

periods (such as medieval ridge and furrow) to be separated and displayed in different colours.

Further fieldwork in the Lactodorum hinterland area will include surveys of this type — and it is hoped that a wealth of detail will gradually be revealed, to complement the initial results obtained by field-walking.

Ongoing work

The fieldwork carried out so far on the Lactodorum hinterland is essential groundwork, but not by any means the complete exercise.

The aim of this initial stage of work has been to establish the locations and approximate date ranges of a whole series of Roman period sites in the Lactodorum hinterland, providing a solid foundation for further future fieldwork.

After 25 years of popular television programmes on archaeology, the impression may have been created that three days of fieldwork is sufficient to solve any archaeological problem! As this present leaflet indicates, the true situation is normally very different — and successful interpretation of the historic landscape is often the result of a great deal of patient study and careful data-gathering.

The initial studies summarised in this leaflet have already revealed some differences between settlement within the hinterland of Lactodorum and settlement in the wider area covered by CLASP's 'Local People: Local Past' study.

Ongoing work will focus on more detailed study of the sites that have been identified, aiming to validate the early indications from this initial survey work and to extend the level of detail.

Links with other projects

CLASP is involved in many other long-term projects.

- At Whitehall Farm, a Roman villa site close to Watling Street (in Nether Heyford parish), CLASP spent 13 years excavating the villa site. The focus is now on preparing for publication what has been learned;
- At Bannaventa, a Roman posting station and small town on Watling Street, CLASP's ongoing fieldwork has recovered tens of thousands of potsherds and thousands of coins and other artefacts, and over 50 hectares of the site and the surrounding area have been mapped in detail by magnetometer;
- At Barby Hill, near Rugby, a CLASP team spent 4 years surveying a large Iron Age hilltop settlement, mapping its extent, excavating test-trenches in selected locations, and collaborating with Cotswold Archaeology who were also involved in excavating part of the site;
- CLASP provided the input for Northamptonshire, to the Iron Age Hillforts Atlas project, led by the Institute of Archaeology at Oxford University. This work included a detailed analysis of Northamptonshire's Iron Age hillforts, with new insights into the functions and interactions between these enigmatic early beacons in the landscape; and
- At Thrupp Grounds — a medieval deserted village site in modern Norton parish — CLASP is carrying out long-term fieldwork, aiming to build up a picture of the evolution of this site, from its earliest days in the Roman period, through the Danish period and into the Middle Ages.

Find out about CLASP

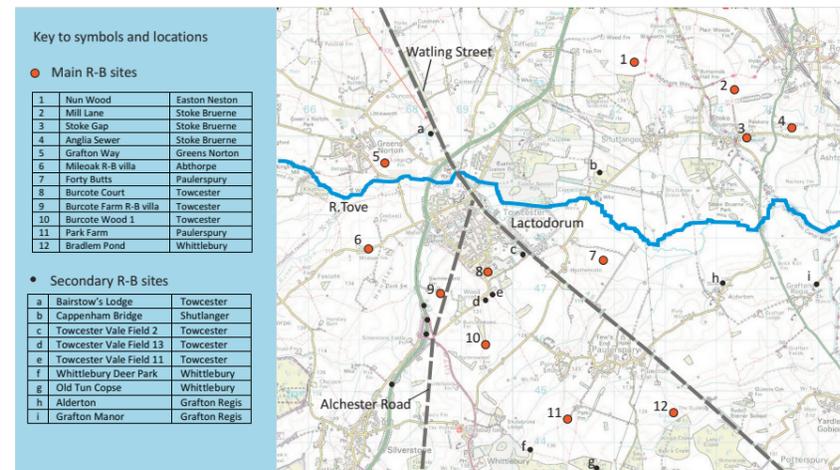
If you found this leaflet interesting, and think you might like to work with a friendly group, and get healthy exercise whilst making a serious contribution to professional archaeology, you should consider joining CLASP!

CLASP is always keen to welcome new volunteers. New projects are regularly planned and executed, knowledge is shared, and training in fieldwork and archaeological computing skills is given in a friendly environment.

For more details, contact CLASP at <http://www.claspweb.org.uk>.

Thanks to CLASP's member organisation Towcester & District Local History Society for their work in researching this study and supporting the production of this printed record. A full list of CLASP's charitable donors may be found on our website.

The hinterland of Towcester, Roman to medieval: Collecting and assessing the evidence of fieldwork



In the 'Local People: Local Past' project, CLASP provided an overview of the general development, the nature of settlement and the character of Romanisation of a 148sq.km area of central Northamptonshire, between the Roman posting stations at Bannaventa (Whilton) and Lactodorum (Towcester) on Watling Street, extending eastward towards a third Roman 'small town' near Duston (Northampton). Within this larger area, a separate fieldwork survey was undertaken to study the development of the hinterland around Lactodorum (Towcester).

The posting station at Lactodorum differed in significance from those at Bannaventa and Tripontium, in that

it was more fully developed as an urban centre, located alongside a major river and at the junction of major Roman roads. Some differences might therefore be expected in the development of the adjacent hinterland.

The community appears to have developed during the early stages of the Roman conquest as a significant administrative centre, with 'ribbon development' along the principal Roman roads well beyond the centre. In the last quarter of the 2C AD the town was radically altered by construction of a large defensive town ditch (23m wide in places, and up to 1.8m deep), with a bank and wall, which cut through the suburbs, isolating areas of settlement to the south and west.

Project methodology

Creation of a 'context framework' as a basis for analysis was the first challenge, aiming to establish the location and nature of focal areas of settlement:

- Desk-based assessment surveyed data sources including maps, aerial photography, crop marks, and archaeological reports;
- Collecting oral/word-of-mouth information from a variety of sources including land owners, farmers and archaeologists;
- Extensive field-walking surveys mapped surface scatters of potsherds, providing a basic time-line for each site, and for studying the distribution of goods across the area; and
- A single geophysics survey also allowed archaeology below ground to be integrated with the evidence from one field survey, providing a backdrop against which to interpret surface scatter.



The survey area

The landscape of the Lactodorum hinterland project is broadly composed of two geological soil environments:

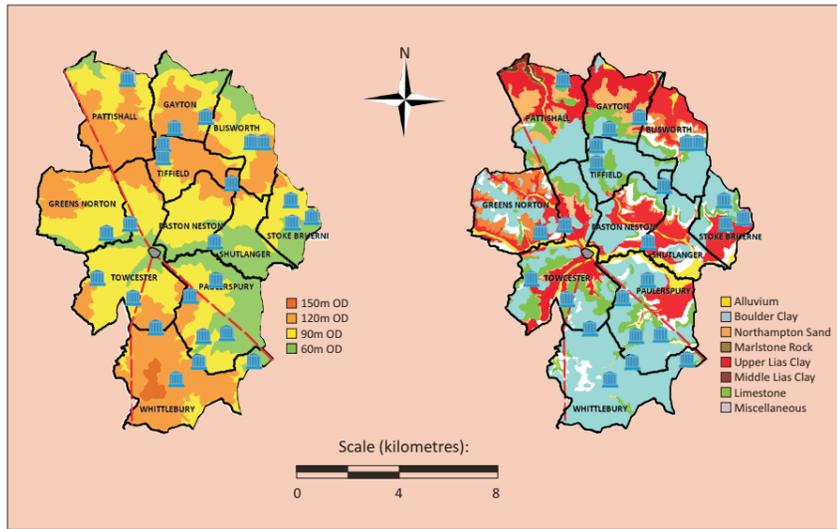
- Heavy clay, mainly located on the higher upland elevations (accounting for 45% of the survey area); and
- The more permeable soils of the intermediate valley slopes (48% of the total survey area).

These two areas contain all the settlement sites. There is also a smaller zone of alluvial deposits adjacent to the water courses flowing through the area.

Desktop survey & field-walking

The desktop survey and field-walking exercises revealed significant Roman period evidence in the Lactodorum hinterland:

- Known Roman period buildings at Mileoak, Swinneyford and Stoke Gap;
- Substantial Roman potsherd assemblages at Burcote Wood, Easton Neston, Greens Norton, Paulerspury Park Farm, Pattishall, Stoke Mill Lane and Towcester Vale (Field 2);
- Small amounts of Roman sherds at two further sites in Paulerspury, one in Shutlanger, two further sites in Towcester Vale (Fields 10 and 11) and one at Whittlebury deer park.



Relief map (L) and geological map (R) of the survey area

The hinterland project involved a huge amount of documentary research, covering a wide range of documents in various archives:

- A significant Roman courtyard villa was 'excavated' in 1850, in Whittlebury parish 500m west of Watling Street, after workmen of the Duke of Grafton, searching for building stone, began digging in Holton Copse in Whittlewood Forest. The antiquary Henry Dryden made detailed drawings of the site, which the CLASP team found whilst examining the Dryden archive at Northampton Central Library. Field-walking confirmed the site ('Bradlem Pond') and a range of potsherds and building material were collected;

- At the other end of the scale, a small Roman period site was revealed by field-walking at Burcote Wood, after CLASP's documentary research noted the presence of a smallholder's cottage on an estate map dated 1608 (Northants Record Office) and short-listed the location for more detailed survey, which yielded both C16/17 and Roman period sherds;
- Aerial photographs were further valuable sources, aiding detection of potential sites from crop-mark evidence (an example of this occurs at Greens Norton).

Analysis of pottery fabrics

- **Grogged wares (early RB period):** In the Lactodorum hinterland, almost half the sites include nearly 50% grogged wares, while the Bannaventa and Raunds areas contain only 20% grogged wares. This suggests that production and consumption of pottery was well established and robust in the Lactodorum area at an earlier date than in the other two areas.

- **Grey wares (all RB periods):** Grey wares are normally the most common pottery type on Roman period sites. However, in the Lactodorum area, this is only the

second most common main pot type, which suggests that the grey ware kilns were accessible to this area, but that consumption of pottery here by the 2C/3C AD may be declining by comparison with the other two areas.

In the Bannaventa hinterland, with 55% grey wares, large-scale villa estates were appearing in the 3C AD, and its availability may account for the larger percentage of grey wares in that area.

- **Shelly wares (all RB periods):**

In the Bannaventa and Lactodorum, areas, 10% of the total is shelly ware, whereas at Raunds it is 30%. This simply indicates that Raunds was closer to the centre of production, while the other two areas were on the periphery of the shelly wares production area.

- **Oxidised wares (later RB period):** Here again, there is double the level of oxidised sherds in Raunds area, because this area lay closer to the kiln sites.

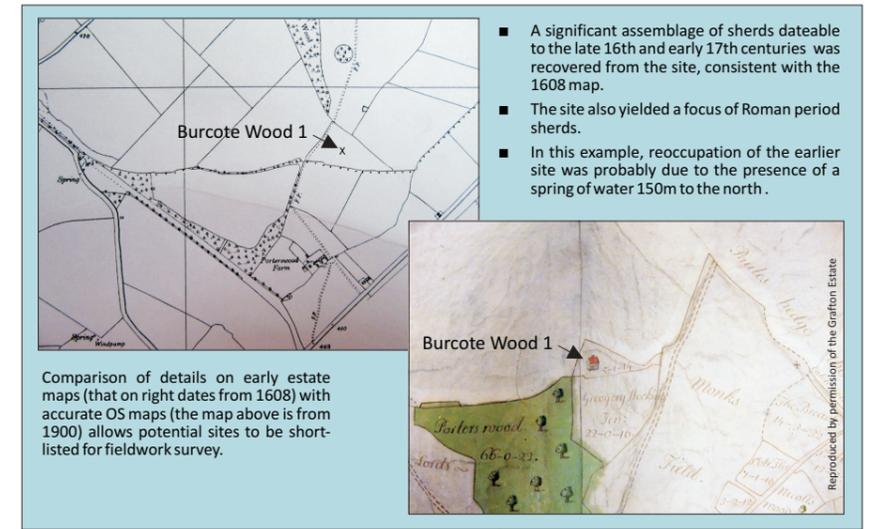
There are sufficient clues in such analyses to indicate early development of the Lactodorum hinterland, followed in the 3C AD by a comparative slowdown there, as development of large villa estates took place in the Bannaventa hinterland. This topic is developed further in CLASP's study 'Local People: Local Past'.

Roman roads

The road leading to Lactodorum from Alchester (a Roman town near modern Bicester) was a major strategic route linking Akeman Street and Watling Street. The southern section of its route may perhaps have been based on an even earlier Iron Age track leading to the Iron Age hillfort at Whittlebury.

There are clear signs of strip development south of Lactodorum along the line of the Alchester road, with a string of farms and a villa site.

A focus of RB sherds at Whittlebury deer park may also be significant; Whittlebury was later prominent as



'witlanbyrig', a probable Saxon burh and site of a royal Saxon witan, with possible continuity of occupation here over a very long period.

Medieval evidence

The potsherd evidence at many of the RB sites indicates re-occupation of the sites in the medieval period.

A site favourable to farming will retain its appeal over time, of course; but the Lactodorum hinterland sites appear to differ from those in the wider survey area, which exhibit less obvious emphasis on the re-occupation of earlier RB sites during the medieval period.

Evidence was also found of iron-making slag at several of the medieval sites. This probably reflects the fact that much of the Whittlebury area was royal hunting forest during the medieval period, providing ample sources of timber for charcoal-burning and smelting activities.

Early maps reveal potential sites for investigation

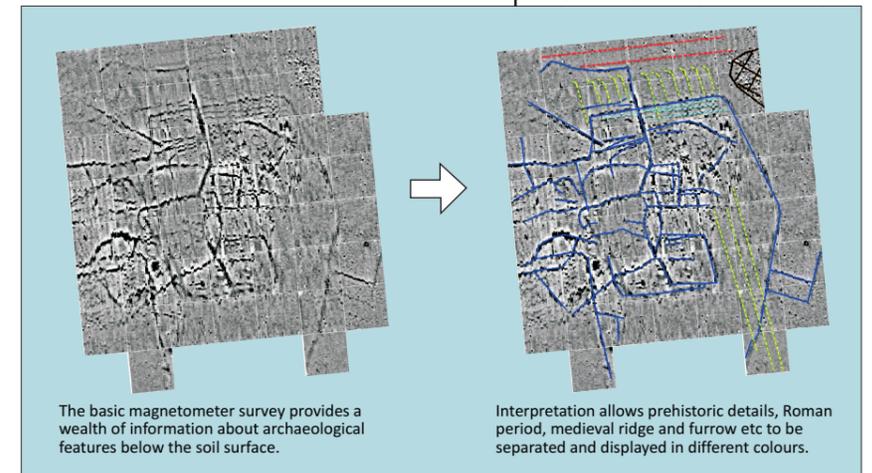
Geophysical survey

Once a suspected early site has been located by field-walking and potsherd analysis, a further phase of sitework can be initiated, involving non-intrusive examination using geophysics detection equipment (CLASP has both resistive and magnetometer equipment for this purpose).

The aim of such work is to reveal any traces of archaeology buried beneath the soil — an example of this is shown in the diagram below, which illustrates geophysics results from Tiffield — a Roman period settlement in the north of the Lactodorum hinterland survey area.

The basic survey data (on left in the diagram below) is 'interpreted', allowing details from different

Enhancing interpretation by targeted geophysics surveys



Analysis of potsherd statistics reveals variations in detail from which significant conclusions can be drawn.

