



# CLASP

## Community Landscape & Archæology Survey Project NEWSLETTER



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

Charity No 1111668

Winter 2023

## Note from the Chairman

**I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our volunteers a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.**

### AGM

Thank you to those that made it to the AGM in Harpole on 25<sup>th</sup> October. We had about 25 attendees. Numbers are definitely down on previous years. It would be great to see more next year.

The AGM does not take very long but is a necessary part of the governance of a charity. This year it lasted less than 20 minutes and was followed by tea and lovely cakes and then of course Steve Young spoke about the recent dig.

The key points from the Chairman's address were:

*cont page 2*

- That we are about to sign a lease to stay at the Field Centre for a further year.
- That the cost of the lease and utilities is £2000 a year plus and therefore we do need to generate new sources of revenue if we are to avoid depleting our Reserves. We do need to relaunch a Fund Raising Committee. Volunteers would be most appreciated.
- The CLASP 100 Club does provide additional income and the more members join up the better.
- As a contingency against having to move from the Field Centre beyond 2024 (because of rent increases or because the Landowner no longer wants tenants) we do need to test our ability to move some of our artefacts to the County's Archaeological Resource Centre.

The Chairman expressed thanks to all those that take on specific roles for CLASP, especially the Trustees for taking on additional responsibilities. He thanked Marcus Lewis who is retiring as a Trustee and asked all members to consider becoming Trustees

The Chairman also summarised the 2022-23 Accounts. The key points were:

- There was a net surplus for the year of £1134, but this considerably overstated the underlying financial position as there was a generous donation of £700 from one member for the analysis of bones, we received £700 net from a Farmer for one-off geophysics research and the annual insurance premium was paid outside the accounting period.

- CLASP has Total Reserves of over £22,000, but most of these funds have been given to us for specific purposes. Our unrestricted funds amount to just £4600

**Rob Close**

**Chairman**

## **The View from the Archaeological Director Winter 2023**

My main focus for this report of CLASP fieldwork for inclusion in this newsletter is to outline and describe the approach, process and preliminary archaeological findings of the excavation undertaken in late August and early September of the southern extra mural area and related suburb of the Roman Posting Station at Bannaventa (Whilton Lodge) on Watling Street, Northamptonshire. This work is part of a series of ongoing investigations into the character of the settlement and the status of the surviving archaeological stratigraphy. It follows on from previous trial trenching undertaken by CLASP to help understand and interpret the development and chronology of the anomalies observed here across the landscape during the large-scale geophysical exploration of the settlement and its immediate environment during the last few years.

The methodological approach chosen was the placement and excavation of six trial trenches divided between three archaeologically defined areas of interest. Each trial trench was dug using a mechanical digger within the field known as Manshead to the south of the focal location of the Posting

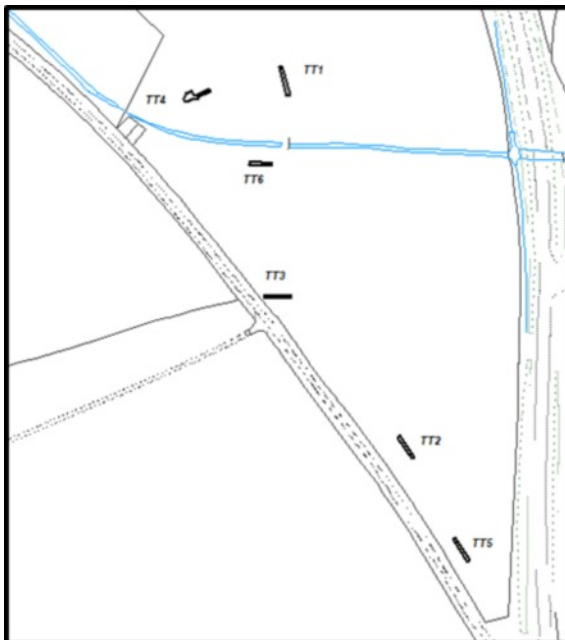
Station in Great Shawney field which lies to the north. Each trial trench was approximately 15m long by 2m wide, three of them had roughly North/West to South/East alignments, while a further two were aligned West to East and the last one South/West to North/East. All individual alignments were selected in preference to the particular archaeological demands and lines of enquiry to be followed and the reasoned belief that these choices would provide the maximum information available for analysing a particularly selected spot.

This locale divides naturally into two regions of elevated ground sited above and below the floodplain and water course that flows through the field. The larger more northerly element of the field for purposes of clarity in this commentary is best described as Upper Manshead whilst the smaller southern triangular shaped section is here referred to as Lower Manshead. Both regions are not only distinguishable because of their location on the higher ground either side of the floodplain of the water course but also because they represent relatively different functions for the archaeological evidence associated with the site. The Upper Manshead zone reflects the character of the Southern Extra Mural area which was dependant and supportive of the function and role of the Posting Station whereas the landscape contained in the Lower Manshead area relates to the positioning and development of an independent self-contained suburb to the south of the urban centred settlement.

The archaeological rationale behind the individual positioning of these trial trenches for 2023 was very dependant upon the specific archaeological nature of the areas within which they were located. Firstly, each trial trench placement was predicated on establishing the context for an interpretative narrative of the surviving evidence in relation to an overall role, function and wider

understanding of that specific area of the site. Secondly, the placement decision was based on the requirement to ascertain through archaeological investigation the status of the surviving stratigraphy in order to inform future field work, research priorities and to have a better understanding of what has been lost. The first zone included the locations of the two most southerly trial trenches (ascribed as Trial Trench 2 & 5) in the Lower Manshead region. These were chosen particularly because of their direct association with the geophysical anomalies attendant on the Roman suburb situated here. Elucidating the actual character and layout of these element of the site beyond the positioning of the geophysical anomalous enclosures and road alignments previously observed is central to understanding any domestic related archaeological remains.

#### 1: Manshead Location of Trial trenches



Next came the area connected to the location of the central two trial trenches a little further to the north but still within the confines of the area I've designated Lower Manshead (ascribed as Trial Trench 2 & 5). These Trial Trenches were placed at the top of the elevated ground above and at the bottom of the floodplain adjacent to the Brook situated in the open ground between the densely occupied Southern Extramural area and the southern suburb. The reason behind the selection of their position was to try and find the remains of the unclear alignment of the Roman Watling Street as it made its approach towards the small town between these elements of the wider settlement from the south. Any evidence of the carriageway would be of particular interest as the alignment linkage across the floodplain between Upper and Lower Manshead is not evident in the geophysical survey even though it must have existed as the road is traceable through the extra mural area in the geophysical data. Identification of the alignment would also clarify where and how the great road ran through the southern suburb as well as potentially supply more information concerning the way Roman Watling Street was constructed.

Our last two Trial Trenches (ascribed as Trial Trench 1 & 4) occupied positions in a third zone on the elevated slopes above the brook floodplain in the Upper Manshead section of the field. As with the trial trenches located in the suburb, the archaeological rationale centred on the potential evidence for domestic or civic related structures and the chronological detail they might impart, also looking for any sign of a planned layout as well as providing any indication that could confirm the function or *raison d'être* of any conceivable edifice. The most westerly trial trench was located in an area covered with an extensive and dense spread of worked and faced stone blocks from a possible

substantial structure the purpose of which is difficult to ascertain. Such a dense distribution of building stone is an unusual occurrence at Bannaventa and is unheard of from anywhere else across the site that has been subjected to archaeological inspection. A little further to the east along the slope the second trial trench in Upper Manshead was utilised to examine an area with a heavy concentration of pottery. The assemblage retained during last year's intensive fieldwalking survey showed an unusually high proportion of Samian Ware vessels amongst the fine ware collection and appeared to be worthy of a closer examination in an attempt to locate the feature or building from which this material emanated.

Having discussed the rationale behind the fieldwork it will be useful to deliberate on each archaeological intervention in the order of their excavation. Trial Trench 5, the most southerly one to be excavated, revealed several archaeological features indicating very strongly that a reasonable amount of archaeological stratigraphy from the Roman period connected to the suburb had survived. Analysis of the features encountered during the excavation of the Trial Trench disclosed the existence of a relatively broad enclosure ditch, a smaller unrelated drainage ditch, a possible bloomery furnace base and a series of posthole alignments. The latter implies a series of timber fence boundary configurations. No apparent buildings or structural elements of a domestic nature were observed although the remains indicate extensive activity over time throughout the Roman period.

The broad enclosure ditch which has an east/west alignment produced a significant amount of predominately coarse ware vessels characterised in the main by greyware sherds. These included a variety of forms such as jars and a flanged bowl. Judging by the lack of abrasion to the broken pots and the large size of the sherds, the material

probably reflected a single deposition in this section of the enclosure ditch as it became filled in and went out of use rather than a piecemeal longstanding accumulation as the enclosure ditch silted up. Initial analyses of the pottery assemblage place a date of the late 2nd to mid-3rd century AD for this material, signifying a 'terminus post quem' for the enclosure ditch when it went out of use at some time in the 3rd century AD. Logic suggests, based on this data, that it would make the original construction of the enclosure feature earlier, with the most likely timing candidate being somewhere between the late 1st to early 2nd century AD.

## **2: Trial Trench 5 The Fill of the Enclosure ditch**



The existence of a significant feature datable to this Roman period in the suburb area, echoed by the geophysical anomalies and presence of an extensive distribution of Early Roman pottery found in the plough soil during fieldwalking, implies an origin of the suburb in the Post Conquest and early provincial development era. This probably means that the laying out and the organisation of the area as part of



the wider settlement could be assigned to the late Flavian or Trajanic period. However, it should also be noted that a number of residual sherds of the conquest and transitional period (Mid 1st – Late 1st) have been retrieved in the area and the rationale behind their presence is not easy to discern although it is unlikely to be connected to a coherent settlement plan.

Besides the pottery found in the fill of the enclosure ditch a small Roman glass bead dated to early 2nd to mid-3rd century AD was retrieved. Decorated with an engraved spiral on the surface of the bead it was most likely part of a necklace. It is of interest as it provides an insight into decorative and fashionable attitudes of female local inhabitants, a cultural aspect of everyday life at Bannaventa which is not always accessible or easily explored in the material assemblages found at the site.

### 3: The Glass bead from Trial Trench 5



Very little diagnostically datable pottery was found in the drainage ditch although the difference in alignment between it and the adjacent enclosure ditch implies a different period of activity for its creation. Immediately to the south of the drainage ditch is a possible bloomery furnace base which

is orientated on an east-west alignment with the flue at the east end. It is difficult to be sure of its authenticity as the feature is much degraded and eroded. Nevertheless, the feature does have a remarkable similarity to similar bloomery furnace bases previously excavated by CLASP and recorded near Thrupp Lodge to the north of Bannaventa. The possibility of metal working activity in this area is further supported by the presence of slag in the immediate area of the feature. An interesting supplementary fact about the furnace base was that during excavation a large sherd of a greyware Nene Valley indented scale beaker appeared to have been placed or laid on the floor of the furnace. Whether this implies a ritualistic statement concerning the end of the furnaces use or is mere happenstance is open to question. The final features examined in Trial Trench 5 appeared to be a series of small post holes that probably can be inferred as forming and representing fence alignments for property boundaries dividing the suburb plots in the Roman period.

Trial Trench 2 was the antithesis of the previous one. Although located in the heart of the geophysical anomalies associated with the southern suburb, no features were observed during the excavation. Some discolouration of the subsoil was evident, suggesting the last ephemeral vestiges of the anomalies picked out by the geophysical survey, but these were neither substantial enough or clear enough to record in a meaningful way. However, the lack of findings is important in that it demonstrates the inconsistent survival of the overall archaeological stratigraphy across the field, highlighting the real potential for significant damage having been done to elements of the archaeological heritage across the landscape of the wider site.

The trial trench here occupies the most elevated position within the putative eastern half of the civilian suburb. It is also situated near to a depression or hollow reminiscent of

a quarry next to the present field boundary situated alongside the modern road on the western side of Lower Manshead field. This depression probably epitomises and could be interpreted as implying the location of a late 18th or early 19th century sand pit. The depression aligns well with and mirrors the setting of a series of similar sand pit extractions visible on Lidar and visually in the adjacent field on the western side of the modern roadway. It has to be recognised that sand or gravel extraction in relatively modern times has had a significant impact on the archaeology of the area removing or obscuring features and contexts. However, this elevated position has also suffered from levelling to some extent by modern agricultural practice over the last forty years which has resulted in the ploughing out and eroding away of any surviving archaeological stratigraphy.

The only material recovered from Trial Trench 2 was a severely eroded Roman coin of the 3rd or 4th century AD and some residual Roman sherds from the top soil. Amongst these was a decorated sherd from a Samian bowl (Dragendoff 37). Interestingly a very suggestive fragmentary stem of a clay pipe consistent with an early 19th century date of the sand pit extraction was recovered from the plough soil here, although equally this could have been lost by a ploughman or agricultural worker whilst cultivating the field.

Moving the analysis and interpretation on into the next area of activity further to the north where Trial Trenches 3 & 6 were located in Lower Manshead, the findings provided some definitive answers to the questions raised by the archaeological rationale behind the intention to excavate here. Trial Trench 3 was the most revealing although it contained no trace of any archaeological stratification particularly in respect of a possible alignment of the Roman Watling Street as it crossed the floodplain of the brook to

rise to the top of the slope upon which the southern suburb stands.

However, the excavation of the trench revealed that any potential archaeology had been destroyed by sand extraction at some time in the late 18th or early 19th century, a finding which provides further supporting evidence of a level of damage to the wider Roman site as already experienced Trial Trench 2. Subsequently this quarry had been filled in with a deposit of heavy 'boulder' clay after it had gone out of use, most likely in an effort to enable agricultural activity to recommence in the field. The southern edge of the quarry was quite visible along the entire length of the trial trench and it was obvious that further archaeological exploration was unnecessary. Fortunately, although excavation generated a complete absence of finds, a penny of George III dating from 1806 was found through metal detection in the makeup of the fill. This was incredibly helpful in supporting the interpretative analysis applied to trenches 2 & 3, particularly in providing a chronological timeframe connected to the quarrying which so far has been speculative.

**4: George III Penny found in the clay fill layer Trial Trench 3**



Unfortunately, Trial Trench 6 was archaeologically disappointing producing no physical sign for a carriageway or any evidence of activity and features at all for the Roman period. Our inability to confirm the actual alignment of Watling Street was surprising, particularly as the positioning of the two trenches had been designed to have an extended overlap across the most likely area, a placement designed to ideally limit our chances of missing the road way. Providentially, subsequent to the back filling of the trial trenches and the scarifying of the field for cultivation, I was afforded an opportunity to observe the probable position of the actual carriageway which unexpectedly seems to follow an alignment slightly further to the east. I was able to observe, follow and record the position of a dense linear gravel spread in the plough soil on the elevated slope consistent with the width of a significant roadway. I was able to confirm this by reviewing & reassessing the Lidar data. Hopefully further archaeological excavation will confirm the correctness of this interpretation in the future.

This year's third area of fieldwork lay in the Extra Mural area of Upper Manshead centred on Trial Trenches 1 & 4. These interventions had more positive outcomes with one trench producing a specific archaeological context and the other generating a range of evidence and stratigraphy of Roman date. Trial Trench 1 contained only one discernible feature; a cremation urn placed within a contemporary larger pit. The pit contained a fill of organic material and some fragments of wood but no other artifacts. Based on the form and fabric of the urn it could be hypothesised the cremation dated from between the immediate pre conquest period to the earliest decades of imperial rule.

## 5. Lifting the cremation Trial Trench 1



The deposition of a cremation here is not altogether unexpected as a human skull fragment was retrieved from the slope during metal detecting investigation some years ago. This cremation echoes the three cremations and a burial of two ladies from further north in the field. This could be interpreted as highlighting the existence of a disparate funerary activity not previously recognised across the entire area of the Upper Manshead, thereby possibly demonstrating the initial function of the zone prior to the establishment of the Roman Extra Mural settlement. This could also account for the diffuse scatter of pre-conquest sherds in the fieldwalking assemblage.

This interpretation apart and surprisingly, given the heavy distribution of field walked pottery and particularly the heightened number of fine wares such as Samian at this locale, no structural remains or other features were located. The reason behind this unintelligible phenomenon may well reside in the topographical context of the trench's location which had an alignment that follows the severe

slope of the ground as it descends down towards the brook. Modern ploughing, the subsequent flattening of the slope profile and the natural tendency for material in the soil horizon to move in a downward direction through a process of solifluction may well account for the misleading distribution of the spread of the assemblage. It appears the origin of this material is more likely to be associated with as yet undetected features on the flatter landscape beyond the top of the slope to the north that has been displaced into the plough soil and moved further south.

Trial Trench 4 was the most archaeologically active of all the trenches and displayed a complex level of activity in relation to the Roman period. Unlike anywhere else in either the southern Extra Mural area or the suburb, the surface of the field here is covered by a dense spread of roughly worked limestone consistent with the existence of a structure or building. Removal of the topsoil revealed the remains of wall foundations and rubble surfaces the layout of which was difficult to interpret. Given the size of the area open during the excavation it was not possible to assign a clear relationship between any of the wall foundations and rubble spreads. However, the distinct impression given was that these features might represent different phases of development of a building or structure.

A broad assemblage of pottery was recovered from the trench, containing a significant number of sherds from fine ware vessels. Several vessels from the associated contexts of the area contained enough sherds to be able to reconstruct the profiles of some forms of both greyware and oxidised wares. An initial analysis of the pottery assemblage hints strongly of a mid-3rd to late 4th century AD date for the most dynamic period of activity here. However, the presence of significant 2nd to early 3rd residual material could support the possibility of an earlier phase of construction for some of the features. As the

meaning of the data obtained still lacks a degree of clarity concerning the function and form of the structure, it leaves the overall interpretation open to a level of conjecture concerning the use and function of these structural features.

**6: Stone foundations found in Trial Trench 5**



Currently the findings are open to a variety of interpretations, the favourite hypotheses, given the range of domestic pottery connected to these contexts as well as the possible survival of at least one sub floor level and robber trenches, implies the existence of a house. The residence would have been a noteworthy building in the Extra Mural hinterland of Bannaventa as stone edifices like this have not as yet been encountered anywhere else across the settlement. A second way of reading the archaeological evidence is to see the stone foundations as part of a base for a bridge pier and riveted terracing for raising the carriageway above the marshy ground of the floodplain in order to ease the access of wheeled traffic up the steep approach slope into the Extra Mural area. The final possibility, which is less probable than the other two, might relate the foundations to a sophisticated drainage system constructed to manage the water flow of the brook to help



maintain the passage of traffic at the ford. Hopefully a further open area excavation of a larger area next year will supply a definitive answer.

A total of 54 Roman coins were found this year of which one was 1st/2nd century in date, 19 were from the 3rd century and another 23 could be attributed to the 4th century. The remaining 11 coins were so eroded that they could not be dated any closer than to the 3rd or 4th century AD. Amongst the coin assemblage an issue of Constans is worthy of comment as it provides context for historical developments in late Roman Britain. The nummus is a propaganda piece dating to 348-350 AD and depicts the arrival of the emperor onto the island in the wake of the assassination of his brother Constantine II and his victory in the civil war between them. Constans needed to establish his rule in Britannia which necessitated his crossing of the channel in the middle of winter to secure the unruly and probably military vulnerable province from hostile barbarian forces. On the obverse is the diademed head of the emperor whilst the reverse depicts the Christian emperor Constans standing on the prow of a galley with the motto 'FEL TEMP REPARATIO' – the restorer of the golden age.

It demonstrates the extent to which Britain was still viewed as a remote if not semi mythical place on the edge of empire and civilisation. The pacification of the island and its return to the imperial fold reflected well politically on the conquering young emperor Constans. This period also most likely signals the beginning of the end of a 'golden age' for the province after its support for Constantine I and his house had brought prosperity as well as social, financial and political rewards, much of which must have disappeared after the disastrous defeat of the Magnentian revolt in 351 AD that resulted in wholesale culling of the British elite by Constantius II and the enforced

marginalization of the province in the late 4th century from the centre of power.

Amongst the other small finds recovered were artifacts that shed some light on certain social aspects of everyday life for the inhabitants of Roman Bannaventa. The three included in this account are objects made out of bronze alloy. Each one is worthy of note as they represent individual decorative choices that personalised common everyday functional objects; they are small statement pieces that provide insight into the mind of their owners.

### 7: Metal detected small finds



The bronze alloy stud is part of a horse harness which would have been used to secure a piece of narrow leather found in bridles and breast collars. The metal discs are called '*phalerae*' and can be distinguished by an integral attachment on the underside for fastening as well as holding narrow leather strips. These studs could be highly decorated but this one is a basic example; however, it would undoubtedly have been burnished so it gleamed on the horse's harness. Its existence also underpins the importance of the horse in daily life in the local environment which is seldom seen witnessed in the archaeological record. *Phalerae* may be uncommon but they

are not rare and interestingly other examples were retrieved in the Whitehall Farm Villa excavation. Only these examples were rectangular in shape and undecorated with internal integral attachments.

Our second small find is a bronze alloy finger ring which has been crushed and broken whilst in the plough soil. The rouletted pattern is geometric and intricate in design and is of a size and thickness to imply it is a woman's ring. More detailed observation shows a central raised band flanked by hatching suggesting the design is embossed rather than cast. As with the first object the ring provides us with insights in this case into the fashion and personal adornment mind set of women living at the site.

The final artifact is a little bit of a mystery and I'm not absolutely sure of its role or function. It has a nicely decorated head and a hafted shaft at the other end to affix it into a mounting. The bent shaft is intentional and was part of the production process as opposed to post use damage. This makes it highly unlikely that the object could have been a hair or clothes pin or such like, although if attached to a beam or wall it would make a fantastic hook for hanging a wide range of items upon. An activity which has a surprisingly everyday modern day feel to it. All of the three small finds are not easily chronologically placed but a date range between the late 2nd to early 4th Century AD would seem most appropriate.

Hopefully all this information will be integrated into the broader findings concerning the southern extramural and suburb area of the Posting Station for a CLASP zoom talk in the first instance and then a lecture to Rugby Archaeological Society in Rugby in the New Year in early February 2024. Thanks again for your support and enthusiasm I'm sure next year will bring forth some excellent opportunities for fieldwork and a resumption of

the traditionally timed publication of the CLASP Newsletter in the late Spring and late Autumn.

### Jennifer Smith Harpole Heritage

In May we had our AGM and it is with regret that a decision was made that Harpole Heritage Group would close in May, 2024. We have found it difficult to get people to volunteer lately, but we are all advancing in years.

I decided to retire after 25 years, having been secretary since the group started and the committee also decided to retire. Most having been on the committee for a long time.

In June we had a presentation from Terry Whelham from the "War Graves Commission". July brought Doreen Addicott who told us about the "History of Weedon Depot".

August started off with an "Afternoon Tea" and John Pomfret, gave a detailed presentation of "Railways in Northamptonshire" and John Perkins told us about our "Puritan History"

We always learn a lot from these talks and I for one will miss them.

We look forward to more interesting speakers over the next few months, before we close, and hope that someone in the future will start up another group.

## List of Contacts for CLASP Associations

Organisation	Contact	Tel
Flore Heritage Society	Jay Phelps	01327 340282
Brington History Society	Ian Dexter	01604 771353
Whitehall Farm Roman	Norman Garnett	01604 755479
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

## **SUBSCRIPTION REMINDER**

Although CLASP's financial year has changed from *1<sup>st</sup> Sept to Aug 31<sup>st</sup>* to *1<sup>st</sup> April to March 31<sup>st</sup>*, the Treasurer is happy for members to continue paying their subscriptions in September or at the AGM.

If you wish to rejoin CLASP, details of how to make a payment can be found on the CLASP Website. If you have already rejoined, please accept my sincere apologies for this reminder.

Julia Johns, Membership Secretary

### **CLASP**

Reg Charity No 1111667

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**NB: By completing this form and submitting it, you are giving your consent to CLASP to store the information you provide, and to use it within CLASP.**

Membership to CLASP is payable annually. If you do not wish to pay by Bank Transfer, your subscription (£10.00) may be paid by cheque and sent to the address below. Please make cheques payable to CLASP. In order to keep our records up to date, please complete ALL the sections below whether you are a new member or renewing your existing membership and, **please return this form with your payment.** Thank you.

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