



BACK TO OUR ROOTS

.....
THE GRANTORS
BRINGING AN
ENTIRE COMMUNITY
TOGETHER WITH
A SHARED LOVE
OF ITS PAST
.....

When metal detectorist Dave Derby discovered Roman coins that had lain scattered beneath a grantor's field for 1,500 years, they raised more questions than answers.

Arable and sheep farmer Nick Adams had given Dave permission to comb some of his 460 acres, little knowing that his land would unearth this fascinating insight into life in ancient Britain.

Roman coins were the first items painstakingly recovered from the soil and local archaeologist Stephen Young was brought in to advise. Building material was discovered and trial trenches turned into excavation... and a Roman villa and bath-houses saw daylight for the first time since the first century.

Brooches, rings, pot fragments, animal bones, even engraved drinking glasses and wine goblets – all were carefully retrieved from the soil.

Since the turn of this century Stephen's sage presence on the rolling fields overlooking the M1 and Grand Union Canal to the west of Northampton has sparked a series of events that have changed a community's life. The sloping field has been a constant

hive of activity, with schoolchildren, archaeology students and an army of volunteers all desperate to stumble across the next big find. They have flocked to Nick's Whitehall Farm from as far afield as Japan and Australia to help reveal an incredible multi-room Roman villa, roundhouses and two bath-houses complete with tessellated mosaic floors and timbers that had remained hidden beneath his Nether Heyford land until recent times.

NOTHING CHANGES

The pilgrimage never ceases to have a profound effect on Nick, whose family has farmed the area for almost 400 years: "It's sobering to consider that the 100 or so people in this Roman settlement faced the same issues with weather, soil and topography to feed themselves and survive that I do today."

Plum stones, remnants of hazelnuts, around 25,000 animal bones, including songbird and hare bones, and a wolf's jawbone – one of only three pieces of wolf identified from Roman Britain – all give an insight into the lifestyle of the settlers, likely to have been a large extended clan group living in view of at least a dozen

other settlements within a five-mile radius.

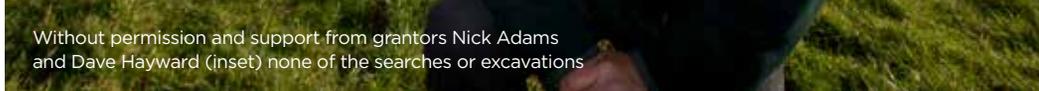
Nick's sense of being a guardian of the land was heightened when Dave's metal detector shrieked over the shield of a Roman – affectionately named Marcus by his rescuers – whose likeness has been reconstructed using facial recognition.

The skeleton of an early 1st-century Roman was also discovered, and Stephen said: "This was a deviant burial, possibly for a criminal. Later we dug elsewhere on the farm, nearer the famous Watling Street road from London, and discovered the grave of a 5th-century teenage girl. This has led to us discovering more 5th and 7th-century burials."

The finds on land owned by have left former Northampton University lecturer Stephen with a nagging belief that somewhere close by there is a Roman burial ground to match the 5th/7th-century Anglo-Saxon one – complete with shield-bearing soldiers – that they have also discovered.

He's lucky to have the support of CLASP, the Community Landscape & Archaeology Survey Project formed following the villa find, whose volunteers have helped with everything from digging and excavating right through to creating a forensic digital record of where, when and how every one of the thousands of objects were found.

Stephen, CLASP's Director of Archaeology, said: "Without our volunteers and the cooperation of our two grantors, these treasures would have remained buried forever. They offer a fascinating insight into our ancestors' lives and have brought the local community together in a way we'd never have thought possible."



Without permission and support from grantors Nick Adams and Dave Hayward (inset) none of the searches or excavations

THE GRANTORS – NICK ADAMS AND DAVE HAYWARD

Nick "More than 600 volunteers have spent around 45,000 hours in total on my land when the crop is off and I haven't got a single regret. I was surprised when they found the coins but intrigued at what else might be there, so when they found the villa and the burial ground it was amazing.

"We held an open day to gauge local interest in helping with the project and dug a trial trench to see if people would be interested in finding out more about amateur archaeology and around 400 people came over the hill!

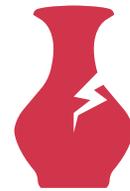
"I'm hugely proud and privileged to have been involved with it. It's wonderful seeing the process and peoples' reactions when they find something but sadly, despite many promises, we've found very little gold!"

Dave "The project has grown and grown and has brought the community together. I've been chair of the trustees of CLASP for several years and help with a lot of the contextualising (making sure there's a record of each artefact for future generations). I was a police sergeant, so love the forensic side of collating and curating. People in the area now have a greater sense of the history of where they live and their sense of community and pride in it is greater as a result."



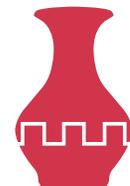
Facial reconstruction meant the team could reconstruct a likeness of what the soldier (above with his spear) would have looked like (left)

IN NUMBERS



2,500

fragments of glassware from all corners of the continent



20,000

pieces of pots and ceramics found near the villa



25,000

animal bones found nearby, proof of farm-type activity



560

Roman coins dating from as early as the 1st century

Archaeology



THE DETECTORISTS - DAVE DERBY AND ALAN STANDISH

Dave “The first time my detectorist colleague Steve Pulley and I searched the ploughed field we found 25 coins, pottery and carved stones and were certain we’d found a Roman site. We told Nick and further finds confirmed we’d found a Roman settlement. It’s a tremendous feeling to hold something untouched by human hand since the first century, but one of the greatest moments came at the open day when I showed a youngster how to use the detector. She found a Victorian penny and I’ll never forget the look on her face. The queue to ‘have a go’ was huge that day.

“Another time we were checking a field and found a lovely Saxon brooch, a piece of iron that turned out to be the end of a sword and a body, one of the first of 17 skeletons – some of them military men buried with their weapons – at the Saxon burial site. We were respectful, but it was a very emotional moment.”

Alan “I’d been a teacher at a local school for disadvantaged children until I retired. I brought them up here and the effect on them was incredible.”

THE ARCHAEOLOGIST - STEPHEN YOUNG

“This is one of the most established community archaeological projects in the country, but there’s no reason why there can’t be more to ensure the nation’s heritage secrets don’t stay that way. There could be Roman settlements in grantors’ fields around the country. All it takes is a willing landowner and volunteers prepared to work with him or her. The rewards are endless if unearthing the past is as thrilling to them as it’s become to me.”



THE VOLUNTEER - TONY KESTEN

“The dig has changed my life. I’ve learned about archaeology, working in a context team and handling the media side of what we do. The site is now one of the most-recognised and best-established in the UK.”



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- ▶ Email plantprotection@cadentgas.com (you will be sent an automated response to confirm receipt)
- ▶ Call Plant Protection for free on **0800 688 588**

THE SEVEN WHITEHALL WONDERS

- 1 A 2nd-century Roman Samian cup for drinking wine.
- 2 Late 3rd-century indented beaker from the Rhineland.
- 3 Iron belt buckle from a 5th-century female burial site.
- 4 Post-Roman spear and personal knife from the 5th century.
- 5 Roman roof tile with graffiti of man holding a bow.
- 6 An ornamental oil jug for bathing, smashed in a ritual.
- 7 Wooden handle - minus sponge for intimate personal cleaning!

