

# Forty years of Northamptonshire Archaeological Society and its journal

by

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## Summary

*The history of Northamptonshire Archaeological Society from 1965 as the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies, through its establishment as a separate society in 1974 and continuing to the present day, is examined largely through the evolution of the journal. The journal provides both a record of the changes in archaeological practice over the past 40 years, and also illustrates how changes in printing and the advent of computers has taken us a long way from the typed and duplicated Bulletin of 1966.*



Fig 1 The Desborough mirror: the society logo

## The Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies

In the late 1950s and early 1960s increased leisure and wealth produced a resurgence of interest in local history and archaeology. At the same time there was a growing realisation that the ever quickening pace of development, which in Northamptonshire included ironstone and gravel quarrying as well as housing, industry and new roads, was resulting in loss or damage to numerous archaeological sites. As a result, this period saw the appearance of several local societies, many of them active in the attempt to salvage as much as possible in front of the bulldozers, or carrying out strategic fieldwork through fieldwalking, field survey and aerial photography to identify the previously unsuspected extent and depth of the archaeological resource. This was at a time when, across the country, it was being realised just how much was still out there hidden beneath our fields and towns, but often under imminent threat from the modern world.

In September 1965 a group of these local societies formed the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies to, 'promote the study of archaeology in Northamptonshire, to co-ordinate fieldwork by local archaeological societies..., and to ensure the proper recording and the publication of results'.

From 1966 onward they published an annual Bulletin; the first issue of which ran to 20 pages, as a 'modest first step towards the achievement of the ... objective' (Fig 2).



Fig 2 The eight issues of the Bulletin of the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies

## The Bulletin

Volume 1 of the NFAS Bulletin, December 1966, was duplicated, had a paper cover with a cut-out window, and sold for 2/-. It featured summaries by period of fieldwork through the year, as has appeared in every bulletin and journal since then. Volumes 2–4 had card covers, and sold for 4/6 to 5/6, an increase of 6d a year in those days of much higher annual inflation. These issues maintained the format of annual summaries but included some additional short articles on aerial photography, industrial archaeology and ancient monuments, while Volume 4, 1970, was the first to feature individual articles, with a feature on medieval pottery from Potterspury and a summary of fieldwork and excavation in north-eastern Northamptonshire by Dennis Jackson, the first of Dennis's many individual contributions to the journal.

Volume 6, in 1971, was devoted to the work of Richard Hollowell and his aerial photographic reconnaissance along the Nene valley. It was the first volume to be professionally printed, on glossy paper to reproduce the photographs, with a glossy card cover (Fig 3). Following decimalisation, it sold for 50p, another jump in cost.

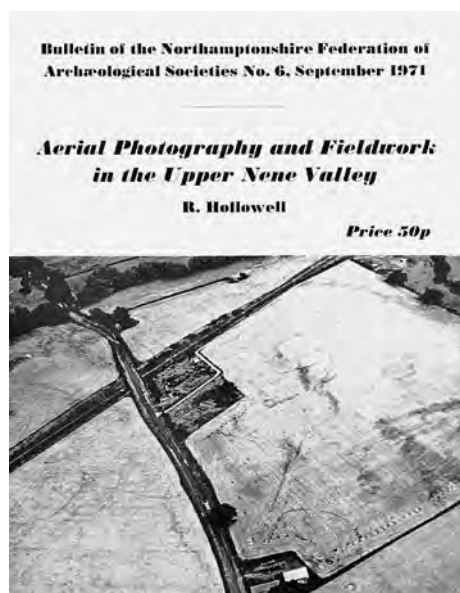


Fig 3 Front cover of Volume 6, devoted to the aerial photography of Richard Hollowell

Volume 7 saw a return to the previous format, but as a herald of the future, Volume 8 in 1973 was again professionally printed, with a bright red paper cover and bold contemporary font, and was the first to be called *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, with a cover price of 35p (Fig 4). In addition to the annual round-up, it featured a short site report on excavations at North Lodge, Ecton by Dennis Jackson, with illustrations of plans, sections and finds, setting the style for the first journal in the following year.

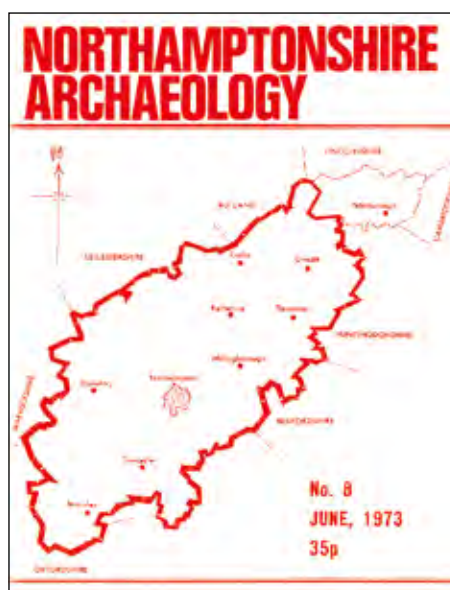


Fig 4 Volume 8: the final Bulletin and the first to feature the title: Northamptonshire Archaeology

## The origins of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society

Nine years after its formation, the next major step was taken, and the Federation became Northamptonshire Archaeological Society. This was reported at some length in *South Midlands Archaeology*, then known as *CBA Group 9 Newsletter* (SMA (1975), 5, 47).

*'The foundation of a new county archaeological society in this country is an unusual event in the 1970s. By the standards of most counties, Northamptonshire is 100 years behind the times. Nevertheless, the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society came formally into existence in May 1974 and became open to general membership in September, as a transmutation of the former Federation of Northants Archaeological Societies. It answered a series of generally felt needs, most obviously (i) for a county-wide society which might attract the interest of the widest general public as individual members and can act as a focus and spokesman for the archaeological viewpoint in the county, and (ii) for a medium of publication for the important rescue excavations in the county.'*

*The society was publicly launched at an inaugural meeting in October, at which the guest speaker was Professor Barry Cunliffe. Individual membership of the society is £2 per annum.*

## The journal

The Bulletin was now replaced by a full journal, *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, with the capacity to carry longer site reports and notes in addition to continuing the annual roundup of fieldwork in the county. The first issue,



Fig 5 Issues of Northamptonshire Archaeology

Volume 9 in the series including the Bulletins, ran to 117 pages (Fig 5).

The cover of the journal was green, respecting the green paper cover of the first issue of the bulletin, and green has remained the society colour ever since. The cover featured an image of the Desborough Mirror, which had been adopted as the society logo (Fig 1). The cover was to remain unchanged until 1995, when the mirror was replaced by a drawing of a flint arrowhead, a find from one of the excavations featured in that journal. Since then, every journal has had a unique cover, most often featuring finds from one of the reported excavations.

In the early days, the text and line drawings formed the bulk of the issue, with photographs restricted to a small collection of black and white plates on glossy paper inserted at the back. This continued to Volume 16 (1981) and Volume 17 (1982) did not contain a single photographic image, which seems unbelievable given our present capacity to manipulate digital images within text. As options for printing improved, from Volume 18 (1983) photographs were integrated into the reports directly.

Another aspect of this period was the use of microfiche to allow back-up data to be published. The first microfiche appeared in 1979, Volume 14, and they then appeared with every volume between 1981 and 1989, Volumes 16–22. In the early 1990s, as computers first began to appear on some desks, their use fell away, and the last microfiche appeared in 1995, Volume 26, by which time computers and digital data recording had transformed our daily lives as archaeologists.

In 1999, to celebrate its 25th anniversary, NAS held a day school with a series of speakers presenting period overviews of the archaeology of the county. The journal for the anniversary year, Volume 28, was given a silver cover, the first departure from the traditional green, and also the first glossy cover (Fig 6). The cover photograph was taken at the day school and featured a who's who that included the majority of the individuals who had filled the pages of the journal for those 25 years. It was only some years later that a full list was compiled (2005, Volume 33, 163), which we reproduce overleaf (Fig 7).

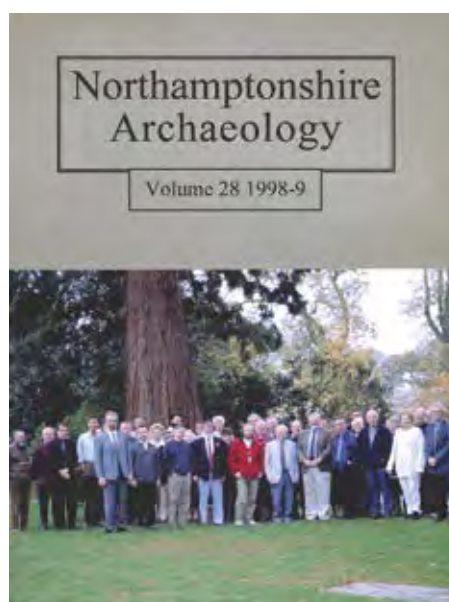


Fig 6 The cover of the 25th anniversary volume, 1999

### The Editors

From the origins of the Bulletin in 1966 through the 18 years up to journal 19, in 1984, without missing a year, A E (Tony) Brown, of the Department of Adult Education, University of Leicester was the journal editor. His achievement is unlikely ever to be matched.

When Tony Brown retired from the post it was taken up by Brian Dix, of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit in the County Council. After two issues, Volumes 20 (1985) and 21 (1986–87), the growing workload in his role as head of field archaeology for NAU, led to delays in preparing a third volume, but this eventually appeared due to the communal efforts of several committee members, Volume 22 (1998–89).

An appeal for a new editor went out and this was initially taken up by Liz Musgrave, from the Department

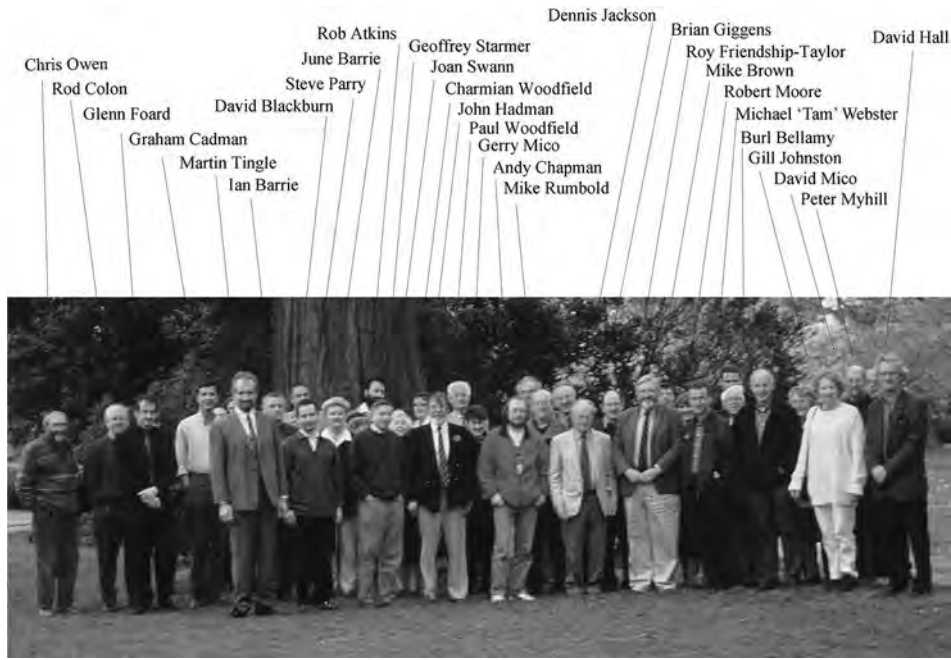


Fig 7 Putting a face to a name

of History at Nene College, along with her husband, Martin Tingle, and they produced Volumes 23 (1991) to 26 (1995). From Volume 27 (1998–99) Martin Tingle continued as solo editor, and as both editor and chair of NAS he kept the society going for several years through to Volume 33 (2005), which was compiled by Martin but distributed by his successor.

With the departure of Martin to Devon, the post was taken on by Andy Chapman, a Senior Project Manager with Northamptonshire Archaeology, functioning as a commercial archaeological contractor within the county council. Andy had been coordinating the supply of a good proportion of the journal content from NA for a number of years.

Four journals were produced in alternate years, Volume 34 (2006) to Volume 37 (2012), but packing in more articles per journal than was generally the case in the past. With Volume 35 (2008), the journal was revamped by moving from the traditional quarto size to A4 format, along with the introduction of full colour printing (Fig 8). To the editor's pleasant surprise, those that responded to the change were all in favour of the move, apart from the occasional comment about how to fit them on a book shelf.

There has been a hiatus from 2012 to 2015, initially resulting from a lack of submitted material but more recently due to the pressure of work as commercial archaeology came out of recession and the editor made a brief

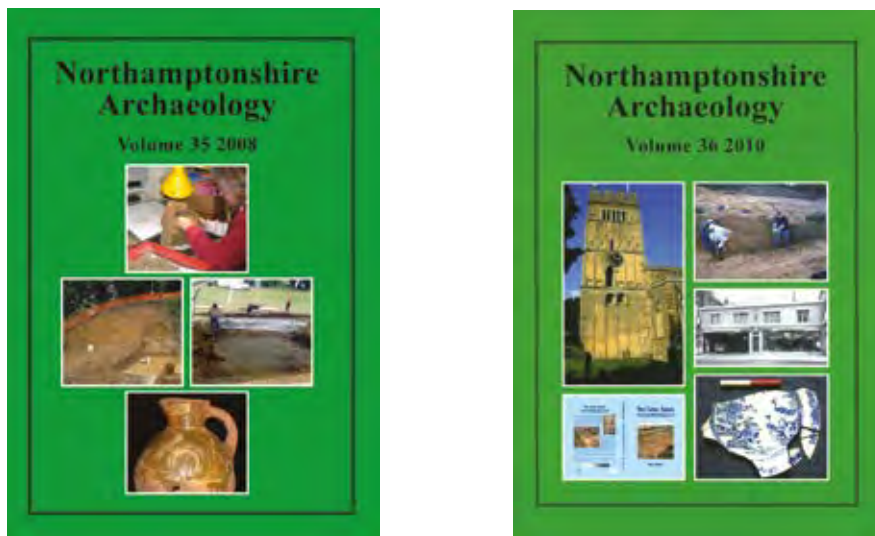


Fig 8 2008 and 2010 Northamptonshire Archaeology goes A4 and colour

return to fieldwork to excavate the site of Northampton's new railway station, which lies within the outer bailey of Northampton Castle.

But finally, the 40th anniversary issue has been completed, and we hope that there are more to come in future years. Through the forty years of publication, not including the current journal, we have published 205 full reports, and with the notes, the annual roundup and other material a total of 5090 pages were published between 1974 and 2012.

Past journals have all been scanned, and PDF copies of articles are available online through the CBA ArchLib (<http://archlib.britarch.net/cgi-bin/open.cgi?page=home/index2>).

### Other publications

Following on from the anniversary conference in 1999, in 2004 NAS published an overview, *The Archaeology of Northamptonshire*, edited by then journal editor and chairman, Martin Tingle (Fig 9). This had a print run of 500: initially it sold rapidly and then steadily for many years, and has now sold out.

In 2010 we also marked the outstanding fieldwork of one of the society's founder members and the most prolific contributor to the journal, by publishing the autobiography of 'Dennis Jackson: a Northamptonshire Archaeologist', prepared for publication by Dennis, his son Stephen and Stephen's wife (Fig 10).

### The newsletter

Through the past forty years, the journal has been supplemented by the issue of a number of newsletters through the year to keep members informed of local events and forthcoming meetings. The style and presentation of NASNEWS has varied considerably, and we now issue it as a PDF by email and also through the website, with

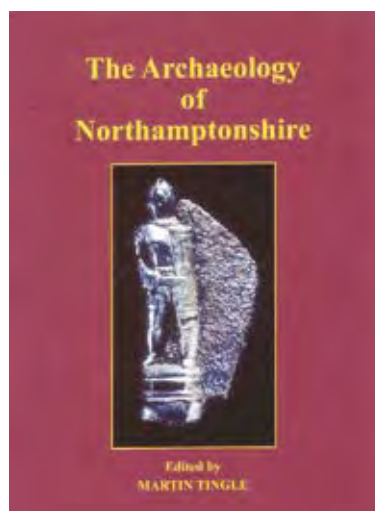


Fig 9 Front cover on *The Archaeology of Northamptonshire*

paper copies going to about a third of members who either do not have or have not provided an email address (Figs 11 and 12).

### Members and meetings

Since April 2011 we have also had a *Facebook* page as an additional means of spreading the word about the society and its events.

In the past the society had held monthly meetings with speaker, moving to different locations around the county, but because of the disappointing, and sometimes embarrassingly small attendances these were discontinued. There is also the issue of not having a meetings secretary with the energy to maintain such a regular programme.

For many years now membership has remained at around 150, with a small annual turnover of leavers and new members. Hopefully, we can at least retain that

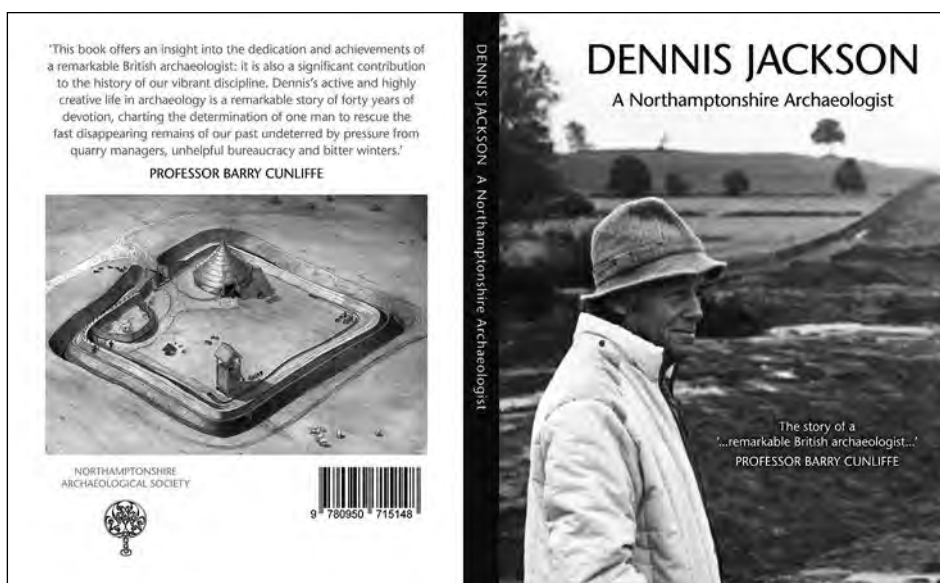


Fig 10 Dennis Jackson: a Northamptonshire Archaeologist



Fig 11 Page from a recent NASNEWS

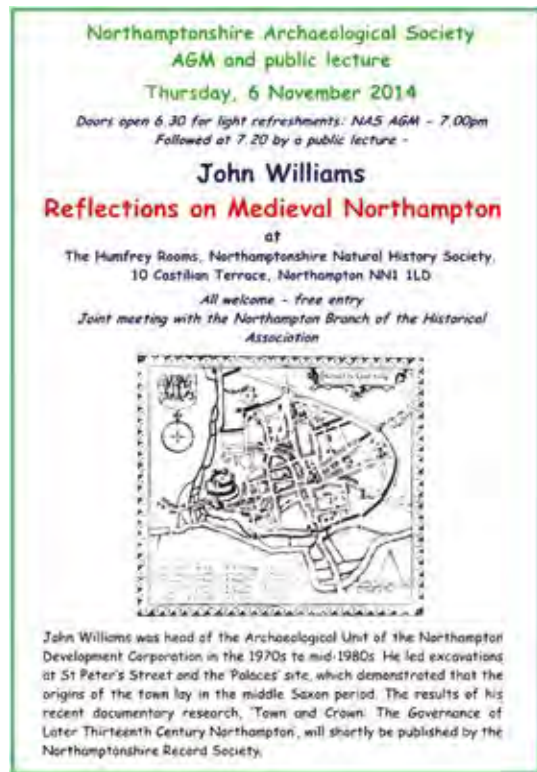


Fig 12 Poster included with NASNEWS to announce the AGM in 2014

membership if not increase it as NAS moves towards its 50th anniversary.

However, a society can only be successful if it has a committee of people willing to put in the time to arrange meetings and organize events and trips, and at the moment we just do not have enough active participation to enable us to expand beyond our current limited programme.

For further information about Northamptonshire Archaeological Society please go to our website: [www.northants-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.northants-archaeology.org.uk), or contact the secretary by email at: [NAS196674@gmail.com](mailto:NAS196674@gmail.com).