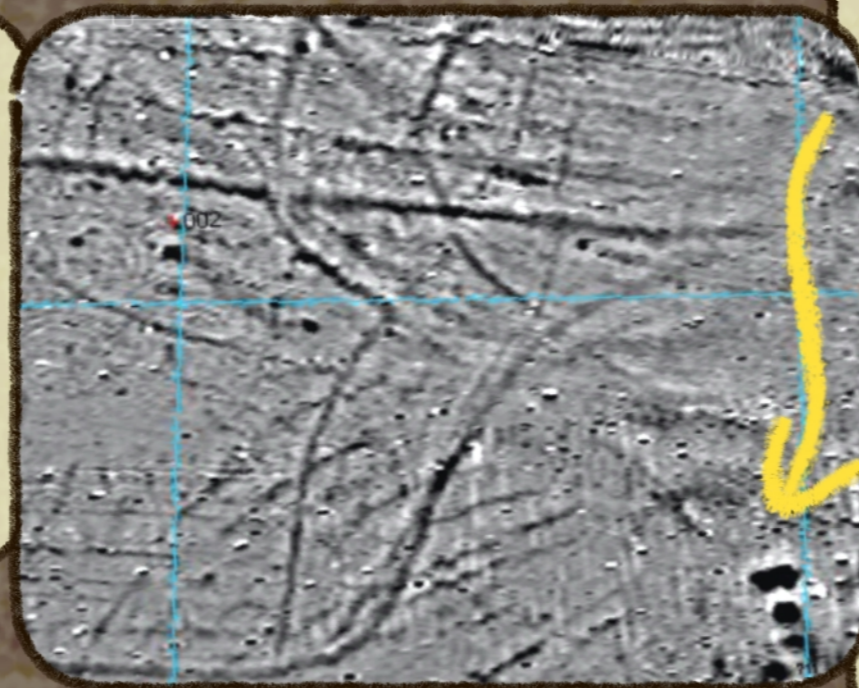


The Sedgeford Anglo-Saxon Malting Complex

Finding the Site



Our early excavations have already identified both a cemetery and settlement. Both of these areas were dated to the Middle and Late Saxon period by the presence of Ipswich and Thetford Ware pottery.



In 2013 we opened a trench over some large hot spots present on the geophysics. These suggested features that had been exposed to lots of heat and we were hoping to find evidence for metalworking. But things rarely go to plan in archaeology!

The features were definitely not metalworking furnaces, instead we initially thought they were bread ovens or grain dryers. However, the presence of clay surfaces and a clay lined pit eventually led to the suggestion that it was a malting site.



The Malting Complex

1

The first process required is steeping, this is done by placing the grain in a tank of water. The grains absorb the water and this kick-starts germination.

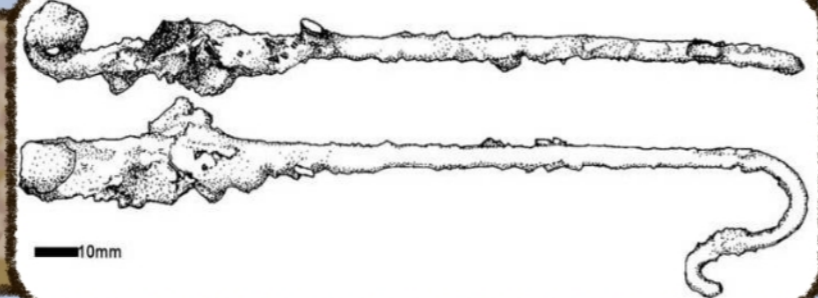
A large clay lined pit associated with a clay floor and kiln is likely to have been the steeping tank. There are the remains of two retaining wattle and daub walls. The grain was likely suspended into the tank using cloth and rope, probably using the large iron hook found within the tank.

Only one steeping tank has so far been identified on the site, there may be others to be discovered or they may have been repairing and re-using this one

2

The germinating floor is where over time the grains germinate, resulting in shoots and rootlets growing in the grain. This process starts the build up of starch needed for brewing. Many of the grains associated with the floors have evidence for rootlets and shoots.

We have identified at least three clay floors associated with kilns suitable for germination. And there are also at least three other clay surfaces that may be floors.



Malt house Reconstruction



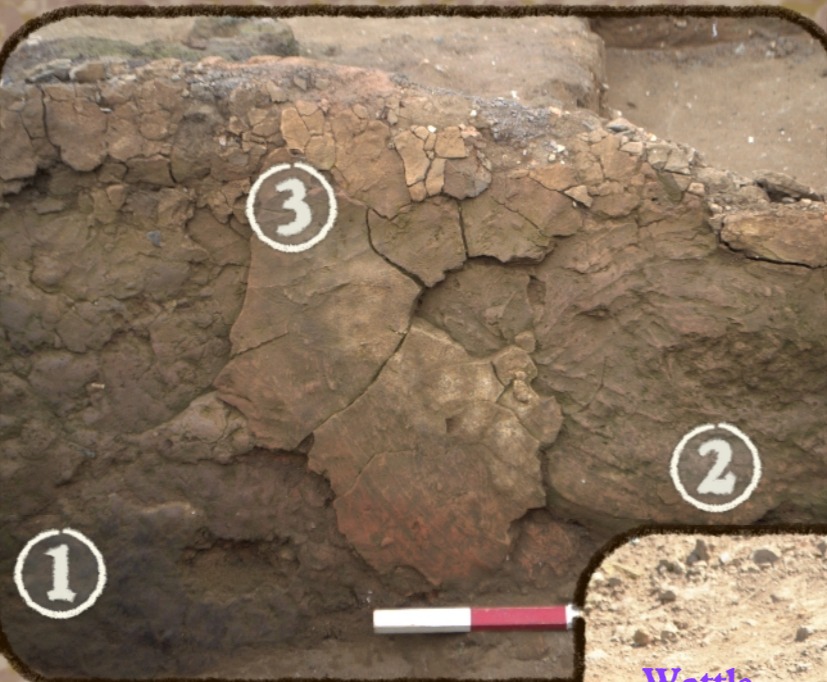
1 Steeping Tank

2 Germinating Floor

3 Drying Floor

The two most complete clay surfaces measure c. 4m by 3.8m. Calculations suggest that they would be large enough for two, maybe three, batches of grain. This means that production could have been fairly continuous as germination takes the longest time of the three malting processes.

Studying the kilns we can see individual events. Within kiln 2 there are three clay linings, two with human finger marks, suggesting that the kiln was repaired at least twice during its working life.

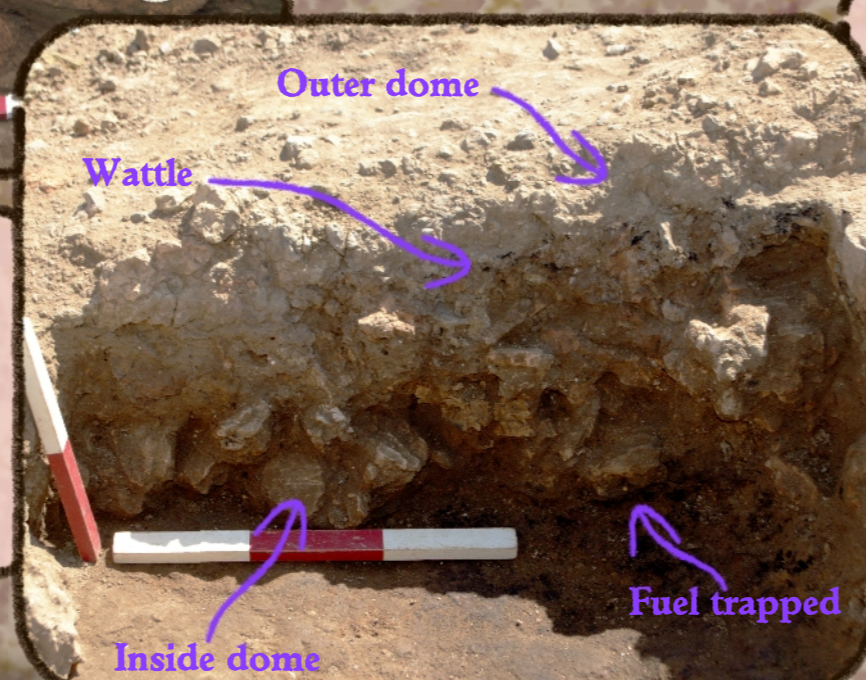


The final process involves heating the grain to dry it and stop the germination process, and retain the starch and sugars produced in the malt. The temperature to achieve this needs to be controlled, too hot and the grain simply burns.

There are at least four wattle and daub kilns on the site. These would have had a domed shape, and all appear to have a pit for the fire, although they do vary. The position of the grain around the kilns suggests that it was dried on a floor built above the kiln. The kiln acted as a radiator heating the air, that rises through and dries the grain.



The fills within kiln 3 tells us that when the building collapsed, it fell to the North, crushing the kiln roof into the pit, sealing the charcoal and ash rich deposit. There was no grain found in this sealed layer.

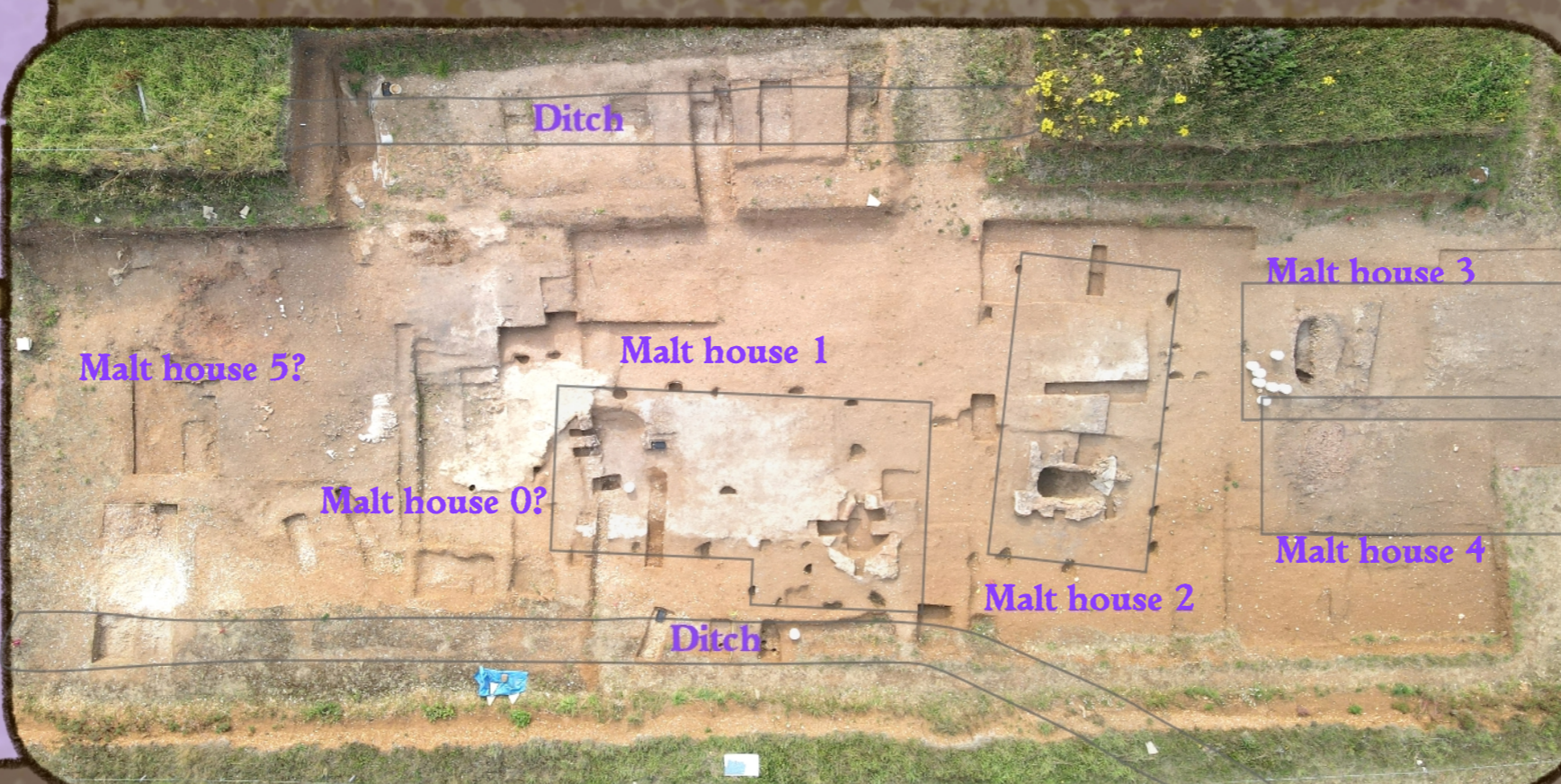


Environmental samples taken from around the kilns have the highest proportion of germinated grains, confirming that this is a malting complex.

The evidence suggests that there are at least four malting houses on the site, dating to the Middle Saxon period. However its unlikely they were operating at the same time. Even so the surface area of the germinating floor suggests that they were malting on a very large scale, possibly too large for the settlement at Sedgeford.

There appears to have been a very large investment, both in terms of raw materials and also man power to construct the malting complex. During this period there may be evidence for other changes to the wider landscape, such as the re-establishment of a waterway and changes in the settlement

Wider Implications



There is strong evidence to suggest that the changes in Sedgeford were being made at the demands of a lord, or perhaps the church. The malt being produced in the malting complex may have been one of many renders, a form of taxation, given by the settlement to those in charge.

N. Faulkner and E. Blakelock. 2020. *The excavation of a Mid Anglo-Saxon malthouse at Sedgeford, Norfolk: An interim report.* Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 22. pg 68-95.