Community Landscape & Archaeology Survey Project Newsletter

Website

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Winter 2025

Charity No 1111667

Chairman's update,

Wishing you all a Happy 2026

Thank you to everyone who came to the AGM in October.

My focus at that was on our financial situation. Our wish to remain at the Field centre for the next several years leads to roughly a £3000 p.a. drain on our financial reserves. We constantly look for grants for specific projects, but if anyone has a good idea about a fund-raising event then please do tell us.

Steve writes in this Newsletter about the comprehensive geophysics survey of Whitehall Farm in the second half of last year. More geophysics will take place this year. We now have quite a large team that does the walking and/or lays out the grids. For those of you that have not participated you will always be made welcome. Please let me know if you want to get involved. No prior experience necessary. There is nothing so refreshing as being out in the countryside with friends when the sun is shining.

Rob

The View from the Archaeological Director. Late Winter 2025/6

Through the Autumn and early Winter months CLASP volunteers have been involved in some interesting and archaeologically informative fieldwork exploration. The central venture involved here became possible because of the archaeological training opportunities offered earlier in the year. The project was predicated on the enhanced capability afforded by the increased number of proficient volunteers available to undertake fieldwork. This core dynamic enabled the most to be made of other purely opportune archaeological factors available to us. These were accessibility to a site, relevance to previous research undertaken by the charity and the contextual importance of the work to our understanding of the extant archaeology work previously completed.

Put simply, boosting capacity allows CLASP to broaden its aspirational outcomes and widen its overall archaeological horizons, underlying the range and type of fieldwork carried out by active members. CLASP has developed the resource potential to build on our ability to apply specific methodological approaches towards investigatory situations in two fundamental areas of activity. It permits us to work on a scale consistent with the archaeology landscapes available and to turn around projects within often proscribed timelines to guarantee enhanced research outcomes - not a bad achievement considering the challenges facing organisations like ours. This enables us to better engage with the restraints that increasingly define rurally based archaeology nowadays. Arguably, amplifying capacity also augments CLASP's aptitude to provide a more holistic and objective approach to investigations of period-based landscapes on a professional level that improve on previous observations and elucidates more clearly our collective understanding. Our capability continues to be at a state of effectiveness which is to be admired more than decried after twenty odd years of existence.

The core of the initiative was a relatively large-scale geophysical survey, for an archaeological community-based group, of the hinterland of a Roman rural settlement. As pointed out in the last newsletter it focuses on the area surrounding and immediately beyond the structural domestic centre of the site. Pointedly, it enables us to address the contextual aspects of the Roman estate subject to the daily rhythm of agricultural life in that period, hopefully permitting a greater understanding of the evolution of the agricultural regime practised during the existence of the settlement.

A zone covering 30 hectare of the landscape immediately surrounding the Romano-British villa complex at Whitehall Farm, Nether Heyford was chosen. I felt it represented the best option for fieldwork investigation given the research priorities afforded to us through the previous archaeological exploration carried out at the site. Even in today's archaeological world the structural elements of a Roman villa will often command the attention of fieldwork practitioners rather than the prosaic investigation of the context within which they lay but from which they grew and prospered.

It is important to note the extent of the geophysical survey area will not necessarily echo the boundaries concomitant with the estate periphery as this is extremely difficult to determine given the limitations of our understanding. Systematic fieldwork, however, does provide an opportunity to develop a hypothetical investigative model

for identifying where the limits of the estate may have been located at least initially in this instance at Whitehall Farm. We are obviously constrained by the lack of written sources and by a long-held assumption in Roman studies that major topographical features in the landscape were strong potential indicators of property boundaries for defining areas of control and influence. The challenge therefore is to develop an objective profile based on the provable characteristics of the neighbouring archaeological evidence to determine a hypothetical theory that can challenge or sustain the accuracy or usefulness of such a traditional academic approach.

Topographical features have become the standard substitute for unravelling the undoubted complexities of the reality of the situation on the ground. However, our inability to account for the borderline interfaces between settlements does not necessarily hinder site interpretation although it obscures any useful comprehension of the spatial continuum in the historical, social and economic sense of the broader landscape. Understanding the extent and influence of property boundaries as ownership profiles across the wider environment allows our understanding of the story of the countryside locale to be explored more meaningfully.

As expected, the geophysical survey detected a palimpsest of observable archaeological anomalies across the 300 individual grids (30x30m) investigated in the fields at Whitehall Farm. Four fifths of the area explored had never been subject to geophysical reconnoitring before, whilst the remaining portion had been studied in the past by Northants Archaeology and MOLA Northants between 1999–2000 and 2019-2020. I included the previously surveyed area in the project to provide a control body of data against which our practitioners could view and compare, in part, their newly generated material. This helps build confidence in their activities and in the overall findings produced from the survey. The duplicated coverage only accounted for 18.5% of the total area surveyed, enough to allow us to undertake meaningful fieldwork but not enough to detrimentally affect the point of carrying out the entire work programme in the first place.

The many anomalies observed in the fieldwork data are not difficult to characterise and can be easily interpreted in the light of other examples observed elsewhere in the archaeological record on other sites. They are also significant enough to offer an opportunity to establish the character, nature and profile of the geophysical anomalies themselves representing as they do features connected to the working and management of the adjacent wider estate. We now possess an 'archaeological signature' of the buried stratigraphy that exemplifies the physical aspects of the agricultural regime at Whitehall Farm during the Roman period.

In the last newsletter I commented at length on the organisation and methodological approach chosen to acquire the field data. Since then, I made an initial assessment of the geophysical survey evidence in my presentation at the AGM and consequently a more detailed interpretation of those findings and their meaning in the first of this year's CLASP zoom lectures. However, in this second newsletter instalment I will provide a more definitive review of the findings, the nuances of investigation, and what they reveal about the core of the Roman estate as it developed through time.

Consequently, continuing analysis now allows us to discuss and comment with greater accuracy on the geophysical anomalies found. A variety of features can be observed in the survey data ranging from extensive lines of pit alignments to a ladder enclosure, possible specialised farming infrastructure features, villa boundary enclosure, paddocks, field systems internal estate road and trackways. Many of these anomalies represent the physical constructs we should expect to find as part of the rural structure of the different phases of settlement from pre villa configurations to l

ate wing corridor villa estate. Their presence enables us to explore and speculate on the relationships between and distribution across the landscape of these diagnostic topographies allowing us to model development and influence in the workings of the estate. The rationale and function of each form highlighting their potential historical role throughout the Roman era.

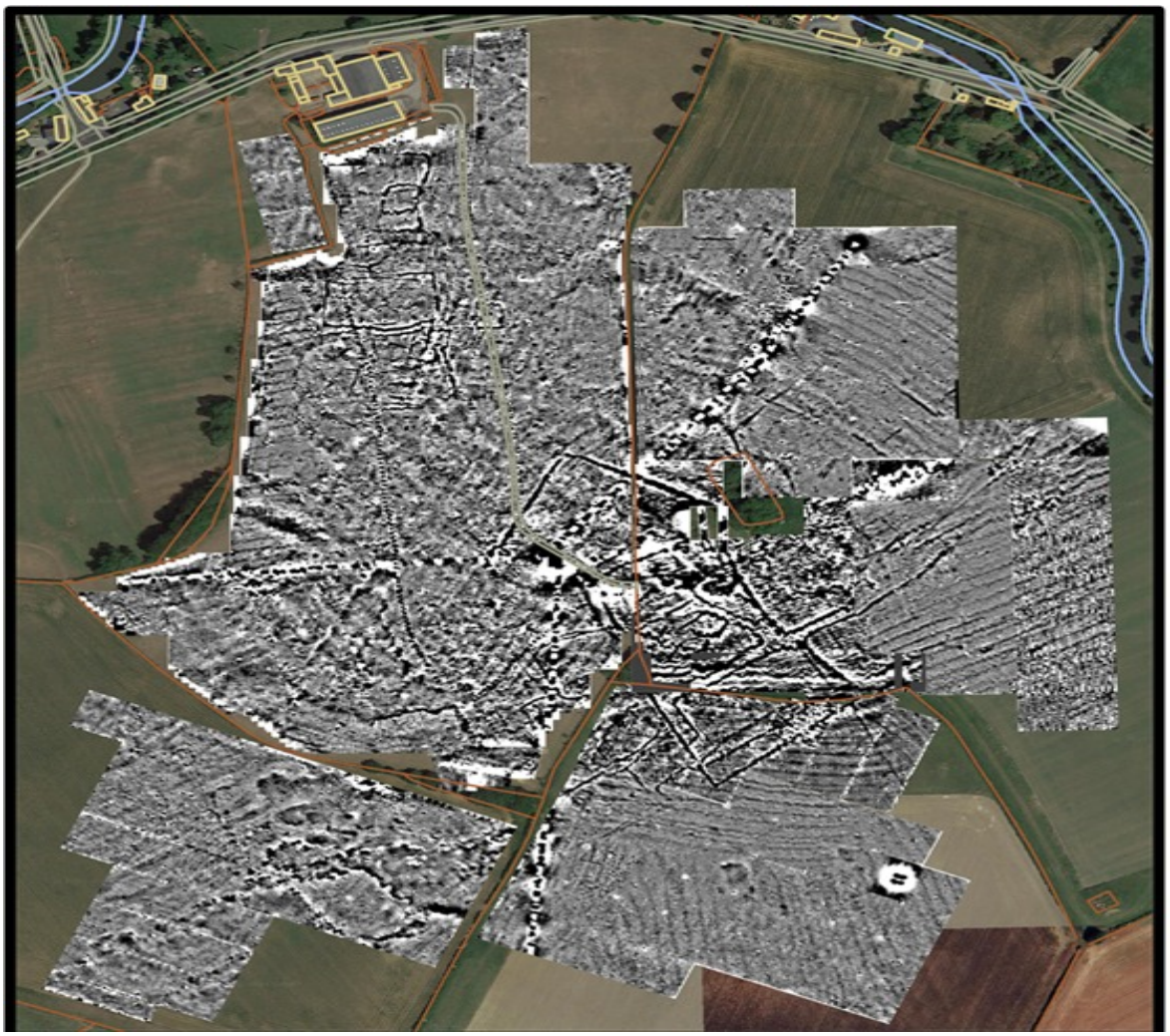

Photo 1: Whitehall Farm Geophysical Survey Anomalies.

Obviously, any meaningful interpretation of the landscape, during this period, in this locality, is dependent upon determining the chronological progression of the features as they dominated and then became less relevant or were subsumed into the agriculture picture in the area. Pit alignments are a common facet of the prehistoric landscape in Northamptonshire and the detection of their presence amongst the geophysical anomalies at Whitehall Farm was not unexpected. A grouping of four lengths of pit alignments were identified, with all of them located in the same field demonstrating a connectivity between them as a feature.

Chronologically these pit alignments are often interpreted as generally belonging to the period between the mid/Late Iron Age and the transitional phase of the early Roman conquest period of the mid to late 1st century AD. Scholars also state the origins of such distinctive features could in the wider countryside conceivably could have originated as far back as the Bronze Age. The evolution of the landscape at Whitehall Farm undoubtedly started with the placement and configuration of these pit alignments. Taken together these pit alignments are fundamental to deciphering the initial agricultural use and 'ownership' criteria of the site. Understanding the rationale

for the construction of these featured is difficult to process as their function is not immediately apparent beyond the obvious barrier they represent; however, they appear to be crucial to the way the landscape was managed and worked at this time and therefore are of great importance.

For us the significance of these features at Whitehall Farm lies in the fact that the pit alignments probably represent the earliest phase of landscape division underlying the settlement's development from the prehistoric to Roman period. This opinion is supported by the fact that the pit alignments themselves appear to be overlain and cut through by other features of presumably later date. Three truncated small stretches of pit alignments with east to west orientations range between 65m, 80m and 107m in length with between 15 to 20 pits surviving in each placement formed right-angled connections to a much larger north to south alignment 320m long composed of at least 80 pits. The configuration suggests the division of the locale into a series of rectilinear partitions of some considerable proportion.

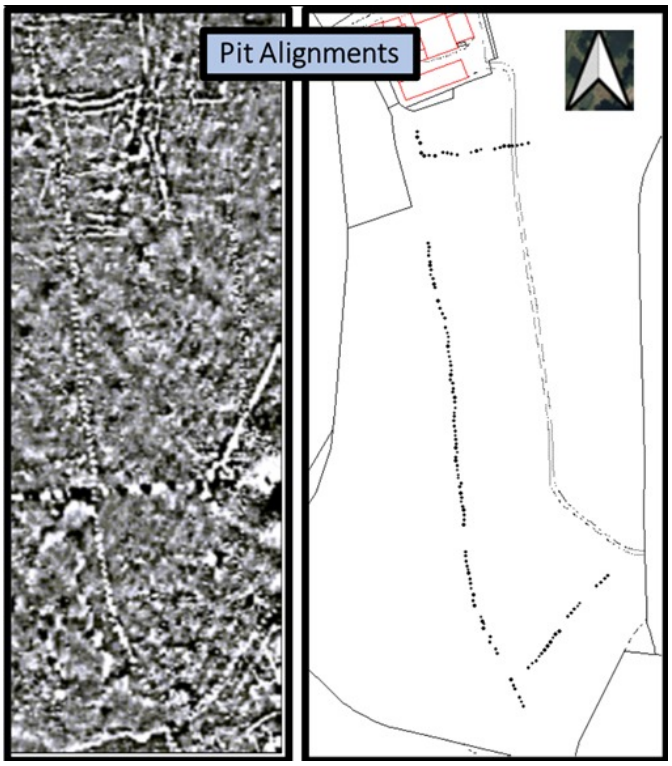

Photo 2: Whitehall Farm Pit alignments

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These barriers do not reflect a centralised grid like pattern as can be seen with *centuriation* a Roman form of land division. Instead, they indicate a countryside defined by a broad patchwork of interrelated rectilinear spaces dividing up the landscape in a highly organised but not necessarily uniformly regulated manner. The size or scale of the individual expanses appear inconsistent with field systems designed to service arable production, neither is the scale of these features consistent with denoting major tribal territorial landscape boundaries. Pit alignments appear to be something in between and I would say understanding these characteristics and their effect upon the landscape is going to be crucial to solving this conundrum.

We should remember pit alignments although substantial features in themselves are not as impressive as the banked and ditched monuments that form massive linear territorial boundary dykes in the prehistoric landscape. Pit alignments do not project the same level of lofty social and political pretensions implied by the larger boundaries.

This assertion in part is borne out by the existence locally of a potentially Bronze Age example of the linear bank and ditched boundary dyke recorded to the west of Stowe-Nine-Churches which is an exemplar of this category. This monument comprised of a row of three banks with intermediate ditches can still be traced for 185m and is constructed to impose and impress if not control the surrounding locality on a scale commensurate with a tribal boundary. Incidentally air photography of the area to the south of the monument have also revealed several examples of pit alignments like those found at Whitehall Farm however, whether these are contemporary with the boundary monument or fit more closely with the Late Iron Age/Early Roman timeline is open to question.

The real function and rationale for these pit alignments undoubtedly lies elsewhere, demarking something very practical although enigmatic that we currently cannot necessarily explain or fully understand, frustrating as this may be. Whether pit alignments can be connected more compatibly with pastoral farming regimes or localised late Iron Age subdivisions or property boundaries within the larger tribal area may need to have further consideration. Another random idea explored by the well-known late local archaeologist Dennis Jackson is that these anomalies represent 'dead hedges' where an interwoven branch and foliage cradle could be assembled in each pit and moved or adjusted depending on the agricultural need. Given the potential longevity of pit alignments and the probable need for ongoing maintenance this seems unlikely as the pits themselves would still have provided obstacles to anything wishing to cross the opening.

Although the purpose of pits constructed in linear alignments may not be fully understood, the theories speculative, and interpretation puzzling, we should remember they are a definable feature in the archaeological record, and their presence denoted a reasoned rationale although this is currently difficult to explain. Fortunately, these features do display a variety of characteristics that are common to their appearance in the archaeological record, and these can be outlined and quantified. The pits forming the alignments share similar size, shape and spacing with very similar profiles consisting of steep sides, angled corners and a flat bottom. On excavation these pits usually produce very little diagnostically datable evidence and are defined by the way they have been kept clean while in use.

Pits do not appear to fill haphazardly over time due to erosion, or show evidence of recutting, but once the reason for being utilised is no longer valid the whole system goes out of use and disappears from the landscape. Therefore, we can see an unexpected level of control and oversight of the day-to-day impact of pit alignments in the countryside. The two examples excavated at Whitehall Farm imitate the characteristic profiles identified and observed elsewhere. During excavation of the individual pits in 2007 it was demonstrated that they were 1.5m deep and tapered down from1.5m at the top to roughly 1m at the bottom. Both pits mirrored the steep sides, angled corners and a flat bottom of the well-recognised general profile. The appearance of this feature also highlights that pit alignments were a very widespread phenomenon whose construction techniques were well known and widely understood in the landscape as a universally and culturally accepted custom/tradition of land division.

In the same field as the pit alignments another relatively common feature which seems to be ubiquitous in the local Roman countryside was observed in the fieldwork data. This type of feature is often described as a 'ladder enclosure' it covered about 2.5h of the gently rising slope between the farm buildings alongside the Weedon to Nether Heyford road and the summit of Stowe hill. The western half of the ladder enclosure overlays the main north-south pit alignment and demonstrates that this group of features was developed at a much later date in the Roman period. The ladder enclosure didn't necessarily replace the pit alignment but probably does reflect changes in the agricultural regime later at the Roman estate when the earlier feature had long gone out of use and been filled in. It is composed of irregular but interjoined rectangular enclosures of various dimensions from paddock to small field. The ladder enclosure appears to be aligned at least in part along a trackway on the eastern side emulating the situation found on other sites.

Photo 3: Whitehall Farm Ladder enclosure.

The paddocks might have been used for livestock management as stock rearing pens. Interestingly the more substantial ditched enclosures appear to have been recut or remodelled through time demonstrating a prolonged period of use. Without excavation it is difficult to date these arrangements although examples elsewhere like those mentioned below tend to indicate these enclosures were predominant and active in the late Roman landscape. Other instances of ladder enclosures in the locality occur at the Flore By-pass site adjacent to the M1 motorway to the north of Upper Heyford and at Milton Ham, just off the M1 near to junction 15. A third example at Wavendon Lodge, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire shows that this type of topographical development is common in the wider countryside locality of the Roman period especially in areas adjacent to Watling Street as it passes through Buckinghamshire

a*nd Northamptonshire. This is a firm indication of the widespread adoption of a particular agricultural regime promoting animal husbandry in the late Roman period. Profiling ladder enclosures, as with the pit alignments, helps us to explore the role and raison d'être of these features. The different sizes of the conjoined enclosures is a major characteristic as is the north to south orientation and their propensity for these anomalies to be linked to trackways. More research needs to be undertaken regarding the individual enclosure sizes and whether they reflect in any way Roman land units based on the actus quadratus that constitute iugerum (0.25h). The term is connected to the amount of land that could be ploughed by a team of oxen in one day.*

Thought provokingly, at Whitehall Farm the larger compounds in the ladder enclosure are roughly equivalent to an *iugerum* whilst the smaller enclosures occupy about a fifth of an *iugerum.* Further study based on the works of Varro, Columella and other ancient Roman authors might help elucidate our thinking here. My belief is that ladder enclosures are more likely to be constructed to cater to the needs of animal husbandry than outright arable production.

Forging or dismissing links between modern measurements and general layout of these features as observed with Roman practice enables us to start to speculate on cultural proclivities connected to husbandry practice in the watershed of the River Nene. Reviewing the evidence can help in or hint at continuing and evolving native custom, the introduction of imperial convention or a hybrid mixed tradition at the heart of agriculture. These are the type of insights into the nature of Romanization within our locality that we should be striving to understand through our work especially as agriculture was the bedrock of provincial life in our locality. Undoubtedly the ladder enclosure features should be thought of as being predominately linked to agricultural practice rather than domestic habitation. Therefore, surely must be seen as part of the infrastructure required to service farming practice, presumably revolving around animal husbandry. The animal bone assemblage from the research excavation at Whitehall Farm supports this theory proving that sheep were extremely important to the farming economy of the late Roman period on the estate. A ladder enclosure would lend itself to the practical day to day requirements of breeding and processing sheep and this feature may well be related to these activities.

The commonest type of geophysical anomalies, observed across virtually all the fields surveyed, are features which are consistent with the drainage gullies forming the boundaries of individual Roman fields. Our geophysical data also implied that it is possible some of these had raised earthen banks on either side of the drainage ditch which presumably could have supported hedges much akin to modern field demarcation. The fields taken collectively form field systems that universally align in a northeast to southwest arrangement, a layout totally opposed to the orientation of the modern field boundaries. This alignment is different from the one seen in the placement of the ladder enclosure feature and therefore emphasises a different criteria to positioning and layout representing a significant different role in the farming regime practiced.

One field system reveals extensive evidence of recutting, demonstrating a longevity of use with the re-digging of drainage gullies and showing the consequent changes of layout through time. These are apparent where one field boundary cuts through another earlier drainage border which is something particularly evident in the smaller area field systems to the west of the later main villa complex.

Another characteristic of these field systems is that they appear to be regularly laid out in a systematic way implying controlled planning and development. The size of the individual fields determines two major types of discernible field system are present:

one comprised of smaller fields of about one *iugerum* in extent and the other larger type is double that size. The larger field system lies to the east of the later villa complex whilst the smaller field configuration is situated towards the southwest. These seem to share, like the ladder enclosure, dimensions which appear to resonate with ancient Roman measurements, hinting at a scheme of land management consistent with a combined hybrid insula native and imperial husbandry practice.

Photo 4: Whitehall Farm Enclosure & Field Systems.

Chronologically speaking it is best to think of these two types of field systems dominating and occupying different time spans and operating under different circumstances within the Roman period. The smaller field system may well have dominated the 2nd to mid-3rd century AD agricultural regime operating at Whitehall Farm. The date echoes the findings derived from the sectioning of some of these features during the research excavation of the site. The small field system can be associated with the stone round house phase of the settlement that grew out of the Late Iron Age to the early Roman era but before the later development of the estate from the leisure and specialist agronomic facility of a larger latifundia into a smaller wing corridor villa estate. Although there may have been a period of cross over or coexistence between the two types. The size and layout of this smaller field period imply cereal production and the dominance of subsistence arable husbandry at this time, as hinted at based on field measurements.

Our second field system, with the larger fields, located immediately to the east of the villa is more likely to date from the late 3rd to 4th century AD. Its importance within the agricultural regime equates with the construction of the wing corridor complex at the centre of the site. This period possibly reflects the prominence of sheep rearing and wool production possibly for the continental market. Britannia was of pivotal importance as a hub in the supply chain to the northern Roman provinces at this time. The bone assemblage from the site also implies a greater concentration on sheep to the extent it influenced the overall economy of the settlement. In addition, the larger field system may or may not be relate to the ladder enclosure anomalies in terms of this activity and all we can say for sure is they were in contemporary use. Although sheep rearing may have been the predominant element of the 4th century

farming scene we should keep in mind that arable cultivation would probably still have continued at least on a subsistence level. Without further excavation it is difficult, with only the survey data, to see whether the two field systems interacted in the farming cycle and were in use contemporaneously to any degree.

Other features revealed by the geophysical survey confirmed earlier findings of several further features which are important to the interpretation of the site. The fieldwork established that the unusual diamond shaped enclosure with a funnelled entrance which was archaeologically sectioned during the research excavation was a unique feature at Whitehall Farm. There was nothing remotely comparable to it among the other anomalies and that its interpretation as the 'hare warren' appears to have some merit. The bone assemblage analysis from Whitehall Farm again reveals an exceptionally large quantity of hare bones ranging from leverets to adult examples retrieved from various contexts of the site. These indicate the creation of a managed rearing environment such as we have apparently detected here. This interpretation is further supported by the phosphate analysis undertaken on the opening to the enclosure during the research excavation. The concentration of animal waste demonstrated an intensely controlled supervision of the entrance consistent with this specialised agricultural application and managed confinement of the hares.

Photo 5: Whitehall Farm Hare Enclosure.

Elsewhere the outline of the banked and ditched structure enclosing the villa buildings and a series of internal paddocks was confirmed on its northern, western and southern sides. The date of this boundary is based on the findings from earlier excavation of sections across the feature indicated a late 3rd to 4th century AD date for its construction, most likely with the development of the villa complex. In the proto villa field along its western edge lying beyond the field system was another mysterious geophysical anomaly. The feature is centred around a small squarish enclosure of about 20 sqm which is associated with a series of pits that average about 2m in length.

Nothing is evident on the surface of the field and no objects were visible in the plough horizon. Had it been the site of a Roman cemetery I'm sure the cultivated state of the field surface would have produced human bone. Equally as we found when investigating similar features at Manshead these may turn out to be industrial in origin instead and only further archaeological work in the future will determine the outcome.

The final aspect of the geophysical anomalies that brings more clarity to the Roman landscape at Whitehall Farm are the incongruities indicating the existence and actual alignments of trackways across the site. Some crucial interpretative points can be detected from the evidence available. Excavation revealed that although the main villa complex faced towards the southeast it was unclear whether this positioning reflected the main direction of approach or exit from the site. We were unsure as to which direction the estate was orientated; did it face inward towards the local area or outward to the wider commercial world. Exploring the relative importance of any potential throughfare towards the small town and local market of Roman Duston or major arterial carriageway represented by Watling Street with its links to the nearby markets of Lactodurum (Towcester) and Bannaventa (Whilton Lodge) and beyond would prove instructive in this regard.

The existence of a trackway bordered by drainage channels and a line of small paddocks adjacent to the northern side of one of these gullies supplies the answer. It demonstrates that the most significant trackway approaching the heart of the villa lies on the eastern side of the complex. It heads in a northeasterly direction down towards the Grand Union Canal and then presumably beyond in the direction of Harpole and Duston. Both these destinations are of interest because the former is the location of a large double courtyarded villa. This was the largest in the region and was most likely the centre of a large latifundia or possibly imperial estate for which the bath house leisure facility and hare emporium may well have been constructed to service in the late 3rd to mid-4th century AD. The finding of a fragment of a monumental inscription during the geophysical and limited fieldwalking survey is interesting in this respect, particularly as the inscribed stone may have originated from an inscription placed upon the large luxurious bath house built at Whitehall Farm before the site's transformation into a small late Roman villa estate. I'm sure future detailed analysis of the inscribed letters and the origin of the stone matrix will provide more clarity on the matter.

Photo 6: Inscribed stone.

This date is strongly implied by the analysis of the hare bone assemblage and the location of a unique enclosure design identified to the west of the villa complex. These type of amenities are mentioned in Roman literature, but none are known to exist in Roman Britain. We can speculate the unique enclosure has a close affinity to the *raison d'etra* of the large bath house leisure facility located adjacently to the east. The hunting of hares with their associated religious aspects could have been an integral part of the activities carried out on site. In this respect it is of interest that the *viewshed*

between Whitehall Farm and the massive villa at Barn Close, Harpole, means both sites are visible to one another and in line of sight.

The wide range of anomalies recorded in the geophysical survey indicate a complex assortment of agricultural activity operating on the estate throughout the Roman period. These agricultural stages were prone to change as farming requirements and ownership priorities altered and affected the economic basis of the settlement over time. For the most part although different aspects of husbandry did indeed predominate at different times, in general, the farming regime practiced at Whitehall Farm would almost certainly, like today, have revolved around a mixed approach of arable production and animal husbandry *vis a vis* sheep.

The watershed of the River Nene as it emerges from the Northamptonshire highlands is starting to reveal a distinctive character of the agricultural process in the locality as opposed to that remarked upon elsewhere for the Middle and Lower Nene where mixed farming was also practiced but the cultivation of cereals was far more important. It's part of a developing profile that highlights the differences between the localities as reflected in the growing density of settlement and occupation as you move down the river valley from the glacial sands and gravels of the west to the gravel terraces further east. The geologies and soils of which would have had tremendous influence on the type and nature of husbandry practiced at a given location.

In conclusion I believe the data obtained allows us a certain amount of leeway to speculate and theorise on the main stages of advancement of the growing Roman estate and later villa complex at Whitehall Farm. It's laid the groundwork for building an interpretative narrative to explain the story presented in the archaeological landscape. The geophysical survey has highlighted the methodologies employed by the Roman inhabitants of Whitehall Farm on a practical agricultural level. Understanding how and why the locality was being used enables us to enhance our chronological view of activities occurring through time. As for the wider estate periphery we cannot be sure and still don't know whether these were set or influenced by topographical boundaries but neither does the evidence negate the potential influence they could have exerted. However, it has given us a greater understanding of the character of the estate through time, providing some of the building blocks towards creating a model which not only describes the features to be associated with farms and villa estates in this area but a greater understanding of the extent of these rural communities.

A main takeaway from the fieldwork I think is all the features identified in the geophysical survey support the existence of a mixed farming economy at Whitehall Farm during the Roman era. The agricultural practice echoes the type of farming seen in the area today a consequence undoubtedly determined by the character and quality of the land available historically and for today. The disposition and placement of the diagnostically different features offer the opportunity to speculate on the range of farming approaches adopted throughout the Roman period, for instance, as remarked upon earlier with the smaller recut field systems as opposed to the much larger later rectangular system. These field systems demonstrate a continuity of working the land throughout this period.

The geophysical survey also allowed us to address at least to some degree the challenges raised in the previous newsletter about the nature of the landscape particularly in the unexplored area to the northeast of the villa and concerning the extent of the boundaries in the Proto villa field at the southern end of the fieldwork area. In the former district the most intensive area of activity is now known to be represented by a line of small paddocks connected to the trackway approach leading to the heart of the community. Otherwise, apart from a modern waterpipe intersecting the area, only elements of the drainage gullies of the larger field system are evident.

Any discernment of the anomalies implies an agricultural basis as opposed to domestic or funerary activity in the area. Unfortunately these findings do not proffer any justification for the widespread distribution of Roman coins retrieved here from metal detection survey. A casual loss over time or a dispersed hoard don't appear to offer pertinent rationales and so their location here remains enigmatic.

The data from geophysical survey also enabled us to confirm the location of the main bank and ditch perimeter surrounding the villa complex and the relationship between it and the field system in the southern part of the site. Overall, the entire data retrieved gives us a reasonably successful conclusion for the fieldwork undertaken which will allow for further analysis that enhances not only our understanding of the site but our comprehension of the wider countryside.

Apart from this fieldwork there are a variety of other activities and news to comment upon which I'm sure our volunteers will be only too happy to be notified about. This year's season of zoom lectures is underway, and I delivered a talk on the Whitehall Farm Geophysical survey and Dr Noël James, Director MKCDC, Bradwell Abbey gave the second on the urn cremation burial from Manshead, Bannaventa, Whilton Lodge. Both were recorded and are now available to view on the CLASP website for anyone who was unable to attend online. The start to this year's series has been a reasonable success and online attendance appears to be growing. In fact, we even went international last time with someone tuning in from Wales. Please try to make use of these zoomed based talks as they enable CLASP to disseminate information about projects we have undertaken and to let you know of other work related to topics and subjects that connect in some way with our locality.

A further significant development has been the long-awaited return of the carbon date evidence from the burial containing the two ladies, a dog and partial horse skeletons at Manshead Field. The burial was extremely unusual and of great interest for those wishing to understand concepts of death, ritual and funeral practice. No other material dating evidence was found associated with the burial pit but a Roman field ditch cut into the top of the feature produced a fill assemblage of the 3rd century AD. SUERC, University of Glasgow did carbon dates for both female skeletons and these were correlated by Chris Chinnock to produce a combined date of somewhere between 130-234 AD with a high probability pointing towards an early 3rd century AD time of interment.

This is a mystifying but pleasant surprise as the form of the burial implied a late Iron Age to Early Roman committal. This chronology is consistent with similar examples of human/animal burials found in the south of England dating to that period. However, the early 3rd century date is problematic because it is, in my understanding, a skeletal assemblage unequalled in a Romano-British context of that era depending on how the evidence is interpreted, and therefore of extreme interest to burial studies.

The imposition of one body above the other could be indicative of a familial association between the two women possibly even mother and child. More prosaically the situation could imply a master and servant relationship. One should note the remains of the older female displays a greater range of lifetime ware effects than those of the adolescent, hinting at different life cycle experiences. The cause of death is unknown and whether one was chosen to accompany the other as a sacrifice is still an open question. Equally the pair may represent a contemporised death through illness or plague. The former narrative is unheard of in the 3rd century AD and would force us to reconsider funeral practice for that period. Future DNA work should be able to tell us more and possibly resolve yet another of our archaeological conundrums.

The inclusion of a complete dog skeleton and partial elements of a horse could be interpreted either as emphasizing the overall status of one of the individuals involved or as a statement, even expression, of the familial character of the burial, by including

in the grave with the ladies, animals which may have been of particularly value to the deceased during their lifetimes. This would act as a consolation on the journey to the next world for both the living and the dead. An extra point to note is the complete lack of personal grave goods deposited in the burial place. This is not because it could be a Christian committal as the skeletons are deposited *'top to tail'* even if on an east/west alignment. We should not doubt that definite statements on interment and ritual are being made by the people making the deposition, only that it is our role to understand them.

The existence of this contentious burial within an area of cremation burials is also puzzling not least because we have two types of cremated remains. There are three cremation burials without urns but including grave goods. These are aligned along an east west axis in the immediate vicinity of the lady/animal burial with a fourth cremation deposited in an urn further to the south on the slope leading down to the brook floodplain. A fragment of a skull found in the same area implies the existence of at least another inhumation in the field, hinting at a widespread mixed burial tradition centred on this part of the settlement. Cremation in Roman Britain is focused in one of two periods either the mid to late 1st century or the early 3rd century AD. Judging by the carbon dates already achieved on the two inhumations several of the cremations excavated may relate to the latter period. Resolving this matter is a must in helping our understanding of the archaeological evidence.

Hopefully we will be developing a project to look at the scientific aspects of these burials. This will involve carbon dating and analytical investigation of all the cremations, DNA and water isotope investigation of the two ladies and possible facial reconstruction of one or other of them to aid the eventual publication of this interesting and potentially seminal case study into particular funerary practice. The whole initiative will be costly and although we have already received a couple of offers of donations and we will be looking to raise funding from appropriate local groups and charities, any further financial assistance you may be able to make, however limited, could be put to useful employment. Inadvertently, CLASP has fallen across a treasure trove of information related to burial practice, ritual and understanding the way of the dead in the Roman Midlands. It would be a shame to miss an opportunity to flesh out this fundamentally important aspect of the archaeological record.

Other news: just after Christmas 2025 on the 27th December an article was published concerning the metal detecting career of Dave Derby from Kislingbury. Many of you will know him through his work with me over the last forty years which has been extremely helpful to CLASP on a variety of projects. He with colleagues was instrumental in locating the site of the Roman villa and the Post Roman and early migration period cemetery at Whitehall Farm. He also worked extensively with us on the Roman Posting station of Bannaventa and the deserted medieval village of Thrupp.

I was approached through Dave's son Peter to assist Kate Prickett in her writing of an article for BBC local news website. I was only too pleased to supply pictures and some quotes to assist her. You can read the piece celebrating his 90th birthday by clicking onto the following link:

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c7vm74gzn2ro

The archiving group have been working on two large Roman field walking assemblages from the Posting Station at Bannaventa and the Ecton kilns and manufacturing site. Besides the archiving of this material a great deal of effort has been expended on teaching volunteers to identify and analyse Roman pottery. Spreading expertise amongst the volunteer demographic is an important aspect of our work and consequently can aid us in becoming more ambitious in our outlook. Work is also underway on reassessing the painted plaster from Whitehall Farm making

sure the digital record is accurate and formulating an investigative plan to study and write up the assemblage for publication. On the technical front, Don Attwell is constructing a wheeled cart to house the magnetometer for use in the field. The main advantages of this are that it will enable those who currently cannot operate the machine for technical reasons to actively take part, to produce more consistent data for analysis when using multiple fieldworkers, and to make the process easier to complete. It has taken us some time to recover from the loss of Fred Kay's experience, but we are improving all the time.

Finally, I'm working on preparing research proposals for several possible projects for the coming year. These range from geophysical survey initiatives to archiving and excavation ventures. The first of these will involve an extensive investigation both geophysical and excavation based of the fishponds associated with Daventry Priory's estate at Thrupp. It will be particularly interesting if we must deal with environment assemblages from the site and is an area with which we are not overendowed with experience since the death of Gren Hatton. Should you be interested in taking an active role in this area let me know. The different elements of the initiative will be circulated by email and will start with a small-scale geophysical survey sometime in March.

The next few months could be quite busy, and I hope you will continue to actively support CLASP whether that be working at the Field Centre or actively participating in the field. Our future is looking good, and we must take advantage of it.

Trevor Saxby Report

Field Centre Activities Over the Last Year

A keen and active group of CLASP members meets at the Field Centre most Tuesday afternoons to learn about and process finds from previous excavations. From long-serving diggers to complete novices, all are welcome and training is given by Stephen Young and Jackie Pyle. You never stop learning in archaeology!

Since the 2024 AGM, we have had talks on flint knapping (with a display of neolithic flint tools); the Roman glass finds from the Whitehall Farm villa excavations; and post-conservation metal finds from the Anglo-Saxon burial ground at Whitehall. We also finished sorting Roman ceramic building materials from Castle Ashby, putting aside distinctive pieces for further analysis to determine types and where they were made.

The bulk of our attention, though, has been on Roman pottery from the town of Bannaventa and the tile kiln sites at Ecton. This is no small task (c.47,500 sherds from Ecton and 75 full boxes from Bannaventa!), so there is always plenty to do. We have been learning how to sort them into four generic groups according to how they were made: grogged, shelly, reduced and oxidised, ready for further analysis.

The Roman potteries at Ecton have not been widely written about, and Stephen Young believes CLASP's work can contribute to a better understanding. So, we have been sorting out rim sherds, which are the easiest to identify and classify, and we hope to work with a recognised specialist in due course. It's good to know that a small local society can make a difference.

Besides all that, it is a good social time, and we usually have a laugh. If you are interested in handling artefacts over 1500 years old and learning more about them, contact Rosemary on the following link:

volunteerinfo@claspweb.org.uk

M.K. Archaeology Day Saturday 1st November 2025

Nick Crank, Archaeology Officer for M.K., invited CLASP to have a stand at this event at Christ the Cornerstone Church in Central Milton Keynes and Stephen, Norman and I were able to attend and mount a display showcasing our activities.
Pre-Construct Archaeology, Piddington Villa, MKHA and a local metal detectorist also had displays.

The event was well attended, and we had lots of interested public talking to us and taking away leaflets.
This part of the event was only from 10 to 12.30, the afternoon being given over to a series of talks of current or recent archaeological projects in the MK area, and I shall try to give you a flavour of their content, though from a purely layman's perspective and not having taken notes. Anything I get wrong I'm sure Stephen or Norman can comment on.

The first talk was by John Boothroyd of Oxford Archaeology and concerned an evaluation prior to the building of a supermarket in Olney, Bucks.
Geophysical survey identified a couple of areas of interest which were subsequently dug, one of which yielded a mosaic floor, much to the surprise of the archaeologists.
Public open days were organised to view the mosaic prior to it being carefully protected and then buried underneath the new car park for the supermarket.
The second presentation, given by Mark Hinman of Pre-Construct Archaeology, was a follow-on from previous updates on a huge development on the Northeast flank of MK, adjacent to the M1.

He quickly recapped information from the previous talks concerning the wealth of Iron Age finds including a succession of around 80 round houses dating mid to late Iron Age.

The main part of the talk was on the final stages of this settlement, late Iron Age to early post-conquest, at which time only one rectilinear building to the south of the site remained along with an intriguing grid arrangement of trackways and features slightly north and west which, because of its form they had taken to calling 'The Village', even though, as he explained, this is not an appropriate term for Iron Age settlements.
Unusually there was no evidence of permanent habitation although plenty of finds of assorted animal bones, pottery sherds (many of them substantial) and coins. The coins were all British and the pottery was of a Gaulish type. It is these finds which make the site so unusual with absolutely no finds of Roman coins or pottery types even though the site lasted beyond the conquest, possibly to late 1st century.

A leading authority on Iron Age settlements that was consulted stated that no other examples of this pattern have been found in Britain, the nearest examples being in France.

This area lay on the extreme western boundary of the Catuvellauni in the mid-1st century and so may have been a meeting and feasting place with adjacent tribes or as the area was water meadow an area for moving the cattle onto in Spring and Summer with habitation being in temporary structures.
It certainly seems that whoever inhabited this landscape in the mid to late 1st century had no real interest in accepting 'Romanisation' even as it advanced towards them.

The final talk by Sand Vucicic of MOLA was about the archaeological work being carried out alongside the construction of the new highway between Black Cat roundabout and Caxton Gibbet in Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire respectively.
By its nature this is a ribbon development and therefore does not necessarily provide a complete picture.

Sanda spoke about the development of farming settlements along the route from Neolithic through to early Medieval illustrating the changes in practice and design particularly innovations brought in as a result of the Roman conquest.
The most interesting element for me was the highlighting of parallel ditches (and a single grape seed) with associated rectilinear features which might suggest Roman influence but in discussion which followed the talk Mark Hinman, who had dug extensively in the area previously suggested that these parallel ditch features, straight sided and flat-bottomed were not uncommon in the area and were definitely pre-conquest iron age for the more efficient growing of wheat.
So, all in all a fascinating and rewarding day in so many ways, well worth attending. When they run the event next year, assuming we're invited, it would be lovely to see some fresh faces manning the stall.

Norman Garnett and Steve Bacon

At Milton Keynes Heritage day.

From Wetton's Guide-Book to Northampton and Its Vicinity 1849.

About a mile and a half to the north-west will bring us to NETHER HEYFORD, a village six miles from Northampton upon the river Nen. The situation is flat and secluded. In 1699, in Hore-stone meadow, within this parish, about a mile and a half east of the Watling-street, was discovered a tessellated pavement, composed of white, yellow, red, and blue tesserae; its dimensions from east to west are fifteen feet in extent, but its diameter in from north to south is uncertain. This pavement was the southern part of the building to which it belonged. In the western and northern parts were several lesser rooms, or cells, about ten feet long and four broad. Some of these rooms were floored with a firm plaster of lime mortar, drawn upon pebbles, fixed in lime. The sides of the floors were painted with three straight lines of a red, yellow, and green colour These colours were so fresh that when the floors were first uncovered the strokes of the hairs of the painting brush were plainly visible. In these apartments were found three urns, various fragments of samian ware, and different antique earthen vessels; one forming part of a pattern, and the others being the remains of urns of white and ash-colour; and also, one of a bluish cast, which appeared to have been a libatory vessel.

Don Martin CLASP Photographer remembers

I gave up Art and History at school when those decisions had to be made and then went on to become a designer with an interest in my family history!

In my design work I had to have a working knowledge of various photographic processes used in the printing industry. My first job after college was at the Oxford University Press. Basic book design with little scope for imagination. I then found another position back in Kent which was much more challenging. I was a one-man department in a printing company with many top-class clients. Projects included company annual reports, fine art catalogues, exhibition work – the range was wide and varied. Occasionally I would go for a walk with my camera and was the family happy snapper. I also became editor of the Family History Society of Martin newsletter for several years, also producing the diving club newsletter.

Later, my boss retired and the company was asset stripped, me included. I decided to freelance. That meant holidays became a rarity but to keep my sanity I continued with scuba diving. The poor winter conditions, a very keen dive buddy and the proximity of the National Maritime Museum gave opportunities for research.

After one very busy winter I felt that a break was necessary after no holiday for five years. I booked a week walking in Majorca which was my downfall. I met Linda there and we were married exactly one year after our meeting. She became programme secretary for the Towcester History Society while I produced the posters for the monthly meetings – and still do. I also designed - various items for the Towcester 917 historical event. I could not escape history if I tried!

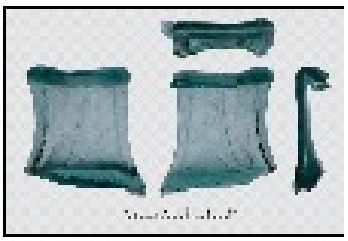
At a history society meeting there was a request from CLASP for volunteers to do some fieldwalking near Towcester. We were intrigued so went along. In the *first* square Linda picked up something which on inspection was identified by her, eventually, as a flint arrowhead! She was amazed and delighted when told that she was probably the first person to touch it since the archer who lost it about five thousand years previously. WOW! She went to every event she could from then on, I have a photo of her in her ski suit at a field walk near our village when she was terminally ill with cancer. She was an amazing woman!

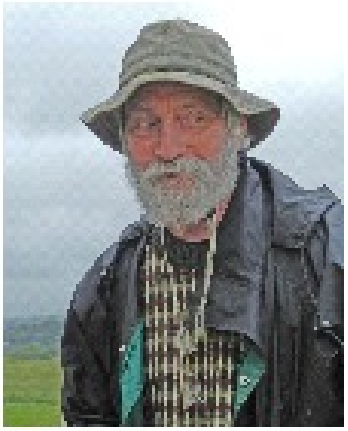
In 2012, not long after Linda's Olney (green cemetery) funeral, Steve said he had no photographer and would I take photos of that year's dig. It was the Anglo-Saxon* cemetery. I was still on autopilot, so it took some hard thinking before agreeing but I have not regretted doing it. It took about two years for me to return to normal, and CLASP and Steve continue to help me along.

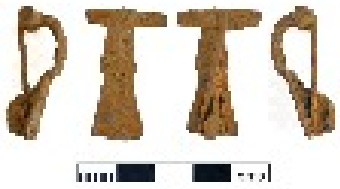
Since then, I have taken photos of every annual dig, helped with geofizzing†, cleaned pottery and bones, photographed the entire collection of coins (after attending a how-to-do-it course in Oxford), photographed hundreds of potshards and pieces of painted plaster, many other finds and have done some excavating. I tried pot reconstruction, but my fingers are getting to be all thumbs now. There has also been some exhibition display work and flier design. So, the reason I am not seen much at the field centre is because my workroom is at home and untold hours are spent immersed in my own little archaeological world. Currently I am sorting the thousands of pictures I have (not all mine!) in preparation for them to go onto the CLASP archive and I continue to take the pills (diabetes2 & blood pressure) and archaeology helps me to keep going towards my target of 100 years. Here is just a taste of my photographic efforts ...

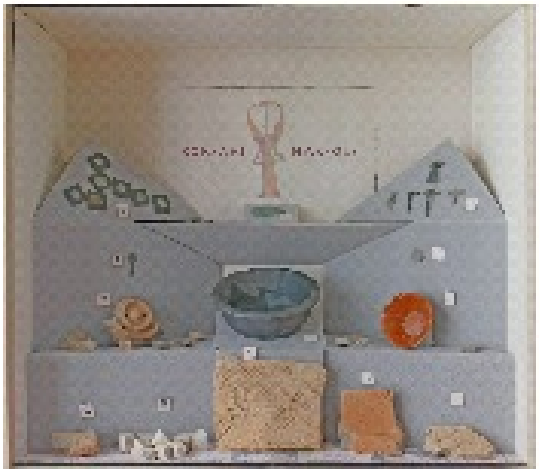
* The Anglo-Saxon cemetery should be called the Post Roman/Migration Period cemetery in archaeology speak.

† When standing with my foot on one end of a 90m tape in cold rainy wind on top of the hill at Daventry golf club, a golf buggy stopped in front of me and a small figure hopped off ... she was Adriana, from Brazil, and she was asked to help me. Why she turned up there is another story. Her English was not good as her first language is Portuguese, so we chatted with some difficulty, but we have been friends since then (and her English has much improved). That is what archaeology can do for you!









List of contacts for CLASP Associations

Organisation	Contact	Tel Number
Flore Heritage Society	Jay Philips	01327 340282
Brington History Society	Ian Dexter	01604 771353
Whitehall Farm Roman villa Landscape Project	Norman Garnett	01604 755479
Bugbrooke History Society	Alan Kent	01604 830518
History of Tiffield Society	Steve Jowers	01327 350292
Blisworth Heritage Society	Jim Aveling	0164 859109
Northampton Artifact Recovery	Alan Standish	Not Available

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