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## THE TEMPLE OR ROOM? THE INTERPRETATION OF THE FRAMPTON ROMAN TEMPLE/VILLA SITE IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY RESULTS

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The Roman site of Frampton (Dorset) is something of an archaeological enigma. Discovered and first excavated in the 1790s (fig. 2), four rooms, all connected by corridors were found to contain high quality figurative Roman mosaics, one famously bearing the rare Christian Chi-Ro monogram and an even rarer inscription (fig. 1). These floors have been considered by some scholars to be part of a temple complex situated on a raised platform amid the water meadows of the river Frome. A scheduled ancient monument, the site is listed “Frampton Roman villa” (Historic England 2018), however, its position, right on the valley floor, made no apparent sense as a domestic structure, and the early plans suggested a series of isolated structures, convincing some archaeologists that it had a religious function. At the time of the excavations, the mosaics were considered to be some of the finest found in Britain, with King George III visiting on two occasions. The site was further investigated in 1903, but nothing was discovered to help understand the structure any better, and so the temple or villa question has remained unresolved.



Figure 1: Detail from the Frampton mosaics (Lysons 1807)



Figure 2: The military (note their tents) excavating the site in 1796/7 (Detail of Plate 1 - Lysons 1813)

### Recent work:

The site is now in the care of Dorset Wildlife Trust who wished to understand more about the building in order that it could be managed more effectively, and this gave Bournemouth University a chance to conduct a geophysical examination. Whilst magnetometry and earth resistance surveys provided some useful general information, the structure had been covered with flints sometime in the past to protect the mosaics, and extensive water meadow engineering had also affected the site, so like the 1903 investigation, these surveys failed to resolve the issues of interpretation. Despite the extremely wet situation and silty/clay geology it was decided to try ground penetrating radar (GPR). Against expectations, GPR did produce results which enabled the site plan to be more confidently resolved (fig. 3). Even so, the low-lying wetland position of the site is still an issue for some with regard to interpretation and so this paper will also aim to address this issue through the use of geophysics to analyse landscape change in the Frome river valley.

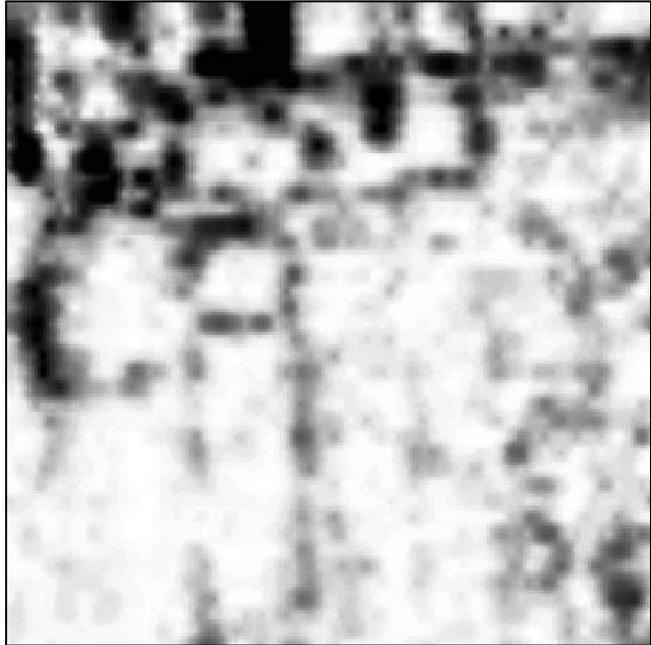


Figure 3: 500MHz GPR time slice results for part of the site clearly showing the lines of walls

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