

Introduction: past, present and future

by

Andy Chapman

Having taken over from Martin Tingle as the editor of *Northamptonshire Archaeology* in 2005, to produce volume 34 for 2006, after 14 years in the role and now completing my seventh volume, it is time to have a brief look at the past, present and future.

next volume would be a Northampton special edition. I evidently have not fulfilled that promise, so now I repeat the promise: volume 41 will be the Northampton special edition (*and below I confidently provide a mock-up of the possible cover, featuring the Northampton Palaces site*).

The past

My first journal conformed to the old quarto page size with black and white plates and it was my second issue, volume 35, 2008, where the change was made to A4 and full colour. This was, it must be said, at least partly motivated by self-interest. In my then role of Senior Archaeologist (Publications) for Northamptonshire Archaeology it was taking a considerable amount of additional time to convert the A4 illustrations that we prepared for our client reports to both a quarto format and to change colour line work and shading to grey tones, all on top of re-editing the texts to compress the content and omit the minor details to, hopefully, produce more reader-friendly reports. In making this change I was expecting some negative comment, but all I received were compliments on the move to colour production. If there were negative thoughts people must have kept them to themselves.

It has not all been quite what I hoped for. Rather than each volume being a miscellany of papers covering sites of several periods, I had the idea, and it seemed like a good idea at the time, to produce a series of period focussed volumes. So, volume 37, 2012 was intended to be a prehistoric volume but as it turned out I only managed to make half a volume focussed on Neolithic and Bronze Age sites, and the other half was the usual miscellany of periods. In retrospect, this was perhaps not a bad result. Given that the very nature of commercial archaeology is to excavate miscellaneous sites determined by the vagaries of development, trying to produce a period volume would be near impossible, with the exception of an Iron Age and Roman volume, given how these two periods feature so prominently in both commercial archaeological work and, consequently, the volumes of *Northamptonshire Archaeology*.

The future

Volume 41

Looking forward, I have not entirely given up the quest for a coherent thematic volume. At the end of my Introduction to volume 39, I hastily promised that the

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My excuse for not bringing this aim to completion sooner is, partly, that having reached 65 I then stayed on at MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) Northampton (who had taken over the Northamptonshire Archaeology team from the county council) for a further two-and-a-half years working part time. So, the leisurely retirement with plenty of time to work on pet projects, such as completing a report on the 1960s excavations at Northampton Castle, which had been funded by English Heritage in the mid-1980s, never materialised.

At Christmas 2018 I did finally retire, so I do now have more time for working on my unfunded backlog (now quite small) of sites awaiting publication, in between: gardening, visiting national parks for walking holidays,

attending jazz concerts (and getting back to playing the saxophone), visiting art galleries (and perhaps even having a go at some painting), spending time on the Isle of Man with our granddaughter when she isn't at school, and occasionally just sitting in the garden in the sunshine doing nothing but watch the birds flying and feeding, and the plants growing.

The first article, on the Anglo-Saxon origins of the town, is already nearing completion. In the autumn of 2019 I will be getting down to the task of taking my work on the excavations at Northampton Castle in the 1960s and the client report on my own excavations in 2013 in the outer bailey in advance of the new station, and turning them into publishable reports. I could be bold and predict a publication date, but it is perhaps best left as coming as soon as possible in 2020.

Paper or digital publication

Another longer-term issue is also worth considering here, and that is the shifting balance (I originally wrote conflict, but decided to use a more neutral term) between digital and paper publication. I was once told by the former editor of the annual publication *South Midlands Archaeology* (SMA) that he had approached an active fieldwork organisation in Northamptonshire (who shall remain nameless) to ask whether they would like to publish an annual summary of their fieldwork, and was given the curt reply, 'no, we publish online'.

Yes, publishing online may well be the way to reach a bigger and broader audience more quickly, but only if people know there is something online to look for. Taking the trouble to write a half page or a page summary in SMA may well have led more people to the website. There is also the question of durability. Will those website publications still be there in 10, 20 or 50 years' time? If not, there is a danger that valuable fieldwork will be lost to the archaeological world in the longer term, and leaving a tangible legacy for the future, rather than just chasing headlines today, must be central to the work of all responsible archaeologists.

In terms of paper publication, there is a good chance that copies of *Northamptonshire Archaeology* will still be in the library of the Society of Antiquaries, the copyright libraries, the British Library, and others, long after we have all become archaeological remains ourselves. That is not to say that paper is the only medium. We had previously made back copies of articles in *Northamptonshire Archaeology* available online through the CBA, but that resource failed, largely, I believe, through lack of interest and use. Ironically, after the CBA website was remodelled to be more user-friendly the library became very difficult to find, even if you knew it was there, as it wasn't a service they wanted to promote to the general public.

We do now have a national online resource through the Archaeology Data Service (ADS), although the continued funding of this service has been an issue in the past. This resource also includes the Library of Unpublished Fieldwork Reports, the client reports that lie behind the majority of the articles from commercial archaeologists published in *Northamptonshire Archaeology*. This has

led some people to say, if the client reports are available online then why publish in the journal? Again, one argument is the durability, another is that in preparing a journal text you have the chance to focus on the significant aspects of a particular site and to provide, ideally, a more concise and integrated text than is often achieved in client reports, which tend to be compartmentalised, often with a sad lack of connection and integration between those compartments, often as a result of time pressures to, as some managers have been heard to say, 'get it out the door'.

We do intend to make all back copies of the journal available online through the Archaeology Data Service, and have made a start in the process by making the *Archaeology of Northamptonshire*, edited by Martin Tingle, published in 2004 and now effectively sold out, available through ADS. As soon as the huge database listing every article in every journal, including details of all the specialist contributions within them, has been completed, we can move ahead with making the journal backlog similarly available to all as an online resource.

This volume does also raise a further issue about what is published in print as opposed to online. We have a contribution from Cotswold Archaeology that is a summary report, running to 3600 words and five figures (and that after I had asked for a little more detail and an extra illustration, with the original article at slightly less than 2,600 words), when a more conventional approach, including specialist reports, might have run to around 10–15,000 words and 10–15 illustrations. The rationale is that the full client report is available online through the Cotswold Archaeology website, with the journal summary satisfying most readers and others can go to the website for the full report. Cotswold Archaeology also took a similar approach with a summary report in the latest *Records of Buckinghamshire*, which was relegated to the Notes section at the back end of the journal. This again raises the issue of long term durability, and a secondary one in that the summary report inevitably includes interpretations that you have to either accept or reject at face value, because they are not backed up by hard evidence that can be directly interrogated. Of course, if all commercial archaeologists were to adopt this minimalist approach, we would no longer have a journal. It would become little more than a bulletin highlighting material that you would have to go elsewhere to see in satisfactory detail.

The Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) at Chester Farm

The publication of results is central to the very process of archaeological fieldwork: the maxim that has sustained me through so much time spent editing multiple editions of the journal. By publication I mean the presentation of a technical report detailing the site and its finds as a permanent record that can be referenced and interrogated by other archaeologists. While the engagement of the public either directly through involvement in fieldwork or indirectly through the public presentation of results are also a key part of the discipline, it becomes merely an entertainment, if an educational entertainment, if you are

not also engaging in making an academic contribution to archaeology, no matter how small.

At Chester Farm the farm buildings and the surrounding land, which takes in the defended area of Irchester Roman town and part of the suburbs, including roads, buildings and cemeteries, was purchased by the county council in 2004 with the intention of creating a heritage resource that addressed these twin aims: to inform and entertain the public and to provide a permanent and secure home for the material finds and the records from numerous excavations as a resource for future study.

Progress with plans was slow, and received a huge setback in 2010 when a fire reduced the farmhouse to a burnt out shell in danger of collapse. With a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, it has now been possible, despite the current reign of austerity politics, to renovate the house (see below) and the associated farm buildings, which will all have a future role in presenting the long history of the site to the public, with the ground floor of the house including that most essential of all heritage requirements, a tea shop and café.



The Archaeological Resource Centre will create a storage area that can accommodate the county's archaeological archives with room for expansion for 25 years and working space for curators, researchers and volunteers. As a field archaeologist who has worked in the county since the 1970s, this is the part of most interest to me, as the archives from those excavations are currently scattered across several locations, including some as far away as Aylesbury, and all are largely inaccessible.

The ARC occupies the space of a former barn, and is timber clad to retain the sense of a collection of farm buildings (see below). A curator has been appointed and



will take up the post in August 2019. It will be a day for celebration by all archaeologists in the county when the first archive boxes are moved to their new tailor-made home. In particular, it will be a day of celebration and relief for Sarah Bridges, the project director and head of Northamptonshire Archives and Heritage Service based at the Record Office in Northampton, who has driven the project forward for so many years.

No doubt when it comes to the opening, local politicians will jump on the photo opportunity and make their usual claims of having a deep interest in heritage (until it involves spending money on it), and will then disappear never to be seen again.

However, while the end is in sight, it is certainly not all plain sailing, far from it. With the disappearance of Northamptonshire County Council, the Record Office will sit within the proposed new West Northamptonshire authority while Chester Farm will sit within North Northamptonshire. It would be a nonsense, as well as financial lunacy, to split either the documentary archives held by the Record Office or the archaeological archives in two, when there will be two facilities specifically designed and staffed for each of these roles, especially when in the current climate endless cuts have reduced the existing service provision to the bare minimum anyway.

There could still be a battle to be fought here to make sure these services make it through intact to the new arrangements for local government.

The present

This journal opens with a strong Neolithic theme, covering the confirmation that a pair of possible long barrows, originally identified by aerial photography on high ground near Flore, do indeed date to the Early Neolithic. This theme continues with an examination of the deposition of worked flint around the Dallington causewayed enclosure, Northampton. It is suggested that people gathered around these monuments for distances of up to 1.0 to 1.5km, probably in temporary camps during seasonal activities occurring within and, perhaps, also around the earliest of our earthwork enclosures. Evidence for comparable zones around the causewayed enclosures at Briar Hill, Northampton and the Cardington causewayed enclosure Bedford is also referenced.

An Early Bronze Age theme continues into the third paper, looking at Daventry Apex, but then soon turns to the more familiar landscapes of the Iron Age, taking us through pit alignments and Iron Age settlements containing roundhouses. Sandy Lane, Northampton offers another brief excursion into the Early Bronze Age before progressing to more Iron Age settlement; a theme that is repeated at Glington, Peterborough, with Early and Middle Iron Age settlement and at Old Stratford with trackways and settlement of the late Iron Age.

Hartwell again gives us more Late Iron Age settlement, but with the dumping of usable rotary querns and pottery into the final ditch fills we appear to be seeing the arrival of Roman power, and perhaps the forcible closure and levelling on an existing settlement. One wonders what the ultimate fate of the residents may have been.

At that point we leapfrog the Romans (this is not my anti-Roman bias showing, we simply had no submitted papers) and arrive in medieval Barton Seagrave to explore the manorial moated enclosure, and other comparable sites through field survey, making use of the geophysical survey, Lidar imaging and test pits, as part of a MSc dissertation. To close the volume, the medieval theme continues through roadside buildings at Long Buckby, close to Long Buckby castle, and continues into the post-medieval period with small-scale roadside settlement at Hartwell.

The Romans finally make a brief appearance in the

notes section, with a short summary of an ongoing project by The Middle Nene Archaeological Group (MidNAG) at Yarwell, near Nassington, and some recent highlights of finds reported through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS).

The notes on publications include the long-awaited appearance of a report on the Wollaston Anglo-Saxon burial from 1997, which included a boar-crested iron helmet, the Pioneer Helmet, named after the gravel company within whose quarry it was found.