



# NASNEWS

Newsletter of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society

Website: [www.northants-archaeology.org.uk](http://www.northants-archaeology.org.uk)



## June 2019

### NAS visit to Chester Farm

18 June 2019

As it was a select few who braved the rain for the tour of Chester Farm and the current excavations, I thought it was worth issuing a unique one-subject NASNEWS to update all members on progress at the site, in particular with regard to the proposed Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC) and the development of the other buildings, including the renovation of the farmhouse itself after the fire of 2010.

#### 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. Progress with plans was slow, and received a huge setback when fire reduced the farmhouse to a burnt out shell in danger of collapse.

With a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, it has been possible, despite the current reign of austerity politics, to renovate the house 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 restored farmhouse*

#### Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC)

The ARC 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.



*Sarah Bridges (yellow jacket), explaining progress and problems with the Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC), the timber-clad building in the background*

The ARC occupies the space of a former barn, and is timber clad to retain the sense of a collection of farm buildings. A curator has now been appointed and will take up the post in August. 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 based at the Record Office in Northampton, who has driven the project forward for so many years.

However, while the end is in sight, it is 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. When we have two existing facilities specifically designed and staffed for these roles, it would be ridiculous to split each of these in two, especially when in the current climate endless cuts have reduced the existing services to the bare minimum anyway.

But 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, as single services to be shared and funded by both authorities.

### **Irchester Roman Town**

Finally, in respect to our site visit, thanks are due to Ian Meadows, the project manager for the archaeological excavations at the site, for providing a

guided tour of both previous stages of work and the current excavations, focussed on one of several cemeteries surrounding the walled town.



*Ian Meadows (orange jacket), provided a tour of the current excavations*



Above, part of the current excavation area, looking south towards the walled town, beyond the line of trees in the background, with graves within a late Roman cemetery under excavation, and covered overnight by corrugated sheets for protection from the rain.

### **Visiting Chester Farm**

The Chester Farm website contains the following statement: "the site is currently not open for public access, except by prior arrangement".

So please do not turn up expecting to get access to any part of the site. Check the website for further information about access and other aspects of the project:

<https://www.chesterfarm.co.uk/about-chester-farm/Pages/default.aspx>