



NASNEWS

Newsletter of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society



Website: www.northants-archaeology.org.uk

March 2024

NAS AGM: Tues, 14 November 2023 The Threshing Barn, Chester House

Election of Hon. Officers and other members of Council. The following were all re-elected as Hon. Officers: Andy Chapman: Secretary, Editor and Treasurer. Rob Atkins: Meetings Secretary and Pat Chapman: Membership Secretary.

Other elected and co-opted members of council: Mike Curtis, Graham Cadman, Brian Giggins, Sarah Scott and Ben Donnelly-Symes.

At the first council meeting of 2024 Mike Curtis was confirmed as Chair for the year.

The public lecture that followed the AGM was delivered by Jeremy Taylor, Lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Leicester, on The Rutland Villa: Beyond the Achilles Mosaic.

NAS walking tour of Towcester Thursday, 13 June, 7.30pm

Meet at 7.30 pm at the Tove Long Stay Car Park in Northampton Road, Towcester NN12 7AF. Brian Giggins will lead a tour around the town. He is an historic buildings expert, currently working on Towcester's Historic Conservation Survey. The tour will be for a maximum of 14 people. It is free but you can give voluntary donations to:

Towcester's Historic Conservation Survey.

Please contact Rob Atkins for a place on the tour. Tel: 07969291261

Email: robatkins1968@gmail.com

Forthcoming events at Chester House

Chester House Estate Roman Festival in June, with NAS visit to the excavations in early July. Full details coming soon.

Northamptonshire Archaeology 2023, volume 42

The next edition is in final preparation and it should be available in May. This edition will cover sites around the county with a focus on Iron Age settlement, along with a touch of Bronze Age and a little Roman and Anglo-Saxon, and the usual notes, recent publications and round-ups

Main articles:

Hunsbury Hillfort, Northampton: a typological and metallurgical study of the non-ferrous metalwork Ian Barnes

A review of the structure and date of the Iron Age hillfort rampart on Hunsbury Hill, Northampton

Andy Chapman and Dennis Jackson

Understanding Middle Iron Age settlement, an Iron Age pottery chronology, and the introduction of the rotary quern

Andy Chapman

A Middle Iron Age settlement at Foxhills, Brackley Stephen Morris

An Early Bronze Age ring ditch, a Middle Bronze Age cremation burial and Iron Age settlement at Apex Park, Daventry

Charlotte L Howsam, Daniel Stansbie and Steve Lawrence

Late Iron Age to Early Roman enclosures and a Roman road at Middlemore, Daventry

Charlotte L Howsam, Daniel Stansbie and Gerry Thacker

Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British Archaeology at Cranford Business Park, Burton Latimer, Kettering Graeme Clarke

Neolithic and Bronze Age pits, and Middle-Late Iron Age and Roman settlement at Brixworth, Saxon Rise

Jo Barker, Peter Boyer and Tom Brindle

A Middle-Late Iron Age settlement at Hampton Drive, King's Sutton

Claire Christie and Kate Bain

Bronze Age ring ditches and an Anglo-Saxon farmstead on land to the east of Hardingstone, Northampton

Tom Parker, Reuben Thorpe and Milena Grzybowska

Middle Nene Archaeological Group Excavation 17-31 August

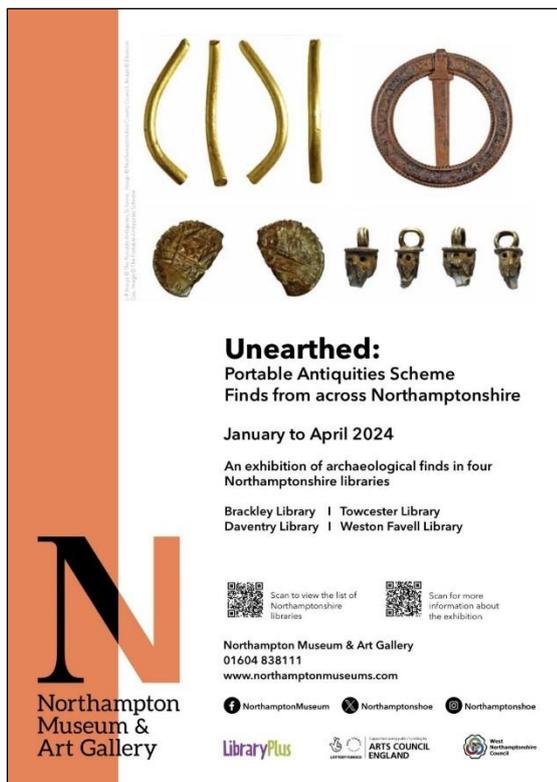
MidNAG are organising an archaeological excavation during the last two weeks of August, 17th to 31st, and they are looking for volunteers to help excavate. Contact Gill Johnston for details and to apply.

Email: agjohnston1941@hotmail.com

It is also worth looking at their website:

Middle Nene Archaeological Group
(midnag.org.uk) and Facebook pages.

PAS finds on library tour: Unearthed



Unearthed:
Portable Antiquities Scheme
Finds from across Northamptonshire

January to April 2024

An exhibition of archaeological finds in four Northamptonshire libraries

Brackley Library | Towcester Library
Daventry Library | Weston Favell Library

Northampton Museum & Art Gallery
01604 838111
www.northamptonmuseums.com

Northampton Museum | Northamptonshire | Northamptonshire

LibraryPlus | Arts Council England | Northamptonshire Council

As circulated to members by email, finds from the county recorded through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) have been on tour around the libraries at Brackley, Towcester, Daventry and Weston Favell Centre as four period groups: Prehistoric, Roman, Medieval and post-medieval, spending a month at each museum in rotation. So by the time you get this NASNEWS you will either be able to catch the final group at your most local of the four libraries, or you'll have to make a tour of the libraries to catch up with all four displays.



The finds display cabinets at Weston Favell Centre, Northampton



Of particular interest to NAS is the Bronze Age display, which includes the gold bracelet terminal for which the society provided most of the purchase price, as acknowledged on the display caption, above. Although I'm puzzled by the 3300BC date for the beginning of the Bronze Age, rather than 2500BC.

Tour of Old Black Lion for local architects

On Wednesday, 13 March, I provided a tour of the site of the Anglo-Saxon halls next to St Peter's Church and then on to the Chalk Lane car park for a tour of Northampton Castle, for a group of architects from the RIBA, below.



Previously, we all had a tour of the Old Black Lion to see progress on its redevelopment. The main structural works are almost complete, and by the end of March the external scaffolding should be coming down.



Inside there is still quite a bit of structural work to do. Once that is complete, the internal fitting out can begin. The digging out of the sunken footpath alongside the OBL on the church side that NAS recruited some volunteers for last year, did not go ahead as access was blocked by the scaffolding. So once that is down it should be possible for the CCT archaeologist to look towards rearranging a date for it.

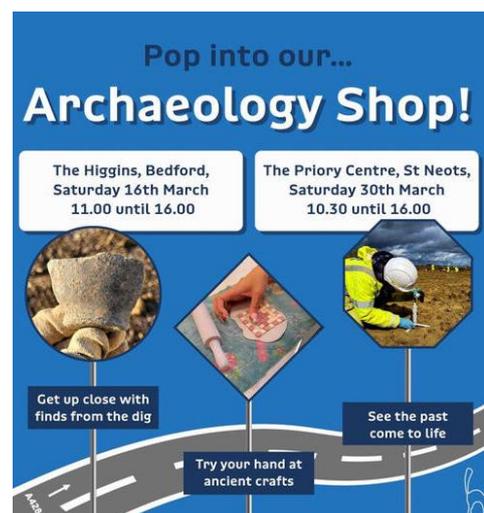


The photographs are by Andy Chapman (view of OBL courtyard) and Madeleine Adams, local architect from the Northants Society of Architects, who arranged the visit. Thanks also to the CCT (Churches Conservation Trust) for providing a guide for the OBL.

Andy Chapman

Museum of London Archaeology Saturday, 30 March

Pop into our archaeology shops! Discover the incredible archaeology of the National Highways [#A428BlackCat](#) and see the past come to life. You can also have a go at ancient crafts, get up close with finds from the dig, and step back in time through our immersive VR experience.



The Archaeology Shop is a free, drop-in event suitable for all the family.

Join MOLA staff at The Priory Centre, St Neots on 30th March:

<https://buff.ly/49xej6J>

Excavations are being undertaken by MOLA, as part of the proposed National Highway **A428 Black Cat to Caxton Gibbet** improvements. You can find out more about the scheme here: <https://buff.ly/3ZP2dl2>

Wicksteed Park, Heritage Fair Sunday, 29 April

Join us at Wicksteed Park for the Heritage Fair Northants North 2024!

Here you can explore a variety of stalls and displays that will showcase the history and heritage of Northamptonshire.

Entrance to the event is free, so don't miss out on this amazing opportunity to find out more about local history and heritage.

More information can be found at: www.northants-fhs.org/fairs-events

If you have any questions regarding the event please contact:

northantsheritagefair@gmail.com

Normal Wicksteed Park parking charges will apply.

NAS will have a stall at this event to advertise the society and hopefully sell a few journals.



Neolithic pits, late Bronze Age/early Iron Age pit alignments and Iron Age to Roman settlements at Wollaston Quarry, Northamptonshire

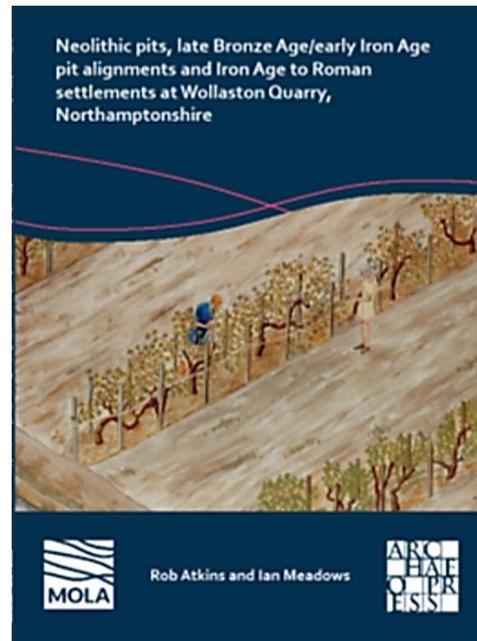
by Rob Atkins and Ian Meadows

Archaeopress Archaeology

147 pages, 60 figures (colour throughout)

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80327-751-6

Digital: 978-1-80327-752-3



Rob Atkins, publication and MOLA

Rob Atkins first joined Northamptonshire Archaeology (NA) in the early 1990s, working at Hampton Court Privy Garden for Steve Parry (lots of brushing of gravel to make the aerial photographs look good).

He subsequently worked at many other sites in Northamptonshire and beyond, before leaving to spend many years with Oxford East (formerly Cambridgeshire Archaeology). He then returned to Northampton, with NA by then transformed into MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) Northampton, to take over my role of overseeing reporting and publication. Through that time he has kept the journal well supplied with articles, and he has also overseen many monograph publications, largely from the NA backlog of excavated sites, through Archaeopress Archaeology. All

of the Northamptonshire volumes have been advertised through NASNEWS and the journal. And above you will have seen a plug for the Wollaston Quarry volume, a backlog site from the 1990s.

This is reading like an obituary, but it isn't. It is in fact a wake, but a wake for **Northamptonshire Archaeology**. Rob is being made redundant by MOLA, along with other staff who go back to the earlier years of NA, while others, like myself, have retired, recently including Steve Parry, head of Northamptonshire Archaeology from the 2000s, head of the MOLA Northampton office after the takeover, and most recently CEO of MOLA itself.

So, there is now no one in the MOLA Northampton office who was there before the early 2000s, and the team that saw NA through the 1990s, the first decade of commercial archaeology, have all gone, along with those days when even commercial archaeology could still be fun, as consultants, budgets (ie profits) and timetables hadn't then taken over. This end of an era for archaeology in Northamptonshire will also be covered in the introduction to the next journal.

We wish Rob well in his new post with RSG Archaeology, who are based at Buxton, but have a local office in Bedford.

Andy Chapman

Friends of Billing Road Cemetery, Northampton

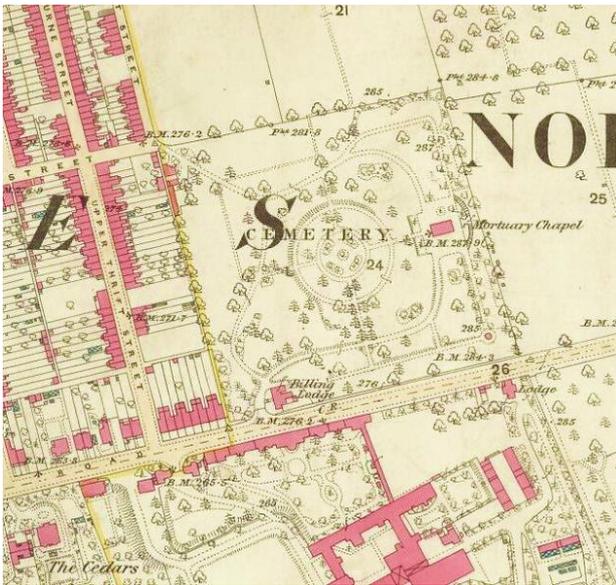
In January 2024 the Friends of Billing Road Cemetery was formally launched, the result of a programme of enthusiastic encouragement led the previous year by Northamptonshire Gardens Trust. The Friends will work with all those (strollers, dog walkers, local historians and historic gardens enthusiasts along with visitors from further afield) who treasure this long neglected historic urban landscape gem on the edge of Northampton's Victorian core.



Deputy Mayor & Mayoress, Paul & Mylissa Joyce cut the ribbon to launch the Friends 27 January 2024 (Photo J Whittall FoBRC)

The cemetery was opened in 1847 by the Northampton General Cemetery Company and was the town's first secular burial ground, providing much needed relief to the medieval churchyards which had become overcrowded as the town's population expanded. The former were described at the time as involving '*... practices disgusting and demoralising in the extreme*'. Garden cemeteries had become fashionable and NGCC aimed high, commissioning a design from eminent Scottish gardener Robert Marnock who was at that time both designer and Superintendent of The Royal Botanical Society's Gardens at Regents Park, London. The cemetery eventually contained more than 21,000 burials; many of Northampton's best-known sons and daughters lie there. Familiar names include the humanitarian 'Emigrant's Friend' Caroline Chisholm, and model engineer WJ Bassett-Lowke. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission tend a memorial to the dead from two world wars.

By the mid 20th century the cemetery had ceased being profitable and the Cemetery Company was wound up. The cemetery passed into the care of the local authority and eventually burial ceased; the site now forms the eastern end of the Billing Road Conservation Area.



Billing Road - Northampton General Cemetery: 25-inch First Edition Ordnance Survey map extract, Sheet XLV.10, published 1887

The Friends' prime objectives involve working with owners West Northamptonshire Council to tackle serious active threats to the fabric of the site and its funerary monuments. Further volunteers are sought to participate in a varied range of activities focussed on the cemetery and pursuing aspirations to make the site safer, more informative and welcoming for visitors and for wildlife. Respect for the dignity of the cemetery remains paramount alongside the wish to overcome the challenges of anti-social behaviour and neglect.

In the future it is hoped to explore the potential for not just conserving but also perhaps selectively restoring some monuments and other historic features such as the main entrance gates, original paths and historic planting.

The cemetery (main entrance at NGR: SP 769 606) is open every day. Visitors are always welcome as are volunteers. Until the Friends have a website, membership details are available from: fobrcsecretary@gmail.com

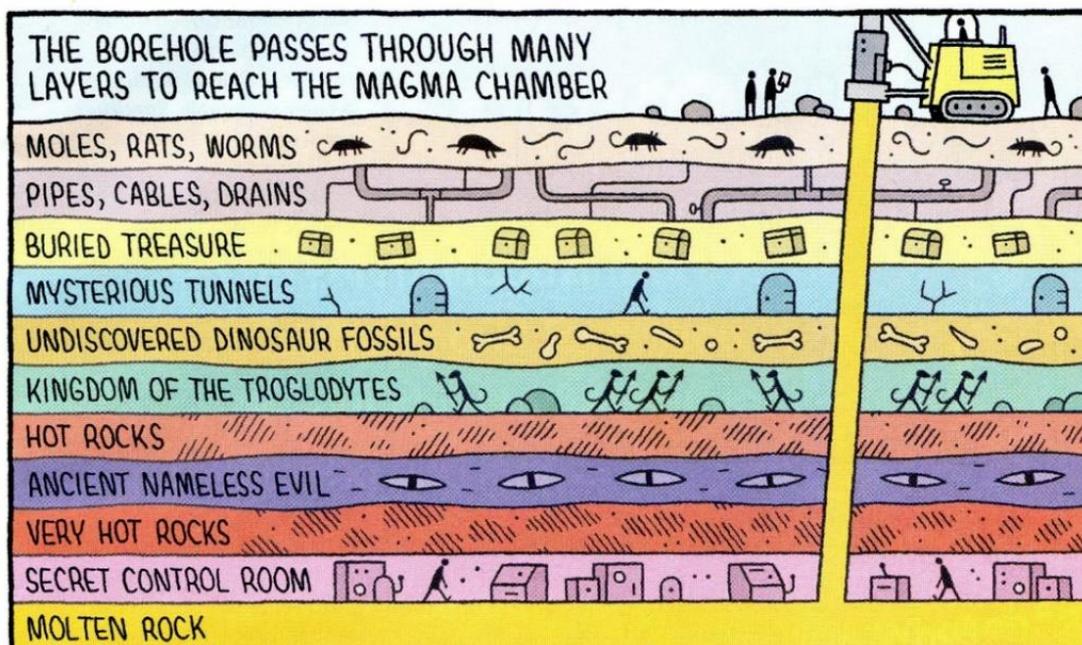
Graham Cadman & Christine Addison

Some stratification

This cartoon from *New Scientist* caught my attention as it hits all the right notes: Buried Treasure, Dinosaur Fossils, Secret Control Rooms and, of course, those Secret Tunnels.

With all of us archaeologists digging in just the wrong places to find that network of highways beneath Northampton, which have their week in the local news about once a year. What always puzzles me is how Thomas Becket is supposed to have escaped from the castle, the Kings castle, through secret tunnels (to the Old Black Lion and up Marefair and Gold Street to All Saints church) that he knew about but the King apparently didn't?

Andy Chapman



THE USE OF TREE RING DATING (DENDROCHRONOLOGY) IN STUDYING URBAN BUILDINGS

by Brian Giggins.

For the last five years, the Towcester Historic Survey Group have been researching the pre-1750 buildings of Towcester as part of the Historic England project on Early Urban Buildings.

Over that time, we have studied in excess of thirty secular buildings ranging from cottages through to large Inns. This has included carrying out measured surveys and extensive documentary research including the analysis of historic Towcester rating returns and looking at past planning applications for structural information.

It was no surprise that the facades of the buildings on Watling Street, the principal road through the town, did not reflect their age but the extent of reconstruction and division of the properties was more than I had expected. Many of the buildings on Watling Street comprised a front range and an attached rear range. In some cases, the front range had been completely rebuilt leaving the earliest fabric in the rear addition and none of the buildings investigated had surviving original ground floor plan.

Without the assistance of Historic England, dating of the buildings would have been dependent upon comparative dating of items such as roof trusses, staircase features, fireplace surrounds, window design, door surrounds etc. This way of dating was still very important but the Historic England funding of tree-ring dating for nine case studies with oak beams enabled more in-depth analysis of these buildings to take place.

Dr Martin Bridge was commissioned by Historic England to undertake the tree-ring dating and it was good experience accompanying him whilst he undertook these. Some potential buildings for dating were dismissed outright as the structural timbers had insufficient growth rings, some were covered in paint or the timbers were inaccessible. Generally, it was the roof timbers that were sampled. These were in both well-lit floored garrets and torch-lit attics where care was needed because of the state of the floor and low timbers. In attics, masks were sometimes required because of dust and disturbed insulation fibres.

One of the timbers in The Vicarage roof retained the complete sapwood which established that it was felled in the winter of 1689/90. Similarly, Highcroft House had timbers felled in the winter of 1713/14.



The Vicarage, Towcester

Often the results produced a range of dates such as 1675-1708 for 98a Watling Street East and 1422-55 for the front range of 193 Watling Street West. The single felling season results help establish when the building was 'topped-out' - the roof covering being completed very shortly afterwards. But that was not when a building would be considered finished; that is when all the internal and external finishing works were completed. In the case of small buildings this was probably the same year if the owner had sufficient finances.



98a, Watling Street, Towcester



193 Watling Street West, Towcester

Prominent inns requiring a high standard of finish, such as the late 17th-century Saracens Head (which was not tree ring dated), might have taken at least an additional year to complete, as would mansions such as Easton Neston House. Although this may seem to be a minor point, it could be significant when analysing the dendrochronological results along with any contemporary documents.

As with datestones, caution must be used when using the results of tree-ring dating. In the case of 98a Watling Street West both the front façade and height of the ground and first-floor rooms indicate that the building was partially rebuilt in the early 19th century and the existing roof timbers were jacked-up and supported whilst this work was being undertaken. The 1675-1708 date range therefore applies to an early phase of the front range of the building.

It was remarkable that all the buildings tree-ring dated did provide dates, as that is not always the case with Northamptonshire buildings where fast-growing oaks for constructional timbers were often used, making them impossible to date by traditional tree-ring dating techniques.

Recent developments, notably the use of isotope analysis alongside analysis of tree-ring cores is overcoming many of these problems but this is specialist expensive work presently outside the budgets of most building recording groups and property owners.



The Saracens Head Inn, Towcester

**Major new publication about
Must Farm Settlement**

Two volumes have just been published detailing the Bronze Age settlement of Must Farm, which was engulfed in flames almost 3,000 years ago. The fantastic preservation at Must Farm, combined with the way material came to rest in the river channel, meant that it was possible to identify the contents of each stilted roundhouse.

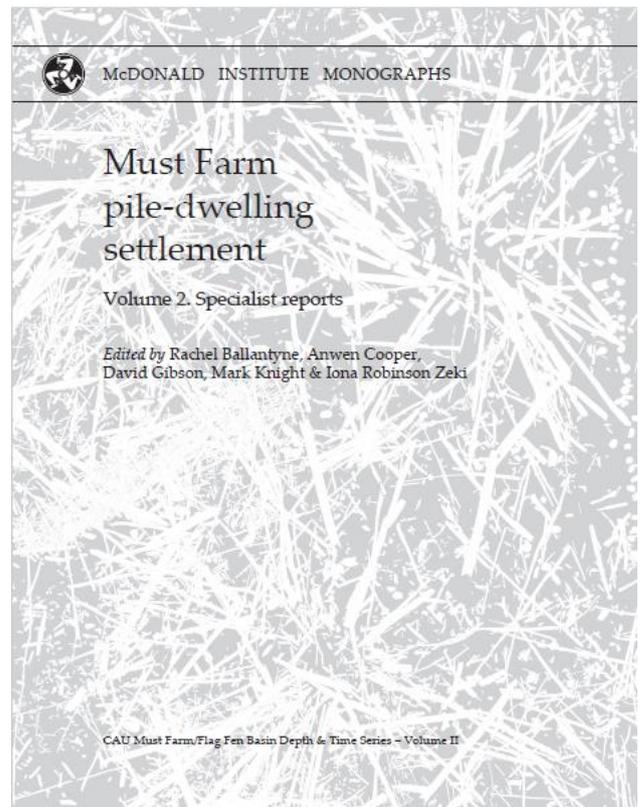
Full findings from the Must Farm site - excavated by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit (CAU) in 2015-16 after its discovery on the edge of Whittlesey, near Peterborough - are published in two reports, published and funded by Cambridge's McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.

More info about these **Open Access** volumes:
<https://www.arch.cam.ac.uk/news/must-farm-volumes>.

Volume 1. Landscape, architecture and occupation: available to read for **FREE** here:
<https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.106697>



Volume 2. Specialist reports: is also available to read for **FREE** here:
<https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.106698>



Excavations at Must Farm in progress

Any events or news for the next issue of NASNEWS please forward to either:

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