



NASNEWS

Newsletter of the Northamptonshire Archaeological Society

Website: www.northants-archaeology.org.uk



August 2025

The new NAS website



Our old website had served us well, but its basic structure hadn't changed since it was first set up over 20 years ago. However, our grateful thanks go to David Waller and Julia Waller, for getting us online in the first place and keeping us there for 20+ years.

The new website has been under construction for some months, and it is now being launched on the public. The address remains the same:

www.northants-archaeology.org.uk

It has a new look, but still offers the same range of information, about events, membership, and NASNEWS and the journal, but with some new additional resources.

I will draw attention to two areas in particular:

Resources: This area provides details of past grants that NAS has provided, and a link to the grant application form. There are also copies

of the AGM minutes from 2020 onward.

There are direct links to some of the other major sources of information about the archaeology of the county: The Archaeological Resource Centre (ARC), at Chester House Estate, and the three elements of the Northamptonshire Archives Service: The Record Office, The Historic Environment Record (HER) and the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). And there also links to various local societies.

Publications: Previously, copies of the last 20 years of NASNEWS were available online, but now we have the complete set back to the first editions (that we hold copies of) from 1976. This not only provides a history of the society, but also an informal, but informative, archive of archaeological events around the county spanning the past 50 years.

As before, we cover our journal, *Northamptonshire Archaeology*, and provide abstracts for the main articles back to volume 26, 1995. There is also a direct link to the Archaeology Data Service (ADS) where pdf copies of all articles from volumes 1-40 can be downloaded for free.

There is also a direct link to pdf copies of the chapters in our 2004 publication: *The Archaeology of Northamptonshire*, edited by our former Chair, Martin Tingle.

And in the coming months we hope to place our 2010 publication: *Dennis Jackson: A Northamptonshire Archaeologist*, online with ADS as well.

But the publication area of our website has also been greatly expanded, so we can now offer a further range of free pdf downloads for the education and entertainment of all, under the title **NAS Archives**.

One major gap that has been filled is to make available digital copies of the series of four monographs and the two popular booklets produced by the **Northampton Development Corporation Archaeological Unit** between 1974 and 1985, see covers below, with the longer volumes chapter by chapter. This is a particularly valuable resource as these publications have all been long out of print.

There are also pdf downloads of two early papers reporting on the discoveries at the Iron Age hillfort on Hunsbury Hill in the later 19th century during ironstone quarrying.

Please drop in to have a look around, and see if there is anything that you would like to download. If you have any ideas for other resources that we could make available, let me know.

Forthcoming Talk

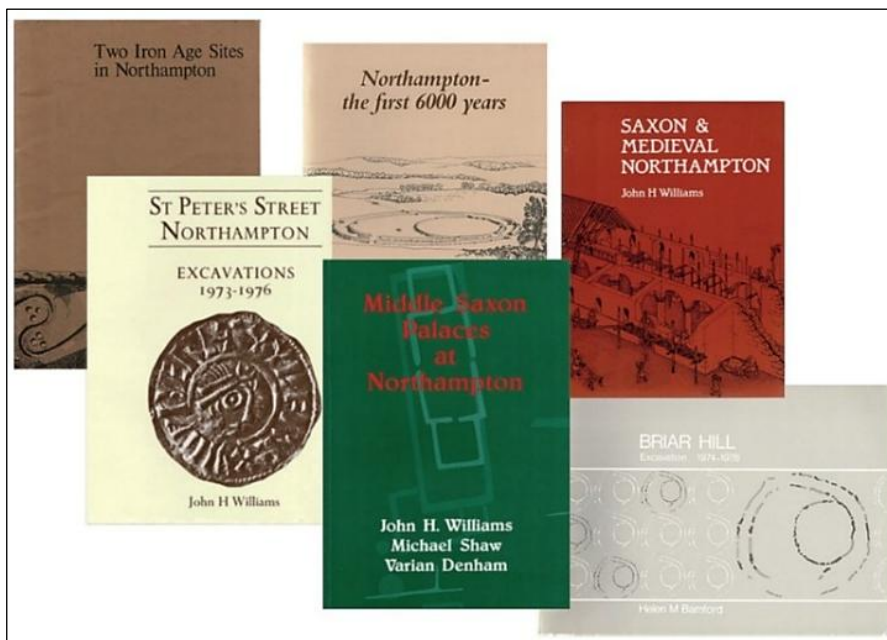
The Archaeology of Northampton
by Andy Chapman

Monday, 18 August, 7.30pm

Northampton Civic Society
at The Humphrey Rooms,
10 Castilian Terrace, Northampton
NN1 1LD

Not sure how well, if at all, this is being promoted, beyond the Civic Society website. So, it would be nice if somebody turns up to listen to it. The website says nothing about booking, so I assume you can just turn up.

It will be a sweeping overview of the archaeology across greater Northampton: from the Briar Hill causewayed enclosure to the Middle Anglo-Saxon origins of the town, and the rise and fall of Northampton's royal Castle.



A photographic review of recent events

Northamptonshire Heritage Fair Sunday, 27 April 2025



The NAS stand and book sale at the Heritage Fair, which brought in £150.00. Also good to meet people running other local societies.

Walking tour of Medieval Northampton led by Andy Chapman Saturday, 17 May 2025



Telling the story of how the east end of a pre-Conquest St Peter's church was found in the 1970s, beyond the end of the present church, and the nine years of fieldwork that led to the uncovering of the timber and stone hall complex. And then on to the castle.

Tour of Northamptonshire Archives Service (The Record Office): Monday, 2 June 2025



The card index system is still at the centre of accessing the Record Office collections, as they have too many documents to create a full digital catalogue of it all, especially given limited funding for any enhancement of the service. There is still a huge backlog just in accessioning new depositions. And for any younger members, the grey metal box to the left is a microfiche reader.

But we have to admit that the highlight of the tour, was a first opportunity for many of us to pass the heavy-duty doors to the former nuclear bunker, which lies beneath the Record Office, and now provides useful additional storage space. Of course, in these modern times of peace and world harmony, such things are no longer needed!

Behind Sarah Bridges, who took us around (see next page), you can see a decontamination shower within this 'air lock' between the inner and outer sealable doors.



The circular objects on the wall are pressure valves, designed to absorb the pressure wave of a nuclear blast, so it wouldn't run through the inside of the bunker.

**Roman Fest, Chester House
Sat & Sun, 28-29 June 2025**



On a very hot weekend, this was our table display and book stall, where we sold another £50.00 worth of journals and books (provided by Mike Curtis).

Many other local societies were also there in the central courtyard.

There were many making and selling re-enactment stalls down the avenue, including Jim the Potter (Trinity Court Potteries), who is always a goldmine of information about pots and potting. Top of next column.



His stall included this curious vessel, below.
Can anyone tell me what it was for?



**Forthcoming
Northamptonshire Archaeology
43, 2025**

Some of the material for the next journal is already prepared, but there is still much to do, in particular me getting down to finishing Part 2 of Northampton Castle.

So, while it will be dated 2025, it is likely that it will be late this year or even early next year before it is printed and distributed.

It is also a new journey for us, as our old typesetter has now retired, having prepared the past five journals for us, and we have to hope that our next one will do as good a job.

Chalk Lane Heritage Park, Northampton



Construction work on the Heritage Park at the former Chalk Lane car park, Northampton which occupies what was once the eastern side of the inner bailey of Northampton Castle (see the May NASNEWS for a captioned plan of the site), is nearing completion.

The playground equipment is in place, as are the steel gateways and poles. The curving line follows the line of the inner bailey defences, as if forming a revetment to an invisible bailey bank, although they actually lie a little into the castle ditch, to provide space for the play area behind. The ditch extended to, and perhaps even a little under Chalk Lane, which follows the outer edge of the inner and outer bailey defences on the eastern side of the castle, from Marefair, in the south, to Castle Street, the approach to the castle gate, in the north.

Each post will have an information panel telling part of the story of Northampton. I provided extensive comment on an early version of the catalogue of 'facts' that could be used for these panels, and that entailed a complete rewrite of the pre-Conquest story, as it seems our local historians are still struggling to catch up with the work of the Northampton

Development Corporation in the 1970s and 80s, in uncovering the Middle Anglo-Saxon timber and later stone hall. With these the high-status buildings set between the early twin churches of St Peter's and the lost church of St Gregory. When it comes to actual prehistory, they are even more lost. I await the final result with some trepidation as to what the design team may have done with it all.

The groundworks

In the early stages of the groundworks, while the stated aim of the WNC was, *'to ensure we do not impact any undisturbed archaeology'*, this clearly did happen. Some of you may have seen my Facebook comments back in April, when I was trying to comment while actually in New Zealand on the other side of the world.

While landscaping the southern end of the bailey bank (which I observed briefly while in the rail station café awaiting a train to London and then Heathrow, and later visited by Graham Cadman), walls relating to the royal apartments were exposed.

Subsequently, while digging out behind the St Andrew's Road revetment wall, to enable its internal thickening, they also uncovered part of the ashlar wall of the castle's great hall. These were all walls that had been uncovered and recorded in the early 1960s.

MOLA, the archaeological contractor monitoring and recording the groundworks, have asked me to withdraw my comment in a Facebook post of 5 April, that this was, to quote myself, *'plain incompetence on behalf of all involved, including MOLA'*. I am happy to withdraw that comment with respect to MOLA, but would still say that the statement by WNC was foolish in view of the extent and depth of some of the planned groundworks.

I would also suggest that having uncovered walls, it might have been sensible to have kept these covered and out of sight, which would have given WNC (and MOLA) control of the

narrative, rather than having it highjacked when photos of exposed walls began to appear on social media. Given the extent of the digging out behind the St Andrew's Road revetment, it was certainly inevitable that walls would be exposed in this area.



Above, is the grassy knoll (to coin a phrase), north of the main Heritage Park (in the background) and adjacent to St Andrew's Road, right, with the surviving inner face of the bailey bank to the left. This shows the partly backfilled cutting behind the St Andrew's Road revetment, where a wall of the castle's great hall was exposed in the groundworks to enable the internal thickening of the wall revetment.

This grassy knoll is the only surviving part of the inner bailey. It was excavated in the early 1960s (see Part 1 of my report on Northampton Castle), with the detailed report to appear in the next journal.

Milton Keynes Museum

New for 2025 *Ancient Gallery*: 'Journey back in time and uncover what life was like in the MK area during the prehistoric era.' We have finally got to the Milton Keynes Museum to see the new 'Ancient Gallery'. The museum as a whole is well worth visiting and although entry is a bit pricey,

it does cover you for a whole year. There is also a team of good, friendly and helpful volunteers spread around the various buildings.

The 'Ancient Gallery' is worth a visit, but I was disappointed by the 'less is more' approach so common now. So very few objects per period, and simplistic captioning (and in the cabinet labelled **Bell Beaker People**, there are four pots but only three labels and all are wrong: with two of the vessels actually Iron Age and not early Bronze Age). There is also a general lack of context, as in the display relating to the round barrow that I excavated at Gayhurst Quarry. There is a case full of heaped up cattle bone, but not a single photograph (and there are many in the site archive), to show these bones in-situ within the barrow ditch.

A History of Northamptonshire in 100 Objects

Saturday, 20 September 2025 to February 2026

Exhibition at Northampton Museum, plus book, website and podcasts

As the organisers have pointed out, this is not **The History of Northamptonshire**, as that would be impossible to fully cover in 100 objects, it is **A History of Northamptonshire**, which hopefully will engage the public and encourage them to explore our local geology, archaeology and history further.

Being one of the guest curators, I do know what the 100 objects are: but that is to be a surprise for the rest of you when the exhibition opens in September. But I can say they span everything from geological prehistory, through archaeological prehistory, and then on to the Romans, the medieval and post-medieval periods, and then on to and

through the 20th century, and even into the 21st century. So there should be something for just about everyone.

The aim is that everything: exhibition, book, website and podcasts will all launch on the same day, which will be quite an achievement.

There will also be a series of related events at the museum, and **Beyond the 100** spinoff displays of further objects at other venues around the county; including at least some that didn't make it to the 100, and I am involved in one at St Peter's Church, Northampton and another at the Stanwick Lakes Visitor centre.

Stanwick Lakes

The Stanwick Lakes three-year Bronze and Iron Age heritage project won Best Volunteer Project at the 2025 Northamptonshire Heritage Awards.

'For Stanwick Lakes, it's a proud moment to be acknowledged at this level - and even more meaningful because this project was planned, delivered and shaped with us by volunteers. It recognises what's possible when people are given the opportunity to lead, experiment and share a passion - in this case - for the past.'

'The award celebrates the creativity, commitment and leadership of our wonderful volunteers who brought our Bronze and Iron Age history to life by restoring the Bronze Age Bowl Barrow, building replica structures including Bronze Age boats and Iron Age roundhouses, and exploring prehistoric textile-making.'

'More than 40 people contributed over 8,000 hours to make it all happen - inspiring schoolchildren, families and visitors of all ages.'

'A HUGE thank you to our volunteers, who we are immensely proud of, and to the Heritage Awards for recognising this remarkable community-led project.'

'As part of the **Northamptonshire Heritage Forum**, Stanwick Lakes (Rockingham Forest

Trust) is committed to protecting the historical artefacts of the county for the enjoyment of art, culture and heritage-loving members of the public, and supporting people and organisations working in the arts and heritage sector.'

Read more here:

<https://stanwicklakes.org.uk/volunteers-award-success/>



Above, the Stanwick Lakes Heritage Museum on the mezzanine floor above the Visitor Centre café, and overlooking one of the lakes.

NASNEWS

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

Andy Chapman (NAS196674@gmail.com)
or Rob Atkins (robatkins1968@gmail.com)