

## CHAPTER 6

# THE EAST

By Alexander Smith

The region defined here as the East is among the smallest of those within the current project, at 11,393 km<sup>2</sup>. It conforms in large parts to the area of England identified as East Anglia, comprising most of Norfolk and Suffolk, along with the south-eastern portion of Cambridgeshire, northern halves of Essex and Hertfordshire, and a very small part of Bedfordshire (FIG. 6.1). The northern half of the region is traditionally associated with the late Iron Age territory (and subsequent Roman *civitas*) of the Iceni, while to the south lay areas usually attributed to the Trinovantes and the Catuvellauni (see Ch. 12 for discussion of such ‘tribal’ areas). These broad ‘tribal’ groups figured largely in classical literary accounts of Britain during the later Iron Age and early Roman period (e.g. Tacitus *Annals* XIV, 31–7), particularly the

Claudian conquest itself and the Boudican revolt of A.D. 60/1. Such accounts have subsequently become firmly embedded in many academic syntheses of the region (e.g. J. Davies 2009), so that much of the early development in particular has been framed through a pseudo-historical narrative, perhaps at times a little too much to the detriment of the primary archaeological evidence.

### THE NATURE OF THE LANDSCAPE

The specific make-up of the region has been determined by six distinctive landscape zones (FIG. 6.2), including the coastal saltmarshes and lowland heaths of North Norfolk and the Suffolk Coast, along with the sandy heaths, valleys and chalk rivers of Breckland, immediately to the east

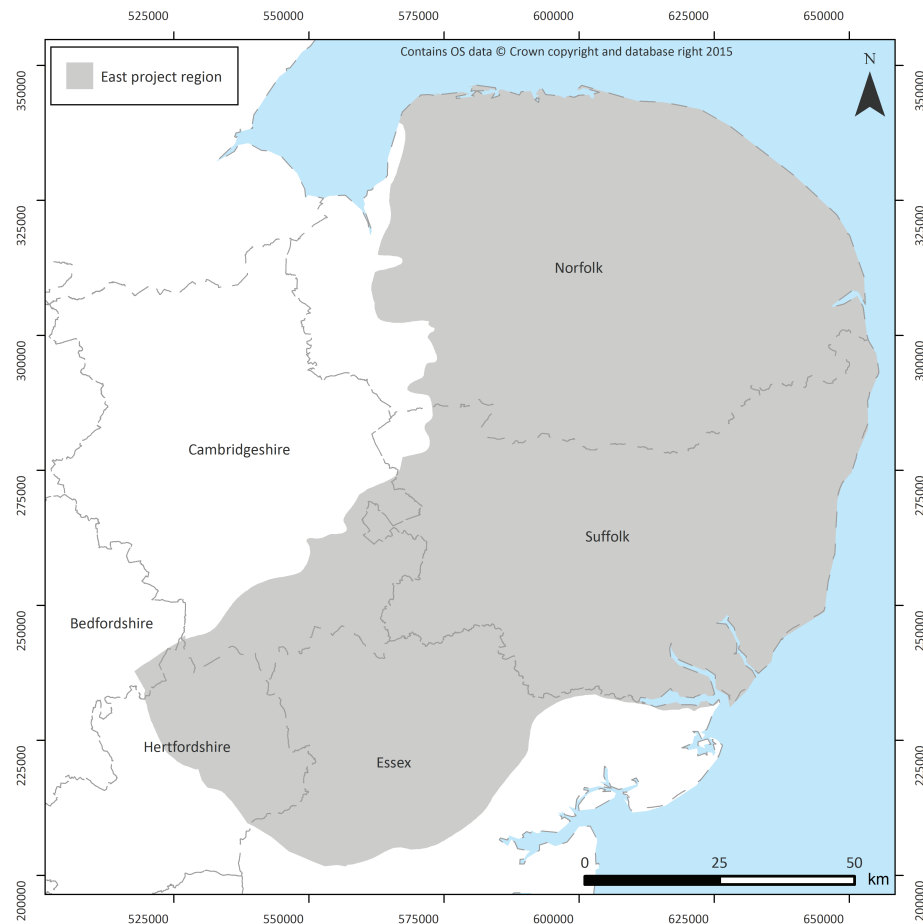


FIG. 6.1. The East region in relation to modern county boundaries

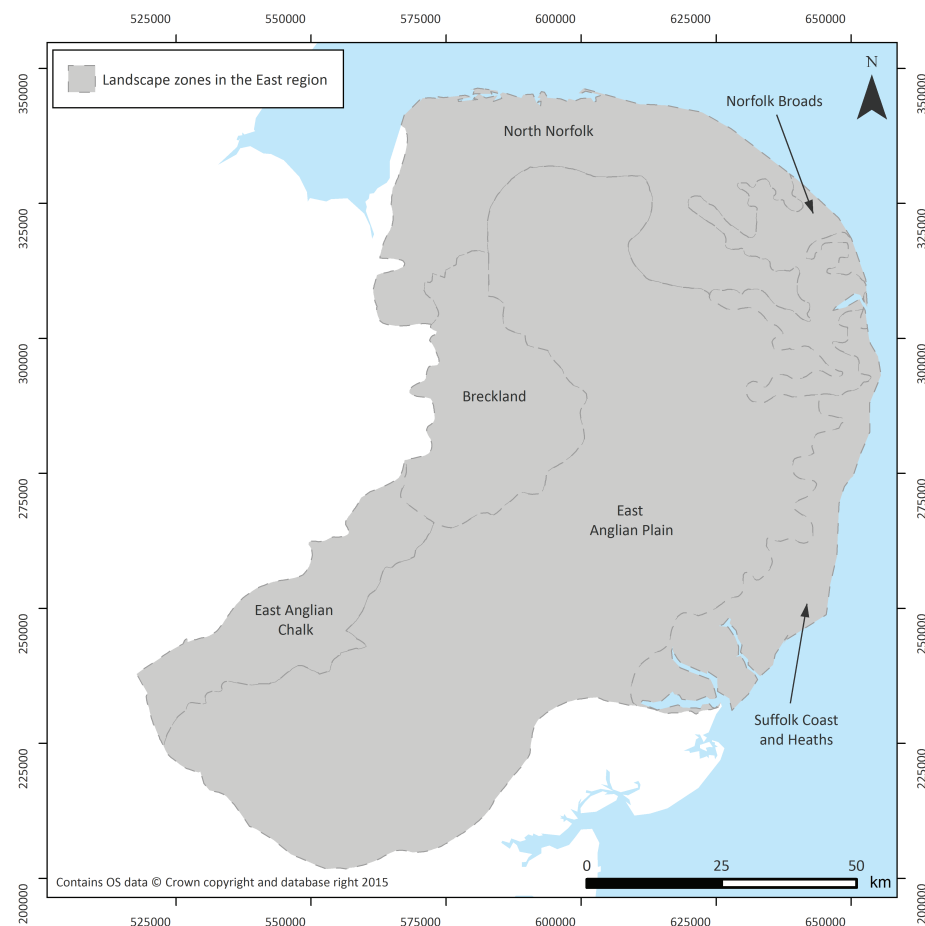


FIG. 6.2. Constituent landscape zones of the East region

TABLE 6.1: NUMBER OF EXCAVATED SITES AND DENSITY (PER KM<sup>2</sup>) BY LANDSCAPE ZONE IN THE EAST REGION

<i>Landscape zone</i>	<i>Area (km<sup>2</sup>)</i>	<i>No. of records</i>	<i>Density of records per km<sup>2</sup></i>
Breckland	1019.26	32	0.0314
East Anglian Chalk	838.70	55	0.0656
East Anglian Plain	6343.87	171	0.0270
North Norfolk	1793.23	27	0.0151
Suffolk Coast and Heaths	845.00	9	0.0107
The Broads	553.17	8	0.0145

of the Fens. The largest area of wetlands in the region comprises the Norfolk Broads, while by far the biggest single landscape zone (6343 km<sup>2</sup>) is that defined as the East Anglian Plain, a plateau dissected by a patchwork of streams and widely spaced river valleys and interspersed with extensive areas of boulder clay, which become far more undulating to the south and south-west. The final zone is the East Anglian Chalk, comprising low-lying chalk hills dissected by river valleys. Although the low-lying coastal areas of the region are very acidic, soils in other areas are generally less destructive, meaning that some excavated sites have produced good environmental evidence.

### THE EAST DATASET

There are a total of 302 records for the East region, accounting for 182 different settlements, along with 'isolated' field systems, agricultural buildings, religious sites, and funerary sites. The density of these records across the different landscape zones is shown in TABLE 6.1, revealing generally higher concentrations of excavated sites to the west, within Breckland and the East Anglian Chalk. When this density is viewed geographically, however, there is also a major concentration towards the south of the East Anglian Plain and north Essex in particular (FIG. 6.3. top), where

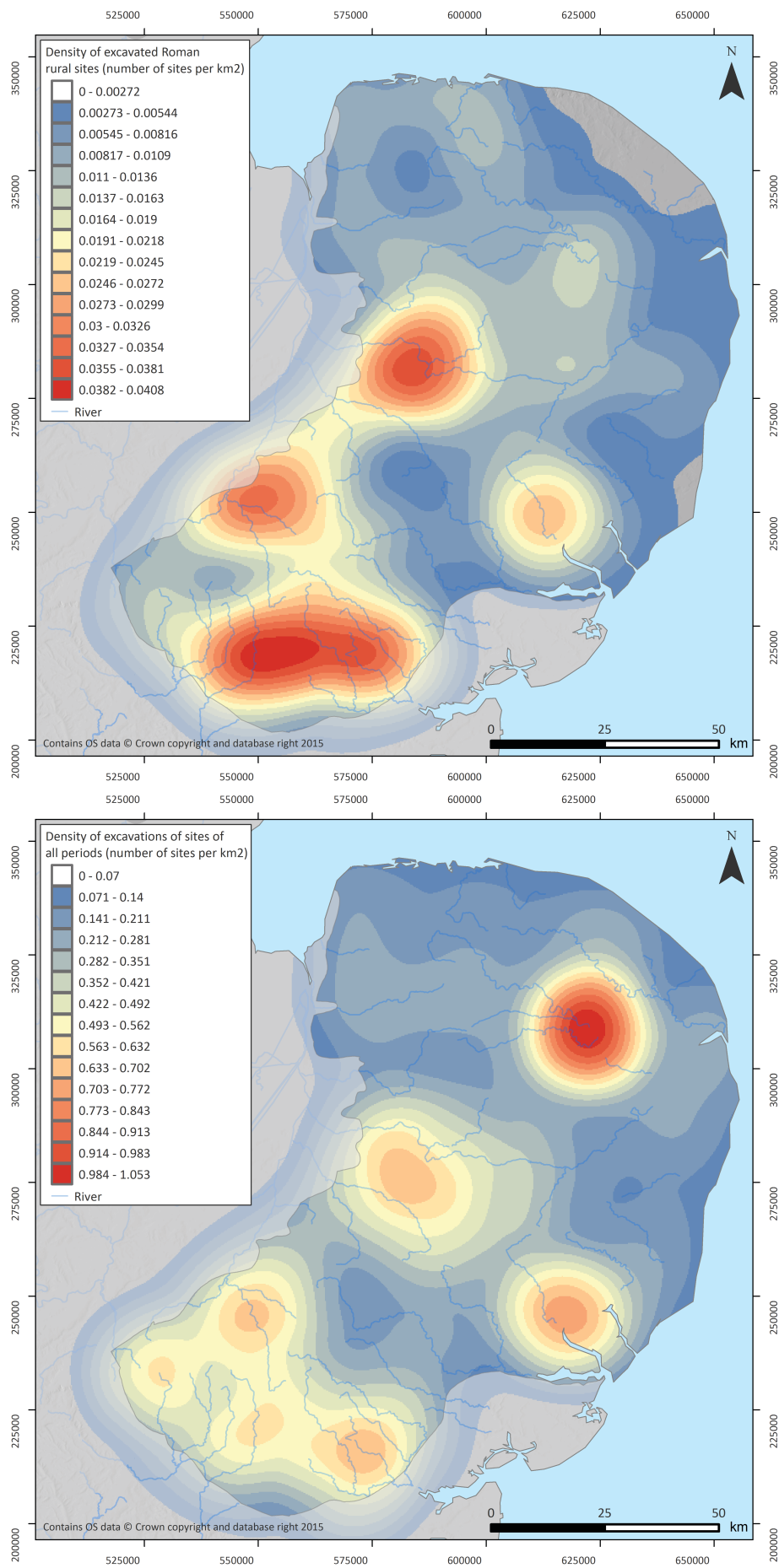


FIG. 6.3. Kernel density of East region records (n=302) and all excavation records (1910–2010) from National Monument Records (NMR) Index (n=4707)

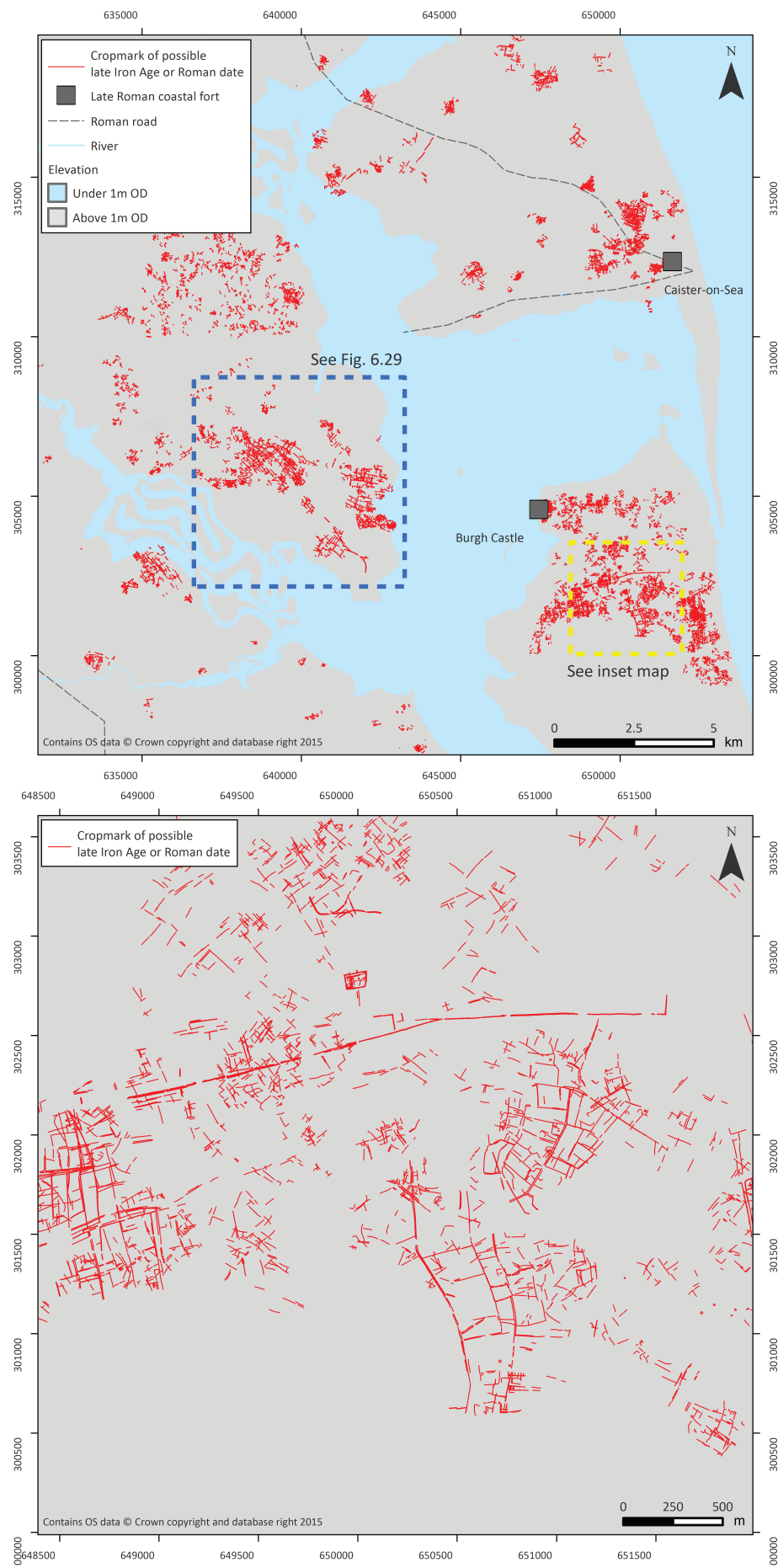


FIG. 6.4. 'Roman' NMP cropmark data in the Norfolk Broads/coast in relation to later Roman coastal forts at Caister-on-Sea and Burgh Castle (cropmark data © Historic England)



road scheme excavations have revealed many sites along the A120 (Roman Stane Street; Timby *et al.* 2007a) and development work at Stansted airport has uncovered extensive landscapes of Roman farmsteads and field systems (Havis and Brooks 2004; Cooke *et al.* 2008). There is also a group of nine nucleated roadside settlements in this part of north Essex and into Hertfordshire that often have multiple records (e.g. seven records for Great Dunmow along Stane Street), thereby contributing towards the higher overall density of records in this area. Other concentrations of records occur around Baldock in Hertfordshire, to the south of Cambridge in the Cam Valley, and around Thetford in the heart of Breckland, while much of the coastal areas of North Norfolk, The Broads and the Suffolk Coast have fairly minimal excavated evidence.

When compared with the National Monument Records (NMR) index of excavations (1910–2010; FIG. 6.3), there are distinct differences, with the two most densely excavated zones around Norwich and Ipswich corresponding with areas of only slightly higher than average Roman rural settlement records. The relative lack of records around Norwich in particular is surprising, as although the city did not develop from a Roman town, the *civitas* capital of the Iceni at Caistor lies just c. 5 km to the south. Nevertheless, despite differences such as these, the overall distributions of all excavations and Roman rural settlement records are quite similar, both exhibiting distinct paucities to the north and east of the region, especially on the coastlines (in part dictated by the National Park status of the Norfolk Broads, with little resulting development). It is known, however, that these were far from deserted landscapes, as extensive cropmark surveys in parts of Norfolk in particular have revealed dense patterns of inter-linked settlements, fields and trackways, ostensibly of Roman date, as revealed for parts of The Broads in FIG. 6.4. The wider distribution of cropmarks/soilmarks in the East region purporting to be of Roman date is shown by Taylor's figure 3.3 (2007, 15, 49; see Ch. 12, FIG. 12.3), which demonstrates

abundant evidence from much of Norfolk, though with an almost complete break further south in Suffolk and north Essex, both as a result of differing soil types and variable local authority records of cropmark data. Taylor also demonstrated the widespread occurrence of finds scatters as evidence for Roman settlement in the region (*ibid.*, 16, fig. 3.4), and this has been increased massively by the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) records of Roman finds, which show particularly dense concentrations of finds across much of the East region (Brindle 2014; Walton 2012).

The distribution pattern of excavated Roman rural settlements recorded in the East is therefore one that is very much biased by patterns of modern development, with over 85 per cent of the records being created since 1990, largely as a result of developer-funded work. Nevertheless, despite such geographic bias, there is still enough detailed information to allow characterisation of the form, character and development of these farmsteads, villas, villages and roadside settlements across the region from the late Iron Age to the end of the Roman period.

## ROMAN RURAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The East region contained a single major Roman urban centre, the *civitas* capital of *Venta Icenorum* at Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk, which was fairly modest in size compared with most other *civitas* capitals. However, the important late Iron Age oppidum, short-lived legionary fortress and subsequent *colonia* at Colchester lay just to the south of the region, and the whole area is particularly noteworthy for its proliferation of Roman 'small towns' (Brown 1995; FIG. 6.5). Many of these 'small towns' developed from pre-conquest settlements, with Baldock and Braughing being classified as oppida owing to the scale of their late Iron Age activity (Pitts 2010). Only one of the Roman 'small towns' was later surrounded

TABLE 6.2: NUMBER OF MAJOR SETTLEMENT TYPES BY LANDSCAPE ZONE IN THE EAST REGION

Landscape zone	Farmstead (all)	Farmstead (complex)	Farmstead (enclosed)	Farmstead (open)	Roadside settlement	Vicus	Villa	Village	Total
Breckland	20	3	3	1	5			1	26
East Anglian Chalk	26	6	2	1	1		3		28
East Anglian Plain	80	12	17	3	19		10	1	102
North Norfolk	11	1	3	1	3	1	1		16
Suffolk Coast and Heaths	5	0	2	0	1			1	7
The Broads	1	0	0	0	0	1			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>182</b>

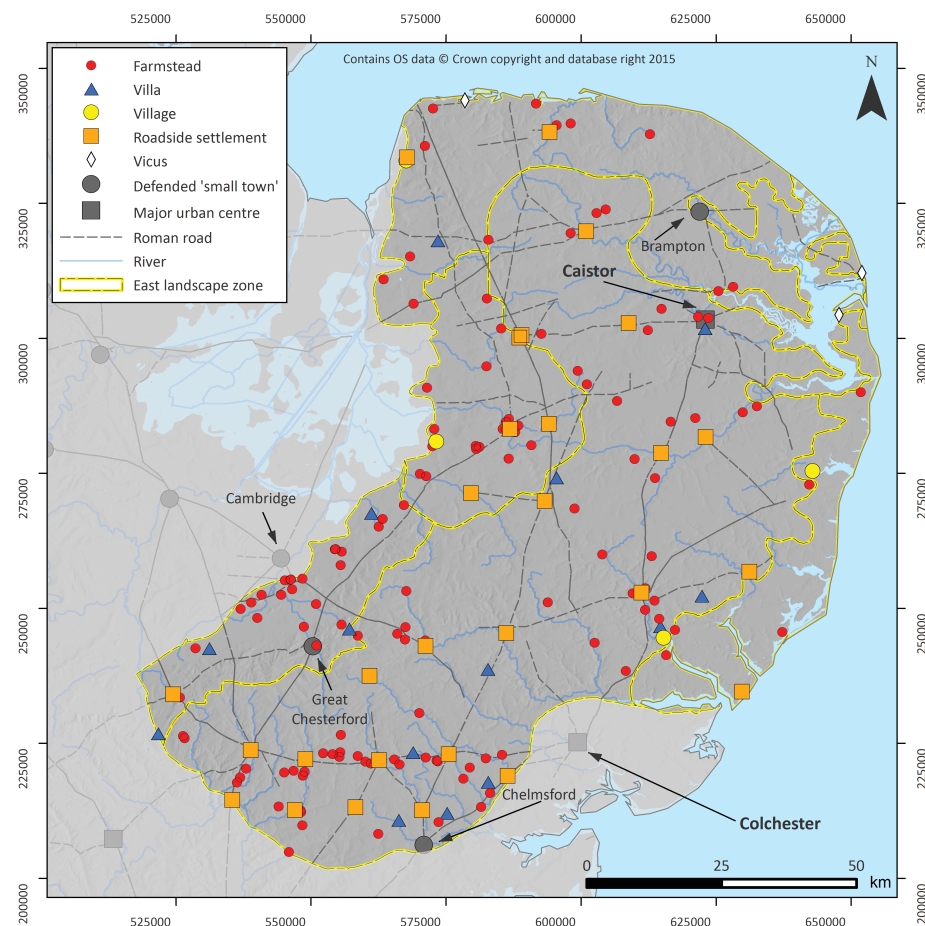


FIG. 6.5. Excavated late Iron Age/Roman rural settlement in the East region in relation to Roman roads and urban centres

by walls (Great Chesterford) and two by earthwork enclosures (Bampton and Chelmsford), the rest comprising undefended (or at least partially ditched) roadside settlements of varying scales, forming a comprehensive network of nucleated sites similar to that in parts of the Midlands. Some of these roadside settlements developed from early Roman forts, while later Roman military activity was restricted to four coastal forts at Walton Castle, Burgh Castle, Caister-on-Sea and Brancaster, all built during the third century A.D.

The 182 Roman rural settlements recorded as part of the current project for the East are dominated by farmsteads, forming over 78 per cent of all sites, rising to 86 per cent in the East Anglian Chalk, though falling to just 64 per cent in North Norfolk, where the admittedly smaller corpus appears somewhat more diverse (TABLE 6.2; FIG. 6.5). Those settlements with villa architecture are relatively rare, especially compared to further south and west, with just fourteen excavated examples being recorded, though many more possible villas are recorded on the National Monuments Record (NMR), often defined by cropmarks and field survey. As just discussed, roadside settlements are particularly numerous in

this region, though nucleated settlements located away from the major Roman road network (defined here as villages) are far scarcer. *Vicus* settlements were limited to those relating to the late Roman forts at Caister-on-Sea and Burgh Castle, as well as a nucleated settlement at Brancaster in North Norfolk, which was associated with a fort in the third century but had earlier origins, perhaps associated with an earlier military phase (Hinchliffe and Sparey-Green 1985; see below, p. 225).

## REGIONAL CHRONOLOGY

Chronological data are available for all except four sites in the East dataset, enabling a fairly robust assessment of development over time. The great majority of these sites have been dated through their ceramic assemblages (especially finewares, which generally have greater chronological resolution), with use of radiocarbon dating being noted in less than 5 per cent of records (see Ch. 1, FIG. 1.4). Nevertheless, finewares are well represented on many settlements in the East, both imported (e.g. samian recorded from c. 75 per cent of sites) and British wares, the latter including products from kilns at Hadham, Nene Valley, Colchester and Oxfordshire.

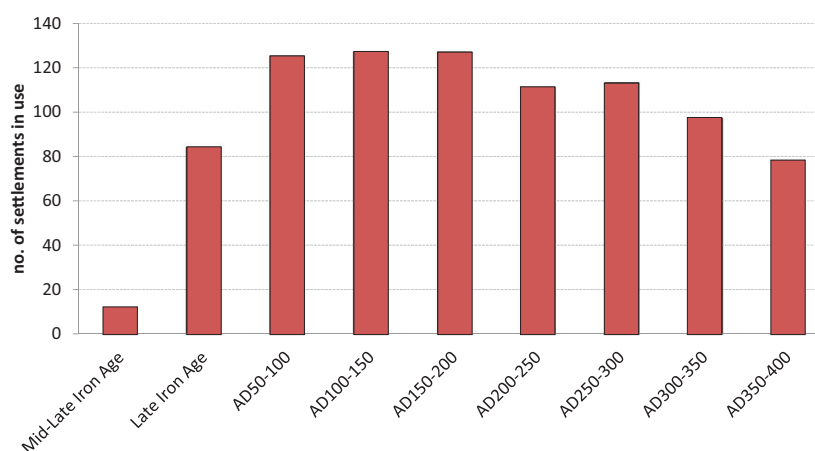


FIG. 6.6. Number of settlements in use over time in the East region (NB: the M-LIA data only include sites that continued into the late Iron Age)

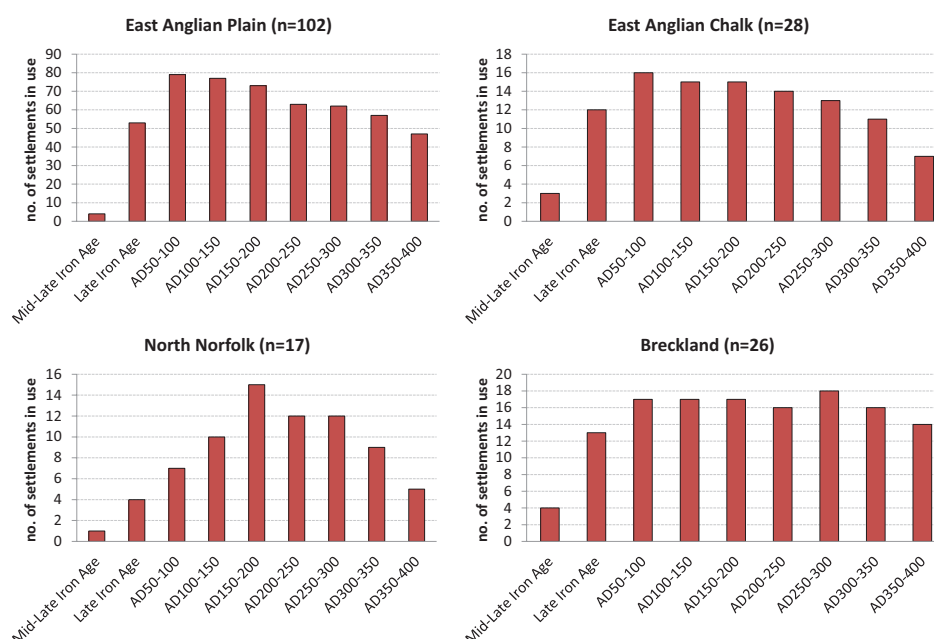


FIG. 6.7. Variations in settlement chronology by selected landscape zone within the East region

The overall chronological trajectory of settlements in use is shown in FIG. 6.6, demonstrating a peak during the later first century A.D. and then decline in numbers from the third century onwards. The variations to this pattern in terms of different landscape zones are shown in FIG. 6.7, with major differences demonstrated by a much more pronounced second-century peak of activity in North Norfolk, very similar to that in the Fenlands to the west (see Ch. 5), and a much less noticeable decline during the later Roman period in those landscapes to the west of the region, with settlement numbers in Breckland actually peaking in the third century. The early Roman peak and late Roman decline further south and east is similar to that noted in other

parts of Essex and the south-east (see Ch. 4), with the decline around Colchester suggested as potentially associated with a movement of the rural population within the walls (Holbrook 2010).

In terms of settlement continuity in the region, it is clear that the late Iron Age was a period of major expansion, with only 15 per cent of sites occupied at this time having origins in the middle Iron Age, the remainder being apparently established as 'new' settlements (FIG. 6.8). Most (90 per cent) of these continued in occupation into the early Roman period, when there was also a considerable number of additional settlements established all across the region. This was, however, a period of significant settlement disruption, with almost 20 per cent of sites being 'abandoned';

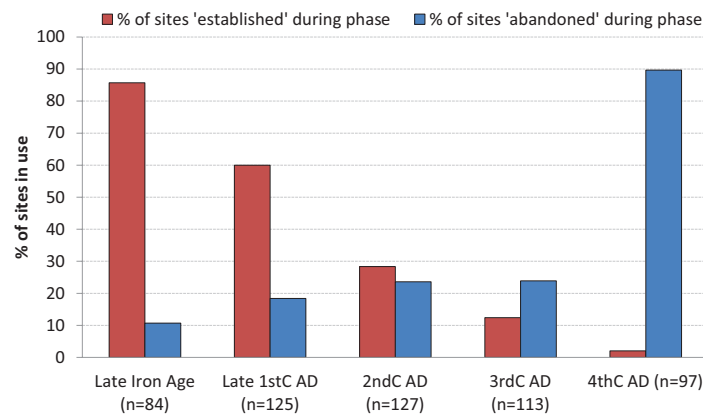


FIG. 6.8. 'New' and 'abandoned' settlements over time in the East region

some, such as Addenbrooke's south of Cambridge, being replaced by field systems (Evans 2008). Another site nearby at Babraham near the River Granta (tributary of the River Cam) was also abandoned during the later first century A.D., with the focus of activity shifting to the west to a series of ditched enclosures and agricultural buildings (Armour 2007). This suggests a major reorganisation of the landscape rather than widespread abandonment, which is corroborated by a further nineteen sites (c. 15 per cent of total) recorded as undergoing transformations at this time, such as at Kilverstone, Thetford, where a major enclosure system was laid out (Garrow *et al.* 2006). It would be tempting to attribute such a state of flux to the upheavals and aftermath of the Boudican revolt in A.D. 60/1, though the problem with this lies in that, notwithstanding a small group of sites around Thetford, the majority of those settlements showing indications of 'abandonment' were located in the southern half of the region (e.g. Colemans Farm, Rivenhall End: Roy 2003), well away from the 'Icenian heartlands' where one might expect devastation to be more apparent.

Archaeological evidence for such 'territory blighted by the Boudican revolt' (Mattingly 2006, 384) is in fact quite limited in the countryside of East Anglia, restricted for the most part to 'exceptional' sites such as the enclosure complex at Fison Way in Thetford, which was levelled around the time of the revolt (Gregory 1991). While this lack of evidence may be partly due to problems of broad ceramic dating of sites, it is likely, as Aldhouse-Green (2006, 227) has pointed out, that Roman retaliation in the aftermath of the Boudican revolt was quite patchy and targeted to specific sites of political importance, with the vast majority of the countryside left untouched. In fact, in North Norfolk in particular most rural settlements show evidence for distinct continuity

until the later second century at least, although the relatively high proportion of farmsteads established 'new' in the later first century A.D. (or after a short hiatus such as at Sedgeford: SHARP 2014) could conceivably be linked with wider scale landscape reorganisation following the revolt (Frere 2000).

The mid- to late Roman period saw an ever decreasing number of 'new' settlements being established (with none post-dating A.D. 200 in North Norfolk), and an increasing number of settlements being abandoned, particularly from the later third century A.D. Unlike a number of the early Roman 'abandoned' settlements, these sites do not appear to have been succeeded by field systems at this time, although at least one site, at Clay Farm, Trumpington, Cambs, had a possible double-ditched late Roman funerary enclosure constructed over the earlier farmstead (Phillips and Mortimer 2011).

A total of 78 sites (42 per cent of all sites) were occupied until at least the end of the fourth century A.D., though only eleven of these were said to have continued into the fifth century or later, including the nucleated settlement at Baldock (Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2014) and the well-known villa at Rivenhall in Essex, which was thought to have been in use until the sixth century A.D., although the sequence here is quite poorly dated (Rodwell and Rodwell 1993; cf. Rippon *et al.* 2015, 9).

#### FARMSTEADS: MORPHOLOGY, CHRONOLOGY AND DISTRIBUTION

The distribution of all 133 excavated farmsteads in the East region is shown in FIG. 6.9, with broad chronological patterns highlighted in FIG. 6.10. There is a clear later first century A.D. emphasis in the number of farmsteads in use, with a steady decline after this point, which, if genuine, must reflect a fundamental shift in the way that the rural landscape was organised and farmed, particularly



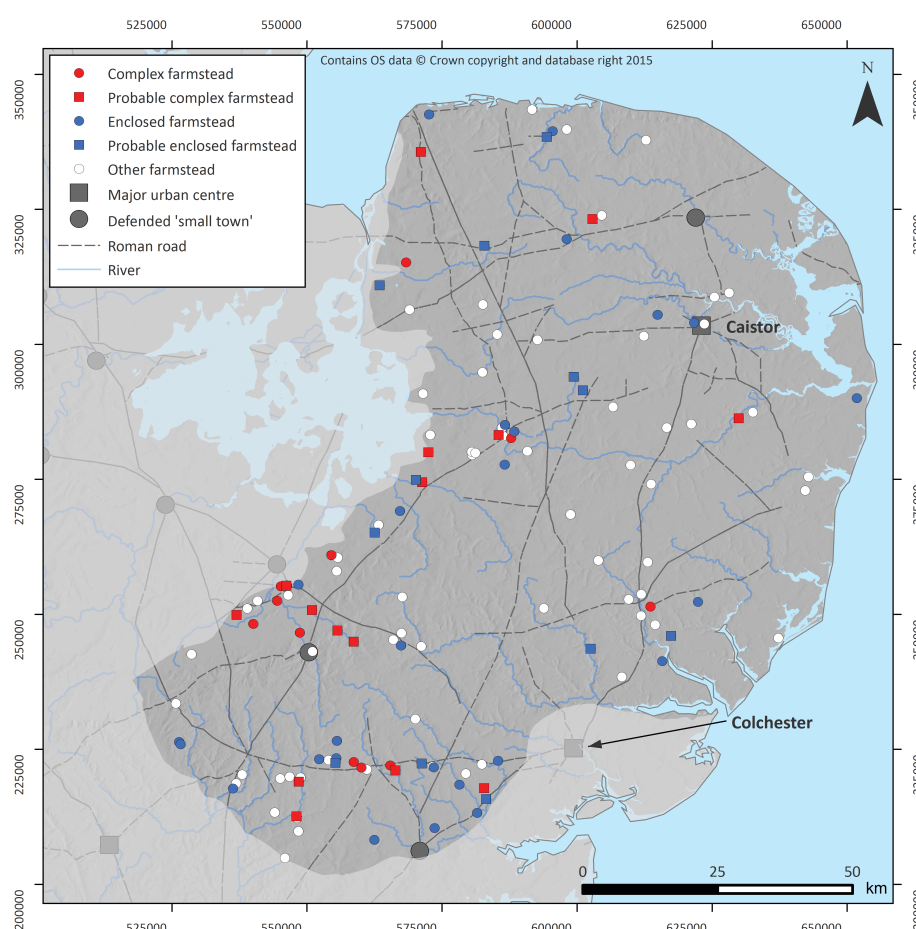


FIG. 6.9. All excavated farmsteads (open, enclosed, complex and unclassified) in the East region

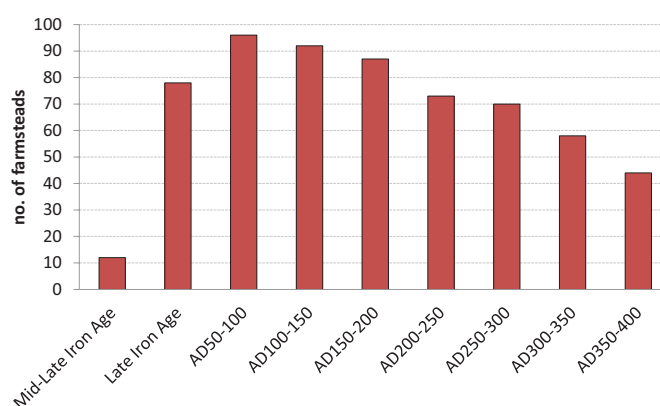


FIG. 6.10. Number of excavated farmsteads in use over time in the East region

in the later Roman period when the drop in farmstead numbers is more pronounced. As with surrounding regions, only *c.* 35 per cent of farmsteads (46 sites) could be classified in terms of their plan, although a further 20 per cent (27 sites) had more speculative evidence enabling classification with a much lesser degree of certainty (FIG. 6.9). Most of the classified farmsteads (including those with less certainty) were enclosed, followed by complex farmsteads and only six having any recognised 'open' phases of development

(TABLE 6.2). The majority of all these farmsteads lay to the south and west of the region, with those outside this area almost all being of the enclosed form (FIG. 6.9), although cropmark evidence from the parts of Norfolk referred to above does suggest that more complex farmsteads may have existed to the north and west (see FIG. 6.4).

The general distribution of excavated complex farmsteads appears to represent the easternmost fringe of their main Central Belt concentration (see Chs 2 and 5), since they are particularly

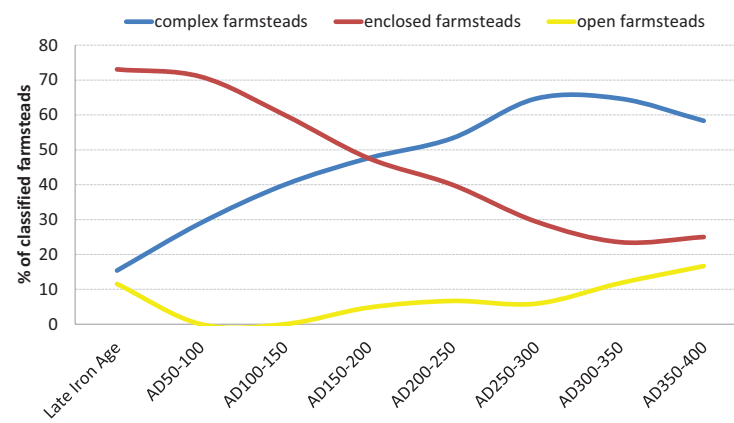


FIG. 6.11. Relative frequency of farmstead types in use over time in the East region

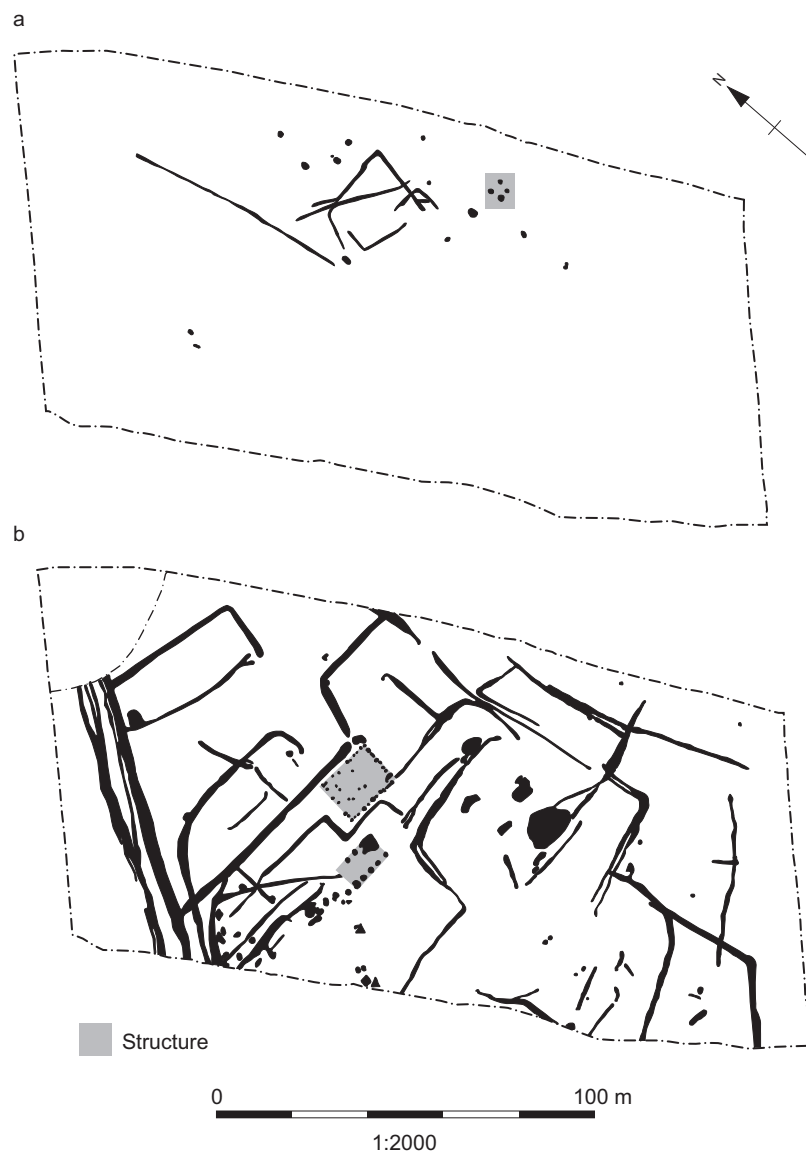


FIG. 6.12. Development of the farmstead at Kilverstone, Thetford, Norfolk from (a) late Iron Age (?) open to (b) early/mid-Roman complex settlement (Garrow *et al.* 2006)

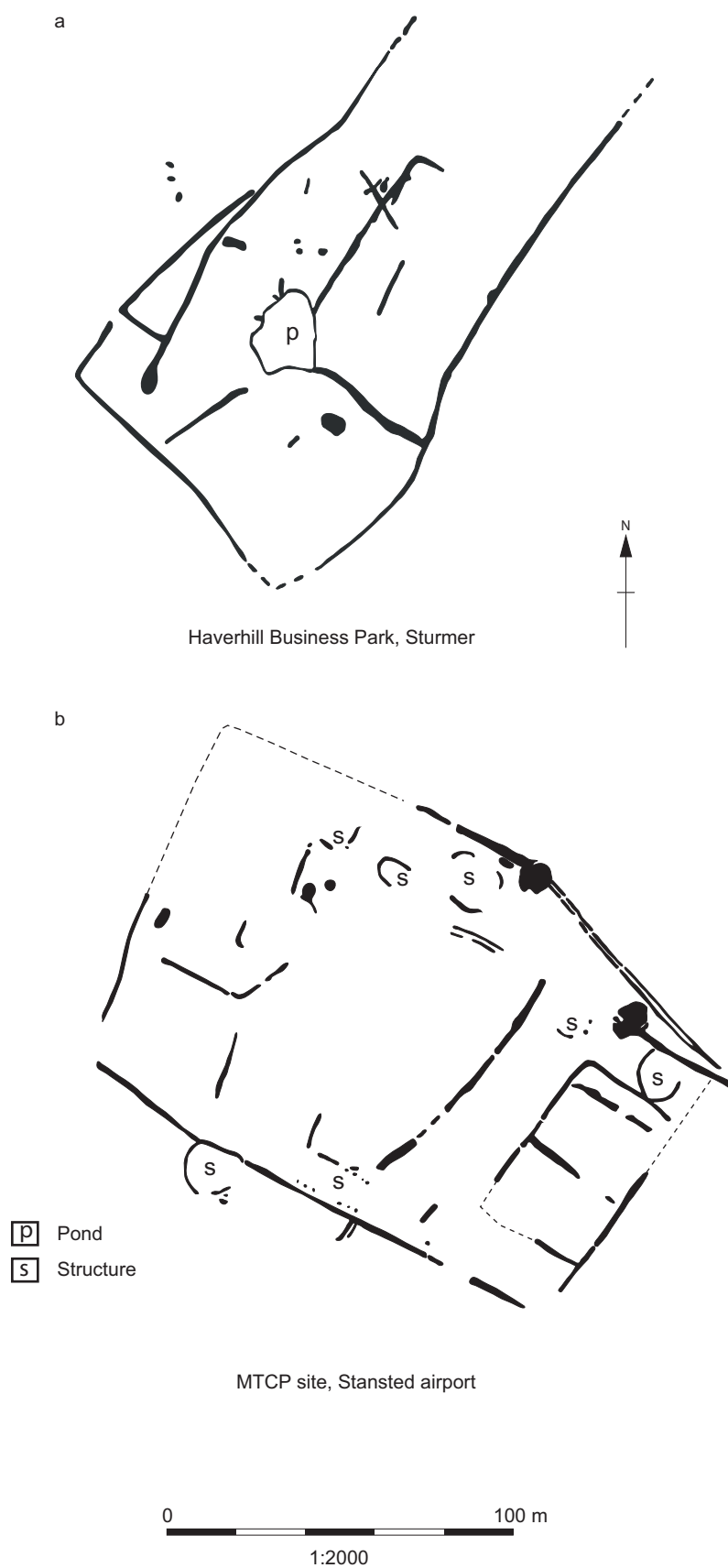


FIG. 6.13. Plans of complex farmsteads in Essex at (a) Haverhill Business Park, Sturmer (Gardner 2004) and (b) MTCP site, Stansted airport (Cooke *et al.* 2008)



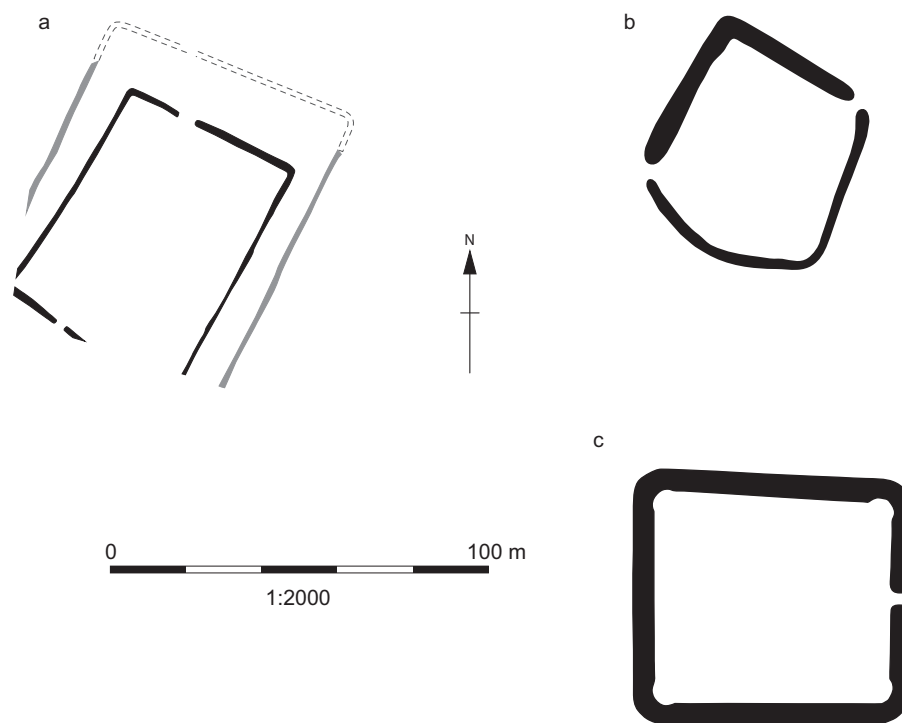


FIG. 6.14. Plans of enclosed farmsteads from the East region at (a) Great Notley, Essex (late Iron Age/early Roman) (Brooks and Holloway 2006), (b) Lobs Hole, Stevenage, Herts (late Iron Age) (Hunn 2005) and (c) Wighton, Norfolk (late Iron Age) (Gregory and Gurney 1986)

prevalent in the river valleys of the East Anglian Chalk, including those in the Cam Valley south of Cambridge, such as at Addenbrooke's (Evans 2008) and Clay Farm, Trumpington (Phillips and Mortimer 2011). As stated above, these Cambridgeshire sites were unusual in appearing to go out of use by the end of the early Roman period, along with a number of other settlements in the local environs (see *Cambridgeshire Fen edge case study*, Ch. 5); the abandonment of these sites has been argued by Evans (2008, 135) to have been associated with the establishment of villas in the near vicinity at places like Shelford (HER CAM 57).

Most complex farmsteads in the region follow the wider pattern of increased visibility during the middle to later Roman period (FIG. 6.11). Half of all these farmsteads were seen to have developed from more simple forms of settlement, as at Kilverstone, Thetford, Norfolk, where an apparent open settlement of late Iron Age date was totally transformed in the early Roman period into a complex farmstead of conjoined enclosures and trackways (FIG. 6.12; Garrow *et al.* 2006). The developmental trajectory from 'simple' to complex was not always followed, however, as seen at Strood Hall in the south of the East Anglian Plain, which developed from a very regular system of early Roman enclosures and trackways to mid- and late Roman phases characterised by timber/

mass-walled structures, pits and middens, seemingly unenclosed by any ditched boundaries (Timby *et al.* 2007a, 84; see Ch. 2, FIG. 2.5).

The later Roman farmstead at Kilverstone was slightly unusual in the region in being characterised by a system of conjoined enclosures (linear complex), rather than by a single sub-divided enclosure (FIG. 6.13), a type that formed the majority of complex farmsteads in the East region (see Ch. 2, FIG. 2.17 for overall distribution). Such sub-divided enclosures are more typically found in areas where simple enclosed farmsteads are dominant and can be viewed as developments of such farmsteads, perhaps associated with more elevated social status and/or with differing economic trajectories.

The 27 enclosed farmsteads are far more widely spread across the East region, and vary considerably, though most tend to be rectilinear in form and fairly modest in size (average 0.5 ha), as at Lobs Hole, Herts (Hunn 2005), and Wighton, Norfolk (Gregory and Gurney 1986) (FIG. 6.14b and c). A small (0.35 ha) late Iron Age enclosed farmstead at Great Notley, Essex, was later replaced on a larger scale (min 0.63 ha) in the later first century A.D., but there was no evidence for any more complexity in its layout, and the excavators suggested that occupation may only have been 'sporadic' (Brooks and Holloway 2006). Almost all enclosed farmsteads were encompassed

by a single ditch, though the ACS site at Stansted did have a concentric outer ditch along at least two of the sides (Havis and Brooks 2004).

The number of enclosed farmsteads in use demonstrates a distinct peak in the later first century A.D., thereafter undergoing quite a steep decline, especially in the late Roman period when very few remain. The only enclosed farmstead known to have been constructed during the late Roman period was the LTCP site at Stansted airport, which lay just to the south of an earlier complex farmstead that had been abandoned (Cooke *et al.* 2008, 155). This site had two distinct parts to the enclosure 'divided' by an area of metalling, and was clearly home to a variety of activities including burial, animal management, crop processing and domestic occupation (*ibid.*, 156–7).

Unfortunately, as with other regions, the proportions of farmsteads that can be morphologically classified in the later Roman period drops to an even lower level, falling to just *c.* 25 per cent. It has previously been argued that such a situation may well reflect a move to more

open-style farmsteads that are generally far more difficult to detect, and in the East region there are some slight indications of this with sites like Strood Hall discussed above, and at Hartismere School, Eye, in Suffolk (Craven 2012).

### VILLAS IN THE EAST

East Anglia has long been noted for its relative lack of villas compared with areas further south and west (Mattingly 2006, 384; J. Davies 2009, 187), and very few of these have been comprehensively excavated and published. The situation is somewhat better in northern Essex with sites like Great Hols Farm and Chignall, but overall our knowledge of villas and their surroundings in the East region remains fairly scant. In total there are just fourteen excavated villas in the current dataset, though a further nine have been recorded as 'possible villas', mostly on the basis of associated building material and excavator's interpretation. One such 'possible villa' was identified through evaluation trenches and geophysical survey at Harlowbury, *c.* 1.5 km from

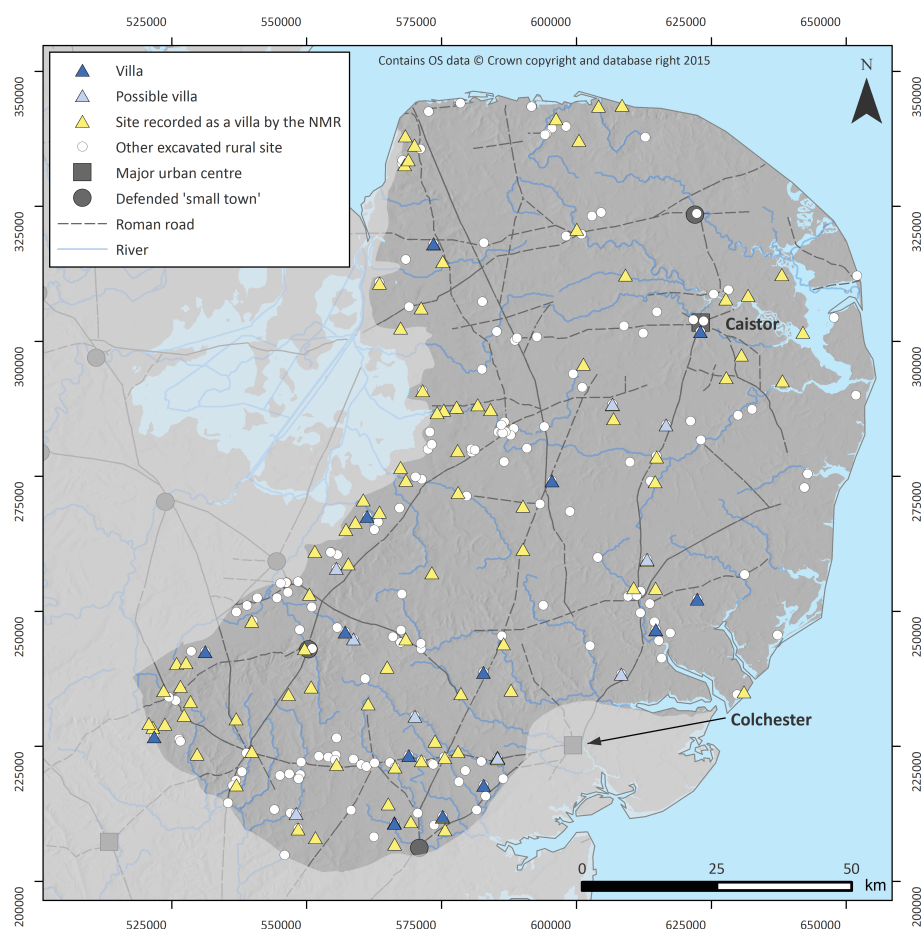


FIG. 6.15. Distribution of excavated villas in the East region, compared with 'villas' recorded in the NMR index

the major Romano-Celtic temple at Harlow, defined as a complex of buildings within a system of enclosures, and probably related to the ill-understood nucleated settlement near to the temple (Dicks and Chadwick 2010).

The distribution of all the certain and possible excavated villas in the East is shown in FIG. 6.15 (including those farmsteads that developed into villas), in relation to an additional 88 'villas' from the region as defined by the National Monuments Record (NMR). Even among the far more numerous NMR 'villas' there is a distinct geographic bias towards the south and west, and this is also where all of the more 'definite' examples are located, indicated by excavation evidence or clear cropmarks. Nearly all of the NMR 'villas' to the north and east are defined through finds scatters or are buildings of uncertain nature, suggesting that the actual pattern of villa scarcity in this area is likely to be genuine. One of the only certain excavated villas in this north-east area was discovered fairly recently *c.* 1.5 km south of the *civitas* capital at Caistor, comprising a modest late Roman corridor villa building, along with substantial aisled structures and a highly unusual masonry Y-shaped building, 150 m from the villa and potentially preceding it (Bowden 2011; see FIG. 6.27).

Villas are not only reasonably rare within much of the East region, they are also founded comparatively late (compared to further south), with the earliest starting in the second century

A.D. and the peak of occupation being reached during the later third century (FIG. 6.16). Although continuity of occupation cannot always be demonstrated, almost all of the villas where we have evidence developed from existing farmsteads, at least four of which originated in the pre-conquest period. The late Roman emphasis of villas is quite different to the pattern for farmsteads, suggesting that, in parts of the south of the region at least, villa estates may have been established at the expense of existing farmsteads, perhaps as part of wider-scale landscape reorganisation.

Limited evidence exists for the immediate context around villa buildings in the region, though elements of what has been interpreted as a substantial planned estate were found in excavations to the south of a large courtyard villa at Chignall in Essex near the floodplain of the River Can (C.P. Clarke 1998). These included stock enclosures, outer fields, a possible detached bathhouse, cemetery, and timber structures of agricultural and domestic function, presumably used by the workers of the estate (*ibid.*) (FIG. 6.17). Elsewhere, what would appear to be similar ranges of enclosures and buildings were observed at villas such as Great Holts Farm, Gestingthorpe, Rivenhall, and Little Wymondley, though rarely do any coherent plans of the villa complex emerge, and specialist information on finds and environmental material that might provide more information on the functioning of the estate is often lacking.

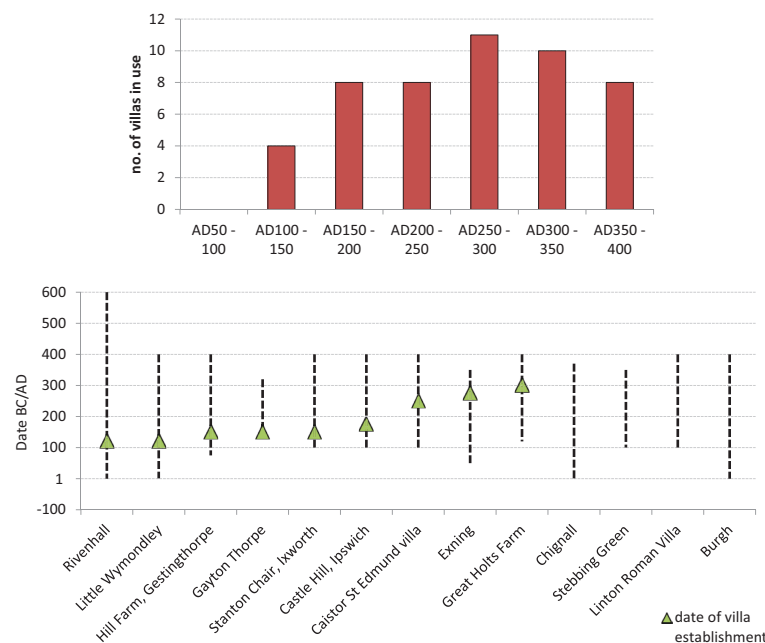


FIG. 6.16. Chronological patterns of excavated villas in the East region

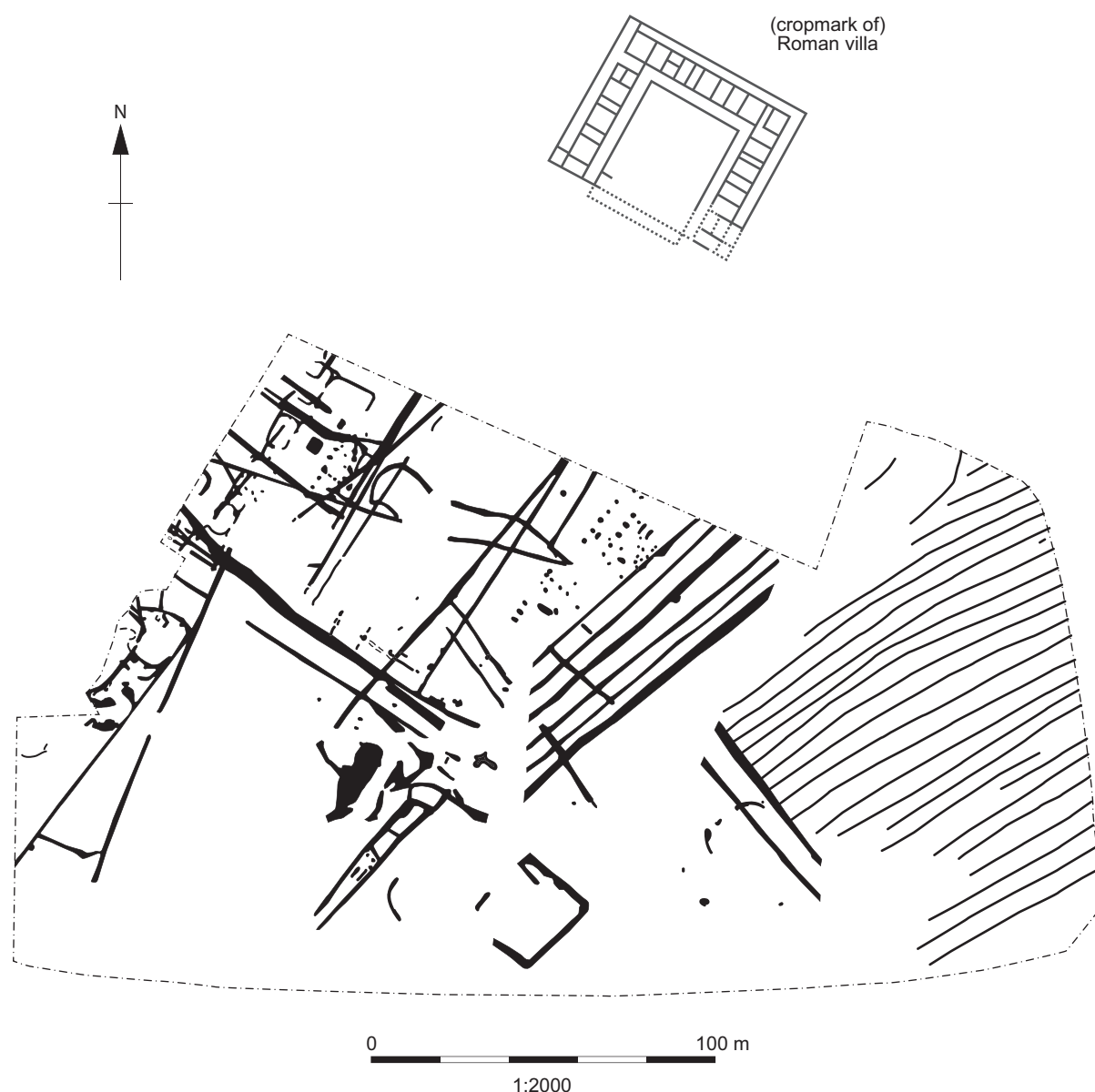


FIG. 6.17. Plan of excavations south of the villa at Chignall, Essex (C.P. Clarke 1998), revealing part of the outer complex

#### NUCLEATED SETTLEMENTS: ROADSIDE SETTLEMENTS, *VICI* AND VILLAGES

##### Roadside settlements

The East region dataset contains records relating to 28 nucleated settlements lying upon the main Roman road system, representing a far higher proportion of the overall settlement number than in any other region (17 per cent as opposed to 7.5 per cent in the Central Belt). As discussed in Chapter 2, such settlements probably formed a key economic element of much of central and southern Roman Britain and their regular spacing along the roadways of the east meant that few farmsteads would have lain more than a day's journey away (c. 20 km) (FIG. 6.18). The economic and social functions of roadside settlements in the East will

be explored more fully below, but here it is important to just reiterate the huge variety in form, scale and development of the places that fall within this broad category of settlement (cf. Ch. 2).

Such settlements in the East were usually located at the junctions of major roadways, with ditched enclosure plots, timber and sometimes masonry buildings, pits, quarries and other features spread out along the road frontages, with occasional evidence for side lanes. Elements of ditched boundaries encompassing at least parts of the settlement were revealed at Kelvedon (Rodwell 1988) and Wixoe (Atkins 2013), though seemingly not to the same scale as the earthwork defences at Brampton or Chelmsford. Rarely does there appear to be any central focus, though occasional 'public' buildings are hinted at, such as the



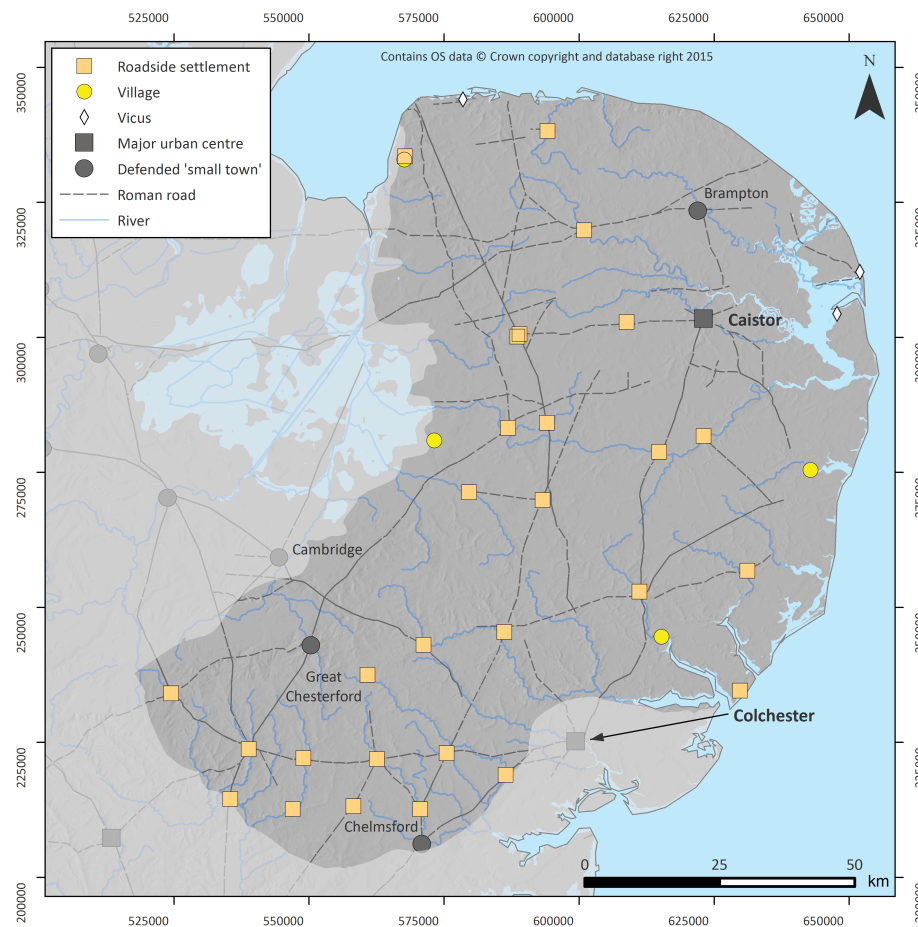


FIG. 6.18. Distribution of nucleated settlement in the East region

substantial masonry buildings at Baldock (Stead and Rigby 1986) and Braughing (Partridge 1977). It is generally very difficult to determine the overall extent of these settlements, especially as very few have had any large-scale excavation (just seven sites over 1 ha) and/or geophysical survey. Where extents are known, or at least estimated, they range from *c.* 6–7 ha at Harlow to an exceptional *c.* 80 ha at Baldock (albeit quite dispersed), with most in the range of 15–30 ha. The settlement at Baldock, located in a bowl in the north-eastern tip of the Chilterns, was remarkable in many ways, and has been quite comprehensively explored over a number of years, with 7 ha of excavation and 25 ha of geophysical survey (Stead and Rigby 1986; Burleigh and Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2010; FIG. 6.19). At other sites, however, such as Coddanham in Suffolk and Great Walsingham in Norfolk, there has been very little excavation, though on the basis of extensive fieldwalking and metal-detector surveys the areas of these settlements have been estimated to be in the range of 50–60 ha (though this possibly includes finds from manure scatters in surrounding fields).

The considerable size of many of the roadside settlements, together with the often limited areas of investigation, ensures that their development over time is rarely well understood. At least twelve showed some evidence of pre-conquest activity, mostly quite insubstantial in nature, though sites like Baldock and Braughing in Hertfordshire were important late Iron Age settlements (often classified as *oppida*), with evidence for high-status burials suggesting that they were elite centres of power. A possible roadside settlement at Thetford, interpreted on the basis of enclosure ditches, timber structures, pits and corndryers lying near to a main Roman road (Andrews and Penn 1999) may also have succeeded an important late Iron Age centre of power, although it seems to have remained a fairly modest and essentially 'rural' settlement, possibly developing from the Iron Age site after a lengthy hiatus.

The early Roman development of some roadside settlements appears to have been stimulated by the Roman military, with first-century A.D. forts postulated at Kelvedon, Coddanham, Pakenham, Saham Toney and Billingford, forming a line up to Colchester and from there into the heart of East

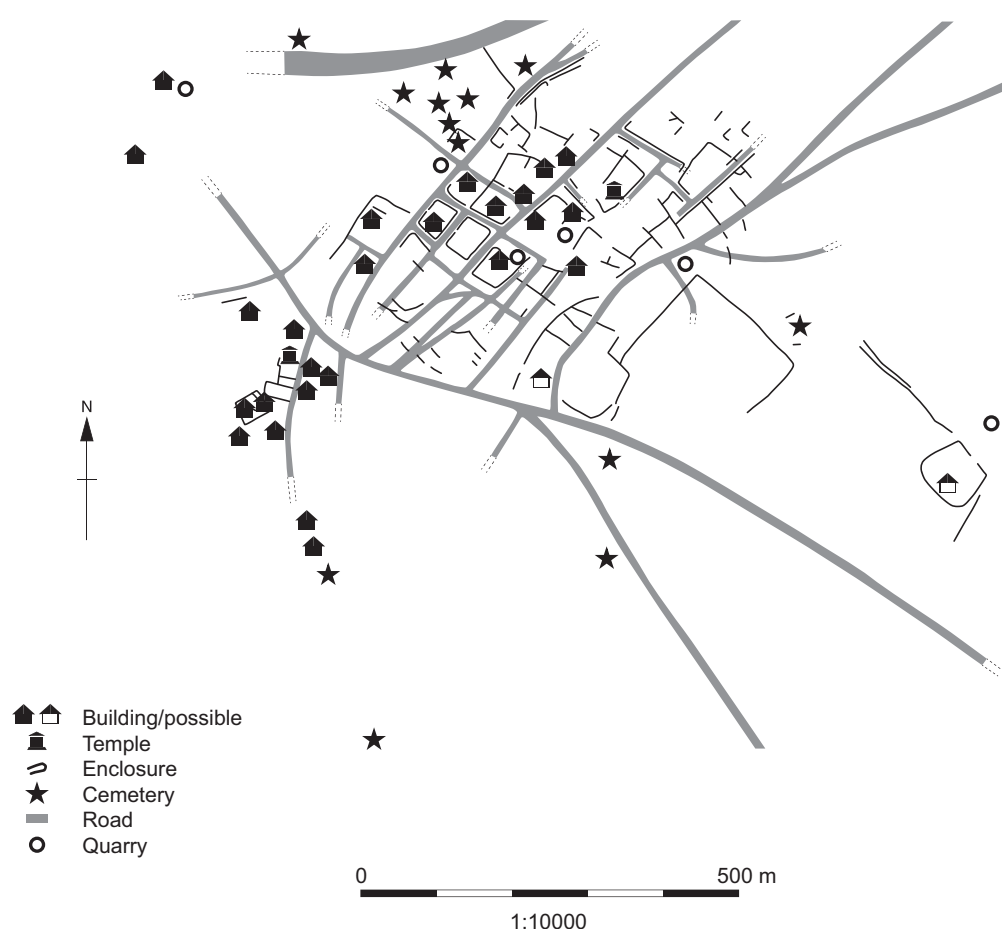


FIG. 6.19. Plan of Roman roadside settlement at Baldock, Herts. (after Burleigh and Fitzpatrick-Matthews 2010, fig. 18)

Anglia, perhaps providing some level of monitoring during the post-Boudican period (J. Davies 2009, 150). Whether associated with the military or not, most settlements grew fairly rapidly following the development of the road system in the later first century A.D., though it was not really until the end of the first or early second century that many reached a more substantial size, often acquiring a degree of planning, however rudimentary this may have been. At Scole in the Waveney Valley for example, mid-later first century A.D. evidence was restricted to cess and rubbish pits, roundhouses and posthole structures, while during the early-mid-second century some measure of centralised planning is thought to have appeared (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 217).

Scole, like most roadside settlements in the East, appeared to flourish in the second and third centuries A.D., with many small-scale developments, but no major alterations in form, scale or complexity. At Needham in Norfolk and Radwinter in Essex there was little late Roman evidence, but this is more likely to reflect the very small scale of archaeological investigation than a genuine cessation of activity. Most roadside settlements

continued to be occupied until the end of the fourth century, although at least eight have evidence to suggest they were in decline long before this. Most investigations within the settlement at Long Melford in Suffolk concluded that all significant activity ceased after the mid-third century, though occupation of sorts continued until the end of the Roman period (e.g. Craven 2008). More typically the period of decline extends from the mid-fourth century, as for example at Braintree, Kelvedon and Hacheston. The dwindling fortunes of at least some roadside settlements at this time seem to parallel a wider rural settlement decline, and certainly does not suggest that the inhabitants of abandoned farmsteads were all flocking to these larger centres. The situation of such sites in the post-Roman period has recently been discussed by Fitzpatrick-Matthews (2014), who highlighted how the post-Roman evidence from Baldock may not be quite as exceptional as it currently seems, with fifth-century data awaiting to be discovered from other sites. As it stands, only three other roadside settlements in the east apart from Baldock are argued to have had fifth-century occupation, Wixoe, Billingford and Saham Toney.

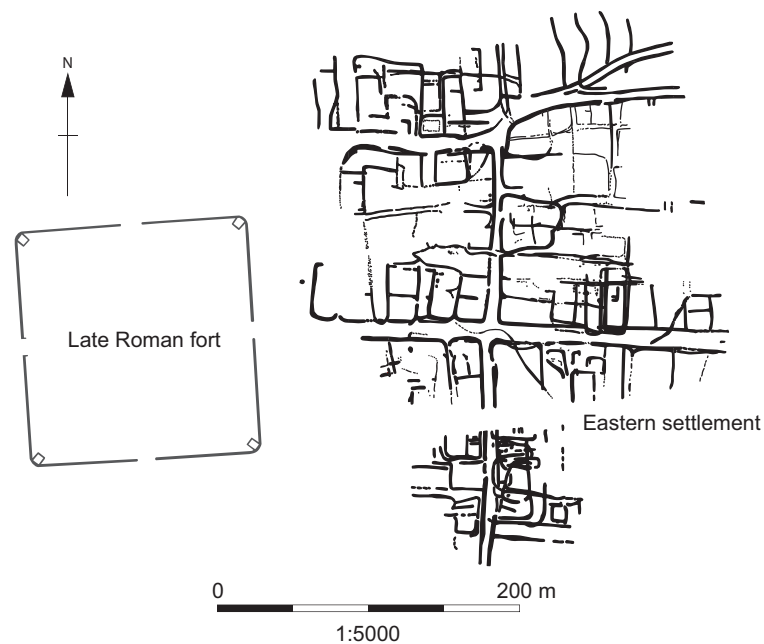


FIG. 6.20 Plan of nucleated settlement to the east of the coastal fort at Brancaster, Norfolk (Hinchliffe and Sparey-Green 1985)

### Other nucleated settlement

In addition to nucleated settlements of varying sizes sited upon the main Roman road system, there was a variety of other often substantial settlements in the East region. A series of small-scale excavations at Felixstowe in Suffolk revealed parts of a large Roman port, possibly extending over c. 30–40 ha including a road/street system and masonry-footed buildings (Fairclough 2011). There would certainly have been other ports around the East Anglian coastline, probably including Hunstanton in North Norfolk, which lay near the end of the Peddars Way Roman road, and from where goods may have been traded across the Wash (J. Davies 2009, 190). Lying 9 km to the east, and overlooking the coastal saltmarshes, was a nucleated settlement at Brancaster, revealed by cropmarks and geophysical survey as a system of rectilinear ditched boundary plots and streets covering over 23 ha (FIG. 6.20; Hinchliffe and Sparey-Green 1985; Wessex Archaeology 2014). These lay to the east of a late Roman coastal fort (with another area of settlement to the west), but seem to have originated earlier, in the later second century A.D., probably before the foundation of the fort in the early third century. Although an earlier military site has been postulated, this remains unproven and so it remains uncertain if the settlement at Brancaster was a military *vici* from the start, or else a coastal roadside settlement (port?) with a later associated fort. This may well have been the case at Felixstowe, the long-lived Roman port settlement noted above, which was only later possibly associated with a fort established

at Walton Castle (Fairclough 2011). Two other coastal forts at Burgh Castle and Caister-on-Sea both have excavated elements of what are presumed to be the associated *vici* (though activity at Caister also started prior to the establishment of the fort), and cropmarks indicate a particularly dense zone of settlement, trackways and fields surrounding them both (see FIG. 6.4).

Finally there are three fairly ill-understood settlements that appear to be of substantial size, but which do not appear to be orientated on the main Roman road network and so are here interpreted as villages. These sites, at Handford Road, Ipswich, RAF Lakenheath and Wenhaston, all span the whole Roman period with possible late Iron Age origins, and had excavated features comprising timber buildings, ditches, pits and wells. Plough marks immediately north of the RAF Lakenheath settlement indicate associated cultivation (Craven 2010), characteristic of what would seem to be essentially agglomerated agricultural settlements.

### BUILDINGS

The East region records produced a total of 385 buildings from 107 excavated settlements. With just over two buildings per settlement, the region falls just below the average for England and Wales (2.5 buildings) but above that of the South (1.9 buildings per settlement). The evidence is not evenly distributed across the region, with a higher proportion of settlements to the south and west



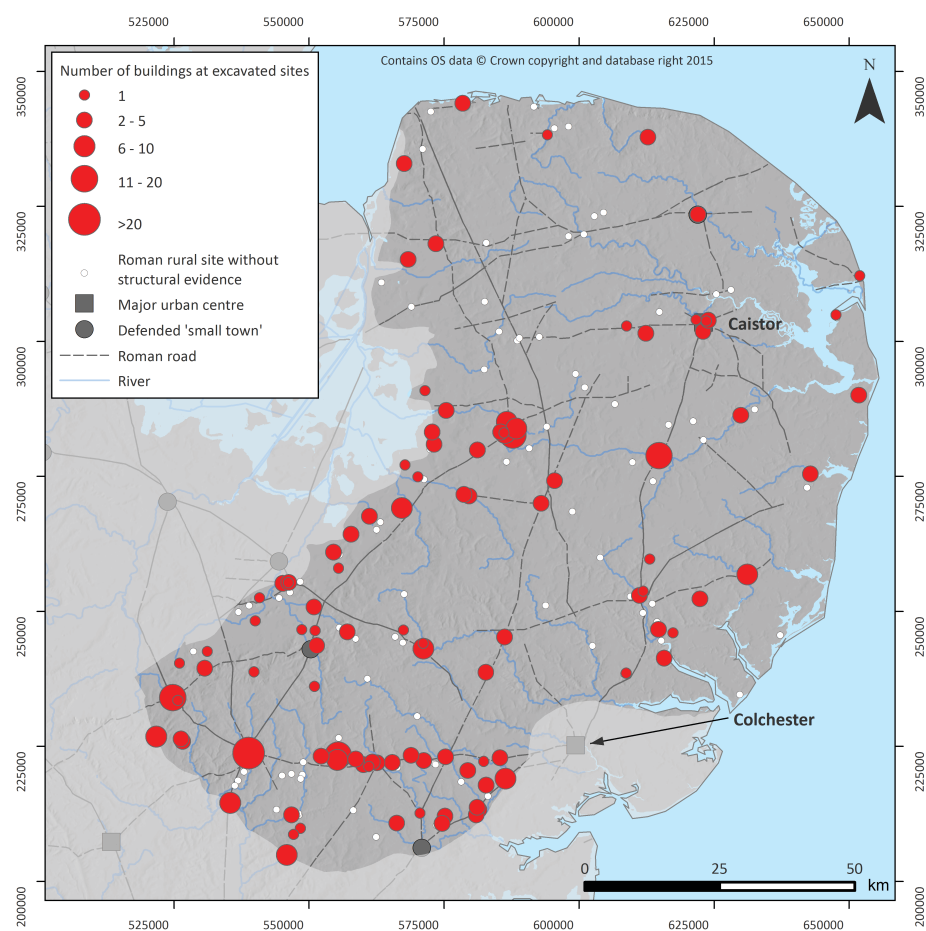


FIG. 6.21. Distribution and frequency of rural buildings on excavated sites in the East region

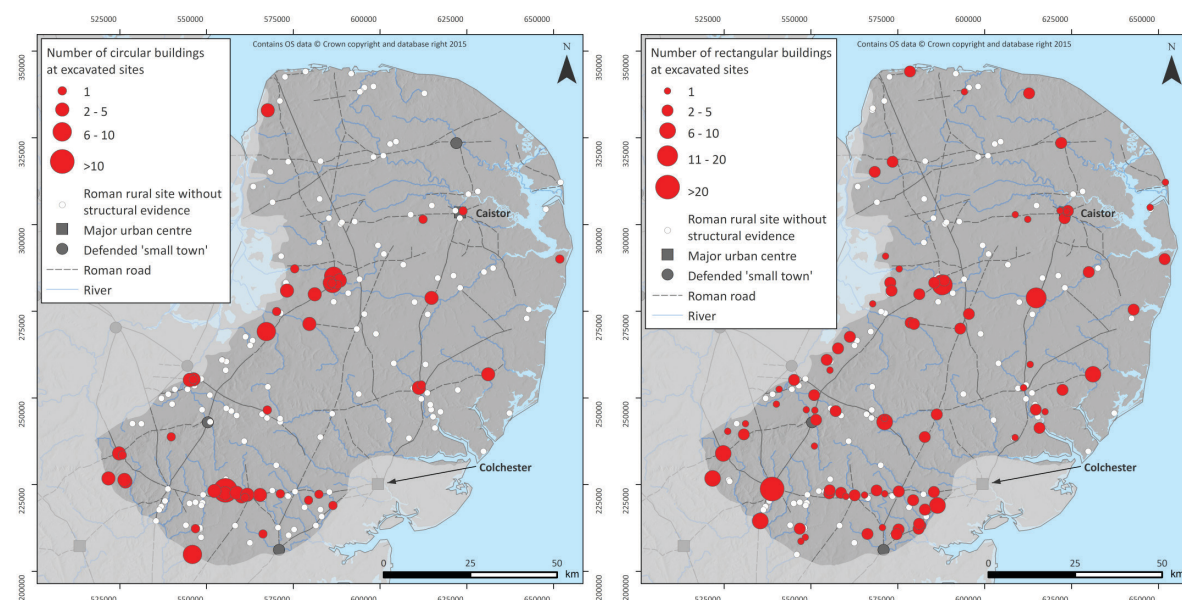


FIG. 6.22. Distribution and frequency of circular and rectangular architecture in the East region

containing evidence for buildings (FIG. 6.21), though even here the number of examples generally remains quite low, the maximum being 22 in the nucleated settlement at Braughing, Herts (Partridge 1977; 1981).

Rectilinear buildings are far more numerous than circular structures across the region, with the latter being concentrated in parts of the south and west (FIG. 6.22). The overall dominance of rectilinear structures starts from the later first

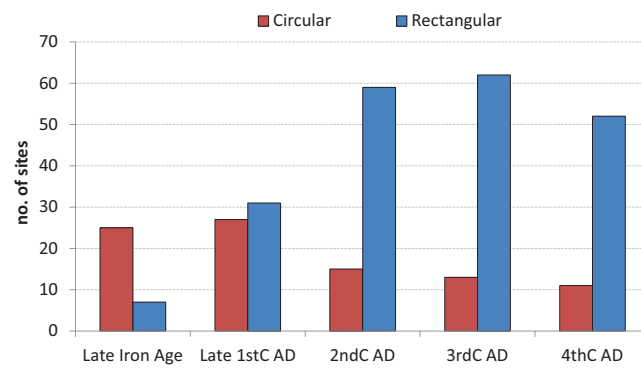


FIG. 6.23. Number of sites with circular and/or rectangular buildings over time in the East region

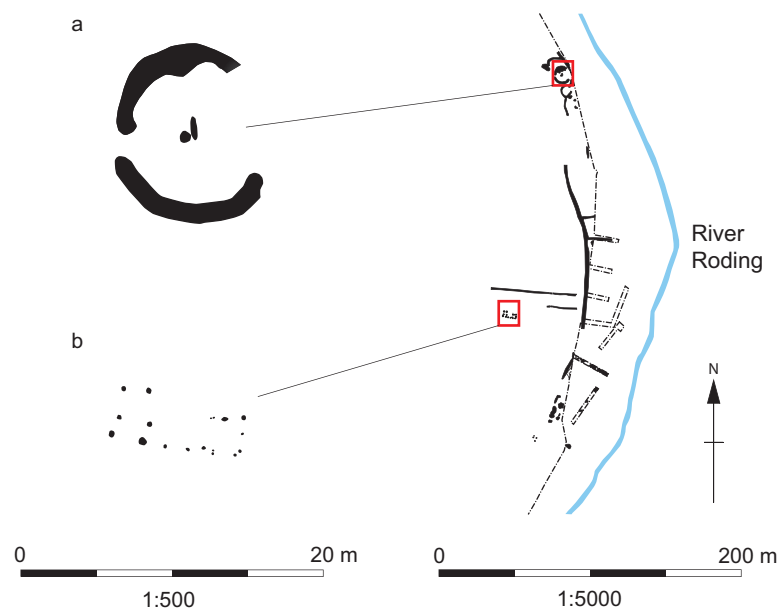


FIG. 6.24 Plans of late Roman (a) workshop and (b) granary/storehouse at Frogs Hall Borrow Pit, Takeley, Essex (Ennis 2006)

century A.D., and becomes much more apparent from the second century onwards, although circular buildings still appear right through into the fourth century (FIG. 6.23). This does not always seem to have been due to inherent conservatism, as in at least six of the eleven sites with evidence for late Roman circular structures, there was no earlier evidence for such buildings. Indeed, at both Frogs Hall Borrow Pit, Takeley in Essex (Ennis 2006) and Kilverstone in Norfolk (Garrow *et al.* 2006), the late circular buildings appear to replace earlier rectangular structures. Furthermore, the function of circular buildings in the later Roman period, as far as it is possible to tell, was more likely to be non-domestic, as for example the shrines at Kelvedon (Rodwell 1988) and Hockwold (Gurney 1986), and the ‘workshops’ at Takeley (FIG. 6.24(a)) and Kilverstone, interpreted as such on the basis of metalworking debris. Nevertheless, there were a few examples of what do appear to have been domestic roundhouses

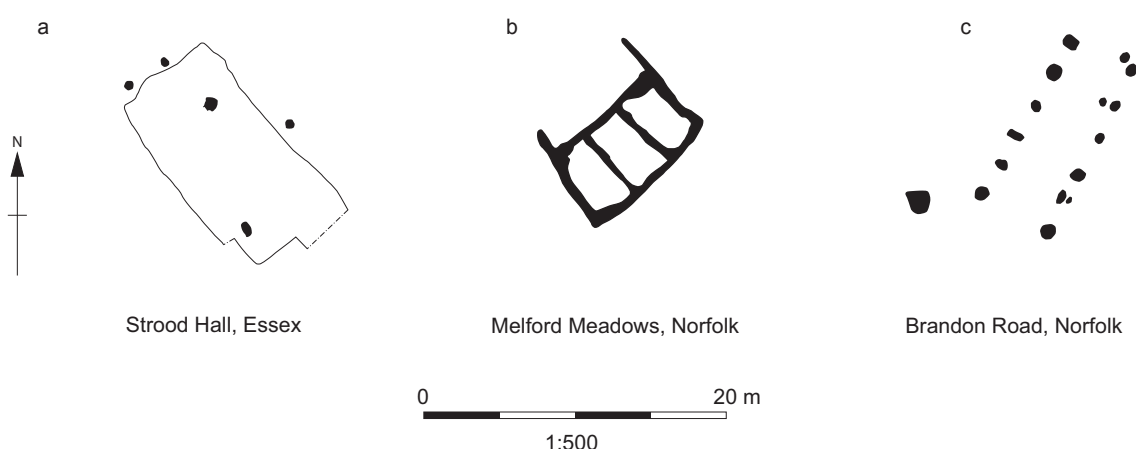
occurring in late Roman contexts, with five being recorded alongside three rectangular buildings within the complex farmstead at MTCP, Stansted (Cooke *et al.* 2008; see FIG. 6.13b).

### FARMSTEADS

Most of our evidence for buildings in the East region comes from farmsteads, both in terms of the number of sites and total number of structures (TABLE 6.3). The chronological patterning of circular and rectilinear buildings at farmsteads generally follows that of the region as a whole (i.e. a rise in number of sites with rectangular buildings and decline in sites with circular buildings; FIG. 6.23), except it is not until the second century that the latter came to dominate, and then not quite to such a marked degree. Complex farmsteads are far more likely to be associated with rectilinear buildings than enclosed farmsteads, although this is mostly dictated by chronological factors as the situation is more mixed in the mid- to late Roman

TABLE 6.3: SITE CONTEXT OF EXCAVATED BUILDINGS IN THE EAST REGION

Site type	Circular buildings (no. sites)	Rectangular buildings (no. sites)	No. circular buildings	No. rectangular buildings	No. timber buildings	No. masonry buildings
Farmstead	31	35	100	73	165	8
Farmstead/villa	2	6	3	22	7	18
Villa	0	9	0	23	1	22
Roadside/ <i>vicus</i>	8	21	17	107	90	26
Village	1	2	2	5	7	0
Religious site	3	7	3	15	5	13
Agricultural building	1	5	2	10	12	0
Isolated building	0	3	0	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>287</b>	<b>90</b>

FIG. 6.25 Plans of farmstead buildings at (a) Strood Hall, Essex (Timby *et al.* 2007a), (b) Melford Meadows, Norfolk (Mudd 2002) and (c) Brandon Road, Norfolk (Bales 2004)

period, exemplified by the differing but contemporary structural forms noted above at the Stansted MTCP site.

As discussed in Chapter 3, determination of specific building function is often not possible, especially given the usual scant physical remains, though most are assumed to have incorporated domestic occupation on the basis of hearths and/or associated finds. Others are likely to have been workshops, as noted above for Kilverstone and Takeley, and agricultural buildings, such as another building recorded at Takeley, which was interpreted as a post-built granary/storehouse on the basis of charred grain/seeds (including pea and field bean) from many of the postholes (FIG. 6.24b; Ennis 2006, 37–40). Additional agricultural buildings from farmsteads in the East include a substantial, post-built granary from Elveden By-pass, Suffolk (Booth 2014, 363–5), and a late first–second century timber building interpreted as a cattle byre from Rayne in Essex (Smoothy 1989).

Over 95 per cent of farmstead buildings in the East appear to be of timber or mass-walled

construction (see Ch. 3), with circular structures most often defined by drainage gullies and rectangular buildings by a mixture of postholes and beam slots. There are many problems in identifying some of these buildings, exemplified by what would appear to be a substantial structure of third-century date from Strood Hall in Essex, defined only as a rectilinear hollow ( $14 \times 8$  m) and infilled with midden material (Timby *et al.* 2007a, 89; FIG. 6.25a).

Of the seven farmsteads with building(s) having at least some form of masonry foundation, at four (Feltwell, Coggeshall, Bottisham and Great Wilbraham) these were thought to have been agricultural buildings or shrines associated with wider villa estates, though mostly with fairly minimal supporting evidence. Elsewhere, structures were suggested as possible workshops at Fosters End Drove and Sheringham Shoals (the former incorporating a heated room for drying; Lally and Nicholson 2008), and a building of uncertain function with cobble foundations was revealed at Maltings Lane, Witham. The latter site

may also have been part of a villa estate as significant quantities of window glass, *tesserae*, tile, *opus signinum* and painted plaster were found in the vicinity (Robertson and Davis 2004). Such elaboration is virtually non-existent at other farmsteads in the East, though six others did have evidence for window glass. The vast majority of all farmstead buildings, timber or masonry, would appear to have been quite simple, single-room structures, at least from the surviving sub-surface evidence, though the occasional existence of more sophisticated buildings is hinted at by a substantial (c. 10 × 6 m) three-room timber building of beam-slot construction, dating to the early Roman period, at Melford Meadows, Brettenham, Thetford (Mudd 2002; FIG. 6.25b).

The most substantial structures to be found on eastern farmsteads are aisled buildings, of which eight have been recorded from six sites, all defined as complex farmsteads where classification was possible. Three of these sites comprise farmsteads around Thetford, with two buildings from Brandon Road interpreted as agricultural barns dating to the second/third century A.D. (Atkins and Connor 2010; FIG. 6.25(c)). All of the other aisled buildings were of a similar date, though three continued into the fourth century. They were of 'undeveloped' type, and quite modest in size (most under 200 m<sup>2</sup>) compared with some of those structures found on villa complexes. As with Brandon Road, it is likely that all were utilised as agricultural barns, one at Beck Row, Mildenhall containing a corndryer/malting oven and suggested as a possible malting house (Bales 2004). Nevertheless, however modest these may seem compared to certain other aisled buildings across the country, they still would have been strikingly different to other buildings on farmsteads in the East, suggesting perhaps a special social status.

#### VILLA COMPLEXES

The fourteen excavated villa sites from the East region contained 48 buildings, including 33 ancillary buildings in addition to the main villa houses. Compared to areas further west and south, the scale of most villa houses was quite modest, with five coming under the 'cottage/hall' type category, such as at Exning in Cambridgeshire where the villa and associated bath suite developed from an earlier aisled building during the later third century A.D. (Webster 1987; FIG. 6.26a). The main late Roman villa building at Great Holts Farm was particularly modest, with the timber-framed structure only really being assigned to 'villa status' on the basis of overall form and the presence of an attached bathhouse (Germany 2003). Nevertheless, there were some grander and more extensive villa building complexes in the

East, such as an unexcavated courtyard villa near the floodplain of the River Can at Chignall in Essex, which was revealed by cropmarks (C.P. Clarke 1998; see FIG. 6.17). Another example is suspected at Stanton Chair, Ixworth in Suffolk, which developed from an aisled or corridor building in the later Roman period (Maynard and Brown 1936). Large winged-corridor buildings have also been revealed at Rivenhall in Essex (Rodwell and Rodwell 1993) and Gayton Thorpe in Norfolk (de Bootman 1998), both associated with other buildings, the latter including an adjacent winged building to the south on a slightly different alignment (FIG. 6.26b).

One of the more recent villa excavations in the East lies 1.5 km south of Caistor Roman town in Norfolk, comprising a fairly modest corridor building (6+ rooms) dating to the late Roman period (Bowden 2011). Lying 150 m south of the villa was a highly unusual Y-shaped structure, with two splayed wings 13.5 m long, converging on a rectangular room, with an apsed room behind (FIG. 6.27). The function of this building is uncertain, though it has been suggested as a summer dining room (*triclinium*) or shrine, and it may well be earlier than the main villa building (*ibid.*). Most ancillary buildings in villa complexes are considerably less exotic, comprising for the most part structures presumed to have been used for agricultural purposes, such as the six aisled buildings revealed on four villa sites. One of these at Rivenhall was particularly massive; at 880 m<sup>2</sup> it is among the largest such buildings known from the country and surely a huge statement of the wealth and social standing of the occupants of the site. Another agricultural structure, lying 250 m from the main villa at Stebbing Green in Essex, was of ill-defined, probable sill-beam construction, and appears to have associated with the production of malt for brewing, a potentially important part of the villa's economy (Bedwin and Bedwin 1999).

#### NUCLEATED SETTLEMENTS

Nucleated settlements (roadside settlements, military *vici* and villages) in the East region contained evidence for many structures, with a diverse array of different building types (TABLE 6.3). The great majority (123) of buildings from nucleated sites were recorded from roadside settlements, with over 86 per cent of these being rectilinear in form, including an aisled building recorded at Braintree in Essex (Garwood and Lavender 2000). The remaining seventeen circular structures comprise three shrines and scatters of domestic roundhouses, all of the latter dating to the late Iron Age or early Roman period, prior to or during the early stages of the development of roadside settlements.

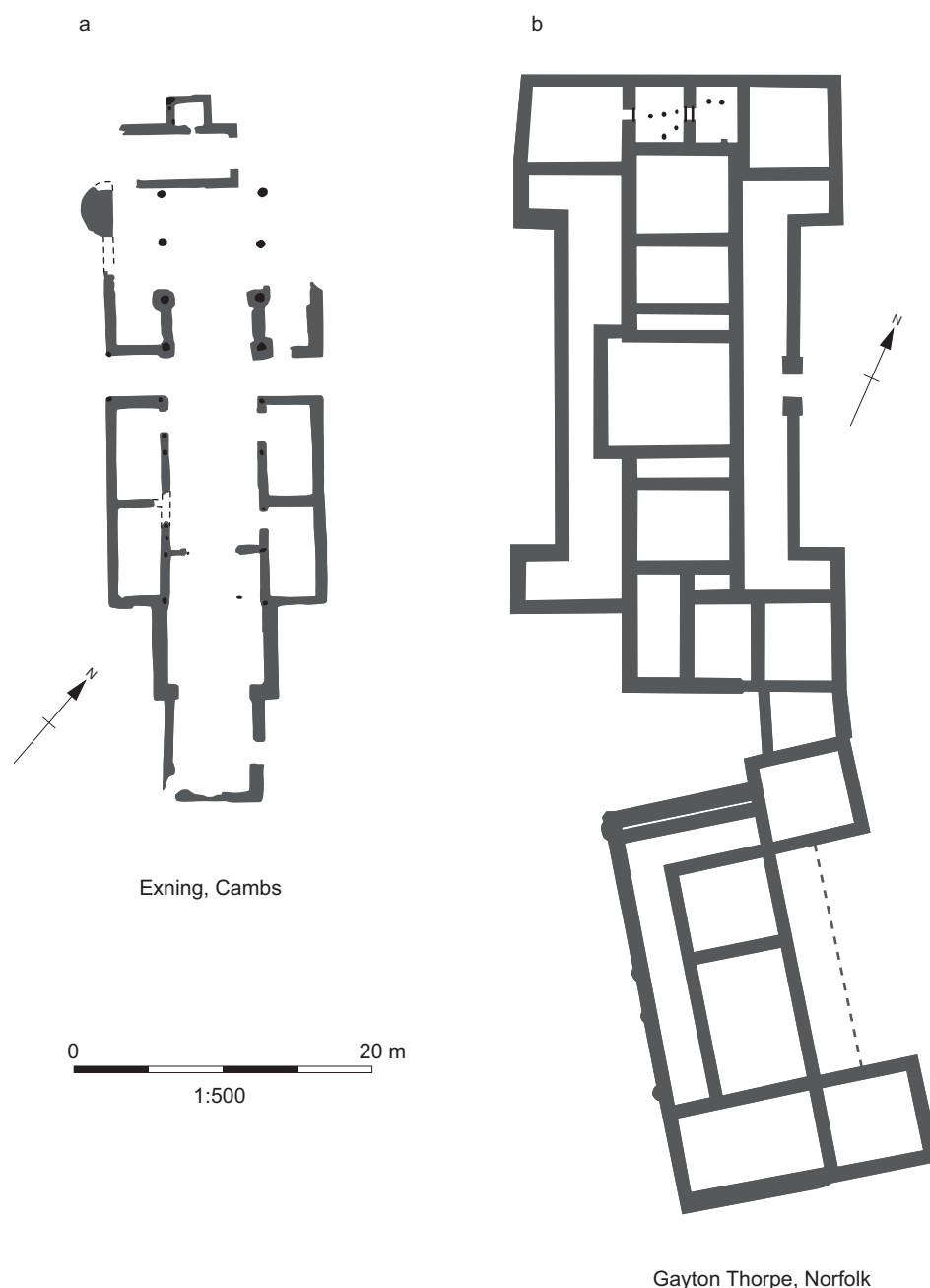


FIG. 6.26. Plans of villa buildings from (a) Exning, Cambs (Webster 1987) and (b) Gayton Thorpe, Norfolk (de Bootman 1998)

Most buildings from roadside settlements were fairly modest timber structures, as typified by the group excavated from Scole on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, where seventeen timber buildings were constructed using a mix of earthfast posts, sill beams and post-pads (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 219). Although none of these was on a grand scale, the recovery of well-preserved roof timbers re-used in a late second-century malting complex did testify to a high level of carpentry skills. One 'strip building' was revealed, with what is suggested as commercial space occupying a

portico to the front facing the road, and workshops and domestic space behind (*ibid.*). Such buildings are frequently observed at some of the larger urban centres in Roman Britain, such as at London and Colchester, though they were more common in the early Roman period (Perring 2002, 41). Seven posthole and/or beam-slot buildings were also excavated in the settlement at Wixoe on the eastern side of the River Stour, although more sophisticated masonry buildings (including a possible bathhouse or administrative building) were also indicated by geophysical



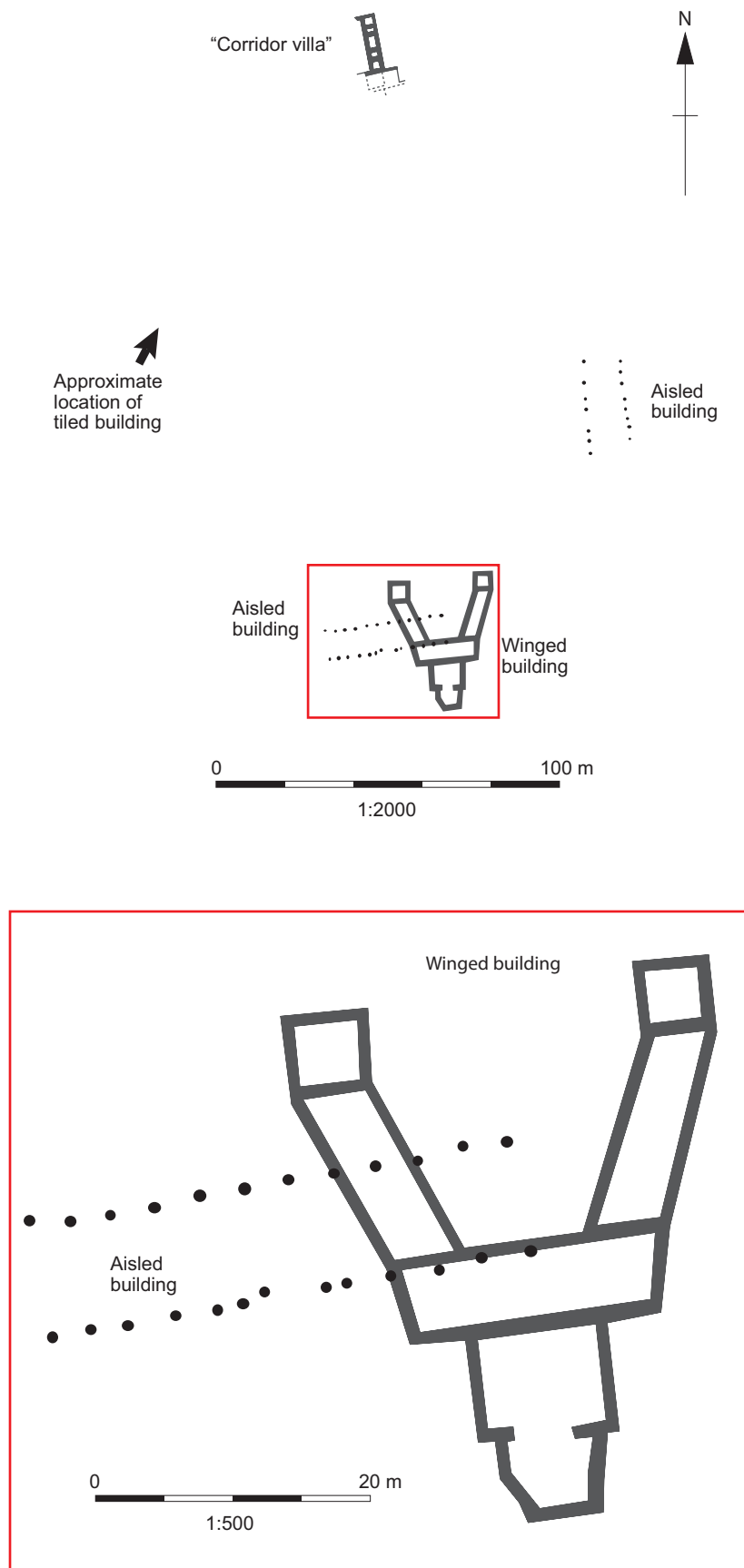


FIG. 6.27. Plan of villa complex south of Caistor, Norfolk (Bowden 2011)

survey and quantities of building material, which included roof tile, wall plaster and fragments of *opus signinum* (Atkins 2013).

About half of all East region roadside settlements had evidence for at least one masonry building, though many of these were only partially revealed and seemingly of fairly simple construction, probably with timber superstructures. Stone-founded shrines/temples were attested at Scole, Crownthorpe, Hockwold and Great Dunmow, while definite bathhouses were located at Braughing, Long Melford and Great Walsingham. The provision of bathing establishments implies a certain level of 'Roman' social infrastructure that was usually reserved for larger towns and cities (along with villas), although there is no way of knowing if they were for general public usage, or more restricted, perhaps for state officials. Other masonry buildings of some status include a possible *mansio* within the settlement at Baldock, the multi-roomed building at Wixoe mentioned above, and two stone-built hypocausted buildings found near the road frontage at Pakenham (Tester 2002). With the possible exception of the latter, these have all been interpreted as 'official' buildings, and there is scant evidence for high-status domestic dwellings within the core areas of such settlements.

## LANDSCAPE CONTEXT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

### TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The East region landscape is generally fairly low-lying, with some higher ground to the south-west, though rarely rising above 130 m OD. As with other regions, topographic factors appear to have had at least some influence on the location of settlements within this landscape, and this is of course inextricably linked to underlying geology and soils. The boulder clays of the East Anglian Plain clearly form the most extensive zone and have the largest number of settlements, although these are generally concentrated in or near the river valleys that dissect this landscape. The settlements lying further west favour the lower chalk zone, particularly where this is cut through by the wide river valleys such as those of the Cam or Granta.

Notwithstanding the major issues of bias associated with the wider settlement patterns noted earlier in this chapter, the general predilection of settlements in the region for relatively lower-lying ground is clear, with almost 70 per cent of all sites lying below 50 m OD. Within different types of settlement, however, divergent patterns emerge. In particular, complex farmsteads and roadside settlements are more

likely to be found at very low levels (especially 10–19 m OD), often on sand and gravel river-terraces, much as in other regions of central and southern Britain. The only exceptions to this, in terms of complex farmsteads, are a relatively tightly defined group in the vicinity of Roman Stane Street (modern A120), including MTCP site at Stansted airport, which lie on the higher Essex claylands at 83–105 m OD.

The concentration of eastern roadside settlements at relatively low levels is partly because c. 75 per cent of them were located at a river crossing or alongside river banks, and even those few found at higher levels (e.g. Great Dunmow and Braughing; 75–77 m OD) were still found close to rivers (see Ch. 2). Villas tend to cluster at a slightly higher level, though again often still sited in river valleys such as at Castle Hill, Ipswich, which lay just below the crest of a low hill in the Gipping Valley (Wessex Archaeology 2003). Enclosed farmsteads likewise seem to have been more common at higher levels, certainly more than the majority of complex farmsteads, and were the most dominant settlement type above 50 m OD, being particularly prevalent on the boulder claylands.

### TRANSPORTATION: RIVERS, ROADS AND TRACKWAYS

Despite the emphasis on habitation in the lower-lying river valleys, and the fact that over 60 per cent of all settlements lay within 2 km of a significant river, evidence for use of the inland waterways remains almost non-existent in the region. Excavations at Cranfield Mill in Ipswich revealed some evidence for what was argued as 'Roman river management' (Medlycott 2011a, 41), while timber wharfs/jetties were noted along the river fronts in the roadside settlement at Scole (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 222) and in the defended Roman town at Brampton (Knowles 1977). The fact that so many roadside settlements were situated at river crossings might suggest that rivers were utilised far more than this evidence indicates (though the instigation of tolls was also probably a factor; see Ch. 2), but in terms of transport links they were always likely to have been secondary to the major road network, which appears to have been quite comprehensive in this region.

Almost all the excavated settlements in the East region dataset lay within 10 km of the Roman road network as defined by the National Monuments Record, while a more intimate association is suggested for villas and complex farmsteads, with over 70 per cent of both types lying within 2 km, as opposed to just 50 per cent of enclosed farmsteads. A similar situation was observed for the Central Belt region, the pattern perhaps explained by the greater economic and social draw



of the road network within these parts of the Roman province, and in particular a close connection of villas and complex farmsteads with roadside settlements. More localised movement through the landscape is also revealed by trackways on 110 sites, fairly well distributed throughout the East region. Trackways were specifically noted on 71 settlements (c. 65 per cent of total), most dating to the Roman period, though possible trackways of pre-conquest date were recorded at five sites, including Shropham Quarry in Norfolk where a track/droveway was revealed leading towards an enclosed late Iron Age/early Roman settlement on a low hill (Carlyle 2011b). The extent of trackways around settlements and across wider landscapes is rarely revealed through excavation, though the cropmark surveys in parts of Norfolk have revealed areas of integrated trackways, fields and settlements spreading over hundreds of hectares (see FIG. 6.4 above).

### FIELD SYSTEMS

The high agricultural potential of much of the East region landscape is well noted, with almost all of it covered by open fields during the medieval period, enabling it to become one of the most prosperous regions in Britain (Williamson 2005, 13). Today it remains the principal grain-producing

area of the country. The scale and intensity of agricultural production in the Romano-British period is less well known, although there is considerable evidence for field systems in many parts of the region.

A total of 60 sites with excavated field systems is included in the current dataset for the region, many of which lay in or near to the river valleys dissecting the East Anglian Plain. A large proportion (42 per cent) of these field systems has direct association with farmsteads. They often just comprise a series of ditches radiating out from the main settlement, though rarely traced as far as those at the MTCP site, Stansted, which ran in very straight lines from the farmstead for over 300 m (Cooke *et al.* 2008; FIG. 6.28). Elements of field systems were also associated with four villas and nine roadside settlements, the latter often recorded immediately outside the settlement core, suggesting that the occupants of such nucleated sites were generating agricultural produce themselves rather than relying wholly on outlying farmsteads. The remaining twenty excavated field systems had no obvious associated settlement and rarely form any coherent pattern, though this is largely to do with the limited overall area of excavation. As with trackways, it is only really when cropmark evidence is sought that the wider picture of Romano-British fields can be discerned, as seen with the extensive



FIG. 6.28. Plan of field system ditches radiating out from late Roman settlement at MTCP site, Stansted (Cooke *et al.* 2008)

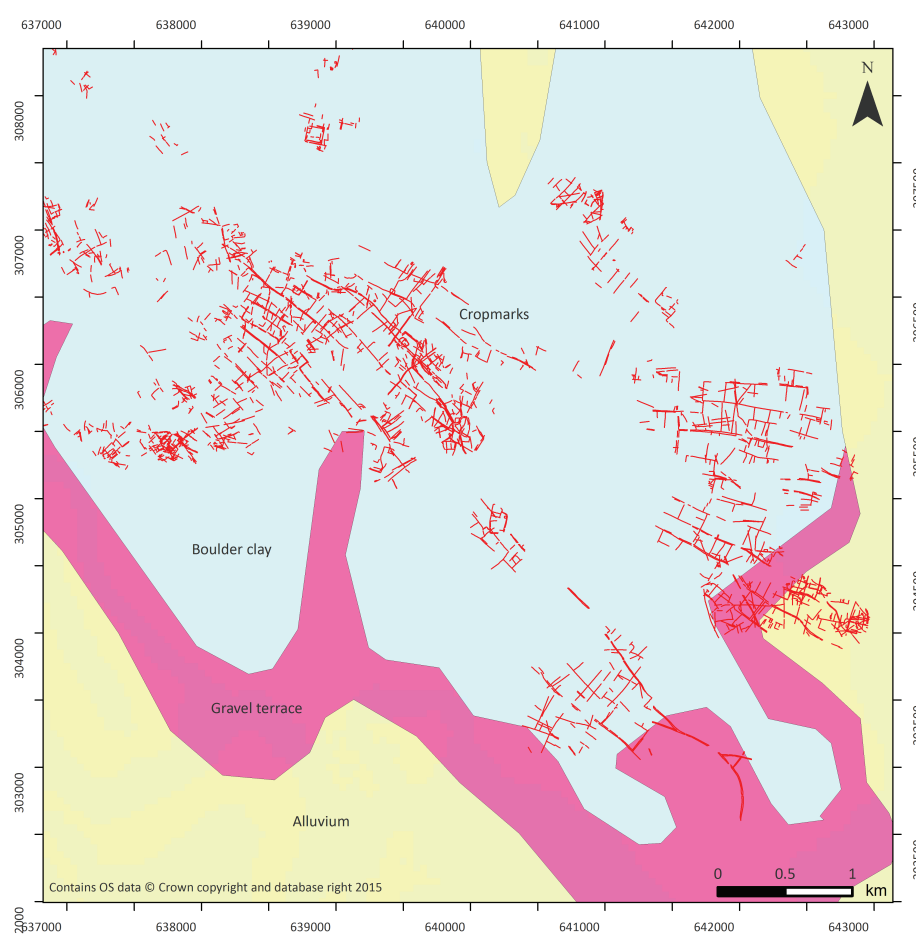


FIG. 6.29. 'Roman' field systems in the Norfolk Broads as revealed through NMP cropmarks (for location see FIG. 6.4) (cropmark data © Historic England)

areas of small co-axial fields on the boulder clay adjacent to the Norfolk Broads, which are believed to be of later Iron Age and and/or Roman origin (FIG. 6.29). These would seem quite different from larger fields revealed on the boulder clay around Stansted, perhaps hinting at differences in the agricultural regimes.

As discussed in previous chapters, accurate dating of field systems remains very problematic, though there is good evidence from the East for many having origins in the Iron Age or earlier. Independently dated excavated examples (i.e. not dated purely by association with settlement) appear to be most numerous in the late first and second centuries A.D. (up to sixteen in use), with a steady decline thereafter (to ten in use by fourth century). This apparent 'abandonment' (or at least silting up of ditches) of many field systems prior to the end of the Roman period is found across much of the central and southern regions, though as elsewhere there is some evidence that the alignment of these fields (especially in the Boulder Clay of the East Anglian Plain) continued to shape the landscape for many centuries to come (Rippon *et al.* 2015, 169–81).

### SETTLEMENT HIERARCHIES: THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BASIS OF SETTLEMENTS

While there may have been a relative paucity of high-status villas and a low level of architectural elaboration within much of the East, there is a particularly large and rich finds assemblage from the region, along with considerable levels of information derived from environmental remains, although the latter is somewhat concentrated towards the south and west. When assessed together with the settlement and landscape evidence, these data provide great scope for exploring variations in economy and social structure, which in turn leads to a greater understanding of the inter-relationships between rural settlements.

### MATERIAL CULTURE

The general range of objects from the East region is similar to that from the South and Central Belt, and has much the same order of prevalence, i.e. with pottery and coins being the most common objects and categories such as lighting, recreation

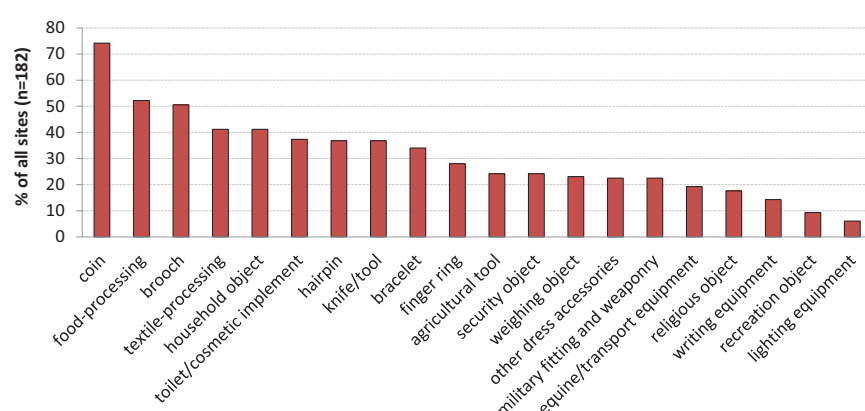


FIG. 6.30. Frequency of major artefact categories on all sites in the East region

TABLE 6.4: DISTRIBUTION OF SELECTED OBJECT CATEGORIES ACROSS LANDSCAPE ZONES OF THE EAST REGION  
(% OF TOTAL NO. OBJECT TYPE)

Landscape zone	Agricultural tool	Bracelet	Brooch	Coin	Equine/transport equipment	Food processing	Hairpin	Knife/tool	Lighting equipment	Recreation object	Religious object	Security object	Textile processing	Weighing object	Writing equipment
Breckland	12.3	10.42	6.64	11.13	2.31	16.6	6.17	8.23	0	1.64	29.6	1.09	26.78	6.29	9.2
East Anglian Chalk	18.03	14.63	12.9	3.95	17.69	17.44	12.03	18.67	72.55	24.59	8.8	15.22	8.29	5.71	17.24
East Anglian Plain	65.57	71.4	64.94	54.71	71.54	62.83	77.59	68.27	27.45	72.13	45.6	75.54	53.32	81.71	62.07
North Norfolk	3.28	3.33	13.9	27.56	8.46	2.74	4.06	4.02	0	1.64	15.2	7.07	10.66	5.71	11.49
Suffolk Coast and Heaths	0.82	0.22	1.52	2.62	0	0.38	0.15	0.8	0	0	0.8	1.09	0.95	0.57	0
The Broads	0	0	0.1	0.03	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total no. of objects</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>1914</b>	<b>28609</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>1313</b>	<b>665</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>87</b>

and writing being the scarcest. Pottery has been recorded from all settlements (though just 70 per cent was quantified), with samian and amphorae being noted on a higher percentage of settlements here than in any other region (75 per cent and 40 per cent respectively); mortaria were approximately equal with the Central Belt, being found on c. 50 per cent of sites in both regions.

The frequency of occurrence of most non-pottery object types is also much higher in this region, with, for example, 74 per cent of sites containing coins as opposed to 58 per cent in the Central Belt and less than 50 per cent in the south (FIG. 6.30). The high prevalence of what may be termed 'elite' material culture (e.g. certain personal objects such as hairpins and finger rings) in particular has been noted for the region, with Mattingly arguing that such portable wealth (as

opposed to architectural wealth) was part of 'specific local patterns of adaptation to Roman rule' (2006, 385) in terms of the creation and maintenance of social relations and identity.

The quantities of objects within selected categories found in the East region are shown in TABLE 6.4, shown as percentages recovered from the different landscape zones. As would be expected given that this is the largest zone with most settlement data, the greatest volume of almost all object types come from the East Anglian Plain, though elsewhere there are certain patterns that may hint at intra-regional differences in social and economic structures. North Norfolk in particular appears to have very few objects associated with agriculture (these deriving mostly from Brancaster), perhaps correlating with an almost total lack of millstones to suggest less

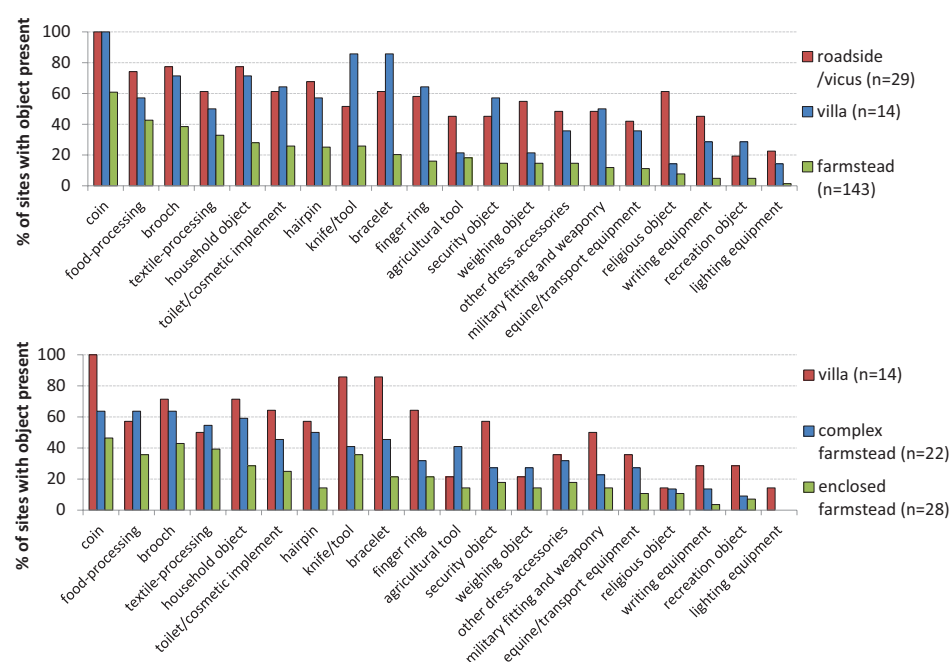


FIG. 6.31. Frequency of major artefact categories on different types of rural settlement in the East region

intensive arable cultivation in this area. Elsewhere, there is some evidence that more intensive agricultural regimes operated in parts of Breckland and the East Anglian Chalk, with these areas not only having relatively high proportions of agricultural tools and food-processing objects (including millstones), but also being provided with quite a number of aisled buildings (for storage) and corndryers.

Many of the differences between landscape zones noted in TABLE 6.4 result from variations in their settlement profiles because, as with other areas of southern and central Britain, there is a distinctly uneven distribution of different object classes and quantities between settlement types. As noted above, the most ubiquitous class of artefact found across all site types remains pottery, yet assemblages quantified to any degree were only noted for 80 per cent of farmsteads, 55 per cent of nucleated settlements and just 42 per cent of villas. Records of certain other types of object appear more 'complete', and here we see, for example, 100 per cent of both villas and roadside settlements having quantified evidence for Roman coinage (FIG. 6.31). In terms of absolute numbers of coins, roadside settlements completely dominate, accounting for 85 per cent of the c. 28,600 coins recorded for the East region, including six sites with quantities over 1000. Although this was largely due to the use of metal detectors on excavations, particularly at sites in Norfolk and Suffolk, the sheer volume of coins from these settlements must surely be a reflection of their important role as market centres.

Most other object categories are also more frequently present at roadside settlements, reflecting both their larger populations and their wide range of different social and economic functions. Brooches are particularly prevalent, occurring on almost 80 per cent of such sites and accounting for 73 per cent of the total number for the East. Along with the prevalence of other personal items, this points to a particular emphasis on personal display, as might be expected of settlements where movement and circulation of people would be commonplace.

Food-processing objects were recorded at 75 per cent of roadside settlements yet, unlike in the Central Belt (and to some extent the South), very few had specific evidence for millstones. That at least some of them functioned as cereal-processing centres, however, is indicated by the thirteen fragments recovered at Scole, where a possible water mill was noted, along with a malting complex (Buckley 2014). Commercial activity is also attested by relatively high incidences of objects associated with weighing and writing (in addition to the coinage), while a high level of textile processing is hinted at by the many spindlewhorls, needles, loomweights (though these are generally thought to date to the later Iron Age/earliest Roman period) and shears found at seventeen roadside settlements. There are also occasional examples of wool combs and weaving tablets on such sites, suggesting that all stages of textile processing were being carried out, with sheep perhaps being driven in from the surrounding countryside (see *Faunal remains* below and see vol. 2). The whole eastern

region and Norfolk in particular has been argued as being especially important for sheep-rearing and textile manufacture, with suggestions that an imperial woollen mill recorded at 'Venta' in the *Notitia Dignitatum* was actually at Caistor-by-Norwich (*Venta Icenorum*) rather than Winchester as usually proposed (Manning 1966; Crummy 2010).

The recovery of religious objects such as figurines and model axes on over 60 per cent of roadside settlements provides some clues about the spiritual focus that such sites could provide, as is also indicated by the presence of structures interpreted as shrines/temples on a number of such sites (e.g. Great Dunmow, Baldock, Crownthorpe). The many religious objects from the settlement at Harlow Holbrooks, including gilt bronze letters, bronze leaves and miniature axes, were probably associated in some way with the Romano-Celtic temple lying less than 0.5 km distant, with some indications (from 200 fragments of copper-alloy sheet) that it may have actually been a manufacturing centre for such items (Conlon 1973).

As elsewhere, villas in the East were generally less well represented than roadside settlements in terms of the total range of different objects recovered, although they were more commonly represented in some categories. In particular, a greater percentage of villas contained certain items associated with personal adornment/grooming (bracelets, finger rings, toilet objects), along with recreation (dice, gaming counters) and security (keys, lock parts), all reflecting a preoccupation with personal appearance, lifestyle and protection. Villas were also best represented with knives/tools, which is perhaps surprising given the considerable evidence for industrial practices at most roadside settlements (pottery production and metalworking in particular). However, the outer 'working' complexes of most villa estates (and where many of the East villa excavations were concentrated) may have incorporated a range of different craftworking activities, as seen with the evidence for boneworking, ironworking and bronzeworking at the villa estate at Gestingthorpe, Essex (Draper 1985).

As expected, the East region farmsteads generally had a much more restricted range of object types, with 40 sites (28 per cent of total) having evidence for just pottery alone. Nevertheless, the proportion of farmsteads with evidence for coinage is still quite high at c. 60 per cent, which is considerably greater than in farmsteads in the South or Central Belt (40–48 per cent), perhaps influenced by the high density of roadside settlements in this region. Although, as with other

regions, most farmsteads still had low numbers of coins recovered (overall less than 10 per cent of the East total) this increased presence may hint at greater integration into a monetary economy. However, the overall role of coinage in Romano-British society is still not well understood, and it has been recently reiterated that their primary function (in the later Roman period at least) was far more intrinsically linked with urban rather than rural life, in particular tax collection and/or commercial transactions (Walton and Moorhead 2015, 6; see vol. 2).

Among the different farmstead categories, complex farmsteads do appear somewhat more likely to have coins than enclosed types (FIG. 6.31), and have a higher density of coins per hectare of excavation, though differences are not particularly marked and may well be linked more to chronology (i.e. the fact that more complex farmsteads were of late Roman date) than variations in coin usage. Nevertheless there is a greater representation of all finds types at complex farmsteads, and in terms of items associated with food processing (notably querns), they even surpass villas, both as a proportion of sites with such objects and overwhelmingly with actual numbers of objects. Five complex farmsteads also had millstone fragments, probably reflecting their roles as agricultural processing centres, as for example at Melford Meadows in Thetford, where the farmstead covered c. 2 ha and included at least one aisled building, along with agricultural tools and millstone fragments (Mudd 2002; Pine 2010).

## ENVIRONMENTAL EVIDENCE

The environmental evidence from excavated sites in the East region is somewhat patchy, with a far greater number of plant and especially animal bone assemblages coming from the south and west (in parts of Essex, Herts and Cambs) than further north and east (Norfolk and Suffolk). In terms of faunal remains, such geographic bias has been noted previously (Albarella *et al.* in prep.), and seems to be at least partly due to the greater extent of acidic soils in the North Norfolk, Suffolk and Breckland heaths and the Norfolk Broads, though it is also due to the relative lack of excavated settlements in these zones.

### Faunal remains

In total, 99 phased animal bone assemblages of over 100 NISP have been recorded from the East region and, despite the geographic bias just mentioned, there are some slight trends noted in the frequency of main domesticates according to different landscape zones (FIG. 6.32). As a whole, the assemblages from the East region are very



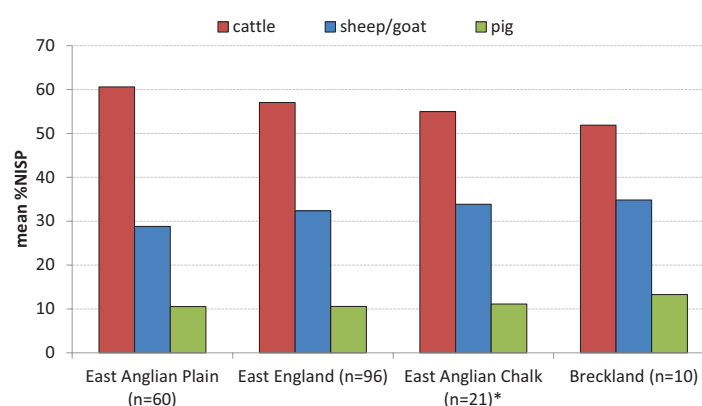


FIG. 6.32. Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across in the East region and in selected landscape zones (mean percentages from sites in each zone) (\*excludes large assemblages from Great Chesterford temple)

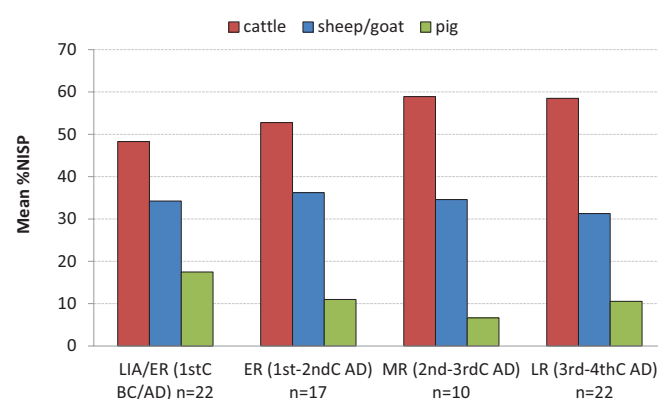


FIG. 6.33. Relative frequency of major livestock taxa over time in the East region

much dominated by cattle, more so than any other region except the North. This dominance is even more marked in the East Anglian Plain, or at least in the southern part of this zone where most of the data are located, though there are indications that sheep/goat (and to a much lesser extent pigs) are more common on the chalk landscapes to the west. This is particularly the case in Breckland, where it has been noted that the light soils are very much suited to sheep-rearing, and were successfully used for this purpose during the medieval period (Crummy 2010, 76). A greater emphasis on cattle herds to the south, if genuine, ties in well with that observed in the adjacent London Basin zone in the South region, where the vast majority of settlement assemblages were firmly cattle based, and may be associated with supply networks to London and Colchester (see Ch. 4).

An increase in proportions of cattle over time during the Roman period is well documented, both for central/eastern England and across the province (Albarella *et al.* in prep.; King 1999). This was certainly the case for the current East region dataset, though the high point appears to have been reached by the mid-Roman period, with the situation changing little thereafter (FIG. 6.33).

Sheep/goat proportions are rather more stable throughout, though with slight evidence for a late Roman decline, while pigs, always a distant third, become significantly less important after the late Iron Age/early Roman period (first century B.C./A.D.). This is in part influenced by the very high pig percentages from sites within the Braughing oppidum (up to 49 per cent at Skeleton Green), though late Iron Age phases of farmsteads such as the MTCP site at Stansted also have proportions of pig well in excess of 20 per cent.

In addition to evidence for slight intra-regional and chronological variation in the faunal remains, there are also some notable differences in the assemblages from different settlement types (FIG. 6.34). Unfortunately only four phased assemblages derived from villa sites, two from the same settlement at Chignall, where excavations were located to the south of the main courtyard villa. The assemblages from here (especially that of the late Roman phase) together with those from Great Holts Farm and Stebbing Green, all in Essex, were completely cattle dominated, while the very low percentages of pig compared to those from villas further south and west may be explained because most assemblages were from locations well

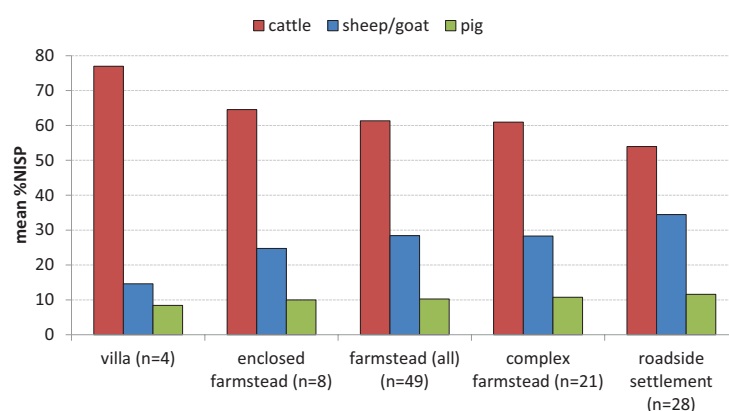


FIG. 6.34. Relative frequency of major livestock taxa across different settlement types in the East region (mean percentages from site types)

removed from the main villa buildings. There was very little difference noted between the two major types of farmstead, both being almost equally cattle dominated, though roadside settlements did have a markedly higher proportion of sheep/goat, similar to the situation in the Central Belt (see Ch. 5). This may well be linked with the relatively strong association of such sites with objects of textile processing noted above, all perhaps being part of a system of larger scale cloth production.

Within these broad regional and intra-regional trends there are of course many individual variants, reflecting local circumstances, choices of the farming communities and post-depositional factors. A late Iron Age/early Roman farmstead on a chalk hill at Edix Hill, Barrington, for instance, had relatively high proportions of sheep/goat (60 per cent of main domesticates) and was interpreted as being geared up toward livestock farming, with ditched and fenced boundaries defining droveways and stock enclosures (Malim 1997). Elsewhere, an especially cattle-dominated assemblage was noted from the roadside settlement at Braintree (83 per cent; Havis 1993), while the major Roman temple sites at Harlow and Great Chesterford have substantial faunal assemblages, renowned for their dominance of sheep/goat (85 per cent and 99 per cent respectively; France and Gobel 1985; Medlycott 2011b).

### Plant remains

Almost 40 per cent of all records from the East region included some form of report on the plant remains (predominantly charred but occasionally waterlogged material), relating to 128 different settlements. Although there is still a bias towards the south and west, the records are more widely dispersed than those for the animal remains, with a small number of samples from North Norfolk and the Suffolk Coast and Heaths.

The general range and proportion of crops present on sites in the East are quite consistent

with those for the central and southern regions, being dominated by spelt wheat in all landscape zones. Spelt appears to have been grown and processed with some intensity over the course of the Roman period, especially to the south and west of the region where often abundant chaff and occasional whole spikelets (e.g. Tunbridge Lane, Bottisham; Kenny 2012) were recorded in most of the corndryers where environmental sampling had taken place. Both emmer wheat and free-threshing wheat were noted in *c.* 25 per cent of plant assemblages, almost always in lesser quantities than spelt, and free-threshing wheat in particular was very rare in Breckland and North Norfolk.

After spelt, barley is the next most commonly encountered cereal crop, and is equally well represented in North Norfolk, occasionally being the dominant crop on site, as at Massingham Road, Rougham, where a sample from an early/mid-Roman ditch contained barley grains and rachis nodes along with one possible wheat grain (Wilson *et al.* 2012). Barley was also the predominant cereal type identified at Norwich Road, Caister-on-Sea, on the north-east Norfolk coastline, *c.* 200 m south-east of the coastal fort, its prevalence there argued as being due to its greater tolerance of salt (Albone 2006). Oats are also just as commonly found in much of Norfolk, though less so in other areas, and in most cases there is the usual uncertainty as to whether it is the wild or cultivated form. Charred plant remains from a second-third century A.D. corndryer at Foxley Road, Norfolk, contained mostly oat grains, though these may have represented fuel for the oven (Wilson *et al.* 2012).

A range of other types of crops was encountered sporadically, each recorded in less than 15 per cent of East region assemblages, though with some intra-regional differences. Rye, for example, was found in approximately a third of assemblages from Breckland, possibly part of a wider concentration as it was also well noted in the



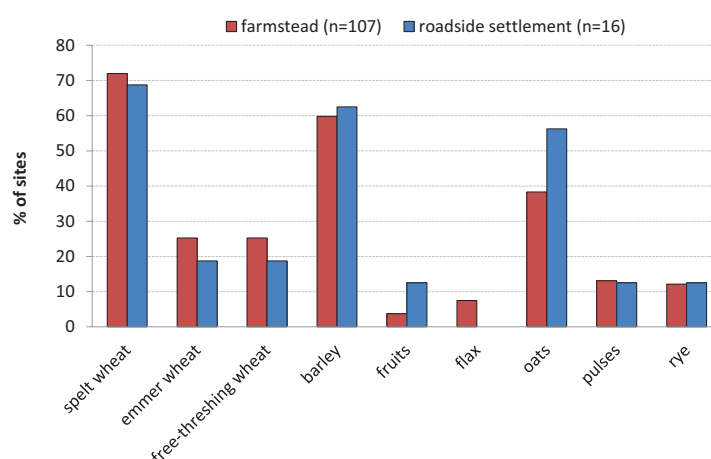


FIG. 6.35. Percentage presence of cultivated plant taxa in farmsteads and roadside settlements within the East region (includes charred and waterlogged remains)

adjacent Fenland zone (see Ch. 5). Fruits and other horticultural crops are rarely encountered in assemblages, largely owing to the relative lack of waterlogged and/or mineralised remains. However, a range, including plum, apple/pear, blackberry, grape, elder berry, sloe, bullace and wild celery, was found from deposits in the roadside settlements at Baldock and Scole, while waterlogged remains from a well at a farmstead at Hinxton in Cambridgeshire included plum, sloe and cherry stones. Evidence for grape was found at six sites, while vine pollen from Scole indicates the presence of vineyards somewhere near to the settlement (Wiltshire 2014, 416).

The rich array of fruit remains from the roadside settlement at Scole correlates with evidence from other similar sites, such as Baldock, suggesting a slightly more varied diet than that typically found at farmsteads, although the range and prevalence of most arable crops remains quite similar across both settlement types within their landscape zones (FIG. 6.35). One of the few possibly notable differences concerns the greater percentage of oats present in assemblages from roadside settlements, this perhaps serving as animal fodder for horses in particular. Some indication of the mechanisms of food production and distribution is provided by environmental samples taken from excavations at the roadside settlement of Wixoe in Suffolk, where it was suggested that part-processed crops were imported from the hinterland, with the final stage of processing occurring in the town (Atkins 2013). As yet there is little evidence for granaries within such nucleated settlements, with the possible exception of an aisled building from Braintree, though as mentioned above, millstone fragments did occur in some roadside settlements, and quernstones were generally quite plentiful, including over 60 fragments from Icklingham, West Stow (West 1989). This all suggests that food

processing, whether mechanised or not, was an important and widely practised activity at these larger population centres.

There is little in the plant assemblages to suggest any major differences between the two most common farmstead types, except that material from complex farmsteads appears to have been somewhat more dominated by spelt at the expense of other wheat varieties. These sites are also relatively better represented with rye, flax and fruits, hinting at greater diversification, perhaps as part of crop rotation. Unfortunately there are just five assemblages from villas in the east, and most of these had a very low number of samples. An exception was at Great Holts Farm in Essex, where 213 bulk samples were collected, most with low densities of plant remains, but some within the aisled granary suggesting a highly organised agricultural regime, with wheat, barley and pulses all shown to be grown and stored as separate crops (Germany 2003).

## REGION SUMMARY

The East may be one of the smallest regions of the current project, and be lacking in excavated data for large parts, but there is enough to recognise distinct variations in the character of Roman rural settlement within different landscape zones. In all areas there is evidence for major continuity of settlement from the late Iron Age into the early Roman period, though with evidence for disruption and transformation in some parts during the later first century A.D. The excavated sites in the south of the region reached their peak in numbers at this time, though further north this peak is not reached until the mid-Roman period, with a fairly pronounced decline thereafter, especially in North Norfolk.

As elsewhere it is a region dominated by small farming settlements, which appear to undergo a particularly steep decline in numbers during the later Roman period, probably signifying a fundamental shift in the way that the rural landscape was organised and farmed. This was a period in which certain farmsteads were increasing in size and complexity (developing into complex farmsteads), especially in the south and west, perhaps becoming centres of increased agricultural production, associated with extensive arable fields of primarily spelt wheat. The growth of villa architecture at this time was undoubtedly associated with such changes, though most buildings remained relatively modest compared to those further south and west, and there is little evidence that they were ever a regular part of the landscape in the north-east of the region. The relative lack of complex farmsteads and villas (notwithstanding the undated evidence from cropmarks) in this area, together with differences noted in field systems, arable crops and certain objects associated with food processing, hints at quite measurable differences in the farming landscapes between the north and further south and west, which in turn may reflect distinctive cultural landscapes. The differences may also imply varying political realities, with the northern parts of the region possibly having greater levels of state control associated with supply of the military to the north, where East Anglian pottery demonstrates some trade connection (see vol. 2). Such a scenario would fit in well with the context of military sites being established at Brancaster and Caister-on-Sea from the early third century A.D., as well as the concentration of roadside settlements, which may have acted as collection and distribution points.

The key to any understanding of Roman settlement patterns in the East region is the network of these nucleated roadside settlements, which is among the densest anywhere in Britain, though similar to adjacent parts of the Central Belt. Many of these originated with some pre-conquest activity and continued until at least the end of Roman period, although there was a noticeable decline in fortunes from at least the mid-fourth century A.D. onwards. It is clear that these nucleated sites fulfilled a range of roles, including industrial production, commercial opportunities and provision of religious foci, though just how much of a local administrative function they had is somewhat more uncertain. There is little evidence for high-status dwellings, though relatively high-status finds (hairpins, finger rings, metal and glass vessels, etc.) are far more abundant, hinting at differences in the way that wealth and social status were expressed compared to regions further south and west.

This well-developed network of roadside settlements may be a significant factor in the relatively high prevalence of material culture in farmsteads in the East compared to any other region. Does the high proportion (in terms of occurrence if not quantity) of farmsteads with coins, brooches and household objects, for instance, indicate an increased integration with the growing market economy centred on the nucleated roadside sites? Or are they part of a regional manifestation of how social relations and identity were formed and maintained by local farmers, as Taylor (2013, 186) has demonstrated for other parts of the Roman province? These themes will be explored in subsequent volumes, and the propositions are, of course, not mutually exclusive; both indicate the importance of material culture for our understanding of rural communities in this region.