



**Northamptonshire
County Council**

Northamptonshire Archaeology

Archaeological Test Pits North-West of
Irchester Roman Town,
Northamptonshire
March 2006



Paul Mason

March 2006

Report 06/40

Northamptonshire Archaeology

2 Bolton House
Wootton Hall Park
Northampton NN4 8BE

w. www.northantsarchaeology.co.uk

t. 01604 700493/4

f. 01604 702822

e. sparry@northamptonshire.gov.uk



STAFF

Project Manager Steve Parry MA, MIFA
 Text Paul Mason BA
 Pottery Tora Hylton
 Fieldwork Paul Mason
 Illustration Paul Mason

QUALITY CONTROL

	Print name	Signature	Date
Checked by	Pat Chapman		
Approved by	Steve Parry		

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	BACKGROUND	1
3	METHODOLOGY	3
4	RESULTS	3
5	THE POTTERY	4
6	CONCLUSION	4
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	4

Appendices

Appendix 1: Stratigraphical data

Appendix 2: Summary of pottery assemblage

Figures

Fig 1: Site Location

Fig 2: Location of Test Pits

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS		
Project name	Archaeological Test Pits North-West of Irchester Roman Town	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted an evaluation comprising three test pits on land to the north-west of Irchester Roman town in advance of the construction of an access road and car park. A subsoil containing sherds of 1st - 4th century pottery was present below the topsoil.	
Project type	Evaluation	
Site status		
Previous work		
Current Land use	Scrubland	
Future work		
Monument type/ period	Roman	
Significant finds		
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Northamptonshire	
Site address	Irchester	
Study area (sq.m or ha)		
OS Easting & Northing	494244 267793	
Height OD	42m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	English Heritage/NCC	
Project brief originator	Michel Kerrou	
Project Design originator		
Director/Supervisor	Paul Mason	
Project Manager	Steve Parry	
Sponsor or funding body	Buckingham Group Ltd	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	March 2006	
End date	March 2006	
ARCHIVES	Location (Accession no.)	Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)
Physical		
Paper		
Digital		
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Unpublished client report (NA report)		
Title		
Serial title & volume		
Author(s)		
Page numbers		
Date		

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL TEST PITS NORTH-WEST OF
IRCHESTER ROMAN TOWN, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

MARCH 2006

ABSTRACT

Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted an evaluation comprising three test pits on land to the north-west of Irchester Roman town in advance of the construction of an access road and car park. A buried soil containing sherds of 1st -4th century pottery was present below the topsoil.

1 INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology excavated three test pits on land to the north-west of Irchester Roman town in March 2005 (NGR 494244 267793, Fig 1). The fieldwork was undertaken to identify any archaeological remains in advance of proposed ground-works relating to the construction of an access road and car park for the planned Chester Farm Heritage Park. A subsoil containing sherds of 1st – 4th century pottery was present below the topsoil.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 Circumstances of development

Chester House Farm was acquired by Northamptonshire County Council in 2004 with a view to enhancing public access and developing the site as a heritage resource. The Built & Natural Environment Service commissioned a series of specialist conservation investigations intended to underpin the long term sustainable management of the holding. In particular the results will be used to inform compilation of a comprehensive Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for Chester Farm.

The acquisition was secured through one of the River Nene Regional Park's 'Tangible Projects' with funding from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The farm has been caught in a spiral of decline having lost its associated farm lands with the strategic development of the adjoining urban areas and the need for associated employment, highway improvements and gravel extraction. Phased

development of the site as a heritage park will help to make Chester Farm publicly accessible as an educational, leisure and recreational facility and safeguard the long term future of the site, which comprises a Scheduled Ancient Monument with a walled Roman Town and Deserted Medieval Village and a Grade II* listed former manor house, parkland and associated listed farm buildings. This will in turn benefit local communities and visitors to the area both as a tourist attraction, and as a feature of the developing regional park.

2.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

Earlier Prehistory

The flood plain below the site is crossed by a series of palaeochannels from late glacial or early post glacial courses of the Nene (Meadows 1997), although there is no known archaeological activity connected to this. The earliest material recovered dates to the later prehistoric period and although several flint axes have been recovered to the east in Ditchford, it is the Bronze Age that provides the earliest human evidence at Chester Farm. A ring ditch on the flood plain incorporated beaker sherds suggesting an early Bronze Age date (Meadows 1997, Chapman 2003). A flint scatter was recovered in fields to the west of the Roman town (Dix 1991) and several stray flint finds were recorded by Baker (1882, 87).

Iron Age and Roman settlement

The Iron Age, in particular the middle to late Iron Age, sees a significant increase in the archaeological evidence for settlement in the vicinity of the site. A number of ditches, pits and enclosures, including some of apparently non-domestic function (Hall and Nickerson 1967), have been discovered. This extensive occupation does not have an apparent focus, although that could lie beneath the walled town, which has produced some evidence for Iron Age occupation (Taylor 2000, 9).

Roman activity on the site dates from the first century AD, initially as an unenclosed settlement, which was subsequently partially enclosed within an earthen rampart to which was added a stone wall. The enclosed area covers c8ha with at least a further 14ha of extra mural settlement or suburbs.

Post Roman occupation

Evidence for early post- Roman activity from the site is confined to a putative 5th

century structure (Knight 1967, 111-113). The establishment of the settlement at Chester on the Water may have occurred during the late Saxon or early medieval period, probably without any direct continuity with the former town. The hamlet is first mentioned in medieval tax returns of 1236 (RCHME 1979, 91-6, fig 89 and pls 3, 4(a) & 32)

2.3 Topography and geology

The site lies towards the base of the southern side of the Nene Valley at *c* 42m OD on a scarp marking the edge of the solid geology where it gives way to the glacial gravels and alluvial clays of the flood plain. Chester Farm and its outbuildings lie some 400m to the east.

The solid geology of the valley side comprises a lower deposit of Upper Lias Clay under a deposit of Northampton Sand with Ironstone that in turn is capped by clay and limestone of the Upper Estuarine series. This is overlain by ferrite brown earths of the Banbury association.

3 METHODOLOGY

Three 1m x 1m x 0.5m deep test pits were hand excavated. A photographic and written record of the results was made and their location was plotted onto an OS base map. Spot heights were surveyed and related to the Ordnance Datum.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Test Pits 1 and 2

These test pits, positioned to examine the ground within the car park (TP1) and the access road to the east (TP2), were excavated to a depth of 0.5m (41.44 – 46.77m OD) (Fig 2). Present at a depth of *c* 0.30m below the ground surface was a compact light reddish brown sandy loam subsoil (2) containing abraded sherds of 1st -3/4th century pottery and a few unidentifiable fragments of animal bone. This was overlain by a mid-greyish brown sandy loam topsoil.

4.2 Test Pit 3 (TP3)

This test pit, located to the east of TP1, was excavated to a depth of 0.5m (42.35m OD). Present at a depth of 0.30m was a loose olive brown sandy loam with a dark brown veining possibly representing recent disturbance. Nothing was retrieved

from this layer. It was overlain by topsoil.

5 THE POTTERY

The excavation of test pits produced a small number of Roman pottery spanning the 1st through to the 3rd/4th century. A total of nineteen sherds with a combined weight of 114gms were recovered from TP 1 and 2. The sherds are small abraded and display few diagnostic features, therefore fabric type has been used as the main indicator of date.

Much of the assemblage appears to comprise locally manufactured coarsewares which date to the late 1st and 2nd centuries. The presence of a single sherd of Lower Nene Valley Colour Coat extends the date range to the 3rd/4th centuries. Grog-tempered wares occur in both soft and hard fabrics, the former is represented by small rim sherd from a channel-rim jar, a form which dates to the late 1st -2nd century. There is only one diagnostic sherd of greyware, a plain rim from a shallow bowl, which probably dates to the 2nd century.

Imported wares are represented by one undiagnostic sherd of Samian.

6 CONCLUSION

The fieldwork did not locate archaeological features. A subsoil present in TP1 and 2 contained abraded Roman pottery suggesting that the area was away from the main Roman occupation. The absence of this layer in TP3 may be due to localised ground disturbance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, R S, 1882 Notes on archaeological discoveries at Irchester, *Proc Soc Antiq 2 ser*, **9**, 85-9

Chapman, A, 2003 Three Bronze Age Burial Sites in Northamptonshire, *Northamptonshire Archaeol*, **31**, 1-14

Dix, B, 1991 *Archaeological evaluation at Irchester Northants 1990-91*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report

Hall, D N & Nickerson, N, 1964 Excavations at Irchester 1962-63, *Archaeol Journal*, **124**, 65-99

Knight, J, K, 1967 Excavations at the Roman town of Irchester 1962-3, *Archaeological Journal*, **124**, 65-99

Meadows, I D, 1997 *An archaeological watching brief and pre-emptive works at Irchester Quarry June 1995-May 1996*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report

Meadows, I D, forthcoming *Archaeological desk based assessment of land around Chester Farm, Irchester (Module 2)*, Northamptonshire Archaeology Report

RCHM 1979 *Royal Commission on Historical Monuments England, An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton; II: Archaeological Sites in Central Northamptonshire*

Taylor, J, 2000 *Northamptonshire Extensive Urban Survey – Irchester, Northamptonshire*, County Council Historic Environment Team

Appendix 1: Stratigraphical data

Test Pit	Geology	Subsoil	Topsoil	Comments
1	Not present	Reddish brown sandy loam	Mid-greyish brown sandy loam (0.28m thick)	Romano-British pottery in 'subsoil'
2	Not present	Reddish brown sandy loam	Mid-greyish brown sandy loam (0.35m thick)	Romano-British pottery in 'subsoil'
3	Not present	Olive brown sandy loam	Mid-greyish brown sandy loam (0.30m thick)	No finds

Appendix 2: Summary of pottery assemblage

FABRIC TYPE	TEST PITS			
	1		2	
	No/Wg		No/Wg	
Roman Pottery				
Greyware	2	6	3	7
Grog-tempered ware (soft)	5	16	3	14
Grog-tempered ware (hard)			2	32
Oxidised Ware			2	27
Lower Nene Valley CC			1	9
Samian	1	3		
Total	8	25	11	89

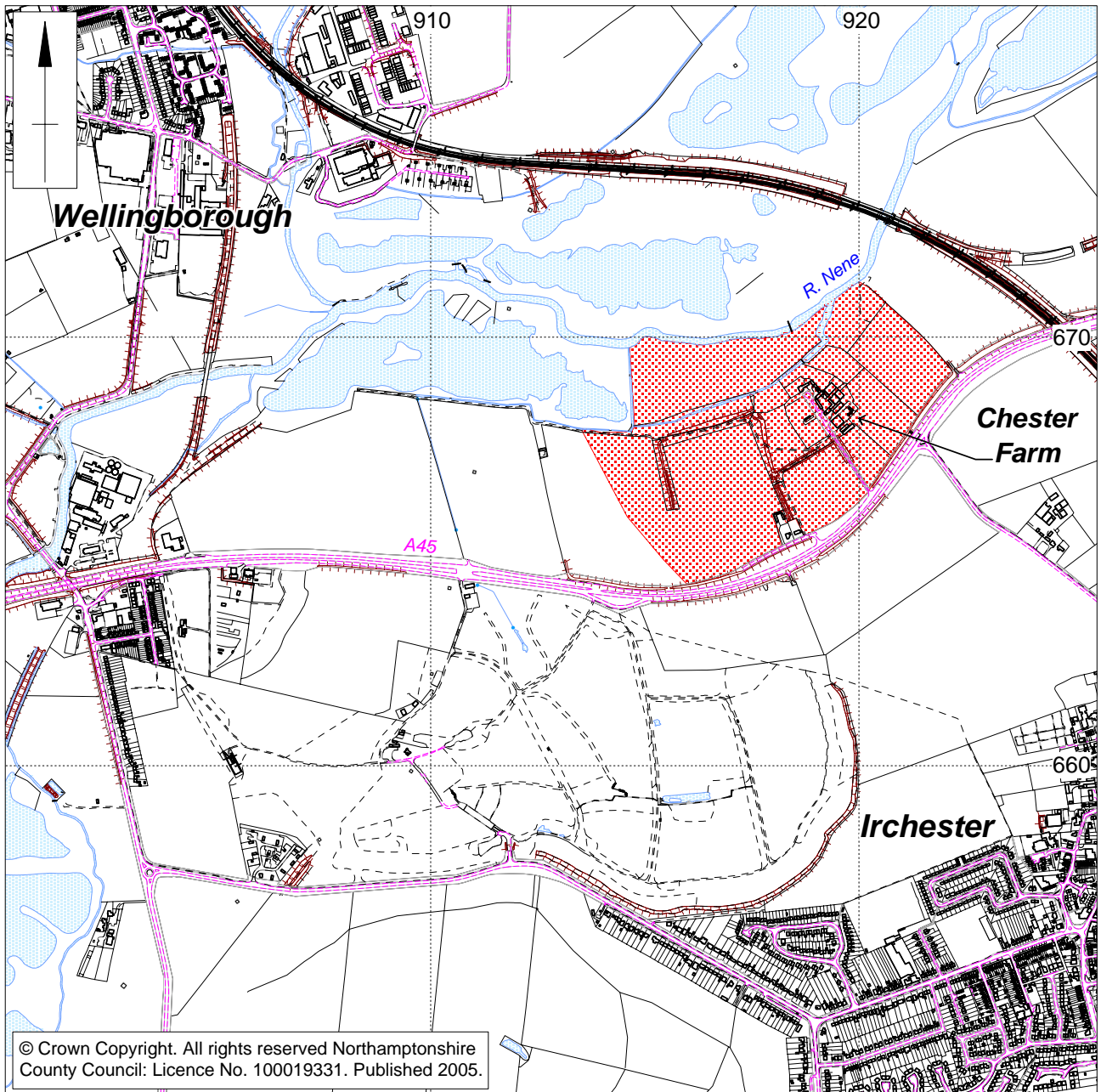


Fig 1: Site Location (1:15 000)

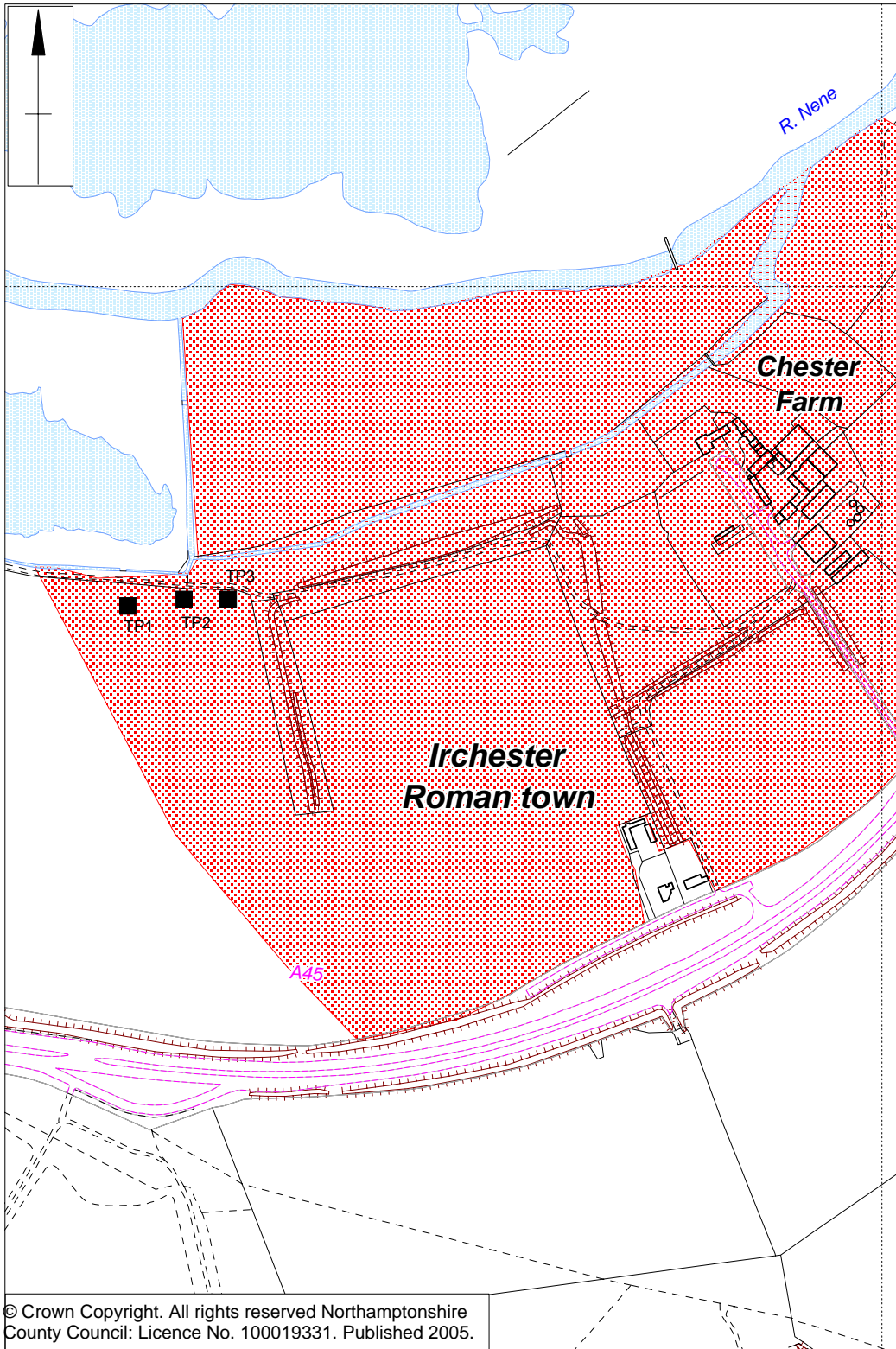


Fig 2: Location of Test Pits (1:5000 @ A4)