

The Roman Settlement at Ashton near Oundle

by John Hadman and Stephen Upex

Early in 1974 Northamptonshire County Council published a leaflet *Oundle: Options for the Future*, which considers several possible schemes for the development of the town. The plans include a by-pass road following the disused Nene Valley railway line and crossing the river to join the present A605 east of the town. The point of juncture is to be a roundabout situated in the centre of a Roman settlement where the Middle Nene Archaeological Group conducted an exploratory excavation in 1971 (*BNFAS* 7, 1972, 12). In the Spring of 1974 aerial photography by Stephen Upex revealed an abundance of crop-marks here which had not been previously recorded (fig. 4). By coincidence it could be seen that in antiquity there had already been a road following almost exactly the route of the proposed new by-pass!

It was decided that, whatever might be the timetable for the proposed road-works, an investigation of this area was required immediately. A joint excavation by the Middle Nene Archaeological Group and Prince William School, Oundle, commenced in September 1974 with the kind permission of the Hon. Mrs G. Lane.

The area chosen for excavation was where there had been a considerable stone scatter. An open box, 31 metres by 17 metres, was mechanically cleared of topsoil. We quickly realised that the whole of the opened area was packed with features less than 30cm beneath the surface (fig. 5). When preliminary clearing had been completed, it was found that there was indeed a road running across the centre of the area and a junction with another, narrower, road at right angles to it, heading in a westerly direction.

The main road was 6.5 metres wide, and, although not yet sectioned, it is obvious that there were several phases of metalling and patching. The earliest surface now visible consisted of flat, well worn, slabs of local limestone, some of which showed evidence of burning. A source for this material lies less than 800 metres to the east. Gravel and in places a mortar-like material was used as an aggregate. The natural subsoil is gravel and sand, and a large pit excavated in 1971 approximately 20 metres to the north of the opened area could have provided some of this gravel. The later phase of road surfacing consisted of smaller pieces of limestone, some laid flat and some pitched. Again, gravel was used as a fill. This surface had been damaged by the plough.

The parch-mark in the crop was only evident in one field and ran from the A605 for 200 metres towards a bend in the river Nene. This suggests some kind of crossing — either a bridge or a ford. In the opposite direction an *agger* on a slightly different alignment crosses a field some 400 metres distant. The short section of minor road running almost due west is approximately 4 metres wide with a camber of about 13cm, and is surfaced with limestone cobbles and gravel. One cart-wheel groove is clearly evident. The projected line of this road can be traced by differential growth of shrubs where it goes under the hedge. If this road continued across the other side of the A605, it would run into the area where evidence of a Roman cemetery was noted in the nineteenth century during the construction of Oundle Station (Hartshorne (1847), 13).

The area to the east of the main road has not yet been investigated; but on the western side excavation has revealed buildings with a direct relationship to the alignment of both roads.

One building, represented by a considerable amount of collapsed stonework and one remaining course of its northern wall, had its long axis facing the main road. More excavation is needed to find the exact dimensions and the function of this building.

Investigation to date has been concentrated on a building at the road junction itself. This structure (fig. 5) had its short axis facing the main road, from which there had been a wide run-in or entrance. The wall-lines were represented by robber-trenches and only in one or two instances were pitched foundation courses noted. The building was 8.25 metres wide and the length has not yet been determined. The bulge in the sections taken through the foundation trenches suggests that the walls had supported a reasonable weight. However, no real evidence of the nature of the walls or roof was found. A mortar floor had later been replaced by one of blue clay which had been used to level up a depression running across the building parallel to the road. Examination of this showed that it was a ditch, probably associated with the original construction of the road and dating to the early part of the second century. This had been filled and packed prior to the construction of the buildings.

The interior of the building provided much evidence of smithing. There were five identifiable furnaces, four of them cut through the blue clay

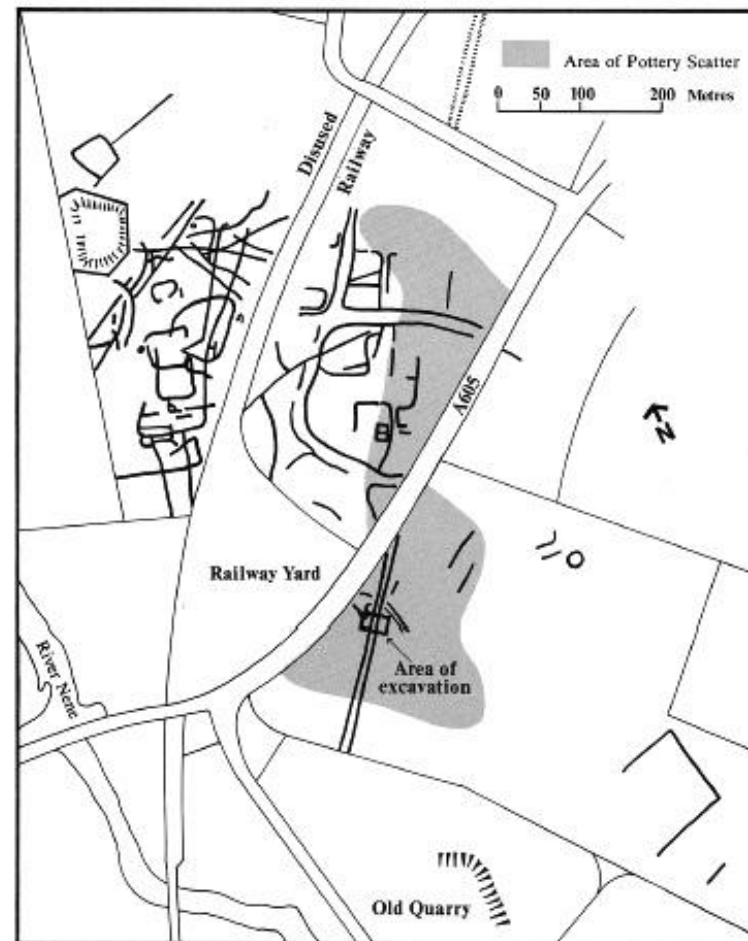


Fig 4 Plan of crop marks at Ashton, near Oundle

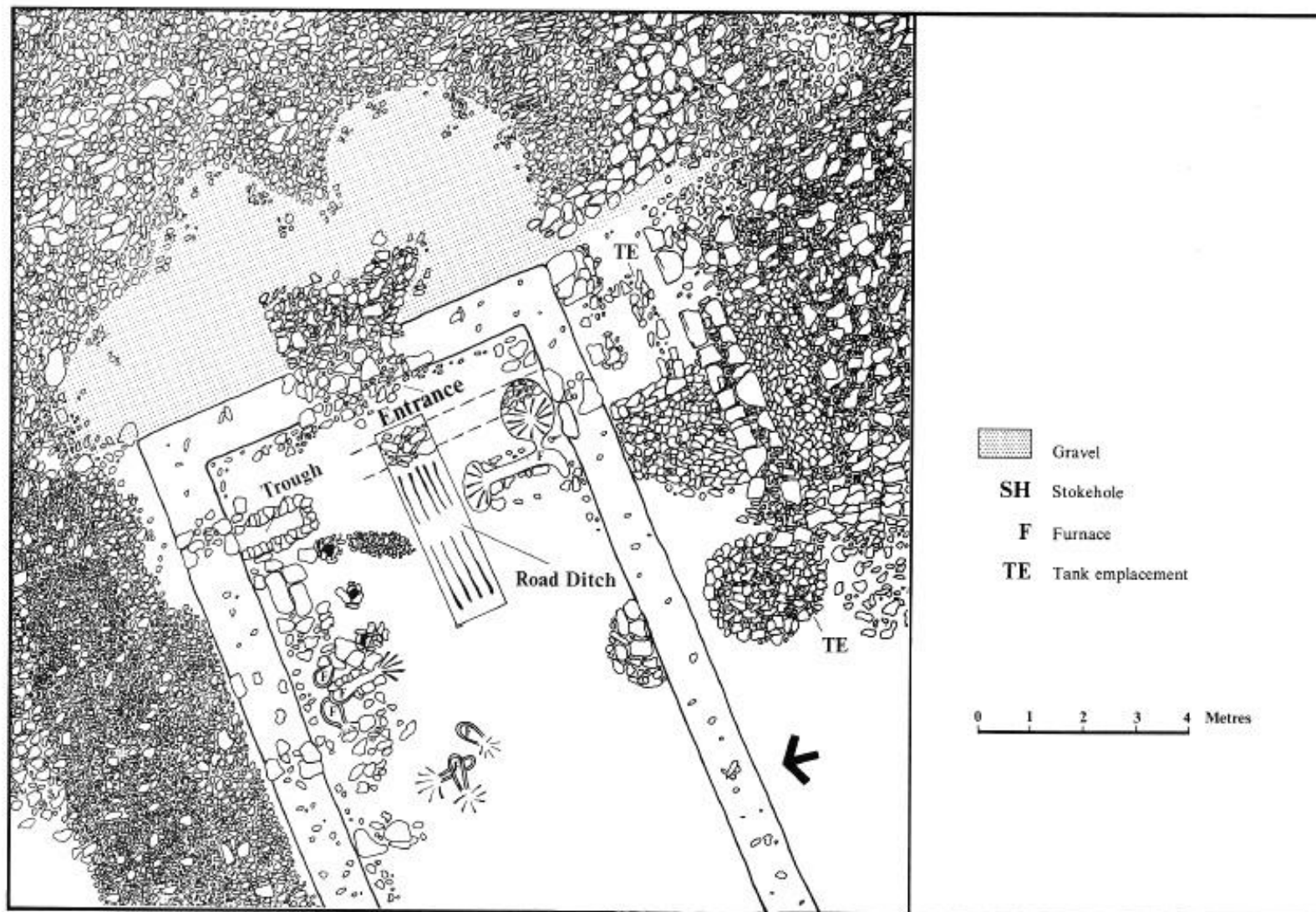


Fig 5 Plan of the Roman settlement at Ashton, near Oundle

floor. The best preserved furnace had a long firing-chamber with a side vent and stone emplacement, probably for bellows. A rake-out pit yielded small pieces of slag and much hammer-scale. Associated with another furnace, which had been re-lined several times, was a smith's hammer and a mower's anvil, similar to ones found at Lynch Farm (*Durobrivae* I, 1973, 28ff.). Three metres away was a stone-lined trough which could have acted as a quenching tank. Considerable quantities of slag, nails and various iron objects scattered over the whole of the opened area pointed strongly to the building having been used for iron-working — at least in its later phase.

The site as defined by the crop marks and scattered pottery and building debris covers an area of over 30 hectares (75 acres). The evidence of the current excavations and the concentration of surface material in one spot suggests the existence of a small planned nucleated settlement at a river crossing. Evidence for a similar settlement also exists at Thrapston. The settlements may be said to lie at regular intervals between the known Roman towns of Durobrivae (Chesterton) and Ircchester, and both are within 1500 metres of the Roman road (Margary no. 570).

Bibliography

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| <i>BNFAS</i> | <i>Bulletin of the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies</i> |
| Hartshorne (1847) | C. H. Hartshorne in <i>Archaeologia</i> XXXII, 1847, lff. |

Ashton, 1976

by John Hadman and Stephen Upex

Contained in the plans for the future development of Oundle is a bypass road following the disused railway line from Barnwell to Oundle. It crosses the Nene to join the A605 immediately east of the junction with the road to Ashton and Polebrook. Aerial photography here in 1974 by Stephen Upex revealed an abundance of crop marks and a road through the known Roman settlement (*Durobrivae* 3, 1975, fig. 4).

Joint excavations by the Middle Nene Archaeological Group and Prince William School were carried out in 1974 and 1975. The importance of the site became increasingly apparent and the Nene Valley Research Committee set up the Ashton Excavation Committee to oversee further work. The landowner, the Hon. Mrs G. Lane, offered her kind cooperation.

In 1974-5 two roads came to light, with buildings lining the western edge of the main road. One building has so far been investigated in depth (*Durobrivae* 3, 1975, 13ff.). Parts of two other buildings were discovered.

Geophysical survey

Geophysical survey was carried out on the unexcavated areas under threat. To supplement the completed magnetometer survey, Mr Martin Richards selected a 30 metre square box adjacent to the excavated area for detailed work with a resistivity meter. Initial results looked confusing, but by smoothing and filtering the contoured levels the possible lines of three structures emerged.

The main road

For convenience the wider of the two roads seen from the air in 1974 as a parch mark has been called the main road (fig. 2).

A section cut across the road in 1976 produced a picture which is anything but simple. The earliest surface, which is much narrower and possibly on a slightly different alignment from the later ones, dates to the Flavian period. Above this was an accumulation of industrial and domestic debris. A wide area in a depression to the east of the road seems to have been used for metalworking processes which are not yet understood. Another surface dating to the Hadrianic period was again covered with debris from metalworking. The final road surface was laid down on top of this iron-stained

ashy deposit, probably late in the second century. Consisting of layers of small limestone cobbles with mortar and gravel, topped by larger flat slabs of limestone, the road was in use well into the fourth century. One layer of mortar had several wheel grooves made by a small truck. The grooves had immediately been filled with gravel, the next construction layer. Both heavy wear and subsidence necessitated road mending in the final phase of use.

The 'industrial' depression east of the road seems to have been in use over a long period for dumping industrial and domestic waste. The high phosphate content suggested the presence nearby of farm animals. The soft nature of this deposit caused the road to sag and the final layer of roughly pitched road metalling was an attempt to counteract this. Set on a thin layer of black earth, this final surface must have followed a period of disuse.

The minor road

The minor road runs due west from the main road between Building I and Building III (fig. 2). The surface exposed in 1976 continued to show the dense packing previously observed. Although less than 3 metres wide, the road had a pronounced camber and its edges were sealed by an accumulation of dust and debris kicked or washed off the surface of the road proper. Unlike the main road, it had the character of a well-maintained surface with consistent wheel-ruts worn into the top limestone cobbles. When sectioned, the road revealed several superimposed layers of limestone cobbles, interleaved with gravel. Part of the top surface of the road was overlaid by an area of rough paving resting on black soil. This butted against the wall stones of the back yard west of Building I. It may represent a ramp or threshold and is certainly subsequent to the last period when the road was in full use.

The ditches

The earliest surface of the minor road sealed two earlier ditches which had already silted up enough to bear the weight of road traffic and the foundations of one wall of Building III. The wall of the back yard of Building I was built into the ditch on the south side of the minor road and the ditch filling had been cut back to solid natural to support it. Both ditches seem too deep and too wide to be just road ditches and were possibly pre-existing boundary ditches; but adequate dating evidence is still lacking.

Building III

Part of the wall of Building III was located with its foundation in the ditch of the minor road. There were traces of a return wall, a partition wall and a small area of rough paving.

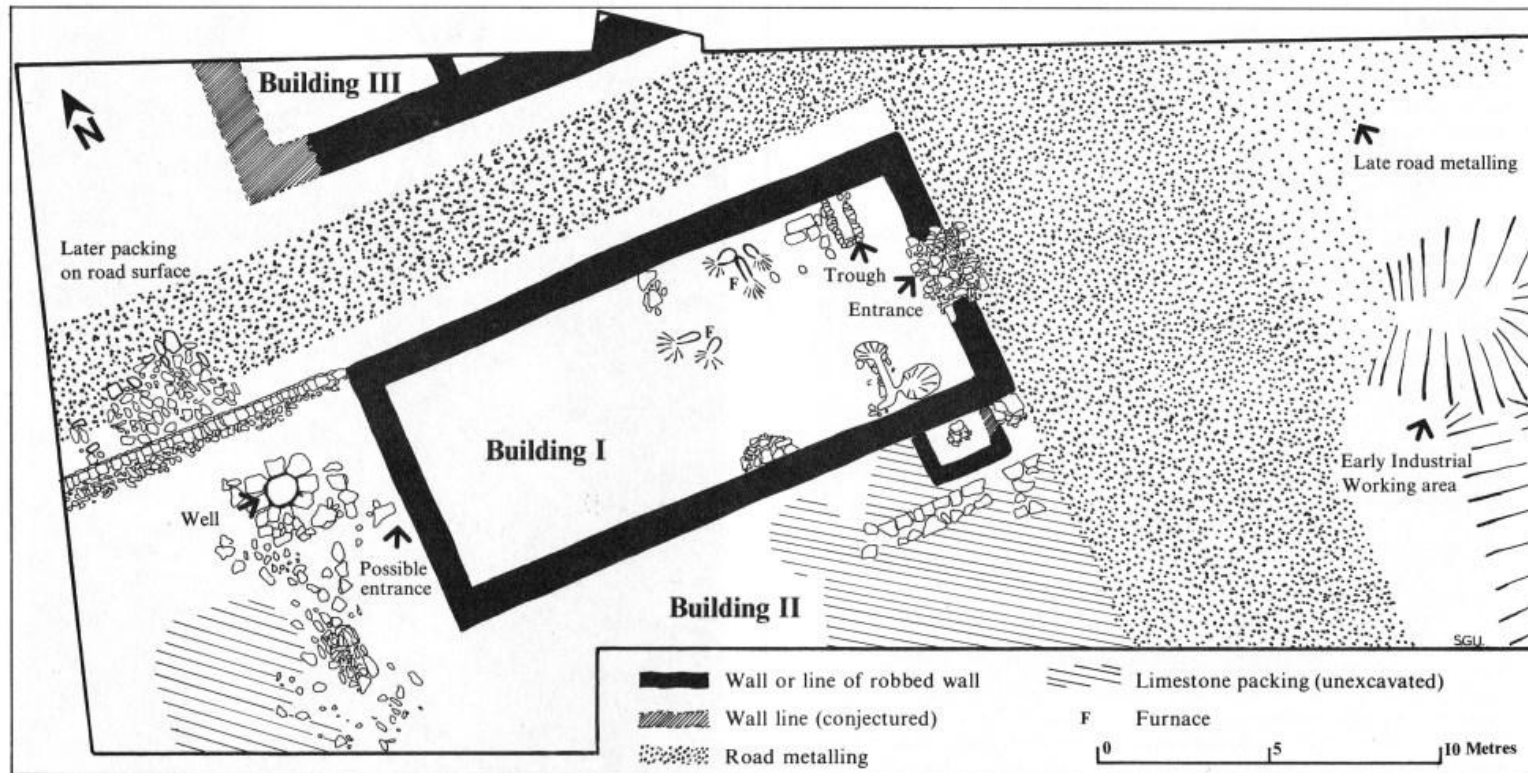


Fig 2 Plan of the excavation on the Roman site at Ashton near Oundle

Building I

The building on the south side of the minor road provided a great deal of evidence for iron-smithing in 1974-5, and the main objectives of 1976 were to locate the rear wall of the building and to investigate the possibility of earlier structures. Both aims were realised. The building was seen to have a total length of almost 17.5 metres. In removing floor levels post-holes of first-century date were located.

Two post-holes were cut by the wall of the stone building which was associated with the Hadrianic road level, and so they may be related to the Flavian layers beneath it.

At the rear of Building I progress was hampered by plough grooves which had cut into the last two phases of flooring. The only feature visible at present is a stony arc-shaped area which together with the rest of the interior of the building will be considered in 1977.

The area west of Building I has for the moment been called a back yard. Several layers can be recognised, one being an area of very rough paving connected with the feature which includes a well.

The well

The well which became evident towards the end of the excavation soon became the main focus of attention (fig. 3). The well-head had disappeared, leaving the shaft (about 1 metre wide) which is of dry stone construction. Large roughly shaped tapering masonry blocks had been used, the inner surfaces showing smooth wear which could indicate long use. The layers down to 3.5 metres represented a deliberate filling of the well, mainly with limestone blocks, closely packed in a matrix of relatively clean sandy silt with bone and late fourth-century pottery. Blocking the shaft at this point was a large lead tank (fig. 4). It lay at the highest level reached by the water table. Below it were layers of black sandy silt with varying amounts of stone, bones, fourth-century pottery and organic remains. They extended to the bottom of the well, which at 8.1 metres deep was set on solid grey clay.

Apart from the lead tank the more interesting finds included leather and shoes, well preserved ironwork, the handle, brackets and staves of a bucket and a number of wooden objects that had been lathe-turned.

The construction of the well has not yet been investigated, but there is a slight change in the stonework at one point which may indicate the use of two separate building techniques.



Fig 3 Excavation of the Roman well at Ashton

Trial trenches E and F

In the autumn students from Prince William School investigated the alignment of the main road further south. The two long trenches revealed that at that point the road only existed as a gravel bank. There was no substantial metalling. Several pieces of evidence showed that humble structures existed to the west of the road.

Just before the excavation finished three students sectioning what was thought to be a small ditch began to produce early pottery. Further work has now revealed a late Belgic ditch with many thousands of densely packed sherds. Many of the vessels were imported fine wares, including terra rubra, terra nigra and Lyons cups and beakers. The complete absence of Romano-British vessels helps to date the filling of the ditch, tentatively, to between A.D. 10 and the Roman conquest. The finding of a fine bronze coin of unrecorded type minted at Verulamium by Tasciovanus, together with the sheer quantity of fine ware, underlines the strong influence of the Catuvellauni in this area.

Conclusions

The overall picture which is emerging from the present excavations is one of a nucleated settlement or small town beginning in the late Iron Age and spanning the whole period of Roman occupation.

In the earlier periods evidence of all kinds points to a thriving community with agriculture and metal industries prominent. The substantial nature of the buildings and the street planning show the early growth of the settlement. Its position on the Nene and its distance from Durobrivae hint at an original strategic importance, but as yet there is no clear evidence of a military presence. Life was not always of a humble nature as the abundant finds of imported pottery, the glass and metalwork bear witness. Agriculture on the rich soils of the river valley and its surrounding uplands would have brought prosperity, reflected perhaps by the large villa at Cotterstock less than 2.5 km away (p. 24).



Fig 4 The lead tank from Ashton

The Lead Tank from Ashton

by Christopher Guy

The lead tank found in the Roman well at Ashton (fig. 4) is one of about 12 such objects found in Britain, the majority from southern and eastern England. They are of varying size, but are of similar construction and would seem to have had a similar (if uncertain) function.

The Ashton tank is about 84cm in diameter, 38cm in height and its estimated capacity is 220 litres (46 gallons). It was made from 3 sheets of lead approximately 3mm thick, a circular piece for the base and two rectangular sheets for the sides. Strips of lead seal the junction of the base with the sides and the two side-seams, which contain lugs at the top. The lead on either side of the joins was slashed and molten lead was poured on. This partially fused with the sides and gripped them as the cooling metal shrank to create a watertight joint. This type of join is found on other tanks, e.g. on the tank from Ireby, Cumbria (*CW* XLV, 1946, 163-171). The lugs are of one piece with the side-seams, jutting out about 7cm and being 12.5cm deep. They contain roughly circular holes 3cm in diameter. It is very unlikely that the lugs were ever used for lifting the tank, but a lid may have been fastened to them. The top of the sides was slightly thicker and had been bent out at a right angle to form a rim.

The cast decoration on the sides of the tank (fig. 5) is very simple. It consists of a raised double cable running horizontally round the tank about 8cm below the rim and vertically from rim to base to divide each panel into three sections. As a single cable it also runs from the top corners of each section diagonally down to meet at the middle of the bottom. The pattern was probably cut into a strip of wood which was then pressed into the mould to leave the decoration standing in relief. This type of double-cable decoration is found on the tank from Willingham, Cambridgeshire, where the space between the cables is much less, and also on the tank from Walesby, Lincolnshire (*LAAS* NS IX, 1961, 13). The practice of dividing the side-panels into sections by vertical decoration is found on all the examples, except on that from Ireby. Diagonal, single-cable decoration (crossing, not just meeting) is found on the tanks from Bourton-on-the-Water (*BG* LV, 1933, 377) and Pulborough, Sussex (*Ant.J.* XXIII, 1943, 155-57).

The most interesting part of the decoration on the tank is the Chi-Rho monogramme in the middle section of one of the side panels. This is formed from three strips of lead 11cm long and a shorter curved piece forming the open loop of the Rho. This monogramme would seem to indicate that the tank either had a Christian function or that it was owned by Christians. The Chi-Rho monogramme also occurs on the two tanks from Icklingham, Suffolk (*Ant.J.* XXII, 1942, 219; *PSIA* XXXII, 1971, 209) (one also bears an Alpha and an Omega) and on those from Pulborough and Walesby. It is possible that these tanks were used for baptism, the candidate standing in the tank while water was poured over his or her head.

Two other pieces of lead were found in the well, immediately below the tank. One of them was folded and no decoration was visible, while the other was part of a side-panel for another tank. This piece, about 49cm long and 33cm high, has a lug and side-seam down one edge, and the lead strip which would have held it to the base runs along the bottom. It has an everted rim and immediately below this runs a band of decoration 11cm wide. At the bottom the border of this band is two plain strips. The decoration consists of three and a half small panels divided into quadrants by diagonal single cables and in each quadrant there is a circle with a dot inside it. A line of these circles runs horizontally below the plain strips. Similar decoration to this, but on a larger scale, appears on a tank in the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge (*BG* LVI, 1934, 115).

Abbreviations

<i>Ant.J.</i>	<i>Antiquaries Journal.</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society.</i>
<i>CW</i>	<i>Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society.</i>
<i>LAAS</i>	<i>Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society Reports and Papers.</i>
<i>PSIA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology.</i>

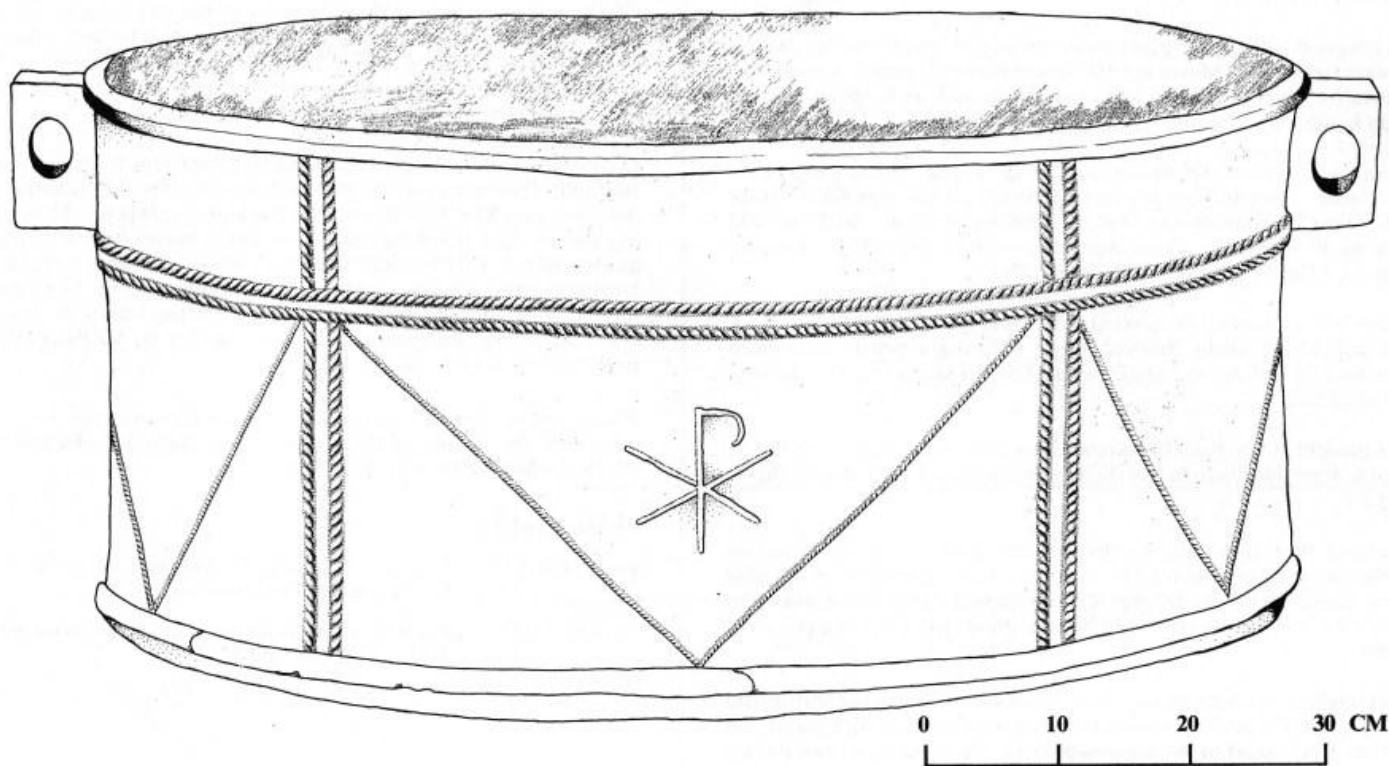


Fig 5 Reconstruction of the lead tank from Ashton

Ashton 1977-8

by John Hadman and Stephen Upex

Following the discovery in 1976 of a ditch filled with the debris of a first-century Belgic settlement, the emphasis of the last two years' excavation has been on completing excavation of the main open area to establish the date and nature of the primary occupation. Thousands of fine-ware sherds from the ditch (located south of the main excavation) point to an important Catuvellaunian centre near the borders of both Coritani and Iceni. Late Iron-Age pottery has been identified in the main area, but no structures of pre-conquest date.

The earliest features at the eastern end of the site (fig. 19) are a number of irregular hollows dug into the natural sand. A triple ditch system runs from the west of the site towards its centre, where the two inner ditches turn south. The shallow inner ditch, re-cut in part, produced first-century pottery and brooches from its upper levels of backfilling. The larger ditch (not shown on plan) later took a wall and its upper levels of filling contain ash and charcoal, which seems to come from industrial processes elsewhere on the site. Both ditches are parallel to, and turn with, the road, but their interrelationships need further investigation. The inner ditch is probably the earlier and was being filled slowly at the time the ditch skirting the road was being dug. The digging of the larger ditch may represent a reaffirmation of a property boundary near the road edge; for it is almost certain that the two ditches were not in use simultaneously.

In the south-west of the open area many features are probably contemporary with the ditches. The most obvious is a circular hut, possibly domestic, outlined by vertical limestone slabs and floored with a well packed clay or mortar flooring over a thin gravel layer and a midden deposit. This make-up contained a coin of Tasciovanus and a group of pottery deposited in the post-conquest period, but containing a great deal which may be earlier and relate to the material from the Belgic ditch. In the centre of the hut is a stone hearth. The evidence for walls was difficult to see until it was realised that most of the vertical slabs had slumped outwards into gaps left by what could only have been stakes or posts with a maximum diameter of 6-8cm.

It was not clear from what level the vertical stones were inserted. They could have been left flush with the surface of the gravel or they could have stood clear of the contemporary surface which was later made up almost to cover them. They probably served as a retaining barrier when the clay or mortar floor material was still plastic and at the same time gave some

protection at ground level to the flimsy wall. The midden deposit beneath the floor continued outside the hut and stretched almost to the southern edge of the opened area. A slightly different soil colour within the hut may be due to staining from occupation material; for the pottery seems to be contemporary.

The hut itself as defined by the slabs is not a primary feature on the site; for a stone on the eastern side, certainly re-used, had a deep cup-like depression as if it had been a door socket. The entrance to the hut was on the eastern side where the slabs were placed flat. Just inside it was an almost circular hollow, into which some of the clay or mortar had subsided. No other internal features were seen.

South and east of the hut were ephemeral remains of still earlier gullies sealed by the midden deposit. They may have been part of a drainage system to protect two small pottery kilns, which were discovered late in the 1978 excavation. One of them held the remains of kiln-furniture, but apart from their size (50cm in diameter) there was no indication of the vessels produced in them. Several post-holes may also have been associated with these features.



Fig 19 The Ashton excavations from the air

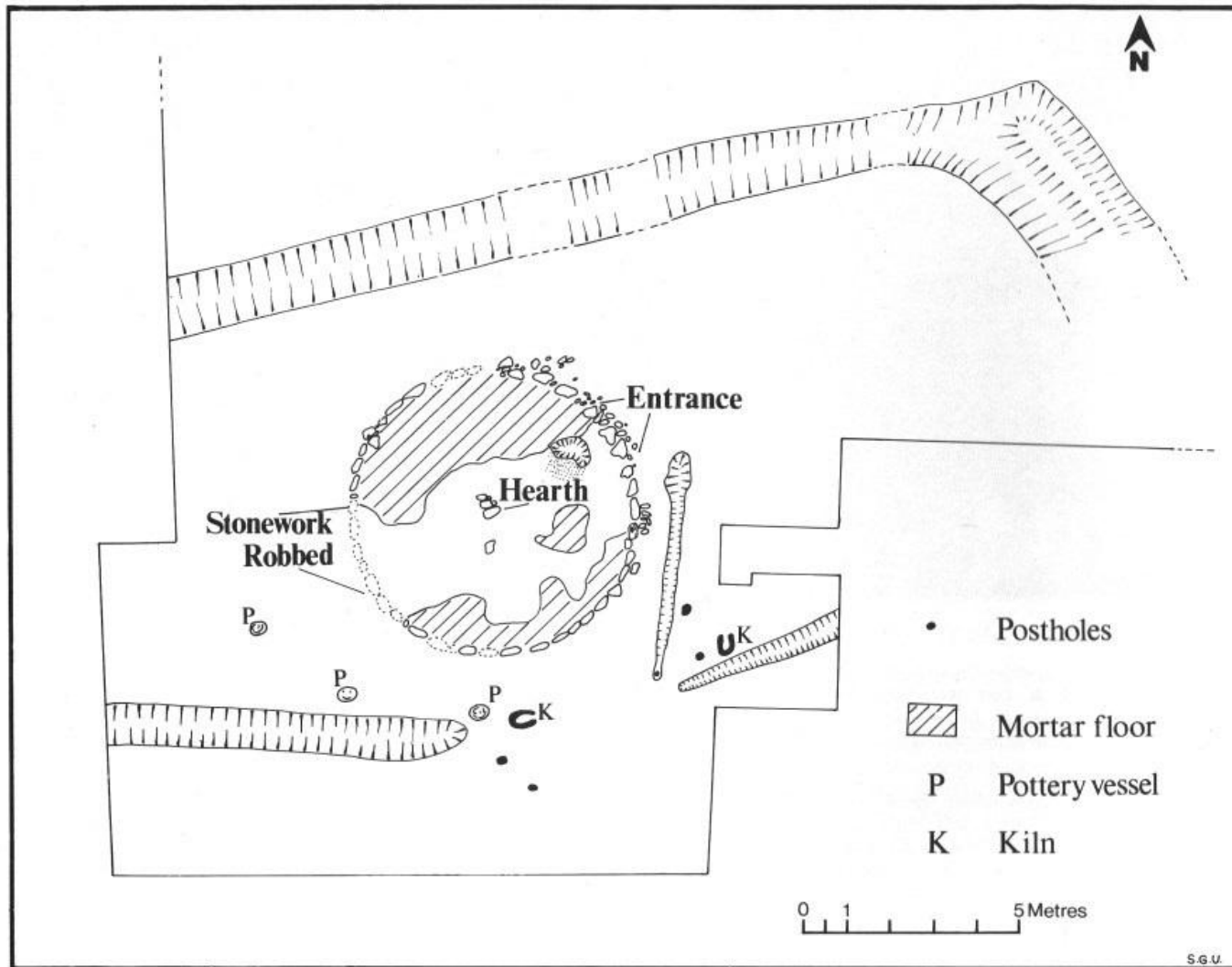


Fig 18 First-century features at Ashton, 1978

South-west of the hut three large calcite-gritted storage jars had been set in the ground. The level at which they had been sheared off indicates that they were damaged when the flooring of the circular hut was laid. The only link between the interior of the hut and the material outside it is a sealing layer of small limestone cobbles, acting as the courtyard surface to the later stone-built smith's workshop and its associated well.

Although much work remains to be done, the evidence for the early period so far indicates a degree of continuity from the immediate pre-conquest period to the end of the first century A.D. The circular hut has no immediate parallels in the area, although a late Iron-Age hut excavated by Mr D. A. Jackson at Aldwinckle had a ring of stones placed nearly 50cm inside the wall line. The stratigraphical link between the hut and most of the other early features is not definite, but the hut is probably contemporary with the earlier inner ditch. If this is so, then this part of the site can be regarded as the corner of a standard late Iron-Age or early Roman farm. Precisely the same sort of site can be seen on the aerial photographs of the unexplored area to the west of the A605.



Fig 20 View of Ashton, 1978

Ashton Roman Town: Archaeological Rescue Excavation

by Brian Dix

The results of previous archaeological work at Ashton, as reported in several past issues of *Durobrivae* (7, 1979, 29; 5, 1977, 6ff.), have highlighted the desirability for large-scale excavation in advance of the proposed roadworks which will destroy part of this Roman small town. Consequently, the Northamptonshire county surveyor, in recognising the importance of a full investigation prior to the commencement of contractors' works, allocated funds which have permitted a team from the county archaeology unit to undertake this responsibility. With the kind permission of the landowner, the Hon Mrs M.L. Lane, and following the granting of Scheduled Monument Consent, archaeological rescue excavation along the line of the planned highway improvement began in late June 1982. The work is being supported by the Department of the Environment and has benefited greatly from assistance from the Manpower Services Commission.

Two large areas covering some 5,000m² were opened initially on either side of the previous excavation trenches to provide an important link with the results of earlier work. In the northerly of the two areas a series of stone buildings has been discovered beside a metalled street which is the continuation of a road that was already known (fig. 13). The road-surface was repaired and re-metalled on several occasions and a number of grooved and worn stones, together with ruts in the surface, are indicative of the traffic which moved along it. At one point, two side-streets form a crossroad-junction; but elsewhere a series of lanes or areas of hard standing pass between the individual buildings which are each aligned with their narrow ends fronting the road.

The layout of the buildings on either side of the street-line forms a regular arrangement which may have originated at some time during the mid- to late-second century A.D. In the two instances where the complete outlines of buildings can be observed the overall dimensions of the respective structures measure 12.90m long by 6.90m wide and 10.85m by c. 5.50m. Like the other buildings, they appear to have continued in use until late Roman times, but already by the close of the fourth century one building at

least had been partially dismantled and the materials of its construction re-used elsewhere.

The numbers of hearths set into the floors of individual structures, together with the quantities of hammer-scale which were also present, indicate that smithing was frequently carried out inside. It is possible that the former occupants lived in rooms on a floor above, and a narrow passage, 1.20m wide, at the rear of one workshop may have contained a flight of stairs which led to an upper floor.

The individual dates when particular buildings were erected and re-built have yet to be determined with certainty; but it is already apparent that the buildings are secondary features which overlie an earlier system of land allotment. The adjacent road pattern may also be an addition to the original settlement plan, since there is a clear indication from the other excavated areas to the south that a series of enclosures was originally laid out following a different road alignment and their positions subsequently altered to respect the later street-line.

In addition to an area which was opened beside the southern limit of the earlier excavations, a further 4,000m² of an adjacent field has been exposed to reveal a continuation of settlement-evidence towards the River Nene. Although both timber- and stone-built structures have been recorded from this work, it is clear that there were fewer buildings in this area of the town which probably lies close to the margins of the Roman zone of occupation.

A number of enclosures was laid out in the area from perhaps A.D. 50/60 onwards. Their boundaries were initially defined by ditches, but later these were replaced with fences and one property was separated from an adjacent street by a masonry wall. Some of the surrounding land had been given over to use for human burial by the late Roman period and a series of graves laid in a formal arrangement probably represents part of a cemetery. Some groups of burials, however, were interred within separate properties. Where individual graves can be dated from pottery vessels which were placed in them, the burials appear to have been made in the late fourth century.

Variations in funerary practice included furnishing the grave with a stone lining, placing the body within a wooden coffin or resting it in the grave on a shallow bier, and in two instances the head had been removed from the corpse and placed at the foot of the grave. It is hoped to report further on these burials in a future issue of *Durobrivae*.

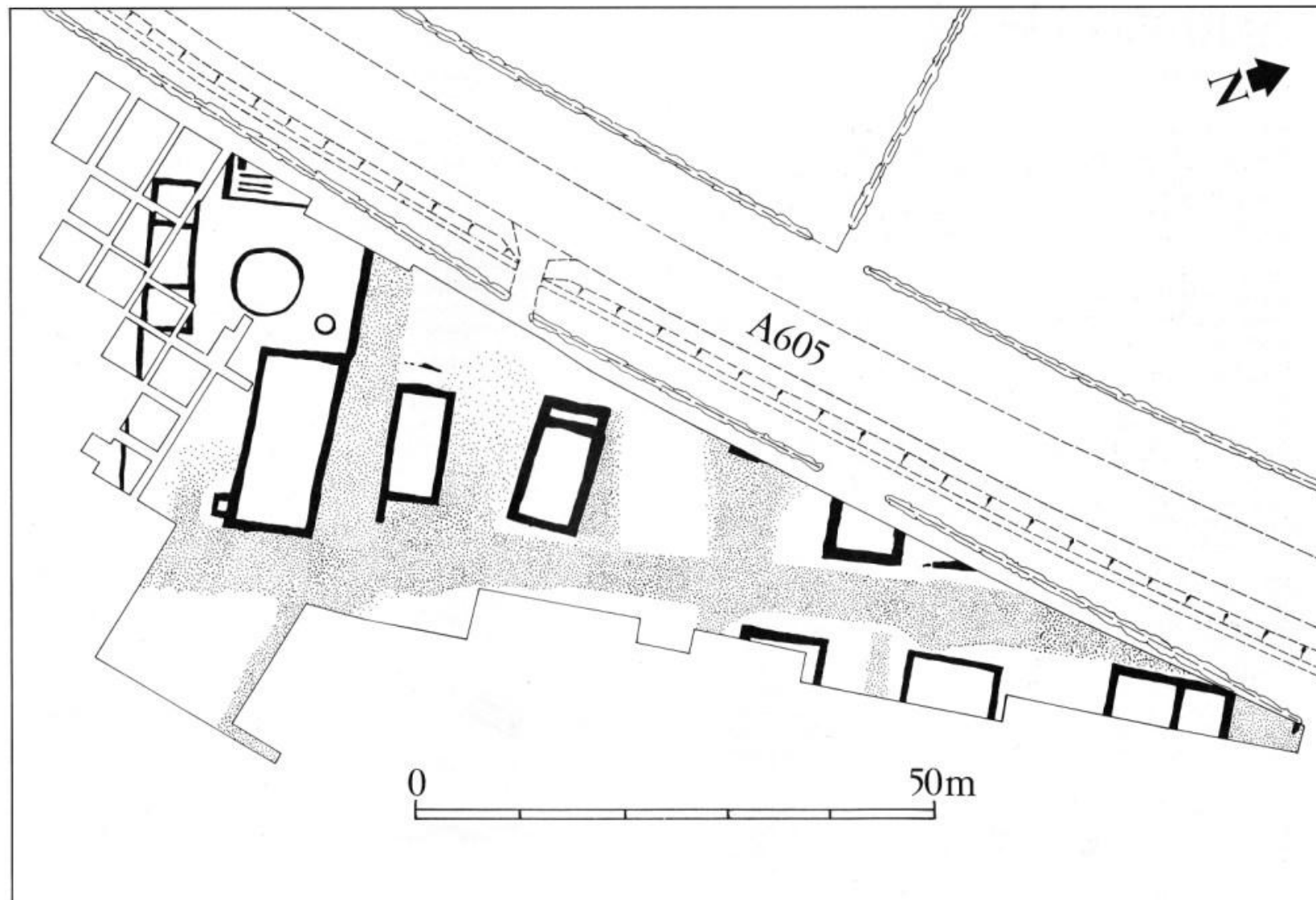


Fig 13 Plan of part of the Roman town at Ashton near Oundle

Ashton 1979-82

by John Hadman

The excavations at Ashton started in 1974 and continued each summer until June 1982 when the Ashton Excavation Committee handed over the reins to the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit. It was gratifying to all those who had worked on the site and who had pressed for more outside involvement when the County Council agreed to allocate funds from the by-pass road scheme to allow a full-time team to start work.

The area already opened by the Ashton Excavation Committee was extended each season until 1982 and a more complete picture began to emerge as ground further away from the main Roman road junction was examined.

The principal area investigated in 1979 (fig. 14) was along the road edge and to the south of the large Building I containing smithing hearths. A metalled surface running at right angles to the road led to a side entrance into that building as well as proceeding westwards towards another building located in 1978. A large stone-packed feature within this area proved to be a sandpit. When excavated, it provided an ideal opportunity to examine the chronological relationships of the ditches which ran under the large Building I, another ditch running at right angles to the road, and a short length of wall sealing the pit itself.

Two hearths were found, both outside buildings, and one of these proved to be interesting in a number of ways (fig. 15). Heavily built of limestone blocks, it was lined with clay and obviously had been subjected to very high temperatures. There were two vents, one leading off at right angles to the long axis of the hearth. Identical structures had been discovered in Normangate Field, Castor, in 1969 and at first they were thought to be pottery kilns. The common factor was a narrowing or waist, effectively dividing the structure into two elements. No evidence of pottery manufacture has been found at Ashton, but the associated waste products of smithing suggests a use in that industry.

In 1980 a strip building some 20m from the road was uncovered (fig. 16). The narrow structure, with its long axis at right angles to the road was built in several phases and was later in date than several underlying ditches. Three internal rooms and an external addition were recognised, but there was no evidence of function. Immediately south of the building and probably contemporary with it a horse had been buried in a square pit cut through an earlier ditch. Other deep square pits to the west of the building

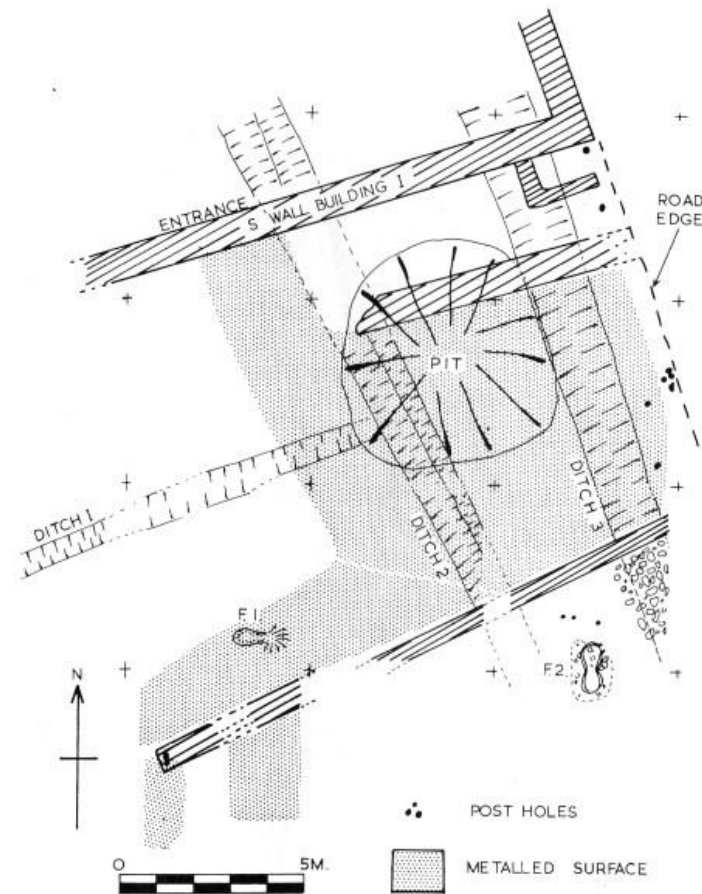


Fig 14 Plan of Ashton excavations 1979

were set very close together and shared evidence of upright timbers in the corners. These were probably cess-pits or latrines.

The overall pattern of ditches now seemed to suggest a well-ordered system of land allotment. In some cases these boundaries were accompanied by fences as evidenced by the regularly spaced post-holes. This type of evidence continued to emerge over the next two years when groups of burials were located. The burials appeared to be fourth-century in date and included one peculiar rite found in other late cemeteries. In two cases the head had been severed and placed either beneath the feet or between the knees. The graves varied from simple holes in the ground to well constructed stone-lined cists. Coffin nails were found in a number of graves and most burials included the use of accompanying limestone slabs either as supports for the head or as weights on the body. As a number of burials were in or across ditch lines, the land-use in that particular area seems to have altered considerably in the late Roman period.

In 1982 two wells were located in what was now quite recognisable as a backyard position. No other stone structures of any substance were found as the excavations proceeded away from the main roadline. One narrow well just over 6m deep was square in plan and the finds from this included the top of a stone column, suggesting a substantial building somewhere in the vicinity. The other well, 1.5m in diameter, was poorly constructed and the eventual excavation provided very little environmental evidence apart from large quantities of animal bone.

The Ashton Excavation Committee had one more season of work assisting the Northamptonshire Archaeology Unit to complete the excavation of the whole of the threatened area before a start is made on the new by-pass road. This will bring to a close ten years of investigation of this small Roman town.

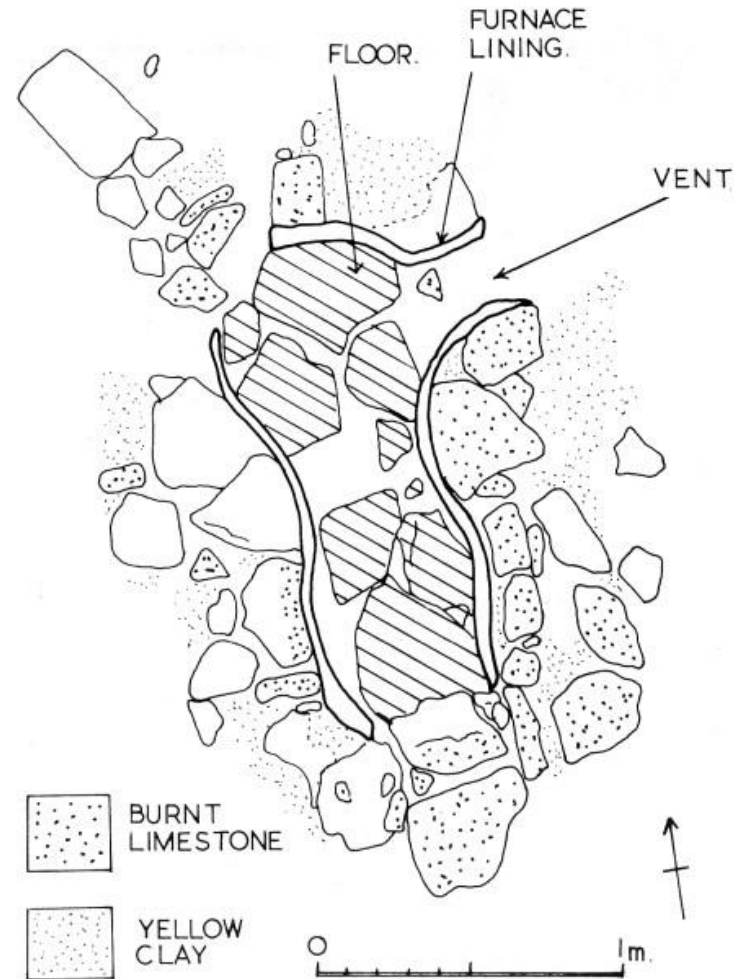


Fig 15 Plan of hearth F2 at Ashton, 1979

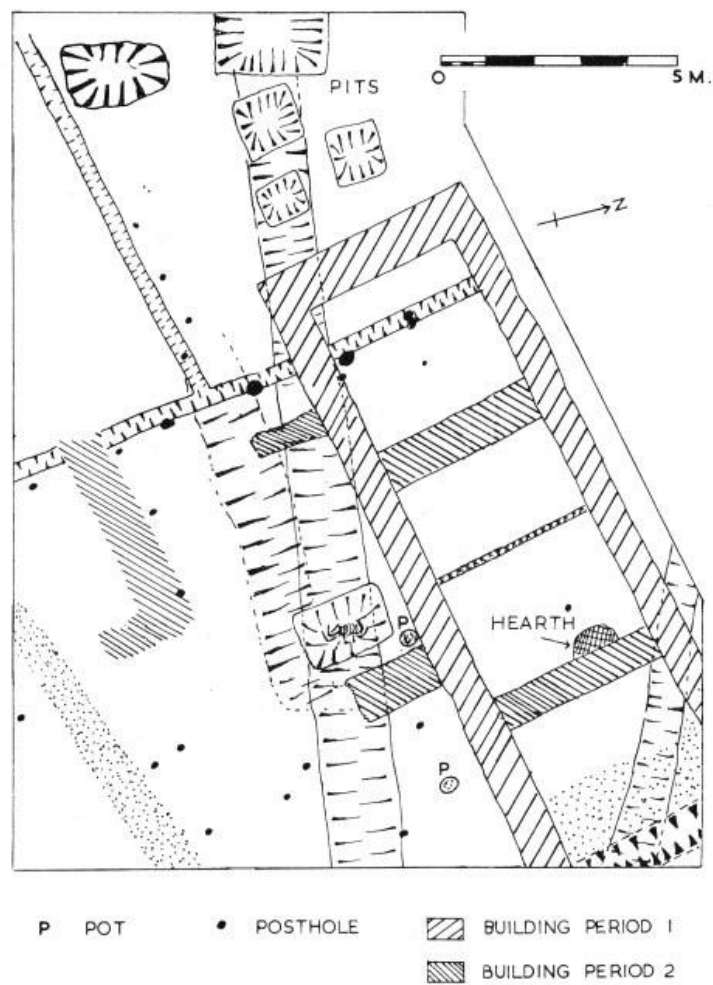


Fig 16 Plan of Ashton excavations 1980