

# Drawing Out Information from Roman Wells



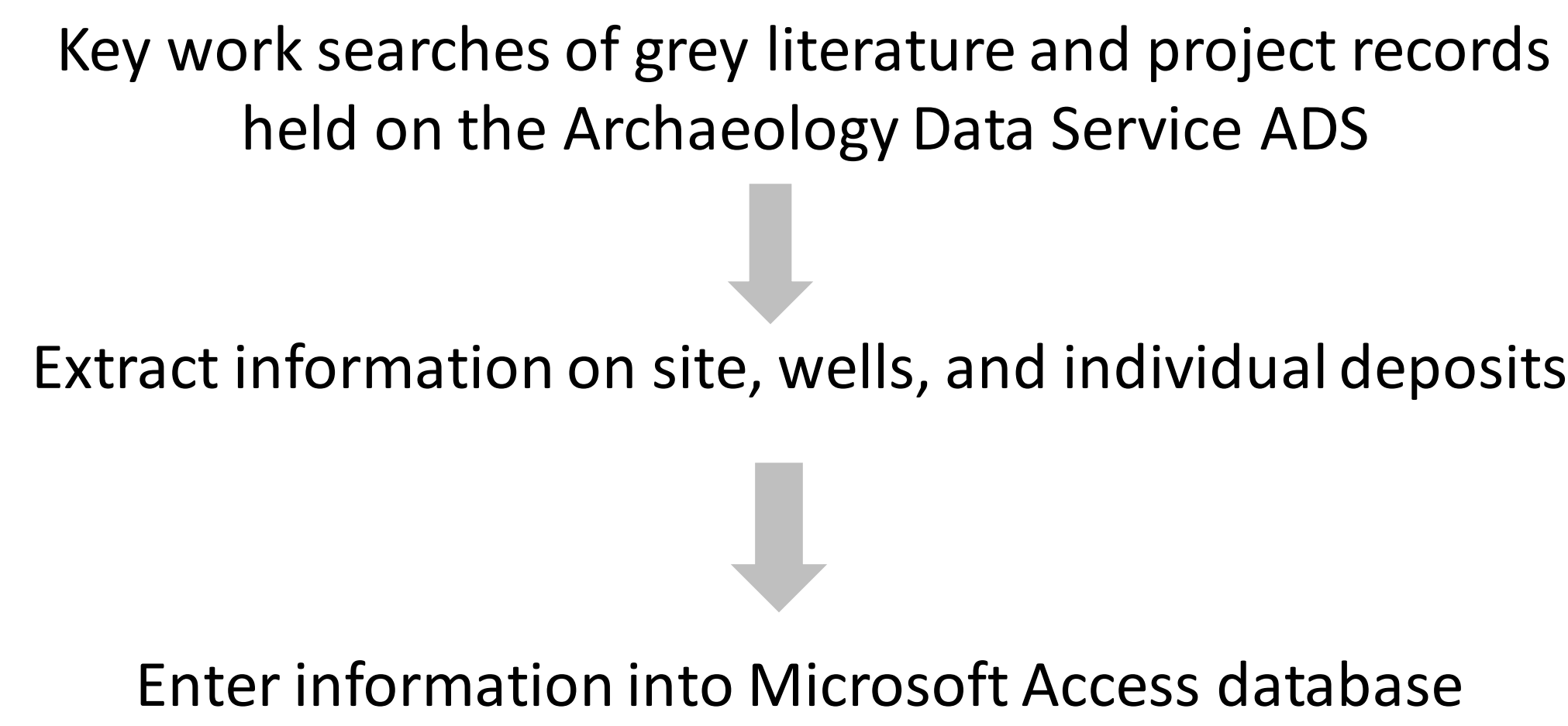
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## Introduction

Roman Wells are often viewed as functional items, used for water collection and then filled with ‘rubbish’ after use. But Recently Gerrard (2009), Morris (2011) and Cool and Richardson (2013) have highlighted the possible symbolic nature of well deposit.

This poster presents some of the initial provisional information from an undergraduate internship for the department of archaeology and anthropology. The internship is part of a scoping exercise, with the creation of a database detailing deposits found in Roman and early medieval wells, from unpublished grey literature. Allowing for the nature of well deposits to be explored in depth.

## Methodology



## Example



The top of late Roman well from Heslington East in York (Roskams et al 2013)



Cattle skull with other animal bones from the late Roman well at Heslington East (Roskams et al 2013)

Heslington east is a late Roman well, and one of the wells studied in the internship and included in the dataset. It was created in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD and had a short lifespan, with infill deposits from the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> (Roskams et al 2013). Waterlogging allowed the preservation of organic materials like wood and leather. The deposits also included pottery, animal bone, and roof tiles (Roskams et al 2013).

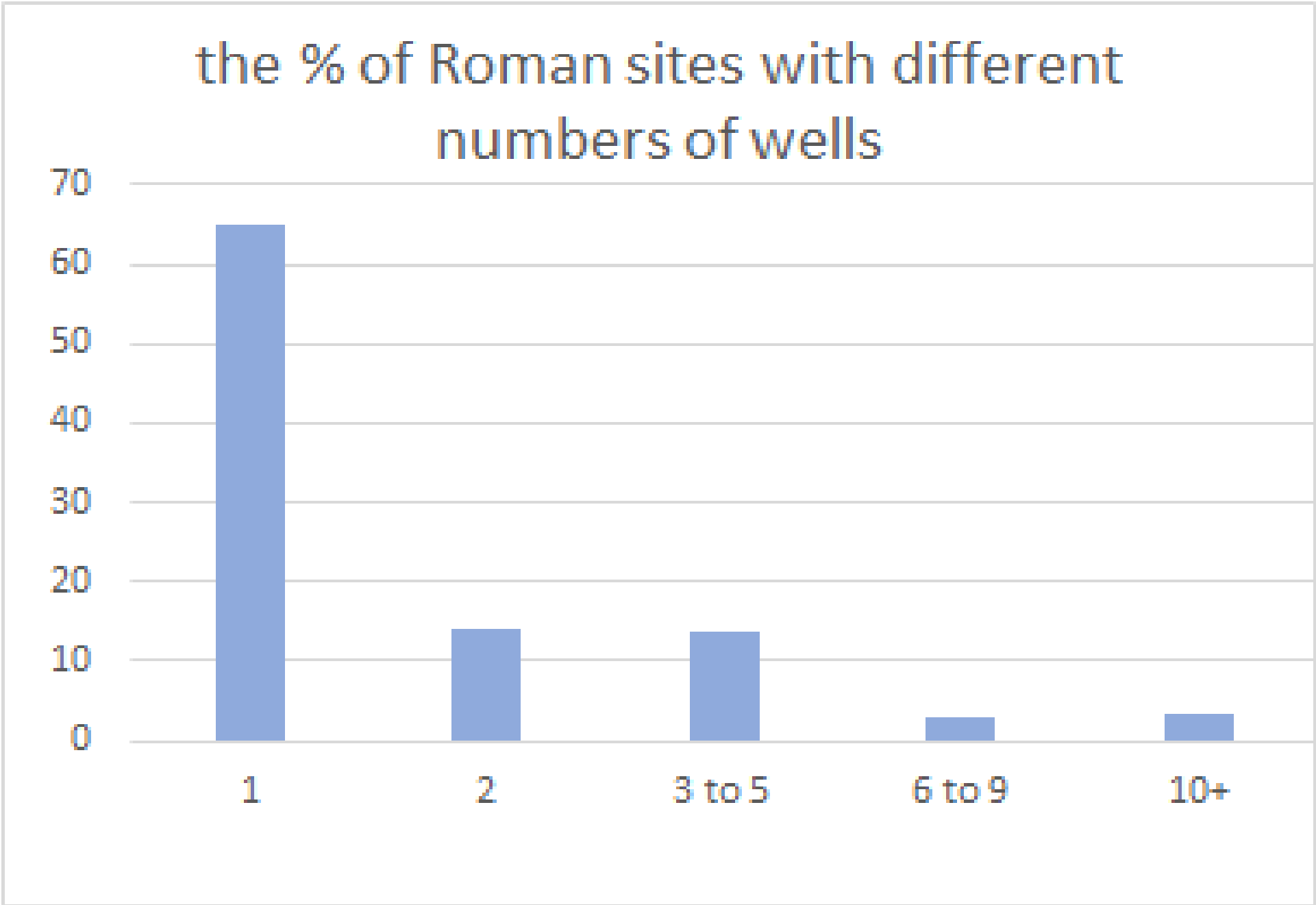
The presence of both horse and cattle bone deposits makes it one of the twenty-two well identified to have this combination of these animals deposited into the well.

## Results

- 432 roman sites
- 532 wells.
- Over 60% of sites had one well
- Eight sites have over 10 wells present

After collecting information on the wells, I accumulated data on the different deposits that had been placed in them. The deposits can end up in the wells in the construction phase of the well, during the life of the well, or after the well has gone out of use; information from these deposits can start to inform on the wells ‘life history’.

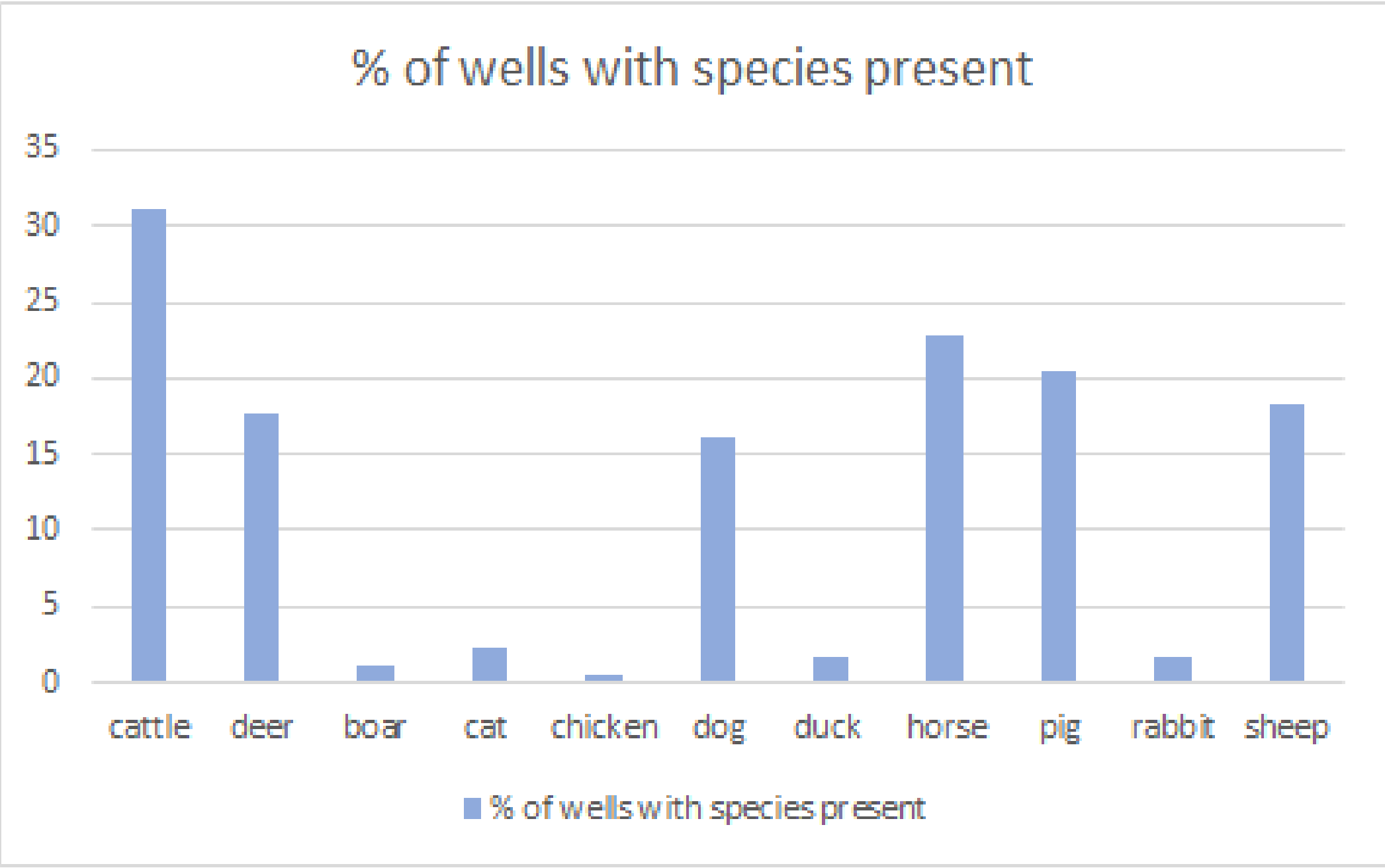
Deposits from the wells were placed into several different categories. Of the wells recorded 73% contained deposits of pottery, the next most common deposit type was animal remains. It is possible to split the animal remains information further to investigate the species present.



Graph showing the percentage of Roman sites that have different numbers of wells

Deposits	No. of wells	% of wells
Animal remains	180	33%
Human remains	43	8%
Buckets	19	4%
Building materials	86	16%
Pottery	392	73%
Personal items	102	19%
Sculpture	11	2%

Table showing the different categories of deposits found within wells and the number and percentage of wells they were found in



Graph showing the percentage of wells with different species present

- The animal bone assemblage from the wells is made up of at least 11 different species
- Cattle were the most common present in at least 31% of the wells, followed by horse in at least 22% of wells.
- Cattle, Sheep and Pig are common animals on Roman sites (Grant 2004), but remains of deer and horse are much rarer.
- The horse and deer assemblage is higher than expected for Roman sites (Maltby 2010).

## Conclusions & Going forward

These results are very provisional as they represent a snapshot as the data collection and analysis is progressing as part of the internship. The project is now gathering information on early Medieval (AD410-1050) wells and their deposits. What this poster does show is the wealth of information available from Roman wells and highlights the possibility for student synthesis projects.

The data generated on Roman wells will be used as the basis to my masters dissertation and the whole dataset will be further used to explore this topic by my supervisor Dr James Morris in collaboration with Dr James Gerrard.

## References

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