



# CLASP

## Community Landscape & Archæology Survey Project NEWSLETTER



Local Heritage initiative



ROMAN RESEARCH TRUST

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

Autumn 2019, issue 29

Charity No 1111667

## Annual General Meeting of CLASP

All members of CLASP are warmly invited to this meeting, to be held at Harpole Bowls Club, Larkhall Lane, Harpole, NN7 4DP, 7 pm on Wednesday 9th October 2019

### Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Receive and approve the Minutes of the 2018 AGM
3. Matters arising
4. Report by the Chair of Trustees
5. Report by the Treasurer
6. Report by the Chair of the Organising Committee
7. Any other business – to be notified to the Chair of Trustees prior to the start of the meeting and should be urgent and non-controversial

Non-members coming to the Public Meeting are welcome to attend this first part, which will give an idea of CLASP's organisational structure.

The meeting will be brief and will be followed by the public meeting with talks about CLASP's activities, field work, excavations – and future needs.

**Note that subscriptions (£10) are due on September 1st but may be paid at the AGM or sent to Julia Johns, Membership Secretary, 7 Eton Close, Weedon, Northants, NN7 4PJ**



**C**ommunity  
**L**andscape  
**A**rchaeology  
**S**urvey  
**P**roject

---

# Public Open Meeting

9<sup>th</sup> October 2019

20.00hrs

Harpole Bowls Club, Larkhall Lane, Harpole NN7 4DF

**Latest CLASP archaeological excavations and discoveries**

## **Speakers**

**Fred Kay (Geophysics Manager)**

**Interpreting Geophysics**

**Stephen Young (Archaeological Director)**

**Romans and Saxons on the Nene watershed**

**Raffle**

**Light refreshments**

**Free admission**

**but**

**donations welcome!**

## From Dave Hayward, Chairman of Trustees

There can be only one achievement that has embodied CLASP for the past six months and that must be the finding, obtaining and now development to finalisation of our new Field Centre at New Creation Farm, Nether Heyford. Thanks to the tenacity of one of our own members in achieving the principle of CLASP renting a building at the farm, through subsequent negotiations, and then into the physical side this has been a hectic period for many of us.

What was a redundant woodworkers workshop, thanks to the efforts of many of our members has become a recognisable archaeological archive and working area. Not just the work of own members has helped this project come to fruition but also the support from others, not least the fantastic donation by Northamptonshire Libraries of the redundant shelving from the old Daventry library.

Now that we have the physical artefact collection transferred from Whitehall to the new location we are faced with a significant project to index, repackage where necessary and then research this enormous collection. I know that we have members who are interested in developing and leading this work, there will I am sure be many opportunities for you all to become involved in this exercise.

In parallel with the archive element we must utilise the building for meetings, training, personal research and development of a research library – any relevant books and magazines that you might have and no longer require please leave them at the Centre.

Just a few words regarding our summer fieldwork, this went extremely well and a technical report is included elsewhere in this newsletter. It is important that we all give our thanks to those members who make these events possible by doing all the preliminary and post 'dig' work from organising the toilets, surveying the ground, getting the tools in place and organising those attending are just some examples.

We must also thank, and not take for granted the landowners who give us permission to work on their land.

I hope to see you all at the AGM, where apart from the normal meeting content, Rob Close, the Chair of the Organising Committee and myself will be making

*cont page 4*

a presentation on the topics of CLASP's future human and financial resources. It is important that all of the membership appreciate the significance of these issues.

Thanks again for your efforts, we are getting there!  
D F Hayward MBE

---

**Deadline for the Spring 2020 Newsletter will be Sunday, February 16, 2020. All photos please at approx 300 dpi and separate from the text with indications of their positions.**

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

The Committee has met three times since the February 2019 Newsletter was issued. As always, busy agendas and a diverse range of topics discussed.

**2019 Projects:** As the excavation at Crick was not possible because farming arrangements changed, the two main projects were a very successful return to the Anglo-Saxon Cemetery and test pits at Manshead. (See Steve Young's report for the details). The costs of these digs are significant because of the need for a JCB to save much of the back-breaking work and the provision of a toilet. A nominal charge of £10 was made for each dig but this does not cover costs. The Committee will need to look at whether external sponsorship can be found or whether the charge needs to be materially higher.

**2019 AGM and Public Meeting:** These will again be held at Harpole Bowls Club, on 9<sup>th</sup> October. Our speakers at the Public Meeting are Steve Young & Fred Kay.

**External events:** CLASP participated in a number of external events. Special thanks are due to organisers Jim Aveling and Marcus Lewis (Daventry Museum's summer exhibition), Trevor Saxby (Milton Keynes History weekend) and Fred Kay (supporting MOLA in the organised tours of Borough Hill) plus all the CLASP members that provided support.

**CLASP Field Centre:** Many thanks to all that helped with the moving of the shelving and furniture from Daventry Library in May and the artefacts from Whitehall Farm, as well as for the painting and repair of the building. The

*cont page 5*

Centre was used in June for two successful archaeology taster courses attended by 23 people. A presentation on archaeology found in nearby HS2 excavation work is planned at the end of September.

**Online membership:** It is now possible to renew membership on the website.

**CLASP's Website and Facebook:** Gina Brown has been active in developing our FaceBook presence. We are looking for a Website Administrator following the retirement of Jeremy Cooper after many years in this role. Active use of these websites is important in extending our reach to potential new members.

**Key CLASP roles:** With the acquisition of the Field centre we are ambitious about extending our archaeological reach. However, we have much to do just to stand still, including the creation of records, ensuring the preservation of artefacts, publishing our research findings and finding ongoing sources of finance. We need more persons to help across all our activities, to mitigate the issue of a few persons being asked to take too much on. We hope members will be willing to help but we are also going to approach Volunteer Organisations.

**Key challenges:** The Organising Committee will have to be more proactive in addressing resourcing and in supporting the Trustees in fund raising.

**Rob Close**

---

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

At the time of going to press we still haven't had any information concerning the bone samples connected to the Post Roman and Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at Whitehall Farm which have gone off to be examined by Samantha Leggett at Cambridge University as part of her doctoral thesis. I'm sure when she has finished the analysis and her thesis is complete the scientific results of the isotope investigation on those burials will be made available to us and therefore those of you who are itching to know, like me must remain patient.

The 2019 fieldwork on the site of the Post Roman and Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Whitehall Farm revealed the location of twelve new graves of which nine were excavated. The existence of these graves was predicted from previous seasons of excavation where the distribution and layout of individual interments and the lack of burials in certain places was becoming evident, making the gaps in our overall plan obvious. It proved that more burials exist at the site and that the final burial ground totals will be considerably in excess

*cont page 6*

of those that were first contemplated. This brings the total number of known complete inhumations to twenty-eight with extraneous fragmentary skeletons, implying the burial ground population included at least thirty-five individuals. Most of the burials explored formed part of a linear row of graves aligned roughly on a north/south axis adjacent to a trackway previously observed through geophysical survey and confirmed by excavation. This is consistent with previous excavated evidence indicating that the 5th century AD interments were laid out according to a structured grid alignment similar to those recorded at Cannington, Somerset and Lankhills, Winchester. This has considerable ramifications for the way we should consider the site and its development through time not least because it points to a level of organisation and spatial control well beyond what we may have considered at the level of a family cemetery.

Our current understanding of the grave locations is indicative of four or five linear rows containing between eight and ten inhumations per line suggesting the presence of a sizable community within the locality and the probability that many more graves remain to be identified. The position of the individual graves also appeared to be evenly spaced along the row, respecting the overall pattern of the graveyard. Six of the inhumations associated with the row have a west/east alignment with their heads positioned at the west end of the grave, all of the skeletons being interred without grave goods. However, the addition of more archaeological evidence has increased the complexity of our interpretational model of the evolution of the site because it has raised challenges concerning general perceptions and aspects of the diagnostic profiles which had been constructed over the previous seasons of excavation.

Amongst the inhumations were some really interesting examples with one grave containing a young woman complete with perinatal foetus who had probably died in child birth whilst another contained a child. Yet another held the first instance of a deviant burial from the 5th century AD graveyard. Laid into the grave face down the skeleton was also minus its feet which may have been cut off prior to death. Part of the problem with this individual is how we interpret the social '*mores*' here. The body has been treated in a way that doesn't necessarily imply respect and even may reflect communal fears but this is set against the fact that the person involved has been interred in a properly constructed grave that is part of a wider organised distribution pattern.

*cont page 7*

These inhumations have far reaching implications for the rationale behind the day to day function and overall organisation, beliefs and values being expressed within the society of this period.

A further two skeletons probably of the same 5<sup>th</sup> century AD date were excavated with the position of their graves implying that they were lying in the neighbouring rows of graves which we had previously recorded. One of these individuals was buried with a personal iron knife placed at the hip whilst the other was interred with a range of grave goods, suggesting a person of status within that specific social grouping. The grave goods include a spear, shield boss and a copper alloy strap end with associated belt clasps located on the hip and shoulder. Both the spear and shield boss are consistent with a 5<sup>th</sup> century AD date and are completely different from the examples retrieved from later contexts.



Deviant burial during excavation

Several assumptions are now open to re-evaluation as we now appear to have a new variety of interment where the head is located at the west end of the grave but the burial also includes grave goods which is contrary to previous experience. These changing or different funerary expressions are perhaps indicating a multiplicity of approaches to belief and belief systems that are far more complex and arcane than we may have thought on first analysis. Once the newly excavated skeletons have been examined, we might have more information about the overall distribution of gender and age distributions than previously assumed.

A further burial aligned north/south associated with late 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> century interments was also excavated. This skeleton was male and had been buried with a spear and shield boss as had been recorded in the other burials of this date. It also demonstrated that potentially bodies from this period of interment can be found further to the north in the burial distribution than previously expected. A total of four burials from the late 6<sup>th</sup> to early 7<sup>th</sup> have now

*cont page 8*

been excavated but further work will be needed to establish the overall distribution of these burials. Interestingly they all appear to be laid in one linear row, head to foot, possibly across the entire burial ground. We are observing something significant in burial practice but its meaning remains obscure although I'm optimistic that one day we will understand the import of the practice.

This year's archaeological fieldwork on the Roman Posting Station of Bannaventa involved a dual methodological approach to investigating the chosen site of exploration. Our rationale included undertaking a second season of intensive metal detecting survey to follow on from a previous one in 2007. The metal detecting fieldwork focused on the field to the south of the scheduled area to help supplement and compliment previous findings in order to make them more statistically reliable. The field survey involved the associate CLASP member groups of N.A.R.C and the Phoenix metal detecting clubs who have traditionally worked with us on all such joint projects. In excess of two hundred ferrous and non-ferrous contact targets were located during the survey over a period of eight days and their provenance measured in by theodolite.

Amongst the small find assemblage, a total of 103 coins were retrieved of which three were relatively modern, being post 18<sup>th</sup> century whilst a further sixteen, although dating from the Roman period, proved to be illegible and unidentifiable other than the fact that generically they belonging to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. During preliminary analysis, by me, nearly all of the 84 remaining diagnostic Roman coins could be attributed to the later Roman period. These coins were mostly copper alloy *antoniniani* from the mid to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century or *nummus* from the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Their presence in the detected assemblage demonstrates economic activity in this extra mural area essentially from the reign of Gallienus (253-268 AD) to that of Honorius (393-423 AD) the last emperor to be recognised in Roman Britain. Two of the coins are worthy of noting in more detail; the first is probably the earliest datable coin found during the detecting survey and is probably a silver denarius of Julia Paula the wife of the emperor Elagabalus, dated to circa 219 AD, whilst the other is a silver siliqua of Gratian of the Urbs Roma type dating to 367-383



AD representing the final phases of economic activity. The two coins represent the extreme ends of the dating range of the retrieved assemblage.

A most interesting fact is that statistically two thirds of the coin assemblage



Siliqua of Gratian (367 - 383 AD)

from this year belonged to the 4<sup>th</sup> century whilst the other third is connected to the mid/late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. The emphasis on the number of 4<sup>th</sup> century coins could be construed as indicative of a more robust monetary system and an active commercial basis pertaining to this neighbourhood of Bannaventa, at

that time a sizable intensification of availability and usage on the preceding century. These findings compliment those made by CLASP during the 2007 season of fieldwork where, in the coin assemblage, those of the 4<sup>th</sup> century appear to be twice as common as those of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

Taken together the 245 attributable Roman coins from both surveys imply that although, as we know, the defended area enclosing the Posting Station itself was severely reduced in size in the late 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, it does not necessarily mean that occupation or economic life beyond the walled area was stifled or disappeared completely. The important point is that although the civic and administrative areas were restricted within the walled zone to only half the size of the earlier small town boundaries it suggests that the suburbs outside the focal area of the settlement, at least on the southern side of the site, not only survived and were continuously inhabited throughout the late Roman period but were in reality, contrary to perceived understanding, undergoing a widespread revival or intense new development in the latest phases of provincial rule. This implies a much more complex development and inter-relationship across the disparate neighbourhoods of Bannaventa than previously believed.

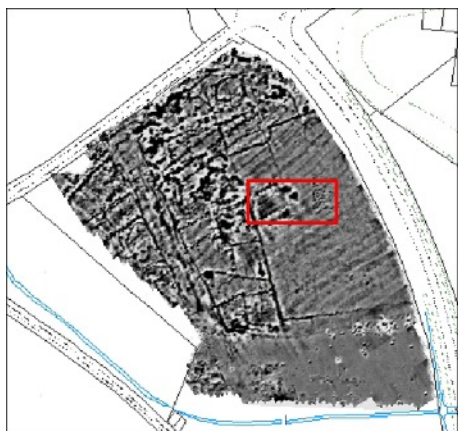
One might think this a minor point and although perhaps in the wider scheme of things a relatively small sized sample, the archaeological ramifications for

*cont page10*

similar posting station sites farther afield could be quite striking could we repeat the exercise and allow us, should similar evidence be sort and made available, to speculate as to whether this was a similar senario for other Posting Stations along Watling Street. If pursued, proved and ultimately, if supported by findings elsewhere, this would cause academia to reassess the very negative stance which is commonly held that these facilities where redolent of decline and decay in the later empire, particularly in Roman Britain. One hopes further future analysis of the coin assemblage to the north of Bannaventa based on random metal detecting finds will support the truth of this hypothetical assertion. Such findings also illustrate the importance of multi-disciplinary approaches to project-based fieldwork to reveal hidden possibilities and that deeply held assumptions may be open to re-assessment.

Amongst the rest of the metal detecting assemblage four Roman brooches were retrieved, three in a fragmentary state whilst the fourth fibula was a complete example of a fan tail form which included its iron fastening pin. Two brooch plates from other fibulae were also discovered; all of these items probably date to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. A steel yard weight and a lead weight hint at economic activity whilst various other studs and decorated pieces need to be cleaned before being analysed. Taken overall the metal detecting survey was efficiently and effectively carried out and the results will definitely improve our understanding of the chronological and economic picture of this extra mural neighbourhood of Bannaventa.

In conjunction with the metal detecting survey two trial trenches were excavated, initially by mechanical digger, on two anomalies located during an earlier geophysical survey of the field (see photo 3 contained within red lined area). It was hoped that we would be able to establish the existence and character of these features and determine the nature of the relationship between them should this have been archaeologically evident in the stratigraphy.



Location of geophysical targets for archaeological excavation

The second methodological approach to

*cont page 11*

this year's fieldwork was to explore geophysical anomalies observed in the area during a previous survey and to extend our understanding of them as far as possible. Underpinning the rationale for undertaking the trial trenching of these anomalies was a presumption that we would prove the archaeological voracity of these features. Further, we would hopefully ascertain whether any pits indicated the actual presence of a possible distribution of burials comprising a discrete but as of yet unknown grave yard whose location was separated from the known Roman cemetery that lay further to the north outside the southern gate of Bannaventa itself. It was also important to see if those same anomalies were spatially related to the geophysical foot print of what may have been a significant structure that lies almost immediately to the west. The building, perhaps with a religious function, aligned like the pits in roughly west/east orientation within this extra mural area of the Posting Station opens up a range of possibilities. The potential of investigating a sacred site perhaps with Christian overtones with associated burial affinities was not to be overlooked. At this point one should also sound a measure of caution in that sometimes too much speculation on the basis of too little substantiated evidence can lead to disappointment and re-evaluation in the light of subsequent events and assimilation of the actual facts.

Excavation revealed that one set of these geophysical anomalies did in deed constitute a cohesive series of pits but these features did not reveal any hallmarks of a discrete grouping of burials. Unfortunately, when four of the pits were excavated it became obvious that these features were not graves. Indeed, it was pretty apparent that beyond the fact these anomalies had been originally created by human agency their meaning and function are not readily discernible. The only common factors apparent during excavation were that all the pits were about a metre in circumference, up to half a metre in depth and that they contained concentrated fills of compacted gravel (20-49mm) which may or may not have formed a lining within the feature. The only finds from the four features were a long bone from a large animal most likely a cow and two sherds of residual pottery as yet unidentified but possibly Saxon or medieval in date.

Forming a uniform, coherent and discrete distribution, the 'pits' do not appear to be either tree bowls left after felling and removal or possible exploratory gravel pits by people trying to identify a source of raw ballast material because there is no evidence of a gravel layer within the vicinity. The rationale

*cont page 12*

behind their creation cannot be currently inferred but at least we have confirmed the existence of these anomalies indicated through geophysical survey and ruled them out as potential burials.

The second trial trench connected to the location of a possible outline of a building was much more informative if not a little intriguing in the range and complexity of the features and finds that were made. Our excavation of this anomaly was intended to bisect the footprint of the structure in order to try and identify the nature of the building, establish its actual existence and explain any constructional detail and general layout if it could be observed. A sub floor compacted surface was revealed during stripping along with dark linear alignments consistent with the position of timber sill beams that would have supported a timber superstructure most likely of a large timber hall or barn. The existence of the residue of an internal gravel floor suggests the former rather than the later interpretation. Whether this was connected to industrial activity is still to be decided although the presence of hammerscale in adjacent stratigraphy might imply an association. The presence of Roman pottery in the contexts connected with these features affirms the general date of the structure.

On the north side of the building was a substantial pit which on excavation contained a significant amount of Roman pottery and the head and possible back bone of a horse as well as the entire skeleton of a dog. Initial on-site examination of the '*samian*' sherds from the pit imply a pre Antonine date for its origin and a late 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD date for infilling and going out of use. We do not know at present the relationship of the feature to the dating of the building or whether this is likely or unlikely. The pit itself also appears to have cut an earlier grave as the right leg of a person was observed during the excavation of the substantial pit and hopefully once we have obtained a licence, we will excavate the burial and any possible associated burials next year. Therefore, we have found at least one burial but not in the place we expected and located a structure where we hoped we might; the difficulty will be in understanding the relationship between the disparate features and their individual chronology.

In a further enlargement to the northern end of the trial trench on its western side and below the possible sill beam discolouration a series of three crema-

*cont page 13*

tions were excavated. These cremations obviously predate the later building, were deposited in a related series of pits and although they have not yet been examined, the recovery of a fragment of a jaw bone suggests one of them is an infant's cremation whilst the inclusion of an iron artefact in another could be interpreted as possibly being indicative of an adult. Each cremation was secreted in its own pit but no evidence of any associated cremation urns was retrieved although Roman pottery was removed from the upper levels of these features, implying a 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD deposition. These are the first cremations that we have excavated and they appear to coincide with the reappearance of this practice during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.

The quality and range of the features observed and assemblages recovered have highlighted many new areas of research and interpretation and have profoundly redirected our hypothetical approach to the function and rational behind the occupation of the area through the Roman period. We are also more aware of the truncated and eroded state of the archaeological stratigraphy on site and the difficulties of excavating here to produce meaningful good quality results.

---

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

At our AGM we shared 'Memories of 20 years' since Harpole Heritage Group started and heard about 'Harpole Charities'. The talk about 'The Ladies of the Air Transport' during the war told us of how much women contributed to the war effort. We have also heard about the 'History of Abington Park', we are so lucky to have such a beautiful park in our town.

A small group of our members visited Delapre Abbey to see the rooms not usually open to the public and visited the cellars. We have also enjoyed our annual Summer Lunch - we always look forward to the delicious puddings.

Jennifer Smith.

---

## 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
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 Project	Rob Close	07740 039467

---