

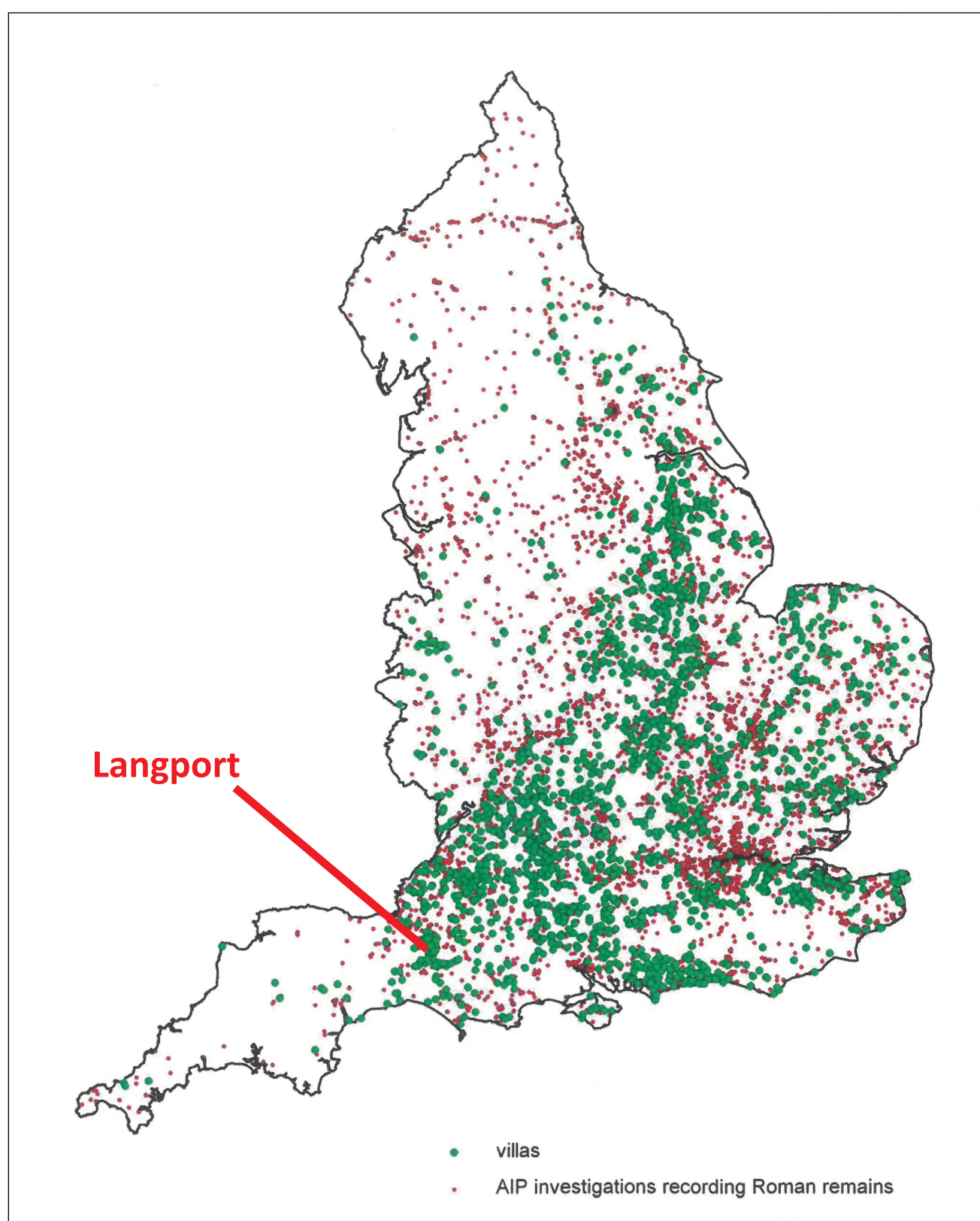
The Villa in Context

Excavations at Somerton Road, Langport, Somerset

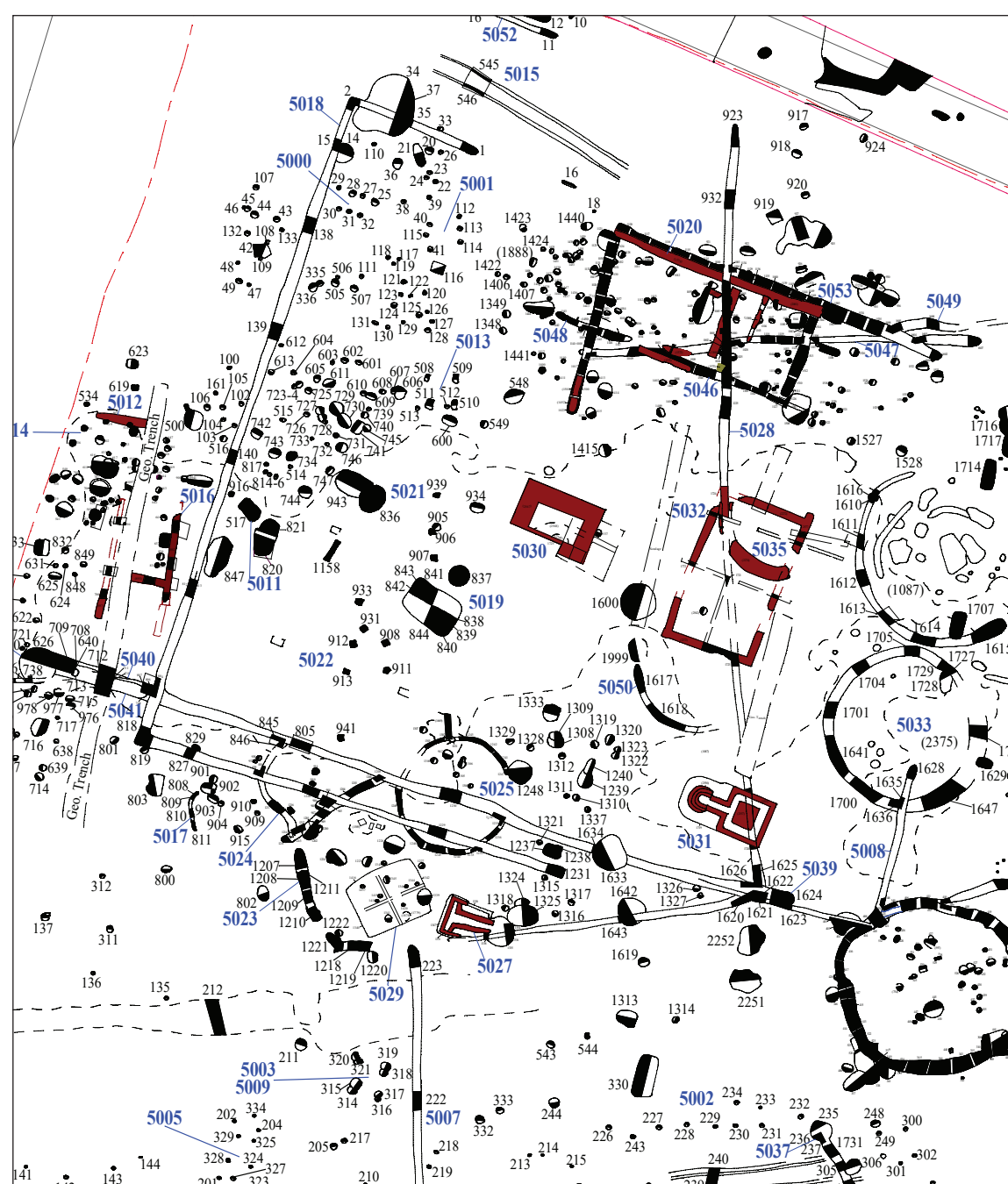


The Roman Villa

The simple definition of a Roman 'Villa' is a stone or partially stone built building in the countryside that makes use of 'Roman' style architecture and architectural features such as under-floor heating (hypocaust), painted wall plaster or baths. This sets them apart from timber buildings that the majority of the rural population would have lived in and the timber roundhouse of the preceding Iron Age. The term covers a wide range of building forms, however, from a massive 'palace' such as Fishbourne in Sussex, to a simple cottage-like two or three room building, such as at Chilton Fields near Harwell. The term also covers a number of uses of a 'Villa', some, perhaps most, were working farms, set in the centre of a large or small estate, surrounded by barns, byres, fields and working buildings, whereas other villas were the country escapes of a wealthy family who would have also maintained a town house.

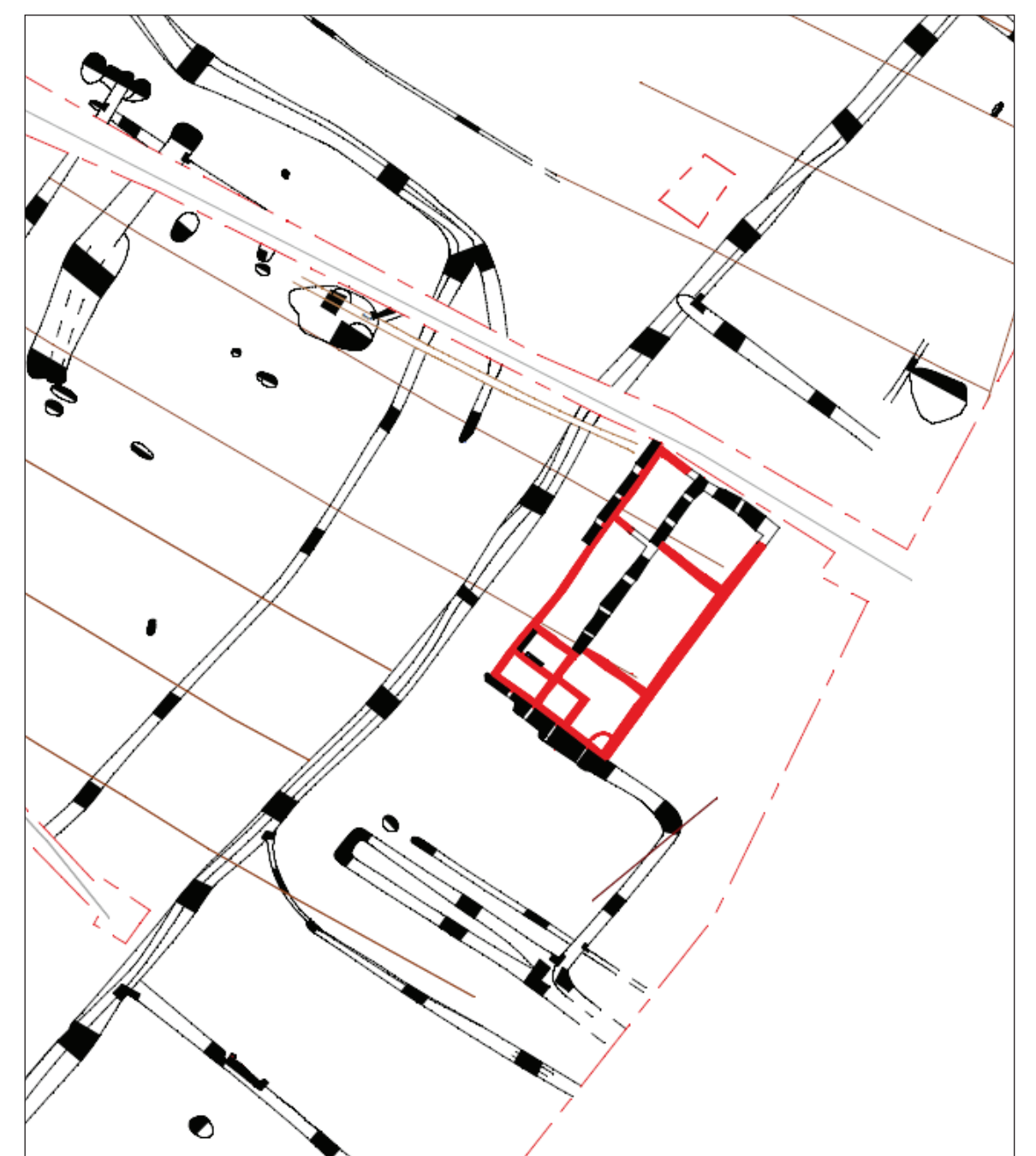


Above: Roman sites identified in England (green) and those which include structures which could be classed as 'villas'.



Bowdens Quarry Villa (above).

An agriculturally orientated villa, excavated by TVAS South West just north of Langport in 2014. It consisted of several stone buildings around a rectangular enclosure, along with corn dryers. It is also a great example of continuation of occupation starting in the Later Bronze Age.



Milfields, Cam Villa (Gloucestershire) (above).

A small rural villa, located within a wider Roman field system, excavated by TVAS South West in 2019. Apart from two ovens no outbuildings were found. It may be that this villa stood alone or any other buildings lie outside of the excavation area. High status features included a hypocaust, stone furniture and painted wall plaster.

It is estimated that around 2000 buildings that fit this definition of a villa are known of in England and Wales, of these approximately 180 are to be found in the county of Somerset. These include well-known examples such as Low Ham Roman Villa, the mosaic from which can be seen in the Museum of Somerset, Taunton. Every year a small number of villas continue to be discovered, as is the case here at Langport.

When was the Roman period?

The Roman period began with the conquest of southern Britain by the emperor Claudius (beginning in AD43) and ended with the formal withdrawal of imperial authority in AD410. Roman legions had attempted a conquest a century earlier under Julius Caesar, and parts of the south of England had some contact with the Roman continent as early as that, while at the other end of the period, the influx of Anglo-Saxon migrants had started probably as much as half a century before the 'official' end of the Roman period in Britain.

Somerton Road, Langport Villa for comparison (right).

The size of the building and items such as the mosaic fragments hint at a complex of some status.

