

**Itchen Abbas Roman Villa
Hampshire
Archaeological Desk Based Assessment**



June 2010

UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

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Hampshire
Archaeological Desk Based Assessment**

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List of contents

1. Non-technical summary 3

2. Site location..... 5

3. Geology and Topography 6

 3.1 Geology..... 6

 3.2 Topography..... 7

4. Site conditions..... 7

 4.1 Site Conditions..... 7

5. Archaeological Background (See Figure 4.) 8

 5.1 Timescales used in the report..... 8

 5.2 Early Prehistoric: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic 8

 5.3 Later Prehistoric: Bronze Age and Iron Age. 9

 5.4 Roman..... 10

 5.5 Anglo-Saxon/Early Medieval 13

 5.6 Medieval..... 14

 5.7 Post-Medieval- Modern (including map regression) 14

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 17

SOURCES CONSULTED 18

Acknowledgements 19

List of illustrations

Frontispiece: Itchen Abbas Villa tessellated pavement (David E. Johnston Collection, University of Southampton.)

Figure 1. Location of Itchen Abbas.5

Figure 2 Aerial photograph showing the position of Itchen Abbas Roman villa. Image © Google Earth6

Figure 3 Excavation plan of Itchen Abbas Roman villa. Reproduced from *Journal of the British Archaeological Association. Volume 35. 1879. Page 209.* 12

Figure 4. Archaeological sites and soil/crop marks around the Roman villa at Itchen Abbas20

Figure 5. Aerial photographs of the site of the Roman villa at Itchen Abbas, Hampshire.21

Figure 6. Historic maps of the Itchen Abbas area.....22

Figure 7. Map regression for the site of the Roman villa at Itchen Abbas23

1. Non-technical summary

- 1.1 This desk based assessment has been researched and prepared by Dominic Barker of the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton.
- 1.2 This study has been produced by the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton to assess the archaeological potential of the site of a Roman Villa to the north of the village of Itchen Abbas in Hampshire. This report has been produced in the context of a proposed, collaborative research project between staff and postgraduate research students at the Department of Archaeology the University of Southampton and staff based at English Heritage.
- 1.3 The project seeks to assess the condition of the Roman Villa remains and to provide material for dating the site as part of a wider project looking at Roman rural settlement in the hinterland of the Roman settlement at Winchester. The project also seeks to provide practical, fieldwork based training for undergraduate students from the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton.
- 1.4 The assessment comprises an examination of evidence in the Hampshire County Council Historic Environment Record, the National Monument Record and the Archaeology Data Service. Additionally, the assessment considers the results of nearby archaeological evaluations and excavations,

incorporates published material and charts historic land use through a map regression exercise.

- 1.5 The study shows extensive evidence for settlement and farming activity from the Iron Age right through to the late Roman period, with possible development and continuity of a single settlement over the area. Earlier activity is represented by at least two Bronze Age barrows and it is possible that some of the crop marks visible on aerial photographs also relate to this period.

2. Site location

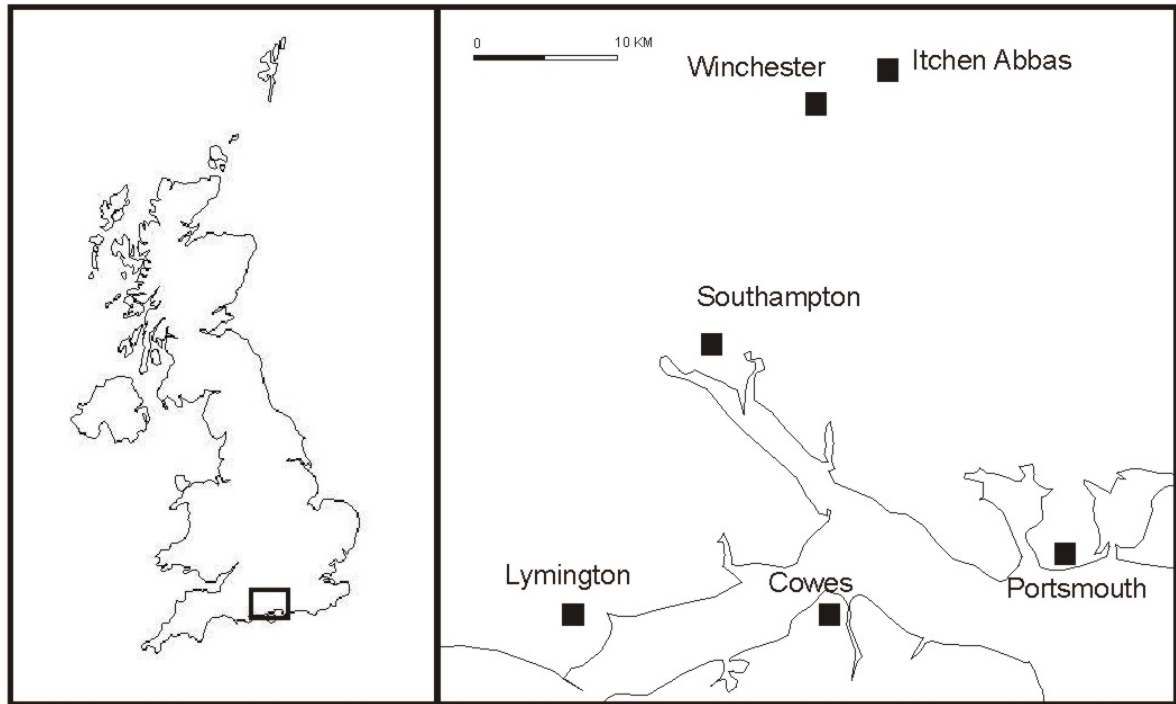


Figure 1. Location of Itchen Abbas.

The site is located in the county of Hampshire, approximately seven kilometres north-east of Winchester and one and a half kilometres north-west of the village of Itchen Abbas (see Figure 1.)

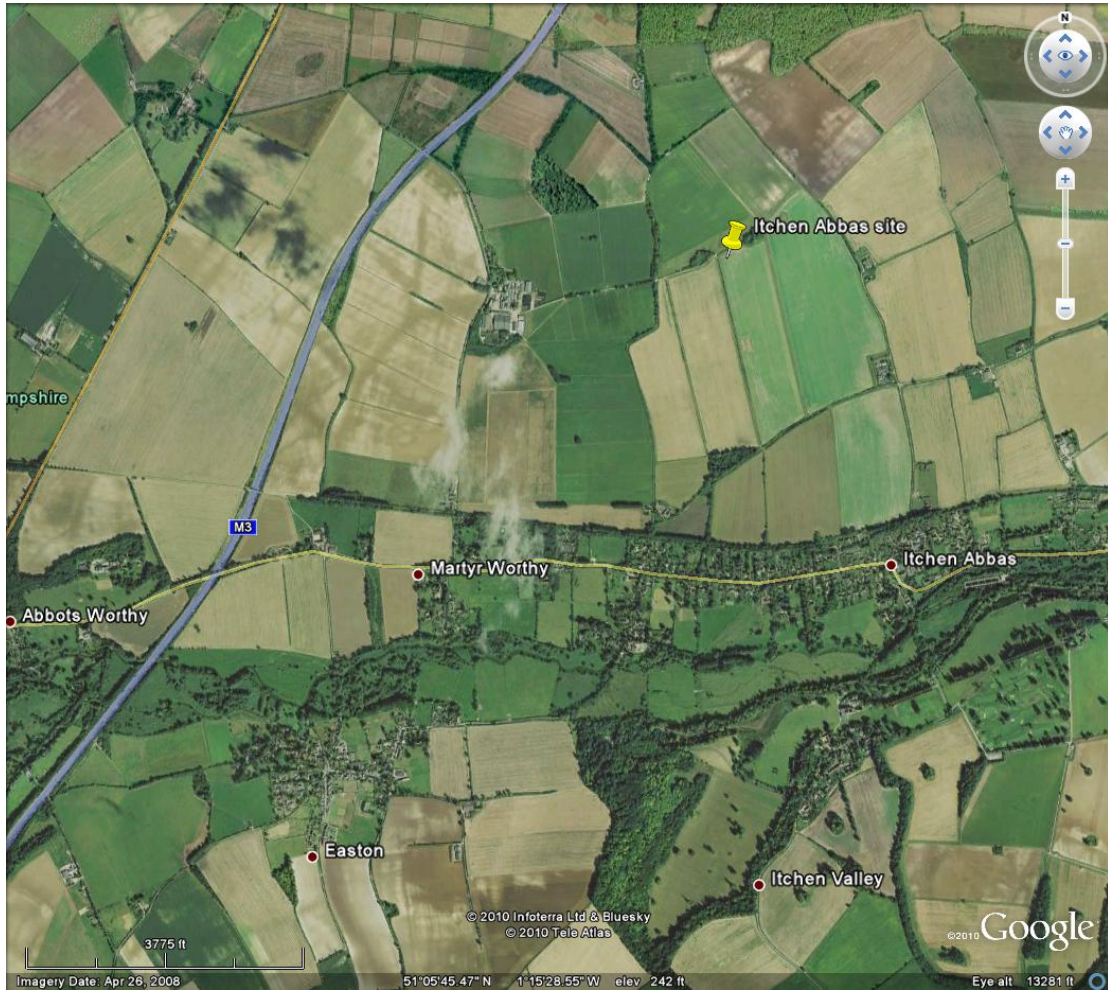


Figure 2 Aerial photograph showing the position of Itchen Abbas Roman villa. Image © Google Earth

3. Geology and Topography

3.1 Geology

3.1.1 The underlying geology of the site is upper chalk with some patches of clay-with-flint and tertiary debris (BGS 1990).

3.2 Topography

3.2.1 The site is located on a chalk ridge running approximately west to east at about 107m above Ordnance Datum. The villa site is on the south side of the ridge, commanding fine views over the Itchen valley and hills to the south.

4. Site conditions

4.1 Site Conditions

4.1.1 The site was inspected on 30th November 2009. It is currently a mixture of arable, woodland and pasture fields. The actual site of the Roman villa is woodland, with a large arable field to the south and strip of set-aside land to the north-west.

5. Archaeological Background (See Figure 4.)

5.1 Timescales used in the report

Prehistoric

Palaeolithic 450,000 - 12,000 BC

Mesolithic 12,000 - 4,000 BC

Neolithic 4,000 - 1,800 BC

Bronze Age 1,800 - 600 BC

Iron Age 600 - AD 43

Historic

Roman AD 43 - 410

Saxon/Early Medieval AD 410 - 1066

Medieval AD 1066 - 1485

Post Medieval AD 1486 - 1900

Modern AD 1900 – Present

5.2 Early Prehistoric: Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic

5.2.1 No finds of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic are located in the area of the study site.

5.2.2 It is considered that if any Palaeolithic or Mesolithic material exists in the area this material is likely to be located further down in the Itchen valley to the south. The possibility remains that Neolithic material, particularly lithic material, may occur in the study area. However the overall potential for evidence from the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic period on the study site is considered low.

5.3 Later Prehistoric: Bronze Age and Iron Age.

5.3.1 There are the earthwork remains of a bowl barrow of probable Bronze Age date (HER reference 18062, grid reference SU 52986 34367) see Figure 4.

5.3.2 Another probable Bronze Age barrow exists as a crop mark ring ditch, to the south-west of the earthwork barrow, (HER reference 53257, grid reference SU 52970 34330). Both these features lie roughly 200 metres to the north-east of the Roman villa site.

5.3.3 Aerial photographs show a crop mark of a probable Banjo Enclosure (HER reference 18019, grid reference SU 53200 34750). It is probably of Early Iron Age to Late Iron Age date (c. 800 B.C. to A.D.43). There is nothing visible on the ground.

5.3.4 Aerial photographs also show the crop mark site another Banjo Enclosure (HER reference 36898, grid reference SU 53480 34940). The small banjo enclosure has an entrance on the eastern side, visible on air photographs. The funnel leads onto two linears (antennae) one oriented North-West to South-

East and the other North-East to South-West. The enclosure appears to include internal pits.

- 5.3.5 An oval enclosure connected to a series of ditches, visible as crop marks/soil marks on air photographs (HER 36242, grid reference SU 52930 34280). This is presumed to be an Iron Age settlement site, the predecessor of the Roman Villa. It includes a large sub-rectangular ditched enclosure with an entrance visible on its north-east side. Attached to the north side of this enclosure is a semi-circular ditched annexe. Other elements of the settlement include a series of smaller enclosures linking track ways, boundaries and part of a field system.
- 5.3.6 A track way visible on air photographs (HER reference 36243, grid reference SU 52930 34280). HER dates this as Early Bronze Age to Late Iron Age (c.2200 B.C. to A.D. 43).
- 5.3.7 An enclosure visible on air photographs as a soil mark (HER reference 36244, grid reference SU 52930 34280). The HER dates it as Early Bronze Age to Late Iron Age (c.2200 B.C. to A.D. 43).
- 5.3.8 A series of linear features visible on air photographs as soil marks (HER reference 36245, grid reference SU 52930 34280). The HER dates this as Early Bronze Age to Late Iron Age (c.2200 B.C. to A.D. 43).
- 5.3.9 These concentrations of probable late prehistoric features make it obvious that any archaeological survey and excavation is certain to encounter extensive settlement, agricultural and burial related archaeological deposits.

5.4 Roman

5.4.1 A Roman villa (HER reference 17990, grid reference SU 52880 34300) was excavated by the Rev. C. Collier in the late 19th century. ‘A History of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight’ mentions that ‘Roman pottery’ from the Itchen Abbas site was exhibited to the Archaeological Institute field meeting at Winchester in 1845, although there is no mention of who found it and in what circumstances (Doubleday 1900, 307). The Journal of the British Archaeological Association also mentioned that ‘The existence of an unexplored Roman villa at Itchen Abbas, near Winchester, had been mentioned at the meetings on more than one occasion during the present session’ (POA (Proceedings of the Association)1878, 233) but it is not possible to trace any of these references in the Proceedings.

It is difficult to reconstruct the exact period of time that Collier seems to have spent excavating at the site. He seems to have started in March 1878 and to have finished sometime before the end of that year, presumably when bad weather set in during the autumn of 1878.

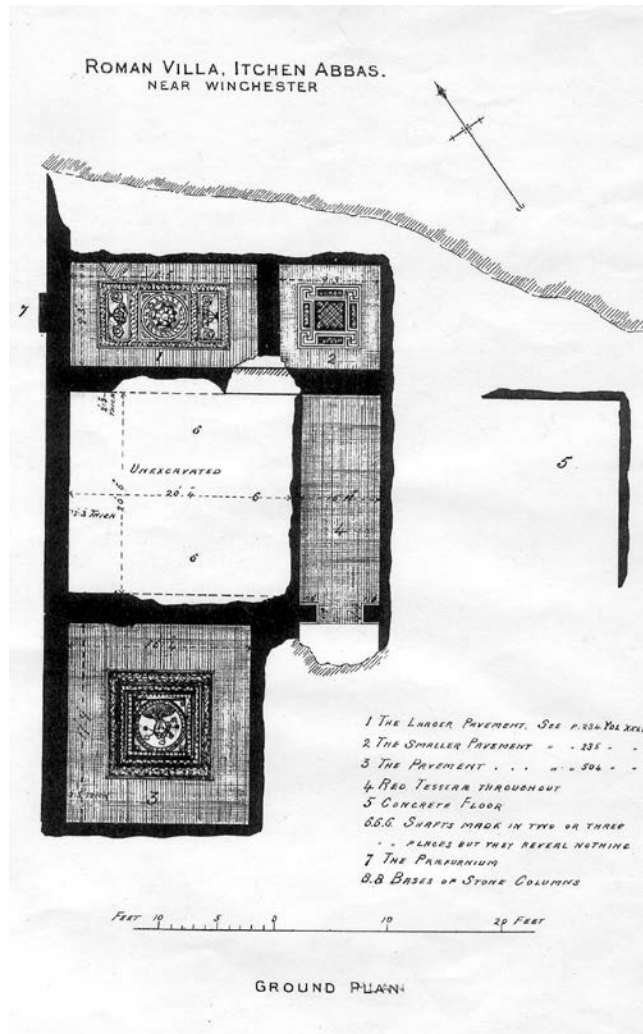


Figure 3 Excavation plan of Itchen Abbas Roman villa. Reproduced from *Journal of the British Archaeological Association. Volume 35. 1879. Page 209.*

His published plan (see Figure 3) shows a set of five rooms, one with a plain red tesserae floor (4 on the plan) and three with complex panelled tesserae floors (nos. 1, 2 & 3 on the plan). The northern room (1) had a hypocaust heating system under the floor, whilst the room marked 5, had a fine white concrete floor. Collier mentions finding ‘a considerable quantity of wall-plaster’ and ‘the portions of broken pottery which we meet with are of various kinds, and many of the remains show that the vessels of which they are portions were of very beautiful shape.’ Also ‘Remains of about eight different

kinds of vessels of pottery have been collected, but no glass has been found.

There are portions of vessels of samian ware, and of a vessel with a remarkably smooth and glassy surface.' He also found two coins, one a small brass of Constantine and the other illegible (Collier 1878, 234).

Collier says the remains were about 18 inches (0.5 metres) below the surface but does not describe the construction techniques or materials of any of the walls encountered (Collier 1878, 233). It appears that no photographs were taken during the excavations. The excavations were published in a series of disjointed notes in the Journal of the British Archaeological Association (POA 1878, 233-234, 504. POA 1879, 109-110, 209. Collier 1878, 233-234).

5.4.2 Two pieces of Roman pottery were found during a field walking survey in advance of the M3 motorway construction (HER reference 17988, grid reference SU 52800 34400).

5.4.3 The potential for the Roman period of further survey and excavation is obviously very significant, with substantial building remains and associated structures almost certain to remain on the site.

5.5 Anglo-Saxon/Early Medieval

5.3.1 There is a large, late Roman and early Anglo-Saxon cemetery located about 1.5 kilometres south east of the site, in the School Lane area of Itchen Abbas village. However it is considered that the cemetery does not extend any further north than School Lane (Wessex Archaeology, 2007, ii) In the Domesday

Survey the manor of Itchen Abbas was held by the abbey of St. Mary, Winchester in the time of Edward the Confessor. The abbey continued to hold it until the dissolution in 1538 (Page 1911, 191-192).

5.3.2 During this period the villa site lay to north of any settlement down to the south in the Itchen Valley and was either in open fields or down land pasture. The archaeological potential for this period is low.

5.6 Medieval

5.3.3 There are no records of any medieval activity on the Hampshire HER.

5.3.4 The villa site continued to remain outside the main area of occupation during this period, at Itchen Abbas in the valley to the south.

5.3.5 The archaeological potential for this period is low.

5.7 Post-Medieval- Modern (including map regression)

5.3.6 Air photographs show two linear features running approximately east to west (HER reference 38396, SU 52580 34900). The HER says they are probably field boundaries of relatively recent date.

5.3.7 Air photographs show an area of linear and rectilinear features (HER reference 38398, grid reference SU 53630 34360). Dating is uncertain but they may relate to the late prehistoric features in the same area.

- 5.3.8 Isaac Taylor's one inch to one mile map of 1759 (Figure 6) does not show much detail of the villa site and would appear to show open down land pasture.
- 5.3.9 Thomas Milne's one inch to one mile map of 1791 (Figure 6) also does not show any detail for the villa area.
- 5.3.10 The Ordnance Survey one inch to one mile first series map published in 1817 (Figure 6) shows a barrow which is probably the earthwork barrow HER reference 18062 (see section 5.3.1 above).
- 5.3.11 C & J Greenwood's one inch to one mile map published in 1826 shows villa site as 'Three Yew Trees', indicating a possible change of land use in the period from the Ordnance Survey map and this map (Figure 6).
- 5.3.12 The first edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map published in 1870 (Figure 7) of the site of the Roman Villa shows an enclosed copse or plantation with no sign of structures or trenches in it. The site is located in a wider landscape of what appear to be well established arable fields. There are a number of chalk pits located to the north-east of the site.
- 5.3.13 The 1st revision of the 1:2500 map produced in 1896 is basically the same as the 1870 map, this is a little surprising when one bears in mind that Collier's excavations took place in 1878-1879. It might have been expected that the excavations or structures would be marked on this revision (Figure 7).
- 5.3.14 A rectangular structure, aligned approximately north-west to south-east, is shown on the east side of the copse in the 2nd revision of the 1:2500 map dated 1909. It is unclear if this is meant to show a roofed structure or a trench (Figure 7).

- 5.3.15 The 1:10560 map of 1910 shows a similarly aligned and sized feature (Figure 7).
- 5.3.16 Finally the 1:2500 map dated 1966 shows a square shaped structure lying in or over an earthwork feature shown by hachures. It is unclear but these hachures may show either a trench or spoil heaps associated with the excavation. This later map will be useful in locating the structure as it can provide digital data and coordinates that could be used as a starting point for geophysical and topographical survey, as well as test pitting (Figure 7). One important land use change occurred between 1962 and 1968 and was the establishment of the Bridget's Experimental Husbandry Farm at Bridget's Farm to the west of the site. This meant the creation of a number of small rectangular field units in the area to the south of the villa, features that show on some of the later air photographs. However these features do not appear to have had a detrimental effect on earlier archaeological features.
- 5.3.17 The archaeological potential for the Post-Medieval period is low. The only significant development appears to be the establishment of the copse of trees directly over the site of the villa. This may have caused significant and on going damage. The other significant development, the establishment of the Bridget's Experimental Husbandry Farm, does not appear to have had a large impact on the earlier archaeology. It is possible that post-medieval chalk pits could be encountered anywhere on the site.

6.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 An archaeological survey and test pit excavation is proposed to take place around the site of the known Roman Villa to the north of the village of Itchen Abbas, Hampshire.
- 6.2 The project seeks to assess the condition of the Roman Villa remains and to provide material for dating the site as part of a wider project looking at Roman rural settlement in the hinterland of the Roman settlement at Winchester. The project also seeks to provide practical, fieldwork based training for undergraduate students from the Department of Archaeology, University of Southampton.
- 6.3 Evidence in the Hampshire HER, aerial photographs and on historic maps indicates that significant, well preserved archaeological features and deposits, representing structures and activities are likely to be encountered from the late prehistoric (Bronze Age and Iron Age) and Romano-British periods.

SOURCES CONSULTED

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Isaac Taylor Map of 1759

Thomas Milne Map of 1791

C. & J. Greenwood Map of 1826

Ordnance Survey 1 inch to 1 mile 1st edition 1817

1870 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st edition

1896 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 1st revision

1909 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 2nd revision

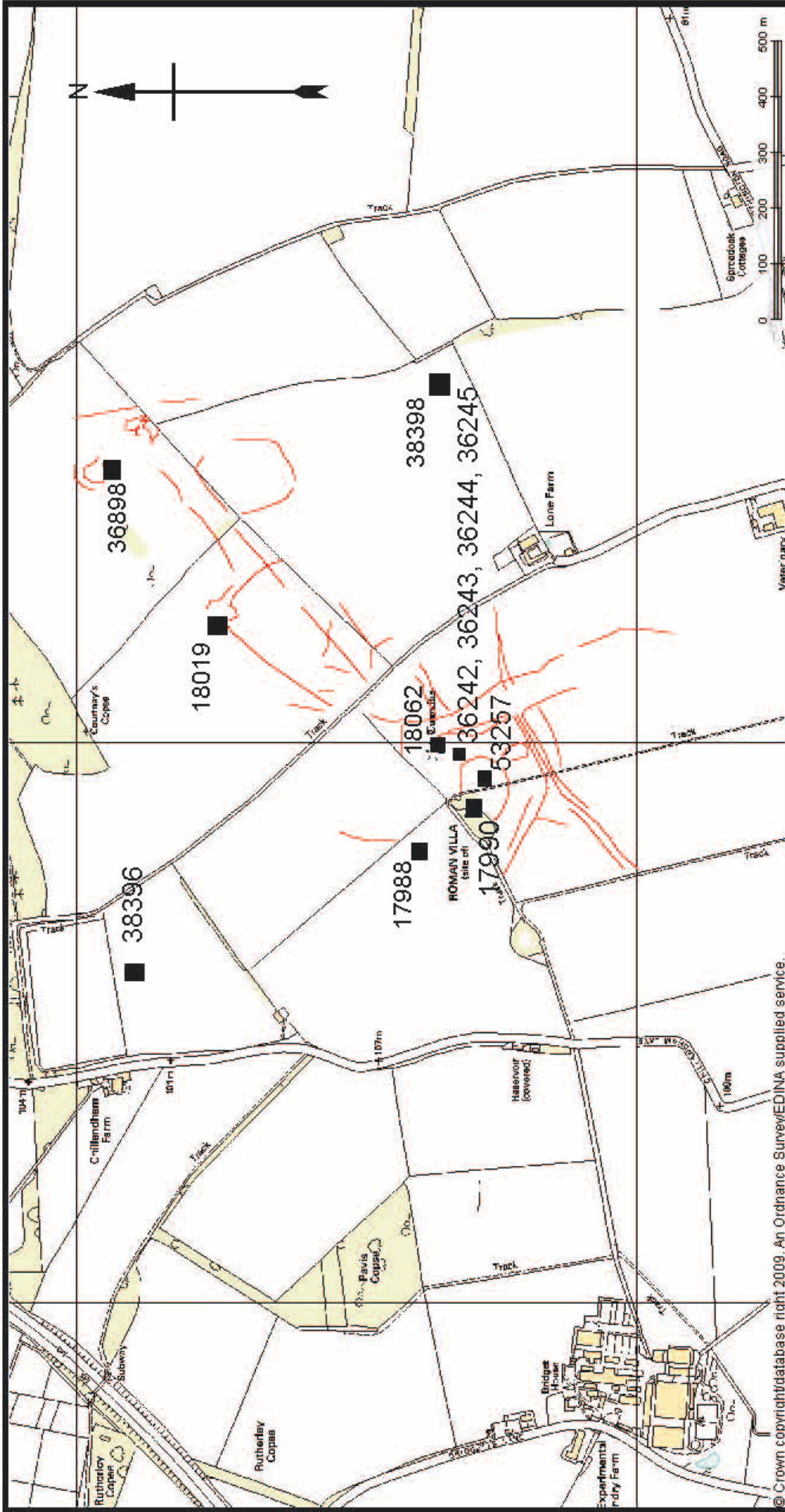
1910 Ordnance Survey 1:10560

1966 Ordnance Survey 1:2500

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Pam Braddock of English Heritage for advice, encouragement and the initial suggestion of looking at the Itchen Abbas Roman villa site. Thanks also go to Tracy Matthews, Historic Environment Archaeologist for Winchester City Council for her advice and support. At Hampshire County Council Hannah Fluck, Senior Archaeologist in the Landscape, Planning & Heritage Environment Department and Charlotte Malone, Assistant Archaeologist (Historic Environment record) provided background information on the site from the Hampshire County Council Archaeology and Historic Buildings Record.

Finally colleagues at the University of Southampton provided invaluable support and encouragement; particularly Dr Lucy Blue, Tim Sly, Kris Strutt, Dr David Wheatley, James Cole, David Underhill-Stocks, Sue Hakenbeck and Linda Mitchell.



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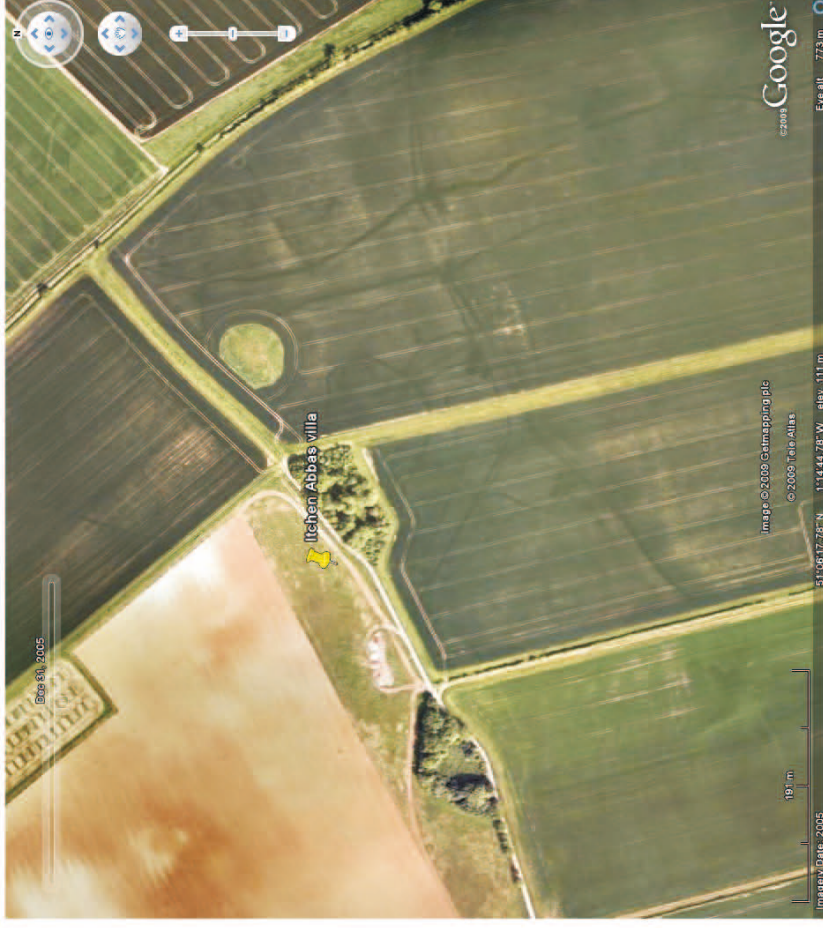
**Itchen Abbas Roman Villa
Hampshire**

Aerial photograph data from Hampshire County Council Historic Environment Record and Google Earth.
Map data © Crown Copyright Ordnance Survey
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Figure 4. Archaeological sites and soil/cropmarks around the Roman Villa to the north of Itchen Abbas.



NMR/English Heritage Aerial photograph 1972



Google Earth aerial photograph 2005.



Figure 5. Aerial photographs of the site of the Roman Villa at Itchen Abbas Hampshire.

Itchen Abbas Roman Villa
Hampshire

Google Earth image © Google Earth
NMR image © NMR/English Heritage



Isaac Taylor 1759



Thomas Milne 1791



Ordnance Survey 1817



C & J Greenwood 1826

Figure 6. Historic maps of the Itchen Abbas area.

Itchen Abbas Roman Villa

Map data © Crown copyright Ordnance Survey
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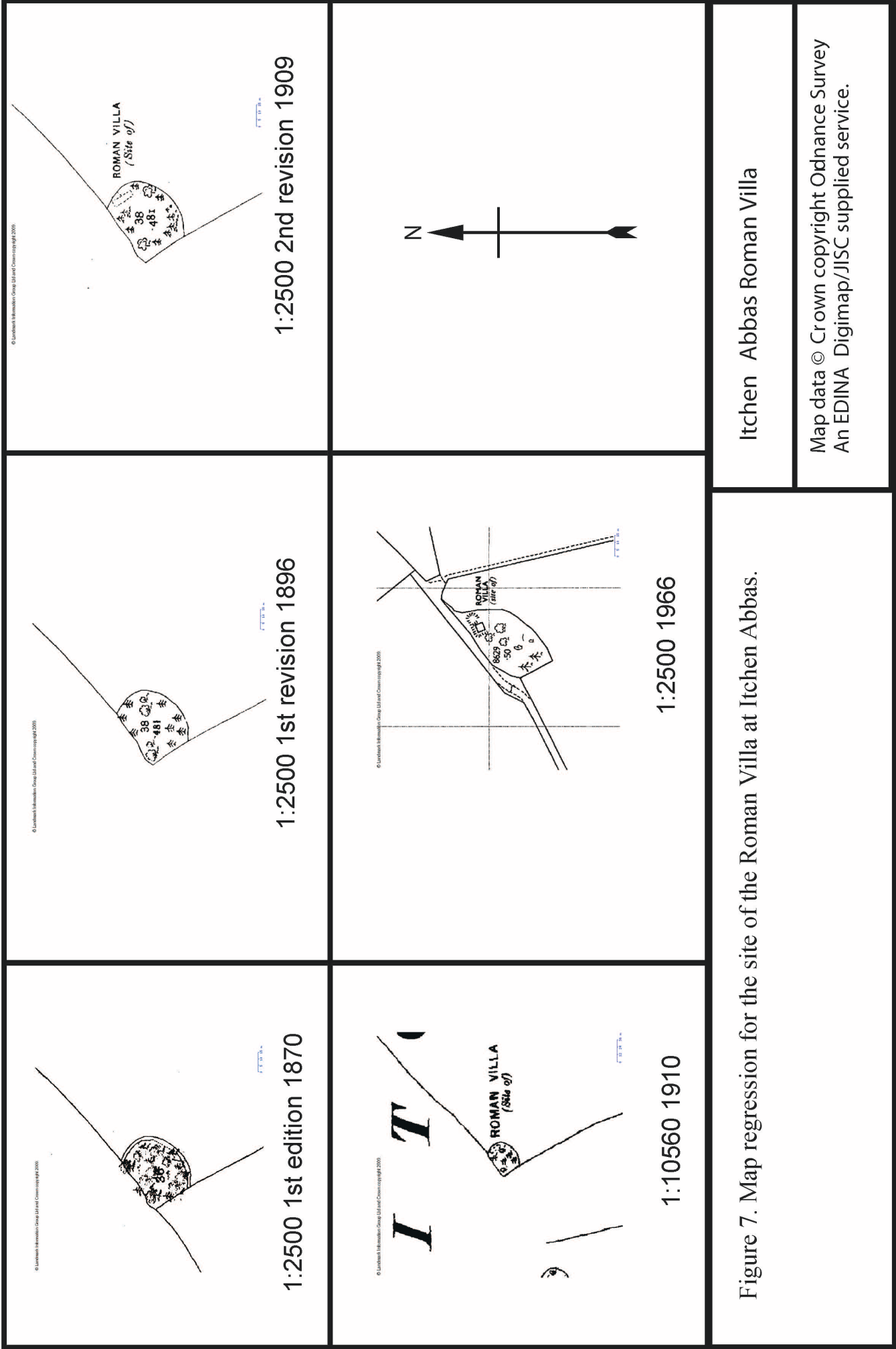


Figure 7. Map regression for the site of the Roman Villa at Itchen Abbas.