

Caistor skeleton mystifies archaeologists

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A skeleton, found at one of the most important, but least understood, Roman sites in Britain is puzzling experts from The University of Nottingham.

Dr Will Bowden from the Department of Archaeology, who is leading excavations at the buried town of Venta Icenorum at Caistor St Edmund in Norfolk, said the burial was highly unusual: "This is an abnormal burial. The body, which is probably male, was placed in a shallow pit on its side, as opposed to being laid out properly. This is not the care Romans normally accorded to their dead. It could be that the person was murdered or executed although this is still a matter of speculation."

The [skeleton](#) has been removed for further investigation. Dr Bowden said: "It is an exciting find and once we have cleaned the bones they will undergo a full examination and a range of scientific tests to try and find out how this individual died."

The Caistor excavations, sponsored by the Foyle Foundation, May

Gurney, the Roman Research Trust and South Norfolk Council, have also found evidence of Iron Age as well as early prehistoric occupation some 10,000 years BC. Dr Bowden said: "These excavations have added an enormous amount to what we knew before. There are flints so sharp you could still shave with them - they are so fresh they have barely moved in all that time."

Excavations were first carried out at Caistor St Edmund in 1929 after aerial photographs picked out the site in the parched fields following an exceptionally dry summer.

Dr Bowden's work began two years ago. Using the latest technology the team revealed the plan of the buried town at an extraordinary level of detail never been seen before.

The high-resolution geophysical survey used a Caesium Vapour [magnetometer](#) to map buried remains across the entire walled area of the Roman town. Dr Bowden worked with Dr David Bescoby and Dr Neil Croston of the University of East Anglia on the new survey, sponsored by the British Academy. Around 30 local volunteer members of the Caistor Roman Town Project also assisted.

The survey produced the clearest plan of the town yet - confirming the street plan (shown by previous aerial photographs), the town's water supply system (detecting the iron collars connecting wooden water pipes), and the series of public buildings including the baths, temples and forum, known from earlier excavations.

Caistor lies in the territory of the Iceni, the tribe of Boudica who famously rebelled against Roman rule in AD 60/61. The survey revealed numerous circular features that apparently predate the Roman town.

These are probably of prehistoric date, and suggest that Caistor was the

site of a large settlement before the Roman town was built. This had always been suspected because of numerous chance finds of late [Iron Age](#) coins and metalwork, but until the survey was carried out there had never been any evidence of buildings.

This summer [archaeologists](#) returned to start excavating the site. Dr Bowden said: "To have the opportunity to excavate here is the chance of a lifetime."

Source: University of Nottingham ([news](#) : [web](#))

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