2.5 The Roman and Early Saxon periods
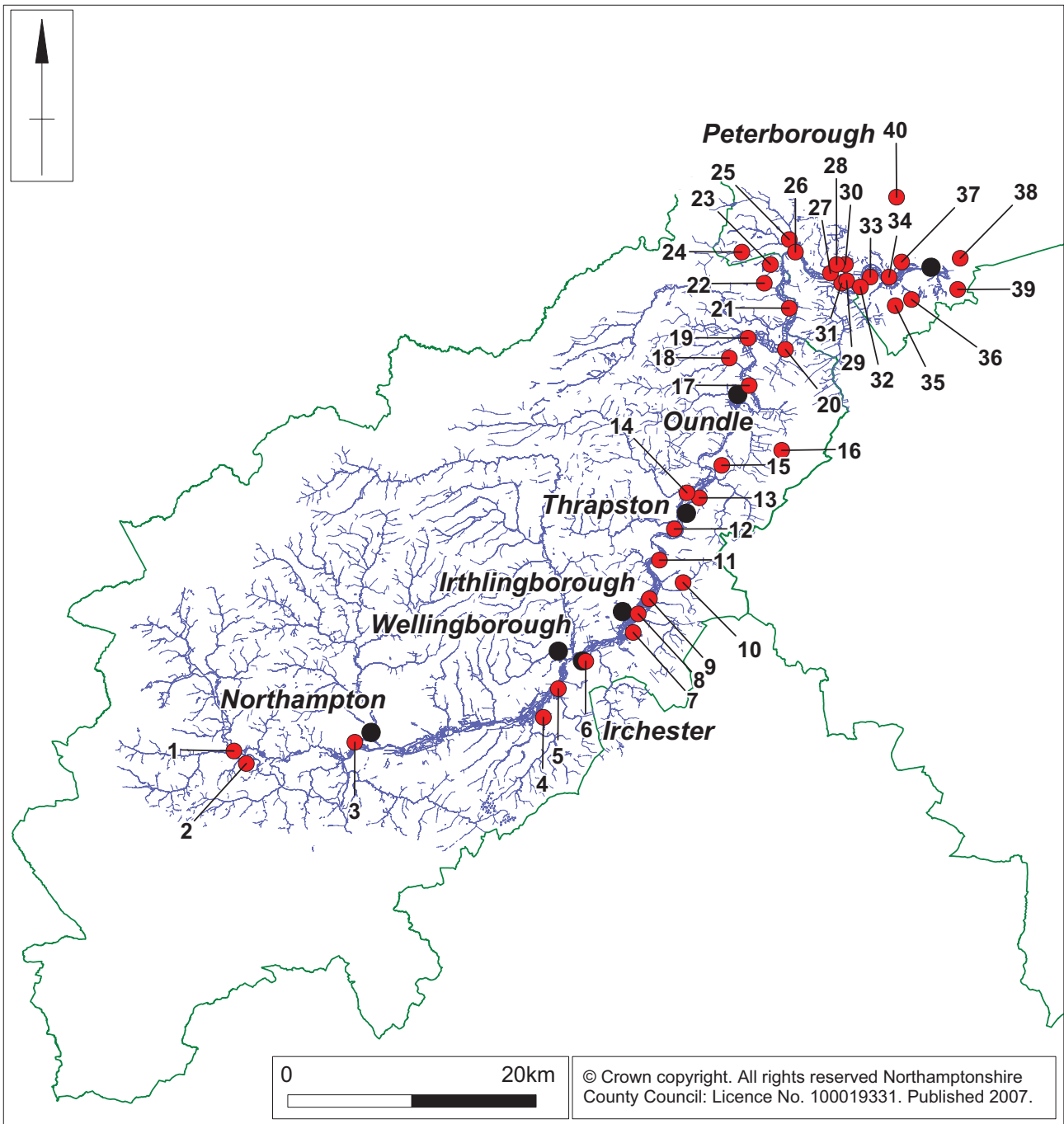
by I Meadows

Introduction

The Roman period in Northamptonshire and along the Nene Valley in particular has been the subject of several studies over the past 100 years (Fig 2.5.1). The quality of Roman remains and the awareness of them along the Nene Valley was reflected by the work of Chris Taylor published in 1975 (in Fowler (ed)). This survey showed how the increasing fieldwork and the awareness of the Roman sites along the Nene Valley had produced a landscape that became progressively more densely studded with known sites. In the early years the distribution was very much an artefact of interested individuals or groups of individuals working in a local area, these areas becoming less marked as time progressed. Work since 1975 has produced a huge number of new sites, filling in gaps and showing the pattern to be immensely more complex. Large-scale excavation work at Stanwick by English Heritage and at Wollaston by Northamptonshire Archaeology have examined landscapes whilst work at Ashton, Irchester and Titchmarsh have explored parts of towns, and innumerable smaller excavations and fieldwalking have helped to further complete the picture.

The Roman period is generally felt to be such a well-understood period of the archaeological past because of the visibility of many of the individual monuments in the landscape and the robustness of their artefacts. In truth, the mechanics of the landscape and land use are far less well understood even in this intensely studied area. The Nene Valley is a landscape containing rich agricultural resources as well as natural resources, which were exploited in this period providing a level of wealth. Of the eight towns within the county all have riparian locations, the reasons for this association could be a reflection of the river as a route but this seems unlikely (see hydrology section), or historic crossing points or other less tangible features. A majority of the villas in the Northamptonshire Historic Environment Record (HER) also lie within the valley either on its floor or sides, this statistical bias in location demonstrates clearly that the choice of location was not made within an isotropic plain but with positively selected aspects of the landscape. Whilst evidently the light gravel soils that had been extensively cultivated from the Iron Age, and in much of the valley since the Bronze Age, would have acted as a positive element in location it is also possible that the reason for the settlement distribution that can be observed owes it origin to that earlier occupation. Many sites have produced evidence for what can only be described as rural conservatism and the continuity of elements from one period to the next shows that the Roman landscape was often the culmination of the previous thousand years of activity in the valley.

In the recent resource assessment (Taylor nd) it was noted there were 1573 Roman sites in the Sites and Monuments Record (now the HER), 22.5% of the total record, the danger of any archaeological period is viewing it in isolation as if in a pigeonhole and because the Roman period is so dramatically visible in the archaeological landscape there is the tendency to overlook the influence of previous periods. It is well acknowledged that the Roman period commenced with an already densely occupied landscape and it is extremely unlikely, however vigorous the imperialism, that major aspects of landscape would be dramatically changed. Elements such as population will not have dramatically changed in any way, neither is it likely that the extensive field systems that will have existed or communications routes would all be disregarded in a grand redesign of the landscape in the immediately post-conquest years.

Scale 1:500,000

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0   20km

1 Weedon Bec	**15** Thorpe Achurch	**28** Peterborough, Normangate Field
2 Whitehall Villa	**16** Barnwell	**29** Peterborough, Mill Hill Villa
3 Northampton, Duston	**17** Ashton	**30** Peterborough, Castor
4 Grendon	**18** Cotterstock	**31** Peterborough, Water Newton
5 Wollaston	**19** Southwick	**32** Peterborough, Lynch Wood
6 Irchester	**20** Warmington	**33** Peterborough, Ferry Meadows
7 Higham Ferrers	**21** Fotheringhay, Lodge Complex	**34** Peterborough, Longthorpe
8 Redlands Farm	**22** Nassington	**35** Peterborough, Orton Longueville M97
9 Stanwick	**23** Ole Sulehay	**36** Peterborough, Orton Hall Farm
10 Raunds	**24** Bedford Purlieus	**37** Peterborough, Thorpe Hall
11 Ringstead	**25** Sacrewell	**38** Peterborough, Fengate Catswater sub site
12 Woodford	**26** Stibbington	**39** Peterborough, Stanground
13 Titchmarsh	**27** Ailsworth	**40** Peterborough, Werrington
14 Aldwincle		

Roman sites mentioned in the text   Fig 2.5.1

The military presence

It is perhaps a feature of the Nene Valley that the military occupation is small and apparently brief. The major vexhilation fortress at Longthorpe, at a probable river crossing and on a suggested earlier course of the Ermine Street (Frere and St Joseph 1974, 5), was initially occupied soon after 43 AD and the occupation continued until 61/62 AD. The site was erected to house a substantial reserve of troops and around the fort an extensive works depot comprising pottery kilns was also found (Dannell and Wild 1987). A possible second fort was suggested in the area of gravel extraction about 1km west in what is now Ferry Meadows (Wild 1974, 145). A pair of forts were also present at either side of the river crossing between *Durobrivae* and Normangate Field (Mackreth 1995, 147). The lack of identified military sites over the rest of the county may reflect a true lack of military occupation or simply that the military presence was transitory other than at key points. The suggestion of military activity at Ashton, Irchester and most recently at Piddington remains to be more convincingly proven.

Communications

The military conquest of lowland England and the subsequent occupation was characterised by the creation of a major road network to facilitate movement. Two of the major routes cross the study area roughly north south, Ermine Street and Watling Street. The supposed lines of these roads and others across Northamptonshire have been published in various locations, notably the RCHM(E) surveys of the county, also crossing points have been identified either by observations or excavations. It is, however, an unfortunate fact that many of the lines of projected Roman roads have not been examined archaeologically and they remain to some degree speculative.

The road networks in the immediate vicinity of most of the towns are reasonably visible from aerial photographs but in many cases the line further from the settlement is based on projection. Bridge structures have been identified at three points in this study area, at Water Newton (Mackreth 1995), Aldwincle (Jackson 1976) and Grendon (author's observations) (Plate 2.5.1), other crossings may have been by bridge or ford as at Irchester (Keevil and Williams 1995). A further possible bridge has been suggested at Southwick where in 1950 a row of posts were observed on the same alignment as the cropmark of a ditched track running through the Stone Pit Lodge complex (RCHM(E) 1975, 86). The importance of crossing the river is shown by the suggested late first-century date of the first Aldwincle bridge, and the occurrence of two forts either side of the river crossing at *Durobrivae* (Mackreth 1995, 147) to safeguard passage.

The significance of the major routeways should be seen in the context of long distance communication rather than as the normal infrastructure of access routes that threaded the countryside. Excavated sites such as Wollaston and cropmark sites such as Fotheringhay Lodge Complex (CUAP ADR 30-34 AVD 52-54 ZF 39-48) show how many rural settlements in the valley were interlinked by a system of droves, tracks and other routeways that were of only local significance but which formed part of the whole network. These routes have been found at Wollaston and other sites to be a continuation of the pre-Roman rural system of routes onto which the major roads were grafted or imposed. This may be the reason that the track running through the Roman cropmarks at Thorpe Achurch is over 100m to the north-west of the postulated line of the main route (Margary 570).

In Suffolk working back through maps has shown how field systems may have remained intact at the conquest, but that in certain instances the straight military routes were imposed across the landscape (Williamson 1987). In Northamptonshire the straight routes may have been imposed but even some of those were a consolidation, at least along some sections, of earlier routes.

Recent work at Warmington confirmed the presence of the projected likely course of the road through the village with a ford across a stream that drains into the river (Meadows 2002) (Fig 2.5.2). This route is then largely represented further west by straight boundaries, but its projected line interestingly misses the small town of Ashton, which lies some 1.5km to the north. That the projected

straight route avoids the town might suggest the route may have been chosen to avoid the meander in the river, which would have necessitated two river crossings, the selected line, however, did still afford an orientation that reached the Roman small town at Titchmarsh. The apparently axial route within the excavated settlement at Ashton lay on a parallel axis to the other and was from excavation evidence in use from the later first century. The location of the small town off the line of the significant route would suggest other factors had influenced its siting. The town at Titchmarsh lies at the intersection of several of the proposed road lines and also at a point where a bridge was constructed (Jackson 1976). No road line has been identified to the west of Titchmarsh, suggesting the road network in the eastern part of the Nene Valley was separate to that in the west, which implies the valley itself was not perceived in its entirety as an easy or necessary route for communication.

In the middle part of the valley the road network appeared to be centred upon the walled town at Irchester. This town was accessed from the north by a route that utilised a causeway and probable ford (Keevil and Williams 1995 op cit). From the south it was approached by two routes, one identified from Dungee corner and the other traced, by excavation, through Grendon and Wollaston parishes, this latter route may have originally linked Irchester to Towcester. Neither route was identified in the immediate environs of the walled town, indeed the recent work examining the archaeological evidence for Irchester has cast doubt upon the existence of a south gate which would be assumed to have been the target for such routes (Meadows 2005). The putative road from Irchester to Towcester was examined archaeologically for about 3km and a short distance further south on the same alignment the remains of a probable timber bridge were exposed during mineral extraction. The examination of such a long section of Roman road produced some surprising data, the first aspect of which was that the route, if it indeed was a road from Irchester to Towcester, had its origins in the early Iron Age as a pit alignment. The second aspect of note was that for most of the examined length the route ran along the limits of the extent of the later medieval alleviation, suggesting it may have laid at or just above the limit of seasonal flooding. Along the route the only areas of metalling comprised thin gravel spreads and these only occurred in the immediate vicinity of the associated farmsteads seldom extending more than 100m, for most of the length the route was only recognised by its being defined by ditches on each side.

To the west Watling Street runs across the upper reaches of the Nene Valley at Weedon Bec. This route crosses the course of the river at about 10km from its source and the river is still only a minor watercourse. Unlike the other major river crossings along the Nene no settlement is known at this point, Towcester lies 13km to the south and *Bannaventa* 5km to the north, suggesting that the river crossing point was not significant in the same way that other crossings had been.

The absence of a known road line along the valley is perhaps not surprising since the major routes were designed for essentially north south movement whilst lesser routes, whose visibility in the archaeological record is far less, would serve more lateral movement. The absence of long distance cross-country routes should not, however, be seen as a justification for river traffic (see Hydrology section).

Warmington

Legend:
- Warmington excavation
- Course of Roman road
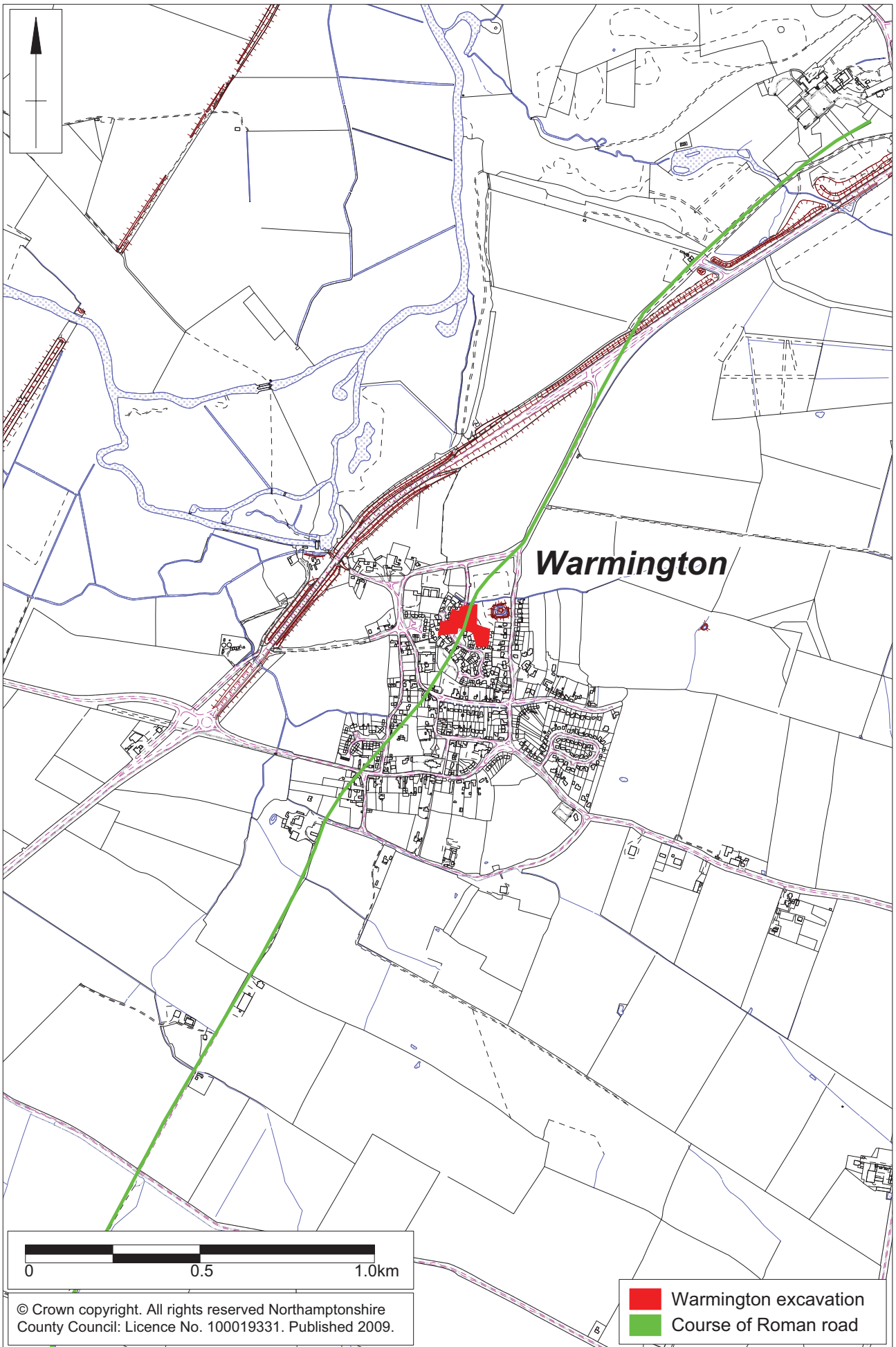
Projected line of the road around Warmington   Fig 2.5.2

Major settlements

There were several nucleated settlements located along the valley, generally just off the floodplain (Fig 2.5.3). At the eastern end lay the walled town of *Durobrivae* with its enormous sub-urban spread, 11km west along the valley was the small town of Ashton and 10km further on was Titchmarsh. A further 17km west lay the walled town of Irchester and then 20km further west the poorly understood site at Duston. Because the sites are not on a single route the spacing is irrelevant.

Durobrivae

The major town of *Durobrivae* has been little examined by modern excavation and the walled area now lies under permanent pasture. The status of the settlement has been the subject of debate and it is likely that it changed through time. Its origins may lie with the river crossing and the associated military presence (see above) but it will always be best known for its large extra-mural development both along Ermine Street and across Normangate Field.

As a settlement it is claimed that it lay at the tidal limits of the Nene (Mackreth 1995, 150) assisting boat traffic downstream, thereby enabling the development of the town as a market for the pottery and other industries that then supplied the bulk of their products downstream. The industries of the area are well known from excavations of the pottery kilns and iron working sites in the industrial suburb of Normangate Field (Perrin 1990) but so far no secure evidence of riparian trade has been found. The argument is made that these industries alone could not have generated or sustained such a substantial settlement and that an agricultural market function, based upon fenland products, was also responsible (Mackreth op cit, 151)

The site of the walled town lies on a slightly raised area of ground although the suburb lies on the more flat area of the wide floodplain rising away both to the east and west. This location would have allowed a slight protection from extreme flood events as was shown by the plotted extent of the 1948 flood (a benchmark flood). The walled town lay above the flood extent as was the bulk of the Normangate Field (Mackreth op cit, fig 13.1).
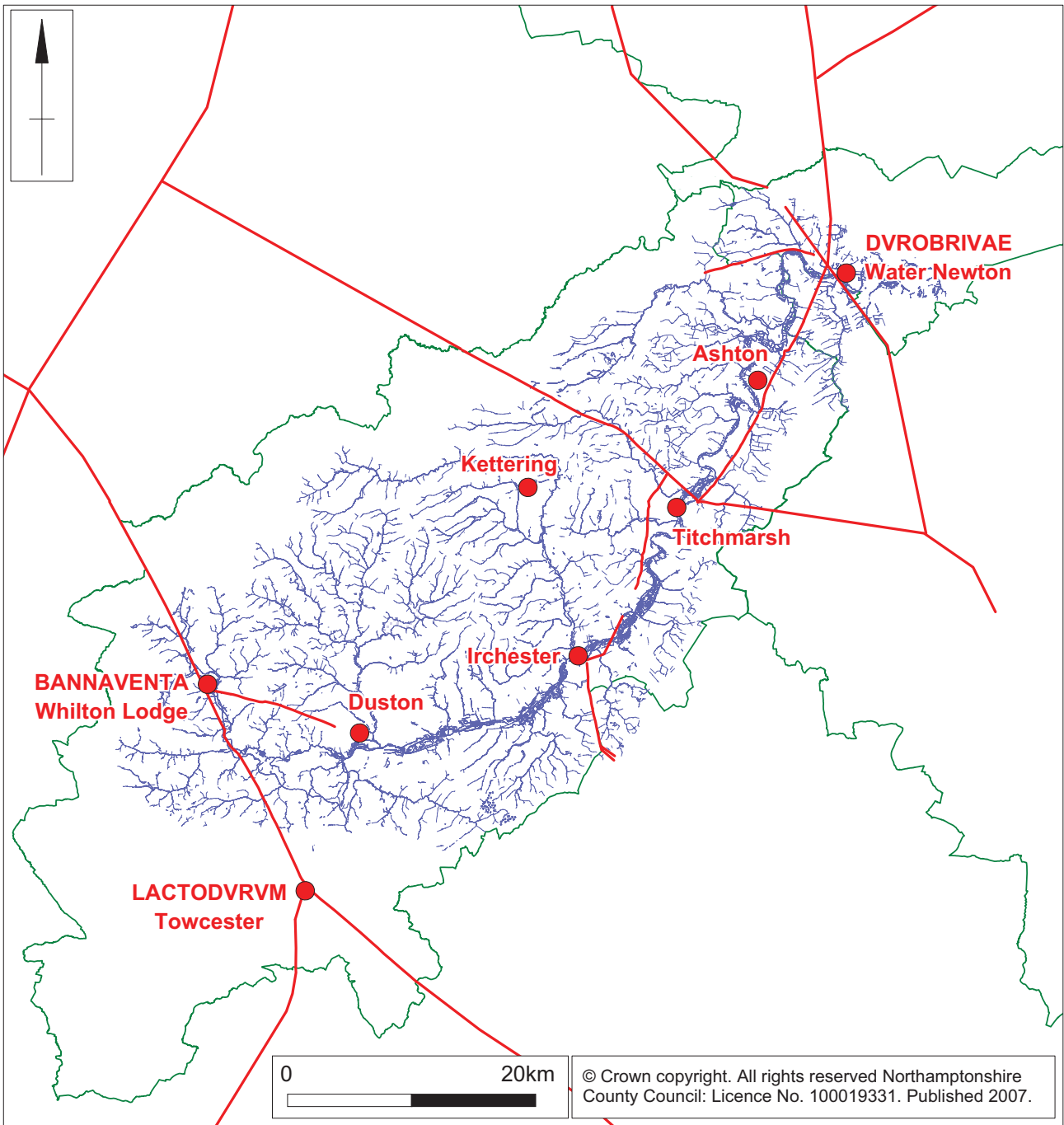
The lack of fieldwork within the walled area of the town precludes the identification of the true character of the town, but from aerial photographs several structures of some size suggest a settlement of some status. This quality of structures is further reinforced by some of the immediately adjacent 'villa' structures (see below).

That the town was located at a river crossing in simple terms may have given the impetus for urban development but the availability of natural resources for pottery production and the extent of the suggested tidal range may have also encouraged the location.

Ashton

This small town, covering *c* 15 ha, was located beside the river, in part on slightly elevated ground. The site was known from cropmark evidence and also from excavations (Dix 1983) and in the 1990s a programme of fieldwalking identified the likely limits of settlement activity in the areas under cultivation. The town had demonstrable activity in the years after the conquest but no evidence for a pre-conquest settlement has been found also no categorical evidence for a military presence has been recovered although some fragments of military metalwork have been found.

The small town comprised a network of streets and those that have been excavated so far appear to be fronted by stone founded workshops, in particular for blacksmithing. A single pottery kiln was excavated in the former railway yard where it had narrowly missed being destroyed by sand and gravel quarrying. Further evidence for metalworking or metal recycling may come from the

DVROBRIVAE
Water Newton

Ashton

Kettering

Titchmarsh

Irchester

BANNAVENTA
Whilton Lodge

Duston

LACTODVRVM
Towcester

0   20km

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Scale 1:500,000

● Roman towns
☐ Roman roads

Roman roads and towns   Fig 2.5.3

fragments of lead and the complete 'tank' recovered from a well. It is likely, however, that much of the population was engaged in agriculture, a single T-shaped oven might also attest to brewing.

The location of the settlement to the north of the suggested main road route from *Durobrivae* to Titchmarsh might suggest some other reason for the settlements location. Projecting the road line within the settlement to the river has not lead to the identification of a ford or other river crossing is known and no wharves have been identified so the attraction for this location apparently off the main route remain unclear.

In addition to the occurrence of burials in the 'back yards' of the properties, a substantial cemetery containing over 100 bodies was totally excavated. Most of the west-east aligned graves contained no grave goods and it has been suggested that it was Christian. A number of presumably earlier cremations were also found in the nineteenth century during the construction of Oundle station.

Titchmarsh

This small town, covering about 15ha, lies at the junction of three routes and at a proven river crossing; it is also the most westerly extent, south of the river, of the route from *Durobrivae* (Fig 2.5.4). Very little excavation has been carried out at this site but it was unenclosed. The site is known from aerial photographs to contain an unusual junction of the three major routes. No defences and no obvious plan are apparent suggesting a fairly organic development for the settlement. Evaluation work in the early 1980s in advance of gravel extraction (Windell 1984) and excavation ahead of road widening (Voice 1986) produced evidence for stone-founded buildings and yards but no further work was carried out.
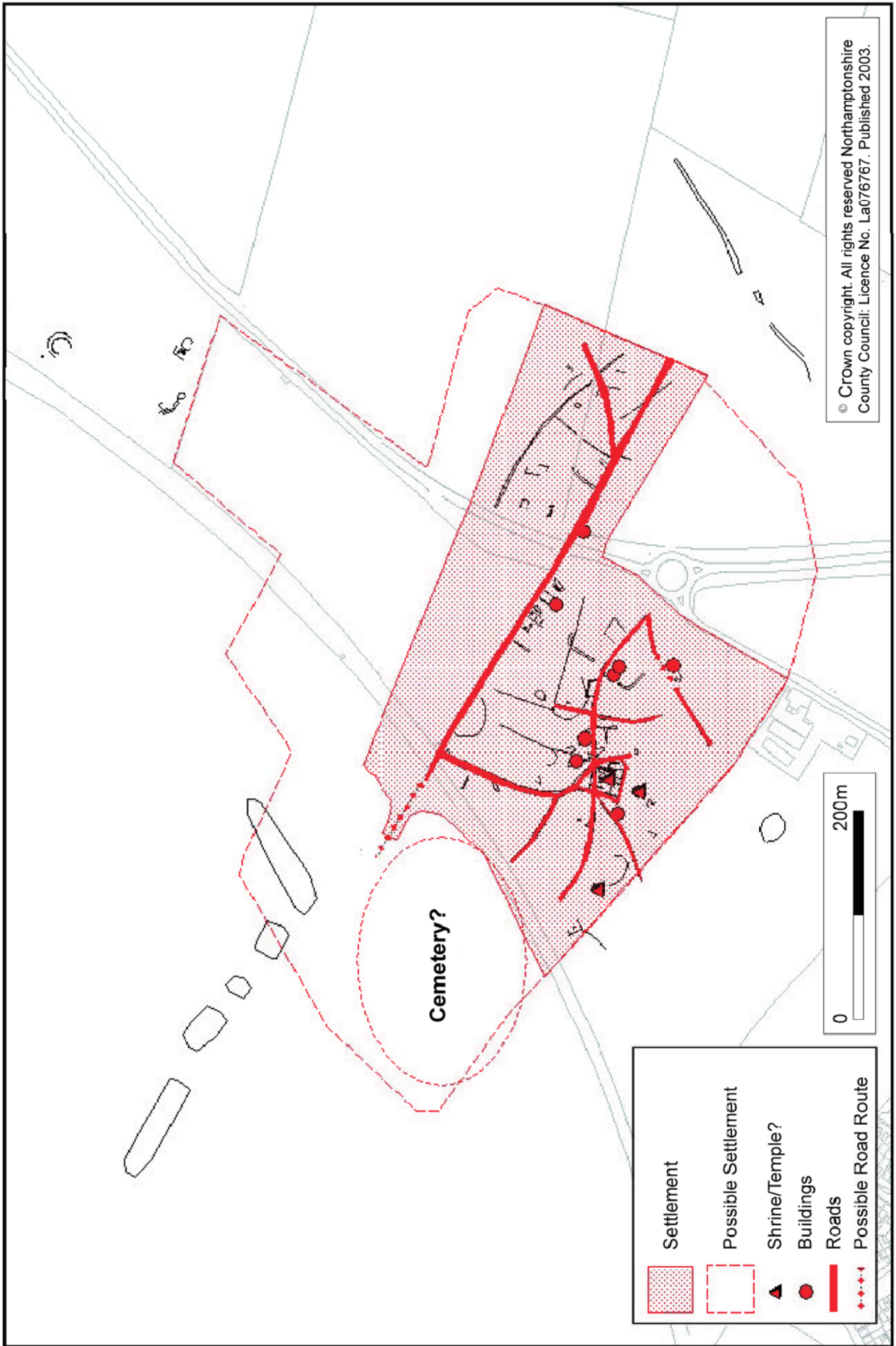
Although some authors have suggested a military origin for the settlement supporting evidence is lacking. The work on coinage and brooches has, however, suggested pre-conquest Iron Age activity but the relationship to the subsequent settlement is unclear (Curteis *et al* 1999). There was clearly occupation on the site from the first century onwards.

In a loop of the roads within the settlement there was an enclosed polygonal area within which were a group of stone-founded buildings. Various interpretations have been postulated, ranging from a temple complex to a small administrative centre. A stone base or capital and an inscribed stone suggest some structures of status for the settlement. A large cemetery of graves containing no grave goods was discovered during gravel workings in 1961-2.
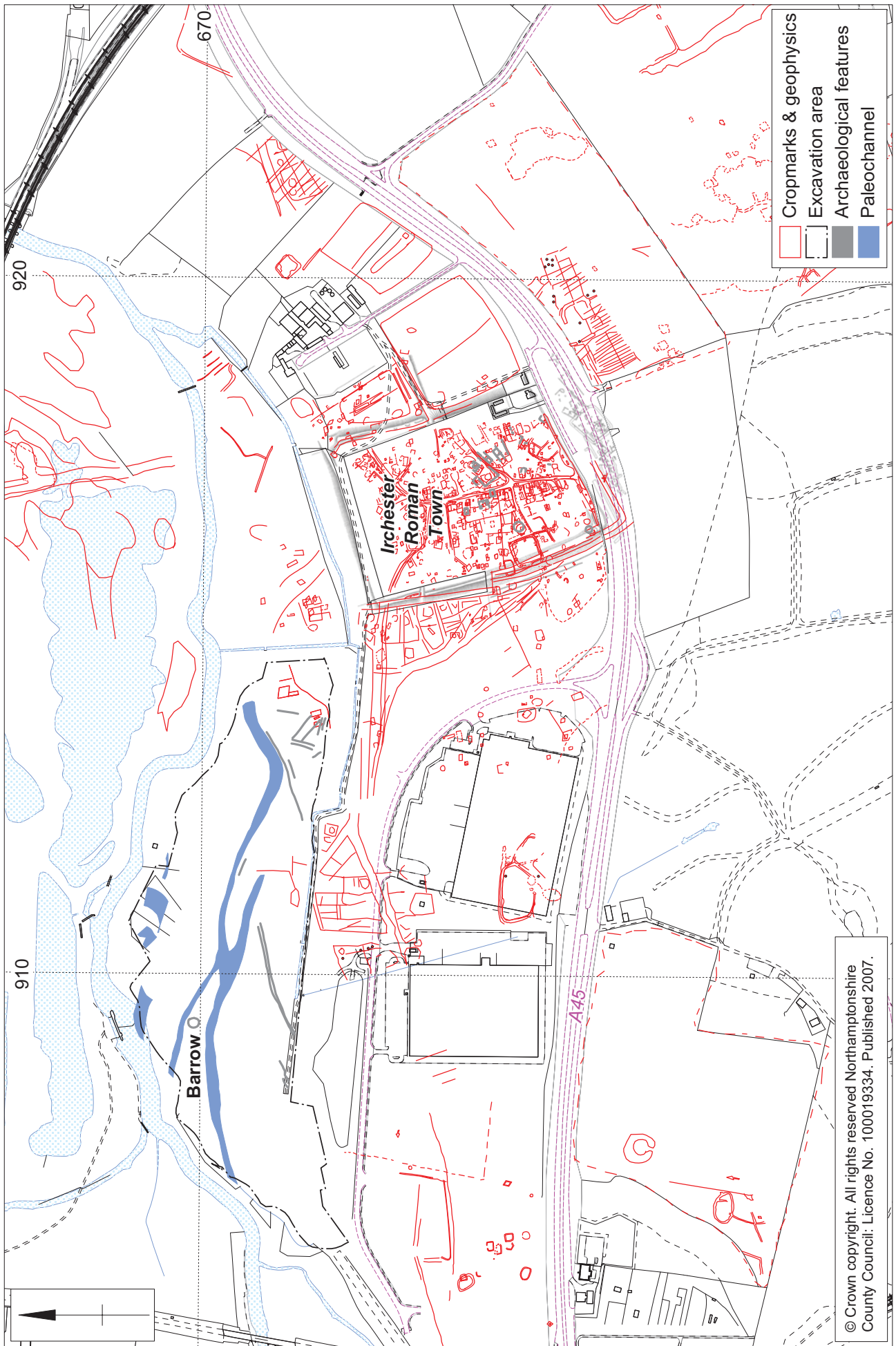
This settlement and its function is otherwise very poorly understood although it clearly was a local centre.

Irchester

Irchester is a walled town located on a saddle of land on the south side of the Nene Valley (Fig 2.5.5). Extensive aerial photography and more recently geophysical prospecting has revealed the ground plan of the settlement and most of its surviving extent as the remains were impinged upon by ironstone quarrying. The origins of Irchester are difficult to disentangle but several Iron Age sites are present in the immediate vicinity of the Roman town and whilst they might have contributed to the site's development it may simply be they shared the same natural location. The road network and river crossing may have been more significant contributing factors to the development of a major settlement. The road identified running through the excavations in Grendon and Wollaston significantly had its origins as an Iron Age droveway and prior to that a pit alignment perhaps flanking/demarking a route which may also reflect a pre-Roman focus at Irchester. Irchester is located at a suggested nodal point in the Roman road network with routes crossing the river; the course of many of the routes is, however, not fully verified by excavation.

Cemetery?

Settlement

Possible Settlement

Shrine/Temple?

Buildings

Roads

Possible Road Route

200m

0

97   Plan of monuments at Titchmarsh   Fig 2.5.4

Legend:
- Cropmarks & geophysics
- Excavation area
- Archaeological features
- Paleochannel

Irchester Roman Town

Barrow

A45

670

920

910

98

Scale 1:7500

Irchester town and suburbs   Fig 2.5.5

The town covers an area of about 18ha. It has produced clear evidence of first-century occupation and was probably well established by the second century, the defensive circuit imposed over the settlement during the later second century. The defences disregard the pre-existing street pattern and can be seen on aerial photographs to clearly truncate many of the road lines.

The town was largely positioned on a saddle of land with some evidence for enclosures extending down onto the floodplain, but with the enclosed land parcels giving way to open meadow, presumably reflecting land that may have been more prone to seasonal inundation (Meadows 2005). The morphology of the whole town, whilst at fist glance appearing somewhat peculiar, is probably also reflecting efforts to minimise the problems of ground water and surface water drainage. The core of the town on the higher ground with road lines that flare out over the saddle would assist in drainage of that area, and the curving form of the western suburb was probably also to take into account the slade that would have concentrated and conducted surface water. The suburb appears to thin at the point where any water draining down the slade would have crossed it.

The settlement contains both strip buildings and possible workshops (Morris pers com) and structures of some quality, as is shown by the recovery of a column capital, a statue and a fragment of a monumental tomb of a strator. This inscription has been used by some authors (Collingwood and Wright 1965, 75-6) to suggest the area around Irchester may have included a certain amount of horse breeding as a strator was in charge of the governor's horses. There is little evidence of any industrial activity associated with the town other than a single pottery kiln (Monument number NN 35797), so it was probably largely a local market and administrative centre.

Duston

This settlement is ill understood as a result of the fieldwork taking place largely in the nineteenth century when parts of the site were being destroyed during road building and quarrying. The site lies on the north side of the river at what is believed to be a river crossing. It is also generally thought that it also lies on a road to *Bannaventa* 12km to the northwest and another route from Towcester 12km to the south-west, but neither route is well demonstrated although both are suggested by projection of the line. A further route is postulated between Duston and Irchester on the north side of the river.

The settlement sits on land that slopes down to the floodplain but no evidence for the postulated river crossing or any other riparian structures have been identified.

There is very little detail of the form or character of the settlement at Duston although elements of at least one tessellated floor was identified during the quarrying, suggesting a building of some quality. In the fieldwork carried out during 1970s it became clear that the settlement extended over at least 4ha and included workshops as well as domestic structures arranged along or near a road frontage. There is little evidence of the character of activities within the settlement, but a small malting oven may reflect a degree of agricultural processing and perhaps brewing, indeed there is little evidence of any craft or manufacturing. A substantial number of coins were recovered both in the nineteenth century and in the work in the 1970s suggesting that the settlement was a centre of commercial exchange and perhaps also taxation. Coin moulds of third-century date were also recovered.

Discussion

The major settlements along the Nene Valley, although all sharing a common location, do not display many very positive reasons for a riverside location. Whilst the river may be thought of as a potential route it is unlikely that the river above *Durobrivae* was suitable for navigation and certainly above Irchester it is highly improbable, except for very small vessels. The choice of a riverside location may therefore be seen as unusual unless the provision for river crossings was a significant attractant. In the case of Titchmarsh and *Durobrivae* bridges across the river can be demonstrated and at Irchester a causeway can be shown, but in the case of Ashton and also Duston no evidence of the form or nature

of the river crossing, if one existed, can be shown. In this light it is interesting to consider the location of Ashton 1.5km from the suggested main road line, as particularly unusual and its siting may have been determined by other social or economic factors that a roadside location was not sufficient draw to counterbalance.

Indications of ornate buildings or carved masonry can suggest a town's potential aspiration, but none have, however, been recorded from Ashton. Capitals and other stonework have been recovered from *Durobrivae*, Titchmarsh and Irchester and geophysical surveys and cropmarks suggest for each of them the existence of structures whose function goes beyond domestic or industrial.

Lesser settlements

Along the valley there are many cropmark remains that might denote lesser settlements (for example the Fotheringhay Lodge complex and those in Thorpe Achurch) but generally these have not been subjected to excavation, or any excavation has been peripheral and minor. The only notable exception is the work at Higham Ferrers by Oxford Archaeology. The site at Kings Meadow Lane was first encountered by Ernest Greenfield in 1961 (Meadows 1992) when two stone-founded structures were excavated in advance of house building. These remains formed the southern limit of a spread of remains that have over the last decade been the subject of an intensive programme of fieldwork. The exposed settlement comprised over 2ha containing at least eighteen buildings of apparently domestic character, including stone-founded circular and rectangular buildings. The rectangular buildings were arranged along the side of a road running north-east to south-west along the side of the valley. The relationship of this road to the track identified to the west is unclear (Moore 1975, 154-5). At the northern end of the occupation there was a shrine, sadly the structural remains had been severely damaged although the recovered turned stone column fragments, tile and structural stone would suggest the original construction was impressive. A second shrine structure to the west of the road line lay within a stone-walled temenos, of which three sides survived. Within its precincts hundreds of votive offerings were recovered including coins, brooches and lead defixiones. This shrine appears to have gone into decline in the later third or fourth century. Secondary scatters of artefacts to the south and north of this shrine would suggest that shrines or altars had been set up along the roadside.

The nature of this site is unlikely to be unique in the valley and many of the rural complexes such as the Fotheringhay Lodge complex could perhaps have had religious functions. The excavator felt the settlement owed its existence to the shrine in the absence of evidence of agricultural, industrial or craft activities (Lawrence pers com).

Rural sites

For the purpose of this report the term 'villa' will, as far as possible, be avoided in order to avoid the associated connotations. The Nene Valley contains many rural farm sites with varying degrees of ostentation and development ranging from small timber-founded structures to multi-roomed stone constructions. This range may reflect individual economic success, social aspiration or even position within a social hierarchy. There is the danger of seeing the distribution as simple chronological 'snap shots', whilst beyond the scope of this project individual sites show different developmental stages at different times in their history, some getting richer others getting poorer and others appearing whilst others vanish, although some broad trends can be seen. This mobility of the distribution has been well illustrated by the work in the Raunds area (Parry 2006).

The nature of rural land structure is very complex and no authors have successfully been able to identify either from the archaeological record or from Mediterranean examples the interrelationship of rural sites. That the structure of Roman estates can be as complex as later medieval holdings with

land both in single conjoined blocks around the centre or as dispersed holding scattered over the landscape shows that the precise nature of rural activity cannot be easily recovered. This is also true for the nature of the economy for individual sites. Even those for which environmental indicators have been recovered the complexity of the mechanics of recovery and survival mean that at best it is merely an indication of types of activity rather than the degree of activity.

The rural landscape is perhaps the best litmus test of issues such as continuity since it is the non urban landscape that has to support with food and other produce any urban consumers. In the Nene Valley there are several sites that display vertical continuity of Iron Age sites overlain by Roman sites (Parry op cit, 76) but this in itself does not necessarily denote direct continuity of occupation. This superposition of one period on another does, however, imply the location is significant and that may reflect its location within the land unit or holding. The issue of continuity is made very complex because of the often limited dating evidence that occurs on rural sites, and at a time that sees a new artefact assemblage there is always the issue of speed of take up in rural areas. In the Peterborough region a gradual replacement of Iron Age vessels with Romanised fabrics is suggested at a number of sites, for example Werrington (Mackreth 1988), Fengate Catswater sub site (Pryor 1984 157) and Monument 97 (Rollo 2001, 57 in Mackreth) which highlights the difficulty of seeing pottery as such a rigid dating tool.
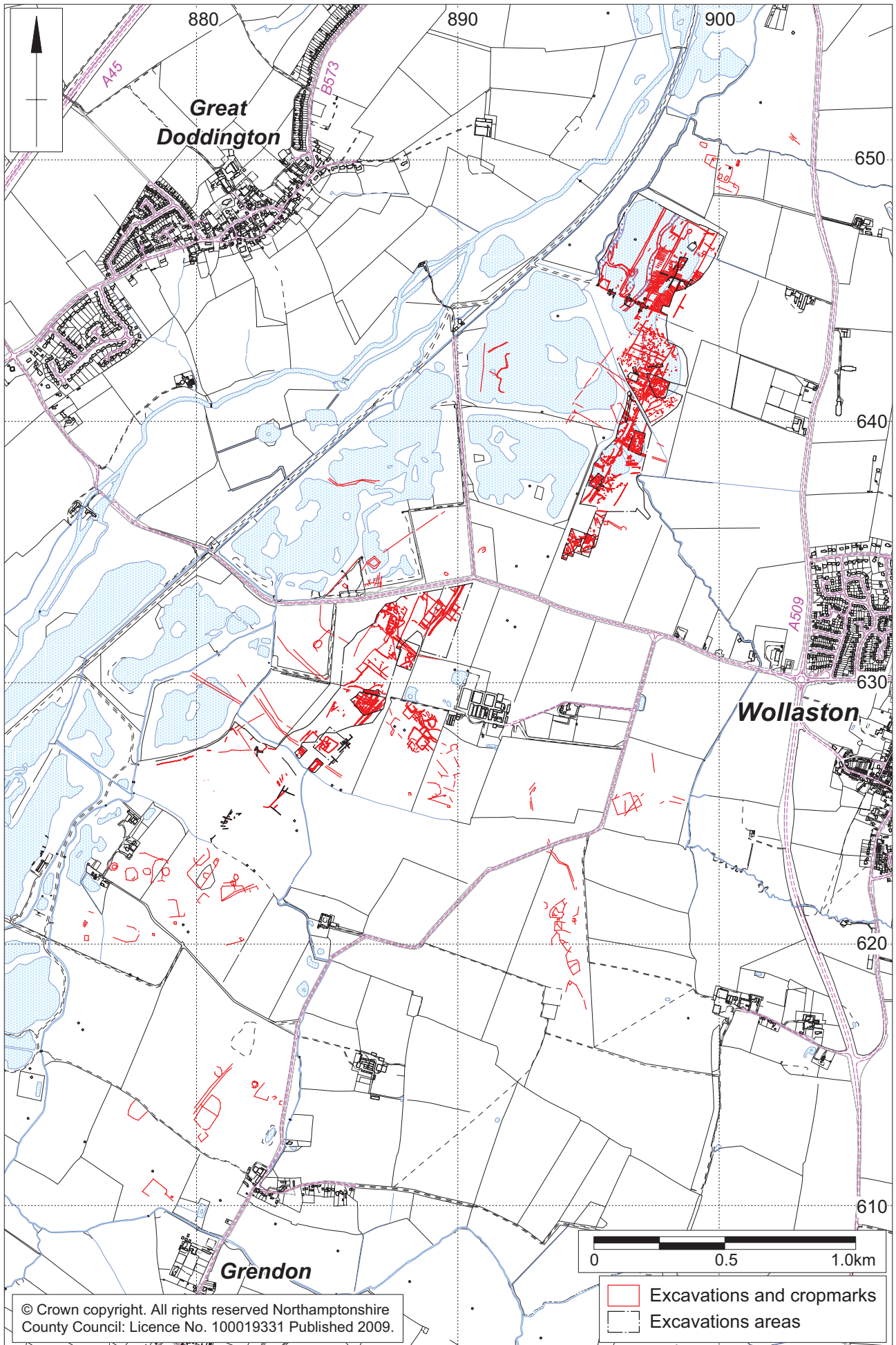
With the difficulties of discerning continuity described above it must be accepted that many sites will have continued to have been occupied from the pre-Roman Iron Age into the post-conquest period without interruption, it is perhaps the sites that display interruption that are more interesting. This rural continuity is likely by inference to extend to the land units and communications network (see above).

The nature of the earliest Roman rural settlements in the lower Nene is unlikely to be different to that which preceded and indeed it may even be the same site. This may also be the case in the middle Nene with sites such as Wollaston showing the potential of continuity by the juxtaposition of 'middle Iron Age' farmsteads with Roman farms to either side of a road (Meadows forthcoming). The paucity of excavated sites in the upper Nene Valley by comparison to the rest of the valley prevents comments about the broader trend in the transition from Iron Age to Roman. From Northampton upstream there have been very few excavations, an exception being the work conducted at Whitehall Farm under the auspices of CLASP (Community Landscape & Archaeology Survey Project).

At Whitehall Farm on land close to the line of Watling Street excavation as part of the Community Landscape archaeology and survey project has revealed the remains of two stone roundhouses that became linked by a proto villa structure which in the late third or early fourth century was rebuilt as a corridor villa. This site lay within an enclosure of 2ha, defined by a bank and ditch.

The bulk of our archaeological knowledge for the rural Roman period landscape in the Nene Valley is downstream from Northampton, with the evidence of the middle Nene derived from a few key sites such as the unpublished excavations at Wollaston (Meadows forthcoming), Stanwick and a series of smaller interventions.

The excavations at Wollaston in advance of gravel extraction were located on a wide part of the flood plain where the river course formed a bend, this wide flat area contained archaeological evidence for Roman occupation along its margin (Fig 2.5.6). The Roman farms, of which four were excavated, were all located along the line of a road that had originated as a pre-Roman track along a line initially defined by a pit alignment. The farms were all adjacent to or partially overlying pre-conquest Iron Age farms, perhaps reflecting some continuity of the land units in the area and maybe some continuity of people. Each farm also lay at the limit of the medieval alluviation suggesting that flooding may have been an issue at that time.

The Wollaston landscape   Fig 2.5.6

Great
Doddington

Wollaston

Grendon

| | Excavations and cropmarks |
| | Excavations areas |

0   0.5   1.0km

Artist's impression of the vineyard at Wollaston   Fig 2.5.7

Beyond the area examined in the quarry were three higher status Roman buildings but because these three sites are only known from the cropmark evidence it is unclear what the relationship between them and the excavated landscape sites was. That all three display greater scale and are built in stone might suggest any range of options but the poor quality of the farms excavated and the low coin and other artefact count in the light of a concerted metal detector survey might denote a tied relationship between the excavated farms and the larger properties. Relationships of tenure cannot be determined by archaeological excavation but such a hierarchy would seem to make sense. The individual farmsteads showed no signs of anything other than agricultural activities, with indications of the use of the flood plain for hay meadows (M Robinson report in archive) along with the cultivation of cereals. Both of these activities are highly typical of rural sites of any period, but at Wollaston, and perhaps supporting the premise that the poor farms were part of a hierarchical landscape, extensive evidence for viticulture was also recovered.

At the northern end of the excavated area, slightly to the south of the Little Irchester villa, an area of parallel trenches was uncovered. These trenches were straight-sided, flat-bottomed trenches but careful excavation revealed the ghosts of posts and root balls within the fills (Fig 2.5.7, Plate 2.5.2). The evidence was of a plant requiring support at regular intervals along each of the trenches; this plant was then identified by the occurrence of pollen of Vitis vinifera in two samples. The morphology of the trenches was such that they conformed to the morphology of classically described vineyards planted in the pastinatio method. This vineyard covered at least 11ha, with the trench system extending beyond the excavated area. A second vineyard was identified 2000m to the south with another 500m to the south-east where it was described as lazy beds (Jackson 1995). Vine pollen was also recovered from the well within one of the farmsteads.

The growth of what is obviously not a basic agricultural crop and the copying of the classical form for the vineyard suggests the land around Wollaston was not managed by the occupants of the low grade farms excavated on the site, reinforcing the possible seignurial relationship between them and the grander structures just outside the study area.

At Stanwick the excavation was of structures at the opposite end of the economic spectrum to the poor farmsteads at Wollaston (Crosby and Neal forthcoming). Excavation work again in advance of gravel extraction examined a large complex of occupation ranging from the pre-conquest period onwards. In the first century the site included a shrine comprising a Bronze Age round barrow that was enclosed in a polygonal stone temenos wall, worship or at least the deposition of coin offerings continued until early in the second century (Neal 1989). No other quasi-religious structures were identified on the site for the rest of the Roman period. Contemporary occupation with the use of the barrow shrine was re-arranged in the early second century with the laying out of a series of enclosures and trackways and the establishment of a number of stone-founded buildings. The site was again subjected to reorganisation and modification in the late Antonine period with buildings grouped in a series of complexes. Many of the structures of this period continued to be occupied through most of the remaining Roman period. One structure, identified as an aisled barn in the late second century, was enlarged and developed in the fourth century in a massive fashion and is seen as the centre of the large agricultural estate.

The types of agricultural practises included evidence of the usual range of produce along with evidence of secondary processing in the form of the base of two donkey mills (Neal 1992, 285). This mill would have been able to produce commercial quantities of flour and would suggest the economy of this rural estate centre was not solely one of production. A role as an estate centre for this complex has been suggested, but the scale of such an estate remains unclear.

About one mile from the above site lay Redlands Farm which comprised barn structures and a possible watermill. Some time after the mid-second century this structure was redesigned as a villa. It is unclear whether this site was part of a larger estate centred upon the Stanwick site or if it was a separate social and economic entity. The possible construction of a watermill would require the

selection of an appropriate location with an adequate water flow as its prerequisite. As a structure it also would demonstrate a centralisation of cereal processing to create commercial quantities of flour. If a watermill was also present in the main Stanwick complex (Neal 1989, 165) then it is possible to suggest that much of the land around would have been given over to cereal production. A watermill is estimated to be able to produce flour from about 400lb of corn per hour (White 1970, 447), in five hours it would be able to mill one ton of corn, these amounts are about forty times the processing level of a donkey mill. It is unclear from the available evidence what the market for the flour was and despite the riverside location transport of the flour by water is unlikely, it is also unclear what grade of flour would have been produced by such mills (Moritz 1958, 168-76).

The occurrence of this evidence for milling corn may be taken as a reflection of the character of land use in the vicinity as the raw unprocessed corn is unlikely to have been transported huge distances to the mills. This perspective is perhaps further supported by the work carried out in the Raunds Area Survey (Parry 2006, 72-84) that produced evidence for extensive cultivation in the form of manuring scatters of pottery. These scatters were present throughout the early and middle Roman periods but by late Roman times there appears to be an abandonment of some settlements and large areas that are no longer being manured This suggestion of extensive cultivation in the hinterland of the Stanwick may well reflect cereal cultivation, at least until the third century when manuring appears to be less.

Downstream of the Raunds area few sites immediately within the river valley have been excavated although several above the river have been examined. Generally, apart from the large scale quarrying between Ringstead and Great Addington and the extensive quarrying immediately downstream of Thrapston to Aldwincle, the valley down to Oundle has not seen much quarrying which might have lead to excavation. In addition it must be presumed that this part of the valley has a deep alluvial cover or high water table since there are also few cropmarks.

At Ringstead, a building lying 500m from the current river course was present at the edge of the flood plain. This site produced evidence of possible lime production (Jackson 1980, 14). A circular building defined by a shallow gully lacking secure dating was the earliest structure on the site, this was overlain by a stone-founded circular structure 8m in diameter with a tessellated floor. This structure was abutted by a multi-roomed rectangular structure that displayed several phases of alteration, probably occupied through the third and fourth centuries. These buildings lie almost directly opposite another site of similar character in Woodford (Parry 2006, 199-201) on the opposite side of the river.

The site at Woodford had been known since the eighteenth century but there was only salvage excavation carried out in 1986. The site was positioned on the gravel floodplain and was sealed beneath alluvium. As part of the observation 41m of a metalled track was recorded, on an orientation that would coincide with a ditch cropmark at Ringstead perhaps suggesting the two sites were linked, at least in terms of local communications. A series of field ditches of first- and second-century date were backfilled and built on in the later second century. The structures comprised a small circular building 4m in diameter (Parry 2006, 199-200), perhaps a donkey mill of similar form to the example identified at Stanwick (see above). This putative mill was overlain by a rectangular structure with a second rectangular structure on a similar alignment. The pottery and coins recovered indicate that occupation on the site extended to the fourth century.

Downstream of Titchmarsh knowledge of most of the Roman sites is limited to either cropmarks or limited observations. It is clear from the number of sites listed for these parishes that the land was densely occupied (RCHM(E) 1975).

Excavation at Barnwell and Cotterstock either side of Ashton have focussed on discrete rural sites. At Barnwell, some distance away from the river, the excavations examined part of a much larger complex identified by geophysical survey (Hadman and Upex 1974, 86). The site appeared to comprise a substantial clay pit, which was identified mineralogically as a quarry for clay used locally in tile production. A substantial building, some 13.2m x 3.6m was found, which seemed to start as an

open shed but in the third century an enclosing wall was erected and a substantially made floor of limestone overlain with opus signinum and tiles was laid. This site in common with many of the rural sites examined appears to have an industrial aspect to its occupation.

At Cotterstock the large villa identified in the eighteenth century and further recorded by E T Artis (Artis 1828, plates 59-6) and more recently examined (Upex 2001) lies away from the flood plain on slightly elevated ground. This location is perhaps a practical response to the risk of flooding, further upstream in the Raunds area it was noted that the majority of the villas were located on first terrace gravels that would also give slight elevation (Parry 2006, 76). Similar locational choice was perhaps displayed at Wollaston (see above) where the farmsteads were all positioned at was to be the limit of medieval alluviation. The limit of that alluviation may reflect the extent of regular flooding for a far longer period, for most of which the floodwaters were not carrying as much soil load that would generate recognisable alluvial horizons.

Downstream of Cotterstock much of the archaeology is only known from cropmark evidence. The Fotheringhay Lodge complex (RCHM(E) 1975, 40-1) to the north of Fotheringhay, for example is located on a slight gravel ridge and it comprises a series of ditched enclosures or paddocks either side of a ditched trackway running approximately north south. To the south of Fotheringhay the Stone Pit Lodge complex also comprises a long trackway with associated enclosures. The identification of a series of timbers as the remains of a possible bridge continuing the line of this track (RCHM(E) 1975, 86) illustrates how these tracks were part of a much larger infrastructure of communications. This complex of remains as a whole represents the largest surviving area of unquarried archaeological remains in the valley.

The work in the lower Nene Valley, first by Edmund Artis in the early nineteenth century and subsequently by others, has produced a dense spread of rural sites of this period. This density, partly a reflection of the intensity of fieldwork, can clearly be seen but what underlies the distribution is a range of sites that go from palatial to small farm. Very few of the sites actually lie upon the flood plain but two notable exceptions are the two villa complexes in Ailsworth (RCHM(E) 1969 16-7), each of which is now partially sealed beneath alluvium. These two sites are known from aerial photographs and one was explored by in the early nineteenth century revealing at least fifteen rooms, half of which had mosaics or tessellated floors. Unfortunately, although Artis recorded the buildings ground plan and the character of the rooms, little attention was given to any evidence that might have indicated the role of the structure either in terms of agriculture or other activity. Both of these sites are close to the Roman town of *Durobrivae* and could well represent residences.

Downstream of *Durobrivae* the evidence for Roman rural sites is limited to a few known sites within the floodplain such as the complex at Lynch Farm with other sites above the flood plain such as Mill Hill villa (RCHM(E) 1969, 24) and the activity in the Lynch Wood area identified and partially recorded during the construction of parts of the Business Park (Meadows 1990a). The majority of Roman occupation seems to be concentrated just above the flood plain with sites such as the possible villa observed by Stukeley near Thorpe Hall (RCHM(E) 1969, 10) and the ill defined Roman site underneath the Cathedral in Peterborough. Better understood but also above the flood plain are the two sites excavated by the Nene Valley Research Committee in the 1970s at Orton Hall Farm (Mackreth 1996) and Orton Longueville (Mackreth 2001). The last two sites potentially display a change in location through time with occupation commencing at Orton Hall Farm at about the same time as occupation ceased at the Orton Longueville site. At Orton Longueville the occupation commenced in the Iron Age continuing through until the mid-second century when the site was abandoned. This site produced no evidence of non-agricultural activity but most of the evidence relates to consumption rather than production. At Orton Hall Farm where, in the late third century, buildings were erected there was evidence for both cereal processing in the form of a possible mill house, brewing and also stock raising, in particular cattle (Mackreth 1996, 220-31).

The site at Lynch Farm had evidence of occupation from the first to fourth centuries, a farmstead (Wild 1973a) and cemetery (Jones 1973) formed part of a much larger complex, which remains poorly understood. The series of ditched enclosures forming land units and the suggested drainage channels reflect the agricultural use of the floodplain margins even to the extent that effort was made to manage and drain ground for agriculture (Wild op cit). The postulated fishpond, if it were such, would denote wider use of the riparian location to provide fish for the table. Within the associated complex of structures, an aisled barn represented the final phase, it contained small furnaces which could have served for smithing activities, also within this barn a group of agricultural tools were also recovered (Manning 1973, 28-30).

The large fourth-century complex on the hill at Castor is of palatial scale (Mackreth 1984), replacing an earlier villa complex (Green *et al* 1987), is suggested by some authors as the residence of a regional governor or high ranking military commander. Excavations over the last fifteen years have revealed elements that suggest the planned form of the main structure (Mackreth op cit) continued into the landscape as it extended down onto Normangate Field. This would indicate a formal planned residence of symmetrical form within extensive grounds containing a median trackway running up from Normangate Field (Meadows 1990b).

Discussion

The diversity of the known rural sites along the Nene Valley precludes any definitive statement, however, it is the sheer diversity of the sites that makes the Nene Valley so significant. Archaeological excavation has not only examined the wealthy sites, traditionally assigned the blanket term villa, but has also explored many lesser examples. It is impossible to meaningfully discuss potential estates other than mentioning either a simplistic Theissen polygon approach or the linking to significant landscape features such as water courses, but as has been suggested by other authors (Parry 2006, 84) this approach is at best naïve and could be completely erroneous. The interrelationship between the various sites and the rise and fall of apparent status amongst some of them might reflect changes in agricultural regime, tenure or even a desire to invest in other things which might divert resources into aspects that are not susceptible to detection by archaeological means.

The occurrence of levels of industrial activity, often of a small scale, on these rural sites shows how diversification was in the Roman period as much a key to economic survival as it is in modern farming. It is unclear whether some of the episodes of industry were short-lived experiments, or indeed production linked to domestic needs, but the frequency that pottery production for example is found on rural sites might suggest that as an industry it had full-scale industrial production and also local 'cottage' industrial production. Evidence for pottery production has been found at several sites along the valley, although generally off the flood plain.

Agriculture

The evidence for agriculture along the Nene Valley is derived from the environmental data including pollen, plant macros and animal bones, along with the less direct evidence of the form of land division and associated activities. As has been effectively demonstrated in the Raunds area much of the off flood plain landscape was under an arable regime (Parry 2006, 81-3) and it is not unreasonable to see most of that as cereal-based. This pattern may be a reflection of much of the land use adjacent to the flood plain with the flood plain being a predominantly grazed or hay meadow resource. Where examined there is a clear edge to the land units extending onto the flood plain. This edge, whilst perhaps an artefact of the type of boundary employed, may equally reflect a change in the character of use. Ditched boundaries to land parcels are only needed to restrict animal movement (whether in or out of the land parcel), to enhance surface drainage or to define ownership. In the case of flood plains, whilst drainage might be an issue, the Nene during the Roman period was probably inclined to

both episodes of winter flood and summer draught, a situation that the later navigation improvements sought to redress by creating a permanent body of water.

The evidence for cereal production along the valley comes not only from the fieldwalking data but also from the sites that have produced evidence for milling, Redlands farm (?pre- mid-second century), Stanwick (third/fourth century), Woodford (?pre-mid-second century) and Orton Hall Farm (fourth century). This geographical and chronological spread would suggest that whilst some areas might have ceased to be used for cereal cultivation other large areas certainly did not. Amongst the plant remains detected, in addition to the dominant spelt, oats and barley were also represented.

In addition to the evidence for milling (see above) there is extensive evidence for other cereal processing in the form of a range of ovens. These ovens, traditionally referred to as corn driers, whilst possibly having served to dry corn may also have functioned as maltings converting grain into charred grain suitable for brewing. Ovens were found at many sites both rural and urban, for example Ashton, Stanwick and Orton Hall Farm. At Orton hall Farm the importance of beer in the rural economy as a safe drink and the process of brewing is extensively discussed and clearly the volumes being produced would not generate substantial excess beyond the requirements, in that instance, of the suggested estate

The farmers, or the landowners, of the Nene Valley were clearly able to adopt a range of crops as is shown by the extensive evidence for viticulture that has been revealed in Grendon and Wollaston. The probably second-century pastinatio trenches reflect an awareness of classical agricultural treatises in which the different forms of viticulture are outlined such as *Columella Rei Rusticae Book V*. That rural sites in Northamptonshire demonstrate awareness of complex agricultural practices such as the creation of pastinatio has implications as to the spread of knowledge across the province. To construct a vineyard in Britain would provide wine which, whilst perhaps not of Mediterranean quality, would perhaps be better than European wine that had travelled to Northamptonshire. The vineyards would produce a substantial quantity of grapes that would be used to produce a white wine. Although no evidence for pressing or treading the grapes has been found a treading floor could be part of any of the unexamined villas, or within the town of Irchester a machine such as a grape press would leave little trace as examination of the example in the Villa of the Mysteries shows they were largely wooden. There is also no reason to presume that any treading device would leave a permanent trace, portable examples in the form of large tubs are known from the classical world (Jashemski 1979, 226).

Having produced the wine the next issue is how wide was the distribution and what form did it take (Fig 2.5.3). Whilst small-scale use of the river for transport is possible, perhaps utilising shallow vessels similar to the punt shown on an altar from Holland (Ellmers 1978, 10), no containers have been recovered such as barrels from the area. It is likely that the vineyards excavated represent the tip of a much larger agricultural crop than had been previously recognised. The second Wollaston vineyard comprised an initial batch of pastinatio trenches, but the bulk of the area was simply planted directly and the only archaeological evidence was the vast number of postholes from the vine supports. If this method of cultivation were more generally used then the evidence for viticulture would be almost impossible to detect. That viticulture was a significant agricultural practise is perhaps further reflected by the granting of permission '..to all the Gauls and the Spaniards and Britons to cultivate vineyards and make wines..' by Probus in the 270s (Historiae Augustae, Probus, 18.8).

The existence of tracts of meadows either for grazing or haymaking is likely in the valley as a practical use for land which was liable to flooding (Parry 2006, 82). The nature of such practices, however, is such that they leave little evidence although the recovery of significant number of a particular beetle from a well at Wollaston is taken as an indication of an adjacent haystack as the laval stage of these beetles is parasitic on plantains which would have been gathered with the cut grass. Hay would have been important to maintain stock through the winter months and if the strator

indicated at Irchester (see above) was in the area of the Nene Valley in connection with horses then both grazing and fodder would have been required.

Livestock on the farms along the valley, as indicated by the faunal remains, was dominated by cattle followed by sheep; for example from the sites with the largest analysed assemblages the percentages were as follows: at Orton Hall Farm cattle were about 60% of the recovered assemblage in all periods with sheep, after the first period, making up on average slightly less than 30%; at Stanwick cattle were about 47% and sheep 45%. Whilst the bone assemblage is not necessarily a guide to agricultural practise it shows that both animals were not slaughtered until maturity, suggesting that meat was not the primary value of either breed. Obviously the slaughtered animals represent food rather than necessarily what was farmed in the valley, but other than the tentative examination of the forms of field systems there is little other indication of the type or ratio of kept stock for this period.

The definition of fields by ditches is sadly an aspect of the Roman landscape of the Nene Valley that has only been locally addressed. Generally, excavation focussed upon settlement nuclei do not result in the recovery of a plan of the extensive associated field systems that would have of necessity supported the rural communities. In most excavations before the 1990s field systems were often recorded as present but almost in a dismissive way. At Stanwick and Wollaston extensive tracts of fields have been recorded, unfortunately those sites are both still unpublished and both represent only part of the field system as the study areas were in both instances dictated by the extent of gravel extraction. There is extensive evidence for the creation of both large and small fields defined by ditches of various sizes at both sites, the individual parcels may have had specific roles either in the management of stock or cultivation of specific crops but unfortunately this is generally impossible to determine. The individual ditches were probably often reinforced with hedges and other barrier elements but these too leave little trace.

At Wollaston one farmstead was subjected to trace chemical analysis along with detailed excavation and it was possible to identify one small enclosure as a stock pen whilst another area might have been a midden (Clogg and Taylor nd). In addition a large part of the farmstead enclosure contained small shrub or tree root balls suggesting a small orchard.

Industry

The Nene Valley has few natural resources other than building stone, clay and ironstone and there is extensive evidence for the exploitation of these resources in the Roman period. Whilst some of the activity is of small scale, and could perhaps simply reflect diversification by individual farmers, other sites are less equivocally industrial.

Although very little excavation work has occurred in Normangate Field, that which has confirmed that the buildings include workshops and other industrial structures (Dannell 1974) along with agriculture elements (Wild 1976). This mixing of industrial with agricultural practices is seen on other sites upstream of this large suburban spread. The landscape was studded with rural sites many of which had an industrial element, for example the sites at Sacrewell (Challands 1974) and Stibbington (Wild 1973).

In Normangate Field excavation work in the 1970s, when it was thought the area might be affected by the development of greater Peterborough, identified a number of areas of extensive scorching which may have represented either bonfire kilns or surface-built kilns, the remainder of which was lost through cultivation. The area was prospected using magnetometry to identify possible kiln-like anomalies, but each one that was explored comprised only areas of burnt sand, sometimes covered with 'friable baked clay' (Wild and Dannel, 1974 86-8). A substantial kiln was recorded in the nineteenth century (Artis 1828, plate XL) along with a range of structures with hearths and ovens (ibid, plate XXXIX) interpreted as potters workshops. In addition to the pottery kilns in the

Normangate Field suburb, further kilns have been found between *Durobrivae* and Water Newton indicating the existence of several potters working around the town.

The origins of the pottery industry in the lower Nene Valley are diverse and although the military kilns exist adjacent to the Longthorpe fortress they are not seen to be the stimulus for the subsequent development of the industry. It has been suggested that one impetus for the development of the pottery industry was the growth of the town at *Durobrivae* which would have provided a ready market as well as distribution centre. The clustering of kilns around the town is further enhanced by the presence of further nuclei at Stibbington upstream and Stanground downstream (just beyond the present study area).

At Stibbington an extensive area containing evidence of pottery production has been known since Artis, this evidence spreads from the present A1 trunk road to the river covering about 100 acres. Three kilns were excavated on the river gravels in 1957 (Hartley 1960) and further kilns were examined in 1968 in advance of building works adjacent to the school. This second excavation revealed two further kilns of fourth-century date and a building interpreted as a potters workshop (Wild 1973). The kilns were substantial industrial structures with internal diameters of 1.1-1.3m and the accompanying workshop contained stone-lined tanks, one of which contained clay mixed with ground fresh water mussel, presumably a temper. In a well adjacent to the workshop a broken millstone, about 0.7m diameter, with an unusual wear patter was interpreted as the flywheel or kickwheel for a potters' wheel.

On the opposite side of the river at Sacrewell a stone-founded building around which lay at least eight iron working furnaces were identified in a pipeline easement (Challands 1974). The furnaces included several bowl-types, but part of a single shaft furnace was also identified. The presence of a shaft furnace for smelting the ore roasted in the bowl furnaces indicates the production of refined iron blooms for further working by smiths. This site's occupation spanned the mid-second to fourth centuries. Further evidence for iron smelting in the lower Nene Valley has also been found in Normangate Field, Orton Waterville and Orton Longueville. None of these sites are located on the raw material for smelting, which would suggest the bulky material was imported from outcrops elsewhere in the area such as those known from the Bedford Purlieus and Old Sulehay (RCHM(E) 1975, 115) slightly to the north and west. Unfortunately, the area continued to be exploited for ironstone in the medieval period and later, although some sites were identified in the nineteenth century as Roman (Artis 1828).

Whilst there is evidence for primary metalworking much is secondary working in the form of refining the blooms and more particularly smithing. On most rural sites it is difficult to tell whether the existence of a smithing hearth indicates industrial activity or simply serves the needs of the farm or immediate community, either repairing or producing tools and implements. In the case of the town at Ashton however, every building excavated produced smithing hearths and in at least one traces of hammer scale were observed on the floor (Dix 1984). Tools associated with smithing were also recovered including chisels and hammers. If this town was a secondary iron working centre its products are unclear but it is located away from the raw ironstone which presumably would have been smelted first and the refined blooms brought to Ashton. In addition to the evidence for metalworking there is also limited evidence for pottery production at Ashton (NAU 1992).

A stray find of a blacksmith's anvil weighing about 6kg from Nassington (Challands 1979) is similar to an example portrayed on a piece of pottery now in Peterborough Museum, found in the nineteenth century in the *Durobrivae* area. This pottery vessel would clearly be portraying a commonplace piece in this area but the process of use and reuse of raw materials may have removed many of these anvils. The Nassington example was recovered from an area where the raw ore, Northamptonshire sand ironstone, outcrops.

Upstream of Ashton there is little evidence of large-scale industrial activities in the immediate valley although pottery production sites are known at a number of places along the valley (Swann 1984, 144-6).

One of the impacts of these industries on the broader landscape would be the demand for wood as fuel, as a result substantial amounts of woodland would need to be accessible in particular to the industries of the lower Nene Valley. This woodland would have been managed, probably since before the conquest, and presumably would have provided building material as well as fuel both for domestic and industrial use (Rackham 1976, 51). The pottery and iron industry of the region in particular would have made a major call upon this resource and its scale and longevity would imply the existence of extensive areas of managed woodland in the Roman period (Swann 1984, 7). Each pottery kiln firing would consume about 4cwt of fuel wood (based on the results published in Bryant 1973, 158). Charcoal may have been produced as a refined fuel but the ephemeral nature of evidence for its production means that none have been identified.

Any extractive industry for either building stone, roofing slates or stone for lime burning have left no traces perhaps because quarries by their nature are difficult to date and because later extraction will have obliterated any evidence. That stone was extracted is shown by the extensive use of stone for walls either of low sleeper type or, as was seen at Redlands Farm, as coursed masonry to a height of 6m (Keevill 1991).

Religion and Burial

Roman religious sites and cemeteries occur in the valley but for most part there is little evidence to suggest that the location was the result of anything other than association with adjacent settlements. Shrines and burials in Normangate Field were positioned in amongst workshops and in some instances their function did not remain constant. Similarly, the cemetery at Lynch Farm (Jones 1975) was presumably located to serve the needs of people living and farming that area of land, and they were interred along the edges of some of the land parcels so as to minimise disruption to agriculture. The putative shrine structure (Wild and Dannell 1974a) would equally have served a local community as the absence of substantial votive deposits suggests.

At Ashton the extensive cemetery and other burials were located around the town, either around the edges of plots or, in the case of the cemetery, in an area given over to that use (Plate 2.5.3). Little direct evidence exists for religious practise on the site although the recovery of a large lead tank from a well could reflect Christian worship, but their actual role remains ambiguous (Guy 1981).

Upstream of Ashton a shrine structure has been identified from aerial photographs on the western edge of the Roman town at Titchmarsh (Curteis *et al* 1999) and a further possible temple comprising a cella and temenos has recently been identified by geophysics within the walled area of Irchester (Yates and Butler 2006). None of these shrines have been excavated and their full character therefore remains unclear but recent excavations at Higham Ferrers have revealed a site comprising a shrine and associated structures (see above). It is unclear what the origin of this site was but the shrine appears to be the earliest part of the site, with the other buildings then being erected in association. It is unclear at present whether the site was developing along the lines of Nettleton Scrub (Wedlake 1982) where a shrine had a series of ancilliary service structures erected adjacent to it.

The large urban cemeteries around Titchmarsh and Irchester were located outside the towns, in the case of Irchester on ground slightly above the flood plain but at Titchmarsh the cemetery, largely destroyed in gravel extraction, lay on the gravel flood plain. In both these cases the location owes itself to proximity to the town rather than any riparian choice.

At Stanwick the enclosing of a Bronze Age barrow and the deposition of coins and other offerings in the first and second century clearly denotes a religious site but its location was more a reflection of continued or renewed reverence of an earlier visible monument. The reused fragments of perhaps a mausoleum at Stanwick are of note (Neal 1991) as they firstly illustrate highly classical figures but also because of the possible representation of a river god or at least one associated with water, perhaps Oceanus. The stones were derived from at least one other structure and it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the presence of such a figure might have served as a passing reflection of a riverside location.

The occurrence of hoards of material along the valley could in some instances denote religious or ceremonial offerings. Several coin hoards have been recovered around *Durobrivae* and Irchester but most were perhaps a reflection of periods of instability rather than anything else. The large hoard of ironwork from Sibson (Manning 1998) containing a range of tools and other implements may represent a blacksmith's hoard of materials, but the significance of these iron work hoards is difficult to understand (Manning 1972). The most significant hoard in the valley must, however, be the Water Newton silver (Painter 1977). These objects are undoubtedly religious in origin and whilst their burial might denote a period of uncertainty their existence must reflect on a religious community in the immediate part of the valley (Painter 1999).

The end of the Roman period

The end of the Roman lifestyle in the Nene Valley is difficult to identify. It is clear that there is occupation in the fourth century and it is generally unclear how far that occupation extends into the fifth. A number of sites along the valley have evidence for occupation to the end of the Roman period and with the reliance upon artefacts for dating it is difficult then to recognise how long before the Roman vessels and artefacts may have gone out of use. Whilst clearly no new coins would have entered circulation, it is difficult to ascertain how abrupt the cessation of, for example, the pottery supply would have been in an area where pottery manufacture had been such a major industry (Perrin in Mackreth 1996, 188-90). At Orton Hall Farm there was evidence for likely post-Roman pottery production of Roman style vessels in non-Roman fabrics, notably a mortarium which must denote a degree of continuing Roman food preparation practises (Mackreth 1996 Fig 119 no 15).

Unfortunately, as the area is under fairly intense agricultural pressures off the flood plain any late Roman or immediately post-Roman contexts will have been generally disturbed or lost through cultivation. Sites along the valley sides seldom produce evidence for structures of his period although they do produce scatters of the ambiguously dated Early/Middle Saxon pottery (EMS) (Parry 2006, 91). As one of the few parts of the valley studied in detail the Raunds model for the evidence of translation of Roman settlement to Saxon is very significant. The results of this survey show that most of the fourth-century Roman sites do not continue and of the twelve concentrations of early/middle Saxon pottery only three coincided with a previous Roman site, so the problem is identifying when this dislocation occurs.

At Orton Hall Farm it is evident from the pottery that occupation continued into the fifth to sixth centuries and the occurrence of Anglo-Saxon buildings on top of earlier Roman structures might denote continuity or reoccupation after a short period. The nature of the remains comprised three possible post-built structures and one SFB. The recovery of evidence at this site of post-Roman occupation raises the issue of the visibility of the remains if not found as part of the excavation of a highly visible earlier site. Owing to the stratigraphic position of Late Roman and Early Saxon material it is most prone to denudation by cultivation and as the EMS pottery is not robust in a ploughsoil, sites may, in some instances, have been completely eradicated.

Upstream from Peterborough there are several pagan Saxon cemeteries that lie off the floodplain (Fig 2.5.8). To the south of the river lay the Fletton and Woodston (RCHM(E) 1969, 12 & 36) cemeteries

excavated in the nineteenth century, there were difficulties disentangling the finds from them as a level of mixing had occurred. Both would appear to be predominantly inhumation cemeteries. Further upstream a predominantly cremation cemetery was excavated in the north-west corner of Longthorpe fortress (Frere and St Joseph 1974, 112-22). All three of the above cemeteries were found with no trace of adjacent settlement evidence; unfortunately as both Fletton and Woodston were recovered largely during gravel extraction any less visible contemporary levels have now been lost.
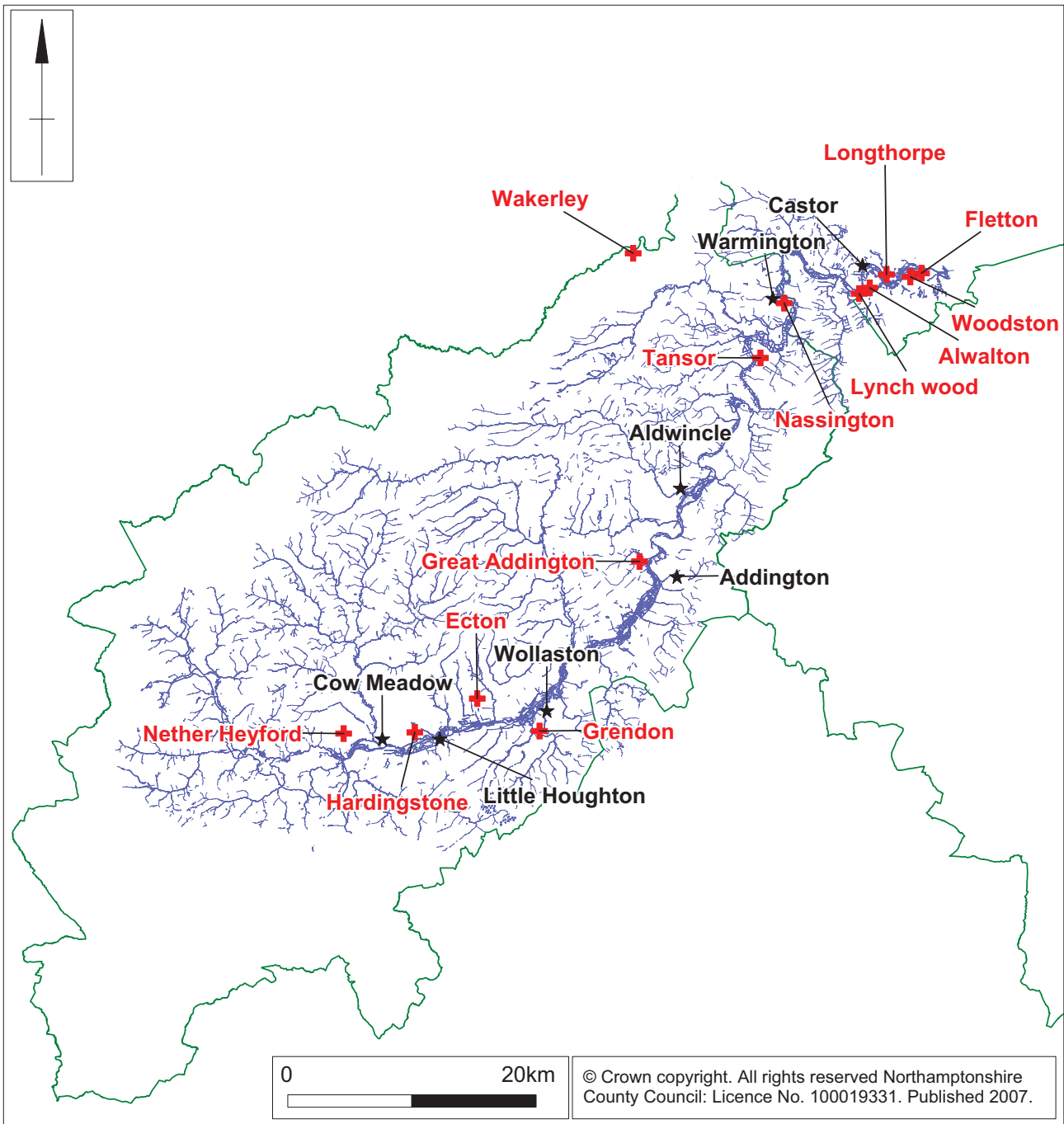
Further upstream a cemetery or cemeteries occurred on the top of the scarp overlooking the floodplain at Lynch wood. In 1975 during the laying of a water pipe three Anglo Saxon urned cremations were discovered (Howe 1984) adjacent to a field boundary. Examination of the surrounding area produced no further burials although others may once have been present. About 1000m to the south-west a cemetery of sixty-one burials, both inhumations and cremation, was discovered in 1999 (McDonald and Last 1999). The twenty-eight cremations were mostly urned and generally included grave goods, most frequently bone combs were represented. It is unclear what relationship if any existed between these two groups of burials but clearly the location was significant.

Metal detector users on the line of the Castor bypass recovered the remains of what was probably a rich burial in 1990 (HER 8254) (Plates 2.5.4, 2.5.5). The remains were located on top of the hill overlooking the large meander in the river that contained the lynch farm complex. No human remains were found and contextual evidence of the burial survived the objects' initial recovery. It would appear that a small pit was excavated to contain a hanging bowl which was probably complete when buried, in addition an iron spearhead, some Roman glass fragments and a gold and silver fitting, probably a belt buckle fragment were recovered. Unfortunately, a steam plough furrow removing one of the bowls mounts cut through the pit containing the bowl. The area had been box-scraped and it was unclear how closely associated the artefacts were when found. The occurrence of a hanging bowl denotes a level of social quality and as an artefact category they are normally present only in rich graves, the belt fitting was of exquisite workmanship and is unlikely to have occurred other than in a grave context. A barrow that would have been visible on the floodplain below may have marked the position of this burial.

A possible Saxon settlement site was identified on the border between Orton Waterville and Orton Longueville during gravel extraction. The remains recorded comprised postholes, pits and trenches but sadly no plan exists (RCHM(E) 1969, 31, 15 & 16) and it is difficult to be certain that the pottery assigned to the site is correct (Dallas 1977, 17-19). Other than this site and the remains at Orton Hall farm, the Saxon occupation is generally denoted by stray sherds of pottery such as the one recorded from Normangate Field or ambiguous structures such as those found in Castor overlying the earlier Roman palace structure (Green *et al* 1987, 125).

The occurrence of cemeteries illustrates there are people present in the landscape, although they seem to have eschewed the floodplain for both burial and settlement. The numbers suggested, however, appear significantly lower than those of the same area in the later Roman period. The issue of visibility in this post-Roman period is clearly significant in terms of limiting the understanding of the period, but the apparent distribution of burials along the edge of the valley but off the flood plain might reflect a deliberate placing of the dead. Equally the paucity of Roman sites that show evidence of any sort of continuity might well reflect a substantial change in both the way of life and the population.

Upstream of the Peterborough area the amount of evidence for activity on the flood plain does not increase much. There is little coherent settlement evidence of early/middle Saxon date despite it being a quite intensely examined area what evidence occurs is often discovered incidental to other work. For example a mixed cemetery of cremations and inhumations was revealed during gravel extraction to the south-east of Nassington (Leeds and Atkinson 1944). Three cremations were found along with

Map labels:

Wakerley
Longthorpe
Castor
Fletton
Warmington
Woodston
Tansor
Alwalton
Lynch wood
Nassington
Aldwincle
Great Addington
Addington
Ecton
Wollaston
Cow Meadow
Grendon
Nether Heyford
Hardingstone
Little Houghton

Scale bar: 0 — 20km

Scale 1:500,000

✚ Saxon cemeteries

★ Saxon graves

Location of Saxon cemeteries and burials   Fig 2.5.8

at least sixty-five other bodies; mostly accompanied with spears, shield bosses, knives, a bucket, brooches, pins and beads.

A further group of Saxon burials was recorded during gravel extraction in Great Addington near a tributary stream flowing into the river about 500m east. This cemetery (RCHM(E) 1979, 1 no 6) was recorded poorly and some of the details might suggest the burials included Roman as well as Saxon. The description is of many skeletons with little further detail. To the north-east of the village a single cremation urn of a probable fifth-century type was also found containing calcined bone; other urns, shield bosses and spearheads are also recorded from this location about 800m from the river (op cit 1 no 7).

Large areas adjacent to the flood plain were fieldwalked at Warmington and around the Roman town at Ashton and little evidence for Early/Middle Saxon settlement activity was recovered. In the intensely examined Raunds area which extends from the river up onto the boulder clay upland, a total of twenty-two pottery concentration potentially indicative of settlement were identified. They potentially reflect all the occupation during a 400-year period, owing to the limitations of the dating material. The distribution shows a selection either of the valley base or on the upper flanks of the valleys for tributary streams. In several instances there was also evidence for sites either side of these channels, with sites over the whole area between 360-650m from a watercourse, probably reflecting the importance of a water supply for a range of uses.

An unusual site was examined at Kings Meadow Lane in Higham Ferrers where an oval ditched enclosure up to 100m across was examined and was found to contain hardly any contemporary features, leading to the suggestion it was a very large stock enclosure. To the north-west four sunken-featured buildings were found and numerous Middle to Later Saxon postholes were found indicating the presence of at least two post-built halls.

At Grendon four sunken-featured buildings were identified lying 30m apart (Jackson 1995, 20-22). Associated with them were iron working features including the remains of at least two iron smelting furnaces and some pits and postholes. Two inhumations that were found were suggested to have been of similar date but no corroborating finds were recovered. About 50m to the north-east a further possible sunken-featured structure was found (Authors own observations). About 200m to the north of this additional structure lay a princely burial (Fig 2.5.9). This burial (Meadows 2004) comprised the remains of a young man, probably arranged in a large grave pit on a bed and accompanied with a sword, knife, hanging bowl and helmet. The burial lay parallel to the axis of the Roman road that had previously possibly formed the route linking Irchester and Towcester.

This burial is significant not just because of the accompanying artefacts, which single the individual out as of princely status, there only being four helmets of this date recovered from the whole of England, but also because of its location (Plate 2.5.6). The grave sat isolated from other potentially contemporary activity, the nearest remains being the structures described above, which suggests that this burial had been carefully placed. Examination of the landscape suggests just how carefully, although no Saxon features were observed, the location in terms of the Roman road system is significant. Firstly, the burial lies parallel to the road and offset by 8m, perhaps to allow for an overlying barrow mound, unfortunately no earthwork survived and no quarry ditch was detected but the name of the furlong, Cringle furlong, may recall a small round hill derived from Old Norse *cringler*. Secondly, the existence of this route, as a possible main route between the two Roman towns, and one that lay above the limit of flooding as suggested by the fact it is just beyond the limits of medieval alluvium, might suggest it would survive into the post-Roman period. A short distance in either direction from this burial are junctions in the road, to the north a T-junction and to the south a crossroads, this hub position in terms of the local Roman road infrastructure might suggest that a mound constructed at this point would have had maximum visibility and the buried individual the greater chance of being remembered. The landscape at this point is a wide flat flood plain so even a

low mound would have been visible, even the nearby Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments were located about 250m to the south on a slight ridge.

Discussion

The pagan Saxon period in the Nene Valley is characterised by settlement remains and cemeteries. The problem is that although sites can be recognised they can seldom be closely dated within the broader period, as a result much occupation is simply of the range 450-850AD (Parry 2006, 91). This broad range means that although a substantial number of settlements are suggested from pottery scatters, it is impossible to identify and explore issues of contemporaneity. This has a further impact in terms of relating settlement activity to cemetery and burial practices, clearly the distinctive pagan burial practices date to the seventh century or earlier but the potential contemporary settlements, as suggested by pottery scatters, might be later.

Because of the difficulty of closely dating the pottery assemblages of this period it is likely that settlement mobility and transience could be masked by the chronological envelope of the ceramics. In the Raunds area, where extensive fieldwalking has identified scatters of pottery and weighted them to suggest settlement as oppose to other activities, a pattern of binary settlement on either side of stream valleys (Parry 2006, 92-5). If one accepts the difficulties of identifying securely the nature of the settlement distribution for the pagan Saxon period no such issue exists for the burial of that period.

The cemeteries in Northamptonshire were positioned in locations adjacent to the flood plain but not on the flood plain, often on slightly raised ground. The individual sites were often identified in the nineteenth century as a result of extractive industries and therefore too little information survives to consider individual site morphology, however, the distribution overall raises an interesting pattern. There is a concentration of cemeteries around Peterborough and no large cemetery has been identified upstream of Great Addington, although groups of burials are recorded in Ecton, Grendon, Hardingstone and Upton.
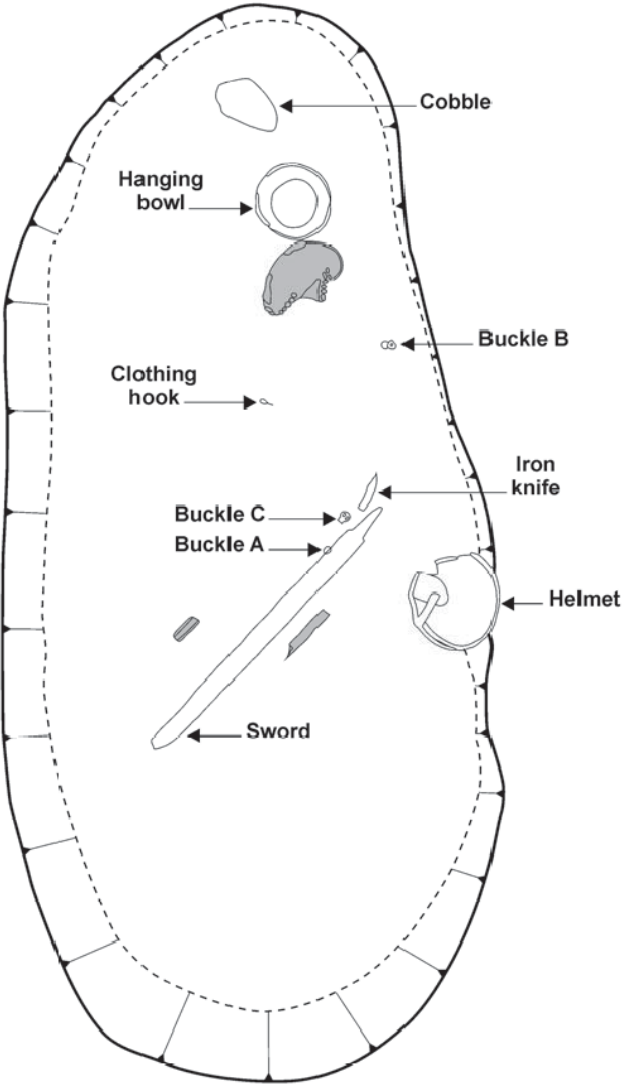
The reason for this distribution might be that the existence of a cemetery does not reflect a purely local burial place, instead it might reflect a desire to form larger burial places 'folk cemeteries' like Spong Hill in Suffolk. When one considers the whole of the county there is only one other cemetery, at Wakerley (Adams and Jackson 1989), suggesting that perhaps the people in the cemeteries are the unusual ones because the potential population density as suggested by the fieldwork around Raunds (Parry op cit) and other parts of the county is neither reflected in the distribution of cemeteries or the number of bodies recovered.

The possibility of un-urned cremations might explain the paucity of bodies for the period, with remains either being lost through cultivation or spread soon after their cremation. That, however, does not explain the apparent positive selection of a location along the river valley for the larger local cemeteries, all of which overlook the Nene with the exception of Wakerley (Adams and Jackson 1988-89), which overlooked the Welland Valley. What made the river valley a significant factor influencing location choice for cemeteries is unclear but it is clear that even significant burials, such as those from Castor and Wollaston, were placed adjacent to or within the valley rather than other parts of the county.

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Plan of Grave

Cobble

Hanging
bowl

Buckle B

Clothing
hook

Iron
knife

Buckle C

Buckle A

Helmet

Sword

Bone

0   1m

Wollaston princely burial   Fig 2.5.9

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Plate 2.5.1: Probable bridge at Grendon.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.5.2: Vine bedding trench showing root holes and postholes.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.5.3: Late Roman cemetery at Ashton.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

0   100mm

Plate 2.5.4: Fitting from Castor.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.5.5: Hanging bowl fragments from Castor.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)

Plate 2.5.6: Helmet from princely grave at Wollaston.
(Northamptonshire Archaeology)