

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
EXTENSIVE URBAN SURVEY

WHILTON LODGE  
(*BANNAVENTA*)

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Funded by English Heritage

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2002

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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 Whilton Lodge 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 Whilton Lodge 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

Whilton Lodge (*Bannaventa*) is one of the 14 nucleated settlements incorporated within the current survey that acted as local or regional centres in the Roman period. Located roughly midway between Towcester (*Lactodurum*) and Caves Inn (*Tripontium*), Whilton is probably one of the larger small towns (c.16-22ha) and probably acted as a local market centre along Watling Street, one of the province's prime arterial roads. Limited early observation and rescue excavations between 1970-92 in the north eastern quarter of the town indicate that it may have developed in the mid to late first century AD around a road junction along Watling Street close to a crossing of the river Nene, possibly close to a pre-conquest site of unknown form. Like a number of the Nene valley towns Whilton may have owed its existence to the strategic significance of its location on the road network and to the wealth of its surrounding agricultural landscapes.

Whilton's layout may derive from initial ribbon development along Watling Street around the road junction linked to local considerations of access to the surrounding agricultural landscape. Seemingly extensively occupied by the second century AD, the developed plan of the settlement is still not well understood.

A limited but nevertheless significant amount can be said about the town's historical development close to Watling Street and the later defended core but far less so elsewhere. Watling Street and a series of neighbouring land boundaries perpendicular to it seem to have been laid out in the mid-first century AD. During the late first to early second century these boundaries were formalised and the first recorded building, a round house, was constructed. During the course of the mid-second and third centuries further timber buildings, this time of rectangular sill beam construction, were constructed in the northeastern part of the town probably some way away from the main road frontages. This period may also have seen the construction of stone buildings towards the southern and northern fringes of the settlement noted during earlier observations on the town. During the second or early third century Whilton was also provided with a defensive circuit of ditch and earthen rampart enclosing approximately 5ha of the core of the town around the road junction. This was later slighted and replaced by a double ditch and wall on broadly the same ground plan in the later third or fourth century.

The southern fringes of the town in the late first – third centuries may have been marked by a cemetery close to Watling Street, noted in nineteenth century observations of building work alongside the present Norton road. Little else, however, is known about religious and burial activity within the town.

Clearly occupied up to the end of the fourth century the town is not known to have survived in any recognisable form into the Early-Middle Saxon period. Finds of early-middle Saxon pottery and a middle Saxon coin, however, may indicate that activity of some form continued beyond the Roman period.

# **I DESCRIPTION**

## **1.0 TOPOGRAPHY & GEOLOGY**

The Roman settlement at Whilton Lodge straddles the modern A5 and lies on the southern end of a ridge of glacial sand and gravel up to 120m above Ordnance Datum. The full extent of the settlement is not well understood but may well cover some 16-22ha predominantly along the course of Watling street and around a defended core of some 5ha lying to the north east of a minor brook and west of the River Nene.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL & TOPOGRAPHICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 PREHISTORIC**

Evidence for Iron Age occupation at Whilton Lodge is sparse but potentially significant. No definitively pre-conquest settlement was recorded in the 1950s and 1970s excavations but a range of scattered finds suggest that the area of the Roman settlement may have incorporated a later Iron Age focus of activity. Single Iron age coin finds from both excavations and a small quantity of handmade, probably prehistoric pottery from a feature under the town ramparts represent all that is currently recorded but in the absence of much systematic investigation through field walking or recent excavation this is perhaps not surprising.

### **2.2 ROMAN**

The earliest subsequent occupation can be dated to the mid-late first century AD when ditched boundaries were laid out broadly perpendicular to Watling Street and an eastern side road north of and under the later rampart of the defended area (Dix & Taylor 1988). Earlier discoveries during drainage work at the turn of the century and in the 1950s excavations in Shawney Field<sup>1</sup> suggests that this early occupation ran along both sides of Watling street at least as far as the southern limit of the later defences. The rescue excavations within the interior of the defended area indicating that this boundary system extended at least some 100m back from Watling Street. This plan then appears to have formed the basic framework around which all subsequent activity focused. The nature of settlement in this area during the first century, however, is less clear as no first century buildings have been excavated. The earliest building to date is a round house of early second century date under the defensive rampart. At present it is impossible to tell whether or when the settlement area is densely occupied. There is also no evidence of early military occupation of the area and currently little in the artefact record to suggest any such link with the early history of the settlement.

### **2.3 SAXON**

The latest recorded Roman coin from the excavations or metal detecting is of the House of Theodosius (dated to AD 388-9). No structural evidence or pottery from the site can confidently be ascribed to the late fourth-early fifth century, though a number of recorded fourth century types that may continue this late are present. It is thus difficult to assess the nature of any late Roman activity at Whilton but early to middle

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<sup>1</sup> reported in the Journal of the Northamptonshire Natural History Society & Field Club 33 (1957) 132-43

Saxon sherds reported to have been recovered from a robber trench of the late town wall may indicate that the defences of Bannaventa had fallen into disuse.

The pottery and discovery of a primary series sceat of porcupine type (c.AD690-725) in metal detecting in Mans Head Field (SP 6122 6422), though may suggest some form of middle Saxon activity associated with a nearby small cemetery at SP 6191 6283 some 700m further south along Watling Street.

### **3.0 THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

#### **3.1 COMMUNICATIONS**

Information about the road layout primarily comes from aerial photographic evidence and suggests potentially quite complex development around a junction between Watling Street and the road running east south east towards Duston. In the past the suggestion was that junction lay further to the south outside the defended area but recent replotting of the aerial photographic evidence clearly indicates that the junction of the two roads lies within the defended core of the settlement. The overall plan of the road system at Whilton Lodge is less clear than a number of the other towns in the county but just about sufficient is currently known to suggest its likely overall plan. Essentially the settlement was focused on Watling Street (thought to have been constructed in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of the area in the AD40s) and a side road of unknown date running across the Nene valley towards the Late Iron Age and Roman settlement at Duston. As with other defended towns such as Irchester it appears that the rest of the settlement was laid out around a dendritic system of track ways that ran out into the surrounding agricultural landscapes. A watching brief in 1969 to the south of Norton road and immediately to the east of the brook also noted the probable course of a side road running from a likely junction with Watling Street at SP 6136 6400 past the western side of the walled town until it possibly joined a complex track way junction at SP 6092 6452 (904/0).

Inside the walled area little is still known about the layout of the town other than that a minor track way running north west to south east inside north east quarter of defended area may mark part of side lane or simply access to the rear of properties closer to Watling Street.

#### **3.2 DEFENCES**

Knowledge of the plan of the town defences at Whilton Lodge is still incomplete and dependent on a combination of aerial photography and the rescue excavations carried out in the 1970s. Indications are that the enclosure is some 5ha in size and lay awkwardly astride Roman Watling Street. The defences probably formed an uneven quadrilateral with broad rounded corners but as yet there are no indications of its course in its south eastern quarter. The aerial photographs indicate that it was formed by a triple ditch system around all its identifiable course but two further substantial ditches may mark some form of extension or annexe to the towns defences to the north on its western side.

Thanks to the rescue excavations, the triple ditch system is now thought to incorporate two distinct phases of defensive work (Dix & Taylor 1988). The first consisting of a major ditch (c. 7.7m wide and 2.6m deep) and earthen rampart that is not well dated

but cut a Hadrianic (early-middle second century) oven and was seemingly backfilled by later third to early fourth century AD. Its attendant rampart contains second century pottery and a late second-early third Samian sherd (possibly suggesting late 2<sup>nd</sup> or early 3<sup>rd</sup> century construction). The outer ditch, and probably also the middle one, were dug during or after the later third century and the clear suggestion is that the latter represented a remodelling of the earlier defences. The late double defensive circuit was probably associated with the construction of a wall of unknown size over the infilled inner ditch at around this time.

### **3.3 BUILDINGS**

The earliest significant occupation known from the excavations can be dated to the mid-first century AD when a number of ditched boundaries probably defining enclosures was laid out along Watling Street. Although much of the area within 100m of the road may have been bounded at this time there is little direct evidence for domestic occupation in the first century AD. Although small parts of a number of enclosures were excavated, only one early timber building was recorded. A round house, some 6.7m in diameter, defined by a bedding trench for hurdle or wattle walls was constructed over an early boundary in the early second century (smr 895/0/15). Currently, therefore, though it is likely that the main road line was defined and enclosures laid out during the first century it is impossible to be sure from the small excavated areas whether the site was already developing into a larger nucleated settlement.

Subsequently, at least two phases of rectangular sill-beamed timber buildings were constructed (smr 895/0/32) during the second and third centuries. These buildings show a range of minor variations in design and change in axis from north-south to east west but were broadly of similar size and displayed little obvious evidence of marked change in status. Dating evidence was poor but both broadly were broadly in use between the mid-second to third centuries AD. No buildings are known after this date from the excavated areas and currently no stone buildings have been positively identified though Morton (1712) noted 'the stones of ruined walls' being dug up within the area of the settlement and 'a scatter of building debris' was recorded in 1969 to the south of the town around SP 6122 6443.

### **3.4 COMMERCE & INDUSTRY**

Evidence for craft production and the study of trade is almost entirely absent at Whilton. Within the area of the rescue excavations, however, the absence of published syntheses of the all the artefactual evidence, currently limits what can be said. This and the absence of systematic field walking over any other part of the settlement mean that there is virtually no artefactual or structural evidence upon which to base study. Analysis of an assemblage of 102 coins collected from metal detecting at the southern end of the settlement, however, does indicate that Whilton has similar monetary profile to other small towns in this part of Roman Britain and thus probably did act as a significant focus for trade and taxation.

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

#### **3.5.1 Temples and Shrines**

Neither the excavations nor the air photographs provide any evidence for the presence of temples or shrines within the settlement. The air photographs at Whilton, however,

rarely provide evidence for buildings of any description and it is possible that a significant shrine remains to be discovered. Field walked and other surface finds (including the well recorded group of metal detecting finds from south of the town) provide little evidence for a major religious focus within the settlement.

### **3.5.2 Cemetery**

Only one likely cemetery has been recorded at Whilton, some 150m south of the defences and close to the line of Watling Street. Discovered during nineteenth century, Baker (1830) and later Botfield (1853) noted skeletons along the line of what is now Norton road. Three other burials are recorded as having been discovered during the 1970s excavation but only one, an adult male inhumation inserted into the infilled ditch of the later town defences, is published. The absence of evaluation around the fringes of the settlement cannot rule out the possibility of other cemeteries for the town and it is possible one lay to the east southeast towards the river Nene or to the north in as yet uninvestigated areas.

## **3.6 LAND USE**

The presence of deep wells within the 1970s excavations suggests that further investigations at Whilton have the potential to provide very useful information about the immediate environment of different areas within the town. Unfortunately, in the absence of publication of any ecofactual data from the excavations, evidence for possible agricultural practices is very scarce. The discovery of a reaping hook, shears and an ox goad may, however, suggest that agriculture was a part of the economy of the settlement.

The large pits recorded in the 1950s towards the southern edge of the town, also provide little agricultural or environmental information as most appear to have been dug for sand and gravel and rapidly backfilled after use.

The absence of excavation or other evaluation work close to the brook and River Nene prevents any assessment at present of the extent of alluvium or palaeochannels. Any development to the south of the town or close to the Nene to the east, however, clearly needs to consider the potential for palaeoenvironmental work and the strong chance of good quality preservation of archaeological evidence under later alluvium seen elsewhere in the valley.

## **II ASSESSMENT**

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

**Whilton is an important example of a class of medium sized defended small town not uncommon to the region. The settlement bears closest comparison with one its nearest neighbours, Caves Inn (*Tripontium*), as an example of a small town whose main significance seems to have lain in its location along Watling Street, one of the provinces main roads at a key junction, possibly close to an existing late Iron Age site. Much of the core part of the settlement is still intact and has a limited but useful record of aerial photography. Unfortunately the settlement has rarely been the focus of sustained archaeological interest and consequently has no systematic field walking, geophysical or modern research excavation evidence. Those areas destroyed by earlier quarrying (c.2.5.ha) largely lie towards the north eastern edge of the town of which c.900m<sup>2</sup> was subject to systematic recording through excavation.**

#### **1.0 DOCUMENTARY**

No significant contemporaneous epigraphic or literary sources about Roman Whilton are known but the site location accords with that ascribed to the road station of *Bannaventa* in the Antonine Itinerary and is commonly given as its name in current literature. If, as seems likely, the suggested place-name is correct the settlement's location also corresponds well with its meaning of 'market on the spur' or 'prominent field', and adds credence to the suggestion that it functioned as a local trading centre.

#### **2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL**

The quality of air photographic information about the core of the settlement is moderate and mainly acts as a guide to the layout of ditch systems and pits. In common with the evidence from Ashton, however, it provides little or no information on the nature and location of buildings in the town and consequently settlement form, density and zonation. Nevertheless, the air photographic plots provide some guide to the overall morphology of the settlement except in several key areas. The main caveats in air photographic evidence come from the area of long term pasture covering the south eastern quarter of the town, and information on potential road and boundary layouts to the south west close to the brook.

The absence of systematic field walking or geophysical survey hampers our understanding of the overall extent of the settlement and potentially its development over time, though some estimate can be made on the basis of the aerial photographic evidence and earlier observations and chance discoveries.

The single most valuable archaeological data set available for Whilton, therefore, remains the rescue excavations of 1970-72 in the north eastern quarter of the town. Any open area excavations of Roman small towns are rare in Britain and those at Whilton provide a useful point of comparison for the study of small towns in the region and nationally. There are a number of significant gaps in this data set, however, which hamper consideration of several key aspects of the town's development. There is currently no zoological or botanical information available and consideration of the artefactual evidence from the earlier excavations has been limited largely to partial accounts of the pottery. The main value of the Whilton excavations lie in the

information on the nature and date of the town's defences, and the density and broad form of occupation within three separate areas of the north eastern corner of the town. Much of the information recorded is already published (Dix & Taylor 1988) and more on the finds in particular is available in archive form.

## **2.1 Survival**

The extensive gravel extraction of the north eastern corner of the town has now destroyed all archaeological deposits over an area of some 2.5ha. Additionally, antiquarian comments such as those of Morton suggest that archaeological deposits in other parts of the town may have been damaged in the course of early modern ploughing and digging. Unfortunately, their location and extent are unknown, though aerial photographs seem to indicate an area of significant ground disturbance over the southern part of the defences. These and the course of the modern A5 suggest that some 3.1 ha of the town have now been destroyed. Most of the rest of the town, however, is intact and the main archaeological threat today remains present and future cultivation. Given the ephemeral nature of the buildings recorded in the excavations and the known disturbance of many probable stone structures, further erosion through ploughing represents a continuing and significant threat to the archaeological potential of the town, especially in relation to the study of its late Roman deposits.

The absence of any archaeological work around the likely stream crossing also currently means that it is impossible to be sure of the town's southern extent and whether there is any evidence for an area of peripheral activity further south. Furthermore, although aerial photographs indicate that a road runs east southeast from the town towards Duston, there is currently no understanding of the extent to which occupation may extend alongside it, or even of the precise line of the town defences in this quarter.

## **2.2 Settlement Morphology and Communications**

The layout of the roads and property boundaries at Whilton are only moderately well understood and provide a fragmented picture of the overall morphology of the settlement. To the east of Watling Street the line of a side road towards Duston and a southerly branch road is known but not their relationship to the defences and as plotted the former seems to be off set from its continuation to the west of the A5. The course of Watling Street and a possible branch road to the west of the town are also little understood in Man's Head Field, as is the location of their crossing point over the brook. To the west of the town the date and likely relationship to other roads of the complex track way junction (904/0) is also unknown. All of these areas would greatly benefit from geophysical survey to determine the overall layout of the town's roads and to begin to assess their relationship to the construction of the defensive circuit. The most obvious additional future requirement would be for evaluation in advance of any development to establish the location and form of the main road to the south of the settlement on the floodplain either side of the stream and any evidence for the form and date of a river crossing.

Further afield the course of the road running east-southeast from Whilton is currently thought to lead to the late Iron Age and Roman settlement at Duston. Its direction and overall course, however, remain poorly understood between Whilton Lodge and Little Brington and would benefit from evaluation or further survey, particularly to establish its crossing point over the Nene.

### **2.3 Buildings**

Little is still known about the density, location and state of preservation of buildings along the main road frontages. The 1970-72 rescue excavations identified both early timber built round houses and sill beam rectangular buildings. These were relatively shallow ephemeral structures and consequently the main threat to buildings in the scheduled area is undoubtedly continued cultivation. It is likely that significant damage has already occurred to many of the later stone buildings, particular given the likelihood of early modern digging for drainage, gravel and sand extraction or to reclaim stone. At present little is known of the quantity and form of buildings across the settlement but plotting of stonework visible on the ground surface as part of systematic field walking would probably help provide a generalised picture of their distribution.

### **2.4 Commerce & Industry**

No clear structures such as furnaces, kilns, or ovens related to manufacturing have yet been recorded at Whilton within the small, excavated area. Typically these types of structure are surface built however, with little or no earth fast features and are particularly susceptible to any episodes of deeper ploughing or truncation, as appears to have been the case before archaeological intervention in the 1970-72 excavations. At present the site does not seem to be an important centre for the production or processing of metal work, pottery or bone, though it may have acted as a point for the redistribution of regionally produced pottery and other domestic artefacts. The extant excavated artefact record provides a limited but useful additional resource for study of other craft and trade related issues but is largely held in archive rather than the published report. The coin list from metal detecting is also a useful resource for comparative work with other probable towns in the region but comes from only one part of the southern edge of the town and may not be wholly representative. This information should be augmented by further accurately recorded metal detecting surveys that would thus allow consideration of the overall economic development of the town and areas of potential economic zonation within it.

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

The excavations at Whilton provide very little data for the study of Roman burial practices in small towns. Information on the three isolated burials from the 1970s excavations and the probable cemetery to the south of the town is scanty but at least augments better data from elsewhere on the location and basic form of burial rite. The limited extent of damage caused by the construction of Norton Road probably means that some of the likely cemetery to the south of the town is still intact and requires evaluation. No further cemeteries are known, though others may well exist around the fringes of the town and although no early Roman burials have yet been recorded the presence of first and second century pottery in the Norton road material may indicate their location. Development around the fringes of the scheduled area close to the course of known Roman roads should require evaluation in order to check for potential further burial areas.

At present there is no significant evidence for shrines or temples within the town. Their presence, however, cannot be ruled out and field walking, geophysical survey and metal detecting of the cultivated areas should be a key priority in this regard.

## **2.6 Landscape & Environment**

Little paleoenvironmental assessment has been carried out on the settlement and the potential of excavated deposits are thus largely unknown. Few deposits with the exception of the wells and possibly boundary ditches closest to the brook or River Nene are likely to be waterlogged but the floodplains of either may provide excellent data for the riverside environment to the south and east of the town. The lack of analysis of excavated deposits from small towns is a problem nationally and any future work should ensure evaluation of its potential as a priority.

Unlike a number of the other Northamptonshire towns there is also little or no palaeoenvironmental information currently available from the immediate hinterland of the town. The survival of significant tracts of land in and surrounding the town have the potential to provide good suitable deposits for future sampling.

## **3.0 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 judgement. 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 summarised in the Roman period section of the general report of the Extensive Urban Survey.

The modern location of Whilton has led to significant but only partial damage to its immediate historic landscape. The site's location in a natural corridor from southeast to northwest over the watershed between the Nene and the Warwickshire Avon has led to its development as a transport corridor for waterways, rail and ultimately motorway. As a consequence significant parts of the landscape immediately to the east of the town have either been destroyed or are now inaccessible to study. That said, much of the rest of the immediate landscape is reasonably well preserved and parts of the alluviated land close to the nearby Nene may still be intact. The presence close to the town of a villa and its surrounding agricultural landscape provides a rare opportunity to study town and country relationships at a detailed level. Other instance of a small town with very nearby villa are known but rarely is it possible to study both and the intervening landscape and consequently this represents a potentially very important survival.

Elsewhere within the town's hinterland the potential for landscape based survey is generally good. The arbitrary 10km radius hinterland chosen for this survey incorporates most of the Upper Nene valley and its tributaries and consequently also provides a potentially useful study area in its own right. The predominantly rural use of this part of the county within the historic past has meant that large tracts of this landscape have good potential for further study. Similarly to Towcester to its south, the predominantly pasture dominated agricultural regimes of the region around the town provide the possibility that in some areas at least the earlier Roman landscape has survived better than elsewhere in the county.

The only major gaps in potential for future survey of the landscape lie to the west where development and expansion of the modern town of Daventry and its attendant industries has damaged a significant block of land. The only other area of major modern development to have damaged the archaeological landscapes in the hinterland

of Whilton lies to the north around Crick. Here a rapid expansion in development for the new Daventry international Rail freight Terminal (DIRFT) has seen a significant part of the landscape to the south of the Avon damaged. Thankfully, most of this area has been subject to detailed archaeological intervention in advance of development and now constitutes a very important resource for the study of Iron Age and Roman rural landscape of this part of the region.

Parts of this area have seen a reasonable tradition of aerial survey and occasional extensive field survey (by Dick Hollowell and David Hall) but little of this work has been systematically published. In other respects, however, the area around Whilton has seen very little sustained archaeological work on the Roman period and remains probably one of the least well understood landscapes within the county. On admittedly sparse present evidence though the Roman landscapes around Whilton generally present a high archaeological potential for future study.

Two particular landscape blocks could provide invaluable information regarding specific themes related to the town and its wider role within the region. First, the extant evidence from the town and aerial survey indicates that Whilton lay on both Watling Street and a branch road to the southeast running towards Duston. The substantially intact nature of the rural landscape for several kilometres surrounding this junction provides the opportunity to study the development of the existing rural landscape of the upper Nene valley in the aftermath of the construction of one of the major trunk roads of Roman Britain, the development of an urban focus and a local route between to small towns. Opportunities to study such a combination of developments within their rural landscape are rarely available and consequently the area is of high potential.

Second, is a large block of landscape on the Northamptonshire uplands five to ten kilometres to the north east of the Roman town. This area has received very little archaeological attention but is substantially intact and would provide an ideal opportunity to study an upland landscape away from the main river valleys within the county but which still lay within a relatively short distance of a small town. Survey of such an area is so far missing within the county and provides an ideal opportunity to study evidence for any contrast in settlement or rural land use in the Roman period between upland and lowland and between a town's immediate hinterland and its further hinterland. Preliminary results of an analysis of field walked material collected by Hall suggested a marked degree of settlement continuity and stability in the latter the area in comparison with the area closer to Watling Street and Whilton. The sample studied, however, was small and the survey far from systematic or intensive and further work in this area would be invaluable in better understanding the degree to which the development of the road networks and small towns changed the wider rural landscape of the county as a whole or just those parts of the landscape within easy reach.

### **III RESEARCH AGENDA**

Given the evidence above and current potential of the site the sections below outline a series of key research questions relating to the development of Whilton itself. Certain

wider research issues, better dealt with in relation to all the towns known from the region are considered in the project overview document.

### **Origins**

What is the nature of the settlement that first develops during the first century AD? Are the boundary enclosures occupied? If so, were they initially essentially small farms or part of a more specialised or complex settlement?

Is there any substantive evidence for late Iron Age occupation? If so what is the nature of this occupation and where is it located? Can proper evaluation through new field walked and metal detected material provide useful information in this regard?

### **Communications**

When are Watling Street and the main side road to Duston constructed? What are the date, nature and extent of any roads or track ways to the west of the main road junction? Is there any evidence to indicate the route of the road running eastward towards Duston either side of the Nene? What is the nature of the junction of track ways close to the brook (904/0) and how did it evolve? Are these track ways secondary to the main road or part of pre-conquest routes incorporated in a wider network during the first century? Where and how did Watling Street cross the brook?

### **Urban Topography and Zonation**

What were the functions of the different properties through time? Is the initial impression of rapid boundary construction laid out to respect Watling Street correct? Does domestic/craft/trading activity focus on the main through roads? What activities are taking place along the track ways to the west and north west of the town? In particular what can the integrated analysis of contextual, ecofactual and artefactual evidence from future excavation tell us about the use of space across the settlement through time? Can the evidence from field walking exercises add basic information about wider patterns of functional zonation (such as the extent of manufacturing or high status/religious buildings) across the settlement? Is there any evidence for different zones of activity in separate areas around the network of track ways to the west of the main road? Is Whilton different from the other Nene valley towns in not having a significant temple or religious complex? What is the full extent and impact of the construction of the town's defences?

### **Landscape and Environment**

Is there any evidence from the earlier excavations that can be used to study the immediate environment of the different exposed parts of the settlement and how does this relate to their uses? An especially valuable exercise would be to compare environmental conditions between the main road frontages and enclosures peripheral to the town. The absence of environmental work in the course of development or mineral extraction in the immediate hinterland of the town prevents further comparison with the neighbouring floodplains but the opportunity exists in future for such work and should be taken.

### **Craft and Agricultural Practice**

To what extent was manufacture part of the economy of the town? Can the artefactual assemblages from the excavations tell us about the extent to which products were

manufactured within the town and if so where? The pottery assemblages from the town may suggest that it acted as a market (as its suggested name implies) for the exchange of a limited range of local and regional products. Is this true, and if so, how was this organised in relation to the wider agricultural communities of the hinterland? Was the town a significant centre for the collection and processing of animal and plant products or partly at least (as some of the finds suggest) an agricultural settlement in its own right? What secondary products, if any, were made? Was craft production organised significantly differently to smaller agricultural settlements in the region? Were enclosures towards the fringe of the town used for specialised agricultural produce, for livestock management or simply an extension of the surrounding agricultural landscape? What is the relationship between the town and an adjacent villa connected to it via a road to the north west?

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

Where is the evidence for earlier religious and burial practice within the settlement? How do local Roman burial traditions relate to evidence for belief in other parts of the province? What is the evidence within the settlement for related ritual practices associated with Roman pagan and Christian belief? Are there rituals associated with the particular forms of craft or other activities evident in the town?

### **The Later Roman Town**

What can we identify of the nature of later fourth or early fifth century occupation in the town? Possibly a focus for burial, did the settlement still function as a significant craft and trading centre? Were most or even many of the buildings still occupied? Is it possible to identify the decline of the settlement during the fourth century or was its demise sudden? What is the evidence for Early-Middle Saxon occupation in the vicinity? Is there evidence to indicate that the town site was considered more than a resource for building materials by the middle Saxon period?

## **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 five 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.

**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:** Archaeology not assessed for this report.

## **1.0 EXISTING DESIGNATIONS**

### **1.1 SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS**

10 hectares of the settlement core is currently designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Northants 152). The Scheduled encompasses land on either side of the A5 Watling Street excluding the previously-quarried area in the north-eastern quadrant of the settlement.

### **1.2 LISTED BUILDINGS**

There are no Listed Buildings within the settlement area.

### **1.3 CONSERVATION AREA**

None of the settlement area is designated as a Conservation Area. However the Grand Union Canal Conservation Area passes to the east of the settlement (approximately 600m from the settlement core).

### **1.4 REGISTERED PARKS**

None.

## **2.0 MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES**

The surviving area of the settlement is of national importance. The current scheduled area covers only a part of the likely significant area of the town and should be extended pending evaluation. Intervention should be considered on any development to the north, south and west of the settlement alongside the possibility of extending the scheduled area to incorporate parts of the floodplain close to the likely crossing of the Nene to the east.

Approximately 10ha of the likely area of the town is already scheduled. Missing from the current schedule for the site, however, are potentially important extramural areas of the settlement a further 200m to the north along Watling Street, northwest around a track way that connects the town to a probable villa (894/1/1), and any areas towards the floodplain of the brook to the west and southwest. Evidence for occupation in the latter area is currently scarce, but a combination of the aerial photographs, antiquarian records and more recent watching brief work suggests this is likely to be an important peripheral area of the town containing small enclosures, track ways and a cemetery. Man's Head Field immediately to the south of the scheduled area is also likely to incorporate the point at which Watling Street crossed the brook and potentially provides well preserved and waterlogged information.

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

The following questions represent a series of research questions for the settlement but it is clear from the sections above that some represent key priorities for the immediate future.

- First, is the need to assess the artefactual and ecofactual archive for the 1970-72 excavations in order to check the most significant single source of evidence for the nature of the town available to date.
- Second, is the need to better understand the development, nature and extent of occupation at Whilton via systematic field walking and metal detector surveys of the cultivated fields.
- Third, is the need to better understand the potential and state of preservation of archaeological and paleoenvironmental evidence in riverside areas within 1 km of town and whether there is any surviving evidence for a river crossings over the Nene and the brook to the south of the town.
- Fourth, is the critical need for geophysical, fieldwalking & metal-detecting survey of the town, particularly the south eastern quarter lying under pasture, but also all the fields lying west of the A5 in order to understand the morphology and extent of settlement in this direction.
- Fifth, is the need to consider archaeological intervention in advance of any development in fields adjacent to the currently scheduled areas as far as the river to the east and brook to the south in order to establish the existence of any pre-Roman or peripheral occupation.
- Sixth, is the need for excavated evaluation of the survival of superficial deposits in the core area of the town to assess the potential survival of late Roman and post Roman occupation. Especially important in this regard are the areas of pasture to the south east.

Geophysical survey, having proved valuable in delineating the extent of early quarrying at Irchester, should be used to identify the location of similar activity noted by Morton.

## **2.2 Conservation Priorities**

Although scheduled, much of the core area of the settlement is under threat from cultivation and an assessment of its present and future impact on the archaeological resource should be a key concern for the future conservation of the monument. Particular consideration should be given to the need to remove core areas of the town from cultivation.

The settlement has no visual value and given the degree to which significant archaeological structures are likely to have been denuded by cultivation and quarrying are unlikely to be of great amenity value if excavated. The one potential exception may be the area of pasture covering the southeastern quarter of the town.

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