

# A MIDDLE IRON AGE ENCLOSURE AND A ROMANO-BRITISH SHRINE COMPLEX NEAR EGLETON, RUTLAND

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Between May and July 2008, Northamptonshire Archaeology (now MOLA Northampton) excavated two archaeological sites at Rutland Water prior to the construction of a new lagoon by Anglian Water, facilitating future wildlife conservation of the wetland habitat. The lagoon is located to the west of Rutland Water, near Egleton, Rutland. Site 1 was a large rectangular middle Iron Age enclosure of the fourth to first centuries BC, with a roundhouse located outside the eastern entrance.

Site 2 was a Roman circular stone shrine constructed in the mid-second century AD within a rectangular enclosure. The building was partitioned inside, separating a ritual preparation area on one side from a hearth and votive pits in the central area. The shrine produced 218 coins, the crest from a bronze figurine helmet of the goddess Minerva or the god Mars, a lead curse tablet, pottery vessels and animal bone; all from floor and demolition deposits. At the end of the second century the outer enclosure was refurbished and a smaller enclosure containing a timber building was constructed to the north. The shrine was abandoned in the late fourth or early fifth centuries. Prior to its eventual collapse, the body of an adult male was buried at its core. The shrine was preserved beneath a former medieval headland at the edge of the open fields of Egleton.

## INTRODUCTION

Conservation of the ecological world sometimes comes into conflict with preservation of our past. In recent years the Rutland Water Habitat Creation Scheme, one of Anglian Water's flagship projects, has created lagoons to maintain a wetland habitat for large numbers of birds and other wildlife, in an area celebrated as an internationally important nature conservation area, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Protection Area. Until recently its archaeological, and in particular its Roman heritage, has been less widely acclaimed. Then excavations in 2008 for Anglian Water, by Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA, now MOLA Northampton), found the unexpected remains of a Romano-British shrine in close proximity to an earlier, and by then long abandoned, middle Iron Age enclosure. Careful study of this has revealed the story of a cult centre's creation, usage and abandonment.

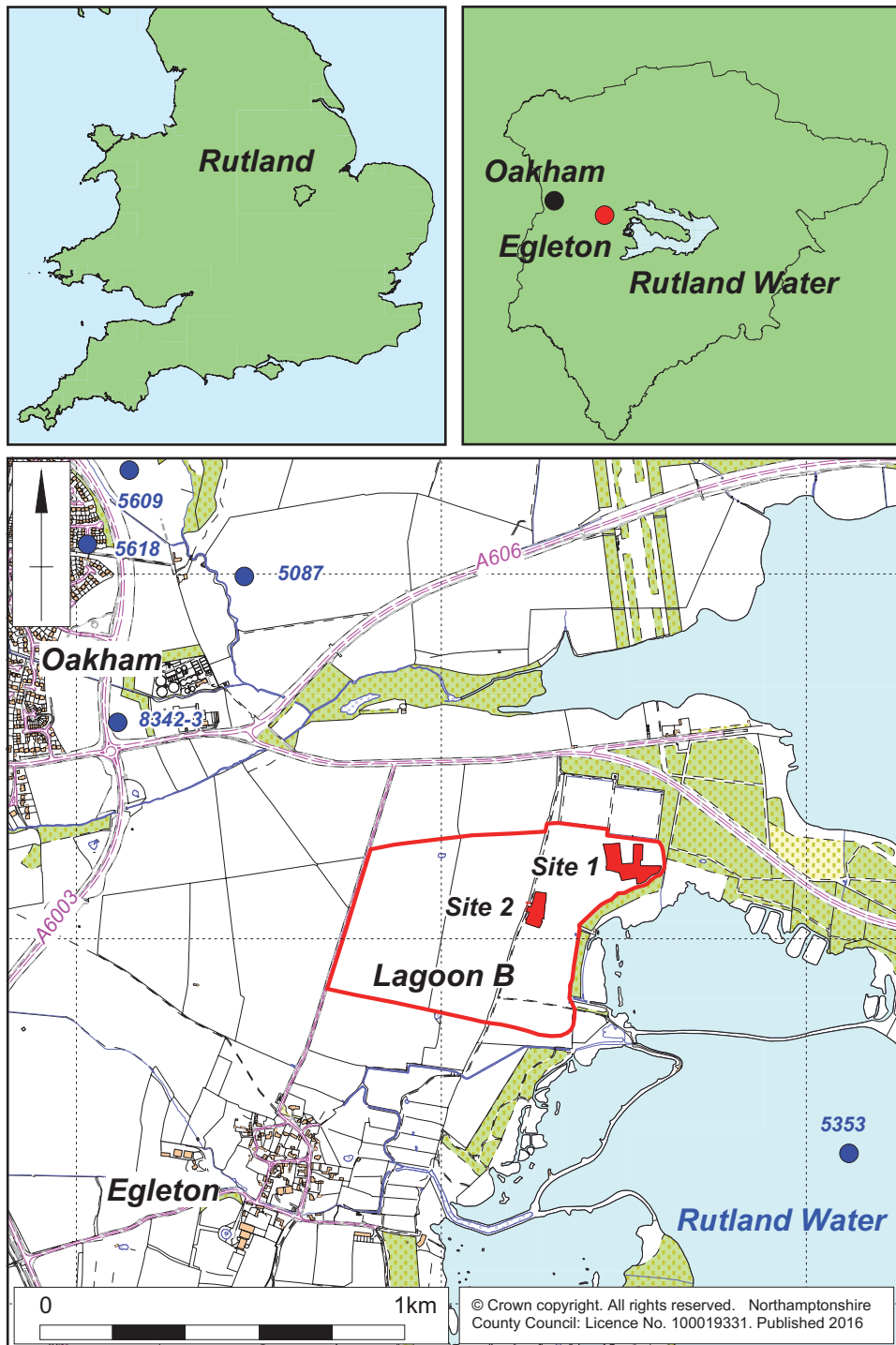


Fig. 1. Location of archaeological sites 1 and 2, Lagoon B, north of Egleton, Rutland.

Between May and July 2008, an archaeological strip and record excavation was carried out on farmland to the west of Rutland Water, near Egleton, Rutland (NGR SK 88464 07852; Fig. 1). The work was carried out prior to the construction of Lagoon B, one of three lagoons constructed by Anglian Water.

Evaluation of the sites comprised geophysical survey (Butler 2007; Butler *et al.* 2008; Fisher 2009) and trial trench evaluations (Jones 2008; Carlyle 2010). Together they identified a middle Iron Age enclosure (Site 1), other Roman enclosures (Site 2) and medieval furrows. Mitigation measures were then set in place to excavate the remains. All work was conducted in accordance with the *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment* (EH 2008), the appropriate standards and guidelines of the (now Chartered) Institute for Archaeologists (IfA 2008) and the NA fieldwork manual (NA 2006). The archive has been deposited with Rutland County Museum under Accession Number OAKRM.2009.14.

Following the fieldwork, an assessment report and updated project design was issued by NA (Clarke and Carlyle 2010), followed by a planning report (Carlyle 2011). A popular article later appeared in *Current Archaeology* magazine (Brown 2013). This present article is based upon previous literature with a level of detail appropriate to this journal. Part of the wall of the Roman shrine has since been recreated by Anglian Water, using the original stone recovered from the site on the western edge of Lagoon B, adjacent to a cycle track, and a public display board has been erected, summarising the archaeology.

### Topography and geology

Both sites were situated in the area now occupied by Rutland Water Habitat Creation, Lagoon B, which is located in the Vale of Catmose, c.1km to the north-east of Egleton, Rutland (Fig. 1). The lagoon covers an area of 32.5ha and was constructed on former pasture. The ground slopes gently to the south-east, at c.86m above Ordnance Datum (aOD). Higher ground lies on either side of the vale in the direction of Upper Hambleton to the east, Burley Wood to the north and Gunthorpe to the south-west. The sites nestle at the head of a small valley spur overlooking the (now flooded) Gwash Valley, to the east. Two streams pass through Egleton to the south and Oakham to the north.

The underlying bedrock is of Jurassic age and comprises Upper Lias Clay (BGS 1978). The soils are of Denchworth association (LAT 1983, 712b), comprising slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey soils.

### Local Iron Age and Roman background

Prior to 2008 there was no record of the archaeological sites within Lagoon B, although a number of records for prehistoric, Roman and medieval sites were identified in the surrounding area (Tann 2004; Halcrow 2005). The locations of these sites are shown in Fig. 1.

The closest contemporary remains were located c.1.4km to the west, comprising middle to late Iron Age enclosure, a hearth and a possible kiln (HER8342-3) with transition into the Roman period. Roman pottery has also been found on other

sites nearby (HER5609; 5618), and from a field that now lies under the reservoir (HER5353). An undated cropmark, *c.*0.5km to the north-east (HER5087), suggests another enclosure. A prehistoric double pit alignment was found during the construction of the bypass (Mellor 2007), which may have been Iron Age or earlier.

Excavation of Roman villa buildings at the dam near Empingham were undertaken in the 1970s, and more modest domestic settlements have been investigated in nearby parishes since (Cooper 2000). Rutland folk were prosperous in the mid-second century AD, expanding settlement growth and upgrading timber buildings to stone structures. The fourth century, though, brought decline for many marginal farmlands, and some smallholdings in the Oakham area were abandoned (Brown 2010). Excavation revealed that the history of the shrine (Site 2) follows this pattern, proceeding hand-in-hand with the fortunes of the community it served.

While evidence for activity in the immediate neighbourhood is sparse, a densely settled agricultural landscape grew up in the broader region of hills and valleys, between the *civitas* capital of the Corieltavi tribe at *Ratae Corieltavorum* (Leicester) and the small town of *Durobrivae* (Water Newton, Peterborough). *Durobrivae* was the centre of a thriving pottery industry, producing distinctive beakers that achieved considerable market penetration in Roman Britain, and were also deposited at the shrine. There was further pottery and tile production in the Welland Valley, south of *Durobrivae*, where ironstone quarries were also worked. Some 12km to the east of the shrine lay the Roman town at Great Casterton, where Ermine Street crossed the River Gwash.

Within this mixed industrial and agricultural region the shrine provided a religious focus at the head of the Gwash Valley, sheltered by the surrounding hills. Consisting of a circular stone building with an internal diameter of 10.5m, it bears close comparison with an ever-swelling corpus of structures that fall into the Roman religious building classification as local cult centres (Rodwell 1980).

Medieval ridge and furrow survives extensively around the village, and was plotted across Lagoons B and C by geophysical survey (Butler 2007; Butler *et al.* 2008; Fisher 2009) and confirmed during evaluation (Jones 2008; Carlyle 2010). The parish boundary between Egleton and Hambleton lay along a medieval headland, beneath which the Romano-British shrine was preserved.

#### A MIDDLE IRON AGE ENCLOSURE AND ROUNDHOUSE OF THE FOURTH TO FIRST CENTURIES BC

Site 1 was situated on gently sloping ground at *c.*85–84m aOD, close to the western shore of Rutland Water (Fig. 1). Prior to the construction of the reservoir, it lay near the brow of a low ridge between two small tributaries with a south-easterly aspect. A rectangular enclosure with a ring ditch outside the entrance on its eastern side produced several scored ware pottery vessels, examined by Andy Chapman, of a middle Iron Age tradition common to Leicestershire and Northamptonshire, and in the neighbouring counties. The predominance of shelly fabrics is typical, but not closely datable, being broadly between the fourth and first centuries BC. A single sherd from a burnished bowl in a black fabric, with sparse small shell inclusions,

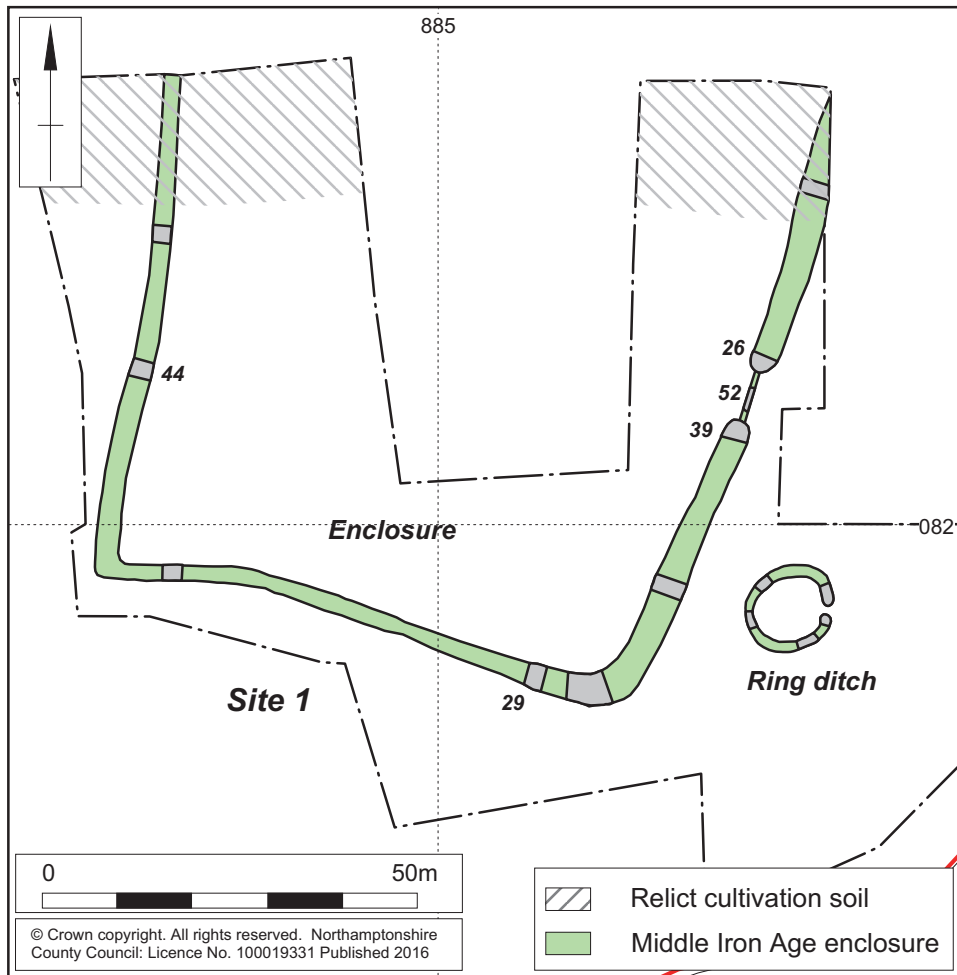


Fig. 2. Plan of Site 1, the middle Iron Age enclosure and ring ditch.

often occurs in late assemblages dating to the first century BC that might suggest the site was abandoned around that time.

Very little pottery was found overall, indicating low-level use over short or intermittent periods; 12 sherd families provide an indication of the total number of vessels, although each group containing two sherd families is dominated by a single vessel.

### The enclosure

Three sides of the enclosure were investigated; the fourth, northern side was already truncated by a drainage ditch and filter beds (Fig. 2). The surviving part of the enclosure was *c.*81m long by 74m wide, *c.*0.6ha in extent. Approximately two-thirds of the interior was revealed with no internal features. The entrance, centrally

placed on the east side, was 7.5m wide, and a shallow gully, 52, extended between the terminals, providing a slot for a timber gateway.

The east side of the enclosure ditch had been recut on at least one occasion and the northern entrance terminal, 126, showed the recut slightly offset to the east, largely truncating the original so that only the fill at its base and part of its western edge survived. The original ditch survived better at the south entrance terminal, 39, where the recut was offset further to the east. Only the east side of the enclosure and the entrance had been refurbished, as the recut was not found elsewhere.

The northern entrance terminal, 26, originally had a V-shaped profile, *c.*3.0m wide at the top, tapering to a narrow flat base, 1.6m deep. The surviving basal fill, derived from weathering, was slightly silty orangey-grey clay with occasional ironstone chunks and charcoal flecks. Sherds from a scored ware jar were found that had an upright, flat-topped rim. The thin-walled vessel was 5–6mm thick, with a grey core and inner surface, and mottled grey to light brown outer surface. The sherds around the site range from smaller jars or bowls, to thicker-walled vessels, 7–13mm thick, probably larger jars. Scoring has been deeply incised to the extent that many sherds had fractured along the scored lines.

The recut of the ditch terminal had a similar profile and dimensions to the original, at 1.4m deep, and also filled with material derived from weathering and natural silting near the base. The upper fill was brownish-grey mottled silty clay, 0.72m thick, with frequent charcoal flecks, more typical of mixed discarded domestic waste. Sherds from a scored ware vessel were found (280g), along with a single sherd from a thicker-walled vessel in a fine fabric, black throughout, containing a sparse small shell, with a burnished surface, together with fuel ash slag from metalworking. Around 97.5 per cent of the total 158 sherds (790g) of hand-built shell tempered pottery derived from the entrance terminals. The assemblage from the southern entrance terminal has a larger average sherd weight of 8.6g, as the sherds are less fragmented, but the overall average sherd weight is only 5g. The larger groups comprise a mixture of larger sherds, together with small sherds.

The south entrance terminal, 39, was V-shaped but wider, *c.*4.0m wide by 1.5m deep, with orangey-grey mottled clay derived from weathering at the base. Sherds were found for the full profile of a small scored ware bowl, grey-black throughout, with dense large shell inclusions. The bowl has a flat base, 90mm diameter, and the scoring on the body runs near vertically. The rim is slightly everted above a concave neck; it has a diameter of *c.*200mm and stood 150mm high. A smashed ox skull and part of an articulating cattle limb were also recovered from the lower fill.

On the eastern side of the ditch was a slump of greyish-brown mottled clayey silt. The rest of the fill comprised orangey-grey clay with occasional charcoal flecks, small chalk and ironstone chunks, a scored ware sherd and a round rim from a thick-walled vessel, 13mm thick. Fragments of thin-walled fired clay (70g) may be from a hearth lining.

The soil samples taken from around the enclosure, examined by Karen Deighton, were devoid of plant macro-fossils and with little charcoal. Samples from the entrance terminals contained more charcoal, probably derived from the same source as the associated casting waste (see below).



Plate 1. Ceramic 'egg', found in the middle Iron Age enclosure north entrance terminal.

The recut of the southern terminal was consistent with its northern counterpart, mainly filled with dark silty clay derived from mixed dumped waste. This contained the conical base of a triangular crucible used for lost-wax casting of copper alloy objects, examined by Andy Chapman. The fragment (8g) has a typically uniform grey vesicular fabric, together with three small body fragments. Vesicular fuel ash slag (6g) was also found with hard fired clay (20g). The terminal also produced a carefully fashioned ceramic 'egg', 40mm long by 25mm diameter, which has a grey core and light brown surfaces (Plate 1), initially thought to be part of a mould and now reinterpreted as a slingshot. Smaller quantities of slag were found in the upper and lower fills of both terminals together with fired clay, highly vesicular through over-heating.

The southern enclosure ditch, 29, had a steep-sided V-shaped profile, but was less substantial than elsewhere. On average it was *c.*2.3m wide, but widened considerably as it joined the east side (front face of the enclosure). The fill sequences shared the same character as those at the east entrance, although finds were less frequent, with only 15g of pottery. Part of a rubbing stone from a saddle quern was recovered near the south-west corner, examined by Andy Chapman. The estimated original dimensions of the stone are *c.*200mm wide by *c.*300mm long in a medium coarse Millstone Grit. The rubbing/grinding surface is slightly convex, and the top is steep-sided and domed.

The western ditch, 44, was comparable to the entrance in size and shape, although with a relatively narrow base. The basal fill was of weathered material seen elsewhere; merging towards a more oxidised upper fill consisting of orangey-brown silty clay with the appearance of redeposited earth, suggesting the ditch had been deliberately backfilled with firm material rather than dumps of mixed waste to create a short crossing at this point.

An extensive layer of dark brownish-grey clayey silt, up to 0.25m thick, extended over the northern part of the site, obscuring the enclosure ditch in this area. This layer post-dated the enclosure abandonment and predated the medieval furrows, perhaps a relict cultivation soil of Roman date.

### The roundhouse

South-east of the enclosure entrance lay a small ring ditch (Fig. 2), which probably surrounded a roundhouse. The ring ditch had an internal diameter of 9.8m and a narrow east-facing entrance, 1.25m wide, with ditch terminals 0.8–1.9m wide by 0.3–0.5m deep. Light-brown silty clay fill produced animal bone, burnt stone, burnt clay, fuel ash slag, charcoal and a single sherd from a scored ware jar. Charred material comprised abraded charcoal derived from burning wood, perhaps during metalworking, and herbaceous seeds from the material used for kindling. There were no associated features inside the ring ditch or in the surrounding area.

### The middle Iron Age faunal remains

Analysis of the animal bone was conducted by Philip Armitage, resulting in 370 (35 per cent) of the Iron Age specimens being identified to species and anatomy. Over 687 (65 per cent) remain unidentified, reflecting the presence of highly fragmented bone, and significant numbers of loose cattle and pig teeth. Preservation was poor, creating brittle specimens.

Cattle were the principal livestock, typically kept to provide milk and meat; they lacked bone wear to support use as draught/plough animals. Older cattle would have been killed for their meat and hides; however, the dental ageing data revealed that this community was also culling calves and young animals at one-and-a-half to two years for their meat. These small horned animals were typical of the Iron Age (Armitage and Clutton-Brock 1976), as indicated by short stumpy horn cores from a young adult bull. The presence of small/dwarf animals is further evidenced by the post-cranial elements, including two ankle bones that are smaller than the modern Dexter steer documented by Noddle (1988), and are comparable to cattle documented from other Iron Age sites. Two cows have a stature (withers height) of 1.101m and 1.084m respectively (Matolcsi 1970), and an even smaller animal is 1.011m.

Among the cattle bones at the enclosure entrance were the articulating remains of a right hind leg and foot from an adult animal. From the same context there is a highly fragmented small/short-horned ox skull, aged over six years (Davis and Payne 1993, 18). Similar associations of cattle limbs and skulls at the Danebury hillfort were interpreted as special ritual deposits (Grant 1984; Wilson 1992, 342; Hill 1996; Wilson 1999, 299). However, the Danebury bones were from pits and some authors consider that ritual deposits do not occur in ditches (Wait 1985; Morris 2008, 18). An alternative explanation for the hind leg and foot is provided by Morris (*ibid*, 8 & 54), as secondary butchery waste, resulting from initial dismemberment of the joints. This is because Iron Age butchery methods often left connective tissue present on the limb bones in comparison with Roman butchery, which was more likely to



result in disarticulation. The presence of such waste in the enclosure ditch therefore suggests some slaughter and dismemberment in the vicinity.

Sheep were of secondary importance, providing wool, milk and manure. Older animals, when they were no longer productive or fertile, may have been culled from the flock to provide meat and skins, although no butchery marks were noted on these sheep bones. There is no evidence for the presence of goats; all of the teeth examined are attributable to sheep (Payne 1985; Zeder and Pilaar 2010). The more complete/semi-intact post-cranial elements are also sheep (Boessneck *et al.* 1964).

Pigs contributed to the community's food source, although the actual extent of this is difficult to gauge owing to the over-representation of isolated teeth.

Compared with other Iron Age sites the percentage frequency of the horse bones and teeth are low, but it may be that the remains of such animals were disposed of in more distant localities. Dog bones are similarly represented.

### Discussion of the middle Iron Age occupation

Situated near the crest of a low ridge and overlooking the stream to either side, the site was carefully chosen. It is one of a number of enclosed sites of a similar date along the Gwash Valley (Cooper 2000, 145). The majority of settlements were located on the ridges of higher ground between the river valleys that bisect the local terrain, and Site 1 is typical of the general pattern.

The closest site is on the outskirts of Oakham, *c.* 1.4km to the west, where a possible kiln and other occupation evidence were found (Fig. 1, HER8342-3). However, it has greater similarity to a site that lay *c.* 3.6km to the south-east, comprising a large sub-rectangular enclosure, 120m long by 80m wide, 0.96ha, within which were a probable roundhouse and a small circular stock-pen. Remnants of an associated field system lay on the slopes to the south and west of the enclosure. Further to the south-east, on the ridge of high ground between the rivers Gwash and Chater, near Lyndon and Edith Weston, there were two further sub-rectangular enclosures.

These enclosures were quite common, perhaps small farmsteads, set within a landscape of fields, meadows and woodland. The ridges above the settlements would have sheltered them from the worst of the weather and the streams flowing nearby would have provided plentiful fresh water.

It is likely, given the limited chronology at Site 1 and the small quantities of refuse, that the site had a short period of use, and may have been one of several scattered enclosures used by the same community, perhaps on a seasonal basis. The distribution of broken pottery, animal bone and other waste suggests that activity was focused around the entrance to the enclosure, and that it was not intense. A single roundhouse was probably the most significant structure, but had no evidence for refurbishments, and there was little evidence for longer term occupation.

The enclosure does not seem to have had a bank, a lot of the fills had weathered from the top and sides of the ditch, but there was no evidence for the gradual accumulation of tip lines on the inner or outer edges of the ditch. A stock-fast enclosure could have held cattle and other livestock for short periods, but does not preclude an enclosure to keep animals out and prevent them from grazing on

crops growing within. The location of the roundhouse outside of the enclosure also suggests that the enclosed ground was required, clear of structures, but there was no evidence for crop processing. Livestock could also easily be grazed and herded freely across open land for most of the year, but at key times would have benefited from close supervision. Despite the low level of finds from the enclosure ditch, the presence of a post-abandonment cultivation soil in the north, suggests that little was lost to later ploughing.

The roundhouse was not occupied for long periods and may have been used only at certain times of year. Its location quite clearly controls access to the enclosure and suggests an element of security in its placement, perhaps to guard the herd against predators during calving, or when a crop is most vulnerable to theft or livestock intrusion. Casting waste was found in and around the roundhouse, but no furnace. However, the heat to melt certain copper alloys can be generated by a carefully constructed and enclosed wood/charcoal fire, making it a highly portable craft. The ring ditch was not refurbished, the amount of domestic waste from it was low and it would have silted up in a matter of a few generations. This tends to indicate a building and associated enclosure that performed an ancillary function to a farming settlement, situated further up the agricultural hierarchy and located elsewhere. The site was abandoned long before the Romano-British shrine at Site 2 was established, but may have been visible in pasture as an earthwork.

#### A ROMANO-BRITISH SHRINE COMPLEX OF THE MID-SECOND TO FIFTH CENTURIES AD

Site 2 was occupied by a circular stone shrine from the mid-second century AD, situated within a rectangular enclosure formed by several small gullies, completely separate from the middle Iron Age enclosure to the north-east (Figs 1 and 3, Plate 2). A more substantial enclosure was subsequently built around the shrine in the late second century, and was not abandoned until the fourth century. An additional enclosure, containing a small rectangular timber building, was built to the north of the shrine at around the same time as this later refurbishment. In the late fourth or early fifth century an adult male, who had died in his early 30s, was buried in the centre of the shrine building. The building eventually collapsed or was demolished, the rubble covering the grave and the foundations. These dates are based on an assemblage of 1,528 sherds (188kg) of pottery, studied by Jane Timby; 218 coins, studied by Ian Meadows; and a range of 406 other finds, studied by Tora Hylton. Finds were plotted on scale plans during the excavation (Plate 3).

Of particular interest were two quite specific items associated with religious belief and practices; a fragment from a figurine and a curse tablet. The crest from a Corinthian helmet originates from a cast bronze figurine of the Roman goddess Minerva or the god Mars, coated with either tin or silver (Plate 4). The inside edge of the crest is curvilinear with an attachment for the missing helmet; it broadens towards its upper tip and the outer edges are scalloped. The sides are decorated with 11 equidistant deep-set grooves; stylised plumes/feathers, repeated on the front of the crest. Decoratively it is similar to an example from Stonea Grange, Cambridgeshire (Jackson and Potter 1996, fig. 112, 98).

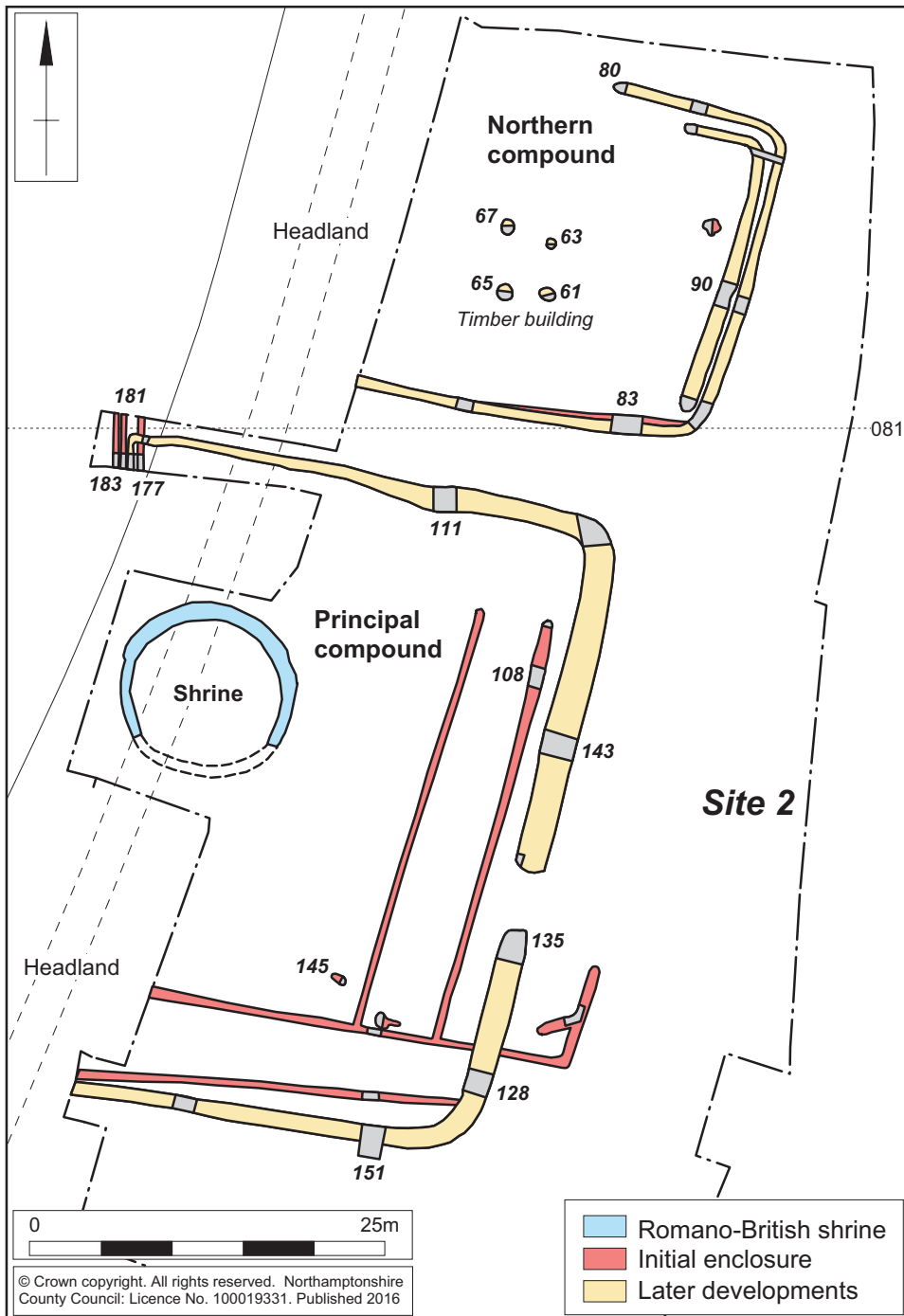


Fig. 3. Plan of Site 2, the Romano-British shrine complex.

The lead curse tablet was deposited near the end of the shrine's use. A curse tablet is an inscribed piece of sheet lead intended to influence by supernatural means the action or welfare of another against their will (Tomlin 1988, 59). It is extremely fragile lead, 0.5mm thick, rolled three times to form an 8mm diameter tube, folded in half (Plate 5). Both ends of the tube are missing and the conservation assessment



Plate 2. General view of the shrine during excavation, looking south.



Plate 3. Plotting and recording the density of the finds scatter within the shrine.

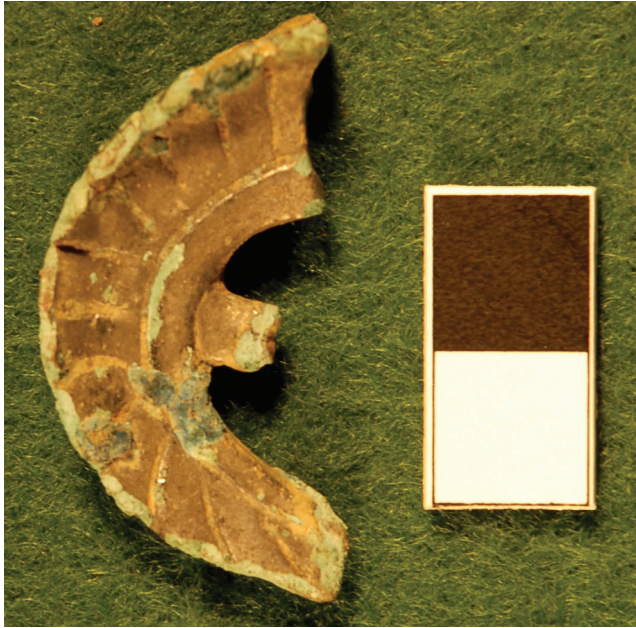


Plate 4. The bronze crest from a small figurine of Minerva or Mars, wearing a Corinthian helmet, found outside the shrine entrance.



Plate 5. The rolled and folded lead curse tablet, deposited in the late fourth century AD.

by Sarah Morton indicated that it would not be possible to unroll, as there is little or no metallic lead left.

Also of note amongst the finds, the pattern of coin loss is overwhelmingly late, and with so many illegible or only identifiable to a century, detailed analysis is fairly meaningless. However, deposition seems to be consistently below the British averages (Reece 2002, 145), except in the AD 138–80 issues where the results are marginally higher, and in the AD 260–378 issues where they are more than 8 per cent higher than the national average. Coins dated AD 330–48 are over 18 per cent higher than the national average.

### Shrine construction and early use in the mid-second century AD

The shrine had an internal diameter of *c.*10.5m, and the wall foundations consisted of pitched ironstone rubble held fast with clay (Fig. 4, Plate 6). The foundation



Fig. 4. The earliest floor plan of the shrine, showing features of the mid-second century AD.



Plate 6. The shrine wall foundation, showing pitched ironstone construction.

trench for the wall was 0.8m wide, cut 0.2m into the natural clay. Rising from this was a limestone wall, 165, 0.6m wide, which survived up to four courses high. The inner and outer faces of the wall were constructed in roughly dressed slabs, with the core filled with smaller pieces of limestone rubble and clay (Plate 7). The southern portion of the shrine's outer wall had been obliterated by the plough. The upstanding masonry of the remainder, however, had helped protect a complex sequence of deposits within the shrine.

The failure to finish the masonry neatly would not have been apparent to visitors, as the inner face of the wall was plastered over, and decorated with red and white paint. This was partly preserved around the northern half of the building when the wall was later refaced and thickened; perhaps to strengthen it, by adding an additional layer of external masonry, 186, shoring up an unstable section (Fig. 4, Plate 8). This may also suggest additional weight was placed against this wall of



Plate 7. The shrine at an early stage of excavation, showing the wall construction.



Plate 8. The shrine wall, showing refaced construction around the northern exterior.



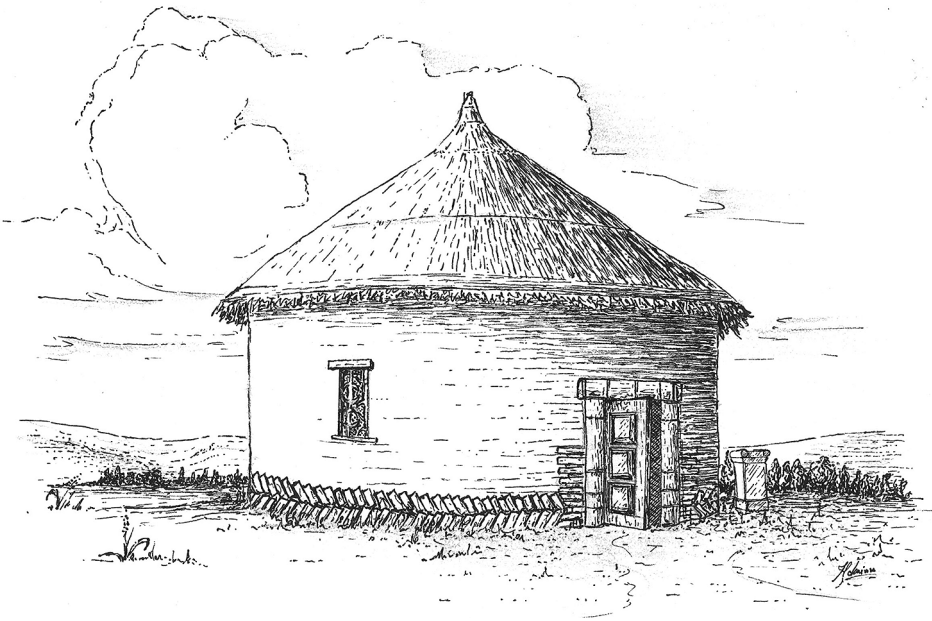


Plate 9. An artist's reconstruction of the shrine building, as it may have appeared.

the shrine. The absence of tile fragments suggests that the shrine had a thatched or wooden shingle roof (Plate 9).

A timber door frame was marked at the entrance to the south-east, where a stout pair of post-holes, 262 and 265, were set 1.7m apart, 0.55m wide by 0.28m deep, and packed with ironstone cobbles (Fig. 4). In the thoroughfare was a layer of compacted clay, 255, mixed with limestone and ironstone gravel, which corresponded with a more extensive area, 246, immediately outside the doorway. This metallated layer was probably formed by regular use, combined with successive attempts to consolidate the ground.

A low rectangular plinth, 187, lay immediately outside the doorway on the right-hand side, comprising mortared limestone slabs erected against the shrine wall, 1.1m by 0.9m in plan and one course high. The bronze crest from a miniature Corinthian helmet was found lying beside this plinth (Plate 4).

The layers preserved within the shrine reveal a fascinating glimpse of Roman ritual practices, involving both animal sacrifice and the deposition of material goods. The shrine's original floor was a simple affair, consisting of patchy ironstone gravel spread loosely over the natural clay, 263 (Fig. 4). Part of a lathe-turned shale bead was recovered from this level, similar to an example from Danebury (Laws 1991, fig. 7.40, 4.13), together with a complete glass counter manufactured from opaque black glass, the surfaces of which are now heavily pitted. This circular item has a convex upper surface and the underside is flat, 15mm in diameter and 6mm high. Similar plano-convex discs are known from Colchester (Crummy 1983, fig. 95) and Caerleon (Allen 2000, fig. 113, 134–8), and were used in board games.

The floor surface was interrupted by two small, relatively shallow pits, and a pair of post-holes cut near the centre of the building (Fig. 4). Pit 258 had been truncated by the insertion of a later grave (see below), what remained was 1.0m across and 0.28m deep; whilst pit 276 was smaller at 0.6m diameter. These pits were filled with mid-brown silty clay with occasional charcoal flecks. Post-holes 260 and 267 were *c.*0.3m wide by 0.29m deep, packed with ironstone cobbles. These features probably date to when the shrine was first erected, but a single coin recovered from this level was, unfortunately, too degraded for identification. Animal bones, including part of the lower right foreleg of an adult cow, were found scattered across this early floor, painting a picture of a space where food and sacrificial cuts of meat could be left as offerings.

#### OUTSIDE THE SHRINE

The shrine building did not stand in glorious isolation; it probably lay at the heart of a rectangular plot bounded by a series of gullies, which survived less than 1.0m wide and 0.2m deep. Gully 83, which was truncated by the later enclosure, may have formed the northern side of this complex, whilst gullies 177, 181 and 183 may have formed the western edge (Fig. 3). The orientation of these latter gullies do not, however, match well with the overall plan and they could not have fully enclosed the shrine, seeming to terminate somewhere outside the excavated area. The southern and eastern bounds were more clearly defined, showing that the original entrance to this plot could have been north-east of the shrine. These bounds suggest an area *c.*45m long by 35m wide, *c.*0.16ha.

The pottery recovered from the gullies dates to the second century and is broadly the same date as that recovered from the later ditches, suggesting that the gullies predate the refurbishment of the shrine and principal compound by only a short time. A small assemblage of six sherds from gully 108 included two Central Gaulish samian sherds. This gully was packed with darker soil containing a mass of burnt sheep/goat bone, possibly representing the disposal of sacrificial offerings at the shrine.

The bone from gully 108 is exclusively highly fragmented and burnt, apart from a single proximal sheep tibia showing knife cut marks from disjuncting. There were only three identifiable elements, 16 indeterminate sheep/goat long bone shaft fragments and over 101 splinters, all smashed in antiquity. Evidence of burnt votive offerings from other shrines and temples is scarce, with the closest parallel provided by calcined bone from Wanborough, Surrey (King 2005, 342). At the Great Chesterfield temple in Essex, relatively few of the sheep bones from complete carcasses were burnt or scorched, few were calcined, with the majority burnt black (Baxter 2005). Charred cereal and herbaceous seeds from matting were also present, suggesting that this was also a municipal disposal for material scattered across the floor and cleaned away between ceremonies.

#### Refurbishment and continued use of the shrine (late second to fourth centuries AD)

Late in the second century a new floor was laid within the shrine, hinting that the construction of a more impressive external enclosure was part of a wider upgrade to

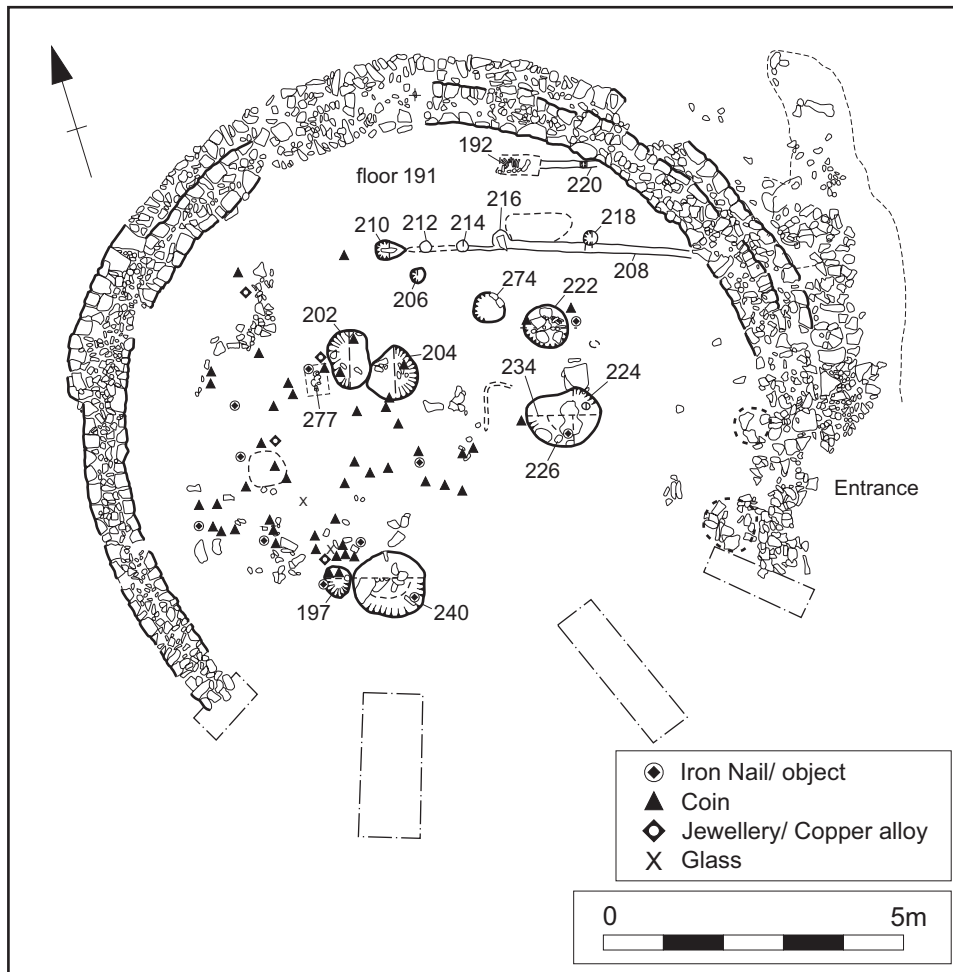


Fig. 5. The refurbished floor plan of the shrine, showing features and scattered finds of the second to fourth centuries AD.

the cult centre. The new floor comprised compact greenish-grey clay, 191, covering the earlier pits and post-holes in the centre, but abutting the posts for the doorway, indicating their continued use (Fig. 5). Two amorphous nodules of black glass were recovered from the floor, but it is difficult to be sure whether these are melted fragments of game counters or glass beads.

Among the alterations to the interior was the installation of an oval fire pit, 234, 3.0m inside the shrine entrance (Fig. 5). The pit was *c.*1.0m wide by 0.27m deep, with steep concave sides and a flat base. Dark greyish-brown silty clay lay at the base, containing large amounts of charcoal and fragments of animal bone. Reddish-brown silty clay lay at the surface with fewer charcoal flecks, and the sides were burnt orange-red. Stakeholes 224 and 226, driven into the ground on opposite sides of the fire pit, may have supported a spit, allowing meat to be gently roasted

above the embers, or perhaps had helped to suspend a vessel for heating water. On its southern side was also a small groove or elongated post-hole (not illustrated).

A shallow slot betrayed the presence of a timber partition installed to sub-divide the north-eastern part of the interior from the central area, projected *c.*5.5m from the wall across its north-east arc (Fig. 5). The partition beam slot, 208, had five post-holes, 210–18, set at irregular distances. Within this screened space lay a short drain, 220, that terminated at a shallow pit, 192, in which the partly articulated remains of a lamb or kid were found; other animal bones from this area included piglet, duck, eel and cattle shanks. Precisely what activities were going on here is unclear, but the concentration of bones in the screened-off area makes preparations for rituals involving animal sacrifice likely.

The votive offerings included four cattle lower limbs found on the floor, 191, three of them behind the screen within the north-east part of the shrine. Such activity was evident at the late third- to fourth-century circular shrine at Brigstock, Northamptonshire, where similarly articulated cattle lower limb bones had been inserted into the earthen floors (King 2005, 346). The animals appear to have been heifers when killed, matching exactly the ages for cattle from Dutch Roman temples at Elst and Empel (Lauwerier 2002, 68). Such animals would have been approaching adult size, but had little time to have contributed to the economy as part of a herd. Limb deposits consist of the meatless lower legs, leaving the meaty parts for food, and mitigating the loss of the meat to the community (Groot 2007, 154–6). The sacrifice served both as an offering and part of rural farming practice, by taking some livestock to the shrine to be slaughtered. Some of the meat was consumed on site by feasting, and perhaps as a gift to the shrine guardian, but body part analysis may suggest that a good portion of the meat was also taken away.

In addition to the fire pit, eight pits and post-holes – 197, 202, 204, 206, 222, 240, 274 and 277 – were cut through the new floor (Fig. 5). These scattered features were mainly west of the centre of the building, their position appearing to correspond with the distribution of coins and other artefacts. The pits ranged between 0.5–1.1m across and were up to 0.52m deep, typically filled with mid-greyish-brown silty clay, charcoal flecks and small burnt cobbles, particularly pit 240. Finds from the pits included animal bone, sherds of pottery, small fragments of tile and three coins of the fourth century, including a coin of Constantine I (AD 313–14) in pit 202. Two of the pits, 197 and 277, received more distinctive ritual offerings. Pit 197 was packed with ironstone cobbles, and contained pottery, animal bone, glass and five coins. Spanning a period of over a century, the coins include a silver denarius of Septimus Severus, dating to AD 197–8, and bronze coins of Claudius II Gothicus (a posthumous issue of AD 270 or later), and Licinius, AD 313–16. Pit 277 contained three pristine fourth-century Nene Valley colour-coated beakers, which were probably buried immediately after deposition (Plate 10). There was also an iron knife, with a horizontal back and a cutting edge which curves to the tip, a Manning's Type 11 (1985, fig. 28).

Further treasures lay scattered across the refurbished floor of the shrine. The wealth of finds included 50 further coins, vessel glass, bronze armlets, toilet instruments and two iron spearheads. The vessel glass is a small undiagnostic inturned rim in blue-green glass, datable to the first to third centuries (Price and Cottam 1998).



Plate 10. Three Nene Valley colour-coated beakers from pit 277, and a small plain beaker from the debris above this pit.

The four armlets are types that are commonly found: three have a flat rectangular cross-section ‘ribbon strip’, two of which retain terminals showing the fastening, and one which is perforated for a hook and eye fastening; and the other is penannular. These have hand-tooled decoration, comprising close-set incised transverse grooves, either covering the entire armlet (Neal and Butcher 1974, fig. 60, 153) or as intermittent panels (Clarke 1979, fig. 37, 163). One armlet has been cut to form a ‘cog wheel’ style decoration on the outside edge (Clarke 1979, fig. 37, 437). Stylistically the forms date to the fourth century. The fourth is part of a cast imitation of a bead armlet with a circular cross-section (Crummy 1983, fig. 46, 1715).

The toilet instruments are for personal grooming and, whilst common, complete sets are rarely found (Plate 11). The set comprises tweezers, flanked by matching nail cleaner and scoop. All three items are connected by means of a decorative U-shaped suspension loop, which is held in place by a rivet passing through the perforated terminals of the implements and both arms of the loop (Cunliffe 1971, fig. 42, 71).

One of the spearheads is complete, a distinctive javelin or lance head, which is from the mid-first century, part of Manning’s Group 1A (1985, 162–3). This may have been an old family heirloom by the time it was deposited, as the other floor finds are generally later in date. It has an asymmetrical leaf-shaped blade with a welded socket, 95mm long (*ibid* 1985, plate 77, 57). The blade has a triangular cross-section, one side is flat, and the other side is arched and a faint longitudinal rib is apparent, 45mm long by 23mm wide. Another incomplete spearhead has most of the socket and head missing.

The coins and other artefacts were concentrated in the western half of the interior, suggesting that this was a ceremonial focal point for the theatre and display



Plate 11. A set of copper alloy toilet instruments for personal hygiene.

of the rituals, rather than the grisly backstage preparation area behind the screen to the north-east. Perhaps an altar stood here, where supplicants could place their votive gifts, and where the shrine guardian or priest could receive them and would perform the sacred rites.

The shrine yielded a total of 218 coins, which create a series from the mid-second century, but with the majority of issues dating from the mid-third to later fourth centuries. Most of the coins either lay upon the floor of the refurbished shrine or among debris lying on top of the floor, but they may originally have been contained in a vessel before being dispersed around the building. The overall character of the pottery deposited in and around the shrine was fairly rural, with imports forming a minor component. The vessel repertoire was also quite restricted; bowls and dishes were more common than jars, while beakers were common overall.

#### THE PRINCIPAL COMPOUND

The initial network of gullies had quickly filled with silt and waste from ceremonial activities. Regular use and popularity demanded a far more substantial rectangular enclosure, boasting a sizeable V-shaped perimeter ditch (Fig. 3). This new religious compound was the same size, *c.*0.16ha, entered via a single 8m wide causeway on its eastern side. The western side of the enclosure could not be excavated as it lies beneath a modern track.

Ditch 135 was the most substantial at 1.5m wide by 0.75m deep near the entrance. The ditches on the north and south sides of the enclosure, ditches 111

and 151, were slightly smaller and narrowed significantly to the west. The V-shaped profile remained consistent, although the depth varied. In general there was a basal fill of light to mid yellowish-brown silty clay, largely derived from weathering and a darker upper fill comprising greyish-brown clayey silt with charcoal flecks. Animal bone and Roman pottery, dating from the late second and third centuries, was recovered throughout. Overall, the ditch yielded a substantial pottery assemblage of some 322 sherds (4,805g). The group mainly comprises Lower Nene Valley wares and shelly wares. A further indicator of the later date is that bowls and dishes account for 56 per cent EVE of the group, whilst jars make up just 32.9 per cent, which is a late Roman trend. An iron knife was recovered from ditch 128, but much of the blade is missing and is not identifiable to type.

Just like the earlier gullies, the main compound ditch became a tempting receptacle for discarded animal bone, food waste and other floor debris. As feasting may have been an important part of the rituals performed at the shrine, it is likely that the sacrificial animals were herded to the site specifically to play their part in these rites.

Recognised as mainly discarded domestic food waste from the slaughter, butchering and consumption of locally raised livestock, the animal bone assemblage in the principal compound reveals a diet based largely on beef, supplemented by mutton, lamb and pork from succulent newborn/suckling piglets. A group of 25 sheep/goat long bone shaft fragments from ditch 143 had been smashed to extract marrow from them, a common practice when making broth. Whole chicken carcasses came from ditches 128 and 143. At least one horse, 16–17 years old at death, was noted by a single tooth (Levine 1982). Frog bones indicated that the ditches were generally wet and partially water filled.

#### AN OVEN FOR FOOD PREPARATION

An oval oven, 145, was excavated in the south-eastern corner of the enclosure (Fig. 3). The flue lay at its western end, where it narrowed to a gully; what remained was essentially a pit that was 1.1m long by 0.5m wide and 0.18m deep. The sides and base of this oven had been burnt to pinkish-red, while fired clay fragments among the fill were probably the remains of a collapsed domed superstructure. Mixed with this were the remnants of fuel from the oven's final firing; charred branch wood, cereal grain and herbaceous seeds testify to the use of straw and dried grasses to help ignite the kindling.

The cereal grain included naked barley, possible spelt wheat and possible hulled barley, which had perhaps been used in food preparation. There was a complete lack of chaff or other grain processing waste in any of the samples from the site. Charred grain was only present in the vicinity of the oven and from the terminal of gully 108. The herbaceous species included fat hen, dock and cleavers, all common in arable fields and open ground.

#### THE NORTHERN COMPOUND

A smaller satellite enclosure was laid out 5m to the north of the main compound in the later second century, over 23m long by 22m wide, c.0.05ha (Fig. 4). The position of the entrance is uncertain, but it may have been on the northern side, where ditch 80 terminated. Given the shallow depth of the ditch, 0.75m wide by

0.25m deep, the opposing side of the entrance could have been lost to ploughing. An internal ditch, 90, of similar width and depth ran parallel with the exterior along its eastern side. Near the centre were four pits that may have held the posts from a timber structure, *c.*4.5m long by 2.5m wide. The four post-holes, 61–67, were of similar size, 0.85m wide by 0.25m deep, and arranged in a rectangular formation. They contained ironstone cobbles for packing, but no finds. The pottery from this smaller compound did not extend beyond the third century, indicating that it was relatively short-lived and was probably no longer needed as the cult declined in popularity.

#### Abandonment and dereliction in the late fourth to fifth centuries AD

A mixed layer of debris, 190, accumulated above the floor surface in the late fourth century. Finds recovered from this layer reflected the distribution within the building prior to abandonment, suggesting a certain degree of disturbance to underlying deposits (Fig. 6). The lead curse tablet was found amongst this material. There are 452 sherds of pottery with a spectrum of wares dominated by Lower Nene Valley colour-coated pottery, followed by reduced and shelly ware. The vessel profiles continued to show a dominance of bowls and dishes at 47.2 per cent EVE, compared to 37 per cent for jars and 13.3 per cent for beakers, a broadly similar vessel profile to that from the principal compound ditch.

A complete copper-alloy finger ring from this layer has a circular hoop with a D-shaped cross-section, secured by a soldered lap joint sited beneath the bezel. The hoop expands towards the bezel, which comprises three crenulations flanked on either side by barely visible transverse grooves (Crummy 1983, fig. 50, 1768; fig. 52, 1789). Fragments of a second ring were recovered from the same deposit. There is also part of a bone pin, possibly a hair pin, with a circular-sectioned shank surmounted by a reel; a scar on the upper surface of the reel indicates where the head has broken off, and is perhaps a Crummy Type 5 or 6 pin (1983, figs 21, 22).

The detritus testifies to a period of neglect and perhaps abandonment, when patches of red and white painted plaster were peeling away from the walls. Although the plaster, examined by Tora Hylton, represents a very small amount (41 fragments, 218g) of what would have existed originally, its presence alludes to a structure worthy of internal *décor*. The surface of the plaster is fairly smooth and it has not been polished. The backing is generally uniform and was applied in a single layer, 30mm thick.

Stone debris lay on the western half of the floor and around the doorway, hinting that the superstructure was crumbling. Burnt stone and charcoal indicated that small fires had been lit against the walls. The roof or at least its timbers may still have been intact, however, as concentrated pockets of mouse and vole bones accumulated amongst owl pellets from predators roosting above. Based on the species and pattern of breakage, the pellets may be from a barn owl (Glue 1970; Dobson and Wexlar 1979; Kusmer 1990; West and Milne 1993). The survival of roof beams for owls to perch and shelter are also documented from Drayton II Roman villa, Leicestershire (Baxter 1993, 5), and a tawny owl was noted inside a Roman mausoleum at Grange Farm, Gillingham, Kent (Armitage 2007).



AN INHUMATION BURIAL OF THE LATE FIFTH OR SIXTH CENTURY AD

Despite its decrepit state the site had not yet completely lost its power, and was chosen for the burial of a man in his early 30s in a shallow grave, 249, at the centre of the shrine (Fig. 6, Plate 12). His body lay on its back with the arms flexed at the elbow, the right hand placed below the chin and the left hand positioned on the chest, orientated east to west. Several cattle bones, including part of an articulated spinal column, were found within the grave, indicating that joints of meat had followed the deceased into the earth.

Over 75 per cent of the skeleton was recovered, which was well-preserved with some cracking in the direction of fibre orientation, studied by Sarah Inskip. Most cortical bone surfaces were available for pathological analysis, but none were observed. Osteoarthritis of the costal facets of the ribs and thoracic vertebrae were

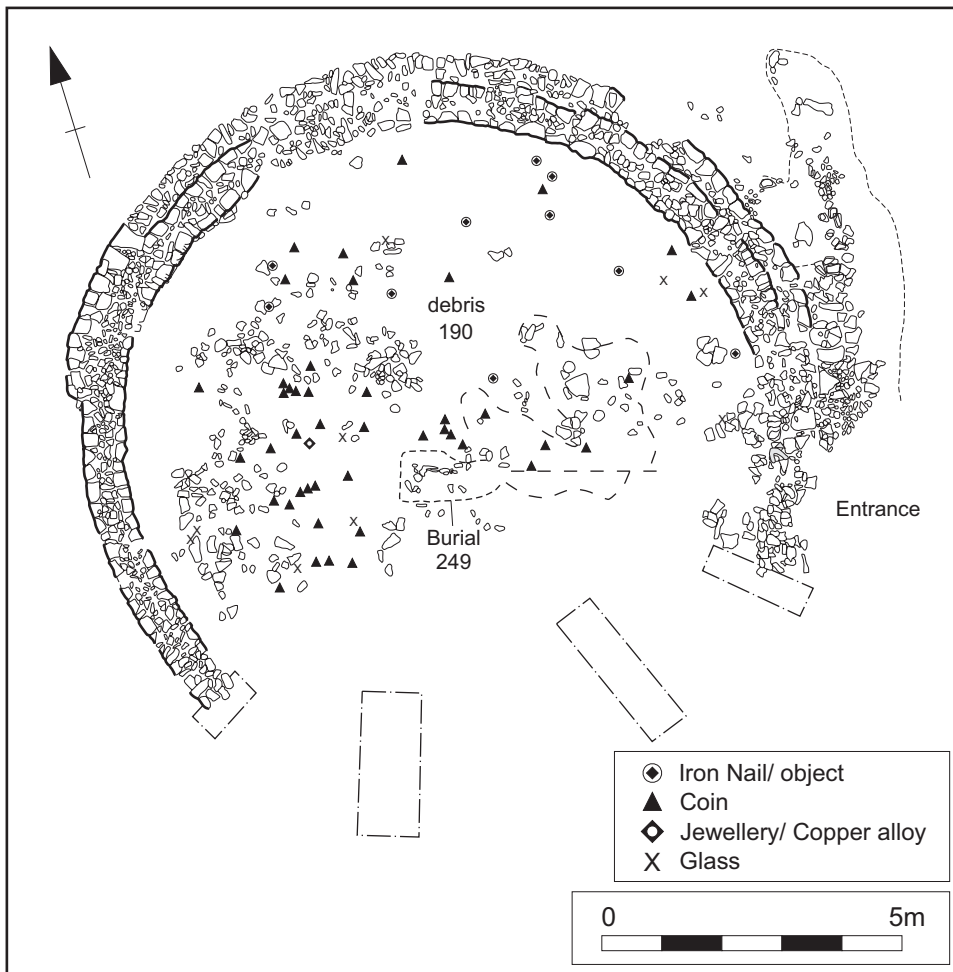


Fig. 6. The latest floor plan of the shrine, showing the late fourth-century finds scatter and central burial dated to the fifth to sixth centuries AD.



Plate 12. Excavation of the central inhumation burial.

recorded. In this case, marginal lipping and pitting of the articular surface was very minor in its severity, consistent with the man's age. Many Schmorl's nodes were present in the lumbar and thoracic vertebra, indicating the individual suffered considerable back trouble from hernias. The anterior teeth (all lower incisors and upper second incisors) showed signs of substantial occlusal wear that may indicate the use of the mouth in an activity requiring a third hand whilst crafting (Larsen 1997, 258). An adult burial in association with a circular shrine appears to be infrequent, another example occurring at Cannington, Somerset (Rahtz 2000).

The cattle spinal column comprises five cervical vertebrae, 13 thoracic, six lumbar and one sacrum. In all of the vertebrae, both the cranial and caudal epiphyseal plates are unfused, indicating an age of less than five years (Silver 1971, 285). Unilateral chopping along the left side and a traversal cut through one of the cervical vertebrae indicates removal of the head. The spinal column was considered to be a significant

part of the body which was often given to important persons (Vila 2000; Baxter 2005). This side of beef may represent a ritual food offering for the deceased, the remaining meat consumed by the family and attendees at the funeral.

The burial was found at the very end of the excavation, as weather deteriorated and the digging team were deluged by the elements. A grave cut had not been spotted in the clayey floor levels above, so it was initially thought that this act might have been a foundation deposit. Radiocarbon dating, however, placed the burial somewhere within the fifth to mid-sixth centuries, after the collapse of Roman rule (cal AD 410–60 & cal AD 480–530, 68 per cent confidence; cal AD 380–550, 98 per cent confidence, 1610 ± 40BP, Beta-277440). Whether this date signalled Anglo-Saxon reuse of an ancient derelict shrine, over 200 years old, remains uncertain.

#### FINAL COLLAPSE OF THE BUILDING

Any Anglo-Saxon activity was not accompanied by repairs to the building fabric. Eventually, the roof timbers rotted and collapsed, scattering iron nails across the interior, where they were sealed beneath limestone rubble from the tumbled or levelled walls. The metal finds assemblage (excluding coins) is dominated by nails, which make up 88 per cent of the total, with 78 per cent of these recovered from this final episode. Lying among this collapsed superstructure was the skull of an ox, aged *c.*15 months at death (Davis and Payne 1993, 18). The animal's age again fits in the range documented in cattle from Roman temples in the Netherlands (Groot 2007, 111). The skull may have fallen from its place suspended in the rafters or could have been a final votive offering, sealing the shrine at the end of its long life.

#### Other Romano-British shrine complexes in the area

In the mid-second century, the shrine was enclosed on the gentle slopes overlooking Egleton stream, in the sheltered upper reaches of the Gwash Valley. This shrine, possibly dedicated to Minerva, Mars or the Romano-British equivalent, compares closely with an increasing number of shrines and temples in the region that have been classified by Rodwell (1980) as a Type 5, local cult centre. He defines this as:

A rural or semi-rural temple...where there may be ancillary buildings such as a guesthouse or baths...sites will vary in size, importance and the provision of facilities.

Perhaps the closest contemporary shrine complex was at Collyweston Great Wood, Northamptonshire, *c.*14km south-east of this shrine (Knocker 1965). The site, excavated in 1953, comprised the foundations of one rectangular and two polygonal stone buildings, three to four other buildings, and a circular paved area. The complex may also have been surrounded by a wall or ditch.

At Brigstock, Northamptonshire, *c.*24km south of Egleton, a third- to fourth-century complex was situated on the site of an Iron Age settlement, and consisted of one polygonal and three circular stone buildings (Greenfield 1963; RCHME 1975). Sizeable quantities of pottery and other finds included fragments of bronze figurines of horses and riders, suggesting that the deity may have been depicted on horseback, such as Mars (Henig 2005, 35).

Being able to firmly identify shrines and temples is fairly rare, and it is likely that many of the lesser sites served private households, rather than the wider

community. A possible shrine at Pineham Barn, Northampton, had a small circular stone building situated adjacent to a stream (Carlyle 2006). The building lay directly outside an enclosed farming settlement of the second century that was demolished in the late third to early fourth centuries to make way for an expansion of the farmstead enclosures, removing much of the north-west foundations and interior. Other circular stone buildings in Northamptonshire at Overstone (Williams 1976), Bozeat (Meadows 1992) and Ringstead (Jackson 1980) produced no clear evidence to determine their use.

Further afield in the Great Ouse Valley at Kempston, Bedfordshire, there was a small polygonal building inside a rectangular enclosure, close to a Roman cemetery. A silver coin hoard was found nearby, and a pit containing 17 coins next to the building suggested that it was a shrine (Dawson 2004).

Rural shrines have also been identified at Bancroft villa, Milton Keynes (Williams and Zeepvat 1994), Frilford, Oxfordshire (Lewis 1966, 81–2) and Cannington, Somerset (Rahtz 2000). At Frilford, a circular shrine was constructed on an Iron Age ritual site that had been in use since *c.*350 BC. An iron ploughshare and bronze model sword with shield were found in features forming part of an earlier shrine that predated the building, suggesting continuity of worship. Cannington also lay adjacent to a large Roman and later cemetery. So far uniquely comparable to the shrine at Egleton, it also contained a centrally placed grave, dated to AD 468–518, but it is not certain if the burial was placed in the building at the end of its use or as a mausoleum.

The distribution of stone shrines broadly reflects the availability of limestone along the Jurassic Ridge, from Somerset to the Lincolnshire Wolds. Outside this area other shrines may have been timber, and just as common, but making them more elusive in the archaeological record.

A number of shrines occur in border zones between tribal territories, suggesting they may have also functioned as meeting places (de la Bedoyere 2002, 119–20). Frilford lay between the territories of the *Dobunni* and *Catuvellauni*; Cannington, between the *Dumnonii* and *Durotriges*; and Collyweston and Egleton, between the *Catuvellauni* and *Corieltawi*. Although the majority of these shrines date from the second century, they often had a strong association with pre-existing religious practices and beliefs, so it is probably no coincidence that many are on or close to Iron Age sites.

In common with many shrines, the foundation courses of this shrine were of pitched stone supporting upper courses of stone laid horizontally. The foundation and walls were of drystone construction, although the voids had been packed with clay; the mortar identified by the excavators within wall cavities is probably the remnants of the painted plaster. The pitched foundations were of ironstone rubble and the walls were of limestone; perhaps because of the durability of ironstone and its greater resistance to weathering. It is not known if the walls were made entirely of stone or were partly timber.

The complete lack of tile fragments suggests that the roof was thatched or covered with wooden shingles. The doorway to the shrine was on the south-east side of the building, over a raised threshold; two wooden posts inside the doorway may have held a door. When the floor was resurfaced with clay in the late second century, the posts remained *in situ*, indicating their continued use.

Jane Timby's study of the pottery showed that the overall character of the assemblage from the site is rural. Imports form a very minor component in complete contrast with, for example, the small roadside settlement at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, with various religious foci, where samian contributed 3.9 per cent (instead of 1.3 per cent) to a much larger assemblage (Timby 2009). The local wares are typical of the Midlands for the mid-second century onwards.

There are few local sites with quantified assemblages with which to compare. Four ceramic phases were defined for material recovered prior to the construction of Rutland Water (Cooper 2000). The incidence of samian and other finewares to shelly and utilitarian wares from Rutland Water ceramic phase 2 (CP2) is higher than the assemblage here, but may reflect an earlier date of occupation. The only continental fineware to occur on both sites is Moselle black-slipped ware, although the numbers are low, and amphorae, which are not recorded from the Rutland Water sites, are represented by just a few Baetican sherds from this shrine. Other specialist products such as mortaria are also scarce. The general trends match the overall ceramic pattern for the area, with an increase in first Lower Nene Valley reduced wares, followed by colour-coats and late shelly wares in the fourth century.

The national trend for Roman sites in Britain appears to show a general decline in the proportion of jars to other vessels through the Roman period, with an increase in bowls and dishes. It is also usually the pattern that on rural sites, jars, although declining in number, still tend to dominate at over 50 per cent, and that more urban sites show a higher overall proportion of bowls and dishes (Evans 2001, 370). The vessels from the shrine are quite restricted, so perhaps unusually, bowls and dishes have significantly higher percentages to jars from the latest contexts on the site. The trend at Higham Ferrers also followed a decrease in jars, but this was not as marked in the later third to fourth centuries (Timby 2009, table 5.4). Beakers are well-represented in the Rutland Water CP2 and this shrine in the later periods, which again may have some significance in terms of religious practices or may simply reflect a fashion trend. It is difficult to know whether the high percentage of bowls and dishes is typical of rural sites in this area, or is a reflection of the nature of the site and how it functioned.

The most significant whole pots were recovered from features that may have served ritual and practical purposes. The timber partition on the north side of the building acted as a screen and within the partitioned area preparation of the rites could be undertaken. In the central area, pits contained the bones of a duck and an eel, as well as several coins; such bones are rarely found in domestic contexts supporting their premise as a votive offering. Duck bones were also found at the Temple of Mithras, Walbrook, London (Shepherd 1998). Animals and their meat played a key role in ritual practices, often being burnt in a sacrificial fire. Sizeable quantities of burnt sheep/goat bones were recovered from the principal compound ditch. Ritual feasting may have played a major part in the ceremonies performed at the shrine, and certainly the slaughter of animals was accompanied by animal bone butchery marks. Live animals were brought to the shrine, killed and dismembered as part of ritual sacrifice. How much of the meat was consumed on site by feasting or as gifts to the shrine guardian, and how much may have been taken away after the ceremony, is less certain.

Interpretation of the animal bone assemblage must be made in the knowledge that it contains material from an identified ritual site, and is apparently indicated by those assemblages directly associated with the shrine and features in the principal compound. However, the composition of animal bone from the northern satellite enclosure, and much of the bone in the principal compound, is much more likely to derive from the slaughter, butchering and discard of food debris. Feasting would have been an important part of major ceremonies, and it is likely that the shrine guardian or priest would have lived nearby as curator of the site, generating his own daily food waste.

The age distribution in the sheep mandibles from Great Chesterfield (Baxter 2005) draws attention to the high frequency of juveniles and sub-adults, arguing for an autumn sacrifice of young animals. Similar seasonal sacrifice of lambs and young sheep at this shrine is provided by the tooth wear evidence. Suckling piglets were also evidenced by four bone elements. Less common, small-scale votive offerings are apparent. A solitary hare radius may be of significance, as this species, found together with red deer, fox, dog and horse, at Bancroft, Buckinghamshire, may be evidence of hunted game (King 2005, 346–7). Likewise, the duck coracoid may be the remains of a votive offering (*ibid*, 353), but since there is no evidence for duck breeding in Roman Britain, this duck would have been a wild mallard (Albarella 2005, 255). Freshwater eels are slightly unusual in that they have not been previously recovered amongst votive offerings and may suggest more detailed sieving of such deposits is needed.

The distribution of the animal bone, coins and other artefacts inside the building broadly mirrors the distribution of pits, suggesting that the focal point of the shrine, possibly an altar or statue, was situated opposite the doorway. The fragment of a bronze figurine was found outside the entrance to the shrine, perhaps a second image for supplicants who were not permitted within. Such religious segregation is a common feature of most religions.

The disuse of the shrine associated with the inhumation burial may indicate that the site of the shrine still held its sanctity with local people long after it had fallen out of use.

Plough furrows from the medieval open field system at Egleton worked up to the line of a headland, situated at the boundary between the parishes of Egleton and Hambleton. Most of the remains beneath the headland were preserved, but elsewhere had been badly truncated. The headland also forms the parish boundary, cut along its length by a post-medieval ditch, shown on the 1887 (first edition) Ordnance Survey map and removed c.1980 when the current track was constructed. The successive cutting of the ditch had caused significant truncation to the western edge of the Roman enclosures.

### Reconstruction and public display by Anglian Water

This is not quite the end of the story of the shrine. Following completion of the excavations, the shrine was dismantled and the stone was put into storage. The masonry has now been cleaned, and used to recreate part of the foundation wall at its original diameter and near its original setting, with a display board describing the

history and significance of the site. In addition, finds such as the group of colour-coated beakers are on display in the visitor centre. Visitors to Rutland Water can now enjoy the landscape, the wildlife and a taste of the local archaeological heritage.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The excavation was carried out on behalf of Anglian Water, through their environmental consultants Mott MacDonald, to a programme agreed with Richard Clark, the Principal Planning Archaeologist for Leicestershire County Council. The fieldwork was supervised by Chris Jones for Northamptonshire Archaeology, managed by Simon Carlyle and Jo Everitt, Anglian Water's environment and heritage assessor, who arranged the reconstruction of the shrine and the visitor centre display. Specialist reports are available in the planning report, which is available online with the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) and from Leicestershire Historic Environment Record. Specialist work was completed by: Yvonne Wolfram-Murray, worked flint; Andy Chapman, Iron Age pottery and metalworking debris; Jane Timby, Roman pottery; Pat Chapman, fired clay; Ian Meadows, coins; Tora Hylton, other small finds; Philip Armitage, animal bone; Karen Deighton, plant macrofossils; and Sarah Inskip, human remains. Sincere thanks are due to Ian Baxter for allowing access to the draft study of faunal remains from the Great Chesterfield Temple Precinct, now published. Post-excavation was by Simon Carlyle. Illustrations are by James Ladocha. This publication is by Jim Brown from MOLA Northampton, and is supported by a grant from Anglian Water.

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