

A short history of Northamptonshire Archaeology

by

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Summary

In 1973 Northamptonshire County Council appointed their first full-time archaeological officer, but it was only following the appointment of Alan Hannan as County Archaeologist in 1976 that the Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit began to grow, establishing a Sites and Monuments Record for the county and carrying out its first major excavations at Furnells manor, Raunds in the late 1970s to early 1980s. The 1980s saw excavation at Ashton Roman town and further excavations and field survey in and around Raunds through the Area Project, run jointly with English Heritage. Following the advent of developer funding in the 1990s, the fieldwork team were rebranded as Northamptonshire Archaeology, and saw steady growth in size through the 1990s and 2000s as the range and diversity of commercial work grew: from building recording, to watching briefs on single house plots, to desk-based assessment and evaluation through geophysical survey and trial trenching, to open area excavation on all sizes of infrastructure projects for housing, roads, quarrying and warehousing. The recession of 2008 set commercial archaeology back along with the rest of society, and this period also saw a shift in the ethos of local government away from the provision of services to becoming enabling authorities. In this climate, a commercial organisation within a local authority became an anachronism and in early 2014 Northamptonshire Archaeology was transferred from the County Council to MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) to form a regional office to complement the core business in London, and archaeological fieldwork within public service came to an end in Northamptonshire.

Introduction

As stated in the official press release:

‘On the 21 January 2014, Northamptonshire Archaeology transferred from Northamptonshire County Council to MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology). The 50-strong team based in Northampton continues to work closely with clients to assess and investigate the archaeology and built heritage of the area, cost-effectively and speedily, as it has for over 25 years. The changes have come about in response to plans Northamptonshire County Council submitted in 2011 to rehouse its archaeological service, to secure its future stability and growth. MOLA was selected by Northamptonshire County Council in December 2012, through a competitive tender

process, as the preferred new home for its archaeology team.’

Below, I provide a brief but, hopefully, representative history of Northamptonshire Archaeology, although the perspective is inevitably coloured by my own position within the organisation, which began in the summer of 1978 when my wife and I joined the team excavating the church and cemetery at Furnells manor, Raunds, the first major excavation undertaken by the fledgling organisation. I remained within the fieldwork side of the organisation, so this account looks only at fieldwork, and it would need someone else to provide a history of the strategic side of the old Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit, which later became Northamptonshire Heritage, in terms of the development of the Sites and Monuments Record (now Historic Environment Record) and the provision of planning advice.

Apart from memory and internal documents, a useful source for the early history of what became NA has been the pages of South Midlands Archaeology (SMA), the newsletter of CBA Group 9, in providing names and dates that go back before even my arrival on the scene.

The 1970s

The employment of a full-time archaeological officer occurred in May 1973 (*SMA* (1974), 4, 32–3). In that first year Paul Everson initiated the formation of a Sites and Monuments Index and advice was given on a number of new road schemes including an M1–A1 link road and the Northampton–Wellingborough A45 new road. The A45 and its later extensions further eastwards, the A45/A605, to near the county boundary at Warmington, was to play a large role in the fieldwork projects of NA throughout the 1980s and well into the 1990s.

In those early days Paul was based in ‘temporary’ accommodation at Bolton House, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton, at that time the home of the architects working on the great glass pyramid that was to occupy the site as the super new County Hall. [This scheme fell by the wayside, with the County Council moving instead into Northampton House, to occupy a new office block owned by the Borough and badly in need of a tenant.] In the late 1980s NA was relocated from County Hall back to this ‘temporary’ accommodation, alongside the Police, Fire and Rescue, Ambulance and the Record Office. NA was to stay at 2 Bolton House until the summer of 2013, shortly before the transfer to MOLA, when they relocated next door to a slightly less ‘temporary’ building, 1 Bolton House; it had a concrete floor rather than raised floors and a less leaky roof.

Following the departure of Paul Everson, Alan Hannan was appointed as County Archaeologist in August 1976, based in County Hall, Northampton. Glenn Foard was tasked with developing the Sites and Monuments Record and there was a second assistant to work on post-excavation (*SMA* (1977), 7, 45–46).

Alan Hannan was to oversee the rapid growth of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Unit (NAU) through the late 1970s and 1980s. The excavation of Furnells manor, Raunds began in 1977, led by Andy Boddington (Fig 1), and by 1980 the annual entries for NAU in the summaries within both *Northamptonshire Archaeology* and *South Midlands Archaeology* had grown to many pages: Dave Windell was excavating Iron Age enclosures at Earls Barton and Great Doddington on the route of the A45, Graham Cadman continuing the excavations at Furnells manor, Raunds and Michel Audouy was at Earls Barton Church (*NA* (1980), 15 and *SMA* (1980), 10, 21–33). In addition, funding for Dennis Jackson was also now directed through NAU, and Dennis was then excavating an Iron Age enclosure that had survived as an unploughed earthwork at Brigstock.

The 1980s

The early 1980s saw the end of the first wave of excavation at Raunds, and a major new excavation at Ashton Roman town and cemetery, led by Brian Dix (*SMA* (1983–85), 13–15). The second half of the 1980s was dominated by the Raunds Area Project, a co-operative venture between the County Council and English Heritage (EH). This saw excavation at Stanwick Iron Age and Roman settlement and villa by David Neal for EH, and excavations by NAU at the deserted medieval hamlet of West Cotton Raunds by Dave Windell (Fig 2) and at further sites within Raunds itself by Michel Audouy, along with the systematic fieldwalking survey of four parishes led by Steve Parry (*NA* (1985), 20 and (1986–7), 21 and *SMA* (1988–1991), 18–21). The scale of the work was made possible by workers supplied through the Manpower Services Commission in this period of high unemployment through the early years of the Thatcher government:

they were paid an extra £10 a week on top of their normal unemployment benefits.

The late 1980s also saw the departure of NAU from County Hall, Northampton (no more complaints about muddy boots and dirty archaeologists defiling County Hall), with the staff relocated to the empty ‘temporary’ buildings at Wootton Hall Park, where Paul Everson had been based in the early 1970s, as already noted. With the establishment of a pot washing room with a drying cupboard, a dark room (later converted to environmental processing) and a dedicated finds store, NAU was finally capable of running all aspects of systematic programmes of excavation and post excavation from a single base.

The 1990s and the rise of developer funding

In 1990 the whole basis of fieldwork archaeology began to change. Government work schemes for the unemployed came to an end and Planning and Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) placed archaeology within the planning process with the developer responsible for covering the costs. With the advent of developer funding and competitive tendering there was a consequent need to separate the functions of planning advice (Curatorial Section) and commercial fieldwork (Contracts Section) within NAU (*SMA* (1992), 22, 29–41), although both continued to operate from the same building at Wootton Hall Park.

The separation was taken a stage further in July 1993 when the Curatorial Section became Northamptonshire Heritage, under County Archaeologist, Alan Hannan, shortly after moving back into County Hall, Northampton, while the Contracts Section became Northamptonshire Archaeology, with Brian Dix as Chief Archaeologist, staying in the offices at Wootton Hall Park on the outskirts of Northampton (*SMA* (1993–94), 40, 40–52 and 41, 21–30).

In that first year 29 projects were undertaken, all but five within Northamptonshire. The new subject of Garden Archaeology saw NA excavating at Kirby Hall for English Heritage, and the success of that project led to an early ‘away job’, excavating the Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace, Surrey, prior to its re-creation (Fig 3).



Fig 1 The late Saxon and post-Conquest churches and cemetery at Furnells manor, Raunds, late 1970s



Fig 2 The timber slots of the late Saxon manor at West Cotton, Raunds, excavated 1985–89

Many subsequent garden projects were to follow, both large and small, including work at Chiswick House, London and Stowe Gardens, Buckinghamshire for the National Trust, spread over the 1990s and 2000s. The culmination was a return to working for English Heritage

with the evaluation and excavation in 2004–06 of the garden created for Elizabeth I by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire. The centre piece of this garden had been a grand marble fountain, and the footings for this were found to lie in line with



Fig 3 The planting trenches of the formal Privy Garden at Hampton Court Palace as excavated in the early 1990s

the steps descending from the keep, from where Elizabeth probably had her first view of the garden, now recreated and open to the public.

The story for more conventional fieldwork for the rest of the 1990s was one of steady growth in the size and the number of projects undertaken, with an increasingly higher proportion of the work outside Northamptonshire. Development at Kennel Farm, on the west side of Basingstoke, Hampshire, was one of the pioneering ‘away jobs’ in the mid-1990s with fieldwalking, geophysical survey, trial trenching and two open area excavations, setting the scene for many future projects under developer funding and competitive tendering.

Building recording was a small but growing part of the business in the 1990s, with the most outstanding early job being the recording of the Saxon tower at Earls Barton church in 1992, when it was encased in scaffolding so the render on the panels could be removed and replaced (Fig 4). Building recording at houses grand and small prospered through the work of Joe Prentice and Iain Soden through the later 1990s and 2000s.

From the mid-1990s Brian Dix was supported by Senior Archaeologists; Michel Audouy, Mike Shaw and Steve Parry and the direction of larger fieldwork projects fell to the three Project Officers; Andy Chapman, Ian Meadows and Iain Soden. The larger projects included several years of work at Wollaston Quarry (Fig 5), open area excavations in advance of the first stage of the Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT) (Fig 6), urban excavations in Northampton and Daventry, the beginning of a long-term involvement at Ketton Quarry, Rutland, the excavation of an exceptional cattle bone deposit in a Bronze Age round barrow at Gayhurst Quarry, Milton Keynes (Fig 7), and many others.

After the departure of Brian Dix in the late 1990s, Michel Audouy took over and saw NA through a difficult year of transition to a fully commercially-focussed business, and then left archaeology, with Steve Parry taking over as Principal Archaeologist, a role he continues to hold with MOLA Northampton. From this point on, every year there was a set target for a surplus to go into the county council coffers. If the profit made fell below the target, the organisation was considered by the NCC to have made a loss, and each time we met the target the next year it was set even higher.

The 2000s: the rise of the consultant

Through the 1990s many jobs were carried out directly for the developer, but a growing trend had been the appearance of archaeological consultants, acting as the intermediary between the developer and both the curatorial archaeologist setting the brief and the archaeological contractor carrying out the required works. This made life more complicated for everyone concerned, apart from the consultants, but in the 2000s working through consultants became the norm.

By 2001 half of the work of NA was out of county and this rose to two thirds by the mid-2000s, with growth continuing (see Fig 14). A new wave of fieldwork Project Officers came in, initially Anthony Maull and Andy Mudd, and subsequently other new faces, Adam Yates and Antony Walsh came in directly at project management level as the quantity of work continued to expand, and the process of competitive tendering became ever more competitive.

Andy Mudd led the largest road scheme NA had then undertaken, excavating several Iron Age and Roman

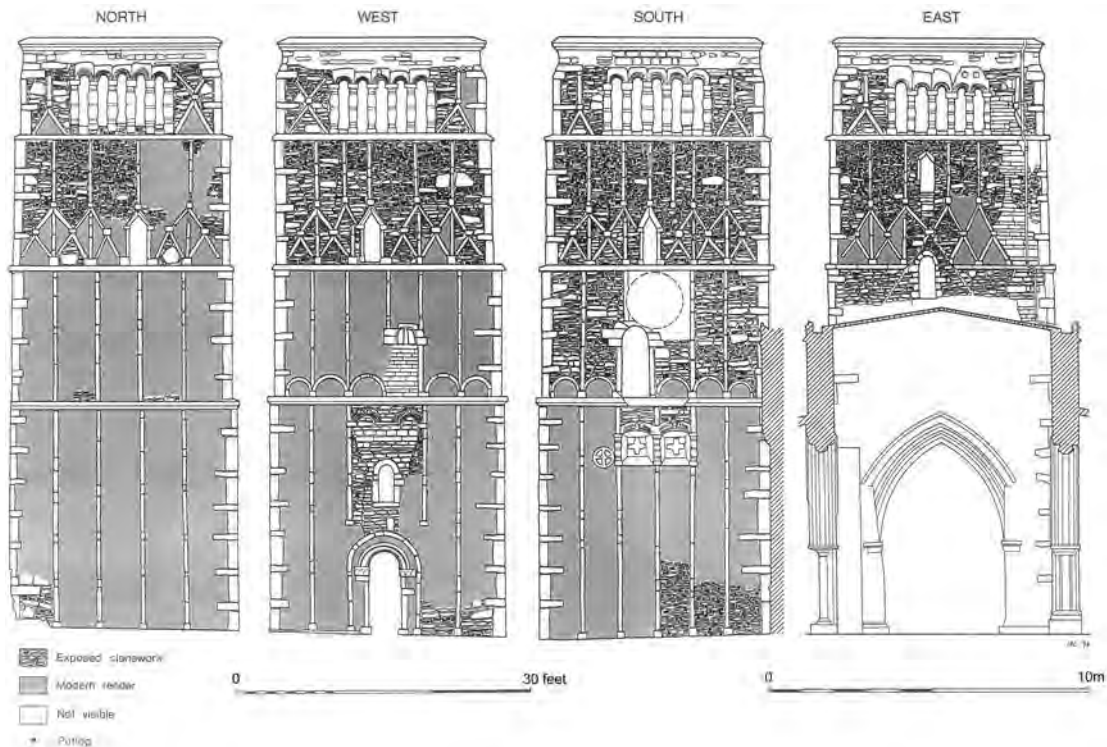


Fig 4 The Saxon tower of Earls Barton Church drawn in 1992



Fig 5 The Saxon helmet with its boar crest, and the sword and hanging bowl from a burial at Wollaston Quarry, mid-1990s



Fig 6 Excavating Iron Age roundhouses at DIRFT, mid-1990s

settlements along the A43 Towcester and Silverstone to the M40 road improvement scheme. The report became the first NA published monograph (Fig 8). This project was followed by work at Chieveley, West Berkshire, on the A43/M4 road junction.

There were urban excavations as far away as Norwich, and a number of episodes of work in Coventry including excavations within the medieval cathedral and on the town defences, where a length of the town ditch was examined (Fig 9), as well as the medieval suburbs.



Fig 7 Bronze Age round barrow at Gayhurst, Milton Keynes, with cattle bone deposit in the inner ditch, late 1990s

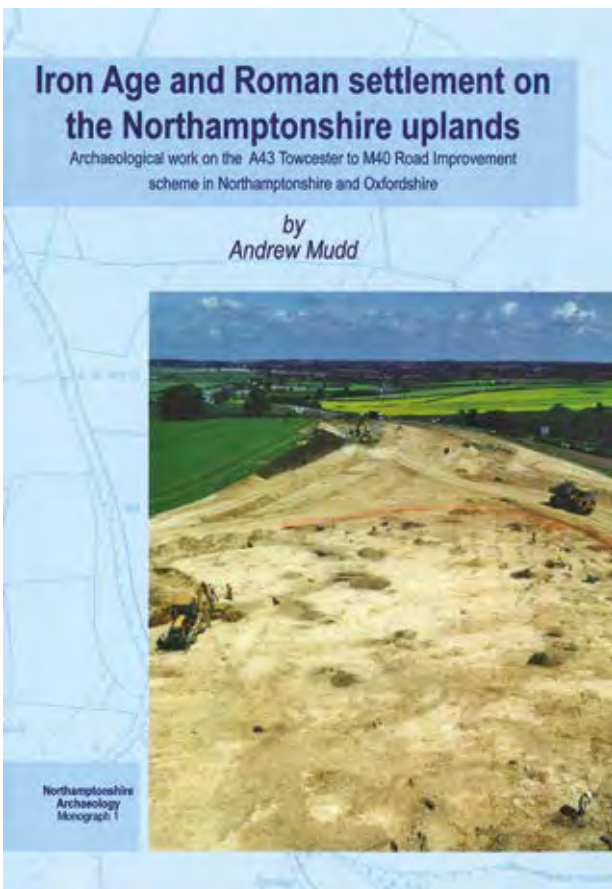


Fig 8 Front cover of the monograph report on the excavations along the A43 in the early 2000s



Fig 9 Excavation of the town ditch at Coventry, mid 2000s

Geophysical survey, first undertaken at Raunds in the late 1980s, had become an increasing part of the business through the 1990s, and has continued to grow and develop to the present day. Improvements in the instruments, the software and computer power have facilitated the gathering and processing of ever larger files of data across even more extensive areas, often taking in many fields destined for housing or warehouse development.

Under team leader, the late Adrian Butler, one highlight was the programme of works at Chester Farm, Irchester, owned by the County Council and in the early stages of development as a public resource. There had been areas of geophysical survey in previous years as need arose, and NA were commissioned to pull this data together and to fill in the gaps to provide a survey covering the entire extent of the Roman town. The survey of the walled town showed a new level of detail, picking out the internal road

network and details of the individual houses fronting onto them (Fig 10).

Based in Northampton, industrial archaeology has not been a mainstay of the business, but there have been occasional forays, usually northwards. The most successful was the excavation of parts of the Portobello Cutlery Works and an adjacent court of workers houses of the mid to late 19th century at Sheffield, South Yorkshire, in 2009, together with analysis of the associated documentary and census evidence (Fig 11).

However, the bread and butter fieldwork continued to be excavation in advance of rural development such as quarrying, roads, housing and warehousing development. There have been long running quarry projects in county at Bozeat and Harlestone Quarries, and out of county at Maxey and Tower's Fen, Thorney, both Peterborough, Cambridgeshire, at Ketton Quarry, Rutland and further afield at Baston Quarry, Lincolnshire, Norton Subcourse, Norfolk, and at Passenham Quarry, Calverton, Milton Keynes (Fig 12).

The recession of 2008 was a blow to archaeologists as well as to the rest of society. With development projects small and large being cancelled or put on hold there was no need for archaeological provision and through 2008–2009 many field archaeologists lost their jobs, with the impact falling heaviest on the youngest members of the commercial teams, those on short-term contracts to

begin with. No doubt many young archaeologists were lost to the profession for good during these years, and university courses were reduced in size and some ceased altogether.

The 2010s and the future

In the wake of the recession, when for a couple of years NA did lose money rather than providing a profit for the county council, and with the ethos of local government shifting from the provision of services to being enabling authorities, a commercial organisation within a local authority had become an anachronism. So, by the early 2010s the writing was on the wall and our days within the county council were clearly numbered. In retrospect, it is surprising that we survived for as long as we did, paying an annual profit into the coffers for so long had certainly helped.

In the summer of 2013 NA finally moved out of those temporary buildings at 2 Bolton House into the building next door, and the majority of the site archives were brought together under one roof, having been scattered around in several make-shift stores for many years. This paved the way for the selloff, and after many months of discussion and planning, in January 2014 Northamptonshire Archaeology became part of MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology), one of the largest archaeological contrac-



Fig 10 Geophysical Survey plan of Irchester Roman town (NA for Northamptonshire County Council)



Fig 11 The brick-lined boiler house, flue and chimney base of the Portobello Cutlery Works, Sheffield



Fig 12 Excavation of a small Roman mausoleum at Passenham Quarry, Caversham, Milton Keynes

tors in the country, who, despite the name, had also been set adrift from the Museum of London some 18 months previously.

From 2010 work has picked up again to the extent that all commercial archaeologists are finding it difficult to recruit enough diggers, and many of our current team are from abroad, with a particularly large group of Polish archaeologists at the time of writing. The mix of

work remains the same, desk-based assessments, building recording, watching briefs, geophysical survey, trial trench evaluations and open area excavations. But in a highly competitive market the consultants are always looking for more and more work for less and less money and this can only be achieved by reducing sampling percentages and cutting corners. There is room for a debate here, as at what point does it cease to be archaeological valid and become

merely an archaeological clearance operation, paying only lip-service to archaeological values? In my opinion, we are now often close to if not beyond the tipping point of it becoming merely smash and grab raids, rather than systematic fieldwork.

On a more positive note, work in Northampton has also seen a recent upturn as the town enters another wave of development, with excavations in 2013 within the outer bailey of Northampton Castle in advance of the new station and in 2014 of urban plots in the medieval town at Angel Street in advance of a new county hall (Fig 13). Ironically, the work at Angel Street for the county council came shortly after the transfer from the NCC to MOLA.

A few Northamptonshire Archaeology statistics

To finish, here are a few numbers to show how the scale of the work carried out by NA grew over the years. This is not unique to NA, it shows how the advent of developer funding from 1990 onward vastly increased the number and the

range of sites that were being considered and investigated as a result of archaeology becoming a material consideration within the planning process. The result has been to turn what was once ‘rescue’ archaeology, practiced by local groups, some independent archaeologists and archaeological units often attached to local government, into a commercial business practiced by a range of commercial organisations of different sizes, from one-person up to 200 or more staff for a handful of companies, and now only rarely within local government and more often limited companies many with charitable status.

The figures provided are based on the number of reports issued in a year, which provides a good indication of business turnover. From the inception of developer-funded archaeology at the beginning of the 1990s there was a steady increase in the number of projects both in and out of county, but the number of away jobs became an increasing proportion of our work (Fig 14).

By the early 2000s work outside the county had risen above work in county. In 2005 over 150 client reports



Fig 13 A medieval malt kiln at Angel Street, Northampton, in 2014

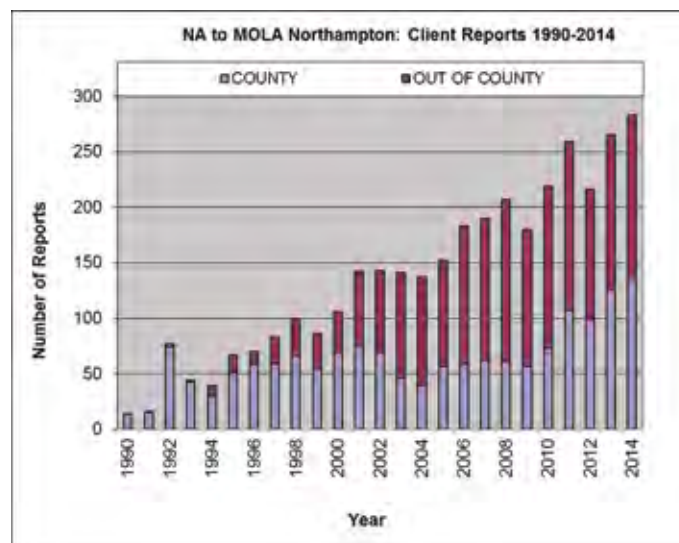


Fig 14 Client reports issued by NA/MOLA Northampton both in and out of county 1990–2014

were issued and in 2008 the number went over 200. Then, along with everyone else, there was a downturn with the recession of the late 2000s. This did provide an opportunity to complete some backlog tasks, and the late 2000s finally saw the publication of three monographs covering the excavations and fieldwalking survey at Raunds in the 1980s.

The dip in Northamptonshire-based work in the mid to late 2000s also reflects the impact of the county council's withdrawal from maintaining an archaeological advisor to advise the planning authorities. With the restoration of a proper service of archaeological advice to planners and developers through the county council from 2010, the quantity of Northamptonshire-based work rose in number and as a proportion of the business.

The apparent dip in 2012 is when NA was running several large-scale excavations and therefore took on fewer small jobs, thus reducing the number of reports issued. In 2013, our final year as Northamptonshire Archaeology, the number of client reports issued reached a record high of 265, a nine-fold increase in the 20 years from 1993.

Copies of nearly 900 NA client reports are currently available through the Archaeology Data Service (<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/greylit/>) [July 2015], and the final total should exceed 1000 reports. From 1990 to the end of 2013 NA issued some 3135 client reports, 1463 in Northamptonshire and 1672 for out of county projects.

In terms of formal publication, between 1982 and 2011, NA produced 158 magazine articles, journal articles and monographs, with 90 of these published in the ten years between 2004 and 2013 (Fig 15).

The rise and fall of public service archaeology

Having worked for Northamptonshire Archaeology for most of the 36 years between 1978 and 2014, I saw the rise from small beginnings to reach a peak under County Archaeologist, Alan Hannan, in the late 1980s to early 1990s. In the 1990s the single organisation was split in two by the advent of commercial archaeology, and the structure and position of archaeology within the county council was thereafter steadily eroded. With the retirement of Alan Hannan in 1995 the post of County Archaeologist was progressively downgraded from that of a departmental head to become County Archaeological Advisor and then merely an Officer. So while Alan Hannan had direct access to the head of Planning and Transport and other departments as an equal, subsequently, given county council protocols, the most senior archaeologist could only directly approach someone at an equivalent level in another department, and consequently archaeology slid down the agenda or was discussed at the highest level between departmental heads, without an archaeologist involved.

However, the decline of public service archaeology is now history, and the move to MOLA should be just the beginning of the next chapter in the story for the staff of the new organisation: a story that, hopefully, will continue to be recorded in the pages of Northamptonshire Archaeology.

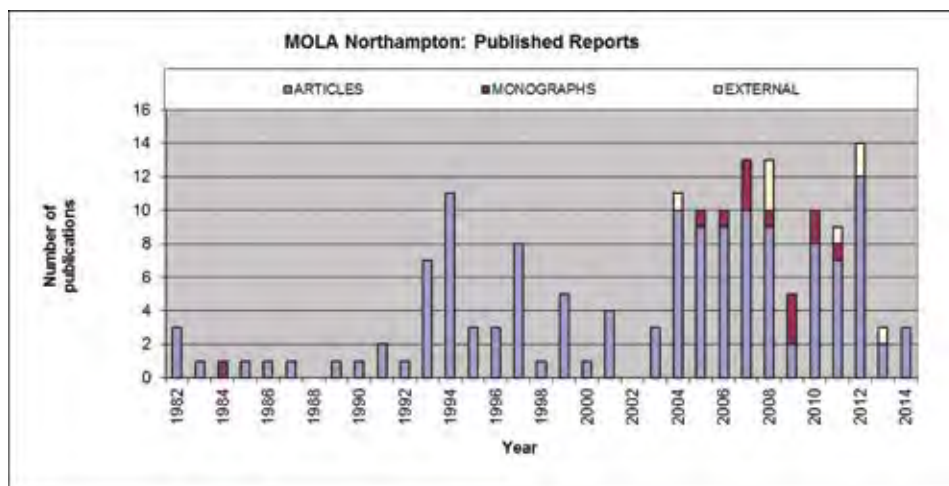


Fig 15 Formal publications produced by NA/MOLA Northampton 1982–2014