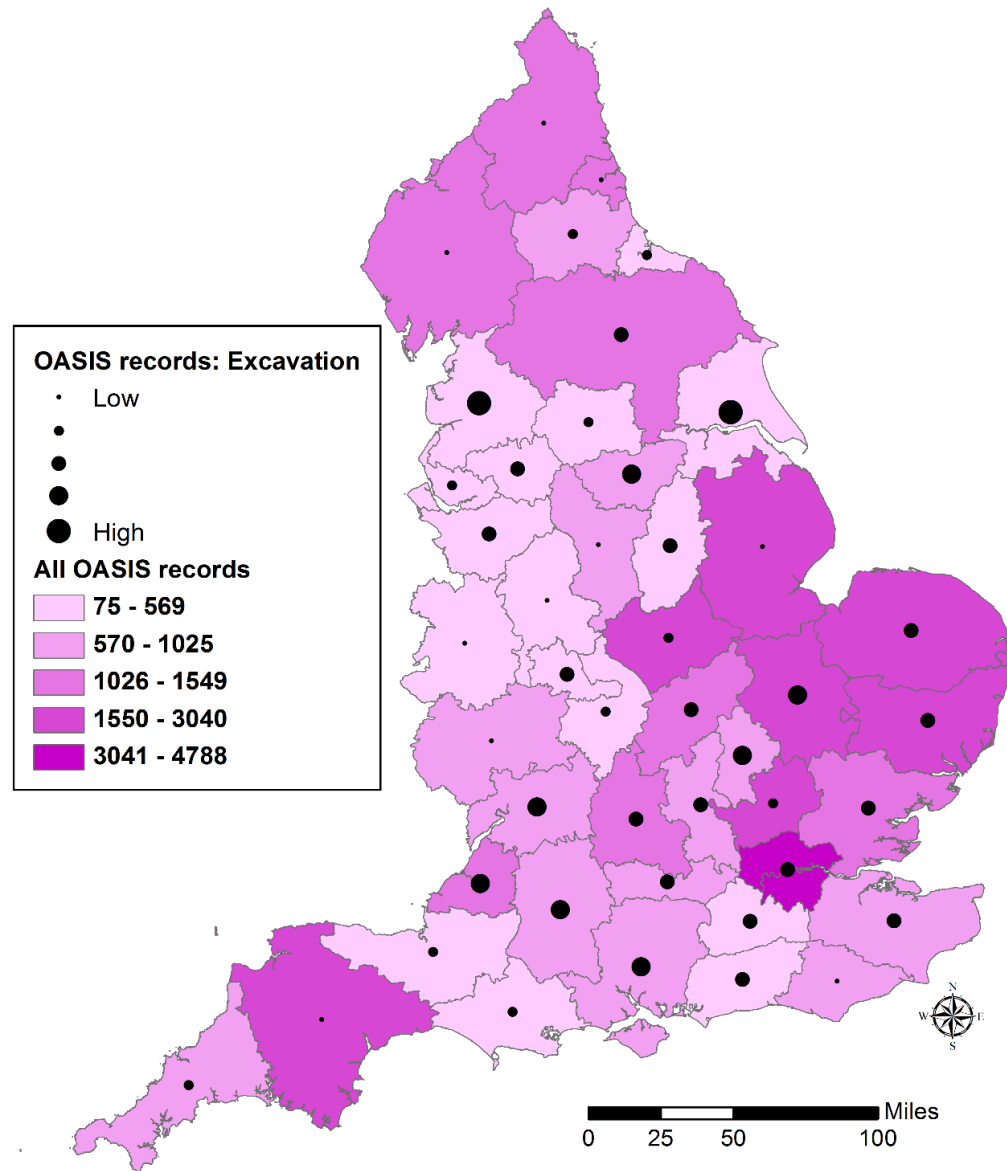
In academic practice

- 3479 records from England (1800s to 2014!)
- 1630 records with GL
- 1375 records *with only* GL
  - 1477 **_reports_**
  - 337 **_reports_** *from OASIS* (22%)

In academic practice

Reports used by the Roman Rural Settlement project

OASIS records: Excavation
· Low
·
·
·
· High

All OASIS records
75 - 569
570 - 1025
1026 - 1549
1550 - 3040
3041 - 4788

Miles
0   25   50   100

http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/blog/oasis/

Final thoughts

- A pragmatic approach: grey literature can be a good thing

- The tip of the iceberg – what about the data behind the reports?