

Ongoing work

The project is still continuing — indeed, some exciting work still lies ahead. Much fieldwork remains to be carried out on the eastern side of the site, including further geophysics surveys and targeted excavation of trial pits and trenches to clarify detailed points. Thanks to extensive and consistent fieldwork over several years with a workforce of experienced volunteers — commercial archaeological projects cannot afford to pour in this amount of human resource — this project has already yielded a huge variety of artefacts, in addition to correlating results from earlier work on the site.

CLASP is now working patiently on the analysis and interpretation of the finds. Such a large assemblage of coins, pottery and other artefacts provides a wealth of evidence of the details of social life — from daily life within the town and its hinterland to trading links, both local and far-flung. This project will serve as a reference point, whose archaeological profile aids and informs interpretation of other nearby sites from the Roman period and the development of new approaches to such landscape studies.

You can read more details about archaeology at Bannaventa in:

- “Excavations at Bannaventa and Whilton Lodge, Northants, 1970-1”, B.Dix & S.Taylor, in *Britannia* Vol. 19 (1988), pp299-339
- “Whilton Lodge, Bannaventa: Extensive Urban Survey Report”, J.Taylor, 2002
- “The Portable Antiquities Scheme and Roman Britain”, T. Brindle, *Brit. Mus.Res. Publ.* 196 (2014), pp81-83

Links with other projects

CLASP is involved in several other long-term projects focused on Iron Age and Roman-period sites in west Northamptonshire.

- At Whitehall Farm, a Roman villa site close to Watling Street (in Nether Heyford parish), CLASP spent 13 years excavating the villa site. Excavation is now largely finished, and the focus is now on preparing for publication what has been learned.
- In the 'Local People - Local Past' project, CLASP is aiming to study social evolution and characterise settlement over the wider area, bringing together data from many sites and using map-based analysis, to piece together an overall picture of the locality from late Iron Age to early post-Roman times.
- A similar survey is also underway on the hinterland around Lactodorum (Towcester) to identify similarities to and differences from the localities that surround both settlements.
- CLASP is currently providing input, for the whole of Northamptonshire, to the Iron Age Hillforts Atlas project, led by the Institute of Archaeology at Oxford University.

These projects, and others currently under consideration, all form a part of CLASP's stated aim — “to research, interpret and document the early historical landscape of west Northamptonshire, working closely with the local Historic Environmental Record, English Heritage and other regional and national bodies to carry out archaeological research to professional standards by involving the local community”.

Find out about CLASP

If you found this leaflet interesting, and think that you might like the idea of working with a friendly group, and getting some fresh air and healthy exercise whilst making a serious contribution to professional archaeology, maybe you should consider joining CLASP!

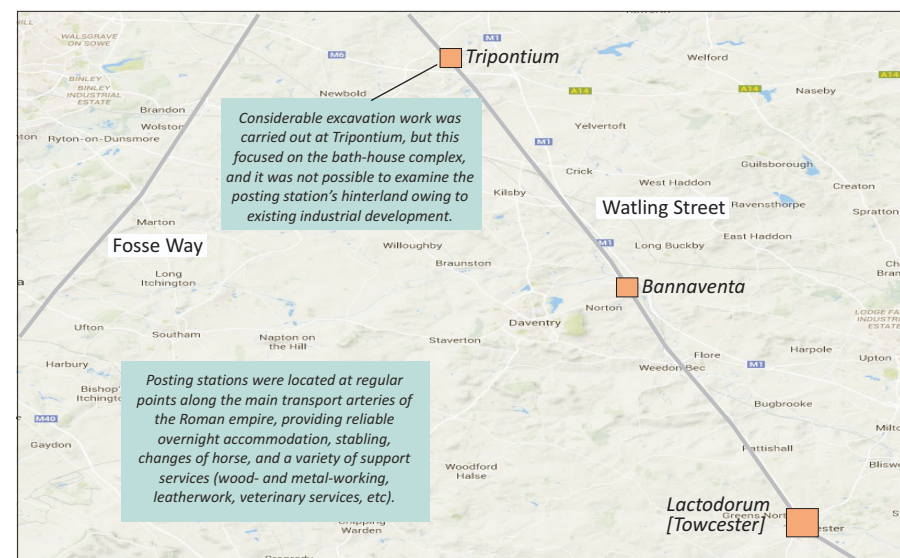
CLASP is always keen to welcome new volunteers. New projects are regularly planned and executed, knowledge is shared and training in both fieldwork and archaeological computing skills is given in a friendly environment.

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

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Bannaventa — ‘the market on the promontory’: An integrated landscape survey of a Roman posting station and its hinterland



Bannaventa is a way station on the major Roman road 'Watling Street' — the modern A5 trunk road. The posting station is 16km north-west of the Roman town of Lactodorum (modern Towcester), and 19km south-east of Tripontium (now Cave's Inn). Bannaventa stands on a hilltop with a fine view to the south along Watling Street — the Roman name translates as 'the market on the promontory'.

Little systematic archaeological work has been undertaken on the Roman posting stations along Watling Street, other than the excavation work by Rugby Archaeological Society at the neighbouring posting station at Tripontium, which focused mainly

on the *mansio* bath-house complex.

The opportunity for CLASP to carry out a multi-discipline archaeological study across a wide area of the Bannaventa site therefore promises to contribute significantly to this relatively neglected area of the study of Roman Britain.

The project will combine data from earlier work with new fieldwork using modern techniques — field-walking, metal-detection and geophysics surveys, analysis of historic aerial photographs, and some trial excavations.

This project was undertaken by CLASP in conjunction with English Heritage, and will inform future conservation policy for the site.

Roman posting stations

Bannaventa was a walled posting station. The Roman empire had four types of posting station:

- **Mansio**: a high-class overnight guest house for VIP travellers, requiring proof of identity.
- **Caupona**: relatively low-status overnight accommodation near a *mansio*, often a haunt for thieves, prostitutes and the like.
- **Taberna**: better class than a caupona, offering refreshment to the traveller.
- **Mutationis**: servicing vehicles and animals, with wheelwright, cartwright and veterinary services in addition to changes of horse.

It still remains to be determined what type of posting station was created at Bannaventa — although archaeologists originally viewed it as a humble *mutationis*, CLASP's work on the site's layout has revealed evidence to suggest that Bannaventa may in fact have included a high-status *mansio*.



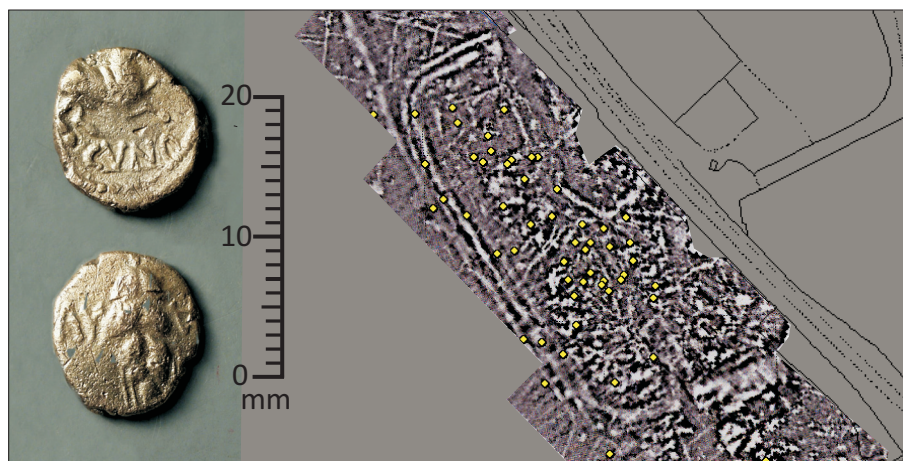
Layout and chronology

The site appears to have been first occupied in the Late Iron Age — a rectangular enclosure has been identified, overlaid by the course of Watling Street. Iron Age potsherds and coins have been recovered from the area, including a gold quarter-stater of Cunobelinus (died 42AD), and bronze Late Iron Age coins.

Organised metal-detection surveys were carried out across the site, by CLASP members from Norton Northamptonshire Portable Antiquities Search Team (NNPAST) and Northamptonshire Artefact Recovery Club (NARC). Each find's location was logged precisely using a Total Station. These surveys yielded 1200 coins, and a further 1500 coins found previously on the site by individual detectorist surveys have also been made available for analysis.

Organised fieldwalking surveys across the western extent of the site have so far collected about 100,000 potsherds; here too, the site was marked out in grids and all finds were accurately located on the map.

The coins and potsherds, with their precise locations, were identified, classified and mapped, providing dating evidence for the site's evolution as a chronological framework for occupation of the site.



L: Iron Age gold stater
R: Late Roman coins, mainly found within the walled area

The coin assemblage covers the entire Roman occupation (C1-C5) with most of the coins from the C3/C4, 3rd-century coins being found all across the site but with a focus of late-4th century coins within the walled area. The date-spread in the Bannaventa coins closely matches those established for other rural sites in the area. The potsherds also tell a similarly detailed story; and in addition, finds of stone and worked masonry in one area of the site have raised interesting speculations about the existence of a *mansio*.

Combining all this evidence allows the complex chronology of the site to be interpreted, revealing that:

- The early Romano-British town was laid out haphazardly, and developed irregularly in the late C1 / early C2 across a much larger area than that of the later walled and defended posting station.

- The posting station and its immediate hinterland (including field-systems, enclosures and track-ways) appears to have covered well over 200 acres.
- Interestingly, Watling Street did not bisect the main settlement through its centre, but was offset towards the western side, as can be seen from the geophysics survey results on the next page.
- In the late C2 a bank and ditch were constructed across part of the settlement, reducing the occupied area considerably.
- A second town ditch was constructed in the late C3, outside the earlier ditch, and the inner bank was reinforced by a substantial wall in the early C4.
- Outside of the newly created ditch and rampart at the southern end of the site, buildings appear to have been cleared and the area used as a cemetery in the late C3 / early C4.

Administrative function

As for the functions served by Bannaventa — the evidence indicates administrative, economic and marketing activities, but there is nothing to suggest that this Roman station had either a military origin or a later military purpose.

The site developed gradually under the influence of Roman organisation, from a loose distributed community to a well defended small unit.

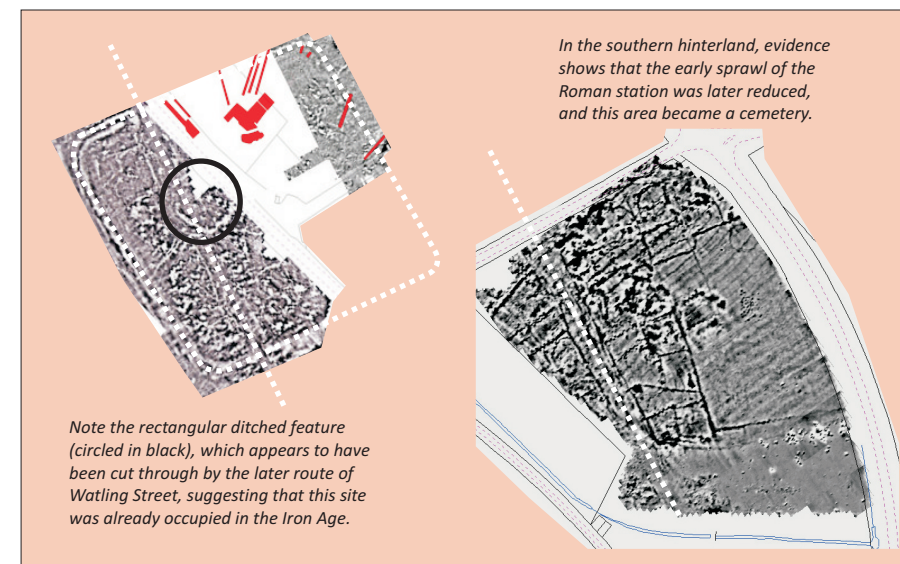
Geophysics surveys

CLASP's fluxgate magnetometer and resistivity meter have been used to survey about 117 acres in detail, covering the core of the walled town and its western hinterland. The wealth of detail revealed is indicated in the illustrations on this page, in which roads and track-ways, field-systems and individual enclosures are all distinguishable.

The layout of the visible anomalies indicates that the entire site was developed in phases, including the town itself — features from different periods overlap and intersect. Study of such overlapping features will guide and inform future possible excavations to determine phasing and chronology.

There is also evidence of some early communication routes, including a direct route leading NW from the north gate of the walled town. Another possible track-way appears to head due west from Bannaventa towards Borough Hill (Daventry).

Bannaventa and its western hinterland; extensive field systems and roundhouses



Note the rectangular ditched feature (circled in black), which appears to have been cut through by the later route of Watling Street, suggesting that this site was already occupied in the Iron Age.

In the southern hinterland, evidence shows that the early sprawl of the Roman station was later reduced, and this area became a cemetery.

Close-up views reveal some aspects of phasing

Mutationis or mansio?

This is still an open question. However, finds of worked column masonry and cut stone in the north-west of the enclosed area, traces of possible foundations, and the fact that this part of the site has a more 'open' nature with less crowding of buildings, all point to the erection at this location of some kind of status building, and may perhaps indicate that a *mansio* once stood here, although there is no evidence of the bath-house usually associated with this type of complex.

Most of Bannaventa's buildings would have been shops, workshops and strip-houses, all roofed in cheap non-durable wood-shingle tiles or thatch. Fewer than 2000 earthenware roof-tile fragments have been retrieved during fieldwork. No votive material has been found to confirm the presence of a shrine or temple. Slag from the site shows that bronze was worked here, and probably also iron, with some finds indicative of smelting activities.

