



# CLASP

## Community Landscape & Archæology Survey Project NEWSLETTER



Local Heritage initiative



ROMAN RESEARCH TRUST

Website: [www.claspweb.org.uk](http://www.claspweb.org.uk)

Charity No 1111667

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### From Dave Hayward, Chairman of Trustees

Another year that I hope will see CLASP continue with the significant advances that were made in 2016. The year begins with our first urban excavation at Towcester to assist Towcester Youth Club meet the planning requirements for its proposed extension. This work should take us through a series of domestic structures from the 17th to early 20th centuries. There is evidence of much earlier activity as well. Hopefully details of the results of this work will be in the next Newsletter.

CLASP is to my mind becoming stronger with more members driving the organisation and spreading the load across the organisation. This is particularly evident with the current work on digital archiving, software and wider historical research. As a result of this it allows others to focus on the core work of CLASP researching and investigating the archaeology of the Romano-British era and its immediately associated periods.

There are exciting times ahead with the proposed expansion of Daventry towards Watling Street coupled with enhanced activity in the wider Bannaventa area. It is important though that the remainder of the CLASP area of interest is not ignored but actively researched to help create a full landscape of the area. This is down to you all.

As always we need new members, if everybody could recruit one new member it will really help us maintain our current impetus.

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One sad note, I noted recently in the Daventry Express obituaries the death of Cador Roberts who volunteered at Whitehall during the 'early years'. He was a real gentleman who got stuck in to some of the most frustrating archaeology.

I hope to see you all at our field-work through 2017.

Dave Hayward

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## **From Rob Close, Chairman of the Organising Committee**

Since the last newsletter the Organising Committee has met twice, in November and this January.

### **Public meeting following the AGM held in October**

The Committee thought the meeting was a success, being well-attended, an excellent venue and with two very interesting presentations. We decided to use Harpole again for the 2017 meeting on **Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> October** and we have already organised speakers.

### **Archaeological activity**

The Committee has been briefed by the Archaeological Director on potential key projects for 2017 and will be involved in agreeing priorities.

Dave Hayward, as Project Director for the urban Excavation project at Branson's Lane, Towcester this month took the Committee through a very extensive Project Proposal. This set out what is known about the history of the area, what the County Archaeologist expects from the project, what we propose to do, how the project is to be organised, what needs to be managed and Health and Safety.

The Archaeological Director will present his Project Proposal for the work this summer to the April meeting of the Committee for input and sign off. Since the last newsletter the Organising Committee has met twice, in November and this January.

### **Communication**

The Committee reviewed its current diverse means of communicating its activities to the membership. Members access information via the CLASP web-

site and are currently provided with information by this newsletter, the CLASPweb mailing list, distribution of Organisation Committee agenda and minutes, briefings by Organising Committee members to their Societies, emails from the Independent Members' Representative, Ad hoc emails about projects and at the public meeting following the AGM.

Please let us have your suggestions as to how any of these might be improved.

Rob Close

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**Deadline for the September 2017 Newsletter will be Sunday, September 3, 2017. All photos please at approx 300 dpi and separate from the text with indications of their positions.**

### **From Steve Young, Archaeological Director**

Since the last newsletter, CLASP volunteers have had the opportunity to work on three very different types of archaeological project. The first consisted of an exploratory excavation on a possible moated enclosure which forms part of the medieval landscape connected to the deserted township of Thrupp near Norton, Northamptonshire. A second excavation gave volunteers a chance to take part in a small scale open area urban excavation at Branston Lane, Towcester. This was the first time that CLASP volunteers have been exposed to the issues and complexities of excavation in an urban environment. The experience demonstrates the changing range of archaeological and methodological priorities associated with urban as opposed to other field work areas, whether these are characterised as rural in nature, commercial, research or community based. Meanwhile the third project saw the continuation of the extensive geophysical survey of the Roman Posting Station of Bannaventa, Whilton Lodge, Northamptonshire. Each initiative shows in their own way the diversity of experience on offer to volunteers, the level of competence of our practitioners and the usefulness of community based archaeology in understanding and recording our shared heritage. All three initiatives were well supported and resulted in significant advances in the interpretation of the sites involved as well as continuing to develop our outreach and networking options to a wider professional and community based audience.

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During late November and early December 2016, initial exploratory work was carried out within a small wooded copse to the west of the deserted township of Thrupp, on the site of a possible medieval moat. Two trial trenches were excavated across the northern ditch and associated bank of this feature which lies immediately to the east of Thrupp Lodge. The potential importance of the site lies in its proximity and relationship to the deserted medieval village, as well as in providing an archaeological background to the role of these features within the wider landscape during the middle ages. Therefore it was imperative that we ascertain whether these ditches were indeed part of a moat and consequently could be assigned a medieval date. Once we can confirm both of these possibilities, the overall character of Thrupp and the integration of the different elements of the settlement will be better understood.

The location of a moat adjacent to the heart of the medieval village was of particular interest because it will probably cast light on the existence of either the locus of a potential manor site, or more likely the position of a medieval grange known to have been constructed somewhere in the locality by Daventry Priory in the 13th century AD. A third less obvious interpretation might suggest the location of a rabbit warren, although there is no place name evidence or historical reference to support such an assumption.

The excavation trench revealed a ditch with a width of 5m and depth of 1.5m possibly surmounted on the internal edge by a stone foundation for a bank, thus confirming the possibility of the existence at the very least of a partial or complete ditched enclosure within the confines of the current wooded copse, although whether it could be described as a moat is still open to question. The sides of the ditch were not clay lined and water retention for a wet moat would have been limited. Residual pottery recovered from the fill and surfaces of the ditch indicated a medieval origin between the 13th and 15th century. However the feature had been cut through in the Victorian period by a drain along the entire length of the base of the ditch, most likely to improve the drainage of the area immediately to the east of the lodge. A very fine clay pipe bowl of the mid 19th century featuring a Red hand of Ulster design was retrieved from this feature. The find could imply seasonal employment of itinerant workers on the farm at that date. We cannot discount at this stage that the Victorian use of the feature might even indicate the rationale for con-

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Medieval Moat ditch containing Victorian re-cut drain

structing the medieval ditch which may well have had a similar function. Only further work on the western side of the moat will, later this year, enable us to come to a supportable conclusion as to the complex proper function.

Subsequent erosion and development of the site typified by the conversion of the southern half of the features associated with the moat into a pool has made interpretation of the 'moat' more complex than it might otherwise have been and only further work in March or April will allow us to determine the exact function and chronological profile of the site overall.

In late January we were able to undertake a small scale urban excavation at Bransons Lane, Towcester covering an area of about 5sq metres. A planned extension to the building immediately next door to the site meant that the building plot would need to be archaeologically examined before re-development went ahead. The rationale for undertaking the field work was therefore two fold, to re-examine an earlier unpublished and incomplete excavation of 1985 of part of the site and to record any undisturbed archaeology which had not been previously recorded ahead of the development. The location of

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Bransons Lane is thought to be of importance in understanding the story of Towcester because the survival or absence of earlier structural and material evidence on the site although a small area will inform the debate and help determine the extent and nature of urban development to the south of the town centre during the Roman and medieval periods.

The excavation initially located the surfaces and trench associated with the earlier dig and went on to uncover the foundations of a building along the



frontage of Bransons Lane whose rear wall is still extant. In addition the remains of two toilets cut into the foundations of that structure were excavated the later one probably of mid to late 19th date appeared to be connected to the sewer system whilst the other earlier one possibly from the early 19th century was a filled in earth closet. The sealed context in this toilet contained a

Bransons Lane excavation site, Towcester

diagnostically datable assemblage of pottery which included a regency porcelain milk or cream jug with a moulded head spout.



Although we have not had the opportunity to examine the assemblages in great detail, an initial examination of the finds associated with these features and contexts indicate at least three periods of activity starting in the mid to late 18th century and continuing into the early 20th. Indeed the majority of the archaeological information from the site implies that what we discovered is a typical example of small town provincial urban development originating in the Georgian period

Regency Porcelain Moulded Spout from Bransons Lane

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on a virgin site which subsequently was subject to demolition and redevelopment during the Victorian and modern era.

Most importantly no evidence of features or structures were observed under the Georgian and Victorian structures although residual amounts of pottery from the Roman, Medieval and 17th date were recovered from the site. All of the pottery from these periods appeared to be residual and no related features were observed or found. However underneath the Georgian foundations and on top of the natural deposits was a layer of loamy alluvial material that contained almost the entire collection of Roman and Medieval sherds. The deposit probably represents periodic inundation of the site by flood water during the Roman and Medieval era when the area was most likely a low lying swamp. This would account for the lack of evidence of habitation for both periods and should be taken as a good indication of the lack of urban expansion this far south along Watling Street in those early periods of activity.

After exhaustive geophysical survey of the Roman Posting Station of Bannaventa to the west side of the A5, CLASP has now begun to undertake field work to the east of the road. Although the area presently surveyed only covers three hectares, the anomalies detected are extremely helpful in understanding not only the immediate area in the eastern part of the settlement but it also helps explain other elements of the site in its entirety. The new geophysical survey evidence is clear, unambiguous and arguably the most far reaching in its scope and meaning for interpreting the site than any of the work previously recorded at Bannaventa. The area under investigation lies to the north of the known walled town and has in the past been interpreted as probably being an area of extra mural development beyond the defended core of the Posting Station.

However, it is now very clear that the late walled settlement is far smaller than the overall size of the site as originally conceived. The origin of the perimeter bank and ditch are most likely to be found in the early Post Conquest period between the late 1st to early 2nd century AD but only excavation in the future will confirm this hypothesis. So far the principal discovery has been the detection of the large ditch and bank construction that is considerably larger in scale than the defences of the later walled area probably by a factor of three or four to one. This feature is probably best interpreted as the

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boundary perimeter of a far more extensive settlement which would indicate that the site was originally developed as a planned town. The later Posting Station would have been a late expression of the rationale for Bannaventa whereas the earlier larger site could have developed elements of a planned town of a size commensurate with that believed to exist at Lactodurum (Towcester). Interestingly the shape of these earlier defences at Bannaventa mirror those associated with Lactodurum and perhaps are indicative of a more cohesive plan for such settlements along Watling Street under the early empire. Used in conjunction with the less obvious evidence of Lidar and earlier geophysical evidence one can postulate that the bank and ditch surrounded the present scheduled area and most of the promontory upon which the site is located.



Bannaventa: The Early Roman Town Defences & the later Posting Station  
(Note: the white areas have not yet been surveyed)

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Undoubtedly these new findings will enable us to rewrite the development and history of the site. The discovery, if confirmed through excavation, would also allow us to compare Bannaventa with Roman towns and cities explored on the continent. It is well known that their development model displays a tremendous growth in the early empire and drastic entrenchment in the later empire. An initial assessment of other geophysical anomalies indicate that the earlier 'town' could well have had a more structured and organised layout. A gap between the ditch and bank suggests a previously unknown northern gate associated with the alignment of another substantial road exiting the town to the north. This may turn out to be an earlier alignment of Watling Street before the road was moved further west to meet the needs of the later Posting Station.

It is an exciting time for CLASP and personally I feel the quality and nature of our fieldwork are improving and developing our understanding of our past all the time.

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### **From Gren Hatton, Chipping Warden Hillfort**

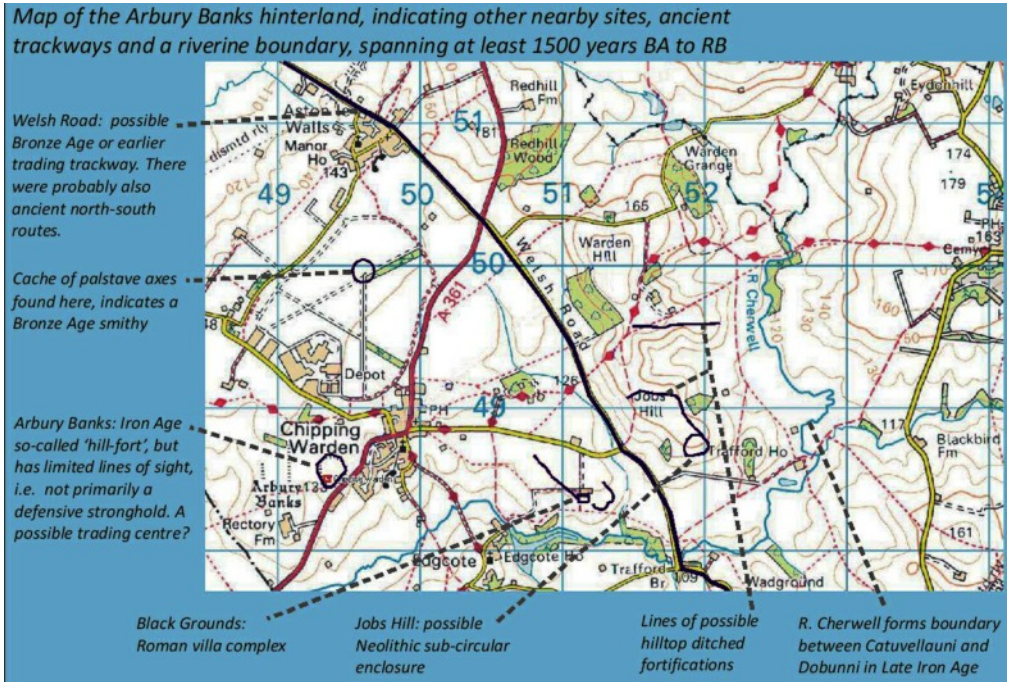
Some months ago I wrote a short article for this magazine about the Iron Age hillforts of Northamptonshire. It was a general introduction to what is in fact quite a diverse and detailed subject – and in this issue I will write about a specific hillfort site that you might well pass by on an afternoon's leisure drive or bike ride in our lovely Northamptonshire countryside.

Chipping Warden (on the A361 between Daventry and Banbury) is a sleepy little village. The main road takes you around the western edge of the village in a broad sweep, so it's all too easy just to drive on by ... but it's worth going more slowly, because there are some interesting things to discover.

There's an Iron Age hillfort called Arbury Banks at Chipping Warden – west of the main road as it exits the big bend around the village. It's on private

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farmland, so you can't just go wandering across it – but if you stop the car and peep into the fields you might just catch a glimpse of some of its banks and ditches. Alternatively, take an aerial look at it from Google Maps or



Google Earth, both of which show it clearly.

There's one rum thing about this hillfort that you'll spot immediately – it's not actually on a hill. In fact, although it has open views for a few km to the west, the views to the east are blocked by a range of hills (Warden Hill and Jobs Hill) which tower over the village and its old hillfort. The river Cherwell snakes around the eastern side of these hills, and flows down into the plain below the village to the south.

The names Chipping and Warden are significant – 'chipping' is a medieval word meaning 'marketplace', with original Saxon roots; and 'warden' is made up of two more old Saxon words, 'ward' meaning 'lookout point' and 'dun' meaning 'hill'. So, the name Chipping Warden literally translates as 'the marketplace beside the lookout hill'.

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This modern name evolved during the medieval period, at a time when Chipping Warden was a thriving market community, whose wealth sprang from its location on the north-south route (today's A361) at a major crossing point with the Welsh Road (which crosses the A361 1km north of the present village). In the medieval period Welsh Road was a major drove route for livestock coming down from Wales to the markets of the Midlands and Cotswolds – but I will show in this article that the origins of Welsh Road actually go back at least 2000 years before the medieval period.

You might think that a so-called hillfort that isn't actually on a hill, and which commands no all-round view, would be of limited use. However, this is looking at the situation from the wrong angle – in fact, it's the name 'hillfort' that confuses us, because it implies that ALL hillforts had a solely warlike purpose, and this was almost certainly NOT the case back in the Iron Age. As I've already hinted, Warden Hill would have served as an auxiliary lookout point for the hillfort, allowing coverage of a much wider sweep of the surrounding landscape in times of potential danger. But the main purpose of this fortified stronghold was most likely peaceful, and it probably acted as a centre for trading between different tribal groups in the surrounding countryside.

Its location relatively close to the river Cherwell is also significant, because we know that in the first century BC the Cherwell south of Chipping Warden acted as a boundary between the Dobunni tribe (to the west) and the rather warlike Catuvellauni tribe (which advanced into Oxfordshire and Northants and finally stopped their advance at the banks of the Cherwell somewhere around 40-50BC). The Cherwell at this point is still almost narrow enough to jump across, so its function as a territorial barrier is purely nominal – which further supports the view that this was essentially a peaceful place, mutually agreed as a trading point.

There is a Roman villa site at Chipping Warden, just to the east of the village, in an area known as Blackgrounds. There's nothing specifically visible as you drive past it on the back-road east of the village, but the site has been excavated and catalogued, and reports are on file in the archives for those who might like to know more. The existence of the Roman villa site also supports the

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view that this area was a long-term peaceable trading point, stretching back long before the medieval period through Roman times and into prehistory. On the south side of Jobs Hill (which is close to the Blackgrounds site east of the village) there is also a neolithic ditched and banked enclosure on the hillside overlooking the modern country road. It is yet further evidence of the very long-term significance of this little area as a place of human activity and a meeting point.

A few years ago, while I was directing the CLASP survey of Northants Hill-forts that I described in the previous article, I made a detailed survey of the Chipping Warden area. This involved meetings with farmers and landowners – and one of these farmers had a collection of Bronze Age axe-heads (c1000 BC) that had all been found within a few metres of each other on his land, at a location that was extremely significant.



You can see a selection of the axe-heads in the photograph – there were 13 of them altogether, and they were mostly unfinished castings. This implies that they were produced in a smithy that stood at that point. The smithy was located exactly halfway between the site of the Iron Age hillfort and

Bronze Age palstaves at Chipping Warden the line of Welsh Road (see marked on the map) – and it was probably deliberately located there, to serve the passing trade along prehistoric Welsh Road and also the trading centre at the fort.

There's one final thing to say about Welsh Road at this point. I've mentioned that it served as a livestock drove route in the Middle Ages – and it was prob-

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ably also used for livestock droving in the prehistoric period too. However, its other important use would have been in the Bronze Age, because North Wales contained a major series of copper mines that were extensively worked during the Bronze Age. Bronze is an alloy of copper and tin – and Britain's sources of tin in the Bronze Age came from prehistoric mines in Cornwall. It is likely that that tin and copper would have been transported along prehistoric routes, until they came together at Chipping Warden to provide the raw materials for this Bronze Age smithy.

In a nutshell, there is a potted history of the Chipping Warden area over a 3000 year period. Next time you go for a leisure outing on a sunny day, you might care to explore the hills and back-roads around Chipping Warden, pause on the hilltop and admire the long views, dabble your feet in the shallow waters of the Cherwell, or picnic alongside one or other of the landmarks mentioned in this article.

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### **From Rob Close, Security and Availability of CLASP's Digital Archives**

Over its many years of Archaeological investigation, CLASP has created a considerable database. Fred Kay's Geophysics database alone has over 14,000 digital files. Where final reports have been completed these have been submitted electronically to external bodies and are in the public domain. However, much of the information resides on the computers of individual officers.

Actions are being taken to improve the safety of this data and, in time, to widen access to it.

An immediate step on safety has been to put all the Geophysics data on to a Master Hard Drive which I hold and on a Back-up Hard Drive held by Steve Young. Over time, the Context data held by Dave Hayward and all the considerable information held by Steve Young from field walking, excavations, metal detection etc. will also be put on these stand-alone Hard Drives.

We wish also to ensure that all our data can eventually be accessed by our membership and, subject to controls, in the public domain. The latter will ensure that the work of CLASP will be accessible in the future so anyone doing an internet-type search will be able to "discover" our information.

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To this end, a small working group has been defining the best way to name folders and files.

The naming system starts with a four digit code for the parish we are working in, followed by the name of the site. We then have folders for each of Desktop Research, Field Walking, Metal Detection, Geophysics, Excavations and Cross-Discipline Reports. For each project we then have the project (normally field) name and the ordnance survey grid reference.

We have recently piloted this for Geophysics work at Thrupp (Norton parish and Long Buckby parish) and will be applying it for the Excavation work from 23<sup>rd</sup> January at Bransons Lane, (Towcester parish). It will be consistently applied on ALL our future projects.

(For any of you who wish to know more please see two excellent technical notes on the CLASP website by Gren Hatton - **CLASP TR12 - Creating a Digital Archive, Issues 1 and 2**).

At some future date we will aim to migrate all our historical files to the new naming system but this is an enormous undertaking and is not the immediate priority.

We will provide updates on the overall project from time to time.

Rob Close

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### **From Jennifer Smith, Harpole Heritage Group**

Harpole Heritage Group continues to have excellent speakers for their meetings. Tom Briggs spoke about the history of 'Bletchley Park' and plans for the future. Roy York showed a very amusing film about the 'Battle of Waterloo' the film having been made in 1914 in the area near Irthingborough. Tony Boullemier spoke about his book 'The Little Book of Monarchs'. Some of our lady members catered once again for our Annual Dinner - we all look forward to the delicious puddings which they serve us.

With permission from Harpole Parish Council we have had erected an information Board 'Harpole Leisure' near to the Flagpole Green, which tells all about the groups, clubs etc in the village- well over 40.

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## From James Aveling, Blisworth Heritage Society

Our new display cabinet in housed in Blisworth Parish Church has been open for three open afternoons so far. We have to date had a reasonable amount of visitors and hope that after our winter closure, numbers will increase in the warmer times of the year.

We hope to make more people aware of what we have and the knowledge that our village's history and heritage is available to them. Since the last Newsletter, we have had a number of meetings. Our recently retired GP attracted a large audience when he surveyed the past fifty years of medical practice in the village.

We had a fact packed account of King John's struggle with his Barons and many mentions of Northampton Castle and John's many visits. Our November meeting was about the fascinating story of Percy Pilcher ending with his unfortunate demise at Stanford Hall. All in all it has been a successful year.

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## List of Contacts for CLASP Associations

Organisation	Contact	Tel
Phoenix Artefact Search Team	Bill Wiggins	01327 7 843469
Weedon Bec History Society	Julia Johns	01327 341729
Flore Heritage Society	Jay Phelps	01327 340282
Brington History Society	Ian Dexter	01604 771353
Harpole Heritage Group	Jennifer Smith	01604 831294
Whitehall Farm Roman Villa Landscape Project	Norman Garnett	01604 755479
Towcester & District Local History Society	Gina Boreham	01327 352687
Bugbrooke History Society	Alan Kent	01604 830518
Friends of Daventry Museums	David Adams	01327 605372
Blisworth Heritage Society	Jim Aveling	01604 859109
History of Tiffield Society	Steve Jowers	01327 350292
Northampton Artefact Recovery Club	Alan Standish	Not available
Barby Hill Archaeological Project	Gren Hatton	01788 822411