

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

# Duston

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Funded by English Heritage

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## **BACKGROUND TO THE REPORT**

This is one of a series of reports compiled by Northamptonshire County Council's Historic Environment Team as part of the English Heritage funded Extensive Urban Survey (EUS) of Northamptonshire, which is intended to provide an effective information base and research framework to guide the management of the county's urban archaeological resource. The survey encompasses all urban settlements and others that may have had some urban attributes, from the Roman period to the 1930s. The only exception is Northampton, which is the subject of an Intensive Urban Survey in its own right.

Each report comprises three distinct sections: a detailed description of the town in each major period; an assessment of potential and definition of a research agenda; and a strategy for future management. A consistent approach has been taken in the presentation of the description in each report with detail being presented under each standard category even where this has no direct obvious relevance to the urban aspects. This section has however been presented in the form of a gazetteer with standard headings so enabling the reader to identify those sections of particular interest. The Duston report by Jeremy Taylor covers just the Roman settlement as it lies in isolation from any later settlement. Other contributions to the EUS on digital mapping, database input and related work for the EUS have been made by various individuals including Christine Addison, Chris Jones, Paul Thompson, Rob Atkins, Phil Markham and especially Tracey Britnell and Abi Kennedy.

The first objective of the report is to determine layout, character and chronology of development of the Roman town. An attempt has been made to identify the various components of the town which are likely to have left identifiable archaeological remains and, as far as practicable, to define the exact location and extent of these buried or upstanding 'monuments'. They have also all been assessed for likely current survival and their potential to contribute to research objectives. The relationship of the town to its hinterland has also been considered and the potential for study of that interaction has been assessed. In this way the report aims to provide a well founded research framework, establishing the current state of knowledge of Duston Roman town and defining a research agenda which can guide future archaeological investigation within the town. Conservation objectives have also been defined. This report should be viewed as a starting point rather than a definitive study, which it certainly is not. If this report serves its purpose then it will need to be regularly reviewed and substantially revised in future years as archaeological investigations are undertaken.

Given the limitations of time, which inevitably must guide the conduct of a countywide project, it has been necessary to limit the depth of investigation. No original archaeological earthwork or other such field survey has been conducted, but all available existing archaeological data has been consulted. Each town has been visited to examine the topography of the town and an assessment attempted as to the general state of archaeological survival.

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## **SUMMARY**

The site at Duston is one of 13 nucleated settlements included in this survey that definitely or probably acted as local or regional centres in the Roman period. Located roughly midway between the major settlement at Whilton Lodge (Bannaventa) to the northwest and Irchester to the east, Duston was probably one of the more significant undefended nucleated settlements in the county, which probably acted as a local centre along a side road from Whilton to the river Nene in modern Northampton.

No published excavations or modern surveys are reported for the site and currently our understanding of it is largely dependent upon a number of notes made by antiquarians such as Pretty (1849) and Sharp (1871) in the nineteenth century ahead of road works and quarrying. By the early part of the twentieth century George (1904) felt that much of the former Roman remains had already been quarried away but rescue excavation and watching briefs in the 1970s did succeed in adding some useful information about the date, layout and nature of occupation in the southern part of the town. Together, these results suggest that the settlement probably first developed in the Late Iron Age and conquest period (early-middle 1<sup>st</sup> century AD) within the core of the later settlement and that subsequently the settlement developed as a series of enclosures either side of at least two roads occupied by a range of simple stone or timber rectilinear buildings. It is possible that the settlement developed around a junction of these two routes though archaeological evidence for such an interpretation is absent and likely to have been destroyed. Duston like several of the Nene valley towns may have owed its existence to the social and economic advantages of its location on the emergent Roman road network, its location at the confluence of the Nene and important tributary valleys and to the wealth of its surrounding agricultural landscapes.

Given the early date of many of the discoveries, their partial reporting and the limited extent of later rescue work little can be said about the settlement's historical development. As most, if not all, of the core area of the settlement now lies under urban and suburban development in Northampton there is no aerial or ground survey evidence to complement the earlier work and little possibility of any in the future. The information from the rescue excavations and watching briefs of the 1970s suggests that the settlement consisted of a series of irregularly shaped ditched enclosures laid out to either side of the main roads within which stood first timber and then later stone buildings of simple form fronting onto the roads. In the few areas of the settlement investigated in any detail the superimposition of enclosure ditches and buildings through several phases from the mid first century to the early to middle fourth century AD indicates a long and complex sequence of development. Both the nineteenth century records from the quarry areas and the 1970s excavations recorded significant clusters of cremations and inhumations that probably represent at least two cemeteries as well as additional individual graves. The main cemetery, somewhere in the northern part of the settlement was unfortunately not accurately located.

**Present evidence suggests that Duston is likely to be a further example of a small group of undefended nucleated roadside settlements from the county that were based in part at least on Late Iron Age predecessors similar to those that are also poorly understood at Kings Sutton and Kettering.**

# **I DESCRIPTION**

## **1.0 TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY**

The Roman settlement at Duston lies on a south facing slope on the northern side of the river Nene. The area covered by the settlement dips from 76m AOD on Northampton sands to the north through head glacial sands and gravels to alluvium at the bottom of the slope at 60m AOD to the south.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL & TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 Prehistoric**

Pre conquest origins for the settlement at Duston have long been considered as significant based largely on the recovery and recording of some 20 Late Iron Age coins from the earlier antiquarian notes and 13 first century brooches of Colchester, Aucissa/Hod Hill and Langton Down types. The majority have been recorded from largely unprovenanced or poorly provenanced locations within and around the quarried areas but two further coins, one of Tasciovanus one of Cunobelinus were recovered during the 1970s excavations. Structural and other artefactual evidence for clearly defined settlement in a pre conquest context from the excavations, however, is limited to a single ditch containing Late Iron Age pottery from 'Site 1' of the 1970s excavations. The main excavation areas in 'Site 2' do not appear to have developed until the middle to later first century AD. The few earlier reports of Iron Age pottery from elsewhere within the settlement remain to be examined in order to verify their nature. Recent excavations ahead of development at Upton 400m to the south west of the main focus of settlement have identified further Iron Age settlement but this may be part of a separate and or earlier Iron Age site.

### **2.2 Roman**

The earliest subsequent occupation can be dated to the mid-late first century AD when the first groups of roadside ditches and enclosure boundaries were laid out within the southern parts of the settlement investigated in the 1970s. There is little evidence of buildings from this period within the rescue excavations but given the truncation of much of the site during stripping and the ephemeral nature of much of the surviving evidence for early timber buildings it would be foolish to suggest that the area was not settled at this time. Some support for this suggestion comes from the presence of early cremation burials from this area of the site. There is little or no suggestion that the settlement at this time had any military associations and it is probable that the boundaries formalised and possibly expanded the settlement from the Late Iron Age. By the later first and early second century AD the widespread distribution of finds noted in the quarries and from areas of housing indicate that much of the probable settlement area was in use, a pattern of relatively rapid expansion seen at other towns within the region. Much of this area appears to continue in use well into the 4<sup>th</sup> century and throughout this period the settlement seems to have functioned as an agricultural and possibly commercial focus. There is little obvious evidence that it acted as either an industrial or religious centre.

### **2.3 Saxon**

The latest recorded coins from the settlement are of late fourth century AD issues predominantly recovered from the areas quarried in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries but not exclusively so. No structural evidence from the site can confidently be considered to date to the late fourth-early fifth century. The problem of determining late Roman settlement activity at Duston is further exacerbated by the truncation of deposits from the rescue excavation areas before recording began. It is thus still largely impossible to consider the precise character of late Roman activity at Duston though the absence of Saxon material from the 1970s site suggests that occupation of the southern part of the site had ceased. Evidence noted by George (1904), however, for early Anglo-Saxon burials to the western end of the quarries at the beginning of the twentieth century would suggest that some form of significant occupation of the settlement at Duston continued, even if locally it had shifted northward.

### **3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 COMMUNICATIONS**

Information about the road layout comes primarily from the 1974 excavations and from the projection of a suggested road line from Bannaventa (Whilton Lodge) along the modern Berrywood Road. Within the settlement little is known about the street plan but from the fragmentary information available it is possible to suggest that much of the settlement lay along two roads (from Bannaventa to the north west and from Towcester to the south west) that met somewhere around SP732606.

At present the direction of any roads to the east or southeast beyond this junction towards Irchester are unknown. It is, however, possible to suggest that the road from the direction of Towcester did not continue northeast beyond the suggested junction because no sign of it was found at Site 1 of the 1970s rescue excavations alongside Weedon Road. A small area of hard standing found in an evaluation of the former Abbey works site to the east of the junction along Weedon Road may be part of a road but its north-south alignment suggests that it is more likely to have been a yard or side track or road.

#### **3.2 DEFENCES**

There is no evidence that Duston was ever enclosed within defences.

#### **3.3 BUILDINGS**

Evidence for buildings within the settlement is fragmentary and often short on detail of location or form. Sharp, recording the discoveries from the quarries, is contradictory for in 1871 he reports that no indications of domestic habitation had yet been discovered yet in 1862 he had noted that with finds of black and white tesserae coming from the quarry there had undoubtedly been a Roman house on the site. Furthermore, flue tiles, roof tile and T-clamps amongst the material recovered from the nineteenth century quarrying imply the presence of at least one substantial building between the angle of the Weedon and Duston roads.

The majority of detailed information on buildings within the settlement, however, comes from the 1970s excavations and those around Site 2 in particular. The unpublished plans and archive text for this excavation indicate a loosely planned but nevertheless quite densely occupied and extensive settlement covering at least 4ha either side of the road running south west towards Towcester. Though the plans from the watching brief are sketchy there is a clear indication that the majority of domestic and craft buildings within this area clustered along or close to the main road frontage with broadly rectilinear enclosures and yards to the rear used for a variety of agricultural and other purposes.



Two probable timber structures found in the southernmost excavation area (Trenches A-C) could only be broadly dated to Phases 1-2 (later 1st-2nd century AD). One represented by the truncated remains of a shallow gully was almost certainly a round house the other part of a post-built rectangular building orientated broadly east-west and at least 6m long.

Within the excavated areas there are then no further buildings until the construction of a possible timber building indicated by a row of north-south orientated post holes in phase 4 (late 3<sup>rd</sup> century). This is soon replaced by a simple stone founded rectangular building 11.5m long by 6m wide in Phase 5 (late 3rd-late 4th century AD) of Trench E. This building, with its long axis orientated north west-south east lay perpendicular to the course of the main road and was set some 50m back from it. A small malting kiln or drying oven lay in its interior, as did two inhumations, though the stratigraphic relationship of the latter to the house was uncertain.

Stretches of walling found at four other locations within the area of the watching brief indicated the locations of further stone buildings broadly though not precisely parallel or perpendicular to the through road and within 40m of it. Most were too fragmentary to interpret but one immediately to the east of Trench E was at least 14.3 x 9.5m in size. Areas of gravel and limestone hard core indicate that most of these buildings were associated with small side tracks or yards probably linking them to the main road.

A small excavation close to the roundabout to the west of this site located a further 5m stretch of walling that probably constituted part of a further building. This may suggest that domestic occupation extended at least a further 250m to the west of the main focus of rescue excavation.

### **3.4 COMMERCE & INDUSTRY**

George (1904) noted that over 1000 coins had been recovered from the quarries and the quantity and dating of the coins from the 1970s excavations support the suggestion that Duston acted as a centre for monetary transactions probably associated with taxation and general commerce. This suggestion may be further supported by the presence of 3<sup>rd</sup> AD century moulds for the production of 'counterfeit' coins, an activity that has been considered officially supported or at least condoned during this period.

Further evidence for craft production and the study of trade at Duston is scarce. Within the area of the rescue excavations the absence of a published syntheses of the all the artefactual evidence currently limits what can be said. Research by the author into the archive, however, suggests that with the exception of a pottery assemblage of 5,300 sherds and a list of some 150 coins (45 from a single hoard) there is little material that would be suitable for further study. That said it is notable that nowhere amongst the reports of this work is there any indication of craft or industrial activity on any significant scale. This is particularly striking in regard to the site's location on good iron ore deposits and the abundance of evidence for smelting and or smithing within other towns in the region. The few structures (such as drying or malting ovens) and finds (such as the knife, saw and leather working punch) that were reported overwhelmingly relate to agricultural practice or the processing of arable produce. Together this evidence suggests that Duston probably acted primarily as a local agricultural centre and potential point of local taxation or exchange for goods manufactured elsewhere.

## **3.5 RELIGIOUS, RITUAL & FUNERARY**

### **3.5.1 Temples and Shrines**

Neither the excavations nor the earlier antiquarian records provide clear evidence for the presence of temples or shrines at Duston. Large numbers of miniature pottery vessels from the quarries may indicate the presence of an otherwise unrecorded religious focus but are just as likely to have come from graves in the noted cemeteries. Likewise, although the bronze bust (suggested by George to be of Lucius Verus) and the collection of pewter vessels indicate some degree of social sophistication and wealth, alone they are not exceptional discoveries within a settlement of Duston's size and do not indicate a religious or ritual role for the settlement.

### **3.5.2 Cemetery**

Evidence that Duston acted as a significant centre for burial is plentiful if not well recorded. Pretty (1849) noted four inhumations during work on the Turnpike road and a letter in the Dryden collection subsequently records a further 26 skeletons orientated in the same direction. Sharp (1871) later summarising discoveries from the quarry noted the remains of very many skeletons as well as indications of a larger number of cremations (of which many of the complete pots in the Northampton museum collection may be examples). There is no information on the precise location or layout of these interments but they clearly constituted at least one significant cemetery in the angle between the Weedon and Duston roads. Furthermore the presence of large numbers of both cremations and inhumations indicates that the cemetery, unusually for excavated examples from Northamptonshire Roman towns, was in use through both the earlier and later Roman periods. There are also good reasons to think that the later Roman inhumation cemetery at least contained burials of some status with examples interred in both a stone sarcophagus (e.g. Markham 1909, 252-4) and lead coffin, the former probably lying within a mausoleum with walls some 4ft thick. This cemetery, though poorly located probably lay towards the northern or north eastern extremity of the settlement as few reliable finds of definitive settlement evidence (rather than occasional single finds) have been recovered outside the quarry north of Duston Road.

The excavations and watching briefs of the 1970s further indicate that this was not the only focus for burial at Duston. A watching brief on a series of rectilinear compounds and enclosures thought to lie at the southern periphery of the site recorded a group of at least 12 inhumations aligned west south west - east northeast alongside a major ditched boundary. Although poorly dated (one had a 3rd-4th century coin in its mouth) these late Roman burials may well have been part of a larger but now mostly truncated or destroyed cemetery on the southern edge of the town. Several were decapitated, a tradition seen at other towns within the region and particularly associated with so-called boundary burials found both around and within settlements. A further five inhumations (two of which were decapitated) were recorded at three separate locations across the watching brief and excavation areas within the Roman settlement. Although their context was not always well reported they all also seem to be aligned on property boundaries and thus represent further examples of this common later Roman tradition that ran alongside burial in formal extra-urban or peripheral cemeteries.

## **3.6 LAND USE**

The location of the settlement at Duston on sloping land above the river Nene combined with the large-scale destruction of many of its most significant archaeological deposits suggests that the potential for study of the immediate environment or land use strategies

in its vicinity is limited. No botanical samples have been reported from the 1970s excavations and the small quantities of zoological remains (<150 fragments of bone) recovered are insufficient to be of any real use. Four (possibly five) ovens or malting kilns were reported from a variety of locations across the settlement south of the Weedon Road, usually associated with mid-late Roman (2nd-4th century) buildings. In the absence of supporting botanical evidence, however, it is difficult to suggest what this may indicate other than that the processing and consumption of agricultural produce may have been an important if not primary function of the settlement.

The extent of quarrying further south and the absence of excavation or evaluation on the flood plain of the Nene in the immediate vicinity prevents any assessment of the extent, date and location of former paleochannels and alluvium. Whilst evaluation of these areas may provide valuable palaeoenvironmental samples their distance from the settlement and the intervening areas of destruction probably mean they would be of marginal value.

## **II ASSESSMENT**

### **ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE AND SURVIVAL**

**Duston is a significant example of a class of medium sized undefended small town not uncommon to the region. Due to the destruction of much of its core in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and subsequent development it is difficult to judge whether the settlement bears close comparison with some of its nearest neighbours but may have been similar to sites such as Titchmarsh and Ashton also within the Nene Valley. Its primary significance seems to have lain in its role as a pre-existing Late Iron Age focus of unknown form or purpose that was incorporated within the regional road network linking sites in the Nene Valley with Watling Street to the north west and possibly Towcester to the south west. Much of the core part of the settlement has been destroyed by quarrying or damaged by subsequent urban development but the site has both a useful early antiquarian record of discoveries and some limited evidence from rescue excavation. Unfortunately much of the settlement area was developed before modern archaeological intervention and recording strategies were in place and Duston has rarely been the focus of sustained archaeological interest. As a consequence our understanding of the settlement is patchy and largely dependent on unsystematically recorded finds or observations.**

**Most of the core of the settlement is likely to have been destroyed by quarrying, damaged by housing and industrial development or severely truncated as part of related landscaping works. The results of the former Abbey Works evaluation, however, indicate that part of the eastern periphery of the settlement may still be reasonably well preserved. Though not as well understood it is also likely that small areas of the south western periphery of the settlement survive between areas of development south of Weedon Road to either side of the A45 may also be reasonably well preserved.**

#### **1.0 DOCUMENTARY**

No significant contemporaneous epigraphic or literary sources about Roman Duston are known.

#### **2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

The urban and industrial context of the surviving parts of the Duston settlement severely limits what is, and will be possible to say about the development, layout and function of the Roman town. To date, the main sources of evidence have come from rescue excavation or watching briefs during construction work during the 1970s or during later trenching for services. This is augmented by stray finds recovered from individual properties across this part of town and the notes and letters of the earlier antiquaries during ironstone quarrying. No aerial photographic, earthwork or surface survey evidence is available because of the early inception of modern development and there is likely to be little or no opportunity for such work in the future other than in a few areas towards the southern periphery of the settlement. It is likely that small-scale excavation and evaluation will remain the most valuable source of additional archaeological information in the future.

## **Survival**

The extensive ironstone quarrying of both the majority of the northern part of the town and its southern periphery near the floodplain has destroyed as much as 46ha of the landscape in and immediately adjacent to the site. Whilst it is possible that islands of archaeological deposits survive within the quarried area it is currently not possible to define where these may be. The remaining area covered by the Roman settlement largely lies under a sports complex and industrial development. Here buildings and service trenches will have destroyed much significant information though pockets of archaeological deposits will almost certainly survive as at the Abbey works site in yards, small green spaces and under metalled surfaces. Much of the landscape around the sports grounds and industrial units investigated in the 1970s, however, was severely truncated by topsoil stripping and localised landscaping and it is thus possible that much archaeological evidence from the area between the two main quarries is now lost. The main archaeological threat today stems from continuing redevelopment of existing facilities, infill of the few remaining open spaces and the construction of new or restructuring of existing industrial units.

None of the settlement is currently scheduled but two relatively small areas close to the suggested southwestern and eastern edges of the settlement may survive in reasonable condition. Within the context of the extensive loss of archaeological deposits at Duston these constitute potentially significant areas for future assessment. First is the area of cut features, including pits, ditches and a small circular oven found towards the northern end of the former Abbey Road Works site (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2000) c.500m to the east of the 1970s excavations at Site 2. Here a buried soil horizon up to 0.5m thick that may extend for up to a hectare over the northern part of the site overlay the Roman deposits and in places may have preserved contemporary soil horizons. Though probably a peripheral area of agricultural activity to the east of the main settlement, the level of preservation would suggest that this area is of significant potential.

The second area is that partially covered by development alongside the A45 to the south of the roundabout at the junction with the Weedon Road. Little is known about the extent of Roman archaeology in this area but the potential exists for further settlement to the west of the road running towards Towcester.

### **2.1 Settlement Morphology and Communications**

With the exception of the southwest - northeast road identified in 1974 virtually nothing is known about the layout of roads and track ways within the Roman settlement or their likely survival. Subsequent trial excavations at a number of places within modern residential and industrial areas have largely failed indicate that metalled surfaces survive but the small area usually available to view makes interpretation difficult and the discovery of a limestone hard standing at the Abbey Works site shows that some may survive. The limited likely extent of such surfaces, however, and the degree to which they may be investigated will make it difficult to judge the significance and direction of any found.

Given the broad area over which settlement remains have been recorded it is conceivable that further secondary roads may have extended beyond properties on the two main road frontages. If the hard standing at the Abbey Works site were part of a track way its north-south orientation would suggest that it was just such an example. The proximity to the main road of most of the buildings discovered in the 1970s work, however, may suggest

that the settlement was primarily a ribbon development along its two through routes with little secondary development.

## **2.2 Buildings**

Thanks largely to the records of the excavations and watching briefs in the 1970s a reasonable amount is known about the range of building types at Duston. With two or three timber buildings of both round house and rectangular post built construction and five or possibly six stone simple founded rectangular buildings it is clear that a wide range of building forms were constructed across significant areas of the settlement from the first to fourth centuries AD. As is common in many areas stone largely superseded timber forms in the later Roman period but all forms with the exception of the post holes of the rectangular timber buildings had relatively shallow foundations.

It is also clear that the main road frontages and an area c.50m either side of them were quite densely occupied at least from the 2nd century AD and the former quarry to the north also evidently contained at least one significant building. Furthermore, the number of wells found across the earlier quarries (15-20 are noted by Sharp 1871, 4) indicates that Duston was probably a fairly substantial settlement. Given the urban, formerly quarry dominated landscape in which Roman Duston now lies the potential for the study of its architecture is likely to be limited by the size of surviving pockets of archaeological deposits in and around residential and industrial developments. Although limited in extent some at least of these deposits may not have suffered as severely from superficial damage by cultivation as many of the rurally located sites covered in this study. Consequently the potential survival of some later Roman features may be better than on many of the Roman towns in the county. Support for this comes from the Abbey Works excavations but the likelihood of heavy topsoil stripping and landscaping in conjunction with the larger developments should caution against optimism that this situation is widespread. The damaging effects of landscaping and stripping of overburden is further exacerbated by the ephemeral nature of many of the Roman architectural foundations noted from the site and was evident in the damage inflicted on later Roman stone buildings within the area of the 1970s excavations and watching briefs.

The destruction caused by the quarries and other urban developments, however, make it unlikely we will ever get a clearer idea of the overall nature and layout of the town's architectural traditions. This should not stop attempts to assess evidence for individual buildings when the opportunity arises, especially if it proves possible to attempt to investigate the functions or internal layout of surviving buildings. Importantly, given how little we still understand of the settlement's overall extent, development opportunities in the area behind the suspected main road frontages and to the east and south west of the core need to be used to evaluate whether domestic/craft/agricultural buildings occupied the intervening space and if so, their general orientation in relation to any potential side roads.

## **2.3 Commerce & Industry**

Despite the rescue or antiquarian context in which many of the discoveries at Duston have been made a number of structures such as hearths, ovens and malting kilns have been noted. Largely surface built structures, these are known to have been damaged where past development has required landscaping or heavy soil stripping but their presence in significant numbers across both the core and peripheral areas of the site suggests that important examples and their associated deposits may still survive. Furthermore, even where development has removed surface stratigraphy the prevalence

of wells still provides some possibility of determining former craft or commercial activity. The earlier excavations, however, have recovered little significant information about iron or pottery production in particular though a re-evaluation of the archive of pottery and metalwork may provide clues to otherwise unreported activities.

At present the settlement appears primarily to have been a focus for agricultural processing, burial and possibly for taxation and commerce. The scale of these activities is currently poorly understood as none of the extant studies have attempted to quantify the excavated material. The available artefactual evidence, though reasonable in the case of pottery, coinage and metalwork, is either haphazardly reported in antiquarian accounts or unpublished and as such is still a limited resource for the study of craft and exchange. Any opportunities for future excavation should aim to provide quantified groups that could be used for comparison with the Site 2 excavations from 1974 and potentially other towns and rural settlements within the region. Although individual groups may be small, evaluations from different parts of the settlement may draw out contrasts in the zonation of activities that are at present unknown.

#### **2.4 Religious, Ritual & Funerary**

The earlier excavations at Duston provide a small but nevertheless potentially useful group of inhumations that could be used in wider studies of Roman burial practice in towns in the region. They include examples of both a small inhumation cemetery and probable boundary burials of the later Roman period that provide a useful comparison with larger assemblages known from a small number of other towns such as Ashton. Including infant, decapitated and double burials with and without attendant artefacts for a small group they incorporate much of the range in practice and age we might hope to encounter.

The excavations and the antiquarian records also provide reasonable evidence as to the likely location of at least two potential burial areas behind the main road frontages and so aid in the continued study of urban topography in relation to treatment of the dead. Although topsoil stripping will have damaged burials in the areas of the 1970s watching briefs it is possible that some may still survive. Unfortunately the fate of the land in this area after the watching brief concluded is not noted and so its potential remains uncertain.

The cemeteries noted in the ironstone quarries are likely to have been totally destroyed and the paucity of the surviving records makes it impossible to gain a reasonable understanding of the overall layout and development of burial in these parts of the settlement.

At present there is no significant evidence of shrines or temples within the town. Their presence cannot be ruled out but as yet it is difficult to suggest anywhere that such a focus may be located. Given that the majority of known or probable shrines in small towns in the region are quite centrally placed within the settlement it is likely that any such monument may already have been lost.

#### **2.5 Landscape & Environment**

The absence of paleoenvironmental work from any of the evaluated sites limits the potential to understand much about the town itself or its immediate hinterland to the north, west and south. There is, however, still potential for some work to the east of the main focus and possibly to the south west if stratified deposits such as those suggested for

the Abbey Works site survive. Earlier reports about the presence of wells from the quarries omit any reference to the likely quality of preservation of deposits but it is possible that here at least water logged material survives providing good, if isolated, deposits for analysis. Much of the immediate hinterland of the town has been built over or quarried away and so the scope for an assessment of its wider agricultural and environmental context is limited to samples that might be derived from surviving pockets of archaeology.

## **2.6 Hinterland**

For the purposes of assessment of the hinterlands of the Roman towns an arbitrary boundary of 10km radius was established and its potential graded according to professional judgment. A wider understanding of the role of urban foci in the region and their relationship with surrounding agricultural landscapes is better reviewed as a whole and the findings of such an approach to Northamptonshire are summarized in the Roman period section of the general report of the Extensive Urban Survey.

The Roman settlement at Duston now lies under modern Northampton and consequently its immediate hinterland has been seriously affected by urban development. Most of the settlement itself and all of the landscape immediately around underlie housing or industrial development erected since the nineteenth century and largely without archaeological intervention. In the process the majority of the Roman town including its main road frontages, a small potential cemetery and most of the evidence for agricultural or craft activity in its immediate environs has been lost or damaged.

The 10km hinterland of Roman Duston is also dominated by modern Northampton severely restricting any possibility of study of its neighbouring landscapes. The wider hinterland incorporates a sizeable part of the middle and upper Nene valley and the Brampton arm of the Nene, a major tributary to the north. Whilst this would comprise a very valuable potential study area, these landscapes have also suffered considerable damage. Mineral extraction and the growth of the county's largest town has destroyed or damaged most of the town's hinterland within a 3 kilometre radius, particularly downstream along the Nene the valley itself. Some archaeological work has taken place in advance of these developments (e.g. at Upton, Blackthorn and Overstone) but largely in the form of rescue excavation without attendant wider survey to place individual sites in context. To the south of Duston, across the Nene a significant tract of land around the Iron Age hillfort at Hunsbury has seen piecemeal work for many years that has recently been supplemented by large scale work ahead of development around Courteenhall. This provides perhaps the fullest picture of the nature of the Iron Age and Roman rural landscapes close to Duston that requires synthesis.

Broader areas of agricultural land does survive beyond Northampton to the west and north of the Roman town that could provide important information about the road system and rural landscape on the route to Bannaventa. Unfortunately this area has historically seen little archaeological excavation or survey and so little can presently be said. Elsewhere the surviving tracts of land that lie within the 10 kilometre hinterland are so distant and isolated that their study would be of marginal relevance to study of the town.

Given present archaeological knowledge of the area and the extent of its destruction the Roman landscapes around Duston have low archaeological potential for study. With the exception of the block of land either side of the road from Duston to Bannaventa there are few contiguous and accessible parts of the landscape left. Although the hinterland



contains a number of examples of significant excavations of both Late Iron Age and Roman sites (predominantly villas such as Brixworth) there has been little systematic survey ahead of destruction through urban development. The fragmentary and often limited scale or early date of these investigations, however, limits their value in assessing the economic relationships between the town and its hinterland, especially in the absence of any likely future opportunity to study the town itself on any scale.

### **III RESEARCH AGENDA**

Provided with the evidence above and the current potential of the site for future investigation the sections below list a series of key research questions about the Roman town of Duston itself. Certain wider research issues are better dealt with in relation to a discussion of all the towns within the region and are considered in the project overview.

#### **Origins**

What is the date and nature of Late Iron Age and conquest period occupation at Duston? Critically, is there clear evidence that some form of settlement or indeed religious focus already existed on the site before the Roman conquest? Are any new discoveries of Iron Age tradition metalwork or coins from demonstrably Iron Age rather than post-conquest Roman deposits? Can the existing small Iron Age assemblage of pottery from Site 1 of the 1970s excavations and the extant brooch and coin groups be used to confirm this? Is there any direct link either in the form of contiguous occupied areas or track ways between the Iron enclosures recently recorded in Upton to the south west?

#### **Communications**

Is it possible to confirm the route of the road to Bannaventa along its projected line south of Weedon Road? Can a junction between it and the road towards Towcester recorded in 1974 be found? Can the course of the possible road towards Towcester be identified anywhere beyond the quarries to the south of the 1970s watching briefs? Is their evidence for a road running east or southeast beyond the suggested junction along the Nene valley in the direction of Irchester? If so when were these roads constructed and/or formalised? Are any areas of hard standing simply yards associated with individual properties or evidence of secondary roads running beyond the main road frontages? Is there any evidence for waterside works on the floodplain beside the River Nene?

#### **Urban Topography and Zonation**

A basic and critical problem remains how to identify the extent of the settlement, particularly to the east and southwest. Within the confines of the few areas now available for future investigation, were the main roads the primary focus for domestic architecture? Does this ribbon development extend further east than currently known? Were both the main frontages and areas away from them used primarily for settlement and agriculture? Can the analysis of material evidence from future isolated excavations or evaluations across the settlement identify any zonation in activity? In particular were iron working, pottery production or other related activities a part of the community's role and if so where?

#### **Landscape and Environment**

Can future excavation or evaluation determine whether surviving archaeological deposits within the settlement have potential for environmental analysis? Do any parts of the

town's associated field systems extend on to the floodplain of the Nene beyond the quarries to the south? The destruction of most of the surrounding landscape makes further comparative work in the town's hinterland impossible but some opportunity may exist for work on the well preserved deposits to the east under the Abbey works site that may provide insights into the immediate agricultural environment of the later Roman settlement.

### **Craft and Agricultural Practice**

Was the settlement largely or solely an agricultural centre with an attendant role in monetary exchange? Is there any evidence that it also acted as a centre of craft production? Can the pottery assemblages from the 1970s excavations provide us with some guide as to the distance over which material was regularly transported? Do the coin lists from the site, seemingly rich in Late Iron Age and first century Roman issues suggest that it had an unusually significant role in monetary exchange in the first century AD?

### **Religious, Ritual & Funerary**

What was the extent of the probable cemetery to the south of the settlement recognised in the 1970s watching brief? Are there further early cremation burials in this area? What insights can we gain into its size and chronological development? Do the recorded burial traditions follow rites seen elsewhere in the region and especially at Ashton? Are there further burials located to the east of the town?

Is there any evidence for a focus for religious practice in the form of a temple or shrine within the town? Do any of the wells appear to have been ritual foci in their own right? What is the nature of the rites associated with them?

### **The Later Roman Town**

Can the pottery and coin assemblages from the 1970s excavations give us a better idea of the duration of occupation in this part of the town? Are there any surviving areas of archaeological deposits to the west of the ironstone quarries and A45 that have evidence for later Roman or Anglo-Saxon occupation? Is there evidence from anywhere within the former Roman town of Anglo-Saxon settlement rather than burial activity? If so can any of this be securely dated to the fifth century? Is there any suggestion of continuity of burial if not settlement to the west of the Roman town?

## **IV STRATEGY**

The assessment of the management and conservation priorities within the Extensive Urban Survey have been based around an assessment of levels of importance previously applied elsewhere in the county for management purposes. The grading falls into six categories:

**Scheduled:** nationally important remains that have statutory protection.

**Unscheduled national importance:** in some cases statutory protection is suggested while in others recording action may prove to be the appropriate response to threats.

**County importance:** Where significant archaeology is known or where it is likely but confirmation is required. Normally recording rather than preservation would be the appropriate mitigation strategy.

**Historic Buildings:** buildings known or which have the potential to contain significant pre 19<sup>th</sup> century structural remains

**Local importance:** where archaeology may survive but where, on present evidence investigation does not appear appropriate.

**Destroyed:** where the archaeology has been wholly destroyed.

**White Land:** where the archaeology has not been assessed for this report

## **1.0 EXISTING DESIGNATIONS**

### **1.1 Scheduled Ancient Monuments**

None of the area of Duston Roman Town is currently scheduled

### **1.2 Listed Buildings**

### **1.3 Conservation Area**

### **1.4 Registered Parks**

## **2.0 MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES**

### **2.1 Evaluation and Recording Priorities**

Due to the extent of nineteenth and twentieth century destruction the surviving area of the settlement is primarily of county or regional importance. The areas of greatest potential interest lie towards the southwestern and eastern fringes of the settlement (as indicated on the Strategy map). These require further evaluation in order to determine their potential significance. The eastern area may include a small area of settlement lying to one or both sides of a further road running towards Irchester and may in places have surviving surface deposits of high archaeological and paleoenvironmental value buried under later soils. The area to the southwest may provide one of the few extensive and contiguous areas for investigation but may well lie beyond the settlement.

Most of the surviving areas of the former settlement are under continuing threat from industrial development and service trenching and as such requires monitoring and intervention through excavation or watching brief where appropriate. Particular consideration should be given to evaluation of any area of development that provides the potential for open area excavation close to the suspected areas of occupation discussed above, especially if there is any indication that Roman deposits have been buried by subsequent soil build up.

Intervention should be considered anywhere within the area delimited as of county significance under the housing or industrial development unless there is good evidence for extensive truncation of the soil profile through previous landscaping.

Priorities for future archaeological research into Duston can be defined:

- First, is the need to adequately publish the results of the 1970s excavations and watching briefs. This archive is in an advanced state of readiness and would require little further investment to ensure its publication.
- Second, it is important to establish the extent, potential and state of preservation of archaeological deposits within the area of housing and industrial land to the east of the known settlement along Weedon Road.
- Third, it is important to evaluate the area of potential archaeological survival towards the southwestern edge of the settlement along the A45 in order to establish the settlement's extent and any link to the Iron discoveries at Upton.
- Fourth, is the need to consider archaeological excavation in advance of any significant open areas of development within the industrial estate not previously cellared or landscaped.
- Finally, it is important to evaluate the potential for palaeoenvironmental and artefactual sampling of deeper archaeological deposits within wells or larger pits in areas where surface archaeology has been truncated by development.

## 2.2 Conservation Priorities

None of the settlement area is currently scheduled and no areas within the town would appear to justify scheduling on present evidence. Neither are there any significant setting issues with regard to archaeological monuments.

The settlement has no visual value and given the degree to which significant archaeological structures are likely to have been destroyed or damaged by building and quarrying they are not thought to be of significant amenity value.

## REFERENCES

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