

## Notes

### AN ELEVENTH-CENTURY COPPER ALLOY STIRRUP-STRAP MOUNT FROM OVERSTONE, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Some time ago, whilst metal detecting in the Overstone area of Northamptonshire, Mr Brian Hemmington discovered an interesting stirrup-strap mount. In August 2007, Mr Ian Wagstaff brought the object to the present author, in his capacity as the local Finds Liaison Officer for the *Portable Antiquities Scheme* (PAS), and the find was subsequently identified and recorded on the PAS database.

#### GENERAL BACKGROUND

The distinctive group of finds we now know as stirrup-strap mounts are items of early medieval horse furniture, and are so-called as they seem to have been fixed between the stirrup and its associated strap, in order to prevent wear on the leathers. They were originally identified as book clasps, but this has been reassessed in the light of metal detected finds. Indeed, the most comprehensive study of the form (Williams 1997) is a survey of artefacts very largely collected by this means. Examples from excavated contexts are few, and chronology is thus insecure, but on art historical grounds (particularly the use of debased Ringerike and Urnes style ornament), most are believed to date to the eleventh century (though see Lewis 2007). One of the few Northamptonshire examples from an excavation is from the deserted medieval hamlet of West Cotton, Raunds (Chapman *in press*, fig 11.38, 1), although even that is an unstratified metal detector find.

#### THE OVERSTONE MOUNT

This object (Fig 1) is made of cast copper alloy, and is in good condition, with an even green-brown patina. It measures 56mm long by 34mm wide, and weighs

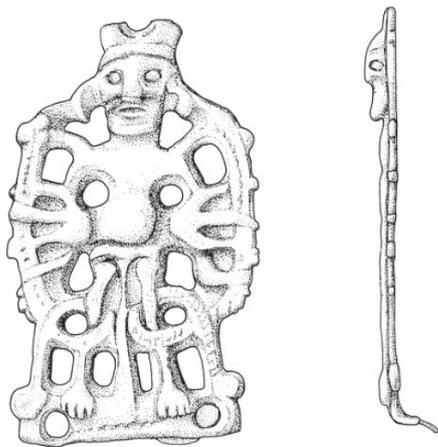


Fig 1 The Overstone stirrup-strap mount

29g. It is most notable for its anthropomorphic design; it features a central, facing, male figure surrounded by zoomorphic motifs. The central figure's head is in high relief, and bears traces of what may have been a beard or moustache, as well as a hairline or stylised helmet. The figure is naked, and some effort has been made to suggest muscle tone in the torso. The figure's arms and legs are apart, and some form of girdle lies around his upper legs, with an M-shaped profile. Below this hangs a straight rod (probably a phallus), terminating between the figure's feet, which are rather crudely rendered, being three-toed, and grasping the horizontal base in a manner comparable to bird claws. This base is pierced by two circular perforations, and the upper suspension loop (now broken away), emerges from behind the figure's head.

The figure is flanked by a pair of rudimentary serpents, whose tails entwine the figure's legs, with their heads (characterised by gaping mouths and bulging eyes) either side of that of the central figure. The serpents' bodies are grasped by the central figure's hands, and an unclear zoomorphic motif lies horizontally behind the arms of the man. Comparison with Williams' (1997) drawings suggests that this animal lies with its tail and hind legs to the left, and its head and forelimbs to the right, where it bites the body of the serpent. A number of grooves and facets on the lower sections of the serpents' bodies may have been intended for niello and silver wire ornament, as seen on similar examples from elsewhere in the country (Williams 1997, fig 25).

#### DISCUSSION

Artefacts dating to the late Viking Age/Anglo-Norman period are unusual. Indeed, PAS examples known from Northamptonshire number only 42 at the time of writing (see Ashby *in prep.*). These finds include strapends, buckles, brooches, and horse harness fittings. There are eleven stirrup-strap mounts from the county, including good examples from Abthorpe, Weedon, and Potterspury, but finds from excavated contexts are less common. The Overstone stirrup-strap mount thus holds particular importance as one of very few indicators of Anglo-Scandinavian/Late Saxon activity in the county.

The Overstone example is particularly unusual, being large in size, and of Class A type 3 (Williams 1997, 36-39). This type is poorly represented across the country (ten examples are recorded in the 1997 corpus, with only four others on the PAS database at the time of writing), but Williams (1997, 14) suggests that the type may have its origin at Winchester. Notably, most examples found thus far are rather debased in ornament, with all the PAS examples being degenerate. The present find, though not demonstrating the same level of craftsmanship as that apparent in the manufacture of the stirrup-strap mount from Sherborne St. John, Hampshire (Williams 1997, no.70) - which the author cites as one of the finest

stirrup-strap mounts in his corpus - nonetheless sits with the more accomplished examples of the type. The Overstone find is thus an exciting addition to the corpus, and its preservation by record with the PAS is important. The find is recorded at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk), with reference number NARC-6C5583.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr Brian Hemmington and Mr Ian Wagstaff for bringing the find to the PAS, and thanks to all those who gave opinions on the artefact, including David Williams and Michael Lewis. Thanks are also due to Michael Lewis for information regarding his recent work, and to Pat Walsh of *Northamptonshire Archaeology* for the drawing.

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#### THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PORTABLE ANTIQUITIES SCHEME, 2007

2007 has been an interesting year for the Portable Antiquities Scheme in Northamptonshire. Some uncertainty surrounds the security of the national scheme's long-term funding, but the local scheme - now well established in Northamptonshire County Council's *Archives and Heritage Service* - has continued to thrive. Increased numbers of finders (detectorists, field walkers, and casual finders alike) bring their finds for identification and recording to the Northamptonshire Finds Liaison Officer (FLO). In 2007, 118 people reported finds, and the total number of objects recorded in the year was 1387, surpassing the figures for 2006 by some margin. More importantly, these data are beginning to show signs of what they can tell us about the economic, settlement and landscape history of the county, and in some respects (for the Roman period in particular) the region stands out nationally, showing an unusually high concentration of finds.

The Scheme has attempted to maintain a high level of contact with existing finders, as well as encouraging others to come forward and volunteer their finds for recording. As well as meetings with members of the public, the FLO has maintained contact with finders by

attending meetings at metal detecting clubs, and running finds surgeries held at regular intervals across the county. These currently take place at Corby, Daventry, Kettering, Northampton, Oundle, Towcester, and Wellingborough, with key support from the district councils, as well as at Piddington Roman Villa Museum, in collaboration with the *Upper Nene Archaeological Society*. There have also been a number of 'one-off' surgeries, in order to assess demand, and an event at Stanwick Lakes proved to be a particular success. The FLO has also attended and lectured at a number of archaeological conferences, and has spoken at the meetings of a number of local history and archaeological societies. We would like to extend opportunities for community engagement with the scheme, by encouraging more finders to come forward and introduce themselves, and by creating the chance for those already participating to become even more involved. It is hoped that finders might be interested in keeping their own detailed records, helping to record on the database, or producing short notes and reports for publication in local journals and magazines (such as *Northamptonshire Archaeology*).

Publicity for the scheme has been stepped up, both within and outside the county. In particular, attention has been paid to the promotion of the scheme in academic fora, and to liaison with local museums, partner authorities, and community interest groups. The latter have included metal detecting and local history societies, townswomen's guilds, and even Brownie groups. The FLO has also developed particularly close links with members of the CLASP community archaeology 'umbrella' group, and spoke to them at their AGM.

In August 2007, the FLO, together with colleagues from the PAS, participated in *English Heritage's Festival of History* at Kelmarsh Hall. This event, at which the PAS's presence is now well established, once again proved to be a superb promotional event, and their small team of five staff spoke to over 1400 people, including large numbers of children. Such outreach will no doubt pay dividends in terms of public awareness of the Scheme, for both finders and interested researchers. The FLO has also worked with a number of undergraduate and postgraduate archaeology students who were interested in researching the PAS data for their own projects.

The Northamptonshire FLO continues to act as Treasure advisor for the county, and is often the first point of contact for finders of potential Treasure. Rates of reporting of treasure finds continue to increase; this is testament to the increasing publicity and good will that the Scheme enjoys, and thanks are due to the county's finders and landowners for their continued cooperation. Such collaboration is now beginning to bear fruit in the form of tangible results; readers may recall a Bronze Age founder's hoard reported in a previous note (Brindle 2004). This hoard has been placed on display in Northampton Museum, and stands as an example of what can be achieved when finder, landowner, Finds Liaison Officer (Tom Brindle, Northamptonshire FLO 2003-2006), and authority work together.

In addition to seeing finders in his office, at club meetings and at surgeries, the present FLO has, together with other FLOs and PAS colleagues, attended a number of

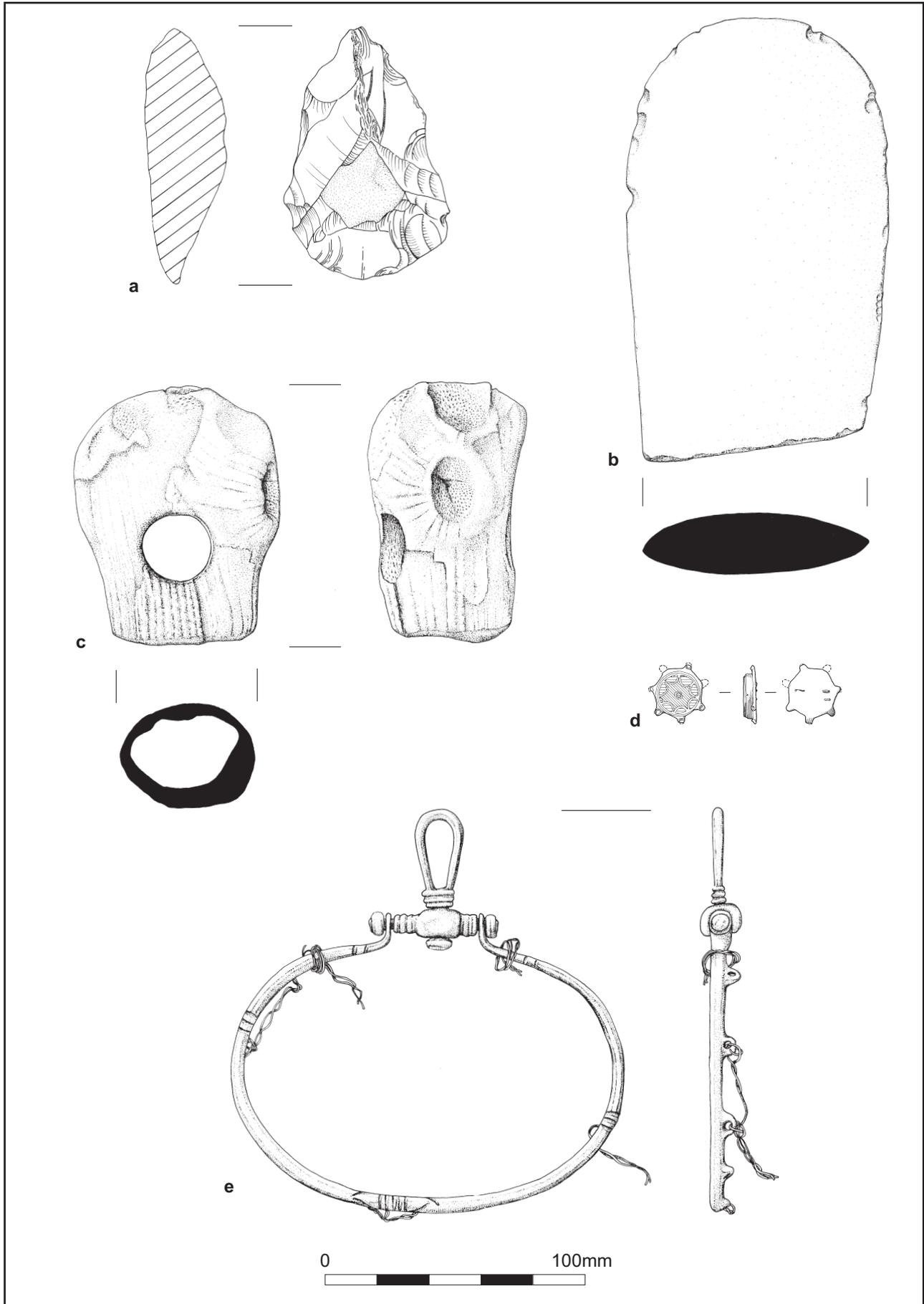


Fig 1 Key finds recorded with the Northamptonshire PAS in 2007

metal detecting rallies over the year, both within and without Northamptonshire. PAS intervention at these events was invaluable, as large numbers of finds were found, some of which may not otherwise have been recorded by the Scheme.

In 2007, a total of 1387 finds from Northamptonshire have been recorded onto the national database ([www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)). These finds are arranged within 705 records, as they include large collections of pottery sherds and bulk material. Notwithstanding, since 1999, over 7000 records have been made for Northamptonshire. This year, many of the more interesting artefacts (detailed below) seem to have been found in the districts of Northampton and South Northamptonshire, but with other finds continuing to be recorded from Daventry, Kettering, Wellingborough, Corby, Kettering, and East Northamptonshire in roughly equal quantities. A brief account of some typical finds from each period follows, as a means of demonstrating the range of material encountered in the region.

The following are amongst those finds recorded by the Northamptonshire FLO in 2007 (reference numbers relate to the PAS database, publicly available for searching at [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk), illustrated in Figure 1. The oldest Northamptonshire artefact recorded by the PAS to date is a Lower Palaeolithic flint axe (NARC-FD1537, Fig 1a), found by a detectorist in the Gayton area. From the Neolithic we have an incomplete greenstone adze (NARC-180DE7, Fig 1b), and a macehead carved from red deer antler (NARC-181793, Fig 1c), comparable to finds from Liff's Low, Derbyshire (see Edmonds 1995, fig 82). Little has been reported from the Bronze Age in 2007, though the completion of treasure proceedings for the much-publicised Northampton founder's hoard (NARC-77BD13; see above) is of note. From the Iron Age, a number of coins have been recorded, including gold staters (eg NARC-5F5173) and silver units (eg NARC-FEA435); these are usually of types minted by the kings of local tribes, such as Cunobelin and Tasciovanus.

From the Romano-British period, one might note a folding 'hare and hound' knife (NARC-03BF62) and numerous brooches, but the real value lies in the large numbers of coins that have been recorded; to date, a total of 1003 coin records have been made. The archaeological utility of this data will no doubt become clearer with the completion and publication of doctoral research projects being undertaken at the University of London by former Finds Liaison Officers Tom Brindle (previously FLO for Northamptonshire) and Phillippa Walton (previously FLO for Cambridgeshire and the North-East). Both projects are likely to incorporate PAS data from Northamptonshire.

From the early medieval period, Anglo-Saxon cruciform and small-long brooches have been reported, and are arguably suggestive of hitherto unrecorded cemeteries (see NARC-EFCE90 and NARC-7A8DC6 for examples). Of particular interest is a radiate-headed brooch (NARC-9BD914) from South Northamptonshire, which may be of continental (eg Frankish) origin. The Middle Saxon period (c AD 600-800) is relatively under-represented, though we have a number of coins, including sceattas (eg NARC-419B22; NARC-A61021), and silver pennies of Offa (NARC-DC37D2) and Coenwulf (NARC-C472D2),

kings of Mercia, and the later Saxon king Edward the Elder (NARC-D203C1). Interestingly, the Late Saxon period / Viking Age (cAD800-1050) fares a little better than the preceding period in terms of artefactual finds. In addition to the Northampton stirrup-strap mount (NARC-6C5583, see Ashby this volume), we may also note a Late Saxon cloisonné brooch (NARC-C34DE6, Fig 1d), an Anglo-Scandinavian lead alloy disc brooch (NARC-56D604) and a Norse bell (NARC-D9C172) all from South Northamptonshire. In general, the finds from the early medieval period are beginning to build into a useful dataset, and one which the present author plans to exploit in forthcoming research on identity and regionality in Viking Age England (Ashby *in prep.*)

From the medieval period, the most notable find is a scatter of coins and artefacts in an area of South Northamptonshire that may relate to a previously unknown 15th-16th century market or meeting place (investigations ongoing). There is also a complete purse frame (a particularly unusual find) from South Northamptonshire (NARC-182644, Fig 1e). All of these finds are testament to the wealth and level of activity in rural Northamptonshire around the end of the Middle Ages, and provide a useful dataset for future research on Northamptonshire's later medieval and post-medieval economy and society.

In closing, it should be pointed out that the successes of the scheme would not be possible without the cooperation, support, and assistance of Northamptonshire County Council, the various partner authorities, and of course the finders themselves. With their help, it should be possible to build upon recent achievements, and encourage ever greater numbers of people to record their finds with the scheme, for the benefit of local communities and the academic establishment alike. Particular thanks are due to Norton Northamptonshire Portable Antiquities Search Team (*NNPAST*), Northampton Detecting Association (*NDA*), Steve Young and *CLASP*, and the Nene Valley Detecting Group (*NVDG*), but all finders, whether detectorists, gardeners, fieldwalkers or dogwalkers have played an enormous role in the scheme's successes. With particular regard to the present note, the author is indebted to the following finders: Iain Barrie, Tim Binns, Dave Derby, Steve Gibson, Ian Giggins, Robert Hemmington, John Marchant, Steve Pulley, and Paul Warren. Finds illustrations for Figure 1 were prepared by Pat Walsh and Jacqueline Harding of Northamptonshire Archaeology.

The Northamptonshire Finds Liaison Officer is based at County Hall in Northampton, and can be contacted care of the *Archives and Heritage Service*. To search for finds from Northamptonshire and elsewhere in the country, and to find out more about the PAS, please visit our website: [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk).

#### Catalogue of illustrated finds (Fig 1)

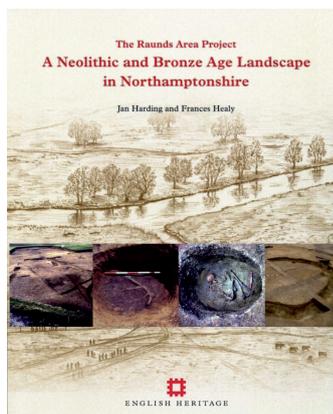
- a Palaeolithic flint axehead (NARC-FD1537)
- b Neolithic greenstone adze (NARC-180DE7)
- c Neolithic antler macehead (NARC-181793)
- d Early medieval cloisonné brooch (NARC-C34DE6)
- e Medieval/post-medieval purse frame (NARC-182644)

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## SOME RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS



**A Neolithic and Bronze Age Landscape in Northamptonshire** by Jan Harding and Frances Healy  
English Heritage 2007; 324 pages  
ISBN: 9781873592991 Product Code 51176

Like all aspects of the Raunds Area Project, this report has been long awaited, and is now finally available. English Heritage, Northamptonshire Archaeology and Oxford Archaeology investigated more than 20 Neolithic and Bronze Age monuments in the Nene Valley between Raunds and Stanwick. From c4000 BC to the early 1st millennium BC a succession of ritual mounds and burial mounds were built as settlement along the valley sides increased and woodland was cleared. The Long Mound, the Long Barrow, part of the Turf Mound and the Avenue were built in the 5th millennium BC. With the addition of the Long Enclosure, the Causewayed Ring Ditch, and the Southern Enclosure, by c3000 BC there was a chain of five or six diverse monuments stretched along the river bank for well over a kilometre. From c2200 BC monument building accelerated again and included at least 20 round barrows, almost all containing burials, at first inhumations and then cremations, continuing down to c1000 cal BC, by which time two overlapping systems

of paddocks and droveways had been laid out, indicating a change to domestic occupation of the valley.

In terms of getting hold of a copy of this report there is good news and bad news. The good news is that a digital copy can be obtained free of charge on the English Heritage web site ([www.english-heritage.org.uk](http://www.english-heritage.org.uk)). Just follow the path: Home/Learning and Resources/Publications/Research Monographs. You can then choose this report from the list of research monographs now available online as pdf files. The full report is provided as chapter by chapter downloads; eight altogether.

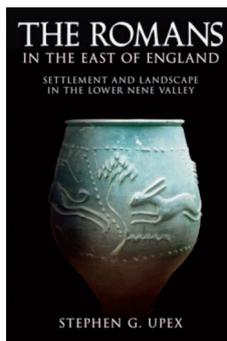
The bad news is that if you want a printed copy it is available as Print On Demand (POD) but at a cost of £45 plus £5.00 postage and packing (payable to English Heritage). To obtain a copy email or write to English Heritage Postal Sales, c/o Gillards Worldwide Warehousing & Distribution, Trident Works, Temple Cloud, Bristol BS39 5AZ (email: [ehsales@gillards.com](mailto:ehsales@gillards.com) or phone: 01761 452966).

What is available at present is the synthesis of the results, and this does not include conventional finds and environmental reports, although interesting aspects are highlighted in a series of "Panels" that appear at intervals. There is, therefore, a second volume still to come that will include the specialist reports. I assume that this too will be published free of charge as a download and as a POD hardcopy at a similar price to volume 1.

**Iron Age and Roman Piddington: 6th Interim Report and phase descriptions of the late Iron Age settlement, military phase, Roman villas and Saxon phases at Piddington, Northants**

by R M & D E Friendship-Taylor

The Upper Nene Archaeological Society 2008,  
£5.00 to members, £5.50 to non-members, available from the museum or by post (+£1.40 p & p) from Roy & Liz Friendship-Taylor, 'Toad Hall', 86 Main Road, Hackleton, Northampton NN7 2AD.



**The Romans in the East of England: Settlement and Landscape in the Lower Nene Valley**

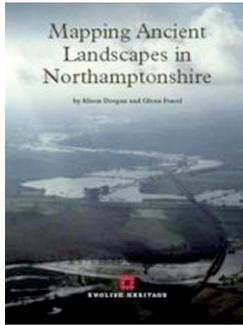
by Stephen G. Upex

Tempus 2008 224 pages, 79 figures and 23 colour plates  
ISBN: 9780752441184

Paperback price £19.99 (+p&p) (In July it was available for £13.19 from Amazon)

Professor Upex shows how the Nene Valley and East

Midlands area provides an ideal case study of the Roman occupation of Britain. The book deals with the region's Iron Age origins, its significant sites and roads, and its association with the Boudican revolt, and accounts for the reasons why it became one of the wealthiest areas of Roman Britain by the end of the third century. Villa occupation was lavish, and different villa systems have been detected and mapped. The importance of the area is seen in spectacular fashion with the late Christian hoard of church silverware and other buried treasure.

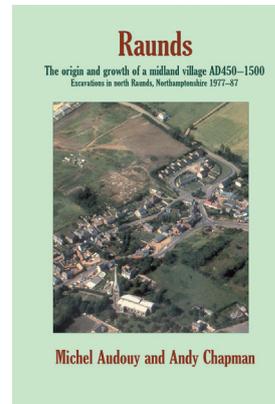


**Mapping Ancient Landscapes in Northamptonshire**  
by Alison Deegan and Glenn Foard  
English Heritage 2008

The Northamptonshire NMP project team are pleased to announce the simultaneous release of the Northamptonshire NMP Project data via the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and the publication of Mapping Ancient Landscapes in Northamptonshire. This marks the conclusion of the Northamptonshire NMP Research, Dissemination and Archiving Project. This project was started in 1994 as part of the National Mapping Programme (NMP) and was one of the first to embrace a totally digital methodology. Mapping and recording was completed in 2001 and was following by a scheme of research and analysis and dissemination of the project's data, funded by English Heritage (EH) and supported by Northamptonshire County Council (NCC). *Mapping Ancient Landscapes in Northamptonshire* is published by English Heritage and is authored by Alison Deegan and Glenn Foard with contributions from Alex Gibson and Graham Cadman. It will shortly be available to purchase from the EH online shop. It will also be available to download by chapter from the publication downloads page.

The mapping and recording stage of this project data generated a considerable range and quantity of digital data and much of this is now available via the pages dedicated to the *Northamptonshire NMP Project* on the ADS website. On the *ADS Interactive Map* users can view all the Northamptonshire NMP mapping and key information from the associated databases. The Interactive Map can also display the original transcription files, which indicate the photographic source of an individual feature and a distribution plot of the air photographs covering the county. At present the Interactive Map is displayed against 1km and 5km grid lines but there are plans to include base mapping from a service such as Google Maps or Multimap in the future.

These data, including over 450 NCC air photographs, are also available for download. This will enable the user to manipulate and display the spatial data in their own GIS and to interrogate the wealth of morphological and interpretative information that lies behind this mapping. The ADS will also maintain the archive of this data.



And yet more news from the Raunds Area Project:

**Raunds: The origin and growth of a midland village, AD 450-1500 Excavations in north Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977-1987**

by Michel Audouy and Andy Chapman (editor)  
Oxbow Books 2008; 168pages and 130 illus, plus CD containing specialist reports  
ISBN: 9781842173374

This volume, also long awaited, presents the results of open area excavation in north Raunds between the late 1970s to the end of the 1980s, work of great significance in developing our understanding of the origins of the English village. The excavation focused in particular on the evolution of Furnells Manor, and examined the processes of village development from the early Saxon period through to the desertion of the outlying manorial centres at the end of the medieval period. Most significantly, it defined the formation of the village in a system of regular plots created by the mid tenth century, probably following the English reconquest and the creation of the Danelaw, as part of a widespread reorganisation and nucleation of settlement. The work began a transformation of medieval settlement studies.

In order to keep the cover cost down, and to be consistent with both the companion volume describing the work at nearby West Cotton and the presentation of the prehistoric aspects of the project, as outlined above, the decision was taken to present the overview and the excavated evidence in the volume with the specialist reports on an attached CD. In the case of north Raunds, which is relatively short for a monograph, the cost impact is not significant, but for the forthcoming West Cotton report, which is over twice the length of the Raunds report, there will be a significant difference, as in this case it would have been necessary to publish two volumes, or one extremely thick volume, to encompass all of the material.

However, the benefit from publishing in this form is

not considered to be the saving on publication costs but the hope that the cheaper cover price will encourage more people to buy the volume to access and make use of the evidence.

The intention with both the Raunds and West Cotton volumes will be to make them available online as pdf files once the hard-copy sales have run their course.

ANDY CHAPMAN

### NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGY REPORTS ONLINE

In commercial archaeology a report is produced detailing the results of every developer-funded project from, say, extensive open area excavation on a quarry site running for several years to a single visit to check the footings for a new garage in one of our historic villages. The size of these reports is therefore anything from hundreds of pages down to a handful of pages and a single location plan.

These grey literature reports are only produced in small numbers and are available within the county Historic Environment Record (HER) and from the archaeological contractor who carried out the work. Only the most significant of these projects will go on to formal publication in the journal or elsewhere, and then sometimes only in summary form, while many of them will be covered by a paragraph or two in the annual summaries in this journal and the annual regional round-up, *South Midlands Archaeology*, and in other national and period journals.

As reported in the notes section in the last journal (volume 34, 2006, 142) *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, the archaeological contractor within *Northamptonshire County Council*, are now making their client reports available online through the national *Archaeology Data Service* (<http://ads.ahds.ac.uk>), who have established a library for *Unpublished Fieldwork Reports (Grey Literature)*. You just need to go to the home page of ADS and click on the *ArchSearch* option and choose *Library* and then *Unpublished Fieldwork Reports (Grey Literature)*. From here you can search by county, by archaeological contractor or a host of other options. For any single report you are given basic details of title and have the option to open a pdf copy of the full report, which you can either view online or download to your computer for later viewing or printing.

Below we provide a full bibliography for the 60 reports on projects in Northamptonshire carried out by *Northamptonshire Archaeology* that were available online at the end of June 2008. By the time this journal appears there may be even more available. The list does include a number of sites for which reports have been published in *Northamptonshire Archaeology* in recent years. In some instances the two will be nearly identical; in other cases the client report may contain additional material such as full finds reports, perhaps with additional illustrations.

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