

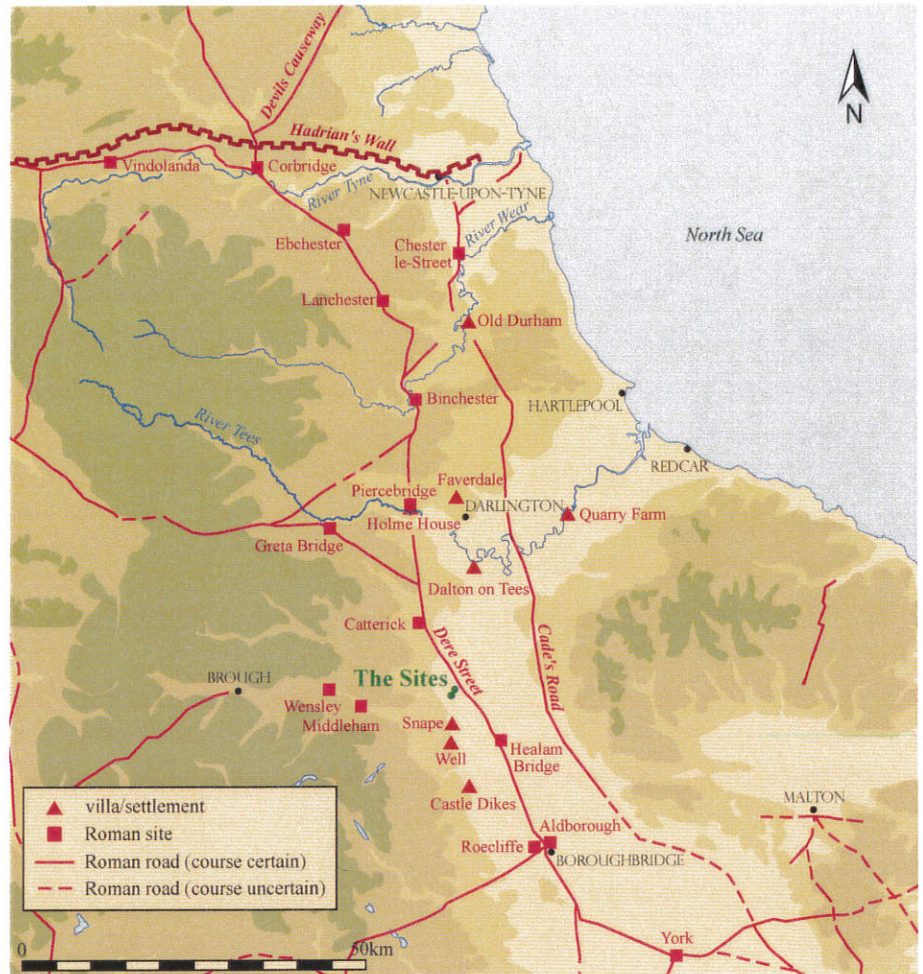
# BEDALE, AISKEW AND LEEMING BAR BYPASS:

Prospect Archaeology and Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd have been commissioned by Wills Bros Ltd on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council to undertake a series of archaeological excavations ahead of the construction of the Bedale, Aiskew and Leeming Bar Bypass. The archaeological works were designed by and are being managed by Jacobs on behalf of NYCC.

The excavations represent the final phase of fieldwork of a programme of archaeological investigations which was required as part of the planning process for the road scheme before construction works could proceed. Several geophysical surveys have been carried out along the road corridor, followed by a series of trial excavations in areas highlighted by these surveys, and other means, as being of significant archaeological potential. Three sites can be classed as being of regional importance; Aiskew Roman villa, a substantial ditched enclosure, probably of late Iron Age date but continuing into the early Roman period, and an area on Leazes Lane where the new road scheme will cross the projected line of Dere Street.

Excavation on the villa began in early November 2014 and is continuing to date, but the area of the villa building that lay within the road corridor has now been fully investigated and recorded. The initial findings of these works are presented here. The excavation of the enclosure began in early January and will extend until the end of March. On completion of all fieldwork, the process of post-excavation work will begin with each category of artefact examined by specialists leading to the compilation of a post-excavation assessment report. Further analysis of the artefactual and archaeological remains will then take place ultimately leading to the publication of the sites.

The site at Dere Street remains to be investigated. However, it is suspected that the vast majority of the area where the new road crosses Leazes Lane was formerly investigated and recorded as part of the last phase of the A1 Dishforth to Leeming improvement scheme undertaken in 2009-10.



Location of the sites in relation to the Roman roads and sites in the vicinity



Aerial photograph showing enclosure during excavation, looking south-east



Pre-excavation aerial photograph of villa; room with concrete floor surface in right foreground and earlier evaluation trench in background (looking west)



Bone pin



Copper-alloy brooch



Iron knife with suspension hoop



Coin minted in Arles AD327



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## The Aiskew Roman Villa

The Aiskew Roman villa is located on a ridge of higher land defined by Scurf Beck to the west, which flows southwards into Bedale Beck, a tributary of the River Swale, and Dere Street Roman road to the east. Dere Street was the main road running north from York up to Hadrian's Wall and into Scotland, and lies just over 1km to the east of the villa; the modern A1 follows the course of the road in this area. The major Roman town at Catterick is situated 10km to the north and Alborough Roman town is around 25km to the south.

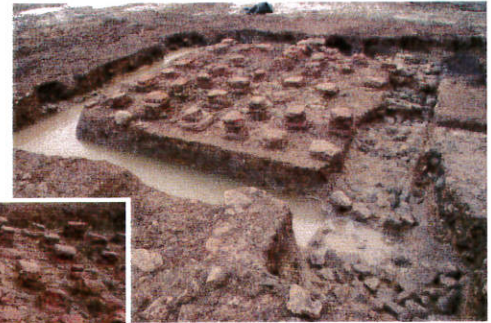
Geophysical survey indicates that the villa is of substantial size and is set within a landscape of enclosures and field systems. The road corridor runs through the western extent of the villa and a triangular area of land has also been stripped of topsoil to the east to better understand the Aiskew villa complex. The masonry walls of the villa have been robbed at some date with the stones presumably used to build structures somewhere in the vicinity. Cobble foundations upon which the masonry walls were constructed do survive within deep foundation trenches demonstrating the substantial construction of this villa.

Within the area stripped, a range of rooms are located on the east side of a 4m-wide north-south aligned corridor within which small areas of tessellated surface survive. An intact concrete floor surface survives in the room at the north-east end of the corridor and on top of this were areas of painted wall plaster which had collapsed onto the floor, possibly when the villa was demolished.

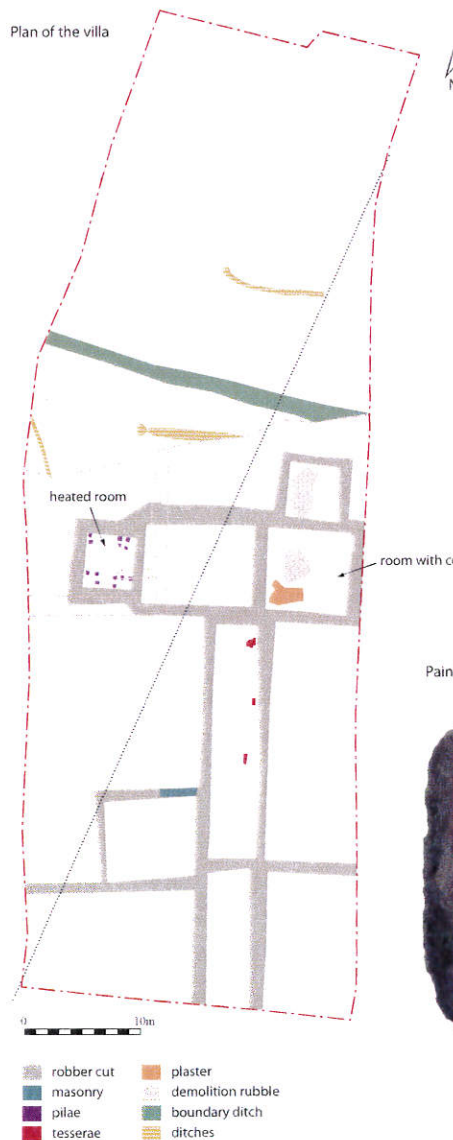
A small square room with internal dimensions of around 4m appears to have been added on to the north-west side of the villa complex at some date. This was a room heated by a hypocaust system as demonstrated by the remains of pilae stacks which would have supported a suspended floor. Hot air would have been drawn under the floor from a fire within an external stokehole identified on the north-west side of the room. Hollow wall tiles known as box-flue tiles would have been attached to the inside of the stone external walls and the hot air would have travelled up through the tiles and out of the building through vents. The internal surface of the tiles was covered in layers of plaster and the final layer was painted. The demolition debris excavated from this room contained large quantities of these wall tiles and painted wall plaster in many different colours demonstrating that this was a well-appointed room. It may have been used for entertaining and could perhaps be a heated dining room.

Stone and tile roof tiles have also been recovered from demolition deposits across the building, providing information about the construction techniques used. A number of iron nails of varying sizes would have been used for purposes such as to secure roof tiles and for the timber elements of the structure. Small quantities of window glass demonstrate that some of the rooms would have had glazed windows, but this was a valuable resource and much would have been removed for recycling. An east-west aligned ditch located a short distance to the north of the villa contained occupation debris which is providing information about the lives of the inhabitants as is a substantial quarry pit which had been backfilled with midden material including quantities of ash which may be rakings from the hypocaust stokehole. Quantities of animal bone have been found along with oyster and mussel shell. Personal items include bone pins and copper-alloy brooches and iron tools include knives and a cleaver which would have been used to butcher animals. The pottery recovered from the excavations to date suggests that the villa was in use during the 3rd century AD and into the late 4th century.

Pilae stacks in heated room surrounded by wall robber trenches with cobble foundations surviving to east (right of picture), looking north



Detail of heated room showing charcoal deposits in stokehole in north-east corner of room, looking south



Box-flue tile with scoring to help adherence of plaster

Painted wall plaster



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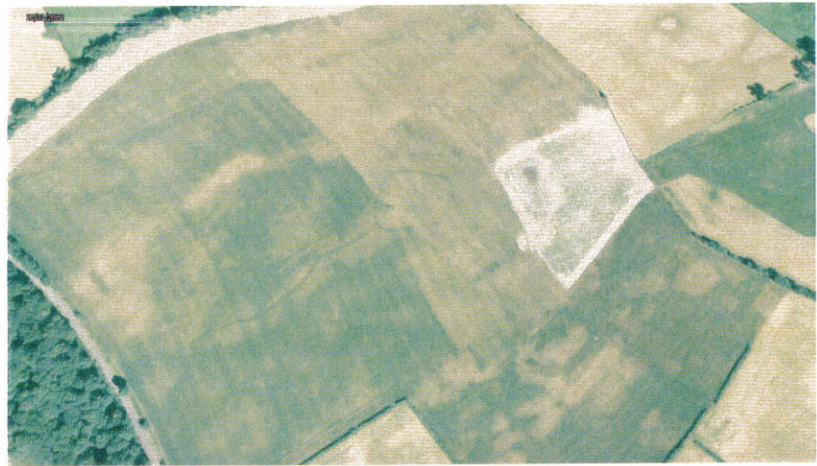
## The Ditched Enclosure (Site 58)

Site 58 is a large ditched sub-square enclosure which has been identified as a cropmark on aerial photographs and was subject to a geophysical survey and trial trenching evaluation in 2009. The enclosure measures c. 50m north-south internally and has a narrow entrance on its west side with a ditched trackway, identified as cropmarks and by geophysical survey, leading up to the enclosure from the south-west. An outer ditch is located along the northern side of the enclosure. Sections across the ditch on its southern side have revealed it to be up to 6.80m wide and 1.80m deep and it had evidently silted up and been recut on at least one occasion. Enclosures of this type were used for habitation and generally contained at least one roundhouse, with structures often rebuilt over a considerable length of time. Such enclosures were in use in the region from the Late Iron Age and the local population continued to occupy many sites into the Roman period. The interior of the Bedale enclosure has been badly damaged by ploughing and all that survives are a few pits; there are no traces of insubstantial structures such as roundhouses.

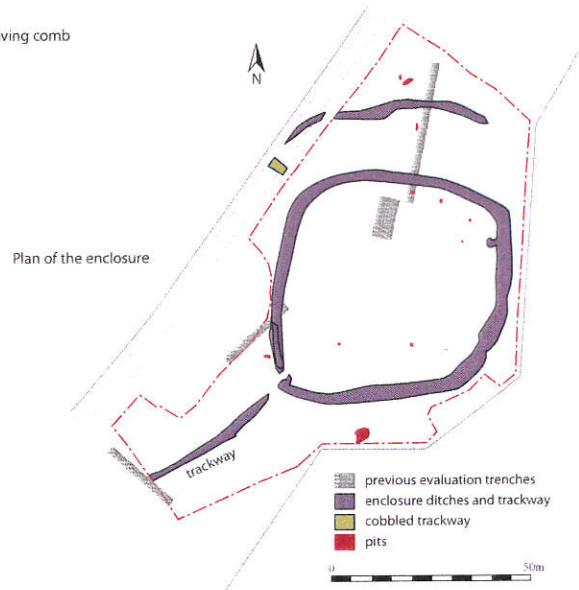
The upper fills of the ditch have produced small quantities of handmade Iron Age tradition pottery; such pottery is not closely datable as it was manufactured in this region over a very long period and continued to be manufactured during the Roman period. However, the enclosure was obviously in use into the Roman period as a small quantity of wheel-thrown Romano-British and imported samian pottery has also been found. The ditch contains a well-preserved assemblage of animal bones which is dominated by cattle and sheep. Bones from very young calves suggest that the settlement was involved in animal husbandry. Pig and horse are also present along with wild species such as red and roe deer. As well as evidence for butchery, the animal bone assemblage includes worked fragments and material indicative of waste from craft working. A beautifully preserved bone weaving comb has also been found in the ditch; these tools were used during the Late Iron Age and early Roman periods in textile production and are often decorated such as this example.

Soil samples taken from the deposits in the ditch have produced evidence that metal working occurred within the enclosure; along with evidence for probable iron smithing, small quantities of copper-alloy waste and fragments of ceramic crucibles which contained small globules of corroded copper alloy indicate that copper-alloy working took place. The samples also produced charred plant remains with barley grains being the most abundant and wheat grains also present. As is typical for settlements in the region this settlement would have practised a mixed arable and pastoral farming regime. Fragments of stone quernstones which would have been used to process the crops have also been found in the enclosure ditch.

The ditched enclosure, Site 58, seen as a cropmark on an aerial photograph taken in 2002, with ditched trackway leading up to the enclosure entrance from the south-west



Bone weaving comb



Excavation of the enclosure ditch

